

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Milk fed (2021) by Melissa Broder is an interesting novel in its storytelling and character development. The novel depicts a narrative that tells about the main character's emotional journey starting from a complicated relationship with other characters. Through the story presented by this novel, alienation issues such as not being at peace with oneself, feeling isolated and searching for the meaning of life can be seen. With this analysis, the author presents Erich Fromm's thoughts reflected in this literary work.

In Milk Fed, the beauty standards Rachel experiences reflect societal norms that prioritize a slim and physically perfect appearance, particularly for women. Rachel feels immense pressure to conform to this ideal, reinforced by her surroundings, the media, and her family, especially her mother. A slender body is viewed as the primary measure of beauty and self-worth, leading Rachel to develop an obsession with dieting and calorie control. These beauty standards make her perceive her body as an object to be modified according to societal norms, rather than something to be appreciated or accepted. External pressures, such as her mother's criticism regarding her weight, exacerbate Rachel's feelings of inadequacy. The influence of popular culture and media further reinforces this ideal, pushing Rachel to constantly strive for physical perfection. Consequently, she experiences self-alienation, losing connection with her own body and feeling unable to live freely without guilt when she fails to meet these imposed beauty expectations.

Alienation refers to a specific scientific concept associated with particular aspects of separation. It involves the potential for individuals to be exploited for the advantage of others, to be controlled by others' desires, and to be subject to external judgment (Beaver, 2012). In another case, alienation has been referred to in relation

to the growth of shallowness in interpersonal relationships, stunted personal development, lack of meaning in life, and the “loss” or “death” of God (Elsayyad & Abuzeid, 1987). It can occur for many reasons, such as social change, psychological stress, stigma, or injustice. All of these things leave people feeling disconnected or out of control over important parts of their lives. This has devastating effects, such as lowering mental health, disrupting social relationships, and reducing satisfaction and productivity at work. Alienation is a feeling of being completely separated or out of place in one’s life.

Characterization is the role and characteristics of an individual based on the way the author express himself in the story (Mays, 2016: 219). Characterization is used to explain the details of character in the story by an author in order the readers can get know them (Safrudi, 2014). The concepts of characterization and characterization are essential to understanding how alienation is experienced by the main character in the novel *Milk Fed*. The characterization process describes the emotional and psychological journey of the main character, where alienation is shown through the way the author expresses the character's thoughts, feelings, and interactions with her environment. By analyzing the characterization in this novel, we can better understand how feelings of alienation and disconnection from the outside world become central themes in the character’s life.

This research focuses on the main character (Rachel) in the novel *Milk Fed* by Melissa Broder, who exhibits unique characteristics through the exploration of the theme of alienation. The main character in the novel shows how feelings of alienation can affect individual, psychological and social development. The novel depicts the main character's journey in facing and overcoming a deep sense of alienation. By highlighting several aspects, this research aims to understand how alienation plays a role in shaping the character's identity and experiences, as well as how this contributes to broader themes in the work.

Psychological alienation refers to feeling isolated from others, which often occurs in various mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and dissociative identity

disorder (Chen, Chen, & Zhong, 2022). Those experiencing psychological alienation may feel disconnected from their feelings, thoughts and identity, which can lead to feelings of emptiness, loss of meaning in life and difficulty establishing real relationships with others. In the case of depression, alienation may manifest as an inability to engage in daily life, while in the case of anxiety, people may feel trapped in a negative thought loop that reinforces feelings of isolation. In more severe conditions, isolation can lead to identity fragmentation, which is a state where people feel like they have several different personalities. When a person experiences psychological alienation, they can experience an existential crisis, a condition where they wonder what the meaning of their life is and feel disconnected from their purpose. A psycho-social explanation approach postulating that social inequality causes anxiety, depression, stress, and other emotional states that produce unfavorable health outcomes, thereby creating a causal link between social position and health (Overseen & Kelly, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the issue of alienation as experienced by the main character in Melissa Broder's novel *Milk Fed*. Alienation, a theme that resonates deeply within contemporary society, is often reflected in literature as a mirror to the psychological and social struggles that individuals face. In *Milk Fed*, the protagonist's experience of alienation is intricately woven into the narrative, highlighting the emotional and existential disconnection that many people endure. By focusing on this character's journey, the study aims to uncover the underlying causes of her alienation, how it manifests in her life, and the broader implications it has on her mental health and sense of self.

## **1.2 Research Question**

In this research, I as a writer used only one research questions to emphasize the problem to be answered in this research, which are as follows:

1. How is alienation portrayed through the main character of the novel *Milk Fed* by Melissa Broder?

### **1.3 Research Objective**

Based on the research question above, so the writer purposes the following research objective:

1. To portray the manifestations of alienation experienced by the main character, Rachel, depicted in the novel.
2. To investigate Rachel's perception and its influence on her feelings of alienation and detachment from the world around her.

By addressing these research objectives, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theme of alienation depicted in "Milk Fed" and shed light on its implications for the main character, Rachel.

### **1.4 Use of Study**

The author provides insight for individuals and groups through in-depth and systematic study. By investigating various aspects of a topic, the study not only enriches understanding but also offers new insights relevant to the situation or problem at hand. The results of this study can be used to improve methods in the field of literature. This study has two main implications: theoretical and practical.

#### **1.4.1 Theoretical Use**

This research into Rachel's experience of alienation in the novel offers substantial theoretical insights. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of how alienation is represented in literature, presenting a novel perspective on established theories by contextualizing them within the character's psychological and societal framework. This investigation can refine literary theories related to character development and alienation, fostering a synthesis of psychological, sociological, and literary perspectives. Furthermore, it contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by applying alienation theories to new literary contexts and narratives.

#### **1.4.2 Practical Use**

Practically, the outcomes of my research hold significant relevance for educational

settings, including literature courses and curriculum design, where they can elucidate themes of alienation and character analysis. Additionally, the insights gained can be beneficial for therapeutic practices, offering a narrative framework to understand and address experiences of detachment and isolation. The research also provides valuable perspectives for literary critics, authors, and societal discourse, enhancing public understanding and dialogue on the implications of alienation in both individual and societal contexts.

### **1.5 Scope of Study**

This research will be focused on analyzing the alienation experienced by the main character, Rachel, in Milk Fed novel. Will analyze various aspects of alienation experienced by the main character, and will apply the concepts of alienation theory by Erich Fromm, such as alienation from work, alienation from oneself, and alienation from others, to analyze Rachel's experiences. This research will explore the context of alienation in Milk Fed, faced by the main characters, and will analyze how affects Rachel's alienation and how this alienation is reflected in her interactions and relationships with the people around her and how effects of alienation on Rachel's life and behavior and will look at how alienation influences the outlook on life, emotions, and actions of the main characters in the novel and will be focused on the main character, Rachel and her experiences.