POPULARIZATION OF SCIENCE FICTION: FORMULA ANALYSIS ON ELLE McNICOLL'S NOVEL, *SHOW US WHO YOU ARE*

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Abstract

This research is the formula analysis of popularization of science fiction in representing the neurodivergent character, Cora, in *Show Us Who You Are*. The novel, exposes the female autistic who would be the next hologram creation of Pomegranate's experimentation. The method used in this study is an inductive-qualitative approach with comprehensive data collection and analysis that generate arguments and critical thinking. The material object used is the novel *Show Us Who You Are* written by Elle McNicoll, while the formal object is the formula put forward by Raymond Williams about conventions and inventions in the science fiction genre. The combination of science fiction and middle grade makes Elle McNicoll's work unique in reconstructing the romanticization of neurodivergent character from the neurodivergent perspective. Thus, these innovations are presented in various formulas which deconstruct the binary narrative through feminist critique in soft SF formed by the author in the delivery of an inclusive neurodiversity movement.

1. Introduction

Science fiction is a genre that is based on a combination of technology and scientific knowledge. This combination creates a new world of synthesis between reality and fantasy simultaneously. Thus, the synthesis seeks multidimensionality that can affect the application of equality in various groups. Lombardo (2015) states that science fiction narratives can become interactive multicultural links in the future. This science fiction is also a fictitious prototype in projecting crucial issues in the future (Zaidi, 2019).

This neurodiversity narrative is one of the hot narratives being discussed in various media, especially post-pandemic ones. During the Covid-19 pandemic, all works had to be done by working from home. This sparked discussions from marginalized groups, namely people with disabilities. In the 1990s until now, the narrative of neurodiversity is a disorder of the brain which is indeed difficult to cure. The renewal of adequate technological innovation, namely the development of the internet can support various fields for people with disabilities (Betts et al., 2023).

Middle Grade is a sub-genre of children literature, which is prioritized for readers aged 7-12 years and a medium for writers to voice and popularize individual actions and collective movements, one of them is OwnVoices movement. In the middle grade, the

people represented would also get a safe space in preventing controversy and generating consensus from the results of reflection on reading middle grade literature (Dolet & Salas, 2021).

Elle McNicoll is a neurodivergent author with autism. In the voicing neurodivergence groups, McNicoll has published novels with neurodivergent characters, both standalone and series novels, such *A Kind of Spark (2020), Show Us Who You Are (2021), Like A Charm series – Like A Charm (2022) and Like A Curse (2023)*. This research aims to show the convention and invasion between science fiction and middle grade constructed by Elle McNicoll in *Show Us Who You Are* (2021) popularizing the OwnVoices movement for neurodivergence around society which will be revealed by the formula in narrative and female characterization on 'Cora' aged twelve years old as the main contributor in raising the awareness of neurodiversity.

2. Literature Review

This research uses two theories in discovering formula analysis of the twenty-first century of science fiction genre: (1) Formula of Science Fiction, (2) Feminism Disability Theory. The explanations are as follows:

1. The formula in Science Fiction is always about the combination of technology and the future. Raymond Williams (Hake, 2021) states in his book *Utopia and Science Fiction* that "part of the power of science fiction is that it is always a potential mode of authentic shift: a crisis of exposure which produces a crisis of possibility." This indicates that every science fiction narrative will always be transformed following technological, social, cultural, and psychological developments (Diamandis & Kotler, 2020, p. 7). However, the characteristics of science fiction until 1970 are still constructed as male-dominated paradigm (Chakraborty, 2022). Thus, narratives on science fiction written by male authors tend to expose their masculinity, as if they have no other explorations that seem less dominant (Martin, 2023). For example, in the late 1900s, William Gibson, had discovered about the presence of AI in a television matrix, which made him hallucinate as if he could return to his past. This is what is known as the world of cyberspace, a world without boundaries. Thus, various double hauntings appear that are frightening for normal people experiencing *postmnemotechnic*, a simulacra borderline between reality and imagination living effortlessly and without much space inside brain. However, it is these fragmentations that form the basis for the posthuman era which makes memory an alternate world that forces the virtual world to look real. Moreover, this *postmnemotechnic* is finally reformulated by neurodivergent writers to deconstruct narratives that are not related to neurodivergence, which indicate that neurodivergent survivors are always underestimated or seen as useless human beings (Reading, 2022). Therefore, conventions and inventions in science fiction nowadays are evolving within the marginalization on disabilities as an opportunity to resist stereotypes and the struggle they have experienced such as the transformation from male to female hero (Calvin, 2016) , hard SF (technology) to soft SF (utopian) (Mirenayat, Bahar, Talif, & Mani, 2017), normal people to neurodivergent (Flynn, 2019).
2. In this study, with reference to the main character, Cora, a little girl who has autism, the Garland Thomson-Feminist Disability theory (Snyder, Brueggemann, & Garland-Thomson, 2022) is used to support the analysis of this study because Cora would be a

scientific sample in order to cure all neurodivergent by her friend's father. This theory explains the subordination of women with disabilities in representing their identities, bodies and activities. The identity position of women in normal conditions has been subordinated to social construction, while Garland adds that physical even mental disabilities make women with disabilities look more marginalized. Thus, as if cultural-constructed, it still counts only men with disabilities could still achieve a position in a cultural and social civilization rather than handicapped woman (Lamb & Garden, 2019).

Jiménez in his journal entitled *Fantasy and Science Fiction in Mohsin Ahmed: Exit West* explains the formula on Exit West which portrays the illegal refugee crisis. The combination of formulas is also the basis for discussing hybridity issues which are dramatized into a form and narrative in the novel *Exit West*. Science Fiction is useful in explaining the ideological construction, while Fantasy enlarges the political landscape in various dimensions (Jiménez, 2020).

Second, a journal proposed by Brown entitled *Swimming Against the Tide: Disability Represented Through Fish Symbolism in (and on) Middle Grade and Young Adult Novels* produces the character, Dory, as a representation of disability in the Finding Nemo sequel. Starting from 2006-2015, several literatures used the symbolization of blue fish to portray the character of disability. Incorporating idioms and imagery strengthens the phenomenon of disability identity in various literary and films consumed by children (Brown, 2019).

Third, a research designated by Sandra Jones entitled *Hey look, I'm not on TV: Autistic People Reflect on Autism Portrayals in Entertainment Media* related to the representation of autistic characters that are displayed fictitiously in television series and films that have pros and cons in constructing perceptions of autism experience without any generalization among the public (Jones, 2022).

Fourth, a research by Bouton entitled *Wonder through the Eyes of Empathy: A Middle Grades Teacher's Guide* trying to use literacy as a tool in voicing diversity towards the middle grade which can become people who are more modest and peaceful among human beings (Bouton, 2019).

Lastly, Shortley in her thesis entitled *But Now I Yearn for A…Story About A Cripple Who Isn't Cured: Representations of Disability in Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature* resulted that people with disabilities are a social construction that compresses their bodies into a perspective that they are human beings who are weak and helpless, while teachers should start to equalize reading for children so that they show that this world contains not only normal people but also those who have special needs (Shortley, 2018).

3. Research Method

The research method used is descriptive-qualitative research. The material object is the novel Elle McNicoll entitled *Show Us Who You Are* published in 2021. The formal object is the formulation of science fiction and middle-grade has transformed the disability narrative to become popularized in society. This novel shows the autism female character, Cora, who tries to oppose the Pomegranate's research on artificial intelligence that attempts to replicate humans with special needs identically to the authenticated humans.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Futuristic Inventions

In the formation of science fiction that is more challenging for readers, it is necessary to have a writer who contributes to following civilization and imagining unexpected things that create arousal of expectations, especially in the post-humanist era, one of which is in the film Blade Runner 2049 (Lindop, 2022). Holograms are an essential element in writing novels that strive for the neurodiversity movement (Krings, Bohn, Hille, & Ludwig, 2023). McNicoll includes these artificial intelligence elements in his novels such as the following narrations:

> *"What does Pomegranate do? They use artificial intelligence to provide a service. More like holograms." (McNicoll, 2021: 15)*

This indicates that Pomegranate is invested in the holograms as said by Krings et al. (2023) in achieving democratic equality for all people even though it has to intersect with the business industry and the technology industry. This would be an intriguing discourse how the (dis)able-ism are being copied and uploaded into artificial intelligence to become a normal version digitally.

> *"It will be open to the paying public. They can pay money to spend time with the holograms. Well, because some of them will be doubles of famous people. They can pay money and have a long conversation with their favourite actor or musician. Like they're really meeting the person. Hologram that is—will be as humanlike and true to life as possible. They'll study the subject they're recreating and won't activate it until it's identical. It's people's brains and souls uploaded onto a computer and then projected!" (McNicoll, 2021: 16)*

Furthermore, in this narration, the hologram looks promising that there is a symbiosis of mutualism when a hologram has a similar but not the same consciousness and soul, but this is the humanistic ideal in achieving a democracy (Määttä, Bodén, & Godhe, 2021). Due to the perfection and pristine condition, everybody would pay any numbers as you throw beneficial and spotlessness to human greed which is entertaining and somehow the blindness hides them from capitalism.

> *"Well, we interview real people and study them so that we can make a Gram of them and then they can live forever. Virtually. Like virtual immortality. Then their loved ones can visit them after they've died." (McNicoll, 2021: 17)*

With the rapid growth of knowledge that is not comparable to practitioners who function as mediators, this consumerism activity results in a shift in perspective which explains that achieving one's wellness will bring about immortality (Wright & Zascerinska, 2022). Meanwhile, being immortal is a basic desire from the side of the dark person in humans. When this civilization is stopped, the world scenario will stop according to Harari's statement in *Homo Deus* (2015):

> *"Humans are reaching a place where they are capable of being Gods. This level of human power, control and enabling should not be considered lightly, as our species and what it means to be human is either seeing a*

> *controlled modification by those with the power to do so, or could be seen*
> *to be under attack."*

People in transhumanism believe that they have complete control over the needs they want to achieve so this cannot be considered a trivial matter to celebrate life freely (Hauskeller, 2016).

4.2 Counternarrative of Neurodivergent

So far, we have seen that every neurodivergent sufferer has a fairly glorified life when represented by a non-neurodivergent writer. Therefore, with the advent of OwnVoices, neurodivergent writers have made a counternarrative of neurodivergent life according to reality. This is what makes the Pomegranate company in this novel innovate a new technology, namely 'The Grams,' a holographic human replicated device. Then, Magnus, Adrien's father, invites Cora to become a subject-test for neurodivergent.

> *"Magnus is really interested in interviewing you for the Golden Department.*
> *Well, they're really good at recreating neurotypical people, but he'd love to*
> *get a realistically autistic Gram. We never talk about me being autistic.*
> *(McNicoll, 2021: 18).*

Neurodivergent has always been used as a test-subject by medical authorities and has always been a scapegoat for normalcy desired by parents who do not accept the fact that children have their own uniqueness and intelligence especially empathy testing out for the readers. It would make a dehumanization in neurodivergent and normal people (Hartley, 2022).

> *"You really think AI can accurately re-create a human being? After that?*
> *Yes." (McNicoll, 2021: 55)*

> *"It's a person! A digital person, Adrien. It's amazing. Of course, I'm*
> *interested in that." "What about real people? Aren't they much more*
> *interesting? There's nothing I would hate more than to be one of those*
> *creepy Grams." (McNicoll, 2021: 97)*

Even Adrien and Nora have different opinions about the presence of 'The Grams' technology. Adrien really upholds human nature in general, while Cora is not happy with the life that she has been blessed with which makes her want equality with normal humans.

4.3 Female as Hero

From the incident above, that fellow neurodivergent has different parental traits. Women are always used as weak main characters, especially if they have autism. However, in reality when women try to go against human nature with strong feelings and intuitions, they will be completely free, both in spirit and identity.

> *"My brain knows that I'm looking at a hologram, carefully re-created to*
> *represent a human being. The logical part of me knows it to be true. But*
> *every other part of me feels like I'm seeing a ghost." (McNicoll, 2021: 115)*

> *"You didn't give me anything back. You didn't even give me a ghost. Or a shadow. You merely broke my heart all over again and gave me a false promise. I'm not ill, Mr. Parton. I don't need a cure. There are lots of things that need curing in the world right now. I'm not one of them. Not everyone will feel like me. Some people might want to change who they are. But that's a choice for them to make. Not their families. Not people like her. Not even you, Minister." (McNicoll, 2021: 188)*

All the above narratives indicate that feelings greatly influence one's independence, and even though being born with autism, it does not undermine one's fighting spirit for real friendships and not for togetherness with holograms. So far, women have always had little time to reflect and strengthen their identities, so that is what makes women's classification always subordinated (Dall'Asta, 2021).

5. Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from *Show Us Who You Are* is that McNicoll has succeeded in reconstructing formulas so that the voice of neurodiversity can be achieved for readers; she constructs with the conventions and inventions that occur in her narrative. There are three forms of invention that are applied to the narrative of *Show Us Who You Are*, such as the invention of the hologram technology, the counternarrative neurodivergent perspective, then the female character as the hero in a novel. These three things are related and represent dialectic of issues that are currently happening with the hope that in the future when the marginalized groups become powerless compared to normal people who are far more privileged with their technological abilities, the dialectic issues will successfully voice out the neurodiversity movement.

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