CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Background of Research

"Places are never just places in a piece of writing. If they are, the author has failed." (Machado, 73), a famous author, Carmen Maria Machado said in her book "In the Dream House". This statement expresses the significance of setting in literature, as it influences both the story and the reader's interpretation of it. A story's setting refers to the time and place where the story takes place. It could be a real or fictional location, ranging from a small village to a large city. Setting has a significant impact on a story's theme because it communicates the atmosphere of the story. In this research, the author will focus on how Ernest Cline uses settings to portray utopia and dystopia in his book *Ready Player One*.

A utopian setting is a fictional world that is thought to be ideal. It is frequently used to criticize or provide an alternative to real-world problems. It can be a civilization or a community free of societal problems, where people live in harmony with each other, as well as with nature. Utopian literature often discusses the possibilities of humanity in creating an ideal society, along with the methods to realize them. The word Utopia was invented by Sir Thomas More in 1516 in the title of his book "*Utopia*". According to Abrams (1999), More created his title by unifying Greek words between "*eutopia*" which means good place and

"*outopia*" which means no place. Abrams describes Utopia as "*A class of fictional writings that represent an ideal but nonexistent political or social way of life.*"

A dystopian setting is a fictional world designed as the opposite of a utopia. It might be a society or a group that is marked by oppression, aggression, and a lack of liberty. In dystopian literature, the risks of totalitarian governments, natural disasters, social degradation, as well as other social, political, or economic problems that can cause humanity to collapse are frequently discussed. Dystopias frequently depict a gloomy and repressive future in which individuals are robbed of their basic human rights and freedoms and forced to adapt to the dominant regime's views and ideologies. The word Dystopia was invented by an English philosopher John Stuart Mill by unifying the Latin prefix "Dys" which literally translates to "Bad" and the already existing term "utopia". Abrams describes the word as a word that "*represents a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination*".

A novel's utopian or dystopian setting may have a significant influence on the analysis and development of its theme. With its idealistic elements and harmonic components, a utopian society could bring out themes of optimism, aspiration, and humanity's desire for perfection. The writer might encourage readers to anticipate improvements in the future while exploring opportunities for humanity by presenting a utopian setting. The physical characteristics, social structures, and cultural norms of the utopian environment impact the characters' experiences, highlighting the advantages of a well-functioning society. A

dystopian society, on the other hand, with its oppressive and flawed attributes, stands out, reaching themes of struggle, resistance, and cautionary stories about the effects of unrestricted power or social problems. The dystopian setting serves as a driving force for the characters' journeys as they deal with restrictive systems and struggle against injustice. It represents the downfall of society by highlighting the vulnerability of human rights and liberties. Presenting both utopian and dystopian settings is a way for the authors to explore the topic of human nature. They can dive into the complexities of human behavior by examining the way characters engage with their environments, highlighting and motivating the potential impact of different approaches, which can make readers pause and reflect on their own civilization

Ready Player One is set in the year 2045, where the world is facing a serious crisis and Earth has become an impossible place for humans to live happily. In these times, everyone prefers to live in a virtual world called "*OASIS*". The "*OASIS*" is a virtual world where people can play, go to school and work. Basically, anything that can be done in real life can be done in the "*OASIS*". This book is simultaneously utopian and dystopian in nature. The "*OASIS*" virtual world offers a utopian vision of the future where people can escape their real-world problems and pursue their dreams in an endless world of virtual reality. In contrast, the real world of 2045 is depicted as a dystopian world where poverty, pollution and political corruption dominate society, leading to the downfall of civilization.

The author decided to conduct this research for three reasons. First, the author wants to gain a deeper knowledge of how setting is used to build and shape dystopian and utopian worlds in literary works by examining the setting in *Ready Player One*. Second, the novel explores a variety of issues in the utopian and dystopian society, such as the consequences of escapism, the danger of uncontrolled power, the human need for community, and how much people care about their identity. The author wants to investigate how *Ready Player One*'s Settings, which is a big aspect of the novel, relate to its themes and messages. Third, *Ready Player One* is a successful work of literature, which is why the author wants to analyze it to hopefully help future studies on science fiction and dystopian literature.

1.2   Identification of the Problem

The main problem that the author wants to solve in this research is the way Ernest Cline creates *Ready Player One*'s utopian and dystopian settings and how it impacts the themes within the novel. *Ready Player One* shows a great contrast between the *OASIS* and the real world of 2045. The *OASIS* is a virtual world where people can explore new worlds, interact with each other, and discover a sense of belonging that they may lack in their real lives. It is also a world where they can escape their real-world problems and enjoy living out their dreams. In contrast, the real world of 2045 is depicted as a grim world dominated by poverty and political corruption, resulting in a collapse of civilization. The real world is branded by scarcity and suffering, with people striving to survive in a cruel and brutal environment. By identifying the ways the settings are used to develop and

convey the themes, the author of this research hopes to deepen the understanding of the novel's underlying message. This research aims to contribute to the larger discussion of the relationship between setting and theme in utopian/dystopian literature.

1.3   Review of Related Studies

There are many researches that study Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, and settings in literary works. The author decides to include three studies related to the literary work and four studies related to the topic.

To begin with, Justin Nordstorm did a research entitled ""*A Pleasant Place for the World to Hide": Exploring Themes of Utopian Play in Ready Player* ". Nordstorm analyzes the interplay between utopia and dystopia in *Ready Player One*, as well as discussing the inter-relation between the utopian aspiration and gameplay by comparing Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, Bernard Suits' "*The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*" and James McGonigal's "*Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Change the World*". Nordstorm discusses how Ready Player One has overlapping contradictions, such as a utopia within a dystopia, a futuristic setting preoccupied with the past, and players playing intricate games within the OASIS itself.

The next is a research done by Dika Shafira Hidayat and Achmad Munjid from Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia entitled "*Elite Domination and Lower Class Resistence in Ernest Cline's Ready Player One*". By using Marxist theory, they elaborate how a big company in the novel called IOI (Innovative Online Industries) dominates the OASIS, and how the people resist the domination. This

research explains how the proletariat, or the protagonist wants to prevent the company from increasing its rule, while the capitalist, or IOI wants to continue governing. However, the proletariat must alter the system as a whole in order to put them on top. The ruling class is only partially overthrown in Ready Player One due to IOI's involvement in a variety of industries in addition to internet and communications. Nevertheless, progress is progress, no matter how modest. Parzival adds that they are going to end world hunger and improve the world, even if he is still unsure of how to achieve it. This suggests that their fight may continue.

Another research on *Ready Player One* is a research by Bryan Pandu Wicaksono from the State University of Surabaya, Indonesia entitled "*A Hero's Journey in Ernest Cline's Ready Player One*. This research describes the hero's journey which is the main theme of the novel using Joseph Campbell's *monomyth* concept. Wicaksono analyzes *Ready Player One* as a three-phased hero's journey which were; Departure, initiation, and return. Wicaksono elaborates Wade's journey within these phases. The departure phase have four stages, including; "Call for Adventure", "Supernatural Aid", "Crossing the First Threshold", and "Belly of the Whale". The initiation phase which consists of the "Road of Trials", meeting the "Goddess figure" and the "Woman of temptress", and the final stage of this phase is "The Atonement". The last phase is the Return, in this phase, Wade had gone through "Magic Flight", "Refusal of return", "Mastered the unknown world", and "Freedom to live".

Next, an article by William B. Dillingham entitled "*Setting and Theme in Tom Sawyer*". Dillingham claims that Tom Sawyer's setting, particularly the Mississippi River and the small town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, strengthen the book's themes of freedom, adventure, and individualism. He examines how the river provides an escape from society's limitations and how St. Petersburg acts as a reflection of the larger world, where Tom and his friends learn to manage life's challenges. In this article, Dillingham uses a formalist approach to investigate the connection between setting and theme in Mark Twain's novel. Formalism is a literary theory that emphasizes close reading of the text itself over extrinsic elements like the author's intentions or historical context. Dillingham's formalist approach includes a close examination of the imagery and words used to describe the setting of "*Tom Sawyer*." He pays close attention to how Twain utilizes the Mississippi River and the town of St. Petersburg to create a specific mood and atmosphere, which defines the characters' intentions and behaviors.

Next is the article by Howard Babb entitled "*Setting and Theme in Far from the Madding Crowd*". In this Article, Babb believes that the setting of Far from the Madding Crowd, particularly the rural countryside of Wessex, enhances the book's themes of nature, human connections, and survival. He examines how the natural landscape of Wessex shapes the characters' experiences and how their connections with one another and with nature are strongly connected. Babb examines how the rural landscape of Wessex influences the characters' behavior, motives, and relationships. Babb also employs the idea of "organic unity," which is essential to formalist criticism. He believes that the setting is an important

element of the novel's overall structure and meaning and that all components of the text - including character, plot, and theme - are connected and serve as parts of a unified whole.

The next article is "*Uniqueness in the Integration of Setting and Theme in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*" by Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam. In this article, Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam employs a formalist approach to examine the connection between setting and theme in Conrad's novel. He claims that the "*Heart of Darkness*" can be interpreted as the "center of evil" which creates a concept that connects the themes with various symbolic aspects of the settings. Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam focuses on how the setting is more than just a background for the story but is essential to the novel's structure and meaning. He observes how the setting is intertwined with the novel's plot and characters, shaping their experiences and perceptions.

Next, Joe Patrouch in his article "*Symbolic Settings in Science Fiction: H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, and Harlan Ellison.*" The article focuses on the use of symbolic settings in science fiction literature. Patrouch discusses how these settings are used to symbolize and comment on serious troubles and concerns. Patrouch examines the use of symbolic settings in the works of three renowned science-fiction authors: H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, and Harlan Ellison. He examines the settings of their works in depth, showing how they serve symbolically and contribute to the overall themes of their stories. Patrouch provides an insightful idea towards the significance of settings in science fiction and how they may be used to explore complex themes.

Another study is the article "*Utopia and Dystopia in the Map of American Literature*" by Muhammad Kiki Wardana. This article gives a detailed overview of the utopian and dystopian themes found in American literature throughout history and examines their influence on American society. Wardana begins by tracing the roots of utopian and dystopian literature in America, emphasizing the significance of works such as Thomas More's "Utopia" and George Orwell's "1984." Wardana then looks into the various types of utopian and dystopian settings seen in American literature, ranging from futuristic civilizations to alternate historical eras. Rather than focusing on a single work, the author examines how these ideas are integrated into the structure of American literature as a whole. This method provides essential background for researchers analyzing different works of literature since it enables them to comprehend how their chosen work fits into the larger literary scene.

All studies were analyzed by the author of this research to explore the analysis of utopia and dystopia in the form of setting and how it influences the themes of Ernest Cline's *Ready Player* One. Furthermore, the author will combine the knowledge gained from analyzing the studies mentioned above to conduct this research.

1.4   Research Questions

There are some interesting problems to be analyzed in *Ready Player One*. Nevertheless, to add some limitations to the analysis, the author created two questions as follows:

● How do the two different worlds within *Ready Player One* interact and influence each other in terms of the novel's overall portrayal of a utopian/dystopian setting?

● How do the utopian/dystopian settings impact the themes of escapism, power and control, identity, community and the message of the story in *Ready Player One*?

1.5   Scope of the Research

The author will focus on dystopian and utopian settings in Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*. This research will analyze the dystopian and utopian settings that occurred within the story that were described from the main character's perspective as a first-person point-of-view. The author limits this research to two discussions. First, the author will analyze the 3 types of dystopian and utopian settings (Setting of time, setting of place, and social setting) within *Ready Player One*. Second, the author will explain how dystopian and utopian settings affect the theme of the story.

1.6   Objectives of the Study

Objectives are the goals that the author needs to set to be an achievement to complete the research. In this research, the author sets two goals that need to be done. First, aims to reveal the dystopian and utopian setting contained in *Ready Player One*. Second, the author aims to investigate how the dystopian and utopian setting presents the theme of the story.