

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature has the ability to portray many social phenomena, including sensitive and complex issues. Through narrative, literature is not only able to help map reality, but also to shape readers' understanding and response to that reality. Literary texts not only function as entertainment, but also as a medium to build understanding about the world, including experiences related to family, social relationships, and children's life conditions.

For instance, child neglect is one of social issue which has serious impacts on the development of an individual, ranging from physical, emotional, and psychological aspects. Neglect is not as apparent as physical violence and often difficult to spot. Thus, the impacts can last for a long period of time and affect how children understand themselves and interact with their surroundings. Considering this, child neglect becomes an important issue to be studied, not only in social terms, but also in its portrayal in multiple media, including literary texts.

Portrayal of child neglect in literary texts is important to study because it can influence how readers understand the issue. Indirect portrayal or portrayal wrapped in humor can serve as a way of delivering difficult realities without making them too overwhelming for readers. Because of that, it needs deeper analysis to understand how literature creates such portrayal and the meaning behind it.

One of literary texts with such an issue is Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys*

(2008). Lowry is an American writer who is famous for her writing about social issues and children's lives. Throughout her career, she has received various literary awards, including two Newbery Medals in 1990 and 1994, for her novels *Number the Stars* (1989) and *The Giver* (1993). Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* also gained popularity through an animated film adaptation in 2020.

Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* tells the story of four Willoughby children—Tim, Jane, and the Barnaby twins—whose parents, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, are cold, uncaring, and neglectful. One day the Willoughby children find a baby on their doorstep. Mrs. Willoughby tells them to leave the baby somewhere else. They choose a mansion and leave the baby on the porch with a letter stating her name is Ruth. Feeling unloved and unwanted, the Willoughby children begin to imagine a better life without their parents, like the baby they found, whom they assume is living in a mansion now. They plot to send their parents on a dangerous voyage, hoping they never return. After their parents' departure, the children are left in the care of Nanny. As the story progresses, the Willoughby children and Nanny meet Melanoff and have a friendly conversation. Melanoff is a wealthy candymaker who turns out to have cared for baby Ruth. When Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby sell the house, the Willoughby children and Nanny ask Melanoff for help. Later, the Willoughby children learn that their parents perished on a Swiss Alpine peak. Living in Melanoff's mansion, the Willoughby children get their happy ending.

Lowry portrays child neglect in *The Willoughbys* in a style that differs from the tragic treatment found in some literary texts; she employs irony, dark humor, and exaggeration to depict the issue. This approach raises questions about the forms

of neglect, the factors of neglect, and the impacts of neglect portrayed in the novel. Thus, the present study analyzes Lowry's narrative strategies and portrayals of child neglect to offer an alternative perspective on how such themes appear in literary texts.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background, this study focuses on how child neglect is portrayed in Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys*. Therefore, here are research questions to be the main focus of the study:

1. What forms of neglect are portrayed in *The Willoughbys*?
2. What factors contribute to the neglect in *The Willoughbys*?
3. What are the impacts of neglect on the child characters in *The Willoughbys*?

1.3 Objectives of Study

Based on the research questions above, here are the objectives of the study:

1. To identify the forms of neglect portrayed in *The Willoughbys*.
2. To analyze the factors that cause neglect in *The Willoughbys*.
3. To examine the impacts of neglect on the child characters in *The Willoughbys*.

1.4 Previous Studies

Research on Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* remains limited. Most of the previous

studies found on *The Willoughbys* focused more on the animated film version. The previous studies found are using linguistic or psychological approach.

One of the studies is a journal article “An Analysis of the Expressive Speech Acts in The Willoughbys Movie” by Aritonang and Ambalegin (2023), published in *BASIS: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris*. This study uses pragmatics to identify expressive speech acts used by the characters in *The Willoughbys* film. The result shows that the use of language by the characters reflects their emotion, interpersonal relationships, and psychological conditions (Aritonang & Ambalegin, 2023, p. 95). This study gives the understanding on how the characters expressed their feelings in the film version.

Another study on *The Willoughbys* animated film is a journal article “The Effect of Parental Rejection on Children’s Personality Depicted in The Willoughby (2020)” by Safitri et al. (2023), which was published in *Buletin Al-Turas*. Using psychology as an approach, this study focuses on the effects of parental rejection towards the personal development of character Tim Willoughby. This study shows that parental rejection affects a child's behavioral, emotional, and psychological development (Safitri et al., 2023, p. 33). This study has a similar goal in analyzing children and parents’ relationship in *The Willoughbys*, yet this article only focuses on one character.

In addition to academic studies, there are few critical reviews to Lois Lowry’s *The Willoughbys*. Coats (2008) states that Lowry uses parody and dark humor to present a family story that does not follow any ideal family expectations

in most children's literature. Coats (2008) also highlights how the Willoughby parents are depicted to dislike their children and try to get rid of their responsibility toward them. According to Coats (2008), this novel is a satire critic towards traditional family values that are often shown in classic children's literature. Through a fun and ironic narrative, Lowry presents themes of dysfunctional family, neglect, and children's needs. This review shows that the issue of parent-child relationships is one of the important aspects in Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys*.

Furthermore, Steiner (2009) also provides a review to Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys*, highlighting the use of folklore elements and characters from classic literary texts, integrated into the novel. Steiner (2009) states that readers are interested in the concept of parents who openly show their lack of care to their children and the children who feel that being orphans can be a better choice in life. These aspects create interest in analyzing the novel especially in relation to familial relationships and the dysfunction of the ideal family in literary texts.

Study on Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* (2008) is still limited in number. Most of the previous studies found focus on the animated film adaptation rather than the novel. While critical reviews mostly highlight the use of satire, humor, and dysfunctional family in the novel. These findings create the research gap in studying Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys*. Therefore, this present study is conducted to examine the portrayal of child neglect in *The Willoughbys*.

1.5 Research Method

This study used a qualitative-descriptive method to analyze the novel. A qualitative

method is used in this study to focus on the interpretation of meaning. George (2008) explains that qualitative study “designates any research whose results are captured in words, images, or nonnumeric symbols” (p. 7). Thus, it is suitable for this analysis which takes the form of narrative and dialogue in the novel.

Close-reading is the technique used to gather data by reading the text thoroughly and repeatedly to identify parts that are relevant to the research focus. The data gathered were then analyzed and connected to the theoretical concepts in the theoretical framework. This technique helps in analyzing language details, structure, and contexts in the text. Close-reading emphasizes the importance of detailed reading on elements in the text to reveal meanings that are not always directly stated. Moreover, this study is also supported by library research, to gather data from library sources to relevant theoretical framework and previous studies.

1.6 Scope of Study

This study focuses on child neglect in Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* (2008). The analysis is limited to selected narrative elements, namely character and characterization, setting, and conflict, in order to examine how child neglect is portrayed in the novel. The study applies Mays' (2018) narrative theory to analyze these elements and uses DePanfilis' (2006) framework to identify the forms, factors, and impacts of child neglect. By focusing on these aspects, the study aims to explain how the novel presents child neglect through its narrative structure.

1.7 Organization of Writing

This study is divided into four chapters, which are outlined as follows:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the foundation of the study. This chapter consists of background of the study, the research questions, the objectives of the study, previous studies, research methods, scope of the study, and organization of the study.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter explains the main ideas and theories used to help analyze the novel. It includes narrative elements such as characters and characterization, settings, and conflicts, as well as important concepts from child neglect by DePanfilis (2006).

CHAPTER III: CHILD NEGLECT IN LOIS LOWRY'S *THE WILLOUGHBYS* (2008)

This chapter presents the discussion on Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* (2008), with the focus on child neglect. The analysis is conducted using narrative elements such as character and characterization, setting, and conflict, to reveal the forms, the factors, and the impacts of child neglect portrayed in the novel. The data analyzed in this study consists of quoted texts gathered by close-reading, then interpreted with the theoretical concepts in the previous chapter. Thus, this chapter aims to answer the research questions through a thoughtful discussion.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the findings of the study on Lois Lowry's *The Willoughbys* (2008).

REFERENCES

This section contains a list of all sources cited and consulted throughout the study.

