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INDIVIDUALISM IN *ALL THE BRIGHT PLACES* BY JENNIFER NIVEN

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Abstract

This article analyzes the individualism of the supporting characters towards the main character, Theodore Finch. Using descriptive and dramatic approach as the method and individualism as well as new criticism as theories, the researcher finds that the main character, Theodore Finch becomes the victim of the individualism of his teacher as well as his classmates. How the supporting characters are characterized in the analysis and how the main character is described becomes clear that individualism attached to the society Finch lives.

Key word: individualism.

Keyword: *Individualism*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisa individualism dari tokoh-tokoh pendukung terhadap tokoh utama, Theodore Finch. Dengan menggunakan metode pendekatan dramatis dan deskriptif dan teori kritik baru, Theodore Finch menjadi korban karakter individualis dari guru dan teman-teman sekelasnya. Bagaimana tokoh-tokoh pendukung digambarkan demikian juga bagaimana tokoh utama digambarkan nyatalah bahwa watak individualis ada pada masyarakat dimana Finch tinggal

Kata kunci: *Individualisme*

Introduction

Two things become characteristic of a good literature, that is, the reflections of real life and values. An author, through his literary work, pours a social problem. A social problem in which the author himself is involved because he is the member of the society. Therefore, a literary work and a society cannot be apart. On one hand, a literary work influences a society. On the other hand, a society influences a literary work. On the other words, the researcher dares say that a society and a literary work have a relation for each other. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren discuss the relationship between literature and society. They state that literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. They are convention and norm which could have arisen only in society. But, furthermore, literature represents life; and life is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation. The poet himself is a member of society, possessed of a specific social status; he receives some degree of social recognition and reward; he addresses an audience, however hypothetical (1956:94).

In his Sociology of literature, Damono states that literature presents a picture of life which is a reality in society in that it involves relations among society, relation between society and personalities, relation among people, and among events in human's feeling (2009:01).

Instead of the aforesaid delineation of the literature and real life, a good literature always talks of something valuable in that it gives us further understanding of life (Rahayu, 2021). It talks of something well-said. Little states that one quality of all good literature is that it says something worth saying. Good literature adds to our understanding of life in the world around us. It embodies thought and feeling on matters of human importance (1966:02).

Therefore, the researcher would like to discuss a literary work, in this case, a novel, which gives us further understanding of life through a fictitious character which the researcher strongly believes is a reflection of a life. The novel belongs to Jennifer Niven *All the Bright Places*. There are characters in the novel depicting a fact in a social life. A fact in a social life that is discussed here is people whose characters belong to the individualism.

Theoretical Framework

As the analysis is a social analysis in literary work, therefore, the researcher uses the concept of individualism; Individualism is a direction to conquest over as well as above others (McIntyre, et. al, 2018:06). Further, individualism is a cultural value that is different from how people describe themselves relative to their surroundings, stretching from thinking of people as independence to highly interrelated, respectively (Forsyth, et. al., 2011:04). Besides, the concept of individualism refers to the rights and privileges of the individuality in confrontation against the broader group or the state (Brouwer, 2012:15). In addition, individualism is self-assured, short-sighted, uncontrolled, as well as destined eventually to conquest itself (Paul, 2012:178).

The other theory is New Criticism, Carter (2006, p.23) states that New Criticism is a theory that focuses on intrinsic elements such as themes, points of view, plot, background, symbols, character, and characterization. New Criticism focuses on the text itself to find the meaning of a literary work. A character, Theodore Finch, the victim of individualism, is the focus to analyze in *All the Bright Places* novel. To know more detail about the meaning of the character in this research, the researcher needs to understand the description in general of that character. How the author tells the story and shows a character in the story is called characterization. Naturally, the author has to offer readers to know the character in the story. Readers can see from attitudes, dialogue, and physical appearance from the other characters' thoughts about that character and the things that are always done by the character (Albertine Minderop; 2011, p.2).

Thus, from the theory above, this article discusses the characters as having individualism in their surroundings, the area of school; that Theodore Finch is described as being the victim of the other characters who are above him, different from him in their environment, having independent characters, being in confrontation against Finch and being uncontrolled of themselves.

As to the previous studies, the first previous study refers to Adiguna, et. al with her article entitled Obsesi Tokoh Theodore Finch dalam novel karya Jennifer Niven *All the Bright Places*, by using theory of psychology of literature, the writer describes the characterization of Theodore Finch that are good and pleasing. The second previous study refers to Abidin, et. al with the article entitled A Study of the Element of Depression in All the Bright Places, by using beck's cognitive theory of depression, the writer finds depression and suicide with a seriousness and realism. The third previous study refers to Widyantara, et. al entitled *the plot of the characters in All the Bright Places*, using the elements

of plot: exposition, complication, crisis, climax, falling action, and resolution, the writer finds mental health issues in the characters. The similarity with this article is that all mentioned articles above and this article use the same novel whilst the difference is that this article analyzes individualism looked at from the supporting characters point of view. In other words, this article is purely a novelty.

Research Methods

The writer uses descriptive and dramatic method in analyzing the two works through characterization by which the researcher means to present the character mainly through description and discussion as well as through reporting the character's speech and action. Thus, from describing, discussing as well as reporting the character's speech and action, the writer presents and analyzes the individualism of the supporting characters. Further, to get clear data to analyze, the writer uses individualism to be a primary method to analyze the individualism of the main characters in *All the Bright Places* novel by Jennifer Niven. The writer also used new criticism as the secondary method in order to help to analyze the characterization of the main characters.

Results and Discussion

1. Individualism in *All the Bright Places*

As explained above that some characters have the characteristic of individualism against the main character, Finch, therefore, the researcher analyzes character by character of their individualism: Mr. Embryo's individualism, Charlie's individualism, and Finch's other classmates' individualism. First of all, the individualism refers to Finch's teacher, Mr. Embryo with the arising conflict referring to Finch's having arguments with his teacher. Finch is a high school student, a teenager who often faces circumstances with different traits and behavior from others. It is uncommon for student characters to notice. The youth need proper guidance or direction. That is why he is able to live a good life. Embryo once again narrows his eyes, squints, and stares at Finch hard, tries to induce a sweat.

"Mr. Embryo once again narrows his eyes to a squint and stares at Finch, trying to indicate a sweat. "And can we expect you to show up and stay out of trouble this semester?"

"Absolutely."

"And keep up with your classwork?"

"Yes, sir."

“I will arrange the drug test with the nurse” he jabs the air with his finger, pointing at me”(Ch1/p.16)

The quotation above means that Mr. Embryo asks Finch to come for a drug test. Finch is the only one selected. Because Finch is a student and Mr. Embryo is a teacher, therefore, Finch cannot resist his teacher's wishes. Mr. Embryo's action leads Finch to try to commit suicide at school so that many teachers and kids are worried about Finch. Some teachers may give warnings to Mr. Embryo to overcome the problem. The actions of Mr. Embryo with Finch are a warning and look like a cold conflict. Nevertheless, this warning is given by the teachers through speech than writing.

Further, the conflict arises as Finch's bickering to Mr. Embryo is not explained why he has done so to Mr. Embryo because Finch thinks that Mr. Embryo never believes what he says. Whatever Finch does looks terrible from other people's point of view that is annoying and troubling. All the teachers at school, even Mr. Embryo, think that Finch is indeed a bad boy, and they have given up warning Finch.

“The thing I don't say is: I want to stay alive. The reason I do not say it is because, given that fat folder in front of him, he never believed it. I'm fighting to be here in this shitty, _he never once mentioned violet, and I'm relieved” (Ch1/p.16)

It explains that the cause of conflict against Mr. Embryo is a different perception. The difference in the statement obtained by Mr. Embryo is that Finch goes to the top of the building to commit suicide and makes everyone in the school, including teachers and students disturbed. The truth is Finch tries to make a suicide attempt, but Finch cancels his shot because Finch tries to help Violet who is shaking and shivering on the building, to jump. It is shown in the text below:

“She is shivering or shaking. I cannot tell which, and so I slowly inch my way toward her, hoping I don't fall off because the last thing I want to do is make a jackass out of myself in front of this girl” (Ch1/7)

It explains that Finch thoughtlessly jumps up too and grabs Violet's hand so she would not fall. The suicide attempt of the two teens thwarts very dramatically because everyone at the school sees that action. However, no one knows the real story behind it except them.

Though Mr. Embryo is so individualistic, however, Finch resolves the misunderstanding with Mr. Embryo by following his request, and does what he orders patiently. Mr. Embryo never questions the truth of the story from Finch.

That is why Finch thinks that whatever he says, nobody will believe it. Finch has a great respect for Mr. Embryo, a teacher who cares about him. Whatever Mr. Embryo says to Finch, he will try to comply. It is shown in the text below:

“I am happy to, sir-I mean, I, like, really enjoy this conversation of ours-but I am good” (Ch1/p.15)

It implies that Finch enjoys being with Mr. Embryo. Finch also tries to get Mr. Embryo not to think much about Finch even though it is fun for Finch because Finch finally knows that someone cares about him. Mr. Embryo is very caring and kind to his students. Because of Mr. Embryo's concern, he considers what Embryo does is too much. Finch is worried about Mr. Embryo's health proved by how many cigarettes Embryo smokes, especially when Finch makes a trouble at school. All in all, Mr. Embryo's individualism makes Finch, his clever student, as the victim with a suicide trial.

Second of all, the individualism refers to Charlie, Finch's classmate with Finch's argument against Charlie about suicide attempt. As everyone has a conflict in their life against their friends, sometimes, conflict strengthens their friendship. A conflict in a friendship is common, and not all conflicts end badly, like beating each other. It is Finch's behavior that Charlie does not like. Because Finch insists on trying to kill himself, Charlie comes and challenges Finch's faith. Finch is uncomfortable and insulted. Though Finch is painful for a long time, he still keeps listening and talking to Charlie. The above explanation can be seen the quotation as follows:

“Charlie found out about my bad behavior, about my stupid suicide attempt, he just said “man, why do you do that?” “because we all have to die someday, I just want to be prepared” Charlie must have thought but never once called me “weirdo” which is why he is my best friends.”(Ch 1/ p. 12-13)

The researcher regards the quotation above as Finch's patience of Charlie's individualism, by asking Finch to commit suicide, because Charlie's behavior does not hurt Finch's feeling. Though there are differences in opinion between Finch and Charlie, Finch never hates Charlie. In fact, Finch enjoys befriending Charlie. "Weirdo" is the key word that Finch avoids naming Charlie, therefore, their friendship last long in spite of respect and honor shared to each other.

Charlie's individualism above Finch comes to its peak with the conflict arising when Finch goes to the bell tower and tries to commit suicide but thwarts because he suddenly tries to help someone who also attempts to suicide, the

rescued action that is unknown by everyone but only known by Finch himself. As Finch's friend, Charlie does not expect and asks casually about what Finch is doing, which makes Charlie disappointed and worried, but Charlie is so afraid that he would offend Finch. Finch just says in his usual joking tone and says that everyone will die, and Finch just wants to try it. It is shown in the text below:

“Man, why do you do that?”

Because we all have to die someday. I just want to be prepared” this isn’t the reason, of course, but it will be enough for him” (Ch1/ p. 12)

It implies that Charlie also thinks that Finch is weird because he has been fascinated by death, meanwhile, everyone in the world wants to live. What attracts Finch to end is his hatred for his father and his unhappy family. Meanwhile, Charlie is a cheerful kid with black skin and quickly brings a different woman every night. It seems Charlie and Finch's perception is very different. Their different perception can cause conflict.

Though Finch is the victim of Charlie’s individualism that rises conflict, still, Finch tries to solve his conflict against Charlie by appreciating Charlie's good attitude towards Finch as Finch has shown otherwise at school. Finch is grateful that Charlie is his best friend. Because not many people in the school like Finch, even their teachers try to avoid Finch's problems, but Finch still has a good friend, his name is Charlie. It is shown in the text below:

“Charlie may think it, but at least he does not say “weirdo” which is the way he is my best friend. Other than the fact that I appreciate this about him, we do not have much in common.” (Ch1/ p.12)

It implies how deep Finch’s feeling is to Charlie even though Finch does not tell his problem, but his best friend never pushes or asks about his life. Finch appreciates his personality, even though as a friend, Finch has nothing in common regarding hobby with him, but they can still be made a good friend without a problem. If something goes wrong one day, Finch is sure Charlie will not do Finch any harm because of attitude appreciation. In a nutshell, Charlie’s individualism above Finch with his ignorance of Finch condition leads Finch to end his life through committing suicide.

Last of all, the individualism goes to Finch’s other classmates through their ignorance of Finch that arises conflict between Finch and them. There are many factors that make Finch avoided by his friends: a crazy person, breaking windows, creating conflict, and fighting hobby that are labeled to Finch. Finch does such behaviors as he does not have parental cares leading him to finally unleash his anger at school.

“Finch seeing Amanda's face, freaked him out. At the time, Amanda with Violet. I laugh at the thought, almost fall. Amanda catches me and said, “weirdo!” she cups her big mouth.” (Ch1/9-10)

The quotation above implies that Amanda bullies Finch. Meaning that Finch's conflict is not direct violence or physical but indirect violence that is mocking and facial expression. The researcher regards this other classmate's individualism is because of Finch's state leading to the conflict of the role because the role here is material states like richness and poverty, violence like a popular, and finch-like a freak. Further, the researcher analyzes individualism like mocking and facial expressions from Amanda as a famous person toward Finch because he is a freak. It is a role conflict leading to the ignorance of other because his friends think that Finch is a strange as well as a low loser.

Further, Finch finds that there is something wrong with what he does that makes everyone at his school hate him, when he does something inappropriate as a student, such as destroying the school equipment, disrupting school activities by fighting against Romero during class session, and not paying attention to the warnings given by school principals and teachers. Everyone at school knows Finch's lousy attitude; if other people think Finch is a bad boy, he will make himself look even worse. It is shown in the text below:

“That and sometimes I say and do things without thinking. People do not like that” (‘Ch5/ p.61-62)

The quotation shows that everyone at school does not like Finch's attitude. Finch knows that his work looks different from other people. He understands that all people at school look at him strangely and look like they mock Finch's behavior because Finch is a trouble maker, a school property destroyer, and a suicide attempt doer. It becomes a problem if his friends in public tease Finch and Finch cannot manage his anger, then there will be unexpected problems such as being expelled from school because Finch already has a lot of red notes and the quarrel between friends.

Again, though Finch is the victim of the individualism of his other classmates, Finch, still, tries to solve the conflict of Finch against his classmates; Finch accepts the unequal behavior of everyone, including himself. Although this is a question for Finch because many people care and pay attention to someone's behavior without knowing the cause and do not want to help Finch's problems. It is shown in the text below:

“Honestly, Violet, I do not know why the kids do not like me. I mean, I know, but I do not. I have always been different, but to me, different is normal. I decide a version of the truth” (Ch5/ p. 61)

It describes Finch's attempt to accept himself. When everyone is busy to blame Finch because of his bad behavior, Finch prefers self-reflect to other things. Finally, Finch is able to control himself well regardless of the people around him whose words can hurt Finch's feelings. It can solve Finch's problem through self-reflection. In conclusion, both Amanda and other classmates have the characterization of individualism as to let Finch become the victim of his circumstances: his trial to break the school's window as well as his conflicts with people in the school area

Conclusion

In this part, the researcher has to admit that it is not so easy to apply the available theory in this article. There are some obstacles in this application; whether or not the theory of individualism and new criticism are appropriate in this research, the researcher still maintains the theories as they support what the characters, Mr. Embryo, Charlie, and Finch's other classmates do against Theodore Finch with their individualism.

Other obstacle is that the interpretation of the characters' characteristics that the researcher digs from the novel to support the theory of individualism undergone by the characters is not easy. However, through deeper understanding, the researcher is able to match with the theory even though there is still correction for the development of the analysis from other researcher in the future. Finally, the researcher hopes that this research of individualism can give additional knowledge of individualism in society.

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