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“ANAYA’S THEOLOGICAL SCEPTICISM AND ITS , IMPACT”

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Abstract

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menunjukkan adanya skeptisisme teologis dan dampaknya yang disampaikan oleh Rudolfo A. Anaya dalam novelnya *Bless Me, Ultima* melalui seorang tokoh bernama Antonio (Tony). Skeptisisme teologis ini muncul karena ketidakselarasan pendidikan agama yang ia terima dari kedua orang tuanya dan dari khotbah pemuka agama yang ia anggap tidak rasional. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah *content analysis* (menggali nilai-nilai filosofis di dalam karya sastra) dengan pendekatan filsafat dengan teori hermeneutika (memahami simbol yang terkandung di dalam karya sastra). Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah, dampak dari skeptisisme teologis membuat tokoh Tony melaksanakan kegiatan keagamaan sekedar demi keharmonisan dan persahabatan dalam hubungan antar manusia.

Kata kunci: *theological scepticism, personal experience, worship, friendship.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya was born on October 30, 1937 in Pastura, New Mexico. *Bless Me, Ultima* is largely autobiographical, as Anaya drew on the religious and political issue that shaped his experience as a Hispanic American living in the Southwest during World War (1939-1945). His father was a vaquero (a sheep and cattle rancher) and his mother was a devout Catholic came from a farming family (<http://www.noveexplorer.com/category/bless-me-ultima/> pp. 1). *Bless Me, Ultima*, then, is a work that examines the various forces that shape the life of Antonio, a young Mexican-American boy who is a main character in the novel (http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/rudolfo pp. 1).

Bless me, Ultima is wonderful story based on the “Chicano” or Northern New Mexico native people culture, religion, and customs that tells us about a young Mexican boy, Antonio Marez, growing up in New Mexico during the mid 1940s. It begins when he is six years old, and Ultima, a curandera or healing women, comes to live with his family because she is getting too old to live by herself. This novel shows us how Tony faces a lot of difficulties and has to deal with curses, healings, dead people and mean friends. Tony becomes a man of learning throughout his childhood with Ultima’s help. His father wants Tony to grow up free to roam the land and become a vaquero, as he once was. His mother wants Tony to be a priest, a man of learning. Tony is torn between them regarding his future. The novel contains a rich panorama of visual imagery as it describes the New Mexico landscape of the 1940s, and it also shows realistic concepts about life and living of people. One important view of the novel is the power struggles that is a result of acculturation. (Black, 2000: 146).

Throughout the story, Tony also faces confusion over religion and spirituality. Tony is confused over Catholicism. Though he does believe in God, he wants understanding from Him, answers to his questions. From a very young age, Tony witnesses death, deaths of Lupito, and death of a family friend, Narciso. Tony realizes the power of good over evil and understands that truth is more powerful than that which is prescribed by custom. Religious teachings which Tony knows so far is not aligned with the realities of life which he witnesses. This condition makes him become hesitant

about the concept of God. He becomes sceptical in his spiritual beliefs, similarly faced by his friends. Skepticism in the theological issues covered in the discussion of the philosophy of religion.

Philosophy of religion requires such an external standpoint from which the philosopher can critique and judge the beliefs located within specific religious traditions (Harrison, 2010: 48). Scepticism in religion has been a discussion of philosophers throughout the ages; this doctrine is often referred to, in this case, is Pyrrhonism. Philosophical scepticism is opposed to philosophical dogmatism, which maintains that a certain set of positive statements are authoritative, absolutely certain, and true. Most ancient sceptics do not seem to have believed that simply because one cannot be absolutely certain about anything, one should therefore suspend judgment on all things. Religion ought to be based on certainty. Its aim, its effects, its usages collapse as soon as this firm conviction of its truth is erased from the human mind (<file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion> - pp. 2). Theological scepticism is based on belief about the nature of supernatural claims and the nature of the human mind. A sceptic may be an atheist simply because he or she perceives little, if any, evidence for the belief in a god. Montaigne refers to varied moral authorities, one of them being custom and the other reason. Through philosophy, he seeks full accordance with the diversity of life (<file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion> - pp. 4).

Scepticism, according to Dr. Lorens Bagus (1996), is a philosophical method that is used by those who suspend judgment about something because of doubts or because they are waiting for better evidence. Sceptic means thoughtful, reflective, curious, listen, and examine carefully. A sceptic is a person whose attitude is critical, thus usually provocative; not easily accepts the statement without any convincing evidence. Pascal's scepticism stated the only way out from a legitimate sense of uncertainty is by degrading someone and then turning to the humility of faith (1019). According to Hume, cited by Lorens Bagus, the belief in the existence of the external world and the existence of God can only be justified psychologically based on matters relating to customs, habits, conventions, statutes, and coherence between our impressions and ideas (1024). Sceptics do not deny the reality of sense perception. One particular type of metaphysical scepticism is noteworthy: theological scepticism. A theological sceptic raises doubts regarding the possibility of knowledge about any gods. A theological sceptic may be an atheist, a theist, or an agnostic. The theological sceptic maintains that we cannot know for certain whether any god exists. Such a view does not entail the notion that we should be atheists (<http://skepdic.com/skepticism.htm#5> pp. 3). The feeling of absolute dependence related to episodes of the particular religious emotion-types, such as joy, gratitude, hope, contrition, compassion, and sorrow is the essentially religious element in these emotions. The particular religious emotions are responses, some pleasant and some unpleasant. Gratitude, for example, is a response to a particular kind of situation in which the subject is the recipient of some benefit; contrition is a response to a situation in which a subject has committed some fault; and so forth (<file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion> - pp. 4).

2. READING REVIEW

Some studies have been done on this novel, one of them was written by Kaunang (2012) who discussed the conflict of cultural values and Anaya's criticism of Catholicism. In this thesis Kaunang discussed Anaya's criticism of the church practice conveyed through Tony. Other researchers discussed the reflection of Transcendentalism in this novel that believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; in inspiration, and ecstasy, which is achieved through meditation

(<http://www.transcendentalists.com/terminology.html>). Criticism of *Bless Me, Ultima* revealed that Antonio's character caught the maternal and paternal cultural conflict as well as Chicano and American cultural conflict. This conflict is a reflection of Anaya's life in New Mexico in 1940 (http://www.clifnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/criticism). Other research is connected to mysticism content (<http://www.enotes.com/bless-me-qn/themes-characters>). There is also a research discussing the search for identity and reconciliation of old and new American cultures that is considered as the central theme of this novel. This novel has also provoked strong reactions in contemporary Chicano literature, as it relates to Catholicism; in addition, this novelist was considered unique with his interesting narrative techniques, and the story is conveyed accurately and lyrical ([file:///D:/rudolfo anaya critics files/translate_p.htm](file:///D:/rudolfo%20anaya%20critics%20files/translate_p.htm)).

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The problem that I will discuss in this study begins with the research question, why is Tony skeptical of the concept of God and what is the impact of his skepticism?

4. THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to show that Tony has experienced a theological scepticism and the impact of his scepticism.

5. THE BENEFIT OF RESEARCH

The benefit of this research is to explore the relation between literature and philosophy, mainly the correlation of Anaya's literary work and the concept of Scepticism.

6. METHOD

This research is to explore the content of the novel in order to reveal the philosophical values of literature (Endraswara, 2008: 163). Procedures related to the procurement of data, involve reading all the contents of the novel thoroughly in order to understand the content of the deepest meaning intended by the text. The second, is determining the unit of analysis – includes sampling and data recording. I focused on a problem that I want to deal with, that is theological scepticism and its impact. Finally, I specified a particular character embracing a particular type of scepticism based on their thought, ideas, and behaviour. To analyze the philosophical thoughts and views of Tony, I used the method of hermeneutics, which is called the hermeneutic circle (Hadi, 2014). The general procedures in hermeneutics are: the text must be read with earnestness using sympathetic imagination. The stages of hermeneutic circle are as follows. First, I read the novel from beginning to end, and to be clear, I read it many times to understand covered in the symbolic connotative, metaphorical, and suggestive forms. Second, I assume; that Tony is experiencing conflict in his belief about the existence of God. I let my horizon of understanding shaped by the text and then projected into a new understanding, that doubts about divinity is the reflection of religious scepticism.

7. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Pyrrhonists hold the view that there are no absolute standard or values. Each person has their own standards to determine the truth. A theological sceptic raises doubts regarding the possibility of knowledge about any gods. Anaya in *Bless Me, Ultima* shows this kind of thinking through his fictional characters. For example, Tony and his sisters were reluctant to follow the will of Maria: "We must pray," she beamed with joy although her eyes were red with crying. We prayed

rosary after rosary, until the monotonous sound of prayers blended into the blur of flickering altar candles (56).... . We prayed until our faith passed into an exhaustion that numbed us to sleep. The first to fall asleep was Theresa, and my father quietly got up and took her to bed. Then Deborah nodded and toppled. And I, who wanted to endure to please my mother, was next. I felt my father's strong arms carrying me out, ... I do not know how long they prayed. I only know that my soul floated with the holiness of prayer into the sky of dreams (57).

Most sceptics do not seem to have believed that simply because one cannot be absolutely certain about anything, one should therefore suspend judgment on all things. This view is shown by Florence which questioned the truth of religion that does not make sense (185). "You have to choose, Tony, Cico said, "You have to choose between the god of the church, or the beauty that is here and now –" He pointed and I looked into the dark, clear water of the creek. Two brown carp swam from under the thicket into the open (227). Cico has a certain concept of God which he aspired. He wants to deliver a new view of divinity which is based on peace and happiness:

"There are many gods," Cico whispered, "gods of beauty and magic, gods of the garden, gods in our backyards – but we go off to foreign countries to find new ones, we reach to the stars to find new ones –". "The golden carp accepts all magic that is good, but your God, Tony, is a jealous God. He does not accept competition – Cico laughed cynically (228).

Tony began to be affected and even support the idea of Cico who wanted to display another god who would give peace: "No," I nodded, "but what if there were different gods to rule in his absence?" Florence could not have been more surprised by what I said than I. I grabbed him by the collar and shouted, "what if the Virgin Mary or the Golden Carp ruled instead of – !" (189). Antonio considered the possibility that his mother had been praying to the wrong god; perhaps she should pray to the golden carp. The initiation into the religion of golden carp cause him to begin to raise doubts about Tony even had an intention to replace God with other gods and he was sure Florence would receive his idea with joy: "No," I nodded, "but what if there were different gods to rule in his absence?" Florence could not have been more surprised by what I said than . I grabbed him by the collar and shouted, "what if the Virgin Mary or the Golden Carp ruled instead of – !" (189).

a. Father's Sermon Increasing Doubts

Philosophical scepticism is opposed to philosophical dogmatism, which maintains that a certain set of positive statement are authoritative, absolutely certain, and true. The perception of God that Tony understood is that He was worshiped because He is everything. God could give kindness to the good and could punish evil humans (191). He also listened to the sermon of Father Byrnes; in his view the sermon was very unreasonable, and very scary. Father Byrnes went on to discuss the difference between mortal and venial sins. His explanation was very simple, and in a way frightful. If one died with a venial sin on one's soul one could not enter heaven until the sin was absolved by prayers of rosaries or masses from one's family on earth. But if one died with a mortal sin on his soul he could never enter heaven. Never. It was frightening to go to hell forever (191). Sceptics do not deny the reality of sense perception. The sermon in the church did not give a sense of peace to the congregation, especially to children, and made the children confused. They could not accept the contents of the sermon according to their common sense. Father Byrnes' stories about hell made the children very frightened (191). Terrible sermon and did not give a sense of peace might make the children become uncomfortable to follow the activities in the church (193).

b. Scepticism As A Result of Personal Experience

Spiritual conflict that was experienced by Tony was based on the contrasting views that he experienced through religious teachings and from his personal experience: "But God didn't forgive anyone. The theological sceptic maintains that we cannot know for certain whether any god exist. The feeling of absolute dependence related to episode of the particular religious emotion-type, such as joy and hope. Tony thought if God does exist, he hoped God would grant the request of His people (98). Gratitude, for example, is a response to a particular kind of situation in which the subject is the recipient of some benefit; contrition is a response to a situation in which a subject has committed some fault; and so forth. Tony felt sorry for doubting the existence of God:

c. Between Doubt and Belief

In an effort to maintain his belief, Tony displayed an attitude of humility and faith into thinking that maybe God was too busy that He overlooked some events in the world: "Perhaps, I thought, God had not seen the murder take place, and that is why He had not punished Tenorio. Perhaps God was too busy in heaven to worry or care about us" (130). Because of Tony's humility, though God did not grant his request to meet with Him, Tony remained faithful to implement the teachings of his religion. Merely to entertain and relieve his restless feelings and thoughts. Tony even turned to blame himself, as he thought that he did not seriously implement the religious doctrine, so that many times he apologized to God. Tony was accustomed to obtaining religious education, so he always tried to obey the religious teaching (130). Tony's self-concept is based on the traditions and customs about God that he got from her mother. Tony was back to apologize to God for all his mistakes. It reflects that he feared the punishment of God. This attitude is an effort to dampen the theological crisis in the traditional way as a result of his education. Moreover, by apologizing to God he felt more comfortable. Tony became very upset because God according to his mother's teachings and the teachings of the church did not show His power to overcome all the pain of life: "Did God Listen? Would He hear? Had he seen my father on the bridge?" (21). When Tellez family got disease, neither doctors and pastors could cured them, Tony thought: So again the power of the priest has failed, I thought. Why can't the power of God work against the evils that beset the family of Tellez? Why is it allowed to continue? (215).

Children believe what their parents tell them, but as they get older they start to question various concepts about reality and experience which used to be unquestionable, (http://www.directessays.com/essays_on/God/Religion/Christianity/T). Tony, who was growing up and seeing how cruel the world was, could not control his curiosity, which made him constantly questioned the existence of God. Tony was still carrying out the religious tradition. Aside from the traditions and customs that he had, Tony often felt worried when he did not carry out religious orders, he was afraid of punishment from God, as taught by his mother. Although his mind was filled with doubts about God. Tony did his utmost to draw closer to Him. Eventhough God was not also present in his call, sometimes he felt guilty and less prepared to accept the presence of God; then he tried to purify himself: "I used to think everyone believed in God." I said (227). When Tony's doubts culminated and he intended to replace God with the golden carp, the weather suddenly deteriorated and he felt God had admonished (189). Tony's conviction grew stronger, when Florence receiving the disaster, he believed that God was upset to Florence who was always condemning Him:

d. Worship For The Sake of Friendship and Comfort

Theological confusion can be a bit muted with grounding traditions and psychological problems. This attitude arises when a person consciously or unconsciously resolves this problem by returning to the tradition derived from the family education and for psychological comfort. People

around Tony showed skepticism about the divinity, but they are always present in the church. If they doubt the Lord why they were in church? According to Hume cited by Lorens Bagus (1996), the belief in the existence of the external world and the existence of God can only be justified psychologically based on matters relating to customs, habits, conventions, statutes, and coherence between our impressions and ideas (1024). Tony was also influenced by psychological factors for the convenience of himself and his feelings for the sake of fun. Sociological factors also influenced the attitude of Tony with the motivation to preserve harmony with his mother. The reflection of psychological and social factors were also revealed through Ultima, whose motivation was maintain good relations with Marez family and for the sake of comfortable feeling.

Although Tony was always overwhelmed by theological anxiety, he tried to return to the religion which he knew so far. Although at first Tony tended to reflect the probability of Scepticism, he also reflected Pascal's scepticism as he lowered his wits and displayed an attitude of humility to beg God for forgiveness. Based on his experience, Tony felt a punishment from God when he was thinking negatively about divinity. A sudden storm and thunder boomed that made him fear and feel guilty: ... I crossed my forehead, and cried "Forgive me, my Lord!" Then the second loud ring sounded (189). Tony's friends gave a reason why they had always been to church, but doubted the divinity. A conversation between Horse with Florence, known that Florence was blasphemous, but he always went to church because he wanted to hang out with his friends. He could not stand loneliness, which is the real hell when one does not have friends and lives in solitude (187).

Tony seemed reluctant to attend church, but he stayed there: "Let us pray," Father Byrnes said and knelt. We followed suit, kneeling on the rough, splintery knee boards of the pew (191). Nevertheless, his friend, Cico went to church regularly, just to please his mother's feelings: "Then why do you go to church?" I asked. "My mother believes" – he answered, "I go to please her –"(227). Tony felt guilty because he and his friends doubted God, so he tried to be able to accept His existence just to please God. (163).

Although Ultima was not religious enough as she was mystical, she always followed the will of Mary to pray (43). Ultima always helped Maria prepare the equipment for praying (56, 57). It showed that the unity in prayer could make human relationships become more harmonious.

CONCLUSION

The reason of the characters reflected theological skepticism was based on personal experience. The experience includes a tradition of family life, miserable experience, and the teachings of the church that were considered scary, illogical, and did not give peace. While agnosticism in the novel was the implications of skepticism, when Anaya featuring the characters who wanted to create another god that is expected to provide peace. Anaya might want to say that agnosticism - between theist and atheist - as the implications of skepticism. However, Anaya might not agree with skepticism when he made Tony feel guilty and went back to God. This happened when Tony surrounded by usual doubts, suddenly lightning boomed and storm blew so made him feel fear (189). Anaya made Florence dead by drowning in a pool when he was constantly protesting God (229) proved and perhaps Anaya wanted to say, those who do not believe in God would be bad for humans.

Anaya covered the theme in this novel that had significance in his own life. Tony's experiences mirrored Anaya's own experience. It also typified the experiences of many Hispanic struggling to reconcile two cultures. Tony had to reconcile two different religious philosophies. Tony's mother is devoted to Catholicism and his father has no interest in religion. It might be a

picture of both Anaya's parents. Skepticism issues might be considered important by Anaya as the expression of his childhood. Skepticism might also be important at this time in real life. A lot of people who seemed to be very religious, but committed violence among humans just to defend God. Whereas, God Almighty, He does not need to be defended by human beings and killing each other. Most people believed that the essence of religion is peace.

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