

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Struggling is one thing that we cannot avoid in life. People need to struggle to achieve their desire or to get a better life. Each person has his or her own struggle in continuing his or her life. For instance, in one condition such as cancer survivor, he or she has to struggle to fight against his or her disease although he or she has to take any kind of medication to get better. From this example of struggle, it is believed that people have to do any way to keep struggling in continuing life no matter how hard their life is. Struggling is not only for adults, but it also can be done by teenagers or adolescences.

The struggle not to be influenced by negative surrounding is one example of struggle done by teenagers. It remains as an important thing since they are still in the search of identity. In order to be a good teenager, they need to maintain a right relationship not only with their parents but also with the teachers. It is important because both of them are the good role models who can teach how teenager should behave in a proper way based on their age. Besides their struggles to maintain themselves which is related to internal factor, there are also the other struggles out there that they have to deal with.

Struggle to survive is the other example that is needed for teenagers since during their time, they have to deal with so many problems which commonly occur in their surroundings especially at school. One of the teenagers' problems that become a controversial issue is bullying. Olweus in his article entitled

Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do defined bullying is someone who repeatedly and on purpose says or does a mean or hurtful thing to another person who has a hard time defending him or herself (Olweus 8).

From the previous definition, it can be concluded that bullying has a bad purpose to hurt the other people and has some effects such as feeling under pressure and it finally leads to a depression since the victim's mental has been disturbed by those hurtful words and actions. According to California Department of Education bullying is divided into three categories such as sexual bullying, bias or hate-motivated bullying and hazing. However, in this study the writer concerns with one of the type of bullying which is sexual bullying. It is defined as the typical of bullying behaviour with the added actions of exhibitionism, voyeurism, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse including touching, physical contact, sexual assault (California Department of Education 7). Sexual abuse is categorized as sexual bullying because in this case the target feels being humiliated and tortured sexually. By looking at the evidence as we can see in our society, there is one type of sexual abuse that is rape.

Based on World Health Organization's World definition on violence and health, rape is any sexual act that attempts to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advance or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, but not limited to home and work (World Health Organization 2). From the definition, it can be understood that rape is unwanted sexual activity that violates human right as the victims will experience psychological problem because when someone is being raped they obviously will

fall into a deep depression. Moreover, rape may cause not only physical injury but also mental disturbance toward the victim.

Many great literary works are inspired by the portrayal of the reality in our life. Novel becomes one of the popular literary works because its content reveals explicitly about human experiences and how they resemble the complexity of a real world. As stated below:

Writers of fiction celebrate the separateness, distinctness, and importance of all individuals and all individual experiences. They assume that human experiences, whatever they are and wherever they occur, are intrinsically important and interesting. (Griffith 28)

From the quotation above, the writer believes that novel as a popular fiction plays an important role to describe clearly about every phenomenon or issue that happens in society. Sometimes, the common issue inspires the author to write a story and from this story, people will know that this phenomenon really happens. The issue of sexual abuse trauma is chosen as a good story since it reflects the struggle of the victim to survive in continuing life.

There are some novels depict the issue of rape such as *Disgrace* (1999) by J.M Coetzee and *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker. *Disgrace* tells about the struggle of a father to save his daughter who is being raped by African man who infiltrates to his house. Meanwhile, *The Color Purple* tells about the struggle of an African-American woman to survive from her sexual abuse trauma after being raped by her father. Those novels had won some awards such as Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize.

Another novel that also tells about rape is *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. The writer chooses to analyze the novel because it tells strongly the

issue of struggle to overcome sexual abuse trauma toward the main character. It also won several international awards such as National Book Award Finalist and BCCB Blue Ribbon book in 1999. Furthermore, in 2000, the novel also won several awards and honours including, SCBWI Golden Kite Award for fiction, ALA Best Books for Young Adults, Printz Honor book and becomes the finalist in Edgar Allan Poe for Best Young Adult Award. Not only being awarded, the novel also has been adapted into a movie with the same title starring a famous actress, Kristen Stewart as Melinda Sordino (IMDB)

The author of the novel *Speak* is an American writer named Laurie Halse Anderson. She becomes one of the notable writers after acknowledging with Margaret Edward Award from the American Library Association due to her writing contribution in young-adult literature (Morales and Petersen). Her topic and issue are inspired by problems in teenager's life such as dysfunctional family, rape and bullying at school that makes her novel becomes famous and controversial. In spite of the controversial issue, her freedom and honesty on writing in each story makes the readers open their eyes widely to be aware of those issues that happened in society.

In the novel entitled *Speak*, Anderson brings the issue of rape and bullying at school. *Speak* tells about a young girl named Melinda Sordino who is raped in summer before her first year in high school by her friend, Andy Evans at the senior party. Melinda is trying hard to call the police and report it. However, she is too afraid to talk and does not know what to say. After the police arrive at the party, some students are arrested because of the alcoholic drinks. Yet, Melinda does not tell anyone what happened to her and no one even ask her. After the rape

incident and entering a high school, Melinda keeps silent and falls into deep depression. She never talks to anyone and that becomes the reason why many students love to bully her at school. Since the sexual abuse causes great traumatic experience to Melinda, she tries to overcome it by joining an art class in her school where the teacher asks her to express about her real condition in a sense of art.

There has been a research that is similar to this study. The research has been done by Rizal Aditya, a student of Airlangga University. In his research, he examined the struggle of the main character to overcome his war-fear trauma in *The Things They Carried*, a collection of short stories by Tim O'Brien. Although his study focused on the issue of war fear trauma, but the way the main character overcome her trauma is similar to the writer's research. In his analysis, Aditya found that analyzing the story using new criticism enables to show how the formal element such as characterization, plot, and setting can reveal the theme. The findings of the study support that the formal elements in the story develops the organic unity through its formal elements.

For the writer, analyzing Melinda's struggle to overcome her sexual abuse trauma in this story is interesting. Therefore, the writer wants to analyze about it deeper. The analysis is conducted by using a new criticism approach to help the reader understand about the characterization of the main character, Melinda Sordino. Besides the characterization and plot, symbolism also becomes the important elements of analysis since there are several symbols in the novel that expose some meanings related to Melinda's struggle to overcome her sexual

abuse trauma. To analyze Melinda's struggle, then the writer formulates two research questions as follows.

B. Statement of the Problem

In order to reveal the theme and to understand the problem in the study, the writer needs to formulate the statement of the problem. The following question is made to support the writer's arguments that finally need to be answered as stated below:

1. How do the plot, characterization, setting and symbolism support the theme of Melinda's struggle to overcome her sexual abuse trauma in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*?

C. Objective of the Study

In analyzing the issue, the writer expects some purposes and objectives that are going to be achieved. Hence, the writer formulates a question as mentioned in statement of the problem to know the result of the analysis. The writer purposes to achieve the objective of the study as following:

1. To explain how the characterization of the main character, plot, setting and symbolism can support the theme of Melinda's struggle to overcome her sexual abuse trauma in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*

D. Significance of the Study

This thesis attempts to explain the readers about the characterization of main character, plot and setting in the text that can reveal the theme of Melinda's

struggle to overcome her sexual abuse trauma. The writer also wants the reader to know the detail meaning of symbolism that supports the theme as described in the novel. Moreover, the writer wants the reader to know more about Laurie Halse Anderson's contribution in the literary work. Furthermore, this thesis is hoped to help the students of Universitas Airlangga to be able to apply new criticism approach in literary text and also to broaden their knowledge about a new criticism theory. In addition, this thesis is conducted with the expectation it can give a better understanding about the issue of sexual abuse and it can create a better perspective towards the victim of rape to be more treated well in our society.

E. Scope and Limitation

The analysis in this study is limited to the specific aspect in order to give clear details of the story and to avoid unfocused analysis. The subject of this study is focused on the formal elements of characterization, plot, setting and symbolism found in the story that supports the theme as an organic unity. Characterization of the main character, Melinda Sordino is chosen as the main discussion since she becomes the victim of rape by her senior at the school party. Melinda has to experience a deep depression, becomes a silent girl, and has to struggle to overcome her sexual abuse trauma.

F. Theoretical Background

The writer decides to analyze the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson by using new criticism. The theory firstly appears in United States and it introduces the concept of "close reading" which means focus on the text itself

without considering any other outer aspect such as the author's background, author's intention and even the reader response. 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 to carefully examine, or "closely read", all the evidence provided by the language of the text itself (137).

From the statement above, it can be understood that since the theory is based on the text itself, new criticism's main focus is toward the formal elements of the text which form the organic unity of the text. The formal elements include in the text, for example: plot, setting, characterization, symbols and the other elements. Since the theme works as the organic unity remains an important aspect for the great literary work, the analysis is going to reveal the theme more specifically as described in the text as supported by Griffith about the definition of theme:

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. (Griffith 36)

In this study, the writer analyses the characterization, plot, setting and symbolism that finally relate to the theme of struggle to overcome sexual abuse in the text. The writer believes by analyzing further about the characterization of the main character, Melinda Sordino, the writer can examine specifically about the character's personal appearance, character's action and the other characters' reaction toward the main character's attitude or behaviour. The plot is discussed

since it stages, such as exposition, complication, climax, falling action and denouement, can show the movement of conflict that is experienced by the main character. It is as emphasized by Nurgiyantoro that plot has cause-effect relation in literary text to create conflict towards the character (112, translation is mine).

In addition, from the setting described in the story, the writer can analyse the setting of place and time which also influence the character's personality as quoted by Gill that settings can reflect the mood of a character in that they can become mental landscape (149). The symbolism is analyzed in the story because the writer finds several symbols that may describe two or more meanings. The rich and complex meaning of symbolism is supported by Griffith's argument that explains symbol is an object that has meaning beyond itself. The object is concrete and the meanings are abstract (52).

G. Method of the study

The method of this study is qualitative method. The primary data of the analysis is taken from the novel entitled *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson as the important source. Most of the data presented in this study to support the analysis are relevant because the writer collects some evidence from the sentences and dialogues in the novel. Some related literary works are also taken from the library and some of them from the internet to enrich the background of the study.

The writer collects the primary data of the study to analyze the characterization of the main character Melinda through the sentences or dialogues as stated in the novel. The plot, setting and symbolism also act as the important elements to support the theme of struggle from sexual abuse trauma in the story.

The writer only focuses on the text itself and read it several times. The steps of doing this research would be as follows: first, the writer starts to analyze the plot particularly by looking at the conflict that is experienced by the main character. Second, the writer looks on the characterization of the main character named Melinda Sordino. As depicted in the story, Melinda is having a traumatic problem because she is being sexually abused in her past life. The next formal element that is going to be analyzed is the setting of place and time. Both time and place in the story can show the length of the conflict and it also supports to reveal the theme of Melinda's struggle. The last formal element that includes in the writer's analysis is symbolism. In the text, several symbols in the novel give a big influence toward the theme as to give meaning to the text itself. Finally, the writer draws a conclusion to relate all the formal elements to the theme as an organic unity.

H. Definition and Key Terms

Bullying : The action of intimidating other people

either physically or mentally.

Characterization : The way character is depicted in the story through their action, behavior and gesture.

Plot : A series of event contains conflict

Setting : The place in which the character act in the story

Sexual Abuse : Any act where the target being tortured sexually

Struggle : An effort to fights against something in order to overcome the problem

Symbolism : An object that rich beyond of the meaning

