

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

Thesis

*Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
to Obtain Strata One (S1) degree*



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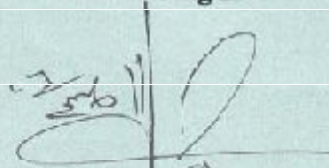
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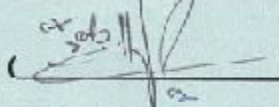
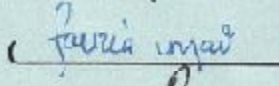
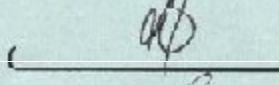

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ABSTRAK

Azzahra, Siti Fauzana. 2012. Efforts To Revitalize Lives Spirit In Colum McCann's Novel *Let The Great World Spin* (2009). Skripsi. Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris. Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni. Universitas Negeri Padang.

Skripsi ini merupakan analisa teks (karya sastra) novel *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) karya Colum McCann. Masalah yang dianalisa dalam skripsi 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 skripsi ini dianalisa dengan menggunakan text-based approach yang difokuskan pada unsur sastra yaitu; karakter, setting dan plot (konflik). Analisa ini dikaitkan 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.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

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) 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.

1.1.1 Efforts to Revitalize Lives Spirit

There are three terms that need to be clarified in this analysis. They are efforts, revitalize, and lives spirit. The first term is efforts. Dweck (2000) in her book *Self-theories: their role in motivation, personality, and development* defines effort as “one of the things that gives meaning to life. Effort means you care about something that something is important to you and you are willing to work for it.” In other word, effort refers to an attempt that is very essential to produce a real purpose in life. Living without doing anything is not enough. Thus, people must have a wish, a dream and an action to get better life. It would be a fortuneless existence if people are not willing to commit themselves in facing their life problems.

The second term is revitalize. The term revitalize was firstly introduced by John F.C Wallace 1956. He is a Canadian-American anthropologist and psychologist. According to Wallace (2010) in his paper called "Revitalization Movements", revitalize means to make something that is failing or weak become strong and successful again. The definition above gives explanation that "revitalize" refers to reestablishing something to be the good one. It enables people to reform their lives spirit in a better way to live.

The third term is lives spirit. In thesaurus dictionary, spirit means the vital principle or animating force within living things. Furthermore, Raphael (2012) defines life spirit as a hypothetical force to which the functions and qualities peculiar to living things are sometimes ascribed. In other words, the quality of spirit enables people to face danger or pain without showing fear. This spirit is powerful and is capable of earning eternal life. Thus, the spirit of a human is always searching for what is perfect. Therefore, efforts to revitalize lives spirit in this analysis refer to the action of humans who move forward in facing the upcoming life. The characters are able to face the life better than before.

1.1.2 A Brief of Colum McCann

Colum McCann is an Irish writer of literary fiction. He was born in Dublin; Ireland on February 28, 1965. McCann grew up in suburban Dublin in a house filled with books. His father was a journalist for an Irish press group as well as a literary editor for a Dublin newspaper. McCann follows his father's steps by making

storytelling when he was at elementary school. He chose his education by attending one of the only available journalism schools in Ireland, the College of Commerce Rathmines, in 1982. Then, he began his career as a reporter for The Irish Press. In 1988, he received his B.A. from one university in Texas.

Colum McCann is the author of two collections of short stories and five novels, including *This Side of Brightness*, *Dancer*, and *Zoli*, all three of which were international best-sellers. His newest novel is *Let the Great World Spin*. His fiction has been published in 30 languages and has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *GQ*, *Paris Review*, *Bomb* and other publications. He has written for numerous publications including the *Irish Times*, *Die Zeit*, *La Repubblica*, *Paris Match*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*.

Colum's fifth novel, *Let the Great World Spin*, was published in 2009. It is a powerful allegory of 9/11. The novel has won numerous honors; the National Book Award (2009) for fiction, 21st Century Best Foreign Novel of the Year, Weishanhu Award for 2010 (China), and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (2011). J. J. Abrams has optioned the film rights and has promised to work with McCann on the screenplay. In the United States his literary works was received with acclamation in all levels of media. Not only has McCann been awarded the National Book Award in 2009 for *Let the Great World Spin* but has been hailed by media sunspots such as Oprah Winfrey.

Many people give praises and comment to this novel. The *Richmond Times - Dispatch* (the primary daily newspaper in Richmond the capital of Virginia, United States, 2009) states that the novel is “beautiful, heady... [a]s worn down as McCann's characters are, they each struggle heroically against life's downward pull, and that's what makes the novel so powerfully uplifting”. This statement reflects that the story is interesting to follow and it is worth in academic discussion. The protagonists do not only stay on one spot; they realize and change the sorrow of life.

Moreover, McCann has ever said in an interview done by Nathan Englander (Jewish-American author) November 30, 2009. He says:

I suppose the great dream of this writing lark is that the books continuously get newer and deeper and stronger. Or at least we hope that we're not repeating ourselves. Vonnegut said that we have to be continually jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down. I think that's what happened with this book. I saw a big cliff and I took off. Inevitably I will smash to the ground. That's what happens with every book. At this moment, though, I'm still flying, still catching the updrafts, and still trying to understand it.

In this point, it can be seen how Colum McCann always improve his literary works. He never gives up revising them. His works does not only telling a story, but also explores many things by transmitting the idea of the novel with different meaning to the people. In addition, he tells that ...“I love the fact that our stories can cross all sorts of borders and boundaries. ...I feel humbled by the notion that I'm even a small part of the literary experience.” Then, he adds his story is everywhere. It means that

the story is acceptable in every level of society. It can be related to economy, social, and cultures. Thus, every person can enjoy this remarkable works of his.

1.1.3 Let The Great World Spin

The novel *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) by Colum McCann reflects efforts to revitalize lives spirit. The characters try to change their lives spirit to be the better one. In this novel, they are desperate people who had lived in the darkness such as being street walking prostitute, drug and alcohol addict, and isolated. However, the characters realize their depressing circumstances. These situations lead them to look forward in facing their future. Thus by having life spirit, they stand up and do something to find a point of light. The representations of the characters in this novel are Lara, Claire, and Tillie. Each of the characters has different ways in revitalization their lives.

The first character, Lara, concerns about her choice in showing her seriousness in revitalizing the life spirit. She reestablishes her life spirit to move forward by having positive activities. She stops using drugs and alcohol that make her addicted. This girl thwarts her bad habit to the good one by painting. Besides, she builds up her life by learning arts. The skill gives her opportunity to be a better artist. Since Lara has a talent in arts, she becomes an artist in an art company. She holds art films and reaches a better achievement.

The second character, Claire, develops her life spirit by socializing. She chooses to join a new community. She finds solace in a support group to help her

associating with other neighbors. Then, Claire becomes brave to speak giving her opinion in front of the members. This group produces articles from the members. Claire succeeds to publish it in the newspaper. Her busy activities help her to forget her sadness. This situation makes she stands on her feet in determining the future.

The last character, Tillie, strengthens the bond among the family members. In the past, she was a prostitute and a mother who was not exactly successful at rearing up her daughter. Thus, her daughter is also following her mother's step as a prostitute. She does not want this situation happened again to her grandchildren. Tillie decides to leave her status as a prostitute. She chooses to raise her grandchildren. Besides, she supports them when they have to deal with problems.

1.2 Problem of Study

Efforts to revitalize lives spirit emerge as the main issue done by the characters in this novel. In order to reveal this issue, the research questions are needed. Those research questions are:

1. How far does the whole novel expose efforts to revitalize lives spirit?
2. To what extend do the fictional devices such as characters, setting and plot (conflict) contribute in exposing efforts to revitalize lives spirit?

1.3 Purpose of Study

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.

1.4 Previous Study

The analysis about the novel *Let The Great World Spin* (2009) that focuses on efforts to revitalize lives spirit has not been found yet. However, there are some studies that can give contribution and inspiration in analyzing this novel.

The first study that gives contribution to this analysis was written by Nick Maziarka (2009) entitled *literary analysis: Comparison of Ideal Dreams in Steinbeck's Novels*. This is a study about novel *Of Mice and Men* and *The Pearl* which is written by John Steinbeck. This study analyzed how the central characters created goals that seem impossible to achieve or fulfill their future life. They realized that the pursuit of their dreams only results in disappointment and disaster. The study analyzed the characters that are used in both of the novels. This analysis was based on theory of goal by Andrew J. Elliot. This study was done by exploring the ambition to reach ideal dream. The result of this analysis, the characters in both novels learned that they must let go of their great dreams before any more harm comes. They discovered that ideal dreams, even when they originate from pure intentions, do not often reach fulfillments. Different from the analysis of this novel, this analysis

analyze the fictional devices focused on characters who make some efforts to revitalize their lives spirit.

The second study was written by Jordan Rigby (2007) entitled *The Hours: A Measure of Modernist Time*. This analysis analyzed the novel from Michael Cunningham. This analysis was based on theory of modernism by Watkins and Severon and the theory of consciousness by Sigmund Freud. It explored Cunningham's style of writing and many characteristic attributed to modernism. This analysis was done by exploring the structure of the story in order to break the style of modernism in Cunningham's novel. Besides, it analyzed the characters and plot of the novel. The condition is shown through two characters that lived in different time and space. Both characters in the novel showed that they could perform their life without relying on something. From this analysis, it can be perceived that the characters in this novel are struggling to maintain their life, even though the outside world that says they are perfectly fine. This analysis contained the struggle of the characters that are optimistic to overstep the boundaries in their life. The similarity of this analysis is the fictional devices that focused on characters and theory. The concept of life instinct (eros) by Sigmund Freud is used in this analysis.

The studies above give contribution and inspiration to the topic, efforts to revitalize lives spirit. They also enrich the knowledge about the topic. Unlike the studies above, this analysis focuses on how far the novel reflects efforts to revitalize lives spirit through actions that done by the characters and supported by plot and setting on the novel.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this novel deals with the concept of life instinct (Eros) by Sigmund Freud. Freud in Salem (2006) states that instincts are innate, goal directed sequences of behavior; they are more complex than simple reflexes but are impervious to the influence of learning and experience. Here Freud implies that human action is always governed by instinct. Instinct has function in a complementary manner in the personal and interpersonal lives of human.

Human instinct influences people behavior. Freud in Guerin (2005), states that human behavior is governed by death instinct (Thanatos) and life instinct (Eros). Death instinct (Thanatos) according to Freud is self-destructive behavior. It is an expression of the energy created by the death instincts. When this energy is directed outward onto others, it is expressed as aggression and violence. The concept of the death instinct is indispensable to the understanding and treatment of trauma. Characteristics of traumatic experience, such as dissolution of the empathic bond, failure to assimilate experience into psychic representation and structure, a tendency to repeat traumatic experience, and a resistance to remembering and knowing, are considered as trauma-induced death instinct derivatives.

However, life instinct is considered to be the basis of basic survival and pleasure motivation. This instinct aims to complete and sustain the individual life. The main motive of life instinct is to maintain the life. It forces people to survive by having solution for the problem. Freud in Kastenbaum (2007) asserts that the function of life instinct cause people seek out for new experiences, reach out to others and

expand energy in pursuit of their goal. This instinct provides people to have enthusiasm in life. Through this enthusiasm people can sustain their life and reach their goal. It means that life instinct encourages people to obtain the better life.

Furthermore, in this analysis life instinct plays the important concept since it is related to the topic of the novel. In this case, the life instinct helps characters in the novel (Lara, Claire, and Tillie) to revitalize their lives spirit and get out from the condition that obstruct their way to move ahead in the future. In this analysis, the characters are representative of people who are aware about the need to solve the problem, find the new way in life and make some efforts to revitalize their lives spirit. Different characters make different efforts to revitalize their lives.

In addition, this analysis is related to the concept of Self-Reliance by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1984). Self reliance is a concept about trusting the genuine of self. Emerson's idea is about how someone must act through themselves whenever they want a change happened in their life, rather than accepting what has given by the Creator. In the essay titled *Self Reliance*, Emerson in Thoreau (2009) writes that "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles." According to him, self-reliance is the chance to take the reins of the life and lead to the front. Self reliance gives people chance to discover more about life. It controls life that gives a real opportunity to expand the horizons and explore the future. Being a self reliant gives human great freedom. It opens the eyes to new possibilities, prospects and options. The important content of this concept which relates to this analysis is about how everyone creates his or her awareness that

they have right to determine destiny and future. The awareness will lead someone to think and do some efforts to change the life.

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.

The analysis of this novel is supported by text-based interpretation. Guerin (2005) says that this approach is focused on the analysis and the interpretation of the text itself. It means that the process of analysis is done within the text only without regarding the other aspects outer the text. It signifies that the presence and the meaning of this story are found by examining the interrelation among the elements of text; theme, plot, characterization, setting and point of view.

Fictional devices involved in the analysis of this novel are focused on character, plot and setting. 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 us to understand

and catch the meaning of the works. Through exploring the character, it can be evaluated how the messages on a story are delivered to the reader. The analysis of the character can be done through actions, thoughts, dialogues and how they react toward certain conflicts of circumstances. The characters that make some efforts to change their miserable life spirit be the better one are Lara, Tillie, and Claire.

The second device that is going to be used in this analysis is plot that focused on conflicts. According to Bokesch (2002), conflict can be identified into four kinds; man versus man, man versus nature, man versus society, and man versus self. In this analysis, the conflicts which are faced by the characters are from the internal conflict. The internal conflicts come from the character's own mind. It can be seen through the anger, argument, the shape of envy, and confrontation idea and opinion. The characters show the ways to resolve their problem from their inner strength. Furthermore, conflict is needed to reveal the issue of revitalization of life spirit since the character realize their waste of life and make some actions to improve their life spirit to be better than before.

Another element of fictional device that will be used in this analysis is setting. The setting also helps in revealing the meaning of the works. It has strong connection with situation, location, condition and atmosphere of the characters in the story. Endriga (2003) says that setting has a way of drawing the reader into a piece of literature while facilitating understanding of the characters and their actions. This statement shows that the setting plays as one of important thing to influence the character's condition, situation and atmosphere. The situation in this novel happened

in New York 1974. According to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in McCann (2009), this novel captured the spirit of people in a time of transition. It refers to the condition of living in the dark side of the world. People struggle to escape from the darkness and clear a path for healing and redemption from a later time. Moreover, the setting in this novel also refers to the character conditions that live in pressure, fear, tension, and threat. They support and complement the conflicts in order to convey the text's meaning. Furthermore, setting plays an essential role to set efforts to revitalize lives spirit.

1.6 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.

CHAPTER III

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 extremey 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 strong 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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