

‘All The World's A Stage’

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Abstract

Hampir semua orang tahu bahwa orang yang pesimis cenderung melihat segala sesuatu dari sisi negatifnya, sedangkan orang yang optimis melihat segala sesuatu dari sisi positifnya. Tidak ada perdebatan mengenai arti kata kedua kata tersebut, tetapi orang kadang-kadang berbeda pendapat mengenai William Shakespeare. Melalui tiga karya dramanya, penulis mencoba menganalisis apakah Shakespeare seorang yang pesimis atau optimis.

Keywords: *A pessimist, a stage, poor players, a weeded garden, a brief candle, sans everything, biography.*

I. Introduction

'All the world's a stage - And all the men and women merely players', says Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, one of the most exquisite poetic comedies which he wrote in approximately 1600. I was consequently very abruptly inevitably extremely astounded when I heard a television presenter simply announce: " *'Dunia ini panggung sandiwara', kata Ahmad Albar.* (" *'All the world's a stage'*, says Ahmad Albar.")

Is Shakespeare a plagiarist? As a matter of fact, Shakespeare's concept of the world as a stage dates back to the second period of his dramatic writing which extended from 1595 to 1601, namely when he wrote no tragedies but comedies and histories only, i.e. *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Twelfth Night*, *King John*, *Henry IV (Part II)*, *Henry IV (Part I)* and *Henry V*. It was a time when he was presumably relatively gleeful, evidently fairly prolific, and undoubtedly financially successful.

I have no itchininess to discuss whether Shakespeare or Ahmad Albar has committed plagiarism. I prefer to analyse, through some of Shakespeare's plays, whether this celebrated playwright is a pessimist or an optimist. His tragedies. *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, will be the main sources of reference besides *As You Like It*, which is a comedy.

Since literary works are frequently related to the life of the author, I have decided to conduct this study not only through intrinsic approach but also through extrinsic approach, namely through the literary aspects of Shakespeare's works and through his biographical background in order to find out whether there is a relationship between Shakespeare's life and pessimism found in some passages in his works.

II. Pessimism In Hamlet

Hamlet's mother's remarriage to Claudius hard on the heel of his father's death has made Hamlet extremely moody. Although the ghost of his late father has commanded him to take revenge. Hamlet keeps procrastinating his duty because he is not sure whether it is really his father's spirit or an imposter luring him into action and because he has not found a good opportunity to kill Claudius. *'To be or not to*

be', a phrase which is often misinterpreted as 'to kill or not to kill', is one of the most frequently quoted lines in *Hamlet*. This very well-known phrase, the first line of Hamlet's soliloquy that is cited verbatim below, actually implies 'Shall I go on living **or** commit suicide?'

*To be or not to be - that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? - To die - to sleep -
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die - to sleep -
To sleep! Perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life. (III.i.56-69)*

Hamlet is contemplating on suicide. He wonders whether it is better for him to continue living and take action or to end his own life. The subsequent rhetorical question (*whether... or...?*) implies: 'Is it nobler to succumb to the oppression of fortune, or to resist the troubles of life, and to get rid of them by such resistance?' To die, to sleep! Maybe it is not more than a sleep; and then to say by such a sleep we put an end to the heart-sickness and the countless sufferings to which we are subject as mortals; it is certainly an end which is earnestly desired. To die, to sleep; to sleep! In that sleep of death, however, there is the possibility of dreaming (*perchance to dream*) when we have got rid of all the earthly troubles; it will make us think twice before committing suicide. This is the consideration that makes us feel compelled to submit to and put up with sorrows and troubles of mortal existence.

In the following lines, Hamlet further talks about the sorrows and troubles of life. He says:

*For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, The oppressor's
wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of despised love, the law's
delay,

The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of
the unworthy takes, When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? (III.i.70-76)*

Hamlet believes that none of us would want to bear the inflictions and contempt which the world brings (*whips and scorns of time*), the wrong to which we are subjected by the oppressor, the proud man's humiliating speech or behaviour (*the proud man's contumely*), the anguish of scorned love, the delay of the law, the haughtiness of office-holders (*the insolence of office*) and the indignities which we (who are patient men of merit) suffer at the hands of the unworthy, when we can release ourselves from all these ills (*his quietus make*) merely by means of a naked dagger.

Hamlet's soliloquy further reveals that in spite of the burdens of life, as human beings, we are reluctant to take our own lives for fear of the mystery of life after death, as the following extract indicates:

*... Who would fardels bear,

To grunt and sweat under a weary life
But that the dread of something after death –
The undiscovered country from whose bourn*

*No travellers return - puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the coward hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (III.i.76 - 88)*

Through the three quotations above, one can easily see that Shakespeare is pessimistic about life for he evidently mentions at least twenty sorrows and troubles in life.

Prior to the soliloquy above, there is another soliloquy revealing Hamlet's intention of committing suicide:

*O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! O, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. (I.ii. 129-137)*

Rapt in his thought, Hamlet reveals his abomination for the ways of this world. He feels that life is exhausting (*weary*), uninteresting (*stale*), monotonous (*flat*), and futile (*unprofitable*). Utilizing a metaphor, he further remarks that the world (life) is a garden which is overgrown with wild plants (*unweeded garden*); it is entirely full of coarse and unnatural things (*things rank and gross in nature*). As we look into Shakespeare's life more profoundly, we do find a close relationship between the '*sea of troubles*' that he mentions in '*to be or not to be*' and his own unhappy experiences.

Very little is known of Shakespeare's early manhood, except that he was said to have been in trouble for deer-poaching and was forced to abscond from Stratford to London. He must have had difficulties in settling his problems at court. '*The law's delay*' and '*the insolence of office*' undoubtedly disclose his vexation with the unjust law officers whose integrity - in his opinion - has to be questioned.

The fact that he was compelled to marry Anne Hathaway of Stratford, who was eight years older than himself, after he had failed to marry a girl named Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton surely gave him '*pangs of despised love*'. Between the years 1576-1584, the so-called 'the unrecorded years of his life', Shakespeare must have experienced many other '*outrageous fortunes*' which made him '*grunt and sweat under a weary life*', as we can deduce from his '*slings, arrows, heart-ache, natural shocks, mortal coil, whips, scorns, proud man's contumely, spurns, fardels, and ills*'. It is indeed a '*calamity*' in Shakespeare's life which literary critics rarely expose but which is actually pellucidly exhibited in '*To be or not to be*'.

III. Pessimism In *Macbeth*

Macbeth, an excessively ambitious general, assassinates King Duncan after hearing the witches' prophecy and getting insinuation from his wife, who is better known as the fiend-like queen. He also kills the two chamberlains and puts the blame on them. After becoming king of Scotland, he kills other Scottish noblemen and anyone whom he believes to be in his way. At the end of the play, Lady Macbeth, who is Macbeth's best support and 'supporter', suffers from somnambulism. No matter how undaunted

Macbeth is, he confesses that he feels frightened when he hears his wife's death. He reveals the meaninglessness of life in the following passage, which is frequently referred to as the candle scene:

*She should have died hereafter:
There would have been a time for such a word. –
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life 's a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V.v. 17 - 28)*

In the first two lines of the quotation, Macbeth expresses his deep regret over his wife's death because it happens precisely when he needs her moral support badly, namely when the enemies are besieging his castle. He says there should have been a more appropriate time for such sorrowful news.

In the third line, the word 'tomorrow' is used three times. The repetition of the word looks redundant but actually this deliberate verbiage is to emphasize Macbeth's feeling of the boredom of life and the extremely slow passing of time. The verb '*creep*' (move slowly) and the adverbial phrase '*in this petty pace*' (in such small movements) are also very appropriate for the depiction of the slow movement of the passage of time. The repetitive use of the diphthongs / əʊ / in 'tomorrow' and / eɪ / in 'day' is another successful attempt of the playwright to illustrate Macbeth's feeling of the boredom of life. In the fifth line, Macbeth says that time moves slowly before it reaches the last moment of time which will be recorded. He then says that all the past days of human life (*all our yesterdays*) have only given light to fools on their way to death which turns their bodies to dust (*dusty death*). The dramatist undoubtedly succeeds in dramatizing the futility of life which will only bring human beings to nothing but dust. The pinnacle of this passage is Shakespeare's '*Out, out, brief candle!*' for this short expression not only provides a 'visual' picture of the end of life which is like a fading candle light but also depicts life which lasts only for a short time. In the next three lines, Shakespeare compares life to a walking shadow and then to a miserable stage-actor who swaggers (*struts*) but worries about having to leave the stage (*frets his hour upon the stage*) and who is then no longer heard.

Shakespeare believes that life is a story (*a tale*) which is told by a very foolish person (*an idiot*). Moreover, he says that life means nothing (*signifying nothing*) for it is full of great wrath (*fury*) only.

Even in such a short passage, there are seventeen words and phrases which indicate Shakespeare's pessimistic view of life, as itemized in the following:

1. *Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,*
2. *creeps*
3. *in this petty pace*
4. *from day to day*
5. *lighted fools*
6. *dusty death*
7. *out, out,*
8. *brief*
9. *candle*

10. *a walking shadow*
11. *a poor player*
12. *frets his hour upon the stage*
13. *is heard no more*
14. *a tale*
15. *an idiot*
16. *full of sound and fury*
17. *signifying nothing*

Shakespeare not only wrote poems and plays but also took part in the performances of his plays as a stage-director and an actor. As an actor, he must have known precisely how an actor felt when he '*struts and frets his hour upon the stage*' Furthermore, although Shakespeare has gained recognition as a great poet and playwright, he may have felt that he had not done enough in his 'brief' span of life (1564 - 1616). Moreover, despite his pessimistic remark that all the '*yesterdays have lighted fools -the way to dusty death*' and that life signifies nothing, he did not realize that the world would one day highly appreciate the legacy he has bequeathed them, for the thirty-six plays and more than 150 sonnets that he has written do give the world invaluable enlightenment.

Earlier in the play, there is yet another scene, namely the dagger scene, in which the reader can see Shakespeare's pessimistic view of life. While the welcoming meal for Duncan and his lords is in progress, Macbeth leaves the banqueting hall. In a famous aside in which Macbeth is trying to reckon with his conscience as to whether or not he should assassinate King Duncan, he reveals his fear of the consequences of the deed he is about to perform:

*If it were done when 't is done, then 't were well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow Might be the be-all and
the end-all here,
But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. (I.vii. 1-7)*

The penultimate and the ultimate lines of the citation above bear a potent manifestation of Shakespeare's concept of life which lasts only for a brief span of time. He believes that compared to life after death, life in this world is like a narrow strip of land between water. In this remarkable image, Shakespeare talks of life as a narrow bank which thrusts into the great seas of eternity. In brief, we may infer that according to Shakespeare, life is brief and futile.

IV. Pessimism In *As You Like It*

Although in *Macbeth* Shakespeare compares the world to a stage and human beings to actors and actresses, his concept of the world as a stage is more explicitly expressed in *As You Like It*. Even in the first line of Jacques' speech in the excerpt below, it is evident that Shakespeare regards the world as a stage:

*All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,*

His acts being seven ages. (II.vii. 138-142)

Shakespeare vividly reveals his profound philosophy of life. He cogently says that the world is a stage where human beings are only actors and actresses (*players*). A man is regarded as a different character in the play of life according to his age. The seven ages of his life are described in seven acts and I will deal with these acts seriatim:

*At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms. (II.vii. 142-143)*

The first stage of one's life is infancy, which is something unpleasant for it is markedly marked with crying (*mewling*) and being sick (*puking*). Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway of Stratford produced three children: Susanna and the twins (Hamnet and Judith). As a busy young man who had to work hard to make ends meet by day, Shakespeare must have been irritated to hear the babies cry when it was in fact the right time for him to have a little rest at night

The second stage refers to boyhood. Shakespeare candidly says:

*Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel And shining morning
face, creeping like snail Unwillingly to school. (II.vii. 144-146)*

The 'snail' simile absolutely congruently describes a schoolboy who is reluctant to go to school. Shakespeare must have detested schools very much for the idea of a school boy who is unwilling to go to school can also be found somewhere else in his works, such as in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare was not very well-educated. As a boy, he used to study in the free grammar school at Stratford, but he had to leave at the age of thirteen possibly because he disliked schools. Ben Johnson, a contemporary playwright, glibed at Shakespeare's low education, saying that he had '*small Latin and less Greek*.' (Alexander: 7) The next stage is not a pleasant one, either. Shakespeare must have been woeful when his expression of love (*woeful ballad*) to Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton was unrequited:

*And then the lover, Sighing like furnace, with
a woeful ballad Made to his mistress' eyebrow. (II.vii. 146-148)*

In the next stage, Shakespeare talks about a soldier. For him, a soldier is not a person to be respected at all. There are many negative things that Shakespeare perceives in a soldier, as evidenced from the underlined phrases in the following extract:

*Then a soldier, Full of strange oaths,
and bearded like the pard, Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in
quarrel, Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. (II.vii. 148-152)*

As has been mentioned earlier in this study, Shakespeare must have had problems with the court, particularly with unjust law officers. In the following stage, which Shakespeare considers the fifth stage of one's life, again he renders a scathing criticism on the corrupt people who are in charge of restoring and keeping law and order:

*And then the justice;
In round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. (II.vii. 152-156)*

Although the word '*round*' has a positive denotative meaning, in this context it has a negative connotation particularly when it is related to the word '*capon*', which implies none other than a cock or a male domestic fowl castrated and fattened for consumption. Likewise, the playwright is cynical when he says '*wise saws*' (tactful proverbial sayings) and '*modern instances*'. Admittedly, such law officers must have stared at 'their' helpless defendants with their severe eyes (*With eyes severe*).

A closer scrutiny of the sixth stage makes us more convinced that Shakespeare is a pessimist for he evidently reveals that in this stage man has become considerably weak. The word '*lean*', for instance, is a strong contrast to the word '*round*' in '*round belly*' in the preceding stage. His previous '*eyes severe*' now already need '*spectacles on nose*'. Did the bard of Avon fear to undergo this lousy stage or did he already see many examples of strong and powerful people around him who had not only become visually impaired but also lost their masculine voice? The point is that at this stage of one's life, there is nothing to be 'proud' of except his blur eyesight, his '*childish treble*', his '*lean*' body and his diminutive rickety shanks. All the adverse conditions are unfolded in the serio-comic lines in the excerpt below:

*The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. (II.vii. 156-162)*

Before we definitely deduce whether Shakespeare is a pessimist, it would be necessary for us to analyse the following stage, which Shakespeare believes to be the last stage of human life:

*Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (II.vii. 162 - 165)*

The '*last scene of all*', a phrase that Shakespeare has coined so fittingly, eminently unveils the universal veracity that in this stage one no longer possesses either power or beauty. In this stage, one becomes childish again; one even suffers from senility or dotage (*oblivion*), a disease which, in our modern medical term, is more commonly defined as the Alzheimer's disease. To make matters worse, one has neither teeth to 'allow' one to taste one's food nicely nor sound eyes to enable one to see. The '*last scene of all*' is indeed the most tragic of all the scenes for in this stage one should live without anything (*sans everything*). The deliberate verbosity of the emphatic reiteration of the word '*sons*' (meaning 'without') is extremely beyond expression. The proposition that in this stage one is inflicted with all the infirmities which are concomitant to old age surely bears a universal truth. As a final remark, I should say that there is no bloom but gloom in the seven stages of human life in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

IV. Conclusion

A conclusion consisting of a single sentence may suffice: Pessimism exhibited in some of the passages in the three plays is a reflexion of Shakespeare's own obnoxious experiences.

To clarify the matter, however, I think I need to sum up once again that in '*To be or not to be*' in *Hamlet* there are at least twenty words and phrases which provide a fool-proof of Shakespeare's pessimism on life. In addition, the metaphor '*unweeded garden*', which is used to describe the world, in

the same play, gives further evidence of his pessimistic view on life. The ‘*Candle Scene*’ in *Macbeth* pessimistically depicts human life which is as brief as a candle light. The same scene stresses that life ‘*signifies nothing*’ since he believes that one’s past experiences in life only lead one to ‘*dusty death*’. Shakespeare’s pessimism on life can also be seen from the metaphor in the ‘*Dagger Scene*’, in which he compares life in this world to ‘*this bank and shoal of time*’; he obviously emphasizes that life in this world is much shorter than the great seas of eternity (life after death). ‘*All the world’s a stage*’ in *As You Like It* surely shows Shakespeare’s most pessimistic view on life. In this scene, human life is metaphorically compared to a play consisting of seven acts, none of which contains bliss but miseries. In the last stage of one’s life, one should even live without anything (‘*sans everything*’).

His sorrowful life, particularly his unhappy childhood and his blissless marriage, may have contributed most to his pessimistic view on life which he exhibits in the three plays

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