

**CHILDREN'S VIEW OF PARENTS' DIVORCE REFLECTED
IN NICHOLAS SPARKS' *THE LAST SONG* (2009) : A
SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**



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Abstrak

Penelitian ini memiliki tujuan untuk meneliti pandangan anak terhadap perceraian orangtuanya pada *The Last Song* karya Nicholas Sparks, hubungan dengan kondisi masyarakat dan alasan penulis menggambarkan perceraian di novelnya. Dalam meneliti *The Last Song*, penelitian ini menggunakan sebuah pendekatan yang dicetuskan oleh Wellek dan Warren (1949) dengan tiga perspektif sosiologi literatur disebut pendekatan sosiologi. Pandangan anak yang tergambarkan pada *The Last Song* dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor seperti komunikasi dan juga pilihan hidup orangtua. Hasil dari faktor tersebut memunculkan dampak perilaku pada anak yang akhirnya menentukan pandangan anak. Dengan memeriksa latar belakang biografis penulis—termasuk kondisi masyarakat di lingkungannya, di mana Kalifornia adalah tempat tinggal penulis. Kalifornia memiliki catatan kasus perceraian yang tinggi. Jadi, peneliti menemukan bahwa *The Last Song* ditulis dengan maksud menggambarkan kondisi masyarakat Kalifornia pada saat itu. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa *The Last Song* memberikan gambaran yang sangat jelas tentang pandangan anak-anak terhadap perceraian orang tua mereka yang terbagi menjadi 2 sebagai reaksi positif dan negatif.

Kata Kunci: pandangan anak, perceraian, pendekatan sosiologi, United States

Abstract

This study has a purpose to examine children's views on parents' divorce in Nicholas Sparks's *The Last Song*, the relations and the condition of society is the author's reason to describes about divorce in his novel. In examining *The Last Song*, this study uses an approach that was coined by Wellek and Warren (1949) with three perspectives on sociology of literature called sociological approach. The childrens' view depicted in *The Last Song* is influenced by several factors such as communication and also the parents' life choices. The results of these factors give rise to the impact of behavior on children which ultimately determines the views of children. By examining the author's biographical background—including the condition of the community in his environment, where California is the domicile of the author. It has a high record of divorce cases. Therefore, the researcher found that apparently *The Last Song* was written with the intention of describing the condition of the people of California at that time. The results showed that *The Last Song* gave a very clear description of the children's view toward their parents' divorce which was divided into 2 as positive and negative reactions.

Keyword: children's view, divorce, sociological approach, United States

1. INTRODUCTION

Divorce is something that often happens in the community. There are many negative views from the community regarding this action, especially for couples who already have children that will greatly affect the physical or psychological development of the child. Divorce also is a legal action taken if a husband and wife want to end their relationship from marriage.

In psychology, whatever happens to a human being sometimes impacts not on the person, but also affects the surrounding. Just as divorce will also have an impact on children. In a study of psychology, there were several variations in the effects of divorce on young students which is often experienced by some children, namely emotional disturbances, trauma, and also mental disorder.

The novel begins with Steve and Kim has divorced then Ronnie can not accept about her parent when she is still in seventeen years old in earlier. Then her mother wants Ronnie and her brother fill their time with Steve as long as the summer and he rejects when Ronnie wants to go home until summer's end. One day, Ronnie comes to the beach and there is a volleyball competition but she is not interest but suddenly a man falls to her, he is Will who is Ronnie's boyfriend then. In afternoon, around her father house there are many eggs of turtle which is stolen by Civet and Ronnie try to save the eggs then she stays at the hole eggs. At night, Will comes to her house and accompany her to preserve the egg's turtle.

Their relationship better than before and Ronnie begins to accept her father and starts to do a good thing to him. Finally, when all of turtle eggs was cracked and there are many little turtle to go beach and then Ronnie, her father and her little brother are very happy and her father goes to home to take something but when he run, he is unconscious after that he is token to the hospital. Finally, Ronnie knows that Steve has a disease. Steve becomes better but he knows that he will life not for a long time he almost finish her song for her daughter but when Ronnie try to finish the song then her daddy passed away when she has finished the song. Ronnie comes back to her mother's house and her boyfriend continues her study.

The novel was adapted into a popular film of the same name, in march 31st 2010. The film was directed by Julie Anne Robinson and this included in a

romantic drama film by Nicholas Sparks. Nicholas Sparks also is a writer of the novel, there are many her works of the novel such as *The Last Song*, *The Notebook*, *The Lucky One*, *The Longest Ride*, *Dear John*, *a Walk To Remember*, *message In a Bottle*, *The Best Of Me*, and the other novel.

The previous studies are used as one of the references in this research. The example one that was conducted by Zuhraida (2014) entitled “*Ego Defense Mechanism Reflected In Nicholas Sparks’ The Last Song Novel (2009) : A Psychoanalytic Perspective*”, where there are 2 focuses of keywords that first is based on the issues raised about divorce and the other one is based on the same novel to study. The difference which produced by the previous studies with this one is that the research focuses on the children's view of divorce and also how the acceptance by children to face the problem which reflected in the novel and the topic has never been studied before.

That is why the researcher chose the topic of divorce from this novel because *The Last Song* is a novel that really describes the phenomenon of divorce in society at the time and its effects. Divorce and children's view is a condition that must be considered and becomes an interesting thing to be analyzed, moreover by supporting this research using a sociological approach to deep understanding.

2. METHOD

This research includes a qualitative research. Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Denzin and Lincoln stated that “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (1994, p. 2). The researcher also uses descriptive methods. Nassaji (2015) has argued that the purpose of descriptive research is to explain a phenomenon and its causes in detail. The type of data that found in this study is qualitative data which is in the form of opinions and words. To adjust the data with the method, the researcher uses descriptive method because there are many opinions and arguments from the characters and the data presented must be in the form of descriptions therefore the results are easier to

understand. The main data source is from Nicholas Sparks's novel entitled *The Last Song*. The other data sources come from journal articles on the internet that are related to ideas raised as topics, namely, children's views on divorce and related to the object the researcher wants to examine, namely, *The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks. The method of collecting data uses observation. The object of the study by observing the intrinsic elements in the novel, the characterization, and the relationship of the story to the state of society. Moreover, the writer does firstly reading and making notes the important things in the novel such as the narrations, the opinions and the dialogues that has information. It can support and develop the research. Afterwards, the data collected is selected to make the coding data that support the problem that is being discussed and it will be easier to describe. After that, using sociological approach to answer these questions: How is the children's view towards her parent's divorce? And How does the story relate to the society at that time?

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Children's View Toward Divorce in the Novel

This research is reinforced by the research from Clarke (1999) where he focused on intergenerational relationship and found that there are 6 factors that influence relationships comprise conflict and tensions between children and parents. They are (1) communication and interaction style; (2) habits and lifestyle choices; (3) child-rearing practices and values; (4) politics, religion, and ideology; (5) work habits and orientations; and (6) household standards or maintenance. The result showed that the percentage summary is quite contrasting with one another where conflicts related to the first one is communication and also lifestyle and habits make these two problems the highest reaching 32% of the accumulated respondents. This factor 6 can affect the views of children towards their parents where they are also involved in divorce from parents who are often as a victims. The discussion is focusing on 2 problems with the highest percentage because the problem with the highest percentage of these factors can be applied to finding in

this research. First is about communication and interaction style and the other one is about habits and lifestyle choices.

3.1.1 Roonie's View

Roonie's view of divorce is included on the negative side that refers to Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) which the child views on divorce as negative actions that parents have taken because a children have experienced with little difficulty in post-divorce adjustment. This research where Roonie considers that the divorce is something wrong where he really hates her father. Ronnie's hatred of his father was caused by the trauma of losing in the past where her father left her, her younger brother and her mother, which made her a temperamentally woman. Because of the attitude of the Roonie that showed to his father was bad, the father began to realize his mistake where he behaved more patiently towards her because of unstable emotions while Roonie was still in puberty.

According to Hadyani (2017) who conducted a study of children from divorce cases using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method found that there would indeed be negative demeanor from the child where the child becomes feeling inferior, loses family figure, and juvenile delinquency. Roonie has lost a father figure from childhood, so she shows a reaction that could help her to be happy but all the memories that reminded her of her father only made her angry, indicated by the narration:

“Roonie felt a crush of memories over whelm her: the fire and subsequent rebuilding of the cruch, the stained-glass window, the song she'd finally finished.” (Sparks, 2009, p. 2)

Where the church is the place which is where Roonie and her father always visit it to worship and also decorate with the stained-glass windows and when Christmas decorates the Christmas tree with her father.

The research was conducted by Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) found interesting data for findings and also still included in the problem there were pros and cons, with the result is gender can affect the effects that the child will receive after the parent's divorce, where the female gender will have many negative effect more than male gender whether from the social or psychological aspects of the

child because they have fluctuating emotions. The children involved in a divorce case where the child thinks it will all end badly then they will feel their life will feel alone and also only consider the person who cares for them after, then that is their parents. Emotions like this are often shown by the roonie like one of the following dialogue:

- Mother** : Why'd you do that? Her mom said, frowning. I like hearing you play
- Roonie** : I don't
- Mother** : How about if I turn the volume down?
- Roonie** : Just stop mom. Okay? I'm not in the mood.

(Sparks, 2009, p. 8)

This dialogue is when her mother turned on the radio with mozart music broadcasts that made Roonie remember the events of 4 years ago at the Carneige Hall in playing the piano where the father was a piano teacher and that made Roonie very easily get a mood changes

3.1.2 Jonah's View

Jonah and Roonie are siblings where Jonah is the younger brother of Roonie, but Jonah's view of their parents' divorce is different from Roonie's which Jonah does not negatively view their parents' divorce but does not mean that he agrees with divorce. Jonah's attitude was always a good boy, who loves his mother and father after divorce, he also loves his older sister as this character arises because of the good, caring and loving behavior of parents, even after divorce.

According to Hadyani (2017) who conducted a study of children from divorce cases found that The existence of competent mother figures, reduced conflict of parents, school environment and friends who provide positive support is a factor that helps participants accept themselves in the face of divorce parents, to rise from adversity. Based on that research, the role of the mother who lives with the child after the divorce greatly determines the child's view of a problem; whether the mother doctrinaires in good or bad, there is control from the parent. Jonah's mother is very good at educating her children so that it has an impact on Jonah's good behavior. Jonah also had no problems with his father, he

really loved him. Jonah was happy and enjoyed the trip which was certainly very different from Roonie in the following dialogue :

- Roonie** : I don't want to see or talk with him
- Mother** : Just try to make the best of it, okay? Your father is a good man and he loves you
- Roonie** :Is that why he walked out on us?
- Mother** : You have been looking forward to this, haven't you, Jonah?
- Jonah** : Are you kidding? This is going to be great!
- Mother** : I'm gllad you have a good attitude. Maybe you could teach your sister.
- Jonah** : Yah, right.

(Sparks, 2009, p. 8)

The difference in views produced from the 2 characters in this novel is Jonah and Roonie because at what age the child found his parents experiencing divorce. In this case Jonah was one of the small children when his parents divorced so he didn't like his father almost completely because after the divorce the father was still on good terms with his mother and often visited them at home.This opinion is also reinforced by research conducted by Amato (1987) revealing that the dominant children whose parents experience divorce when they are very young, they will experience a less negative impact due to the imperfect understanding of the child.

3.1.3 Blaze's View

Blaze's view is almost the same as the view that the Roonie has due to a number of factors, where both of them are an honest woman—vulnerable to being hurt by a divorce from their parents. The previous research done byWallerstein and Kelly (1975) found the female gender will have many negative effect more than male gender whether from the social or psychological aspects of the child because they have fluctuating emotions. It can all be triggered because of several factors where the parent relationship when divorced is good or not or may be possible because

there is a problem before the divorce can also affect the child's view of the divorce.

The statement below that Blaze said to Rooney, where Blaze's father after divorce has had a girlfriend and her mother too, it does not rule out the possibility of marriage with her mother to do this and make them divorce:

“My dad lives with his girlfriend. This is his third one since the divorce, by the way, and she is the worst by far. She’s only a few years older than I am and she dresses like a stripper. For all i know, she was a stripper. It makes me sick every time I have to go there. It’s like she doesn’t know how to act around me. One minute she tries to give me advice like she’s my mom, and the next minute she’s trying to be my best friend. I hate her.” (Sparks, 2009, p. 41)

In contrast to Rooney's parents from Blaze's parents where they were more concerned with their new partner than their children, that's what made Blaze have no respect for his parents and looked for men and blaze thought Rooney was a bit luckier because her parents' relationship after being separated still remained good and focused on the growth of their children.

3.2 The Relation between the Story of *The Silent Wife* and the Society

Divorce has also been very happening in today's society, therefore several factors from the community can change the view of an individual seeing a problem, because something can turn out to be positive or negative because of community behavior. There is a connection between individual decisions and also the views of the society about the work of this novel as it has been investigated by Wellek and Warren (1962) found that a literary work that appears in a place is a picture of society that is summarized in a work that includes customs, habits and can also be a way of looking.

3.2.1 Time Period and Setting in the Novel

The first release date of this novel was September 2009 where the narration in the novel revealed the Carnegie hall, where it was the first place to be the opening act in the novel:

A couple of articles in classical music magazines followed, and a moderately long piece in *the New York Times* that focused on the father-daughter connection came next, all of which eventually led to a coveted appearance in the Young Performer series at *Carnegie Hall* four years ago. (Sparks, 2009, p. 13)

Carnegie hall is one of the places where it is used for orchestral music shows. Where in 2009 the place became one of the places for the famous pianists. Where in the, year most show is the piano show. Not only tells about the story of a piano performance symbolized by a place, but the narration has a correlation to the story where Rooney is a pianist and his father is a piano teacher. As the following dialogue:

Her dad, once a teacher at Julliard, had been her teacher as well, and for a long time, she'd been consumed by the desire not only to play, but to compose original music with her father. (Sparks, 2009, p. 12)

The place only use 2 places in the novel where the other one is the main place where the storyline takes place which is on Tybee Island, a small coastal city in Georgia and summer season. As the following dialogue:

But to stay until late August? Pretty much the entire summer? That was banishment, and for most of the nine hours it had taken them to drive down, she'd felt like a prisoner being transferred to a rural penitentiary. (Sparks, 2009, p. 8)

3.2.2 Divorce in the Twenty-First Century in USA and in the Novel

During the 20th century many divorce trends showed that the pressure on the average child experienced became smaller over time since their parents' marriage ended. Divorce is becoming more socially acceptable because divorce is becoming more common. Women's work has increased and the welfare state has grown, which means that single mothers are relatively more able to provide their children today than in the past. The regulation of custody has also changed, and children whose parents divorced in recent years are more likely to maintain relations with their parents.

Now, there are more details set out in stories in California, USA, 2009, divorce at that time in the United States was considered as something very common and also happened in many communities. Although divorce is still seen as a taboo, but marriage is now increasingly optional (Cherlin, 2005). Someone is freer whether they are going to get married or not and the public must not judge it, wrong or not action while not harming other people or the community will still be considered right. This tendency of marriage also affects the level of divorce that will occur in the community.

4. CONCLUSION

Implementing sociological approach by Wellek and Warren (1949) conducted that the sociology of the writer, the social content of the work, and the influence of literature in society to the analysis of *The Last Song* using the three perspectives of sociology of literature. It leads the researcher to find out what Nicholas Sparks as the author tries to tell through the story of relationship after divorce that he described into Miley Cyrus as Rooney as the main characters, the relation between the event in the novel and the event in the society in the circumstances. It turns out so the child's view of divorce can be influenced by several factors found by researchers which are divided into 2 namely positive and negative.

Positive does not mean agreeing with parental divorce, but rather accepting the situation that is being experienced. The factor that causes this view is during the divorce of their parents, the age of the child is still at a young age where the child's reasoning or understanding of complex problems cannot be completely digested due to lack of intelligence, same as with the results of the research that has been done by Amato (1987) revealing that the dominant children whose parents experience divorce when they are very young, they will experience a less negative impact due to the imperfect understanding of the child. The view in character is reflected by Jonah where he is a boy from divorce cases.

Furthermore, the view of the child to see divorce as something negative is also influenced by several factors where the child's gender also influences this view as well as research conducted by Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) found the

female gender will have many negative effect more than male gender whether from the social or psychological aspects of the child because they have fluctuating emotions. The view in characters are reflected by Rooney and Blaze where both of them are girls from divorce cases.

Nicholas Sparks lived in California where the setting of the novel was in the same place, where the problem of divorce was very high there in 2009 as in the novel, the data also shows Until 2009, Statistics statistics in North California reached 4 percent with marriage data around 10.5%. the percentage of divorce and marriage from 2000-2014 continued to experience a less significant decline. These data are issued by wf-lawyers.com where this is a media that provides statistical information.

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