

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Human beings will experience a set of natural phases in life: birth, childhood, teenage hood, adult hood, middle age, and elderhood. Some people may find it exciting to talk about the first few phases of their life. On the other hand, they might be reluctant to talk about growing old because not so many people like being old. As a consequence, people have to fight against old age.

The great number of anti-aging products sold in the market shows that being old is not so preferable because it brings both biological and psychosocial changes. Donion (1999, cited in Stanley and Beare, 1999, p. 11) states that there are biological and psychosocial theories on the aging process.

Biologically, old people's cells and molecule structures, immunity, and senses are not the same as when they were young. They may also have different personality and social life as they are getting older. Furthermore, the resentment of being old has existed since thousands years ago. The following is Ptah Hotep's, the ancient Greek scribe, statement about aging made some 4,500 years ago:

O sovereign my Lord! Oldness has come; Oldness has descended. Feebleness has arrived; dotage is here anew. The heart sleeps wearily every day. The ayes are weak; the ears are deaf, the strength is disappearing because of weariness of the heart, and the mouth is silent and cannot speak. The heart is forgetful and cannot recall yesterday. The bone suffers old-age. God is become evil. All taste is gone. What old age does to men is evil in every respect. (Pritchard, 1955, as cited in Matcha, 1997, p. 26)

However, people will inevitably experience those phases even though some of those changes may not be nice and easy. Therefore, it is always interesting to learn about how people adapt with the changes.

According to Hooyman and Kiyak (1993, p.58), there are two classes of elderly. The first class is those who are able to attend their daily needs and the second class is those who are dependent. The first class does not disturb the society. Moreover, they contribute some values to the society. The second class, on the other hand, is those who are dependent and regarded as social burdens, thus may be negatively treated. The existence of both classes has some effects to the society. As a comparison to elderly population in the past, the number of old-aged populations in America grows simultaneously every year. Bliesmer (1999, cited in Stanley and Beare, 1999, p. 2) states that since 1950 the number of American citizen over the age of 65 years old has grown twice while the number of dependent American citizen over the age of 85 years old has grown four times. As the result, they become a sub culture, encouraging the society to pay more attention towards their existence.

As stated by Hooyman and Kiyak (1993, p.57), Americans themselves are ambivalent about old age. The ways they treat their old-aged people nowadays are different from the way they did in the pre-industrial society. Victor (1987, p. 75) states that the position of elderly in pre-industrial society is usually described as one of respect and authority. Typically, pre-industrial society is depicted as the "Golden Age" of aging and the Elderly. These could happen because in preindustrial societies, elders were seen as a social elite that should be viewed as wise and deserving of respect. Additionally, the oldest

people own most of the land, giving them real power. Thus, preindustrial societies take the form of a *gerontocracy*, a social system that gives a society's oldest members the most power, wealth, and prestige (Hall, 2012, par. 7). This is usually contrasted with their position in modern society, although they provide better facilities and services for the elderly for examples: pension fee, medical service, elder care, and other services. In brief, Chapman (2003, par.2) concludes that America's elderly are so spoiled by the government because of the government's well treatment. However, they are thought to be worse off because they are consigned to meaningless retirement, neglected by their family, and ignored by the prevailing youth culture (Victor, 1987, p. 75).

In modern society, people dismiss the knowledge and skills of old people as irrelevant to the lives of the young. In this era, urbanization and industrialization combined to undermine the extended family as the primary unit of society. This isolated the elderly from both society and the family (Burgess, 1960, as cited in Victor, 1987, p. 75).

In modern American society, there are some positive and negative stereotypes about old-aged people. On the bright side, they are believed to be wiser, more experienced and religious. However, people can also name more numbers of negative stereotypes to them, such as being senile, unattractive, weak, useless, powerless, lonely, confused, and many more (Hooyman and Kiyak, 1993, p.30). This condition shows us that people are more focused on the negative stereotypes. Since stereotypes are socially constructed, as explained by Estes, Swan, and Gerard (1984, as cited by Matcha, 1997, p. 71):

The conceptualization of old age, as well as the potential of the aged for securing power are "socially" created in that they are

not determined solely by objective facts. Rather, they are created by: (1) the interpretation and ordering of perception of those facts into paradigms; and (2) the power and influence of the perceivers and interpreters of the data.

Therefore, those stereotypes may appear in various media and one of them is literary work.

Literature is one of the best and most efficient ways to peek the society's way of thinking. As stated by Albrecht (1954, p. 425), literature is interpreted as a reflection of norms and values, as revealing the ethos of culture, the process of class struggles, and certain types of social facts. The readers can understand the way a certain society perceives some things through the problems faced by the main characters. Moreover, literatures are mostly written based on the author's experiences and/or his perception on a certain matter in his life and the world. Literature can put the readers into a different world and let them live their life as someone else thus enriching mind and giving a new point with that of which people can look at life.

Literature can be pictured as the platforms on which the readers see the earth from different points. The more platforms provided in the literature, the better view of the world can be obtained. According to Kulwadee (2009, par. 2), the more people read, the wider and deeper they understand other cultures. Literature can also be used as a mirror reflecting how the society is associated with the elderly. *Tuesdays with Morrie* is a kind of literary work which provides many platforms to catch a sight of how American society deals with the elderly.

Tuesdays with Morrie is a novel written by an American writer and newspaper columnist, Mitch Albom. It was written in 1997, topped the New

York Times Non-Fiction Bestsellers of 2000, and nowadays, more than eleven million copies of *Tuesdays with Morrie* are printed worldwide. The novel depicts an old man who is dying but he struggles against the stereotypes labeled to elderly. The old man's name is Morrie Schwartz, Mitch Albom's former university professor. They have not met each other for very long time until one day Mitch sees Morrie on *Nightline*, a TV show. On that show, he knows that Morrie suffers from ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), a terminal disease, and is in a wheelchair. Therefore, he decides to reconnect with his old professor, and when he does, Morrie asks Mitch to visit him regularly. Back in college, Morrie and Mitch used to meet on Tuesdays, so they agree to have their next meeting on Tuesdays. In these visits, Morrie teaches Mitch a lot about life. Morrie enlightens Mitch the meaning of life, and how even on a deathbed, a man can still see everything for the good that is in it and do something that can be useful to others. Having ALS, Morrie is suspected to have shorter life; his life is predicted to be about a few months more. However, instead of weeping about his short life, he chooses to do something. Helped by Mitch, Morrie designs a project on how to spend his few times in his own good ways. Although he is physically limited, he can do some big things. Morrie is a man of great wisdom and values the little thing in life. Morrie is an exception whose personalities are different from the negative stereotypes labeled to old-aged people. Different from those negative stereotypes, as an elderly, Morrie is far from being called senile, unattractive, weak, useless, powerless, lonely, confused, or role-less. He is still cognitively and socially active. He shows his role by being a lecturer in the class called

life taught, to Mitch. His strong personalities can inspire other people to regard elderly in different perspectives.

In this thesis, the writer uses sociological approach which will be encountered by social gerontology. Social gerontology concerns about changes in the social characteristics, circumstances, status, and roles of individuals in the society. To be more specific, social gerontology explains about the stereotypes labeled to elderly and also social theories of aging which explain the changes in social relationships occurring in late adulthood. Therefore, this approach can bring out how someone's condition can be found different from the negative stereotypes labeled to him.

Based on the explanation above, it will be interesting to analyze how someone's life situations can be contradictive from bad stereotypes labeled to old-aged people as reflected in a work of literature, a novel. This thesis is entitled *Morrie Schwartz's Life Situations against the Old Age Negative Stereotypes in Mitch Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie* because the writer attempts to rearrange Morrie's life situations on the novel which are not suitable with the negative stereotypes labeled to old-aged people.

1.2 Problem of the Study

Based on the background stated previously, the problem of this study can be formulated as: what are Morrie Schwartz's contradictive life situations with the old age negative stereotypes in Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Concerning the problem of study above, the purpose of this study is to reveal what Morrie Schwartz's life contradictive situations with the old age negative stereotypes in Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie* are.

