

DREAD AND DESPAIR IN N.K JEMISIN'S *THE FIFTH SEASON*

Bramanta Apta Sabilillah

English Literature, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
bramanta.17020154055@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengkaji ketakutan dan keputusan tokoh utama dalam novel N.K Jemisin yang berjudul *The Fifth Season* (2015). Studi ini menjelaskan bagaimana ketakutan dan keputusan menyebabkan kegagalan dan keberadaan kehidupan karakter utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori eksistensialisme Kierkegaard. Rasa takut dan putus asa memang menghebohkan tetapi menjadi topik yang mendebarkan dalam diskusi akhir-akhir ini. Essun, karakter utama dalam novel ini, adalah karakter kuat yang telah mengalami banyak kemalangan sejak dia masih kecil. Akibatnya, ia mengalami kegagalan dalam hidupnya dan krisis eksistensial dalam dirinya. Kehancuran hidupnya dimulai dengan kematian putranya, yang dibunuh suaminya. Hal ini berdampak pada masa depannya, di mana masa depannya menjadi berantakan dan menyebabkan kegagalan dalam hidupnya.

Kata kunci— Keputusan; ketakutan; Eksistensialisme; Novel.

Abstract

This paper examined the dread and despair of the main character in N.K Jemisin's novel entitled *The Fifth Season* (2015). This study explained how dread and despair led to failure and the existence of the main character's life. This research used Kierkegaard's theory of existentialism. Dread and despair are horrendous but are a thrilling topic in the discussion lately. Essun, the main character in this novel, is a strong character who has experienced numerous misfortunes since she was a child. As a result, she experienced failure in her life and an existential crisis in herself. The destruction of her life began with the death of her son, whom her husband killed. This impacted her future, where her future became messy and led to her failure in life.

Keywords— Despair; Dread; Existentialism; Novel.

INTRODUCTION

According to Kierkegaard (1813), dread and despair will always exist in humans and are signs of their existence. Stone MH (2017) stated that dread is a desire that exists in humans for what is feared. So essentially, the deep fear in humans is formed from human desire. According to Shanahan L (2019), despair is a condition worse than death, commonly called loss of hope. Death is horrible, but despair is a state where an individual feels how bad the situation befell him, so the individual sees death as a minor threat rather than despair.

Research often found young people who commit suicide because what has happened to them has become very painful and can no longer be endured (Bilsen J, 2018; Miron O, 2019; Jean M, 2020). This does not only happen to young people but every individual. This is strongly supported by the opinion of the father of existentialism, Kierkegaard (1813). He said that dread and despair had

become something that will always exist in humans. In line with the above argument, this study is similar to that Kierkegaard's ideas. The researcher analyzed dread and despair through the main characters in the novel by N.K Jemisin entitled *The Fifth Season*.

The Fifth Season is part one of *The Broken Earth Trilogy*. This novel is the work of N.K Jemisin, the first black woman to break records in a row. With the fiction genre, which combines magical and supernatural elements, this novel has become a winner of prestigious awards such as the Hugo awards. *The Fifth Season* taken place on a planet of unknown origin or name, home to an enormous continent called the Stillness. How the history written on this continent contains land-change activities. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions make life precarious on this continent. Nevertheless, the people who live on this continent must fall and rise to survive. This is because *The Fifth Season* (volcanic winter) tends to recur every few centuries.

This novel depicted the interwoven storyline of three characters who eventually discover that it is the same point of view at a different part of her storyline: Damaya, Syenite, and Essun. Main character is described as a middle-aged person who can control the movement of the ground by diverting heat energy from the surroundings. The owner of this ability is also known as Orogene. Sanzed society is afraid and also wants to exploit this ability of orogene. At the novel's opening, the reader is shocked by the murder of Essun's son when she comes home from work. Her ex-husband Jija also kidnapped their daughter Nassun, so Essun embarked on a journey to retrieve her daughter and avenge her son's death.

This article revealed dread and despairs in the character's life, supporting her downfall and agony in N.K Jemisin's novel. The researcher focused on the main character named Essun. It reveals the dread and despair that occurs in each of her journeys which is described in detail in the novel *The Fifth Season*. It is hoped that the reader can know about dread and despair, which are described in detail in this novel, and is expected to have better knowledge and understanding.

METHOD

This is a literary study that employed an existentialist approach to literature. This study uses note-taking as a research instrument by emphasizing the evidence found in the novel. The research data is taken from the novel by N.K Jemisin entitled *The Fifth Season*. After reading the novel continuously and being interested in reading each story part in the novel, articles and other data related to N.K Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*. The researchers used Kierkegaard's existentialism theory to discover dread and despair in the novel. First, the novel is read and understood efficiently to collect the data related to this research. Then, the researcher compiles all the evidence and information and provides it in the discussion. After the information is delivered, the researcher concludes. As it is known that existentialism is a theory put forward by Kierkegaard, this view makes humans the centre of existence. The researcher analyzed the problem in this novel using existentialism by assessing the dread and despair that occurs in the main character, which leads to her failure and suffering.

RESULTS

A. Dread in Essun's life

Dread itself, is a human desire for the fear that comes from outside us. This is supported by the opinion of

other researchers (Stone MH, 2017; Gregory M. S, 2019; Banfi L, 2021). Who said that dread is a shaking, alienation, and is associated with a very emotional experience. According to their study, this is related to how dread affects the main character in this novel so that she feels her existence is developing in the opposite direction.

The main character is in a state where something lead to an existential crisis and suffering. It is sad how everything that happened to the main character has happened since he was a child. The fact that dreads affect Essun's existence and suffering. Essun had a very great fear of his strength when he was young. It does not end even though she is an adult. Fear of the thoughts of people who consider themselves monsters, how she would hurt people while using her powers, and the fear of organizations that see themselves as mere pet dogs. As noted in the discoveries that many events and evidence are correlated. Dread is something Essun has had since she was little.

Essun has been treated differently from the other kids since childhood. This is interconnected with her strange power that can manipulate the earth's movement. Her childhood was surrounded by people who thought she would become a monster when she grew up. It started in kindergarten. Essun plays with other children, and at one moment, an argument arises between Essun and her friend, which causes her to release her powers (Jemisin: 2015). This made everyone judge that Essun was a monster, and she was exiled to her parents' barn. During alienation, Essun could only be silent and wait for the food to come from her mother. Alienation is in resonance with what was proposed by (Christ O, 2015; Rayce S. B, 2018). Alienation is a separation from the relationship and even itself. Here if related to what happened to the young Essun, she received exile from her parents and does not even know what happened to her and rejects the existence of that power. The author's description of how Essun is treated makes the reader feel the emotions that little Essun obtained when facing it all alone. After being exiled for a long time, a guardian from the Fulcrum arrives who intends to take her out of the barn and facilitate Essun with knowledge and training about her powers.

Essun arrived at The Fulcrum and became one of the training students at the organization. Unexpectedly what Essun received was another horror that was scarier than death. Here Essun is

gathered with her fellows who also have powers called orogenes. They are treated the same as monsters; the difference here is that they are forced to obey to become the perfect weapon and loyal dog for Fulcrum. The Fulcrum owns all of the orogenes; either we obey or not, our life is decided by the Fulcrum (Jemisin: 2015). In this scene, the author tells how Syenite (as Essun was called when she was young) also had misfortune when she had to serve an organization in the name of peace. Syenite was treated like a dog who had to obey the tasks assigned by their superiors. This is because they are monsters if they roam without being controlled by the organization. This makes Syenite feel she is only being treated like a consumable item for the organization's benefit. This is related to dread and despair, which is her misfortune is an endless fear, according to Kierkegaard (1813).

Essun's character development is interconnected between the past and her old age, which is told earlier in this novel as known before that her ex-husband carried out the murder of Essun's child. This is related to Essun's youth, who was full of fear of Fulcrum, plus in his old age, there was a tragedy as well. This dreadful fear is repeated in her old age. As (Adolphs R, 2013; Coelho C. M, 2020; Johnson, L. R, 2016) said that fear will always repeat itself because it is part of human existence. Essun's character growth since childhood was always shrouded in dreads that made her character and existence end in misery. This is a pile of fears that Essun received from when she was little until her old age. Essun becomes a ruthless figure who only aims to get revenge against her husband. The author manages to describe in detail how the turning point in the character becomes obvious through constant fear and suffering.

B. Despair in Essun's life

The researcher focused on presenting all the data that has been found previously about existentialism in N.K Jemisin's novel *The Fifth Season*. The researcher presents the data by displaying in detail the characters' speech. Kierkegaard (1813) divides five existentialist discourses: existence precedes essence, anxiety, dread, despair, freedom, nothingness and alienation, but this time the researcher will only identify dread and despair in this novel through the topic mentioned earlier.

Despair is a desire for what human want or a feeling that our hopes will not be delivered, making us lose our direction and future (Diez Roux A. V, 2017; Hannay A, 2018). Several despair elements make Essun a failure in her life. The first is the death of her son Uche. Essun is a mother who has two children, and her life started well

without any problems, but that all changed when she came home. When she got home, she felt the house was lonely and quiet and saw her son lying on the ground, covered in blood and bruises all over his body (Jemisin:2015). The plot that goes on can be felt in how horror it is. Seeing this, even a mindless beast could feel deep sorrow. In front of her eyes, her son lay weak and helpless and died covered in blood. This blood can also be interpreted as revenge for the perpetrators who did all this "blood for blood." Revenge is a product that comes from anger and hatred through something that happens to the individual (Threadgill, A. H., & Gable, P. A., 2020; van Doorn J, 2018).

The author clearly described the grudge that is fostered in this novel. The depiction of every corner of the room that is quiet and dark makes the illustration very pronounced in the reader's mind. Despair, tension, and sad emotions are mixed into one when the author details the atmosphere that occurred. The failure of Essun's life begins with her son's death and the kidnapping of her daughter Nassun. Readers seem to be reminded again about the death of their first child and the story of their daughter being also kidnapped by her husband or can be called ex-husband. Mother of two children, her son has died, and her daughter has been kidnapped (Jemisin: 2015). In the narration given by the author, the depiction of a character who feels suffering so profoundly with an accident that hits without notice proves that the despair that occurs will never end. Essun screamed in her heart about the murder that happened to her son, which was the turning point for the loss of her humanity. Essun had lost herself in grief; in her eyes, there was only the fire of revenge. Kierkegaard (1813) also says that if someone loses their identity, that is precisely despair. Even though by overturning the fact that her life will not be exemplary after.

The finding that was found next was a thought from Essun's subconscious that said. "I killed him by being his mother"(Jemisin: 2015). This can symbolise how a character is in a state of loss of hope. Resonate with the article, namely a situation where someone thinks the situation is so bad that it creates an entity that she has no life in the future (Rabow, M., & Rawdin, B, 2010; Huen, J. M., Ip, B. Y., Ho, S. M., & Yip, P. S, 2015). Essun, in this case, is described as already in a state unable to do anything. Her son's death prevented her from being separated from evil thoughts. Wrong thoughts lead to her losing hope in seeing the future. Despair was described in detail in

Essun's state like this. With the loss of hope that occurs, it can add facts and evidence. Evidence that despair can lead to failure in one's life.

The failure in life that Essun felt was not only when she became a mother, but in this novel, it is told that she had suffered when she was young too. At a young age, Essun is said to be a weapon and enslaved person to an organization founded by the community. Each of us is a weapon, a helpful beast, sample blood to add to the breeding lines, and we are just fucking monsters (Jemisin: 2015). This organization called Fulcrum aims to accommodate and train special people. Because Essun is a particular person who can move heat energy in the ground, she is trained in organizations with people with the same strength as her. Therefore, all orogenes are worth as enslaved people, and their right to live belongs to the Fulcrum (Jemisin: 2015). In this evidence, it can be said that every orogene (unique human) is a pet to the organization. Orogenes right to live is something that belongs to a superior fulcrum, and they must obey what the head of the organization says without any exception, even if it costs their life. Though no one could challenge this, and no one was brave enough to refute it or defy the orders of Fulcrum. Though, in their hearts, there is a freedom that screams to be expelled. Freedom is the ability to make choices without coercion or outside influence (Chanley J, 2014; Goltz S. M, 2020; Elford G, 2021). This resonates with the situation in this novel which illustrates that orogenes are just a tool by the Fulcrum, but in their hearts, they want to be free.

To conclude, several factors above are why Essun's life falls apart. The endless misfortunes that befell Essun since she was a child are what despair means. Relating to what has been said by Manzi Y (2013), despair will always exist because it also includes the extension that exists in every human being. Humans will never escape from despair, and it surrounds human-like the moon and the earth. From mothers who experience despair over their marriages to children who experience despair because of their schooling, even from the born of a human, despair is everyone's true friend.

DISCUSSION

According to Perry (1989), Existentialism is a very extreme philosophical movement that exemplifies anxiety and uncertainty. Existentialism began in the 19th century (Sartre, 2001: 49; Andayani, 2018). In this article, the researcher will analyze Existentialism using Dread and Despair. Dread and despair will not be separated from human life. The existence of human life is always

shrouded in dread and despair because it has become part of human existence. According to Kierkegaard (1813), dread and despair are something that already exists in every individual, and every person has them because this is part of his existence. Every individual who exists has experienced this. Children to adults will always be shrouded in dread and despair. Even in everyday life, everyone can see and feel how dread and despair occur in each individual—from children who experience the loss of their parents to adults who experience their old age without a family. The misfortune and despair that happens to everyone are evidenced in a journal stating that today's people experience despair more terrifying than death (Bilsen J, 2018; Miron O, 2019; Jean M, 2020). This is evidence that dread and despair are true friends of human existence, and humans cannot be separated from dread and despair.

This article analyzed dread and despair through the novel by N.K Jemisin. Jemisin grew up and was born in New York before becoming a full-time writer as she is now a career counsellor. Jemisin creates his works through books in the fiction genre. With her books, Jemisin has won many titles and made her a writer who has won the Hugo Award for three consecutive years. She has won many titles because of her brilliant works, and how she writes is admired by many other writers. One of her works that used as an analysis material for this article is *The Fifth Season*. *The Fifth Season* is the first volume of *The Broken Earth Trilogy*. This novel was published in 2015, and after one year of publication, this novel was awarded the *Hugo Award* as the best novel in 2016. *The Fifth Season* tells the story of a continent friendly to catastrophes, where the power to shake the ground is used as a weapon, and there is no mercy on this continent. This novel details how a character experiences many events every time in her life. The main character in this novel is named Essun. In this novel, Essun is told from 3 points of view: Damaya, Syenite, and Essun. The first is Damaya when Essun was still young, and this name is the first name that her parents gave her. The second is Syenite, and this name was her nickname when she was training her strength and became a student of The Fulcrum. The Fulcrum is an organization that embodies and facilitates the development of Orogenes. Orogenes is a term for humans who can shake and move the ground. The third is Essun, and this name was taken when she decided to create a new identity where everyone did not know if she was orogenes. Every name in this character has one thing in common,

namely misfortune, which differs only in the time of her life.

The philosophical theory that emphasizes freedom, individual existence, and choice is Existentialism. On the other hand, according to Gokalp N (2012), Human freedom is very influential on existentialism theory. It stated that existence is "self-making in a situation" that every human influential in this. It resonates with a journal article owned by (Chanley J, 2014; Goltz S. M, 2020; Elford G, 2021) which explains that freedom comes from within us without the influence of others. This study defined that individuals have their own story and purpose in life, and even though the universe is irrational, humans should strive to make rational decisions. The question of human existence is focused on this and an impetus for the absence of an explanation of the essence of existence. This also plays a role because if there is no existence of the almighty or other absolute power, the primary way to break the void and find true purpose in life is to embrace its existence.

The researcher explored Existentialism in this article by analyzing the dread and despair in the novel. There are several aspects that researchers will look for to analyze this article. All these aspects will be searched for data through novels that are read in detail and thoroughly. The researcher uses three research papers from other researchers as sources related to Existentialism to help develop this article and can be a reference for further research articles. These three studies are:

R.Asmarani (2014), in the title "Sula's Existential Freedom in Toni Morrison's Novel Entitled Sula," The research conducted by this researcher tells the story of young black women who try to express their freedom of rights. In this case, the researcher aims to interpret the story by analyzing Sula's character and relating it to Existentialism. Therefore, this section discusses literary criticism related to Existentialism. Therefore, the hidden content or aspects of the novel Sula by Toni Morrison will be seen.

B.Sahed (2017), with the title "Existential Humanism in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness," Conrad's representation of characters, settings, women, and themes reflects the tendencies expressed in Jean-Paul Sartre's ideology of Existential Humanism. Therefore, the object of this meditation is to seek Conrad's existential opinion, which has been manifested recently. It uses the Existentialist advance of educated criticism to uncover characters' freedom, responsibility, and absurdity in a meaningless world.

Wójs, Paweł (2018) entitled "Existential Experiences Like Illness - A Case Study Of Gilbert Jonas," This paper will argue about the strategy chosen by the author, which aims to characterize existential experience so that it can be easily presented concerning the category of illness and Gilbert Jonas' struggle with the disease. This strategy presents the similarities between existential experience and illness while at the same time emphasizing that existential experience is not a disease. The researcher refers to the descriptive technique and obtains the data entirely from the novel. The researcher also uses existentialism theory to discover the content of Existentialism in character, especially what happened to Gilbert Jonas.

The similarity of the three research papers above with this article is about how a character struggled to write the destiny of his own accord and have freedom for themselves. The three studies used existentialism as an analytical theory. Linked to this article which also uses existentialism. Then, this article used the research above as an understanding. Furthermore, the research resonates with this article which used an individual to examine how existentialism theory affects people's lives. Existentialism is used for this research because the researcher is interested in the theory of this philosophy. This theory is very suitable if used to analyze a novel by N.K Jemisin entitled *The Fifth Season*. As everyone knows, when someone reads a novel, sometimes there is something stuck in our minds, and sometimes there is a term that is difficult to understand because it contains elements of Existentialism that people's do not use in everyday language. Therefore, many people still do not understand analyzing a novel using this theory, and this research focused on analyzing this novel according to existentialism theory. By analyzing *The Fifth Season* using dread and despair existentialism, reader's can imagine and feel an expression and emotion in the novel and show the hidden beauty of this novel by N.K Jemisin.

In this novel, the researcher also found that the dread and despair that happened to Essun happened in every period of her life. This is very interesting to research. How dread and despair significantly affect the characters. In a research journal by (Stone MH, 2017; Gregory M. S, 2019; Banfi L, 2021), it is proven that dread and despair affect individuals. In this study, it was written that Kierkegaard's view of dread and despair is a

manifestation of fear, emptiness, and irony. Essun's revenge against her husband resonates with research journals discussing that revenge stems from anger and hatred for something that has happened to her (Threadgill, A. H., & Gable, P. A., 2020). Moreover, she has feared the world and its power since she was a child. This resonates with journal articles (Adolphs R, 2013; Coelho, C. M, 2020; Johnson, L. R, 2016) which state that fear exists in humans and will always repeat itself. The horror in the above finding explained how dread and despair affect the character. Things that happen lead to loss of hope and suffering. Loss of hope is another name for despair. Loss of hope is something that affects humans on their judgments in the future. Loss of hope also means that it is a condition where a human being can no longer hope for the future (Rabow, M., & Rawdin, B, 2010; Huen, J. M., Ip, B. Y., Ho, S. M., & Yip, P. S., 2015). The fact that despair led to the destruction of Essun's life so that she could no longer think about her future.

Starting from how dread failed in Essun's life and despair led to Essun's existence and suffering. Despair is a condition that is more severe than death and is often associated with a loss of hope (Diez Roux A. V, 2017; Hannay A, 2018; Shanahan L 2019). This study resonates with what has happened to Essun. Essun's despair has several factors, the saddest of which is how her son lay dead surrounded by blood and bruises all over his body. It is a very gruesome depiction of despair. A mother with two children, one was killed, and the other was kidnapped, depicts a misfortune that repeatedly happened in her life. The misfortune that happened and befell Essun has existed at every time in her life, but this is what researchers say has a massive impact on the destruction of Essun's life. As when Essun was exiled from society because of her power, like an alienation. Alienation is a state of separation of a person from the environment and social relations (Christ O, 2015; Rayce S. B, 2018). The author of this novel understands how to describe the destruction, but she forgets how the failure of life that Essun has is a feeling built since Essun was little. Likewise, when Essun went through her teenage years, society considered her a monster. Fulcrum sheltered her only as a living weapon without being given the right to choose. The author described how there is no happiness in Essun's life. Even Essun could not choose her path in life when she was a teenager, and the writer gave Essun hope when she grew up, but that too was ruthlessly crushed. The right for Essun to be happy is not something the writer likes, or conceivably Essun herself is hated by the writer.

CONCLUSION

This article employed the existentialism theory of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's theory of existentialism is reduced to dread and despair. In Kierkegaard's understanding, dread and despair exist in every human being, and humans will not be separated from them. This article is researched using a novel by N.K Jemisin entitled *The Fifth Season*. The main character in this novel is Essun. Essun is interesting to discuss because his life story in the novel contains endless misfortune and sadness. The sorrow and agony of Essun are related to existentialism. Existentialism is a theory that makes the individual an agent who determines her desires or life without any influence from others. Essun's character is depicted as a woman with superhuman strength who can move earth activity through her energy. This makes her treated as a monster by others. Essun had received undesirable behaviour since she was a child because of this power. With this power, all happiness was taken from him, from childhood happiness to her son's death. With the constant misfortunes that Essun received, she became a completely different person, allowing her to behave beyond reason to get her desire again. Furthermore, this relates to dread and despair, the content of existentialism. Similarly, what Kierkegaard did, namely existentialism is based on an individual, and all decisions come from the relationships and behaviour of each individual without the help of different intensities.

The problem in this article are dread and despair, which lead to failure and suffering in Essun's life. It is explained that with all the misfortune and suffering that befalls her. This resonates with existentialism theory that affects the main character in the novel. Using Existentialism the researcher is interested in concluding the research and analyzing a novel entitled *The Fifth Season* by N.K Jemisin. With this research, the researcher hopes that everyone will be more interested in existentialism and can be used as research that can make it easier for others to get new information about dread and despair in the novel.

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