

# DIMENSIONS OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: THE READING ON *FIVE FEET APART*

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the characteristics of Young Adult Literature genre found in the novel. Young Adult Literature's characteristics relate to the novel's intrinsic elements which consists of character, theme, plot, and point of view. The approach used in analysing the novel is structuralism approach. This research uses descriptive qualitative method. The result of the analysis states that *Five Feet Apart* is categorized into young adult literature since it conforms the genre's characteristics. The characters of the novel have a physical appearance and the way they behave as well as interact with each other. Moreover, the characters in the novel have a change in attitude and way of thinking. Seen from the analysis, the plot is going fast and the storyline is written in the present. Theme in the novel is about romance because the novel tells the love story of the two young adult people who suffer from lungs illness, named Stella and Will. There are two points of view from young adult protagonists as the main characters in the novel. The point of view changes in every chapter because the story is sometimes told by Stella and sometimes by Will. Finally, it can be concluded that characteristics of Young Adult Literature genre are found in the novel *Five Feet Apart*. Fulfil

**Keywords:** *Young Adult Literature, characteristics, genre analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

A Literary Genre is a type or kind of a general genre in literature, such as fiction, romance, thriller, horror, etc. Bawarshi (2010) in his book, *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Introduction, and Pedagogy* explains that one of the functions of the literary genre is to make a literature activity more meaningful for the writer or the readers. The traditions of each genre evolve as genres and the relations change over time. Briggs and Bauman argue that the new genre has resulted from an observation of literary reality (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). It proves that a genre can develop a following through social change as well as induces a certain range of reactions among adolescent readers. Young Adult Literature is an example of a genre based on social change.

Young Adult Literature is a literary genre that narrates about the life of youth with their issues of adolescence. This genre started between 1950 and 1960. In the beginning 1960, Young Adult Literature started to focus on the

twenty something age, which means people under 30 years old. Michael Cart (1996:43) states that "When the 'under 30' generation became a widespread concern, research on adolescence began to emerge. It would also be the decade when the literature for adolescents could be said to have come into its own". In 1980, the topics of Young Adult Literature raised adolescent problems, such as rape, suicide, parental death, and murder. Young Adults in this period also like reading about the daily lives around them (Pramesti 2015). According to Lubar (2003), in 1990, Young Adult Literature talked about "drinking, sexuality, drug/alcohol use, identity, beauty, and even young pregnancy." Lubar (2003) and Wells (2003) also added the themes of western adult novels, such as bullying, popularity, puberty, remarriage, family or school problems, love, friendship, and relationship with authority figures. One of novels whose genre is Young Adult Literature is *Five Feet Apart* by Rachael Lippincott, Mikki Daughtry and Tobias Lanconis which was written in 2018.

*Five Feet Apart* tells the story of the romance of two patients who suffer from a rare disease, namely Cystic Fibrosis and B. Cepacia, which requires the lovers to keep a distance of 5 steps. Stella, the main female character, has been suffering from Cystic Fibrosis since 7th years old, as she gets older, Stella's disease gets worse and she is forced to stay in the hospital for more intense treatment. It is in this hospital that Stella gets to know Will, a young man who also suffers from the same disease as Stella. Will is a young man who is not enthusiastic about undergoing his treatment, Will thinks that no matter how well he undergoes treatment, he will eventually die. However, since Stella and Will meet, Will is slowly getting excited about undergoing all his treatment, from that Will and Stella grow closer, and slowly fall in love. Their love story is hindered by the disease they face, and the various ways they do so that they can meet without touching each other. Until one day Stella gets a lung donation that is able to make her illness heal, in this situation she has to give up her relationship with Will, the day after Stella has a surgery, Will came and just stands on the outside of the operating room, then he gives a picture of the lungs that he has a picture and say goodbye to Stella while kissing the transparent hospital window. Eight months running after the post surgery of Stella's lung, Stella and Will meet again at the airport, with a healthy Stella, and Will still carries oxygen cylinders, with the same feelings, Stella comes closer to Will and still separates with a distance five feet apart.

In this study, the researchers are interested in analyzing the characteristics of Young Adult Literature exposed in the *Five Feet Apart* by Rachael Lippincott, Mikki Daughtry, and Tobias Lanconis. This study focuses on the characteristics of the Young Adult Literature genre found in the novel *Five Feet Apart*. This study applies the theory of Nilsen and Donelson (2001) and Latrobe and Drury (2004:72) about the characteristics of the Young Adult Literature genre. Nilsen and Donelson (2001) also explain the characteristics of Young Adult Literature. They find seven characteristics of Young Adult Literature: (1) Young Adult Literature uses the point of view of young people; (2) The plots of Young Adult Literature develop faster and find from developing

restricted characters and events; (3) Novels of Young Adult Literature consist of several genres, themes, or subjects. such as Young Adult Literature - romanticism; (4) The story of Young Adult Literature usually tells about the issues of physical and mental growth of young people; (5) The story generated by Young Adult Literature is aimed to inspire the readers to be successful and mature from childhood to adulthood, even the reality is cruel; (6) The main character always throws out their parents to get their own goals; (7) Surrounded by many characters from different social, economic, and ethnic conditions.

The characteristics of Young Adult Literature are also alluded by Latrobe and Drury (2004:72), such as: (1) The storyline is situated in the present; (2) It has a multidimensional character and dynamic characters; (3) The protagonist responds to the plot's events in a realistic manner; (4) The protagonist goes through important developmental challenges in a realistic way; (5) As the protagonist grows older, he or she discovers important, universal human truths; (6) The story is told from the viewpoint of a young adult protagonist.

There is one previous study in the English Department of the Faculty of Cultural Sciences University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya with the same discussion about genre analysis but a different term. This previous study analyzes the fantasy fiction genre under the thesis title "The Hobbit as Fantasy Fiction: A Genre Analysis" written by Patricia Cindy Joelianto in 2017. There are studies about Young Adult Literature, that are written Pramesti entitled Considering Young Adult Literature as a Literary Genre (2015), discuss the characteristics of young adult literature in viewing its current existence for readers. The journal explains the understanding and characteristics of genre Young Adult Literature without proving these characteristics in the novel. Young Adult Literature had never before been analyzed, especially at the Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya.

## **METHOD**

### **Data collection**

The source of data is the novel *Five Feet Apart* by Rachael Lippincott which was published in 2018 with 288 total pages. The data of the research is in the form of quotations taken from the novel. The instrument of this research is the researchers themselves. All of the data collection and the data analysis are done by the researcher. There are four steps to collecting the data. First is reading the novel *Five Feet Apart* by Rachael Lippincott, Mikki Daughtry, and Tobias Laconis, then the researchers identify the data relating to the topic from the novel. The last step is collecting the data by grouping the data according to the types of entries and creating a list of data.

### **Data analysis**

There are five steps to analyse the data. They are selecting the data, classifying the data, analysing the data, interpreting or paraphrasing the quotations of the data, and drawing a conclusion. The researchers analyse the data using a descriptive qualitative method to find the characteristics of the

Young Adult Literature genre in *Five Feet Apart*. This method is utilized to consist of descriptive data of characters, events, dialogues, places, and actions. The researchers focus on collecting data in the form of words rather than numbers. As a result, to give a more comprehensive grasp of the mentioned issues, facts are expressed in narrative form and descriptive writing.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

One of the characteristics of the Young Adult Literature genre. The character is multidimensional and dynamic which means, the character has a physical appearance and how they interact or behave to each other. This part will discuss the characters in *Five Feet Apart*, especially the main characters, Stella and Will.

### ***Physical Appearance***

Stella Grant is one of the main characters in the novel, described as a female who has lung disease. Stella has long eyelashes, wavy sandy brown hair, and full lips. Wavy sandy brown hair is a combination of two colors, brown and blonde. It can be concluded that if her hair color is sandy brown, that is the same as her eyebrows. The physical characteristics of Stella are described in the quotations below.

“She’s a prettier closeup, with her long eyelashes and her full eyebrows. She even makes a face mask look good. I watch as she brushes her wavy, sandy-brown hair out of her eyes, staring at the baby through the glass with a determined focus.” (Lippincott, 2018:16)

Stella’s beauty combined with hazel eyes is explained by the time Will draws Stella in the gym. Hazel eyes color is combined with green, brown, and hazel eyes that are as transparent as gray, but when exposed to sunlight, hazel eyes can look like green or light or gold. That’s why, Will thinks that Stella has brown eyes. Stella has a thin body until some parts of her body looks like bones, but she looks stunning and gorgeous with long eyelashes, wavy sandy brown hair, and hazel eyes.

The physical feature of Will is described as an eighteen years old boy and has dazzling deep blue eyes. Will also has a tall, thin body and wavy brown hair, as seen in the quotations “The door slowly opens, and tall, thin person ducks inside...but his wavy brown hair is peeking out from under a clear surgical cap.” (Lippincott, 2018: 87). Will has a physical appearance roughly the same as Stella and they have the same thin bodies and wavy hair. Will also has a high posture with brown hair and deep blue eyes. Blue eyes are the most attractive colors for eyes. The color of deep blue eyes is the same as the deep blue sea, and the color is combined with light blue or gray to very dark brown in the middle of the eyes. Because of that, the physical trait changes Will’s appeal.

Stella and Will are the two teenagers whose ages are around seventeen until eighteen years old. This can be seen when Will says that he will celebrate his birthday in the next two days. This is described in the quotation: "Hold up. Your birthday is in two days?" I smile at her, but she doesn't smile back. "Yep! Lucky number eighteen." (Lippincott, 2018:114). From the quotation, it can be concluded that Stella and Will as the main characters are still in their teens around seventeen until eighteen. The same as Stella and Will, some of the friends around them have the same age, such as Camilla and Mya as middle school friends from Stella, and Will's friends, Jason, Hope, and Poe.

Based on the analysis of the character's physical appearance above, it can be concluded that the characters in *Five Feet Apart* have a physical appearance; it can be part of the multidimensional character listed in the characteristics of Young Adult Literature genre. Moreover, according to the explanations of characters above, the characters in the novel are teenagers around seventeen and eighteen years old.

### ***Ways of Behaving***

In addition to having the physical appearance, the characters have ways of behaving that is clearly shown in both main characters, Stella and Will. Stella has a highly disciplined and organized attitude and action. Stella also has a control issue. "I have . . . control issues. I need to know that things are in order." (Lippincott, 2018:46). Stella also has a short plan and long-term plans, and she calls with My Master list and Daily List, her to-do list filled with any colored inks to mark something important. According to the explanation above, Stella is an organized person, she has to prepare everything as best and thoroughly as possible, so she cannot do something unannounced.

Unlike Stella's habit, which is very disciplined and highly organized, the second main character Will, is described as a person who rebels, and has freedom. He does not like to set and obey the rules, and he likes to get something fresh, not trapped in a small room.

"No sign of Barb or my mom anymore, but Julie's on the phone behind the desk, in between me and the exit door that will take me straight to the only stairwell in this building that leads to the roof. I close my door quietly, creeping down the hall. I try to duck down lower than the nurses' station, but a six-foot dude attempting to stay low and sneak around is about as subtle as a blind folded elephant. Julie looks up at me and I press my back up against the wall, pretending to camouflage myself." (Lippincott, 2018:34)

The quotations above suggest that Will try to escape from the bedroom to the rooftop of St. Graint's hospital, although Will must take care of everything and stay in the room, it also says that Will has not only once broken the rules like this. Before that, Will is caught by Barb when he falls asleep by the vending machines. It proves that he likes to break the rules and never wants to obey the

rules. Will wants freedom. It's one of the pieces of evidence that Will has free and uncooperative behavior. Although Will likes freedom and doesn't like being restrained, Stella and Will are creative people. They always have a unique way of acknowledging their feelings, such as when Stella lectures people on her personal YouTube account about her illness, or when Stella asks Will to go out on their first date using her YouTube account. Stella makes a video and it is uploaded to her YouTube account, she has the video regarding Will's illness which contains medication, and how to interact with people who have B. Cepacia, etc. This video is one of the ways Stella can tell Will that they can be together by keeping their distance. Stella also makes a cartoon that depicts Will and Stella.

"A tall boy with wavy hair is facing a short girl, black crayon labeling them as Will and Stella. I smile as I notice the tiny pink hearts floating above their heads, chuckling at the giant arrow in between reading "FIVE FEET AT ALL TIMES" in big, bright-red letters." (Lippincott, 2018:107)

These also prove that Stella has a unique and creative way to take Will on the first date. Moreover, Stella has a YouTube account containing the awareness of cystic fibrosis and already has tens of thousands of followers on her personal YouTube account. This proves that Stella is very creative, for her video content is so inspiring that it has large followers, despite her weak body condition. While Will has an interest in art and a talent for drawing cartoons, Will wants to be a cartoonist. Will's creativity is proven when he tells the reasons why he is interested in cartoons.

"They're subversive, you know? They can look light and fun on the outside, but they have punch." I could talk about this all day. If there's anything I'm passionate about, this would be it. I hold up a book that's on my nightstand that has some of the best of the New York Times political cartoons. Politics, religion, society. I think a well-drawn cartoon can say more than words ever could, you know? It could change minds." (Lippincott, 2018: 70)

Will says that he loves drawing cartoons very much because a cartoon picture contains a lot of inexpressible meaning or has a hidden meaning. Will's talent shows when Will draws Stella's cartoon version. It's a non-disclosure agreement that Will allows Stella to do treatment together. Will describes Stella as a doctor, using a doctor's coat, a stethoscope slung around her neck, her small cartoon hands resting angrily on her hips, and spreading fire from their mouth. Is a form of proportion or ridicule for Stella. This proves that Will is a very creative person who has the creativity and extensive imagination, which is evidenced by the cartoons he draws for Stella.

### ***Dynamics Character***

The dynamic character in the novel is represented in some of the characters such as Stella, Will, Stella's parents, and Will's mom. Stella's first

change of behavior or mindset is her feeling for Will. At first Stella says that she denies her feelings for him, but over time, she begins to admit that she falls in love with Will. The change of behavior and mindset pattern happens to Stella is her mindset about life that affects her attitude. Stella initially thinks that she would be cured and she eventually decides to enjoy her life. It is proved by what Stella says "If this is all we get, then let's take it. I want to be fearless and free...It's just life, Will. It'll be over before we know it." (Lippincott, 2018:142). Therefore, she initially always does her treatment, she gradually becomes lazy and likes to break the rules, such as running out of hospital or holding the event in the Cafeteria. The change of Stella's behavior describes that. Mindset of a person has a big impact on a change of behavior.

The next change of behavior and mindset takes place with Will Newman. The change in attitude which happens to Will is a reversal of Stella's behavior. At first, Will is someone who doesn't care about the treatment he is on and he does not like anything tying. However, after having met Stella, they arrange to do a daily treatment together, and he gradually gets used to it. This behavior is in harmony with James Clear's opinion in the book *Atomic Habits*. He says that forming new habits starting with small changes that would gradually become habitual-repeated habits and would form new identities (Clear 2018).

From the foregoing, it can be seen that changes in one's attitude and behavior can be caused by an inborn intent to change for the better or to get involved in a problem which necessitates changing the bad attitude.

### **Theme in *Five Feet Apart***

Theme is one of the intrinsic elements of the novel that shows the types or kinds of story in the novel. By analyzing the theme, it can be concluded that the theme of *Five Feet Apart* is romance because the novel tells a love story about 2 teenagers who fall in love with each other but are blocked by their illness. Theme can identify the Young Adult Literature genre by the storyline that tells the struggle of the main character. Theme of Young Adult Literature usually tells about the issues of physical and mental growth of young people. It aims to inspire the readers to be successful and mature even if the reality is cruel which is experienced by the main character. This novel tells about two young people with cystic fibrosis (CF) who are dealing with their first love and worry about their futures. Stella is a high achiever who manages her life to take her prescriptions and receive counseling. Will, however, is quite the reverse. He is a rule-breaker who is tired of taking medication, being admitted to the hospital, and going through treatment trials for B. Cepacia. Stella and Will irritate one another when they first meet on the CF ward, but romance soon develops as is normal when opposites attract. Will's infection drastically shortens the already meager lifespan of CF patients since it is quickly contagious and drug-resistant. He is compelled to maintain a six-foot space between himself and the other patients on the ward as a result of these circumstances. More than anybody else, Stella, who is receiving a lung transplant, needs this.

The two youngsters are overcoming mental barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in regular adolescent activities while they battle physical barriers to forming a relationship. They're dealing with difficult situations. Balancing the urge to enjoy a carefree life with the duty of self-care is a never-ending and challenging fight. From the characteristics of Young Adult Literature, the story usually tells about the issues of physical and mental growth of people, which means that the story of Young Adult Literature also discusses the physical disabilities due to disease or accidents. Other than physical diseases, it is also mentioned that the mental condition is experienced by the young character in the novel. *Five Feet Apart* also tells about two young people who suffer from the lung illness which causes breathing problems, so they cannot do what normal teenagers do. It is also stated that people with Cystic Fibrosis and B. Cepacia are not allowed to live near each other. They have physical limitations and they do not have the capacity to function as normal people do.

So, it can be seen from the explanation above that the theme of *Five Feet Apart* is romance because it tells the love story of two young adult people who suffer from lung illness. It once again conforms to the characteristics of Young Adult Literature which tells about young people's life, tells about the issues of physical and mental growth by young people, Stella, Will, and Poe which suffer from Cystic Fibrosis and B. Cepacia.

### **Point of View of Five Feet Apart**

Point of view is the view in the writing used by the writer in introducing the characters or events in the novel. According to Simpson in the article by Suhair Al-Alami entitled *Journal Point of View in Narrative*, point of view includes the perspective of narrating in fiction (Al-Alami, 2019). A point of view focuses on the narrator's style while a perspective describes how the characters interpret and process the events in the tale. There are three categories of point of view: first person, second person, and third person. Look at how the author of the novel describes the story's characters to quickly identify the point of view.

The novel *Five Feet Apart* uses the first person point of view with the perspective of two young people, Stella and Will as the young adult protagonist characters. This can be seen from the use of words I, me, we, us, etc. Point of view in the novel uses the point of view of youths, that is, Stella and Will as the main characters who are around seventeen until eighteen years old.

### **Plot in Five Feet Apart**

Storyline in the novel *Five Feet Apart* grows faster, though having the perspective of two different people, but of the same description it is not twisted. This is one factor that makes the storyline not confusing. It can be seen in the chapter of the novel moving quickly and infinitely. According to Russel's theory (2009) about kinds of Plots, in the journal of *Analysis of Plots in James W. Ellison* (Lestari and Wibowo 2019). The novel *Five Feet Apart* consists of a parallel plot. Parallel plots are plots that combine two kinds of dramatics or progressive plots,



and are usually used when there are two main characters in the story with a similar theme.

Based on the description of the plot which consists of many conflicts, it can be concluded that the novel *Five Feet Apart* tells about the main characters who have many problems in their lives like a problem with their parents, their friends, and their partners. This fulfills the characteristics of Young Adult Literature which says that the story is aimed to inspire the readers to be successful and mature even if the reality is cruel. Through the conflicts and resolution experienced by the main characters, it can inspire youths to stay grateful and remain to have a lifelong spirit.

### CONCLUSIONS

From the elements of the novel, *Five Feet Apart* by Rachael Lippincott, Mikki Daughtry and Tobias Laconis is categorized into the young adult literature genre. The novel consists of thirty chapters with almost the whole story being dominated by seventeen until eighteen-year-old characters such as Stella, Will, Jason, Hope, Mya, and Camilla. The characters have physical appearance and ways of behaving also indicates that the character has a way of identifying themselves. The characters represent various identities, for example, Stella has a disciplined and organized personality, while Will has an uncooperative personality and is fond of living a free life.

The characters in the novel are also affected by the change in attitudes and mindset which prove that they are dynamic characters that change in attitudes, physical, or mindset. The example of a dynamic character is presented at the beginning of the story. Stella is described as a disciplined person on her treatment until there is a change of mind which she feels that she only lives once, a life that she must enjoy to the fullest. Then, the second character, Will, as opposed to Stella, does not do his treatment for his illness yet as the story evolves, he becomes a disciplined patient.

As for other supporting evidence, the Young Adult Literature genre is contained in the novel through the theme. In the characteristics of Young Adult Literature, the theme is mentioned as containing some genre, theme, or subject, such as young adult literature-romance. Through analysis, it is found that the novel updates a romance theme involving two teenagers - Stella and Will who fall in love with each other. It proves that the novel is a Young Adult Literature romance. Novel *Five Feet Apart* also talks about the struggle of the main characters who suffer from Cystic Fibrosis and B. Cepacia. It fits to the characters Young Adult Literature said that the story tells about the issues of physical and mental growth of young people and aims to inspire the readers.

The novel *Five Feet Apart* uses a parallel plot with the first person of point of view as the main person. A parallel plot is one of two points of view from two different central figures with the same theme and progressive plot. The point of view in this story comes from two main characters, namely Stella and Will, who are the main characters of youth people around seventeen until eighteen teenagers. It can be seen that the novelist describes the main character using

pronouns such as “I, me, we, and us”. The storyline in the story moves too fast with thirty major events. It fits the description of the Young Adult Literature genre. It said that Young Adult Literature uses the point of view of young people and the plots develop fast and are found by developing restricted characters and events. The story in the novel tells about the lives of youth.

Moreover, this novel consists of both internal and external conflicts. The internal conflict is experienced by the main character, Stella Grant, and the external conflicts are experienced by the other characters. Based on the exposure to the conflicts above, it has proved that the story meets the features of young adult literature, the main character always throws out their parents, and has a physical and mental growth of young people. Through the conflict and resolution faced by the characters, it may inspire teenagers to be always grateful, never give up, and always eager to live. Based on the above exposure, it can be concluded that the novel conforms to the characteristics of the genre of young adult literature.

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