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Discovering Psychosis in “The Drowning Girl”

Novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to discover the psychosis personality in The Drowning Girl novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan that written in 2012. The story of the novel reveals a condition of someone who suffers psychosis living her life and the psychosis in the novel shown from the dialogues and narratives form. The writer used psychoanalysis theory of Jacques Lacan that exposes Mirror Stages of protagonist and it consist three stages; Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. Therefore, this study applied qualitative methodology and textual methodology as the analysis presented in textual form. The result of the study uncovers the symptoms form and the causes of psychosis of the protagonist. Then, the symptoms form of the psychosis in this study are hallucination and delusion which make someone who suffers psychosis hard to differentiate reality and imagination. Furthermore, the causes of psychosis which discuss in this study are the absentee of father figure, the imagination in infancy period, and the lesbian identity state.

Keywords: *delusion, hallucination, imaginary, psychoanalysis, psychosis*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has their own struggle in life, some people struggle with physical problems and some people struggle with their psychological problems. Some problem can be solved by their own self while other people need someone's help to

fix their problem. In another side, there are also some people who spend their life to save someone's life. For instance, a doctor tends to spend his time to examine and to cure patients. However, there is a psychological condition that makes someone cannot focus on their life, and hard to differentiate between reality and imagination. As Crichton (1798, as cited in Parish, 2011) states when someone has a problem in their mind, they cannot separate the real and unreal object, the real object can falsely be represented. It obstructs the relation of someone to their community in real life so that the subject is hard to know whether it is reality or imagination.

The condition is also known as psychosis, the common symptoms are: delusions and hallucinations. Basically, hallucination is kind of an imagination that only takes one sense of a person, while delusion takes more than one sense. The imagination of the person usually is hearing some mysterious sounds that talk to them alike. Besides, the sounds are usually the voice of a public figure that he idolizes or the familiar sounds which he believed by him while the others which have no problem will see him like he has an unseen friend that they are talking to. Psychosis also talks about lack of memory. He would be hard to remember every event in their life. Not even the important part of their life.

The psychosis occurs on many people with occupational backgrounds. Darrell Hammond, a 65-year-old American stand-up comedian, who suffers from psychosis since he was a teenager. The cause of this disorder is abusive experiences in his childhood age done by his mother. He was beaten, stabbed, and also has been electrocuted by his mom. When he was a young adult, he started to do self-mutilation regarding the psychosis which he had. The condition got worse by the substance abuse that makes Hammond have to be hospitalized in a psychiatric ward for a while (Simon, 2011).

Another case of psychosis can be seen in Michael O'Hare. O'Hare is an American actor, he was best known as the cast of Commander Jeffrey Sinclair in "Babylon 5" television series. He has psychosis symptoms that are delusion and paranoia. He began to see any secret messages in a newspaper, some particular symbols in television, and he believed that he has been watched and followed by the CIA in a specific time. The disorder became an obstacle to his career in the movie industry. Finally, he was not finished the movie and the condition got worse until

he passed away. (Straczynski, 2013).

The case of psychological problem emerges not only in the real life but also in the literary works, such as *The Drowning Girl* novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan. Kiernan is an American book writer of novels, short stories, and comic books. Kiernan known as the author of horror and dark fantasy fiction works. Some novels from Kiernan are *The Five of Cups* (2003), *Low Red Moon* (2003), *The Red Tree* (2009), *Blood Oranges* (2013), and *Black Helicopters* (2018). The novel has won James Triptee, Jr. Award 2012 and Bram Stoker Award 2012. With also five nominees: World Fantasy Award 2012, British Fantasy Award 2012, Nebula Award 2012, and Mythopoeic Award 2012. Therefore, the writer wanted to analyzing the causes of psychosis of protagonist and also the symptoms of psychosis. Accordingly, the title of this study is “Discovering Psychosis in “*The Drowning Girl*” Novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan”

The objectives of the study are to uncover the symptoms of psychosis depicted in *The Drowning Girl* novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan and to analyze the causes of psychosis reflected in the *Drowning Girl* novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study has similarities to other studies from other writers. This study discusses about psychological issue that concern in the psychological problem, specifically is psychosis. Therefore, the writer finds some other studies which discover about psychological problem. The writer will point out the differences and similarities among this study and some other studies. There are three studies of the related studies.

The first study was conducted by Nindita (2019), who was the student of English Letters Department in Universitas Sanata Dharma. The study entitled *The Disingenuous Histrionic Personality Disorder and The Mental Process of Amy Elliot Dunne in Flynn’s Gone Girl*. The study used psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud’s theory to be the guide of her study. Her study discussed on the characteristics of the protagonist’s personality disorder and also how the psychological process of the protagonist in manifesting the personality disorder. The specific issue of her study is *Disingemuos Histrionic Personality Disorder*. The findings of the study are

show the protagonist's characteristics of the disorder and the psychological process of the protagonist to manifest the disorder.

The second study was conducted by Safira (2018), who was the student of English Department in Universitas Airlangga. The study entitled *Mother Loss and Its Impact Towards Jude's Behavior in Jandy Nelson's Novel I'll Give You The Sun: A Psychoanalytic Study*. The study used psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud's theory to be the guide of her study. Her study discussed on the affection of the mother loss towards the protagonist's character, personality and sibling relationship. The specific issue of her study is trauma. The findings of the study are the defense mechanism of the protagonist associated with the losing traumas towards the behavior.

The third study was conducted by Simangunsong (2016), who was the student of English Letters Department in Universitas Sanata Dharma. The study entitled *Naoko's Schizophrenia as Reflected in Haruki Murakami's Norwegian Wood*. The study used the theory of Mark Durand as the guide of his study. His study discussed on the characteristics of protagonist's personality disorder so the finding is the traumatic events associated with the personality disorder of the protagonist. The specific issue is schizophrenia.

From the three of the study above, those studies are discussed about psychological problem. The similarity of all study is about the choosing object of the study, all of the studies uses novel as the object. Nindita, and Safira used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory to be the guide of the studies while Simangunsong used Mark Durand's theory to be the guide of the study and the writer uses Jacques Lacan's theory. The writer focused on Psychosis issue while Simangunsong focused on Schizophrenia issue, Nindita focused on Disingemuos Histrionic Personality Disorder issue and Safira focused on Trauma issue.

Psychosis is an abnormal condition that happened to someone's psychological state. Besides, the subject who have psychosis also far from the reality that caused by their own imagination and perception towards their own thought. According to Jacques Lacan in his seminar book entitled "The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III 1955-1956" (1993, p. 4), that psychosis or other related matter was paranoia. Paranoia shows the hallucination and delusion

to the subject who have psychosis. So, they will hard to differentiate when is the reality and when is the imagination come into their mind. The condition would be relapse or onset in the unpredictable situation of their life. As Lacan (1993, p. 11) pointed out that the consciousness of someone who have psychosis would be at below their unconsciousness. It can be concluded that the unconsciousness takes a huge role in their mechanism of life and cause the problem of someone's thought and behaviour, because they cannot control their mind.

Hallucination, one of two part of psychosis symptoms which different with the delusion. This symptom is one of the serious parts for psychosis. Hallucination and delusion are the result of internal and external problems of psychosis. Internal problems refers to the psychological state of the subject while the external problem refers to the relationship between the subject and other people. Hallucination only takes one sense of the subject. Lacan (1993, p. 13) states that hallucination phenomena associated with the history of the subject's life and also it has a connection with symbolic. It shows that hallucinations should be considered as the important part of psychosis's symptoms. It is not only the society but also the subject themselves could be the reason of the emergence of hallucinations in the subject's mind.

The other one is **delusion**. The other people who have no psychosis but have the relationship to the subject usually hard to get into conversation in particular situation. It caused by subject tends to get in the hard condition of the distraction sometimes. Delusion takes more than one sense of the subject and it leads a belief of the imagination. According to Lacan (1993, p. 21), the delusions may happen in unexpected time and it distract the subject's perception of an object's meaning through their reality. The moment appeared particular measurement, so the portion based on the thought and feeling of subject's own self. The subject hard to know the meaning of something surround them. But it appears and bold the meaning in their unconsciousness and it is understandable. Even his conscious and also other people are hard to get the meaning.

Lacan define the three orders to guide the analysis method using. There are **symbolic**, **imaginary**, and **real**. First is imaginary. **Imaginary** in these three orders of Lacan's theory take a main role of all three orders. This order is

completely trapped and emerged in someone's mind. Lacan (1993, p. 9) states that imaginary is the vital role in the three orders on subject's domain and completely caught up within subject's mind. It reveals that imaginary would be reanimated by its relation to the symbolic orders. Lacan mentioned that the natural aims is depicted in imaginary function of this domain. Everything in this imaginary function refers to what Lacan's term as 'animal domain'. It is like represent what kind of image of psychosis through the animal behavior.

Second is symbolic. **Symbolic** is the complex orders of all three orders. This order could have everything surround the case being blended. According to Lacan (1993, p. 9), the symbolic order covers all elements in particular case to have a stand as opposed one to another. It could be concluded that the influence of anything in socially relationship between someone to the others and also in their own self are really matters for someone who have psychosis issue. By getting analyzed the symbolic order, it would make us successfully to entering the case and wisely in analyzing system.

Third is real. **Real** order is the reality surround psychosis which appears rarely in the psychosis. It is hard to differentiate between the imaginary and real in the psychosis condition. According to Lacan (1993, p. 9), both real and imaginary have boundary, outset, and continuity with more and less. Based on that quotation, real and imaginary tends to have similarity in the surface. The reality condition would seem like it is only imagination and also the imagination would seem like it is reality.

Theoretical framework is needed to finishing the analysis of the study. By using theory which relate with the issue that will be discussed. The writer uses Jacques Lacan's theory in his book entitled "**The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III 1955-1956**" (1993). The term 'psychosis' used by Lacan to described the abnormal condition of someone's psychological state that could not separate the reality of their own life and their own imagination. Lacan has three important orders to define the causes of psychosis. Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real. The study uses the same book to analyze the symptoms of psychosis. Lacan define that the main symptoms of psychosis are Hallucination and Delusion. Those two symptoms are the most serious part of psychosis. The symptoms are reflected

of the internal and external problems of the subject of psychosis. Internal problem refers to the psychological state of the subject while the external problem refers to the relationship between the subject and other people. The symptoms have a relation with the reality's subject, but not the same way.

METHOD

The writer uses Qualitative Approach because the writer tries to analyze psychosis in novel in the form of essay. The data are utterances, narrative, and also in written texts. As Flick (2018, p. 13) defines that qualitative approach is used to analyze factual cases in the domestic and impermanent them and started from reader's expression and events in specific framework. The writer uses qualitative approach in order to analyze the factual data in the object of the study that have local identity and started with the writer events and expression in specific aspect, in this case, psychological aspect. The writer also uses Textual Approach in this study. According to Adamczewski on his book entitled "Following The Textual Revolution: The Standardization Of Radical Critical Theories Of The 1960s" (2016, p. 140), textual approach focus on the text only as the object, not any other factor except the text of the object. Textual Approach applied to analyze this study by focusing in the textual object properly only. The source of this study was taken from the novel written by Caitlín R. Kiernan entitled "The Drowning Girl" published in 2012.

There are some steps to collecting data, firstly is reading the object properly to get the information which needed to this study. Secondly is identifying the data which needed to this study and also deciding the issue of the object which want to analyze. Thirdly is marking the data which needed to analyze. Fourthly is classifying the data which needed to analyze. Lastly is choosing the data that important to be analyzed then uses the theory of the related issue to analyze the data. The data analysis presented in the form of essay. The data uses the psychoanalysis theory of Jacques Lacan. Lacan's psychoanalysis theory in his book entitled "The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III 1955-1956" (1993). The writer using all of the data from the object of the study. The object of the study is novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan entitled The Drowning Girl which published

in 2012.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Symptoms of Psychosis in *The Drowning Girl* Novel

Hallucination

Someone who has psychological problems, experiences some things that common people never feel. One of symptoms of psychosis is hallucination, in this case the protagonist cannot differentiate which one is reality and which one the imagination. The protagonist has someone to share anything that relates to her condition. But it does not make her better yet, she still hears any distraction from the voice that plays on her mind. At this time, she hears a song playing again in her mind.

There was a visit to Dr. Ogilvy in between. I didn't hear the receptionist when she said I could go in. I was too busy scribbling in the margins of pages in a year-old issue of Redbook. Eventually, Dr. Ogilvy came out to see if there was something wrong, and she found me writing in the magazine. I'd written lines from "The Lobster Quadrille" over and over again, over and over, out of order. She asked if I was okay, "Imp, is something wrong?" and when I didn't answer (I was trying to, but my head was too full of Lewis Carroll) she asked if she could look at what I'd written. (The Drowning Girl, 2012:177)

The quotation shows that the voice of hallucination here is in a song form. The song makes the protagonist hard to live her life. "I'd written lines from "The Lobster Quadrille" over and over again, over and over, out of order." It shows that the hallucination of the song plays around in her mind and distracts her reality and she cannot control the voice. "The Lobster Quadrille" here is the title of the song that she heard in her mind. "(I was trying to, but my head was too full of Lewis Carroll)" it represents that the voice is like forcing her to hear it and it makes her mind thinking about nothing but the voice. "Lewis Carroll" is the name of the author of the song that makes it clearer, a poem that is played in the protagonist's mind is a song and it cannot be controlled by her and the distraction influence her

response to the place where she stands.

Delusion

The subject of psychosis has lost their trust in their memory because sometimes they feel something happen even though it is not a reality. The protagonist believes in something that is not a reality, but feels like she experienced the event.

“Where did she go?” I ask. “Did you see her leave?” “Who do you mean, ma’am?” the man wants to know, and he looks confused. He has that quizzical expression people get when they begin to realize there’s something wrong with me. (The Drowning Girl, 2012:166)

And I say the very first thing that occurs to me. I say, “You were in my head. A few minutes ago. You said, ‘Get it over with.’” There’s a tremble in my voice. My voice is a counterpoint to Eva’s, as is what I’ve said, implying that this coincidence isn’t happy. It may not even be a coincidence... And then Eva leans near and whispers into my right ear. Her breath is warm, but the smell of the sea grows cloying with her face near to me... Her lips brush my earlobe, and I flinch. And I want to kiss her. (The Drowning Girl, 2012:163,165&166)

The first quotation shows something that just the protagonist said that she experienced is only her delusion that means it was not reality. “He has that quizzical expression people get when they begin to realize there’s something wrong with me.” It shows that the man who is the witness beside her, saw what just happened surrounding them. He wonders what is happening to the protagonist and starts to realize there is a condition about her. The second quotation reveals that the occurrence was like a reality that is experienced by the protagonist. “You were in my head. A few minutes ago.” It shows that it is only on her hallucination at first, but after that it becomes visible in front of her eye. “And then Eva leans near and whispers into my right ear.” It shows that the protagonist hears the sound of Eva by the time Eva whispers in her ear, it represents the feeling of reality vibes on her memoir. “...but the smell of the sea grows cloying

with her face near to me.” it shows that the occurrence feels like a reality that the protagonist can smell the scent of Eva, even though it is only her delusion. “Her lips brush my earlobe, and I flinch.” it shows that the delusion also can be felt by her sense of touch, it getting real that all of her senses can be felt. The delusion touches her reality aspect that makes it feel really real so that she believes it is really not only delusion but it is real and factual.

Causes of Psychosis in The Drowning Girl Novel

The Absentee of Father Figure Represents Imaginary Period

The imaginary period should have the complete image about self-image, but the story tells about the protagonist living her life with no father figure since she was a kid.

..but he left when I was ten, and no one's sure where he went. (The Drowning Girl, 2012:2)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist had no figure of father in her infancy period of childhood, while father figure is as important as mother figure in that period. The absentee father figure depicts an incomplete image of the relationship concept. “...he left when I was ten...” shows that she still has the memory about her father leaving the family, it represents the repressed emotion about losing her father and it still haunted her mind until she became an adult. “...no one's sure...” shows that the protagonist tried to figure out the condition of her father by trying to ask her family but she got nothing at all. She wonders how her father could left the family when she was ten years old. The quotation about losing her father shows how she needs a masculine figure in her life to fulfill the complete image of relationship.

Imagination in Infancy Period Represents Symbolic Period

The symbolic period should fill the self-image and everyone surrounds someone's life. The story tells that the protagonist spends her infancy period of life living with her mother and her grandmother who has psychosis. After her mother and her

grandmother passed away, she started to live with her aunt.

...I'm going to write about the first time I saw The Drowning Girl... For my eleventh birthday, my mother took me to the museum at the Rhode Island School of Design. (The Drowning Girl, 2012:7)

The quotation above exposes instead of spending a usual birthday celebration or playing with her friends, her mother took her to go to the museum of art. It also shows that the protagonist spends her childhood period with only her mother without her father. The vibe of imagination filled a museum of art obviously. "The Drowning Girl" refers to a name of a painting which later on will be haunted by her adult life. "I'm going to write about the first time I saw The Drowning Girl" shows that she would 'see' The Drowning Girl in the future even though she is not going to the museum after the last time she visited. The painting really impressed her mind and it made the imagination of the painting's vibe have stuck on her mind and later on would distract her life.

Lesbian Identity State Represents Real Period

Since real order is influenced by the injection of the symbolic order negativity, most of the protagonist's behavior is abnormal. The story tells that the sexual orientation of her is lesbian and she diagnosed as the subject of psychosis.

...and the fact that my girlfriend puts up with my weird shit and makes sure I take the pills and is great in the sack. (The Drowning Girl, 2012:5)

The quotation exposes that the protagonist is lesbian. The word 'girlfriend' is not only referring to a friend that is a girl, but refers to the love relationship of a couple. Because of the incomplete image of masculinity by the fact that her father left the family, she only knows an image of feminine so it brings the effect of creating her sexual orientation. The phrase 'weird shit' represents an odd character or unusual behavior of the protagonist that her girlfriend could cope with. Her girlfriend really gives her attention, so that she loved the way her

girlfriend is. It could be seen that her girlfriend would make sure that the protagonist takes her medicine. She also explains her girlfriend by the idiom 'great in the sack'. It represents that the protagonist and her girlfriend have some sexual activities to fulfill their relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis explains the symptoms and the causes of psychosis condition faced by protagonist in *The Drowning Girl* novel by Caitlín R. Kiernan. The symptoms of psychosis in this study are hallucination and delusion. There are two forms of hallucination, which are seeing and hearing the imagination. The protagonist seeing something unreal which comes from her imagination such as a woman of the painting in the gallery art. She also hears some form of voice such as; human voice, noise, and a song. The delusion form in the novel shown by the protagonist that believe her imagination is a reality. The protagonist believes that she has sex with her imagination and also has a love relationship with the imagination.

The psychosis condition of the protagonist caused by the absentee of father figure, the imagination in infancy period, and the lesbian identity state. The absentee of father figure makes the protagonist had no idea about how the masculine figure on her life. Then, the imagination in her infancy period injected by her mother and grandmother indirectly which also suffer psychosis condition and it influence her reality that makes her cannot control her own reality. Finally, the lesbian identity state shows how the loss of her identity about masculinity. Therefore, these three causes blend as one repressed emotion on the protagonist which leads to her psychosis condition.

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