

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Deconstruction theory will be used to analyze the text in this study. In this part of the study, more detailed information about deconstruction and related study that examine a literary work using deconstruction will be provided. The theoretical framework consists of two parts: 1). the history of deconstruction, and 2). the method of deconstruction.

2.1.1. The History of Deconstruction

In order to explain the history of deconstruction, it would be necessary to retrace back in time where the term “deconstruction” was coined by Jacques Derrida during his presentation of “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” at Johns Hopkins University. He coined this term to explain his new method of interpreting a literary text: by reversing the elements of the text. According to him, deconstruction refers to a critical method or tool to examine literary text, not as school of criticism (Bressler 337). Martin McQuillan stated that deconstruction is not a school or an ‘ism’. There is no such thing as ‘deconstructionism’: this is a word used by idiots (McQuillan 41).

Differently from Structuralism or New Criticism that are looking for the ‘center’ of a literary text, deconstruction always tries to ‘decenter’ the previously held central point. The process of ‘decentering the center’ will pass through the

identification of the ambiguity, ambivalence, and inconsistency of the text. By finding these aspects, a deconstruction practitioner will have a legitimate reason to say that the text is unstable and fluid, thus it can be deconstructed.

Derrida began his criticisms in Ferdinand de Saussure's *sign*, signifier, and signified. Saussure believes that *sign* (word) is composed of both signifier as the spoken or written element of a word and signified or the conceptual image of the word represented by the signifier. Moreover, he asserted that the bond between signifier and signified are arbitrary (Saussure 67). The relationship between two of them are flexible and formed by agreement. This flexibility can be exemplified by the fact that there are many different words in different languages that refer to the same concept. Saussure added that we can understand the meaning of a word is not through the process of understanding, but differentiation. We differentiate one signifier into another in order to get the name of the word. For example, someone can recognize the phoneme /b/ because it is different from the phoneme /d/. Derrida adapted this idea, stated that we are not only differentiating the signifier but also the signified. Someone remembers the concept of "chair" because it is different from the concept of "table", for instance. Realizing that signification is so flexible and fluid, Derrida asserts the term "transcendental signified", which implies "the ultimate truth that provides ultimate meaning" (Bressler 365). The transcendental signified appears in many Western cultural values in the form of logic, truth, humanity, self, God, et cetera. It becomes the pioneer of logocentrism. Logocentrism is a term for the belief of centering the transcendental signified as the reason of knowledge and actions. For instance, a

group of “religious” sect committed a series of crimes and stated that the crimes were necessary for the sake of “humanity” and “God”. From this example, it can be understood that the act of centering one or more transcendental signified creates the privilege from one signified over the other signified and put it in the higher position.

As the ultimate truth, transcendental signified does not need the process of differentiation since it can explain itself in its own way. From this view, Derrida argued that when transcendental signified is examined; it can not maintain its status as transcendental signified since it has been defined into words. It can be replaced by the opposing concept. Such concept that Derrida examined in his work entitled *Of Grammatology* is the binary opposition between speech/writing (Derrida xxiv). In Western value, speech is often placed in a higher position than writing, because it includes the direct presence of the speaker, thus lead into better understanding. However, in writing, the absence of the speaker just viewed as the transcription of speech and often ended in misunderstanding. Here, the binary opposition of speech/writing has created another opposition: presence/absence. These binary oppositions put the first part of the oppositions (speech and presence) as the privileged (superior) and the second part (writing and absence) as the unprivileged (inferior). From this example, Derrida applied deconstruction by stated that speech and writing have similar concept: both of them, for example, are the method of communication that goes through the process of encoding and decoding. Derrida argued that writing is not less important than speech because it has direct relationship with what Saussure identified as language. It has the

principle of difference. For example, we can understand the word “salt” because it differs with the word “halt”. From this statement the term “writing” have been redefined and placed in the privileged place over the speech.

From his conclusion upon the examination of the hierarchy of binary oppositions of speech/writing, Derrida proposed that the relationship between the elements are unstable and open to role reversal, which may lead to deconstruction. He also concluded that these elements are not opposing at all. In some way, they supplement and support each other. For instance, in the binary opposition of men/women, the position of women is not always at the unprivileged. Sometimes, they contribute as equal as their husband does (as the decision maker in the family economics, even some of them act as the breadwinner of the family). Judging from this conclusion, Derrida begins his famous idea of *différance*. According to Royle, *différance* is what makes presence possible where at the same time making it differ from itself (Royle 71). Derived from two words that means “to postpone” and “to differ”, the concept of *différance* represents Derrida’s main idea: the ambiguity itself. By keeping the word *différance* to be ambiguous and having double meaning at the same time, Derrida asserts that we should postpone our perception on signified and, at the same time, differ it from the other signifieds.

Through the process of deconstruction, Derrida does not wish to create a new “center” by deconstructing the unprivileged element. Rather, he just wanted to give a new understanding, another point of view, or a fresh reading of a literary text. Through this new understanding, the deconstruction practitioners are

assumed to be free from the generally accepted textual reading and single meaning.

2.1.2. The Method of Deconstruction

As a method for textual analysis, deconstruction has several steps that help its practitioners to achieve two main general objectives. These objectives are to find of the “undecidability” of the text and to establish a new perspective which creates new understanding. In order to achieve these objectives, deconstruction practitioners have to search for the “misspeaks”: the moment where authors failed to utter the meaning through their writings (Bressler 128). This failure of utterance leads to deconstruction main statement: that the text has such unstable, “undecidable” meanings. These undecidable meanings open many interpretations and support deconstruction’s main view: that there is no such single meaning or interpretation. There is no absolute truth. According to Tyson, this is can be obtained, in brief, by noting all the various interpretation from characters, themes, events, images, and so on that the text seems to offer. The next step is by showing the way these interpretations conflict each other and how these conflicts produce more interpretations, and so on (Tyson 259). From these steps, a deconstruction practitioner can argue the text’s undecidability.

In order to achieve the second objective, a deconstruction practitioner has to assert a new perspective to the text, the one that has not appeared before. This new perspective can be gotten from the result of the deconstruction of the binary opposition in the novel. This new perspective does not wish to act as the new

center, rather than just a new reading of a certain literary text. The first step of methodology for this purpose is to find and identify the binary operations that dominate the text. After noting these oppositions, a deconstruction practitioner can continue to the next step: analyzing the values, concepts, and ideas behind the operations. The analysis can be done by observing the ambivalences, the ambiguities, and the inconsistencies of the text. When the unstable condition of the operations has been questioned, a deconstruction practitioner can advance to the next step of deconstruction, which is by reversing the elements of the oppositions. From this step, various steps can be taken. If the deconstruction practitioners want to show the text's undecidability, the process ended here. They have to let the meaning of the text to be undecidable. Otherwise, if they want to offer a new perspective, they have to disassemble the previously held point of view and pronounce their new reading to understand the text.

2.2. Review of Related Studies

In Airlangga University, there is one undergraduate thesis that examined a literary text using deconstruction. The study was written by Bagus Wijoseno, entitled *Deconstructing The Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion*. It examines the portrayal of theism and atheism within the text. In the binary opposition of atheism/theism, the first element is placed as the privileged while the second as the unprivileged. By applied deconstruction, Bagus negate the role of atheism by stated the atheists' inability to exclude themselves from the circle of belief, their

failure to avoid the need of faith, and their failure to dismiss the use feeling and emotion.

Inside his analysis, Bagus proposed the main binary opposition between theism vs. atheism (Wijoseno 23) and analyzed it by find out the contradictions, the inconsistencies, and the ambivalences of the atheism values within the text. He explained the contradiction of the text by putting one argument from the atheism's voice and gave counter argument that showing its contradiction. For example, in the first contradiction he stated about atheism's voice on subjectivity of morality. Atheists said religious morality is not absolute. It is temporary and changeable. From this statement, Bagus said that "Nobody has the right to comment or criticize other's morality" (31). This style of analysis is maintained until the end of his analysis.

However, in this study, the writer lists all of the binary oppositions found in the text. From these oppositions, the writer starts to find the ambiguity, the ambivalence, and the inconsistency of the text; and finally deconstructs the previous oppositions. Finally, the writer asserts the possible ideology of the text from the new interpretation found through the process of deconstruction.