

EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE LIVES SPIRIT
IN COLUM McCANN'S NOVEL *LET THE GREAT WORLD SPIN* (2009)

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Abstrak

Artikel ini merupakan analisa teks novel (karya sastra) *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) karya Colum McCann. Masalah yang dianalisa dalam artikel ini adalah tentang upaya merevitalisasi semangat hidup yang dilakukan oleh karakter dalam novel ini. Tujuan analisa ini adalah mengkaji sejauh mana novel mengekspos upaya untuk merevitalisasi semangat hidup. Teks novel dalam artikel ini dianalisis dengan menggunakan metode text-based. Dalam metode text-based, unsur sastra dalam penganalisaan difokuskan pada karakter, setting dan konflik. Analisa ini dihubungkan dengan konsep life instinct (Eros) oleh Sigmund Freud dan konsep self-reliance oleh Ralph Waldo Emerson (1984). Hasil analisa menunjukkan ada tiga cara dalam upaya merevitalisasi semangat hidup yaitu melakukan aktivitas positif, bersosialisasi dan memperkuat ikatan antar anggota keluarga.

Key words: efforts, revitalize, lives, spirit.

A. Introduction

People confront problems every day. Problems are part of one's life and continuously occur no matter how difficult they are to solve. Problems come when people are in a process to achieve a goal. They need mental process that involves discovering, analyzing and solving. A problem is an obstacle, impediment, difficulty or any situation that need resolution. All of that are the various forms of matter which is likely to face. The problem needs to be overcome in order to find a solution that best resolves the issue. Welker (2009)

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stated an ancient Korean proverb “Even if the sky falls on you, there is a hole that you can escape from.” There is a way out of every bad situation. In even the most desperate situation, people still have hope and confidence about the future.

The way out depends how people respond to any problems that come up. Different people have different ways to solve their problems in order to find the solution to a successful point. A psychologist, Dean (2011) states that there are two types of human reactions in facing the problems in life, the first is pessimistic and the second one is optimistic. Pessimistic people when solving their problem are dominated by negative thoughts. For them, life is full of indecision and doubt. They are not confident of their abilities. People with a pessimistic attitude have poor mental status. As a result, they become depressed when bad events occur. Furthermore, it leads to bad health and shorter lives. In addition, Polgar (2011) says that the pessimism attitude has been agreed useful in predicting suicides.

Meanwhile, optimistic people are ready and willing to confront difficulties. They have willingness to solve their problems. They do not want to keep and maintain their old lives (past) that are full of unsolved problems. Thus, they want to solve them by changing their life to the better one. Seligman in Scott (2012) has found that an optimistic world view carries certain advantages. They have superior health, greater achievement, persistence, emotional health, increased longevity, and less stress. It means that optimistic people have a higher quality of life than pessimistic ones. The optimistic people want to constantly improve their life. They look at problems as ways to change their life.

By using awareness, people can pursue their spirit and overcome all of obstacles. Awareness is the biggest point that should be owned by people to make their life be better. Warmerdam (2010) say:

Self awareness is the first step in creating what you want and mastering your. Where you focus your attention, your emotions, reactions, personality and behavior determine where you go in life.

From the quotation above, it can be said that it allows you to see the controls of your emotions, behavior, and personality so you can make changes you want. Until you are aware in the moment of the controls to your thoughts, emotions, words, and behavior, you will have difficulty making changes in the direction of your life. Awareness appears for they want to break through bad condition. Awareness motivates and changes people to do some efforts to revitalize their lives spirit.

One strategy to change one's life to be a better one is to revitalize the life spirit itself. People look for chances and make some efforts to make their wish come true. Total work needs to be exerted to reach the goal. In order to succeed in reaching the goal, someone needs to do some efforts. These efforts are actions intended to achieve the purpose. According to Wallace (2010), revitalize means the act of reviving energy and strength to (a person). It means that someone can renew his or her spirit in their life. The desire to revitalize the life spirit creates positive impact to the human's life. That desire must be followed by awareness. Thus, it stimulates people to improve their life spirit and be the better one that represents the quality of greatness.

People need efforts to revitalize their lives spirit that might be different from each other. Many great people in this world realize that they need some

efforts to revitalize their lives spirit. As Wallace in Liebmann (2008) said “Life is beautiful; life is challenging; life is short.” One of them is Aristotle Onassis. Onassis has a very drastic life change. He came from a poor family; however he became a billionaire at the age of 25. His zeal to change his life was very amazing. He says in his biography (2011) “It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.” It means that he had awareness and willingness to change his difficult life to be the better one. Awareness as the most important factor plays in his hand. He had his own choice to decide his upcoming life. He did this because he was triggered by poverty. Therefore, he concentrated in revitalizing his life spirit since life is short. To put it in another way, he reminded himself that every minute counts. He only had less time to enjoy whatever life might have to offer.

The phenomenon of revitalization of life spirit is not only found in reality but also is appeared in literary works. It is narrated in the novel entitled *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) by Colum McCann. This novel is interesting to analyze since the characters show the revitalization of life spirit. It exposes the efforts of the characters to change their lives from the darkness of their past to the life that is full of light. The characters are Lara, Claire, and Tillie who live in the unlighted life and change their life to be better in three different ways.

This analysis is analyzed based on the concept of life instinct by Sigmund Freud and the concept of Self-Reliance by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The combination of these theories shows the relationship between life instinct and self reliance. These theories are related each other to create efforts to revitalize lives spirit. Life instinct needs self reliance to strengthen the quality of someone inner

perception. The person has the courage to trust his or her own insights and intuitions, rather than those of established authors and acknowledged authorities. They lead their own decision without any control that can limit someone to improve his or her life. Moreover, this belief will give an encouragement for everyone to build power and ability to do any kinds of effort that can support them to revitalize their life spirit. It means that they are aware about the obstacles in their life. Thus, they can do some actions to change it to the better one.

This study is going to find out how far the novel *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) by Colum McCann exposes efforts to revitalize lives spirit. Besides, this study is done in order to explore to what extent characters, plot (conflicts) and setting give contribution in disclosing efforts to revitalize lives spirit.

B. Methodology

The analysis of this novel is done through text-based interpretations. It is focused on analyzing the fictional devices; character, plot, and setting. Both characters and setting are inseparable for they are interrelated each other. In analyzing the characters and plot, it is done by analyzing the conflicts on the protagonists and describes their actions and thoughts to revitalize their lives spirit. Then, setting deals with condition, situation and atmosphere that make up the stories in the process of analysis. Moreover, these elements are analyzed based on the concept of life instinct by Sigmund Freud and the concept of Self-Reliance by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

C. Discussion

This article focuses on the issue of *efforts to revitalize lives spirit*. The fictional devices which are used to analyze are characters, plot (conflict) and settings. Efforts to revitalize lives spirit are represented by three characters in this novel. They are Lara, Claire and Tillie. They are representative of people who live in bad situation and realize to make some efforts to revitalize their lives spirit. The actions that are done by the characters are having positive activity, socializing and strengthening the bond among the family members.

1. Lara

This character is the representative of a person who lives in a miserable condition being a drug and alcohol addict. The character does some efforts to free herself from the shackle of drugs by having positive activities. The positive activities help her to recover from drugs and alcohol addiction. Despite she faces difficulties to revitalize her life, she keeps trying to do so. At the beginning, the internal conflicts cannot be faced by the character successfully. Fortunately, her spirit to maintain the seriousness in recovery is very high. Finally, she succeeds to recover her addiction from drug and alcohol.

The first effort that she does is to stop using drug and alcohol. To do so, she revitalizes her life spirit to leave her past by moving away to new environment. The character decides to begin a new life with a new atmosphere to avoid bad condition. This new environment enhances her motivation to get rid of drug and alcohol. However, it is hard for the character to recover. She jumps again to drug

and alcohol after trying to get rid of them for one year. It can be seen from the quotation below;

IN '73 BLAINE AND I had swapped our lives in the Village for another life altogether, and we went to live in a cabin upstate New York. We had been almost a year off the drugs, even a few months off the booze, until the night before the accident. Just a one-night blowout. We'd slept in that morning, in the Chelsea Hotel, and we were returning to the old Grandma notion of sitting on the porch swing and watching the poison disappear from our bodies. (Page 118)

From the quotation, it shows that the first attempt to stop using drug and alcohol is moving to new environment. The environment that she chooses is *village*. *Village* is a natural place that has fresh air, healthy, and convenience. It is far away from the busy and noisy activities in New York. The village gives the character an excellent atmosphere that helps her in recovery. Besides, her efforts to get rid of drug n alcohol is proven when she decides to move to new place. The phrase *almost a year off the drug, even a few months off the booze* is her attempts to clean her body from drug addiction . Unfortunately, it is difficult for the character to recover from drug. When she gets an accident, she is shock and taking drug. It is strengthen by the sentence *...until the night before the accident*. The situation of the accident that is full of fear, stress, and anxiety makes the character gets a shock. This condition causes conflict for the character. She tries her best to recover, however her efforts do not achieve the goal. She cannot control her emotion, thus the way to release this conflict is by taking drug. That is why this shock leads her to use drug again. The pharase *old Grandma* means that she goes back to her old bad habit. She does not succeed to demolish it. The self control is

still weak; the situation involves her using drug and alcohol again. The first effort to recovery fails to achieve.

The second positive activity she undergoes to revitalize her life spirit is changing her bad habit to the good one, painting. The character realizes that painting as a way to distract her attention from drug and alcohol. Nevertheless, the effort is not easy at all. She retreats again for the second time to consume drug and alcohol. Fortunately, the character learns from her failures. She struggles with her entire life. She overcomes her addictions and is able to lead a very normal, fulfilling and successful life. The following quotation supports it;

There is something that happens to the mind in moments of terror. Perhaps we figure it's the last we'll ever have and we record it for the rest of our long journey. We take perfect snapshots, an album to despair over. We trim the edges and place them in plastic. We tuck the scrapbook away to take out in our ruined times.
(Page 121)

For the third effort, everything is changing. The character is able to preserve her sincere about drugs. She faces many obstacles to stay away from her addiction. It is strengthened by the utterance *moments of terror*. The condition of terror has frightened the character. It covers her mind and becomes her inner conflict to deal with. However, she stands up to overcome her problem. The activities like *trim the edges, place them in plastic, and tuck the scrapbook away* are the efforts that the character done to overcome her inner conflict. The way she releases her conflict is by thinking about her future. Although the terror about drugs covers her mind, she still keeps trying to demolish them in her life. She never gives up making efforts to revitalize her life spirit even though she is already unsuccessful

twice. Fortunately, she keeps trying from her failures to reach her goal. By having new positive activities, the character gets out from the situation that obstructs her way to move ahead in the future.

2. Claire

Claire who isolate herself is the next character that revitalize her life spirit. She loses her son in Vietnam War, thus she does not have spirit to live. She loves to be alone in her son's room and avoids the society. Her biggest conflict is struggle to escape from solitary life. She stands up and does some efforts to revitalize her life spirit by socializing. Socializing helps her in forgetting the death of her son. Finally, she moves forward to face her life in her own path.

The first action is to motivate herself and stand up continuing her life. Although it sounds easy, for the character it takes years to recover from the death of the loved one. Nevertheless, the character realizes her situation and changes it. It can be revealed from the quotation below;

How is it being dead, son, and would I like it?
Oh. The buzzer. Oh. Oh. Spoon clang to the floor.
Oh. Stepping quickly along the corridor. Return
and pick up the spoon. Everything neat now, neat,
yes. Give me back his living body, Mr. Nixon, and
we will not regret it, I won't complain. Just give
him back to us all sewn up and handsome.
Control yourself, Claire.
I shall not fall apart.
No.
(Page 84)

The setting in the quotation above refers to sad condition that is faced by the character. This condition makes her depressed. She collapses and loses her awareness to live for a long time. The inner conflict is shown when the character tries to escape from her loneliness. She releases her pain by motivating herself. It

is strengthened by the utterance *I won't complain*. It means that there is an effort from her to accept her son's death eventhough it is hard for her to release. Fortunately, she is aware of her suffering. Thus, she stands up to revitalize her life spirit. The utterance *Control yourself, Claire* reflects that the character does not want to waste her life. She is aware that her life must go on. She rises from her downturn to rearrange her life. The sentence *I shall not fall apart. No* indicates that there is a great motivation from the character to stand up facing the future. She moves forward and leaves her past.

By motivating herself, she decides to join a new community. It is her second effort to get out from her bad condition. This new community helps her overcome her sadness. It is supported by the quotation below;

She has been to four houses over the past eight months. All of them simple, clean, ordinary, lovely. Staten Island, the Bronx, two on the Lower East Side. Never any fuss. Just a gathering of mothers. That's all. The other women were already there—they smiled at her from the deep, pouchy sofa. They air-kissed, all of them, and the morning drifted smoothly. They even forgot where they were. (Page 76)

The setting refers to the pleasant situation, which help in stopping the memory of character's son. She is getting better. It is supported by the utterance *They even forgot where they were*. She demolishes her past that full of imagination about her son. She finds new activity to relieve the thought about him. The inner conflict is released when she adapts to her new group. It shows that she interacts with others by going *to four houses over the past eight months*. Before, she only stayed at home without doing anything. However, she looks for other activities that help her to have new friends to talk. The new activity is socializing It is strengthened from the sentence *Just a gathering of mothers*. She succeeds to throw away her

loneliness. She focuses on her new life experience. The character is already found a group to socialize. She communicates and shares her loneliness together with other mother who lost their son in the war. She moves on to revitalize her life spirit.

After motivating herself, the third way to revitalize her life spirit is giving motivation. She gives advice to move forward facing the life in front of the members. She builds her self-confidence gradually. Thus, she is able to escape from the shackles of her son's memory. She knows her anxiety and she wants to change it to be better together. The motivation is implicitly addressed to her. The character has awareness to change her future. It is proven when she forgets her sadness and runs her life smoothly.

3. Tillie

This character is the representative of a former prostitute who has trouble with the law. She is a thirty eight years old grandmother. Her granddaughter is also prostitute who get accident after trying to escape from jail. The inner conflict is shown when she realizes her role as a grandmother when she is in a prison. She is aware that she does not want her next generation follow her. Her persistence to change the fate of her granddaughters is very high. Thus, she makes some efforts to revitalize her life spirit. She determines to strengthen the bond among the family members. Finally, she can prove her own worth.

The first effort to revitalize her life spirit is making decision to raise her granddaughters by herself. This character as a grandmother has the role in leading the future of them. She makes sure her granddaughter should not be prostitute.

The way she proves it by deciding to rear them well. Thus, she convinces herself to take them and live with her. It is described in the quotation below;

When they first told me 'bout Jazzlyn I just stood there beating my head against the cage like a bird. They let me go to the funeral and then they locked me back up. The babies weren't there. I kept asking about the girls but everyone saying: Don't worry about the babies, they're being looked after.
(Page 212)

The text shows the sadness condition of the character. She is depressed about the news of the death of her only daughter. The inner conflict appears in the character's thought about the grandchildren. She realizes that they are in collapsed situation. Fortunately, there is awareness from the characters to save them. The solution to solve the conflict is by making decision to raise her granddaughter. She does it because she is triggered by her daughter who works as a prostitute. She does not think about herself anymore, but she thinks about them. The phrase *kept asking* explains that her persistence to know the news about them is marvelous. It means that her efforts to raise her granddaughters do not stop easily; she keeps trying to do so even she in jail. Her willingness to embrace the granddaughter is very strong. Thus, she does not want other people to take care of them.

Furthermore, the next point is protecting the granddaughter. She makes sure that they are not injured. The following quotation explains it;

I said to myself, I said, I'm gonna make enough money to go home to my granddaughter and buy them a big house with a fireplace and a deck out the back with lots of nice furniture. That's what I wanted.
I'm such a fuck-up. No one's a bigger fuck-up than me. No one's gonna know that, though. That's my secret. I walk through the world like I own it. Watch this spot. Watch it curve.
(Page 202)

The setting refers to the difficult situation that is faced by the character. She is in a jail and it is impossible to reach her goal with her status. The way to release her inner conflict is by motivating herself. The sentence *I'm such a fuck-up* means that the character knows her weakness. Fortunately, she does not want her weakness is known by others. Thus, she changes it and tries her best to revitalize her life. Besides, she does it for the sake of her granddaughter. The utterance *I'm gonna make enough money* describes that she tries to prepare everything for them. Besides, *Big house* is a place to secure the people inside. The character wants to protect her granddaughter from the hardness life. Thus, they can survive without following her darkness life in the future.

D. Conclusion

The novel *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) by Colum McCann reveals efforts to revitalize lives spirit. It is revealed from the lives of the characters as the representative of desperate people who had lived in the darkness. The efforts to revitalize lives spirit are done through having positive activities, socializing, and strengthening the bond among the family members. These efforts lead to the process of changing the life spirit. Therefore, the three characters are able to reach their goal in the future.

Each of the characters has different ways in revitalization their lives spirit. The first one is drug and alcohol addict. The way to release her inner conflict is by trying hard to recover from something that extremely harmful in her body. The second character builds her self-confidence to escape from solitude. It is revealed from her conflict to motivates other members. The last one changes her family's

future. The solution to solve her conflict images when she keeps her promise not to let her grandchildren be prostitute. The setting in this analysis refers to the difficult situations that are faced by the characters. The condition when they struggle to overcome their problems also supports the analysis.

Clearly, the characters do some efforts to revitalize their lives spirit in this novel. Setting plays an important role in analyzing this novel. The phenomenon of this issue is also can be found in reality. This is a common situation that often happened in a real life. People can change their lives spirit if they have awareness and stong willingness. They can get out from the situation that obstruct their way to move ahead in the future by hard working and great motivation.

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