

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Every beginning always has its end, if there is life there is also death as its end. Death is one of the things that all living things have to face, including human being. Sooner or later everybody who lives obviously will face the death whether they are ready or not, whether it is because of the disease, accident, or another reason. For human being, even if they are one of the smartest creatures who can sometimes control their own life, they cannot escape from the death, whether it is their own death or the death of people whom they love. When the death of someone whom they are close to or they love comes, the one who is left can suffer because of that incident. People's traumatic experience caused by losing their beloved person sometimes changes their life; they can be depressed person, pessimistic person, or maybe even isolate himself or herself from other people. Their way to overcome their traumatic experience caused by the death of beloved person can be different between one person to another. Some people will choose to end their life in order to avoid that painful feeling, but some will choose to make an attempt to survive after experiencing that traumatic experience. Those circumstances which are a reflection of a real life sometimes become an issue in a literary work and portrayed by the characters inside the story, either it is through the main or supporting character. The issue about

survival attempt after experiencing a traumatic experience is always being an interesting topic of literary work to discuss, because we can take a lesson from that issue, about how to continue our life after experiencing a traumatic experience, how to live a normal life like before, because sadness or problem in our life is not the end of our life.

Literary works, whether they are poems, novels, short stories, or plays do not always contain a story about the death of a character and another characters who make an attempt to survive after the absence of people they are close to or they love in their life caused by death, but this issue is such a real reflection of people and their problem about it in the real life and sometimes occurs in a literary work. There is a journal article which discusses about this issue entitled *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Journey through the Pain of Grief* by Olivia McNeely Pass. The journal article talks about an attempt to accept a painful or traumatic experience which is the death of a daughter by the character named Sethe after experiencing the process of denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and attain acceptance stage at the end by using the framework of human emotions in response to grieving and death approach as developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Besides *Beloved* novel, there is another literary work contains an issue about survival attempt after experiencing a traumatic experience caused by the death of a beloved person in *Rabbit Hole* play.

Rabbit Hole is a play by an American playwright, lyricist and screenwriter named David Lindsay-Abaire which received its first full production in New York in 2006. This play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2007. Besides winning the 2007

Pulitzer Prize for Drama, *Rabbit Hole* also received five Tony award nominations, including Best Play, and the Spirit of America Award. This play adapted into a movie in 2010. Lindsay-Abaire wrote this play because of a friend's suggestion to write a play about something that frightened him, and finally he decided to write a story about a husband and a wife who suffer a lot because of the death of their only child in a car accident. David Lindsay-Abaire graduated in 1992 from Sarah Lawrence College and has concentrated in its theatre. His first theatrical was success with *Fuddy Meers*.

Rabbit Hole tells a story of a couple who is in an attempt to survive or to live their normal life again, after the death of their only child named Danny who died because of a car accident. A seventeen-year-old boy accidentally strikes Danny while Danny was chasing Taz, the family dog over the street. Becca and Howie as Danny's parents experience deep grief because of that loss, but the most suffered one is Becca, Danny's mother. While Becca tries to send Danny's stuff away regarding her depression, Howie tries to cope with his grief by joining a support group. Although the characterization of Becca is presented as a judgmental, rude, egoistic, and depressed person, at the end of the story her characterization is depicted turns to be better. Her changing characteristic is her attempt to deal with her traumatic experience to continue her normal life.

The writer chooses to analyze *Rabbit Hole* play for this study because it has an interesting issue about a traumatic experience which influences a person's life and the survival attempt after experiencing it. This issue is appropriate to be analyzed

using New Criticism theory. To interpret a literary work using New Criticism theory, we need to pay attention to its formal elements because according to Tyson about New Criticism “their focus on each text’s own formal elements ensured, they claimed, that each text—each object being interpreted— would itself dictate how it would be interpreted.” (Tyson 148). The formal elements need to be revealed one by one until the organic unity is formed in order to find out the theme of the story as its main goal. The first formal element which is going to be analyzed is the characterization of Becca. The reason why the writer chooses to analyze the characterization of Becca is due to the writer’s curiosity in finding an example of a life changing after a traumatic experience happens and the solution to cope with it to continue a normal life like before. The character’s decision in making an attempt to survive after the loss of her beloved person is useful as a message behind it for the readers, which is a reflection in a real life that can happen.

Using New Criticism theory for this study, besides from the characterization, the issue or theme of a literary work sometimes can be known from the symbol which is reflected in the story. Sometimes the author presents an image in the text which has other meaning from its usual meaning. For example autumn; besides has a meaning as one of the seasons, the term autumn can have other meaning as death, therefore, in this situation the term autumn is an image which also has a figurative meaning. According to Tyson, sometimes symbol has private meaning and only the author of it knows its meaning, and our analysis about symbol within the text can be different

from the author's intention, but it does not matter as long our analysis about symbol supports in finding the theme of the literary work of our study (Tyson 142).

Another formal element that will be analyzed to find the theme besides characterization and symbol is plot. Plot is about everything which happens in the story, and every event which occurs in the story is connected. According to Kennedy, plot is an artistic formation of the events which constructs a conflict in a story (Kennedy 12). Plot is considered helpful in finding the theme by looking at the plot stages especially in its conflicts and the resolution for the conflicts.

The reason why the writer chooses characterization, plot, and symbol as the formal elements that will be analyzed to reveal the theme of this play is because there is a changing characteristic of a main character throughout the story in this play which influences the story at the end. Because of Becca's changing characteristic throughout the story, the theme of this play which is about survival attempt can be revealed, after we read the characterization of Becca which is changed at the end of the story. Another chosen formal element is plot. The analysis of characterization and plot can be a good combination since plot and character along with its characterization is related. Gill stated that plot can be defined as the character's action in the story and the reason why they do that action (Gill 179), we can find out what is happening in the story through the character's actions which form the characterization. The relation between character along with its characterization and plot through conflicts or another situation stage which is carried by character in the story has role to reveal the theme, and the reason why the writer chooses symbol is

because the hidden meaning which is portrayed from the title of this play also related and indicates what issue which is carried in this story.

By using New Criticism theory, the reader is expected to have understanding in analyzing a literary work only by the text itself, without any connection with the author's background or other ways, and by using New Criticism, it is also expected that the reader can understand the deeper meaning and value of the literary work they read by investigating the text itself.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the statement of the problem that the writer decided to construct is:

- How is the theme of Becca's survival attempt after the death of her beloved son revealed through Becca's characterization, plot and symbol in David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statement of the problem above, the objective of the study is:

To explain the way Becca's characterization, plot, and the symbol of rabbit hole work together to reveal the theme which is about Becca's survival attempt after the death of her beloved son in David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole*.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

The analysis of *Rabbit Hole* play will be focused on Becca's characterization, symbol and plot of the story which support the theme since they are formal elements that influence the whole story itself. Becca as the character that will be analyzed is chosen because of her changing characteristic regarding her traumatic experience, and conflicts which are emerged in the story caused by her poor characteristic, until her attempt to survive after experiencing her traumatic experience and conflicts which is related to the symbol of rabbit hole that she believes later.

1.5 Significance of the Study

By analyzing a play entitled *Rabbit Hole*, the writer expects to give contribution as a reference of literary study for everyone especially for English Literature students in Universitas Airlangga who are interested in New Criticism theory and would like to apply this theory in analyzing a literary work, especially in a play. There are many researches using New Criticism and the analysis in general formal elements such as setting and characterization, but the analysis of symbol element is rare. Through this study, not only to give understanding in analyzing characterization and plot element, but the writer also would like to give understanding in analyzing symbol element which contains literal and figurative meaning in a fiction especially drama or play, because the use of this kind of literary text as the object of analysis with New Criticism approach is not as much as novel.

By analyzing the issue about a survival attempt after experiencing a traumatic experience, the writer also expects this study is helpful for the readers to have understanding with a portrayal of real life about the problem which occurs in life such as losing a beloved person which influences our life and how to overcome our traumatic experience and make an attempt to survive after experiencing the tragedy.

1.6 Theoretical Background

The theory that will be used by the writer in analyzing this literary work is New Criticism, which means that we only need to focus on the text itself to interpret this literary work without paying attention to the history or author's background. According to Parker in *How to Interpret Literature*, readers might be interested on the author's background or biography, but many critics believe that the meaning of the literary work is in the text itself, because the author's background or biography cannot be reliable to decide the meaning of the literary work (Parker 13).

New Criticism is still important to be used as an approach to interpret a literary work, although this theory cannot really be called as contemporary theory because it is no longer practiced by literary critics. New Criticism is still important to be used because this theory focuses only on the text, so the validity of the text meaning is reasonable, because author's background cannot always be a guidance to interpret the meaning of the literary work that we analyze. A literary work is not always based on the author's background, and that is why we need to really

understand the literary work that we are going to analyze, by reading only to the text closely.

In analyzing a literary work using New Criticism, we need to pay attention to the text itself to find the formal elements because we need to work on its formal elements to find the theme of the work at the end of the interpretation,

“Because of New Criticism’s belief that the literary text can be understood primarily by understanding its form (which is why you’ll sometimes hear it referred to as a type of *formalism*), a clear understanding of the definitions of specific formal elements is important.” (Tyson 141).

Some formal elements that the writer is going to analyze in this study are characterization, plot, and symbol.

According to Kennedy, “A character, then, is presumably an imagined person who inhabits a story.” (Kennedy 74), while characterization is a representation of how the imagined person who inhabits a story behaves throughout the story. The chosen characterization to discuss is Becca’s. The writer decided to analyze Becca’s characterization as the main character to find what issue which is carried in this story since what lives a story is those who inhabit a story or called character, especially main character.

Another formal element that will be analyzed is plot. According to Kennedy, plot is an artistic formation of the events which constructs a conflict in a story (Kennedy 12). This is related to the previous formal element since what plot does is

pouring the character's ideas within actions which influences the storyline. There are several plot structures: Exposition, Complication, Climax, Falling Action, and Resolution. The plot structure which is built especially complication and climax stage which contain of conflicts and the resolution stage indicates what this play is about, which supports in finding the theme of this literary work.

The next element that will be analyzed is symbol, according to Tyson, "A symbol is an image that has both literal and figurative meaning" (Tyson 142). The writer chooses to analyze this element because this literary work contains a symbol which may have figurative meaning. Symbol which is portrayed from the title of this play also indicates what issue which is carried in this story. By analyzing those formal elements, then the goal of this study using New Criticism which is to find the theme of the literary text, will be reached.

1.7 Method of the Study

The method which is used for this thesis is qualitative method and the theory is New Criticism. In collecting sources for this study, there are two types of sources which are used; they are primary and secondary source. *Rabbit Hole* play by David Lindsay-Abaire is the primary source for this study, the writer needs to read this play script as the main source of this literary study for several times in order to get a good understanding and data about this whole text to find the theme of this work at the end of the interpretation. The writer chooses play as the object of this study because there

are too many researches using another type of written fiction such as novel as its object. The secondary sources are also needed to support the analysis of this study, they are printed books about new criticism and the formal elements in drama as the chosen object, thesis using New Criticism approach for related studies, journals, and also some online data about the author of *Rabbit Hole* play and its awards from relevant websites to strengthen the writer's argument in this study.

The first step to do is finding the object of this study. The play script as the object is obtained from the internet to be printed then. After finding the object, the next step is to read the whole play script as the literary object several times in order to get a good understanding and data about this object. While reading this play script, it is important to collect information in this main source to support the analysis of the characterization, plot, and symbol element. Making notes about the important things which are appropriate in the text to facilitate the activity of analyzing is needed, for instance from the dialogue, which can be a source in revealing the characteristic of the character which can help in analyzing the characterization element later. After the data is collected, the writer starts to analyze.

Since the theory which is used is New Criticism, in collecting data for this study we are based on close reading. In close reading we only need to focus on the text itself to understand the text better and observe its formal elements. There are two steps to do in this stage, first we need to observe the chosen formal elements, and then find the theme of this literary work. The first formal element that will be analyzed is characterization. The writer needs to record all of Becca's characteristics

from the beginning until the end of the story to find out what type of character is this. The way she talks, the way she acts, and the way other characters describes Becca support in deciding what type of character and how is Becca's characterization. The second formal element to discuss is plot, the writer records all of the conflicts in the story and its resolutions since the main discussion about plot in its conflicts and the way the conflict is resolved. Next is symbol element, the writer tries to find the meaning of the symbol which is used for this literary work's title by investigating the literal and figurative meaning of the pointed image. After working on its formal elements and consolidating it all, finally the finding of the theme of this play as the goal of this study is reached.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Attempt : A deed of making such an effort to get something that we want to get.

Formal elements: The main aspects which build a literary text such as setting, plot, etcetera.

Survive : Managing or continuing a life after experiencing a difficult time.

Symbol : An image which has both literal and figurative meaning (Tyson 142).

Theme : The main idea of the story.