
Hedonism Portrayed in Tony Kushner's Play Script "Angels in America"

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Abstract

This study aimed to discover and explained the hedonism of the main characters in Tony Kushner's play script entitled "Angels in America". The data sources used in this study was the play script of "Angels in America". The writer used descriptive qualitative research method through Sociological approach. Data were obtained by using the techniques of reading, noting, and analyzing. While in classifying and analyzing the data, the writer used Weijer's theory of Hedonism. The writer found 20 data of hedonism which were divided into 2 types of hedonism. The first type was hedonistic egoism with 10 data and the second type was value hedonism with also 10 data. The findings also included the factors that cause hedonism such like life style, personal problems, medicine, ego, and homosexuality then the impacts which were medicine addicted, aggression, being out of control, egoism and illness.

Keywords: Hedonism, Sociology, Play Script



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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works is the result of author's imagination whether it come from true events and fictional thoughts. Moody (1962) states that literature is something come from human feelings, of arranging words in pleasing pattern of expressing in words some special aspect of human experience. It usually set down in printed characters in paper for the reader to read, though some forms of it performed on certain public occasions.

Hedonism is a life style where people live by maximize pleasure and minimize pain. All hedonistic theories identify pleasure and pain as the only important elements of whatever phenomena they are designed to describe. Edwards (1967) explains that hedonism make pleasure as the goal of life and only pain is the thing to avoid. Hedonists define pleasure and pain generally, such as physical and mental aspects are involved. In other words, pleasure is understood broadly below, as including or as included in all pleasant feeling or experience: contentment, delight, ecstasy, elation, enjoyment, euphoria, exhilaration, exultation, gladness, gratification, gratitude, joy, liking, love, relief, satisfaction, Schadenfreude, tranquillity, and so on. Pain or displeasure too is understood broadly below, as including or as included in all unpleasant experience or feeling.

The writer chose Tony Kushner's play "Angels in America" as the object of the research. Angels in America is a gay fantasia on national themes is a play in two parts by American playwright Tony Kushner. The work won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer prize for play script, the Tony award for best play, and the play script desk award for outstanding play. The writer identifies the hedonism aspects in this play. Hedonism has become a complex issue in modern era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In conducting this research, the writer used some previous studies as references and to support the research. The writer also utilized some other sources such as articles and books that related to this study.

2.1. Previous Studies

In conducting this research, the writer selected five related previous study as references for this research.

Setyaningrum (2018) who studied *Hedonism as Reflected in Hemingway's Snow of Kilimanjaro*. The research deals with the hedonism in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* short story by Ernest Hemingway. The writer used hedonism as the main theory. The objectives to find the hedonism values and the influence of hedonism from the main character of the short story. The study was conducted by applying descriptive qualitative research. The result of the analysis to answer the research question showed that from seven kinds of hedonism, there were five kinds that were found in the short story.

Valufi (2020) who studied *Types of Hedonism on the Main Character Sir Walter Elliot in the Novel Persuasion by Jane Austen*. This research used descriptive qualitative method because all data were in the form of sentences. The writer used a philosophical approach and analyzes data using Weijers' theory as the main theory. The results of this study found that Sir Walter Elliot performed two types of hedonism, namely aesthetic hedonism and selfish hedonism.

Ridho (2020) who studied *Hedonism practices as reflected through main character of wolf of the wallstreet movie*. This research used descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. The data were taken from the main character dialogues in *The Wolf of Wall Street* movie. The result of the research showed that there were five types of hedonism practices found in the main character dialogues of *The Wolf of Wall Street* movie, they were folk hedonism, value and prudential hedonism, motivational hedonism, hedonistic egoism, and hedonistic utilitarianism.

Desriyani (2015) who studied "*The Relationship Between Self Esteem-and Hedonism Lifestyle and Body Image*". Subjects in this study were 80 female employees who work in the company of coal. Sampling using purposive sampling technique with specific criteria. The results showed there was a positive and significant relationship between body image and self-esteem with a significant value was $0.000 < 0.05$, which means there was a significant correlation. The correlation coefficient body image and self esteem of 0.601 strong. $n > 0.015 < 0.05$, which means there was a significant correlation. Significant value between body image and lifestyle of hedonism, a significant value significantly between self-esteem with a lifestyle of hedonism was $0.025 < 0.05$, which means there was a significant correlation.

Suartini (2019) who studied "Hedonism and culture toward impact of shopping behaviour. The data used in this study were primary data by distributing questionnaires to 100 MSME consumers in Bali. The data analysis technique used is path analysis (path analysis) with SmartPLS software version 3.0.m3. The results of the t-test in this study indicate that the hedonism behavior variable has a significant effect on Balinese cultural culture with t-statistic of $0.809 > t\text{-table } 1.97$ and the value of p-values was $0.000 > 0.05$. The effect of hedonism behavior on buying interest was positive and significant with statistic value of 1.037 t-value of table 1.97 and p-value of values of $0.000 < 0.05$. The adjusted R-Square value for Balinese cultural variables only explained 74.2% of the hedonism behavior variable. The construct of

buying interest was only explained at 69.7% of the Balinese cultural construct. The calculation results Q Square can be seen that the value of 0.798 was higher than 0 which means that the model has a good predictive value of relevance.

After studying all the previous studies above, there were some similarities such as approach and theory. The writer concluded that there were still many aspects that have not been discussed, such as the factors for the occurrence of hedonism, how hedonism was described and its types. The writer wants to conduct a research by examining the types, causal factors and portrayal of hedonism by using play script by Tony Kushner entitled *Angel in America*. The object of the research is what made this research different from other studies of hedonism.

2.2. Research Theory

The word "hedonism", known as (*hēdonē*) came from Greek word means pleasure, refers to some related theories about what is good for humans, the right behaviour for humans, and what motivates humans to behave in the way that according to who they are. All hedonism theories identify pain and pleasure as two important elements of whatever phenomena they are designed to explain. If hedonistic theories identified pleasure and pain as two important elements, instead of the important elements of what they are describing, then they would not be as unpopular as they all are. According to Veenhoven (2003) said that hedonism refers to the way of life, characterized by how people seek pleasure. Hedonism is also a kind of moral values that appreciated enjoyment. As stated by Schwartz (2006), human wants what is important for them in their lives and it can be said as pleasure. Value is a motivational construct which made human tries to get the desirable goal in their life.

Watt (2001) states that the issues in sociology and literature are the same. Literature, like sociology, deals with human beings in society and how human want to fit in order to transform society. Thus, the literary work could be regarded as an attempt to recreate the social world of human relationships with family, environmental, political, state, economy, and so was also a matter of sociology. Swingwood and Laurenson (2003) said that while there are some gaps between sociology and literature, it might be able to explain the essence of literary texts.

Play scripts is a composition of prose or poetry that was transformed into a performance on stage. The story progresses through interactions between its characters and ends with a message for the audience. The six Aristotelian elements of play were, plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song. The primary two were the most vital aspects according to Aristotle.

3. METHOD

This research used qualitative descriptive research method. According to Blaxter (1996) Qualitative research is one of the types of research. It can scientifically describe events, people, and other things without using numerical data. The aim of qualitative research was to express our point of view and study through words and other behaviour such as interpretation, explanation, and observation. In addition, Blaxter argues that qualitative data is based on research that focus on understanding and meaning through verbal narratives and descriptions rather than numbers

The main data of this research were words, phrase or sentences taken from Tony Kushner's play script *Angels in America* the first and the second act. This play was published in

1991 by Theatre Communication Group. This play consisted of 278 pages. The other source comes from related books, journal and articles that were related to this research and used as the supporting data.

The writer would read and study the object of analysis which the play script of *Angels in America* several times to get a better understanding about the object of the study. The writer used noting and quoting method in order to select the data from the object. Then, the writer identifying the data using appropriate theory. The theory used in this research was Weijers theory that hedonism consists of 6 types they were: folks hedonism, value hedonism and prudential hedonism, motivational hedonism, normative hedonism, hedonistic egoism and hedonistic utilitarianism. In analyzing the data, the writer used sociological approach and theory of hedonism by Weijers. The data would be explained through qualitative descriptive method.

4. RESULTS

In accordance with the objective of this study, the writer divides the data findings into two parts. The first is the types of hedonisms and how hedonisms were portrayed found in Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* and the second is factors and the impact of hedonism to the main characters in Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America*. The following is a list of the types of hedonisms and how hedonisms were portrayed:

4.1 Types of Hedonisms and How Hedonisms Were Portrayed Found in Tony Kushner's Play "Angels in America".

The writer found data of hedonism portrayed in the script. The data consists into 2 types of hedonism which were hedonistic egoism and value hedonism.

Hedonistic Egoism

Data 1: "I have to finish painting the bedroom". The writer concluded the first data as hedonistic egoism type because when the character who named Harper was asked to move to other town in order to get better life, she refused simply because she wanted to finish painting her bedroom. From this data it could be seen that the aspect of hedonism here was the happiness the main character got from doing the thing she likes to do. In this case she refused something more promising and kept on doing the thing that made her happy.

The data above match the definition of hedonistic egoism in which the main character rather stayed on her place to do what she likes and made her happy rather than moving to somewhere new even when that place could offer her a better life. She ignored her friend desire who wanted to move there with her. The aspect of hedonistic egoism in this data was because the main character refused to move on even there would be something better for her.

Data 6: "I was out of cash; it was an emotional emergency". The writer concluded this data as hedonistic egoism. In this data it was explained that the main character who named Prior, he stole something because at that time he was out of money and he needed the thing he stole so badly at the moment. This data showed that the condition where they really need something, people can do anything in order to reach what they wanted even it considered to illegal action they would not make an excuse to reach their pleasure.

From the data above, it was obviously seen that the main character did not feel any shame when he stole something because he even dares to tell his stealing story to other people. This fact proved that this data hedonistic egoism because the main character only cares about what

made him happy or what could fulfil his pleasure and obeyed other people's happiness.

Data 13: "You're a nurse, give me something I don't know what to do anymore". In this data it was portrayed that the main character who named Louis was in a hospital and he was asking the nurse to give him something which was medicine to reduce the pain he felt. What made this data a hedonistic egoism was the way she asked the nurse for medicine. He said as if a nurse was the one who responsible for the pain that he felt and he mentioned it as if a nurse knows how exactly how to make him felt better.

The writer concluded the data above as hedonistic egoism because from the way the main character asked the nurse, it could be seen that the main character did not care about what the nurse would feel he only care to what would make him reach his pleasure even it would sacrifice other's happiness. All the explanation above match to the definition and characteristic of hedonistic egoism.

Value Hedonism

Data 3: "None. One. Three. Only three". The main character who named Harper were asked by her friend whether she took pills or no. At first she said no but later she admitted that she consumed three pills already. She consumed pills in order to reduce her stresses. This type of data could be considered as value hedonism because the main character continuously consumed pills to get out from her problems. This was a lifestyle which made medicine as way out of problems. The value from the medicine was the pleasure for the main character. The aspects that made this data hedonism was the life style of the character to consume pills.

Data 5: "I have emotional problems. I took too many pills". The main character who named harper admits that she took too many pills because of her emotional problems. The main character used drugs as the answer of her problems and the pleasure of drugs was what the main character seek. This data can be classified as value hedonism because the main character believes that by consuming pills or drugs she could go out of her problems. This fact match to the definition of value hedonism believes that even it leads to nothing. That characteristic of hedonism was clearly portrayed in this data because the main character's drugs abuse.

Data 7: "These pills you keep alluding to". This data portrayed a character named Prior asking about the pills consumed by Harper. Harper took these pills to reduce the stress she felt. The hedonistic aspect of this data was in the part where Harper takes pills. This was an example of an instant action taken by someone to achieve satisfaction. In this case, the character named Harper pursued the effects offered by the pills took. This was what made this data a value hedonism

4.2 The Factors and Impact of Hedonism to The Main Characters in Tony Kushner's Play "Angels in America".

Based on the result of the data analysis There were five factors that caused hedonism in this play namely life style, personal problems, medicine, homosexuality and ego. Personal problems and medicine were the most dominant reason for the factors that caused hedonism to the main character of the play script. The causes of hedonism must be followed with impact. The discussion result shows that the factors that caused hedonism on the main characters. There were 5 impacts that were caused by hedonism toward the main characters first was medicine addicted, second was aggression, third was being out of control, The fourth impact was egoism and the last was illness.

5. DISCUSSION

There were two types of hedonism used in the play script of *Angels in America* which were hedonistic egoism and value hedonism. The first was hedonistic egoism which consisted of 10 data. According to Weijer's theory, Hedonistic Egoism was a hedonistic form of egoism, which holds that one could do whatever was most in one's own interests morally. The writer applied the definition on the data then explained the data through descriptive qualitative method and the second was value hedonism which also consisted of 10 data. Weijers defined that this type of hedonism explains as all pleasure was valuable and should be pursued even if it did not lead to any benefit. This theory the writer applied the definition to the data and explained the data through descriptive qualitative method. So it could be said both types of hedonism were dominant because the data were shared equally for both types of hedonism.

The factors that cause hedonism on the main character of the play such as lifestyle, which portrayed when the main characters wanted to move to a bigger city to get a better life. Personal problems, which are portrayed when the main characters fight each other as an example the part where Harper got mad because she found that her husband was a gay. The next factor was medicine which became a way out of problems for the characters. For example, character who named Harper consumed medicine because she had anxieties, mental problems. By consuming Valium regularly and even sometimes she took too much pills of Valium in a day but that was the only thing that could make her feel better. The next factor was homosexuality. The writer concluded that homosexuality as a part of hedonism because the characters pursued the pleasure from being gay. Then ego which portrayed when the main characters refused things that did not like and only accepted the good things according to them. The theory by Weijers were applied by matching the definition of hedonism and the result of factors and impacts. All of these factors and impact were appropriate to the theory of Weijers about hedonism such as sacrificing other's happiness and pursuing the pleasure with no benefit at all.

The explanation above, shows that there were five aspects that caused hedonism in this play namely life style, personal problems, medicine, homosexuality and ego. Personal problems and medicine were the most dominant reason for the factors that caused hedonism to the main character of the play script.

The causes of hedonism must be followed with impact. The discussion result shows that the factors that caused hedonism on the main characters, the writer found that there were 5 impacts that were caused by hedonism toward the main characters. The first was medicine addicted by the main characters that portrayed in the play script for example, when the main character consumed too much pills to forget problems. Second was aggression which was portrayed when the main character became racist against other character. Third was being out of control which was portrayed when the main characters needed something, then decided to steal because he was out of cash. The fourth impact was egoism when the main characters refused follow other character's suggestion even it was for his own good. The last was illness. In this play script it was portrayed that the main character got infected with AIDS as the result of his homosexuality.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The data results revealed there were two types that found from the play script of *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner. The data were hedonistic egoism and value hedonism. There were no dominated types of the data because the data were shared equally for both types of

hedonism.

The factors that caused hedonism and the impact of hedonism toward the main characters. There were five factors that caused hedonism such as life style, abusement medicine, homosexuality, personal problems and ego. While the impacts of hedonism there were five such as aggression which were portrayed when the main characters argue and up fighting, out of control which were portrayed the main characters had an hallucination, egoism which were portrayed as the caused of ego by the main characters, medicine addicted when the main character consumed too much pills to forget problems, The last was illness. In this play script it was portrayed that the main character got infected with AIDS as the result of his homosexuality.

Based from the overall result of the research, the writer will like to suggest for those who are interested in analyzing literary works especially play script, the phenomenon of hedonism can be an alternative issue to be analyze because in modern era, hedonism becomes a big issue in the life of human beings. The writer also hopes this thesis will become a reference for the next researcher who wants to conduct research with sociological approach to identify hedonism in literary works.

The result of this research findings contained sociological aspects that portrayed in the data such as life style of the characters, the way the characters socialize, and the environment that influenced the characters, things that caused the characters to practice hedonism such as mental problems and homosexuality. The writer expected this thesis to be utilized and can become reference to others in learning sociology and its approach and to achieve deeper understanding about sociology in literature.

Finally, the writer hope that this thesis can be useful and be a precious knowledge for all, in developing and enhancing critical thinking skills and ability to analyze and interpret literary works and also becoming more comfortable with examining social issues that appeared in literature especially for the students of English Department around the world.

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