

Jamie May's Success and Bill Houston's Failure Search for Meaning of Life in Denis Johnson's *Angel*

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to analyze the meaning life of Bill Houston and Jamie May. In order to complete this paper, the writer used library research to collect the material. The writer uses a book written by Viktor Frankl about logotherapy to analyze the novel. Logotherapy consists of existential problems and the way to find the meaning of life. Existential problems fall into existential frustration, existential vacuum and noogenic neuroses. Projection and de-reflection are a therapy which is used to recover existential problem. The meaning of life can be found through deed, suffering and love. The result of the analysis shows that the true meaning of Bill and Jamie's life are found after they feel some frustration, helpness, loneliness and love.

Keywords: Frankl; logotherapy; meaning of life; de-reflection; existential problem.

1. Introduction

A human is a creature who is created with thought, so he can appraise bad or good things. The human with thought will be able to choose good things, so he will avoid bad things. When the human chooses good things, it will bring him to a good life. On the other hand, when he chooses bad things, he will fall into misery. Although the human has an ability to appraise good and bad things, he still falls into bad things such as alcoholism, drug and corruption. These bad things are caused by

the human who loses his direction, so he does not know his meaning of life. The human falls into alcoholism, drug and corruption as a sign of loss of direction. Emptiness is also an example of the loss of direction. The human may have richness but he feels empty. Furthermore, he will suffer from emptiness and ask his meaning of life.

Everyone in the world has his meaning of life, but many of them do not know his meaning of life and they try to find it. The human does not know his meaning of life because he just looks for worldly things, so his eyes are blinded. The human thinks emptiness which he feels will be lost by richness or glamour things, but it will not satisfy him in unnecessary.

The human will recognize that he needs something which should be looked for, and he will feel worries until he meets a special event which changes his life. The special event which is experienced by human will lead him to find the meaning of life. When the human is trying to find the meaning of life, he will meet the difficulties likes the deed, suffering and love. The difficulties will make a frustration, but the deed, suffering and love will help human to find his meaning of life. The meaning of life will give a knowledge which helps the human to know what to strive for, maintain and release. Beside the human will not only face a frustration but he will face a conflict which is related to his needs and his spirit. The conflict happens when human tries to find something but there is an obstacle against his attempt.

These unpleasant reason is experienced by the Jamie May and Bill Houston. They are characters in Denis Johnson's *Angel*. This research tries to find the Jamie May's and Bill Houston's meaning of life. Unpleasant reasons are their ways to find their meaning and they cannot refuse these unpleasant reasons.

2. Biography and summary

Biography: Denis Johnson is a son of state department staff. He was born in Munich, German in 1949. Because his father is U.S staff, he raised in Manila, Tokyo and Washington D.C. His youth was affected by drugs and alcohol. His experiences in

drugs and alcohol lead his novel theme. He graduated from Raymon Carver and he earned his Master in University of Iowa. Today, he is known as a famous writer and he is also a Mitte Chair at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

Denis Johnson got his master from University of Iowa, then he published his first novel, *Angel*. *Angel* was published in 1983 that told the story of Jamie May and Bill Houston life. The novel is about two people who run from their problem. Jamie May leaves her home after knows that his husband cheated her and Bill Houston, an ex-navy who does not has purpose. They meet in a bus and make a journey along the novel because the emptiness that fill their soul.

Angel has mystic and scary story. Besides that *Angel* has the violence and the tenderness. These are the reason to analyze *Angel*. *Angel* has a good story although the story is quite confusing. From *Angel* can be concluded that *Angel* become a reflection of the Denis Johnson meaning of life. It means that the story of *Angel* reflect the reality of Denis Johnson's life

Summary: *Angel* is novel that tells a life of Jamie May and Bill Houston. Jamie May is a wife who left her husband because his husband cheated her. Jamie May is in a bus station named Oakland Greyhound where she will take the bus. She is on the run from home. Along the road, she thinks of her husband who has betrayed him. Jamie May feels sadness and a fear of her life.

Four days in bus, Jamie May is in confused and helpless and she meets Bill Houston. Bill Houston, an ex-navy, an ex-husband, and an alcoholic. He is a man who travelling without any purposes.

On one chance Bill Houston offers Jamie May a can of beer and it is a beginning of their conversation. Their conversation is started from Bill Houston. He tells Jamie May the meaning from his tattoo. Beside that Jamie May also tells her problem to Bill Houston. Jamie May tells about her husband and how he betrayed her. They become a friend in several days. Bill Houston also said that Pittsburgh is his destination for some high old times. Bill Houston talks about his personal life and

he tells Jamie May that he had married three times and divorce three times. Bill Houston also tells Jamie May that he does not has a specific reason why he had married and divorced three times. He said that he just after the first time he married then divorce, he wants to do something like that. In their conversation Jamie May express her confusion and her sadness.

Jamie May and Bill Houston go to Pittsburgh and they spend their time in alcohol. After their togetherness, Jamie May and Bill Houston separated. Jamie May is raped by the stranger and she is found by Bill Houston. Their direction is Bill Houston's mother house. In Bill Houston's mother house, they meet Burris and James, Bill Houston's brother. James tells Bill Houston that he and Burris have a robbery plan. This mission will cooperate with Dwight Snow. He is a master in robbery and he was used to rob the bank.

In the day of robbery, the robbery is failed and Bill Houston shoots the bank guard. Because Bill Houston shoots the guard, he has to be jailed. Jamie May has a mental disorder then she has to be hospitalized. Bill Houston undergoes all the process of justice and he has some trial. Along the justice, he meets his step father H.C Sandover and he feels a heat. Bill Houston also wishes, if somebody had to be murdered by him, it could have been his step father. The process of justice is followed by Bill Houston but he is cannot be justified because his act. The justice punishes him a capital punishment in gas chamber. Jamie May survives from drug and she is under control by Outpatient Program. She can survive from her addiction because she wants to meet her children. Jamie May gets a letter from Bill Houston and she goes to Burris prison to deliver Bill Houston message. The message is Burris is still his brother although he had a mistake.

Bill is going to be executed soon. When Bill waits for the execution, he meets some people who will be executed. Bill Houston meets Richard Clay Wilson who had killed children. They share the last days together. Richard likes to poem then Bill Houston listens to it. In the last hour of their time, Bill Houston and Richard get their

last meals and Bill Houston goes first to the gas chamber and he is died. On the other hand, Jamie May lives her lives for her purpose.

3. Theory

In purpose explaining Jamie May's and Bill Houston meaning of life then intrinsic element and extrinsic element is used. Intrinsic element will explain about the character, theme, setting and plot. Extrinsic element will be explained by logotherapy. In logotherapy there are some points. One of these points is existential problem. Existential problem consist of existential frustration, existential vacuum and noogenic neuroses. Existential frustration is a deep chronic sense of dissatisfaction arising from unresolved existential problem to find a concrete meaning. Existential vacuum is the lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for then they are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness and a void within themselves. Noogenic neuroses is a conflict between value or spiritual problem and it is derived from spiritual dimension. Noogenic neuroses is shown by doubting the meaning of life. Noogenic neuroses emerges from existential problems (the problem is searching the meaning).

In logotherapy there are philosophical pillars of logotherapy. Three philosophical pillars are freedom of will, will to meaning and meaning of life. Freedom of will is human desire to determine his self. Human has a limitation and from these limitations human tries to determine his self. Will to meaning is a human desire to have a meaningful life and meaning of life can be said something importance in human life and it is become his direction.

In this world human will face with existential problem and the existential problem will make human frustration. In logotherapy there are projection and de-reflection to cure existential problem. Projection is said a defense mechanism and projection is experience by human when human tries to cover up his mistake and delegate his mistake to other. Projection can appear is hallucination. De-reflection is one of therapy techniques. De-reflection is a therapy that uses self-transcendence on

everyone. It means that a human ability to break free and do not care anymore to uncomfortable conditions. Human who has an existential problem then tries to do a positive thing. He tries to ignore all problems and he sees it as something easy.

Human will implement his meaning of life through three ways. These three ways are creative work, experiencing something and the attitude toward suffering. Creative works, it means that a man do anything that it can makes him meeting his meaning of life. Through a work or a deed, human can find his meaning of life and learn this life carefully. When human works, he will feel that he is somebody. Experiencing something, it means that from experiencing something human can find the meaning of life and make human life is more meaningful. By encountering someone, human can share opinions and it can be medium to find the meaning of life. The attitude toward suffering has a meaning that human have to accept all suffering. Human have to change his attitude toward the condition. Human cannot change the condition but human can change his attitude then human can survive and reach the purpose. When human can accept all suffering thing, human is able to see the different point of view.

4. Result and discussion

Intrinsic: *Angel* will discuss intrinsic elements. These intrinsic elements are character, theme, setting and plot. Characters in *Angel* are Jamie May and Bill Houston and they are the major character. As the minor characters there are Jamie May's Husband and Bill Houston's step father. Jamie May's character is strong and brave. Jamie May also a character who loves her children. Bill Houston is a character who has an attractive face. He is such a nice man in physical. Bill Houston's personality tends to be bad. Jamie May and Bill Houston is protagonist character and their opposites are Jamie May's husband and Bill Houston's step father as antagonist.

Greimas's plot is used to explain the story. Greimas plot structure divide *Angel* into three steps. These steps are initial condition, transformation stage and final stage. The initial stage is signed by Jamie May who left her home and she falls into

frustration and emptiness and Bill Houston as an ex-navy is in loneliness. They meet in a bus and they become a friend. Transformation stages are the beginning, the middle and the end. The beginning of transformation stage is shown by Jamie May who uses drugs and alcohol and Bill Houston sets the robbery bank. The middle of transformation stage is shown by Jamie May who meets an Angel and Bill Houston shoots the bank guard. The angel asks Jamie May's self respect and responsibility. The end of transformation stage is Jamie May who recovers from her addiction and she decides to follow the program to recover herself. Bill Houston is in prison to be responsible his act. The final condition is Jamie May finds her meaning of life and Bill Houston has to meet the capital punishment.

Theme in *Angel* is divided into major theme and minor theme. Major theme is a whole theme in the story. The major theme is the success of Jamie May finds her meaning and the failure of Bill Houston finds his meaning of life. The minor theme is a theme which is available in every part of plot. The theme of initial condition is Jamie's disappointment and Bill Houston's loneliness. Theme of the beginning of transformation stage is Jamie May's frustration and Bill Houston robbery plan. Theme in the middle of transformation is Jamie May's meeting with an angel and Bill Houston's shoots. Bill Houston's capital punishment and Jamie May's recovery is the theme in end of transformation stage. The final condition is Jamie May's success finds the meaning of life and Bill Houston has to meet the capital punishment in gas chamber.

The setting becomes the indication of events in the story. The setting is in Jamie May's house, bus, Pittsburgh, Bill Houston's house, Arizona State Hospital, bank, prison and gas chamber.

Extrinsic: Logotherapy is used to analyze the extrinsic element. The points of logotherapy are existential problem, philosophical pillars of logotherapy, therapy technique in logotherapy and the meaning ways.

Existential problems are existential frustration, existential vacuum and noogenic neuroses. Jamie May's existential frustration is signed by Jamie May who feels disappointment because her husband affair and Jamie May who feels a fear to her future. Jamie May's husband who has an affair with the other woman become a deep sadness for Jamie May. On the other hand, Bill Houston also has existential frustration signed by Bill Houston's disappointment because he hates his step father and he cannot guess a move in his self. Existential frustration will be followed by existential vacuum which is experienced by Jamie May and Bill Houston. Existential vacuum is signed by Jamie May who has a notion to suicide and she feels the emptiness. Bill Houston also feels existential vacuum is shown by Bill Houston feels the emptiness and he expresses it through women and beers. The chronic step from existential problems is noogenic neuroses because in this step human feels emptiness in his spirituality. Jamie May's noogenic neuroses is Jamie's hate to the nuns and she asks what they do. Bill Houston's noogenic neuroses is shown by Bill Houston who does not try to find God although he has many problems.

Philosophical pillars of logotherapy. There are three pillars and they are freedom of will, will to meaning and meaning of life. Jamie May's freedom of will is shown by Jamie desire to break her emptiness by drugs. The drug will destroy Jamie May's health and Bill Houston's freedom of will is Bill Houston's desire to earn money with robbery plan. Freedom of will is followed by the will to meaning that is found by the therapy technique. Jamie May will experience two therapies, projection and de-reflection. Through these therapies, Jamie May will find her will to meaning. Projection therapy is shown by Jamie May who has a hallucination meeting the angel. Hallucination is a kind of projection and the hallucination of angel is drawn as the other Jamie May's personality that appear in form angel. The angel asks Jamie May's responsibility and self respect. After projection, Jamie May will experience de-reflection. De-reflection is signed by Jamie May who follows some programs to break her addiction. Jamie May follows these therapies and she finds will to meaning. Jamie May know that her will to meaning is lied on her children. Bill Houston also

finds his will to meaning by projection. The projection in Bill Houston's case is in the form of friend. Bill Houston knows his will to meaning to pray the other human being because he knows that he has a friend that will not see each other after he is death. Third pillars is meaning of life. Jamie May's meaning of life is in her children and she wants to meet her children. If the meaning of life of Jamie May is her children then Bill Houston's meaning of life is in his friend because he has a desire to pray the other human being.

Human who knows his meaning of life will tries to implement his meaning of life. There are three ways to meaning of life. These ways are creative work, experiencing something and the attitude toward suffering. Jamie May experience these ways. Jamie May's creative work is Jamie May tries to achieve her meaning of life by creative value. It means that Jamie May do a positive thing like separated herself from drugs. She will follow the programs in Narcotic Anonymous. It means that Jamie May will do a creative ways. Jamie's experiencing something is Jamie May who follows the programs and therapy in Narcotic Anonymous also follows the spiritual principle of these programs. Experiencing something has a meaning that Jamie May experiences the spiritual principles of the programs. Jamie's attitude toward suffering is Jamie May had got a suffering when she used drug. In Narcotic anonymous, Jamie May is taught about attitude of gratitude. From there Jamie May is taught to grate to all things that she has. Attitude of gratitude is program where people have to always grateful to all things that he has. It is suit to the meaning ways, the attitude toward suffering. In the bad or good condition, people have to be grateful. From the attitude of gratitude, Jamie is asked to always grateful and she has to forget her suffering.

5. Conclusion

Novel *Angel* tells Jamie May and Bill Houston life. They are the lost people and they have to meet some events that it will colour their life or bring them into their

purpose. These events will help them to find their meaning of life. The success and the failure will be faced by them.

In logotherapy there are some points. There are existential problem and the therapy. Existential problem consist of existential frustration, existential vacuum and noogenic neurosis. Existential problem is the condition where people will be frustrated to his existential, existential vacuum is a condition where human feel emptiness in his life and noogenic neurosis is a condition where people has a problem in his spirituality. Existential frustration and existential vacuum bring people to noogenic neuroses.

Logotherapy has three philosophical pillars. The philosophical pillars are freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning of life. In will to meaning will be explained the therapy of logotherapy. Logotherapy has two kinds of therapy and in Jamie case is used one of them. In purpose to recover these problems, logotherapy uses one of two therapies. The therapies are de-reflection. De-reflection is therapy that asks the patient to doing the positive things. Jamie May who experience existential problem tries to recover by de-reflection. Jamie May's existential problem is caused from the conflict between Jamie May and her husband. From the problem develops into existential problem and brings Jamie May into drug and alcohol. Drug and alcohol cause a mental disorder then she gets some hallucinations. De-reflection therapy reflects into drug and alcohol therapy which followed by Jamie May. Jamie May has to stay away from drug and alcohol then she does a positive thing. There are twelve programs that follow by Jamie May and the twelve programs represent de-reflection therapy.

On the other hand, Bill Houston also experience existential problem. It is started from his conflict between Bill Houston and his father. Bill Houston hates her father then his hatred brings Bill Houston to leave home. Bill Houston also state his live is empty and he expresses it by beer and woman. Bill Houston and his brother plan a robbery but it is failed. In failed robbery plan Bill Houston had shot a guard and he has to jail.

In the end of the story, Jamie May who struggle to break from drug and alcohol is success. Finally, Jamie decides to follow a fellowship called Narcotic Anonymous that help people to break from drug and alcohol. Jamie May knows what she wants and she want her child back. Jamie May wants to live again with her children. In jail Bill Houston feel guilty for his act. He wants to tell the family of the guard that he loves them and he does not want the shot event happen. In prison Bill Houston has much time for muse. From there Bill Houston want to think a minute about Jamie because Jamie is important. The justice gives a capital punishment and Bill Houston has to face his death.

From there, it can be concluded that Jamie May reflects herself as a success. She is able to find her meaning after all things which had happened. On the other hand Bill Houston reflects as a failure. Bill Houston cannot find his meaning but he has to meet his death in misery.

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