

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Many American women's combative attitude suggests that they are plagued by notions of femininity. The fact that human beings is separated into two classes of people with distinctly different attire, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, hobbies, and jobs may really be shown by just taking a walk while keeping one's eyes open. It is possible that these distinctions are only surface-level and will they eventually dissipate. What is certain is that there is no question about their existence (Beauvoir, 1956: 14).

Nevertheless, women are committed to renouncing their traditional roles to actively take part in the national liberation movement and to evolve advanced strategies for achieving women's demands in the overall struggle for social change (Davies, 1983: 880). Women have been fighting for equal opportunities, equal representation, and equal rights in every walk of life. The struggle for gender equality and women's rights has been a long and ongoing journey, with women facing numerous challenges in their personal and professional lives.

The women's movement initiates feminist work in film which is meant to validate women's experiences. In feminist film theory, the film addresses social conditions by examining the real-life encounters of women who watch that movie. The protagonists in women's films share a belief that women can turn down the prejudice against women in media. They build a commitment to alter it (Bernard, 1995: 62).

Certain Women (2016) is an American drama movie edited and directed by Kelly Reichardt. This small independent movie is based on three short stories by American novelist Maile Meloy. Those are “Tome”, “Native Sandstone”, and “Travis, B.” which are intertwined with each other all of sudden in the movie. This movie portrays the divergent struggles of women set in the same town of Montana.

In this movie, there are some lessons of existentialist feminism, a movement influenced by Simone de Beauvoir that emphasizes women’s freedom, choice, and responsibility in shaping their own existence. For the most part, *Certain Women* (2016) provides a naturalistic, simple, less politic, and powerful portrayal of the struggles faced by women in contemporary society. The movie represents what women do in daily basis, and no commercials. Those women are Laura Wells, Gina Lewis, Jamie, and Elizabeth Travis. Each of them has certain issues.

Laura Wells faced discrimination in a male-dominated workplace environment. She was a lawyer trying to deal with an especially grueling client, Fuller, for eight months. Fuller visited Laura many times at her office but never listened to her advice that he had no chance to sue the company since he had received a small initial settlement in the first place. As Fuller neglected her advice, Laura took him to another lawyer, a male lawyer. He told Fuller the same things Laura had said for the last eight months, as of now, Fuller did not complain anymore after one consultation with him.

The second female character, Gina Lewis who was a wife and mother, worked through her marriage while building a new house. She overcame the tough situation when her husband lacked support for her plans during the negotiation on

taking the sandstone from Albert. When she persuaded Albert to offer them sandstone on his property for sale, her husband undermined what she tried to achieve and made her annoyed by his attitude.

Jamie, the third female character, lived alone at the ranch and was responsible to feed and take care of horses during winter. She had monotone life and nobody to talk with until meeting Elizabeth, the fourth female character. Elizabeth was a law school teacher who made the eight-hour round trip twice a week to teach law class. They, a young lady who longed for new world and her new teacher acquaintance, formed a respective connection with very few words that turned out to be true.

Therefore, the interesting story and strong female characters of *Certain Women* (2016) who shape their own existence beyond societal confinements make me interested in writing this thesis with the theme of women's struggles using existentialist feminism study.

1.2. Research Questions

According to the background study previously stated, the problems of this study is going to be divided into three main analyses. The following are the formulation of research problems:

1. What are the intrinsic aspects in *Certain Women* (2016) movie?
2. How does the main female characters reflect existentialist feminism in *Certain Women* (2016) movie?

1.3. Aims of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the intrinsic aspect in *Certain Women* (2016) movie.
2. To comprehend how existentialist feminism depicted in the four main female characters in *Certain Women* (2016) movie.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study will be limited on the discussion of the four main characters namely Laura Wells, Gina Lewis, Jamie, and Elizabeth Travis as existentialist feminists through intrinsic and extrinsic aspects in the *Certain Women* (2016) movie, directed by Kelly Reichardt, produced by Filmscience production company, including dialogue, narration, and through characterization points. The scope of this study discusses the intrinsic aspect in *Certain Women* (2016) to complete this analysis, while the extrinsic aspect highlights the existentialist feminists that emerged from the female main characters' characterization, specifically how they obtain equal opportunities and freedom of self-determination in everyday struggles.

1.5. Previous Study

To create comprehensive research, I conduct literary research for similar studies that have the same topic which is women's struggles. Thus, the first is a thesis entitled "*Representation of Female Stereotypes in Sense and Sensibility Film (2008) through Cinematography and Narrative Elements*" by Tirta Nyuminnar (2011), State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah. The author focuses on the representation of female stereotypes using Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure.

The second study entitled "*Women's Struggle throughout Gloria's Life Journey to Uphold Women's Rights in The Gloria (2020) Movie*" by Putri Azizah Malik, Diponegoro University. This study discusses women's struggle using liberal

and multiracial feminism theories. The data are used to disclose the women's issues mentioned in *The Glorias* (2020) movie such as gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, gender inequality, and illegal abortion.

The third study is a thesis entitled "*The Struggle of Women Against Gender Inequality in Ruth Ware's 'The Woman in Cabin 10'*" by Siti Muniroh (2020), State Islamic University Maulana Malik. The author uses the theory of gender equality by Mansour Fakih in analyzing the women's struggle against marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, and violence.

The fourth study is a journal article entitled "*An Analysis of Existential Feminism on Bombshell (2019) Movie*" by Niken Ayu Lestari, Diana Aggraeni, and Tri Arie Bowo, Bangka Belitung University. This study discusses existentialist feminism and uses *Bombshell* movie as the object of the study. The authors focus on career women's existence as an object for men.

The following study is a magazine from Paul Goodwin (2016) which analyzes "*Film Discussion: Certain Women*". This discussion explores not only how Reichardt's work stands out due to its quiet, introspective storytelling and deep character exploration, rather than action or plot-heavy narratives, but also how female characters in *Certain Women* (2016) facing personal and societal challenges in Montana.

The last study is an essay written by Ella Taylor (2017) with the title of "*Certain Women: Trapped Under the Big Sky*". This essay focusses on how subtle performances and little gestures can point out inside changes. It also argues that

Reichardt's movie offers a counter-narrative to the traditional conceptions of strong female protagonists, making them subtly revolutionary.

The studies above cover the discussion of women's struggles in kinds of movies and novel that are relevant to support my research. Distinguishing it from prior researches, I utilize a film entitled *Certain Women* (2016) as the object of research. In addition to that, I analyze this movie using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism theory.

1.6. Method of the Study

1.6.1. Method of Research

I apply a method of research named library research. This method implicates two types of collecting data: primary and secondary data. In this study, I used qualitative method to demonstrate existentialist feminism approach depicted in *Certain Women* (2016) movie. As mentioned by George (2008: 7) in the book *The Elements of Library Research*, qualitative method is the results of research featuring in words, pictures, or non-numerical symbols.

The primary data is obtained from the research object, the movie entitled *Certain Women* (2016). Meanwhile, the secondary data is formed from books, lecture materials, and the internet to support the analysis.

1.6.2. Method of Approach

Once the data is collected, I analyze it using an objective approach to examine the intrinsic aspects. M. H. Abrams (2015) states in his book entitled *A Glossary of Literary Term*:

Objective criticism deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called an "extrinsic" relationship to the poet,

to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead, it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end and to be analyzed and judged solely by “intrinsic” criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements. (2015: 73).

Intrinsic elements of the *Certain Women* (2016) movie include theme, plot, and other intrinsic elements of the story. Cinematography approach will examine how scenes appear on the screen so that this thesis becomes more comprehensive. I also apply an existentialist feminism perspective of Simone de Beauvoir (1956) to support extrinsic elements for the purpose of strengthening the research result. In her book entitled *The Second Sex*, she said that the ‘modern’ woman embraces masculine values: she takes rejoice in conceptualizing, executing, working, and producing on the same measures as men; rather than despising them, she asserts her equality with them.

1.7. Organization of Writing

To create a more structured and effective discussion, I split up the organization of the thesis into five chapters.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this thesis, I introduce seven sub-chapters. Those are the background of the study, research questions, research aims, scope of the study, previous studies, research method, and organization of the writing.

CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

I explain the intrinsic film theories for the object of this study.

CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

I explore the existentialist feminism theory to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an analysis of the object of research with proofs. It contains an analysis of the intrinsic elements, cinematography, and how the four main female characters representing existentialist feminism to simply uphold women's rights.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The last chapter of this study concludes the whole discussion and data analysis from the previous chapters.

REFERENCE

