

# DECONSTRUCTION ON THE CONVENTIONAL IMAGES OF CHILDREN IN JACQUELINE WILSON'S *THE ILLUSTRATED MUM*

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## Abstract

This research aimed to (1) reveal the unconventional images of children deconstructed by Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*, (2) show how deconstruction was presented in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*. The data of the research were significant expressions related to deconstruction taken from the novel. The result of this research showed: *first*, there were two unconventional images of children shown by the unconventional traits and unconventional roles of children. The unconventional traits included caring, sensitive, unselfish, responsible, and independent. The unconventional roles were parenting, protecting one another, and doing household responsibility; *second*, there were five ways that Wilson used to deconstruct conventional images of children and children's stories. Those seven ways were creating complicated plot, using different point of view, employing sensitive issues, subverting adult/child image, subverting good/bad image, subverting male/female child image, and denying logocentrism.

Keywords: Deconstruction, children's literature, logocentrism, conventional images of children.

## INTRODUCTION

Children face two problems both in the real life and in literature. Children's problem in the real life is that society perceives them as the ones who are weak, dependent, innocent, unknowledgeable, and irresponsible. The depiction of those characteristics comes from children's problem in literature, especially in children's literature. Children characters in the most conventional children's stories are depicted as the ones that are weak, dependent, innocent, unknowledgeable, and irresponsible. The example comes from *Cinderella*. She is rewarded by a fairy godmother named Mother Holle after being exiled by her mother and comes to a strange place. Cinderella is very happy because of her kind heart and patience; she can finally go home and is given a reward. Gretel, in *Hansel and Gretel*, is another example. She is punished by a wicked witch because she does not want to

do what the wicked witch commands and she is afraid that the wicked witch will eat her, too. It is seen clearly that those traditional children stories have brought logocentrism that is commonly understood as the winning of speech and thought as the center of truth, especially in constructing children's images. The first logocentrism is that children characters in those stories are made to be weak, innocent, dependent, and unknowledgeable. The other one is that children are exposed with only easy plot where there is no meaningful conflict and suddenly the story is ended with a beautiful conclusion.

This situation can be problematic if children are always given those kinds of stories. There will be certain ideology that is penetrated in their mind as readers from those everlasting fairy tales and other same typical stories. Ideology can be present in children's stories by three ways (Hollindale, 1988, 8-17). The ideology

which brings children's images is called as conventional images of children. Conventional image is derived from the word conventional and image. Based on *Oxford English Dictionary* (2006: 320), conventional is "tending to follow what is done or considered acceptable by society in general; normal and ordinary." Therefore, conventional image is defined as someone or something that is widely accepted in a society or something related to a convention. It is considered as acceptable since society agrees.

Martalock (2012: 3-4) says that conventional images of children refer to what people and society believe, understand, and assume about children's role in society. The images include how society thinks about children's development, motivation, and purpose. The conventional images of children also include incapability of speaking for themselves. The conventional images of children have been presented in most children's stories where society sees children as inferior and as the "second class" that are ruled by the "first class", adults. Children only receive nice plots, happy ending plots, safe topics to discuss, etc. The way adults treat children in literature can be problematic since children can have misleading perception that life is easy after reading those conventional children's stories.

Lukens (1999: 9) clarifies "children are not little adults. They are different from adults in experience, but not in species or to put it differently, in degree but not in kind." It means that just like the adults, children also need to know about love, laugh, happiness, sadness, death, divorce, mental illness, loss, pain, etc. Nevertheless, the author has to use different ways to tell the story to the children. Adults, especially parents, need to understand that children are close with those sensitive topics nowadays. They need to understand those topics in order to know how to cope with those problems.

To free children from those conventional images which depict children in the negative images, there must be children's stories which create unconventional images of children. Conventional images of children arise because there are some patterns created by structuralism. There is a pattern that a princess must be saved by a prince and the hero of a story must be a male character. Castle (2013: 28) in his book entitled

*The Literary Theory Handbook* says that cultures such as kinship, structure of family, and gender role are also the same in all parts of continents. This kind of "pattern" or "structure" is the concern of structuralism.

As the action to fix the error which structuralism creates, there is a new view called as post-structuralism. Castle (2013: 28) says that post-structuralism is not like postmodernism which tends to ignore the importance of "structure" that is made by structuralism. Instead, it keeps criticizing the problems created by the structure itself. One branch of post-structuralism view is deconstruction. It is a view that is proposed by Jacques Derrida during 1960s in UK and US. Derrida insists that to deconstruct does not mean to destroy. It never intends to destroy the structure that has been created by structuralism and Western philosophy. Yet, it means to construct or to distract. Since the center, belief, truth and binary are constructed, it means that it can be deconstructed.

Derrida believes that there is binary opposition inside the deep pattern of a text. There is an antagonism and opposition between male/female, light/dark, adult/child, man/woman, etc. Eagleton (1996: 115-116) argues that "Deconstruction tries to show how such oppositions, in order to hold themselves in a place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves, or need to banish to the text's margin certain niggling details which can be made to return and plague them." The other job of deconstruction is to reveal the deconstructed pattern of a text in order to break the traditional belief. Derrida proposes a method of reading and seeing something that is perceived as "the other" or "the unseen". Therefore, Deconstruction offers alternative ways of reading.

Western philosophy has promoted some beliefs by giving privilege to speech over writing, man over woman, light over dark, adult over child, white over black, etc. That kind of belief, called as binary opposition, can cause a hierarchy that is dependent on the dominant values over the marginal values. In addition, Derrida challenges Western philosophy on this by saying that binary opposites are inseparable; even they depend on each other, on the dominant that stands against the marginal (Venturino, 2013: 231).

Binary opposition creates a violent hierarchy because it places one term over another which is not essential. This is proven by Klages (2013: 55) statement that:

“Each term has meaning...only in reference to the other, and only as what the other is not. Being is what is not nothingness, reason is what is not madness, word is not what is not silence, etc. The binary opposites are inseparable in their opposition, because the term on one side of the slash only has meaning as the negation of what’s on the other side of the slash.”

Deconstruction cannot be separated from the term Logocentrism. Selden, et al, (2005: 164) explains logocentrism as well. It is derived from the Greek word “Logos” which means word that includes speech, thought, and law as the central or fundamental principle. Eagleton (1996:113) describes logocentrism as “...a belief in some ultimate ‘word’, presence, essence, truth, or reality which will act as the foundation of all our thought, language, and experience.” It is structuralism desire to make some ultimate ‘word’, presence essence, truth, or reality as a center of human activity.

Logocentrism is also close with ideology. Ideology is perceived as a language game. People often do not realize that ideology is a common sense that is used to win the battle of ideas. Ideology is different from idea. Easthope and McGwan (1992: 41-2) believe that idea is used for individuals’ need and it is for them only. Whereas ideology is used to be spread silently and unconsciously and it “specifies meanings in so far as they are social and collective.” It means to say it can be categorized as ideas when people use their “ideas” for the sake of their need. Nevertheless, when that “idea” is for many people and it is hidden but ‘spread’, it is ideology. Ideology often spreads beliefs about gender role, gender identity, social class, even race. It can act as well as an expression of class interest, subjectivity and hegemony.

Derrida proposes Deconstruction as a new method of reading in which it offers another alternative. Structuralism has tried to “construct” human beings with its concept of center, binary opposition, and logocentrism. If

there is no awareness in analyzing literary works, people often get the universal pattern and commonsense in the text. Therefore, as what Derrida always emphasizes, the job of deconstruction is “to discover...”the other” of philosophy” (Selden, et al, 2005: 169). In other words, deconstruction offers readers texts which show and raise the marginalized one to be seen, discovered and perceivable. It also shows how the marginalized one is dominated and superordinated by the dominating. Deconstruction helps people to shake the structure of binary oppositions, logocentrism, and the “center” of the truth where they do not neatly stay in their positions divided by the slash (/). Derrida invites readers of the texts to see the term in that binary opposition as a supplement of one another.

What deconstruction does in literary work is doing two ways. The first is reading the texts against itself, “...looking for the holes or shaky parts of the system of stable meanings the text tries to set up” (Klages, 2013: 60). Therefore, the first tactic of deconstructionists, confirmed by Eagleton (1996: 116) as well, is to show that the texts come to discomfit the ruling system and the structure of logic that they have built. It is done by showing there are possibilities that the texts get to trouble and they are even contradictory themselves. In other words, deconstructive way of reading shows the fault of a traditional belief that has become universal truth.

The second way of deconstructive reading is to reveal some literary works that have deconstructed form. It is “a made of experience, the possibility of experiencing the impossible, which is ‘never a stranger to the event, that is, very simple, to the coming of that which happens...’” (Castle, 2013: 163). The examples of those texts are the ones ‘giving privilege’ to the secondary term or the marginalized one of binary opposition like how woman struggles and survives in patriarchal society, how children do effort to fight against life without too much adults’ roles and how blacks show their identity that might be better than whites. Those are “new experience” of the texts which were once not written. It happens as, so far, people are busy with a text that has binary such as

masculine/feminine, private/public, rational/irrational, true/false, etc where the first term is given privilege. It also shows that the binary can be broken through and the binary is 'inside' the text. Not only that, people need to rethink that the first term actually depends on the second term. The identity or the meaning of the first term is got from its way of excluding the second term only (Sarup, 1993: 50-1)

People who are well aware will recognize that the genre of conventional children's literature is very limited. Hunt (1999: 5) believes "Children's books have a long history around the world and they have absorbed into themselves elements of folk and fairy tale, and the oral tradition" and the elements of conventional children's literature seem constructed already. Lukens (1999: 142) writes in her book that "Tales told over and over, told in one land to another, tales complex in structure for older readers or simple in outline for younger readers—most have themes that state a universal truth." It can be said that the genres and the theme of conventional children literature have pattern and they are built already to be the universal belief in society.

However, Hourihan (1997: 11), in his book entitled *Deconstructing the Hero*, believes that the power of myth and fairytales is very strong. As the elements of myth and fairytales are constructed already, they are apparent often in other generation stories. The stories have different title, character and setting, yet the essence is exactly the same. For example, the story of *Odyssey* written during the second millennium of BC has the same pattern with *Where the Wild Things Are* that is written in 1963. The essence of pattern is just the same, regaining position, freedom and domination. Roland Barthes adds that myth and fairy tales function as shaping people, as well as children, "perception of reality" (Hourihan, 1997: 12).

Conventional children's literature contains several serious problems besides those already mentioned. The first problem is that there is possibility of creating "fixed" or "universal truth" in the stories (Lukens, 1999: 142). The "truth" is created by language existing in the social context and they are very ideological. That the depiction of a

princess who is always saved by prince, a step daughter who is always obedient to her wicked step mother, a sacrifice done by a daughter, and revenge is not good in those fairy tales and folk tales are meant to 'construct' readers thinking including children. Children's books are part of the structure which is ideological. Pattern of the stories are constructed already and the pattern which is often apparent is Western patriarchal superiority (Hourihan, 1997: 11). This kind of ideology is one example of "structures" that is showed in the pattern of fairy tales, myth, and folktales which, as mentioned before, have always had very strong influence on children's fiction.

The second problem from conventional children's literature is that it strongly contains what is called as didacticism. Starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries at which fairytales, folktales, myths, and other religious and moralistic stories flourished, they were used as didactic tales, to "tell" what is wrong, what is right, what to do, what not to do Gapalakrishan (2011: 5-6). The other and the most serious problem is conventional children's literature is not "children themselves". Those stories do not reflect children inside them, yet they are categorized as children's literature. They cannot be the mirror for children and it is of course problematic. According to Mankiw and Strasser (2013: 85), "Books are mirrors in which children can see themselves. When they are represented in literature we read, they can see themselves as valuable and worthy of notice." Here, Mankiw and Strasser emphasize if there are no child characters in the stories children read, they cannot feel they are there in that particular situations. They cannot "recognize" themselves as a child and their behavior reflected in the books. As mentioned before about the point of view of fairy tales and folk tales, it is often not from children's eyes. Nevertheless, Peter Hunt (in Nodelman, 1992: 34) suggests that children's stories and the writers need to "think about children and read children's literature from a child's point of view".

Moving to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children's literature, including children's books and magazine, starts to come into their own. At least in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have come

unconventional children's literature, or people also call it as contemporary children's literature. In addition, what makes the 20<sup>th</sup> century children's literature different from conventional ones is the distinction of genres. They include historical fiction, realistic fiction, science fiction, modern fantasy, poetry, even picture books (Gapalakrishan, 2011: 7).

Society has changed and it might be changing in the future. That is why, since people's attitude to children is changing, literature for children is changing, too. People, including children, cannot deny the fact that, unfortunately, in this century, war, death, divorce, murder, crime, physical and sexual abuse, starvation, violence, terror, and poverty are parts of their life. Every time, from the morning to the evening, children are exposed to those topics both in the news and entertainment (Gapalakrishan, 2011: 4).

Parents commonly think that those sensitive or risky topics are not good to be introduced to children even through literature. However, Mankiw and Starsser (2013: 85) argue that parents need to see those sensitive issues including death, terrorism, bullying, diversity, family diversity, disabilities, homelessness, and mental disorder not as problems which need to be hidden from children. They need to see them as subjects that become part of their daily life of family and children. If the reason is that parents do not know how to approach those sensitive issues to children, unconventional children's literature comes to help them.

Lukens, et al (2013: 26) believes that such sensitive issues can be handled also with sympathy by good and skillful writers. Such writers like Jacqueline Wilson, Judy Blume, Katherine Patterson, Beverly Clearly, Julius Lester, Jacqueline Woodson, etc, are examples of unconventional children's literature writers who put sensitive issues neatly and properly on their works. Subjects that were once considered as taboo such as sexual growth and the effect, free sex, premarital sex, abortion, impotence, autism, crime, and pregnancy are confronted in unconventional children's stories.

This is also affirmed by Nodelman (1992: 32) saying that people, it means adults, parents, and children's literature writers, need

to "provide young readers with a 'realistic' description of people and events that insist on the reality of one particular way of looking at the world and themselves..." Stories such as having family member who suffers from mental disorder or autism, having father in prison, being wedded in very early age, etc are sensitive topics yet they need-to-be-recognized by children as they are part of this changed era. Adults, including parents, need to refresh their understanding about children nowadays who are different from children from past generations.

By reading children's stories about realistic and sensitive topics which are close to their everyday life, besides fairy tales and fantasy, books can be the aids for them to encourage and motivate them in reading and learning about the world (Bothelo and Rudman, 2009: 1). Through literature, children can recognize the world's situation. They can see issues of war, poverty, and disease from the TV or the internet, but literature gives them encouragement to read and know more about the world.

Unconventional children's books provide more critical and challenging form. There is no longer simple plot where the ending must be always "happily ever after". Nodelman (2008: 9) agrees that "the simpler it is, then the more obviously will it say less than it hints at, demand an implied reader who knows more-and therefore, the more likely it will be that children readers who can make sense of it will understand more than it actually said." It means the more complex the form of literature, the more challenging it will be for children to "read between the lines". They are encouraged to find the meaning more than what has been written. If children can do it, they will get more understanding than what is written in the text only. It does not mean that these stories are told in gloomy and pessimistic atmosphere; even most of them are written in playful, attractive, fun, and optimistic way

"Mature theme can be explored in children's literature; they contribute to understanding when they meet the requirement of excellence" (Lukens, 1999: 149), including writers' way of presenting the stories. By reading those kinds of stories, children understand not only general or

universal theme and problem, just like in conventional children's literature, but also more specific theme and problem which are experienced by each different individual in the story.

Unconventional children's stories present children inside them. Mankiw and Strasser (2013, 85) believe children will find and recognize "themselves", their behavior, and their experience in daily life while reading. It happens as the stories are told from the first point of view of children that makes them feel valuable and worthy. As Lukens (1999: 176) says that in the first point of view, "...the reader lives, acts, feels, and thinks the conflict as the protagonist experiences and tells it...", it makes the first point of view that is mostly used in unconventional children stories become useful for the readers. Besides, the reliability of the story, including the plot, conflict, and resolution, is trustworthy. It presents detail problems faced by most children nowadays, not the general ones. Problems such as being alienated, bullying, living with step mother, having lost pet, or even taking care of mental disorder brother, for instance, are problems which are experienced and close to them now. It is no longer that adults, such as parents, teachers, or aunts, who solve the problems. Even, it is not magic or a fairy godmother that helps them to find a solution for their conflict.

It is clear that some unconventional children's stories or contemporary children's stories bring some positive changes. They break some conventional images of children and children stories. Conventional images are images that are traditionally, socially and universally constructed. Soon after, the conventional images are unconsciously agreed by society. Relating conventional images of children, the images are also known as social construction of children by Western philosophy. It is the social representation of children which is seen through adults' lens. Silvia (2014: 54) believes that "Traditionally in the West, the concept of childhood is associated with the inability to speak." It clarifies that children are seen as innocent, powerless, not being able to express themselves, powerless, marginal, unknowledgeable and inferior.

One way to make children aware of an ideology existence and conventional images of children in children's stories is to "deconstruct them in order to reveal their underlying ideology" (Hunt, 1999: 52). These images of signs appear often in children's literature. What makes it problematic is that this pattern can re-occur, be re-written, be re-used, and be re-worked for any other text in the next generation. Hourihan (1997: 13) believes that this kind of pattern which appears in other stories called as intertextuality, a belief that is proposed by Kristeva in the late 1960s. Kristeva (in Lassen-Seger, 2006: 21) explains that the essence or the idea of a story is never new; it is only the past experience of previous stories. The stories nowadays are only the new version of the stories in the past having same essence. According to Hourihan (1997: 12), the pattern will construct images that function to shape people, including children, perception of reality.

Deconstruction in children's literature also has a mission "to expand the universe of small, to give voice to children and listening to their speeches; allowing representing childhood in their own way..." (Silvia, 2014: 55). Children need to be aware to re-think about gender roles that, for instance, girls must be obedient and dependent on boys. They are not allowed to be free from adults' interference. They need to re-think about classism and racism which happen nowadays in certain places and how they affect humanity. By doing that, they will be critically reading, thinking, and presenting role in their real life.

Jacqueline Rose, James Kincaid, Perry Nodelman, Kimberley Reynolds, and Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (in Lassen-Seger, 2006: 10) suggest that this approach "has enabled oppositions between adulthood and childhood to be deconstructed in order to expose and possibly challenge existing power relationship." In children's stories, there have been many binary opposites such as adult/child, gentleman/pirate, master/slave, male/female, white/black, human/animal. These binaries can create structure that is problematic in external reality, for example, the meaning of 'gentlemen' in Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is the opposite of 'pirates'

meaning. It is because 'gentlemen' is constructed as 'brave', 'knowledgeable', 'neat', 'honest', 'self-controlled', and 'sober'. Whereas, 'pirates' meaning is the opposite of those 'gentlemen' meaning, 'innocent', 'dirty', 'deceitful', 'violent', 'drunken' (Hourihan, 1997: 16).

Therefore, the researcher tries to explore further regarding to the topics of deconstruction in children's literature. Thus, the researcher is interested in analyzing Jacqueline Wilson's novel entitled *The Illustrated Mum*. This novel is chosen based on several reasons. First, it contains several unconventional images of children which is the result of deconstruction from conventional images of children. Second, it shows the deconstruction form of conventional children's stories which are always seen as easy as it has unconventional form of children's stories. From above explanation, it is necessary for the researcher to conduct the study in finding and analyzing the deconstruction on the conventional images of children in children's stories.

This research has two aims namely (1) reveal the unconventional images of children deconstructed by Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*, (2) show how deconstruction was presented in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*.

This research is significant to give the insight and knowledge in English literature especially in children's literature, conventional images of children and children's stories to give benefit for these following groups of people such as students, lecturers and future researchers in getting knowledge, providing examples and guiding for further analysis in the relevant topics.

## THE RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of qualitative research tends to be description than prediction as it is to understand in a deep understanding from the research participant. It means to say that the interpretation comes from the researcher herself. Qualitative research is also beneficial in focusing on the voice of the marginal. Different from quantitative research that concerns on the average, typical, as well as the trend generalized as large population, qualitative research focuses on certain people who are outside and not

represented in the averages of quantitative research.

The way of textual analysis works is in relation to deconstruction concept that there is nothing outside of the text that "textual analysis involves the identification and interpretation of a set of verbal and non-verbal signs" (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009: 210) inside of the text. It clarifies that the contents of analysis from this research were some symbols, signs, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, etc that were used to communicate through the novel. After that, the data reflected and were related to the social context. In the process of placing the data, the researcher was involved as well.

The sources of data in analyzing the novel came from Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* published in 1999 by Doubleday in Great Britain. The data provided by this novel were some significant words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs which were related to revelation of unconventional images of children and how deconstruction was presented in the novel. These data provide the unconventional images of children that were built by Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*. The data showed how deconstruction was presented in the novel.

Qualitative research in textual analysis requires the researcher as the main instrument. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 211) explain that the researcher is the interpreter of the text she or he is working on. What is important from qualitative research in textual analysis is not the interpretations from others, but the researcher's own interpretation.

There were two steps done as parts of the technique of data collection: the first step referred to the close reading and re-reading activities and the second step was done by categorizing the raw data.

The triangulation is essential in establishing the trustworthiness which is crucial in ensuring the quality of the research findings. In this research, the first and second supervisors who helped the researcher in checking the data. In addition, there are two friends under the same study program who also helped the researcher in checking the data. These friends were chosen because they were in the same concentration and used the same topic, children's literature, in their thesis.

To analyze the data, content analysis is used. The researcher conducted questioning, observing, recalling, noting, coding, and identifying process. She used some steps: 1) reading and rereading Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* carefully and comprehensively, 2) signing and noting any words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs related to the unconventional images of children (traits and roles) and the ways deconstruction are presented, 3) identifying, writing down, and selecting the relevant data based on the research questions, 4) classifying the relevant data based on the categories and sub categories, 5) analyzing and interpreting the data, 6) extracting data to make new alternative reading on Deconstruction and, 7) applying the measure of trustworthiness of the relevant data by triangulation.

## THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher finds that Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* that 1) there are unconventional images of children which have been deconstructed in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*; 2) there are seven ways of deconstruction used by Wilson. The unconventional images include unconventional traits and roles. The unconventional traits include caring, sensitive, unselfish, responsible, and independent. The unconventional roles are parenting, protecting one another, and doing household responsibility. The ways deconstruction which Wilson uses are creating complicated plot, using different point of view, employing sensitive issues, subverting adult/child image, subverting good/bad image, subverting male/female child image, and denying logocentrism.

### A. The Unconventional Images of children in Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*

The unconventional images of children found in the Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* are divided into two categories. The first category is the unconventional traits of children and the second category is the unconventional roles of children.

#### 1. Unconventional Traits of Children

There are five unconventional traits of children found in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*. There are five subcategories in this category; they are caring, sensitive, unselfish, responsible and independent.

#### a. Caring

Logocentrism believes that children are innocent human beings who do not care about other people's feeling. Wilson deconstructs that conventional image by creating caring child characters represented by Star and Dolphin. The datum below shows how caring the child characters are.

'God, look at my neck! It's getting all wrinkly,' she said. She touched the taut white skin worriedly **while we did our best to reassure her**. 'I look so *old*'  
'You're not old at all. You're young,' said Star (Wilson, 1999: 7).

The quotation above shows that Star and Dolphin as the child characters in the story are not innocent. They try their best to make her mother feel better.

#### b. Sensitive

Logocentrism believes that children are not sensitive. Sensitivity means the feeling of knowing what other people need. It can be said that being sensitive is being knowledgeable. Here, Wilson deconstructs that image by creating sensitive child characters who know what to do when they are facing a problem.

**I knew what to do. I knew it was the only thing to do.** But I felt I was betraying Marigold as **I stood in the phone box and dialed the three numbers.**

'Emergency?'

'Yes. **Yes, it is an emergency,**' I said. '**I think I need an ambulance.**'

I was so confused to someone else who started asking me questions.

'This person's covered in paint,' I said. 'I won't come off. No, it's not my little brother or sister. It's my mum. No, she can't come herself. She...she can't move. **She's sort of stuck. And she won't speak to me any more. I'm scared she maybe can't hear because the paint's in her ears and every where. We live at Flat B, 35 Beacon Road.** Please. Will you come?' (Wilson, 1999: 161)

From the datum above, it is seen that Dolphin is very sensitive to know what to do when her

mother is really in a bad condition. She calls an ambulance to ask for a help. To make it even better, she explains in detail Marigold's condition and what she has done before to help her. She also explains the address in detail. She could have done nothing if she was not sensitive enough. She could have asked her neighbor but she knows Mrs. Luft (her hateful neighbor) will not be helpful. It is clearly seen that Dolphin is sensitive enough to act in a quick way.

### c. Unselfish

Society believes that children are selfish human beings who always think only about themselves. Nevertheless, Wilson deconstruct that image by creating unselfish child characters represented by Star and Dolphin.

'What are you doing?' Star hissed. She hooked me into McDonald's **and sat me down at a table in the corner. She put her ice cream sundae in front of me.**

'It's yours,' she said. 'I'm over there with Mark, right?'

She ran back and snuggled up close to him. **She didn't have anything to eat for herself.** I stared down at the sundae. She'd ordered a butterscotch one too (Wilson, 1999: 82).

The datum above explains that she does not only take Dolphin with her to McDonald's, but she also gives her food while she has nothing to eat. She knows that her sister very rarely comes to this place and enjoys the food there. Therefore, she gives all the ice cream she gets from her friend to Dolphin and she even does not bother to think about herself.

### d. Responsible

Logocentrism believes that children are not responsible human beings. When they make a problem, they cannot solve it by themselves. When they are given a responsibility for something, they cannot take it well. Nevertheless, Wilson deconstructs the image by creating responsible child characters represented by Star and Dolphin.

'Star! You've been such a long time, sweetie!'

'Sorry. There were heaps of people. And I had to **walk back carefully** because I

**didn't want the cake to get bashed. I do hope you like it.** I didn't know whether to pick the fruit or the sponge. I got the sponge because it was cheaper—but maybe you like fruit more?' (Wilson, 1999: 12)

From the datum above, it is seen that Star is very responsible for take care of the birthday cake she has bought for her mother. She holds the responsibility to give her mother birthday cake in good condition.

### e. Independent

Society believes that children are not independent. They have to be accompanied by other adult figures when they go to some places. However, Wilson deconstructs the image by creating independent child characters.

I trudged on towards **Holybrook Primary. Nearly everyone got taken by their mothers, even the kids in Year Six. Marigold hardly ever took me to school.** Mostly she stayed in bed in the morning. **I didn't mind. It was easier that way.** I didn't like to think about the times when she *had* come to the school, when she'd gone right in and talked to the teachers (Wilson, 1999: 31).

The datum shows that Dolphin is still in a primary school. Usually, children get taken by their parents to school, especially primary students. In the sentences above, Dolphin also says that even year six students get taken by their parents, but she does not. Her mother never takes her to school since her mother still lingers on her bed in the morning. She walks to her school alone or accompanied by Star, her sister, without adult's guidance.

## 2. Unconventional Roles of Children

There are three unconventional roles of children found in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*. There are five subcategories in this category; they are parenting, protecting one another, and doing household responsibility.

### a. Parenting

In most conventional children's stories, parenting is done by adult characters.

However, in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*, parenting is done by child characters in the novel, especially Star. The datum above shows parenting role done by Star.

'You've been drinking,' Star said coldly, though Marigold's voice wasn't really slurred. **'Dol, you should go to bed.'** Marigold giggled. **'It's like you're the mummy,** Star. Should I go to bed too?' (Wilson, 1999: 45)

The datum shows how Star reminds Dolphin that it is bed time and she should go to bed. It is like the parents who ask their children to go to bed in order not to be late for school tomorrow. This datum indicates as if Star was the mum, just like Marigold says in the bold sentence above. Reminding bed time is one of parenting role which is supposed to be done by Marigold, the mother figure in this story, not Star, Dolphin's sister.

#### b. Protecting One Another

Children need protection, and they usually get it from adults, especially their parents. Nevertheless, in this novel, the ones who provide protection both for child characters or mother character in the story is child characters represented by Star and Dolphin. They need to protect themselves and they need to protect their mother from society that always mocks their mother.

'Me too,' says Star. 'Good idea, eh? Right, you come and **wait for me outside school this afternoon, OK?**' 'OK,' I said. I did my best to smile (Wilson, 1999: 31).

The conversation above shows that Star wants to make sure Dolphin is safe after school time ends. The way she protects Dolphin is by asking her to wait for her until she comes and they can walk home or catch the bus together. It shows how she tries to give protection for her sister from physical harm.

The datum below shows how child characters try to protect their mother from society represented by their neighbor.

'I'm worried about being late home, Miss Hill.' She paused, her tongue feeling round her mouth like a goldfish in a bowl. 'Is everything all right at home?' she asked. 'Oh yes. Fine.' **'Your mother...?'** **'She's fine,'** I said, **my voice loud and cheery,** practically bursting into song (Wilson, 1999: 34).

The conversations above show that Star asks Dolphin not to tell anyone that Marigold has not yet come home. She asks her to act as normal as she can in order to avoid any questions related to her mother from teachers or friends. They need to do it because the society thinks their mother is crazy and an unhealthy mother. When Dolphin is asked by her teacher, she pretends that everything is well with a loud voice and cheerful tone.

#### c. Doing Household Responsibility

In the most conventional children's stories, the characters that do household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning the house, shopping, looking after the house, etc are adult characters. Yet, Wilson deconstructs the image by creating child characters that do those roles. The datum below shows how child characters do role of doing household responsibility.

'We have cornflakes. But there isn't any milk,' I said. **'I can go round to the corner shop,'** said Star. 'I think it opens early on Saturdays.' **'You can't go out and do the shopping,'** said Micky fondly.

**He looked as if he thought she was too little to shop. I wanted to tell him that Star had done the shopping ever since I could remember. She was much better at it than Marigold** (Wilson, 1999: 93).

Micky (Star's father) does not know that Star gets used to do shopping. He says that she cannot do the shopping and Micky's

statement indicates that children at Star age are not supposed to do shopping for the housekeeping stuffs. However, the evidence that Star performs roles as the one who manages the household activities is also affirmed by Dolphin who says that even Star is better than Marigold and she has done, it starts from she was little.

## B. The Ways of Deconstruction are Used in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*

The researcher found that there are seven ways of deconstruction that Wilson uses to deconstruct the conventional images of children and children's stories. They are: creating complicated plot, using different point of view, employing sensitive issues, subverting adult/child image, subverting good/bad image, subverting male/female image, and denying logocentrism.

### 1. Creating complicated plot

One element of plot is conflict. Mostly, in conventional children's stories, the conflict is only between person and person. Yet, Wilson deconstructs the image of conventional children's stories that are perceived as easy because they only present easy to detect plot by creating two complicated conflict. They are person against self and person against society conflict. This datum shows person against self conflict which is represented by Dolphin (the narrator). "I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to play in my own bedroom because it seemed **empty** without Star. **I felt empty, totally hollow**, as if all my insides had been sucked out of me (Wilson, 1999: 140)." It can be seen from the datum that Dolphin feels very empty without her sister, Star, she tries to bury her feeling because she knows none can understand how it feels to be left all alone by someone that is very close to her. Star is not only her sister, but her life companion, that is why when Star walks out of her life; there is a hollow in her heart.

This datum shows person against society conflict which is represented by Oliver's mother. "Oliver, what on earth's got into you? I've told you what **I think** about this **little weird girl and her bizarre family. Why you had to get mixed up with her I can't imagine** (Wilson, 1999: 171-2)." The word **little weird and bizarre family** uttered by Oliver's mother indicates society's influence

to her. She thinks that Marigold and Dolphin are weird people that need to be avoided. It seems, again, not fair for them because they are avoided only because of Marigold's condition and appearance, suffering from mental disorder and having so many tattoos. Oliver's mother asks him as well not to be friend with Dolphin only because of her bizarre family, bizarre in the society's perception.

### 2. Using different point of view

Usually, point of view which is used in most conventional children's stories is third point of view. However, in Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*, the point of view which is used is first point of view. Wilson uses it to make the readers know how exactly the children see or perceive something such as divorce, tattoo, mental illness, etc.

Well, I had to bribe him a little, inking a **Death by Harley skull and bike tattoo** on his forearm. It's the tighest tattoo in the book—million of guys all over the world flash identical biceps—but **Brian thought it dead original and seriously cool. Some other kids started clamouring me to tattoo them too** (Wilson, 1999: 128).

The datum highlights on the words **original and seriously cool** and **clamouring me to tattoo**. It is told that Dolphin at first inks Brian a tattoo and the result is that Brian, as another child character in the story, thinks the tattoo is cool. After that, other kids in the class room together ask Dolphin to ink them tattoo as well. It shows the enthusiasm of children about tattoo. Just like Oliver and Dolphin, they see it as a beautiful, creative and artistic thing. They are very honest as they do not take society's consideration about tattoo.

### 3. Employing sensitive issues

People believe that children's stories are far from sensitive issues. Yet, Wilson deconstructs that image by employing some sensitive issues inside her story such as divorce, mental illness, violence, poverty, etc. The datum below shows one example of sensitive issues inserted by Wilson. "**Marigold slapped me hard across the cheek**. I reeled back, catching my breath

(Wilson, 1999: 113).” Slapping someone’s cheek is one example of physical violence. Wilson shows that even parents sometimes can do physical abuse to their children when they are in bad mood, anger, or desperation.

#### 4. Subverting adult/child image

In most of the conventional children stories, the ones who are perfect, powerful, knowledgeable and active are adult characters. Everything that is related to the adults is perfect. They become the decision maker in which children should follow their command. The characters of children in most of the conventional children stories become “dead”. Nevertheless, in Wilson’s *The Illustrated Mum*, the child characters are the ones who take adult’s role, becoming active and knowledgeable. “Star was always the one who told Marigold what to do (Wilson, 1999: 14).” The datum shows that Star, as one of the children’s characters in the story, has an ability to give advice to one of the adult characters in the story, Marigold. It is in contrast to the adult character in the conventional children stories who always become the advice giver for the children character.

#### 5. Subverting good/bad image

Society believes that good children are the ones who always follow adult’s instructions. It means that they are obedient no matter what instruction they get. In the most conventional children’s stories, good children are the characters who are obedient. Children who dare to speak or give opinion to adult characters are considered as bad children. Yet, Wilson subverts that image by creating child characters who are critical since they dare to give opinion and dare to say that what adult characters do is wrong. The datum below shows that Star is very critical. “**Star was so critical nowadays she made Marigold nervous and twitchy**(Wilson, 1999: 59).” It shows that Star undergoes some changes from being uncritical to critical. She knows some bad and good things as she grows up and becomes someone better. That is why she knows what needs to be criticized from her mother’s behaviors.

#### 6. Subverting male/female image

Usually, the hero and the active character in the story are male child characters. Yet, Wilson subverts the image by creating female child characters as the heroine of the story. They are smart and independent. Independence is presented by Dolphin as one female child character in the story.

**‘I’m often out without an adult.’**

‘I’m not. In fact, don’t laugh, but this is the very first time.’

‘Now that *is* weird. **Well. Don’t worry. I’ll look after you.**’ (Wilson, 1999: 181)

The datum above shows that Dolphin often goes without adult figure and she promises to look after Oliver when they are in travel. Dolphin does not only show her independence by going around without adults, but also going to school without adult figure, especially mother figure.

#### 7. Denying logocentrism

The author of children’s stories often follow society’s perception about children images which are conventional. Those images are weak, dependent, selfish, irresponsible, innocent, etc. However, as a children’s story author, Wilson does not follow the mainstream. She denies the logocentrism about conventional children’s images. Thus, she proves it by creating unselfish child characters. ““You can have **the rest of my Mars if you like,**’ said Star, **thrusting the last piece of hers** in my hand (Wilson, 1999: 31).” It is proven that Star is not selfish. Logocentrism about children often sees them as the ones who do not want to share, especially food. Yet, from the above datum, it is clearly seen Star willingly shares the rest of the chocolate bar she has as she knows her sister wants it.

#### CONCLUSION

The researcher finds that Wilson’s *The Illustrated Mum* shows deconstruction on the conventional images of children and children’s stories. It offers a new way of reading, especially, reading children’s stories. The other thing that needs to be highlighted from this novel is that the reasons why children can act like that and why their traits are very “adult”. Children are forced to act like an adult and have adult traits such as

more sensitive, caring, responsible, independent, etc, because of external force.

The complex and hard condition where their mother is suffering from mental illness is one factor that forces them to switch the role to be the ones that are responsible for doing household activities, parenting, and protecting one another. That factor influences the traits as well. It seems that their traits discussed previously are “too mature” making them looked like adults. In addition, there are no relatives that can take care of Dolphin and Star while their mother suffers from that “bad condition”. If they have any relatives, they might be taken care well by them and they can enjoy their childhood time without bothering becoming the adult figures for her mother. If they have a normal mother, they will become and behave like children in general, children in their age, no cooking, shopping, picking up, and doing parenting responsibility.

The condition is in ones side not normal where the children have such “too mature” traits and “too extreme” role. Nevertheless, because of those external factors and complexity of life, they need to be “like that way” to survive without too many adults’ interference. Thus, the condition and the act become logical and acceptable. If there are some children in the real life are facing to those hard and complex conditions, they can behave, act and feel like Dolphin and Star.

Therefore, by reading *The Illustrated Mum*, readers, especially children and young readers can be more active and critical in reading any text. They are expected to be able to see stories from different perspective and re-think the society’s perception, logocentrism, and fixed “truth” which have spread in their life because they can be possibly not always true. By critically thinking and seeing something from another perspective, readers will not easily label and judge something or someone only from what logocentrism and society say. Children are expected to understand there are two sides of a thing. Children can be bad, but they can be possibly good, too. Adults can be good as they are more experienced than children, but they can have flaws, too. Children need to understand that there is no absolute truth, especially in labeling certain thing or someone.

This novel offers deconstructed form of children’s stories, but people cannot deny that on the other side, it offers also a new way of seeing. Thus, in reading deconstructed children stories

like *The Illustrated Mum*, children need a guide from adults because they are still in the process of learning and collecting new knowledge. That is why adults need to have a new way of reading by understanding deconstructing text for children. Adults are expected to guide them in understanding better about sensitive issues, the way children characters in the story see something, etc, as this novel is marketed worldwide for child and young readers. \

Adults in this context are parents. The parents need to certain roles when children reading stories which insert sensitive issues such as *The Illustrated Mum*. Parents need to be the one who give them trust and wings. They need to trust to their children to read this kind of stories, but they also need to guide them. The way they guide them is first to select the stories with good and smooth language. It means that before giving it to children, they need to read or have knowledge about the story they choose. Another way is to help them in understanding some sensitive terms and their meanings such as mental illness (bipolar, dyslexia), divorce, bullying, etc.

Parents also need to give them “wings” in thinking and exploring one genre in children’s literature which is realistic. Letting them reading and enjoying the realistic stories with sensitive issue is one way of trusting them. Asking what they think about a certain condition faced by one character in a story can be one example of giving them “wings”. By doing those ways, children will not have misleading perception when reading stories with sensitive issues. The last and more important is that parents will not feel worry when their children read a story with sensitive issues.

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