

Woman in The Dunes by Abe Kobo and *Veronika Decides to Die* by Paulo Coelho: A Current Study of Existentialism

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ABSTRACT

Soren Kierkegaard's the three phases of Human Existence (aesthetic phase, ethic phase and religious phase) combine with a current study of Existentialism by Gordon E. Bigelow (Existence Precedes Essence, Alienation, Fear and Trembling of Anxiety, Nothingness, and Freedom) are the core idea of this research. The researcher compares the Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho's novel *Veronika Decides to Die* and Japanese novelist Abe Kobo's novel *Woman in the Dunes*. This research reveals how the main characters Veronika and Niki are entrapped by society and nature with the sense of nothingness till their enlightenment. By means of using Descriptive Qualitative research, this research found the way of the main characters provide the meaning of their life based on the three phases of Existentialism and the Six Prime of Existentialism.

Keywords: Existentialism, Six Primes of Existentialism, Three Phases of Human Existence

ABSTRAK

Tiga fase eksistensi manusia oleh Soren Keike gaard (Fase Estetika, Fase Etik, dan Fase Religius) yang digabung dengan penelitian terkini oleh Gordon E. Bigelow (Existence Precedes Essence, Alienation, Fear and Trembling of Anxiety, Nothingness, and Freedom) adalah ide pokok dalam penelitian ini. Peneliti menggabungkan novelis brazil Paulo Coelho dengan Novel "Veronika Decides to Die" dengan Novelis Jepang Abe Kobo dengan Novel "Woman in the Dunes". Penelitian ini mengungkap bagaimana cara terutama Nikki dan Veronika terjebak dalam rutinitas manusia dengan keadaan yang hampa sampai keadaan dimana kebebasan sejati mereka dapatkan. Dengan menggunakan metode Deskriptif Kualitatif peneliti menemukan kedua karakter menemukan makna kehidupan berdasarkan tiga fase eksistensi manusia dan enam tipe existensi manusia..

Kata Kunci: Eksistensi, Enam pokok eksistensi, tiga tahap eksistensi manusia .

1. Introduction

Literature is defined as the mirror of the society (Semi, 1993: 3). Through literary work, an author describes the problem, phenomena, and reality of life in which the author involves in it. In fact, the society and the literary work are entailed and inseparable. The values of literary work also depend on the society of the era and it captured from the writer in expressing and writing his literary works.

Taylor (1981:1) asserts that literature, like other art, is essentially an imaginative act, which is an act of writer's imagination that presents information and value as a work of art. The purposes are not only entertaining but also giving the readers information and valuable experiences about human's life. This vision brings the author uniqueness of viewing and understanding life.

Based on the types of literature, it classifies into two categories, imaginative literature and unimaginative literature. In relation to the research that regarding the novel as the object being investigated, the novels of this research are categorized as a work of imaginative literature. This is

because the literature plays fancifully with aesthetical elements, applies the usage of connotative language, and meets the scenic requirements of art (Sumardjo and Saini, 1994:17).

The author of these novels as the object research expresses their ideas concerning reality, human existence, and social life. Human existence is determined being authentic when he is able to sort and decide freely of whom and what he will be. Moreover, human being constructs their selves with their own act and manner. In the process of shaping themselves, they do not want to be affected and convinced by others, even nature and social culture. In this real life, it is free for human to take a part on whatever they want. Human may also demonstrate their reasons upon what he have done. That's what human existence mean. (Dagun, 1990: 18).

Concerning with human existence, the ideology of human existence was called existentialism, existentialist and the foundation of existentialism, Soren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855). The others existentialist were Friedrich William Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jaspers, Camus, Sartre, Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky (Hasan, 1992:1-2). The names that have been mentioned, we could know that they are well known as a philosopher than as a literalist. Thus, it can be concluded that there was a relationship between philosophy and literature, as said by Budi Darma (1990:135):

Sometimes philosophy and literature become one. Philosophy can be spoken through literature, while literature itself can be act as a philosophy. After the war such as Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre was a philosopher of existentialism which is also literarian. Their novels are the embody of philosophy, and also philosophy.

Because of various Existentialists and followed by its definitions, the researcher will focuses on Six Primes Existentialism by Gordon E. Bigelow in his book A Primer of Existentialism formulates the simple statement of basic characteristics of Existentialism. Through this book, he says that it is a reckless thing to do, because there are several kinds of Existentialism and different definition of it, but he judges that there is as an area of agreement on it. Furthermore, in that essay he classifies existentialists into two categories, they are; ungodly or atheistic existentialists and godly or religious existentialists (Allsid, ed. 1964:203).

The reality brings the fact that human lives in a society where influences them regarding their ideas, thought, attitudes, and behaviors in which they catch from the phenomena in the society where they living. They express the ideas creating characters in the novels and talk about their ideas through the character by delivering speech and actions. Their ideas reflect the society, economic, philosophy, religion, history, and politic of the society (Wellek and Warren, 1963: 94-95).

Unlocking the fact that the author uniqueness in putting across his ideas and creativity on the similar reality, problem, and phenomena of life, sometimes many authors tell the same ideas synchronically and diachronically. Realizing the fact of those similarities, a Comparative Literature has known as the study of comparative literary works.

There are two major schools that dominating in the world of Comparative Literature, the first is French School, and the second one is American school. In French school, *Litterature Comparée*, the French term for "Comparative Literature". It firstly emerged in France around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The founding fathers of this school define Comparative Literature as a branch of literary study that traces the mutual relations between two or more internationally and linguistically different literatures or texts (Weisstein, 1973:3).

French school tends to compare two literary works from different countries on aesthetics values and avoids all criticism. The scope of discussion by French School on literary works and the authors and the study will relate to the facts on how the authors influence each other.

For about American School, Henry Remak is the one of the founding fathers of this school, which appeared in the second half of the twentieth century. He states that Comparative Literature should

not be regarded as a discipline on its own but rather as a connecting link between subjects, a comparison that can be made between two or more different literatures and between literature and other fields of cognition (music, painting, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, sociology, psychology, religion, chemistry, mathematics, physics, etc.) (Remak, 1998: 3). That is why it makes the American perspective on comparative literature dissimilar with the French one.

From the explanation above, it concluded that this research is focusing on American school because it linked the Object of this research to "the social evolution, individual evolution, and the influence of the environment on the social and individual life of man" (Posnett, 1901: 355). Therefore, in using American school's point of view for the comparative literature is important. It is seeking how the relations of literature and society in different nationalities.

Hippolyte Adolphe Taine as the founder of this term uses the words race, milieu, and moment in French race, milieu et moment; the terms which define as "Nation", "Environment" or "Situation", and "Time". Taine argued that literature is largely the product of the author's environment and that environment could yield a perfect understanding of the work of literature, though with important differences that called race. Milieu is the particular circumstances that distorted or developed the dispositions of a particular person. The moment is the accumulated experiences of that person, which Taine expressed frequently as momentum. (Thomas, 1735: 86)

In Accordance with the object of this research, both novels and authors are not in the same races or nations because their nationalities are different.

Woman in the Dunes was written by Abe Kobo in Japan, and he is a Japanese people. In this case, In Japan, when Kanji's writing began to develop and produce a Hiragana and Katakana in the Heian Period (9th century) there are many emerging literary works of literature in Japanese literature, ones of that are the works of Murasaki Shikibu Genji Monogatari, it's considered as a masterpiece or a great work of literature in Japan at the Heian Period. Japanese literature had been developed and started to get the world's attention by the existence of two Japanese writers who get Nobel Prize in literature. Japanese literarian who received the Nobel Prize in first time in 1968 was Kawabata Yasunari. Another works of Kawabata Yasunari such as Izu no Odoriko, Yukiguni and so on. His speech when he received the Nobel Prize entitled Utsukushii Nihon no Watashi Sono Josetsu explains the beauty of traditional Japanese literature. Then in 1994 a Japanese writer awarded the Nobel Prize in literature is Kenzaburo Oe. With the two major Japanese Literarians who received the Nobel Prize in literature, Japanese Literature makes the world's attention intensely.

Ones of modern Japanese literarian who also has won the international world were Abe Kobo. Abe Kobo who is the real name was Abe Kimfusa (1924-1993) a literarian of modern Japanese writers in the group Post War Two. He is a graduation of the Doctoral University of Tokyo, but he chooses to devote his life in the field of literature. Some of his work has awarded in the field of literature, such as his work Kabe (1951) which won the Akutagawa Prize award. Besides the drama, he writes Bo ni Natta Otoko (1957) broadcast by NHK and awarded by Radio Geijutsusai Shourei Prize in 1962. Suna no Onna awarded as the Yomiuri Prize (1963). Because of the quality of the novel, then Suna no Onna transform into a movie by famed director Hiroshi Teshigahara and won an award in Cannes Film Festival in 1964. The success of the film made a name Kobo Abe was increasingly recognized by the literary community not only in Japanese society, but also in the international worldwide. Therefore, the result of his works devours the world attention.

Move to the other novel entitled Veronika Decides to Die which was written by Paulo Coelho as a Brazilian people. He is one of the outstanding literarian writers in Brazil. It is attested by his works which sold more than 130 million copies and have been translated into 72 languages. Besides The Alchemist, his international bestsellers include Eleven Minutes, The Pilgrimage, the three logy of

Veronika Decides to Die and the other two being *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* and *The Devil and Miss Prym*.

Veronika Decides to Die has been adapted into a screenplay by Das Films with Muse Productions and Velvet Steamroller Entertainment. Shooting began on May 12, 2008 and the movie was released in 2009 with Emily Young directing.

For the next point by Taine is the milieu or the situation of both authors when writes the novels also different. It is because there is some reason that defines as follow;

The first novel is *Woman in the Dunes*. In the history of Japanese literature, the novel and the author of *Woman in the Dunes* included in postwar literature. Postwar literature is literature in Japan after World War II. Literature *DaiichijiSengoha* (The First Stream Postwar) stems from the novel *Kurai E* (The Dark Painting), published in 1946, Noma Hiroshi's work. Literary group which emerged in the 1950s called *DainijiSengoha*. In the turbulent state of society emerges Author of Postwar Force II, among others, Abe Kobo, OokaShohei, Shimao Toshio, and Hotta Yoshie (DarsimahMandah, 1992:89).

The Second novel entitles *Veronika Decides to Die*. The situation that Paulo Coelho writes the novel of *Veronika Decides to Die* is criticizing the crisis of healthcare. According to Paulo:

“*Veronika Decides to Die* was published in Brazil in 1998 by September; I had received more than 1,200 E-mails and letters describing similar experiences (depression, panic attacks, suicide). In October, some of the subjects discussed in the book depression, panic attacks, suicide were addressed at a conference that went on to have national repercussions”(http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com/paulo-coelho.html)

It means both novels are having the differencess of Mileu or Situation. *Woman in the Dunes* was written in the situation of Post War two, in the other hand, *Veronika decides to Die* was a novel who was written in term of a reflection of the crisis of healthcare.

For the last differentiations are the moment or momentum when both authors write the novels of *Veronika Decides to Die* and *Woman in the Dunes*.

Veronika Decides to Die gainsthe moment or momentum when the author: Paulo Coelho writes the novel when he has returned his attention from mental hospital in the past. That is why this novel colored by author's intimate knowledge of the world of mental hospitals experience, the relationships, and the comfort and anxiety of living in such place. In additions, this novel publishes when the nation of Brazilian people faces many problems in health care. It means that Coelho's experiences in mental hospital, he writes the novels in the right climax moment against the conditions and situation of the health care problem in Brazil at that time.

For about *woman in the dunes* that written in 1962, gains the momentum when Abe Kobo was rejecting the concept of JPC (Japanese Communist Party) as part of Stalin's policies. Abe supported the independence of Hungary from the Soviet Union and declared their opposition to JPC'S Stalinist policies. So, He tends to write the freedom of thought as an individual man who has not ruled by any policies and tyranny. His Novel entitled *Woman in the Dunes* was written in the right moment against the situation or condition of Japanese who was not free and ruled by Stalinist policies as the flow of the sameness in themes and plot that reflected in main character: Niki Jumpei who was ruled by the villagers in the deep hole of sand prison. In addition, in that part of novels, it picturizes the condition of the village was poor with the tower spy who always monitoring the action of Niki Jumpei in the prison.

2. Methodology

Basically, research design is divided into two forms; they are quantitative and qualitative research. According to Semi (1993:23), quantitative research is the research that follows verification process through measurement, uses statistic data based on model of mathematics. Whereas, qualitative research does not use statistics, but it gives top priority to the trans concept interaction that is studied empirically based on full profundity experience.

Actually, those two research designs are able to use in literary research. Hence, the most comfortable in the literary research is qualitative research, due to the fact that literary works itself is a world of word and meaningful symbol (Endraswara, 2004:5). Furthermore, one of characteristics in qualitative research can be marked as descriptively, it means that the research is explained in form of words and picture if necessary.

The researcher consider the research as qualitative approach, it's an approach that is used to get descriptive data observable written and spoken words from people and the action or behavior (Bogdan and Tylor, 1991:3). The researcher uses qualitative approach because the data cannot be analyzed using statistical formula and the data are in the form of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, quotations, and dialogues or monologues which descriptively to answer the research problems.

Based on the studies above the researcher assumed that the suitable research design applied in this study is descriptive qualitative research. Since the data that used by the researcher focuses on literary works and aims to find meaning behind the author through events, plots, objects, characters, themes, and symbols in the story, so, this qualitative research consider as phenomenology perspective. Phenomenology perspective is a method of research that used to understand the meaning of the events and human interactions in certain situation. It gives serious intention to subjective aspect of each individual, and the researcher try to enter into the conceptual world of their subjects to understand how and what the meaning which the subjects construct into the serial events of their life (Semi, 1993: 26-27).

3. Finding and Discussion

The two novels, *Veronika Decides to Die* and *Woman in the Dunes* as the object of this research has strong issues on Existentialism studies. Its major characters are a reflection of genuine existentialism. The protagonist of both novels is a type of human that have desire to look his own existence.

There are three objectives of this research; first, to describe the way of the main characters in *Women in the Dunes* and *Veronika Decides to Die* in providing the meaning of their life based Six Primes of Existentialism on Existence Precedes Essence, Alienation, Fear and Trembling of Anxiety, Nothingness, and Freedom. Second, to describe how do the main characters in *Women in the Dunes* and in *Veronika Decides to Die* find their existence based on Soren Kierkegaard's three phases of Human Existence; aesthetic phase, ethic phase and religious phase. The third, to reveal the similarities and dissimilarities between *Women in the Dunes* and *Veronika Decides to Die* concerning existentialism.

Three of them have been analyzed and answered in the chapter four. By the time, to answer the first object the researcher uses Gordon E. Bigelow of Six Prime Existentialism thought to find the answers. Those Six are;

The first, Existence Precedes Essence, it is true that the most important that for human being is his existence. Yet, his existence is not the final. It is always in the process of becoming something, as human being always moves from possibility into reality. *Veronika* and *Niki*, this process is possible because he or she has his own freedom. Therefore, human existence exists in human freedom, and this freedom exists in human action. He also says that having an existence means having courage to determine and decide his own life, even by death or escape from their life.

The Second, Absurdity occurs when human minds seek for the complete understanding of the existence of reality. Yet, reality solely gives the partial understanding. The partial understanding given by reality leaves the question that must be fulfilled by human mind. This phenomenon creates a problem. The problem that exists encourages people to seek for the solutions, and absurdly, it has repeated all the time in our live. In this second characteristic Veronika and Niki are the people who are aware of their absurdity. It is showed by some symptoms, particularly gaining the meaninglessness of anything exists in the world.

The third, Alienation or Estrangement, at the time, when human being had already felt estrangement and alienation from God, nature and other men, he would not be able to give faith in everything: to God, to the other men, and even to himself. Veronika and Niki in this condition are driven to become hollow, powerless, and faceless that enter to next element, Anxiety

The forth, Fear and Trembling Anxiety, anxiety points rather to despair, for the inner contradiction in the human being is considered incapable of resolution, so that human existence is always on the edge of absurdity. In this forth characteristic Veronika and Niki are always oppressed by anxiety.

The fifth, Encounter with Nothingness, the sense of nothingness is the feeling of despair and pessimism. Nothingness will bring him to thought that he has been living for nothing, that he has no reason to live. Specifically, it is connected much with the situation that is faced by Veronika and Niki are encounters with nothingness.

The sixth, freedom is very essential for human being. It includes freedom of choice, that every human being free to choose what he will become in his own life. On the other hand, human is existence itself, because only human being does exist. Veronika and Niki in this research are answered that freedom leads human to find his existence. Indeed, existence precedes essence. Actually, by the passion of existentialism, Veronika and Niki are aware of the freedom to choose and decide is, of course, never absolute. Human being is limited and placed at a given position in space and time, and thus, one's freedom is always threatened. they may simply reflect the values of his social culture norms without ever deciding for himself. In short, all of the human existence is lived in tension between limit and freedom. Yet, in the end of both novels, Veronika and Niki have a resolution to find his own existence by such kind of miraculous, love, and meaning to life.

The second objectives of this research are concerning with three phases of human existence by Soren Kierkegaard; aesthetic phase, ethic phase and religious phase.

First, Aesthetic Phase is a willingness of enjoy the entire experiences of emotional and sexual desires. Therefore, he always opened with them and he much tends to hate all of limitedness that forced him to choose. As Kierkegaard says, the aesthetic man is a man can not determine his choice of life. In this phase, Veronika and Niki tend to act as his or her own desire such as hate because of their very routine life.

Second, the movement from the aesthetic phase to the ethic phase is like people who left the temporal platonic desire and he come into the real love with all of its duties. That is an ethic institution and it is an expression of universal principle. In this phase, most of people think that the glorious idea of lives is the supreme happiness.

Beside that, the ethic man does not only live for his self, but also for humanism values. The ethic man's soul has been formed, so that his own life does not depend on the public trend anymore. The basic of his personality is going to be formed very strong and honesty. Moreover, the basic of his life is based on his own soul, and his compass's life is an universal humanism values. Veronika and Niki are having the same expression concerning this second phases, they choose to ignore the society and begins to understand their existence of life or it can be the transition to the next phase, the religious phase.

Third, Religious phase, this phase, there are two kinds of challenges that will be faced by the religious people; they are; first, paradoxical of God. The second paradox for individual who involved in this phase is anxiety that can be trembled and anxious. For Veronika, the first paradox is applied in, it prove when she her suicide failed, she found herself in Villette and begin to understand the happiness of life, she meets with the true love, understand the freedom itself, and begins to understand the kindness of God. The second paradox belongs to Niki. Niki who involved in this phase is anxiety; sexual intercourse with his ex-girlfriend in the city. He always uses a condom with. In unreal, uncertain, unsure and incoherent about his past that has a venereal disease, yet, the condition was changed when Niki has been prisoned in the hole of dunes with the widow. He loves the widow even more and Niki felt in him has sexual attraction to women. Even, Niki do not need to feel worried about having to use a condom.

As a comparative literature, the third object of this research concern about the similarities and dissimilarities of both novels. Fundamentally, both novels are the same in term of Existentialism, but the author of both novels are expressing their own unique idea that makes it different. In addition the dissimilarities of both novels are gaining the scope of race, milieu and moment of both novels and authors and has no relation for each other's. So, the last theory used by researcher gain was failed. Due to the first novel, *Veronika Decides to Die* written by Paulo Coelho had a motive to cure a health regulation, the author tries to show the truth condition behind the healthcare problem in Brazil. Moreover, Kobo Abe with the novel *Woman in the Dunes* has an intention to the effects of the Second World War Two and a current political of Marxism at that time. It means that, the American school as a tool to compare does not fit in this comparative research.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

The Existentialism study gives us more realization about human existence and freedom to choose for human. It also shows us that in spite of his freedom, human also has to take the consequence. So, human being should realize that whenever he wants to be free to choose, he also has to take its consequence.

Moreover, the Existentialism approach shows us that human being can not be easily judged by his physical and outside appearance. It tells us that we should not judge other's deeds easily without trying to comprehend it from many sides.

Both novels, *Veronika Decides to Die* and *Woman in the Dunes* have a strong issue on Existentialism. However, the Existentialism studies upon the novel could be interesting for other researcher who intends to do the research and wants to give emphasizing on the major character's struggle to realize his freedom of life and defend his own existence.

Both authors, Paulo Coelho and Abe Kobo have a many literary works that has interesting element about Human Existence. In addition, it could be rich if other researchers who intends to do the research and wants to conduct a research in the other literary works of both authors.

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