

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Childhood has considerably been one of the most critical phases in one's life. It is in the phase of childhood where the construction of an individual's system is made. There are researches regarding the high possibility of promising adulthood resulted from a proper and appropriate childhood. Skills like independence, creativity, and leadership are some examples of the results of a proper childhood.

As an infant is dependent, there must be a vital figure who is supposed to accompany him or her. In this case, the figure of parents is the most prominent one. According to Tyson, in the scope of psychoanalysis, the family holds the most crucial part in the development of a child because child/human are the product of the family-complex (Tyson 2015, 13). Freud explained that naturally, children heritage an attitude and personality from their parents (Freud 1940, 12-14). In proper parenting, the goal is to give the infant or the children proper development. There are various pathways to reach this goal. Hence, there are various standards of measurement in the act of parenting. Mia Dewi Fortuna, in her thesis, wrote that family plays a huge part as the first social agent since an individual is born. Thus, she added that it makes most of the traumatic experiences to children occur from a family member's circle (Fortuna 2018).

In parenting itself, the mother figure is the key to successful development for the children. There is a term of the desire of the mother that explains how the

intimate relationship between a mother and her child will bring a significant impact on the child's life. When an infant cannot differentiate itself from the environment, it assumes that its mother is its whole world. In other words, the mother and the child are considered unity within the infant's mind. As the mother plays the most crucial role, there are supposed to be moments within a child's life where the mother becomes the child's most inspirational figure.

Yet, not all children experience proper development. Various factors can cause it. One of them is improper parenting. There are cases within the society where the parents treat and inappropriately educate their children. The impact can be seen within a short period or later in the adulthood of the children.

Furthermore, there are possibilities that the impact will be more significant as the ones who are supposed to build an intimate relationship is absent within an individual's childhood. As mentioned before, the mother is the most prominent figure that is supposed to be by the child's side to achieve proper development. Thus, the absence of a mother figure will indeed affect one's life. As for the impact, the psychological issue is one of the most common results of the absence of a mother figure. Still, this result may also affect one's physical aspects as there are possibilities where the psychological state leads a person to do actions that may affect his or her physical condition.

It is also a pretty acceptable argument that the absence of a mother figure becomes a traumatic event in a person's life. It is also conventional knowledge that humans can't avoid traumatic events and unpleasant memories as social creatures.

Tyson, in her book, stated that all the painful experiences, wounds, guilt, and unresolved conflicts were somehow being placed in a storehouse where humans are unaware of called the *unconscious* (Tyson 2015, 12). Trauma will affect one's fixated adulthood, whether it is physically, emotionally, or psychologically. Then, there must be defense mechanisms to cover traumatic and unpleasant memories.

Given that the childhood phase is critical for one individual, traumatic experiences during childhood could lead to deviation of one's sexuality. In this study, the writer focuses on the main character's interest in bisexuality. According to Murphy in *Freud Reconsidered* (1984), bisexuality means the ability of an individual to take pleasure from both female and male objects (Murphy 1984, 67).

Freud's thoughts on bisexuality or and homosexuality are widespread in some of his books or his letter. In his famous letter to a mother with a homosexual son, he wrote his thought about his belief on homosexuality: "We consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual development" (Freud 1935, 423). In his other works entitled *analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937), he wrote that he has come to learn that every human being is bisexual.

"It is well known that at all periods there have been ... people who can take as their sexual objects members of their own sex as well as of the opposite one, without the one trend interfering with the other. We call such people bisexuals, and we accept their existence without feeling much surprise about it. We have come to learn, however, that every human being is bisexual in this sense and that his libido is distributed, either in a manifest or a latent fashion, over objects of both sexes." (Freud 1937, 243–244)

In the literary world, there have already been many works that bear the issue

of a traumatic childhood. One of them is Jandy Nelson's *I'll Give You the Sun* (2014), the winner of the 2015 Printz Awards for the category of excellence in young adult literature. In the novel, it can be scrutinised that the loss of the mother figure affects Jude's personality throughout the story. Although the mother figure within the novel is not absent entirely, the impacts are likely related to the constructed system within Jude's childhood. In the story, Jude experiences separations, including the death of her mother and grandmother.

In the scope of psychoanalysis, one of the possible impacts of a traumatic childhood is the deviation of a person's fixated adulthood. According to Sigmund Freud, a child has several psychosexual stages contributing to the child's fixated adulthood; they are the oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital stages. In each stage, a particular body part becomes the focus of libido or the fixation of psychosexual development (Freud 1920, 31- 45). Therefore, this essay attempts to excavate the influence of traumatic childhood and scrutinise which stage the fixation occurs on the main character. Mona is the main protagonist of Jen Beagin's *Pretend I'm Dead* (2018), the novel that becomes the object of this study.

According to Hien, in his journal about sexual deviation cases, the phenomenon of sexual deviation behaviour is fairly common in society (Hien 1983, 339). Because sexual deviation behaviour was considered socially embarrassing, many cases were hidden due to personal request or privacy (Hien 1983, 339). Hanson and Slater, in their journal, imply that the core issues of some sex offender were related to their past sexual victimisation; they imply the idea of the cycle of abuse (Hanson and Slater 1988, 487).

Victims of sexual abuse often hide their experience and are unlikely to report about the abuse (Hanson and Slater 1988, 488); this act could disrupt the victim's mental condition. The recent case of sexual deviation related to traumatic childhood is "AH", 31 years old Islamic teacher who's recently being arrested for sodomising 25 students in Sidoarjo. Based on his confession, childhood sexual abuse was the reason he conducts sexual offenses against his students.

The novel *Pretend I'm Dead* (2018) addresses the issue of parental neglect's impact on an individual's sexual interest and personality. The novel tells the story of Mona, a 23-year-old American woman who is in search of her self-acceptance. In the story, Mona was previously a maid with pride over her job before being abandoned by her partner, who is also her customer. Then, she travels to Mexico in purpose to find a fresh atmosphere. Within the novel, the background of Mona's childhood is simultaneously revealed through the monolog and dialog of the main characters. There are possibilities that some events within her childhood take part in the development of her behavior in adulthood, especially her sexual behavior.

Pretend I'm Dead is a novel published in 2018 and has already been shortlisted for some significant awards. It is a novel published by Jen Beagin, followed by its sequels, *Vacuum in the Dark*, in 2019. Jen Beagin is an American novelist and writer who achieve the prestigious Whiting Awards in 2017 by the category of fiction. On its debut, this novel was already shortlisted for some significant awards and nominees such as The Center for Fiction's 2018 First Novel Prize and Kirkus's Reviews Best Debut Fiction of 2018.

Because the novel is new and currently published in 2018, the writer has not found any previous studies yet. Therefore, the writer chose several related studies to help the analysis due to its similar issues within this study. One of them is Fidianto's *The Effect of Childhood Trauma on Dave Boyle's Personality and Behavior in Dennis Lehane's Mystic River: A Freudian Psychoanalysis* (2018). In his study, Fidianto focuses on David Boyle, a victim of sexual abuse and kidnapping by two men when he was on his twelfth. Comparatively, this study shares similarities with Fidianto's study regarding the issue and the general theoretical approach in conducting the analysis. Yet, as the primary textual object is different, it can be assumed that the case will also be slightly distinctive.

There are also four other related studies following Rakeesh and Janoori's *Electra Complex and the Confusion of Albee's Martha's Sexual Identity: A Psychoanalytic Study* (2018), Akter, Trisha and Islam's *A Critical Approach to Sons and Lovers from Point of View the Oedipus Complex Theory* (2017), Bansal's *Portrayal of Oedipal Desires in Vijay Tendulkar's The Cyclist* (2018) and Filimonova's *Childhood trauma in The Go - Between and Atonement. An Analysis of Children's Psychosexual Development in The Novels by LP Hartley and Ian McEwan* (2014). These related studies mainly discuss the relation between childhood trauma on psychosexual stages and adulthood sexuality (mostly oedipal relationship), consisting of heterosexual behavior and interest towards one's parent. Therefore, this study could fill the gap as the writer uses the concept of psychosexual stages as the central concept to draw the line between childhood traumatic events to the corresponding portrayal of adulthood sexuality; women

bisexuality.

As written above, the proper childhood experience is one of the prominent factors that influence human adulthood development. In this study, the issue of childhood trauma in Jen Beagin's *Pretend I'm Dead* is scrutinised as well as the defense mechanism portrayed by the main character in the novel. To analyse the issue, the writer uses Freudian psychoanalytic criticism.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

In order to analyse the impact of childhood trauma in Mona's adulthood sexual behavior in Jen Beagin's *Pretend I'm Dead*, the writer divides the statement of the problem into two parts in which are scrutinised later on in the analysis. The problem statements are:

1. How is Mona's childhood experience depicted in Jen Beagin's *Pretend I'm Dead*?
2. How does Mona's traumatic childhood experience shape her bisexual tendencies?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statements of the problem, the goal of the analysis of the thesis are:

1. To explain the process of Mona Boyle's childhood experience in the novel *Pretend I'm Dead*.
2. To unveil that her past traumatic childhood experiences sturdily influence

Mona's bisexual tendencies.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This paper aims to reveal the impact of traumatic childhood on one's adult life, especially on how traumatic childhood could affect a person's sexual behavior. Childhood experiences are one of the prominent factors that take part in shaping the behavior of a person. Improper treatment that occurs in childhood could lead to incomplete development of one's personality, and it could also damage the mental and causing continuous trauma in their adulthood. This paper focuses on the impact of childhood traumatic experience in constructing one's sexual behavior.

Furthermore, this research also scrutinises the defense mechanism on a person with the experiences of childhood trauma. Defense mechanism was created by the human system to keep individual unaware of all painful and traumatic experience and also the anxiety which stored within the human unconscious. This research is written as the writer's contribution to Universitas Airlangga, which he hopes that this paper could help the reader to understand the importance of giving the best childhood memories for their children. Moreover, the writer hopes that this paper could help other students from Universitas Airlangga who are interested in studying Psychoanalysis Criticism, especially using the theory by Sigmund Freud. For further research, the writer hopes that this study could provide helpful insight for those interested in analysing *Pretend I'm Dead* by Jen Beagins from a different perspective.

1.5 Definition of Key-Terms

Childhood : Particular nature which differentiates the child from the adult (Ariès 1962, 128); a bridge between infancy and adulthood (Postman 1985, 290).

Sexual Deviation : Sexual Deviation or usually known as paraphilias were described by Klassen and Wright as an abnormality that interferes with the mutually satisfying sexual behavior or, in practice, involves a coercive sexual activity (Klassen and Wright 2006).

Sexuality : Sexuality is diverse between personal. It is about sexual feelings and thoughts toward another person. (Department of Health & Human Services 2020).

Trauma : Trauma is a frightening experience that transforms an adaptive process into a maladaptive one (Sar 2006).

Fixation : In terms of psychosexual development, fixation is the refusal to reject pleasure from an erotogenic zone during the development of sexuality (Kline 2013).