

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of Study

*Grey's Anatomy* is an American television series created by Shonda Rhimes that has drama as its genre. Just like the title, this show is a story related to human anatomy, hence medicine, hence hospital. Nobody – the author, producer, production house, actors – expected this show to be a big hit as it is today because it was only a replacement in mid-television-season on ABC on March 2005. However, to everyone's surprise, *Grey's Anatomy* has attracted about eighteen millions of viewers in The United States of America alone and earned *Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series – Drama* the very next year. Now, there are already eight season finales and the ninth is currently airing.

In real world, *Gray's Anatomy* is a book written by an English anatomist, Henry Gray, in 1855. He wrote this book to help medical students all around the world, especially surgeons, to have an inexpensive and accessible anatomy textbook to learn. Though originally the book was called *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical*, it was then worldly known as '*Gray's Anatomy*'. It is still in print today and perhaps is the best known medical books of all. It is one of the great reference works of all time, used by physicians, students, artists, and anyone interested in human anatomy.

In the television series *Grey's Anatomy* however, the Grey, the hero in medical world is Ellis Grey, Meredith Grey's (Meredith Grey is the protagonist) mother. Ellis is an on-top-of-her-game surgeon who has won two Harper Avery Awards – the most sought after award among physicians.

What makes *Grey's Anatomy* special and worth analyzing is the uniqueness of the setting, plot, and characters. The show has successfully changed the image of doctors, medicine, and most importantly hospitals in the eyes of the audience. Revitalized are the image of science world about being boring, doctors about being old and stiff, and also hospital about being a place of horror. It may be a fact that being in a hospital is everyone's last thing in mind; but this show has really changed that. In the show, the hospital is not only giving people medication, but also life lessons, motivations, and ironically fun.

I choose to analyze a movie, to be specific a television series because studying a movie has no limitation like studying other printed literature, such as poem, novel, even drama. In a movie or film, there are so many elements that can be sensed by audience such as its action, characters, and setting. These elements cannot be sensed if readers simply read the text of the play.

People who are not familiar with the world of literature and literary criticism, may simply view *Grey's Anatomy* as another television show displaying some ordinary stories about biology and doctors. This is why I step up to reveal the unimaginable

elements of this popular television show to the world; that there are hidden messages in the show that the creator, Shonda Rhimes wants to send to the world.

The main characters on this show, who are all surgeons, meet different patients everyday, who can give them lessons explicitly or implicitly; and vice versa. That's how the ingenuity of the creator is manifested in the blend of the message of the whole story of the show and the message of each episode. Every episode of the show concentrates on different aspects of human lives, for instance hope, family, true love, trust, passion, even revenge; but somehow at the same time the personal issue of the main characters are still highlighted. In other words, there are two dramas going on in the show; the major one is the drama of the doctors, and the minor one is the drama of the patients. In the world of literature, that means there are plot and subplot.

The creator uses the show as a metaphor: the interns are children, the attendings and residents are parents, and the patients are challenges in our lives. The attendings and residents are hard on the interns because they are just like parents teaching their children lessons. They are being mean for a reason that is to prepare the children to face their lives later on when parents can no longer be on their sides. As for the patients being challenges, when the doctors could save the patient, they pass the challenge or when they could not save the patient, they fail the challenge. No doctors can save all the patients because just like in real life, nobody lives without mistakes and downfall at all.

In this thesis, the plot of the show is the main concern. I will also discuss about the characters that can contribute in proving the feminism values. What has happened and

what is yet going to happen are all controlled by the creator's main principle, that is feminism value, which will be explained and expanded thoroughly.

Beside using feminism theory, I will use a theory of understanding literature and film to support the analysis. These theories will work together and support each other in finalizing the analysis of this thesis.

Feminist criticism did not become familiar until the 1960s. Some recognized feminist criticism as something academic as a theoretical movement, but most viewed feminist criticism as being a political movement that has consequences to the real world. Provided this information, I became more convinced to write a thesis about feminist criticism in *Grey's Anatomy*. Most of us have heard that everything is all about politics; there is no such thing as a coincidence; America is the number one country in the whole planet. So I am going to unveil the concealed motivation behind the making of this very popular American television series.

It cannot be denied that however smart the society are – that they are very aware that television drama is only a fiction – what the societies see in television still has impacts on their way of thinking, reaction and belief. Tracing back to literature is the illustration of human beings and their lives, when people watch a movie, they cannot enjoy it only with their imaginations but they admit it or not, reflect and sympathize the movie with their own lives. Many researchers have shown that people's way of thinking and belief towards medicine are mostly extracted from the media, especially televisions. For example, Harter and Japp (2001) on their article 'Technology as the Representative

Anecdote in Popular Discourses of Health and Medicine' say that people do go to doctors or other scientific practitioners of medicine to consult but they already have in mind some information whether facts or myths they had previously gained from media such as news, books, films, and TV.

Seeing how this phenomenon evolves in human lives, I once again emphasize that the creator, an African American single mother, Shonda Rhimes creates *Grey's Anatomy* with a certain motivation in mind that she wants this movie to benefit her; how she gains recognition as being a woman, an African American living in the United States of America, and as a writer, uses the feminist criticism as a political movement.

It is necessary to first examine the research that has been conducted on such similar topics – about feminist criticism, and about *Grey's Anatomy* itself. I have found that a number of research have been done using feminist literary theory, but there are only a few research have been done on *Grey's Anatomy*, but as far as the research is done, none has been performed on feminist criticism in *Grey's Anatomy*. Barnett (2007), for example made her senior honors thesis: 'Dissecting the medical drama: A Generic Analysis of *Grey's Anatomy* and *House, M.D.*' Her thesis discusses the differences between *Grey's Anatomy* and *House, M.D.* and the impact of those medical dramas have on the audience on medicine. Kahlenberg (1995) wrote a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication, 'Character Portrayals on Prime-time Television: A Content Analysis'. Her thesis is analyzing the production of prime-time television shows, the people behind the scenes like the directors, producers, and writers. In the thesis, she proved her

assumption that there were stereotypic images of men and women in those prime-time television shows.

## **1.2. Statement of Problems**

This thesis shows and proves the influence of feminism theory in the plot and characters of *Grey's Anatomy*. There are three cases that I will answer in this thesis:

1. How does the author use the plot to assert feminism movement?
2. How do the characters portray feminism values composed in *Grey's Anatomy*?
3. How the creator of *Grey's Anatomy* affects the characters in *Grey's Anatomy*?

## **1.3. Scope and Limitation**

The scope is the feminism value embraced in the story of *Grey's Anatomy*. Observing only the main characters in the story and their issues will be the limitation that guides me to do the research.

## **1.4. Goals and Function**

My goal in writing this thesis is to prove that feminism is really the basic rule that the creator, Shonda Rhimes, holds firmly in writing the storyline. *Grey's Anatomy* is not an obvious literature talking about power of women like other literary art, for example *Sex and the City*. Because of this phenomenon, I feel that it challenges me in a good way that I have an obligation as a literature student to prove my thesis; *Grey's Anatomy* is a work of a feminist.

And by doing this thesis, I implicitly persuade the readers or audience to be more critical in seeing things in life, in this case watching television show, that everything is made for a certain reason and has an interesting background to it. In other words, the function of this thesis is opening audiences' eyes, especially those of American television series viewers that what they watch are not merely for entertainment, but are also the media used by creators to convey messages they want audiences to believe.

### **1.5. Research Methods**

I used qualitative method because the study of this thesis was exploratory, meaning that not much had been written about. In qualitative method, the research was rather deep than broad. Creswell (1994) had said about qualitative method in his book '*Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*', the literature or theory used in this thesis has three functions. First is to frame the problem of the study of this thesis, which is found in chapter one. The second use of the theory is to base the whole content of chapter two. The last function, which is the third, is to analyze the literary art by comparing and contrasting the literary art to the theory.

Before determining the literature used in this thesis, I had watched *Grey's Anatomy* even before I had in mind the idea of writing a thesis. After contemplating of what was open to be researched about *Grey's Anatomy*, I could finally confidently decide a study of feminism in *Grey's Anatomy*. The use of literature in chapter one of this thesis was then fulfilled.

I studied about the theory through books, journals, and websites. After understanding feminism theory, I wrote the chapter two by summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. Beside feminism, I also put several other theories that will be useful in finalizing this thesis, such as biography of Shonda Rhimes, literature, film, and television, plot, and character.

The final step was comparing and contrasting the literature to the literary art. I spent the most time doing chapter three when writing this thesis. I had also asked a trusted party, who had watched *Grey's Anatomy* to review and criticize this thesis, more importantly the analysis chapter. The party gave a good comment that this thesis was coherent.

By conducting this structured method of research, I believe that the analysis of this literary art is fairly deep. Creswell (1994) had said that when the analysis is deep and focused, it can be said that one good research by qualitative method is accomplished.