

**Dystopian Transformations and Character Construction in Young Adult Science Fiction Lauren Olivers' *Delirium***

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study entitled *Dystopian Transformations and Character Construction in Young Adult Science Fiction Lauren Olivers' Delirium* focuses on the issue of dystopian transformations and character construction. The study investigates the main character, Lena; character construction in the novel; and the contribution of character constellations in the construction of Lena's characterization. The study was conducted within a descriptive text analysis by applying a qualitative method and is framed by theoretical frameworks of narrative theory (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983) and young adult literature science fiction and dystopia (Bradford, Mallan, Stephens & McCallum, 2008). The results demonstrate that Lena's characterization is constructed through two factors. These factors are the atmosphere of dystopian transformations and constellation characters which give both positive and negative effects to Lena's characterization.

**Keywords:** *Science Fiction, Dystopia, Young Adult Dystopia, Characterization, Narrative Theory, Constellation Character.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays science fiction is believed to be one of popular genres among authors, filmmakers and scriptwriters. Asimov (1991, as cited in Shihah, 2002) states that science fiction is a branch of literature which is developed by the sophistication of science on human being. The involvement of the 'science' element in fiction adds a creation of science and sophisticated technology in the storyline. Science fiction can be defined as literary and narrative approach to the future, and this approach attaches several unique characteristics of science fiction (Lombard, 2012).

In science fiction, there are two kinds of imaginary worlds, which are used as instruments of great philosophic and social significance, namely utopia and dystopia (Mahida, 2012). Dystopia is the opposite of utopia, which portrays a highly pessimistic and dark future society, (Orwell, 1984, as cited in Lombardo, 2011). The theme of dystopia usually illustrates the future as a new world with undesirable and anarchic society.

Thus, everything in the future is worse and more unpleasant.

As dystopian society is believed to be controlled by the government, people there are described as the ones who criticize the overprotective and controlling government, (Orwell, 1984, as cited in Lombardo, 2011). The characters in dystopian fiction use the weakness of human to follow the authoritarian rule (Ramona, 2012). The people in dystopian world tend to obey and follow all of the rules that have been made by the upper/higher class society. It means that characters in dystopian fiction are constructed by the law, controlled and dictated by totalitarian government. There are no ways that one certain character's opinions are against the government or oppose those in power. Generally, a main character fights against the society, especially government's dictatorial rules in the story.

There are six key concepts - Science Fiction, Dystopia, Young Adult Dystopia, Characterization, Narrative Theory, and Constellation

Character—which become the major theoretical frames that inform the study. According to Burford (2012) critical combination of the best elements of science fiction and dystopian literature (dystopian science fiction) is both are fascinating genres and valuable learning tools because of its dark landscape as well as its specific focus on extrapolating social problems. Dystopian literature becomes a mainstream fiction in science fiction and is increasingly popular with young adult readers (Miller, 2010). Dystopia becomes the most genres that tells about future, and is called as “new wave”. This genre is believed as one of popular themes in young adult science fiction because the themes in this genre are often reflected in physical closure (Sullivan, 1999).

Young adult utopia and dystopia are built for the character development of children and young adult (Hintz & Ostry, 2003). It is indicated that those genres can influence the characterization of them through the story. According to

Rimmon-Kenan (2001, p. 64) characterization is form of style of speech where the characters’ language is individuated and distinguished by the narrator. The characterization can be seen through some narrative theory tools, such as focalization and speech representation. Focalization is a term, which refers to the relation between the characters, actions, and objects offered to the reader (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001). Focalizing process is dividing into two sides, external focalization and internal focalization. While, Cohn (1978) states that speech representation is used to represent the utterances of characters through direct discourse, indirect discourse, and free indirect discourse.

In a story, a main character will not stand alone toward him /her characterization. The good or bad traits can come from the other characters that also play to build main character’s characterization. Nikolajeva (2003) states that there is constellation of characters, some characters, that will find in helping and providing the figures of

protagonist. It can be proven by some intense interaction or contradictory situation between the main characters and character constellations. Nikolajeva (2003) also divides kinds of constellation of characters, which mostly found in children's literature and young adult literature. Two of them are parental figures and peers: helpers and quest objects.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Due to the issue adapted in the novel, the present study takes a generic approach that utilizes science fiction genre and intersects it with narrative theory focusing on the characters, events, focalization, speech representation, and dystopian transformation. The study chooses *Delirium* because this novel is a good example of dystopian science fiction for adolescents because the novel reveals how adolescents deal with two different situations and survive with their own choice.

The data were collected by reading the novel thoroughly and repeatedly. It is due to the fact that the

study mostly deals with narrative textual analysis. The textual evidence is collected from the narrative events displaying the main character's acts, thoughts, and speeches with other characters. This study is aimed to see how dystopian science fiction constructs its characters in *Delirium*. The results of the study are expected to give some useful and positive impacts on English Department's students and larger society. In addition, the analysis is also expected to provide an alternative way as a response to literary work by critiquing a literary work.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the analyzed data, the present study finds that the construction character in dystopian science fiction is constructed through two factors: the atmosphere of dystopian transformation and constellation characters which give both positive and negative effects to Lena's characterization. From the atmosphere of dystopian transformation, the focalizing process

is taken from the main character, Lena Haloway that plays as focalizer and first person narrator. By seeing Lena's focalization, it is written about the background of love as a disease. The emergence of 'love as a disease' is one of the characteristics from this new world order (dystopian science fiction). In the form of internal focalization of Lena as a main character, she feels uncomfortable with the government system. It is due to the fact that the seriousness of government system to make some strict rules, and they use the power to control their society. As Stock (2011) says that dystopia is believed to be a representation individuality in which moral and/or political autonomy is controlled, this line emphasizes that the consideration of love as a disease and other things related to it are controlled by the government as upper class society.

It also can be seen in speech representation, which describes the characterization of Lena. Through the direct discourse, Lena as a first person narrator has a lot of statements about

herself, which obey to the rules, nice, and nervousness in facing the rules. However, the characterization also can be concluded by analyzing the indirect discourse, which is found from other characters around her. It includes some opposite attitude from her action, which is considered as rebel by her Aunt, Carol.

Some constellation characters are contributed to Lena's character development. First, there is a parental figure, which is taken from Carol as her aunt. After the death of Lena's mother who was infected by deliria, Carol and her family take care of Lena. Carol as a part of dystopian society wants Lena to be obedient to the government rules in Portland. Lena always tries to make her aunt comfortable although she feels uncomfortable with the cold, rigid and unreadable attitude of Carol. Until Lena realized that what has been done with Carol is not the best for her. However, the parental figure of Carol is considered as dispatcher and donor.

Other constellation characters, which play as helper and quest object,

are taken by Hana and Alex. Hana is Lena's best friend, who faces same problem in same age as Lena. At the first time, Hana shows the unpredictable attitude with carelessness from all of the rules. Lena always admires Hana's attitude and action in making her more relaxed from the procedure. Hana always supports her and listens to her problem. The last constellation is Alex, a male character who distracted Lena's attention. The appearance of Alex is an influential distraction for Lena in facing the process of surgery. It is due to the fact that Alex's attitude as non-dystopian society has different manner from other man in Portland. The good attitude of Alex can make the instability of Lena distracted easily. Alex has infected Lena with love (or deliria nervosa).

## CONCLUSION

Relying on the findings and the discussion above, it can be concluded that Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* novel tells the life of young adult who faces their maturity process on deciding

their life's choices in dystopian world. The choices are made by the government system, which generally controls all of the rules of life. Moreover, the young adult still have time to think about the decision for their future. It also can be said that young adult fiction to some extent, teaches young adult how they deal with some different situations and survive with their own choices. It also reflects young adult in their real lives, who mostly depend on technological advancement. Sometimes they cannot control themselves in using the sophisticated technology provided by the government. Thus, the dystopian teaches young adult the new world, which is the opposite of the real life as a lesson.

Regarding the investigation of novels, the study suggests that further researchers may discuss some other researchable issues in young adult novels, such as the portrayal of utopian science fiction issue in the novel, character's development as a young adult, and the author's approach in dystopian and utopian transformation.

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