

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study by discussing background of the study, question of the study, purpose of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, methodology, clarification of the key terms, and organization of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

According to Tally Jr (2009, p. 2), “the term alienation has its simple meaning—a condition of being estranged from someone or something...” This present study strives to find and analyze this condition in Murakami’s *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* (2006). In the three short stories selected from the book, the writer found that the characters in respective stories show similar behaviors which potentially can be classified into one or more of four out of five alienation aspects proposed by Seeman (as cited in Senekal, 2010, p. 23) namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Nonetheless, before moving on to the next step, there are some essential issues needed to be explained in order to clarify this study’s significance as a literary analysis.

The first issue is the relevance of alienation study in recent times. According to Yuill (2011, p. 104) since 1980 onwards, new alienation studies decreased in number. At least three reasons are identified: “...the waning of 1960s radicalism, the wider failings of the Marxist project in the 1980s, or a relocation and reordering of where and how work was studied by sociologists... replaced by more *a` la mode* postmodernist concerns.” However, starting from 1990s there was an upsurge in alienation studies. Research Committee on Alienation of the International Sociological Association (ISA), kept alienation studies alive until then (Geyer, 1996,

p. xii). According to Senekal (2010, p. 22) there are three developments which trigger this ascend: “the fall of the Soviet Union, globalization, the increasing awareness of ethnic conflicts, and post-modernism.” In arguing that the rise of postmodernism only propagates alienation, Geyer (1996, p. xiii) asserts that “the world of simulacra and virtual reality (two aspects which belong to postmodern paradigm) tends to be an alienated world, for reasons that Marx and Freud could not possibly have foreseen” resulting in trend towards alienation. In conclusion, in spite of the multitude of changes that have taken place in the time gap between Marx’s or Seeman’s lifetime to ours, an analysis on alienation is still relevant to be conducted in the contemporary condition. This decision leads to the second point, which is the selection of Seeman’s alienation theory in analyzing contemporary literature.

The next issue is the reason behind selecting Seeman’s alienation theory. First of all, to understand the importance of Seeman’s theory, learning a brief explanation on alienation is inevitable. The term alienation specifically has been used variedly in many researches, even defined dissimilarly in other disciplines. “For instance, in law, alienation refers to a conveyance of property; something is said to be “alienable” if it can be sold” (Tally Jr, 2009, p. 2). This variation is caused by the diverse concepts of alienation postulated by many thinkers. There are at least two notable notions in sociology: Marx’s and Seeman’s concepts of alienation. Marx (in Ekerwald, 1998, p. 17) contends that there are three types of alienation experienced by the workers: private property, the commodity character of labor, and the division of labor in the society. Seeman reformulates his theory based on Marx’s and comes up with a more practical methodological framework, i.e. his five aspects of alienation. Considering the practicality, recent uses, and reinterpretations of Seeman’s theory explained in Neal and Collas (2000), Kalekin-Fishman (1998), Senekal (2008), and Geyer (1996), the writer selects it as the framework for this study.

The last point is the reasons behind the selection of Murakami’s works as the objects of the study. First of all, his works are chosen because they are widely read contemporary literary works. His popularity as a literary star is hugely increased since

the release of his novel *Norwegian Wood*. Even from his early works, Murakami is regarded as a controversial figure by Japan's literary circle for blurring the border that separate two kinds of conventional Japanese literature: pure literature, *jun bungaku* (純文学), and mass literature, *taishū bungaku* (大衆文学), which makes him a well-known writer. Thus, being popular and contemporary, his works are suitable to be the object of this study, which aims to reveal alienation in contemporary condition.

The second reason is that his protagonists have a tendency of showing alienation issues by being isolated from their surroundings. They are rather individualistic, leading a solitary life, and having values which are uncommon. Murakami's characters seem to strive for being true to himself and having genuine connections with their fellow men. For example, Hoshino in *Kafka on the Shore* neglects his job as a truck driver to accompany Nakata, an odd old man, to find a magical stone. The journey is a form of isolation from the mass culture; as a quest for a magical stone is not what the society would call a normal pursuit. In the course of the story, Hoshino experiences revelations and feel a genuine relationship with the old man. He realizes by seeing how the old man behaves, that all this time he is not being true to himself; that the only features of his identity are the ones that are represented by the materialistic aspect of the mass culture. It can be understood as an effort to overcome alienation in the postmodern society.

Among his works, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* (2006) is selected not only because of the theme of alienation which is evident in the stories it offers, but also because the amount of analysis on Murakami's short stories is scarce compared to his novels studies. Considering that popularity is regarded as one of the measures for literary works' importance, it does not mean that his short stories are less powerful. Though Murakami is well-known for his novels such as *Norwegian Wood*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and *Kafka on the Shore*, it does not mean that his short stories are less important. It is already stated above that he becomes popular since his novel publication, *Norwegian Wood*, but we must not forget that the novel is a development from "Firefly," a short story compiled in *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*.

In addition, Murakami himself says in the introduction pages of the short story collection that for him, writing short stories is like planting gardens while writing novels are like planting forests and that he often experiments his penmanship in short stories before he uses what he discovers in the process of writing short stories in his novels (Murakami, 2006, pp. ix-xiii). Thus, his short stories are not less essential compared to his novels in humanities faculty.

Given his being one of Nobel in Literature candidates more than one time, many writers have been drawn in having Murakami's works as subjects for their studies. Wattanagun and Chotiudompant (2009) explore the quest of self-discovery, a seeking for identity of Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* characters: Kafka, Hoshino, and Nakata. The writers analyze poignant point of Murakami's work: the construction of individual identity through the association of the representation of signs in late-stage capitalist Japan. Meyer (2011) reveals how Murakami as one of the representatives of Japanese contemporary writers, construct their fictions in which the surreal and theme of alienation are portrayed. Meyer argues that the emotional alienation is freed through the supernatural dreams the characters experience. Strecher (2011) elaborates the main concerns of the latest studies on Murakami's works. These studies chiefly focus on the aforementioned "nationality-less"—*mukokuseki*—writing style, exploration of the human psyche, and a shift of theme from detachment to commitment (by comparing Murakami's early and latest works).

In conclusion, this study tries to offer a new interpretation in the field of alienation studies, specifically on Murakami's writings by employing Seeman's alienation theory to find out what kinds of alienation found in Murakami's short stories and how it manifests in the contemporary Japan. The writer hopes this study can contribute a new interpretation in literary studies, especially on alienation studies and Murakami's literary works.

1.2 Questions of the Study

These are the guiding questions in analyzing the data:

- What aspects of alienation are apparent in the selected stories from *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*?
- How does alienation manifest itself in the selected stories from *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*?
- How does the issue of alienation in the stories relate to contemporary Japan?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this present study are:

- To identify aspects of alienation apparent in the selected stories from *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*.
- To reveal how alienation manifest itself in the selected stories from *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*.
- To unearth how the issue of alienation in the stories relate to the contemporary Japan.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study tries to examine short stories written by Murakami in his short story collection *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. From 24 stories it offers, the writer selects three of them which are thought as the most representative on the issue of alienation. The selected stories are “A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism,” “Tony Takitani,” and “Firefly.”

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study attempts to reveal that alienation is apparent and one of the frequent issues expressed in Murakami’s works. There is an increasing amount of effort in analyzing Murakami’s works done by many writers. However, a study with Seeman’s alienation

theory and its relation to contemporary Japan which places Murakami's short stories as the object of the study is scarce since most of the works analyzed in studies on Murakami's works are his novels such as *Norwegian Wood*, *Kafka on the Shore*, and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Hopefully, this study can contribute a new way of interpreting and understanding Murakami's works.

1.6 Methodology

This study employs a context-oriented approach. Context-oriented approaches put texts in a larger context in regard to the theory chosen (Klarer, 1998). In this case, the selected short stories are placed in the context of alienation theory to reveal what kinds of alienation aspects and how they manifest in the object of the study.

The works that are analyzed in this study are three short stories from a collection of short stories written by Haruki Murakami, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*: "A Folklore for My Generation: A Pre-History of Late-Stage Capitalism," "Tony Takitani," and "Firefly" which are analyzed with Seeman's alienation theory as a framework to reveal what kinds of alienation aspects and how they manifest in the stories. The alienation theory proposed by Seeman with its reinterpretations described in Neal and Collas (2000), Kalekin-Fishman (1998), Senekal (2008), and Geyer (1996) are used as a tool to reveal what alienation aspects found in the object of the study and how they manifest. From five Seeman's alienation aspects, this present study employs four of them i.e. powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Consequently, this study aims to show the connection between these aspects and how they manifest. In addition, this study also aims to unearth the relation between the issue of alienation in the stories and the social climate of contemporary Japan.

1.7 Clarification of the Key Terms

1.7.1 Alienation

According to Tally Jr (2009, p. 2), “The term alienation has its simple meaning—a condition of being estranged from someone or something.” Furthermore, Seeman (in Senekal, 2010, p. 23) proposes aspects which correlate to alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion.

The first chapter introduces the background of the topic, question of the study, aims of the study, and scope of the study. It also provides a short explanation of the methodology: data collections (including the object of the study) and how the analysis is done. The last constituent is clarification of terms. Next is literature review, the second chapter. The section copes with all information found in relation to the topic discussed: alienation according to thinkers specifically to Hegel and Marx, Seeman’s aspects of alienation and its reinterpretations, postmodern Japan, and other studies done on Haruki Murakami’s works. Methodology follows the second chapter. It mainly concerns with the characteristics of how the study is done. It informs the methodology, data collection and analysis. Then, the study offers discussion upon the subject; chiefly dealing with the unraveling of what alienation aspects and how they manifest in the stories. The last one would be conclusion and suggestion which confirm the results taken from the discussion and friendly advices for further studies regarding the topic.

