

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Background of the Study

The traditional and age-old custom which forces women to stay at home and at the same time isolates them from the workplace and from the society has been socially accepted as a fact, owing to the belief that women are inferior to men. Feminist struggle to counter such misleading concepts started as early as in the 18th century when Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the earliest feminists in England, tried to disclose the inequality between man and woman in her book entitled A Vindication of the Right of Women (1792). Through her book, she introduces her feminist ideal which is “not only sexual equality in the family and society at large but the end of the sexual division of labor” (Holmstrom 2).

The result achieved by the feminist movement is obvious today. Not only are women freed from domestic ‘imprisonment’ and able to enter the workplace, “[they] are beginning to realize and appreciate their own potential... They say to themselves, ‘Where do I want to go with my professional life, and what do I have to do to get there.’” (Russel & Fitzgibbons 19). Recent statistics mentioned in Marie Richmond-Abbott’s essay entitled

“Women Wage Earners” confirm the progress that took place in the 20th century in the United States :

. . . Women have moved in ever increasing number into the labor force. Between 1900 and 1980, female labor force participation grew 18 percent to 50 percent. (The number of women who work for pay or who are trying to find a job almost doubled between 1950 and 1974 alone). By 1988, 56 percent of all women were in the work force. These labor force participation rates are projected to continue to rise to the year 2000 (p.135).

Although a lot of women are now able to enter the workplace, they still have to fight for equality in the workplace with men. Despite having equal chance to have a career, women still find it very difficult to be as successful as men. Women’s jobs are usually limited to the low level ones. “For example, in the health care industry the nurses’ aides, abortion clinic workers, social worker, laboratory technicians, and nurses are likely to be women; physicians and hospital administrator are more likely to be men” (Crawford & Unger 368). Research conducted by Crawford and Unger shows that in general “[t]he closer to the top of the hierarchy, the fewer women there are” (Crawford & Unger 368). The number of women in top level positions all over the world is indeed far from satisfying :

In a recent study of more than 500 companies in the United Kingdom, 92 percent of top executives were male; in the United States, only about 5 percent of senior executives are women, and this hardly changed during the 1900s. Women hold between one and five percent of top executive positions in Canada, Brazil, and Germany. In fact, there is not a single

field open to both women and men in which there are more women than men at the top, in any country in the world (Crawford & Unger 368).

Having researched all these facts, I naturally become very interested when I read a novel by Michael Crichton entitled Disclosure, which presents as one of the major characters a career woman who is very successful in her job and even outperforms the men in her office. However, in spite of the fact that Crichton “does a very clever and innovative job at expressing his views of the various and very different pressures and expectations that both men and women face in the corporate” (Avernus), I am aware that this novel is not received well among the feminists.

The portrayal of the female major character, Meredith Johnson, has instead caused a controversy because in spite of her successful career, she is depicted as a working woman with a lot of negative traits. It is not surprising, therefore, that “[t]his novel was harshly criticized by feminist commentators, who saw it as just another vilification of working women” (Michaelcrichton.com: Books & Movies-Disclosure). However, the author defends himself by pointing out that :

Eventually I conclude that working women liked the story because it focused attention on a female character they found difficult to deal with the unscrupulous corporate climber. They weren't able to publicly criticize these climbers, because back in those days, working women thought they should stick together and not criticize each other. So they were pleased that a book did it for them (Michaelcrichton.com: Books & Movies-Disclosure).

Such different opinions concerning the character and the novel have challenged me to analyze the portrayal of Meredith Johnson more thoroughly. In

order to obtain a deeper understanding of this subject, I am going to make use of several feminist essays and books, namely “The Socialist Feminist Project” by Nancy Holmstrom, Women and Gender by Mary Crawford & Rhoda Unger, “Women Wage Earners” by Marie Richmond-Abbott, “Professional Women: How Real Are the Recent Gains?” by Debra Renee Kaufman, and the last Career and Conflict by Anne Russel & Patricia Fitzgibbons. Most of the source I use deal with the problem of working women and gender inequalities in the workplace.

Finally, having analyzed the portrayal of the female major character in this novel by using the feminist approach, I would decide if this novel is indeed “a vilification of working women” or on the contrary, it is a novel that conveys the feminist spirit.

2. Statement of the Problem

1. How does the author portray the female major character in the novel?
2. How is the portrayal of the character related to feminism?
3. Why does the author create such a portrayal?

3. Purpose of the Study

1. The way the author portrays the female major character in the novel.
2. The way the portrayal of the character is related to feminism.
3. The purpose of the author in creating such a portrayal.

4. Methods of Research

The method I use is library research. I begin by reading Michael Crichton's Disclosure, and several books which are relevant to the topics to be discussed. After that, I analyze the primary text by using some theories from some references and materials from the Internet which can support the analysis and can help me in writing a good thesis. Finally, I draw some conclusions of what has been discussed.

5. Organization of the Thesis

I divide the thesis into three chapters, which are preceded by the Preface, the Table of Contents and the Abstract. In the first chapter, I present the Introduction, which contains Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. In the second chapter, I analyze the way the author portrays the female major character in Michael Crichton's Disclosure by using the feminist approach, and in the third chapter, I draw conclusion of my analysis. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendix.

