

**POSITIVELY FACING DEATH REFLECTED IN PAUL
KALANITHI'S *WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR* (2016): A
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**



**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
to Getting Bachelor Degree of Education Department of English Education
School Of Teacher Training And Education**

By :

FITRI PUJI LESTARI

A320100130

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURAKARTA**

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By :

FITRI PUJI LESTARI

A320100130

has been inspected and approved to be tested by :

Consultant



Dr. M. Thoyibi, M.S.

NIK. 410

ACCEPTANCE

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By:
FITRI PUJI LESTARI
A320100130

Accepted by the Broad Examiners
Department Of English Education
School of Teacher and Training Education
Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta
On 24 October 2020

Team of examiners

1. Dr. M. Thoyibi, M.S.

(Head of examiners)

(*M. Thoyibi*)

2. Dr. Phil. Dewi Candraningrum, S.Pd., M.A

(Member I of Examiner)

(*Dewi Candraningrum*)

3. Titis Setyabudi, S.S., M.A

(Member II of Examiner)

(*Titis Setyabudi*)

Dean,



Prof. Dr. Harun Joko Prayitno, M.Hum

NIP. 19650428 199303 1 001

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The Writer



POSITIVELY FACING DEATH REFLECTED IN PAUL KALANITHI'S *WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR* (2016): A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah: 1) Mendeskripsikan indikator menghadapi kematian secara positif dalam memoar *When Breath Becomes Air*; 2) Menganalisis cara menghadapi kematian secara positif yang digambarkan dalam memoar *When Breath Becomes Air*; dan 3) Untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis alasan penulis menghadapi kematian secara positif dalam memoar *When Breath Becomes Air*. Jenis penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif. Objek penelitian adalah cara penulis menghadapi kematian secara positif yang tercermin dalam memoar *When Breath Becomes Air* (2016) karya Paul Kalanithi. Penelitian dianalisis dengan pendekatan sosiologis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa indikator penulis, Paul, menghadapi kematian secara positif adalah: menghadapi kematiannya dengan pasrah, menjaga optimisme, segera mengerjakan cita-citanya, dan menghabiskan lebih banyak waktu dengan keluarga dan teman. *When Breath Becomes Air* menggambarkan cara penulis menghadapi kematiannya secara positif alih-alih kehilangan harapan dan kebahagiaan, seperti: menjadi penulis, menyiapkan karier, membesarkan bayi, dan meluangkan waktu berkualitas bersama keluarga dan teman. Paul secara khusus menyikapi positif menghadapi kematian karena beberapa alasan, seperti: kepeduliannya yang besar untuk membantu kehidupan orang, cintanya kepada keluarganya. Paul tidak pernah memikirkan pekerjaan sebagai dokter kecuali untuk membantu orang dan melindungi hidup seseorang. Dia sangat nyaman melakukan pekerjaan itu dan dia senang bisa berguna bagi orang lain. Paul juga berjuang melawan kanker untuk bertahan hidup karena dia ingin tinggal lebih lama dengan istri dan putrinya, Lucy dan Cady.

Kata kunci: secara positif, menghadapi, kematian

Abstract

The objectives of the research are: 1) To describe the indicators of positively facing death in *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir; 2) To analyze positively facing death depicted in *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir; and 3) To identify and analyze the author address positively facing death in *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir. The type of the research that is used by the researcher is qualitative research. The object of the study is positively facing death reflected in Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir (2016). It is analyzed by using a sociological approach. The result of the research indicated that the indicators of Paul's positively facing death are: confronting his mortality as well, keeping optimism, working on his goals immediately, and spending more time with family and friends. *When Breath Becomes Air* depicts the way the author faced his death

positively instead of losing hope and happiness, such as: becoming a writer, setting up his career, raising a baby, and making quality time with family and friends. Paul specifically addressed positively facing death because of some reasons, such as: his big concern to help people's life, his love to his family. Paul never thought about the job as a doctor except to help people and to protect someone's life. He was very comfortable doing the job and he was glad to be useful for others. Paul also fought cancer to survive because he wanted to stay longer with his wife and daughter, Lucy and Cady.

Keywords: positively, facing, death

1. INTRODUCTION

Nobody better explains the true meaning of death than the person who will face it in a few years. Death is the permanent cessation of all biological functions that support living organisms (Dictionary.com, 2018). Common phenomena include aging, predation, malnutrition, disease, suicide, murder, starvation, dehydration, and major accidents or trauma using terminal injuries. In many cases, the body of a living organism begins to decompose immediately after death (Zimmerman, 2010).

Death is something which is difficult to understand, and also common. Mankind is as familiar with death as humans are familiar with life. Death and life are revolving things. Death is natural, but it is never worth thinking about. Death is a wonderful thing. The difference between death and life is only breath. If only death could be seen to the limit, and if it had not happened so suddenly (Korpiola and Lahtinen, 2015).

However, there is never enough time to answer all questions. Humans are not bodies that move around aimlessly. The body cannot understand anything. However, there is a soul living in it that gives purpose to the body. Hands, feet, lungs, heart, brain, and all of them stop working when the soul returns to its original place, according to the time assigned to it, for human being (Pandya, 2011).

Death, especially human death, at the time of occurrence or unpleasant, due to the feeling of pity of the deceased and the loss of association and kinship with the deceased Other worries of fear of death, necrophobia, anxiety, sadness, grief, emotional pain, depression, sympathy, love, loneliness. Many cultures and

religions have ideas about life after death, and also have ideas about rewards or judgments and inheritance for past sins (Korpiola and Lahtinen, 2015).

Many questions about death were not only thought by scientists, but also by a neurosurgeon, Paul Kalanithi. His investigations into the death have brought him to the brink of death after he was convicted of cancer. But, it was what happened to Kalanithi. With a brilliant academic career and nearing completion of training as a neurosurgeon, Kalanithi received the devastating news that he had lung cancer at the age of thirty-seven. Overnight he went from being a doctor to a patient and he wrestled with the question of what makes life worthwhile because his ambitions and accomplishments have been taken away. As he and his family experience grief, Kalanithi contemplated the nature of life (Radwan, 2019).

Kalanithi wrote *When Breath Becomes Air* in the last moments of his life. *When Breath Become Air* describes Kalanithi's transformation from a medical student possessed by "the question of what makes life worthwhile and meaningful, given that all will be lost in the end" to neurosurgeon at Stanford grappling with the brain, the most important organ of human identity, at last. become a new patient and father facing his death. The questions that arise in Kalanithi's mind are: What makes life worth living in the face of death? What do you do when the future no longer leads to the desired goals, but in the present endless? What does it mean to have children, take care of new life when another life dims? Here are some of the questions that Kalanithi faced in his memoir to leave a story to his daughter someday.

Before becoming a cancer patient, Paul was an excellent neurosurgeon accomplishment. Just waiting for a few time, he would finish his training and got a promotion. However, at a young age, 36 years old, he underwent two existences at once. At one time he was a neurosurgeon treating the patient, on the other hand he was a patient who tried to survive.

Paul Kalanithi began experiencing cancer symptoms while serving as a resident doctor in neurosurgery. His back began to spasm, and within six months he had lost his weight so that he could tie his belt two levels tighter. He suspected that he suffered from cancer before he even became a doctor. The x-rays looked

fine to the doctor who treated the usual doctor. Then, he relaxed a little, exhausted and in pain from the long and stressful hours of becoming a medical student, but soon, he felt his chest painfully.

Paul and his wife, Lucy were going to visit their friends in New York by plane. But, Lucy decided to stay in California while she considered their marriage, she felt alone and unsupported, especially considering how busy Paul was. Before Paul left, he had undergone a series of medical tests, including a chest X-ray, but when he arrived at his friend's house, he was so exhausted and in pain that he decided to leave early. His primary care doctor called as soon as he got off the plane in San Francisco, and as a result, his X-rays were hazy.

However, with 15 months remaining in his residency, Paul's fate changed. For six months, he lost weight and suffered severe back pain, something he had never experienced before. He went to the doctor, and at the first appointment, he took several X-rays. His doctor concluded that he was going too far at work. Paul was skeptical but returned to the ward anyway. He wanted to finish his residency, which he had worked so hard to complete. However, the pain returned, this time in his chest. His weight loss continued, he lost 145 pounds and had a persistent cough. Paul realized that his symptoms were a clear indication of cancer.

Paul wrote that cancer has ruined his life and career. Paul realized if a patient's life would never be the same again after the deadly disease verdict was imposed. It had been learned much further past day when he was a doctor. It is the main question Paul Kalanithi posed in his best-selling memoir, *When Breath Becomes Air*. It is a question that most of us do not like to think about. In his memoir, Paul did not try to self-pity, dramatize cancer and death, or suddenly become a life motivator with his memoirs. From a sociology perspective, at the beginning of Paul's cancer stage 4, he continued to run his activities as a doctor though he had to struggle.

Paul passed away on on Monday, March 9, 2015, in an emergency hospital bed and encompassed by his family. Lucy clarified that *When Breath Becomes Air* was not completed, despite the fact that Paul composed it vigorously. With that book, Paul needed to assist individuals with getting demise and face their death.

Lucy communicated that she was so thankful to be a piece of what offered significance to Paul's life, and to have watched him face life emphatically and face death with honesty. At long last, Paul genuinely comprehended what the genuine importance of life and death was, on the grounds that he had not just had the chance to convey individuals to life/death yet additionally to be a section uncommonly visited by death.

The objectives of this study are: 1) To describe the indicators of positively facing death in *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir; 2) To analyze positively facing death depicted in *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir; and 3) To identify and analyze the author address positively facing death in *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir.

2. METHOD

The design of this research is qualitative research. It is library research while information sources are using literary information. It purposes to investigate Paul Kalanithi's memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* using sociological approach. The steps to lead this research are (1) deciding the type of the study (2) deciding of the object of the study (3) deciding data and data source, 4) deciding of data collecting technique, and (5) deciding the method of data analysis. The object of this research is positively confronting death as reflected in Paul Kalanithi's memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* (2016). This memoir is investigated using a sociological approach.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Paul was a fruitful man in pretty much every part of his life, had a caring wife, finished numerous titles and won numerous honors. Be that as it may, he should battle to locate the 'significance of life' when confronting death at an early age. At that point he was determined to have cellular breakdown in the lungs, a sickness that killed him 22 months after the fact. Confronting death, he composed *When Breath Becomes Air*, a journal about the quest for importance in his last days.

Thus *When Breath Becomes Air* is true story of Paul Kalanithi in facing his own death positively, as a patient and also as a doctor. The indicators of Paul's positively facing death are: confronting his mortality as well, keeping optimism, working on his goals immediately, and spending more time with family and friends.

In whole story of *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanithi was described as a neurosurgical and also a writer. He was a clever, persistent, strong, and had a big concern to his patients. He wanted to help someone's life with his ability. It shows from the sentence "What makes life meaningful?" that asked by Paul many times. He loved reading and writing. Although in the worst part of his life, he could survive. When he wrote, "Until I actually die, I'm still living". He showed his positive will to face death. *When Breath Becomes Air* is a novel about love, life struggle, family, humanity and career dedication. It tells about a cancer survivor, Paul, in facing his death positively.

The indicators of Paul's positively facing death are: confronting his mortality as well, keeping optimism, working on his goals immediately, and spending more time with family and friends. The book makes the readers look at life through the perspective of a doctor and a patient. Through description of Paul's routine clinical practice, readers know about illness and people's suffering. It is in line with the novel's review by Nishad, et.al (2020) that this book teaches readers to make empathy, courage, and understanding of life and death. *Empathy is finding echoes of another person in yourself. As a neurosurgeon, the author had many encounters with patients where he had to break bad news, and when he was the patient, he realised how easy it is to diagnose somebody is dying and how difficult it is to accept death. This book teaches us empathy, courage, understanding and most of all, the ability to face death with grace* (Nishad, et.al., 2020). A study by Masykuroh (2020) shows indicators of Paul's optimism viewed from psychological perspective. She discovered four markers of good faith in the diary that is self inspiration, being encircled by individuals who act emphatically, have appreciation and have a feeling of joy and bliss.

When Breath Becomes Air depicts the way the author faced his death positively instead of losing hope and happiness, such as: becoming a writer, setting up his career, raising a baby, and making quality time with family and friends. In line with the findings of this study, a study by Radwan (2019) stated that in Paul's narrative of a dying self, he reveals how her smooth professional, family and social life has been turned upside down and bothered by the painful burden of a threatening disease. Paul Kalanithi had implemented various strategies in an effort to get out of these defeats and a pessimistic tale of death, to end his chaotic circumstances, to shift from diagnostic shock to living with cancer, and to restoring predictability, control and production desire. This manifests in the struggle to tell stories his story about disease, to pursue his vocation in literature and philosophy and to bring back the past self. The strategy Kalanithi used contributed to him the ability to face terminal illness and death with integrity and courage (Radwan, 2019).

Paul specifically addressed positively facing death because of some reasons, such as: his big concern to help people's life, his love to his family. It is in line with a study by Yuliastuti and Imroatushsholihah (2019). The study shows that the id, ego, and superego were well played on Paul Kalanithi. The first time, he was conquered by the id and the ego. He tried to fulfill request of the id. It was seen from his passion of writing and studying literature. By the following time, the superego appeared and worked as good as its moral principles. It was described from his decision to become a doctor to help someone's life.

Wellek and Warren (1956: 84) explained the connection between the novel and society is identified with the issue of the writer as an artistic maker. Considering the economic wellbeing, social philosophy of the author, and the request outside the creator of writing. For this situation, including a few factors that impact the creator in making abstract works. In a meeting with the author's wife, Lucy Kalanithi, she clarified that what drove Paul to neurosurgery and writing was discovering significance throughout everyday life. He needed not exclusively to comprehend human life, conduct and perception, yet in addition, how the mind performs demonstrations of reasoning and talking. He before long

found that understanding life additionally implies getting death. Also, for Paul, there was no preferred method to comprehend death over to have useful involvement in patients when they are wiped out and once in a while passing on in bed; to be with them in their last minutes and help patients through those troublesome occasions. Yet, as time went on as a student occupant, Paul understood that being a specialist gave him a shallow comprehension of life and death, against his desires (Interview with Lucy Kalanithi, by Jeffrey Brown, February 4, 2016)

Paul is preparing to turn into a neurosurgeon, so the greater part of his patients have had head wounds. He stated, "amidst this interminable arrangement of head wounds, I started to presume that being near a consuming light at such critical times me to its inclination, such as attempting to examine stargazing by taking a gander at the sun... I viewed. much misery; far more detestable, I got accustomed to it (Kalanithi, 2016: 32).

Dying so youthful, it was no big surprise Paul felt so unfortunate that he needed to leave so early, particularly considering he had worked as long as he can remember to turn into a neurosurgeon, which comprised of long and difficult long stretches of work and preparing. Paul mourned, "Relentless clinical preparing is future-arranged, about deferred delight. You generally consider what you will do in the following five years ". However, Paul had no 'future' any longer. He was wildly searching for an incredible importance. In his last months, Paul chose to compose this book, as his commitment to the interminable. He needed to give us understanding into life and death. Paul needed to give his perusers, particularly youngsters experiencing a terminal sickness, what the way will resemble. Perusing Paul's memoirs resembles looking into his psyche, knowing his contemplations, the impression of a young man dying.

According to Radwan (2019), when faced with terminal illness, the self loses its sense of the destination and the map by which it navigates life. It is struck. This perception is encouraging people who are seriously ill to design alternative procedures that are built around their physical distraction so that they

can adjust to the situation. They often discuss the question of how to defy the impending death as and how to generate the desire to survive thoughts of death.

The disruptive impact of the Kalanithi's cancer diagnosis extended to his familial and social life. Driven by his full dedication, sympathy and care, the family, including his wife and parents, peers and seniors had all turned into managing medical nurses drugs and supplements of various kinds. They helped Kalanithi enjoyed the best of the remaining time. Meeting the urgency of his critical illness, the Kalanithi family engaged in a busy life that might smoothly direct her life from doctor to patient. Strikingly, they were acting as a doctor replacing the role of the family; for example, they made a record with a post request drug store, requested a bed rails, and purchased an ergonomic sleeping pad to help relieve the burden of back torment. His father seemed supportive and helpful. He also revived Kalanithi's hope and desires by showing that his son was able to overcome this terrible disease and would somehow be cured.

Wellek & Warren (1956: 84) stated that the connection between the novel and the society concerning the existence of the work itself, containing the contents of literary works, purposes, social problems relationship, and other things implicit in the literary work itself. *When Breath Becomes Air* has many important things to tell the readers. It tells about how life and death, for everyone interested in life especially for them who struggled in bad situations. This novel was written by Paul Kalanithi about his own life story. Main character in this novel is himself known as Dr. Paul. He made the story into interesting memoir to read.

From the views above, it can be concluded that the use of sociological approach is aimed to explain carefully the functions and linkages between elements that build *When Breath Becomes Air* of social aspects of the author, readers, and social symptoms, in this case, positive facing the death.

4. CLOSING

When the researcher has done the illustration and data analysis, the researcher is able to conclude due to the problems formulated in Chapter I. First, the indicators of Paul's positively facing death are: confronting his mortality as well, keeping

optimism, working on his goals immediately, and spending more time with family and friends. Formerly, Paul had lived exclusively for the future: building a career, a family and waiting for the goals he planned to achieve later. As Paul was sentenced stage IV lung cancer, his future became evaporate and he must focus on the only thing that he had definitively: the present. Thus, in the end, he decided to look death in the eyes. With the acceptance of his death, Paul began to focus on living rather than dying. Optimiscally, Paul shifted the focus from "death" to "life" until the end. This optimism and acceptance gave him a more positive outlook towards life.

When Breath Becomes Air depicts the way the author faced his death positively instead of losing hope and happiness, such as: becoming a writer, setting up his career, raising a baby, and making quality time with family and friends. As a writer, Paul wanted to provide readers his insight about life and death. Paul needed to give his readers, particularly youngsters with a terminal sickness, a feeling of what the street ahead would resemble. As a doctor, Paul wanted to help people's life and made his life meaningful. By raising a baby, it would be a wonderful addition to his family, and would allow Paul's life to continue after his death, and with his family, Paul felt his life complete and wonderful.

Paul specifically addressed positively facing death because of some reasons, such as: his big concern to help people's life, his love to his family. Paul never thought about the job as a doctor except to help people and to protect someone's life. He was very comfortable doing the job and he was glad to be useful for others. Paul also fought cancer to survive because he wanted to stay longer with his wife and daughter, Lucy and Cady.

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