

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND RELATED STUDIES

In analysing a work of literature, theory and approach are needed in order to support the analysis so that it can achieve its scientific degree. Therefore, in this analysis the writer applies eclectic method, and several theories of existentialism, and postmodernism as the main theories in order to gain the goal in finding out the answer to the problem statements. The writer also supports her analysis with several reviews— related to the theories used, which are written in the “Related Studies.”

A. Kierkegaard's Existentialism

As stated by Ronald Nash, there are two options in overcoming nihilism. First is conveyed by Nietzsche. He explained that the way to cope with nihilism is by creating our own value and leaving it when it has become an absolute value (qtd. in St. Sunardi 33). Meanwhile, Kierkegaard offers a different way in facing nihilism. He offers people to return to God. The second choice fits with what had been done by John Doe.

Therefore, this theory is used to explain the conduct done by John Doe. Before going into further explanation, it needs to be comprehended first what existentialism means. According to the Webster's New World Dictionary, existentialism is "The doctrine that existence takes precedence over essence and

holding that man is totally free and responsible for his acts. This responsibility is the source of dread and anguish that encompass mankind” (qtd. in Wyatt n. pag.).

Horton and Edwards in their book entitled Backgrounds of American Literary Thought also define that “existentialism is the philosophy which declares as its first principle that existence is prior to essence” (466).

From those definitions, it can be known that man exists first, then, later on creates his own meaning. It means that man formerly has no human nature. If man has no human nature, then, man has free will. Therefore, in creating his meaning of life, he is free to choose and act, as he wants. As a consequence, he has to be responsible for the choices and acts he has made. The responsibility includes not only for he himself, but also for all mankind (Wyatt n. pag.; Horton and Edwards 466).

In making the choices, man has ethical foundation that is based on individual. As the result, there is no universal but a relative truth. Such a notion has a close relation with the idea of postmodernism.

As stated by Kierkegaard that each individual must find out the truth of his own existence in a solitary confrontation with God and the only significant part of man’s life was what he did in the fullness of his obligations as a true Christian. According to him, the essence of man’s life was determined by the sum total of the choices he made on the basis of being a true and totally committed Christian (Horton and Edwards 471-472).

Moreover, he believed that there were three stages of human existence as the result of the free choice of the individual concerned: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The three stages lead to the concept “leap of faith.” He explained:

The aesthetic is the life of the sensuous moment, characteristic of childhood and of unreflective hedonism generally. The ethical stage is reached when the individual becomes aware of the temporality of human existence and tries to deepen the meaning of his life in reference to some absolute moral standard. At the religious level, however, man’s highest duties are toward God, in whose presence man cannot be indifferent. (Horton and Edwards 473)

Each of the three stages is characterized by a sequence of acts of devotion that a man must create in the sightlessness of absolute trust in God (Horton and Edwards 474).

B. Postmodernism

The term “postmodern” covers many ideas and meanings, but in this study it refers to a worldview. Postmodern is not a break from the modern, as stated by Emmanuel Subangun in his book entitled Dari Saminisme ke Postmodernisme. “Modernity is the ground and postmodernity is the stairs faced to the sky” (176).

From the explanation above, it can be understood that postmodern is not an era, it is “part of modern” instead. The two of them cannot be comprehended separately. Such thoughts are conveyed by Jean-François Lyotard. He mentions that “postmodern can appear within the modern” (qtd. in Selden and Widdowson 184).

From the explanation above, it can be understood that modern can be considered as an era, a period of time, begins from the Enlightenment era up to this day. Whereas, postmodern here is a response towards the conditions of modern era. It is a worldview that offers another way of thinking in facing modern era, which happened to have failed in making a better life for humankind.

Modern era is marked by the use of human ratio and science as the answer to all of their problems. Science and technology are believed to be the main means for achieving a better life.

Modern man could find a new, rational foundation for universal truth; science, particularly, would reveal new truth, which, when applied to the modern society and institutions, would literally remake the world. Modernism...held the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would further not only the control of the forces of the nature, but also the understanding of self and world, moral progress, justice in social institutions, even human happiness. (qtd in Hurd n. pag.)

As the consequence, people emphasize their happiness on material achievements and ignore the “spiritual dimension of human beings” (Veith 7). The optimism of modern era, later on, changes into a pessimism attitude since “the enlightenment project is seen as having produced a range of social and political disasters” (qtd. in Selden and Widdowson 183).

Moreover, there is obvious fact that “ science had not answered all questions but it even gives people “environmental pollution atomic bombs”, which means that “

modernism does not make everyone happy” (Veith 7). Gene E. Veith calls such a condition as “loss of faith,” and it emerges postmodern worldview.

Reverse to the matter of “postmodern” term, which has many meanings, the writer tries to define the term into a simple definition made by a historian, Arnold Toynbee. “Postmodernism is a term that indicates, among other things, a basic worldview that rejects absolutes—all absolutes, of any kind whatsoever” (qtd. in Godawa n. pag.). Based on such meaning, postmodern worldview holds the idea that “all truth is subjective” (qtd. in Godawa Posmodern Movie Part II n. pag.). It means that people may hold what they consider as truth base on their own belief. If it is so, then truth and morality are relative. As the result, “reason” that marks the modernism, is replaced by “the pleasure-principle” (Veith 7). Moreover, Gene E. Veith comes to a conclusion that “ what makes an action moral or immoral is whether or not the person made the choice” (7). Thus, this is what is meant “postmodern relativity” by Brian Godawa (n. pag.).

C. Related Studies

Due to the approach used, the writer has taken several reviews written by critics about Seven. The reviews are made by Brian Oliver, Craig, Mike Jackson, Bill Chambers, Steven D. Seagal, and Brian Godawa. The next paragraph will describe their reviews.

The first review is by Brian Oliver. In his review he provides the details about the intrinsic elements of Seven. He describes the main characters, the plot, the setting,

and also the theme. He explains the characters both physically and mentally. The descriptions are made simply through short sentences so that is easier to understand.

The other reviews are talked about the extrinsic element of the work. Most of them discuss about the relation between literary work and thoughts.

The review by Craig talks about “a treatise on the nature of madness and evils”. He gives explanations about the condition of modern society, which often deals with evils and questions whether people still care for goodness in their lives.

The review by Mike Jackson pays attention on the ideas that “the world is evil, but what are you gonna do?” (n. pag.). He observes many different reactions towards it and notices that most of people depicted are ignorant. The same ideas basically also conveyed by Bill Chambers and Steven D. Seagal.

Another review that also talked about the relation between literary work and thoughts is written by Brian Godawa. He, in general, writes articles about postmodern movies. In his article “Postmodern Movie I: The Good, the Bad, and the Relative,” he explains that there is a worldview inside a movie that is wrapped in a story through such elements as character and plot. Further, he adds that sometimes people do not realize it. And, as a matter of fact, people—in doing their actions in life—are motivated by their philosophy or worldview even though they may not define those beliefs by their philosophical names. One of the worldviews that is talked about here is postmodernism, which is defined simply by Arnold Toynbee as “a basic worldview that rejects absolutes” (qtd. in Godawa n. pag.). This worldview is closely related

with existentialism. He believes that existentialism has dominant influence on the values and worldviews portrayed in the postmodern cinema. Next, he discusses about deterministic movies about chance, thoroughly determined movies about freedom and an atheist of existentialism. In this article, he also discusses Seven as “a movie that addresses the negative results of postmodern relativity” (n. pag.).

CHAPTER III