THE PROCESS OF BEING A GOOD FATHER
PORTRAYED IN TONY PARSONS' MAN AND BOY NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Tony Parson’s novel Man and Boy depicts the struggle of a young father to raise his only son. This study aims to analyze the main character’s life and reveal the process of being a good father portrayed in the story. Furthermore, it is necessary to find out how the characterization of the main character is revealed in the story and also how the conflicts experienced by the main character shape his personality. The writer uses New Criticism in analyzing the story. In addition, to elaborate the analysis, the writer uses Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs’ technique, structure of fiction. Finally, it can be concluded that the main character who is portrayed as immature and careless person at the beginning turns to be mature at the end of the story. He has experienced some life lessons through conflicts so that he learned how to be a mature man and a good father.

Keywords: Characterization; Conflicts; Father; Plot; Process; Structure of Fiction.

1. Introduction

Tony Parsons was born in 1953. He is a British journalist broadcaster and author as well. His first novel Man and Boy, tells about Harry Silver’s life, the main character of the story. Harry works as television producer. He has a beautiful wife named Gina and a four-year-old son, Tom. It is depicted in the beginning of the novel that Harry Silver’s family relationship seems to be fine. But, in one occasion Harry ruins everything about his family relationship. He sleeps with a colleague from work. His wife soon finds it out from the short message in Harry’s phone. After all, Gina leaves him and moved to Japan to pursue his career. However, from the first conflicts with his wife, there are sequences of conflicts that he has to overcome. First, he has to be a single parent. It means he must struggle for the responsibility. Second, he has to lose his job in the middle of difficult times as a single parent. And the third, He has to accept the fact of the death of his father. These conflicts make Harry become a better person in terms of way of thinking and decision-making. His changing character can be seen in the scene when he gives the child custody to his wife. This scene portrayed his good personality. This is in contrast with his personality portrayed at the beginning.

In analyzing the novel the writer will apply theory of New Criticism. New Criticism theory focuses on formal elements in the text itself and finds the theme, as well as explaining the ways in which the formal elements form it, and also focuses on formal elements in the text that lead to the organic unity of the story (Tyson 136). Hence, when analyzing the novel using the theory of New Criticism the writer only focuses on the text itself.

Furthermore, the formal elements are one of the important aspects of the New Criticism theory which cannot be eliminated, so that the writer thinks that formal elements has to be included in the analysis in order to find the statement of the problem. According to Lois Tyson “if a text has an organic unity, then all of its formal elements work together to establish its theme, or the meaning of the work as a whole” (138). There are several formal elements that create organic unity in a text itself; included images, symbols, metaphor, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization, plot, and so forth. However, in analyzing the novel Man and Boy the formal elements that will be focused in this research are conflict, character or characterization, plot and theme.

Character is one of the important elements in the literature that has to be included in fiction, drama, novel or such literary works. It is because they are intended by the author to help readers in having an analytic perspective of sensing the particular traits about the characters. Characters are generally known to undergo some process in how they are told in a story; this process is what is called as characterization. The process of characterization is shaped by the conflicts that portrayed. In addition, from the conflicts the reader could see the real traits of the fictions character in the novel.

Generally, conflict in the fiction can be understood as a process of clash experienced by an individual (groups) toward other individual (groups) or certain things. However, there are two types of conflicts:
external conflicts and internal conflicts that frequently appear in the fictions. External conflict can be explained as a struggle between characters and an outside force. The outside force may be another character or it may be the society or certain group of people. Internal conflicts take place in the mind of the character himself. Characters must deal with their own feelings or desires. It is when characters may have to make some decisions between right and wrong and choose some solutions to solve a problem.

Theme can be explained as idea of fiction. In other word, it is the main general of message or vision that the authors are trying to share with the readers (Roberts and Jacobs 363). Moreover, a novel or a work might have many different themes and it depends on the perception and how people interpret one’s work (Gill 131). As an important element of literature, theme has a crucial role in portray the whole work of novel. Therefore, to understand the theme it can be seen on how words, phrases or sentences are formed by the author. Sometimes theme cannot be known clearly due to the delivering of it implicitly. It is needed to have a deep analysis, so that one can find the theme easily.

2. Discussion

Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs state in their book Literature: An introduction to Reading and Writing, Structure describes how the author arranges materials in accord with the general ideas as purposes of their works. It also defines layouts of fictional works in which the ways the story is shaped. Moreover, a story might be divided into numbered sections or parts; so that structure concerns on the arrangement of the story (94).

2.1 The Divorce of Harry Silver’s Marriage

After five years have passed, Harry is about to celebrate his thirtieth anniversary. At the time he realizes that he has wasted his youth time for married so young. And he thinks that in his thirtieth anniversary it should be more ‘youthful’. So that, he wants to do things that he cannot do in the past. Moreover, according to him reaching the age of thirty is like a gold achievement of the top so, it has to be done rightly. After all, he decides to buy an expensive car that he claims it to be very luxurious.

The car smelled like somebody else’s life. Like freedom. It was parked right in the window of the showroom, a wedge-shaped sports car that, even with its top off, look as sleek and compact as a muscle.

Naturally it was red—a corny, testosterone-stuffed red (6).

The description above depicts that Harry wants to show his youthful by buying the expensive car. Besides, from his explanation it can be seen that the car is a sign of youth freedom even though he does not tell it directly. His explanation tells more that how the car looks like is as good as his desire to own it. It is also clearly explained that the analogy he uses to describe the car features related with youth life. From this view the writer thinks that as a man who wants to reach his thirty Harry wants to get off his limits as an old man for a while in order to having some momentary pleasure of youth. This pleasure of youth is very important for him because he thinks that he is getting older and will not has such pleasure in the future.

Implicitly, the car-buying thing is a reflection for Harry’s past that cannot be experienced again. Married in young ages is the reason for him to do it freely and without feeling doubtful. In other word, in his thirtieth birthday he wants to fulfill his desire that he thinks proper for him in that time. Harry acknowledges that he has married so young but indirectly saying that he regrets it. From the way he talks about the past it can be concluded that there are feeling of regrets that he feels.

We had married young. Gina was three months pregnant with Pat on our wedding day and it was, by some distance, the happiest day of my life. But nothing was ever really the same again after that day. Because after that there was no disguising the fact that we were grown-ups (12).

In the text above Harry somewhat shows that he is regret for married so young. He does feel that the marriage is important for him as he said ‘the happiest day of my life’. But, in the following statement above after that it is implied that he says in remorse feeling: Harry thinks of everything in his life would not be the same again. In other word, he has become an adult for take the married in the first place. And also he has those responsibilities just like many other men who married their partner for the first time. Overall, he realizes that he cannot become a teenage boy anymore who has freedom in everything he does without giving attention to his family first.
Harry works as a producer with his best friend Marty who position as a host of the talk show which also named after his friend’s name “The Marthy Mann Show”. In one occasion, Siobhan is introduced to Harry by Marty. She is a teenage girl who works as a new assistant producer. Harry himself does not know that he will be partnering with that young girl. After the talk show of The Marthy Mann Show’s over in the midnight, with some accidental issues causes by the guests’ stars. Initiatively, Harry tries to drive Siobhan back to her home.

‘Is that your MGF down in the parking lot? The red one?’ Here it comes, I thought. The lecture about what cars do to the muck in the air and the hole in the sky. Sometimes I despair for the young people of today. All they ever think about is the future of the planet.

‘Yeah, that’s mine, ‘I said.

‘Nice car,’ she said (28).

Harry presumably thinks that when Siobhan is asking about his car she will be all of sudden mocking or at least saying the car is not environmentally friendly. Instead of judging the car, Siobhan surprisingly like Harry’s car as she said it is a ‘nice car,’ which means she loves the car. As stated before Harry wants to do some youthful things, related with this event Harry finds out that there is a girl who loves his car; therefore he does not feel old enough to look more young and modern-fashioned with the car in front of her. Nevertheless, Siobhan’s compliments make him different in terms of feelings.

After several day has passed Harry’s wife accidentally finds out his affair from a message that Siobhan sends to his phone. Gina feels betray and disappointed for what Harry has done to their marriage. When Harry gets home he sees Gina with all packing bags while she is crying. After all, Gina decides to leaves him with Pat but Harry insists to bring Pat live with him. This action takes Harry to face a lot of conflicts; such conflicts come from outer like losing his job, his role model, father is critically ill and also struggling for child custody of his son as well as deciding giving the full responsible of Pat to Gina.

2.2 The Illness of Harry Silver’s Father

In their book Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing, Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs state that complication in literature is the onset of the major conflicts of the plot specifically can be understood as sequence of conflicts that rise from one conflict (94). However, the first conflict that Harry has to face after separating with his wife is being a single-parent. It is really difficult for him to manage his lives in such condition. After all, he is the one who has to do everything in the household not only he has to be the breadwinner as well. Moreover, both duties nurturing and breadwinning his son makes Harry has no choice to live his life day by day as a single parent. As time pass by Harry learns in taking care of his son properly in every situations. There is a big difference of Harry’s portrayed in the story as he compete with those difficult situation at the time.

After the separation with his wife Harry is burdened with the responsibility in breadwinning and nurturing his child. This makes him suffers from the inside and outside situation as he regrets for not giving some much attention to his child in the first place. It can be known that Harry is unskilled in doing the household things in that time as single father even for taking care of his son like bathing him. However, he ends up frustrated and need some help for a while and also finding a new job in supporting their needs. Finally, Harry seeks some help from his parents in order to ease his hard life for a moment.

‘I just spoke to Glenn. He told me that you collected Pat. That really wasn’t necessary. He was perfectly happy there. And I know how busy you are at work. But if you are going to look after him after I get back then you need to know that he has his hair washed every Sunday. And don’t let him put sugar on his coco pops. He can go to the toilet by himself—you know that already—but sometimes he forgets to lift the lid. Makes him sure he cleans his teeth. Don’t let him watch Star Wars videos all the time. If he doesn’t sleep in the afternoon then make sure he’s in bed by no later than—’(85)

It is obvious that a kid always wants a touch of his mother especially in daily routines. The bonding with moms is always strong since the mom spending a lot of time with the kids in the house. And also it can be denied that the maternal situation that involved in relationship happens very strong. However, it is simply related with the condition of Harry as the text describes above. Gina reminds Harry for things that he doesn’t know about his son habitual routines such as what he should do and should not do. In other
word, Gina directs Harry to handle their son properly since she knows Harry’s concerns are only on his job and his personal life merely. Hence, this action from Gina making Harry realizes and feels like getting some huge ‘lacing’ as a father. Harry regrets for what he has done in the past which not knowing his son that well. As a result, Harry feels failed as a father but he keeps trying to take care of his son since his son is also very important for him. He makes up his mind and tries to take care of his son just like his father used to take care of him in the past. After all, he still finds it difficult to take care of him so that he needs some help from his parents. This kind of help that he needs is somehow depicts him as a spoiled person.

The second conflict that Harry has to face is losing his job. In one occasion, Marty all of sudden fired Harry in a restaurant in order to replacing him with Siobhan. Marty can fire him because he has an authority in certain way. However, before that Harry is wondering when Marty asks him to have a lunch in a restaurant. Actually, there is no special occasion to celebrate whatsoever. And also it is very unusual for Marty to ask Harry for lunch because he never do that before except for celebrating something in purpose. Harry, after all, understands that he will be fired.

Marty fired Harry in middle of his difficult times. He fired him in purpose because he wants Siobhan to take the position as a producer and besides that Marty and Siobhan are in relationship. Harry tries to make sure Marty to not doing that because he is in difficult situation as he just separated with his wife and becomes a single parent. Moreover, it depicts Harry is so desperate to get the job. There is no other way to look for another job because he needs it to financially taking care his son. By doing that Harry tries being responsible father to get the job so that he can support the family. In addition, Harry also feels that he has been betrayed by his best friend who has been working with him for a couple of years. Harry has no choice at the time he then left the restaurant and took his stuff in the office. The occurrence happens soon after his wife left him.

Since his father is the one that he idolize the most he cannot accept the fact the death of his father. In one occasion Harry’s father sick because he has tumor in his lungs. It becomes a shock for Harry and his mother. They never know before that Harry’s father has tumor until when his father in bad condition and it is needed to take him to the hospital. However, after several days in the hospital his father condition is getting worse. Harry’s shocked because his father has been his role model and hero in his entire life.

After all, He learns that it is not the strength that his father used to taking care of the family. Instead, it is the love that will help him to do everything for his beloved family. Since he was kid Harry learns to adore his father who was in the army. This learning brings him to have the thought of being strong. Even though he is not successful for being just like his father as brave and tough, he just want to try and be brave. Hence, Harry learns to become more gentleness, compassion and courage at the moment when the time his father in sick situation.

2.3 The Willingness of Harry Silver towards His Son

In middle of his sadness due to his father who still lying down at the hospital for a couple weeks Harry has to face the fact that his wife wants to take his son with her. While she was in Japan, Gina cannot take Pat with her because Harry convinces her that their son will suffer to adapt the situation there. However, after several months pass Gina wants pat with her. She also plans to move from Japan and live with her new boyfriend in London. However, Harry will not let Pat with his wife because he thinks the bonding of him and his son is getting stronger. He wants to be the only father who watching him grows up.

‘You’re right—we don’t own our children. But my lawyer will argue that, all things being equal, a child should be with his mother.’

‘And my lawyer will argue that you and Richard can go fuck yourselves,’ I said. ‘And my lawyer—when I got one—will also argue that a child should be with his parent most capable of bringing him up. That’s me, Gina.’ (262)

The text clearly explains about the child custody that bring into the conversation between Harry and Gina. Both of them are arguing about who deserve to taking care of the child. Gina seems pretty upset for Harry words it is because in the beginning Harry promises that he will let her to taking care of their son after everything is settle down. However, Harry feels that he deserves to become the one who take care their son it is because the bonding between him and his son are getting well. He also has learned in taking care of Pat properly in financial and emotional matters.
After all, there is no way to solve the problem since both of them want to Pat as their responsibility. The only way for both of them to decide officially who deserve as Pat single-parent is the child custody. In addition, it can be seen also in the text that the main character shows his egoistic. It is obviously that a child under the age of seven supposed to be with her mother. Even though it is stated indirectly but the reader could understand by themselves. However, Harry also does not care with such things because he thinks that he has responsibility over his son which he has been with him for four months since Gina leaves him.

Harry has a relationship with a woman named Cyd that he meets at the restaurant. Cyd is also a single parent with a young daughter named Peggy. Moreover, the relationship of Harry and Cyd is getting well since they first time met at the restaurant. And also since the situation of Cyd’ status is not much different like Harry; Harry figures out that things will be much easier to understand each other personality. Nevertheless, there is one thing that becomes a problem; Cyd realizes that Harry is not that serious person. Harry acts like a young person who wants a mere relationship once in a while. This makes Cyd is uncomfortable and wants to explain everything about things that he should realize about that.

‘You think you want someone who can transform your life with love. But you don’t really want love, Harry. You couldn’t handle real love. You want romance.’ (265).

It can be understood from the text above that Cyd wants to Harry realize that once he decide to have a relationship he should be serious about it. Moreover, Harry just desperate at the time about his difficult situation, so that he wants to have a partner in which can bring the romance in his love life. In certain point Cyd makes sure Harry that it is fine for him to just live like he used to. But she also explains that in this situation they are not young anymore which means they cannot act like ones. Indirectly, Cyd wants to Harry give his son responsibility to his mother and start a new life with her. Harry never realizes about what Cyd tries to imply, overall, Cyd leaves him and in one occasion Harry find out that Cyd gets back with his ex-husband.

Meantime, there is no better progress of Harry’s father condition at the hospital. His father health conditions is getting worse and grievously, he needs much morphine to ease the pain that he suffer from. However, in the critical time of his father condition at the time Harry realize that His father will pass away so that he wants to use his time with his father at the hospital.

‘I love you,’ I told him, taking his hands, and saying those words that I had never said to him before.

And I told him because surely it could get no worse than this—but it did get worse, that’s the thing about cancer, it can always exceed your blackest moment.

So the next day I went back to that crowded ward, sat by his bed holding his hand, and—crying harder this time—I told my father that I loved him again (267)

The text above shows how the bonding that Harry has towards his father is very strong. It can be seen that Harry loves his father very much. He does not want to accept that his father will pass away soon since he realizes that from his father unprogressive conditions caused of cancer. As an only child in the family Harry really adores his father especially from the point of his father as a military man. Moreover, it is also obvious that a boy must be considering the father as his role model. Harry also must be considering his father as his role model it can be seen from the beginning that Harry want to be just like his father in maintaining his family and life

Furthermore, after several days survive with bad conditions Harry’s father is passed away. Harry knows about that when he is with his mother at their house and his uncle calls and tells him. Harry and his mother has also realized about that since they get many calls from people but do not want to pick it up because they do not want to face the fact that he has passed away. At the mourning time Harry feels something that missing from himself which his father present. This difficult moment becomes lessons of value for Harry which also happen to be his thoughts of turning point. And he realizes that his father teaches him indirectly to be love in his family and not being egoistic immature man.

Besides, Harry also learns from his mother when she states that ‘love means knowing when let go’, at the time he is asking about why her mother capable of carry on after losing her husband. He wonders that his mother manage so fast from his father’s death. His mother tells him that it is not because his mother
does not love his father more. But, because of she loves him very much therefore she can keep herself calm and accept the death of his husband, Harry’s father.

‘But you have to learn to let go,’ my mother said. ‘That’s part of it, isn’t it?’

‘Part of what?’

‘Part of what it means to love someone. To really love someone. If you love someone the you don’t just see them as an extension of yourself. You don’t just love them for what’s in it for you.’ (335-336).

Concerning with his mother’s statement about why she can accept the fact of the death of his husband Harry soon realizes that the same things should be done to his own son. He thinks that he should not be too egoistic and just let his son be with his wife. However, he knows that his capability of taking-care his son is not that strong. Even though he can be a responsible father for his son, Harry seems quite impose of his role as a single-parent. His mother makes him realize indirectly that letting go does not mean he will lose his son in fact he just give his son a better place to live with his wife.

After he makes up his mind Harry decides to give the child custody to his wife. He thinks it is the best way to stop the arguing between them and importantly it is for the good of the child himself. Before that Harry also realizes that sometimes parents are the ones who make their children suffer from the broken marriage. He also does not want his child grows up learning that his parents are full of hatred from it. Moreover, it can be understood that because Harry learns values from his father so that. He willingly gives the responsibility to his wife. It can be seen that it must be very hard for Harry to do that because as a father Harry knows all of the boys want his father as a role model. Followed by the climax Harry, after all, fall in love again with Cyd. Nevertheless, it shows the end of the story which Harry finds his values and be with Cyd, a girl that refuses his love because she thinks that Harry has not mature yet.

3. Conclusion

The analysis by using New Criticism above shows how New Criticism is applied to examine the formal elements in Man and Boy novel. The formal elements that focused on this study is on structure included conflicts, plot and characterization. Judging from the story line and the characterization of the main character, it can be understood that the text reveal the life learning values that faced by Harry Silver. Harry learns values from his father that loves is everything and love means letting go someone that he loves the most.

In the beginning, Harry Silver is portrayed as an immature and selfish person who wants to express himself as a youth person in his thirtieth birthday. Such characterization represents from the way he sees things and reacts toward some things. However, wasting money with car-buying brings in his life brings Harry to have an affair with a young girl which makes him separating with his wife. This first conflict lead him to several conflicts which soon he has to overcome by himself.

It also can be seen that Harry’s struggle is depicted through difficult times as a single-parent. He knows nothing about taking care of his son but he keeps trying to. This action from Harry somehow shows him as a responsible father even though he is not that perfect. However, He also regrets for not having quality time with his family, especially his son. He happens to fix his relationship with his son that he thinks somehow loosened the bonding. In the middle of difficult time as a single parent, Harry has to face another conflict which the death of his father. Since his father is the one who he adores the most, Harry cannot accept the fact. Meantime, Harry learns something from the death of his father. He learns values that he thought he has learned when he was a kid. His mother also gives clear thought for him about how he should treat the one he loves. Nevertheless, the reader could see from the life of the main character on how he fails until he learns to be more mature in terms of way of thinking. People need to learn from their mistakes at first until they understand what the meaning of love toward someone that they care the most. As depicted in the novel that Harry let his son be with his mother because he knows it is the best for him.

4. Works Cited


