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OPENING STUDENTS' AWARENESS ON ABORTION: A MIMETIC READING ON HEMINGWAY'S *HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS*

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Abstract

In some certain literary text the issues relating to character building such as faithfulness, responsibility, honesty, tolerance and many others, are often exposed. However, the question is how the lecturer or teacher can employ the literary texts in such a way that he or she is able to bring the students into the experience of character building. This challenge arouses me to discuss and share how literary text gives contribution in character building. This article will discuss how a mimetic reading of Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills like White Elephants" can be employed to open the students' awareness on the issue of abortion. A mimetic reading views literary work as an imitation, reflection, or representation of human life. Through this reading technique, "Hills like White Elephants" shows students not only what abortion is like, but also what individuals feel about it, what they hope from it, and how they make an effort to escape from it or cope with it. As this short story doesn't present the issue of abortion from the point of view of black and white or moral instruction, it enables students to reflect and share their attitude towards the issue of abortion based on the human experience they analyze in the text. Students are enriched with what the characters face, feel, hope, and experience, and they will use it wisely to respond the issue of abortion.

Keywords: Literature, mimetic reading, human experience

LITERATURE AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

The issue of character building has lately got much attention amongst educators, government officers, teachers, lecturers, parents, and legislators. Education will be considered successful if it shifts the students' behavior and attitude in facing their life and its dynamic. Successful teaching also means that it changes the students' narrow paradigm into broad knowledge and awareness. Problems facing many nations such as racism, sexism, trafficking, gender bias, violence, riot, disintegration, social gap, religious sentiment, genocide, hostility, cheating, intrigue, corruption, or assassination are suspected as a result of the failure in character education.

Especially in Indonesia, teaching morality has been done to students since they were in elementary schools. The subjects such as religion, morals, civics, Pancasila education, and other local subjects are expected to solve the problem concerning with the character building. However, many people still complain about its ineffective result of these subjects. Violence,

disrespect, lack of manners, and bullying have grown from time to time in spite of these kinds of subjects of character education. Some experts on education suspect that these subjects only develop students' cognitive aspect. The other possible cause is, some others experts state, that teachers and lecturers might employ inappropriate teaching method. A lot of discussion has been held to celebrate and emphasize how character education or character building through education plays a very important role in developing the country and civilizing, or more precisely, humanizing the mankind.

Since the ancient time literature had been strategic means in shaping human civilization. Plato (427-347 B.C.), who once condemned poets for producing art which he considered nothing more than a copy of copy of untrustworthy intuition as he wrote in his *The Republic*, recanted the total banishment of the poets from society. He was aware that poetry could perform the function of singing the praises of loyal Greeks or victors of the state. In spite of his warning that artists and their craft should be censured, Plato believed that if poets were the supporters of the state, they could be employed to shape politics, morality, and public view. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) in his *Poetics* stated that a work of art is an imitation of nature and reflect a high form or art exhibiting noble characters and noble deeds which give the readers or audience pleasure. A Roman philosopher Quintus Horatius Flaccus, or simply called Horace (65-8 B.C.) stated that the aim of Literature is "dulce et utile" to be sweet and useful. The best writing is to teach and delight. Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) declared that poetry is art of imitation (mimesis or representing). Poetry above all other arts and science embodies truth. Mathew Arnold (1822-88) claimed that literature reflected the society with its values and concern. According to William Wordsworth (1770-1850) poet was a man endowed with more lively sensibility, enthusiasm, and tenderness who had greater knowledge of human nature. Henry James (1843-1916) was of the opinion that novel was a personal, direct impression of life and constituted its value greater or less according to the intensity of impression.

Nowadays some educators who concern themselves in character education still believe that literature teaching can contribute character building. There is some various elements among researchers in formulating character. Lickona (1991:337) offers a slightly more comprehensive list, which includes responsibility, respect, tolerance, prudence, self-discipline, helpfulness, compassion, cooperation, courage, honesty, fairness, and democratic values. According to Weaver (1994:33-34) literary characters have almost the potential for influencing the reader as the real people with whom a reader might share reading experience. Meanwhile, children's literature provides an effective vehicle for interweaving character education into existing curricula to address problems in everyday life (Schmidt and Palliotet, 2001). Good literature can do more than transmitting values, it can also help to develop virtue because literature allows students to rehearse moral decisions. It is also broadening as students will identify with the characters in the stories and develop empathy for others and are drawn out of self-centeredness. Literature opens windows into the lives of people whose situations are very different from their own (Bennet, 1993). An advantage of using literature in building character is that teaching is neutral, and not perceived by the pupils as judgmental or condemning. It means that educators let the literature do the teaching (Curry, 2000).

I am also the one who still believes that teaching literature can be employed to contribute the character building. In this paper I am going to share my experience of teaching Prose, in this case short story entitled "Hills like White Elephants" (1927) written by Ernest Hemingway and how reading and understanding the significance of this short story can be used as a tool of character building. What I mean by character building here is not improving the ethical performance at once but knowledge or awareness of human life experience which will become

consideration, contemplation, and deep thought in making a decision, especially a decision concerning with the issue of abortion. Using mimetic reading and considering literature as human life experience, students will get new insight and paradigm in viewing and responding the issue of abortion.

LITERATURE AND MIMETIC READING

To understand how literature teaching can contribute character building, it's necessary to grasp what literature is. Literature can be defined as imaginative and creative writing (oral works that can be written) which has some certain qualities (mirroring the author's world, artistic elements, and aesthetic values) and represents human experience. Literature also refers to the practice and profession of writing. It comes from human interest in telling a story, in arranging words in artistic forms, in describing in words some aspects of human experiences. Literature is characterized by beauty of expression and form and by universality of intellectual and emotional appeal. Literature shows us not only what a society is like in a certain age, but also what individual feel about it, what they hope from it, and how they can change it or escape from it (Bressler, 1999:9-12). The important thing that should be underlined from the above definition is that literature represents human experience and shows the description of society and individual's thought, paradigm, perspectives in coping with life. These things will enlarge and broaden students' background knowledge.

People need to read literature for two reasons, pleasure and knowledge (Bressler, 1999:12-13). Bressler stated that the study of literature firstly should begin and end in pleasure. Modern life is full of pressure. It is people's common desire to seek temporally relaxation from the stress in life. Secondly literature gives readers an insight into the tradition, custom, beliefs, attitudes, folklore, values of the age in which it is written.

Perrine (1974:3-4) divided literature into two types, escape literature and interpretive literature. Escape literature, stated he, is that written purely for entertainment, to help readers pass the time agreeably, while interpretive literature is written to broaden and deepen and sharpen our awareness of life. Escape literature takes us away from the real world: it enables us temporarily to forget our troubles. Interpretive literature takes us, through the imagination, deeper into the real world: it enables us to understand our troubles. Escape literature has its only object pleasure, while interpretive literature has its object pleasure plus understanding.

To understand the further what literature is, Barnet (1994:9) suggest comparing between reading newspaper and literary text such as novel or short story. Barnet claimed that reading narrative in newspaper means the readers come across a story of, let's say' a subway accident. The readers assume that the account is true, they read it for the information of relatively unusual event. Any one hurt? What sort of people? In our neighborhood? Whose fault? However, when people read literary text, they do not expect to encounter literal truths. They read novels or short story not for facts but for pleasure and for some insight or for a sense of what an aspect of life means to the writer.

The way readers view literary text plays important roles in understanding its significance and interpretation. Finding the significance and interpretation here means, like what Abrams stated (1981:35), defining, classifying, analyzing, and evaluating works of literature. According to Abrams (1981:35-37) the traditional practice of understanding works of literature is divided into four. They are mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective criticism. Mimetic criticism views literary work as an imitation, reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is that of the "truth" of its representation to the objects it represents or should represent. Pragmatic criticism views the work as something which is

constructed in order to achieve certain effects on the audience, such as aesthetic pleasure, instruction, or emotion, and it tends to judge the value of the work according to its success in achieving that aim. Expressive criticism treats literary texts primarily in relation to the author. Text is an expression of feelings or products of imagination operating in his or her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, and it tends to judge the work by its sincerity, genuineness and adequacy of writer's vision or state of mind. Objective criticism approaches the work as something which stands free from poet, audience, and the enviroing world. It describes the literary product as a self-sufficient object which is to be judged by intrinsic criteria such as complexity, coherence, integrity, and its interrelation of its component.

OPENING STUDENTS' AWARENESS ON ABORTION: MIMETIC READING ON HEMINGWAY'S "HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS"

It is true that students' discussing ethics and morals teaching in literature will not automatically result in improving their behavior. While some students may learn much from reading literary text and are able to use the values they get from the text to cope with their life, other students may not be touched by anything while they read the literary work. However, one thing that they cannot avoid is that they are exposed with how society looks like and how human experience their life and its problem: what they feel, what they expect, how to escape from it, and how to cope with it. The other thing is that the human experience in the literary text will enlarge and broaden the students' knowledge. This knowledge will influence every decision they make.

The first thing that the teachers or lecturers should do in teaching character education through literature is choosing the text which is able to open the students' awareness and knowledge on some strategic issue concerning with character building. Secondly, the lecturers and teachers must be sure that all students read the text, every part of the text, every single sentence and word and understand the text. Thirdly, the students should be convinced that the literary text is reflection or imitation or representation of the world and human life. So, mimetic reading is the unavoidable technique to approach the text. The students will be enlightened and enriched by what happens in the text and some possible actions, decisions, choices, paradigm, views, behavior, or attitudes. What human feels, expects, and chooses in the text becomes the source of their consideration, contemplation, and insight in viewing some strategic issues.

I choose Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants" to open student's knowledge on the issue of abortion. This issue is discussed because it concerns with human behavior and attitude in character education including responsibility, integrity, conscience, and respect. Before I ask the students to read the text, I ask them what they know about abortion, and I order them to write everything they know about abortion. Twenty eight (28) students in my Prose class write almost the same understanding about abortion, that is, it is the removal of an embryo or fetus from the uterus in order to end pregnancy, or it is a kind of surgical methods for terminating a pregnancy especially before the six months. The additional information they write is about the pro and contra, arguments for pro-choice and pro-life, its legal rules say, and sinful life. To sum up, they tend to view from bad or good perspective and the medical or academic point of view. To add, more precisely to enrich, to broaden, and to open their awareness and knowledge about the issue of abortion, I and the students read thoroughly the text and discuss this story as a reflection or imitation of what may happen in life.

"Hills like White Elephants" (1927) by Ernest Hemingway is a short story about a couple of a young man and a woman from the United States of America who are travelling from one country to others, one city to others, staying from one hotel to others. They are waiting at a train station.

They are talking about an issue that they never mentioned explicitly. However, from the context it is known that the topic of their discussion is abortion. In the midst of the long joyful journey and happy moment, they are disturbed by the fact that the girl, whose name is Jig, is pregnant. The man suggests that abortion should be done as her pregnancy deprives them of their happiness and pleasant traveling moment. However, the girl does not feel comfort with the suggestion. Though in the end of the story there is no explicit action of abortion, the girl shows her expectation and deep feeling about that matter.

As all facts concerning with the story (intrinsic elements) have been discussed and disclosed, I urge the students to present the human experience: what they characters feel and expects about their life problem or how they cope with and escape from it. I don't command them to explore the moral teaching or debate on the issue of abortion from legal perspective or religious point of view. What they have to do is viewing this short story as imitation or reflection of human life and experience, in the way that they understand what may happen when the characters in the story face the issue of abortion. The imitation or reflection of the human experience presented in the story will open students' knowledge and awareness on abortion. The human experience is not about pro-choice or pro life movement, moral values, or condemnation to the sinful behavior.

Some human experiences which may be shared from the story are as follows. Firstly, a woman may view her pregnancy as something valuable. Pregnancy can be pleasing phenomenon. "They're lovely hills" and "It's lovely" are what the woman says about her pregnancy. Hills like white elephants symbolizes the baby. Secondly, for a woman doing abortion can mean sacrificing herself to a big risk. It is such a hard decision to do. If she does it, it means that she doesn't think of herself, or she doesn't care of herself. It can be observed in the girl's dialogue: "Then I will do it because I don't care about me". Thirdly, pregnancy might give happiness for a woman, so when she aborts the baby she will lose her real happiness. These following dialogues show this experience.

The man : "We can have everything"
The girl : "No, we can't!"
The man : "We can have the whole world"
The girl : "No, we cant"
The man : "We can go everywhere"
The girl : "No, we cant. It isn't ours anymore"

Fourthly, the man has different point of view in facing the pregnancy, in the way that the man thinks that her pregnancy deprives him of his pleasant and joyful travelling.

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that made us unhappy".

Fifthly, the man view abortion as something which can easily be done, without any deep consideration about the feeling, future, and future relationship. Many times the man states that it is something easy to do. The following are the man's statements in viewing abortion:

'Oh, cut it out.'

'It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig,' the man said. 'It's not really an operation at all.'

"They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Yon don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

The above statements can be interpreted the doctors who are performing the abortion surgery will let the air into the uterus as they remove the fetus. The man states that he knows lots of people that have done it, which suggests that it is a common operation like an abortion.

After exploring the five human experience presented in the story, I ask the students to write anything they know about abortion based on their mimetic reading. The new knowledge or awareness that they get from the story are as follows:

01. Sometimes men have courtly and sexual relationship for fun, but a woman takes it as a serious and deep love relationship.
02. Women use her conscience in making decision of doing abortion, while men their rational.
03. Women tend to maintain and keep the fetus alive.
04. Women are always under pressure of men's authority in abortion case.
05. Abortion is a difficult choice, and it is not as easy as standing in pro-life or pro choice side or debating on its religious and legal aspect.
06. At times men are selfish and self-centered.
07. Pre-marital sexual intercourse resulting in pregnancy is unbeneficial for women, and women might possibly become the victim.
08. Women should be sympathized in abortion case.
09. Don't debate on pro-life and pro-choice, but please sympathize women's deep feeling and thought of how hard to make a decision of abortion.
10. As a matter of fact I know a little about woman's feeling and expectation.

The five human experiences shared in the story and the new awareness the students get from the life experience explored from the story hopefully will contribute in broadening their knowledge when they encounter debate, internal conflict, or problems concerning with the issue if abortion. As the students are provided with these deep experience, hopefully they are enriched and equipped with wise view.

CONCLUSION

Speaking of building character through education, especially English literature teaching, can be possibly meant to open students' awareness on what humans have experienced in their life through the literary text. As one of the purpose of reading literary work is to confront human experience, which means to shed light on the complexity and ambiguity of human experience and broaden readers' awareness of the possibilities of the experience, teaching literature becomes one of the strategic elements in building character. In literature some issues relating to character building such as faithfulness, responsibility, honesty, tolerance and many others, are often exposed.

However, discussing morality, character, and ethics in literary works doesn't mean automatically improving the readers' behavior. The function of literary text is not to change the ethical performance or judge the sinful behavior. If read from mimetic approach, meaning to say taking literature as reflection or imitation of human experience or human life, Literature gives new insight or paradigm of human life. This will broaden and enrich readers' awareness and knowledge. This awareness will enable readers to have deep thought and thorough consideration about some issues of human life.

Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants", when read as reflection or imitation of human life, gives some valuable and fresh knowledge about the issue of abortion. Abortion is not only a matter of pro-life and pro-choice, condemnation of sinful behavior, or debate from legal perspectives. It is a deep story of how a woman views pregnancy using her conscience. It tells

about women's expectation of the relation with her partner. It also involves a high risk and her sacrifice and different attitude amongst the spouses and enclosure of the different attitudes between men and women in viewing abortion.

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