

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Every person in this world must ever experience and face a process in their life called as struggle. If people go for a journey, the struggle will be an inseparable part of the journey that must be experienced. Struggle means to try very hard to do, achieve, or deal with something that is difficult or that causes problems (merriam-webster) . They indeed give their best in making efforts when they face the struggle. Today, there are a lot of successful people. They have good jobs, prosperities, and better lives. Those people will never be like whom they are today if they do not experience and face the struggles in their past. They must ever be in a difficult point when they felt they are in their hardest time. Even though they are in their lowest point of their lives, they do not give up. They work hard, struggle, and do everything to survive in life. Every person has their own definition of struggle. In this novel, Miles as the main character experience struggle as effort that Miles did which changed his perspective about his life.

Not only adult people are the ones who experience struggle, but children and adolescent also do. Adolescence means the teenage years between 13 and 19 and can be considered as the transitional stage from childhood into adulthood. Adolescence can be a time of both disorientation and discovery. The transitional period can bring

up issues of independence and self-identity; many adolescents and their peers face tough choices regarding schoolwork, sexuality, drugs, alcohol, and social life. Peer groups, romantic interests and external appearance tend to naturally increase in importance for some time during a teen's journey toward adulthood (Psychologicaltoday). According to Oxford Dictionary, disorientation self means a state mental of confusion. So it can be said in this moment, adolescent tends to confuse about their life, about which direction that they will take and also in this moment adolescent also experience discovery. It means that adolescents try to discover about themselves, who they are and who they want to be. Every adolescent has their own way to struggle to overcome their problem. Many of them find a positive way to face their problem but there are also many adolescent that face their problem in negative way. It happens to adolescents nowadays. Adolescents nowadays tend to face their problem in negative way eventhough not all the adolescents. Negative way here such as do drugs, drunk, etc. They hope that it can solve their problem yet it only make their problem more complicated. It is very common if adults struggle to achieve something in their life because they can know what to do, think rationally how to survive, find the way out, and face their problems. However, children or adolescent generally have the different capacities in handling the problems they never had before. It is harder for adolescents to cope with their problems because in this phase, they stil in proces of discovering themselves.

People have their own understanding of their meaningful life. Meaningful here refers to the life that people live now in which it is more exciting without the feeling of emptiness (Melati 7). For an example of feeling emptiness is when someone feels that his or her life is very flat and when everything that happens in their life cannot make them feel animate or just feels ordinary. Then, they feel that they need to explore more; moreover, they also need to get out of the box or get out from their comfort zone so that they can free themselves from their flat life. A transition from flat life to meaningful life usually occurs after meeting some influential people and dealing with many problems that happen beyond someone's expectation.

Love becomes something that cannot be separated from adolescent and struggle. Love is human's basic need and adolescents start to feel love in this stage. They start to like and have interest in opposite sex. According to Lewis, in late adolescence which means sixteen years old up, the adolescents should be displaying concern for others through giving and caring, instead of the earlier childhood pattern of self-gratification. It can be said Miles's feeling or interest in opposite sex happens because in this stage Miles tries to show his concern for others through giving and caring. He cares for his parent, his friends and also the girl that he loves. Love here is very universal. It is not only feeling for opposite sex but also for parents, friends and etc. Adolescents tend to experience both struggle and love. It also can be said the

struggle is become the part of the journey of the adolescents to feel love. For the example is this story, one of Miles' struggle is his sacrifice for the girl that he loves.

Many literary works depict the struggle as the main issue. It becomes the proof that struggling is important for human life. For the examples, there are a lot of novels that display struggle as their main issues such as *My name is Mina* by David Almond, *The Begining of After* by Jennifer Castle and *Close to Famous* by Joan Bauer, etc. *My Name is Mina* by David Almond tells about a girl who struggles to discover herself through writing her journal; *The Begining of After* by Jennifer Castle tells about a girl who is struggling for her life after the death of her family because of the accident. She is struggling to move on with her life; *Close to Famous* by Joan Bauer tells about a girl who has a good skill in baking yet she has a big issue, she cannot read. She must experience struggle to overcome her problem.

*Looking For Alaska* by John Green that becomes the primary data of this study is one of the young adult novel that have struggle as the main issue. John Green is an American author of young adult fiction. The writer chooses John Green because he has a lot of amazing works. John Green has also received awards for his works. The writer has chosen *Looking For Alaska* as the object of this study because the writer finds that this novel has a moral value that the writer needs to show to the reader. Despite the writer wants to show the moral value of the novel to the reader, the writer also wants the reader to take the moral value from the story and also to motivate them especialy the youngsters. In this novel, there is one big issue. Miles

Halter as the main character experiences the struggle but he can survive and find a meaningful life. This issue is very close to adolescents' life. In the youth, youngsters must experience new things in their life and the writer hopes that the way Miles experiences his struggles in finding his identity and meaningful life can help to motivate the youngsters.

*Looking For Alaska* tells us about how an adolescent took a great effort to change his life from a flat or predictable life into the meaningful one. In this novel, Miles as the main character made a challenging decision to change his life. Miles Halter was a shy and friendless person, therefore; he wanted to change his flat life by moving to a new school in Alabama. In his new school, he met and found some friends that made him feel comfortable and face a lot of experiences. His life changed more when he met a girl named Alaska.

According to John Green's biography in his official website, he grew up in Orlando (Florida) before attending Indian Springs School and he continued his study at Kenyon College. John Green is the New York Times bestselling author who has a lot of works such as *Looking for Alaska*, *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Paper Towns*, and *The Fault in Our Stars*. In the book of *Will Grayson*, he becomes the co-author with David Levithan. He received the Michael L. Printz Award in 2006. He was the Edgar Award winner in 2009 became the finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize twice. John Green's books have been published in more than a dozen languages.

Analyzing Miles' struggles in this novel is very interesting for the writer. To analyze it, the writer uses the New Criticism approach. The writer chooses New Criticism because in *Looking for Alaska* by John Green it becomes the suitable approach for this novel. New Criticism is also known as objective criticism. New Criticism was firstly introduced to America and called as "Close Reading" (Tyson 135). For New Criticism, a literary work is timeless which means the readers and the readings may change but the literary text stays the same (Tyson 137). In New Criticism, the formal elements such as images, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization, plot and so forth and also the linguistic devices such as paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension contribute to the construction of the theme.

The writer analyzes the characterization, plot, and irony of the text to reveal the theme of the story and help the reader to understand about Miles' struggles illustrated in the text. The writer chooses only characterization, plot and irony because those three of formal elements are the strong formal elements that appear in the story. Characterization is how the characters are told in the story. According to Richard Gill, there are two ways of how characters are illustrated in a text; they are called as telling and showing (97). Showing and telling the characterization are different. Showing is depicting the characters directly about the appearance while telling depicts the pictures a character indirectly through his or her actions (Gill 98). Plot is a pattern of carefully selected, causally related events that contain conflicts

(Griffith 30). Irony in a simple form means a statement or event undermined by the context where it occurs (Tyson 139).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

In order to analyze Miles' struggle in searching his meaningful life in *Looking For Alaska*, the writer wants to propose some questions:

1. How did Miles' struggle to find his meaningful life?
2. How was Miles' understanding of his meaningful life?

## **1.3. Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is based on the statements of problem above is:

1. To analyze how Miles struggled to find his meaningful life
2. To know Miles' understanding of his meaningful life

## **1.4. Significance of the Study**

From this study, the writer wants the reader to understand about the struggles Miles faced to find his meaningful life. This study is expected to give some life lessons such as people usually do not realize that worthy and valuable things are actually around them, and Miles did not either. So, from the experiences that Miles had been through, the reader can get many life lessons.

Since this study is a contribution to Universitas Airlangga, the writer hopes that this study can help the students of Universitas Airlangga who want to use and apply New Criticism approach on their thesis. The writer also hopes that this study can help the students to understand more about the formal elements of the text in

revealing the theme of the story which is formulated by the characterization, plot, and irony of the novel.

### **1.5. Scope and Limitation**

First of all, before doing the analysis, the writer would like to explain the scope and limitation to avoid unfocused analysis. The analysis of this study focuses on the formal elements such as plot, characterization, and irony which are found in the story to support the theme. In examining the plot, the writer examines the internal and external conflicts because they show Miles' struggle to find a meaningful life. In examining the character, the writer examines Miles' characterization that is influenced by the conflict that he had and the appearance of Miles which is classified as flat or round character. In examining the irony, the writer examines the verbal irony that appears in the novel as a proof that the irony build the theme. In examining Miles' understanding of his meaningful life, the writer examines three major of events that happen to Miles' life. These three major of events are when Miles realized that his parents loved him so much, when Miles finally fel in ove with the girl that he loved and when miles realized he had his real friends beside him. Those also become the turning point of Miles when he realizes that his life is a meaningful one. Those events become the turning point for Miles because after those events, miles change his perspective about his life from the flat one into the meaningful one.

### **1.6. Theoretical Background**

The writer uses New Criticism approach in this research. New Criticism is known as Close Reading. It means that the reader only focuses on the text itself. The reader must ignore the external aspects such as author's background, author's intention, and the others because the external aspects have no involvement to the text. Those external aspects tell nothing about the text itself. The new critics assert that emotional response of readers to the text is neither important nor equivalent to its interpretation (Bressler 60).

According to Tyson in his book entitled *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*, the only way we can know if a given author's intention or given reader's interpretation actually represents the text's meaning is by examining carefully or "closely read" all the evidences provided by the language of the text itself: its images, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization, plot, and so forth; they form or shape the literary work called formal elements (137)

From Tyson's statements in his book above, it shows that new criticism focuses on the formal elements of the text itself that makes the organic unity. According to Charles E. Bressler, quoting from Samuel T. Coleridge, organic unity is all parts of literary work which are necessarily interrelated with each part reflecting and helping to support the literary work's central idea (61). The formal elements can also support the theme of the novel. As Griffith stated that:

Theme is a central idea in the work-whether fiction, poetry, or drama. It is a comment the work makes on the human condition. It deals with four general areas of human experience: the nature of humanity, the nature of society, the nature of humankind's relationship to the world, and the nature of our ethical responsibilities (36).

The theme that can be revealed after examines the formal element is someone's greatest need is to feel love and to be loved by others. This theme is related to the nature of humanity because it is related to how basically human is social creatures who need others and cannot live alone. Human also needs love in their life for itself and others. It becomes the little thing that important in people's life and also struggle becomes the part of humanity because every human in this world experiences struggle. In this study, the writer analyzes the characterization, plot, and also irony that exist in the novel as an organic unity in constructing the theme of the novel entitled *Looking For Alaska* by John Green.

### **1.7. Method of the Study**

The method that the writer uses is qualitative method. With the qualitative method, the writer applies Close reading to analyze this novel. A novel by John Green entitled *Looking For Alaska* became the primary source for the analysis. In this study, the writer collects the sources from library and internet to support this study. As the secondary sources, the writer uses the printed books, the journals and the thesis that discuss the same issue of struggle.

The first step to do the analysis is by doing close reading. Close reading means the reader only focuses on the text itself. The writer has to read the novel which becomes the primary data more for several times. By reading the novel more than once, the writer can examine the formal element to get the meaning of the text. The second step is to look at the main issue of the text. The main issue of the text is Miles' struggles to find his meaningful life. The writer examines the plot, characterization, and irony to reveal the struggles faced by Miles Halter as the main character. By examining the plot, it can reveal the events and the problems that had been faced by Miles as his struggles to find his meaningful life. The plot is examined from its internal and external conflict. Miles' characterization also can be seen from the plot through internal and external conflicts that influence his characteristics and personalities. Then the writer classifies it as the round or flat character. The verbal irony that supports the theme is also discussed. Next after examining Miles' struggle in formal elements, the writer examines Miles' understanding about his meaningful life that can be drawn from his struggle. The last but not least step is to make a conclusion that there is a relation between the formal elements and the theme in which the formal elements as an organic unity construct the theme.

### **1.8. Definition of Key Terms**

Adolescent : a young person who is developing from a child  
into an adult (English Oxford Dictionary)

Adolescence : the teenage years between 13 and 19 and can be considered as the transitional stage from childhood into adulthood. Time of both disorientation and discovery (Psychologytoday)

Love : strong feeling of deep affection for somebody or something (English Oxford Dictionary)

Meaningful Life : when people do not feel lonely and they feel enthusiast about their life (Melati 7)

Struggle : try very hard to do, achieve, or deal with something that is difficult or that causes problems (merriam-webster).

