

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

The feminist thought has existed for a long time. This can be attributed to the existence of several literary works on feminist, such as: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labor* (1911), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). After a decade of publication of the book *The Second Sex* (1949), around the 1960s there was a 'women's movement' that brought feminism closer to literature. Some of the literary works that have been written are : *The Human Situation : A Feminine View* (1960) by Valerie Saiving Goldstein, *Fat is A Feminist Issue* (1978) by Susie Orbach and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood. These literary works have become one of the places used by feminists to express women's aspirations.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is one of the works that Margaret Atwood has written. She is one of Canada's most famous novelists, her work is in the form of prose fiction and her feminist outlook. This novel published in 1985 in Canada. In the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood tells about the transfer of power that occurred in America, which later turned into the Republic of Gilead. It is said that the Republic of Gilead is a dystopian for women, because in it there is a patriarchal understanding that makes men as the holders of the highest power.

Furthermore to reveal the feminist issues contained in this novel, the researcher uses several existing phenomena existence of feminism issues in this novel, the first:

“Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies”. (Atwood, 1985, p.190)

This sentence is found in chapter 21, which is when the handmaids are brought back to their respective places, after performing a birth ceremony at the house of one of their handmaid colleagues. Where this sentence was uttered by Offred in her heart which contains the meaning of remembering what her mother said in the past who wanted a women's culture. Women culture by her mother is women who are united by the same experience and lifestyle, in the context of women's culture, this does happen in this novel but it is different. The different is based on the freedom, according to the point of view Offred's mother, women culture is when women are united by the same experiences and lifestyle based on the freedom of each woman, whereas what happens in the novel women culture what happens is based on obedience and piety as a handmaid women culture on Offred mother point of view of freedom. Based on the data above the researcher conclude it can be explained that women are different from men Atwood (1985) based on the data in this quote about women as the second gender because in this quote it is imagining gender equality.

The second phenomena:

I rub the butter over my face, work it into the skin of my hands. There's no longer any hand lotion or face cream, not for us. Such things are considered vanities. **We are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important.** The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut. (Atwood, 1985, p. 146)

This quote is taken from the seventeenth chapter. When Offred finish dinner, she took a piece of butter and put it in her shoe to hide. This was done because she was not allowed to use lotions and face creams. Offred who felt her skin was dry, then secretly put the butter on her face and on her body. Offred said if her body is only likened to a container, for the fertilization process. So that only the inside of the body is considered important, the outside is not. This is related to the theory oppression of Beauvoir (1949) woman as a second sex.

Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* novel has been widely appreciated in the form of journal articles. That related to the novel which researcher use as a reference and comparison. The first journal article is "Offred as The Victim of Totalitarianism in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" written by Transiska and Wedati (2020). This previous researcher used a qualitative descriptive method. This research applies the theory of Friedrich and Brzeziński and Hannah Arendt's totalitarianism. This research is about the influence of totalitarianism in the Republic of Gilead and Offred's struggle against totalitarianism in the novel. Next article is "Handmaid as The Object of Sexism in Gilead Society: A Feminist Analysis in Margaret Atwood's

The Handmaid's Tale” written by Septiawati and Darma, (2014). In this previous research, the researcher aimed to analyze acts of sexism. There are acts of sexism accepted by Offered's character as a handmaid in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Previous researchers analyzed this research using the sexual political theory of Kate Millet. However, there are several previous researchers who discussed the previous novel *The Handmaid's Tale* using a different theory among them Transiska and Wedati (2020) and Septiawati and Darma(2014). The similarities between the two are, using the same novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood but both use different theories in research Transiska and Wedati (2020) using Friedrich and Brzeziński and Hannah Arendt theory totalitarianism, while in research Septiawati and Darma (2014) using Kate Millet theory the sexual political theory. There are no previous researchers who have reviewed this research before.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the research background, researchers identified several problems related to feminism, they are:

1. There are influences of totalitarianism embraced in the Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
2. There are resistances by the character to fight totalitarianism in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

3. There are several acts of sexism that the character in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
4. There are existences of oppression received by woman in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
5. There are woman struggles carried out in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

Based on the identification of the problem, research limit several problems on feminism, they are:

1. There are existences of oppression received by woman in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
2. There are woman struggles carried out in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Based on limitation of the problem, research formulated several problems of feminism as the follows:

1. What are the existences of oppression received by women in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*?

2. What are woman struggles carried out in novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood?

1.5 Objective of the research

The research objectives are:

1. To discuss the oppression accepted by woman encounter in novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.
2. To discuss the women struggles in novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

1.6 Significance of the Research

1. Theoretical significance

Theoretically, researchers have several desires that later can make a better contribution in the field of science, especially in the field of literature in this research. Researchers also hope that this research provides information about the oppression that are still accepted by women, both physically and mentally, and provide knowledge and some theories about feminism. Finally, the researcher hopes that this research can be used as a comparison and reference for the future.

2. Practical significance

Practically, this researched and by knowing how to apply its theories. Researchers hope that this research will benefit readers. Researchers hope that with this research in social interaction or family interaction there will be no longer differences in position and kind of oppression received by women anymore in terms of social, economic, and political.

1.7 Definition of Key Term

Feminist : Feminist is an approach that contains political elements that can be used to attack other approaches that have wrong perceptions about women. Guerin (2005)

The second sex : The Second Sex (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, that men and women have differences so that they cannot be said to be the same. The difference according to Beauvoir, men are considered “the default”, while women are considered "the other".

Oppression : Oppression is a form of deviation that occurs in the social, political and economic environment. Some of oppression that

occurs around us can be seen or can still be felt. According to Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, cases of oppression still occur in certain categories that are able to dominate other categories.