

QUEST FOR MEANING OF EXISTENCE OF LYDIA IN ALICE

THOMAS ELLIS'S *UNEXPLAINED LAUGHTER*:

EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH



RESEARCH PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Unexplained Laughter written by Alice Thomas Ellis is the fifth from thirteen of her literary work. The other novels are: *The Sir Eater* (1977), *The Birds of Air* (1980), *The 27th Kingdom* (1982), *The Other Side of the Fire* (1983), *The Clothes in the Wardrobe* (1987), *The Skeleton in the Cupboard* (1988), *The Fly in the Ointment* (1990), *The Inn at the Edge of the World* (1990), *Pillars of Gold* (1992), *The Evening of Adam* (1994), *Fairy Tale* (1996), and *Hotel Lucifer* (1999).

Unexplained Laughter (1986) was published in Penguin Books which 155 pages and 22 cm. The genre of this novel is drama. The novel uses American English language and British English language. It was firstly published by Gerald Duckwort & Co and was made and printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk, and the typeset in Baskerville. The cover illustration is Van Beck. It is her best-known novel adapted for British television as was her *Summerhouse Trilogy*. The author is Alice Thomas Ellis as her pen name; the original name is Anna Margaret Lindholm. She was born on September 9th, 1932 in Liverpool. She was the author of numerous novels, and also of some non-fiction, including cookery books includes *All-natural Baby Food* and *Darling* (1977). In 1956, she got married with Collin Haycraft, with whom she remained happily married until his death

in 1995. They got seven children (William, Thomas, Oliver, Arthur, Sarah, Mary and Joshua), raised in Anna religion, but they were also struck by tragedy; their daughter Mary died in infancy at the age of two days, and their son Joshua was killed in an accident while still his teen. In 1988, *Unexplained Laughter* was adapted on British television, as was her Summerhouse Trilogy. She died on March 8th, 2005. (<http://www.biographycenter.com/biographies/AliceThomasEllis.html>).

This story tells about; in a weak moment, sardonic journalist Lydia, recovering from a faithless lover, invites an emotionally needy, acquaintance to accompany her primitive cottage in rural Wales. Never particularly fond of Betty, “the human equivalent of sackcloth and ashes,” Lydia finds herself alternating between resentment of Betty’s good sense and optimistic outlook, and toleration of her desire to be helpful and, not incidentally, do the cooking. The two women have decidedly different temperaments, with Lydia often cynical, worldly, and full of snide comments, while Betty is honest, direct, and patient. Their conversation, often hilariously ironic dialogues, show two people who have nothing in common, stuck with each other for a vacation and toughing it out.

Hywel, a dour farmer; Elisabeth, his fearful wife (with a secret lover) Beuno; Hywel’s brother, who is studying to be a priest; and randy Doctor Wyn provide Lydia and Betty with their only real social life. A dull dinner party given by Elisabeth, visits by Beuno (whom Lydia regards as “one of her own kind”) to discuss philosophy, trips to the Fair and to a concert,

walks in the countryside, and eventually a grand finale of a picnic, all of which offer a marked contrast to Lydia's lively, intellectual life in the city.

Hywel's sister Angharad, a deformed and mute "free spirit" (or demon) who roams the countryside, comments poetically on what she observes of these people and their behavior when she looks through windows and eavesdrops on conversations in the woods. Drawn to nature instinctively, she notes the contrasts between human nature and the life she sees in the woods and countryside. "If the land was a graven image, then Angharad was its priestess." Mysterious, "unexplained laughter," heard only by Lydia though the laughter is usually associated with observations made by Angharad. Gradually, Lydia begins to learn more about man and nature, love and betrayal, and good and evil, especially the nature of Satan, whom she calls by the much less threatening name of "Stan." She also can not imagine God is like. She resemble God is like Santa Clause or someone. Anyone she can imagine is quite unlikely exists.

There are many responses toward *Unexplained Laughter* novel in pro and contra. Alice Thomas Ellis is the breadth of the subjects she deals with indicates her complex personality. In positive comment, Anomie says that *Unexplained Laughter* is the most enjoyable book, she has read in ages, and she recommended it wholeheartedly—"displaced human" (a swiftly titling planet), January 11, 2004. In contrast, Mary Whipple says that this novel is "Dry, ironic humor contrast with genuine sadness, and cynicism with sensitivity here, as Lydia's farcical intrusions into the country life lead her to

new understanding and a greater appreciation of the real world”, Tuesday, October 28, 2008.

The market is also interested in this novel, a Penguin Book Fiction has list price such as: U. K the price is £2. 95, AUST (recommended) is \$8.95; N.Z (inch) is \$10.95, and CAN about \$6.95.

Unexplained Laughter won two Awards. Firstly, was given in 1972 the *Yorkshire Post* Book Award for best book, finest work, best first work, and runner- up for best first work later book named Novel of the Year. The Book of the Year now receives £1200 and a scroll; the Best First Book £1000 and a scroll (<http://factstaff.unca.edu/Moseley/yorkshire.html>).

Secondly, in 1977 got *Welsh Art Council Award*. There have been awards for Music and Art books. This award is unusual in its relatively slight emphasis on fiction. Only once (1988), has the Best Book, or Book of the Year, gone to a novel; more often the most honored book is a work of history, often military history, travel or biography. *Unexplained Laughter* (1988) also which was adapted for British television, as was her Summerhouse Trilogy. (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1485280/arts.html>).

There are four aspects why the writer is interested in studying this novel. They are character and characterization, plot, point of view, and theme. The first, the character's *Unexplained Laughter* especially Lydia as the major character shows that sardonic journalist after got love anguish and high imagination. The second is author uses flash-back plot for this novel. She stories about her childhood when she stays in North Wales (Rigg,

Diana.1995.Serpent on the Rock, LJ.<http://www.amazon.com/Wales-childhood.alicethomasellis/op/15592119>).

The third is point of view. It is shown by mysterious character namely Angharad. This character in the novel comes for advice or to make confession, or free spirit or the mute was shown by Angharad in *Unexplained Laughter*. The researcher is given access to her inner monologue: “I think I am dead. I think I have been dead for a long time now. I am Angharad do you hear me? Listen.”

The last is the philosophical aspect (experience of life) as theme. In *Unexplained Laughter*, Ellis has described the existence through the major character, namely Lydia. The major character has choice to decide when she wants to get over love affair from her love anguish. The choice between bad or good to has meaning for life. Here, she decides to visit the countryside was all peace and tranquility. On holiday in the Wales countryside becomes the occasion to reflection on creaturely limits, mortality, betrayal, and religion, interlaced with hints of transcendence. In the night when she talks about with Betty, she heard mysterious noise that she insists is laughter. Mysterious “Unexplained Laughter”, heard only by Lydia. It also caused Lydia to quest God is exist.

So, quest for meaning of existence in *Unexplained Laughter* novel is one aspect which is interesting. If we read this novel, we can see that she also wants to discuss. Lydia’s searches for meaning of existence illustrated with “unusual experience may lead to quest her meaning of life”.

The writer will observe *Unexplained Laughter* with Existentialism theory of needs by Gordon E. Bigelow. He classified the aspects of existentialist was divided into six, such as: existence precedes essence, reason is impotent to deal with the depth of human life, alienation or estrangement, fear and trembling, anxiety, the encounter with nothingness, and freedom. The writer concludes Existentialist is the appropriate approach to study this novel through Lydia as the major character.

Based on the phenomenon above, Lydia's searches for meaning of existence which influences her life. Therefore, the writer is interested in analyzing it using existentialism perspective entitled: **Quest for Meaning of Existence of Lydia in Alice Thomas Ellis's *Unexplained Laughter*: Existentialist Approach.**

B. Literary Review

The researcher does not find other writer conducting a research on the novel. *Unexplained Laughter* novel by Alice Thomas Ellis's has not been studied yet in Surakarta such as: Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta and Sebelas Maret University. It has also not been found in Semarang University. However, other researchers may do other research related to the novel.

In this study, the researcher tries to analyze this novel using an existentialism perspective. The research is to examine the author of the novel reflects quest for meaning of existence of Lydia through his work which includes the structural elements of the novel.

C. Problem Statement

Regarding to the research background, the writer would like to formulate the problem statement into:

“How does Lydia the existence of human being reflected in Alice Thomas Ellis’s *Unexplained Laughter?*”

D. Limitation of the Study

In order to focus the study, the researcher limits her study on the problem of human’s being existence which is described in the novel *Unexplained Laughter*, and focuses on Bigelow’s theories of existentialism.

E. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study as follows:

1. To analyze the novel based on its structural elements
2. To analyze the novel by means of Existentialist Approach

F. Benefits of the Study

By conducting this research, there are some benefits from this study such as:

1. Theoretical Benefit

To give additional information and contribute to the large body of knowledge, particularly studies on Alice Thomas Ellis’s *Unexplained Laughter*.

2. Practical Benefit

To answer the researcher's curiosity about quest for meaning of existence of Lydia in Alice Thomas Ellis's *Unexplained Laughter* using Existentialist approach.

G. Research Method

In this research, the writer analyzes Ellis's *Unexplained Laughter* novel. There are five points that should be taken into account in this research:

1. Type of the Study

In this research, the writer uses a qualitative research. It is a library research while data source are using literary data. It aims at analyzing the novel using existentialism perspective. The steps to conduct this research are (1) determining the type of the study, (2) determining the object of the study, (3) determining data and data source, (4) determining technique of data collection, and (5) determining technique of data analysis.

2. Object of the Study

The object of the study is *Unexplained Laughter* written by Alice Thomas Ellis and published in Penguin Books, 1986.

3. Type of the Data and the Data Source

A primary data source is the novel *Unexplained Laughter Novel* written by Alice Thomas Ellis. Secondary data include material about the author and material about existentialist.

4. Technique of the Data Collection

The technique of data collection is library research, the steps are:

- a. Reading the novel
- b. Determining the character that will be analyzed
- c. Reading some related books to find out the theory, data, and information required
- d. Taking notes of important in both primary and secondary data
- e. Classifying the data into some categories
- f. Arranging and developing the selected materials into a good unity with the topic of the study.

5. Technique of the Data Analysis

The technique of data analyzing in this study is descriptive, to give and interpretation of the text. The research analyzes quest for meaning of existence of Lydia found in Alice Thomas Ellis's *Unexplained Laughter*.

H. Paper Organization

The research organization of "Quest for Meaning of Existence of Lydia in Alice Thomas Ellis's *Unexplained Laughter: Existentialist Approach*" to make it easier to be understood is as follows. *Chapter I* is Introduction; it consists of background of the study, literature review, problem statement, limitation of the study, objectives of the study, and benefits of the study. *Chapter II* is Underlying Theory; it consists of notion of existentialism, characteristics of existentialism according to Gordon E. Bigelow, structural element and theoretical application. *Chapter III* is Structural Analysis of *Unexplained Laughter*; the structural elements consists of character and

characterization, setting, plot, point of view, style, and theme; *Chapter IV* is Existentialism Analysis, especially using the characteristics of existentialism according to Gordon E. Bigelow such as: existence before essence, reason is impotent to deal with the depths of human life, alienation or estrangement, fear and trembling, anxiety, the encounter with nothingness and freedom. *Chapter V* is Conclusion and Suggestion; it consists of Conclusion and Suggestion.