CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature has been known for a long time. It reflected human life and artwork, as this following quotation. “Literature springs from our inborn love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspect of our human experience.” (Moody, 1977:2) Literature can be said as the result of the author's imagination but the framework is what’s happening in the surrounding society who later developed by the authors with interesting words. Literature can be classified as having two mayor forms they are fiction and non-fiction. Literature can be divided into drama, poetry, and prose (novel and short story).

As the work of imaginary, fiction especially novel gives the problems of human life. It presents social problems as the issues that the reader can take a lesson from these problems, and the reader knows what has happened in a society even in their neighborhood. Novel can be a source of story that entertain readers and improve their knowledge about culture and society.

Social problems become a problem when a number of people began to complain about a situation that they face in society (Coleman and Cressey, 1987:4). These people believe that they are victims of the environment around them who do not care about their fate. One of the social problems that exist in America is homeless. Two decades ago, every city had its “skid row” with bums, derelicts, vagrants… The “bum” or “hobo” of the past become today’s “homeless person” (Tischler, 1996:542,543). A word of “homeless” has a complicated definition. People staying in shelters for the homeless, on the streets, or in other similar settings can be
called as homeless (Toro, 2007:463). People who are very poor have the risk to become homeless. Homeless condition is also influenced by unemployment, a low minimum wage; there is a very noticeable difference between the wages of workers with the chief executives. Many companies only accept employees, who have the skills, make unskilled people to be unemployed and receive any job for minimum wages. A lack of affordable housing and inability to pay the house rent send them living on the street.

In fact, the increase in inflation and unemployment in the American economy began in the early 1970s, despite the ups and downs in the business cycle, it has drifted downward ever since. Unemployment, unskilled, and extreme poverty are some of the causes to make someone become homeless. The poor in rich countries are facing more hardship than in a poor one because they are minority. The proportion of poor people has gone up reaching 15.3 percent in 1983, before dropping back to 14.4 percent the following year. And then the poverty also increased in 1990s. The poverty rate of 13.7 percent in 1996 has gone up from 12.8 percent in 1989. More than one in five children (20.5 percent) lived in poverty in 1996.

One of the authors who explores issues of the homeless and poor people is John Grisham in one of his novel *The Street Lawyer*. In this novel, Grisham tells the story of homeless lives, why they became homeless, what are the causes and effect of people who become homeless.

*The Street Lawyer* novel begins when a homeless person who named himself with ‘Mister’ enters the office of the Washington D.C. law firm Drake & Sweeney and make a lot of lawyers as hostage. Although eventually he was shot dead by police snipers but one of all hostages, Michael Brock, that is a successful lawyer in
law firm Drake & Sweeney wants to know why this ‘Mister’ holding them and giving strange questions about how much their salary as a lawyer at this large law firm. On his way to search the truth, Michael Brock found the reality outside his estimation that in Washington D.C., the great city where he lived, in fact have a lot of sorrow. When night came, he saw a lot of homeless people who gathered at a homeless shelter to get some food and a place to sleep though only one night, especially in bad winter. And the numbers of homeless shelters are not comparable to the number of homeless people in the city. Brock also knows the fact why this ‘Mister’ tries to make them a hostage and then the death of a homeless woman and her children have a relationship with his law firm where he worked. Then, Brock takes the data that is very important to the law firm where he works and make him became the target of the police and finally he decided to switch his profession to become a street lawyer and began to defend the rights of the homelessness.

Generally, sociology of literature means to understand literature by considering aspects of society itself. Sociology of literature aims to improve understanding of the literature in relation to the society, explaining the creativity that is not opposed to the reality. Literature is not only about individual phenomenon but also a social phenomenon (Ratna, 2003). Sociology of literature focuses on literature as a result of interaction between author and society. Literature is a complex structure so that in understanding it should be analyzed. Structural analysis cannot be separated with a semiotics analysis because literary works is a structure of meaningful signs. Structural and semiotics theory are the objective literary criticism that considers literary works as something autonomic, regardless of the surrounding nature, the reader and the author (Pradopo, 2003:140,141). Definitively, structuralism gives attention to the analysis of elements in literary works. The
elements of prose are theme, conflict, setting, characters, plot, point of view, and style of language. The most important in this criticism is literary work itself. Structural analysis which is combined with semiotics called dynamic structure (Teeuw in Pradopo, 2003:146). In Dynamic structuralism, according Mukarovsky, the chain of relationship is between four factors: the creator, literature, readers, and reality.

Sociology of literature can explain the essence social facts, literary works as communication systems, especially in relation to the extrinsic aspects, such as social groups, social class, social stratification, social institutions, social systems, social interactions, social conflict,... (Ratna, 2003:18). One of the theories which are relevant is theory of Karl Marx. Marx (in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004:145) believed that the workers must take the terms the capitalists offer them, because the workers can no longer produce their own needs. As Marx believed, if the worker doesn’t want to do the job at the wage that offered for them, someone else like unemployment will take their job, and they will be unemployment, too. It can cause the rich become richer while the poor change poorer.


The writer is interested in literary works, especially novels. The writer considers that literary work is unique, especially novel because the author can show the world with its problems which is then written into words and next become a book. Reading literary works, we know the social problem of human life. The novel
The Street Lawyer shows the social problem, especially homeless people in America. Until now, this problem is still not resolved, not only in America even in some developed countries it is still an issue that must be solved. All that reasons encourage the writer to choose this topic. The writer hopes this thesis to be useful for further research related to the social problems, especially about the homeless. This thesis also aims to develop the study of sociology of literature considering that literary works can explain the problem that is happening in society.

1.2 Problems of the Study

According to the title of this proposal “An Analysis of the Homeless People in America Reflected in John Grisham’s novel The Street Lawyer”, the writer tries to clarify the problems into some questions, and they are:

1. What are the causes of people become homeless picturized in John Grisham’s novel The Street Lawyer?
2. What are the effects of people who become homeless picturized in John Grisham’s novel The Street Lawyer?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the analysis of this thesis are:

1. To explain the causes of people become homeless picturized in John Grisham’s novel The Street Lawyer.
2. To explain the effects of people who become homeless picturized in John Grisham’s novel The Street Lawyer.

1.4 Scope of the Study

In research, it is very important to limit the analysis on specific data that has been chosen so that over complicating and unfocused issues and analysis can be avoided. The analysis is limited to the background of homeless people, the causes
and effects of people become homeless picturized in John Grisham’s novel *The Street Lawyer* and the attitude of the government and society toward the homeless people picturized in this novel.

America has a lot of social problems. One of the social problems that exist in America is about homeless. The inflation and unemployment which has increased in the early 1970s and the poverty in this country make their presence overlooked. The impact of the extreme poverty, unemployment continually, and inability to pay house rent make them live on the streets and today people call them as homeless people.

1.5 **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is to give information to the readers what has happened in society even in their neighborhood through this novel. By reading this novel, the readers know that developed countries like America also have social problems such as homeless. Until now, the homeless problem is still not solved even in developed countries. The writer hopes this thesis could be a reference to know the condition of a society and improve the knowledge of the readers about the homeless, what are the causes and effect of being homeless. The writer also hopes this thesis could become references for further study especially about this topic.