

CHAPTER II

LITERARY FRAMEWORK

2.1. Intrinsic Aspects

Autobiography novels refer to novels written as manifestations of the writer's life using the elements of fiction. According to Mary McCartney in Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography Studies in the Art of Self Invention* (1985: 3), fiction takes an important role in shaping the story along with the *truth* as an evolving content. Characters, place, and time settings in an autobiography novel are presented as representations of the real-life story of the author. There are many intrinsic elements presented in the novel. For this study, the writer will mainly discuss theme, character, setting, and conflict.

2.1.1. Theme

According to *The Norton Introduction to Literature* (Mays, 2016: 383) theme is the common or general topic conveyed in a literary work. It builds the foundation of the story structure. Theme is not written explicitly. It can only be understood through a thorough reading of a literary work. A story does not necessarily contain only one theme. A literary work usually consists of one main theme and also other ideas that support the main theme, or commonly referred to as sub-themes (Mays, 2016: 384).

2.1.2. Characters

A character in a literary work is any individual who takes action, makes an appearance, or is mentioned as playing a role (Mays, 2012: 219). A literary work can give an impression to the reader if the story is able to present interesting characters. Stated by Bennett and Royle (2004: 62) character is the heart of a literary work: object of curiosity and enchantment, admiration and aversion. It is the character that determines the feeling we experience when reading a literary work. The emotion of sadness, joy, loss, can be felt through the character as the initiator of the story.

Mays (2016) categorizes characters into major and minor characters. Major characters are those who receive more attention. They tend to experience complex changes throughout the story and become the main initiator of the events. Conversely, minor characters do not show up as much as major characters. However, their appearance may play an important role in supporting the story and shaping reader's perception in understanding the major character.

Additionally, characters can also be divided into protagonist and antagonist. Barnet explains that the protagonist typically plays a central role in literary works, while conversely, the antagonist serves as a character who against or conflicts with the protagonist (1978: 1584).

2.1.3. Settings

The setting in a story helps the reader to understand the place and time—so that the reader is able to understand the context in which the work was written. The story relies on the setting to build the mood, situation, and character (Mays, 2016:284). According to Abrams & Harpham's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2009), settings generally can be categorized into setting of place (locale), historical time, and social environment.

Setting of place is the physical location where the story takes place. The events in the story can occur in specific locations such as rooms or houses. The setting of a place that is geographically wider is called the general setting (2009: 330).

Historical time is related to the time setting of the story. Each period of time has its own social elements. Through the background of time, the reader can get an overview of the conditions and cultural situations of a society such as historical events, the clothes that were worn at that time, the buildings that become the scene of events, and all the attributes that shape the story.

The social environment is the social background setting in which the story takes place. This relates to the socio-cultural and political aspects of society that are the highlight of the story. Social environments provide information to depict what

issues are faced by the community that affect the characterization of each character (Abrams & Harpham, 2019: 330).

2.1.4. Conflict

The involved characters in the story is defined by conflicts. These conflicts encompass a range of struggles faced by the main character, from a central problem to multiple minor obstacles within a dominant issue (Abrams, 2009:256). In *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* (1990), Meyer states that conflict can be categorized into internal and external conflicts. Internal conflict involves moral or psychological dilemmas that arise within a character. External conflict occurs when a character confronts challenges originating outside themselves, such as physical battles with formidable adversaries, personal obstacles, the forces of nature, or societal pressures within the narrative (1990: 45).

2.2 Marxism

In examining *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, Marxist theory is used as the foundation of analyzing. According to Abrams, Marxism, in its diverse forms, grounds its theory and practice on the economic and cultural theory of Karl Marx and his fellow-thinker Friedrich Engels. It is also stated that evolving history of humankind, of its social groupings and relations, of its institutions, and of its ways of thinking are largely determined by the changing mode of its “material production”—that is, of its overall economic organization for producing and distributing material goods (2009: 181).

Marx theory has long been introduced as a guide for working class society in abolishing the status quo of the capitalist system—and sparking hope for the working class to create a world without class hierarchy. Referring to Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today* Marxism believes that the cause of all events experienced by humans is based on the economic motive (1950: 53). The interconnection between social life and economy creates ideology system. In other words, socio-economy influences religion, political system, arts, education, mass media, and many other aspects of human's life. Marx's thought reveals that the reality perceived is a construct shaped by the ruling class to serve their economic interests.

2.2.1. Capitalism

Karl Marx, in his book *Capital Volume I* (1992), describes capitalism as the socio-economic system where social interactions revolve around the exchange of commodities, specifically through private ownership of production means and the exploitation of wage labor. Marx argues that in a capitalist society, an object is seen in value from the benefits it can provide. Marx introduces the term *commodity* as a primary concept. Commodity is an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another (1992: 127). In capitalism, these needs are fulfilled through the value contained by objects—which are then produced to generate profit.

Marx argues that production and the exchange of commodities such as goods and services are two characters of capitalism (1867: 125). Commodification involves

the transformation of goods, services, and diverse elements of human existence into commodities within the confines of a capitalist structure.

One form of commodification is prostitution, where the human body is treated as a commodity in exchange with money. Karl Marx viewed sex workers as victims of capitalism. In his *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx described sex work as just one way laborers are exploited under capitalism, and believed ending prostitution was essential to abolishing capitalism. Sex work often results from economic desperation. In capitalist society, where workers are alienated from the means of production and economic resources are unevenly distributed, some individuals may turn to sex work as a means of survival or to support their economic needs.

In addition, under capitalism, workers are alienated because of industrial need requirements—which makes human relations eroded. It leads to disharmony between the worker with himself and one class with another. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote that the feeling of alienation separates workers from themselves. As labor is external to workers, wrote Marx, it does not belong to their essential being (1988: 75). This statement means that as a human being, labor is beyond the needs of the body. According to Marx, labor is only a medium for obtaining external needs (1988: 74). Workers force their body for labor. Isolated from their spiritual needs, workers can only fulfill their animal needs: such as eating to satisfy hunger and drinking to quench thirst.

2.2.2. Class Consciousness and False Consciousness

Ludwig Feuerbach explains in *The Essence of Christianity (1841)* that what distinguishes humans from animals is consciousness (1841:1). He asserts that humans are perfected by several powers, namely the power to think, will, and love (1841: 2). The power to think becomes a critical tool for humans in expressing the inevitable that occurs: as a tool to ignite awareness.

Karl Marx agreed with Feuerbach's statement. In *A Critique of Political Economy (1859)*, Karl Marx argues that it is not human consciousness that determines their condition but their social condition that determines their consciousness (1859: 389). To put in words, class consciousness refers to the condition in which the proletarian society realizes their position in the environment in which they live and in the wider social context.

Marx believes that consciousness is essential for the working class to take collective action, including political and revolutionary movements, to challenge and ultimately change the prevailing capitalist system. In a state of class consciousness, workers are more likely to unite, organize, and demand their rights and a fairer distribution of resources. This concept is central to the Marxist idea of a proletarian revolution.

On the other hand, the concept of "false consciousness" is the counterpoint to class consciousness. False consciousness refers to a distorted or misguided

understanding of one's social and economic reality, often perpetuated by dominant ideologies and institutions in society. The ruling class, or bourgeoisie, may use various means, such as media, education, and culture, to propagate ideas that serve their interests. These ideas may lead the working class to believe that their current socio-economic conditions are natural, just, or in their best interest, even when they are exploitative and oppressive. False consciousness impedes the development of class consciousness. It hinders workers from recognizing the exploitative nature of the capitalist system and can create divisions among them.

2.2.3. Hegemony

At its essence, hegemony is a straightforward concept, revolving around political leadership based on the consent of the ruled, which is achieved by spreading and endorsing the perspective of the dominant class (Bates, 1975: 352). The theory of hegemony itself was developed by Antonio Gramsci, who was both a Marxist scholar and the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party. It is important to highlight that Lenin had previously introduced the notion of hegemony, but his approach mainly revolved around political and state-related aspects. In contrast, Gramsci's interpretation of hegemony is more comprehensive, as he posited that the influence of dominant groups is subtly upheld through the agents of ideology, culture, and civil society.

In developing the concept of hegemony, Gramsci also reconfigured the concept of superstructure proposed by Karl Marx. Marx posited that the dominant class controlled the economic system, which predominantly shaped a society's culture, politics, religion, legal system, and ideology. In contrast, Gramsci viewed the superstructure as an active element that is responsible for maintaining the ruling class's dominance. Gramsci's concept of superstructure is more expansive and centered on culture. Gramsci breaks down the superstructure into two parts: civil society and political society. Civil society comprises micro-level organizations such as schools, churches, clubs, and parties, while political society consists of governmental institutions (Bates, 1975: 353). These organizations carry out their roles in disseminating concepts, ideas, and beliefs, forming a continuous circle of influence.

As a social construct, race can serve as an indicator of the formation of hierarchy and hegemony within a country. According to Omi and Winant (1994), the concept of racial hegemony refers to a system of dominance arising from racial differences. In this framework, consensus is achieved through an agreement between the exploited and the exploiters. In *Handbook of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations* (2007) Rodney D. Coates, a sociologist and Marxist scholar, argues that complex political processes such as war and industrialization are necessary for a specific racial or ethnic group to represent national identity. The white people become

a superior race and forms the basis of life considered as the norm, including language, mindset, and lifestyle (2007: 322).