THE ANALYSIS OF COETZEE'S DISGRACE AND DOSTOEVSKY'S NOTES FROM THE UNDERGORUND BASED ON AMERICAN SCHOOL

Eka Rizki Amalia
Institut Pesantren K.H. Abdul Chalim (IKHAC), Mojokerto
ekarizkiamalia@ikhac.ac.id
ekarizkiamalia2104@gmail.com

Nurulazizah Ria Kusrini
Institut Pesantren K.H. Abdul Chalim (IKHAC), Mojokerto
nurulazizah@ikhac.ac.id

Abstract

Two novels with different authors can share the same ideas, or at least some of the themes, since literary works are creative works which cannot be limited by time and place. Comparing and contrasting two novels coming from different countries can give us clue of what the authors intend to tell through their works. This paper tries to analyze a South American novel "Disgrace" and a Russian novel "Notes from the Underground". This paper discusses the analysis of both novels from the theory of American school.

Key words: 'Disgrace', "Notes from the Underground", American School

Introduction

Comparative literature is the study of literary works from different culture or as Bassnett (1993) calls the study across culture. Since they come from different culture, they provide similarities as well as differences which can be studied to get deeper understanding of the literary works. The differences and similarities can lie from the different background of the authors, the texts which are influenced by the culture of each country, political situation, author's intention, and so forth.

The origin of comparative literature comes from national literature and world literature. However, comparative literature has broader range as Santics asserts that world literature is total, unite, and it possesses universal nature (Santics in Jost, 1974: 12). Meanwhile, national literature serves as the "anchors of investigation" (Januwarsi, 2011: 18), thus making it as the subjects of comparative literature.

There are some schools in comparative literature. Two which are known well are French school and American school. French school arose from the early part of 20th century until World War II. This school examines literary works by looking for the evidence of the origins and influences between literary works from different nations. Thus, what to be investigated is how a particular literary idea or motif traveled between nations over time. While the other one, American school, it comes to emerge as the reaction for French school. It is more in looking for examples of human's truth based on literary archetype throughout literatures from all times and places.

Comparing literary works is possible though the authors come from different countries with different culture, social life, etc. Of the differences, they still have similarities because literary works are creative works. The similarities can be from the theme, the message implied, and others. This can be because the authors share the same experience, idea, opinion, spirit, or the influence of the social situation. Sanctics states that "regardless the nationality of the authors, literary works have to be studied together, as long as they have similar tendency and the same time period, or they depict the same themes and motifs" (Sanctis in Jost, 1974: 12). Thus, this paper will analyze two novels from the point of view of American school.

There are two novels to be analyzed: *Disgrace* and *Notes from the Underground*. *Disgrace* is a novel written by J.M. Coetzee and published in 1999. The novel set in post-apartheid South Africa. It tells about a 52 years old man who loses his everything after encounters in an affair with his student. He passes different phase of life then he choose to live with his daughter in the country. Conflicts are not finished yet, even becoming worse after intruders attack them both physically and mentally. The ending is not satisfactory for the main character, yet he chooses to continue moving on his delayed work.

Notes from the Underground is written by Fyodor Dostoevsky in 1864. It tells about a 40 years old hyper-conscious man who is spiteful, hateful, and isolates himself from the society. He considers the society is fulfilled by less intelligent people who have no free will and bound to their narrow minds. The Underground Man is actually the victim of urban life who is not capable of accepting ideas by relating it to real life. He faces conflicts he has been keeping since he was young, and he is still trying to recall some of them by, for instance, taking revenge to an officer who once bumped him in an inn or pub and regretting his treatment to a young prostitute. The story ends by his finishing his notes, but still leave implied message to his reader that he is still writing.

Synopsis

Disgrace

The novel tells about the main character David Lurie, a South African professor of English who loses everything. First it is told the he is 52 years old, means that he is losing ages and his good looks. Then he does something unacceptable, causing him losing people's respect and approval. It is further told that he loses not only his job, but also his reputation, his dreams of artistic success, and even later the ability to protect his daughter. David has married twice and both of his marriages end up in divorce. He is given a daughter from his first marriage, named Lucy. David is a lecturer at a technical university in Cape Town South Africa, teaching one class in romantic literature. David does not really enjoy his job as he is not fond of teaching. He just does it because it earns money. So, in front of his students, he is mostly forgotten, even his name.

David's "disgrace" comes after he is blown up to seduce his vulnerable student, a girl name Melanie Isaacs. This affair is revealed to the university committee and convened to pass judgment from the board of committee. David plead guilty upon every of what Melanie accuse him to have done, without first reading the plea, but refuses to apologize in any sincere form to Melanie and her family. Further, he does not admit wrong of what he has done. He claims it is caused by passion which he could not resist. He says, the one who should be blamed is the cupid arrow. This answer annoys the judge. David appears to be less protective upon him, making him not employing lawyer to defend him, as well as not defending himself when he is being examined. The result is then he must resign from his job. During these times, David is working on a play about Lord Byron's final phase of life. This is somehow portrays David's life of living in a life which put pleasure as the most important thing in life, and is having affair with married woman.

Having dismissed from his teaching position, David goes to his daughter's farm in the Eastern Cape. At first David gets difficulty in accustoming himself to country's life. But then, he feels the natural rhythm of life in farm gives him harmonies in his unpleasant life. Unfortunately, it does not last for quite long time. Shortly after he feels comfortable with rural life, he is forced to a shocking incident. One day three men attack the farm, rape Lucy, assault him, kill the dogs except one, and take some stuff. David then called the police. What annoys David is that Lucy asks him to tell only what he experienced, nothing

more. Lucy says nothing about the incident happened to her. But later it is revealed that she is raped and impregnated. Lucy's keeping silence and David's awkward personal approach to Lucy cause the relationship to loosen. David forces Lucy to reveal her being raped to the police but she always rejects by saying that David knows nothing of what is happening. She asks him to just hide it and this cannot be accepted by him. After some times having argument and 'quarrel', David feels that Lucy is becoming stranger toward him than ever before. He feels that he is not a good father for he cannot protect Lucy though Lucy tells him that it is not his fault. Their relationship becomes further. David returns to Cape Town.

On the way back to Cape Town, David calls Mr. Isaacs, Melanie's father, to tell the story of his version. Mr. Isaacs invites David dinner and meet the family. David comes and tells what happened from his version. Arriving at his house, David finds his house has been robbed. His stuffs are missing including some books of Byron. He tries to start over, continuing writing his work. However, he realizes that all he needs now is coming back to Lucy and gives her support as father. He had a telephone conversation with Bev, an animal welfare, veterinarian as well as their friend, who then gives him excuse to come back to Lucy. Bev says he should talk to Lucy.

David comes back to Eastern Cape and finds out that Lucy is pregnant, and it is likely that the boy, whose name is known as Pollux, is the father. Pollux is the brother in law of Lucy's neighbor as well as her dog keeper, Petrus. What surprising is that Lucy decides to keep the baby. It is no more shocking than the fact that Lucy is going to marry Petrus for the reason of protection and self-safety.

The novel ends by David's returns to work in the clinic with Bev. His work, as it is used to, is putting animal to sleep. He takes his favorite dog and gives it up to Bev to be put to sleep.

Notes from the Underground

This novel is told by a narrator, which sometimes refers to the Underground Man himself. This novel consists of two parts: "Underground" and "Apropos of the Wet Snow". The first part begins by the narrator telling us of how unattractive and hateful he is. He is told to age 40 years old. He has been in the 'underground' for about 20 years, means that he has been in the underworld since he was 20. He considers himself as an intelligent man, thus it makes him unable to act in any way because of his too much intelligent, causing

him can argue any justification. He says that intelligent men can never become anything, and he says he is one of the examples.

The Underground Man lives in St. Petersburg, Russia. He used to be a civil servant but then retired because he inherited some money. He spent all time wandering problems in his life. He is sometimes very impressed by art, philosophy, and love which bring "the sublime and beautiful". He imagines that he has reader to his writing who responds to him.

The first thing he brings up to argue is about free will and the laws of nature. He uses 2+2=4 as the example. He asks why the result has to be 4, though if we want it 5, for example. If all have to accept the result, 4, then there is no freedom of willing. A normal and ordinary man will accept the result without questioning. But he is different. He is a hyper-consciously man that he cannot accept it. So what he wants to say is that he has free will and has freedom to choose everything he wants.

The Underground Man then talks about suffering. He argues that suffering is enjoyable if we have consciousness upon it. He gives example, when he knows that he is in the bottom of a rock and has no chance to get better, he will enjoy it as pleasure. It is his free will to take pleasure of that. As he has explained before, because he has free will, he has the freedom to choose to be happy or not upon any kinds of situation. He further mentions about intentional suffering, which has tight relation with free will and the laws of nature. The Underground Man says that one day we may be able to figure out all laws of nature and then be able to predict what everyone will do, think, and want. This will cause chaos as everyone will try to escape from determinism to prove that they have free will. Determinism is the belief that everyone cannot choose what they want or do because they have no control, all are decided by the surroundings and other factors.

The Underground Man uses this argument as reason to reject the idea of a perfect socialist society by giving example of Crystal Palace. He says that free will does not allow it. He also says that people like to build. They keep building things because they are cannot be satisfied by perfection. If they do not build any longer, means they have nothing to do, and this frustrating them. Part I ends with the Underground Man says that what he previously mentions that he has readers, they are all imaginary readers. He says he will never have readers.

The second part of the novel consists of stories. We can say that part II is the actual story. There are three main points in this part. The first is about the Underground Man's obsession on an officer, the second is about a dinner party with some old school friends,

and the third is about a prostitute names Liza. Before coming to the stories, the Underground Man complains about Romanticism. He hates romanticism of France and Germany. He loves Russian romanticism the most because he says it is able to appreciate the sublime and beautiful, but it is still based on reality. Then the Underground Man flashbacks when he was 24 years old.

The first story is dealing an officer. One night in a Traven, the Underground Man was bumped by an officer in his shoulder to move him out of the officer's way. He was so offended by this that he spends years of his life planning to take revenge to his officer. He plans to bump the officer while walking along the Nevsky, the major central street in St. Petersburg. When he finally succeeds to bump the officer, the officer does not even realize it, as the officer is a hulking man and the Underground Man is nothing compared physically. This is worse than he imagine.

The next story is another flashback of the young underground Man. It is about a dinner party with some old friends who one of them is being transferred out of the city, named Zverkov. Actually the Underground Man hated them when he was younger, but he still often visits Simonov, one of the friends, and he decides to meet them to have dinner at appointed place. Simonov forgot to tell him that the time has changed. They should meet at five but it turns to 6. The Underground Man arrives early and is very annoyed finding out their friends have not come yet. He has argument with them, telling them of how he hate the society and them as the symbol. They finally leave him. They go to a secret brothel. The Underground man follows them with a great feeling of anger, wanting to beat them. He does not care whether they will beat him or not. When he reaches the brothel, he cannot find them. It seems that Zverkov and friends are already with prostitutes in their rooms. He then sleeps with a young prostitute named Liza.

The story then comes to Liza. After they have sex, he lectures Liza that she should not become a prostitute. He tells her of many danger may come to her either physically, mentally, or socially. He lectures her of many diseases she can suffer, how her soul can be broken, how society will reject her, etcetera. Liza sweeps, and the Underground Man gives her his address. When he arrives at home, he regrets giving her his address. She might come and see his poverty then many things come in his mind about what Liza might probably think and say about his condition. After a week or two, Liza shows up. They have short argument which ends with the Underground Man sobs in tears in Liza's embrace. They have sex again. He gives her cash to insult her further but she leaves leaving the cash

behind. The Underground man finds how noble she is then chases after her. It is too late because she is already gone.

The closing part II back to the Underground Man at the age of 40. He tells us that all, including him himself, live based on books they read. Further he tells his imaginary readers that he shall stop writing his notes. Other narrator shift the role, telling us that actually the Underground Man cannot stop writing. He is still writing, but at least for the reader it already comes to end.

Analysis

The two novels were written by different authors coming from different countries and background. However, they share the same theme in the novels, with similarities and dissimilarities view of the themes.

The first theme is sex. In *Disgrace*, sex is described as not merely fulfilling desire, but other meaning implied there. Sex is used as a way of filling emptiness and loneliness as in David's pursuit of prostitutes told in the beginning of the novel, also Bev's invitation to David. Sex is also as a symbol of domination as in Lucy's rape. The most important is that sex serves as a source of shame as in David and Melanie's relationship and again in Lucy's rape, the shame which leads to disgrace.

Notes from the Underground depicts sex as a symbol of humiliation, which is rooted from the intention of domination of the Underground Man towards a prostitute, whom he believes that the status is far under him. As the Underground Man feels humiliated by Zverkov and friends for their status in society, he wants other to feel it worse than he does, as redemption. The only possible object is a prostitute, Liza. The second sex with Liza is more to filling the emptiness upon his being alone in the world without companion, friends nor relatives, his poverty, and his feeling depression of self-unconfident.

The next theme is suffering. Suffering in *Disgrace* appears physically, mentally and emotionally. We can find physical suffering in some scene, like when the dogs were killed by the intruders, David being hit and Lucy's rape. More important than those are mental suffering which all characters seem to encounter. In some cases this leave serious psychological wound as portrayed by Lucy's after being raped. She was witty and sociable before, but she turns to be very quiet and refuses to meet people. We also see Melanie as vulnerable personality. She is actually weak and easily hurt physically and emotionally, proven that she takes it seriously her relationship with David then when it comes that her

family and boyfriend make it as big problem, she dismisses class, being absent for some lecturing and skips the exam. It is not described well how does she suffer but it is implicitly told. David also suffers in his wanting and needy in woman that she pursue a prostitute as well as Melanie to fill his desire and emptiness. He also suffers from losing his position and status in society because of his affair with his student, Melanie. David also suffers when he is incapable of protecting Lucy from being raped. He feels he fails to fulfill his role as father. He also suffers when his relationship with Lucy is getting further after the incident.

The Man from the Underground sees 'suffering' very differently. He argues that we can take pleasure from suffer, if we are fully aware of it, or in other words if we have full consciousness upon it. As people actually have free will to choose, they can choose whether they want to be happy or sad in their suffering. But the Underground Man says that not all people have hyper-consciousness as he does. So, not all people can choose or take pleasure from the suffering. The Underground Man adds that he also likes to make people suffer. He says that people need to suffer because they need to be conscious that they are alive. Suffering can lead to consciousness. People need to know that they are not supposed to give up suffering, since they need to be conscious and maintain their existence in the world.

Hate becomes the next theme to discuss. In Disgrace, this theme runs throughout the novel. Sometimes it is hidden but the reader can still feel it, some are described very vividly as they burst out. For instances, when David tries to beat Pollux, when Mr. Isaacs comes to David and accost him, when David is very eager to throttle Petrus, etc. Other character does not show the feeling of hate but feel hated, as Lucy feels when Polux rapes her. She feels the rapist's rage towards her.

The Underground Man describes himself as a spiteful, hateful, and unattractive man. He lives in an underground and isolated worlds created by himself. He has been there for so many years that he hates the society for being so different with him. In some scenes, he hates himself for being so easy humiliated by his friends the he humiliates a prostitute in return. He hates French and German's romanticism for they are not rooted on reality, at least that is what he says.

The next theme is isolation. Both characters in the two novels experience the isolation. David is socially isolated from his small society-university- for having love affair with his student. The Man from the Underground suffers from his own isolation

made by himself. He argues that his free will and his hyper-consciousness do not allow him to blend into society. He hates the society because of their perfection depicted as *Crystal House*. He says, perfection leads to static condition because when something is perfect, there is nothing left to be done.

The next theme is society and class. David is a white living among color society. The novel *Disgrace* takes the setting of post-apartheid, where color people have just gotten their existence and acceptance upon their rights to stand on the same position as the whites. It is still early of the revolution that the colored people see white people with hatred. White people are still felt to have higher class as a matter of their education, wealth and the long period of apartheid.

The Underground Man is actually from the middle class as he was a civil servant before retiring after getting inheritance from his relative. But somehow, he is poor now because he does not do anything for her living. We can say that he is jobless and only care to wander his life. He hates the society represented by his friends because of their status, property, and position in the society. Though only Zverkov who is said to have everything a man wants, the other two friends are also not as poor as him. He says he is different from his society.

Setting

Disgrace was published in 1999 in South Africa when the apartheid has just ended. Apartheid is political system enforced by the National Party (NP) governments from 1948 to 1994. Apartheid was developed after World War II by National Party as the dominate party in Africa. This system segregates the rights of color people. The white people had full political rights and the color (black) people were forced to live away from white people, go to separate schools, and other activities were limited.

It was post-apartheid when the novel was written. So it is still rather not conducive. The color people are still struggling for their rights to be in the same position as the whites. For they suffer for such a long time, most of them keep the feeling of hatred upon white people a lot. One example is Lucy's rape. Lucy told David how she can feel the boy's hatred when he rapes her. Though the novel was written in post-apartheid era, it does not touch political issues. The author also does not directly write about life under apartheid. He focuses most on the events the characters are suffering.

Notes from the Underground takes the setting in 1864. It is one of existentialist novel in the 20th century, when at that time this philosophical belief blossom. Existentialism believes that individuals, rather than a god or government or authority define the meaning of their own lives. Individuals are free to choose the path for his own lives, and he also has free will that allows him to decide what he should take for his life. The Underground Man asserts this idea in many scenes in the novel. Reflecting this idea into his life, the Underground Man chooses to isolate his life from the urban society.

The Underground Man is the victim of modern Russian urban experience. He prevents himself from positive social interaction with the society. He tries to relate the world according to the codes and examples he finds in the books of European literature. However, in the same time, he rejects some ideas coming from it, for instance, the idea of romanticism of French and German literature. The Underground Man then fails in his attempts to relate the codes with real life, makes him more isolated and gets deeper underworld.

Looking at the period when the two novels are written, they are diachronic. However, there is something similar about those two novels. The setting of both novels is the transition era; *Notes from the Underground* is the transition of traditional Russian life to modern one, *Disgrace* is the transition from apartheid era to post-apartheid. The transition affects both authors in depicting the characters of their novel, influencing the issues talked in the novel and the conflicts arises. Though David and the Underground Man sees the transition era differently, they could feel its effects affect their life.

Conclusion

Both authors of the two novels discuss similar themes which consist of sex, suffer, hate, isolation and class society. Though they are presented in different setting, they portray most likely the same meaning and message behind. The two novels also picture the main characters' characteristic as having private problem inside which then affect the way the see their life. The period of the two novels and its condition are also shown to be affecting the characters' characteristics and view. The ending of the two stories also do not show a significant life changing. To conclude, reading these two novels will give the picture of everything someone experience in life which can shape the personality and how he treats others regardless of the difference form of the experiences.

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