

## Coming Of Age: An Analysis of A Young Adult Character Development In Ellen Hopkins' *Crank*

By:

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### Abstract

The present research entitled *Coming of Age: An Analysis of a Young Adult Character Development in Ellen Hopkins' "Crank"* is a textual analysis of Ellen Hopkins' young adult fiction focusing on the issue of coming of age in the novel. The discussion focuses on the main female character in the story to reveal the ways coming of age issue is addressed in the novel. Therefore, the discussion is framed within the theories of the characteristic and development of young adult (Bucher and Hinton, 2010), coming of age (e.g. Millard, 2007 and Fox, 2010) and identity (Barker, 2002). The research utilizes a qualitative method particularly textual analysis. The result of the present research shows that coming of age describes a progress shift which is experienced by the main character, Georgia, from a teenage girl who is simple-minded to a mature adult with higher-level of thinking. In other words, coming of age issue shows the process of adolescents from immaturity to maturity.

**Keywords:** *Coming of Age, Young Adult, Character Development, Identity*

## INTRODUCTION

Every adolescent or young adult is maturing, but each may take a different road and going at different speed on his or her journey from childhood to adulthood (Manning readiness to be an adult. Therefore, Bucher and Hinton (2010) further state that it is important to know adolescents or young adults on an individual basis and to use this knowledge to select appropriate young adult literature.

One of the common themes of young adult literature is coming of age. Terminologically, the expression coming of age is usually used to mean 'to reach full legal adult status' (Millard, 2007, p.11). Millard (2007) further says that the moment of coming of age is usually occur in twelve and nineteen-years-old. In this case, adolescents try to reach full legal adult status variously between cultures, especially in relation to such cultural markers as alcohol, sexual consent, driving license, and marriage.

The issue of coming of age is often adapted in a story of young

and Bucher, 2009, as cited in Bucher and Hinton, 2010, p.2). In other words, every adolescent experiences their development differently, which are affected by their surroundings, like family and peers, and also their adult fiction. One of the examples is the novel entitled *Crank* which was written by Ellen Hopkins. *Crank* talks about a teenage girl named Georgia who is quiet and seems not to have any problems in her life. However, everything in her life changes when she went to visit her father. She experiences many problems in her coming-of-age period such as becoming a drug user, being raped by a teenage boy and so on. In other words, the story describes a teenage character who has to face her life with some problems. The ways she overcomes her problems are interesting to be analyzed. In addition, the writer wrote her novel in an unusual yet unique way by writing the stories of Georgia like a poem. Hence, this study focuses on how the the issue coming of age is addressed in the novel *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins.

Regarding the explanations above, the study is conducted to reveal way coming of age issue is addressed in the novel *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins. This study is conducted using qualitative method due to the data used in this research is in the form of text. The data which are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences are critically selected as textual evidences to answer the research question. The research analyzes the way coming of age issue is addressed in the novel *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins. The result of the study is expected to give valuable knowledge in young adult literature and to enrich the literature collection of the related theories employed in the present study.

To add more, the three key concepts – young adult characteristic and development, coming of age, and identity – become the major theoretical frames that inform the research. Adolescents or young adults are those between 12- to 20-years of age who experience a period of transition from childhood to adulthood (Bucher and Hinton, 2010, p.2). This transition involves

developments, namely biological, psychological and social development (Karunan, 2006, p.5). Karunan (2006) further states that these developments occur simultaneously at different paces for each adolescent within each gender, being impacted oftentimes, by structural and environmental factors.

In the journey to the maturation, physically adolescents or young adults mature earlier (Bucher & Hinton, 2010, p.2). Physical or biological development of young adults can be easily observed from their rapid growth and changes. Bucher and Hinton also state that adolescents also experience changes in their way of thinking called cognitive development (2010, p.3). Bucher and Hinton (2010) further state that cognitively, adolescents or young adults experience higher-level thought process. In the process of cognitive development, the moral and ethical of adolescents increase naturally with the guidance from the parents, teachers and other authority figures. In addition, social development is also experienced by adolescents. Socially, they have a

preoccupation with friends and peers (Manning & Bucher, 2009, cited in Bucher & Hinton, 2010, p.2). In other words, adolescents increase social interactions and also strengthen their friendship with the peers.

Coming of age is one of the themes that emerges in adolescents' literature. Terminologically, the expression coming of age is the term that usually used to mean 'to reach full legal adult status' (Millard, 2007, p.11). Millard (2007) further says that the moment of coming of age is usually occur in nineteen and twelve-years-old. In this case, adolescents try to reach full legal adult status variously between cultures, especially in relation to such cultural markers as alcohol, sexual consent, driving license, and marriage. In other words, adolescents try to prove that they are mature enough to be adults who have larger rights and obligations as humans being.

To add more, coming-of-age novel usually presents an issue with which all young people must engage in on their road to adulthood (Fox, 2010, p.33). Within the issue coming

of age, adolescents are important due to the ways in which they are at the forefront of social change, even while they are simultaneously the products of an adult social culture that shapes their development (Millard, 2007, p.8). In other words, adolescents are considered having potentiality to change their society and reconfigure the existing social structures and also institutions.

The purpose of the coming-of-age novel is a particularly useful distinction (Said, 1975, p.3, as cited in Millard, 2007, p.16). Said (1975) further states that in many contemporary coming-of-age novels the narrative moves forward in time towards a point of maturity from which it can address that unspoken origin that began it, but which is antecedent to its beginning. It can be understood that the narratives moves in the coming-of-age novel attempts to discover why and how the adolescents experience and face the process of coming of age to reach a point of maturity.

Identity may refer to the characteristic attributes or expected behaviors. Hall (as cited in Du Gay

et al, 2000, p. 17) defines identity as something that is never unified and increasingly fragmented and fractured. In the process of its construction, identity is always changing along with the change of contexts and influences (Kellner, 1992, p. 142). It is in line with Gauntlett's (2002, p. 16) and Bauman's (1996, p. 25) opinions that people's identity is evolving so that it can change and adapt through 'fragmentation of time into episodes' which each was collected from its past to its future.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the data, the issue of coming of age in the novel *Crank* is addressed into two phases that Georgia went through relating to how she stepped into adulthood. The steps are the immature phase and the mature phase. The immature phase shows the stage when Georgia has not had the ability to solve her problems of her teenage life. Whereas, the mature phase shows a phase when Georgia acquired the ability to make decisions for her life

According to Barker, identity belongs to an individual as a subject or as a member of part of particular social group (Barker, 2002, p.109). Barker (2002) further says that identity is thought to be a universal and timeless core, an 'essence' of the self that is expressed as representations that are recognizable by ourselves and by others. In other words, identity is an essence signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles.

in which those decisions help her to solve her conflicts.

The immature phase is characterized by the lack of confidence shown by Georgia. The lack of confidence can be seen from three things that reflect her behaviors. First, Georgia is not able to face the reality in overcoming difficult problems in her life. Second, Georgia is easily influenced by her peers and other people in her life. The last one, Georgia also often makes uninformed judgments and

decisions without thinking about the impacts and consequences.

Whereas, the mature phase of Georgia's life as a teenage girl is marked by the change of her behaviors in facing and solving her teenage problems. In this phase, Georgia's behavior shows that she has been well developed emotionally and she behaves responsibly. First, Georgia has been finally able to accept other's fault and decision. Second, Georgia learns to suppress her selfishness. The last one, she learns how to make informed decisions and judgment.

Regarding to the issue of coming of age, the immature phase and the mature phase indicate the theme in the novel *Crank* in which its protagonist progresses from naive or callow youth towards a sense of a mature adult consciousness and fulfilling social integration (Millard, 2007, p.161). In other words, as the protagonist character, Georgia experiences the progress from a teenage girl to be a mature adult. It reflects that as an adolescent, Georgia experiences a progress shift from children who think that life is

simple and fair to be a mature adult who has higher-level thinking ability.

The conflicts that happen in Georgia's life are the process to the maturation. It conforms Said's statement (1975, p.3), as cited in Millard (2007, p.16) that "in many contemporary coming-of-age novels, the narrative moves forward in time towards a point of maturity from which it can address that unspoken origin that began it, but which is antecedent to its beginning". It can be understood that the narratives moves in the coming-of-age novel attempts to discover why and how the adolescents experience and face the process of coming of age to reach a point of maturity.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion Ellen Hopkins' novel *Crank* captures the tendency of how coming of age novel describes adolescent who is in transition stage from children to mature adult. The narrative events in coming-of-age novels move forward in time through a point of maturity. The narrative events revolving around the main character's teenage life also indicate

that there is a journey to the stage of maturity. The journey to the maturity is emphasized by the fact that the main character is able to solve her teenage problems. It changes the main character from a teenage girl who is simple-minded to a mature adult with higher-level of thought.

There are some suggestions relating to the present research that can be proposed for further research. First, it would be better for the next researchers to analyze other researchable issues or aspects that contained in the novel. Second, the next researchers may conduct a similar issue in other literary texts such as short stories, poems, drama scripts or song lyrics.

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