

# Story Meaning in *Warera no Jidai no Fuukoroa - Koodo Shihon Shugi Zenshi* by Murakami Haruki

Zaki Ainul Fadli\*

Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University

**Abstract.** *Warera no Jidai no Fuukoroa - Koodo Shihon Shugi Zenshi's* short story by Murakami Haruki tells the romance of Japanese teenagers in the 60s (Showa era). This study uses a sociological approach to literature to analyze the meaning of the story through a picture of the society of the 60s told in a short story. The results showed that in the Showa period gender equality was still difficult to realize because people's thinking still supported patriarchal domination. Besides, the portrayal of the romance story is the author's criticism of the fragility of society in that era.

## 1 Introduction

Literary works are created by writers to be enjoyed, understood, and utilized by the community. The writer himself is a member of the community; it is bound by certain social statuses. Literature is a social institution that uses language as a medium; language itself is a social creation. The literature presents a picture of life, and life itself is a social reality. In this case, the literary work revolves around the relationship between writers, literary works, and the community. From these three aspects, there is a reciprocal relationship that makes a literary work can be formed. Because a literary work is influenced by how the author's background, how the influence of society on the literary work, and how much is the reflection of people's lives that exist in the literary work [1].

Literary works are made as a process of expressing the reality of life that exists in society. Because the reality of life that exists consciously or unconsciously affects writers in writing his work. The literature will tend to write his work based on the experience he gained as a member of the community. This will later be influenced by ideology and also the interpretation of writers themselves. Like Murakami Haruki who often writes about his life experiences in his work.

Murakami Haruki is a Japanese writer born in Kyoto, January 12, 1949. He grew up in the suburbs of Kobe, precisely in the city of Ashiya, with his grandfather who was a Buddhist priest, and his parents who were Japanese high school teaching teachers. His parents who taught him about classical literature and traditional Japanese values encouraged his interest in literary works. But instead, he was influenced by the western writing style, although he still presents Japanese cultural heritage in his books. His initial

---

\* Corresponding author : [zakiaf@live.undip.ac.id](mailto:zakiaf@live.undip.ac.id)

interest was in the works of 19th-century European writers, as well as American detective stories. The works he read included his work Dashiell Hammett and Kurt Vonnegut who encouraged him to be attracted to American popular culture. This interest in American culture was also encouraged because he was born during the American occupation of Japan in 1945-1952.

In 1968 he continued his education at Waseda University, Tokyo. It was here that he met his wife Yoko and married in October 1971. After graduating from Waseda University, he opened a jazz club, Peter Cat, in Kokubunji, Tokyo. Initially, the desire to open this club was opposed by both parents, because they did not agree with club life that is identical to the life of the night world. But thanks to the support of Yoko's parents, he managed to open a club which he lived from 1974 to 1981.

Murakami Haruki began writing his work at the age of 22, *Kaze no Uta wo Kike*, Hear the Wind Sing, which was published in June 1979 and received film adaptation in 1981. His first success encouraged him to continue working. After that, he began writing short stories and also translating foreign works such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Truman Capote, and John Irving. Years passed, Murakami continued to publish his works including *1973-nen no Pinbooru* (Pinball 1973), *Hitsuji o Meguru Bouken* (A Wild Sheep Chase), *Supagetii no Nen ni* (The year of Spaghetti), *Warera no Jidai no Fuukuroa - Koudo Shihon Shugi Zenshi* (A Folklore for My Generation: A Prehistory of Late-Stage Capitalism) to his most famous work *Noruei no Mori* (Norwegian Wood).

Some of his works are entertaining by putting humor, and some contain social criticism and reflection of people's lives. He is also seen as someone who can provide renewal in my jun-flower (a serious work of literature). Some view Murakami's works as Postmodern literary works and Murakami is placed as a cultural mediator between America and Japan [2].

The discussion in this paper uses a sociological approach to literature that focuses on the context of this short story as a mirror of society. As expressed by Ian Watt, a literary work can be seen in three perspectives, namely the social context of the author, literature as a mirror of society, and the social function of literature [3]. The approach of literary sociology views literature as a reflection of society, related to the norms and values that exist in the author's society, literature is seen as a means of social criticism of the existing state of society.

## 2 Discussions

This discussion uses the approach of Ian Watt's literary sociology which focuses on problems that existed in society in the 60s (Showa Era) in the short story. Briefly, Sapardi Djoko Damono said that sociology is an objective and scientific study of humans in society about social and social processes. In this case, literature is also closely related to society. Because a literary work itself is a reflection of society.

In Ian Watt's theory of literary sociology approach, he distinguishes between literary sociology that studies the social context of the author, literature as a mirror of society, and the social function of literature [3]. The author's social context examines the position of writers in society and their relation to the reader. Literature as a mirror of the community examines how far the literary work reflects the reality in society. While the social function of literature examines the relationship between social values that exist in literary works with social values that exist in society.

There are several things expressed by Murakami Haruki in the short story *Warera no Jidai no Fuukuroa - Koudo Shihon Shugi Zenshi*. Two of them are issues related to gender and the fragility of society in the 60s (Showa era).

## 2.1 Gender issues

This work is a reflection of the state of society which alludes to the old values of Japanese life before the Showa era, precisely regarding the public's view of the meaning of the virginity of a girl who would later marry. This is closely related to the old ideology of Confucianism in Japan which still instills the value of a man's position higher than a woman's. Although this ideology is no longer in use and contradicts the Japanese Law of the Meiji era that provides gender equality, this ideology is still imprinted in society. Like his other works, he placed himself as my character. Here my character acts as the narrator, the plot of the story focused on the story of the life experience of one of the characters in the story.

*Warera no Jidai no Fuukuroa - Koudo Shihon Shugi Zenshi's* short story alludes to the life of the 60s in Japan which focused on the romance between two geniuses 彼 (Kare) and 藤沢 嘉子 (Fujisawa Yoshiko), but because of this ability they cannot enjoy the meaning of the romance between two geniuses 彼 (Kare) and 藤沢 嘉子 (Fujisawa Yoshiko), from their lives until finally they meet and love each other. This will later change the character's views about his life.

The author raises the theme of the love story between two teenagers who foundered by Fujisawa Yoshiko's character's view that a man must marry someone younger than him. And a girl must marry someone older than her. Fujisawa Yoshiko then refused to marry Kare because he was the same age as her. However, behind that the two figures each love each other, this is evidenced that the figure of Fujisawa Yoshiko continues to look for Kare and she promised to give her virginity after she married someone else. This certainly makes inner turmoil for Kare because he has to let go of the only person who has told him the meaning of life. Like the following quote:

。。。、それは無理よ。私とあなたは結婚できないわ。私はいくつか歳上の人と結婚するし、あなたはいくつか歳下の人と結婚するのよ。それが世の中の普通の流れなのよ。女というのは男の人より成長が早いの上。そして早く老化するの。あなたにはまだ世の中というものがよくわかってないのよ。私たちが大学を出てすぐに結婚しても、きつとうまくはいかないわ。私たちはきつと今のままではいられないわ。もちろん私はあなたのことを好きよ。生まれてからあなたの他に好きになった人はいない。でもそれとこれとは別なの。。。

..... That is not possible. I cannot marry you. I will marry someone who is several years older, you will also marry someone who is several years younger. Such is the situation. Women mature earlier than men. And they quickly age. You still don't understand life. Even if we get married right after graduating from college, it certainly won't work. However, we can not always be like this now. Of course, I love you. There is no person I love more than you. But that and this is different .....

The above quote explains Fujisawa Yoshiko's feelings which could not manifest his love because of the general public opinion about the married couple. Where a man will marry a woman younger than him and a woman will marry a man who is older than her.

。。。彼と藤沢嘉子はいわば精神的な双生児だった。二人の育った環境は不気味なほどと似ていた。二人とも顔立ちが整っていて、成績が良くて、生来のリーダーだった。クラスのスーパースターだった。どちらの家庭も番福で、両親の仲が悪かった。母親の方が少し歳上で、父親は外に女を作って、ろくに家には帰ってこなかった。離婚しなかったのは世間体をはばかってのことだった。

He and Fujisawa Yoshiko were spiritually twins. The environment in which they grew up was unnatural. They are blessed with good looks and good achievements, like a

future leader. Even a star in the class. Even though they come from good families, their parents' relationships are bad. Mothers take care of the household, while fathers have relationships with other women, and don't always go home. The thing that encourages not to get divorced is just to maintain people's views.

The quote still seems to reflect the condition of Japan in the Meiji era, where there was a Civil Act of 1898 which established the rights of the head of the household. Which gives full authority to the head of the family to manage household matters in full [4]. This, of course, gives birth to an abuse of power where a double standard arises that a husband can act as he wishes proven in the short story quote in the actions of the father's figure who has a mistress even though he is married. This is still common in today's society where the concept of infidelity despite being regulated in the law that it is a crime, but there are still individuals who still do it.

僕は思うのだけれど、これはかなり妥当な考え方であり、生き方である。そして比較的サイレントなマジョリティーである彼女たちを真ん中にはさんと、リベラルとコンサーヴァティヴが存在した。セックスというのはスポーツだと思っている女の子から、男の中にも、結婚するなら相手は処女じゃなくちやいやだというものもいた。

In my opinion, there is a view that this is reasonable thinking, there is also a way of life. According to most comparisons, some of them think that this is conservative and liberal thinking. Some argue that sex is a sport. Therefore, among men, there is an assumption that they do not want to marry someone who is not a virgin.

The above quote explains that there are several views regarding sex. In that era, some looked at sex as a natural thing. But there is also a view that when a man wants to get married, he must marry a virgin. But this is certainly somewhat contrary to the views of men in general where they consider that sex is a common thing, but here they demand the sanctity of a woman to marry. This view has also arisen in the Meiji era where there were double standards that allowed men to indulge themselves in sexual relations but still demanded the couple to be married that he must be still pure.

From some of the quotations above, the author explains a problem that exists in the community. This relates to the view of the community itself, which certainly limits the individual, especially regarding women's freedom in choosing married partners, women's rights in the household where the authority in the household is with the husband so that the husband can act according to his wishes, and also the notion of a woman's virginity that must be maintained, but in this case, there is his view that considers that sex is a natural thing. Fujisawa Yoshiko, in this case, represents the suffering of women who experience limitations in their rights.

During the Edo and Meiji era, gender equality could not be fully realized. Even though the main background story is the Showa era, the people's thoughts that refer to the old people's thoughts are still imprinted so that gender equality is still difficult to realize. On the other hand, several things are a reflection of several forms of gender equality that have been realized, among others, the freedom of women to enjoy tertiary education, even the percentage of groups completing secondary education has increased by 90% and the percentage of groups completing tertiary education has increased by 30% in the post-war period in Showa era. Behind the perception of the old community that still made gender inequality, the government at that time had tried to realize gender equality.

Overall this short story has a social function as a criticism of the general public who still views the old values which at that time were considered to conflict with the community. Because of views on gender inequality, the superiority of men is still felt by the community, especially in marriage.

## 2.2 Criticism of the community

*Warera no Jidai no Fuukuroa - Koudo Shihon Shugi Zenshi* tells the romance of Japanese teenage life in the 60s.

うん、蹴破るべき扉か目の前にちゃんとあるというのは、なんと素晴らしいことだろうドアーズ、ビートルズ、ボブ。ディランBGMもぬかりなくぼつちりと揃っていた。

At the most vulnerable, least immature, and therefore most important time of my life, I breathed in the wild air that might be tomorrow in the 1960s, and of course, I was completely drunk. It's gone. And there was a door to kick. Yeah, what a wonderful thing to have in front of the door to kick! Doors, Beatles, Bob Dylan --- BGM was also perfect and neat.

As mentioned in the quote above, the 1960s were a special time for authors as Japanese citizens. Murakami was born in 1949 and attended high school in the early 1960s when Bob Dylan, The Beatles, and The Rolling Stones made their debut. Murakami's works, including this short story, were well received by his readers because they were able to describe the atmosphere that Jiwon Baik called nihilism. Nihilism is a feeling that replaces passion after passion disappears. Coolness comes after the nihilism gets cold. Both are based on memories. Jiwon Baik gave examples of memorable times, the 1980s for Korea, 1960s for Japan 'Sixty' Children, and the Cultural Revolution for Chinese. Such historic times can only be explained by those who were sensitive to the nation at that time before capitalist globalization took effect. The sensitivity limits are reduced because of the flood of consumer culture, time becomes a boring black hole through the memory line. Black holes digging into our memories can be connected as if the bottom of the wells are connected [4].

The picture of Japan in the 60s was also strengthened by the title of this short story. The term "late capitalism" is a synonym of the postmodernism era following what was expressed by Jameson. The term postmodernist itself is born from a paradigm that denies the centralization or concentration of meaning. As revealed by Derrida, that the meaning of something is not absolute, but it moves and can change according to the chain of signs.

Except as stated in the title section, in the short story it is not explicitly stated about the relationship between content and the term late capitalism. It is precisely here that the author invites the reader to think about the relationship. The relationship may lie in a feeling of helplessness, the emptiness of life felt by the character, and his girlfriend who finally broke up in the middle of the road. The powerlessness and emptiness of the meaning of life are part of five aspects of alienation. This is reinforced by Chin's opinion which states that Murakami 'A Folklore for My Generation' is centered on the conditions of late-stage capitalism, the age of consumerism, mass production of commodities and culture, and globalization [5]. This short story tells of a failed relationship between two characters that the narrator described as perfect in his generation but then stagnated. This short story has a Japanese background in the Showa era which tells the romance of teenagers who grew up in the era when Japan began to enter the era of rising economic growth, the era mentioned by Chin above.

The idealistic description of the human capitalist era in this short story is depicted in the view of the perfection of human capitalist society that glorifies achievements, wealth, and popularity. The figures for Kare and Fujisawa Yoshiko who have perfect qualifications as lovers. Kare is a smart figure, has a soul of leadership, good at talking. So is his girlfriend, Fujisawa Yoshiko, who is beautiful and smart. The variety contained in the quote "*Futaritomo kaodachika totonotte ite, seiseki ga yokute, shourai no riidaa datta*", although they are still teenagers, this is an idealistic picture of humans in the capitalist era.

However, it turns out that what they feel is very different from what others think about them. "I always think of myself as a boring person," said Kare. Kare said he was able to do anything like having good grades, choosing good universities, and so on. And they were dating because they had the same feelings about it. "Maybe ordinary people who are imperfect choose imperfect humans as their friends".

And the picture of perfection such as commercial advertising contrasts with Kare's story of their anxiety, their separation because of the tradition of marrying an older woman, and the fragility of their perfection. Kare wants to marry Fujisawa Yoshiko, but Fujisawa Yoshiko refuses because of a marriage tradition that does not suit their conditions.

This story can be said to be the author's way of describing the fragile reality of society as reflected in the powerlessness of Kare and Fujisawa Yoshiko. Kare was unable to convince Fujisawa Yoshiko to have sex when they were dating, and Fujisawa Yoshiko was powerless in accepting the tradition of marriage. As if Murakami invites the reader to redefine sex, marriage, and success.

### 3 Conclusion

From the discussion of the *Warera no Jidai no Fuukuroa - Koudo Shihon Shugi Zenshi* short story above, it can be concluded that the *Warera no Jidai no Fuukuroa - Koudo Shihon Shugi Zenshi* was intended as a social criticism about the condition of the community at that time. Murakami Haruki's writing style that always presents his work as entertainment even though it is *jun-bungaku* or serious literary work can lead the reader to an understanding of the social criticisms that he wishes to convey through his work. Gender inequality still occurs in society because of the patriarchal perspective of society. Even though Fujisawa Yoshiko is a woman, her perspective on marriage strengthens the patriarchal system in society. Murakami Haruki also wrote the criticism through the figure of Kare and Fujisawa Yoshiko who were described perfectly by their environment, but they felt helpless towards the social construct created by the community. Through stories about the romance of romance, sex, and marriage, Murakami Haruki invites readers to think that the ideal picture established in the era of capitalism through the ideal figure in commercial advertisements, as compared to Kare and Fujisawa Yoshiko, is not the reality that exists in society. This is a form of the author's criticism of the fragility of society in the 60s (Showa era).

## References

1. S.D. Damono, *Sosiologi Sastra: Sebuah Pengantar Ringkas*. Jakarta Pusat: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. (1978)
2. Akins, M. Tanaka, *Time and space reconsidered: the literary landscape of Murakami Haruki*. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London, 5 (2012)
3. Wiyatmi, *Sosiologi Sastra: Teori dan Kajian Terhadap Sastra Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Kanwa Publisher , 26 (2013)
4. E. Suherman, *Dinamika Masyarakat Jepang dari Masa Edo Hingga Pascaperang Dunia II*. *Humaniora*, Vol. **16**, No. 2, 201-210, (2004)
5. J. Baik, *Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 11:166 (2010)
6. G. Chin, *Mining for Reality in Late-Stage Capitalism: Reading Murakami Haruki and Don DeLillo Towards a New Literary Realism*. *Brief Encounters*, Vol **3** No 1 (March 2019), 9, (2019).