

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Research

Capitalism makes people assess someone based on the quality of powers such as fortune and wealth. It differentiates people between higher class and lower class or superiority and inferiority. It brings on arrogance and insecurity in their feeling. Until, it causes alienation in the capitalist society. Musto (2021) states that Karl Marx conceives alienation as part of a characteristic in a particular epoch of production and it is capitalism. Alienation in capitalism depicts the most important aspect of modern life namely economic order. Øversveen (2021) claims that Weber (2001) states that the economic order in which all human activities, aims, and aspirations are subordinated to the accumulation of capital is the most fateful force in our modern life.

Alienation is the effect of the capitalist society. According to Marx (1959) states that alienation is estrangement. It is a state when a person is alienated by people as the object "isolation" or people are alienated by a person "self-estrangement". This estrangement often happens in the capitalist society. And it is brought about the private economic.

The private economic system creates an alienated feeling inside a person. According to Liberto (2024), he claims that capitalism can influence a person's characteristics because of the private economic system. The private ownership creates classes. Classes create power differences. Therefore, power differences creates alienation. Ultimately, a person who has the higher class can oppressive and condemn the lower class

as objects. In contrast, the lower class alienates himself from the higher class. Then, the superiority separates himself from the inferiority. It is because of the private economic system happens in the capitalist society. Capitalism always occurs in a big country such as America. Portrayal of it can be obtained through American literary works writers such as Kurt Vonnegut.

Kurt Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, in November 1922. As the youngest child who obtained the Great Depression from his father put out of his job. On Mother's Day, his mother is suicide. He attended Cornell University but withdrew in January 1943 and enlisted in the US Army. He was taken as a prisoner by the Nazis during the Battle of the Bulge and witnessed the firebombing of Dresden by Allied air forces. Vonnegut died in 2007. Despite Vonnegut's life story, he published 14 novels, roughly 100 short-story collections, five plays, and five nonfiction works in his career. He suffered from depression later in life and started seeing a psychologist. He is best known for his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which brought him literary fame in 1969. And *Breakfast of Champions* novel (1973) is the object of this paper for the depiction of capitalism in America.

Kurt Vonnegut's 1973 novel *Breakfast of Champions* portrays the people's condition in America in the 1970s century. People are violent with each other because of consumerism and material gain, such as with their racial and gender differences, lack of professional networks, mentors, and role models, getting stuck in a similar job, and not providing fair treatment to the African-American, and bringing the minority to the self-estrangement (Fernandes et.al., 2014).

In Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, the theme of alienation is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative. It reflects the profound disconnection experienced by the two protagonists in American society. As the story unfolds, both characters grapple with their own forms of alienation. Trout is from the literary world and society large, and Hoover is from his own sanity and the people around him.

Trout is a struggling science fiction writer whose work is largely ignored by society. He feels isolated because people do not take his writing seriously. At the arts festival in Midland City, attendees show indifference to Trout's ideas. Trout often observes the absurdities of life without being able to connect with others. On the other side, Hoover is a successful businessman who struggles with his mental health. He feels increasingly isolated as his sanity deteriorates. He becomes obsessed with the idea that everyone else is a robot except for him. His paranoia leads to violent outbursts against his family and employees. As he spirals into madness, he loses the ability to connect with those who care about him.

Vonnegut also makes good use of alienating his characters like Trout and Hoover, describing the condition of American society at that time with a tone almost infantile, and the tone satirical, often vulgar. He employs a distinctive narrative style, blending humor with stark social commentary, which underscores the characters' existential struggles. The novel ultimately raises critical questions about the cause of alienation, then the characters' experience of alienation, and how they deal with it.

Vonnegut becomes one of the most influential human beings in American literature in history. It also implies the author's feeling in terms of alienation of people in society.

This research examines how Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* portrays the effects of alienation on individuals and society within the context of capitalism, specifically focusing on the characters' experiences and reactions to this estrangement. And for knowing this issue that happens in the capitalist society is reflected in the novel *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut. I use Marxist literary criticism by Gyorgy Lukacs.

## 1.2 Identification of the Problems

In a society where power dynamics are often dictated by wealth and status. Individuals must respect one another, regardless of their social standing. The existence of opulence doesn't justify the harsh treatment of those in the lower. It can lead to alienation, particularly within a capitalist framework. Estrangement can manifest as violence or discrimination. Individuals are often assessed based on their popularity or power. It results in isolation and self-estrangement.

While much of Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* can be seen as humorous and absurd, scholars have taken a critical approach to the more serious elements of alienation. This paper's critical lens will be derived from moments of alienation and characters' reactions to being alienated. Ultimately, Vonnegut crafts a tale of unfortunate events and character interactions to demonstrate that America's lower class is significantly alienated by those in power who are supposed to protect them. They are so alienated that they become less than human, objects who live and breathe without distinction; however, in a twist of irony, these living object people still feel pain, joy, and judgment.

This study seeks to explore the socio-political subtext of Vonnegut's tale. I will apply György Lukács' Foundation of Marxist Literary Criticism to analyze the text as it places a uniquely personal interpretation onto how economies and class structures define identity and interpersonal relationships. The application of such theory to critique the alienation within the text is relative, for it transcends the focus on much larger intentions from microeconomic-level capitalist struggles.

### 1.3 Review of Related Literature

Previously, a lot of research of studies which helps me. For example, an article by Calderon et.al. (2022) highlights the connection between the Great Migration and support for civil rights. The Great Migration strengthened support for the Democratic Party, increased support for civil rights, and encouraged civil rights activism outside the U.S. South. This study shows that support for civil rights was not limited to the Black electorate but also included segments of the white. It helps me about insights into American society in the 1970s century.

In Greer (1989) explores how the narrator's self-references as the author contribute to the work's authorless nature. His finding is that the author blurs the distinction between the character and the author, highlighting the authorless nature of the schizophrenic or split-mind text. In my opinion, this article needs to delve deeper into how the fusion of authorship and character impacts the reader's interpretation of the narrative. Despite the analysis, this article helps me as same as the analysis before, expressive theory.

Besides the article, Hume (1982) examined Kurt Vonnegut's 1973 novel with the study of symbolic characters and narratives to convey a deeper meaning. The research entitled Vonnegut's Self-Projections: Symbolic Characters and Symbolic Fiction provides

context and points out that Vonnegut uses various narrative perspectives to explore the complexities of human consciousness and the sacredness of life. Within the novel, there is a focus on the characters Hoover and Trout as an unrecognized artist, contrasting with the bourgeois selves like Hoover, to highlight different facets of human existence and creativity. The text suggests that Vonnegut tackles the idea of human existence and mortality through the lens of characters like Billy Pilgrim and Eliot Rosewater, who are portrayed as war-damaged minds struggling with their realities. I think it would be better for improvement could involve providing more explicit explanations of the symbolic elements and their connections to the self-projections. However, Hume's finding shows me a deep description about the character.

In his study, Messent (1974) revolves around the stylistic approach and character development in the novel. It involves dissecting the superabundance or large of detail in the novel and its connection to the main protagonists. His findings indicate that without the central characters, the novel would lack structure and coherence. I suggest that it could include finding a better balance between detail and character focus to enhance the overall narrative flow and coherence. Despite the analysis, it describes me more about the character.

Another research that examined the novel is Morse (2000) describes around Vonnegut's skillful use of unorthodox narrative approaches in *Breakfast of Champions*. This research delves into the effectiveness of Vonnegut's innovative narrative approaches in *Breakfast of Champions*. The methodology involves analyzing critics' responses and interpretations of Vonnegut's narrative experimentation. The result of Vonnegut's unconventional storytelling in *Breakfast of Champions* polarizes critics' opinions. I

suggest for providing more in-depth analysis of specific narrative techniques used by Vonnegut could enhance the research. Despite the research, the analysis depicts the influence of the novel. All these studies are conducted by the respective writers to analyze the *Breakfast of Champions* novel.

Reilly and Kurt (1980) claims that this article is the conversations that aim to explore Vonnegut's intentions behind his works. The methodology employed involves direct conversations with Vonnegut. Vonnegut indicated a shift towards writing plays and delayed the publication of *Breakfast of Champions*. I think that this analysis provides more details on the questions asked during the conversations could enhance the depth of the analysis. Despite the analysis, this analysis provides me about Vonnegut and his works.

The portrayal of American society, according to the article by Roopinika and Srija (2022). By using Existentialism, this paper focuses on how racism affects the narrator's identity and his struggle to find himself in white society. Racism affects not only the narrator, but also society in general, both physically and psychologically. However, this article describes how racism developed in America not only after the immigration of African-American, but also after the slave and colonial eras, and it helps me insights into American Society.

Hammarberg (2023) explores Kurt Vonnegut's 1973 novel *Breakfast of Champions* through an eco-psychological lens: solastalgia, the narrator's ecological PTSD and the uncanny and art of leaking (the last two tied to the ecological homecoming narrative) and finds that both the character and the narrator experience psychopathologies resulting from ecological destruction as they cannot prevent intrapersonal destruction, yet Vonnegut

renders creating and engaging someone else's art a possible treatment for mental trauma and cure for personal and communal ecological standstill. Despite his analysis, Hammarberg is absent empirical data: the analysis is purely textual and theoretical, without any empirical evidence from psychological studies to support its claims about the effect of art on mental health. Nevertheless, this thesis helps me for collecting some data about alienation habits.

In his thesis, Svihus (2022) also analyzes the *Breakfast of Champions* novel. He analyzes how it serves as a mirror for readers to reflect on their own consciousness and societal form. By exploring the characters and narrative techniques in *Breakfast of Champions*, the author aims to uncover deeper meaning related to citizenship, self-reflection, and the complexities of human existence. The author draws on reader response theory to emphasize the importance of the reader's interpretation in understanding literary texts. Despite his analysis, the analysis provides a comprehensive review of Kurt Vonnegut's 1973 novel *Breakfast of Champions* from a critical, theoretical, and contextual perspective. This research also gives me more insights into the expressive approach.

Davis (2006) focuses on his postmodern approach to explore Vonnegut's desire to enact change and establish a pattern for a better reality through his works. The finding is that Vonnegut's narratives reflect his social prophetic nature, aiming to influence societal perspectives and behaviors positively. He argues that the novel *Breakfast of Champions* is highlighted for its exploration of the value of the human spirit and the struggle to embrace a narrative that describes this value. I think that this book needs to explore the long-term societal influence of Vonnegut's narrative and its relevance in contemporary

contexts. Despite the description, it helps me in a deeper understanding of the author. Although some of them have similar topics that may have been brought to my attention, the analysis that I want to emphasize has not yet been explored. First, article examines the history of great migration and civil rights. The second research that also examined the novel in his study, focuses on the self-reference "author" theory. The third and the fourth analyze the novel through the character approach. The fifth, in his study, focuses on narrative and critics' response theory. The sixth article discussed the background of the works. The seventh, article highlights the research with the existentialism theory. The eighth, the thesis researches examine the novel with the eco-psychological concept. The ninth, thesis highlights the research with the reader response theory. The tenth, the book scrutinizes the novel with the postmodern theory. Moreover, previous studies have focused on *Breakfast of Champions* and its context through various methodologies. They are none have specifically applied Gyorgy Lukacs' Marxist Literary Criticism to analyze the theme of alienation in the novel. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity for further exploration.

Therefore, I have decided to conduct research on Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* novel by using Lukacs' Marxist Literary Criticism. My research aims to address this gap by examining how the novel reflects the social realities of its time. It critiques capitalist culture. It portrays the effects of alienation on individuals and society. By applying Lukacs' framework, I will analyze how Vonnegut's work reveals the complexities of human relationships within a capitalist context and the resulting alienation that shapes characters' experiences. This approach will provide a deeper understanding of the societal critiques embedded in the narrative and contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding alienation in literature.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

1. How does Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* portray the alienation on individuals and society within the context of capitalism?
2. How do the characters in *Breakfast of Champions* experience and respond to feelings of alienation?

#### 1.5 Scope of the Research

This study centers on the theme of alienation and capitalism as portrayed in Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*. This study is limited to two main areas of discussion. First, this study examines the representation of the portrayal of alienation on individuals and society in a capitalist context. Furthermore, this study explores the personalities of the characters in *Breakfast of Champions* who gone through and reacted to alienation. In addition, this study considers the broader meaning of the characters' reactions to the capitalist system portrayed in the novel.

#### 1.6 Objectives of the Study

1. To explore how *Breakfast of Champions* reveals the impact of alienation on individuals and the society in a capitalist background.
2. To examine how the characters in *Breakfast of Champions* live their lives and how they respond to alienation.