

WAYS TO RELIEVE TRAUMA IN
MICHAEL CHABON'S *THE AMAZING ADVENTURE OF KAVALIER AND CLAY*

THESIS

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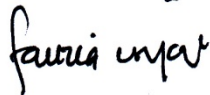
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ABSTRAK

Parama. A, Jaka. 2013. *Ways to Relieve Trauma in Michael Chabon's Novel The Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay*. Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris. Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni. Universitas Negeri Padang

Skripsi ini merupakan analisa dari novel *The Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay* (2001) yang ditulis oleh Michael Chabon. Topik yang dibahas adalah tentang trauma. Permasalahannya adalah bagaimana tokoh protagonist berjuang untuk terlepas dari traumanya. Tujuan penganalisaan ini adalah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana novel ini merefleksikan cara yang bisa dilakukan seseorang untuk terlepas dari trauma yang dimilikinya. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menginterpretasi teks dan konteks serta menganalisa keterkaitan elemen fiksi (karakter dan plot) satu sama lain. Elemen fiksi tersebut dianalisa berdasarkan teori Dominick Lacapra tentang acting out dan working through trauma dan teori tentang konsep tokoh superhero yang dirumuskan oleh Danny Fingeroth. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa seseorang yang memiliki trauma dapat terbebas setelah orang tersebut dapat menerima trauma tadi sebagai bagian dari masa lalunya. Dengan membuat karakter superhero fiksi sebagai perlambangan dirinya di dalam buku komik, protagonist dapat terlepas dari trauma yang dimilikinya.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Many people use the word trauma in every day language to mean a highly stressful event. But not many people know that the word trauma is derived from the Greek term for wound. The definition of the word trauma in oxford dictionary (2010) has two meanings. First, word trauma is used to define a serious injury or shock to the body that come from violence or an accident. The second definition is an emotional wound or shock that creates substantial, lasting damage to the psychological development of a person. Very frightening or distressing events may result in a psychological wound or injury. Those events may lead a person to have a difficulty in coping or functioning normally following a particular event. In order to live their life normally, a traumatic person has to find a way to cope with their trauma.

One example of very frightening or distressing events is an event called the Holocaust. Holocaust is a term used to refer to the genocidal persecution and killing of approximately six million European Jews during World War II that done by Nazi party in Germany. As the effects, the survivors is showing symptoms of mood swings, impulsivity, emotional irritability, anger and aggression, anxiety, depression and dissociation (Kathleen, 2005). In order to lessen the effect of traumatic events, the holocaust survivors have to find a way to cope with their trauma. The use of medical treatment such as using drugs has been suggested to decrease some effect of

the trauma, however that isn't the best way to make the victims fully relieved (Maxmen, 2002). The use of drugs in many cases only shows the decreasing of aggressiveness and compulsive behavior from the patient or just to make them calm from a moment.

There is an alternative way to help trauma victims to relieve their trauma. The effort is needed to be done by the victims if they want to live their life normally. The way can be by giving a therapy or by maximizing someone's ability to cope with his or her traumatic past. There is a study that was done by Roberta R. Greene (2001) entitled *Holocaust Survivors: A Study in Resilience* which presents the results of interviews with thirteen Holocaust survivors. The study recounts how each survivor met unpleasant circumstances during this time of crisis, how they mastered their memories, and successfully overcame the trauma of the Holocaust. The results of the study showed that using positive matters such as made a conscious decision to go on living, to celebrate life, and to think positively can help the survivors cope with their trauma and make their life better.

Nele Van Den Bossche (2010) also had done a research that focused on how comic books and superhero can help the trauma victims. She examined the use of superhero alter ego by Holocaust survivor in dealing with the feeling of helplessness. When people identify themselves with superheroes they can save themselves. The creation of a stronger super alter ego can be one of the ways that can enable victims to deal with their trauma. It helps the victims to fight the feel of helplessness that comes from the trauma and deal with it.

Ways to relieve trauma is an interesting issue to be explored since it is done differently from one traumatic people to another and not only found in reality but also in literary works. One of the literary works which expose the way to relieve trauma is a novel entitled *The Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay* (2001) written by Michael Chabon. In this novel, ways to relief trauma is done by the protagonist Josef Kavalier. He relieved from his trauma by creating two alter egos in two different comic books and joining the army.

1.1.1 Ways to Relieve Trauma

There are two terms that need to be explained in this analysis. They are relieve and trauma. The first term that needs to be explained is the word relieve. The word relieve define in Cambridge dictionary of psychology (2009) as a long term process to set free from pain and stress as coping effort to adapt. Every trauma have its own way of relieving depends on the cause. This is happened because everyone will react differently in dealing with a distressing event. The ways to relieve the trauma will also be different from one person to another depends on that person ability to cope with their trauma.

The second term that needs to be explained is trauma. The original meaning of the Greek word *trauma* refers to a wound. This meaning is maintained in the medical use when referring to a phschological injury. On the other hand, the word trauma nowadays is also has been used to explain a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury (Reyes, 2008). The definition of the word trauma that will be used in this analysis is the one that

explain a disordered psychic or behavioral state that resulting from emotional stress or physical injury.

There are some characteristics of the event which can bring a traumatic experience to the person who encountered it. The characteristics are: The event happened unexpectedly, the person were unprepared for it, and felt powerless to prevent it. As the effects, the person who survived from a traumatic event will shows symptoms of the uncontrollably mood, impulsivity, emotional irritability, anger and aggression, anxiety, depression and dissociation (Kathleen, 2005). In order to lessen the after effect, the person has to find a way to cope with their trauma. Ways to relieve trauma in this analysis means the efforts that done by the protagonist in order to set him free from pain and stress as the effect of traumatic event. The protagonist did this so he could live his life normally again.

1.1.2 A Brief of Michael Chabon

Michael Chabon is an American author and one of the most celebrated writers of his generation, according to *The Virginia Quarterly Review*. He was born in Washington D.C on May 24, 1963. Chabon's father was a physician and lawyer and he's mother also works as a lawyer. He grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Columbia, Maryland. His parents were divorced when Chabon was eleven and after his parents divorce, he was raised by his mother. As a result of the divorce, single-parenthood, and problematic father figures became recurring themes in his work. During his childhood, Chabon passionately collected DC and Marvel comic books. His passion for comic books was inherited from his father and his grandfather.

Chabon spent one year at Carnegie Mellon University, until he was transferred to the University of Pittsburg. Chabon earned his undergraduate degree in English at the University of Pittsburg in 1984. After his graduation he went to UC Irvine for a master program in creative writing under MacDonald Harris and Oakley Hall. Three years later he was awarded an MFA in the Creative Writing program at UC Irvine.

Chabon's first novel *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988) was published when he was 25 and catapulted him to literary celebrity. He followed it with a second novel *Wonder Boys* (1995) and two short-story collections. In 2000, Chabon published *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*; it received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2001. His novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, an alternate history mystery novel was published in 2007 to enthusiastic reviews and won the Hugo, Sidewise, Nebula, and Ignobus awards. His serialized novel *Gentlemen of the Road* appeared in book form in the fall of that same year.

Chabon third novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* was published in 2000. The novel has won numerous honors; American Library Association Notable Books of 2000, Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2001, New York Society Library Prize for Fiction, Bay Area Book Reviewers Award, Commonwealth Club Gold Medal, Finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and many others. There are many appreciation received by Chabon in this novel. One of them is from Daniel Mendelsohn who works for *New York Metro*. He says:

The 600-plus pages had me hooked from the first, wistful, epic-tinged sentence to the final poignant line. Their dense interweaving of big ideas and small details, of the personal and the historical, of the grandly symbolic and the minutely everyday, constitutes a major literary achievement along the lines of, say, *Ragtime* (with which this novel shares many concerns and themes) and ought to elevate its author to the rank of an important, as opposed to a merely good, American writer.

Since the late 1990s, Chabon has written in an increasingly diverse series of styles for varied outlets. He is a notable defender of the merits of genre fiction and plot-driven fiction, and, along with novels, he has published screenplays, children's books, comics, and newspaper serials.

1.1.3 *The Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay*

The Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay (2001), a novel written by Michael Chabon reflects the ways to relieve trauma. Trauma itself is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter people's sense of security, making them feel helpless and vulnerable. In this novel, the way to relieve trauma is done by the protagonist Josef Kavalier. He is a 19 years old Jewish refugee from Prague. He was trying to find his own way to relieve his trauma that caused by the Nazi. It can be seen from his two efforts. Kavalier's first effort is creating two different superhero alter ego named *The Escapist* and *The Golem* in his comic books. His second effort is by joining the army in order to release his anger directly to the Germany.

Protagonist's first effort to relieve his trauma is by creating two different superhero characters in his two comic book named *The Escapist* and *The Golem*. In

his first comic book he created a fictional character named *The Escapist*. He used *The Escapist* in order to deal with his feeling of disempowerment. In his first comic book, the protagonist is acting out his trauma. That was because when he drew *The Escapist* story, he only focused on the violent that he can pay back to the Nazi party. *The Escapist* fights and kills Nazi in every chapter that he made. *The Escapist* comic book helped him to escape only for a while because he tends to draw all of his wishful figments rather than reality to deal with the helplessness he feels.

In his second comic book, the protagonist created a character named *The Golem*. *The Golem* itself is the Jewish symbol that was supposed to help the Jewish community when it is threatened. By creating *The Golem*, the protagonist can work through his trauma. It was because after creating this second comic book kavalier can reunite again with his traumatized self. It is different from the first one, in this second book the protagonist was not only focused in expressing the anger that he felt toward the Germany, but more like pouring his own self in to his work.

Joining army is the second effort that is done by the protagonist. By joining the army, he wanted to act out his trauma in reality. He wanted to fight the Germany face to face in combat war. Protagonist's trauma comes from the threat that done by the Nazy to Jewish people and his family. When there is a chance to fight back the Germany in combat war he took it. Unfortunately, he is stationed on Antarctica as a radioman, with no chance of engaging in combat.

1.1.4 The Golem of Prague

The legend of the Golem is essentially a legend about creation. It is a myth about a Jewish rabbi or another Jewish person fabricating a powerful being out of dirt or clay, thus defying God's power of creation.

The Golem's creation is similar to mankind's creation in Jewish and Christian tradition. Nathan Ausubel (1998) in *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* quotes the Talmud to describe the similarities between Adam and the Golem: "How was Adam created? In the first hour his dust was collected; in the second his form was created; in the third he became a shapeless mass (*Golem*); in the fourth his members were joined; in the fifth his apertures opened; in the sixth he received his soul; in the seventh he stood up on his feet". The Golem, a shapeless matter with no life force, is created in a manner similar of mankind. However, the main difference between the two creations is that the Golem does not have a soul, a gift that only God can bestow on his creations, and therefore the Golem cannot speak.

There are several stories about Golems and their different creators. Nevertheless, the Golem of Prague is probably the best known version. This Golem is said to have been made by Rabbi Yehuda Loew. The rabbi, his disciple, and his son in law formed the Golem in the image of a man out of clay. By reciting spells, the Golem came to life, and he was named Joseph. This name comes after Joseph Shida, who had been half-man and half-demon which had protected the Jews from so many troubles. The Golem, who was mute, was to serve the Jewish community and protect it from the blood accusations their enemies were raising against them. The Golem

managed to reveal a conspiracy against the Jews, and no false accusations were made. In this version the Golem is a protector of the Jewish people against anti-Semitism.

1.2 Problem of Study

There are many issues that can be explored from the novel *The Amazing Adventure of Cavalier and Clay* (2001) by Michael Chabon. However, the ways to relieve trauma emerges as the main issue which done by the character. In order to reveal meaning in this novel, research question are needed. Those research questions are:

1. How far does the whole novel expose the ways to relieve a trauma?
2. To what extent do the fictional devices such as character and plot (conflicts) give contribution in exposing the ways to relieve a trauma?

1.3 Purpose of Study

This study is going to find out how far novel *The Amazing Adventure of Cavalier and Clay* (2001) by Michael Chabon exposes the ways to relieve trauma. Besides, this study is done in order to explore to what extent character and plot (conflicts) give contribution in disclosing the way to relieve a trauma.

1.4 Previous Study

There are two studies that give contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel. The first analysis was written by Noella Jeo (2005) entitled "*Perry Smith and*

Josef Kavalier: Historical and Literary Victimized Victimsizers". In this analysis Jeo compared the protagonist in the novels *Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay* and *In Cold Blood*. It discusses about a better way for traumatized people to be helped rather than doing violent action to themselves or to others.

In this analysis, Noella Jeo focused on the character and plot. She stated that trauma isolates and alienates people from their communities, but reading and creating texts can reintegrate them into other communities and help them rebuild the broken pieces of their lives. By sharing stories, isolated victims can be reintegrated back into communities that before did not understand or care about the victims' histories because they now have greater empathy of their struggles.

The other study that gives contribution to this study is written by Nele Van Den Bossche (2010), entitled "*Discovering trauma of Nazism and the Cold War in the Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay and Watchmen*". In this analysis Bossche compared the protagonist in the novels *Amazing Adventure of Kavalier and Clay* and *Watchmen*. She focuses on character and plot because both of these protagonists have same problem with Nazi.

Bossche analysis focused on potential healing that can result from comic books and superhero. This is very important to those people who feel disempowered, such as traumatized people. The creation of a stronger, super alter ego, as a way of doubling to cope with this disempowerment, can enable victims to deal with their trauma. In *Kavalier & Clay* Joe acquires a certain level of healing by constructing a narrative: *The Golem*. Meanwhile, In *Watchmen* the traumatized characters do not

benefit from their fictional doubles. Until his death, Rorschach is possessed by all the traumatic events he has lived through.

The analysis above gives contribution and inspiration to the topic the way to relieve trauma. They also enriched the knowledge about the topic. Unlike the previous study, this analysis focuses on how far does the novel reflect the way to relieve trauma through the actions that done by the characters and supporting by the conflict on the novel.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this novel deals with LaCapra concept of acting out and working through trauma and the concept of superhero by Danny Fingeroth. Dominick LaCapra in *History in Transit* (2004) formulates two processes to deal with trauma. LaCapra uses the term "acting out" of trauma and "working through" to indicate a process of learning to cope with trauma. When a person is acting out the suffered trauma, it means that he is compulsively repeating it. Since the root of this term is come from Freud theory of death instinct, it will be used in explaining the destructive behavior that done by the protagonist. Freud in Guerin (2005) states that the self-destructive behaviour is an expression of the energy created by the death instinct. When this energy is directed outward into others, it is expressed as aggression and violence.

To work through trauma, the victims have to integrate the traumatic events into his life and into his past. This means the victims has to put the traumatic

experience in the right place and time, in order to lessen the effects of the posttraumatic symptoms. The root of this theory was come from Freud theory of life instinct. Life instinct is considered to be the basic of survival and pleasure motivation. The main motive of life insticnt is to maintain the life. It forces people to survive by having solution for the problem. This theory explains why the protagonist keeps seeking the best way in order to make him relieve from his trauma at all cost. Nevertheless, it must be noted that LaCapra does not view acting out and working through as binaries, nor are they phases in a linear process.

In dealing with trauma by using superhero alter ego, Danny Fingeroth considers the dual identity to be one of the most important traits of superheroes. Superheroes often have a secret identity and when they operate as heroes, they put on a mask. To Fingeroth, the masks of superheroes function both literally and metaphorically: “A physical mask is not necessary to hide identity, at least not among the superheroes. The mask’s purpose is not only to hide the hero’s identity, but it also gives the person wearing it power. The mask is recognized as power gifter and also as disguiser of identity” (Fingeroth, 2004).

For that reason, superheroes are often used in counseling and play therapy. Seeing these traumatic experiences in the lives of their superheroes, traumatized people may decide to create their own alter egos, whether they are fictional characters or vigilantes in real life. Moreover, according to Fingeroth, the most important thing that should be noted that is when someone creating a superhero alter ego, the alter ego should have one or two representative point from the creator. This is to make sure that the alter ego represents the identity of the creator.

The combination of these concepts can be seen on the main character of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2001). He was going through both of acting out and working through trauma. The protagonist was acting out trauma by creating *The Escapist* character in his first comic book and by joining the army. Then he was working through his trauma by creating *The Golem* in his second comic book.

The analysis of this novel is supported by text based and context based interpretation. According to Guerin (2005) text based interpretation is the approach that based on the analysis and interpretation to text itself and context based interpretation is the approach that based on the circumstances of culture, history political, and social. It means that the meaning of the novel are found by correlation among some element of fictional devices such as characters and plot (conflict).

Fictional devices involved in the analysis of this novel are focused on character and plot. Characters are an important element in enclosing the topic of this analysis. Corner (2009) says that a character may be defined as a verbal representation of human being. In literary works, the characters help reader to understand and catch the meaning of the works. The analysis of the character can be done through actions, thoughts, dialogues, and how they react toward certain conflicts of circumstances. The effort in relieving psychological trauma is represented by the protagonist.

The second device that is going to be involved in this novel analysis is plot, which is focused on conflicts. According to Bokeesch (2000), conflict can be identified into four kinds; man versus self, man versus man, man versus nature, and man versus society. In this analysis, the conflicts which are faced by the protagonist

are from internal and external conflict. The internal conflict comes from the protagonist's traumatic self. It can be seen through the struggling that done by the protagonist in finding a way to relieve from his trauma.

1.6 Methodology

The analysis of this novel is done through text and context-based interpretation. Furthermore, it is done by analyzing fictional devices such as character and plot (conflicts). Character is used to show the ways that can be done to relieve from a trauma. This is done by analyzing character action and dialogue through his life. Meanwhile, plot (conflicts) plays important role in conveying the meaning of this novel. Moreover, these elements are analyzed based on the LaCapra concept of acting out and working through trauma and the concept of superhero by Danny Fingeroth.