

The Identity of the Main Character in Life of Pi novel by Yann Martel (Psychology of Literature)

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to understand comprehensively the identity of the main character in the novel "Life of Pi" by Yann Martel. It was a qualitative research with content analysis conducted in Jakarta, from June to August 2013. The data were collected through comprehensive reading to the novel, some relevant books, and articles review in internet. Then, it was analyzed through the psycho-analysis theory. Since this is a qualitative research and the researcher himself is the instrument, most of activities were conducted by the study of literature. It was done by tracing relevant data in novels which showed the developmental phases of the main character from childhood to his teenage in order to know his personality, conflicts, the factors which affect the search for identity, and the efforts made by the main character in his search of identity. Results of this research showed that the main character in the novel Life of Pi by Yann Martel is extrovert, intelligent, earnest and energetic. He is a devout adherent of three religions: Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. He is also a lecturer at the University of Toronto, and an animal lover.

Keywords: Identity, Main character, Novel.

INTRODUCTION

Talking about literature could never end. As long as life still moves, literature will also move to record the dynamic of human's life. It happens because literature is something life in the community. This creative activity is sourced on the sensitivity of sense, creativity, and work. It sublimes in dimensions of internal conflict that drives an author to bring forth a work. It cannot be denied that a literary medium can be an effective bridge to transform ideas, as conveyed by the beautiful words and refined as an aesthetic element.

Daiches in Budianta (2006, p.7), referring to Aristotle, sees literature as a work that "conveys a kind of knowledge that cannot be conveyed in any other way," a way to give pleasure in a unique and enriching the knowledge to its readers. Please be aware, the process behind the creation of it, there are roles of mental activity of the background

appearance of a literary work. Then, in the subsequent process of creation, the authors will build characterizations as they wish, creating the personalities of the characters in their respective roles.

When submitted to the reader, it will be greeted with a variety of responses. The responses will appear in objective and subjective assessment by lovers of literature. But it is undeniable that there will be effects arising from the process of reading, enjoying and appreciating a literary work. This is the effect of mental (psychological) caused by the literature. Therefore, Suardi (2008) said that literature and psychology can be symbiotic in its role in life, because they have a function in this life. Both are dealing with the issue of humans as individuals and social beings. Both utilizing is same basis, it use the human experience as study material. Psychological approaches considered so important uses in research literature.

In relation to learning, the general purpose of teaching literature is that students are able to enjoy and utilize literary works to develop personalities, expand the horizon of life, as well as increase the knowledge and language skill well. Another aim is to appreciate and be proud of literature as a cultural heritage and intellectual property.

Another important aspect that cannot be separated from the literature is a cultural aspect. Musthafa (2008, p.207) said that “the importance of literature is taught because it has a cultural function. This function suggests a few ways to be meaningful literature, and serves as the cultural, as well as a form of cultural discourse that has various functions in the culture as a whole”. This function can show into two view points; that literature has an integrative function in cultural; and literature as a discourse to be controlled and used by the elite to preserve their power.

In relation to research, literature is possible as object of qualitative research. If the research will be directed at the psychological aspects of the characters in a literary work, the reader, or the author, then the most appropriate theory to be a scalpel is psychology of literature.

Basically, Suardi (2011) said that, the psychology of literature can be supported by the three approaches at once. The first approach examines the psychological aspects of the characters in literary works. The second is receptive pragmatic approach which examines the psychological aspects of literary lovers formed from the influence of the works they read, as well as the reception readers to enjoy literature. Then the third is expressive approach, to investigate the psychological aspects of the author in creative process when projected through his work, both as an individual author or community representatives.

Human’s life phases from childhood, youth, adults, are interesting

and important things to know. Dynamics that occur in the process of self during adolescence to adulthood, even to someone entering the age of no longer productive, is a psychological situation that important to note, at least, can be used as a reflection of our lives. Literary work presents problem as a substance that can be observed and interpreted.

Psychology in literature is a part of the theory of literary studies. Because literature is a human creation that is assumed as a result of the author's mental processes and state of semi-conscious situation Emitter (subconscious), which is then realized in concrete form (conscious), it is worth assessed with a psychological approach. Generally, this approach is applied to analyze the novel. Despite it is possible to use for another works such as poetry, drama, and film.

Sigmund Freud, although not as a literary figure, had earlier tried to link his analysis of dreams with a literary work. As mentioned by Scmitz (2007), Freud thought that humans have the urge affected by the unconscious but cannot be expressed in conscious life, and thus must be suppressed. This movement found a way of expression like in a dream. They are often of a sexual nature (such as sexual desire for the mother), and they are usually based on emotion, desire, or anxiety as we experienced in early childhood. Later, Freud himself repeatedly said that the literary text is in line with the dream. Psychoanalytic interpretation of the text so take as a starting point so that the deeper meaning of the unconscious, and the true meaning lies, hidden beneath the surface of the visible text and interpreted in uncovering deeper meaning. Meanwhile, according to Albertina (2011), the psychology of literature built on assumptions genesis in relation to the origin of the work. That is, the psychology of literature is analyzed in relation to the psyche and psychological aspects of the author.

Ryan (2011) more specifically expressed some reading strategies emerged from psychoanalysis theory. From a text, we can know how the subconscious material manifests itself through symbolic and metaphorical suggestion indirectly. The relationship between the characters can be learned because they reveal about human psychological dynamics observed. Psychoanalytic readings can be used on themes such as loss, separation, anxiety about the boundaries or amalgamation with various other things, and the struggle to form a traumatic personal history view. Finally, the language itself can be studied as a tool to initiate processes of unconscious.

Nevertheless, the psychoanalytic approach to literature actually not just looks at the substance of the narrative character of the perpetrators, but rather must be drawn on whether one's generalization is concerned with the physical realist. Is there a psychological phenomenon in narrative text describing the truth in reality? Psychoanalytic approach to the study of psychology of literature will reveal the personality seen through the three elements of the human psyche that includes the *id*, *ego* and *superego*. These three structures are inter-related and its personality forms a totality, and no other human behavior is a product of the interaction of all three.

It is the basis for the researcher to learn about the literary through the text aspects, especially related to the psychology of character built in a literary work. Based on the description above, the researcher intends to do research on a novel with the title "Identity of Main Character in novel Life of Pi by Yann Martel" (a research on psychological literature). Adventure novel is a work of Yann Martel's winning The Man Booker Prize in 2002. This research was aimed to gain an understanding of the identity of the main character in the novel "Life of Pi" by

Yann Martel. This was done by tracing the developmental phases of the main character from childhood to his teenage in order to know his personality, conflicts and the factors that affect to his search for identity, and the efforts made by the main character in search of his identity. Later from there, it could be described how the actual identity of the main character in the novel is. The research was conducted in Jakarta. Because this is a qualitative research and the researcher himself is the instrument, most of the activities were conducted through the study of literature.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research was content analysis with qualitative approach. The discussion further employed the theory of psychoanalysis. The aim was simply to expose a variety of information in the novel text. Then it was described descriptively to reveal how the process of identity searches on the main character occurred, which was then analyzed and interpreted based on the theories of psychoanalysis.

In this research, the data were only in the form of words, not numbers. All information was related to the text of the novel, which dealt with sub-focus and focus of research. The data were obtained from the following sources: 1) Primary data were the original data source directly obtained from the investigation of the data for research purposes. The primary data source in this study was taken directly from the novel "Life of Pi" by Yann Martel, 2) Secondary data sources included data obtained or collected by an outside party (not the author), although the data were also the original data from the same source, in the form of books, reviews, journals and related records on the internet, as well as other materials related to the research and could help facilitate the process of analysis.

The steps of collecting the data for this research were 1) the researcher conducted a careful reading to understand the content of the novel, 2) later noted that the text of the novel deals with identity, 3) after which the data will be grouped in the matrix in accordance with the method of content analysis. Written data sources used were selected based on issues and objectives in the study of literature, especially with the approach of psychoanalysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Searching for identity is a long process for an individual in order to identify the characteristics of himself as someone. In the novel "Life of Pi", the main character made every effort to identify himself. Indeed, no differences were shown by the main character when he was in the search for identity, especially about choosing religion. These efforts include:

1. Studying the teachings of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam diligently. He ran the religious orders; go to his spiritual teachers regularly- to learn and ask questions about many things related to the tenet of their respective religions.

"I am a Hindu because of sculptured cones of red kumkum powder and baskets of yellow turmeric nuggets, because of garlands of flowers and pieces of broken coconut, because of the clanging of bells to announce one's arrival to God (p. 63)."

"On our last day, a few hours before we were to leave Munnar, I hurried up the hill on the left. I booted up the hill. Though Father Martin was not IN—alas, his block was slid over—thank God he was in. Short of breath I said, 'Father, I would like to be a Christian, please'. He smiled. 'You already are, Piscine—in your heart'. Whoever meets Christ in

good faith is a Christian. Here in Munnar you meet Christ (p. 76-77)."

"We prayed together and we practiced dhirk, the recitation of the ninety-nine revealed names of God. I described Mr. Kumar's place as a hovel. Yet no mosque, church or temple ever felt so sacred to me. I sometimes come out of that bakery feeling heavy with glory. I would climb onto my bicycle and pedal hat glory through the air (p. 82)."

2. Reading a number of references about religion and literatures as well as follow the socio-political issues in his country. On several occasions when he was prevented by his parents to embrace the three religions at once, the main character always hang on to its founding by giving the arguments of justification based on knowledge of the various references that he read.

She turned to the bookshelf.

"I have a book here that you'll like." She already had her arm out, reaching for a volume. It was Robert Louis Stevenson. This was her usual tactic.

"I have already read the Mother. Three times."

"Oh." Her arm hovered to the left.

"The same with Canon Doyle," I said.

"Her arm swung to the right.

"R. K. Narayan? You can't possibly have read all of Narayan?"

"These matters are important to me, Mother." (p. 98).

Mother chuckled. "Last week he finished a book called The Imitation of Christ."

"The imitation of Christ! I say again, I wonder how far he'll go with these interests!" carried Father. They laughed. (p. 101).

3. Surviving a huge ordeal when subjected to heartbreaking events when all the members of his family died in the sinking *Tsimtsum* which they were traveling from India to Canada. He has

strong embroidery to survive, to be the sole survivor in the incident. Within a period of 227 days adrift at sea with a tiger Pacific oceans, making itself increasingly believe in the greatness of God. He believes that while he was still in the shadow of God, he would have survived in any condition. And that he could prove it.

“I survived 227 days. That’s how long my trial lasted, over seven months. I kept my self busy. That was one key to my survival. On a lifeboat, even on a raft, there’s always something that need doing. An average day for me, if such a notion can be applied to castaway, went like this:

Sunrise to mid-morning: wake up, prayer, breakfast for Richard Parker, general inspection of raft and lifeboat, with particular attention paid to all knots and ropes, tenting of solar stills (wiping, inflating, topping off with water), breakfast and inspection of food stores, fishing and preparing of fish if any caught (gutting, cleaning, hanging of strips of flesh on lines to cure in the sun.)

Mid-morning to late afternoon: prayer, light lunch, rest and restful activities (writing in diary, examining of scabs and sores, up keeping of equipment, puttering about locker, observation and study of Richard Parker, picking at of turtle bones, etc.)

Late afternoon to early evening: prayer, fishing and preparing of fish, tending of curing strips of flesh (turning over, cutting away of putrid parts), dinner preparation, dinner for self and Richard Parker.

Sunset: general inspection of raft and lifeboat (knots and ropes again), collecting and safekeeping of distillate from solar stills, storing of all foods and equipment, arrangement for night (making of bed, safe storage on raft of

fare, in case of ship, and rain catcher, in case of rain), and prayer.

Night: fitful sleeping and prayer. (p. 254-256).”

4. Deepening knowledge by learning to university. It is to be a step forward for the main character after he suffered a very sad tragedy. Following his studies at the university, the main character chose two areas of science, namely zoology and religion. He is interested in these areas because he was inspired by the spiritual teacher and biology teacher during junior high. He also has enough background and experience on both disciplines. Since teenager, he has been actively deepening his knowledge and practice of the teachings of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Much of his childhood was spent at the zoo, making it quite familiar for him to know much about the behavior of the animals. After graduation, he taught both the art at the university. This effort will also reinforce its identity.

“Mr. and Mr. Kumar taught me biology and Islam. Mr. and Mr, Kumar led me to study zoology and religious studies at the University of Toronto. Mr. and Mr, Kumar were the prophet of my Indian youth. (p. 82)

I was a very good student, if I may say so myself. I was tops as St. Michael’s College four year in a row. I got every possible student award from the Department of Zoology. If I got none from the Department of Religious Studies, it is simply because there are no student award in this department (the reward of religious study are not in mortal hands, we all know that)

I would have received the Governor General’s Academic Medal, the University of Toronto’s highest undergraduate award, of which no small number of illustrious Canadians has been recipients, were it not for beef-

eating pink boy with a neck like a tree trunk and a temperament of unbearable good cheer. (p. 6).

Discussions

There are five sub-foci in this research, namely: 1) the main character's personality, 2) the forms of personality conflict experienced by the main character, 3) response and resolution of the conflict experienced by the main character, 4) factors affecting the search for identity, 5) the efforts undertaken by the main character in the search for his true identity.

The findings showed several data in relation to focus and sub focus of the research. **The first:** Based on the findings and discussion of research, specifically about the personality of the main character in the novel *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, researcher confirmed that the main character was extrovert. It refers to the view of Carl Gustav Jung, the forms of the human personality. It can be noted from how the main characters behave, respond and manage the conflict he experienced. Also how he took the decision-making in every problem.

Second: related to the conflict experienced by the main character, there are at least nine events that led to the conflict for the main character. From the eight conflicts experienced by the main character, the researcher found two forms of conflict which refer to the views of Hunt and Metcalf, namely intrapersonal conflict and interpersonal conflict. After all conflicts were analyzed and divided into two types, it was found that the most dominant type experienced by the main character was the intrapersonal conflict, namely as many as five times in every event which caused a conflict. The five conflicts generally occurred when the main character experienced tremendous tragedy; it was when the boat he and his family were riding sank in the Pacific

Ocean. While the rest, three showed interpersonal conflict. In average, this conflict occurred when the main character was still in India.

Third: based on sub focus, researchers found a number of ways that the main character took in response to any conflicts he had experienced. With reference to the views of Sigmund Freud about human defense mechanism on conflicts (defense mechanism), researchers found a number of ways to respond to conflict: Reaction Formation, Denial (Denial), Sublimation, Repression, Rationalization, and Fantasy. From the eight events of the conflict experienced by the main character, three conflicts were formation reaction. Five others were denial, rationalization, fantasy, sublimation, and repression.

Fourth: related to the factors influencing the identity of the main character, researcher distinguished each factor to the endogenous factors (inside) and exogenous factors (outside). Based on the research findings, there are four factors that affect the identity of the main character. Of the four factors, there is only one endogenous factor found, that is the intelligence factor, although, these factors are also constructed from environmental influences. The other three factors are exogenous factors, environmental influences on family, and other people such as teachers and Mrs. Gandhi.

Fifth: the efforts made by the main character in the search for identity includes at least four important phases, namely studying the teachings of religion, becoming a devout religious believer, reading many references about many things related to religion, literature, and other animal life. In completely limited circumstances and threatening his safety, the main character remains confident even he could manage to survive the sinking of the tragedy when he was traveling with his family

from India to Canada. After he escaped from the tragedy, the main character deepens his knowledge of the science of religion and the natural world by taking the field of zoology and theology at the University of Toronto.

Most psychoanalytic writers, Erikson (2006), for example, use the word "identity" to refer to one's *inner* sense of coherence or continuity. This is identity from within, who I feel like. That kind of identity fluctuates from year to year, day to day, and even moment to moment. Most neuroscientists who talk about humans' extended consciousness (compared to animals') are addressing this identity sensed from within.

Based on Erikson's ideas, two criteria for the presence of identity formation were proposed: exploration (originally called "crisis"; Marcia, 1966), and commitment. Exploration refers to some period of re-thinking, sorting through, and trying out various roles and life plans. The exploratory period is a time when the late adolescent is actively involved in choosing among meaningful alternatives. Commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expressed in a course of action or belief. The two life areas in which exploration and commitment were to be assessed were occupation and ideology, the latter being composed of religious and political positions (Schwartz, 2011).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the description elaborated above, the researcher concluded that the main character in "Life of Pi" by Yann Martel is the work of someone who has extrovert, intelligent, earnest and energetic personality; devout adherents of the three religions; and a lecturer at the University of Toronto as well as an animal lover.

There are some recommendations for future research. As we know that in general, literature research refers to a number of aspects of literary work; it can be either in the form of intrinsic or extrinsic elements. Especially for extrinsic elements, each literature work is free to be studied by any method. There are many literary research methods that can be used, such as sociology of literature, anthropology, feminism, aesthetics and stylistic, structuralism and so forth. Just like other literary studies, research of psychology literature can take any topics beyond literary text. It can be directed at the author's research on the state of psychology as a source of literary creation. As it is known, in general, literary work is a creative process which unconsciously displays psychic aspects of the author, turbulent soul, emotions and thoughts. This can be traced by taking a personal object of research on the author. Furthermore, the methods of research on psychological literature can also be used to analyze the psychology of the reader.

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