

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHOD

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the writer discusses the theories applied to analyze the subject of the study entitled *If We Were Villains* by M. L. Rio. These theories are categorized into two parts, namely intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements that complement each other.

2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic elements are the elements that come from within a literary work itself. In this part, the writer explains the theories used regarding the concepts of character and characterization, setting, and conflict.

2.1.1.1 Characters and Characterization

Characters are uniquely the creative products of novelists, written in certain ways to make them have either prehuman, exaggerated, or complex and impulsive characteristics (Kuiper, 2012: 7). According to Murfin & Ray (2018: 98), a character can be either a human or nonhuman entity whose story is conveyed in literary works. The method of creating and developing these characters is known as characterization. Characterization, as defined by Kidder & Todd (2013: 19, 23), is the intricate process of depicting the formation and evolution of characters in a text, requiring readers to interpret their actions and behaviors across various situations the characters encounter. Furthermore, there are two main ways how an author may characterize a character: showing and telling. Showing, also known as the dramatic method, is where the author writes speeches or actions involving the

characters or showing characters' inner thoughts and leaves it to readers to interpret the characters' intentions and motives. Meanwhile, telling is another technique where an author explicitly describes and tells the characters' motives often in order to evaluate them (Abrams & Harpham, 2012: 47).

There are two primary types of characters: the protagonist and the antagonist. According to Card (2011: 61, 145), a protagonist is the character who goes through change, and that change is the subject of the story. This is a character whom the audience sympathizes with. Meanwhile, an antagonist is a character, a group of characters, or a force that opposes the protagonist, creating obstacles or challenges that the protagonist must overcome.

2.1.1.2 Setting

Setting within a literature is one of the major components that mark the characters' location, time, and conditioning in a story. According to Kuiper (2012: 8), setting refers to the environment in which fictional characters exist and act. It is a factor that influences behavior, relationships, and the direction of the narrative. A character's personality and decisions are shaped not only by internal traits but also by the surrounding environment, since place can determine what actions become possible, restricted, or meaningful. Because of this, the events of a story are often inseparable from where they occur.

2.1.1.2.1 Spatial Setting

Kuiper's discussion particularly emphasizes on spatial setting, meaning the physical locations where events take place, e.g. rooms, buildings, cities, or landscapes (2012: 8). These places influence how characters interact: public

spaces allow performance and social roles, while private or isolated spaces encourage intimacy, secrecy, or confrontation. Therefore, setting can function as a narrative element that helps construct mood, conflict, and character interaction that can carry different narrative possibilities and emotional meanings.

Following this view, the places in *If We Were Villains* can be understood as markers of relationship change rather than simple backdrops. The movement between shared, public, private, and isolated spaces reflects the shifts in emotional closeness and tension between Oliver and James. Therefore, analyzing spatial setting helps reveal how their relationship develops alongside the progression of the story.

2.1.1.2.2 Temporal Setting

Temporal setting refers to the historical period or time in which the events of a narrative take place. Abrams (2011: 363) notes that the overall setting of a narrative includes its historical time, which provides the broader context that shapes the characters' behavior, values, and social expectations. The time period of a story can influence what actions are considered acceptable or unacceptable within a society, as well as how characters interpret relationships and identity. Because of this, temporal setting helps determine the cultural atmosphere surrounding the characters' experiences and conflicts within the narrative.

2.1.1.2.3 Social Environment

In addition to time and place, setting also includes the social environment or circumstances in which the characters live. Abrams (2011: 364) explains that the

overall setting of a narrative involves the social conditions that shape the characters' interactions and relationships. These social circumstances may include cultural values, social hierarchies, institutional environments, and expectations imposed by the surrounding community. Because of this, the social environment can influence how characters express emotions, form relationships, or conceal certain aspects of their identity.

2.1.1.3 Conflict

Conflict that takes place in a literary work is what makes the story interesting. Conflict happens between two different characters or forces that usually ends in either confrontation or struggle. It serves not only as the catalyst for the story's movement, but also as the lens through which characters reveal themselves.

In literary studies, conflict is generally categorized into two main types: external conflict and internal conflict, or as some would classify as man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. society, and man vs. nature. However, this thesis will focus specifically on the conflicts of man vs. man and man vs. self. Lamb (2008: 77) defines man vs. man as a conflict between two characters, which, while often straightforward, is a common element in many narratives. In contrast, man vs. self is an internal conflict within a character, arising from conflicting thoughts or 'shadow sides' (Lamb, 2008: 79). This type of conflict typically occurs when a character faces multiple challenging choices and must ultimately select one out of the possible choices.

2.1.2 Extrinsic Elements

Extrinsic elements are the elements that come from outside of a literary text but applied to interpret and understand it. In this section, the writer explains the theories to discuss the analysis, namely the concepts of sexual identity in queer theory and romantic relationship development.

2.1.2.1 Sexual Identity in Queer Theory

The word queer was historically used as a derogatory term meaning strange, odd, peculiar, or eccentric according to the Oxford English Dictionary. However, in literary analysis, queer theory reclaims the word as a critical framework to challenge the heteronormativity and fixed sexual identities that happen in society. The theory analyzes this phenomenon further by seeing through the lens of the marginalized group of queer people which has been considered as perverse and radically other (Culler, 2000: 131). This means that queer theory itself exists to understand what queer people experience as a group that is constantly challenging societal norms.

Michel Foucault, in Tamsin Spargo's reconstruction of queer theory, rejects the idea that sexuality is a natural or innate truth. Instead, he argues that sexuality is produced through discourse and through sociocultural institutions that determine which desires are acceptable or not. At the same time, sexuality remains a deeply personal truth about who, what, how we desire (Spargo, 1999: 13). Despite being personal, it is shaped and regulated by social systems that decide which desires are considered normal or acceptable, hence the people who are seen as queer are also regulated and managed by the system. Therefore, heterosexuality, the desire to have sexual relations with the opposite sex, is

culturally seen as the more natural and common practice due to its contribution to human reproduction (Spargo, 1999: 45).

In general, some scholars have identified a range of sexual identities often associated with queer theory and LGBTQ+ communities, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer itself as an umbrella term. ‘Homosexuality’ was coined by Karoly Maria Benkert in 1869, a Swiss doctor, which was not used a lot in English until 1890s until it got adapted by sexologist Havelock Ellis (Jagose, 1996: 72). Chancey, in Jagose, also noted that “by the 1910s and 1920s, men who identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status usually called themselves ‘queer’” (Jagose, 1996: 74). This means that the term queer was widely used by a group of men who put more emphasis on their homosexuality rather than their feminine presentation in the early 20th century.

However, Foucault’s queer theory in Spargo also resists the impulse to categorize individuals into rigid identity labels. He emphasizes that this resistance further focuses the identity on ambiguity and contradiction, because rigid identities have a history of downplaying the progression of repression to liberation (Spargo, 1999: 38). This perspective is particularly relevant in analyzing a queer literature like *If We Were Villains*, where same-sex or queer desire may be implied, displaced, or expressed indirectly through narrative tension rather than explicit self-identification. Therefore, the sexual identities of these characters are more relational to each other rather than rooted in something rigid, and the term

‘queer relationship’ fits their progression more compared to gay or bisexual relationship. Their bond is not as straightforward and easily defined with such labels, but it is highlighted with its implicitness, ambiguity, and fluidity. Hence, a queer relationship can refer to an emotional or romantic bond that challenges heteronormative expectations and may remain undefined within conventional sexual identity categories.

2.1.2.2 Relationship Development

In addition to sexual identity, this research thesis explores how the relationship between Oliver and James develops throughout the narrative. To analyze this process, this study employs George Levinger’s relationship development model where he proposes that relationships evolve through identifiable phases shaped by each partner’s actions, thoughts, and feelings (Levinger, 1982: 3).

While Levinger originally formulated this model using a heteronormative lens—primarily to analyze heterosexual relationships leading toward marriage—he emphasizes that the model functions as a descriptive framework rather than a prescriptive one (Levinger, 1982: 5). Thus, this flexibility allows Levinger’s model to be applied beyond its original scope; in this case, it is used to explore a queer relationship instead. This model is classified into five sequential stages of development as follows:

2.1.2.2.1 Acquaintance

The first stage is acquaintance which is when two people start to realize the existence of one another. This stage can happen in many ways, including initial

meeting at a public place such as school, to even more modern ways such as dating applications. Later on, it is necessary that the relationship develops with the need of affiliation between both parties (Nevid & Rathus, 2016: 358). This stage therefore marks the beginning of interaction, where simple recognition gradually opens the possibility for a deeper emotional bond.

2.1.2.2.2 Build-up

The second stage of relationship development is build-up, where both parties start to evaluate each other from both positive and negative factors that contribute in the relationship. Nevid & Rathus (2016: 361-364) explained that this stage may include opening lines in getting to know each other, exchanging personal information, auditioning for love, disclosing oneself, and deciding how to show love to one another.

2.1.2.2.3 Continuation

The third stage discloses that if a relationship is strong enough, the positive factors will later develop into stronger feelings of trust, care, and commitment. It is also possible that both parties will no longer feel jealousy, perceive both of them as equal, and satisfaction that is mutual (Nevid & Rathus, 2016: 364-366). At this point, the relationship stabilizes as emotional attachment becomes part of their daily interaction rather than a temporary attraction.

2.1.2.2.4 Deterioration

This fourth stage of relationship development is the falling out of relationship, but this stage is not necessarily inevitable. If the positive factors outweigh the negative ones, it is possible that deterioration of relationship can be

avoided altogether. There are both active and passive responses that the parties may show during this stage (Nevid & Rathus, 2016: 367-368). Thus, the relationship enters a fragile phase in which tension begins to shape their behavior toward one another.

2.1.2.2.5 Ending

The last stage of this development model is ending, where both parties decide to leave the relationship. This happens due to the accumulated negative factors that make partners dissatisfied with each other, especially when there are alternative partners available. Thus, it is important to evaluate the positive and negative factors to prevent this stage from happening (Nevid & Rathus, 2016: 369). When this balance can no longer be maintained, the relationship ultimately reaches its conclusion.

2.2 Research Method

In this subchapter, the writer explains the method used to conduct the research. This part has three different items, namely the data used and the source, method of data collection, and method of data analysis. This study will mainly use queer approach in analyzing data.

2.2.1 Data and Data Source

The data used in this thesis are collected by reading various sources. There are two types of data, the first one is primary data that is the data collected in order to reach a specific research goal, meanwhile secondary data is the one recollected and reused by other researchers that originally come from primary data (Hox & Boeije, 2005: 593). The primary data of this thesis are from the object of

the study itself, that is M. L. Rio's novel entitled *If We Were Villains*. Meanwhile, the secondary data are collected from various books and journal articles that relate to the problems of the study, namely queer theory and relationship development model. The books are Tamsin Spargo's *Foucault and Queer Theory*, Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, and Nevid & Rathus *Psychology and The Challenges of Life: Adjustment and Growth*; meanwhile, as for journals are George Levinger's *A System's Perspective on the Development of Close Relationships*, Prema et al.'s *Roller Coaster Ride in Life Is What You Make It: ABCDE Stage of Relationship*, and Amanda Taylor's *Secret Histories: The Rise of Dark Academia* to name a few.

2.2.2 Method of Collecting Data

The method used in compiling the data for analysis is called library research method. Library research is a method that makes it possible to determine and find various sources regarding accurate information or the opinion of an individual or an expert in relation to one's research questions (George, 2008: 6). To analyze the novel and answer the questions, the writer needs to use a close reading method in examining what the text means by closely investigating the language that is used in the passage (Snow & O'Connor, 2016: 1). Through this method, the writer interprets how meaning is constructed within the narrative and how it supports the analysis.

2.2.3 Method of Analyzing Data

This study uses qualitative descriptive method in analyzing the data. Qualitative method is used to conduct any research that has the results presented

using words, images, or nonnumeric symbols (George, 2008: 7). Lambert & Lambert (2012) argue that qualitative descriptive method is an acceptable form of research as its focus in discovering the specific events of a topic can be done with minimal interviews. Specifically, in analyzing the literary work, the writer uses both textual and contextual method. Textual method is one of the methods used in order to decipher or infer meaning of a text, from the content, structure, and functions of the text itself (Frey et al., 1999: 225). Therefore, this method is applicable in analyzing intrinsic elements of the novel, namely characters and conflict. Contextual method is a way to look at a literary work in its plurality of contexts, meaning that a researcher is not looking for a single answer when reading and studying texts (Beard, 2001: 8). This method is used to analyze the extrinsic aspects of the novel, namely the sexual identities of the characters and their relationship development.

2.2.4 Research Approach

The writer uses queer approach in doing the analysis. Queer approach is an analytical perspective that examines how sexuality, desire, and identity are constructed, regulated, and expressed within literary works, rather than treated as fixed or natural categories. Influenced by Michel Foucault's understanding of sexuality as a product of discourse and power (Spargo, 1999: 13, 15), this approach focuses on ambiguity, silence, repression, and non-normative relationships as meaningful narrative elements. Through this perspective, the relationship between Oliver Marks and James Farrow is interpreted as a queer

relationship revealed through interaction, conflict, and emotional attachment within the text.