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The Men Who are Lost in Time: *Alienation in Matt Haig's How to Stop Time (2017)*

Rifki Gustian Romdon, Ahmad Bukhori Muslim
Department of English Language Education
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Bandung, Indonesia
rifkigstn@student.upi.edu, abukhmuslim@upi.edu

***Abstract*—Postmodern condition, marked by the advancement of the globalization of media, technology, and economy, raises a sense of discontent in the society. Detachment, isolation, and alienation are examples of how development affects human's sociological and psychological state. This study attempts to propose the idea of alienation as a significant issue and is still relevant in society nowadays by presenting examples found in the novel *How to Stop Time* (2017) by Matt Haig. The examples found are reflected upon theories and conditions in contemporary society. As for the framework of alienation, this study employs the three aspects of alienation proposed by Jaeggi (2014) namely the intertwined powerlessness and meaninglessness, the construct of social heteronomy, and the relation of relationlessness, to unravel how alienation is depicted in the novel through the relation and interrelation among the main character's experiences, his associates, other characters, and the time itself. The result of the study suggests that the novel depicts all the aspects of alienation proposed by Jaeggi (2014). The quasi-immortal trait of the main character and his associates also show other issues which are the issue of loneliness and the loss of freedom through their experience of alienation. Also, the findings in the study suggest that the theory is productive and proposes a practical contrasting standpoint of alienation which is the relation of appropriation. Further research on the novel *How to Stop Time* (2017) is suggested due to its rich potential of exportability.**

Keywords: postmodernism, existentialism, alienation, loneliness, freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

The early 21st century marks a significant progression of human civilization with the development of the globalization of media, technology, and economy which also indicates the shift from modern to a postmodern era. As a consequence of this development, signs of an increasing discontent can be seen in society. Detachment and isolation are examples of how development affects how society works and how human's sociological and psychological state is altered.

The recently developed conception of alienation is proposed by Jaeggi (2014). She argues that alienation could mean ways in which individuals' life may go wrong. For instance, the feeling of apathy and indifference toward life which are bound with alienation threatens to weaken the definition of what good life is in general. This could mean that an alienated person undergoes a detachment from society and even from him/herself so that he/she sees the world with a pessimistic point of view. She further elaborates that alienation is a form of a deficient relation. Alienation does not mean an absence of relation, but alienation itself is a relation. Alienation is the contrasting standpoint of the relation of appropriation; a relation of both integration and transformation of what is given. She argues that alienation is indicated by three aspects namely the intertwined powerlessness and meaninglessness, constructed as a social heteronomy, and a form of the relation of relationlessness.

Numerous alienation studies in the field of literature have been conducted, however, the theory proposed by Jaeggi (2014) mostly used as complementary for Marx's (1867) and Seeman's (1959) theory. This study, however, employs her theory as the main perspective of alienation to see whether the theory is productive on its own. Besides, *How to Stop Time* is quite a new novel; thus, the writer cannot find any literary research on this novel. However, the issues presented in the novel are deemed to hold great potential for literary research and to understand human nature in general, as well as the unique experience and perspective of quasi-immortal individuals.

In order to keep the research on its track, the writer focuses on answering the following problems. (1) What aspects of alienation are presented in the novel *How to Stop Time*? (2) What do the presented alienations represent? This study examines the novel *How to Stop Time* by Haig (2017). This study focuses on the main character and other characters under the condition of *anageria*, their interactions, and their view towards their surrounding which the writer thinks as the most representative example of the issue of alienation from Jaeggi's (2014) perspective. This study attempts to show that alienation is a significant issue and still relevant in society nowadays by comparing, contrasting, and elaborating the condition and narration presented in the novel to theories and conditions of contemporary society. This study might also contribute new insights in interpreting and understanding the cases of alienation. The issues presented in the novel deemed to hold great potential for literary research in the attempt to understand human nature in general, as well as understanding the unique experience and perspective of quasi-immortal individuals that adapted in various kinds of social groups from different places and different times. Several issues commonly found around the discourse of alienation are as follows:

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A. Postmodernism

The term 'postmodernism' is often overly mentioned in the discussions of contemporary culture and is difficult to define even from the postmodern paradigm itself. Hutcheon (2002) defines postmodernism as a perspective in which de-naturalize several dominant features of our ways of life. Postmodernity also aims to point out entities that we unthinkingly perceive as 'natural' (for example patriarchy, liberal humanism, and capitalism) are actually 'cultural' where those things are made by us, not given to us. She continues that postmodernism manifests itself in numerous cultural forms, such as painting, literature, film, video, music, dance, architecture, photography, etc. However, in general terms, postmodernism takes the form of a self-conscious, self-contradictory, and self-undermining statement.

B. Loneliness

Generally speaking, loneliness is a condition of aloneness that can be felt by anyone anywhere and anytime. In terms of meaning, Moustakas (2016), argues that loneliness is inherently neither good nor bad. Loneliness can be understood as an intense and timeless moment of self-awareness which results in bringing a person deeply in touch with his existence and be in touch with others in a fundamental sense. In such a state, he adds, one is inevitably cut off from the companionship of others yet the condition allows him to realize himself in a totally unique manner.

In addition, Svendsen (2017) argues that loneliness is not necessarily related to a lack of social support and thus has to be understood based on subjective experience rather than objective determinants. Being alone and being lonely are two different things. Being alone indicates nothing beyond the fact that someone is not surrounded by others while being lonely contains a certain emotional dimension that the word 'alone' does not always possess.

C. Freedom

In a broad sense, freedom can be understood as the capability of someone to do something without being objected by others. In fact, from the existentialist perspective proposed by Sartre (2011), the amount of freedom given to humans is horrifying because, since birth, humans are condemned to be free. Humans are free to create meanings for him/herself and it is useless for one to seek meaning and answer from the world outside of themselves because the world is meaningless and answerless, to begin with. He mentions that seeking an answer in an answerless world, or seeking meaning in an inherently meaningless world is absurd. Thus, he concludes that the best way to live one's life is by living it authentically. To be authentic means to accept the full weight of freedom given to human and embrace the absurdity of the world. People who refuse the truth of the absurd, he claims, have fallen victim to a bad faith, which means blindly following the path that is lain by others for him/her without fully embracing the consequence and the meaning asserted to it by himself/herself.

Meanwhile, Jaeggi (2014) understands alienation as a form of the loss of freedom. In this sense, freedom does not solely refer to the absence of one's external coercion, but also towards one's ability to realize his/her values of action. This implication, she claims, is closely related to Berlin's (2002) concept of positive freedom. He proposes that the notion of positive freedom entails the wish of an individual to be the master of his own self. To be the master of oneself, he elaborates, means that depending on the decision of one's actions towards one's own will, to be the instrument of his/her own self, rather than being the instrument of others.

D. Alienation

Alienation is a term that is popularly used to describe numerous issues in a diverse branch of knowledge. As for the theory of alienation proposed by Jaeggi (2014), she believes that alienation is a form of a deficient relation. Alienation does not mean an absence of relation, but alienation itself is a relation. Alienation is contrasted to the relation of appropriation, a relation of both integration and transformation of what is given. Thus, alienation is a deficient relation which becomes the factor that inhibits the process of a relation of appropriation. She argues that alienation is indicated by three aspects namely the intertwined powerlessness and meaninglessness, constructed as a social heteronomy, and a form of the relation of relationlessness.

The intertwined meaninglessness and powerlessness can be understood as a process where an individual is being disempowered as a subject and rather positioned passively as a helpless object. A disempowered individual loses his/her agency over the meaning of an action, occurrence, and/or value within and around them. Thus, the disempowered individual is disabled from participating him/herself in giving a meaning towards the world around them. The individual might still have their own version of meaning toward things but the meaning coerced by the more powerful are the ones that are embodied by others thus making them alienated.

Furthermore, the elaboration of the second concept of alienation which is the construction of social heteronomy can be understood as a form of collective and complicated impotence. Alienation is beyond and something different from a straightforward relation of power and domination. It is possible for the victim of alienation to act as the perpetrator of the alienation as well at the same time whether consciously or unconsciously. In short, it is constructed as a form of action and reaction of alienation.

Lastly, the third aspect of alienation which is the relation of relationlessness can be understood as something beyond foreignness or strangeness. Alienation is not merely a detachment or dissociation. Alienation is a form of deficient relation between an individual and things that cannot be appropriated by the subjects; a relation that has little to no impact toward the subjects' worldview, values, motives and/or actions.

E. Relation of Appropriation

Relation of appropriation is the contrasting standpoint of alienation. Relation of appropriation is formed as a process of positive exchange of values that benefits and can be accepted by those in the relation. "Relations of appropriation must be understood as productive relations, as open processes in which appropriation always means both the integration and transformation of what is given" (Jaeggi, 2014, p.1). After the process of productive relations concludes, the values are

integrated and transformed into something that can change the subjects' worldview, values, motives, and/or action in a positive way. On the other hand, alienation can be understood as an impeded relation of appropriation.

To call the relation of appropriation as productive, several steps must be made. First, one must accept when he/she is being alienated by letting one's world view, value, and perception toward ideas, people, and/or conditions to be challenged. Second, one must understand that there is nothing exist already as something outside the process. Any view, value, and/or perception one has towards ideas, people, and/or condition is not the absolute truth of it, realizing that everything is inherently neither good nor bad. Lastly what is appropriated does not exist apart from the process of appropriation. One must realize that view, value, and perception toward ideas, people, and/or conditions can either be good or bad under certain circumstances and/or conditions. Accepting that there are alternative perspectives in the view, value, and/or perception of ideas, people, and/or condition without fully abandoning one's previous stance towards it.

II. Method

This research is qualitative in nature which involves critical analysis to seek answers to the questions by taking into account various aspects of the novel (Riessman, 1993; Sandelowski, 1991). The critical analysis is done to a textual data which as suggested by McKee (2003) meant to understand how many elements the text can be meaningfully interpreted into the theory. In addition, Cresswell (2003) suggests that data that are collected in the form of words, phrases, and sentences are to be reported as the textual evidence and reported subjectively. As for the theoretical analysis, the writer uses Jaeggi's alienation theory (2014) which is deemed to be suitable for this study due to its concise and helpful nature in exploring and discovering the issue of alienation in Haig's *How to Stop Time* (2017).

III. Findings and Discussion

The presented alienation aspects in the novel mostly emerge due to the condition of *anageria* which impedes the characters to establish an appropriate relationship with most of the members of society. The presented examples on this section are selected in order to represent the main plot of the story.

A. The Relation of Relationlessness

Jaeggi's (2014) alienation aspect of the relation of relationlessness turns out to be the most in number found in the novel. This aspect of alienation presents itself as a factor that inhibits the process of appropriation; or as Jaeggi suggests, the undifferentiated state of oneness with oneself and the world. This aspect often presented by Tom's monologues where he contemplates and tries to make sense of the world and himself that are constantly changing over the centuries.

> *I'd [Tom] been living in Iceland for eight years before my brief assignment in Sri Lanka. 'It was lonely.' 'But, I [Hendrich] thought you wanted lonely, after your time in Toronto. You said the real loneliness was being surrounded by people. And besides, that's what we are, Tom. We're loners.*' (p.5)

B. Alienation as a Construction of Social Heteronomy

Jaeggi's (2014) social heteronomy construction of alienation can also be found quite numerous in the novel, however, it is the least presented aspect among the three. The key of alienation that is constructed as a social heteronomy is that it is more than just a form of a straightforward relation of domination or power, but what people are alienated from is always at once alien to them and also their own selves. In alienated relations, people appear to be both the victims and also the perpetrators.

Tom was alienated through a construct of social heteronomy by the albatross society. Agnes, as Hendrich's right hand and the first representation of the Albatross Society, says that Tom knows very little about being an alba, thus alienating him. In this case, Agnes is the perpetrator that alienates Tom. However, Agnes was also once like Tom, alienated about being an alba before joining the Albatross Society.

> *'…Truth is a straight line you sometimes need to curve, you should know that by now. It is a wonder you are alive.' 'I know but—'Agnes closed her eyes. 'You need to grow up, do you understand? You are still a child. You may look like a man now, but you are still a wide–eyed boy and you need to become, quite urgently, a grown-up. We need to civilize you.'* (p.48)

C. The Intertwined Powerlessness and Meaninglessness

The powerlessness and meaninglessness, as suggested by Jaeggi (2014), can be found prevalent in the novel. Since the novel narrates the story through Tom Hazard's point of view, it can be seen that this aspect mostly presented by Tom Hazard due to his condition of *anageria* and due to his role in the Albatross Society. However, Tom's 'curse' of *anageria* does not cause misfortune only to himself but also to those who live with him, those who are dear to him like Marion, his daughter and Rose, his wife. Thus, Tom's family is alienated through the meaninglessness of Tom's condition and their powerlessness to persuade society due to the strong superstitious condition.

> *Another time, while Rose was out alone with Marion she was spat at, for living with the 'enchanter'. Marion, now a girl, was aware of such things. She was intelligent, sensitive child, and seemed to carry a sadness around with her a lot of time. She cried after that incident. And she would fall very quiet if she heard us talk, however quietly, about our worries* (p.124)

D. The Relation of Appropriation

The conception of the unalienated version of oneself through establishing the relation of appropriation is also presented in the novel. As Jaeggi (2014) suggests, the most important part to be able to establish a relation of appropriation is to be able to appropriate oneself. This conception refers to one's capability to embrace the capacity of knowing and dealing with oneself.

> *'So she knows about you?' He laughs. It is admittedly a stupid question, but I still find it such an alien idea that mayfly could know such thing about a loved one, and be fine*

with that, and not feel the risk. Of course, Rose knew about me, and my mother too, but that knowledge was torment, and drove me apart from both of them (p.172).

The excerpt presented above explicitly shows Tom's standpoint on his condition. Tom believes that when the loved ones of the sufferer of *anageria* knows about their condition, it can only mean a bad thing for both. However, his view is challenged when he talks about it with his old friend. In this case, Tom starts to undergo the process of appropriation towards the idea of suffering from *anageria*. He feels himself alienated from his own idea of *anageria* as the main cause of misery for the albas.

'She knows. She knows. Her husband knew too.' 'And the secret didn't get out?' 'Who would believe a secret like that?' 'Some people. Dangerous people.' The way he looks at me right then makes me feel weak, pathetic. A coward on the run. …. 'I'm going to put this right.' I find myself saying. 'I'm going to put this right.' (p.172).

The excerpt shows the exchange of value towards his condition. At that point, Tom knows that by nature, *anageria* is neither good nor bad. And in this appropriation of his facticity of being an alba, Tom realizes that for most of his life, he has been blindly following what Hendrich told him. Tom does not let his view towards his condition to be challenged.

But from now on, I am going to exist in the open. I am not going to let secrets hurt people anymore. Yes. It is about time. It is about time I lived. …. I feel the beginning of something. I feel ready to care and be hurt and take risk on living (p.185).

After the eventful journey in Australia; meeting with his old friend, reunited with his long-lost daughter, and breaking free from Hendrich and the Albatross Society, Tom is ready to starts anew. He embraces the unknown that he always avoids so far.

E. Loneliness

Drawing upon the understanding of loneliness according to Moustakas (2016), it can be seen that Tom Hazard undergoes this phase most of the time in his life. Every presented finding in the aspect of relation of relationlessness represents a phenomenon of loneliness.

I have been so many different people, played so many different roles in my life. I am not a person. I am a crowd in one body. I was people I hated and people I admired. I was exciting and boring and happy and infinitely sad. I was both on the right and wrong side of the history. I had, in short, lost myself (p.60).

Moustakas (2016) argues that loneliness brings a person deeply in touch with his own existence and in touch with others in a fundamental sense and gives him the opportunity to experience himself in a totally unique manner. The excerpt above represents the most prominent example of loneliness. Tom experience loneliness in a sense that causes him to be in touch with his own self in the moment and in the past. He realizes his most fundamental difference from the other human beings. However, in several cases of the first and second aspects of alienation, the representation of loneliness can also be found there as well.

F. The Loss of Freedom

Regarding the issue of the loss of freedom, the writer takes upon the view proposed by Berlin (2002) regarding positive freedom which entails the wish of an individual to be the master of his own self. To be the master of oneself; he elaborates, means that depending the decision of one's actions towards one's own will, becoming the instrument of his/her own self rather than being the instrument of others' will.

I go back to the room and have a little trouble with the wi-fi but eventually get online and go on Facebook and see that Camille hasn't updated. I want to talk to her. But know I can't. I am dangerous. While I'm still a part of the Albatross Society I am the thing that I need to protect her from. (p.172).

The excerpt shows that Tom believes his very existence is a threat towards someone he cares about. Tom resigns his willingness to be in touch with Camille because he is afraid that their mere relation can be dangerous for her. In this case, Tom's concern of Camille's safety, outweighs his willingness when he performs his action, thus making him not to be the master of his own action.

IV. Conclusion

From the finding of this research, it can be seen that every aspect of alienation proposed by Jaeggi (2014) are presented. The intertwined powerlessness and meaninglessness, the construction of alienation as a form of social heteronomy, and the form of relation of relation lessness.

These aspects are presented mainly by Tom Hazard; the main character, Hendrich, Rose Claybrook, and Marion. Tom Hazard is alienated from the 'mayflies' or the human being without *anageria* and even from the Albatross society, which supposed to be a haven for those under the condition of *anageria*. On the other hand, Hendrich is alienated from the 'mayflies' due to his fear of the unknown, while Rose Claybrook and Marion are alienated from the mayflies because they are accused to be the reason and result of Tom's unnatural trait.

The alienation depicted in the novel also represents other issues such as loneliness and the loss of freedom. The mentioned issues and the case of alienation are somehow related to each other. However, not every finding in this study represents the issues. The loneliness in the novel is shown by Tom Hazard as a result of his alienated self that prevents him from establishing meaningful ties with other human beings simply because of his condition of *anageria* that considered to be a threat due to its mysterious nature. On the other hand, the loss of freedom is dominantly depicted by Tom Hazard in the context of his status as a member of the albatross society.

It can be concluded that alienation is something inevitable as the world is constantly changing, and one tends to experience change and encounter differences in his/her life. Despite the effect of alienation which tends to temper someone's mental negatively, the alienation itself is inherently neutral. In fact, according to Jaeggi (2014), alienation is the first step towards appropriation where it is useful to understand others, enrich one's perspective toward many things, as well as helping one to

create his/her reality of the world. Giving one's ability to accept, to adapt, and to appropriate what is alien to him/her. Thus, alienation is not the main source of one's bad experience, but how one reacts to the experience of alienation is.

How to Stop Time is a heartwarming novel that presents numerous contemporary issues which are potential to be analyzed. However, the writer cannot find any other literary studies which use this novel as its data source of analysis. As a reference for future research, the writer suggest to analyze several themes that can be found in the novel such as Tom's love life which can be analyzed further to redefine the concept of love, Tom's journey in his life which can be analyzed through the perspective of character development theories, or Tom's identity through the perspective of diaspora or the self and other where it might also present valuable insight since Tom is the refugee of time itself.

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