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## SELF-LIBERATION IN JODI PICOULT'S MY SISTER'S KEEPER

**Rosa Maria Simamora<sup>1</sup>, Yolanda Silaban<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Fakultas Sastra Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas

Email: rosasimamora1967@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

The research is self-liberation in Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*. The novel represents people especially teenagers who want to liberate themselves from parents' power, unfair treatment, fear and feeling guilty, to get medical emancipation and through sisterhood. This is a library research and applies mimetic theory proposed by Abrams saying that literature is an imitation of the real world. Liberation from parents' power is represented by Anna when she liberates herself by suing her mother because of making her as a donor to save her sister. Liberation from parents' unfair treatment is represented by Anna and Jesse. Anna feels that she is treated unfairly by her mother because her mother has born Anna just for Kate needs a donor, and Jesse feels that he is treated unfairly because he does not get his parents' attention. Liberation from fear and feeling guilty is represented by Sara and Campbell. Sara who is initially afraid of losing her daughter, Kate, is finally able to accept the reality and also feels guilty when Anna died because she had made Anna as a donor for Kate. Campbell liberates himself from his fear and over-thinking, he realizes that he has been wrong for hiding his epilepsy from the people around him, especially Julia. Liberation to get medical emancipation is represented by Anna and Kate. Anna wants to liberate herself to get medical emancipation so she can survive without having to donate anything to Kate. Kate wants to liberate herself to get her medical emancipation through Anna to refuse any kind of medical treatments because of giving up living. Liberation through sisterhood is represented by Anna who liberates herself because her sister, Kate forbids her to donate her kidney so Kate can go peacefully and Anna can live a normal life without having to worry about Kate anymore. In conclusion, the author, Jodi Picoult in her novel *My Sister's Keeper* vividly portrays the condition of people who have right to possess their bodies even though they have to take legal action to sue families to get mutual understanding and advantages.

**Keywords:** *self-liberation, unfair treatment, medical emancipation, fear, guilty, sisterhood.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Jodi Lynn Picoult is an American writer who was born on May 19, 1966 and raised in Nesconset, New York, on Long Island. She graduated from Princeton University and got her Master's Degree from Harvard University. She is married to Timothy Warren Van Leer and have three children, Sammy, Kyle, and Jake, but Kyle was diagnosed with middle-ear cancer when he was six years old. She writes twenty-nine novels and gets many awards, two of them are the legendary Hale Award and Alex Award. Her novels have been translated into thirty-four languages in thirty-five countries. She has two honorary Doctor of Letters degrees; one from Dartmouth College in 2010, the other from the

University of New Haven in 2012. In 2016, she joined the advisory board of *Vida: Women in Literary Arts*, a non-profit feminist organization committed to creating transparency around the lack of gender parity in the literary landscape and to amplifying historically-marginalized voices, including people of color; writers with disabilities; and queer, trans and gender nonconforming individuals (jodipicoult.com).

Picoult writes popular fiction which can be characterized as family saga. She frequently centers storylines around a moral dilemma which pits family members against one another. Her novels often explore the psychological consequences of wrenching incidents and decisions. She has been



described as a paradox; a statement that seems to contradict a general assumption, but in fact contains a truth. She is famous of writing novels about morally complex issues: for *My Sister's Keeper*, she focuses on genetic engineering and manipulation affecting a family (alumnispotlight.com).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1. Clarification of Terms

The word liberal is derived from the same Latin word as liberty – liber, meaning 'free'. Freedom is the ability to do what one wants (rights). Freedom, can also be interpreted as having the ability to act or change without restrictions. Freedom is generally included in the concept of political philosophy and recognizes the conditions in which individuals have the ability to act according to their wishes (encyclopedia.com). Liberation is the act of gaining the freedom to do what we want rather than being controlled by other people. This is the act or process of trying to achieve equal rights and status; the seeking of equal status or just treatment of any group believed to be discriminated against (Wikipedia.com).

Hobbes defines liberation as the absence of external obstacles; which removes barriers to human power to do what they want. Liberation in question is the absence of external obstacles that can hinder the realization of the goals of the social contract. In the context of humanity, liberated is the absence of obstacles that hinder human actions that come out of their will. Humans are free to get all their pleasures and desires at any time. A free person is someone who in various ways uses his strength and intelligence, is able to do what he wants to do without being hindered by anything (inmid.com).

Self-liberation is an action to end a dictatorship or other against us (Quora.com). Self-liberation is a body of thought and practice centrally concerned with the experience, knowledge and action of those who have been excluded and marginalized. The effects of dominant

power and its structures on the oppressed are explored, together with the lived impacts of poverty, social injustice, censorship, repression and violence (liply.com).

### 2.2 Theory and Method

This is a library research where data are collected from some libraries online, author's website, journal and online resources, and applies mimetic theory proposed by Abrams. He said that literature is an imitation of the real life. When a literary work is considered to be an imitation or a description of events that exist in the real world, it is called a mimetic theory (8).

## III. THE ANALYSIS

*My Sister's Keeper*, a novel of 423 pages is a story about a young girl who wants to free herself from her mother's unreasonable demand to save her sister who suffered from acute promyelocytic leukemia, a blood and bone marrow cancer. She had been donating umbilical cord blood since the first time she was born. At first it was successful, but the cancer continued to relapse throughout her sister's life. When she was thirteen, she was asked to donate one of her kidneys to her dying sister. Actually she did not mind donating her kidney, but her sister forbade her to do that because her sister was tired of living with such conditions, and not being a hypocrite, she also started to think about her own safety. She sued her mother by hiring a lawyer and won the case. There were many obstacles, especially her bad relationship with her mother, but she won her case in getting medical emancipation. When the judge was over, she wanted to visit her dying sister in the hospital but on the way, she and her lawyer got into an accident. Her lawyer was fine, but she got brain death and cannot be saved. She lived just because of the medical device and her parents should turn it off with their own hands. Her kidney was donated to her sister, and her other organs were donated to people who needed a second chance to life. Long after she died, everything was normal but she is still deep



remembered in their hearts.

### **3.1 Self-liberation from Parents' Power**

Parents' power in this analysis means that parents control everything. In this novel, Picoult describes how the parents' power, especially mother completely reigns. The author creates Sara as representation of parents' power. She controls Anna's body by making her young daughter as a donor to save her sister who was suffering from acute anemia. Before Anna became a donor, Sara initially had tried to make her first child, Jesse, a donor, but could not because he did not have a spinal cord matched with Kate. We know that parents make choices for their children. It does not matter if the child wants to make that choice or not, the parents always control everything. As Anna says: "Parents control everything" (302).

Parents' power sometimes can lead to child exploitation. In this novel, parents' power that causes the child exploitation is experienced by Anna: it is the act of using children arbitrarily. Picoult creates character Anna as representation of children who wants to liberate herself from the exploitation of her mother. Anna was conceived specifically so that she could donate parts of herself to her sister who is dying from acute leukemia. She says: "they chose little embryonic me, specifically, because I could save my sister, Kate" (8).

The author shows that parents have the power to control everything so children obey them even though the children do not want to. Anna disagrees with this so she sues her parents in court because only it can free her from all their absolute power she has experienced. Anna says: "I want to sue them for the rights to my own body" (19). Anna succeeded in getting her freedom through the courts and realized that only the courts could liberate her from her mother's power.

### **3.2 Self-liberation from Parents' Unfair Treatment**

Unfair treatment in this analysis means being unequal, one-sided, and being arbitrary to one party. The author creates

Anna as the portrait of children who wants to liberate herself from parents' unfair treatment. Then Picoult creates Sara as an unfair mother because she has prepared her unborn daughter to be a supplier for the life of her other daughter, Kate. Sara says: "I plan for her to save her sister's life" (100).

In this novel, Sara seems to care about Anna only because of something is needed from her. Anna says: "They don't really pay attention to me, except when they need my blood or something. I wouldn't even be alive, if it wasn't for Kate being sick" (22). A consequent of this unfair treatment, Anna wants to get justice and to enjoy her life like a teenager in general, not because of her sister's dying. As Anna says: "That I want Kate alive, but also want to be myself, not part of her. That I want the chance to grow up, even if Kate can't" (391).

Sara also treats her older son, Jesse, unfairly and unjustly. Jesse becomes a naughty son because of the lack of his parents' attention who are too busy with Kate. He drinks, smokes, speeding, and also likes to burn empty buildings because he thinks it is all his pleasure. He is often aloof because he feels his presence is not needed. Jesse says: "I slip out of the room, because nobody needs me there anymore. In the elevator, in front of the NO SMOKING sign, I light a cigarette" (98).

In the end, the two characters in this novel, Anna and Jesse, succeeds to liberate themselves from the unfair parents' treatment. Anna succeeds in liberating herself by demanding justice for herself through the courts while Jesse succeeds in liberating himself by committing crimes to get his parents' attention but when he gets it, he being a good boy and becomes a policeman.

### **3.3 Self-liberation to Get Medical Emancipation**

Medical emancipation in this analysis means removes the authority of parents to get involved with medical problems related to their children although if they are still under the age. In this novel, Picoult creates



Kate and Anna as children who want to get medical emancipation, and creates Sara as mother who takes advantage of parents' power because she does not ready to lose her daughter. The author creates Kate as representation of children who is tired of being sick: suffers from cancer around who wants to get her right to die. In this case, Kate liberates herself with Anna's help. The author shows that cancer makes Kate give up living. She had given up and accepted her destiny but her mother had not. Kate says: "I'm not doing it again, all right? I'm sick of it. The hospitals and the chemo and the radiation and the whole freaking thing. Just leave me alone, will you?" (377).

Picoult also creates Anna as a representative of children who is tired of being donors and receiving medical torture, she is not sick but she feels like sick. She is not dying but she could be dying. Anna says: "I started thinking about this. Would I have to be in the hospital? Would it hurt? Could people live with just one kidney? What if I wound up with kidney failure when I was, like, seventy? Where would I get my spare?" (377). Anna is very healthy girl but get torturous medical treatment only because she has a responsibility to save her dying sister. Anna's decision to get medical freedom is the right one by seeking her medical freedom to survive. She refuses to become a donor because she knows that there is no end until she runs out of her organs and she dies. Campbell says: "Because, she says simply, it never stops" (22).

The author shows us the justice in the Anna's side to get right and appreciate her own whole body. In fact, Anna and Kate succeed in liberating themselves to get medical emancipation. Anna succeeded in getting her medical emancipation to refuse to donate her kidney through the court. Likewise, Kate gets her medical emancipation through Anna to refuse any kind of medical treatment because of giving up living.

### **3.4 Self-liberation from Fear and Guilty**

Fear in this analysis means the fear of losing someone he/she loves very much, especially the fear of losing a child. Feeling guilty means a self-conscious emotion that involves negative evaluations of the self, feelings of distress, and feelings of failure. In this novel, Picoult creates Sara as a mother who is afraid of losing her daughter, Kate. As she said: "I'm not going to let Kate die" (36). Sara does not know that her daughter, Kate, is tired of living because she is constantly receiving medical care. When Sara found out about it in court, she was very sorry and accepted her daughter's decision. Sara says: "Kate, I confessed, I'm so sorry" (395).

Picoult also creates Campbell to portray people who is afraid of telling illness to their beloved because he does not want to bother the people he loves. In this novel, Campbell loves Julia very much, but chooses to leave her without a word because he does not want to trouble her who has a free life to care for him for the rest of his life because he is sick. He even hides it from his parents, he says: Christ, Julia, I didn't even tell my parent.... You deserved better than some freak who might fall down frothing at the mouth any old minute.... You were so incredibly independent. A free spirit. I didn't want to be the one who took that away from you (383- 384).

Campbell hides his illness, even from his own parents. He really does not want to bother anyone. For him, his illness is his own burden and there is no need for anyone else to carry his burden even if it is his parents. The author shows us that not bothering a partner is good, but honestly it might be necessary in a relationship when we have flaws. In this case, the author finally makes Campbell liberate himself from his over-thinking to his partner through Julia's dialogue. Julia says: You don't love someone because they're perfect, she says. You love them in spite of the fact that they're not (384). Campbell then realizes that his lover accepts his flaws and he is liberating from fear. What the author wants to show us is that people will not





know that someone will accept the flaws if they do not tell others.

Sara and Campbell succeed in liberating themselves from their fear and guilt. Sara who is initially afraid of losing her daughter, Kate, is finally able to accept the reality of her daughter because she knows that it is what Kate wants and she feels guilty for does not know Kate's desire. She also feels guilty because she has make Anna as a donor for Kate. Likewise, Campbell who succeed in liberating himself from his fear and over-thinking, realizes that he has been wrong because of hiding his epilepsy from the people around him, especially Julia.

### **3.5 Self-liberation through Sisterhood**

The author creates Anna and Kate as a representation of the relationship between sisters. We can feel how Anna sacrifices to save her dying sister. At first we think that Anna really does not want to donate her kidney, but at the end Anna reveals in court that Kate asks her not to donate her kidney. Anna says: Don't do it, she repeated, and it wasn't until I heard her a second time that I understood what she was really saying (390). Kate begs Anna not to donate her kidney because she is tired of being sick and she wants her sister to enjoy her own life without thinking about her. She wants her sister to do what her sister wants to do. Kate says: Think about it, Anna. You could go to your hockey camps. You could choose a college in a whole different country. You could do anything you want and never have to worry about me (390).

Anna is not a hypocrite person because she also wants to live freely to do the things she wants. She realizes that Kate has given up on her life, and only she can grant Kate's desire. Anna says: I don't want her to die, but I know she doesn't want to live like this, and I'm the one who can give her what she wants. I keep my eyes on my mother, even as she swims away from me. I've always been the one who can give her what she wants (389). It is a strong sisterhood that Picoult shows. Anna and

Kate always rely on each other and keep on supporting each other no matter how hard it is.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

The novel *My Sister's Keeper* written by Jodi Picoult, describes self-liberation from parents' power, unfair parents' treatment, fear and feeling guilty, to get medical emancipation and through sisterhood. It describes how people especially children want to liberate themselves from parents' power where the parents make everything on their desire without thinking about their children desire.

People who liberate themselves from parents' power is represented by Anna. She liberates herself from parents' power because her mother, Sara, controls her body by made her as a donor to save her sister who was suffering from acute anemia. People who liberate themselves from parents' unfair treatments is represented by Anna and Jesse. Anna feels that she is treated unfairly by her mother because her mother gives her a birth just to be a supplier for the life of hersister,Kate, and Jesse feels that he is treated unfairly because he does not get his parents' attention. People who liberate themselves to get medical emancipation is represented by Anna and Kate. Anna liberates herself because she is tired of being donors and receiving medical torture, she is not sick but she feels like sick. Kate liberates herself because she is tired of being sick and wants to get her right to die. She had given up and accepted her destiny and even often tried to kill herself because she felt that she had become a burden and had troubled her family. People who liberate themselves from fear and guilty is represented by Sara and Campbell. Sara who is initially afraid of losing her daughter, Kate, is finally able to accept the reality because she knows that is what Kate wants and she feels guilty for does not know Kate's desire. She also feels guilty when Anna died because she had made Anna as a donor for Kate. Campbell liberates himself from his fear and over-thinking, he realizes that he



has been wrong for hiding his epilepsy from the people around him, especially Julia. People who liberate themselves through sisterhood is represented by Anna and Kate. Kate begs Anna not to donate her kidney because she is tired of being sick and she wants her sister to enjoy her own life without thinking about her. She wants her sister to do what her sister wants to do. Likewise, Anna realizes that Kate has given up on her life, and only she can grant Kate's desire, that is why she agrees to sue her mother in court.

In conclusion, Jodi Picoult in her novel *My Sister's Keeper* succeeds in conveying that people absolutely have right to possess, free, and respect themselves as an individual. They have right too to sue those who obstruct or prevent them to have it, even to sue their own close family members.

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