

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Death is imminent for the living. The idea of not to fear death is essentially very true, due to the fact that has been mentioned. If an individual truly fears death, then there is a potential that person will live in fear due to the unescapable grasp of death. And to quote a famous line from film director Baz Luhrmann, a life lived in fear is a life half-lived (1992). Although this quote can be interpreted in many ways, as in ‘you should not be afraid to try new things’, it may also be applied literally. But most of the time, this only applies personally, as in people should not fear their own death for it is inevitable.

The grim reaper sometimes hits harder when the target is someone else, someone you love, adore, or look-up to, which could lead to unforetold consequences to said person. Some people might take it very lightly, as in the emotions of sadness and despair is displayed at a minimum with no visible evidence of any major damage to their mental or physical health. Some people has a tougher time dealing with a loss. They might find themselves to be more distant towards others for an indefinite amount of time, experience mood swings, or even worse, feeling guilty when it is not necessarily their fault. For example, when a family member dies, a journal article titled *Long-term effects of Sibling Death during Adolescence* states that people around the age of 13 to 17 are most likely to show symptoms of this type of guilt. It states that it can also lead to “global anxiety” in

the form of insomnia, feelings of vulnerability and also fear of intimacy (Farson and Nickerson 1991).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Cain, Fast, and Erickson (1964) further elaborates that the guilt can come in at a whole different level, with the subjects saying that they should die, too, or that they should have died instead of their sibling(s). And of course, there are some people who simply feel that they cannot continue on living after a death of a loved one. Some people however, can sometimes turn it all the way around. What is meant, here, is the fact that people can become stronger, wiser, smarter, and in some cases, transform into a completely different persons whether it is for the better or for worse.

Some of the events that are being described exist inside of the object of this research, *Warcross* by Marie Lu. *Warcross* follows the story of Emika Chen, an 18-year-old high school dropout who lives in a distant technology rich future of New York. Her mother had left her and her father when she was very young.. Thankfully, Emika's father loved her very much, but fate does not let that last for too long. Emika has sadly lost his father due to an illness when she was only eleven. Aside from Emika, the other main character, Hideo Tanaka, is also discussed throughout this thesis. Hideo Tanaka is a CEO of a worldwide online game which has integrated itself into real life. The better a player is in the game, the more rewards they may get in real life. But of course, as mentioned, he suffered an immense lost in the past, the same as Emika did. Hideo's situation is a little bit different from Emika, however, with his position as CEO, he has a mountain of

wealth behind his back with also a genius-level innovation skills in his repertoire. He also did not lose his parents, but rather his brother.

Warcross, as one of Marie Lu's best-selling novels, consequentially received many positive responses from readers and critics. It was nominated in the Best Young Adult and Science Fiction Category in 2017, where it placed 7th out of 20 total books. Everdeen Mason commends the novel for the fast developing of plot and entertainment, even going out to say that it "transcends the young adult billing", putting it in a similar pedestal as Neal Stephenson's "Snow Crash, a major literary work which established Neal's reputation as a major science fiction writer. American book review magazine, Kirkus, puts *Warcross* in the best teen science fiction books of 2017. Furthermore, *Warcross* is expecting a televised series with the most recent news about the adaptation being in last September (Petski 2020).

The main reason this novel is chosen is due to personal preference coming from the writer. The conflicts contained within the novel corresponds very well with the writer's experience in life regarding family. The second reason why this novel is chosen is also due to the interesting premise of the novel itself. A virtual world where a game is an essential part of society, filled with technological advancements and mind-blowing visuals, combined with diverse characters and sublime character development cast is surely a hard thing to miss out on. The study finds all of the things mentioned very interesting to discuss and pick up. Hence, why a New Criticism approach for this study is appropriate to be used. Because it discusses the formal elements and figurative languages such as setting, imagery, and characterization as the sole determining factor in order to judge the quality of

a literary work (Tyson 2015, 137-141). Formal elements need to work together as an organic unity that compliment and find the theme of the work. Besides the plot and conflicts, characterization, setting and symbols will also be discussed in the novel.

There are approximately two kinds of symbols, private and conventional. This study tries to come up with a private symbol which came from the analysis of one of the major plot elements in the story, which is the *Warcross* game. The game which one of the main characters played with the bereaved is also a source of symbolism. Moreover, the general description of the setting of place in the novel is a key discussion for this study. Aside from setting of place, the setting of atmosphere and time is also discussed in the study. Throughout the novel, symbols and setting go hand-in-hand with the plot as it progresses. In conclusion, it all goes back to the premise of the story itself and how it heavily focuses on the symbols and setting of the story.

And the last formal element that are discussed is characterization. The character's behavior and thoughts regarding the events that occurred in the story are also a critical point to be discussed for the study. The characters' whole motives on why they do what they do can be inferred through characterization. Hence, it is quite clear how characterization is an important aspect of formal elements that is needed to be discussed. It is one of the main focuses of this study, to see the effects of a death of a loved one of the main characters in order to support the main hypothesized theme.

In terms of previous studies, the study using the same object as this research is entitled *Failure is the Name of the Game: Queer Failure in Video Game Novels* by Laura Brooks (2020). Brooks' study uses queer theory as the main theory and it underlines how Emika is able to queer the system of Warcross as an architect by developing her own style in playing the game even though she was not internationally ranked. Emika also queers the system by entering the Warcross tournament through hacking the opening game. The study explained that the ending is the biggest example of queer realization because Emika refused to submit to Hideo's ambitions and leaves the option for queerness lingering. The research gap here is quite apparent as the main issue and theory of the study is completely different. Moreover, the issue that this study is related to death, and death has always been an interesting issue to talk about. Different concepts and beliefs regarding death such as the existence of the afterlife, reincarnations and more are some proof of how interesting death can be as a concept. Death has also been explored further in previous literary work, some going as to feature it as a personification or a character, all the more evidence of how exciting it can be. Furthermore, this study also takes a look at the effects of death on the main characters to give more insight to the readers how devastating it can be in certain circumstances.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the study, the statement of the problems of this study are:

1. What are the effects of losing a loved one for the main characters of *Warcross* based on the analysis of formal elements such as characterization, setting and symbols?
2. How do the formal elements come together to form “The relationship and death of a loved one can be crucial for the development of one’s character, behavior and thoughts” as the theme in Marie Lu’s *Warcross*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the effects of losing a loved one for the main characters of *Warcross* based on the analysis of the formal elements such as characterization, setting and symbols.
2. To identify how the formal elements come together to produce “The relationship and death of a loved one can be crucial for the development of one’s character, behavior and thoughts” as the theme in Marie Lu’s *Warcross*.

1.4 Significance of The Study

This study examines a very common yet undeniably deep topic which is death. As mentioned above, this topic is very relatable towards people all around the world. And for scholars in general, the writer hope that this study can be another source of information that could prove useful for future papers interested in the New Criticism theory. Although New Criticism may not be as popular as it is in the mid 20th century, this study hopes to be one of many testaments on how New Criticism can be used to analyze a novel, compared to the popular object back then which is poetry. This study also hopes to bring a new light on how devastating one’s death on one’s behavior and the future ambitions it could lead to in the future. This is

complimented by the object's unique setting and premise so it has a better effect in general. And last but not least, for English department students, the writer hopes that this study can be a reliable reference for those who are interested in using New Criticism as their main theory in the final paper.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Here is a simple definition for the keywords:

Ambition : Strong desire to do or achieve something, typically requiring hard work.

Cope : To deal successfully with something difficult.

Loss : The death of a person.

A loved one : Someone who is precious and loved, usually a member of the family or friends.