

# **Masculinity In Spark's The Best Me And Yanagihara's A Little Life : A Study Of Comparative Literature**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to explain the differences and similarities of masculinity depicted in the 17th American novel *The Best of Me* (2011) by Nicholas Sparks which is ranked 2 of the top 10 lists in weekly publishers, with romance and fiction genres, with Novel *A Little Life* (2015) the work of the United States novelist Hanya Yanagihara who won both the 2015 Man Booker Prize, the Goodreads choice awards for the best fiction category and the national book award for fiction. Using the fiction genre, this research is comparative literature. It uses gender theory with masculine concepts from John Beynon (2002) which is written in his book entitled *Masculinities and Culture*. This study uses a context-oriented approach, Data Collection Techniques using literature study by reading, taking notes, and documenting data. After the data is collected, data reduction is carried out. The data that has been selected will be classified to take action to analyze the differences and similarities of masculinity in the male main character Dawson Cole in the Novel *The Best of Me* with Jude in the Novel *A Little Life*. The author finds some differences in reading aspects of masculinity according to John Beynon in the two characters. The difference lies in aspects: Age & Physical, Education, Sexual Orientation, Class & Occupation, Status & Lifestyle. The author finds similarities in reading aspects of masculinity according to John Beynon in Dawson and Jude in the Historical Location aspect. Both of them have pasts that they don't want to open up.

**Keywords** : Masculinity, Gender, Comparative Literature, Novel

## **Introduction**

Novels are defined as a long process of narrative creation and contain complex elements that are imaginatively a reflection of human life, usually consisting of a series of events involving characters with certain locations, contexts, and atmosphere settings. The novel describes the dynamics of human life, both imaginative and fictitious as proposed. The novel is not just a series of writings that excites when read, but is a structured thought structure. Through his writing, the author tries to convey a message to the reader, as well as the reader can learn the meaning of life experienced by fictional characters in the novel.

Literature is a creative and imaginative product of a person to describe his views on the social upheavals that occur at a certain time.

In this case, The novel *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara and the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks are media of information and communication between the writer and the reader in which the author conveys his ideas and imagination which is manifested in a series of plots, while the author absorbs every information that the author describes through the depiction of characters. , events, settings, The conflict and male characters introduced in the novel are related to the concept of masculinity. In other words, both novels introduce the concept of masculinity through the main characters to the readers.

Masculinity and femininity are two words that contain two opposite images with different sets of behaviors and personal attributes. Regardless of how appropriate this definition is to each individual male and female in society, these gender stereotypes are maintained and propagated in society for many years. Purwani, 2019 stated that gender is constructed by culture<sup>1</sup> and Sukiman et al, 2019 every culture reflects the conditions of society<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, gender stereotypes and roles affect both men and women in society. Masculine is a form of male construction for men. Men are not born naturally with masculine traits, masculinity is shaped by culture. The thing that determines the character of women and men is culture.

Both novels have in common the main male characters in that they are presented with their problems from the perspective of the men themselves, such as friendship and love problems. This study will analyze two selected literary works from well-known authors, namely Nicholas Sparks with the novel *The Best of Me* (2011) and Hanya Yanagihara with a novel entitled *A Little Life* (2015) which reflects social life, especially about gender, both masculine or feminist.

In connection with the description above, this study tries to reveal the issue of masculinity in the two selected novels through gender theory which focuses on masculinity. The selected novels are produced in different countries, different times, but present the same issue of masculinity, even in different ways. In further, it also explains the comparison of

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<sup>1</sup> Purwani, W.A. Performativitas Gender dalam Novel *The Female Man* Karya Joanna Russ. (KARANGAN. 2019), 110-115

<sup>2</sup> Sukiman, et al. The Use of Samawa Tribe Sakeco Art as a Literature Learning Material in Junior High School. (Journal of Physics, 2019), 1-5.

masculinity as reflected in Nicholas Sparks *The Best of Me* (2011) and masculinity as reflected in the novel *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (2015) by applying comparative literature study. Thus, in this study attempts to find out the similarities and differences both of those novels, as Dewi (2019) stated that in producing literary work, sometimes the author influences or is influenced by the other works consciously or not<sup>3</sup>. Due to both of those novels told similar stories which can be ascertained there are influencing each other, and it can be examined by comparative literature.

## Method

Basically, research of literary work has distinction method than the other research studies, due to in literary research the theory becomes method in conducting study (Dewi, 2019). In accordance with the background of this study above, this study focuses to investigate the relation between two novels which is strongly linked by masculinity concept. Thus, this study is designed by applying context oriented approach.

A context-oriented approach is one approach in studying literary works. Klarer (2004:107) suggests that an approach like this is used to analyze a literary text by reviewing the genre, historical, social, cultural, political, national and gender backgrounds that are associated with the compilation of a literary work. This study focuses on the analysis of the masculinity concept of John Beyon (2002) contained in the novel *The best of me* by Nicholas Sparks (2011) and the novel *A little life* by Hanya Yanagihara(2015).this study relates the findings in the form of similarities and differences in the concept of masculinity of the two novels with the background of the story's depiction by the author, such as the setting of the place, the social conditions of the characters told, the developing culture, etc.

*The Best of Me* novel is a romantic genre published in October 2011 by publishers from Grand Central Publishing in the United States, totaling 392 pages. The novel *A Little Life*, written in 18 months by the author and published in 2015 by Doubleday Publishers has a total of 814 pages. This study uses the concept of analyzing the comparison in the masculinity of the main character Dowson Cole in *The Best of Me* novel with the main character Jude in the novel *A Little Life*. This study uses the masculinity reading theory of

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<sup>3</sup> Dewi, A.R.2019. Point of View on Death: A Study of Intertextuality in John Donne's 'Death, Be Not Proud', Emily Dickinson's 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death', and Appointment in Samarra as Retold by William Sommerset Maugham. Jurnal Kependidikan, Pembelajaran, dan Pengembangan, Vol 01, No 02, September,2019, Hal 116 –120

John Beynon (2002). The data research technique in this research is in the form of literature study.

This study uses content analysis. Fraenkel & Wallen (2007) state that content analysis is a research tool that focuses on the actual content and features of internal media. The content analysis procedure is as follows:

1. The writer decides the topic to be studied.
2. Define important terms in detail.
3. Determine the unit to be analyzed
4. Finding relevant supporting data
5. Building a rational or conceptual relationship to explain how a data related to the purpose of answering the problem formulation
6. Data collection planning
7. Formulate analysis results

This study will study human behavior indirectly through communication analysis, Dawson Cole in *The Best of Me* novel with the main character Jude in the novel *A Little Life*.

## **Finding and Discussion**

### **The Describe of Masculinity in the Novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks (2011)**

*The Best of Me* novel by Nicholas Sparks carries the theme of love and sacrifice. The novel describes the love story of a couple with very different social statuses. This novel describes the masculinity of the main male character Dawson Cole. There are several aspects of reading masculinity that will be explained, namely:

#### **1. Age and Physical**

Dawson's physical depiction appeals to women, including by Amanda because she is Dawson's lover. Sparks also described that at the age of forty-two Dawson, Dawson really has a physical and appearance that attracts other women. When Dawson accidentally met Amanda at Irvin's cafe to buy mineral water, the cafe cashier showed a gesture of a woman who wanted to be seen. beautiful in the eyes of men.

*"...When Dawson neared the back of the store, the clerk checked her appearance in the mirror behind the counter, then greeted him with a friendly smile at the register..."*  
(Sparks, 2002:136).

This gesture shows that Dawson is a handsome and attractive male figure. This shows the aspect of reading masculinity of age and physical, because it shows that Dawson's physique gives a charming impression to women who see it.

## 2. Education

Sparks portrays Dawson as different from his other siblings. Dawson never liked all of the Cole family quirks. At school, Dawson was a model student. This is a disaster for Dawson. While parents are overjoyed when their child gets good grades, Dawson's father beats him with a belt. To avoid that, Dawson had to engineer his test scores to be worst in order to tell his father that he wasn't a good kid at all. This was told by Sparks when one of the teachers who happened to be a drinking buddy of Dawson's father called him a model student. Instantly, his father found out that Dawson had defected from Cole and became a law-abiding citizen.

*“... One of his teachers mentioned to a drinking buddy of his dad' s that he was the best student in his class; aunts and uncles began to notice that he alone among the cousins was staying within the bounds of the law ...”(Sparks, 2002: 22).*

The Cole family custom is never to really care about studying and schooling. For Cole, the most important thing is that life should be the way they want it to be. When they want to kill, they kill. No cole cares about humanity and rules. Nothing but a Dawson Cole.

## 3. Ethnicity

This aspect reflects a man who understands social patterns that are manifested in the behavior he usually does as an expression of a positive self-character and brings benefits to others. Dawson is accused of having caused an accident that resulted in the death of a doctor at the Oriental named David Bonner. In the end, he was in prison for 10 years. The judge and public defender believed there was another car while Dawson's truck swerved to avoid it. However, life as Cole is not easy. And that feeling of guilt made him always pictured with the wife and children of doctor David Bonner. He lives with guilt and the burden of responsibility towards the Bonners. Six months after his release, he visited the Bonners and apologized even though he knew he would not be forgiven. But Dawson didn't want to be indifferent to the breakdown of the harmonious family he had caused.

*“... He was, after all, responsible for the greatest loss their family had experienced ...”* (Sparks, 2002:104).

Dawson's behavior reflects the reading of masculinity aspects of Ethnicity according to John Beynon's masculinity aspects, because Dawson has an understanding of appropriate social attitudes towards the Bonner family. Dawson's attitude also had a great influence on Marilyn Bonner's family and their children. It was explained that Marilyn's life situation was getting better from year to year.

#### 4. Sexual orientation

Masculinity in this study focuses on the main character. Sparks recounts Dawson's early interest in his classmates when they were paired up in a chemistry group. Dawson began to think about Amanda a lot when he was working at Tuck Hostetler's repair shop.

*“... she would touch his arm to get his attention and the feeling would linger for hours. In the afternoons, as he worked in the garage, he often found he couldn't stop thinking about her ...”* (Sparks, 2002: 27).

Sparks recounted that when Dawson decided to end his relationship with Amanda, both of them wanted to emphasize that Dawson only belonged to Amanda and Amanda also belonged to Dawson by having sexual relations before the separation. Dawson will live forever with those memories.

*“... Later that night they made love for the first time. And for the next two decades and beyond, he carried those words and the memories of that night inside him ...”* (Sparks, 2002: 31).

#### 5. Status & Lifestyle

Sparks shared that the Dawson family was considered a bad family. This depiction shows the condition of the Cole family. Sparks also describes how social views on the reputation of the Cole family.

*“... even the sheriff avoided the place...”* (Sparks, 2002: 20)

Sparks describes people's views of the Cole family. that the Sheriff chose not to have anything to do with the Cole family. Cole will not hesitate to kill anyone who interferes with his life.

#### 6. Historical Location

This aspect reflects the subordinated man based on history which is related to the formation of character in him. According to Beynon's view, a person's behavior and character can be formed based on the past that happened to him. Sparks tells that Dawson was accused of being the cause of the death of a doctor named David Bonner. There are no witnesses to explain what actually happened.

*The truck, Marilyn was told, was owned by Tuck Hostetler. The driver, who would soon be charged with felony death by motor vehicle and involuntary manslaughter, was eighteen years old and already in handcuffs. His name was Dawson Cole ...*" (Sparks, 2002:58).

For Dawson, the incident did not make sense by placing him in the position of a suspect, he accepted the accusation because he realized that a Cole would be difficult to defend himself. After all, Dawson was on the road and vividly remembers the incident and Doctor Bonner's death. He thought about the fate of the family he left behind. Although, the judge's decision to make Dawson a suspect in the death of David Bonner was based precisely on the identity of a "Cole" and there was no concrete evidence to confirm Dawson's guilt, he felt that if he had not gone out that night, maybe David Bonner could still be with his family, and the Bonners would live a much better life. Because of that, Dawson lived with a sense of bearing the life of the Bonner family, David Bonner's wife and children.

### **Masculinity in the Novel *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (2015)**

This novel brings the theme of the friendship of four teenage to middle-aged boys who go to New York City in search of a better life. Jude is the main character who is more dominating than Willem, JB, and Malcolm. Through Jude's character, the writer wants to find the masculinity of someone with a metropolitan city life. There are several aspects of reading masculinity that will be explained, namely:

#### **1. Age and Physical**

*"... you looked really, really nice. You're a great-looking kid; I hope someone's told you that before ..."* (Yanagihara, 2015:112)

That statement was conveyed by Harold to Jude. Yanagihara describes Jude's handsome physique since he was a child. Researchers assume that Jude's good looks are one of the reasons why she was sold as prostitution to adult men. Jude's good looks must be covered with Jude's limp legs due to an accident that happened to him

when he was a child. Due to the deep trauma of the sexual abuse that Jude experienced, Jude felt his body was dirty and he didn't deserve to be loved.

*He will be reminded of how trapped he is, trapped in a body he hates, with a past he hates..*(Yanagihara, 2015: 179).

On the other hand, Yanagihara told about Jude's physique, which was full of wounds and weakness, as well as his limping leg due to being accidentally hit by dr. Taylor. Jude also had a fracture in his back muscles. This condition describes Jude's fragile physique. Just contrasting the masculine physique of Caleb, Jude's ex-girlfriend. "

*"... who is taller than he had thought, at least two inches taller than he is, with a powerful-looking back ..."* (Yangihara, 2015: 353).

Jude's condition like this makes Jude often sick and uses a wheelchair. Yanagihara describes that Jude's face is indeed handsome, but Jude's physique does not show the masculine side of a man who has a strong physique.

## 2. Education

Jude studied at one of the universities in New York City by majoring in Law.

*"...and Jude, who had remained in Boston for law school ..."*(Yanahigara, 2015: 75)

As a law student, Just illustrates that Jude is a brilliant student. His intelligence made Jude an assistant to a business associate professor, Harold, thus making it easy for him to build a close father and son relationship with him.

*"...you're the most brilliant student I've ever had..."* (Yanagihara, 2015: 108)

Jude's intelligence and success are also something to be proud of in front of others.

## 3. Classes & Work

After graduating, at the age of 30, Jude was already working as a lawyer. Researchers found the part where Jude was working on the case of Felix, Mr. Baker from his third wife.

*"... with a crippled nearly thirty-year-old lawyer who was there only to earn money,..."* (Yanagihara, 2005: 91)

The researcher associates it with the careers of his three best friends. Jude has had a more successful and respected career than his three best friends. Malcolm who came from a rich family was never proud of his parents who praised his brother's



work more. Willem who hasn't got a shooting project at the right time, while JB hasn't really become a famous artist. Jude's success is demonstrated by his ability to purchase an apartment specially designed by Malcolm after years of sharing an apartment with Willem due to financial constraints.

#### 4. Sexual orientation

Jude has a gay relationship phenomenon. After being sexually assaulted, Jude has an attraction to same-sex relationships. Jude showed a side of comfort she felt when she was with Caleb.

*He likes Caleb's slow, thoughtful way of speaking, the way he talks about the designers he's worked with, his understanding of color and his appreciation of art. He likes that he can discuss his work—about Malpractice and Bastard* (Yanagihara, 2015: 313)

Caleb is a hypersex man so he is often rude to Jude during intercourse and at the end of their meeting before breaking up, Caleb rapes her. It reminds Jude of his past trauma. Furthermore, Yanagihara does not also show Jude's trauma to men, but Yanagihara tells about Jude's relationship with Willem which turned into a relationship that was more than just friends. Researchers concluded that Jude had a same-sex sexual orientation.

#### 5. Status & Lifestyle

Jude's lifestyle is related to the culture that exists in New York City. New York's middle class lifestyle is shown by Jude's daily activities with his best friend.

*“...and who would go out that night with people he loved and who, even, loved hi..* (Yanagihara, 2015: 91)

Since they were in college, almost every month they went to parties to socialize. At these parties they got to know other students and exchanged stories. Including when Jude and Willem move into a new apartment, they invite friends over to a party and celebrate their new home. So is the case with the freedom of sexual intercourse. There was nothing wrong with Jude having a relationship with Caleb or Willem. Freedom of sexual orientation is also told. Only happens to some senior Jude and his friends on campus

*“...Their next-door suitemates in their second year in Hood had been a trio of Lesbians...”* (Yanagihara, 2015: 243)

Freedom and tolerance for sexual orientation is a form of freedom for diversity that exists in New York which is not bound by a norm that is a certain belief of New Yorkers.

#### 6. *Historical Location*

The Historical Location aspect shows Jude's character which is subordinated based on the events experienced. Jude became a quiet and mysterious man. Only told that Jude himself felt disgusted with his body due to his childhood trauma.

*“...the almost nauseous wrongness of his past life intruding so physically on his present (Yanagihara, 2015: 489)*

This makes Jude secretive and mysterious. Jude didn't want his personal identity and past to be known to others because it was a terrible past.

*Jude's, he thought, was motivated more by a fear that if he didn't move forward, he would somehow slip back to his past, the life he had left and about which he would tell none of them ...” (Yanagihara, 2015: 45).*

After all, Jude didn't seem like a depressed person. Jude is quite capable of hiding his past from his friends and is successful in his law practice. This shows that through Jude, only represents a masculine man who can hide his personal problems and still develop his qualities.

#### **The difference of Masculinity in Dawson Cole *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks (2011) and Jude *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (2015)**

Writers found some differences in reading aspects of masculinity according to John Beynon on the two characters. The difference lies in aspects of age & physical, education, sexual orientation, class & occupation, and status & lifestyle.

The physical differences between Dawson and Jude are related to the past lives of the two. Dawson is a boy who is physically abused and determined to fight the violence that oppresses him. Meanwhile, Jude has been physically, mentally and psychologically abused. As an orphan and repeatedly sexually abused, Jude could not defend himself. This resulted in Jude having a fragile and weak body.

Another difference is shown from the aspect of education. Dawson only graduated from high school while Jude graduated from a top law school in New York. Although Sparks and Yanagihara describe Dawson and Jude as brilliant in school, this still affects the work and social status of both. Dawson works on a rig that pays enough for his needs and those of

Marilyn Bonner and her family. Jude with all worldly ambitions, status, and lifestyle, managed to achieve a brilliant career as a lawyer at the respected Rosen Richard and Klein.

Oriental social culture as a small town is still considered conventional and applies the prevailing norms. Sparks describes Dawson who initially limits himself to Amanda who is already married because she adheres to societal norms where married women should not be too close to other men. In contrast to the more tolerant New York society in Yanagihara's novel. Even in matters of sexuality, homosexuality is not a taboo subject.

The difference in reading the masculinity aspect in Dawson and Jude is related to the difference in the setting of the story. *The Best of Me* novel depicts a small Oriental city that is very different from the big New York in *A Little Life*. Oriental is sparsely populated and still bound by societal norms while New York is a metropolitan city with a more modern population. Researchers found that Dawson is a representation of masculine men based on physical and character, while Jude is a representation of masculinity based on work and social class.

### **The Similarities of masculinity in Dawson Cole *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks (2011) and Jude A *Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (2015)**

The Writer found that there was a similarity in reading the masculinity aspect according to John Beynon on the Dawson and Jude characters in the Historical Location aspect. Both of them have a past that they don't want to open up. Dawson with his identity as a member of a criminal family and has become a former criminal tried to keep himself from the public and decided not to attract too much attention. Jude is traumatized by flashbacks of the sexual abuse she received during her time at the convent and continued when she was sold into child prostitution for adult men. Dawson and Jude show characters formed by the past. This equation shows the representation of masculine men who do not really like to expose their personal identity and still act visionary.

### **Conclusion**

The Novel *The A Little Life Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks (2011) and the Novel *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (2015) are media of information and communication between the writer and the reader where the author conveys his ideas and imagination which is manifested in a plot of the story, while the writer absorbs every information that the author describes through the depiction of the characters. , events, settings, The conflict and male

characters introduced in the novel are related to the concept of masculinity. In other words, both novels introduce the concept of masculinity through the main characters to the readers.

*The Best of Me* Novel by Nicholas Spark carries the theme of love and sacrifice. The novel describes the love story of a couple with very different social statuses. This novel describes the masculinity of the main male character, Dawson Cole. Meanwhile, the Novel *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara is themed on the friendship of four teenage boys to middle age who go to New York City in search of a better life. Jude is the main male character in. Through Jude's character, the writer wants to find the masculinity of someone with a metropolitan city life.

Researchers found some differences in reading aspects of masculinity according to John Beynon on the two characters. The difference lies in aspects of age & physical, education, sexual orientation, class & occupation, and status & lifestyle.

The writer found that there was a similarity in reading the masculinity aspect according to John Beynon on the Dawson and Jude characters in the Historical Location aspect. Both of them have a past that they don't want to open up.

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