

A PROJECT JOURNAL

BOOK REVIEW SOPHIE KINSELLA'S *CONFESSION OF A SHOPAHOLIC*

Devy Nurhayati – Eta Farmacelia Nurulhady, SS, M.Hum, M.A
English Department of Humanities
Diponegoro University
Semarang

1. Introduction

Women are always interested in making themselves look good. Looking good here means not only physically, but also characteristically. They need self actualization in their association. Mostly, women who are older than 25 years old and have already had good jobs choose to live in urban areas. The obsession of trying various things automatically increases. The things are, for example, social relationship, urban lifestyle, and shopping activities. When women are somehow in a situation where they receive their paychecks and suddenly some advertisements show a fifty percent discount for all items whose deadline last in a week, a very triggering question emerges: what are they going to do? This is a very tough query, particularly for those who have problem in differentiating between actual necessities and temporary desires.

Most women in urban society like shopping, especially for branded items. Famous brands, such as *Chanel* for bag, *Cartier* for bracelet, and *NK Malone* for sunglasses are only a few examples of successful branding. The power of brand image can turn some people's perception about spending money. For some women, purchasing such kinds of items is huge pride. It magically can upgrade their self-esteem. Suddenly, they feel being high qualified to socialize and present

themselves in a more sophisticated way. Nevertheless, this shopping habit sometimes grows to be worse. This manner escalates to the level where it affects the subject's financial condition. The irrational reasons for shopping are: not wasting chance on sale, purchasing addiction and other none-existence excuses.

Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic* is a novel that perfectly shows the effect of having bad shopping habit. It was first published in 2001 and written by the *New York Times* bestselling author. This novel tells about Rebecca Bloomwood who is portrayed as a writer and financial journalist with a problem of an unstoppable shopping desire that leads her to serious financial problems. Rebecca's shopping habit takes her to situation where she has to deal with some debt collectors and the obligation to pay her credit card bills. Sophie Kinsella writes the novel in a very hilariously creative style. The story is written in a first person point of view which is easy to follow. Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic* is compelling to review because it has exceptional significance of exposing bad example of shopping habit together with its consequences. The aim of this book review is to present the description about the strengths and weaknesses of the novel.

2. Summary of Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic*

Rebecca Bloomwood, the main character in this novel, is a 25 years old British. She is working in *Successful Saving* magazine as a writer in finance column. Although she used to live in a countryside with her parents and then she

decided to live in Fulham flats with her best friend Suze. Rebecca has Becky as her nickname.

Rebeca is fond of shopping. She likes to stroll around shopping area, trying to find the branded stores. Almost every weekend she goes shopping. Once she was on the go to a seminar when she saw a scarf and she predictably bought it. She is always able to find the reason that she needs any item desperately. Rebecca's visa bill tops the limit. As a consequence, she must deal with debt collectors and face the unpayable credits. Becky starts to read a book for helping her with the urgent problems. She obtains two options. The first option is lessening the shopping and the second one is increasing the income.

From the personal relationship side there is a man named Luke Brandon. He is the owner of *Brandon Communication*, a public relation company for finance. Rebecca has a secret crush on him. One day, Luke Brandon asks her to accompany him to buy a suitcase. Surprisingly, it is for his girlfriend. Knowing that, Rebecca is so mad and decides to leave for her hometown. The fact that Brandon has a girlfriend gets Rebecca so depressed and upset. Finally she tells her parents about her main problem with the visa bills. While Becky is at her parent's house resting from the problems, suddenly, her neighbors come. They tell about an investment problem that by chance Rebecca is familiar with. Rebecca Bloomwood decides to help them. This makes her get a new job for a television program about finance. From this point Rebecca starts to have better financial condition.

3. Review of Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic*

Confession of a Shopaholic is an interesting book to read. There are some interesting points that comprise the strengths and the weaknesses of this novel which will be explained in the following discussion.

3.1. The Strengths of Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic*

The Strengths of the novel *Confession of a Shopaholic* are its tone of writing, point of view, and lessons that readers can learn from.

3.1.1. The Tone of Writing

Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic* has a very unique tone of writing. The novel often uses hilarious description. Therefore, the reader can get the point that the writer wants to express in an enjoyable way. An example is when the story aims to describe how branded fashion items can improve Rebecca's confidence. The readers can see this thought in Rebecca's self talking:

I don't look bad, I think. I'm wearing my black skirt from French Connection, and a plain white T-shirt from Knicker box, and a little angora cardigan which I got from M&S but looks like it might be Agnès b. And my new square-toed shoes from Hobbs. Even better, although no one can see them, I know that under-neath I'm wearing my gorgeous new matching knickers and bra with embroidered yellow rosebuds. They're the best bit of my en-tire outfit. In fact, I almost wish I could be run over so that the world would see them (Kinsella, 2001:14).

Through this description the reader can perceive that Rebecca Bloomwood

determines that branded fashion items can upgrade her fearlessness escalately so much with her confidence. While Rebecca is wearing famous underwear brand, even though it is unseen publicly, to her this still helps her confidence to get better. This is ridiculously out of sense but hilariously elaborating the message.

Separately, in this story there is also a figure named Tarquin, who is a Suze's cousin. This man has also been known as a multimillionaire. The single Tarquin is interested in Becky. Therefore, Tarquin asks her to go out for a date. Subsequently, the book expresses Becky's wrong expectation about the date in a good sense of humor. Rebecca has imagined about a chauffeur-driven-limousine, along with famous places like The Savoy, Claridges, and Annabel's. Surprisingly, they finally approach a familiar pizza restaurant named Pizza Express. The humor cracks with Rebecca's silly talk:

Hang on, where are we? This isn't the back entrance to anywhere. This is . . . Pizza on the Park.

Tarquin's taking me to Pizza Express. I don't believe it. The fifteenth richest man in the country is taking me to bloody Pizza Express. ". . . pizza," I finish weakly. "Love the stuff." (Kinsella, 2001:216).

This tone of a writing is interesting. At first, the readers are brought to imagine that Rebecca is going to visit classy places. This is in line with Tarquin's background which is a successful man. The first visual comes to the reader will be a sweet romantic exclusive dinner. In fact, the writer drops the reader's fairytale expectation joyfully. Sophie Kinsella shows them that they are dating in a cheap pizza restaurant. The conversation Becky starts with Tarquin about where they are actually invites laughter.

Another example of the funny writing tone is when Rebecca has to find

someone to talk to in a seminar. In order to avoid talking to Luke Brandon for her dignity, she takes the wrong option. Unintentionally, she puts herself in a worse situation by talking to the wrong people. The conversation is quoted below:

“Hello,” he says, turning toward me and extending his hand. “Derek Smeath from Endwich Bank. And this is my assistant, Erica.”
Oh my God.
I can’t speak. I can’t shake his hand. I can’t run. My whole body’s paralyzed (Kinsella, 2001:198).

This is very funny because by chance Rebecca approaches her most avoidable person, Derek Smeath. He is, as obviously spoken before, the debt collector from the credit card company. This situation gets even funnier how Rebecca tries to survive by faking that there is nothing happens between them. This awkward silly moment is very refreshing.

3.1.2. Point of View

The story employs first person point of view. This brings the readers to think as if they were Rebecca Bloomwood. Every page shows how Becky figures out her decisions, her shopping addict and her strategy for escaping from problems. This provides the reader with clear perspective about Becky. Even though she is the master of bad decision, her point of view can trigger the reader to keep reading. The immature talk of the main character is a light story to follow. It does not take much effort to find it as pleasuring reading content. The reader feels jumping into the story as if they could give suggestion for Becky not to do some certain things. In the novel Rebecca once goes to a museum to stop her

shopping addiction but she finds out there is even a shop inside it:

Christmas shopping! I can do all my Christmas shopping here! I know March is a bit early, but why not be organized? And then when Christmas arrives I won't have to go near the horrible Christmas crowds (Kinsella, 2001:104).

Even in a museum Becky still can find out the reason to do shopping. The readers are automatically stimulated to say "No do not do that Rebeca!". They feel entertained to actually be involved as people who can help the problem of the main character.

3.1.3. Lessons Learned

After the readers finish the novel, they can filter some applicable lesson to their lives. Here are some important things to learn from the book : shopping too much is not a good habit, paying credit card bills is not as easy as using it, and dealing with problems

From the story, Rebecca has been addicted to buy anything without necessary reason that leads her to many problems. Becky always purchases something every day. She always thinks that she need those things. Moreover, when it comes to sale, Becky considers that it is a saving by buying items right in the sale. Becky shops too much and this makes her entrapped in debts. People can learn that shopping needs priority scale. Therefore, it will not burden them with problem afterwards. Thus, shopping too much is not a good habit for everyone.

Rebecca Bloomwood uses credit card when she buys something. She can buy everything just by swiping the card. However, she forgets that she has to pay

the credit card bill. This matter does not only happen in Becky's life, but also in many urban citizens. People may be surprised when the invoice comes and must be paid because they do not remember all the expenses. Paying credit card bills is not as easy as using it. Therefore, cash and debit card may be the best two possible options for purchasing something that people need.

Becky is not a good example for her action. When she has a problem, Becky always runs away from it. She would rather run away from it than solve it. For example, when she has to face the debt collector, Becky constantly finds reasons to avoid him. Becky says that she is sick, or her aunt passes away, or even she lies that her aunt legacy will be used to pay the bills. When the credit card invoice comes to her, she says she does not receive it. Actually she can explain to the debt collector what the problem is and they can solve it together. This is almost similar to real life case. People who have problems must solve them. People cannot run away from the trouble because it can grow even bigger. They must deal with problems. From those lessons the readers can filter good points to learn.

3.2. Weaknesses of Sophie Kinsella's *Confession of a Shopaholic*

In addition to having strengths, *Confession of a Shopaholic* also contains several weaknesses. Some of them are plot, unclear story, and characterization which are described below.

3.2.1. Plot

In general, the story is written in good sequences. It is easy to understand and follow. However, some parts of the plot are elaborated too long. For example,

in chapter 7 pages 107 until 113 , Sophie Kinsella mainly talks about Rebecca's cooking activity. The tone of the story tends to use unnecessary additional sentences until it takes seven pages length. It can lead the reader to boredom. The main point is too simple, but the paragraph is too excessively extended.

On the other hand, some parts are told the story is told with less explanation. An example is the description of Rebecca's writing process in chapter 17.

With a sudden determination I reach for my dad's typewriter. I feed in some paper, switch on my Dictaphone, take a deep breath, and begin to type. Two hours later, I fax my 950-word article to Eric Foreman. (Kinsella, 2001:265).

This is slightly strange that there is no information about the process of Rebecca's writing. Suddenly, it comes to the sentence "I reach for my dad's typewriter". The process of making the article for *Daily News* is only described in two sentences. It directly has a quick cut off by a finished 950 word article sent to Erick Foreman. There is no information how the newspaper company accepts and reviews Rebecca's article scripts. It just happens like that. In the next chapter, the article is ready to publish. The point in this paragraph can be explained in more details, so the reader can get wider perspective about the situation.

3.2.2. Unclear Ending

The readers know that Rebecca Bloomwood does not have close relationship with Luke Brandon because of the conflict about the job. They already notice that Rebecca actually has an interest in Luke Brandon, but on the other hand, this novel does not show whether Luke has been interested in

Rebecca as a woman to date with. At the end of the story, they go for dinner together and have an intimate activity in a hotel, as shown below:

“We could just talk, or something,” he echoes, and slowly lifts his hands until they cup my face.
And then he kisses me.
His mouth is on mine, gently parting my lips, and I feel a white-hot dart of excitement. His hands are running down my back and cupping my bottom, fingering under the hem of my skirt (Kinsella, 2001:342-343).

However, in the novel the author does not tell the ending of their relationship. It is not really clear whether Becky and Luke really have commitment or just have sex for fun.

Another peculiar story told in the book is when Becky realizes her mistake. Suddenly, she can solve the problem of being a shopaholic. At the end of story, Becky watches television and she sees an advertisement about sunglasses with discount. She wants to buy it. Rebecca comes to final decision:

“Grabbing the phone, I redial the number. I give my name and address, thank the woman very much indeed, then put down the receiver, a content smile on my face. This day is turning out perfect. And it’s only nine o’clock!” (Kinsella, 2001:347).

This is confusing whether the shopaholic problem has a resolution or just goes on to continue. The inconsistency makes the reader confused about the message that the author wants to point.

3.2.3. Characterization

Rebecca Bloomwood is described as someone who does not have any interest in finance and economy. This can be seen while she is attending a finance seminar. Rebecca is said to have no clue about the content of the

seminar. She pretends to be keen on economy by bringing the finance magazine for imaging that economy is her thing. Rebecca also writes a financial column in *Successful Saving*. This is confusing about how a person without finance knowledge can work professionally as a financial journalist in a newspaper. Rebecca Bloomwood's intelligence is questionable. The readers also can see from the part that tells Rebecca becoming a public speaker for finance at the end of the story. This is also a question mark whether Rebecca is actually smart or just a good pretender. The characterization about Rebecca's intelligence in finance is very weak. There is supposed to be information about Rebecca's exact position of interest in her working field. Rebecca's intelligence cannot jump from zero knowledge to a trusted expert instantly.

4. Conclusion

Confession of a Shopaholic tells a story of a shopaholic with her confusion in facing her shopping desire and shopping addiction. The main character Rebecca Bloomwood is a journalist in financial magazine, but she has a lot of problems because of her shopping activity. She loves shopping very much without thinking the effect of unaffordable debts. Although it has some strengths that make it worth reading, the novel also has some weaknesses.

Confession of a Shopaholic by Sophie Kinsella presents an interesting tone of writing, point of view, and lessons learned. The tone of writing in this novel is very interesting because it has a humor in every situation. Hilarious has never failed to gain attention from book readers. Beside the tone, this novel uses the

point of view of the first person that is the main character Rebecca Bloomwood. Her way of thinking is very easy to follow. Thus, the reader is involved to Becky's point of view over many situations. In addition, *Confession of a Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella shares lessons to learn such as: shopping too much is not a good habit, paying credit card bills is not as easy as using it and dealing with problems.

This novel, however, has several weaknesses. The first is the plot that is not consistent in elaborating a situation in too long narration and sometimes too short explanation. The second one is the unclear story at the end. The last one is the weak characterization of Rebecca Bloomwood's intelligence in finance and economy.

With these strengths and weaknesses, *Confession of a Shopaholic* is still a recommended book to read by readers. The novel is such a great pleasure, very light and full of hilarious content that is refreshing. *Confession of a Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella can teach the reader to think before they do something especially about spending money.

REFERENCES

Kinsella, Sophie. 2001. *Confession of a Shopaholic*: New York: Bantam Dell

Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary. 4th ed. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

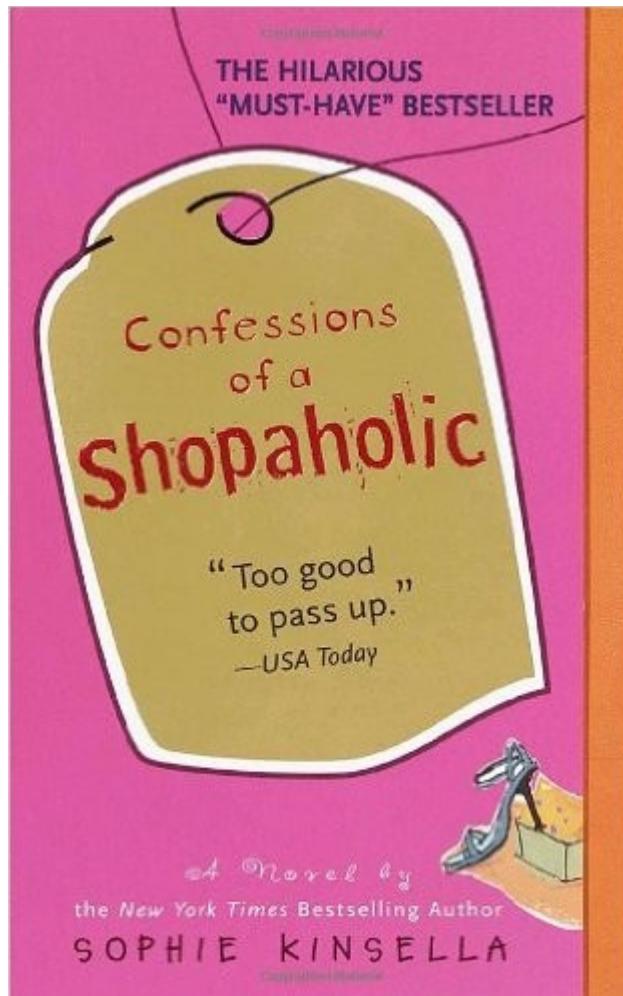
Eastwood, John. *Oxford Learner's Pocket Grammar*. 4th ed. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

Kennedy, X.J. 1991. *Literature An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama: Fifth Edition*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Perrine, Laurence. 1988. *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense-Fifth Edition*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

APPENDICES

1. Cover *Confession of a Shopaholic*



2. Product Details

ISBN : 0-440-24141-3

Author : Kinsella, Sophie

Original Title : Confession of a Shopaholic

Publisher : Bantam Dell A Division of Random House, Inc.

Location : New York

Subject : Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 00-060398

Copyright : 2001

Edition Number : 1st Ed.

Publication Date : February 2001

Binding : Softcover

Language : English

Pages : 350 pages