

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

According to Literary Dictionary, science fiction is “a popular modern branch of prose fiction that explores the probable consequences of some improbable or impossible transformation of the basic conditions of human (or intelligent non-human) existence” (Baldick). In its development, science fiction branches into nearly all genres of fantasy, including utopian and dystopian fiction, mystery, and Gothic tale. The works of science fiction itself has given a special license to the author in creating imaginary world and it allows unlimited freedom in creating settings.

Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herland are categorized as dystopian and utopian fiction which belongs to the subgenre of science fiction. Both novels are also categorized as feminist science fiction as they discuss the same issues related to how society constructs gender roles and the unequal political and personal power of men and women. Gilman's Herland (1915) refers to feminist utopia which is created to explore a society in

which gender differences or gender power imbalances do not exist while Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale refers to feminist dystopia which is created to explore a society in which gender inequalities are intensified, thus asserting a need for feminist work to continue (Baldick).

Although one novel is dystopian and another utopian, I find that both novels still portray the unfairness that women have to endure. In The Handmaid's Tale, the abuse towards women is extreme since it is a dystopian novel. Yet, in Herland, though the women rule in Herland, they still experience some unfairness when three men come to their land and disturb their perfect bliss.

So, both Herland and The Handmaid's Tale deal with the same issue concerning the unfair treatment that women have to face both in utopian and dystopian novels and this is related to the theme which will be analyzed through the female major characters in the novels. Theme according to Perrine is revealed when "a story through its portrayal of specific persons in specific situations will have something to say about the nature of all human beings or about their relationship to each other or to the universe. Whatever central generalization about life arises from the specifics of the story constitutes theme" (106). In the novels, the specific persons are the female characters in specific situations. Thus, I analyze the themes through the female characters.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems are stated as follows:

1. What are the themes of the novels?

2. How does the portrayal of the female major characters reveal the theme of each novel?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my analysis is:

1. To show what the themes of the novels are.
2. To reveal how the portrayal of the female major characters reveal the theme of each novel.

### **Method of Research**

This thesis is done through library research with a few steps. The first step is reading both novels Herland and The Handmaid's Tale as the primary texts. Secondly, I read some sources from some books concerning my thesis. Moreover, I perform the research by reading some essays which are taken from the Internet. Finally, I analyze the two novels and then make a conclusion.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis starts with the Acknowledgements, Abstract and Table of Contents. The content of the thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problems, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the discussion of The Handmaid's Tale. Chapter Three is the discussion of Herland. The last chapter is the

Conclusion. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which contain the Synopsis of both novels and the Biography of the Authors.