

## **A FAMILY PORTRAIT IN NICHOLAS SPARKS' NOVEL *THE LAST SONG***

**KANESYA KELES, CEISY N. WUNTU, IMELDA S. LOLOWANG**

***English Education Department, Faculty of Language and Arts  
Universitas Negeri Manado***

*Correspondence author: [imeldaslolowang@gmail.com](mailto:imeldaslolowang@gmail.com)*

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**Abstract** : This study aims to describe the family problem as seen in Nicholas Sparks' novel *The Last Song*. *The Last Song* portrayed a relationship that turns bad because of divorce. The purpose of this research is to find out the family problem and the causes in the novel. This research uses a qualitative method because the data is collected in the form of words. The primary source of this research is the novel itself *The Last Song* written by Nicholas Sparks and the secondary sources are articles, books and journals that related to this research. The result of this study showed how a family problem could ruin children's life in any aspect. It is regarded that people have to maintain the family relationship well although people cannot avoid some problems which potentially ruin the family relationship. Broken families have a serious impact on the children who experience it. The cause of the family problem is because of lack of care for family, lack of communication, and cheating.

**Keywords** : ***Literature, Family, divorce, broken home.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature is a work created by human that represents human life. "A literary work has the power to touch the deepest sense in humans that can produce perfect consciousness as it successfully carries a mission that can develop flawless awareness" (Wuntu, 2015:100). *The Last Song* is a novel which describes a family problem that can be found easily around us. The author shows how the main characters face a family problem to achieve their goal. "A family is the smallest most sensitive and

essential social system that is provided and facilitated through society as a larger social system" (Felisilda & Torreón, 2020:216). Family consist of father, mother, and children. A family is a place where we can share anything that happens in our life, it is essential to carry the relationship in a good condition however, problems also can happen in family. *The Last Song* potrayed a family that has a bad relationship with each other because of divorce.

"A novel is a book length story in prose, whose author tries to create the sense that while we read, we experience life" (Kennedy, 1996:13). Author that try to figure human's real experiences is Nicholas Sparks. In his work, *The Last Song* he described a family problem that can be seen in our daily life. The reason why the writer choose this novel because divorce not only can happen in the novel but also can happen in reality since as we know novel adapted people experience (Sigar & Rorintulus, 2020). *The Last Song* shows that the main characters have their way to deal with the problems. Ronnie has to battle with her life although it might be difficult but she tries to open herself. Everything in her life becomes worse when her parents decide to divorce. The divorce of her parents can affect Ronnie's life. Ronnie is a good girl that turns into a rebellious one. She has to battle with herself every day (Moonik, Mogeá & Sabudu, 2020). It can be identified the life of an unhappy teenager because of the divorce of her parents and therefore she is not close to her family. She hates her father and never shares anything with her parents. She stops playing the piano because the piano remains her with her dad.

Moreover, she stops school because she wants her parents to understand through her behaviour. The other problem is faced by Ronnie's father, Steve Willer. He is not close to his daughter. Steve tries to fix his relationship with her daughter Ronnie even though he has cancer. He tries to do his best to show that he loves his daughter and family. Sometimes, the problem that we have can be resolved by forgiving and accepting each other. In this case, the problems that can be seen in the main character is Ronnie battle with herself. Besides that, Ronnie's father has difficulty showing his love to his daughter although he suffers from his cancer. And will who

battle with his relationship with Ronnie that resist by his mother. *The Last Song* teaches us that when we deal with problems we should not think about giving up because there is a power of hope and believe that everything is possible.

Based on the statement above this research needs to be studied because it presents a conflict or family problem that can be found around us such as the divorce. The divorce and the effect that portrayed in the novel *The Last Song*. Relevant to this current situation parental divorce may influence every children behavior that the children take in their life such as mental or physical activity which should be handle. Through this work, people can learn to appreciate things and always love themselves. People can take the message that they can use for their life about life lessons, family, faith, love and forgiveness.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### ***Family Portrait***

Stories regularly reflect the ways people prepare and construct which means in their relationship. (Vangelisti, Crumley, and Baker, 1999:336). In *The Last Song*, the novel describes how family relationship affect the personality of the family members. Divorce makes the relationship not in a good condition, because of the divorce this family have to face the struggles. "He smiled thinking that for just an instant, it was easy to imagine they were still married, both of them on the same team, both of them still in love. Except, of course, that they weren't" (Sparks, 2009:21). The quotation explains Miller's family is no longer together because of divorce.

The family systems principle is a principle that advises people can not be understood in isolation from each other but instead as a part of their family because family is an emotional unit. (Felisilda & Torreón, 2020:217). While a family breaks up, it is usually hard for every person in the family to deal with the state of affairs; but children are frequently the worst sufferers of family break up. There are powerful justification to be alarmed about the impact of broken home on children. (Vangelisti,

Crumley, and Baker, 1999:216). *The Last Song* show how divorce has an impact on children especially the main character in the novel. When Ronnie gets hurt because of her parents she shows that through her behavior.

"I don't want to see or talk to him. Ronnie said. Just try to make the best of it, okay? Your father is a good man and he loves you. Is that why he walked out on us?" (Sparks, 2009:11). The effect of the divorce in the novel also shows how friend and society take part in the effect that happens to her like the problem of shoplifting that Ronnie do with her friends.

### ***Struggle***

Struggle is the freedom of fighting to get the purpose and preserve themselves to live on (Spicer & Fleming, 2007:3). The struggle in this research is how the main character survive with the problems to achieve love and dreams. Based on the definition it can be concluded that struggle is the attempt to achieve the accomplishment with the hard work.

### ***The Kinds of Miller's Family Struggle***

#### ***The Struggle to Accept the Facts of Life***

Frankl (1970), in Koren & Lowenstein (2008:141) states that the meaning of life as something is personal and might change over the term as well as the condition changes life goes on. *The Last Song* describes the main character or Ronnie has to struggle with herself when she has difficult life because of the divorce of her parents. She is forced to be independent. She struggling to accept the fact that her parents is divorce.

#### ***The Struggle to Achieve a Dream***

Meaning of life is "private that can be change depend on the situation because life goes on. In summary, desires hopes and human purpose will reach now or in the future people will reach what are they wished. It depend on the people who have

ideals, conditions, and how high the ideal be accomplished” (Frankl, 1970:45). The quotation described that dreams would not come true if people do not mean it and did not try their best to achieve.

They need to realize if they want to succeed or achieve their dreams, they should bring their own instruments. We can see how different people make their dreams come true in different ways. Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they do not. Sometimes they just dream too much without facing the reality (Lolowang, 2013). People reach their dreams in different paths, they also faced different challenges. People will achieve their dreams if they strive.

### ***The Struggle in Showing Affection***

According Erich Fromm (2000:24) “love is primarily member and not accept, and the member are the highest expression of ability. The most important members are the things that are human, not matter. Love always includes certain basic elements, namely parenting, responsibility, attention, and recognition”. Based on the explanation love is things that can explain through feelings and behavior. Ronnie doesn’t get good affection because the divorce. She doesn’t get enough love from her parents. She never feel a good parenting, responsibility and attention. She wants to get the attention through change her behavior.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

Since the data is collected in the forms of words, this research is regarded as a qualitative one. “Descriptive qualitative method is the method in research that is described in words form or picture if necessary, not the numerals” (Endraswara, 2011:5). This study aims to describe the family problem as seen in Nicholas Sparks’ Novel *The Last Song*.

### ***Data Collection***

The data is collected from novel so that it is assumed as the primary sources. The main source of the data in this research is *The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks, a romance Novel published in 2009. The secondary sources are articles, books and journals that related to this research.

### ***Data Analysis***

“Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview, transcript, fieldnotes, and other materials to increase your own understanding of them and enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:153). In analyzing the data, the writer focus on analyzing the family problem. The writer use objective approach to analyze the data. This research use objective theory that focuses in plot, theme, and character.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***A Portrait of Miller’s Family in The Last Song***

“Divorce permanently weakens the family and the relationship between children and parents.” (Fagan and Churchill, 2012:1) No relationship is perfect, even family. Problems also can happen in the family, it could be problems between both of the parents or parents with children. *The Last Song* potrayed a broken home that has an impact on the children. Divorce as the reason of broken home in this family. The cause of the divorce is because lack of care for family, lack of communication and cheating.

He’d ended up quitting Juilliard so he could hit the road as a concert pianist and found himself playing in rinky-dink venues to audience that barely filled the first couple rows. He traveled forty weeks a year, long enough to put a strain on the marriage. Next thing she knew, Mom was yelling at the time and Dad was retreating into his shell like he usually did, until one day he simply didn’t return from an extended southern tour. (Sparks, 2009:13)

From the quotation, the situation gets worse because Steve wants to follow his ambition to travel because it makes the distance between Steve and his family. Both of

his kids feel desperate and lost since he regularly headed out alone to pursue his desire. "You didn't have to travel around the country, you didn't have to move here . . . you could have stayed part of their lives. Her words stung him, and he knew she was right" (25).

Another reason that makes this family divorce because lack of communication, when Steve's was kid he did not receive affection from his parents because his parents were busy at work, that's why Steve did not use to share his feelings with others. The fact that parents' behaviour will always influence children. So, when Steve married the relationship with his wife did not run well because the bad communication. The marriage did not run well also because Steve did not want to open up or talk about his feeling to his wife.

"She told the counselor that Steve kept his feelings bottled up inside but it wasn't his fault. Neither of his parents had been expressive people, she said. Nor had he grown up in a family that discussed their problems. He sought out music as an escape, she went on to say, and it was only through the piano that he learned to feel anything at all." (99) But Steve also did anything to fix the relationship with Kim, they even go to a counselor to discuss their marriage problems. "Some years ago, before Ronnie had stop talking to him, he and Kim had gone to see a marriage counselor whose office was located near Gramercy Park, in a renovated building." (98) Sometimes the situation can not happens as people expected, same as goes to Steve's marriage and end up divorce with Kim and had to separate with his children. "Three years ago, he and kim decided to divorce; less than twelve months later, the tour dates began drying up, until they finally ended completely. Last year, he'd moved back here, to the town where he'd grown up, a place he never thought he'd see again." (16)

The last cause of divorce is cheating. The biggest mistake that makes a relationship is broken because of cheating. Ronnie thought that her dad was left first and it makes Ronnie disappointed. Until Ronnie found the fact that her mom was cheating. "She stared at her mom, recognition dawning even as she spoke. "It wasn't Dad who had the affair was it?" She said slowly. "It was you." (400) The quotation tells that Ronnie's mom is the one who cheats on her dad that makes Steve step back from

his position and left his family. This is the fault of both the marriage was broken. Kim was an affair because felt lonely and search for someone else to fulfil the position as a husband because Steve's focus on his ambition.

### ***Problems Portrayed in Miller's Family The Last Song***

"Life in a single parent family or broken home can be stressful for both the child and the parent. The broken home family will faced many challenges. A broken home in this context is one that is not structurally intact, as a result of divorce, separation, death of one parent and illegitimacy." (Felisilda & Torreon, 2020:217) from the quotation, it said children that come from a broken family confront problems and difficulty rather than the child that comes from a loving family.

### ***Behaviour Problem***

The effect of divorce on children's hearts, minds, and soul rangers from mild to severe, from seemingly small to observably significant, and from short-term to long-term. (Fagan & Churchill, 2012:2) The effect of broken home looks clearly in the novel, that shows in the main character behavior. Parental divorce affect the children's temperament, the emotional change caused the child moody, become aggressive who wants to seek the attention of parents. Looking for identity in an overlapping and less harmonious household. The divorce caused emotional stability. "Don't be rude. Your father's talking to you. Say something." Ronnie crossed her arms. "All right. How about this? I'm not going to play the piano for you." "Ronnie!" Steve could hear Kim's exasperation. "what?" She tossed her head. "I thought I'd get that out of my way early." (Sparks, 2009:20)

Ronnie was angry with Steve because Ronnie thought Steve's was the one who left them. It makes Ronnie changes towards her dad emotionally. Ronnie was not only angry with her dad but also stop liked all the things that related to her dad such as playing piano. "Ronnie *hated* the piano and swore she'd never play again, a decision even some of her oldest friends thought was strange, since it had been major part of her life for as long as she'd known them. Her dad, once a teacher at Juilliard, had been

her teacher as well, and for a long time, she'd been consumed by the desire not only to play, but to compose original music with her father." (12) It shows how Ronnie hate all the thing that related to her father. Ronnie hates piano because it reminds her father.

Divorce can cause children's health and longevity, it also increases behavioural , emotional, and psychiatric risks. (Fagan & Churchill, 2012:2) Ronnie shows her disappointment to her parents through the behavior. day by day Ronnie's behavior gets worse. Ronnie also did shoplifting. "As for the shoplifting I did back in New York, I don't even know why I took that stuff. It wasn't like I needed it. It was just like something to do because my friends were doing it." (253) All the things that affect Ronnie's behavior tell that how important family or parents role in children's life because at the teenage stage in the growth process teenagers need attention and help from people who are loved and closed to them especially parents or family. Teenagers with a broken home condition where parents are no longer role models for themselves will have an impact on the character development.

### ***Academic Achievement***

The effect of a broken home not only shows in the emotions of the main character but also in the academic achievement. "Broken families may have profound negative impact on student's academic performance as parents play an important role in most children's academic development." (Felisilda & Torreon, 2020:217) As described by the character, Ronnie does not care about school or anything. "Mom probably believed that the louder she yelled about Ronnie's grades, or Ronnie's friends or the fact that Ronnie continually ignored her curfew, or the incident- especially the incident the more likely it would be that Ronnie would care." (Sparks, 2009:9)

"Children whose parents have divorced have higher levels of externalizing behaviors and internalizing problems, lower academic achievement, and more problems in social relationships than do children whose parents have not divorced." (Lansford, 2009:142) because of the divorce, Ronnie have problems with her academic

achievement. Ronnie does not care about anything, she even almost failed with her classes. "She's barely passing any of her classes. And I haven't told you this, but I made her take the SATs in February. She missed every single question. Do you know how smart you have to be miss every single question?".

"Children in divorced families receive less emotional support, financial assistance, and practical help from their parents. Divorced homes show a decrease in language stimulation, pride, affection, stimulation of academic behavior, encouragement of social maturity, and warmth directed towards the children." (Fagan & Churchill, 2012:2) The effect portrayed in a divorced family is several and significant. Many aspects of children life could change because of divorce, such as academic behavior. Ronnie was a talented girl she was very good at playing the piano, Ronnie also good in math. Ronnie always tutored Jonah when he has trouble with math. Which means Ronnie has an academic problems because of the divorce.

### ***The Kinds of Family Struggle Revealed in The Novel The Last Song by Nicholas Sparks***

#### ***The Struggle to Accept the Facts of Life***

Life without struggle is like staying bored inside the theatre and watching a boring film. Many playwrights exposed the critical side of life and emphasized that life should be crossed with much experience. (Bharathikumar, 2018:85) Life is not always easy as people dreamed it's required struggle to be able to accept the fact of life. especially when life does not go the way people want. As explained in the novel *The Last Song* the main character or Ronnie have to struggle to accept the fact that her parent's divorce.

As explained in the novel *The Last Song* the main character or Ronnie have to struggle to accept the fact that her parent's divorce. "What is it? You didn't want me to have fun? You didn't trust me? You didn't get the fact that I don't want to be here?" she took a step forward, still glaring. "So you decide you want to ruin my life, too?"

(Sparks, 2009:68). The quotation shows Ronnie shows the feeling to Steve, the decision that Steve and Kim make is ruin Ronnie's life. even Ronnie lives with her mother, Ronnie still struggling to accept the fact. Ronnie never imagined that life without a father figure. "I guess," she concerned, before shaking her head. "No, I know you're right. It's just been so difficult with her lately." (23).

### ***The Struggle to Achieve a Dream***

In *The Last Song* every character has to deal with the struggle. As said by the character, Steve Miller in the novel *The Last Song* Steve wanted to become a famous concert pianist. "After I stopped teaching at Juilliard, I did every show that I could. It was my dream, you know? Be a famous concert pianist? Anyway . . . I guess I should have thought more about the reality of the situation before I made the decision. But I didn't. I didn't realize how hard it was going to be on your mom." The struggle that Steve faced to achieve his dream is to become a pianist is with his family. The relationship with Kim, Steve and Kim had to drift apart because of the ambition.

His marriage had ended, his daughter avoided him, and his son was growing up without him. Thinking back, he knew he had no one to blame but himself and more than anything, this was what he wanted to know: Was it still possible for someone like him to experience the presence of God? (17). At the time Steve struggled, Steve had divorce and lives alone with the condition that Steve had cancer. And feels empty because no one beside him. "You could have come back, you know. You could have taught in New York again. You didn't have to travel the country, you didn't have to move here. You could have stayed part of their lives." As said by the character, Steve's dream to become a successful pianist makes him always travel so that is why the children think Steve just care about his ambition or his dreams.

### ***The Struggle in Showing Affection***

Owen (1987), in Kory Floyd (2006:1) states that "it is through one's expression of affection for another that a relationship is formed or transformed: indeed, relational

partners often remember the first hug, the first kiss, or the first times the words "I love you" were spoken". This means that affection is an important thing in a relationship so that the relationship will feel close with each other. Ronnie in the novel *The Last Song* never feels the affection that the parents give because of divorce. So Ronnie and her parents never express their feelings verbally. It makes their relationship not close or intimate. "Can we talk about something else?" Ronnie cut in. "Like why it's so imperative that I spend time with my dad?" (11). As the character said it is hard for Ronnie to spend time and talk with her dad because Ronnie is not ordinarily talked with her dad.

An hour ago, a young couple had shown up with sandwiches and a kite. She noticed the tender way they stared at each other. She figured they were in college they were only a couple of years older than her but there was an easy affection between them that she had yet to experience in any of her own relationships. Yeah, she'd had boyfriends, but she'd never been in love, and sometimes she doubted whether she ever would be. After her parents divorced, she'd been cynical about the whole thing (134-135).

This quotation above described Ronnie feelings. Jealousy because Ronnie never receive the kind of affection in most of the relationship that Ronnie had. From Ronnie's family, the divorce makes Ronnie never get love from Ronnie's parents. In most relationship, Ronnie had before Ronnie never been in love so Ronnie never know what is affection or what is true love. Ronnie never felt what is love until Ronnie meet Will. Ronnie falls in love with Will because Will is an athlete, smart and has good behavior. "I never stopped loving you, Ronnie. And I never stopped thinking about you. Even if summers do come to end" (462-463). Will as Ronnie's boyfriend always give Ronnie affection like said how much Will loved Ronnie and it makes Ronnie grateful because she never felt before.

However, Steve as Ronnie's father struggle to give affection to Ronnie because Ronnie already hates him. "He cleared his throat. "your bedroom's the first door on the

right." She didn't even want to dignify his comment with a response, so she stormed down the hall, determined to have nothing more to do with him. "Good night, sweetheart," he called out. "I love you" (69). As the character said, everything that Steve said to Ronnie, Ronnie just ignore it. Even Ronnie being rude to Steve, Steve always tried the best for Ronnie.

## **CONCLUSION**

After discussing this finding of this research the writer will conclude a family problem in *The Last Song* happens because of the divorce. Broken families have a serious impact on the children who experience it. Nicholas Sparks as the writer of the novel *The Last Song* shows how the parents' divorce could ruin the life of children. As a child that comes from a broken family, Ronnie faced many challenges in her life.

The main character experienced the impact of a broken family which is identified in her behaviour and mental as well as her academic achievement. The other impact because of divorce such as crime and drugs. Ronnie also doing shoplifting just because her friends do it. She made friends in a bad domain because she did not get affection and love at home. It shows how parents' role is important for children.

Moreover, the difficulties that happen in Miller's family, novel *The Last Song* is to accept the fact of life, dream, and in the form of affection. From the family problem, the character in the novel can learn something valuable. When Steve battle with his family he gets the presence of God in his difficult situation and also Ronnie she realizes how important family is to her. From Miller's family, people can learn to appreciate things before they gone.

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