

THE CAUSES OF DISILLUSIONMENT IN JENNIFER EGAN'S NOVEL *A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD* (2010)

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Abstrak

Tujuan penganalisaan ini adalah untuk (1) mendapatkan jawaban apa saja elemen sastra yang membantu penganalisaan tentang penyebab rasa kekecewaan serta (2) menunjukkan kontribusi elemen fiksi (karakter, seting, dan konflik) dalam mengungkap penyebab rasa kekecewaan dalam novel ini. Data penelitian ini adalah teks tertulis dari novel. Kutipan teks tersebut dianalisa berdasarkan teori rasa kekecewaan yang dikemukakan oleh Sigmund Freud, teori ideologi yang dirumuskan oleh Karl Marx dan teori kekuatan yang dikemukakan Michel Foucault. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa rasa kekecewaan yang dialami oleh karakter disebabkan oleh dua hal, yaitu dominasi yang dilakukan oleh kelas yang lebih kuat dan harapan yang tidak terpenuhi dari karakter. Dari kedua tindakan tersebut, terlihat bahwa rasa kecewa yang dialami manusia dalam kehidupan sehari-hari bisa disebabkan oleh faktor internal maupun eksternal.

Kata kunci: disillusionment, domination, expectation.

A. Introduction

Humans have curiosity because they want to know about every aspect in their life. They wonder how to discover what they have not found yet. The excitement of discovery and finding solutions are strong motivations for people to seek out new modes of thinking. However, the difficulties of accepting new information are visible when the process of discovery conflicts with people's view which has been established before. At the same time, no one likes being lied to; no one enjoys being taken advantage of or being played. Therefore, when people discover that they have been deceived by another people or ideas that they trust, the sense of hurt and betrayal that accompanies this realization can be very harmful. This situation is called disillusionment.

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The term disillusionment refers to the disappointment that people feel when they discover that something is not as good as expected or thought. Trepanier (2012) states that disillusionment refers to the experience of believing in something that turned out not to be true. This situation leads people to feel disappointed because their beliefs about the world are completely different from the facts of reality. The destruction of one belief can often lead to the stressful condition. According to Trepanier (2012) when people are confronted with facts that contradict currently held belief systems, they will choose one of two choices. The first choice is to go into denial mode by rejecting the facts as being untrue in order to continue living as before. The second choice is to accept the new data and try to reconstruct a new idea of reality.

In this study, disillusionment is seen through the domination of the record label toward the musicians. The record labels turn the community's perception on their music trends in order to make them follow what the music industry wants. The disillusionment is also triggered by people impractical expectations. Taylor and Brown in Heath and Jourden (1988) argued that normal individuals hold and predict overly optimistic outcomes for their future. According to them, this unrealistic view can lead human to feel great disappointment after they perform a task. This is because people experience a larger contrast between the target they set before the task and their actual performance. In other words, people unrealistic viewpoint of their goals lead them to be disillusioned.

The case of disillusionment is also found in music industry. Nowadays, the color of music is almost the same and the singers are often not very talented. They do not need to do many efforts because the sound is digitized. The lyric also tends to be meaningless, sometimes it is hurting people. This phenomenon makes many people get disappointed to the music. Thompson (2012) reported that music is being whitewashed by record companies. Music is just like a tool to gain popularity and fame. Most of companies are more worried about commercial appeal than making great music. Music has lost its variety and passion. He added that it forced many musicians to cross over into the dominant new genre so that they can still survive. Furthermore, it is also revealed that most musicians are just doing efforts in order to get on top of music chart without considering the aesthetic. That is the point where they have lost their quality of music. Meanwhile, he also added that all modern music also sounds the same. According to Spain researchers modern songs have become more popular in the past 50 years, and the melodies, sound types, and chords have become less diverse and more homogenous.

Jennifer Egan (born September 7, 1962) is an American novelist and short story writer. Egan was born in Chicago, but grew up in San Francisco. After graduating from Lowell High School, she majored in English literature at the University of Pennsylvania. After graduating, Egan spent two years at St John's College, Cambridge supported by a Thouron Award. She has published short fiction in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Zoetrope: All-Story*, and *Ploughshares*, and her journalism appears frequently in *The New York Times Magazine*.

Her latest novel, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (2011) and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction.

The Pulitzer Prize Board noted that the novel was an inventive investigation of growing up and growing old in the digital age, displaying a big-hearted curiosity about cultural change at warp speed. In commenting on her Pulitzer, National Public Radio (NPR) critic Jonathan Bastian noted that Egan is the one of the most recent and successful examples of a trend that has been steadily seeping into the world of contemporary literature. The novel also won another honors and achievements, such as winner of *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize (2010), winner of *Salon Book Award* (2010), winner of *The Tournament of Books* (2011), finalist of *PEN/Faulkner Award* (2011) and *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year (2010).

A Visit from the Goon Squad (2010) is a book about memory and kinship, time and narrative, continuity and disconnection, in which relationships shift and recombine kaleidoscopically. It is neither a novel nor a collection of short stories, but something in between: a series of chapters featuring interlocking characters at different points in their lives, whose individual voices combine to create a symphonic work that uses its interconnected form to explore ideas about human interconnectedness.

The novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) reflects the causes of disillusionment. Disillusionment deals with the disappointment that people feel when they discover that something is not as good as expected or thought. The experience of discovering something is not as good as expected can lead people to a stressful situation. The shock that comes when one's perception of the world is revealed to be contrast with the facts of reality causes feeling of disappointment. The realization that one has believed in a lie is a painful experience. Disillusionment in this novel is caused by the domination of the stronger class and characters' unfulfilled expectation.

In dominating the society, the record labels as the stronger class enables their power by taking advantages of music aesthetic. They set their point of view about music in order to justify their power. At the same time, this situation also divides into two classes; the stronger class and the weak class. It means members of both classes are not in the same classes in their relationship. Social relationship becomes frustration and incompatibility. The record label even seizes the music marketing. The musicians as the weak class are forced to produce music based on record labels personal interest.

The second cause of disillusionment is unfulfilled expectation. In terms of unfulfilled expectation, the musicians make high assumptions about their future that are impossible to be performed. When their viewpoints do not manifest in concrete condition, those characters can become disillusioned. The characters in the novel hold very high expectations for their future. Those characters expect to be great musicians and stay in their glory forever without considering the changes of situation in music industry. They even cannot accept the fact that they get old and start losing their glory. This situation leads them to face great disappointment when things they expected are really different from facts.

There are some studies that have given contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel through disillusionment issue.

The first analysis is written by Ayo Kehinde entitled *Post-Independence Disillusionment in Contemporary African Fiction: The Example Meja Mwangi's Kill Me Quick (2004)*. This study analyzes Meja Mwangi's novel *Kill Me Quick*. This article analyzes the pain and disillusionment in African novel. In this analysis, Kehinde focused on revealing the novel as socially symbolic act or a reflection of the problem of Kenya immediate society, in particular, and the African continent in general. He stated that disillusionment in Mwangi's novel *Kill Me Quick* are caused by some factors such as, betrayal of public confidence and corrupt administrative bureaucracy. According to Kehinde, this situation leads ordinary people to become alienated, rejected and finally those people trapped in their fear. The living condition is often dehumanizing and existence becomes cheapened. The economy is in the hands of foreign interests whose concern is the production of food for profit rather than feeding the masses. As the effect of this situation, Kehinde showed the characters of this novel, Meja and Meina as foreigners in the cities, aliens to the coterie of Kenyan bourgeoisie, misfits to their families and pariahs to society at large.

The other study that gives contribution to this study is written by Akram Mokhtari Esfidvajani (2011) entitled *A Journey through Disillusionment and Self-Discovery*. This article revealed that any individual holds an illusion in their life and it is necessary to recognize it and find a way for confronting it to reach to self-realization. According to Esfidvajani, disillusionment in everyone's life is resulted by misunderstanding and misinterpretation of realities of life when one endeavors to show this reality. This situation happens when individuals cannot accept the reality of life as it is. It is often lead human to stressful condition or even develops mental disorder. Therefore, Esfidvajani suggested that human being have to know themselves to build internal awareness and external awareness by knowing the society.

The analysis of this novel deals with the concept of disillusionment, ideology and power. Freud in Panarchy (2013) stated that disillusionment is the state of confusion in which people are caught up, and they are at a loss as to the significance of the impressions which bear down upon them and as to the value of the judgments which they form. In this paper, disillusionment are caused by two major factors, they are the domination of the musicians by the stronger class and unfulfilled expectations.

Disillusionment happens because of the implementation of the ideology. The ideology is based on the idea that is formulated by the dominant class in order to secure its power. It also triggers the tendency of the appearance of false consciousness. The beauty of music in this novel is formulated as digitization and perfection. This ideology makes the disillusionment comes to the musicians society. It appears that the musicians are forced in doing things. Therefore, this condition makes the musicians have no choice except running the practice that is conducted to them. Marx in Strinati (1995) states:

The ideas of the dominant class, in all ages, are a powerful idea. Class which has the means of material production at its disposal, at the same time control the various means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it...individuals

who fill the ruling class, as well as thinkers, as producers of ideas govern the production and spread the ideas of his era. As a result, their ideas are the dominant ideas of his time.

These statements show that the dominant ideas that have been prevalent in a society are the ideas of the dominant class. The ideas must be produced and distributed by the dominant class and those ideas are expected to dominate the classes that are not members of the dominant class. The ideas of the ruling class become the dominant ideas, even if the ideas are not the only ideas that developed. This ideological perspective has focused on the role of human agency and struggle. Therefore, the dominant class constructs and disseminates ideas that protect its power because they dominate the weaker classes. Thus, it can be concluded that the ideology of the dominant class makes them gain power by controlling the consciousness of the weaker classes and groups that embrace those ideas.

The implementation of ideology is usually done by someone who has power. This situation is aimed for getting personal interest. Foucault in Deflem (1999) stated that technology is the real and current practice of power. Technology is the result of knowledge that leads to have power. Unfortunately, this power has been distorted by the stronger class in achieving personal ambition and gaining personal interest. By having the knowledge (power) to create innovation in technology, the stronger class has made technology as a profitable field to get benefit.

B. Discussion

In dominating the music industry, the record label sets their point of view about music. This action leads the musicians as the weak class into suffering. It is exposed in the quotation below:

To satisfy the multinational record label company, he'd sold his label to five years ago. But Bennie knew that what he was bringing into this world was shit. Too clear, too clean. The problem was precision, perfection. The problem was *digitization*, which sucked the life out of everything that got smeared through its microscopic mesh. Film, photography, music: dead. *An aesthetic holocaust!* Bennie knew better than to say this stuff aloud. (Page 24)

The quotation above shows how the big record label takes over the smaller record label and then it begins to justify its power. As the following action, it starts to change the music aesthetic into another aesthetic that the big company thinks music should have. The setting refers to the character position as the musicians who want to gain success in his life. However, he needs power to achieve his goal. Being inferior to the record label makes his life becomes stressful. Selling his small record label to the bigger one is the solution to release the conflict. It is the only way for him in order to continue his life. The utterance *the problem was precision, perfection. The problem was digitization* shows that the big record label company or the stronger class set its viewpoint in music industry. The word *precision* and *perfection* revealed the stronger class' will in music industry. Those ideas are implemented by the stronger class in music industry.

In making the music becomes precise and perfect, the big record label company modifies the essence of music itself by using its power; music becomes digitized. When the music is digitized, it means that the work of people or musicians in producing the music itself is omitted. There will be no people playing the music instruments. Meanwhile, the stronger class also gains control in technology in order to justify its power. The works of musicians are converted by computers. It is as Foucault in Deflem (1999) stated that the technology is the current practice of power. Technology is the result of knowledge that leads to have power. Unfortunately, this knowledge has been distorted in achieving ambition and gaining personal interest. In other word, the ability of the musicians in producing music becomes useless. They cannot express their idea and create their taste of music. At the same time, they are forced to follow the stronger class ideas. Therefore, this situation leads the musicians to get disappointed by the time they realize that music is no longer as it was.

At the same time, the function of music industry has also changed. It is no longer about people speak their voice through songs. It is controlled by the stronger class to fulfill its own need. It is revealed in the quotation below:

‘The problem is,’ Bennie went on, ‘it’s not about sound anymore. It’s not about music. It’s about reach. That’s the bitter fucking pill I had to swallow.’ (Page 319)

The quotation above shows that the real meaning of music has changed by the people who have power. By having power, the stronger class controls the music industry for its personal interest. The utterance *it’s about reach* clearly shows the real purpose of the strong class in music industry. It is to show the domination and to form its viewpoints so that the stronger class can accomplish the ambition. The setting refers to the situation where the character has to follow the record label purpose. This situation raises the conflict which refers to the contradiction between achieving his own goal and continuing his life. The phrase *the bitter fucking pill I had to swallow* implies that he knew that the record label dominates music industry and musicians are forced to follow the ideas that are set by the record label. At the same time, he feels disappointed because of knowing the situation is not as he expected. Being powerless to the record label leads the character to frustrated situation in his life.

The record label is the one who takes advantages from the relationship. The record label gets its work done meanwhile the musicians are exploited in doing the work. The domination that is done by the stronger class leads the musicians to stressful condition because they are forced and sacrifice their needs in order to fulfill the stronger class’ interest.in taking control by using force, the connection between the record label and musicians become stressful. It only benefits the record label. However, musicians are trapped into suffering. This situation is revealed through the quotation below:

I heard ‘*Satin Doll*’ playing inside, I heard giggle and yelp and big scoops of laughter, I saw approximately one hundred black limousines and shorter black town cars idling alongside the curb, and I considered the fact that nothing more than a series of atoms and molecules combined in a particular way to form something known as *a stone wall*

stood between me and those people inside the public library, dancing to a horn section that was awfully weak in tenor sax department. But a strange thing happened as I listened: I felt pain. Not in my leg, not in my arm, not in my head; everywhere at once. I told myself that there is no difference between being '*inside*' and being '*outside*.' (page 102-103)

The quotation above shows that there is the separation between the two classes. They are *inside* class and *outside* class. The inside class is considered as the people who have power to control its surroundings while the outside class refers to people who are used to fulfill the strong class' needs. The setting refers to the situation in which the character is separated from his colleague at record label where he works. He becomes disappointed because he is alienated. This situation triggers the conflict as he feels that he is different and cannot join the people who are members of stronger class. Wealth is one of the strong class characteristics. By having wealth, people in that class regard themselves as exclusive. They think that they are special and different from another common people outside.

Therefore, the strong class creates a boundary between them. The word *a stone wall* clearly shows that they are not settle in one caste although they work in the same industry. Common people can never cross the boundary created by the exclusive class because they have set to be tools in gaining exclusive class' interest. As the following impact, this situation leads them to become disillusioned. The utterance *I felt pain* discloses how the situation becomes dissatisfied. When the character realizes that they are being separated, they get depressed. Their work are not appreciated, it is just to accomplish one side interest. As the result, the character becomes disappointed when he finds that the reality is different from what he thinks; they are not at the same caste even though they work at the same industry.

In short, the first cause of the disillusionment in this analysis is the domination of the musicians by record label. The plot (conflict) and setting play an important role in disclosing this phenomenon. The record label which has power dominates the musicians. That record label also plants its viewpoints in music industry by changing music aesthetic in order to gain personal interest. In addition, this situation also leads to a separation into two classes; the stronger and the weak. At the same time, the relationship between the record label and the musician becomes dissonance. Furthermore, the musicians are stuck in the stressful condition and get disillusioned when they find the fact or reality is not as good as they think.

The second action that causes disillusionment is unfulfilled expectation. In achieving goals, the character is full of spirit. He focuses himself to reach the objectives. It can be seen through the quotation

Lou is a man who can't tolerate defeat – can't perceive it as anything but a spur to his own inevitable victory. He has to win. 'The album is called A to B, right? Bosco said, 'and that's the question I want to hit straight on: how did you go from being a rock star to being a fat fuck no one cares about?' (Page 83)

The utterance shows the strong will of the character in reaching his goals. He does not even accept failure or defeat; the only thing he knows is that he must get the things he need. The word *inevitable victory* signifies that he foreseen and make sure that the future is going to be perfect. The setting refers to the situation in which the character is obsessed in gaining his dream. He focuses himself only to his purpose. However, he does not pay attention to his surroundings or obstacles he will face. The conflict arises within himself when he finds that there are unexpected problems he needs to face in reaching his goal. He does not consider external factors that will influence in his way of achieving the goals. He does not even think of obstacles that he will face. It indicates that the character holds unrealistically positive views and predict overly positive outcome for his future. In fact, he does not get his dreams because he cannot solve his obstacles. Meanwhile, he also does not have alternative plans to cover his failure. Therefore, this situation causes him to feel disappointed because of his real situation is different with his dream.

In creating viewpoint for the future, the character often wishes for very great success. The plan that is created seems impossible to be manifested. This situation is revealed through the quotation below:

‘No one smoke hash and become president, Drew,’ you say.

‘It’ll never happen.’

‘This is my period of youthful experimentation,’ he says with an earnestness that would be laughable in a person who wasn’t from Wisconsin. (Page 193)

The quotation above shows that the character holds very great purpose of his future. The phrase *become president* clearly shows that the character wants to be a person that has big influence toward society. It is the highest position in a country and it governs many people. The setting refers to the situation in which the character wants to be a good personality in his future. By being a president, it means that the character will take a great responsibility. Instead of having responsibility, reliable and self-discipline are also required in order to achieve that position. However, the conflict arises as the character does not do any efforts to pursue the goal. This is as what Taylor and Brown in Heath and Jourden (1988) argued that normal individuals hold unrealistically positive views of their traits and abilities and predict overly optimistic outcomes for their future. The word *smoke hash* does not imply any efforts from the character. It only shows his habit and the habit that is done by the character does not support his goal. His condition and his expectation for the future are unclear. They have no correlation; his dream to be a president and his smoke habit do not support each other. It makes his goal is impossible to reach. Making a great purpose without doing a lot of efforts will lead to failure. This situation leads him to feel disappointed because there is a difference between the target he sets and the result he gets.

By not having awareness of the nearby situation, the character gets the bad impact of his carelessness. The utterance *time’s a goon, right? Isn’t that the expression?* (Page 134) shows the cause of the character’s failure. The term *goon* comes to refer more generally to any violent things happen in life. And this situation is the big obstacles and become the turning point of the character. The phrase *time’s a goon, right?* refers to the way that time and fate cruelly rob the

character's youth and goals. However, the character ignores the main obstacle he must face and he only focuses to the very positive views. It is also exposed through the quotation below:

I'm afraid the real Lou will be outside by the pool where he lived with a red phone on a long cord and a bowl of green apples, and the real Lou and this old Lou will have a fight. How dare you? I've never had an old person in my house and I'm not going to start now. Age, ugliness – they had no place. They would never get in from outside. (Page 92)

The quotation above shows that the character becomes disillusioned when they face the old age because he does not prepare any plans for the old age; he just focuses on his youth purposes. The setting refers to the situation in which the character hopes to stay in his glory time forever. He does not want to realize the fact that he is getting old. Moreover, age is considered as *ugliness* by the character. He regards it as something that is unpleasant to look upon and it is highly unfavorable condition. The internal conflict arises as the character comes to his old age and is incapable. Meanwhile, he still refuses the fact that he gets old. Being ugly means that the character is unattractive and he will be incapable person. In addition, the utterance *I've never had an old person in my house and I'm not going to start* clearly shows that the character rejects his current situation. The character is trying to decline his condition; he prefers not confessing his incapability nor does he try to find another way to make his old life becomes meaningful. However, he keeps forcing himself to declare that he is not getting old. This viewpoint leads the character to become frustrated when he realized that it is impossible to be achieved.

In brief, the second cause of the disillusionment is the character's unrealistic viewpoints. The character set very high expectations for his future but he does not prepare for any consequences or obstacle he will find along the way. When those high expectations do not manifest into reality, the character becomes chronically annoyed and disappointed. The unrealistic viewpoint can be categorized as a big cause of disillusionment because the character gets along with it every day.

C. Conclusion

The novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad (2010)* by Jennifer Egan reflects the phenomenon of disillusionment. It is exposed through text based interpretation by focusing on analyzing fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict) and setting. The phenomenon of disillusionment happened because of two causes. They are the domination of the stronger class and the unfulfilled expectation.

The domination by record label as the stronger class has caused the musicians to follow record label's rules. By having power, the record label controls music industry and the music aesthetic is changed. However, its power is distorted. It is only used to gain record label personal interest. Furthermore, they are divided into two classes; record label as the stronger class and musicians as the weak class. The weak class is forced to work in order to fulfill the stronger

class needs. Therefore, the relationship becomes stressful and those weak people become disillusioned.

The unfulfilled expectation of the character has also caused the phenomenon of disillusionment. The character makes assumption about his future and he holds very high expectation. It is when the assumption does not come in reality or the fact the he see is different from what is expected, he becomes stressful and disappointed.

In short, when people realize that the reality is not as it is expected, they get disappointed and depressed. Without having preparation, this situation leads them into problems in their life. This phenomenon is the impact of the domination by the stronger class and holding unrealistic viewpoints.

Note: This article is written based on the Rahmad Putra's under the supervision of Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A.

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