

PARANOIA AND AMBIGUITY IN *BEFORE I FALL* BY LAUREN OLIVER: POSTMODERNISM STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The concern of the study is the paranoia and ambiguity as a social phenomenon experienced by the main character in *Before I Fall* by Lauren Oliver. It intended to examine the author's narration and also the main character's utterances which are portraying as a paranoia and ambiguity condition and the main character's way to solve her problem of life.

This study applies qualitative research, because the data are in the form of words or sentences. It examines the characters utterances and author's narration from postmodernism approach concerning on Jean Francois Lyotard's postmodernism theory. In addition, data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing/verification are the techniques of analyzing the data.

The result of the study finds paranoia and ambiguity as the theme of postmodern literature in *Before I Fall* by Lauren Oliver which faced by the main character, Samantha Kingston. The study also finds the main character's way to solve her paranoia and ambiguity as her problem of life.

Keywords: Postmodern, Paranoia, Ambiguity, Social Phenomena.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a representation of life which exhibits some social phenomena in society. Tyson (2006, p.05) proposed that literature, conceived as a “laboratory” of human life, provides examples of human experience presumably common to all readers. Besides those situation, literature is the portrait of human’s thought to pour her or his creation toward literary works according their feeling and their experience. It expresses their creative thinking in order to attract other people or the reader to consume their works as entertainment even as a knowledge. One of the literary product is novel.

This study chooses Lauren Oliver’s *Before I Fall* as the source of data. Lauren Oliver is a 2012 E.B. White Read-Aloud Award nominee for her middle-grade novel *Liesl & Po*, as well as author of the middle-grade fantasy novel *The Spindlers*. She is also get Goodreads Choice Award for Best Young Adult Fiction. This research uses a theory of postmodernism which is established by Jean-Francois Lyotard. This theory concerns the signs of intellectual movement and it explains the social life, social phenomena including culture and history. Paranoia can be defined as the belief that there is something out of the ordinary. It also can be stated as feelings which refers to imagination of something unreal. Whereas an ambiguity can be described as a content of literary works of postmodern literature which has narratives that can disturb human mind set, or will make an ambiguous meaning.

Postmodern undercuts history, reality and truth. Peter Bary (2009) stated that postmodern deconstruct the basic aim of enlighten of modernism, the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject. Rather than agree with the narrative exemplifying the notion of disappearance of the real, postmodern foreground the concept of irony. Peter broken (in *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* by Peter Barry, 2009) stated whereas modernist tries to destroy the past, the postmodernist realises that the past must be revisited, but with ‘irony’. From the statement above it can be concluded that the postmodern represents the past that has been combined with irony.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research. The data of this study is character’s utterances and author’s narration. Besides, the source of the data is *Before I Fall* a contemporary novel written by Lauren Oliver which published on 2010. Here, the writer conducted some techniques of collecting the data. The first was reading *Before I Fall* novel by using close reading. The second was rereading the novel which was helpful to get the meaning and find the data. The last, collected the data, reduced and then classified according to the research problems. In analyzing data, the writer used data reduction, data displays, and conclusion or drawing/verification as the technique of analyzing data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. PARANOIA

Paranoia is a condition of massive, anxious over interpretation characterized by delusions of conspiracy. This situation sometimes can be called as mental disorder also. People who get a paranoia always try to conquer her or his self through a cruel war between the experiences which unsuitable trapped in their brain. Barker (2008:

24) describes the important problems experienced by modern humans. He stated that one aspect of modernism is the tendency to create bureaucracy in all aspects of life. Each individual is not intended to represent their own actualization, but rather as nobody (impersonal) and work professionally.

A. PARANOIA EXPERIENCED BY MAIN CHARACTER

In *Before I Fall* novel, paranoia was dominated on Samantha Kingston, the main character who depressed of her life. It begin after the day when she got a car accident and suddenly she wake up by nothing has been changed. Seems like the accident was a dream. She certain herself to make her sure of what was happening to her life is a real event.

a. Not A Dream

This novel has several chapters which started by showing a morning activity of Samantha Kingston on each. Her anxiety of what was happening in the previous time. She wondered on what was going on to her and thought over and over to seek the answer and it happened just like a dream.

“In my dream I know I am falling though there is no up or down, no walls or sides or ceilings, just the sensation of cold, and darkness everywhere. I am so scared I could scream, but when I open my mouth nothing happens, and I wonder if you fall forever and never touch down, is it really still falling? I think I will fall forever.”

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.59)

Samantha Kingston was shocked when she just woke up from her sleep. Eventually, what she wondered to herself be what she could not aware. She just remembered of her crash. The car accident last night was a big thing which suddenly disappear in the morning.

“What happened last night?” I say.
She frowns for a second. “Yeah, sorry about that. I couldn’t call back. I didn’t get off the phone with Patrick until, like, three A.M.”
“Call back?” I shake my head. “No, I meant-.”

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.61)

Again, Samantha Kingston seemed she must be crazy on what actually happened. She asked Lindsay, her best friend when she entered her room about what is happening last night. But what Lindsay explain could not answer her curiosity. Lindsay was there in a car accident also, but nothing happened to her, either Samantha.

I’m desperate to spill everything to Lindsay and Elody at that moment, to ask them what’s happening to me - to us - but I can’t think of any way to say it. We were in a car accident after a party that hasn’t happened yet. I thought I died yesterday. I thought I died tonight.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.62 and 63)

The quotation above shows that Samantha Kingston felt that everything which faced by her last night was only remembered by herself. None of her friends remember of that crash, even they act like these things were never happened to them.

Here's what I remember: I remember being in the car. I remember Elody and Ally fighting over the iPod. I remember the wild spinning of the wheel and seeing Lindsay's face as the car sailed toward the woods, her mouth open and her eyebrows raised in surprise, as though she'd just run into someone she know in an unexpected place. But after that? Nothing.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.96)

Yet, Samantha Kingston does not accept her memory about that crash. She got an anxious over interpretation of her experience that night. She tried to conquer herself through a cruel war between the experiences which unsuitable trapped in her brain. And what she got is still nothing.

b. An Undefined Death

In this *Before I Fall* novel, Lauren Oliver recounted that Samantha Kingston suffered a car accident with her friends which resulted in her feeling that it was her end of her life. The accident was not experienced once, but several times that made her paranoia became worst. The death experienced by Samantha Kingston was first happened when she came home from a party which held by Kent. After experiencing such a raging night, one of them when she and her friends worked Juliet out loud by saying that Juliet is a psycho. Coming back from the party, there was an accident that made the car they rode upside down.

Then all of a sudden there's a flash of white in front of the car. Lindsay yells something - words I can't make out, something like sit or shit or sight - suddenly the car is flipping off the road and into the black mouth of the woods. I hear a horrible, screeching sound - metal on metal, glass shattering, a car folding in two - and smell fire. I have time to wonder whether Lindsay had put out her cigarette -

And then - .

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.55)

This car accident was happened not only once. The next day, when the confusion experienced by Samantha began to feel. All the events that she felt had happened yesterday, as if repeated. However, it is only Samantha who has an awkwardness about this. Even other people around her seemed to not feel the weirdness. She began to feel strange and confused. That same night she had the same accident as the day before, which she had already felt.

If you don't breathe...

Then all of a sudden there's a flash of white in front of the car. Lindsay yells something - words I can't make out, something like *sit* or *shit* or *sight* - and suddenly -

Well.

You know what happens next.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.91)

The data above showed that Samantha Kingston, Lindsay, Ally and Elody were died in a car accident after they had a party in Kent's house. However, this accident was realized by the main character only. The rest of her friend didn't described that they did also. Sam was seriously confused knowing this awkward event. So, Samantha and her friend were passed away on that night, actually, however the next chapter told that they life again. This death made the main character confused and brought her into an imagination which out of ordinary.

2. AMBIGUITY EXPERIENCED BY MAIN CHARACTER

Jameson (1991) argues that one of the effects of human ambiguity events attempted to explain in literary works is "... *free-flowing and impersonal, no longer anchored to a stable, autonomous subjectivity*" (free to move and unaffected, no longer depending on the subject holding the control). Samantha Kingston is a teenager who lives side by side with the youthful popularity of youths. In this *Before I Fall* novel, Lauren Oliver describes the figure of Samantha Kingston as a student who has a passionate curiosity. In the course of his life, she displays the effect of ambiguity in the form of confusion in the face of strange phenomena that she experienced.

Samantha Kingston who was originally a girl with a cheerful and stylish character turned into a girl with a hard character complete with makeup in one day. And on different days she came back with a gentle character even softer than usual, until she finally died. The death experienced by the main character in this novel is not defined as sadness or grief to be cried, but her death makes Samantha Kingston being free of everything in her world. The character of Samantha Kingston became a free or moving figure and had no effect as well. She also has no effect on any system that controls it like the paranoia that she has experienced.

‘Are you ever serious?’ I say jokingly, but my whole body feels heavy with disappointment. She doesn't know. She doesn't understand. Whatever is happening, it is happening only to me. A feeling of complete aloneness overwhelms me, like a fog.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.77)

Here, Samantha Kingston brought the fact that *Before I Fall* contained story which ambiguous setting through her death. The accidents faced by the main character were the start of her journey to seeking the answer key. Not about the sadness or a tragic memory, but a deeper awareness to understanding the real thing which only happened to her life.

‘For a second when I look around the room everything seems fuzzy and slightly distorted, like I am not really looking at my room but only at a transparency of my room that's been laid down incorrectly so the corners don't match up with the real thing. Then the light shifts and everything looks normal again.

All at once it comes back to me, and blood starts pounding in my head: the party, Juliet Skyes, the argument with Kent - .

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.59)

The narration above was conveyed that the initial irritation experienced by Samantha Kingston was when she woke up in the morning. Everything she had experienced the night before seemed like a dream, but it was all the truth. Starting from her conversation with Kent, the party she had attended with her friends, Lindsay, Elody, and Ally. Even the treatment with them to Juliet still felt that it was not just a dream.

Then all of a sudden there's a flash of white in front of the car. Lindsay yells something - words I can't make out, something like *sit* or *shit* or *sight* - suddenly the car is flipping off the road and into the black mouth of the woods. I hear a horrible, screeching sound - metal on metal, glass shattering, a car folding in two - and smell fire. I have time to wonder whether Lindsay had put out her cigarette -

And then -

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.55)

The ambiguity experienced by Samantha didn't just happen once. She had woken up in the day and felt the same way several times. And it still could not answer all the questions she asked for life. Samantha Kingston felt that the life she is experiencing is an endless game. She tried to find the meaning every day. Nevertheless a satisfactory answer has not been found. It's as if nothing has changed and will never end in the way she likes.

For the most part, everyone in the cafeteria ignores her she's the definition of forgettable - but Lindsay, Ally, Elody, and I start making that screeching and stabbing motion from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which we all watched at a sleepover a couple of years ago.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.27)

That was a fact common knowledge in its school. People have assumed that Juliet Skyes was a strange figure. Here, Samantha Kingston dedicated herself to open up the hidden story behind her. All of the story of what she didn't know before. One after the other one already realized by her that many things blind her from the fact. What truly happened in her society was.

I'm wondering, vaguely, why Lindsay came all the way down here to write on the bathroom wall - why it was important to her, I mean. She'd already written it a dozen times in the stalls across from the cafeteria, and that's the bathroom everyone uses. I am not even sure why she dislikes Anna, and it reminds me that I still don't know when she started hating Juliet Skyes so much either. It's weird how much you can know about someone without knowing everything. You'd think someday you'd come to the end of it.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.68)

Once a time Samantha Kingston asked why Lindsay hated Juliet as if she were an unworthy creature. Feeling that Samantha and her friends were doing something

that should not be done, Samantha tried to reach something from a conversation with her group. Here she begun to put great suspicion of what Lindsay hid.

‘Why do you hate Juliet?’ I ask Lindsay. It’s strange to me that I’ve never thought of asking until recently. I always just accepted it. Elody snorts and almost coughs up her Diet Coke. ‘Are you serious?’ Lindsay’s clearly not prepared for the question. She open her mouth, closes it, and toses her hair and rolls her eyes like she can’t believe I’m asking. ‘I don’t hate her’.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.108)

The ambiguity experienced by Samantha Kingston led her to an astonishing fact. One of them was a dark story which has been a question mark. Lindsay. As if Lindsay did not expect Anna to be in her life. It also makes Samantha Kingston wonder why and since when Lindsay so disliked Juliet Skyes for no apparent reason. The inscriptions of insults and bullying on the wall of public bathroom written by Lindsay, is a form of hatred for Anna and Juliet Skyes. It was as if Lindsay wanted to show people that it was as bad as Anna and Juliet Skyes. The ambiguity made her realize that there has been a man who cares so much about her. Someone who dedicates himself to be a hero in her life when he was a child.

But I’ve never kissed you, he whispers back. Around us the rain sounds like falling glass. Not since third grade, anyway. I smile, but I’m not sure if he can see it. Better get started, then, I say, because I don’t have much time.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.327)

3. THE MAIN CHARACTER’S WAY TO SOLVE HER SOCIAL PHENOMENA’S PROBLEM

a. Fixed The Gap

Before I Fall appears one of social phenomena of teenagers nowadays, bullying. As one of the current issue which exist in school commonly. Here the writer also collect the information of bullying which happened to main character’s friend, Juliet Skyes. By facing the strange event which makes Samantha realize that a Juliet Skyes is facing the bullying from her closest friend, Lindsay. It made Juliet feel so under pressured and want to end her life. Therefore, Samantha try to help her in repairing the wrong thing which actually happened by her and her friends.

I leave the Rose Room feeling keyed up and energetic, like I’ve just had three mocha lattes from Caffeine Rush in the mall. I replaced Juliet’s single rose with an enermous bouquet - I shelled out forty bucks for two dozen - and a note printed in block letters says FROM YOUR SECRET ADMIRER. I only wish I could actually be around when she receives them. I’m positive it’s going to make her day.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.255)

The citation above show that Samantha Kingston begin to care of Juliet Skyes. She don’t want to see Juliet Skyes in blue circumstances over the time. Moreover,

Juliet is Lindsay's closet friend before. She want to help her in her way. Overcome the problem which she did not know before.

On the way to trace the awkwardness around her, Samantha Kingston tries to dive into the lives of some of her friends who she feels have life problems. Not only Juliet Skyes, apparently Samantha Kingston found out that one of her classmates who often looks aloof is Anna Cartullo.

She hops up on the counter and wiggles her feet in my direction. Unsurprisingly, she's not wearing anything Cupid Day - related. She has on a couple of layered black tank tops and open hoodie. Her jeans are fraying at the hem and have a safety pin through the fly where they're missing a button. She's wearing enormous wedge round-toe boots that kind of like Doc Martens on crack.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.155 and 156)

Anna Cartullo is one of the teenage girls who grew up with a lot of life pressure. One of them is feeling shunned by her school friends and she prefers to close herself to her social environment. Until one day when Samantha Kingston met her in a public cafeteria toilet, she found out she was smoking a marijuana in the form of a cigarette butt. Clearly the writings on the walls of the bathroom stating that Anna Cartullo was a lesbian. And she knows that this is all the work of Lindsay.

All these hateful writings are Lindsay's deeds that feel righteous and entitled to populism. In her conversation with Anna Cartullo, Samantha tries to uncover what is hidden from the feelings of Anna Cartullo, though a little naive even leads to a conversation of shoes that make Anna feel to have friends at that time. The two girls in the bathroom who had a complicated living polemic exchanged shoes on the basis of comfort.

One way done by Samantha Kingston in overcoming her paranoia and ambiguity by experiencing a person who has different characters in every day. In one day he behaved like a naughty girl who wore more open clothes and behaved like a cocky girl. Because it makes her friendship with Lindsay, Ally and Elody are ruined not for any other cause, however Samantha Kingston takes the liberty to unveil Lindsay's dark veil over her friends. It was undeniable which it angered Lindsay and told her to stay away. That day she came to Kent's party with boots from Anna Cartullo that she got from swapping in the bathroom and with her open and sexy outfits. She also ventured to have sex with Rob Cokran and did not care that Juliet Skyes was being bullied all-out in the party room.

‘Are you shure about this?’ Rob slurs in my ear.
‘Just kiss me.’ Psycho, Psycho. The voices are echoing down the hall. I slide my hands under Rob's fleece and wrestle it over his head, then start kissing his neck and underneath the collar of his polo shirt. His skin tastes like sweat and salt and cigarettes, but I keep kissing while his hands move over back and down toward my butt.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.186 and 187)

Not only in the school environment, Samantha Kingston also experienced the problem of harmony in kinship. Izzy, her sister is one of the characters that made her begin to realize, how wrong she had been in establishing relationships with her as a sister. The day she decided not to go to school and chose to walk in the forest with Izzy, Samantha got a hard slap to her heart.

I laugh. 'Yeah, I guess so.' We sit for a second in silence. 'Izzy?'
 'Yeah?'
 'Do - do the other kids ever make fun of you? For how you talk?'
 I feel her stiffen underneath her layers and layers. 'Sometimes.'
 'So why don't you do something about it?' I say. 'You could learn to talk differently, you know.'
 'But this is my voice.' She says it quietly but with insistence. 'How would you be able to tell when I was talking?'

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p. 204)

In her conversation in the forest, Samantha realized that, Izzy needed time with her as a sister who got along. Not like what she's been doing. Samantha is so cold in relationship with Izzy. There are so many opportunities Izzy should have received. Together with her sister learns new things, even trains her to say something properly. Because Izzy has a style that does not talk like a child in general.

Her mother also a character who being one of the key point in her effort to overcome her paranoia and ambiguity. In *Before I Fall*, Samantha Kingston portrayed as a daughter who don't have any good communication with her own mother. She decided to cross her own room which an ink line in order to make her mother not to pass that line. One of the proof that she dislike her personal life to be known with her mother.

And suddenly it had all snapped inside of me, and broken and snapped.
 'You care now,?' She jerked back at her sound of my voice like I'd reached out and slapped her. You want to help now? You want to protect me now?

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.136)

During the conversation which happened in that house, Samantha declared that she will go to school with that outfit. Her new styles even though her mother prohibited her. Samantha Kingston felt that her mother did not care about her, actually. All that things belongs to her life. Her mother try to make the situation become better by asking her husband to talk with Samantha. However, it's useless.

b. Convince herself through another character

In an attempt to solve the mystery that has been bothered her life, Samantha doing various ways to uncover it. One of them is by getting to know more closely with other characters around her and trying to open up and establish a deeper communication than before. Ken is one of the characters who actually put a sense of love to Samantha. However, Samantha did not know yet. Samantha's suspicion of Kent begins at a party invitation at Kent's house, and Samantha begins to meet important

points that will unlock secrets she has not known for a long time. One of them is that Kent loves Samantha sincerely.

‘Kent?’ I say, and my voice seems to have to rise from inside the fog, taking forever to get from my brain to my mouth.

‘Yeah?’

‘Promise you’ll stay here with me?’ I say. ‘I promise,’ he whispers.

And then, just at that moment, when I’m no longer sure if I’m dreaming or awake or walking some valley in between where everything you wish for comes true, I feel the flutter of his lips on mine, but it’s too late, I’m slipping. I’m gone, he’s gone, and the moment curls away and back on itself like a flower folding up for the night.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.244 and 245)

Samantha Kingston tried to convince her that everything she experienced was not a figment. She made sure that this was not her ambition that had kept her caught in a question mark. She asked Kent to stay by her side. But when she began to awake, everything went back to normal. Samantha Kingston wakes up in a recurring confusion.

Here’s another thing to remember: hope keeps you alive. Even when you’re dead, it’s the only thing that keeps you alive.

(Lauren Oliver, 2010. p.100)

This was a phrase which made Samantha Kingston to remain firm in the positive way and try to overcome this obscurity, keep pursuing to have hope of the rightness as the answer she needs. There was nothing problem which could not be solved.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are two elements of postmodern literature in *Before I Fall* novel which appear as the social phenomena which experienced by Samantha Kingston as the main character of the novel. These social phenomenon are examine by the writer using Jean Francois Lyotard’s theory of postmodern.

However, the writer also finds the presence of the character’s way to solve her social phenomena’s problem by fixing the gap which happened behind here and also convincing herself through another characters about her problems. There is so much happiness she created during the struggle against the paranoia and ambiguity she experienced.

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