

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

The 1930s were a momentous era in British history, marked by the aftermath of World War I and the economic instability of the Great Depression (Roselli 14). This period of economic instability intensified class disparities, highlighting the distinct gap between social classes. British society was predominantly divided into two dominant classes: the upper class, including aristocrats, nobility, and other elites, and the lower class, comprising the working class with less favorable social and financial conditions (Cannadine 88). This class stratification later shaped both political directions and societal life (Todd 502). The upper class had significant influence over societal decisions, often at the lower class's expense. People from the working class were relegated to subordinate roles, merely following the status quo enforced by their superiors. This dynamic led to various social issues within these stratified layers of society.

The aforementioned class dynamics is a phenomenon found in the capitalist system, where those with capital hold power, creating a distorted social structure and power imbalance (Offe 102). Aristocrats and the upper class employed various means to expand or retain their power, particularly during the challenging times of the Great Depression (Sach 94). In stark contrast, the lower class found their lives dictated by the policies and status quo enforced by the upper class. This dynamic was intensified by the conservative nature of British society, which tightly controlled power and influence (Menon 31). The resulting social tension and

exploitation were rampant, with the upper class leveraging their position to manipulate the social and legal systems for their benefit.

Moreover, the existence of upper and lower classes led to other issues such as exploitation, class restrictions, and ideological indoctrination. The capitalist ideology instilled the belief that the upper class would always rule, and the lower class must willingly adhere to this ideology (Eyerman 53). This indoctrination led to a misunderstanding of the world by the lower class, who acted according to the upper class's ideology without considering their situation and conditions. Marxist theorists such as Marx, Engels, Lukacs, and Gramsci argue that this condition results from capitalist ideology. The situation where the working class unconsciously adopts the upper class's ideology without considering their benefit is later termed false consciousness (Rosen 369). False consciousness emerges as an effect of social class systems and cultural hegemony perpetuated by the upper class. This phenomenon often affects the working class, leading them to internalize capitalist ideology without recognizing the personal costs and disadvantages.

This sociohistorical context is vividly depicted in literature, aligning with M.H. Abrams' assertion that literature reflects the universe by mimicking social realities and issues of its time (Abrams 11). Like other arts, literature has been presumed to reflect cultural norms, values, and the historical development of a society or culture at certain times (Albrecht 722). Literature often mirrors societal events or periods, meaningfully representing the society from which it emerges. Mimetic theory, coined by Abrams, posits that authors draw from real-life social issues and translate them into their literary creations, effectively making literature

a mirror of societal actions (Abrams 9). In this regard, aside from taking place as a means of social control and influential means, literature also serves as a crucial tool for studying the conditions of specific societies, as depicted in literary works (Albrecht 425).

One such literary work that explores the aforementioned social class issues is Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. Published in 2001, the novel portrays the complex class relations in early 20th-century British society. The novel's narration begins in 1935 and spans several decades, covering pre- and post-World War II England. The story revolves around the lives of several characters, primarily focusing on Robbie Turner, the servant's son, and Cecilia Tallis, the daughter of a wealthy family. The plot is set in a series of misunderstandings and a false accusation by Briony Tallis, Cecilia's younger sister. Briony misinterprets a series of events and accuses Robbie of a crime he did not commit. This accusation leads to Robbie's imprisonment and dramatically alters the course of all three characters' lives. The novel explores themes of love, guilt, and the quest for redemption as Briony seeks to atone for her past mistakes.

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* mirrors the societal conditions of 1930s Britain, capturing the period's distinct class structure. The novel highlights the social and economic divide between the upper and working classes through Robbie's character and the Tallis family. Through the character of Robbie Turner, McEwan depicts the struggle of the lower class to overcome social barriers. Robbie, despite his academic achievements and aspirations, remains trapped by his social status, exemplifying the limited mobility and inescapable class discrimination of the time. As the story

unfolds, McEwan presents an exploration of how class differences impact personal relationships and the harsh realities faced by those at the lower end of the social spectrum. McEwan's *Atonement* is a powerful narrative about the consequences of a single act of misinterpretation and a reflective commentary on the class structures of early 20th-century Britain. The novel offers a compelling depiction of the social and economic divide of the era, making it a significant work for analyzing class dynamics and class issues in literature.

Aside from *Atonement*, another novel talks about a similar issue, *The Remains of the Day*, by the Nobel Prize-winning British author Kazuo Ishiguro. This novel, set in the interwar and postwar periods, follows the life of Stevens, a butler who serves a wealthy English lord. Through Stevens' experiences, Ishiguro examines themes of duty, class, and the changing social order. Like *Atonement*, *The Remains of the Day* explores the complexities of social hierarchy and the often invisible barriers that separate the classes. Despite the latter's morally questionable actions, Ishiguro's portrayal of Stevens' unwavering loyalty and sense of duty to his employer highlights the theme of false consciousness. The selection of *Atonement* for this analysis is significant due to its focus on social class issues. By using a mimetic approach and Marxist literary criticism, this study aims to analyze the class dynamics within the novel. McEwan's portrayal of Robbie as a proletariat trapped in false consciousness attempts class elevation but is disillusioned by the societal realities of his time.

Based on this background, this research aims to analyze the class dynamics between the upper and lower classes as depicted in *Atonement* by Ian McEwan.

Additionally, the writer will examine how McEwan illustrates that class dynamics leads to false consciousness experienced by Robbie as the representative of the lower class, reflecting the social realities of the British sociohistorical context in the early 20th century. By employing the Marxist literary criticism approach, this study focuses on the class dynamics in *Atonement* and how it eventually leads to false consciousness experienced by Robbie Turner as the representative of the lower class.

1.2. Identification of Problems

Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* raises critical issues of social class divisions, which reflects the society in British in the early 20th century, where a society exhibits the existence of the wealthy and the impoverished. In this regard, the writer focuses the analysis of the character Robbie Turner, who in *Atonement* Robbie comes from the lower class and turns out to be a subject of manipulation by the upper class. Within the stratification system of society, problems such as class conflict, exploitation, and false consciousness emerge, positioning Robbie as a victim of these societal issues. In this context, the upper class, such as Jack Tallis and Briony Tallis, play crucial roles in shaping reality with the power that they have. Using Abrams's mimetic theories and the Marxist theories of literary criticism, such as capitalism, class conflict, and hegemony, to examine how these concepts apply to *Atonement*. The concept of false consciousness takes into account understanding Robbie's predicament. Despite being from the lower class, Robbie is led to believe that he deserves equal treatment within the upper class,

exemplifying the false consciousness perpetuated by the societal structure. By examining the sociohistorical context of early 20th century England as represented in the novel, this research seeks to explain the complexity of class dynamics in manipulating social systems, ultimately leading to the state of false consciousness.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

The writer has looked into several related literature regarding the main topic discussed in this research. The first article, *Class and Social Inequality*, by Vasko Talevski, was published in 2020. Talevski analyzes the novel *Atonement* using Max Weber theory on social stratification. Talevski uses Max Webber's thoughts, such as class status, social status, and power. Talevski explains the forms of social inequality and discrimination experienced by Robbie Turner. Additionally, Talevski emphasizes Robbie's class consciousness. Talevski mentioned that Robbie has successfully achieved upward mobility using his knowledge of literature, which makes him behave like an upper-class individual. However, this research counters Talevski's perspective. The findings of this research asserts that it is unlikely for someone from the lower class to overcome the class division. McEwan illustrates Robbie as being trapped by the false ideology that he can transcend his class, yet he fails to do so.

The second relevant study was from Ian Fraser in 2013. In his article, Fraser analyses the class contradictions present in the novel based on E.P. Thompson's perspective. This article explores the notions of class experience and class consciousness, class struggle, class hegemony, and fetishism by E.P. Thompson

that can be seen in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. By analyzing the cases the author takes as examples, Fraser concluded that someone's class can be raised or lowered depending on the circumstances between them in some manner of society. This article is dependable for this research since it shares the same material object. Yet, Fraser focuses on how someone can elevate between classes and act according to their class consciousness. This research focuses on how the social class dynamics depicted in *Atonement* reflect society and how these dynamics lead to a state of false consciousness.

The next relevant article comes from Ilany Kogan in 2014. In her writing, Kogan analyzes the novel *Atonement* with the perspective of psychoanalytical analysis that focuses on the character Briony and the circumstances around her. Kogan discusses the various relationships between Briony Talis and the other characters that lead her to problems related to trauma, emphatic failure identification, and desperation for attention and *Atonement*. Kogan points out that the behavior of Briony by making *Atonement* of her past sins is just to commit her fulfilling needs. The reason why Briony is Briony never successful in atoning her sins is because she fantasizes that the atoning for her guilt is going to be done no matter what way. The sins that she did in the past make Briony atone it in some fiction where both of them live happily ever after in order to make her a kind of empathy. The significance of this article for the research is that the author gives the portrayal of the character development of Briony, which takes account of the way capitalism works in society.

A thesis from Jennifer Christy Rimun in 2013 studying the social condition of socio-economic in the novel *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Rimun emphasizes how fiction can contain some crucial problems that exist in society. Using Marxist literary criticism, Rimun emphasizes three main problems encountered during the novel, which include false consciousness, hegemony, and reification. The author states that those proletariats submit to the orders of the bourgeoisie and accept their poor lifestyles without questioning them. This thesis allows the writer to gain a better comprehension in understanding the concept of class conflict, which then will be an important source in analyzing the data that the writer uses for this research.

The fifth relevant study was from Masood, Muhammad Hamzah, and Shafi Shahzeb in 2020. Masood et al. argue that the exploitation carried out by the bourgeoisie towards the proletariat started a long time ago and still exists today. This research aims to reveal how social injustice occurs in the short story *The Old Man* by Attia Hosain can refer to exploitation and false consciousness. The authors of this article found that the depiction of the exploitation of the working class leads to a state of false consciousness where the position of the working class is no longer taken into account and is no longer prioritized. This research focuses on the textual analysis of the relationship between the upper and lower classes. However, this research aligns with the writer's research, where the writer also discusses the false consciousness in literary work.

The next relevant research came from Intan Permata Sari's thesis in 2010. In this study, the author uses the perspective of Marxism, where she finds that the

revolution that occurred in England in the 18th century significantly impacted its society. Sari argues that the author of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte, reflected the socio-economic state of English society in the 18th century in her work. This thesis supports the writer's research where Sari analyzes the same topic where the conflict between classes leads to false consciousness. Sari's research focuses on how the main character endures discrimination and intends to avenge himself with the power he gains when the upper class adopts him. However, Sari's research provides insight into how false consciousness in *Wuthering Heights* occurs alongside a motive for revenge.

The other relevant study is from Siswati Endah published in 2017 with her writing. Endah discovers several concepts of Gramsci's theory of Hegemony: civil society, political society, counter-hegemony, war of position, war of movement, and intellectual organic. Endah states that hegemony existed when the lower class in society started to open themselves to the influence of upper-class domination. This article is useful to this research since it discusses the same formal object that the writer uses to analyze Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. Comprehending this article allows the writer to get a better understanding related how the hegemony works in society proposed by Gramsci.

Fauziatus Salamah's thesis, published in 2021, also discusses the concept of hegemony by Antonio Gramsci in Carrol Lynch William's *The Chosen One*. Salamah points out that the concept of hegemony that exists in society spreads in two ways: coercion with the power of force and consent, the use of deals and agreements both two sides sincerely accept. Also, Salamah states in her thesis that

the application of hegemony causes the community to experience negative impacts such as violations of human rights (discrimination and death, unfair detainment, prohibition of movement, restriction in marriage, and prohibition of expressing opinion) and physical and psychological violence. This article aligns with this research, which discusses the hegemony reflected in a novel. This study is also helpful in aligning the concept of hegemony that then led to negative effects on proletarians.

1.4. Research Questions

Based on the background of the research, the writer poses the following questions related to this study:

1. How does Ian McEwan depict the upper class's control over society in the novel *Atonement*?
2. How does Ian McEwan portray class dynamics leading to the phenomena of false consciousness experienced by Robbie in *Atonement*?

1.5. Scope of the Research

In *Atonement*, the social structure highlights a stark contrast between the upper and lower classes. This power imbalance leads to various societal problems, including manipulation and exploitation. The class dynamics portrayed in the novel bring about significant consequences, one of which is false consciousness. Ian McEwan depicts Robbie Turner, a lower-class individual living in an upper-class environment. McEwan's narrative illustrates how Robbie's circumstances lead him

into a false consciousness, making him believe that being around the upper class implies he is part of it.

1.6. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are to answer the following questions mentioned in the research questions section;

1. Giving the description analysis of how Ian McEwan portrays the upper-class control over society in *Atonement*.
2. Analyzing the cases where Ian McEwan represents the phenomena of false consciousness experienced by Robbie in *Atonement*.

