International Seminar
Enrichment of Career by Knowledge of Language and Literature III

PROCEEDINGS

Faculty of Letters - Dr. Soetomo University
in cooperation with
Balai Bahasa Provinsi Jawa Timur, KEMDIKBUD

Surabaya, August 20, 2015
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THE IDEAS OF EXISTENTIALISM IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S
THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA:
A philosophical approach in literary analysis

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ABSTRACT
This research deals with the philosophical thoughts in literary text and aims at identifying the ideas of existentialism in the novel The Old Man and the Sea by Hemingway with reference to Sartre’s existentialism. Based on the analysis, it was found that this novel contained ideas of existentialism proposed by Sartre, that is, anxiety, alienation and despair. These philosophical thoughts were conveyed through the fictional character Santiago, the central figure in the novel. He was anxious when he failed to get any fish and was left by Manolin, mocked by other fishermen and threatened by the big sharks. His alienation and despair appeared when he was alone in the sea, having no one to talk to, and when he had to fight alone, overcoming the attack from the big sharks eating the meat of the marlin. These feeling of alienation and hopelessness were supported with the choice of sentence pattern Subject + wish throughout the novel by the author to build a harmony between the content and form.

Key words: existentialism, anxiety, alienation, philosophy in literature.
INTRODUCTION

To understand the relationship between philosophy and literature, we had better refer to what is stated by Martin Skilleas in Philosophy and Literature (2001: 1-12). There are two technical terms which can lead to confusion and should be treated differently: literature in philosophy and philosophy in literature. Literature in philosophy refers to the notion that there is a philosophical work written with the format, techniques and style of literature. In short, it is about "the way the philosophical work is written" Skilleas, 2001: 105). Plato wrote some of his works in the form of dialogue. Soren Kierkegaard, a prominent existentialist, wrote The Diary of the Seducer which was known as a literary work but it is a text of philosophy. In addition, there are other philosophers like Sartre with his work Being and Nothingness and St. Agustinus who wrote Confessions. These works were written in literary style or genre but with philosophical pretension. Therefore, they are classified as works of philosophy although it is sometimes debatable (Skilleas, 2001: 6). On the other hand, philosophy in literature, according to Skilleas (2001: 129), is used to refer to the idea that some literary texts contain philosophical ideas, mainly issues and questions which are considered to be philosophical. These philosophical thoughts in literature are usually conveyed through fictional characters in literary works as stated by Hogan (2000: 6-7). However, these texts are classified as literary texts. Wellek and Warren (1977: 138) mention a few examples. The works of poem by Wordsworth and Albert Camus with his Myth of Sisyphus are classified as literary texts but contain ideas of atheistic existentialism (Bertens, 1996: 81-120).

This paper will discuss the philosophical thoughts, specifically the ideas of existentialism in literature with reference to The Old Man and the Sea, a short novel written by Ernest Hemingway in 1952 with
Santiago as the main character. In this novel Santiago is portrayed as an old fisherman who already experienced misfortune. He did not get fish for days. Finally he got a big marlin. In the course of pulling the fish to shore by himself, he had to fight hard because there were sharks that always followed and took the catch. After passing through struggle day and night for days at sea, Santiago finally got to the land. But he failed to bring his catch as a whole because all the flesh had been eaten by great sharks.

This novel is interesting to analyze from the viewpoint of the philosophy of existentialism, especially ideas of Sartre, for several reasons. First, this novel portrayed a central character named Santiago who was only accompanied by a boy named Manolin as his close friend who left him later. Because of his being alone, it is assumed that Santiago experiences alienation according to Sartre. Second, the problems faced by Santiago deal with the problems of losing-winning, life-death and the problem of responsibility which are the basic ideas of Sartre's existentialism. Thirdly, based on the critical reviews, the studies on this novel have focused more on sub-themes such as Christianity, nature and heroism (Carey, 1973). The problems of existential ideas of Sartre such as anxiety and alienation have not been the subject of attention. In short, there is a gap here about what has been done and what needs to be done.

The analysis in this paper aims at identifying existential ideas of Sartre with the focus on Santiago as the central figure in the novel mainly his existence as a human being, his interaction with others, his way of life, his ambition and spirit. This issues will be analyzed with reference to the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre.
BASIC CONCEPTS OF EXISTENTIALISM.

Existentialism is a philosophical school or philosophical movement of the 20th century with the main figures Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus. The first two, Kierkegaard and Jaspers, are known as the theist existentialists whereas Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus belong to prominent left-wing existentialists (atheists) (Bertens, 1976: 91). Basically existentialism is related to human existence. "To exist means to act. No one can replace my place to exist on my behalf" (Bertens, 976: 84). To express it in a simple way, existentialism refers to the idea that man (everyone of us) has the complete freedom to choose what he/she wants to be and is responsible for what he/she has chosen; not others. Man, through his consciousness, creates his own values and defines a meaning to his life. Sartre pays close attentions to the relationship between consciousness and being which can be summarized as his basic ideas of existentialism as seen below.

1. The principle of existence precedes essence. This is used to refer to the idea that man is a conscious subject, not a thing to be predicted or manipulated. He has the complete freedom and free will. Ha has the freedom to choose what he wants to be. But once he makes a choice, he has to be responsible for what he has chosen; not others and not God. Through his consciousness, he creates values for himself.

2. The feeling of being anxious (anxiety). This concept refers to the idea that sometimes man feels anxious without any direction to specific objects. He feels he is sinful and guilty for not doing the best in life. He has to accept this condition as an existence. In addition, he cannot ask God for help because there is no God. If there is God, he is not free anymore. Therefore, it is often said that
man's freedom is seen in his anxiety when he realizes that he has to be responsible for himself.

3. The feeling of despair. This term in existentialism refers to the hopeless state, a situation where someone feels that he has lost everything in life and there is no hope. In existential point of view, man is free to define for himself about what he wants to be and it will be his identity. But if he fails to be what he wants to be, he cannot blame others. He cannot pray for help because there is no God.

4. The feeling of alienation. This term refers to the idea that sometimes man feels lonely and isolated when he fights to pursue his dream and identity which has been set by himself but finally fails. He cannot ask for the help of others because in Sartre's point of view, there is no true human relationship. Once you are the subject and control other people but on the other occasion you are the object of others.

5. The concepts of absurdity. This term is used to refer to the idea that there is no meaning in life. There is no reason which can explain why human beings should be here. So, man is in a situation of being and nothing. If he does not define a meaning for himself, he becomes nothing or no one and suffers a lot in life. On other hand, if he is successful, he becomes someone. Unfortunately, in life, it is not true that "bad things do not happen to good people"; what happens, happens. So, everything we do is useless as portrayed accurately by Albert Camus in The Myth of Sisyphus.

6. The concept of authenticity. This concept refers to the idea that "one should create oneself and live accordingly. Or to make it more specific, in acting, one should act as oneself, not based on what others think he/she should. An authentic act is the one
that is in line with one's freedom. Accordingly, one cannot blame others when he/she fails; he has to be responsible for it. (http://classes.kvcc.edu/jcorbin/ retrieved on June 10, 2015)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.

Based on the close reading, it was found that this novel contains philosophical ideas, especially the ideas of Sartre's existentialism. These philosophical ideas are expressed implicitly by the writer through the main character Santiago. These include the ideas of anxiety, alienation, and despair. These ideas will be discussed one by one below.

A. The Idea of Anxiety

In addition to the portrayal of Santiago as a hero who was brave, and never gave up fighting against nature, this novel clearly portrays Santiago as the man who experienced anxiety in his life. In many critical reviews, this point is quite neglected. Therefore, it will be analyzed in detail below.

There are three important events that make Santiago anxious. First, Santiago's anxiety started from his failure as a fisherman. This is clearly seen in the beginning of the novel. He was worried because he had been at sea for 84 days but did not catch any fish as seen in the following quotation.

He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eight-four days now without taking a fish. (Hemingway, 1952: 5).

In Sartre's point of view, this condition cannot be avoided in life because once one decides what he wants to be, he has to be consistent and responsible for it. When he is not sure whether he will be successful or not and does not get what he pursues, he feels
anxious and doubtful but there is no point of return. As a man of existentialism, he was free to live his life and responsible for what he had chosen; not other people and not God.

The second event that makes Santiago anxious is the reaction of other fishermen toward him. They mocked him for not catching any fish. This happened when Santiago and Manolin, the boy who accompanied him in the beginning of the story, decided to have some drink on the Terrace as seen below.

They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man. and he was not angry. Others, of the older fishermen, looked at him and were sad. (Hemingway, 1952: 6).

Hearing the mockery and scorn from other fishermen, Santiago feels anxious because he feels useless and his life is meaningless. According to Sartre, one is anxious when he/she realizes that his life is meaningless and he has to be responsible for his/her existence. His freedom makes him anxious.

It is interesting to analyze the reaction of other fishermen to Santiago as seen in the quotation above. Those fishermen looking at Santiago can be grouped into two. The first group is those looking at him and making fun of him. For these kinds of people, Santiago is nothing because he is unlucky. The second is those looking at Santiago and then felt sad. So, these two groups of people give different reactions. This situation really reflects the real life. Some people are happy when you fail while others are sad when you fail. According to Sartre, interrelationship between one person and another person is artificial, not true. For Sartre, "hell is the other" as stated in his drama Closed Door (Bertens, 1996: 100). There are only two options in human relationship: either you become the subject for other people and control them or you are the object of other people and
they control you. Sartre stressed that the root of the relationship is the conflict which ends in a compromise.

The third event that makes Santiago anxious is when he was taking the marlin to the shore but big sharks always haunted him, and tried to chase and eat the marlin.

The skiff was still shaking with the destruction the other shark was doing on the fish and the old man let go the sheet so that the skiff would swing broadside and bring the shark out from under. Hemingway, 1952: 93)

He was anxious because he knew that the sharks tried to eat the flesh of the marlin he had caught and then he said, "They must have taken a quarter of him and of the best meat" (op.cit. 95). The sharks hit him several times by jumping up and down but he could not do much as he said, "Now they (the sharks) have beaten me. I am too old to club sharks to death. (op.cit.96).

**B. The Feeling of Being Alienated and Despair.**

Besides anxiety, Santiago also had the feeling of being alienated due to some events that happened in his life. These will be analyzed in detail below.

First, Santiago began to feel alienated because Manolin, the boy who old who had been with for forty days, decided to leave him because according to Manolin’s parents, Santiago was an unlucky man as seen in the following.

In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish, the boy’s parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally a salao, which is the worst form of unlucky and the had gone at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week. (Hemingway, 1952, 5).
This event is of course very painful because Manolin had been together with old Santiago for long and their relationship was widely seen as a teacher-student relationship. As a teacher, Santiago had taught Manolin how to be a fisherman. As friends, they often exchange ideas and sharing of experiences. According to Sartre, the feeling being of being alienated cannot be avoided in life since it is the part of man's freedom and free will. One cannot expect the other people when he is in trouble. The human relationship is basically artificial. Or, to say it in another way, there is no true relation. When he/she is in good luck and has a lot of money, many people come to him/her. In contrast, when he is unlucky and fails, those close to him will leave as what happened to Santiago. Manolin was forced by his parents to leave Santiago and asked him to go fishing with those who got fish in the first week.

The second event that makes Santiago alienated is when he got a big marlin and he could not control it. Several times he felt that he fought alone as seen in the following.

He looked across the sea and knew how alone he was now. But he could see the prims in the deep dark water and the line stretching ahead and the strange undulation of the calm. (Hemingway, 1952, 50)

In the above quotation Santiago admitted that he was lonely. His alienation was driven the fact he was alone in the large sea; there was no one talk with. He had no one to talk to. To overcome his alienation, Santiago talked himself and talked the birds and fish as if they were human beings.

It is found in many lines in the novel that Santiago liked to talk to himself many times about unreal conditions. His anxiety and despair can be seen from the expressions he used as seen in the following.
I wish I had the boy (p.36)
I wish I had the boy. To help me and see this (p.39)
I wish the boy were here. (P. 41)
I wish I had the boy (p.43)
I wish the boy were and ... (p.47)
Yes. If the boy were here If the boy were here (p. 71).

The expression "wish" is used to describe an event which is contradictory to the present fact. The use of "wish" in the above quotation refers to two events. The first four (page 36, 39, 41, 43, 47) are used to refer to the situation when Santiago caught the big marlin but they fish tried hard to escape and Santiago had trouble controlling it. He wished that the boy had been with him but the fact was that the boy was not him. This is an expression of a person who is alienated and feels hopeless in facing a problem. According Sartre, this is the consequence of freedom and free will. Santiago has decided to be a fisherman. When he faces problems, he may not escape but face it. He feels alienated and hopeless because he has to be responsible for himself; not others. The last one (p.71) is used to refer to the situation when Santiago tried to overcome the sharks which seemed to threaten him by jumping up and down and ate the meat of the marlin Santiago had caught.

But later on Santiago tried to please himself by saying to himself "But you haven't got the boy. You have only yourself and you better work back to the last line new..." (p.45). This quotation shows that Santiago tried hard not to dream about things which are not realistic. He realized that he was not living in the past but in the present.

It is interesting to have a look at what Santiago said when he tried hard to control the fish but he could not make it as seen in the following
Fish, I will stay with you until I am dead (p.43)
Fish, I love and respect you very much. But
I will kill you before this ends.?(45)

These two statements are significant seen from the existential perspectives. Once a person makes a choice, he should be consistent and responsible for what he has decided. In this context, Santiago has no choice: to kill the fish or to be killed. The use of sentence pattern Subject + will here is to emphasize a strong will and commitment. The use of "will" here is not to indicate the future activity.

Subject + will = strong will

Therefore, there is a harmony here between content and form when reading the novel. The writer chose the right patterns to support the content/idea in order to produce an aesthetic value. If the writer had chosen another pattern to express this, the impact will be different.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it is clear that the novel The Old Man and the Sea contains some ideas of existentialism, mainly those proposed by Sartre. These are ideas or thoughts are the anxiety, alienation and despair which can be seen through Santiago, the central figure in the novel. There are three situations or events which make Santiago anxious. The first one is the time when he was aware that it had been eighty four days and he completely failed to catch any single fish. This is an existential thought or idea since he had defined himself to be a fisherman but he failed to accomplish it. He could not blame others because it was his choice. The second situation is when he was mocked by other fishermen. He was anxious because he was
not confident enough whether he would be successful in the future or not. The last situation is when the big sharks threatened him and ate the meat of the marlin he had caught. He was anxious because he had to fight alone to chase away the sharks in the middle of the sea. The feeling of alienation and despair came to Santiago when Manolin left him and worked for other fishermen. The climax is when Santiago got the marlin but he could not control it. His despair and alienation can be seen from the grammatical expression and pattern Subject + wish which are frequently used in the novel. According to Sartre, a person feels alienated and hopeless when he realizes that it is he who has to be responsible for what he has chosen in the world; not others and not God. In short, in this novel Santiago was portrayed as an existentialist man - from Sartre's perspectives - who experienced anxiety, alienation and despair in addition to some other portraits such as hero. These ideas are supported by the choice of sentence pattern S + wish which builds a harmony between content and form.

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