

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

The world we live in has a lot in store that we do not quite understand, even when science seems to have all the answers. The most fundamental conception of this world that we live in lies in the very word 'live' itself, for none of the scientific discourses can provide a certain answer as to what living means. Living beings are born, they learn, grow, and commit all kinds of actions, until, finally, they die. About these things, we do understand. However, there must be more to living than just *living*. Life's experiences, its courses, and even our actions in such courses, they must mean something more than just a process that all living beings go through. They must have significance. Regarding this concern, humanity has long since tried to make sense about it all. Among the concepts made in order to understand life are the concepts of reincarnation and karma taught in Buddhism. Generally, the two concepts are parallel to one another, but before we study about these two concepts, it is important to first understand about the very significance of studying them in the first place.

Reincarnation is an interesting subject, but intricate as well. The discussion of this one subject can grow so big that it swallows a large number of concerns such as history, geography, culture, religion, demography, psychology, and even science. Science here, in its most apparent application, is often used as analogies in supporting the concept of reincarnation. The cyclical processes of the moon, the

seasons, the metamorphosis of butterflies, and even the waking and sleeping are those of the popular analogies in this matter (McClelland 219, 248). The reason for the need of such analogies might be due to the fact that reincarnation can never really be illustrated, visualized, and therefore proven, by itself. If one is to ask a question that goes somewhere among the lines of, “what happens during a metamorphosis?” or “what happens during sleep?”, surely there will be scientists who can bathe him with a great number of proofs and details, as both metamorphosis and sleep can be scientifically observed.

These sorts of question, therefore, are more of the scientific question, for they can be discussed in a scientific context. Consider the case, however, if the question is changed to, “what happens to the soul after death?” In this case, it is highly natural for anyone to feel as if being tossed into a whole different context—one that is not too scientific. Of course, one cannot observe the soul like one observes sleep, not to mention after death. Yet, the question, “what happens to the soul after death?” is one question that leads to the big picture of this study.

Some people believe that, after we die, we will go to the afterlife—a trip with a one-way ticket. Some other people, on the other hand, believe that we may return to the realm of the living. This latter idea is known as the concept of reincarnation, which becomes the study’s main concern. Yet, it has just been stated earlier that reincarnation is not of scientific context. This is true; reincarnation is not of scientific context. Not when the term ‘scientific’ here is opposed to the term ‘mythical’, for, if that is the case, reincarnation falls directly and undeniably to the latter category—mythical. It is important to note, however,

that mythology is not a context banned from scientific discussion and surely not in the school of humanities, including literature.

The basic significance of myth is that it divines ourselves—our minds. Based on Jung's theory about the unconscious, this part of the human psyche has two layers. The first layer, the one most superficial, is what he calls *personal unconscious*; while the second layer, which is more fundamental, is the *collective unconscious*. This latter kind of unconscious, he argues, is shared with all individuals, or is universal, and that its origin is inborn (Jung "Four Archetypes" 2). As for the content of the mentioned unconscious, Jung claims, are *archetypes*—the basic images which are expressed in mythology ("Four Archetypes" 2-3). Therefore, the aspect of mythology that this study is concerned about—the myth of reincarnation—concludes with the idea that it may very well be included within a scientific discussion because, indeed, reincarnation is of high importance as it is something that comes from, hence also defines, all of us and our societies. This conclusion, in fact, is very much in line with what Jung says, that even though rebirth is not something that we can witness or weigh or in any way observe, one does talk about it, profess it, and is even filled with it; and these facts are sufficient to make reincarnation real, as it is not the question "is rebirth a tangible process?" that we are concerned about ("Four Archetypes" 57).

From this statement, the path that this study will thread should be clear. It should be noted, however, that the direction of the trip and what is being looked for in this trip are different matters. For this reason, a look at the literary text, the novel *Cloud Atlas*, is what now required. This novel, which is written by David

Mitchell and was first published in 2004, has obtained quite a number of awards. The two awards that the novel has been shortlisted for are the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2004 and the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2005, as for the awards that it had won, they are the British Book Awards Literary Fiction Award and the British Book Awards Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year, both in 2005 (British Council).

Two of the many admired aspects of the novel are the styles and genres. David Mitchell has written this third novel of his in six different styles of narration and genres, where the first story written in the style of a journal and which is more of historical novel, the second a collection of letters which is of drama, the third a novel based on an investigation which is of suspense, the fourth a memoir which is of comedy, the fifth a session of interview which is of science fiction, and the last an oral story-telling which is of post-apocalypse fantasy. All these six stories, despite their very different forms, are nested within one novel and, like Lego bricks, are interlocked with one another. This reconciliation of the irreconcilable stories owes greatly to one concept: reincarnation.

From the previous brief explanation about the six stories, the fact that the time setting progresses with each story can actually already be seen; for the first story is one being historical and the fifth and the sixth stories are those being futuristic and post-apocalyptic. Given this fact, it is clear that the novel as a whole cannot possibly follow the life of a single person— not unless this person is a god, a vampire or a time traveler, which in this case are not what the novel adopts. The novel, instead, follows the lives of a single soul and adopts the concept of

reincarnation. While this series of lives is what interlocks the six different stories, it is not the only element that this study is focusing on. This is because there are yet other connections present in the novel that the writer would very much like to examine.

As described earlier that the styles of narrations in the novel vary in such a way, ranging from journal, letters, novel, memoir, interview record to oral storytelling, these are actually what the writer would like to refer to as the legacies of each characters—something which they leave behind after their deaths. Being something that continues to exist despite the owner's death, each of these legacies, with the exception of the last one, comes across the reincarnation of its own creators or owners. Hence, the connections work as follows: in the beginning, Adam writes a journal; and this journal is then read by Robert, who writes letters; and these letters are then read by Luisa, who writes a novel; and this novel is then read by Timothy, who writes a memoir and has it turned into a movie; and this movie is then watched by Sonmi, who later has herself interviewed and recorded; and finally, this recording is watched by Meronym, who conducts a study on a Goddess-Sonmi-worshipping tribe. What is very interesting about these past-future connections is that, with the exception of the last one, they take a great role in determining the lives of the creators' next incarnations. Looking at the nature and the role of these connections, the writer sees them as resembling karma and its workings.

According to Peter Harvey's idea about karma and its relation to reincarnation, reincarnation is not a process that happens just haphazardly, and

beings are heirs to their own actions; meaning that good or evil actions leave trace and determine the future—that all depends on their own karma (39). His example in this matter is how the stingy will be reborn poor, the violent sickly, and the ill-tempered ugly. Despite the two ideas' resemblance, however, rests an ambivalence that one—the past-future connections—are observable, while the other—karma—is more of an unobservable, abstract force. Therefore, it is of the writer's best interest that the two ideas are examined in order to see whether or not karma can be represented in a form so different from how it is originally thought as, or more specifically in this case, whether the past-future connections in the novel may actually be the representation of karma or not.

In order to be able to achieve such aim, it is now timely to pay attention to the method of how the two ideas, the past-future connections and karma, are to be examined. To do this, however, it is important to first remember that the discussion about karma opens the door of an elevator to various levels of interpretation. Adding another definition to that of Harvey's, karma is more commonly known among the modern people of today by the phrases of “what goes around, comes around” or “you reap what you sow.” These understandings, unfortunately, though are not wrong, are among the most superficial. If we are to find an example on how karma might be like according to these definitions, the following Bible verse should do it justice: “[e]ven as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (King James Version, Job 4.8). While what is written in this verse can more or less be regarded as karma, Christianity is never very clear about the idea of reincarnation. Therefore, since

we are discussing karma within the scope of reincarnation, we are going to need to focus on a more specific idea of karma. Consequently, this would mean that the research's focus may be inclusive of all the beliefs, religions, and even the folklores that promote the concept of reincarnation and karma. Yet unfortunately, it would still be too vast given the widespread of the belief of reincarnation. Even the Aborigines, for instance, also believe in reincarnation for they believe that those who die at young age, at least, if not everyone, would be reincarnated (McClelland 36).

Regarding this issue, after studying the plot of the novel and considering what it alludes to, the writer has resolved on studying the past-future connections in the novel in relation to Buddhism. The selection of Buddhism here is because the novel's formal elements surrounding the idea of reincarnation and karma are very much in line with Buddhism teachings. These formal elements are the concept of suffering, deeds, and their connections between reincarnations. Aside of that, the novel does bring up topics about Buddhism and the Buddha himself, even when they are not very in-depth. Consequently, this study would therefore examine the connections of the characters in the novel by cross-referencing it with the Buddhist concept of reincarnation and karma.

## **B. Statement of the Problem**

Although the past-future connections in the novel may not appear like, and therefore strike the readers as, the concept of karma due to its observable form, it actually has the same role as karma. Consequently, the incorporation of this element within the novel may actually be the attempt to represent karma that

works under the concept of reincarnation. Therefore, the statement of the problem in this study is:

- In what way can the past-future connection in the novel be identified as karma within the process of reincarnation according to Buddhism?

### **C. Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is to gain an understanding whether karma may be represented in literature by something that is more physical than what most people consider. Along with increasing people's understanding of the concept of reincarnation and karma, it is also expected that, in the larger picture, people will begin to grasp the idea that myth and religion are more than just beliefs—that they have much larger significance to understanding our minds, our creations, our societies.

### **D. Significance of the Study**

It is rather unfortunate how mythology and Carl Jung's Mythological Criticism is not among the mainstream theories, those which are applied in many studies, including within the English Department of Universitas Airlangga. Despite the annual change of the waves of the popular theory among the literature students of this department, Mythological Criticism has never been a theory that is very much favored. In fact, by the time of the production of this thesis, there are barely any theses that apply the theory—the previous, and the only, one that does apply Myth Criticism dates back to 2006. This thesis on *Cloud Atlas*, therefore, is one among the first to do so. Yet, it is also for this reason that the writer fixes his

decision on doing this thesis, the one that hopefully will change the situation in the department by reassuring the hesitant future writers of the significance of archetypes and myths over ourselves and everything in our surroundings.

Aside of its purpose in the local scope of the English Department, Faculty of Humanities in Universitas Airlangga, this thesis also serves a purpose for the public, where it may be a passage to better understand the idea of archetype—especially the archetype of rebirth and its representation in the modern literature. In addition, this study is also expected to cast some light upon the fact that the basic images in myths may not only serve as religions, but rather more as something that has a great significance to our world as we know it.

#### **E. Scope and Limitation**

The literary text being discussed in this thesis is one that provides many possibilities for different courses of research. If literature serves as a platform for the accumulation of human life and its issues, *Cloud Atlas* serves this role best. From each of the six stories and their different genres, there is an abundance of issues such as gender, economy, psychology, *etc.* As for this study, since it is doubtlessly not concerned with all of them, it is focused more on the mythological elements of the novel: reincarnation and karma. Being concerned with the ideas of reincarnation and karma in the novel, the study looks closely at the characterization of the six main characters as well as the ordeals they go through. Since their ordeals are also being discussed, other people involved in them are subject to be included within the discussion as well. This focus is determined in order to conduct the research in the most effective way as possible.

## **F. Theoretical Background**

The theory applied in this research is Mythological Criticism by Carl Jung. In this theory, Carl Jung emphasizes on the idea of the collective unconscious; which is the deepest part of the unconscious wherein lie images that are universally shared called archetypes (“Four Archetypes” 2). These archetypes, as Tyson believes, are the basic forms that are present in any human productions such as “myths, literature, dreams, religions, and rituals of social behavior” (223). A Myth Criticism study, therefore, is a study which is inclusive of the discussion about myths, literature, dreams, religions, and social rituals.

Given the nature of this research, which enables the focus on a certain idea shared with different kinds of human production, the writer intends to look at not only literary work, which is *Cloud Atlas*, but Buddhism as well. To look at both the literary work and Buddhism, this thesis focuses on one concept that is shared by the two—the concept of reincarnation. According to Jung’s theory, reincarnation is one of the five forms of the archetype of rebirth, namely: metempsychosis, reincarnation, resurrection, rebirth (*renovatio*), and participation in transformation process (“Four Archetypes” 53-6). As of this stage, however, the clarity of the concept of reincarnation and karma in the text is still uncertain and is under examination; therefore, this thesis will bring up the conclusion over this matter with the use of Buddhist concept of reincarnation and karma.

## **G. Method of the Study**

The study is a Qualitative Research, meaning that it seeks answer to a question and systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the

question as well as the use of primary and secondary data sources. The primary source of data is the novel *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell, and the secondary source of data is the various books and studies about Buddhism, Mythological Criticism, and also the novel *Cloud Atlas*.

The process of data analysis begins by looking at the concept of reincarnation based on Carl Jung's idea of the archetype of rebirth mentioned earlier in the Theoretical Background. This process is done in order to shed light upon the form of the concept in question, so that this thesis may provide a firm foundation on the issue it is examining before proceeding with other concerns. With the understanding of the concept under the theory of Jung's, the next immediate concern is the understanding of the concept according to Buddhism faith. This is done in order to display the validity of the relation among the literary work and Buddhism.

After the examinations over the concept of reincarnation adopted by the novel using both Jung's theory of the archetype and Buddhism teachings, the thesis is now entering the examination over the novel's concept of karma. The first concern of this stage is to understand the nature of the past-future connections as karma by looking at the forms; whether they are subtle or gross. After that, the next concern is the context in which these past-future connections are incorporated within; meaning among what notion these connections are placed inside the novel. This notion, looking at the big picture of the literary text, is the idea of the universal problem present in all ages; which, in Buddhism perspective, is being referred to by the first truth the Four Noble Truths. Finally, the last

concern is how the past-future connections are operating in the same fashion as karma; a focus which is discussed by looking at the desire that is shared by each character in the novel and how this desire persists by method or karma.

## H. Definition of Key Terms

- **Archetype** : An inherited idea or mode of thought or basic image that is present deep in the unconscious of the individual and is universally shared.
- **Buddhism** : A religion of eastern and central Asia that is based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha.
- **Connection** : The state of being connected of the actions and events that happen in each lifetime of a series of reincarnations.
- **Karma** : The force created by a one's actions that is believed in Buddhism to determine one's future.
- **Legacy** : Something that is produced or made into being by an incarnation, and then passed down to the next incarnation.
- **Reincarnation** : The concept in which people are believed to be born again with a different body after death.