THE HYPERREALITIES IN CYBERPUNK NOVEL *FREE TO FALL* BY LAUREN MILLER

(HIPERREALITAS DALAM NOVEL CYBERPUNK *FREE TO FALL* KARYA *LAUREN MILLER*)

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Abstract

Free To Fall is a cyberpunk novel written by Lauren Miller. As the cyberpunk novel, *Free To Fall* takes some points of science fiction and postmodern fiction. This novel deals with technology and the effect of technology which is hyperreality. Hyperreality is a phenomenon which causes a discontinuity between the real and the fake. Hyperreality is the main topic of this research. This research uses qualitative research method. The collected data are about the information related to the hyperreality in *Free To Fall*, the information about *Paradise Lost*, and the condition of present America related to the technological development. The discussion is started with the analysis of the construction of cyberpunk fiction which leads to the discussion about hyperreality. In analyzing the hyperreality in *Free To Fall*, Baudrillard's Hyperreality Theory is used to analyze the changing images of technology in the novel. The discussion continues to analyze the intertextuality between *Free To Fall* and *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. Furthermore, this research also discusses about the condition of America which is used to show the relation between the hyperreality in *Free To Fall* and in America. As the result, technology has blurred the reality and dragged people into the created reality. The analysis of hyperreality shows that there is a simulation of simulation in *Free To Fall*. Moreover, the hyperreality in America shows that the Americans use technology to create their own paradise where they can get happiness.

Keywords: Addiction, America, Cyberpunk, Hyperreality, Postmodern Fiction, Technology .

Abstrak

Free To Fall *adalah sebuah novel cyberpunk yang ditulis oleh Lauren Miller. Sebagai sebuah novel cyberpunk,* Free To Fall *mengambil beberapa poin dari fiksi ilmiah dan fiksi postmodern. Novel ini berhubungan dengan teknologi dan efek dari teknologi yaitu hiperrealitas. Hiperrealitas adalah sebuah fenomena yang menyebabkan keterputusan antara yang asli dan tiruan. Hiperrealitas adalah topik utama dalam analisis ini. Analisis ini menggunakan metode analisis kualitatif. Data yang dikumpulkan adalah tentang informasi yang berhubungan dengan hiperrealitas di* Free To Fall*, informasi tentang* Paradise Lost*, dan kondisi Amerika saat ini terkait dengan perkembangan teknologi. Diskusi dimulai dengan analisis konstruksi fiksi cyberpunk yang menuntun pada diskusi tentang hiperrealitas. Dalam menganalisis hiperrealitas di* Free To Fall*, teori hiperrealitas oleh Baudrillard digunakan untuk menganalisis perubahan imaji tentang teknologi di dalam novel. diskusi berlanjut untuk menganalisis intertekstualitas antara* Free To Fall *dan* Paradise Lost *oleh John Milton. Selanjutnya, analisis ini juga mendiskusikan tentang kondisi Amerika yang digunakan untuk menunjukkan hubungan antara hiperrealitas di* Free To Fall *dan Amerika. Hasilnya, teknologi telah mengaburkan realitas dan membawa orang-orang menuju realitas buatan. Analisis tentang hiperrealitas menunjukkan bahwa terdapat simulasi dari simulasi di dalam* Free To Fall*. Selain itu, hiperrealitas di Amerika menunjukkan bahwa orang-orang Amerika menggunakan teknologi untuk menciptakan surga mereka sendiri dimana mereka mendapatkan kebahagiaan.*

Kata Kunci: Ketergantungan, Amerika, Cyberpunk, Hiperrealitas, Fiksi Postmodern, Teknologi.

Introduction

Free To Fall, published in 2014 by Lauren Miller, is a cyberpunk novel which tells about the effect of technological development. Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction. Cyberpunk

is a kind of literature of which setting takes in a near future place dominated by corporation and money. The word cyberpunk appeared for the first time as the title of a short story *Cyberpunk* by Bruce Bethke in 1983. Later, the word was coined and is applied to the bizarre, hard-edged, and high-tech science fiction. Cyberpunk portrays technology as omnipresent, present everywhere at all times, that gives pleasure and freedom but also can enslave and deconstruct people (Kellner, 1995:315). Based on the article entitled "Cyberpunk Literary Style" by The Cyberpunk Project, cyberpunk comes from words cyber and punk. The cyber aspects in the cyberpunk show that the systems of government are changed by electronic media and information technology resulting compliant citizenry. In cyberpunk, the government no longer exists and is replaced by megacrops. The punk aspects show there are people who are unwilling to obey the system in society. They use the technology to fight back. In literature and social movement, it refers to a counterculture. In cyberpunk, it means an anti authoritarian [http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/cyberpunk_literary_style.html, Sunday 16th November 2014, 6:56 WIB]. Cyberpunk explores the refusal and the rejection toward the capitalist affluence. It also portrays the holder of the supreme power, which is shown by a corporate, uses its force to monopolize the wealth and power through information and its technology (Kellner, 1995:321). Moreover, the development of science and technology has caused the emergence of hyperreality, which is indicated by the simulacrum that looks more original than the real.

        Cyberpunk's characters are depicted as those who work within and against the systems. They trade their hacking skill across market both legal and illegal. The megacrop which produces technology is seen as a group of expert people. However, they use their skills to produce technology that can give profit and pleasure to themselves and their corporation (Bell, 2001:24). This is shown in the cyberpunk novel *Free To Fall* by Lauren Miller. This novel tells about a sixteen years old girl, Rory Vaughn and her "hacker" boyfriend, North, uncovering a technological conspiracy. The plot takes place in Massachusetts fifteen years into the future where Google and Apple are no longer the stronger ones. Those get replaced by Lux, the popular decision-making application. Lux is only available in mobile phone called Gemini. This is a product of Gnosis, a conglomerate corporation. This is an application on mobile phone that helps us in solving problems, deciding things, making decisions, and etc. As the effect, the mobile phone is no longer used just to make a call or send texts. The main usage of it gets blurred and develops into the thing to lead people making decisions. Through that synopsis, cyberpunk novel

talks about the construction of world where technology becomes the part of people lives. However, the technological development has caused the emergence of hyperreality. Hyperreality blurs the boundaries between the real and the fake. In the novel, hyperreality appears when technology has succeeded to create the simulated Massachusetts. Lux provides information that is obviously the illusion of a freedom choice, a simulated freedom of choice.

Research Methodology

The type of this research is qualitative research. This research is used to explain and explore the information and the facts. The data collection in this thesis is divided into two kinds: primary and secondary data. These data are collected using close reading and documentary technique. Primary data are facts and information related to the hyperreality in *Free To* Fall by Lauren Miller. These are collected from the sources through narration and statement in the novel *Free To Fall*. Besides, the secondary data are divided into two; the information about *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and information about the American's acceptances and responds toward postmodern phenomena which is portrayed by the condition of America today. These data are supported by some sources from the novel *Free To Fall* itself, books, journals, and articles.

This thesis aims to analyze the hyperrealities in *Free To Fall* as a cyberpunk novel. As stated by Cavallaro that cyberpunk as a subgenre of science fiction also takes some points of contact with postmodern fiction (2000:10). In order to prove it, I have to analyze the construction of cyberpunk fiction. The first step I do is analyzing the simulation of *Free To Fall*'s world by discussing the characters' responds to technology and the kinds of technology. Then, these discussions lead into the discussion of the changing image of technology which is analyzed by the changing relation between the character and the technology and vice versa. The changing image of technology has caused the emergence of hyperreality which is indicated by the emergence of modern paradise in Massachusetts. In analyzing the hyperreality, I use Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality which explains that hyperreality has caused the discontinuity between the real and the fake. The first hyperreality leads to the emergence of the other hyperrealities. Moreover, the discussion goes to analyze what lies beyond hyperrealities in the novel. In this discussion, I analyze the hyperreality in America through the condition of the present America.

Result and Discussion

A smartphone causes the emergence of hyperreality. Smartphone has conditioned people to always look down and ignore with their surroundings. The moment people interact with their smartphones, they assume as if they are in their own worlds.

There are two discussions which are analyzed in this research; those are the construction of cyberpunk fiction in *Free To Fall* and what lies beyond hyperreality in *Free To Fall*. According to Cavallaro in *Cyberpunk And Cyberculture*, cyberpunk is seen as a subgenre of science fiction which has some points of contact with postmodern fiction (2000:10). As the subgenre of science fiction, cyberpunk deals with science and technology and it also takes some points of postmodern fiction such as hyperreality and intertextuality. In this thesis, the construction of cyberpunk fiction in *Free To Fall* is explained sequentially from the characters to the phenomena of hyperrealities.

a. Simulation of World

The first step in analyzing the construction of cyberpunk fiction is by analyzing the characters and the kind of technology. The responds of people to Lux is classified into three groups: the user of Lux, the anti-Lux, and the creator of Lux. The discussion continues to find the changing responds to Lux. There are two groups: the anti-user of Lux and the user-anti Lux. This is to show that technology can change people's minds. Moreover, cyberpunk also portrays the resistance toward the capitalist which is shown by the changing respond of user to anti-Lux. In Massachusetts, Lux and Gemini are the indicators of the new sophisticated technologies that succeed to take over Iphone's position. However, Baudrillard said that the sign has lost connection to a real signified caused by technological development. Lux which at first is used as the decision-making application has another purpose. It relates to the application that leads people into the reality constructed by Lux. By using this application people enter into the reality that looks like an ideal reality, in where people get happiness and never deal with problems. Gnosis who stands as the creator turns to be the controller and the users have turned to be the controlled(s). They control people to make them follow all Lux's decisions. Once people use Lux, they have already entered created reality or simulation. This leads to hyperreality.

b. The Changing Images of Technology

According to Jean Baudrillard, the technological development has brought hyperreality. Hyperreality is the phenomena caused by an endless simulacrum and the lost connection between the sign and the real signified. Simulacrum is the simulation of endless simulations. In the book *Simulation and Simulacra*, Jean Baudrillard explains the fourth order of image. the emergence of hyperreality is explained by the orders of image.

c. Technology as a Product

The technological development has brought many kinds of innovations that can help people do their works and problems. The production of R&D in the novel has shown how technology can solve people's problems. R&D is a product of technology in the form of mobile application in Gemini. It is the application which helps people being honest to themselves and others. It works by making people not lying to themselves and others in order to avoid getting brokenhearted. Baudrillard said that the first order of image is image is the reflection of a profound reality (1994:6). R&D is made to imitate people's ways of being honest. However, people are still aware that this application is seen as a product of technology which helps them not lying to themselves and others.

d. Technology as a Companion

As mentioned before, R&D is seen as the product of technology which helps people being honest to themselves and others. However, this application still faces a lot of troubles. Then, Gnosis launches a new decision-making application called Lux as the development of R&D. Lux is made by adding lots of features. Lux is the decision-making application that helps and guides people in making decision about everything. Lux will automatically give people answers about their questions. As the result, this application is not only seen as the product of technology, but also as the companion by guiding people in their lives. Lux comes with the pre-installed voice of the user. The users of Lux can talk with their phones like they talk with the real people. This makes people interact with Lux more than they do with people in their surroundings. Lux has masked the meaning of Lux as only the product of technology and appeared as the guidance for people like what partner always does. This corresponds with what Baudrillard said in which

image mask and denatures a profound reality (1994:6). Moreover, Lux has distracted the people's times to interact face-to-face with other people.

e. Technology as an Addiction

People are too addicted to Lux. Not only has Lux appeared as the guidance of people and distracted people's times to interact with other people, but also has distracted people's freedoms to live as they wish. This is up to the point people believe all what Lux has suggested and they feel the need to consult Lux everyday. Lux is no longer seen as the product of technology, but as the addiction. People trust all Lux's suggestions even though most of them do not represent their wishes. Moreover, there are some people that worship Lux. Since the emergence of Lux, people no longer need to think anymore. They even say "In Lux We Trust". They use Lux everyday and for everything. They cannot leave without Lux. Lux has already succeeded to mask the real function of technology as like Baudrillard said that image mask the absence of a profound reality. Moreover, it also masks the position of God since they trust Lux more.

f. Technology as a Simulacrum

People do not even realize that they have started to enter the reality created by the technology. They think that the decision Lux has made all are the right ones for them. Lux is no longer seen as the product of technology, but it is used as the tool to create a simulated Massachusetts. All of the Lux's decisions are made to lead people into the life created by Gnosis. At first the goal of Gnosis is indeed to lead people into the lives they think they want but at the end this goal changes; that is to lead people into the created reality. Lux has masked the people's consciousness. In the novel, the consciousness is called as Doubt. Doubt is a whisper within or God's voice that has led people to get the lives they want. However, Gnosis sees Doubt as an opponent and a dangerous threat. Gnosis produces many kinds of modern technologies that surround people's lives. All of these modern technologies make people's minds occupied by the excitement of high-tech stuffs. These stuffs slowly shut down Doubt. As the effect, people all are into Lux. Lux has masked and replaced Doubt as the voice of God which can be interpreted as the people's consciousness by making bad rumors about Doubt.

g. Hyperreality

All of these steps above have brought people into hyperreality. Hyperreality has caused the discontinuity between the real and the fake. It also interrupts people's way of thinking in which they cannot differentiate between the real and the fake. The real meaning of Lux has changed from the product of technology into the simulacrum. Lux succeeds to drag people out of reality when they think that Lux is only the product of technological development and lead people into the created reality when they trust all of Lux's suggestions. The creators produce the new innovation that can help people in facing their problems. However, this innovation develops into something that controls people. The development of technology from R&D and Lux has shown how the technology develops into something more than just as the tool but as the need and simulacrum. At this stage people already experience hyperreality. It is like what Lane said people prefer the simulation instead because it gives them happiness and security. In fact, people are not aware of the simulation's aim which is a hyperreality, total control (Lane, 2000:90). The image of modern society is built through the massive usage of technology and the blur of illusion in simulation. Lux has completely led people into the life created by Gnosis. The image of God is also covered by Lux. People think that they get their freedoms through Lux. In fact, all those choices are simulated choices. People already lose their right senses that make them not question all the choices Lux has offered. The time people lose their right sense actually indicates that they have already lost connection with God. The first goal of Gnosis that wants to help people make decision turns into the goal to drag people out of the reality and place them into the created one.

h. Simulation of God in *Free To Fall*

Another phenomenon in *Free To Fall* is a simulation of God. The situation goes chaotic when it is revealed that behind Gnosis there is actually a secret society called The Few. This organization runs inside Theden Academy. The members of The Few act like Gods. At this point, The Few appears as the simulation of God. They already forget that they are also humans like others. The Few through Lux has successfully covered the position of God by making the God's position irrelevant.The idea of this organization is taken from the story of Adam and Eve. The members of The Few assume that humans gain the same power as God after Adam and Eve ate the fruit of knowledge. The Few plays like God and describes people outside the secret organization are like fool people. Instead of making God the highest position in the organization,

they choose the serpent one. They think that serpent is the good one which already leads Adam and Eve to eat the fruit. In order to achieve The Few's goal, The Few through Gnosis makes Lux to guide people's lives through its suggestions. It also reveals the fact that Theden Academy is actually the place to find the new candidates who will be the next developers of Gemini and Lux through the selection of the Few's members. The students of Theden Academy have taught to think rationally and play as Gods through the Plato Practicum as one of their subjects since the start of their studies. The students learn about the simulations of accidents and they become the ones deciding who live and who die. The goal behind all this action by The Few is to rebuild paradise by turning Massachusetts become the modern paradise. They enter the lives or the ideal lives created by Gnosis. The first hyperreality which shown by Massachusetts as a paradise overlaps with the simulation of God. This has caused the emergence of the second hyperreality in which the members of The Few think that they are the Gods. They cannot differentiate whether they are normal human beings or they are the Gods. They have created the modern paradise where they can be the Gods of this paradise.

i. Intertextuality of *Free To Fall* with *Paradise Lost* by John Milton

Intertextuality is one of the characteristics of postmodern fiction. This is about the relation between one text and other texts. This shows that how two or more literary works from across country share the same ideas. This also can be interpreted that one literary work can be created using another literary work that has existed before. Intertextuality becomes the link to relate one text with other texts and shows that the story or the idea of literary works still develops and can be blended. *Paradise Lost* is from UK and *Free To Fall* is from US. The technique used to show these links is parody. *Free To Fall* parodies some lines of *Paradise Lost*. The idea of the secret society called The Few is taken from the story Adam and Eve in a poem entitled *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. *Paradise Lost* is the poem about the fall of Adam and Eve. It tells about how Adam and Eve were created and how they lost their places in the Garden of Eden, called Paradise [www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html]. In *Free To Fall*, The Few through Gnosis plans to play as God. In The Few, the highest position is taken by the serpent. In the original story of *Paradise Lost,* the highest position is taken by God. The serpent represents the Satan in the Bible. In The Few's point of view, the serpent is the good one because it has already told the Eve to eat the forbidden fruit or fruit of knowledge and she shares it with Adam. The members of

The Few interpret themselves as the wise men. All of The Few's members are intelligent and have the strength of will. They describe the people outside of The Few are the fools. These people are like the fools looking for their masters. They are so proud of their prides but they do not want to give up. Then, The Few and Gnosis provide the freedom of choices through Lux. People think that the freedoms they get from using Lux are the real ones. They are too blind and excited with the given freedoms. However, all of those freedoms are fakes made by The Few and Gnosis.

In the original poem, it is said that Adam and Eve have broken the law made by God by eating those forbidden fruits. As the consequence, they get expelled from Eden. The expulsion of Adam and Eve due to their faults is perceived differently by The Few. The Few interprets Milton's perception of *Fall* is the fall of Adam and Eve from Heaven but this is not caused by their sins after eating the forbidden fruits instead of the successful achievement for Adam and Eve. The Few thinks that after Adam and Eve eat the fruits, they gain the same power as God. It makes the position of God irrelevant. The Few perceives this expulsion as the time where Adam and Eve get their freedom. The members of The Few interpret that they have the same power of God. Furthermore, through the Hyperion Project, The Few wants to completely conquer Massachusetts. The members of The Few as the powerful and intelligent ones use the development of science and technology to create something new. By planting nanobots inside people's brains, their mission to conquer Massachusetts will be so easy. The Few's hatred for God has inspired the members of The Few to rebuild the paradise and make Massachusetts as the modern paradise. Through Lux, they plan to control people. The more addicted people to Lux, the closest the members of The Few to its plan. Actually the idea of the creation of modern paradise in Massachusetts is only the alibi of the members of The Few to conquer Massachusetts. They make their own perceptions of the Adam and Eve's fall in the poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton to strengthen their position as the good ones and the Almighty. It is used as the strategy to lure people to join The Few. This intertextuality between *Free To Fall* and *Paradise Lost* has shown the emergence of the third hyperreality. This is proven by how the wrong perception of *Paradise Lost* is more trusted than the original perception. The leaders of The Few are aware with the existence of the poem but they play it in a different version instead and spread the wrong perception to the other members. As an effect, the wrong perception has blurred the original perception of *Paradise Lost*.

The paradise in *Free To Fall* is portrayed as the high-tech Massachusetts. Paradise is the place where people can get peace, prosperity and happiness. It can be found in Massachusetts. Paradise in Massachusetts is built through the massive usage of technology. In this paradise, technologies surround people's lives. People are so eager to buy all the newest technological stuffs. It is so different with the portrait of paradise in Paradise Lost that is portrayed by The Eden. The position of God is taken by the Few. The Few is the one which has decided the lives of people this paradise. The members of The Few have the power to control people through Lux. Moreover, Gnosis becomes the God's servant that lead people into the paradise by producing many kinds of technological stuffs. People who follow all God's order get the happiness. However, those who disobey will face the death instead. The users of Lux no longer make wrong decisions anymore. In this paradise, people do not need to think anymore. They have to trust Lux and they get happiness, security and prosperity. They only need to enjoy the given lives and buy all the technological stuffs provided by Gnosis. This portrays how The Few as The God and Gnosis create its paradise. This modern paradise has appeared as the better one since it provides all things that people wish to have and succeeds to attract people to like this kind of paradise.

j. Beyond Hyperrealities in *Free To Fall*

America is one of the countries with fast technological development. Americans are always anticipating something new from technological development. One of the technological stuffs which takes a highest position is smartphone. Almost of all people own at least one smartphone. Along with the technological development, the function of smartphone changes. In the article entitled "The History and Evolution of Cell Phones", it talks about how phone becomes the pop culture symbol since all people use it. Phone uses only as a communication tool at first. However, phones starts to changes from as a verbal communication tool into a multimedia tool. The creator has provided more features and applications inside the phone, such as camera, video, mail, browser, etc [http://new.artinstitutes.edu/Blog/the-history-and-evolution-of-cell-phones].

The term phone changes into mobile device since people can do many activities through phone. From the physical design, phone also has transformed from big heavy phone into larger-light-stylish phone [http://new.artinstitutes.edu/Blog/the-history-and-evolution-of-cell-phones]. However, this kind of development also has brought a side effect. The addiction to technology especially mobile phone is slowly getting worse. People cannot be separated with their phones.

In the article in usatoday.com entitled "Smartphone Dependency: A Growing Obsession With Gadgets" (2011), it explains that American already enter the stage where people grow obsession toward their smartphones that make them interact more with their phones rather than with other people. However, the psychologist said that the people's loves toward their phones have become an addiction. People argue that they cannot live without their phones. It is up to the point they feel panicked when their phones go dead or get crashed because they said that their phones are always in their hands all the time. People always set their phones go online anytime. Once their phones get disconnected, they said that they can no longer handle their daily activities.

Without people knowing it, they have entered hyperreality. It is when the term technology or phone changes from a tool or communication tool into a need and a simulacrum that leads into the emergence of hyperreality. They cannot even take their eyes off of their phones even for a minute. They become more attracted to their phone than with their surroundings. All of the situations above are portrayed in the novel *Free To* Fall. This novel shows that people in the modern Massachusetts are too addicted to the technology. Almost all people in Massachusetts use Gemini and Lux. Those both stuffs are like their best companions because people interact more with their phones than people in their surroundings. Their addictions to technology have gradually grown. It is up to the point they let Lux to decide something for them. Moreover, people are aware to the technological development. It makes them always want to get the latest technological stuffs. They do not even care about the price. This shows that people are really dependent on technology. This makes them afraid to get separated with the technology. They even think that technology has made their lives run smoothly and they do not need to think anymore. The condition of America in real life shows how technology is not only seen as the tool but as the part of people's lives. As in smartphone, it has already blurred the original function of phone as the communication tool and presented as the media tool. However, it does not stop until as the media tool but changes to be the tool that lead people into hyperreality. Behind this technological development, America itself is another simulation. Americans want to create their own paradises. In this paradise, they can live happily and fulfill all their wishes. The construction of hyperreality in *Free To Fall* relates to the construction of hyperreality in America. This makes *Free To Fall* as a mirror of the real society. *Free To Fall* is the simulation of Massachusetts which makes the readers experience hyperreality when they read this novel. The readers will

think that all things happened in the novel are really happened in America or more precisely in Massachusetts. In fact, it does not occur.

Conclusion

Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction which absorbs some points of contact with postmodern fiction. As a subgenre of science fiction, cyberpunk deals with technology. Moreover, the construction of cyberpunk fiction in *Free To Fall* by Lauren Miller is showed by the emergence of hyperreality. Hyperreality itself is a characteristic of postmodern fiction. Hyperreality is the phenomenon which causes the discontinuity between the real and the fake. The events in *Free To Fall* show that there is a simulation of simulation; that is the simulation of God inside the simulation of paradise in Massachusetts. The overlapping hyperrealities in *Free To Fall* show that the phenomena of hyperrealities still continue and develop. Moreover, hyperreality also appears in the real America. The original function of technology as a tool changes to be a simulacrum that leads into the emergence of hyperreality. As in smartphone, the original function of phone has blurred and changed from a communication tool into an addiction. The addiction towards smartphone and the fast technological development have shown that people enter the hyperreality. Through this technological development, Americans want to create their own paradise in which people can get happiness. *Free To Fall* itself is as the hyperreality because the story of the novel seems real and is happening in present America even though this is only faked

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