



ESTHER GREENWOOD MENTAL DISORDER IN SYLVIA PLATH'S NOVEL THE BELL JAR

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the mental disorder experienced by Esther Greenwood as the main character in the novel *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. This study was conducted to reveal the picture of mental disorders experienced by Esther Greenwood by analyzing the symptoms of depression experienced by her. The approach used in this research is literary psychology with qualitative descriptive methods. Based on research using the theory from Lubis (2016), the symptoms of depression character Esther Greenwood in the novel *The Bell Jar* are emotional symptoms, cognitive symptoms, fear symptoms and psychic symptoms.

Keywords: *Depression, Mental Disorders, Literary Psychology, the Bell Jar*

INTRODUCTION

Real-life images are often found in literary works. One of them in the novel, the story presented in a novel is inseparable from the phenomena that occur in real life. Some novels are written based on the true story experienced by the author who then developed ideas so that fictional stories are formed that are able to arouse the reader's imagination. According to Katon and Sullivan's research (1990), it is estimated that 15% to 33% of people actually get sick for emotional reasons: stress, worry, fear, depression, and insecurity. Some complaints such as canker sores, heart disease, insomnia, appendicitis, diabetes, asthma, schizophrenia, digestive diseases, even cancer.

Mental disorders can affect anyone and not infrequently this mental disorder is suffered by famous people, some Hollywood artists are rumored to have experienced mental disorders, one of which is credit and famous singer Selena Gomez. Quoted from people.com (Mazziota 2022), Selena Gomez is known to have experienced depression and panic attacks until she had to do



rehabilitation related to her condition, the actress and singer said that "taking a break from social media is the best decision I have ever made for my mental health." This condition occurs because Selena also suffers from lupus. Her illness had a mental disorder effect on her.

The aspects of mental disorders discussed in this article are focused on the symptoms of mental disorders experienced by the main character. By analyzing the symptoms, the mental disorders experienced by the character can be described, this study discusses the symptoms of mental disorders suffered by the main character through the actions he takes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In a novel certainly consists of intrinsic elements, one of which is a character. According to Abrams in the book (Nurgiyantoro 2015), characters are those depicted in a literary work in the form of a narrative or drama where the reader interacts as someone who has moral, intellectual and emotional qualities of the way they teach something or perform an Action. Literary psychology according to (Minderop 2018) is a study of literary works that are believed to reflect psychiatric processes and activities.

Rathus (1999) said that people who experience depression generally experience disorders that include emotional states, motivation, functional, and behavioral movements of cognition. According to Alkinson (1991) depression as a mood disorder characterized by *taka da* hope and heartbreak, excessive helplessness, and lack of life spirit, always tense, and attempted suicide. Symptoms of depression are a set of behaviors and feelings that can specifically be classified as depression. A person does not have to have all the symptoms to be diagnosed with depression. However, the more symptoms of depression, the stronger a person experiences a mental disorder called depression.

Lubis in her book (Dr. Namora Lumangga Lubis 2016) generally grouped the symptoms of depression through three aspects:

1) Physical Symptoms

Broadly speaking, there are some common physical symptoms that are relatively easy to detect, such as symptoms of sleep patterns, decreased activity levels, decreased work efficiency, decreased work productivity, and easily feel tired and sick.

2) Psychic Symptoms



Signs of psychic symptoms include loss of self-confidence, sensitivity, feeling useless, feelings of guilt and feelings of burden,

3) Social Symptoms

Depression associated with social symptoms is usually related to a person's social problems when interacting with the surrounding environment. Lubis (Dr. Namora Lumangga Lubis 2016) stated that this problem is not a conflict, but other problems such as feeling inferior, embarrassed, anxious if you are among the group and feel unable to be open and actively establish relationships with the environment even if the opportunity arises.

According to the NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health), sadness is only a small part of the symptoms of depression. The pamphlet, (Health 2018) mentions symptoms and signs of depression, including:

- a. Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism accompanied by a persistent sorrowful, nervous, or “empty” mood.
- b. Irritability, frustration, or restlessness are common feelings.
- c. Guilt, a sense of worthlessness, or a sense of helpness.
- d. Loss of pleasure or interest in hobbies or activities.
- e. Reduce energy, tiredness, or a feeling of being “slowed down”.
- f. Concentration, memory, or decision-making difficulties.
- g. Sleep disturbances, early morning awakenings, or oversleeping.
- h. Appetite shifts or unintentional weight gain.
- i. Aches and pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive disorders that persist despite treatment and have no evident physical explanation.

If you draw conclusions from the theory above, it actually mentions a lot of similarities like depression. Just like NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health), it directly mentions symptoms without classifying them. In contrast, the symptoms mentioned by Lubis are almost the same as those mentioned by NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) but Lubis divides the symptoms into several categories.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative research methods of descriptive type analysis. In the book (Prof. Dr. Lexy J. Moleong 2018), Boglan and Taylor describe qualitative methodology as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from the people and behaviors observed. Satori and Komariah (Satori and Komariah 2013), explain



that qualitative research has the nature of explaining in reality formed by words based on relevant analysis and data collection techniques.

Based on the above opinion, this study produced data in the form of words written from personality and behavior observed in the novel, and explained for exposure and explanation based on relevant data acquisition techniques. Researchers use descriptive methods of analysis because the data studied is a description or phrase that is all formed in the arrangement of sentences. The data relates to the mental disorders of the main character who is described to answer the formulation of problems that have been determined in the previous chapter.

This research approach uses a literary psychology approach. Using a psychological approach in a literary work deals with psychological problems. As Minderop said: There are three ways that are done to understand the relationship between psychology and literature, namely a) understand the psychiatric elements of the author as a writer, b) understand the psychiatric elements of the figures in literary works and c) understand the psychiatric elements of the reader. (Minderop 2018).

This research corresponds to b) understanding the psychological elements of figures in literary works. Researchers used a literary psychology approach to uncover the mental disorders of Esther Green Wood's novel *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Esther Greenwood has a mental disorder in the form of depression. Esther Greenwood's description of depression in the novel *The Bell Jar* is known through symptoms that researchers found based on theories from the NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) and Lubis. From all the theories that researchers make the basis in the process of data analysis, show that experts mention the same symptoms in someone who is experiencing depression.

The data that the researchers found showed some symptoms of depression that matched the theory used.

1. Physical Symptoms

Researchers analyzed physical symptoms in Esther Greenwood's character using theories from Lubis and NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health), symptoms found among others:



Data 1

For a minute I was tempted. The show certainly did seem stupid. I have never cared for furs. What I decide to do in the end was lie in bed as long as I wanted to and then go to central park and spend the day lying in the grass, the longest grass I could fine in that bald, duck-ponded wilderness.

I told Doreen I would not go to the show or the launcheon or the film premiere, but that I would not go to Coney Island either, I would stay in bed. After Doreen left, I wondered why I couldn't go to the whole way doing what I should any more. This mad me sad and tired. Then I wondered why I couldn't go to the whole way doing what I shouldn't, the way Doreen did, and this make me even sadder and more tired. (Plath 1966)

In the monologue by Esther Greenwood, Esther clearly likes activities that do not involve others. Behavior that indicates a loss of interest in the activity is found in the sentence "What I decide to do in the end was lie in bed as long as I wanted.." Esther finally decided to lie in her bed for as long as she wanted.

Data 2

It seemed silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the next. It made me tired just to think of it. I wanted to do everyting once and for all and be through with it. (Plath 1966)

In the monologue, Esther showed passive behavior and was easily tired even though she had not done any meaningful activity. Every thought of it just made him feel tired.

2. Psychic Symptoms

Data 1

*"Hallo", I said conversationally, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "my name is Esther, what's your name?"
The women didn't stir, just stared up the ceiling. I felt hurt. I thought maybe Valerie or somebody had told her when she first came in how stupid I was. (Plath 1966)*



Data 1 showed symptoms of decreased mood, where Esther felt hurt. He feels a loss of confidence because he tends to look at everything from the negative side including judging himself.

Data 2

At the opposite end of the room, Joan was wolfing her spam and boiled tomato with great appetite. She seemed perfectly at home among these women and treated me coolly, with a slight sneer, like a dim and inferior acquaintance.

I had gone to bed right after supper, but then I heard the piano music and pictured Joan and Deedee and Loubelle, the blonde wowan, and the rest of them. Laughing and gossiping about me in the living room behind my back. They would be saying how awful it was to have people like me in Belsize and that I should be in Wymark instead. I decide to put a lid n their nasty talk. (Plath 1966)

Data 2 showed symptoms of mood decline, where Esther felt upset because Joan felt suitable to be there with Deedee and Loubelle. Esther is so sensitive that normal events are viewed from different points of view and even misinterpreted. Esther assumes they laughed and gossiped about her in the living room.

3. Social Symptoms

Data 1

*I tired to decide which one of them had spoken. I hate saying anything to group of people. When I talk to group of people I always have to single out one and talk to him, and all the while I am talking I fell the others are peering at me an taking unfair advantage. I also hate people to ask cherrfully hoe you are when they know you're feeling like hell and expect you to say "Fine".
"I feel lousy". (Plath 1966)*

Data 1 shows that Esther felt uncomfortable communicating normally with a group of people. Esther is not able to be open and establish a relationship with the environment even if there is an opportunity.



CONCLUSION

The symptoms of the feeling disorder experienced by Esther are characterized by physical symptoms, psychic symptoms and social symptoms. Symptoms shown by Esther include decreased activity levels, easily feeling tired, losing confidence, sensitivity and feeling uncomfortable to communicate with groups of people. Nevertheless, at the end of the story Esther remains in control of her.

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