



STEPPING UP EFFORT TO ENLIGHTENMENT IN NOVEL *GRACELAND* (2004) BY CHRIS ABANI

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Abstract

This thesis is the analysis of a novel which written by Chris Abani entitled *Graceland* (2004). It explores the issue of step up efforts to enlightenment which reflected by the main character. It is also intended to find out the contribution of fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting in revealing the issue of efforts to enlightenment. This analysis is related to the concept of life instinct which self-awareness by Sigmund Freud that is supported by the text-based and context-based interpretation. The result of this analysis shows about the way the main character effort to enlightenment in dealing with any situation in his life by building self-awareness, gaining thinking skill and having vocational skill.

Key words: *stepping up, effort, enlightenment*

A. INTRODUCTION

Humans naturally are the same because they are born with the same dignity, degree, rights and obligations. They cannot choose to be born as a part of a particular race or ethnicity. In fact, people make a difference between themselves. This difference emerges due to the feeling of being superior to others. This feeling may appear because of their status, level, etc. People who are born in a good financial and relational condition may find the better and easier ways in achieving their goals, while the others must face the harder ways and give more sacrifice to step up their effort to reach the enlightenment. There are a lot of processes to get the better stage. Stepping up effort enlightenment is the way to get the self-actualization to get the education and the chance like other people.

People have their own coping mechanism to survive from many obstacles in order to step up the effort to enlightenment. According to Merriam-Webster (2019) *stepping up* means to increase, augment, or advance especially by one or more steps. Someone can step up effort to enlightenment when they are aware of the potency in themselves. Indeed, the support of the family and the availability of the facilities are also the major matters to reach the dreams.

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In reaching the dream, people must have some essential life skills those are needed to make it come true. According to World Health Organization (WHO), the life skills are the crucial skills for adaptation and behave positively, which then enable people to conquer the life challenges effectively. WHO divides the life skills into 5 groups; they are self-awareness (personal skill), social skill, thinking skill, academic skill, and vocational skill. Thus, stepping up effort to enlightenment in this study refers to the effort of the main character in *Graceland* (2004) to reach his dream by using his life skills.

Stepping up effort to enlightenment is not easy. There are many efforts that should be done. According to Merriam-Webster (2019) *effort* is defined as something produced by exertion or trying; the total work done to achieve a particular end. *Enlightenment* is a movement, a feeling when people are wanted to change, and feel having strength in their journey. Of Stepping up effort to enlightenment refers to a condition when someone must to achieve their dreams of better life. They have to survive while facing the problems to realize their dreams.

In this analysis, the background this novel is in Nigeria. Although Nigeria has many natural resources, however it has the significant social gap which makes some people live in a very high class condition while the others live in ghetto with bad economy condition. This condition is emerged because the capitalism of England which has colonized Nigeria. Beside that the condition also becomes worse because civil war that leads the citizens to become more suffer. Many Nigerians died because of the hunger. Not all of the citizens in the Nigeria have the same chance to get the education. Some people must do the harder effort and do more sacrifice to reach their dreams and come out from the bad life.

There are some people who have lack of support of the family and also availability of the facilities but they prove that they can reach their dream by stepping up their effort to get the enlightenment. This condition emerges by several reasons, however the most common is caused by financial reason which leads to the lack of chance and support. Instead of giving up on the condition where they were born, they choose to keep they dream alive and work hardly to make it come true.

Oprah Winfrey, an Africa American inspiring woman who had a tragic childhood. She was born in a poor and broken home family. She got lack of attention and affection. She also got the sexual harassment when she was a child. However, she proves that she can be an announcer since she was a teenager caused of her strong desire to be successful.

The other example is David Steward, he is an Africa American businessman. He was a scavenger. He lived in a bad economic condition. Beside that he also faced the discrimination and racism that make him

difficult to reach his success. However, he proves that he can be successful even though he faced many difficulties.

There are several elements are provided in stepping up effort to enlightenment. First, self-awareness, everyone have to aware in themselves to make something or to do something for their life. According to Silvia and Duval (2001:2), self-awareness is one's attention at a given time can either be directed toward one's self. It means that people can think about what they are thinking about something, doing something, and experiencing. People who awareness know what will they do; use their mind to solve their problems. Second, knowledge is the important element in the act to achieve a goal. It is something leads someone to open the new path in life. According to Linda Zagzebski (2018:3) knowledge is expressing the relationship between the subject and the truth proposition. A truth claim becomes knowledge when your state of belief makes cognitive contact with reality. Propositional knowledge, that can be known or believed, is her focus due to simplicity. The criteria required for belief is to have a thought, followed by augmentation with experience. And the last one is skills. A skill is an ability to perform an activity in a competent manner. Skills can be classified into three main types: Transferable/Functional, Personal Traits/Attitudes, and Knowledge-based. According to Cambridge dictionary (2019), skill is a particular ability that you develop through training and experience and that is useful for a job.

The story of the successful people who had unlucky condition when they were children also can be found in the literary works. Those kinds of people have been inspiring other people to write the novel, poem, and other literary works. One of the literary works is the novel *Graceland* (2004) by Chris Abani.

This study analyzes the issue of stepping up the effort to enlightenment which refers to the action of a Nigerian boy who is born in a poor family. He has the unique ways in stepping up his effort in order to reach his dreams to be a dancer which is interesting to be discussed. His strong commitment plays the big role in conquering the challenges to make his dream comes true. Through the main character, the novel makes people realize that the most important thing to reach the dream is the big effort to not giving up which come from them.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Graceland (2004) novel written by Chris Abani reveals the issue of stepping up effort to enlightenment. Stepping up effort to enlightenment in this analysis refers to the action done by the main character, a 14 years old Nigerian boy who has a dream to go to America to become a professional dancer. It is revealed through text-based and context-based by focusing on fictional devices such as character, plot, and setting. This analysis also deals with the psychological theory about life instinct by Sigmund Freud. The main character is stepping up effort to enlightenment in 3 ways: by building self-awareness, gaining thinking skill, and having vocational skill.

C. DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes fictional devices in order to reveal the issue *stepping up effort to enlightenment* in the novel *Graceland* (2004) by Chris Abani. This issue is emerged through the character's thought, activity, and situation which is faced by the protagonist. There are three ways that the main character does to effort to enlightenment. They are by building the self-awareness, gaining thinking skill, and having the vocational skill.

1. Building the Self-Awareness

The first way of stepping up efforts to enlightenment is building the self-awareness of the main character. The protagonist knows his own potency and desire. He has a dream to be a dancer, but he finds many struggles to reach his dreams due to his limitation. The limitations are such as the lack of support, the unsupported environment, and the financial problems. However, He does all of his effort to reach his dream and to become someone who is accepted in the society.

The quotation that mentioned if the main character realizes his potency:

“..... ‘elvis!elvis! wake up. It’s past six in de morning and all your mates are out dere looking for work,” his father, Sunday, said.

“What work, sir? I have a job.”

“Dancing is my job. We all dance in de bar on Saturday. Open dis bloody door!”

Sunday shouted. Elvis opened the door and ayed him. The desire to drive his first thought his father’s face was old

And overwhelming. (p.3)

The setting in this text refers to the indignant situation which is faced by the main character when face his father. This indignant situation happened because the protagonist statement about a job. He feels dancing is a job for him, but for his father it is not. The sentence *dancing is my job* shows that the main character feels already get a job, so he does not need other job. He feels that by dancing he gets enough money for him. It is different with his father thinking about this profession. His father hates the main character as a dancer. It can be seen in this sentence, *all I have to give you is my name, your name, Elvis Oke and when I die, it will continue to help you build something for your children. Dat's way I don't want you to be a dancer* (p.134). It means that if his father is ashamed with the profession. In this sentence, his father emphasizes that if he becomes a dancer, he has tarnished the family name. The setting leads to the external conflict between his father and him. In other sentence if the main character feels if dancing is his job, can be seen in the sentence below:

“he was getting really good as a dancer, and even the cynical Oye whooped with delight the night he stage an impromptu concert for her and Aunt Felicia on the front veranda. He could not afford to stop now, yet he could not afford to continue. The plan to get more money, when he it on it, was so simple he didn't know why he had never thought of it. Of course its execution required subtlety and time if it had any chance of succeeding, but he felt good about it. (p.71).

The quotation above if the main character feels if dancing is part of his life. He loves dancing and he can get money from what he loves. Basic that he has made him possible to dance without preparation. Besides know his potency, he builds the self-awareness by realizing his dreams to be a professional dancer and go to America. The statement:

“elvis had decided to find steady work, as he couldn't depend on his dancing to bring in a regular income. It wasn't that he was giving up on his dream to be a dancer, he rationalized; it was more like he was deferring it for a while. May be with the money he earned, he could save up to go to America. That was a place where they appreciated dancers.” (p.17)

The setting in this text points to the confusing condition. The confusing condition leads into the internal conflict to the main character. This conflict is triggered by the bad income by doing job as a dancing. The main character realizes that he lives in a wrong society where he cannot explore his hobby to become a job that gives him regular income properly. He is living in a place where art such as dancing is not something that can earn them money. Instead of doing the properly and legal job, the people of the Lagos city who do not have many choices choose to be a criminals, such as doing illegal commerce like marijuana. On the quotation above explains that the main character is not interested in doing illegal job which according to the Lagos citizen who live in ghetto, it is the job that can give them money instantly. The sentence *'It wasn't that he was giving up on his dream to be*

a dancer, he rationalized;' is the emphasizing that the main character has the strong commitment to make his dream comes true.

In summary, the main character is building his personal skill (self-awareness). It is one of the main character's strategies to step up effort to enlightenment. The variations of settings cause different conflict to the main character. It refers to the conditions that cause different triggers toward the main character. He faces many struggles in convincing his father that he wants to be a dancer. He realizes his potency and tries to reach his goals. He keeps pursuing his dreams although he has financial and unsupportive problems.

2. Gaining the Thinking Skill

The second strategy that the main character does to step up to enlightenment is by gaining his thinking skill. The protagonist tries to break down his problem with his knowledge. He tries to solve the problem that he faced, he is to be critical thinking when there is new issue, and he have own principle for his own life. This is also supported by his interest in reading. He uses his thinking skill to survive his life without his parents. He did the entire job to get money based on his knowledge that he have when his mother still alive and used his skill to support to break down the suffering.

The protagonist is always spending his time to get more knowledge. It appears in the following quotation:

“sitting on the crowded bus, he thought his father might be right; this was no way to live. He was broke all the time, making next to nothing as a street performer. He needed a better job with regular income. He pulled a book from his backpack and tried to read. It was his current inspirational tome, a well-thumbed copy of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. He read books from different reason and had them everywhere he was: one in his backpack, which he called his on-the-road book, usually one that held an inspirational message for him; one by his bed;”... (4)

The text above shows that the main character has the ways to gain his knowledge by reading a book. Although he has no regular time to read his book at home or school library, but he always take his time to read. It is emphasized by the sentence *He pulled a book from his backpack and tried to read*. The main character has the interest to the art, not only dancing, he also loves poems. The setting refers to the passionate situation that turns the enthusiasm of the protagonist. The conflict in this quotation is the internal conflict that is triggered by the external conflict. The main character feels confused by his unsupportive father. His father is always trying to kill his

dream to become a dancer. However, the strong commitment of the main character can be seen through his effort to read a book in order to gain his knowledge.

The main character also has the critical thinking. It can be seen through the quotation below:

“while he waited, elvis stared into the moody puddles imagining what life, if any, was trying to crawl its out. His face, reflected back at him, seemed to belong to stranger, floating there like ghostly head in a comic book”... (p.4)

The text above describes that the protagonist has the critical thinking. The setting refers to the depressed condition. This condition is triggered by the bad family condition such as: unsupportive father, the death of his mother, and the bad financial condition. Even though he faces many problems that drag his dreams down, however he still has dream left. He even thinks better and more critical compared to the other children that same age with him. It is reflected by the sentence ... *elvis stared into the moody puddles imagining what life*, it points out that he is mature that his age.

Another quotation that supports about gaining the thinking skill can see below:

“he stared at the city, half slum, half paradise. How could a place be so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time? He wondered.

He hadn't known about the poverty and violence of Lagos until he arrived. It was as if people conspired with the city to weave a web of silence around its unsavory parts. People who didn't live in Lagos only saw postcards of skyscrapers, sweeping flyovers, beaches and hotels. And those who did, when they returned to their ancestral small towns at Christmas, wore designer clothes and threw money around. They breezed in, lived an expensive whirl wind life, and then left after a couple of weeks, to go back to their ghetto lives.

The text above describes that the protagonist has the strong thought to catch the signal of the issue around him. This is the proof that he is a critical thinker. The setting in the text above is ironic condition of Lagos, the city where the main character lives. It is emphasized by the by the sentence *he stared at the city, half slum, half paradise. How could a place be so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time? He wondered*. It depicts that Lagos is the city which has the huge gap between the high class and the low class citizen. The words *half slum, half*

paradise is pointing out that Lagos has 2 faces which are the beautiful one and the bad one. This setting then triggers the conflict to protagonist. The main character realizes this situation. He is trapped in the difficult situation since he is living in ghetto where it is not easy to reach his dream.

The main character also has his principle. It can be seen through the quotation below:

“Elvis always refused the marijuana, but the smell hung in the hot air, and it soon became difficult to engage fully with the reality around him. (p.5)

The text above shows that the main character holds his principle strictly. He really keeps himself from the bad influence like marijuana. It also shows that the main character is mature rather than the other people who are older than him who ask him to taste marijuana. The setting refers to the hard situation where there are many temptations which can lead him into a bad path. This setting triggers the internal conflict which comes from external conflict. The main character is living in a bad environment. Luckily, the protagonist has the strong commitment that makes him become someone who has good principle in life. It is emphasized by the sentence ‘*Elvis always refused the marijuana*’. The word *always* is the important thing here which means that it is not the first time he refuses the marijuana. It must be many times but he still keeps his commitment not to smoke it since he knows that it is something bad for him. It is also caused by his hobby reading a book that leads him can differentiate him the good and bad path.

Briefly, gaining his thinking skill is the next strategy of the main character to step up effort to enlightenment. Through the setting, they reveal that the main character has his own way to gain his thinking skill. The protagonist has the knowledge by reading many books and articles independently. He is also has the critical thinking. Besides, he is also a person who has the strong commitment by sticking to his own principle.

3. Having Vocational Skill

The last strategy that is done by the main character to reach his as dance is by having the vocational skill. The character is an experienced dancer and the protagonist impersonator who is desperate to carve out a better life for him, and he frequently performs on the streets to earn money. The main character is responsive to everything the related to dance. He always keeps training himself to increase his dance skill. The protagonist uses his dance skill to get money for his needs.

The main character is an experienced dancer. It appears in the following quotation:

“he was getting really good as a dancer, and even the cynical Oye whooped with delight the night he stage an impromptu concert for her and Aunt Felicia on the front veranda. He could not afford to stop now, yet he

could not afford to continue. The plan to get more money, when he it on it, was so simple he didn't know why he had never thought of it. Of course its execution required subtlety and time if it had any chance of succeeding, but he felt good about it. (p.71).

The quotation above explains that the main character is really an experienced dancer. The setting in that text is the enthusiastic atmosphere before the impromptu concert. The main character has the basic talent as a dancer, it can be seen through the word '*impromptu*' which indicates that the protagonist is a professional dance who do not need much practice before the performance in concert stage. The main character is even energetic to be a part of that concert. He proves that he can perform well and satisfying.

Another quotation which supports that the main character is an experienced dancer is shown below:

He turned. Redemption stood on the dance floor with two women. "You won't dance?" Elvis shook his head.

"Come and help me—come," Redemption said. Reluctantly Elvis got up. He did not want to be off dancing on the floor when the bandleader came looking for him, but he did not want to annoy Redemption. He joined the group and began to swanti. He learned the dance quickly and easily. (p.65)

The quotation above is also indicating that the main character has the strong determined in himself. Besides, the protagonist is also having the powerful commitment that brings him to step forward. The setting on the quotation above is the energetic situation that leads the protagonist into the positive emotion. He shows his ability and talent which are the big wealth. The sentence *He learned the dance quickly and easily* is the proof that the main character has the interest to learn something new. The words *quickly* and *easily* show that he is really experienced.

The main character is also has the vocational skill as an impersonator. It can be seen through in the following quotation:

"she reached into the bag again and pulled out a post card. Elvis took it and stared at it for a long time. It had four panels on the front. In one, the word "vegas" was spelled out in lights. The second panel framed a nighttime shot of the strip, all lit up. The third panel featured an Elvis impersonator,

While the fourth was a photo of the Graceland chape. This is an omen, he thought. This is it. He turned it over and over. On the back Patrick had scrawled a note, and the date stamp showed it was nearly six months old.

“Dis is where I’m going,” felicia said. “I wanted you to have it. My address is on left-hand corner.”

“thank you”

“as soon I’m settled. I will send for you. It will probably take some time to go get you a visa, so you must be patient. Okay?”

He nodded and lit another cigarette.

“das is, if ‘you want to come,” she added

“sure-who doesn’t want to come to states? He said.

“you smoke too much,” she said.

“oh, not you as well!”

“I’m worry about you, Elvis. What do you want to do with your life?” “You know.”

“I don’t. tell me, please.”

“I want to be famous dancer. Like Elvis.” He was a singer too.”

“I can sing”

“she sighed. “listen, Elvis, dis is a difficult world. You have to let go of childish dreams. You can’t get by dancing, at least not here.”

“Thanks for believing kin me.” (p.119)

The setting of the quotation above is energetic atmosphere that leads the main character into the enthusiastic emotion. The protagonist has the self-confidence to be successful like Elvis Presley since he is the role model in the protagonist’s life. The conflict in this quotation is the external conflict which affects to the main character’s life. The main character knows well that living in America is not something easy. It needs many sacrifices. The sacrifices such as: living far away from his family; adjusting with new culture; not having enough formal education to compete with the Americans. However, he believes that his ability to dance can be used to survive in America.

To sum up, the main character is having the vocational skill. There are various settings cause the different conflict to the main character. The main character is an experienced dancer. Besides, he is also an impersonator. There are many conflicts that he faces to go to America to become a dancer. However, he keeps pursuing his dream.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Graceland (2004) novel written by Chris Abani reveals the issue stepping up effort to enlightenment. Stepping up effort to enlightenment in this analysis refers to the actions done by the main character, It is revealed through text-based and context-based by focusing on fictional devices such as character, plot, and setting. This analysis also deals with the psychological theory about life instinct by Sigmund Freud. The main character is maximizing her competence in two ways: by participating in competition and in social life.

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