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PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LITERARY AND EDUCATIONAL VALUE IN THE NOVEL PSYCHOPATH TEST

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Abstract

This journal explores the relationship between literature and psychology, focusing on Jon Ronson's "The Psychopath Test." It examines the novel's structure, psychological insights, and its relevance as educational material in intensive reading classes. The text highlights the intertwining of psychology and literature, highlighting how psychological concepts are used to explore themes like identity, trauma, and personal growth. The passage also discusses the educational values of literature, including critical thinking, ethical awareness, understanding mental health, empathy, scepticism, interdisciplinary learning, and media literacy. The moral values learned from "The Psychopath Test" include empathy, ethical responsibility, compassion, justice, self-reflection, and the critical examination of power dynamics. The research methodology is a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing a literary psychology approach.

Keywords: psychological analysis, educational value, novel Psychopath Test.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a timeless mirror reflecting the diverse facets of human experience. Through the written word, authors encapsulate emotions, ideas, and narratives, creating a tapestry of imagination that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries (Alqadi, 2023). Whether it be the poignant verses of a Shakespearean sonnet, the intricacies of a Russian novel, or the rhythmic cadence of contemporary poetry, literature provides a sanctuary for both the author and the reader to explore the depths of human consciousness. It serves as a catalyst for empathy, enabling individuals to step into the shoes of characters from different walks of life and navigate the complexities of their struggles, triumphs, and epiphanies (Ruti, 2013). In essence, literature is an intricate dance between words and meaning, weaving together the threads of storytelling, artistic expression, and intellectual exploration.

Literature possesses not only numerous roles, but also considerable power. Many specialists notice this power, for instance what is mentioned by Sundari et al. (2021) that some of the key values of (children) literature include enjoyment, aesthetics, comprehension, imagination, information and knowledge, cognition, and language. In short, this principle can be explained as follows. It is the reality that good novels give readers pleasure and enjoyment when reading them. Aesthetics pertain to the beauty that the readers see in a literary work. Literature is a verbal art that leads readers to appreciate the beauty of language. It adds artistic elements to readers" lives, leading them to view their personal experiences in different ways. Fiction, nonfiction, and poetry are artistic interpretations of experiences, events and people.

Literature gives self-understanding and cultural understanding by allowing readers to reflect on others' experiences and appreciate diverse cultures. It also fosters creativity, as imagination is a vital power in daily life, including decision-making, communication, and entertainment (Gibson & Ewing, 2020). Literature demonstrates the vast range of human imagination and extends readers' personal visions of possibilities, promoting higher-order thinking skills. Literature stimulates readers' creative process by stirring and stretching the imagination, providing new information ideas, and perspectives so that readers can imagine the possibilities and elaborate on original ideas (Keen, 2007). In this approach, it expands readers; ability to express imagination in words and visuals.





Literature enhances knowledge and cognition by providing readers with experiences beyond plain facts. It encourages critical thinking and questioning, fostering cognitive development (Halpern, 2013). Literature also serves as a linguistic model in language teaching, providing a richer model for language than speech. Students often use vocabulary from their favourite stories, demonstrating the intertwined nature of language and thinking (Lindfors, 2019).

A novel, as an integral part of literature, holds a distinctive and central position in the realm of literary expression (Bennett & Royle, 2023). It is a narrative form that unfolds over the expanse of pages, allowing authors to weave intricate tales and explore the depths of human experience. Novels serve as windows into diverse worlds, both real and imagined, offering readers the opportunity to traverse landscapes, cultures, and time periods, all within the confines of a carefully crafted narrative (Chabon, 2011).

Characters in novels become vessels through which authors navigate the depths of the human psyche, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of the psychological forces that shape behaviour. Authors use fictitious identities to explore human emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, providing readers with a deeper understanding of psychological forces shaping individual lives and societal dynamics. These characters serve as dynamic tools for conveying diverse emotions and experiences, allowing authors to experiment with complex human psychology (Ruhland et al., 2015).

Moreover, novels often employ psychological concepts to explore themes like identity, trauma, and personal growth (Vickroy, 2015). Whether through the lens of Freudian analysis, Jungian archetypes, or modern theories of cognition and emotion, literature has the power to illuminate the psychological dimensions of the human experience. By weaving psychological insights into the narrative fabric, novels not only entertain but also serve as mirrors reflecting the intricacies of the human mind, fostering empathy and encouraging readers to contemplate the profound connections between literature and psychology (Mayes, 2020).

Psychology is a vital aspect of literature, especially novels, as it delves into the human mind and emotions (Nofsinger, 2017). Novels offer readers insight into characters' thoughts, motivations, and inner conflicts, allowing them to examine universal themes like love, fear, desire, and relationships. Psychologically rich novels, like Fyodor





Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment" and Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway," provide profound understanding of characters' mental states and emotional experiences (Rubenstein, 2009). Literature uses psychological concepts to explore themes like identity, trauma, and personal growth, fostering empathy and encouraging readers to contemplate the profound connections between literature and psychology (Smethurst & Craps, 2015).

Psychology and literature are interconnected, examining human behavior, expression, mental processes, and motivation. Psychology examines both outward and inward behavior, while literature art is influenced by the writer's emotions and experiences (Cromwell et al., 2020). Motivation is crucial for life goals, and psychology aids in problem-solving and cultivating a positive mindset. Psychological techniques have influenced literature and literary criticism, with major thinkers like Freud researching issues like wish-fulfilment and repression (Boag, 2017).

The purpose of psychological study is to understand behavior by defining factors that combine development and expression, establishing accurate prediction systems, and devising techniques for controlling behavior. Literary psychology is described as a discipline that studies literary works that involve events of human life portrayed by fictitious or true people. There are numerous definitions of literary psychology, including the psychology of the author as an individual, the creative process, the types and principles of psychology applied to literary works, and the influence of literary works on the reader (Rowland, 2018).

Literature explores the human psyche through characters and themes, providing insights into psychology. Psychological novels, such as those by Shakespeare and Richardson, focus on characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations over external action (Aras, 2015). The 20th century saw the full potential of these works, with works like Ulysses and ambiguous works by Kafka highlighting the subjective world. These novels challenge traditional narrative structures and explore the complexities of human consciousness. Ulysses takes readers on a fragmented journey, while Kafka's works explore themes of alienation and existential angst. These 20th-century psychological novels challenge readers' perceptions of reality and the intricacies of their minds (Korkmaz Karaman, 2022).





Alfred Adler's personality theory posits a single motivational force behind all behaviors and experiences, driven by the desire for superiority or perfection. He identified four main types of people: powerful, getting, and avoid. Adler identified six main concepts: inferiority feeling, fictional finalism, striving for superiority, creative self, style of life, and social interest (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Related to this, Psychopathy, a mental disorder, that may be an adaptive life history strategy designed by natural selection. Non-right-handedness, a sign of neurodevelopmental perturbations, can test competing models (Pullman et al., 2021). A meta-analysis of 16 studies found no difference in non-right-handedness rates between community participants with high and low psychopathy, nor between psychopathic and non-psychopathic offenders. However, offenders scoring higher on the Interpersonal/Affective and Behavioral dimensions had lower rates of non-righthandedness.

Related to the research, The Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R) is a psychological assessment tool used to identify psychopathy in individuals, particularly those in the criminal justice system (Venables et al., 2014). It is a 20-item inventory of perceived personality traits and behaviors, based on interviews and official records. Psychopaths display high narcissistic, borderline, and antisocial personality disorder traits, including superficial charm, charisma, sexual seductiveness, affective instability, suicidality, lack of empathy, self-harm, and splitting.

It was supported by Hare (1996) that the link between psychopathic tendencies and information processing modalities in mock jurors judging ambiguous cases of sexual assault. Results reveal that the emotionality of the victim and defendant greatly influences case outcomes. Experiential processors are more punitive towards the defendant when the defendant demonstrates low emotionality, while rational processors are slightly more punitive when strong emotionality is expressed. Psychopathic qualities do not alter the truthfulness of the victim or defendant, or overall guilt decisions or sentencing severity.

Then, based on the research from Sellbom & Drislane (2021) psychopathy is identified as multidimensional construct, not easily categorized qualitatively. They suggest multiple subtypes or variants of traits, which are also dimensional and vary in severity. The literature on subtypes of psychopathy is reviewed, but the authors also add





an empirical contribution on Dimensional vs categorical status of psychopathy, multifaceted reality of the psychopathy construct, and psychopathy variants.

"The Psychopath Test" by Jon Ronson is a comprehensive exploration of psychopathy, a psychological concept. The book uses storytelling and investigative journalism to make complex ideas accessible to a broader audience. Ronson uses real-life anecdotes, interviews, and personal experiences to engage readers emotionally. The book also addresses ethical considerations, raising questions about labelling and potential misuse of diagnostic criteria. Through narratives, research findings, and interviews, Ronson provides a multifaceted view of psychopathy.

Ronson explores the idea that many corporate and governmental leaders are psychopaths, using the Hare Psychopathy Checklist to detect psychopathy. He meets individuals like Toto Constant, Albert J. Dunlap, and a young man detained in Broadmoor Psychiatric Hospital. Ronson also investigates controversial treatments and journalistic coverage of psychopathology. He suggests that we should not judge individuals based on their "maddest edges" or assume normal society is rational. He cautions against diagnosing someone without knowing them and avoids confirmation bias.

Based on the information above, the researcher wanted to describe: The structural elements that build this novel, the psychology learned from this novel, and the educational values contained and the relevance of the novel as literature learning material in intensive reading class.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted in an Intensive reading class from the 3rd week of November to 2nd week of December 2023, focusing on the novel "The Psychopath Test" by Jon Ronson. The method used was descriptive qualitative, systematically, and accurately describing facts and causal relationships. Data was collected through document recording and interviews with students, and academic readers. The research employed a literary psychology approach, analyzing literary works by considering psychological aspects to determine their total meaning. The study also sought to understand the relationship between authors, readers, and socio-cultural conditions with literary works. Purposive sampling was used, a technique where data was collected from





informants who were considered reliable sources of information. The sample in this research was the novel "The Psychopath Test," which explores the fascinating world of psychopathy, where extraordinary individuals with a lack of empathy and remorse roam among us. The aim was to obtain precise and accurate data to obtain expected results.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structural elements

Based on the discussion with the students in intensive reading held in the 3rd and 4th week of November 2023 related to this novel, it was gotten the data in building the structural elements as below. Psychopathic traits are characterized by various behaviors and personality traits, including superficial charm, grandiose self-worth, boredom, pathological lying, conning, manipulation, lack of empathy, shallow affect, callousness, parasitic lifestyle, poor behavioral controls, promiscuous sexual behavior, early behavior problems, lack of realistic long-term goals, impulsivity, irresponsibility, failure to accept responsibility for own actions, many short-term marital relationships, juvenile delinquency, revocation of conditional release, and criminal versatility.

Then, viewed from Emotional responses of individuals with psychopathic traits can be markedly different from that of the general population. Psychopaths may exhibit an atypical emotional response to stimuli that would typically evoke strong reactions in others. This detachment from typical emotional responses is often assessed using psychological tests and checklists like the Hare Psychopathy Checklist. Understanding these emotional differences is crucial for diagnosing and managing individuals with psychopathic traits.

The following is the nature of conscience is a central theme in discussions of psychopathy, as psychopaths are often described as lacking an internal moral compass. They are seen as incapable of experiencing the feelings of fear, guilt, and remorse that are the physical manifestations of our conscience. This lack of conscience allows psychopaths to approve of destructive actions and appear rational and convincing while being devoid of any sense of remorse or shame.

The next is behavioral patterns of psychopaths can often be identified through their language and actions. They may rationalize their behavior, blame others, and show





a lack of remorse or guilt. They are also known to be skillful imitators, often mirroring the emotions and reactions of those around them to blend in or manipulate situations to their advantage.

The following is the impact of psychopathy on society is the following that can be significant, as psychopaths often occupy positions of power and influence. According to Jon Ronson's "The Psychopath Test," psychopaths are responsible for a disproportionate amount of societal harm due to their positions and lack of empathy and conscience.

It can also be found that "The Psychopath Test" by Jon Ronson explores the process of mental health diagnosis, highlighting the subjectivity and potential pitfalls of diagnosing conditions like psychopathy. The book critiques the mental health industry, highlighting the expansion of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to include a vast array of mental disorders, which some argue pathologize a wide range of human behaviors. Ronson discusses the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, a tool used to assess psychopathic traits, where individuals are scored on a range of personality traits such as superficial charm, lack of empathy, and grandiose sense of self-worth. A high score on this checklist can lead to a label of psychopathy, which is often seen as immutable and can have significant consequences for the individual, including stigmatization and potentially affecting their treatment within the criminal justice system.

Next is expansion of diagnostic categories can lead to overdiagnosis and the medicalization of everyday behaviors, which can result in unnecessary treatment or medication. This has led to a debate within the field about the balance between identifying genuine mental health issues and avoiding the creation of "diseases" that may simply reflect variations of normal behavior.

Ethical considerations in psychology can be observed as paramount, which has role as the field that involves studying and interacting with human beings who have rights, feelings, and vulnerabilities. The American Psychological Association (APA) and other professional bodies have established ethical guidelines that psychologists must adhere to, covering a range of issues, including informed consent, confidentiality, avoiding harm, competence, and managing conflicts of interest.





Personal reflection and self-awareness are critical components of psychological well-being and growth. Engaging in self-reflection allows individuals to examine their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, leading to a deeper understanding of oneself and the ability to make conscious changes. Self-awareness also plays a role in ethical decision-making and empathy, as it helps individuals make more ethical choices and better understand the perspectives of others.

In the context of psychological research and practice, personal reflection and self-awareness are not only beneficial for personal development but also for maintaining professional competence and ethical standards. Psychologists and other mental health professionals must continually engage in self-reflection to ensure they are providing the best possible care to their clients and conducting research that is both scientifically sound and ethically responsible.

The Educational Values

Then in the beginning of December in twice meeting, the students analyze the educational values gotten from the novel written by Jon Ronson's "The Psychopath Test". It was agreed that it was not a really novel but a work of non-fiction that tackles the concept of psychopathy and the mental health profession. However, it did contain numerous educational values that can be gained from its pages. The conclusion from the class can sum up as bellow:

- Critical Thinking: The book urges readers to critically assess the techniques and procedures used in psychology, particularly the Psychopathy Checklist developed by Bob Hare. In this book, Ronson's exploration urges readers to ponder the repercussions of naming and diagnosing individuals with psychological problems.
- 2. Ethical Awareness: Through his tale, Ronson exposes the ethical considerations in the field of mental health, such as the potential implications of misdiagnosis and the impact of psychiatric labels on individuals' lives. The case of Rebecca Riley, for example, highlights the devastating effects that can follow from the misuse of psychiatric drugs and diagnosis.





- 3. Understanding of Mental Health: The book provides insights into various mental health issues and the intricacies involved in understanding and treating them. It also explores the history and growth of psychiatric thought, particularly the shift towards more scientific approaches with the formation of the DSM-III.
- 4. Empathy and Human Behavior: Ronson's contacts with individuals who may or may not be psychopaths serve as a study in human behavior and the nature of empathy. His thoughts on his own feelings, such as his satisfaction at not being involved in an accident scene, inspire readers to explore their own ability for empathy.
- 5. The Importance of Skepticism: The book teaches the usefulness of skepticism, especially when dealing with difficult concepts like consciousness and the self. Ronson's inquiry into the enigmatic book "Being or Nothingness" emphasizes the necessity to question and examine rather than accept things at face value.
- 6. Appreciation for Interdisciplinary Learning: Ronson's work touches on various disciplines, from psychology and neurology to philosophy and artificial intelligence, showing the interconnectedness of different fields of study and the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to understanding complex issues (pages 1 and 4).
- 7. Media Literacy: The book also takes on the influence of media and reality TV in creating public opinions of mental health, advising readers to be more discerning consumers of media content and to understand the potential for exploitation in these mediums.

These educational values can help readers develop a more comprehensive understanding of mental health issues, the importance of ethical considerations in psychology, and the impact of media on public perception.

Moral Value Learnt.

In the third week of December 2023, the students analyze "The Psychopath Test" novel to seek several moral values that readers can learn from it. Those were:

1. Empathy: The book highlights the importance of empathy and the moral implications of its absence in individuals with psychopathic traits. It encourages





readers to consider the experiences and feelings of others, as opposed to the callousness often associated with psychopathy.

- 2. Ethical Responsibility: Ronson's exploration of the mental health industry and the use of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist raises questions about the ethical responsibility of those who diagnose and treat individuals with mental health issues. It prompts readers to think about the consequences of labelling and the moral duty to treat individuals with dignity and respect.
- 3. Compassion: The book illustrates the need for compassion in dealing with individuals who have been labelled as psychopaths, as well as the broader mentally ill population. It challenges readers to look beyond the labels and see the human being, with all their complexities and potential for change.
- 4. Justice: Through the stories of individuals who may have been wrongly diagnosed or mistreated, the book underscores the value of justice in the mental health system. It suggests a moral imperative to ensure that individuals receive fair treatment, and that the system does not perpetuate harm.
- 5. Self-Reflection: Ronson's own journey in the book serves as a reminder of the importance of self-reflection in moral development. It encourages readers to examine their own beliefs and biases, and to consider how their actions might impact others.
- 6. Critical Examination of Power: The book invites readers to critically examine the power dynamics at play in the mental health industry and to consider the moral implications of how power is used, whether by individuals, institutions, or the media.

These moral values were summed up and analyzed by the students before being presented in the discussion in the class. Those were developed a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of mental health and the treatment used in this book for someone with psychological disorders.

Discussion





After analyzing the result on discussion and presentation held in 4 weeks starting from the 3rd week of November until 2nd week of December 2023, we can discuss the result of the novel with several previous research and theory.

The result of this research relates to the paper from Halpern (2013) that literature promotes knowledge and cognition by presenting readers with experiences beyond mere facts. It stimulates critical thinking and questioning, encouraging cognitive development and from Lindfors (2019) that literature also acts as a linguistic model in language training, giving a fuller model for language than speech.

The context of education and psychological values that can be learnt from this novel actually supported by the result of (Sundari et al., 2021) literature is not just plain words, but a tool that conveys meaning and influences readers. It plays a role in transferring information from the author to the reader, creating and perceiving text. Educational values, such as religious, moral, social, and cultural education, can be transferred in literary works to improve attitudes and behaviour. Talking about psychopathy that often discussed in this novel, it was relate to the research from Sellbom & Drislane (2021) that the notion of psychopathy is multifaceted and cannot be easily categorized qualitatively. They propose other subcategories or variations of characteristics, which are also measured along a continuum and differ in intensity. They make an empirical addition by examining the dimensional vs categorical nature of psychopathy, the complex nature of the psychopathy construct, and several variations of psychopathy. This pertains to the outcome of the examination of the structural components and psychological values derived from this novel.

The result of psychopathy in this book relates to theory from (Hare, 1996) and the result of study from (Venables et al., 2014) in developing The Psychopathy Checklist. It would be useful as the main source in this book used to identify psychopathy in individuals, particularly those in the criminal justice system.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

"The Psychopath Test" by Jon Ronson is a thought-provoking exploration of psychopathy, the mental health industry, and the societal implications of labelling individuals with psychological disorders. Through engaging narratives and encounters





with diverse characters, Ronson illuminates the complexities of diagnosing psychopathy and the ethical challenges arising from categorizing human behaviour.

The book serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of overdiagnosis and the power of psychiatric labels, emphasizing the need for compassion and ethical responsibility in treating those with mental health issues. Ronson's investigative journey emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and media literacy, encouraging readers to question the narratives presented and consider their impact on individuals and society. The book challenges readers to reflect on their beliefs and biases, and to consider the line between sanity and insanity.

SUGGESTION

For readers and teachers who are considering using Jon Ronson's "The Psychopath Test" as a media text for reading and discussion, here are some suggestions:

- Teacher can encourage students to analyze how Ronson portrays the individuals
 he encounters and the mental health industry. By giving time to discuss the role
 of media in shaping public perceptions of mental health and the ethical
 considerations of storytelling.
- 2. Lecturer can use the book to prompt discussions or debate about the ethics of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment. Lecturer can explore the consequences of labeling individuals as psychopaths and the potential for misuse of such diagnoses in various contexts, including the criminal justice system and corporate.
- 3. Teacher can assign projects that require students to research the historical and scientific context of psychopathy, the development of the DSM, and the controversies surrounding psychiatric diagnoses. This can help students understand the complexities of the field and the evolution of mental health practices.
- 4. Readers can do personal reflection to reflect on their own perceptions of mental health and how the book may have challenged or reinforced these views. They can encourage to consider the impact of media narratives on their understanding of mental illness.





5. Readers can make interdisciplinary connections by highlighting the connections between psychology, journalism, ethics, and law found in the book. This can help readers appreciate the value of an interdisciplinary approach to complex issues.





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