

**THE DISTORTION OF REALITY
IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S NOVEL *WHEN WE WERE
ORPHANS***

Thesis



by:

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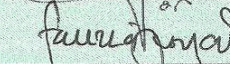
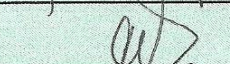
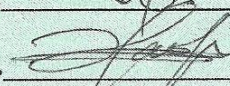
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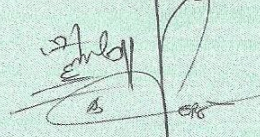
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ABSTRAK

Risna, Ristiana. 2013. *The Distortion of Reality in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novel "When We Were Orphans"*. Skripsi. Padang: Jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni. Universits Negeri Padang.

Tujuan pembahasan ini adalah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana novel *When We Were Orphans*(2000) karangan Kazuo Ishiguro ini memperlihatkan penyimpangan realita yang dilakukan oleh protagonis. Teks novel ini dianalisa dengan menggunakan text-based approach yang difokuskan pada unsur sastra, seperti ironi dan paradoks. Ironi dalam teks ini memperlihatkan adanya perbedaan antara apa yang disampaikan dan apa yang sebenarnya dimaksudkan oleh protagonis. Sedangkan paradoks dapat dilihat dari perbedaan pendapat yang dilakukan oleh protagonis dengan karakter lain dalam teks. Ironi dan paradoks inilah yang membantu memperlihatkan adanya penyimpangan realita yang dilakukan oleh protagonis. Selain itu, penganalisaan unsur-unsur sastra tersebut juga dikaitkan dengan teori denial oleh Anna Freud yang mengemukakan bahwa denial merupakan sebuah pertahanan yang dilakukan manusia untuk membuat dirinya merasa lebih baik dengan menolak menerima kenyataan. Pembahasan ini juga menggunakan teori *self-deception* oleh Brian Mclaughlin yang mengacu pada keadaan dimana seseorang cenderung membenarkan semua hal yang dianggapnya benar. Hasil penganalisaan menunjukkan bahwa seseorang yang memiliki pengalaman buruk di masa lalu memiliki tendensi untuk melakukan penyimpangan realita. Penyimpangan tersebut dilakukan dengan berbohong dan mengarang cerita untuk menutupi kejadian yang sebenarnya.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The reality is somehow unpredictable; it can be good and can be bad. Sometimes people will take it seriously or lightly. Sometimes people change their version of reality in order to alleviate guilt, help make themselves feel better, and to avoid emotional pain or rejection. Shahar (2006) stated that;

We all create certain safe and predictable ways of dealing with the world that involve some slanting of reality. In order to cope with life, and make it more tolerable, we may distort, embellish or ignore certain aspects of our environment, our feelings, or our memories. There are things we just don't want to deal with because they are too painful, we fear them, or because we may get overwhelmed by such information.

The quotation shows that people tend to have their own reason in distorting the reality. One of them is to protect themselves against uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and experiences. They distort the reality so that the others will not know what is happening to them. Some events are distorted to comfort themselves from painful reality. This happens because they find it easier to withdraw rather than cope with a reality that is out of their expectation.

People tend to distort the reality in order to cope with their painful truth. The distortion of reality refers to cases in which people change the shape of their reality for some purposes. According to Shahar (2006), a person is extremely

detached from reality because they feel threatened by it. The more threatening the world seems, the more anxiety they experience, and the more extreme their strategies to avoid dealing with it. It implies that by distorting the reality, they can hide the truth of some painful things in their life, in order to make it more bearable.

Therefore, some details in past experience can be more importance than the others. Some elements can be highlighted, whereas others can be diminished or replaced with elements taken from their expectation. It indicates that when people retelling their past experience, they do not totally restore the truth. Some details of the reality may be distorted to make it fit in with their existing knowledge and expectations. People omitted the truth they regarded as irrelevant, changed the points they considered to be significant, and rationalized the parts that did not make sense, to make the truth more comprehensible to themselves.

People tend to have their own way in distorting the reality. Gerlach (2012) stated that there are several ways in distorting reality. First of all is vehemently insisting that events, feelings, conversations, and decisions that others witness did not happen, or happened at a different time, place, or circumstance. Then, steadily avoiding responsibility for one's life, health, decisions, behaviors, and happiness. They are also projecting one's own shameful traits onto others and refusing to see flaws and other weaknesses in themselves. He also identify that people also lying, denying, and minimizing the reality in order to distort the truth. They are keep insisting on something, when they clearly weren't. Keep believing that their

past is perfect, but being unable to describe how they demonstrated that or to prove it.

Meanwhile, distorting reality is well known among the people. Many people had already done the distortion of reality in their life. One of the example is the case of Oprah Winfrey, a television host as well as actress who is most famous for her talk show named after herself. In her talkshow, she has always been very verbal about her abusive past and her poverty upbringing environment. However, Kitty Kelley's new book entitled *Oprah: A Biography*, includes claims from Oprah's family members that Oprah lied about her traumatic childhood life. It includes an interview with Oprah's cousin, Katharine Esters. Esters paints a different picture of Oprah's childhood by telling that Oprah's claim of being sexually abused is a lie. Not only that but Oprah also embellished the story of her troubled childhood for financial gain. According to Katharine in an interview, the story of sexual abuse helped launch Oprah and make her what she is today. True or false, Oprah Winfrey seems to distort her past reality in order to reach some purpose.

The phenomenon of the distortion of reality is not only found in reality, but also appeared in literary works. One of the literary works which expose the distortion of reality is the novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) by Kazuo Ishiguro. This novel is interesting to analyze since the character shows the distortion of reality. It can be seen from his action; tells a lie and creates story.

1.1.1 The Distortion Of Reality

There is one term that needs to be clarified in this analysis. It is the distortion of reality. According to Humair Hashmi (2007), a consulting psychologist, the distortion of reality was firstly introduced by a group of German psychologists at the beginning of the twentieth century. They discovered a distortion in human perception of reality. They argued that the distortion of reality arise when people react to the way they expect the reality occurred rather than accept the reality itself. They may include or omitt details that are not consistent with the expected theme of the story. In other words, the distortion of reality refers to a denial of reality, because they find it's easier to withdraw than cope with a reality that is incongruent with their expectation.

In this analysis, the terms deal with the distortion of reality that reflected by the protagonist of the novel. His entire life is affected by the dissapearance of his parents. However, he does not want other people know about his painful past time. Thus, the protagonist twist his memories out of original shape. Furthermore, his the distortion of reality arises in two form, tells a lie and creates story.

1.1.2 A Brief of Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on 8 November 1954. He came to Britain in 1960 when his father began research at the National Institute of Oceanography. He was educated at a grammar school for boys in Surrey. He studied Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. He has been writing

full-time since 1982. In 1983, shortly after the publication of his first novel, Kazuo Ishiguro was nominated by *Granta* magazine as one of the 20 'Best of Young British Writers'. He was also included in the same promotion when it was repeated in 1993.

Up to now, Ishiguro has published several novels, shorts stories and screenplay; *Introductions 7: Stories by New Writers* (contributor) in 1981. *A Pale View of Hills* in 1982. *An Artist of the Floating World* in 1986. *The Remains of the Day* in 1989, (adapted to the cinema in 1992). *The Unconsoled* in 1995. *When We Were Orphans* in 2000. *Never Let Me Go* in 2005. *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* in 2009. His work has been translated into over 30 languages.

Ishiguro has been awarded and shortlisted for several literary prizes and awards, among which can be cited: Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize 1982. Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlist) in 1986, 2000, 2005. Booker Prize for Fiction for *The Remains of the Day* 1989. He also awarded OBE in 1995 for services to literature and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. The Cheltenham Prize 1995. Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France) and Premio Mantova (Italy) in 1998. Whitbread Novel Award 2000. British Book Awards Author of the Year (shortlist), Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia Region) and James Tait Black Memorial Prize (shortlist) in 2006.

Ishiguro's narratives center on memories and their potential to digress and distort, to forget and to silence the past, and above all to haunt the present. The

protagonists of his fiction seek to overcome loss (the personal loss of family members and lovers; the losses resulting from war) by making sense of the past through acts of remembrance.

As novelist, Kazuo Ishiguro has often been asked about his treatment of memory in his novels. In an interview with CNN (2001), he stated that, “To some extent, it was an act of preserving things that were good that would have otherwise faded in my memory”. It implies that Ishiguro’s own fading memory of his childhood in Japan was actually one of the initial reasons why he started to write. As he growing older, he realize his memories of his childhood in Japan would not last for ever. There was an urgent need for Ishiguro to write down on paper this “mixture of memory, speculation, and imagination which formed an image of Japan in his mind, before it disappeared altogether” (Ishiguro, interview with Krider). Later on, Japan was no longer the setting of his stories, but memory remained an important factor. In an interview with CNN (2001), Ishiguro affirmed,

More fundamentally, I'm interested in memory because it's a filter through which we see our lives, and because it's foggy and obscure, the opportunities for self-deception are there. In the end, as a writer, I'm more interested in what people tell themselves happened rather than what actually happened.

Ishiguro clearly affirms his desire to write the phenomena of memory. He realizes that people have the tendency to distort their memory in different ways. And as a writer, he believes that memories are the important factor in individuals life.

1.1.3 When We Were Orphans

When We Were Orphans (2000), the novel written by Kazuo Ishiguro exposes phenomena of the distortion of reality. The distortion of reality refers to a memory report that differs from what actually occurred. In this novel, the distortion of reality is represented by the protagonist, Christopher Banks. His entire life is affected by the situation that his parents were kidnapped when he was ten years old in Shanghai. In fact, his father was not kidnapped but he ran off with his mistress, and died a few years later. While, his mother agreed to live as the concubine of the Chinese warlord to secure her son's future in London. However, he did not want other people to know about his painful past time. Thus, he distorted some parts of his childhood experience to hide the truth. It is done through telling a lie and creating story.

In this novel, the protagonist tells a lie about the truth of his childhood experience by building his childhood image as a happy child. He pretends to live in peaceful environment in Shanghai. He claims to have a perfect life in England. He tells a lie about his condition at his journey to England. He also claims to have a good school life at the English school.

Furthermore, the protagonist also creates stories about his life. He announces himself as an orphan, however deep in his heart he believes that his parent still alive. He creates story about his childhood friend. He claims a Japanese soldier as his friend. He also rejects his orphanhood by creating story about his disappearance parents.

1.2 Problem of Study

The distortion of reality emerges as the main issue in this novel. To explore this issue, the research questions are needed. Those research questions are:

1. How far does *When We Were Orphans* disclose the issue of the distortion of reality?
2. To what extent does the fictional device; figuratives language (irony and paradox) gives contribution to reveal the distortion of reality?

1.3 Purpose of Study

This study is going to prove that the novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) by Kazuo Ishiguro exposes the issue of the distortion of reality. Besides, this study is done in order to explore to what extent the figuratives language (irony and paradox) gives contribution in disclosing the distortion of reality.

1.4 Previous Study

There are two studies that give the contribution on analyzing this novel. The first study that gives contribution to this analysis was written by Soren Hellingrød and Cecilie Skaarup (2005) entitled *Delusions: Memory and Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's Fiction*. This is a study about the novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), both by Kazuo Ishiguro. This study analyzed the narrative technique and psychological character depictions in

Kazuo Ishiguro's two most recent novels. According to them, both novels concerned with the notions of memory and identity and it seems that identity is somehow depend on memory. This analysis was based on theory Mark Freeman about the psychological mechanisms of memory. The analysis were also based on the theories of Seymour Chatman and Jacob Lothe. Both theorists operated within the field of narratology. This study was done by exploring how the narrators feel about the way they remember, or have started forgetting their past. The result of this analysis, the protagonists in both novel realized that they mantains a faulty self identity. As the truth finally dawns, they have to revise their entire worldview.

The second study that gives contribution to this analysis was written by Emily Cappo (2009) entitled *Repression and Displacement in Kazuo Ishiguro's When We Were Orphans and Never Let Me Go*. This is a study about the novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), both by Kazuo Ishiguro. This study examines the ways in which repression and displacement are represented with increasing sophistication and complexity in these novels. This analysis was based on theory Sigmund Freud about the repression and displacement. Especially for *When We Were Orphans*, the study was done by exploring the narrator's psychological defense mechanisms. Besides, it analyzed how the repression and both familial and cultural displacement can affect the protagonist's whole life. This study contains the struggle of the protagonist to make him feels at home in his homeliness, and placed in his displacement.

The studies above give contribution and inspiration to the topic, the distortion of reality in *When We Were Orphans*. They also enrich the knowledge about the topic. Unlike the studies above, this analysis focuses on how far the novel reflects the distortion of reality through the figurative language (irony and paradox) used by the protagonist on the novel.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this novel is based on the concept of denial by Anna Freud, and Self-deception's concept by Brian McLaughlin. In order to deal with conflict and problems in life, Freud stated that the ego employs a range of defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms operate at an unconscious level and help ward off unpleasant feelings or make things feel better for the individual.

Researchers have described a wide variety of different defense mechanisms. Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, described ten different defense mechanisms used by the ego in her book, *The Ego and Mechanisms of Defense*. They are; denial, repression, displacement, sublimation, projection, intellectualization, rationalization, regression, reaction formation, and undoing. Therefore in the analysis, the character is committed the defense mechanism of denial.

Denial is probably one of the best known defense mechanisms, used often to describe situations in which people seem unable to face reality or admit an obvious truth. It is an outright refusal to admit or recognize that something has

occurred or is currently occurring. Freud in Boeree (1998), stated that denial involves blocking external events from awareness. If some situation is just too much to handle, the person just refuses to experience it. It deprives the individual of the necessary awareness to cope with external challenges and the employment of adequate strategies for survival as well.

Denial brings out the reason to distort the reality. Anna Freud in Boeree (1998) stated that denial functions to protect the ego from things that the individual cannot cope with. When people deny the truth, they try to protect themselves against uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and experiences. While this may save people from anxiety or pain, denial also requires a substantial investment of energy. Because of this, other defenses are also used to keep these unacceptable feelings from consciousness.

The refusal to accept or acknowledge what is true is a very fitting description of the denial of someone with a difficulty to cope with their experience. Modestti-González, in his journal *The Many Faces of Denial*, draws the idea that denial is easily detectable. She stated that the uncomfortable situation and its consequences are pretty clear for everyone, except the person in denial. Typically, the person denies having a problem and insists that he or she is in good condition, while family members or workmates keep confronting him or her with the problematic behavior.

Furthermore, in her journal, Modestti-González identifies seven types of denial. They are simple denial, minimizing, denial of responsibility, denial of cycle, endorsed denial, transitory denial, and denial of denial. In the form of simple denial, someone avoids a fact they think may be painful to themselves by lying. It is when the person fails to recognize or really believes that the situation does not exist, despite evidence on the contrary. Minimizing is an attempt to make the effects or results of an action appear less harmful than they may actually be.

The denial of responsibility is an attempt to make a wrong action seem right by justifying that decision or action. This is usually done by attempting to avoid potential harm or pain by shifting attention away from themselves. Denial of cycle takes place when a person avoids facing that his or her behavior is part of a pattern or cycle. It can also serve as a way to blame or justify behavior of denial person. The form of endorsed denial is shared by the commanding figures in the person's family, community or work environment in order to deny or ignore the problem.

Moreover, the form of transitory denial is when the person spontaneously accepts reality and takes action or seeks help, as soon as the situation is less threatening for them. The last form, denial of denial is when denial people deny their denial action. This form of denial typically overlaps with all of the other forms of denial, but involves more self-delusion.

People has entered a denial phase or has had a denial moment. They are commonly use the defense mechanism of denial to some degree, in order to ease past trauma or to feel better about the world they live in. However, when they deny the fact of an actual event in the past, they are committing the defense mechanism of denial.

Another action related to the distortion of reality is self-deception. Self-deception is the process of misleading the fact in the mind to accept some claims as true or valid when they are false or invalid. Brian McLaughlin (1988) said that, self deception is one of the popular escapement methods that people use to prevent themselves from feeling guilty, while in the same time allowing them to escape from something that they don't want to face. It implies that some people go beyond self deception and believe in lies that erode their self confidence. They create lies about their own skills then find false clues to prove them; this is another form of self deception.

In some people, the tendency of self-deception seems to be an inborn personality trait. Others may develop a habit of self-deception as a way of coping with problems and challenges. However, people do not deceive themselves on intention but its their subconscious minds that come up with such tricks in order to protect their psychological well being. In short, self-deception is a way people justify false beliefs about themselves to themselves.

The combination of these theories are related each other to reveal the issue of the distortion of reality in novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000). It is

reflected by the main character of this novel. His entire life is affected by the disappearance of his parents. However, he does not want other people know about his painful past time. Thus, the protagonist twist his memories out of original shape and hide the truth.

The analysis of this novel is supported by text-based interpretation. In Guerin (2005); *“text based-interpretation is concentrate on the work itself, on the text, examining it as art.”* It means that this approach is focused on the analysis and the interpretation of the text itself. The process of analysis is done within the text only without regarding the other aspects outer the text. It signifies that the presence and the meaning of this story are found by examining the interrelation among the elements of text.

Fictional devices involved in the analysis of this novel are focused on the figuratives language (irony and paradox). Paradox is the important element in enclosing the topic of this analysis. Bredin (2003) says that paradox is a statement that is apparently self-contradictory but really contains a possible truth. It is also used to describe an opinion or statement which is contrary to generally accepted ideas. Often, a paradox is used to make a reader consider the point in a new way.

Lewis (2000) describes paradox 1) as opposing interpretations of particular phenomena, 2) as oppositional thinking, 3) as aids to understanding divergent interpretations, 4) as perceptual, 5) as becoming apparent through social interaction, 6) as denoting a variety of viewpoints, 7) as residing in the observer not the observed, and 8) as being a possible outcome of using negatives

to define something. In the analysis, paradox can be revealed from the opposing opinion or statement of the protagonist with another characters.

Another element of fictional device that will be used in this analysis is irony. Bredin (2003) says that irony involves a difference or contrast between appearance and reality - that is a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, what is said and what is done, and what is expected or intended and what happens.

There are three common types of irony in literature; *Verbal Irony*, *Situational Irony*, and *Dramatic Irony*. Verbal Irony occurs when people say the opposite of what they mean. This is perhaps the most common type of irony. The reader knows that a statement is ironic because of familiarity with the situation or a description of voice, facial, or bodily expressions which show the discrepancy.

The second type is the Situational Irony. This is the most common in literature. It is the contrast between what happens and what was expected (or what would seem appropriate). This is different from what common sense indicates it is, will be, or ought to be. It is often used to expose hypocrisy and injustice.

The Dramatic irony is use to analize the novel. It is occured when a character states something that they believe to be true but that the reader knows is not true. The key to dramatic irony is the reader's foreknowledge of coming events. Sometimes as the reader read, they are placed in the position of knowing more than what one character knows. Because they know something the

character does not, they read to discover how the character will react when he or she learns the truth of the situation. Second readings of stories often increase dramatic irony because of knowledge that was not present in the first reading.

In this analysis, the irony refers to the protagonist's discrepancy between what appears to be true and what really is true. Furthermore, his desire to hide those painful memories leads him to commit the distortion of reality.

1.6 Methodology

This analysis is supported by text-based interpretation which examines the interrelation between the language styles in fiction. The language styles are irony and paradox. These devices are inseparable since they support each other. This analysis is going to reveal the distortion of reality by analyzing the protagonist's paradoxical statements with another character. The irony emerges in the analysis as a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, what is said and what is done, and what is expected or intended and what happens. Moreover, these elements are analyzed based on the concept of denial by Anna Freud and self-deception by Brian McLaughlin.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

The novel *When We Were Orphans* (2000) by Kazuo Ishiguro reflects the distortion of reality. It is exposed through text based interpretation by focusing on the figurative language such as paradox and irony. The protagonist in this novel has a painful experience in his past life. He does not want another people knowing about it. This condition affects his entire life. To deny the factual truth and release his feeling of sadness and sorrow, he tries to distort some reality in his past. He chooses to do that in two ways, there are by telling a lie and creating stories.

In telling lie, the protagonist is running three major actions that reflect his effort to deny the truth of his past. Those are done by; pretending to be in good condition when he is leaving to England, lying about his condition in school, and also lying about his childhood environment in Shanghai. The irony that related with lying can be seen from the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, then what is said and what is done. The paradox emerges when the protagonist has different opinion with another character. Thus, all the actions of pretending and lying are supporting each other in distorting the reality of his past life.

In the second ways, there are two significant actions which included as creating story; there are creating story about his childhood, and his parents. The

irony emerges in the analysis as a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, what is said and what is done, and what is expected or intended and what happens. These actions of creating stories reflect his effort to escape from the reality of his past life.

In short, people can find some purpose to distort their reality in the past. Sometimes people re-write their version of reality in order to release their guilt and to help make themselves feel better. They think they are protecting themselves as they distorted the reality, however they actually cause more harm to themselves. The best way of dealing with reality is to solve the problems that cause it. But if this is beyond you, you may have to block some of the demands: Shut out reality, or pretend you don't have needs, or ignore those feelings of shame or guilt. By choosing to face reality as it comes, accept the past without any regrets, people can stand strong.

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