



International Journal of Humanity Studies
<https://ejournal.usd.ac.id/index.php/IJHS>
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

THE ABSURDITY OF BUDI DARMA AS A STRATEGY FOR MANAGING CONSENSUS IN THREE SHORT STORIES FROM *ORANG-ORANG BLOOMINGTON*: A RANCIÈRIAN ANALYSIS

Aisyah Akhlaqul Karimah^{1*}, Aprinus Salam¹,
Muhammad Ra'is Zhaliifunnas²

¹Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Ahmad Dahlan University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

* Correspondence: aisyahakhlaqulkarimah@mail.ugm.ac.id

<https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v10i1.138>

Received 9 December 2025; Revised 24 August 2026

Accepted 9 September 2026; Published 29 September 2026

Abstract

The creation of absurd characters who behave or react in ways that deviate from social norms was one of the reasons Budi Darma became well-known. These characters fall outside societal consensus and are labelled *wrong* in the social order. This study argues that the protagonists in the three short stories from *Orang-Orang Bloomington* are Budi Darma's means to explore or negotiate such consensuses. Using a descriptive-qualitative method and Jacques Rancière's notion of *the wrong* meaning elements regarded as outside the social order, this study examines how these characters use certain strategies to manage consensus. It finds that the stories consistently portray complex social dynamics. The absurdity and intellectual disparity among the main characters in "Joshua Karabish" show how creativity can be abused in the absence of ethics. In "Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama", ridiculous behavior challenges social norms and causes disagreement. Ultimately, "Yorrick"'s ridiculous actions encourage emotional dependence, which results in character comprehension and emotional agreement. Overall, these tales demonstrate the complexity of social interactions through Rancière's perspective, highlighting inequality, disagreement, and the possibility of reaching a consensus in daily life.

Keywords: absurdity, Budi Darma, consensus, *Orang-Orang Bloomington*, Rancière.

Introduction

Budi Darma is one of the important milestones in the development of Indonesian prose. He was a renewer of Indonesian literature for introducing innovations in narrative technique and content. Budi Darma was credited with "introducing a new style" to short story writing in Indonesia in the 1970s. He himself stated that the fictional world presented in his short stories is one that is inverted. Therefore, it is believed that along with this change, the fictional world presented by Budi Darma often features strange, peculiar, and extraordinary elements in short stories, things that are illogical (Abdullah & Robi, 2025). Budi Darma's short stories are also said to be typically harsh and cold, as if completely indifferent to the social ethics of society (Asri, 2024). Works such as *Olenka* and



This work is licensed under CC BY-SA.

[Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Orang-Orang Bloomington earned him the Jakarta Arts Council Literary Award, the ASEAN Literary Award, and the SEA Write Award, and are regarded as pioneering what Indonesian critics call an "upside-down world" (*dunia jungkir balik*), in which social hierarchies and standards of reasonableness are deliberately inverted (Hanif, 2020). This can be described as an absurd representation involving names, actions, events, and places.

Etymologically, the word "absurd" comes from the Latin word *absurdus*, which consists of *ab* meaning "not" and *surdus* meaning "hearing" (Putra, 2020). Its literal meaning is "unpleasant to hear," "deaf," and "unfeeling." The word absurd is also often interpreted as "illogical" or "unreasonable" (Sharma, 2024). It refers to experiences that are baseless, contingent, or excessive in relation to fundamental aspects of the "human condition" that appear as if open to rational justification (Sherman, 2007), and are contrary to actual reality (Fox, 2019). Furthermore, Albert Camus elaborated on this absurdity in his famous essay "Le Mythe de Sisyphe," written in 1942. In his essay, Camus attempts to explain the absurd and provide understanding through various examples of absurd things. "That is absurd" refers to something impossible or contradictory, arising from the imbalance between a person's intention and the reality they face, particularly when their actual strength contradicts their intended goal (Camus, 1999, p. 47).

Among the fictional characters in *Orang-Orang Bloomington*, there are several peculiar characters, such as the narrator "I" and Joshua's parents in the short story subsection "Joshua Karabish." These characters are deemed peculiar due to their behavior. The narrator's act of allegedly stealing a work and then confidently submitting that "stolen work" to a competition is an unusual event. Strangely, Joshua's parents, who are the original owners of the work, indirectly encourage the narrator on the grounds that it is the result of the narrator's hard work for participating in the competition. Typically, a conventional subject would uphold existing social norms within societal order. For example, one would feel ashamed to "steal a work," let alone profit from it.

If this issue is examined within the framework of absurdity, the connection between the narrator "I" and absurdism lies in the moment they submit another person's work. By doing so, they violate the principle of originality by stealing someone else's work. In the case of the narrator as a subject, they fall outside societal order because they do not meet or possess the traditional qualifications that are always referenced within social structures. Rancière refers to such "people who are not counted" as 'the wrong.'

The Wrong is defined as those who exist outside the social order. Rancière questions the paradigm that divides the social order based on place, function, talent, lineage, and expertise as fundamental qualifications (Hebblewhite, 2021). Confronted with this condition, within the social order there are individuals who do not possess and do not meet those qualifications (Derickson, 2017). The absence of qualifications results in their existence becoming threatened. This is related to the concept of police, which governs the distribution of the sensible, dividing society into groups, positions, and social functions. Thus, a space of separation exists between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible (Rancière, 2013).

Within the context of society, qualifications or partitions often form through a process of consensus involving the participation and collective agreement of community members (Foroughi et al., 2023). The following are several ways in

which qualifications or partitions can form through consensus within a community environment. First, society can form qualifications or partitions by involving its members in discussion and deliberation. This process can involve communal meetings, forums, or discussion groups where people can express their views, listen to others, and attempt to reach a mutual agreement. Second, some traditional societies or community groups may have a tradition of deliberation as the primary way to achieve consensus. In the deliberation process, community members gather to discuss important issues, and decisions are made by achieving collective agreement.

Third, qualifications or partitions can be formed through public participation in decision-making. This process can include voting, conducting polls, or other mechanisms to gauge majority views and achieve consensus. Fourth, in communities that adopt democratic principles, institutions such as village councils, youth groups, or community organizations can establish qualifications or partitions through election processes or decision-making involving broad participation from community members. Fifth, consensus within a community can also be formed through a commitment to shared values. If a community holds values that are collectively cherished, these can form the basis for consensus in establishing qualifications or partitions related to those values.

Consensus is closely linked to social structure because consensus reflects the level of agreement or shared approval within a society (Sarmast, 2025). In any society, there exists a social structure that has formed. Social structure can be seen as a contested process that is considered to have undergone democratic procedures; the result of this democratic process is what is called consensus. A consensus only becomes a consensus when it legitimizes its authority within a specific power system. Otherwise, an agreement is not truly an agreement, because if it undermines power, then no agreement exists (Salam, 2020).

Consensus means an agreement that has gained legitimacy (Haack et al., 2020). It is the segments of society taken into account and with whom agreements are made that then form the dominant structure. Social order is a concept that plays an important role in the structure of society, as noted by Grothe-Hammer and Berkowitz (2024). Social order is something that is realized, perceived, and internalized by individuals in society (Srblijinović & Božić, 2017). Social structure and order are largely unwritten, such as norms, customs, and etiquette. All of these are recorded and structured within the knowledge and consciousness of society, which is typically passed down from generation to generation (Salam, 2020).

Thus, the qualifications or partitions formed through consensus can vary depending on the cultural, social, and political context of that society. Moreover, consensus does not always mean that all members of society hold identical views; often, it reflects a shared agreement or compromise acceptable to the majority. From the above exposition, the research question that arises in this study is: "How do the absurd characters in Budi Darma's short story collection *Orang-Orang Bloomington* manage consensus?" This research aims to understand the methods used by the absurd characters in Budi Darma's short story collection *Orang-Orang Bloomington* as strategies for managing consensus.

Previous research conducted by Arifin (2016) posits that ideology and the critique of absurdity through literary works offer nothing, as long as the absurdity and critique are realized merely through symbolization, without authentic action.

Miller's (2017) research argues that the first part of the essay discusses a series of recent comics that offer behind-the-scenes stories of political campaigns in France, where the promised "reality" turns out to consist of permanent falsification and consensus adjustment, a process depicted uncritically, even admiringly. It then briefly draws on several examples of caricature in comic book format, along with examples of parody, to seek a more polemical stance. The final part of the essay argues that an album by Étienne Davodeau exemplifies art as dissensus. As for the study on *Orang-Orang Bloomington*, it uses a structural analysis by Alviani Permata (2013), Muhsyanur (2019), Nafisah (2024), and Ramadhanti et al. (2024). By analyzing the episodes in the short story, the study identifies a structure of character encounters that reveals the process of the characters living together after being separated for a long time. Meanwhile, the structure of internal conflict demonstrates an individual's inner struggle concerning the suffering, dark side, and weaknesses they experience. Ultimately, the study portrays a man's anxiety about his identity, his search for identity, and his relationships with others.

Based on the relevant studies discussed above, no study has analyzed *Orang-Orang Bloomington* using Rancière's framework of consensus. Although several studies examine Budi Darma's works, they focus on different titles and analytical objects. Thus, the research gap is methodological rather than merely thematic: Arifin (2016) examines the limitations of symbolic critique without authentic action; Miller (2017) explores how visual polemics destabilize consensus narratives in a different medium. Permata (2013), Muhsyanur (2019), Nafisah (2024), and Ramadhanti et al. (2024) examine the structural dimensions of *Orang-Orang Bloomington*. None, however, applies Rancière's concepts of *the wrong*, *partage du sensible*, consensus, and dissensus to examine how absurd characters manage consensus as a political-aesthetic mechanism within the narrative structure. This methodological gap constitutes the novelty and contribution of the present study. These previous studies therefore serve as relevant references and points of departure rather than an exhaustive representation of scholarship on Budi Darma.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The material object of the study is Budi Darma's short story collection *Orang-Orang Bloomington*. Of the seven short stories included in the collection, the analysis focuses on three stories: "Joshua Karabish," "Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama," and "Yorrick." The study is grounded in the thought of Jacques Rancière. The research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues among characters in the three short stories that are relevant to the research problem. The primary data source comprises the texts of the three selected short stories, while secondary data consist of books, scholarly articles, and other relevant sources used to enrich and sharpen the analysis. Data were collected using the *simak* method, which involves a close and careful examination of significant linguistic units in literary texts based on the theoretical concepts employed (Faruk, 2020). The collected data were subsequently selected according to their relevance to the research problem and the theoretical framework. Through the processes of close reading and selection, the data could be supplemented, reduced, or excluded based on their relevance to the analysis.

The data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively by operationalizing three of Rancière's concepts into concrete analytical categories. First, *the wrong*

was employed to identify characters' positions or actions that reveal tensions with the qualifications, divisions, or forms of recognition established by the social order within the narrative. Second, *partage du sensible* (the distribution of the sensible) was used to examine how each short story distributes visibility, voice, and legitimacy among its characters, including who is recognized as a subject whose speech carries meaning and who is positioned as unseen or unheard. Third, the concepts of *consensus* and *dissensus* were employed to analyze how characters' actions and relationships maintain, negotiate, or disrupt the established order within the community. These three analytical categories were subsequently interpreted to explain how absurd actions in the three short stories function in the formation, maintenance, and disruption of social consensus.

Findings and Discussion

Absurd as a strategy of dissensus in "Joshua Karabish"

The short story follows the protagonist "I," who enters a poetry contest using Joshua's work and unexpectedly wins third prize. Because the poem is not his own, he becomes anxious, fearing that he might contract Joshua's illness. To alleviate this anxiety, he sends the prize money to Joshua's mother and Mrs. Seifert to settle Joshua's debts. However, both refuse the money, claiming that the prize resulted from the protagonist "I"'s hard work. Consequently, the prize money is returned to him, despite the winning poem being Joshua Karabish's work. The protagonist "I," Joshua's mother, and Mrs. Seifert thus represent absurd individuals, as absurdism often produces irrational subjects whose actions challenge rational expectations:

"Let my instincts torment themselves, but I must not deliberately inflict torment upon myself. Whatever the case, someone must take responsibility for those poems. Since Joshua refuses to be accountable, then let me shoulder that responsibility. Even if Joshua's mother or anyone else eventually discovers that Joshua is the poet, I will strive with all my might to prove that assumption wrong." (Darma, 2016, p.41-42).

The protagonist "I" acts absurdly by knowingly submitting Joshua's work as his own and fabricating justifications to legitimize his actions, thereby violating the established social and ethical consensus that recognizes intellectual property and authorship. This consensus, reflected in the creative community and broader society, emphasizes respecting and valuing others' work (Ishiguro & Okada, 2020). The protagonist's anxiety before submitting Joshua's work further demonstrates his awareness that his actions are wrong. His absurd behavior parallels that of Joshua's mother, whose actions also challenge the prevailing ethical and social consensus:

"With many thanks, Joshua's mother returned the check. I know that Joshua likes writing poetry, but I also know that he is just a fool, unlike his older sister Cathy, who has been able to stand on her own since finishing junior high school and has been able to help me after graduating from high school". (Darma, 2016, p.43).

The act of Joshua's mother returning the check containing the prize money from the character "I" is absurd. This is because it is as if Joshua's mother justifies the character "I"'s actions under the pretext that it was all the result of the character "I"'s hard work. Rancière's analysis can be applied to this short story to discuss the distribution of intelligence or artistic capability among the characters. Rancière proposes the concept of "intellectual inequality," which emphasizes that intelligence is not always centralized within an intellectual elite but can be distributed throughout society. In the context of this short story, intellectual inequality is reflected in the differing judgments of the poetic work between the character "I" and Joshua Karabish.

Character "I" commits an absurd act by claiming Joshua's work as his own, submitting it to a competition, and even daring to send the prize money to Joshua's family. This reflects intellectual inequality, where the character 'I' attempts to appropriate and enjoy the fruits of Joshua's creativity without acknowledging the true contributor. The "character's" motive in plagiarizing Joshua's work may not be solely due to 'disrespect,' but could also involve other considerations, such as a drive for recognition or personal gain. Disrespecting someone's work can result from various factors, including a lack of appreciation for others' creativity or even an intent to usurp the recognition and accolades rightfully due to the original creator. By further exploring this motive, we can delve deeper into the conflict of intellectual inequality explained by Rancière's theory, where boundaries prevent individuals from engaging in intellectual activities without due recognition.

Beyond the stolen poem, the characters' interiority reveals the stakes of the dissensus. The protagonist "I" is driven not merely by envy but by fragile self-regard; appropriating Joshua's poem exposes his creative inadequacy, while his anxiety reflects an unresolved moral consciousness. His failure lies not in the absence of guilt but in his inability to transform it into genuine restitution, substituting acknowledgment of authorship with the symbolic act of returning the prize money. Joshua is marginalized by illness, which excludes him from the poetry contest and limits recognition of his work, creating conditions for its appropriation. Joshua's mother and Mrs. Seifert further reinforce this marginalization by regarding him as incapable, while their refusal of the prize reproduces rather than challenges the hierarchy of worth underlying the conflict. Thus, through desire, motivation, and vulnerability, the dissensus demonstrates that Rancière's concept of the wrong emerges not only from ideological structures but also from everyday interpersonal judgments and calculations.

Management of consensus in this short story can also be examined through Rancière's concept of *partage du sensible* (the distribution of the sensible), which explains how the division between the visible and invisible shapes social and aesthetic orders (Wiyanto, 2023). In the story, consensus emerges through the appreciation of creative work and respect for intellectual property. However, the "I" character and Joshua's mother construct a false consensus that excludes Joshua from ownership and recognition of his work. By rejecting the prize, returning the check, and sustaining the claim that the "I" character deserves it, they construct an alternative reality that reinforces an unjust intellectual hierarchy (Kuusela & Hietamäki, 2025). Joshua's intelligence and authorship are consequently disregarded to preserve this inequality.

Dissensus emerges through the characters' absurd actions. The "I" character claims Joshua's poem as his own and submits it to a competition, violating intellectual-property rights and undermining the creative community's commitment to originality. Joshua's mother intensifies this dissensus by refusing the prize on the grounds that it resulted from the "I" character's efforts, thereby legitimizing the unethical act while denying Joshua proper recognition. Similarly, the "I" character's decision to send the prize money to Joshua's family constitutes a political act that generates further dissensus, as accepting the money would validate his illegitimate claim to Joshua's work. Conversely, Joshua's mother's rejection of the check challenges this claim and asserts a conflicting position within the distribution of rights and recognition.

Through Rancière's framework, the characters' absurd actions can therefore be understood as mechanisms for producing dissensus while managing consensus in ways that harm intellectual rights, preserve an unjust status quo, and undermine the norms of the creative community. The story thus implicitly reveals a tension between intellectual inequality and the distribution of the sensible, as consensus is manipulated to sustain a social and intellectual order detrimental to Joshua Karabish.

Crisis of norms in "Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama"

This short story begins its discussion by introducing Mrs. Nolan, a widow living on Fess Street. A young Bloomington student, the tenant of Mrs. MacMillan's attic room, becomes the focus when he grows curious about the old man who is also an attic dweller, Mr. Casper. This old man frequently performs strange actions by pointing a gun without firing it, claiming to be a surviving World War II soldier. Each day, the young man observes the old man's behavior in the attic, creating a mysterious atmosphere. Although curious, the young man never sees the old man leave the attic. Tension escalates when the old man threatens people on the street and Mrs. Casper, even expressing a desire to kill her. Mrs. Casper flees, and the sound of a gunshot startles him; it turns out Mrs. Nolan has shot the old man.

The ambiguity surrounding the old man's identity remains unresolved, leaving the young man with unanswered questions. In this context, the actions of absurdity are reflected through the behavior of Mrs. Nolan and the unnamed old man. A quote from the short story indicates that Mrs. Nolan is considered to act harshly and perform uncommon actions by "pummeling her husband." The "absurd" action is interpreted as behavior that appears strange and irrational, as in this case. Mrs. Nolan deviates from societal norms concerning marriage, and her actions are deemed inconsistent with general expectations. This creates a contrast between the characters' behavior in the short story and the prevailing norms in society. The following is a quote that proves the absurd behavior of the character.

"According to him, Mrs. Nolan became a widow due to her own rough temperament. When Mrs. Nolan was young and newly married, her husband was often assaulted". (Darma, 2016, p.11).

"Absurd" refers to actions that appear unreasonable, strange, or inconsistent with generally accepted social norms (Gunjan, 2024). In the quotation above, the diction "assaulting the husband" represents an uncommon act that distances Mrs. Nolan from prevailing marital norms, which emphasize affection, mutual support,

family responsibility, and the family as a fundamental social unit. In Budi Darma's "Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama" (The Nameless Old Man), Rancière's framework can be applied to examine power distribution and intellectual inequality among the characters. The nameless old man embodies intellectual inequality through his absurd behavior; threatening others and pointing his gun without firing creates uncertainty and curiosity in the young man, producing a disparity between their respective knowledge. Similarly, Mrs. Nolan's harsh act, considered the cause of her husband's death, deviates from prevailing marital norms and generates an absurdity that challenges social consensus.

This tension can be understood through Rancière's concept of *partage du sensible*, which concerns how social norms, values, and positions are organized and perceived within society (Aprilianto, 2025). While consensus reflects norms and values generally recognized by society, the absurd actions of the old man and Mrs. Nolan produce dissensus by disrupting those established norms. Thus, their actions reveal how consensus and dissensus operate through the unequal distribution of knowledge, perception, and social positions.

A fuller characterization explains why these actions appear absurd rather than merely eccentric. "Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama" seeks to maintain relevance and authority through an unverifiable soldier identity, while his repeated pointing of an unloaded gun becomes a theatrical assertion of authority that collapses when his threat against Mrs. Casper exceeds the community's tolerance. His vulnerability stems from dependence on others' belief in an unsubstantiated past. Similarly, Mrs. Nolan seeks to preserve her reputation and autonomy within a marriage remembered as violent. Her alleged assault on her husband can be read as an assertion of agency against domestic powerlessness, yet once public, it is reduced to scandal and detached from any context of self-defense. These desires and vulnerabilities ground a Rancièrian reading of dissensus in both interiority and observable action.

The old man's absurdity emerges through his daily pacing, muttering, and rehearsing with an unloaded pistol until his performance becomes a genuine threat against Mrs. Casper. His theatrical weapon, unverifiable war narrative, and isolation expose the collapse of a performance that can no longer be sustained. The neighbors' fear generates dissensus by disrupting a social order that had tolerated his eccentricity as long as it posed no direct threat. Mrs. Nolan produces dissensus differently, accusations that she "pummeled" and "assaulted" her husband circulate as gossip until accepted as fact. Rather than investigating, the community constructs a narrative that condemns her while making her publicly visible as a widow. Thus, both characters destabilize existing consensus by disrupting social perception, recognition, and communal order, demonstrating that dissensus emerges not merely from individual difference but from actions that disturb how a community perceives and recognizes its members.

The behavior of the *Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama*, the Old Man, and Mrs. Nolan can be understood as political actions involving consensus management. The Old Man's threats and disruptive behavior intervene in the existing social order by provoking disorder and uncertainty, prompting others to question the presumed safety and stability of their environment. Similarly, Mrs. Nolan's harsh conduct, possibly rooted in her past rudeness, can be read as an individual political act that challenges perceptions of her and her marriage and shifts the balance of power

within her social relationships. Both characters disrupt the existing order by intervening in the distribution of visibility and legitimacy and challenging accepted behavioral norms, thereby unsettling the prevailing social equilibrium.

These absurd and dissensual actions consequently transform the prevailing social consensus by generating uncertainty, doubt, and division within the community. The Old Man's threat to Mrs. Casper and his admission of wanting to kill her produce chaos and disrupt the established social consensus, while Mrs. Nolan's alleged act of "battering her husband" violates accepted norms within the institution of marriage and separates her from the prevailing consensus. Through Rancière's perspective, the short story thus illustrates intellectual inequality, absurdity, and consensus management as forces that reshape social relations and dynamics among the characters.

Social order and chaos: The contrast between order and absurdity in "Yorrick" s

The character "I" saw a beautiful girl. It turned out the girl was named Catherine, who was renting a room at the Harrison family's house. Secretly, the character I fell in love with her. One day, a young man named Yorrick arrived and rented a room at Mrs. Ellison's house. The character "I" then decided to move there as well. Because of this, the character I and Yorrick began to meet frequently, living under the same roof.

Yorrick's personality and that of the character I were very different. The character I was orderly, neat, and clean, while Yorrick showed himself to be messy and disorganized. Yorrick's absurdity was reflected in his frequent forgetfulness or repeated failure to act appropriately, such as often forgetting to put dirty clothes in the bathroom and forgetting to flush after using the toilet. This was especially notable given that they were living under the same roof. As illustrated in the following excerpt:

"He often forgets to put his dirty clothes in the bathroom. He often forgets to take out his towel and soap. He often forgets to turn off the bathroom sink faucet. He often forgets to flush after urinating. He often forgets to hang up the phone. And then, one day, he complained about not having a refrigerator. Later, he asked for permission to store his food in my refrigerator, saying that if necessary, he wouldn't mind paying rent for using it. Actually, I objected, but for some reason, I said I didn't mind and told him he didn't need to pay rent." (Darma, 2016).

The actions of the character Yorrick often forgetting to place dirty clothes in the bathroom and neglecting to flush after urinating while sharing living space with others can be considered impolite and inattentive to norms of cleanliness and etiquette. Although these might seem like minor issues, such behavior can cause discomfort or dissatisfaction among those sharing the space. Actions that do not align with generally accepted social norms can be described as absurd.

The consensus in the excerpt is that when the character "I" finally permits Yorrick to use the refrigerator, despite the character "I" actually objecting due to Yorrick's slovenly habits, which sharply contrast with the character "I's" own preference for cleanliness and order, it reflects a general tendency in society or

certain groups to support or grant permission when someone requires assistance or approval. This highlights values such as empathy, consideration, and cooperation among people.

"My efforts to coincidentally run into him again always failed. After going through several processes, including pretending to have no appetite because I was thinking of him, pretending to dislike sleeping because I was thinking of him, and pretending to dislike working because I was thinking of him, I ended up truly having no appetite, truly struggling to sleep, and truly failing to concentrate while working. At first, I deliberately daydreamed about him, but eventually, I often daydreamed without realizing it. I woke up from sleep thinking of him, I couldn't eat because I wanted to eat with him, I became reluctant to work because my mind was consumed by him, and I struggled to sleep because my head was exhausted from thinking of him." (Darma, 2016, p.92).

The absurdity of "I" becomes evident when he develops an interest in Catherine and begins behaving unlike his usual self. His admission that he pretends to enjoy working because he is thinking of her reveals a mismatch between his outward behavior and genuine feelings, as he attempts to impress her. Although such behavior is commonly associated with being in love and thus falls outside ordinary consensus, it also reflects the intense emotional connection and dependence typically associated with love.

These surface traits reveal two deeper motivations. "I"'s desire for order reflects a broader need for control, evident in his calculated self-management and strictness regarding the shared apartment. However, this regulation is compulsive rather than strategic, as his objections to Yorrick's use of the refrigerator and his feigned indifference toward Catherine become contradictory. Yorrick, by contrast, disregards the domestic norms that "I" considers fundamental, as his failure to fulfill shared responsibilities suggests an unwillingness to recognize their collective function, while his casual request to use the refrigerator indicates mild opportunism. This contrast explains the absurdity of their eventual accommodation, rather than transforming their underlying dispositions, the resolution merely adjusts their external arrangement.

The protagonist's emotional dependence emerges when he falls in love, compelling him to continually seek reunion with "her." Through Rancière's claim that intelligence belongs to no particular group, the tension between order and disorder becomes more complex. The contrast between the meticulous "I" and forgetful Yorrick reflects not only differences in capacity but also "I"'s privileged position as the apartment's original tenant in defining competence in shared living. The refrigerator thus becomes a localized enactment of *partage du sensible*, through which "I" determines legitimate uses of shared space and initially frames Yorrick's request as an imposition. Its legitimacy emerges only when "I" reluctantly grants recognition. This apparent consensus remains problematic because its terms are unilaterally established by "I," revealing his authority to determine whose claims become intelligible and legitimate.

A similar tension appears in “I”’s infatuation with Catherine. His absurd behavior, marked by performed indifference that becomes indistinguishable from genuine deprivation, produces an apparent emotional consensus grounded in shared longing rather than explicit agreement. Yet this consensus remains asymmetrical because it is constructed primarily through “I”’s consciousness, while Catherine is denied comparable narrative interiority. If Rancière’s concept of consensus presupposes a shared distribution of voice and visibility, the relationship is fundamentally unequal, one party narrates the relationship into existence while the other remains largely unheard. Thus, both the refrigerator episode and “I”’s courtship of Catherine show that “Yorrick” does not simply illustrate Rancière’s categories; rather, it presents a limit case in which purported consensus may reproduce the very inequality Rancière seeks to interrogate, leaving the tension unresolved despite the seemingly harmonious conclusion.

By applying Rancière’s concepts, this short story provides insight into how inequality, absurd actions, and consensus management can influence the dynamics between characters. It reflects the complexity of social interactions and the effort to achieve mutual understanding in the face of differing values and norms.

Conclusion

The three short stories demonstrate that Budi Darma’s absurd characters are not merely eccentric figures but agents of distinct strategies of consensus management, each negotiating “the wrong” through different social stakes, intellectual ownership, communal security and reputation, or emotional recognition. In “Joshua Karabish,” the character “I” produces dissensus by falsely claiming Joshua’s poetry, revealing an unethical attempt to appropriate another’s creativity and establish intellectual superiority. In “Laki-Laki Tua Tanpa Nama,” the old man’s bizarre conduct, particularly his pointing a gun without firing, destabilizes communal expectations and exposes the fragility of social consensus. By contrast, “Yorrick” presents absurdity as a mechanism through which emotional dependency produces mutual recognition and apparent consensus, although this consensus remains structurally unequal because the narrative is largely confined to “I” perspective.

These findings extend Rancière’s concepts of “the wrong,” *partage du sensible*, and consensus and dissensus into Indonesian short fiction, particularly by demonstrating their relevance to everyday and interpersonal forms of exclusion beyond explicitly political contexts. The stories show that dissensus may emerge through intellectual appropriation, social disruption, or emotional asymmetry, while consensus can function either as negotiated recognition or as an apparently harmonious condition that conceals unequal participation. The “Yorrick” case therefore further complicates Rancière’s framework by suggesting that consensus should not automatically be equated with equality. Literary consensus may itself reproduce asymmetries of voice and consequently requires critical scrutiny.

Generative AI Statement

The authors declare that they used QuillBot to paraphrase certain parts of the text and Grammarly to check grammar or to use an AI detector. Results of generative AI have been curated and edited by the authors.

Acknowledgment

Aisyah Akhlaqul K. contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, interpretation of findings, and writing of the manuscript; Prof. Aprinus Salam contributed to the conceptualization, academic supervision, critical review, and guidance throughout the research and manuscript preparation; and Muhammad Ra'is Zhaliifunnas contributed to the conceptualization, translation, language editing, and writing of the manuscript. This research received no specific funding from any public, commercial, or non-profit funding agency. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

- Abdullah, R. R. D., & Robi, N. (2025). Hasrat dan aksioma dalam cerpen-cerpen Budi Darma: Analisis Deleuzian tentang subjektivitas. *Madah: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 16(1), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.31503/madah.v16i1.885>
- Miller, A. (2017). Consensus and dissensus in “Bande Dessinée.” *Yale French Studies*, (131/132), 109–137. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44512309>
- Aprilianto, T. (2025). Konsep emansipasi pada estetika politik Jacques Rancière. *Acintya: Jurnal Teologi, Filsafat dan Studi Agama*, 1(2), 205–220. <https://e-journal.samsarainstitute.com/jtfsa/article/view/107>
- Arifin, M. Z. (2016). Membaca sinisme seorang absurd dalam novel Orang Asing karya Albert Camus: Perspektif subjek Imanen Slavoj Žižek. *Jurnal Bebasan* 3(1), 41–55. <https://jurnal.ppjb-sip.org/bebasan/article/view/2199/>
- Asri, Z. (2024). The power regulation system in Budi Darma's short story Presiden Jebule. *Culturalistics: Journal of Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Studies*, 8(2), 26–33. <https://doi.org/10.14710/ca.v8i2.25142>
- Camus, A. 1999. *Mite Sisifus: Pergulatan dengan absurditas* (A. Djokosujanto, Trans.). Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Darma, B. (2016). *Orang-orang Bloomington*. Noura Books.
- Derickson, K. D. (2017). Taking account of the ‘part of those that have no part’. *Urban Studies*, 54(1), 44–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016671474>
- Foroughi, M., De Andrade, B., Roders, A. P., & Wang, T. (2023). Public participation and consensus-building in urban planning from the lens of heritage planning: A systematic literature review. *Cities*, 135, Article 104235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104235>
- Fox, J. (2019). Absurd relations. *Human Affairs*, 29(4), 387–394. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2019-0033>
- Grothe-Hammer, M., & Berkowitz, H. (2024). Unpacking social order: Toward a novel framework that goes beyond organizations, institutions, and networks. *Critical Sociology*, 50(7-8), 1399–1420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241232411>
- Gunjan, K. (2024). Absurdism unveiled: The intersection of the absurd and modern realities. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*. 9(2), 180–188. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.92.26>
- Haack, P., Schilke, O., & Zucker, L. (2020). Legitimacy revisited: Disentangling propriety, validity, and consensus. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(3), 749–781. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12615>

- Hanif, M. N. (2020). Dekonstruksi struktur novel Olenka karya Budi Darma. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 8(1), 89–104. <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v8i1.56473>
- Hebblewhite, W. (2021). Jacques Rancière's account of justice. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 30(3), 1187–1197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12691>
- Ishiguro, C., & Okada, T. (2020). How does art viewing inspires creativity? *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 55(2), 489–500. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.469>
- Kuusela, A., & Hietamäki, S. (2025). Empty education: A dialogue of Nishitani and Rancière. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 59(3-4), 609–625. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopedu/qhaf007>
- Muhsyanur, M. (2019). Analysis of postmodernism in Orang-Orang Bloomington novel by Budi Darma. *Magistra Andalusia: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 1(2), 61–72. <https://magistraandalusia.fib.unand.ac.id/index.php/majis/article/view/61-72>
- Nafisah, Z. (2024). Kajian sosiologi sastra Ian Watt dalam buku karya Budi Darma Orang-orang Bloomington. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia (Senapastra)*, 2, 62–70. <https://ejournal.unhasy.ac.id/index.php/Senapastra/article/view/8338>
- Permata, A. (2013). Budi Darma's "Charles Lebourne" as representation of man's darkside and weakness of the innerside: A structural analysis. *Humaniora*, 25(3), 249–257. <https://journal.ugm.ac.id/jurnal-humaniora/article/view/3536>
- Putra, A. W. P. (2020). Autentitas manusia menurut Albert Camus. *Focus*, 1(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.26593/focus.v1i1.4085>
- Ramadhanti, N. V. N., Indriyani, J. G., & Atikurrahman, M. (2024). Personality of the character " I" in the short story" Orez" by Budi Dharma: Literary psychology study. *Prologue: Journal on Language and Literature*, 10(2), 307–315.
- Rancière, J. (2013). *The politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible*. Bloomsbury.
- Salam, A. (2020). *Sosiologi kehidupan: Fragmen-fragmen teoretik*. Gombang Buku Budaya.
- Sarmast, B. (2025). A paradigmatic reflection on the concept of social consensus. *Journal of Social-Political Studies of Iran's Culture and History*, 4(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jspsich.4.1.1>
- Sharma, A. (2024). Confronting the absurd: From Camus to Beckett: Exploring the struggle for meaning in existential works. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(3), 1065–1068. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i3.2024.3790>
- Sherman, D. (2007). Absurdity. In H. L. Dreyfus & M. A. Wrathall (Eds.), *A companion to phenomenology and existentialism* (pp. 271–279). Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996508.ch19>
- Srblijinović, A., & Božić, J. (2017). When order feels good. *Sociological Perspectives*, 60(2), 394–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121416633256>
- Wiyanto, H. (2023). Pemikiran Jacques Rancière untuk seni emansipatif Indonesia. *Jurnal Dekonstruksi*, 9(04), 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.54154/dekonstruksi.v9i04.196>