

Facing Loss: Julie's Inner Struggle in Dustin Thao Novel's *You've Reached Sam*

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ABSTRACT

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The inner conflict experienced by the character Julie in the novel *You've Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao and the way Julie's character overcomes inner conflict is interesting to study with the theory proposed by Kurt Lewin. This study aims to examine the inner conflict experienced by the main character in the novel *You've Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao, along with the factors that affect the occurrence of these conflicts using a literary psychology approach. This research is qualitative-descriptive research with primary sources in the form of phrases, words or sentences quoted in the novel *You've Reached Sam* and secondary sources are used in the form of reference books, and national and international journal articles. The data collection technique is carried out by reading and recording data in the form of inner conflicts and the factors that affect them. The analysis technique in this study refers to the three stages of the triangulation technique. This research found that Juliet's character experiences an inner conflict that is in accordance with Kurt Lewin's formula are approach-approach conflict; avoidance-avoidance conflict; and approach-avoidance conflict. The dominant factors that affect the occurrence of inner conflicts are psychological pressure (driving forces) and tensions.

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ABSTRAK

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Kata kunci

Konflik batin;

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Tokoh Utama.

Konflik batin yang dialami oleh tokoh Julie dalam novel *You've Reached Sam* karya Dustin Thao dan cara tokoh Julie mengatasi konflik batin tersebut menarik untuk dikaji dengan teori yang dikemukakan oleh Kurt Lewin. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji konflik batin yang dialami oleh tokoh utama dalam novel *You've Reached Sam* karya Dustin Thao, beserta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi terjadinya konflik tersebut dengan menggunakan pendekatan psikologi sastra. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan sumber primer berupa frasa, kata, atau kalimat yang dikutip dalam novel *You've Reached Sam* dan sumber sekunder yang digunakan berupa buku-buku referensi, dan artikel jurnal nasional maupun internasional. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan cara membaca dan mencatat data berupa konflik batin dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya. Teknik analisis dalam penelitian ini mengacu pada tiga tahap teknik triangulasi. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa tokoh Juliet mengalami konflik batin yang sesuai dengan formula Kurt Lewin yaitu konflik mendekat-mendekat; konflik menjauh-menjauh; dan konflik mendekat-menjauh. Faktor dominan yang mempengaruhi terjadinya konflik batin adalah tekanan psikologis dan ketegangan.

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INTRODUCTION

Authors create diverse characters in literary works to reflect the complexity and diversity of real life and to offer readers a variety of perspectives and experiences. By presenting diverse



characters, authors can explore social, moral, and emotional themes in a richer and deeper way. Diverse characters also allow readers to find connections and understanding between different individuals and groups. Additionally, diverse characters can add dynamics and tension to a narrative, creating interesting conflicts and more complex plot developments.

As a literary work in the form of prose, a novel has a very complex meaning (Apriyani & Nalurita, 2023). As a literary work in the form of prose, a novel has a very complex meaning. It because novels often intertwines various themes, character developments, and plot structures to reflect the multifaceted nature of human experience. Unlike other forms of literature, such as poetry or short stories, novels have the space and depth to explore intricate narratives and diverse perspectives. The complexity of a novel not only engages readers on an intellectual and emotional level but also invites them to reflect on their own lives and the world around them, making the novel a powerful and enduring form of storytelling.

A novel is a work of fiction that contains the values of a person's life with the people around him and highlights the character and behavior of a person in the story (Nurgiyantoro, 2017:16). In a novel, the character and behavior between characters become the focus of the reader's attention. The author finally explores internal and external conflicts in the storyline. Through the depiction of complex characters and situations, the novel can serve as a mirror for readers to understand various aspects of humanity, from emotions to social dynamics that affect human life. Thus, the novel not only serves as entertainment, but also provides deep insight into human behavior and the values that shape society. *You've Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao is a teen novel that tells the story of love, loss, and acceptance. The story centers on the character of Julie Clarke, a teenager who struggles to cope with the tragic death of her boyfriend, Sam Obayashi. Julie, who was devastated by this deep loss, struggled to move on with her life. The only thing that made him feel better was Sam's voice. One day, in desperation, Julie calls Sam's number, hoping to hear her voice one last time. A miracle occurs when Sam answers the call, opening up an impossible line of communication between this world and the afterlife.

Through these calls, Julie and Sam try to find a way to say goodbye. They spend time talking about their memories, unrealized dreams, and hopes for a future that is now impossible. Each call gives Julie the strength to face the realities of life without Sam. However, this relationship is also a challenge because Julie has to learn to let go of Sam and accept the fact that he is gone. Julie has to deal with various emotional challenges and inner conflicts including how to deal with her friends and family who also feel the same loss. Dustin Thao manages to portray the emotions of teenagers and makes readers feel every pain and relief experienced by the character. This novel is a novel that invites readers to reflect on the importance of time with loved ones and teaches that letting go does not mean forgetting.

The inner conflict experienced by Julie's character in the novel *You've Reached Sam* and the character's actions in overcoming the inner conflict can be studied with the theory put forward by Kurt Lewin. According to Lewin, conflict is a state in which two opposing forces appear in a person, leading to instability and tension. This conflict can occur when individuals are faced with situations that require them to choose between two equally interesting options or vice versa. Conflict is a natural part of human life and is an important component in group dynamics and individual behavior (Nurgiyantoro, 2017:50).



Kurt Lewin (1951) developed a psychological theory known as the field theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding human behavior in the context of the surrounding environment. According to Lewin as stated Burnes (2020), an individual's behavior is the result of the interaction between the person and his environment, which creates a psychological "field". This field includes various factors such as goals, needs, desires, and social pressures that affect a person's actions at any given time. When an individual is in a field full of conflicting forces, the individual will experience conflict. For example, a person may experience a conflict between the desire to achieve a particular goal and the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving that goal. Lewin as stated in the article Snyder (2009) emphasizes that in order to understand and resolve conflicts, it is important to analyze all the factors that affect the situation. Lewin (1951) identifies several types of conflicts, namely approach conflicts; avoidance-avoidance conflict; and approach-avoidance conflict.

Approaches conflict is a type of psychological conflict that occurs when a person is faced with two choices that are equally interesting and mutually beneficial. Both options have a balanced appeal, leaving the individual with a dilemma in deciding which option to take. According to Lewin, this conflict is positive because even though it is difficult to decide, any choice taken will give a pleasant or satisfying result (Burnes, 2020; Lewin & Cartwright, 1951; Roşca, 2020; Snyder, 2009). For example, when one has to choose between two equally lucrative jobs such as being a manager in a well-known company with a high salary and becoming a researcher at a reputable research institution with complete facilities and opportunities to develop oneself in the academic field. Both of these options are equally attractive and have their own advantages. In this situation, even if there is stress because of having to choose, any decision taken will give satisfaction because both options are beneficial.

While avoidance-avoidance conflict is a type of psychological conflict in which a person has to choose between two unwanted or unpleasant choices. In this type of conflict, the individual feels trapped between two situations, where both options are to be avoided, but still have to choose one or the other. This type of conflict often causes high stress and anxiety because both options do not provide the desired or satisfactory results (Burnes, 2020; Lewin & Cartwright, 1951; Roşca, 2020; Snyder, 2009). For example, an employee who is not satisfied with his current job, but he is also worried that he will not find a suitable new job. The employee is in a dilemma and has to choose one of two equally unpleasant options.

Approach-avoidance conflict is a psychological situation in which a person is caught between the desire to approach or achieve a certain goal and the desire to avoid the same goal due to negative consequences. This conflict occurs because the desired goal has a favorable element, but it also contains an unpleasant aspect. This circumstance often leads to indecision in decision-making, as individuals must balance between the drive to achieve gains and the need to avoid losses (Burnes, 2020; Lewin & Cartwright, 1951; Roşca, 2020; Snyder, 2009). For example, one should consider accepting a highly desirable job promotion. On the one hand, the promotion offers higher salaries, better status, and greater career opportunities (the approaching aspect). On the other hand, this promotion also means greater responsibility, longer working hours, and increased stress (the away aspect). The person may feel interested



in receiving the promotion because of the benefits offered, but at the same time, they also feel anxious and indecisive because of the negative consequences that come with it.

According to Lewin (1951), there are three main factors that affect the occurrence of conflict, namely psychological pressure, obstacles, and tension. First, psychological pressure (driving forces) are forces that encourage individuals to act in a certain direction. This pressure can come from individual needs, desires, or goals that are at odds with the environment or others. Second, restraining forces are factors that hinder or hinder individuals in achieving their goals. These obstacles can be limited resources, social regulations, or expectations from others. In conflict situations, these obstacles increase tension because the individual feels blocked in achieving what he wants. Third, tension is the result of the interaction between psychological pressure and obstacles. Tension creates an uncomfortable emotional state for the individual, which often triggers a conflict response. When tension reaches a high level, the individual may respond in a defensive, aggressive way, or seek compromise to defuse the situation. According to Lewin, understanding the dynamics between driving forces, restraining forces, and tension can help in designing effective interventions to manage and resolve conflicts (Adelman, 1993; Roşca, 2020).

In the last five years, many literary researchers have been interested in studying novels using Kurt Lewin's theories, such as Fachrudin (2020); Nurbaya et al. (2020); Hikmawati et al. (2021); Sari et al. (2021); Nurhaya & Indarti (2022); Lestari et al. (2023); F. A. Lestari & Sugiarti (2023); Novika et al. (2023); Yanju et al. (2023); Alfi et al. (2024) dan Prikusuma & Pamungkas (2024). All the results of the study succeeded in finding three types of conflicts formulated by Kurt Lewin.

Five studies that only describe the form of inner conflict in the main character in the novel were conducted by Nurbaya et al. (2020) in the novel entitled *Tanpa Kata* by Endry Boeriswati; Hikmawati et al. (2021) in the novel entitled *Pertanyaan Kepada Kenangan* by Faisal Oddang; Sari et al. (2021) in the novel entitled *Kata* by Rintik Sedu; Nurhaya & Indarti (2022) in the novel entitled *Dua Barista* by Najhaty Sharma; and Alfi et al. (2024) in the novel *Kiara* by Dinni Adhiawaty.

Fachrudin (2020) in the novel *Perempuan Bersampur Merah* by Intan Andaru and Prikusuma & Pamungkas (2024) in the novel *Ibuku (Tidak) Gila* by Anggie D. Widowati, both found three types of conflict and three actions taken by the main character in overcoming the conflict, namely actions of positive valence, negative valence, and neutral valence. The results of research that discovered the forms of conflict and the causes of conflict were carried out by Lestari et al. (2023) in the novel *Rindu* by Tere Liye; Novika et al. (2023) in the novel *Aku, Meps, and Beps* by Soca Sobhita and Reda Gaudiamo; and Yanju et al. (2023) in the novel *Bukan Semillah* by Nadine T. The causal factors found are in the form of driving forces; inhibiting force; the power of personal needs; power of influence; and non-human forces. Meanwhile, Lestari & Sugiarti (2023) apart from finding three forms of external conflict in the novel *Rasa* by Tere Liye, also found factors that influence it, namely internal and external factors.

Based on the search results, research focusing on inner conflict in the novel *You've Reached Sam* (2021) has not been found. This can be a research gap so it is important to conduct



further research. This study aims to examine the inner conflict experienced by the main character in the novel *You've Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao, along with the factors that affect the occurrence of these conflicts using a literary psychology approach.

METHODS

This research is qualitative-descriptive research with primary sources in the form of phrases, words, or sentences quoted in the novel *You've Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao published by Wednesday Books. In addition, secondary sources are used in the form of reference books, and national and international journal articles that are in accordance with the purpose of this research. The data collection technique is carried out by reading repeatedly carefully and recording data in the form of inner conflicts and the factors that affect them. The analysis technique in this study refers to the three stages of the triangulation technique proposed. The first stage is a triangulation technique of data sources, namely by collecting data and then comparing and analyzing information from various references that discuss similar topics. The second stage is a method triangulation technique, namely by using various analysis methods to examine data through Miles et al. (2019) close reading with a literary psychology approach. The last stage is theoretical triangulation, which is using Kurt Lewin's theory to explain the data obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Julie Clarke's character is described as a figure full of sadness and confusion. She tries to find a way to continue her life without her deceased boyfriend Sam. Before Sam's departure, Julie was a passionate girl with clear future plans, including college and her various dreams with Sam. However, the tragedy that befell her left Julie feeling trapped in a deep sense of loss and loneliness.

Julie accidentally finds a way to talk to Sam on the phone. This interaction provides temporary hope for Julie. However, without realizing it, this creates an inner conflict for Julie's character. Julie's journey in the novel shows the inner conflict between past memories and the need to keep moving forward. In this discussion section, the forms of inner conflict of the Julie character and the factors that affect it will be described.

1. Approach-approach conflict

The main character, Julie Clarke, experiences a fairly complex approach conflict. This conflict arises when she is faced with two positive and conflicting choices: between continuing her life without Sam, her deceased boyfriend, and trying to accept reality or continuing to try to contact Sam's spirit over the phone for emotional support. On the one hand, Julie wants to move on with her life and begin to recover from a deep sense of loss. However, every time she tries to forget Sam and tries to forget about her, the memories and feelings of her deep love for Sam resurface. This can be seen in the following quote

At least I haven't said good-bye to Sam yet. And as long as I don't, we'll stay connected, right? Isn't that what he promised me? I'm not ready to let him go yet (Thao, 2021:168)



The quote above illustrates Juliet's sense of loss and inability to let go of Sam which means a lot to Juliet. Juliet feels that saying goodbye is the final step that will break her emotional bond with Sam. By maintaining this relationship, Juliet feels that there is still a bond left with Sam. This inner conflict occurred due to the psychological pressure that Juliet experienced about fear and doubt to face the reality of Sam's loss. Juliet feels that she is not ready to let go of Sam and cannot accept the fact that her loved one has left. This illustrates Juliet's psychological pressure to choose between moving on with her life and her desire to stay in the memories of the past. Sam's promise to stay connected becomes a handle that gives hope and comfort, showing how powerful the emotional and spiritual influence is in Juliet's grieving process.

I'm still thinking about him. About how he won't get to finish school or graduate with us, you know? I mean, how am I supposed to think about college and the rest of my life, when his was cut so short? I know it's not good for me. But I keep wishing he was still here. (Thao, 2021:232)

Julie's character experiences a conflict between wanting to continue her life after Sam's death and her desire to keep talking to Sam through supernatural phone calls. On the one hand, talking to Sam gave him comfort and a chance to say goodbye, but on the other hand, it made it difficult to accept Sam's death. Juliet's inner conflict reflects the duality between the desire to move on with life after losing a loved one and the inability to truly let go of past memories. This, reflects how difficult it is to let go of someone who has become an important part of his life. The psychological pressure that Juliet experiences creates a situation where Juliet feels trapped between two worlds, the real world she has to face and the world of memories that continue to loom over her mind. As in the quote below

And then the phone rings. The number is unknown but I know it's him. I squeeze the phone tight, wanting to pick it up so badly, desperate to hear his voice again. But I can't do that to him. I made a promise. So I let it ring. I let it keep ringing until it stops, the screen turns black, and I'm alone in the room again. My heart shatters, and sinks into the pit of my stomach. I set the phone down, and curl up on Sam's bed, letting myself cry. (Thao, 2021:238)

Juliet's inner conflict illustrates the universal struggle in the face of loss and grief. The desire to always connect with Sam through supernatural phone calls shows how strong the emotional bond between them is, which often makes it difficult for a person to accept reality and move on with life. On the other hand, there is a need to move on with life and find happiness again, which often goes against his desire to stay in the fond memories with Sam.

At the same time, when Julie decides to keep in touch with Sam, she realizes that it may prevent her from healing herself. As stated in the following quote.

"I thought about it," I say, staring down at my phone again, holding it tight. "I think it's obvious what it means now. It means I have to stop thinking about him. That I have to let him go and move on with my life." I let out a deep breath. "I wish it was easier for me". (Thao, 2021:218)

Julie felt comfortable every time she heard Sam's voice. But he also realized that this prevented him from the real healing process. This conflict puts Julie in a deep emotional dilemma. Both choices have a positive impact but also cause guilt and doubt. Before Sam died, they had big plans for their future together. However, after her death, Julie must consider whether to follow the plan or pursue a new dream that may not involve Sam.



Julie is also told to have a dilemma between keeping her phone call with Sam a secret or sharing the story with her best friend to get emotional support. This inner conflict occurs due to the psychological pressure within him between the desire to protect the privacy of his special relationship with Sam and the need to get support from those closest to him.

I wish I could tell her everything. So she will understand why I've been acting the way I have, and know I haven't let go of Sam because I never needed to. *Because he never left me.* But I don't want to risk our connection. (Thao, 2021:205)

Juliet feels overwhelmed by her desire to explain her behavior to others so that others understand the emotional bond she has with Sam. This attachment shows how much love and loss she has experienced, as well as how difficult it is to move on with life after losing someone so dear. Based on the quote above, Juliet's inner conflict is caused by psychological pressure between maintaining a bond with the past or looking to the future. This emotional attachment becomes a kind of protector, but also a barrier to moving forward and forming new relationships.

2. Avoidance-avoidance conflict

Avoidance-avoidance conflict occurs when the main character Julie is faced with two unpleasant choices. Julie has to choose one or the other even if both options cause discomfort or difficulty. This can be seen in Julie's inner conflict when she receives a supernatural phone call from Sam.

The sound of his voice floods me with relief. I bring my fingers up to my mouth to contain a sound. I don't know whether to feel confused or relieved or a mixture of both. (Thao, 2021:32).

This quote describes Julie's inner conflict as she struggles to make sense of her conflicting emotions. Sam's voice that she heard on the one hand brought a strong sense of relief, but on the other hand caused confusion. The uncertainty between relief and confusion reflects the ambivalence that often occurs in human experience when dealing with situations that are complex and contain multiple layers of emotional meaning. Relief comes from a sound that may be perceived as a sign of safety or comfort, but confusion arises because the situation is not fully comprehensible or acceptable to the turbulent mind. This inner conflict creates emotional tension that reflects the complexity of dealing with changing feelings and responses to ambiguous situations.

One quote describing this conflict can be found in the relationship between Julie and Oliver.

I come behind, and put my arms around him. I rest my head on his back, and feel a pulse or heartbeat or I'm not sure what, but it's someone else's and not mine. Something I haven't felt in a while. (Thao, 2021:137)

As Julie struggles to come to terms with the reality of Sam's death, she is faced with a difficult choice between continuing without Sam or establishing a relationship with Oliver even without feelings of love. Both of these options are equally undesirable, as each has a huge



emotional impact. Julie feels caught between two difficult situations, where every decision carries an unavoidable emotional burden. This conflict is exacerbated by Julie's guilt and fear. The psychological pressure factor experienced by Juliet encourages a dilemma, where there are no satisfactory options and every choice has a negative impact.

Through this avoidance-avoidance conflict, Thao illustrates the complexity of human emotions in the face of loss and difficult decisions. Julie feels trapped between two equally unwanted choices. This deepens the reader's understanding of how complicated the healing process can be after losing someone very meaningful.

3. Approach-avoidance conflict

The approach-avoidance conflict experienced by Julie's character in the novel *You've reached Sam* is the relationship between the protagonist, Julie, and the memory of Sam who has died. Julie's inner conflict is caused by *the tension* to remember Sam and feel pressured by the pain of loss. When Julie spoke to Sam over the supernatural phone, she felt a strong urge to get closer to their fond memories and sense Sam's presence. However, she also has to face the grief of losing Sam. This condition certainly results in the emergence of ambivalent feelings where Julie wants to get back close to the relationship that has ended but also feels trapped in emotional pain.

One of the quotes reflecting this conflict comes up when Julie decides to call Sam. Like the quote below.

"After we hang up... I'm going to call you again. And I need you to not pick up this time. Can you promise me that?" He needs me to break our connection for good. He needs me to move on (Thao, 2021:238).

Julie felt joy when she heard Sam's voice, but she also felt an emotional burden. Julie wants to keep the sweet memories between herself and Sam alive, but the tension between the desire to move on with life and the lingering pain causes a deep internal dilemma. Julie feels trapped in a conflict between a desire to avoid the harsh reality and a desire to nurture a relationship that has passed.

Another quote that highlights the approach-avoidance conflict is when Julie has to face the fact that she can't move on with life fully as long as she connects with Sam over the phone. Despite the strong urge to continue talking to Sam, she felt that it would hinder the healing process. It shows how Julie struggles to feel comfortable with Sam or she has to deal with loss, as well as finding a way to move on with her own life.

Our connection is over. Just like that. I'll never get to speak to Sam again. I should get up and go home, but I can't seem to move. So I lie there in the dark for a while. In his bed, alone in the emptiness of the house, wishing things were different. And then something happens. (Thao, 2021:238)

Julie's inner conflict reaches its peak when Julie has to decide whether to continue to engage in Sam's memories or face reality and try to move on with her life. Every decision taken by Julie reflects the existence of a tension factor that creates an emotional state that often triggers a conflict response. However, the tension experienced by Juliet did not cause an aggressive

response but rather sought a compromise to defuse the situation. Juliet's approach-avoidance conflict illustrates the tension between wants and needs, as well as its impact on Julie's healing journey and personal growth.

CONCLUSION

In the novel *You've Reached Sam* by Dustin Thao, Juliet's character experiences an inner conflict that is in accordance with Kurt Lewin's formula, namely approach-avoidance conflict; avoidance-avoidance conflict; and approach-avoidance conflict. Juliet experiences a conflict as she tries to cope with the loss caused by the death of Sam, her lover. Juliet's inner conflict is a conflict of staying away, where she is faced with two equally unpleasant choices. Juliet is caught in this conflict and dilemma, which makes it difficult for her to find peace and move on with her life. Juliet also experienced an approach-avoidance conflict. Juliet realizes that keeping in touch with Sam through these phone calls slows down his recovery process and makes it difficult to truly let go of Sam's departure. Meanwhile, in *You've Reached Sam*, the dominant factors that affect the occurrence of inner conflicts are psychological pressure (driving forces) and tension. This whole inner conflict shows the emotional complexity experienced by Juliet and illustrates how difficult it is for a person to deal with loss and the healing process.

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