

REGRET IN NICHOLAS SPARKS' NOVEL *THE BEST OF ME*

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Abstract

This study aims to discuss the types of regret that represent the effects of the protagonist's regret in Nicholas Spark's novel entitled *The Best of Me*, and to describe the effects of the protagonist's regret. This study is the result of a qualitative assessment of the regrets of the protagonist named Dawson Cole. The theory used in this study is the theory proposed by Zeelenberg (2007), and supported by Pieters R. A (2007). The results of this study indicate that there are two types of regret reflected in the novel; they are existential regret and regret of inaction. The cause of the protagonist's regret is that the protagonist avoids Amanda all his life, and his regret that he is inferior and unworthy to be with Amanda. The effect of the protagonist's regret is that he lies to his own feelings and remains single for the rest of his life.

Keyword: regret, existential regret, regret for inaction, literature

1. Introduction

Definitions of literature have varied over time. In Western Europe prior to the 18th century, literature is a term indicating all books and writing. In general sense, literature is a term used to describe works which are considered of having aesthetic sense. In line with it, Klarer (2004: 1) says that in most cases, literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression, with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word.

Literature offers some major forms, as poetry, prose, & drama. Referring to this paper, prose can be defined as any kind of written text that is not poetry (which means drama, discussed below, is technically a type of prose). The most typical varieties of prose are novels and short stories, while other types include letters, diaries, journals, and non-fiction (also discussed below). Prose is written in complete sentences and organized in paragraphs. Instead of focusing on sound, which is what poetry does, prose tends to focus on plot and characters. Dramas are meant to be acted out in front of audience, it is hard to fully appreciate them when looking only at pages of text.

This is often considered the oldest form of literature. Before writing was invented, oral stories were commonly put into some sort of poetic form to make them easier to remember and recite. Poetry today is usually written down but is still sometimes performed. The novel written by Nicholas Sparks is as a beautifully written romance novel talking of relationship of a family. The novel is Sparks's seventeenth novel following the theme of both love and heartbreak.

In *The Best of Me* the characters Dawson Cole and Amanda are a pair of lovers starting from when they were in senior high school. After 20 years, they met again in Tuck's small house in place with which their memories in senior high school came again. Tuck was an old man who met Dawson accidentally when Dawson tried to escape from his father. Dawson got into Tuck's old garage and that was where they got to know each other. They lived together and Tuck was a good man. He took care of Dawson. One day Dawson had grown up and discovered that Tuck had died. Dawson was sad because only Tuck he had at the time. Finally, Tuck handed over the little house to Dawson along with the beautiful garden of Tuck's wife relic. Dawson family had been famous since his grandfather because the Cole's family had moonshiners business and they were known as a cruel criminal family. Dawson Cole, the one member of Cole's family, was a good man and he did not want to imitate the behavior of his big family known to be cruel. He was gentle, friendly, and polite to the surrounding community. But they did not believe in Dawson because he belonged to Cole family. Therefore, Dawson decided to run away from home and chose to stay at Tuck's home. He lived at Tuck's home without his father. He was happy to take care of the house and the garden. Amanda who had free time, decided to visit her teenager home with him. They both spent time together.

The next day, Amanda and Dawson visited Tuck's lawyer and they spread his ashes to Tuck's wife's cabin. They had lunch, discussing, and spending time together, but Amanda had to go home and Dawson still lived at Tuck's home to repair his car. During this time, his cousin, Crazy Ted came to kill him. Crazy Ted had done something like this in an explosion of oil rig, Dawson knew it, they hit each other. Dawson went to a bar by driving his car. When on the street, he met his hordes of cousins and his father. Dawson did not know that beside his car it was his cousin. Dawson's father was in front of Dawson's car and finally he was shot in the head by his own father. At the same time, Amanda's son had an accident and needed a heart, Dawson's heart was finally donated to him. Amanda knew this and she felt so sad.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Regret

According to Zeelenberg & Pieters (2007) regret is defined as an aversive emotion that we experience when we realize or imagine that our current situation would be more favourable if we had chosen differently. As such, regret is defined as a counterfactual emotion due to the accompanying cognitive processes of comparing current outcomes to what 'might have', 'should have', or 'could have' been. Regret also has an element of responsibility, or self blame, and this feature differentiates it from other negative emotions, such as disappointment. According to Landman (1986) regret is one of the kind of emotions related to sorrow caused by disappointment. According to Sugden (1987) regret is counterintuitive which is a countermeasure for the individual to think "if I make other choices", and such a thought is a tendency that exists in the individual, like equating the effects of decisions by making different choices.

2.1.1 Kinds of Regret

According to Van Dijk & Zeelenberg (2002) the kinds of regret is categorized as a cognitive emotion for understanding a person. In this case Van Dijk & Zeelenberg discusses regret as an existential regret and regret of inaction.

a. Existential Regret

Existential regret, defined as a profound desire to go back and change a past experience in which one has failed to choose consciously or has made a choice that does not follow one's beliefs, values, or growth needs.

b. Regret of Inaction

Tykocinski & Pittman (1998) suggests that regrets over inaction may reduce the likelihood that one acts on a subsequent opportunity that is still attractive but less attractive than the one missed earlier. However, we argue that the opposite may happen when the new opportunity is more attractive than the missed one. In that case, the regret experienced over the failure to act may promote action to be taken on the new opportunity.

2.1.2 Causes of Regret

The study of regret since 1982 can be selected, at least, into 4 groups. First, the study that deals with confirming factors (variables). The second deals with the study of comparisons of regret with other specific emotions, such as disappointment, sadness, deep sadness, and contentment (giggling) Third, the study of diverse forms of regret such as hot regret or wistful regret, Fourth, the study of sources of regret in the system and brain structure. Based on these four regret assessment groups, for this article, the writers choose the factors that elicit regret. The group is a current principal in the study of regret (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2007).

a. Avoidance

Avoidance is a style that tends to view conflict as unproductive and little punishing. The negative aspect of this style is that it throws problems at others and sets aside other language or issues that are with drawing or hiding to avoid conflict (Robbins 2002: 215).

In avoidance individuals will tend to shy away when put in that situation that makes him uncomfortable or depressed (Leary 1996).

Avoidance is an action of emptying, vacating, or clearing away. Avoidance is found in the novel as the causes of protagonist regrets. One of the causes of Dawson's regret that is portrayed in the novel is that he has avoided Amanda throughout his life.

b. Inferior

Inferior is an attitude posed from that individual who feel himself lacking inside a thing compared to other people. Insecurity makes individuals, withdraw from the environment and feeling of being isolated from society. This is tied to low self- esteem meaning the feeling of inadequacy. Humans have always wanted to be recognized and accepted by others. One who experiences low self- esteem gets worse in his identity and will be easily dropped in mischief, that is disguised as acceptance.

Inferior is a relatively permanent feeling about inadequacy or the emergence of a tendency to feel less so it cannot shows its optimum abilities, its inferiority must be tempered and may impede the potential of not developing (Tentama, 2012).

The second kind of protagonist regret is that he feels himself inferior and does not deserve to be together with Amanda. He is not good for her, and he is poor and from a broken family.

2.2 Effect of Regret

In general, regret pushes us to change our actions. We recognize that we have made a poor decision and we don't want to make it again. So we change our behaviors in ways that hopefully bring improvement in our life circumstances (Landman, 1987)

2.2.1 Related Studies

There are several studies related to this research. Thesis written by Ernawati (2012) discusses three things, namely; (1) kinds of regrets portrayed in the novel, (2) causes of regret, (3) effects of regret.

Ernawati (2012) presents the theory related to this research in order to support the analysis. It consist of explanation about previous finding and use a narrative approach. The method used in this study is to give description about character. Ernawati (2012) uses descriptive qualitative method in order to describe and explain what have been interpreted from the object of the research. This study contains several similarities with the research conducted by Ernawati (2012). The first is that this study also uses qualitative method and narrative approaches. Ernawati (2012) only mentions the protagonist in the novel as having a regret while the writers reveal regrets of the protagonist in depth, so that it is clearer.

3. Research Method

Research design is a way carried out by the researcher to make the research easy to do. According to Kerlinger (1986; 276), research design in the plan and the structure of the investigation is done to obtain answers to research questions. There is a variety of methods that could be used in a research and every researcher has different research methods (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, research design adopted in this study is descriptive qualitative method because the process of the analysis and the finding are accomplished descriptively.

Kinds of data used in this research are in the forms of words, phrasse, sentences and as oriented to regrets played by the main character Dawson. All the data used are to reveal the problems of regret from the novel *The Best Of Me*, written by Nicholas Sparks. However, any supporting references which can provide valuable information refering to the analysis are also gathered.

4. Result and Discussion

This part presents the analysis of the protagonist's regret in the novel *The Best Of Me* named Dawson Cole. The discussion will be divided into two sub parts, they are the existential regret and the regret of inaction of the protagonist's regret in the novel.

4.1 The Kinds of the Regrets Portayed in the Novel

4.1.1 Exsistential Regret

The first kind of the regret in this novel is existential regret. It is defined as a profound desire to go back and change a past experience in which one has failed to choose consciously or has made a choice that does not follow one's beliefs, values, or growth needs.

This is tied to guilt, an experience in someone connected with emosional response and despair. That feeling of guilt is the emotion of regret that results when one judges one's own behavior as a failure.

“Being together isn’t about a honeymoon. It’s about the real you and me. I want to wake up with you beside me in the mornings, i want to spend my evenings looking at you across the dinner table. I want to share every mundane detail of my day with you and hear every detail of yours. I want to laugh with you and fall asleep with you in my arms. Because you aren’t just someone i loved back then. You were my bestfriend, my bestself, and I can’t imagine giving that up again.” He hesitated, searchin for the right words (Sparks, 2011: 264).

The quotation shows existensial regret experienced by the main character. It is seen from the conversation above, Dawson regrets about his past. He asks how if Dawson and Amanda are still together; it will be so good for them. They can share their happiness together. Even though they have been separated for a long time their love still remains the same. No one can replace Amanda from his heart, while the same case happens to Amanda. She still loves Dawson yet she has got married. The biggest regret of Dawson is he leaves Amanda because he thinks he is not good enough for her.

“But that wasn’t possible. He thought about all the years he’d dreamed of seeing her again; he thought about the future they might never spend together. He didn’t want to give her time, he wanted her to choose him now. And yet he knew that see needed this from him, maybe more he than anything she’d ever needed, and he exhaled, hoping that it might somehow make the words come easier (Sparks, 2011: 266).

The above quotation clearly illustrates how Dawson feels sorry, that he is asking Amanda's permission to leave her at that time, Dawson meets his true love after more than two years and Dawson Cole still loves her, and hopes there is a miracle for him then he wants to come back to Amanda, even though he also knows that there is no way they can be together because Amanda has already got another life. He still wants her in his life, he wants to spend all of his lifetime together with Amanda. Somehow, if they meet, they still keep remembering their past to remind their love together.

He hesitated, searching for the right words. “You might not understand, but I gave you the best of me, and after you left, nothing was ever the same” (Sparks, 2011: 265).

The quotation above clarifies Dawson’s regret. It proves that Dawson love to Amanda. It shows his eternal love. He said that after he left Amanda nothing ever same. He already give all of his best to her, and nothing left for another person. Amanda has changed him to a better person before he met her, she is everything to him that is why even after he left he cannot change her place and keep being single. Yet no one is like her.

4.1.2 Regret of Inaction

Tykocinski & Pittman (1998) suggests that regrets over inaction may reduce the likelihood that one acts on a subsequent opportunity that is still attractive but less attractive than the one missed earlier. However, we argue that the opposite may happen when the new opportunity is more attractive than the missed one. In that case, the regret experienced over the failure to act may promote action to be taken on the new

opportunity. The delay in taking a stance causes the protagonist to lose his love; his lover has married another man.

He'd said good-bye along time ago, and since then he wanted to believe that he had done the right thing. Here and now, though, in the quite yellow light of an abandoned garage, he wasn't so sure. He'd loved Amanda once and he'd never stopped loving her, and spending time with her tonight hadn't changed that simple truth. But as he reached for his case, he was conscious of something else as well, something he hadn't quite expected (Sparks. 2011: 99).

The quotation above shows that Dawson wants to believe that what he has done is right, but he cannot. His love still remains the same to her. He regrets about what he has not done to her and he feels sorry for not staying anything to her. As he leaves, Amanda gets married with another person. That is his biggest regret.

4.1.3 The Causes of the Protagonist's Regret in the Novel

The next point to be discussed in this part is concerned with avoidance, which is also a part of regret.

4.1.3.1 Avoidance

Avoidance is an action of emptying, vacating, or clearing away. Avoidance is found in the novel as the causes of protagonist's regrets. One of the causes of Dawson's regret that is portrayed in the novel is that he has avoided Amanda throughout his life, Dawson's avoidances will be explained from the quotation below:

"I'm just trying to be realistic. This is your life we're talking about. And..I can't be part of it anymore."

"What are you saying?" "I'm saying your parents are right." "You don't mean that. In her voice, he heard something almost like fear. Though he yearned to hold her, he took a deliberate step backward. "Go home," he said. She moved toward him. "Dawson—" "No!" he snapped, taking a quick step away. "You're not listening. It's over, okay? We tried, it didn't work. Life moves on" (Sparks, 2011:35).

The quotation above shows that Dawson's regret is that he does not clarify his relationship with Amanda because he feels inferior and he is depressed at that time. He is depressed because he has to sacrifice for his father; he hands over himself to the police to rescue his father. That is one of the reasons why he chooses to leave Amanda. And Dawson also regrets that he is not there when Amanda's daughter named Bea dies of leukemia at the age of two years. He regrets that he could not hug Amanda when Amanda loses her daughter. But in the end of the story he could prove his love by giving his heart as a donor to her child and save her.

"And you know what? I loved you back then as much as you loved me, but for whatever reason, it wasn't meant to be and it ended. But I didn't end. And you didn't end, either." She put her palms on the table. "Do you really think I want to leave here thinking that you're going to spend the rest of your life alone? Because of me?" He stared at her. "I never asked for your pity." "Then why would you say something like

that?” “I didn’t say much of anything,” he said. “I didn’t even answer the question. You read into it what you wanted to” (Sparks, 2011:91).

From the two quotations above it is very clear that Dawson begins to avoid Amanda because Dawson will not be released for several years. He cuts his relation with Amanda, while forcing her to choose college instead of living with him. Breaking up with Amanda is the best decision instead of staying together. Dawson does not want to continue their relationship. This is so because Amanda's parents do not approve of their relationship. Her parents say that Dawson is from a broken family and is not as rich as they. Therefore, he is not good enough for her. And Dawson chooses a different way to lead his life. He does not want Amanda to be with him in a difficult life.

4.1.3.2 Inferior

The second kind of protagonist’s regret is that he feels himself inferior and does not deserve to be together with Amanda. He is not good for her, as he is poor and from a broken family. Dawson’s inferior described in the novel is discussed below:

She thought about it. “Okay, how about this? What do you remember most about the first summer we were together?” he reached for a set of wrenches, considering the question. “I remember wondering why on earth you wanted to spend time with me.” “I’m Serious.” “So am I. I had nothing and you had everything. You could have date anyone. And thought we tried to lie low, i knew even then that it would only cause you problems. It didn’t make sense to me” (Sparks, 2011: 164).

The quotation above shows how Dawson feels very inferior to Amanda's family. Amanda herself is a child of a respected family, while Dawson is a child from a criminal family. So, Dawson thinks they will never be able to build a life because Dawson himself is not a rich person and he has nothing even for Amanda. Amanda has everything and Dawson has nothing. Dawson is insecure and afraid of the words of Amanda's family so that Dawson leaves Amanda because he knows who he is. And Dawson wants Amanda to choose a partner equal to her.

“Being close to someone, whoever it is, means letting that person, knowing his past. That thought was daunting, he was an ex-con from a family of criminals, and he had killed a good person. Although he has served his sentence and improved since then, Dawson knows. he will never forgive himself for what he has done (Spark, 2011 :62).

The quotation above shows that Dawson feels inferior, he does not want to be close to other people because he is afraid of experiencing his past. He feels insecure because he comes from a criminal family; his father has killed several persons. Eventhough, finally he gives up to rescue his father, no one knows about it and keeps thinking that Dawson is a bad person. And also because he has been in prison. Since then he has improved himself to be better but he still feels inferior when people approach him.

4.1.4 The Effects of Protagonist's Regret in the Novel

The other points that the writers wants to explain in this part is the effects of protagonist's regret in his life.

4.1.4.1 Lying to His Own Feelings

While there is a cause there will also be an effect. One example of effect of regret in protagonist's life is Dawson lies to his own feelings because Amanda is getting married with another man and leaves her.

“He rose and turned out the light, then headed for his car, feeling strangely depleted. It was one thing, after all, to know his feelings for Amanda hadn't changed; it was another thing entirely to face the future with the certainty that they never would” (Spark, 2011 :99).

The quotation above shows that Dawson is late to meet his lover Amanda to confess his love again because he has been lying to his own feelings, and Amanda has got married as Dawson has left her. Amanda is married twenty years back and Amanda has two children from her marriage. Amanda is not destined to marry Dawson. after a long period of separation Amanda is forced to Marry Frank, the man her parents choose, even though basically Amanda does not love the man her parents choose. But she has not another choice andin the end has to marry Frank.

4.1.4.2 Being Single

The other kind of effect of regret that happens to Dawson is he remains single.

“I hardly ever get to the city. “Even on a date?” she quizzed between bites.“I don't really date,” he said.“Ever?”He began to cut his steak. “No” (Spark, 2011 : 90).

The quotation above shows that Dawson never dates any woman after breaking up with Amanda. It is very difficult for Dawson to open his heart to other women, because he only loves Amanda in his life. Eventhough he lies to Amanda about his feelings, but from the bottom of his heart, Dawson loves Amanda until the end of his life. It is evident that during their separation, Dawson is not married and has never dated any woman. Until the end of his life, Dawson is never married. Even he sacrifices his life by giving his heart as a donor to save “Jared”, Amanda's kid as the prove of his love to Amanda.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing the regret in the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks, some conclusion are made. There are two forms of regret depicted in the novel namely avoidance and inferior. Avidance is an action of emptying, vacating, or clearing away. Avoidance is found in the novel as the causes of protagonist's regrets. One of the causes of Dawson's regret that is portrayed in the novel is that he has avoided Amanda throughout his life. The second kind of protagonist's regrets is that he feels himself inferior and does not deserve to be together with Amanda. He is not good for her, as he is poor and from a broken family.

The Best of Me by Nicholas Sparks is worth reading together with all aspects of the novel. From the novel, we can understand the meaning of an opportunity that does not come twice. The novel is heartbreaking with the twists and turns of the drama even

though it is of a heavy theme. This novel has several positive messages, especially the power of love and the importance of someone to us. There we can see two very attractive lovers who have strong chemistry and feelings. There we can see the loyal nature of Dowsen cole, making the best of the time and opportunity. And from this novel we can learn about the meaning of sincerity and loyalty. For other researches, it is recommended that the other topics in the novel such as regrets, friendships, struggles, motivations and other interesting topics could be studied further since they consist of a great number of valuable moral lessons.

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