



SEEKING FOR IDENTITY IN THE NOVEL *LESS* (2017) BY ANDREW SEAN GREER

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the Novel *Less* (2017) by Andrew Sean Greer. The purpose of this analysis is to find out to which setting and conflict (plot) reveal the efforts of the main character in the Novel *Less* in dealing with problems that come to him by trying to fight and rise from failure. This analysis is related to the concept of life instinct proposed by Sigmund Freud and self-determination by Ryan and Deci. The result of this analysis shows that the main character has self-motivation and goals in his life as shown through his action in seeking his identity.

Keywords: *Identity, failure, motivation, goals*

A. INTRODUCTION

Humans are complex individuals who have dynamic psychological interactions with the environment, family and friends. In the matter of everyday life, people often face problems, ranging from simple problems to complex problems. These problems arise because of unfulfilled needs. These problems require immediate realization so it will not become a burden on individuals and their lives. The problems that come to people's lives have different degrees. Some people may have simple problems while others may have complex ones. Some can be categorized as internal or external problems and some can be physical or emotional problems. Mental pressures, workplace disputes and identity crisis are some examples of these problems.

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People also have different ways of facing their problems. There are people who give up easily when experiencing life's hardship hence they cannot make remarkable achievements. As a result, their lives are often full of regrets and hopelessness. However, there are also people who are strong and persistent in coping with their problems. The hard efforts they put to face the problems often result in great solutions to solve them. No matter how difficult the problems that come to their life, those brave people are going to face them.

In addition, according to Orenstein and Lewis (2020) identity crisis is one of the problems that people experience. Identity crisis is the condition that humans feel that they are nothing in this world. Confusing and doubting themselves in any situation and feeling like they cannot analyze themselves and forget about their characteristics and their uniqueness as a human being (p.8). Identity crisis is still a problem for every human being in this society, not only for teenagers but also for adults.

According to Fearon (1999) Erikson's term "identity crisis" has made it into dictionaries, and is defined in one as follows: "the condition of being uncertain of one's feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins, occurring especially in adolescence as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions (p.11). Fearon also cited that:

This statement implicitly defines "identity" as one's feelings about one's self, character, goals, and origins. While much closer to our current meaning than the older meaning discussed above, this is closer still to "self-image." As we use it now, "my identity" is not the same thing as my feelings about myself, character, goals, and origins, but rather something about my definition of myself, character, and so on.

Then, Larisa (2009) states that identity is the quality which identifies a person or thing. It could be the similarities or the differences that mark of an individual from the rest of people. To talk about our identity, it is a developing process of many kinds personality of an individual to continue a life (p.11). The term of identity in this novel show that the main character experiences the identity crisis that motivates him to see his identity.

In facing an identity crisis there must be an impact on humanity itself. Confusions, asking themselves, stress, and many more can influence identity to

become a crisis. As Erik Erikson has delivered, identity crisis influences humans itself and makes humans different than before. According to Erikson (1968:44) the impacts of identity crisis, such as always thinking that they are useless in this world and do not deserve any chances in this world. They believe in themselves and do not know what to do next in their life, losing self-confidence in doing or starting a new thing or even the hobbies that they like. It also can make them feel alienated from society.

Moreover, Erik Erikson (1980:88) stated that an identity crisis is the failure to achieve ego identity during adolescence. It is also a period of inner conflict during which one examines one's value and makes decisions about life roles. The search for identity and self-identity crisis does not only happen in adolescence but also for adulthood by experiencing something that ruins their life and makes them need to find their self-identity. From Erikson's statement, it can be said that no matter how old a person is, it is possible for them to also experience an identity crisis. Being at an old age can still be said to be immature. So maybe someone who is in that phase gives up on what he has not achieved. Today's society assumes that age is a benchmark for someone to achieve success. Interestingly, there are still a handful of people who struggle and rise from the failures of past problems for a better future, even though they are no longer young. With their maturity in thinking, they began to look for their identity to become more useful human beings.

Any type of identity crisis can also lead to a decline in mental disorder or mental illness. According to WHO (World Health Organization), mental disorders affect one in four people in the world. About 450 million people currently suffer from mental disorders, placing mental disorders among the main causes of ill health and disability throughout the world (WHO, 2001).

Based on WHO's data above, it can be seen that the identity crisis is experienced by most people in this world. In real life, many people experience an identity crisis which nearly ruins their life and makes them need to seek identity. There are so many successful figures who experience an identity crisis that lead to mental illness in this world, among these figures there are businessmen, politicians, and even well-known scientists. Those who fight from identity crisis are individuals that have high spirits for life. As well as the protagonist's efforts in the novel *Less* (2017) by Andrew Sean Greer. He makes efforts to get out from identity crisis.

The issue of seeking for identity from people who are going through an identity crisis is interesting to be analyzed. This analysis focuses on a novel that was written by Andrew Sean Greer entitled *Less* (2017). In this analysis, seeking

for identity refers to the ways the main character in this novel reacts and positions himself in facing problems in his life with self-awareness. The issue is important to be discussed because it will help people realize that they need to fight for a better life.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The analysis of novel *Less* (2017) by Andrew Sean Greer is done through text based interpretation. The fictional devices such as character, plot and setting are used to analyze this novel. Character and plot are used to reveal about the act of seeking for identity by analyzing the character's action and emotion toward the conflict. Then, the setting deals with the circumstance and atmosphere. It gives contribution in the process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. In addition, these elements are analyzed on the concept of *life instinct* by the Sigmund Freud approach and self-determination theory by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict) and setting to reveal the way of the protagonist in seeking for identity in the novel *Less* (2017) by Andrew Sean Greer. The protagonist is a novelist who failed to turn fifty who has not achieved the literary success he yearns for. He also experienced depression when his girlfriend broke up with him. Therefore, the main character experiences depression and end to the identity crisis as a result of failure in his past life. The act of seeking for identity in the analysis can be seen from how the protagonist fights and rises from the failure and gets new insights.

1. Fight and Rise from the Failure

Fight and rise from failure is one of the main character strategies in seeking for identity. The process of fight and rise from the failure happens when the protagonist experiences depression as an impact of a break up from his girlfriend. Fight and rise from the failures also happens when the protagonist has not achieved the literary success he yearns for.

The situation that can be used to convince the main character has self-awareness that encourage him to fight and rise from the failure can be seen in the following quotation:

*But now a bit of luck: from the world
outside the lobby, a chime rings out, one,*

two, three, four, five, six, seven, causing Arthur Less to pop out of his seat. Look at him: staring at his betrayer, the clock, then running to the front desk and asking—at last—the essential temporal question.
(page 9)

The quotation above shows that the main character has self-awareness which proves that he has life instincts that encourage him to fight and rise from failure. The sentence *But now a bit of luck: from the world outside the lobby, a chime rings out, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, causing Arthur Less to pop out of his seat.* This sentence means that finally the main character has the awareness to rise from his failures. He must stand up to fight his failure. He realizes that he must get out of his down. He said to himself there is no feeling of hopelessness anymore. This condition reflects that the main character has the life instinct, so he dared to start seeking his identity.

From the above quotation there is also a sentence that proves the main character has a life instinct as in ... *Look at him: staring at his betrayer, the clock, then running to the front desk and asking—at last—the essential temporal question.* This sentence indicates that the main character has certain questions about what he has experienced. It indicates the main character is aware that what he has done during the depression will only harm himself. With the life instinct he has, he is able to motivate himself to rise up and fight his unconfident, hopelessness and depression.

Another evidence that the main character fight and rise from the failures of past life can be seen from the quotation below:

*Where was he? Somewhere in there he lost the first phase of youth, like the first phase of a rocket; it had fallen, depleted, behind him. And here was the second. And last. **He swore he would not give it to anyone; he would enjoy it. He would enjoy it alone. But: how to live alone and yet not be alone?***
(page 13)

In this analysis, the main character has life instincts that are more dominant than dead instincts. Life instincts themselves are instincts that motivate individuals to perpetuate their lives. These life instincts trigger the main character to get out from the identity crisis he is experiencing and begin to set himself up for a struggle in seeking for identity through the rest of his life. This can be shown

from the sentence *He swore he would not give it to anyone; he would enjoy it. He would enjoy it alone.* This sentence indicates that he indeed has the life instinct. He will not give up and will enjoy it as a form of his journey in seeking identity. The sentence *But: how to live alone and yet not be alone?* From this sentence it can be seen that the main character has a sense of awareness to his life. This also proves that the main character has a life instinct so he fights for it and tries to rise from every failure he has experienced.

Another quotation that prove the main character's struggle to choose to fight and rise from the failures of his past life can be seen below:

Along with the wedding invitation came a letter politely reminding him of an offer to teach at an obscure university in Berlin, along with the meagre remittance and the meagre time remaining for an answer. Less sat at his desk, staring at the offer; the rearing stallion on the letterhead seemed to be erect. (page 16)

One of the factors that make the main character face an identity crisis is that he experienced depression as an impact of breaking up with his girlfriend. From the quotation above, it can be seen that, along with the invitation letter he received, he also realized that he had the opportunity to develop his career and interests again. This is what ultimately motivates the main character to change his life. It indicates that the main character has self-determination towards himself. He decided what was best for himself by taking the opportunity to accept a call that would surely make him develop, instead of dragging on past failures. Of course, this will also make the main character continue his career seriously, and sharpen his skills even more. From this it can be seen that the main character can motivate himself to believe that he has control over himself, take responsibility for his own behaviour and determine his actions.

Through this analysis, it can be seen that the main character has an instinct for life and self-determination. Those things make him get out from the identity crisis he is experiencing. This can be proven from the quotation below:

*Yet, like those impossible beetles that survive years in the dunes, living only on desert rains, his novel somehow, over the years, kept selling. It sold in England, and France, and Italy. Less wrote a second novel, *The Counterglow*, which got less*

attention, and a third, Dark Matter, which the head of Cormorant Publishing pushed hard, giving it an enormous publicity budget, sending him to over a dozen cities.
(page 26)

The quotation above proves that the main character has a strong desire in seeking his identity. The setting refers to the motivational situation which makes him more confident in himself. The sentence *Yet, like those impossible beetles that survive years in the dunes, living only on desert rains, his novel somehow, over the years, kept selling, proves that what was impossible for the main character before, changed to be a reality.* His struggle to escape from the identity crisis shows the result. Based on the quotation above, the main character can also prove that his age is not a barrier to keep working, to have prestige.

The sentence *Less wrote a second novel, The Counterglow, which got less attention, and a third, Dark Matter, which the head of Cormorant Publishing pushed hard, giving it an enormous publicity budget, sending him to over a dozen cities.* It can be seen that the efforts made by the main character in creating his work do not always go well. However, with his life instinct, he will not stop to continue his struggle to achieve what he wants from the works he creates. The failures that he had previously experienced were used as lessons for his future life.

In sum, fight and rise from the failures is one of the main character's ways in seeking for identity. The settings cause different conflicts to the character. It refers to the condition and situation that cause different triggers toward the main character. He faces many struggles to motivate himself to get out from the identity crisis in his life. He keeps holding on to his motivation to be a better person. It shows that he feels relief after overcoming the problem that he had. Then, he will motivate himself to always resolve the hardship of life. It means that life instinct and self-determination helps him to find pleasure and make the achievement in life. At last, all problems are resolved by the main character and make his life more meaningful.

2. Get New Insights

Another strategy that is done by the main character in seeking for identity is through the journey he did to get new insights. He has a self-determination that motivates him to attend literary events around the world. Then, he socializes with people he meets in every country he visits. This helped him to relieve depression from his failure.

The main character decides to travel around the world to open up new perspectives on real life. It appears in the following quotation:

*Only as they are having their coffee does Peter say: "I hear you'll be travelling." Less say yes, he's on a trip around the world. "Good," Peter says, signalling for the bill. "It will take you mind off things. I hope you're not too attached to Cormorant." Less stutters, then falls silent. Peter: "Because they passed on Swift. I think you should fiddle with it while you're travelling. **Let new sights bring new ideas.**" (page 27)*

From the quote above, it can be seen that the main character has a desire to escape from his past failures by travelling around the world. The setting refers to the main character's motivation to go on the trip with the support given by his relatives. It can be seen through the utterance *It will take you mind off things*. This shows that the decision of the main character to make the journey is a good thing for him which can make him not procrastinate in the problems he has faced so far. Then, the utterance *Let new sights bring new ideas* shows that the main character can distinguish which invitations are good for him. This is what makes him have confidence again to remain confident to travel.

The journey made by the main character involves finding another side of him. This can be seen from the quotation below:

Arthur Less, entranced by destiny, finds himself staring at that face he has known so well over the years. The particular Roman rudder of that nose, which used to be seen turning and turning in parties as it sought out this scrap of conversation, that eye across the room, those people leaving for a better party...(page 146)

From the above quotation in the sentence *Arthur Less, entranced by destiny, finds himself staring at that face he has known so well over the years* shows that the main character finds a new perspective of himself as someone who is better than before. Setting refers to the positive atmosphere created by the main character who finds himself. However, he releases his conflict by empowering himself with the self-determination that makes him not lose his hopes. This helped him to relieve depression from his failure. The outcome of his world tour

generates a range of new experiences and the main character discovers things about himself he never thought possible.

Another quotation that shows that the journey taken by the main character can give a new insight on his life can be proven from the text below:

*Name a day, name an hour, in which Arthur Less was not afraid. Of ordering a cocktail, taking a taxi, teaching a class, writing a book. Afraid of these and almost everything else in the world. Strange, though; because he is afraid of everything, nothing is harder than anything else. **Taking a trip around the world is no more terrifying than buying a stick of gum. The daily dose of courage.** (page 34)*

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the journey taken by the main character has had a good impact on him. It is evident that gradually he is no longer afraid of the world, despite his past failures. This shows that the main character has found his identity. The sentence *Travelling around the world is not scarier than buying a stick of chewing gum* shows the realization of the main character that the decision to travel is very good to bring happiness and satisfaction in his life. The phrase *The daily dose of courage* shows that the main character will still have the courage to face the problems that will occur in his life later. He will not repeat his past that created a depreciating identity crisis. This also proves that the main character has a life instinct in him that makes him struggle to overcome life's difficulties.

The next quotation adds more explanation how the main character gets new insights. It can be proven from the text below:

It is, after all, almost a miracle they are here. Not because they've survived the booze, the hashish, the migraines. Not that at all. It's that they've survived everything in life, humiliations and disappointments and heartaches and missed opportunities, bad dads and bad jobs and bad sex and bad drugs, all the trips and mistakes and face-plants of life, to have made it to fifty and to have made it here: to this frosted-cake landscape, these mountains of gold, the little table they can now see sitting on the dune, set with olives and pita and glasses

*and wine chilling on ice, with the sun
waiting more impatiently than any camel
for their arrival.*

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the main character has found his identity. His decision to travel around the world with the intention of saving himself from past failures and problems was successful. In the quotation above, it can also be seen that the main character has experienced many things in his life. This shows that the main character has a life instinct in him. The main character can go through a conscious decision-making process through the ability to perceive, learn, remember and reason to live his life. The main character has a life instinct that is more dominant than the death instinct that makes him try hard for his life. Even though he has a hard time dealing with the hardships of his life, he tends to fight them. This makes the main character see the positive side of difficulties. It can also be seen that through the journey he did to get new insights. Then, he socializes with people he meets in every country he visits. It makes him relieve depression from his failure. The outcome of his world tour generates a range of new experiences and the main character discovers things about himself he never thought possible. All the countries that he visited brought a new perspective for him.

In sum, from all quotations above, the main character has shown his way in seeking for identity through the journey he did to get new insights. He proves it from the way he takes every opportunity he has. He can motivate himself to experience changes in his life. Even in things he had never thought of before. Thanks to his efforts, he got the opportunity to teach at various universities and the works he produced also achieved success. Moreover, he faces the unexpected situation and makes a good solution by himself. It means that he has an open mind, does not limit himself anymore and dares to take every opportunity to change himself to be a better person. The setting in this analysis refers to an unexpected situation that encourages him to face it. The conflict mostly comes from the character itself when he has to face his problem.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Less (2017) is the novel by Andrew Sean Greer reflects the struggle of the main character in seeking for identity through the rest of his life. The analysis of the novel deals with the concept of life instinct proposed by Sigmund Freud and self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci. This shows how main character in this novel reacts and positions himself in seeking for identity. There are two things that show the main character was seeking for identity; fight and rise from the failures and get new insights.

Fight and rise from failure can be seen from how main character controls himself to not worrying about his past life that made him experience the identity crisis. He also began to stand up and continue his career seriously, and sharpen his skills. This happens, as Sigmund Freud said that people who have dominant life instincts will tend to have motivation in their lives to perpetuate and fight for their lives. Even though they have difficulty to face the hardship of their life, they will try to maintain it as long as possible.

Get new insights can be seen from how the main character attending literary events around the world. Then, he socializes with people he meets in every country he visits. This helped him to relieve depression from his failure. The outcome of his world tour generates a range of new experiences and the protagonist discovers things about himself he never thought possible. All the countries that he visited brought a new perspective for him. This happens when people believe that they have control in their life, take responsibility for their own behaviour and determine their actions based on their own internal values and goals.

Everyone can lose their identity at any point in their life. The loss of identity as explained in this analysis occurs as a result of a problem experienced. This of course greatly affects the productivity of an individual, then will cause the individual to become unsure of one's feelings towards himself. This will not happen to someone who chooses to fight and rise in life, and start seeking for identity. They do not allow themselves to be dragged into the problems of life. Therefore, every individual must have self-motivation and goals as what he wants to achieve in his life. When facing problems like losing hope, depression and others will make them try to get rid of. Finally, seeking for identity can be done by anyone as long as they are self-motivated and have goals in life. This will lead them to what they are looking for about themselves or identity.

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