

MEMBACA NOVEL *THE NOTEBOOK* KARYA NICHOLAS SPARKS: DAMPAK PEMBACAAN NOVEL ROMAN POPULER TERHADAP PEREMPUAN

READING *THE NOTEBOOK* BY NICHOLAS SPARKS: THE EFFECTS OF POPULAR ROMANCE NOVEL READERSHIP ON WOMEN

Miftahur Roifah

Universitas Gadjah Mada

roifah.miftahur@gmail.com

Abstrak

Tulisan ini menyajikan penjelasan tentang efek dari pembacaan novel populer yang bergenre roman terhadap pembaca perempuan. Roman adalah salah satu jenis dari novel populer yang banyak digemari oleh pembaca perempuan. Roman yang berisikan tentang cerita percintaan ini, cerita di dalamnya dapat menguras emosi dan perasaan dari pembacanya, terutama pembaca perempuan. Perempuan yang memiliki sisi emosional dan sentimental lebih tinggi dibandingkan laki-laki, akan lebih mudah terhanyut dan terbawa oleh jalan cerita yang ada dalam roman. Tulisan ini akan menganalisa efek yang diberikan dari pembacaan novel *The Notebook* oleh pembaca perempuan terhadap sisi psikologis mereka. Efek tersebut berhubungan dengan bagaimana novel roman populer secara langsung dan tidak langsung membentuk dan mempengaruhi cara berfikir pembaca perempuannya melalui kisah-kisah percintaan yang ada di dalamnya.

Kata kunci: roman, pembaca perempuan, efek psikologis

Abstract

This paper presents an explanation of the effect of readership a popular romance novel toward female readers. Roman is one kind of popular novels that are much favored by female readers. This roman contains a love story that can drain the emotions and feelings of the readers, especially women readers. Women who have emotional and sentimental side is higher than men, it will be easier swept and carried away by the stories that exist in romance. This paper will analyze the effect given from reading the novel *The Notebook* by female readers for their psychological side. The effect is related to how popular romance novels directly and indirectly shape and influence the way of thinking of her readers through the stories of romance in it.

Keywords: romance, female readers, psychological effects

I. BACKGROUND

Today, more people enjoy reading popular literature rather than the high literature. They have been busy with their works which is tiring and spending a lot of time, therefore they only read in their spare time. Because of this reason, they choose the one which is entertaining and not heavy reading that is the popular one. The high literature is associated with serious books, having a complex structure of details around a central purpose or idea, so that they demand careful reading and careful rereading (Stanton, 1965: 3). On the contrary, popular literature is easy to read, containing small number of characters, situation, and themes, also mirroring the infinite variety of lives (Stanton, 1965: 9). Therefore, reading popular literature is one of the way people escape from their routines to find pleasure.

Romance novel is one of the genres of popular literature. It is a love story, focusing on the development of the love relationship between the two main characters, written in such a way as to provide the reader with some degree of vicarious emotional participation in the courtship process (Ramsdell, 1987). Moreover, romance novel is kinds of popular literature which is highly read and consumed. Vangent (2005: 4) mentions that today romance novel is mass consumed; the romance writers understand the romance market and the romance reader very well. One of the romance novels which is considered and belongs to popular literature is *The Notebook*, a novel by Nicholas Sparks.

The Notebook was published in 1996 and was written based on the true story. The novel sets in 1920s in North Carolina, the time of pre and post war II. It tells about the love story of the protagonist character, Noah and Allie. Allie is suffered from Alzheimer in her old age and she cannot remember any of her love stories with Noah. To remind Allie their love story, Noah writes down their story in a book and he always reads that story for Allie. The novel is considered as popular because it is the New York Time best-seller list in its first week of release. *The Notebook* is also a hardcover best seller for more than a year. It gets 4 of 5 stars and 465.565 rating based on the goodreads.com. The popularity of the novel is proven by adapting into romance movie with the same title.

Romance novel is indeed becomes the most popular genre in popular literature compares to the others genres, yet, unfortunately the consumer of popular romance has been stigmatized by critics as superficial and small-minded; more specifically, the consumer of popular romance has been labeled as feminine (Vangent, 2005:4). Jenson (1984) states that nearly all readers of romance novels are female, women of all ages,

careers and ethnicities are attracted to these novels. It is due to the reasons that similar to television, romance novels portray reality in many unrealistic ways, therefore influencing the perceptions that readers have about social constructs and relationship standards and expectation (Bun, 2007: 2). Romance novel is somehow able to speak to women about life and love and by reading romance novel; female readers may get the feel of a love they don't get in their own life or they find a love they already seeking in their life through the story of the romance novel.

Furthermore, connected to the issue above, which is popular romance novel is close to the women readers, this paper is going to analyze the reasons and the effects of popular romance novel readership by women through the psychoanalysis study. It is also associated to how do popular romance novel consciously and subconsciously shape and influence their women readers thinking through the story of the text. This paper use *The Notebook* as the representation of the popular romance novel.

The Notebook is taken because in addition to the popularity of the novel as mentioned before, this novel does tell a great love story. The novel provides the readers an understanding that true love can be ageless and timeless. Nicholas Sparks as the writer uses good details which make the readers able to imagine every single event and story in the novel as if we were there. Besides, Sparks focuses on the character's thought and feeling which becomes the main point of this novel to catch the attention of the readers.

II. DISCUSSION

In literary contexts and the study of popular fiction, psychoanalysis is considered as the methodology. The using of psychoanalysis in popular fiction is applicable to analyze five points of characteristics (Adi, 2011: 185). First, psychoanalysis is used to explain the relationship of literature, the actions, motives and the presence of the texts; related to the Freud's methodology. Second, psychoanalysis is the aesthetic discourse in literary narrative structure. It means that the psychoanalysis is applied in semiotics discourse in language context; it's connected the structure of fiction with the structure of dream, disordered. Third, psychoanalysis is used to analyze the character of the text which has mental disorder or to analyze the psychological aspects of the characters in the novel. This analyses is much more concern to the intrinsic elements of the text. The next is, psychoanalysis is applied to analyze ideology and culture; when the psychoanalysis

appears in cultural discourse. For instance is analyzing literature through the feminist approach to explore the different position of man and woman. The last is, psychoanalysis is used to elaborate the process of creating the popular fiction, connected to the production process instead of readers.

Psychoanalysis is also associated with Freud's dream analysis. In this theory Freud elaborates the connection of dream with someone's desire. This assumption is also applicable in analyzing popular fiction. Adi (2011: 187) explains that Freud sees that there is an analogy between popular fictions with dream. The popular fiction gives satisfaction indirectly to the reader's desire when they are reading popular fiction itself. Besides, the reader's desire influences them in giving response toward the popular fiction they read. Furthermore, in this context, the reader is positioned as the one who is dreaming or fantasizing when they are reading. The reading process becomes the way they fulfill their dream, fantasy, and desire. Calvin Hall (in Adi, 2011: 189) says that the images of dreams are the concrete embodiment of the dreamer's thought, these images give visual expression to that which is invisible, namely conceptions. Basically, reading a popular fiction is asking the readers to living up to the fantasies draws in the text of the fiction itself. By living up into the fantasies draws in the text, the readers is able to imagine every single events in the story, feeling the glorious of the characters, so that they can love anything the writer provides inside their novel.

Connected to the women reader's of popular romance fiction, Radway (Adi, 2011: 189) in his research shows that women who read popular romance fiction wants to fulfill their desires, expectations, dreams they don't get from their husband or partner in their love relationship. Reading romance novel from women is a way to escape from their routine life. Women feel that when they read romance novel their dreams, desires, and expectations become real and fulfilled. Therefore reading popular romance novel is kind of psychological process for women.

2.1. The Notebook as a popular romance novel

The notebook is the New York Time Best-seller list in its first week of release. This novel is also a hardcover best seller for more than a year. The novel gets 4 of 5 stars and

5.565 ratings.¹ After its success on the first released, *The Notebook* is later adapted into romance movie with the same title.

The writer of the novel is Nicholas Sparks, a writer who is well-known as a good writer in creating romantic novels. His ability in creating good romance novel can't be doubt, he already published number of romance novels which are successful, sold out and best seller. Sparks is able to hypnotize his readers due to his ability in providing good scenes of love story together with the conflicts and the happy moment. Many of Sparks' novels are also adapted into movie. Sparks others romantic novels are *A Walk to Remember*, *Dear John*, *The Last Song*, *Nights in Rodanthe*, and many more.

Based on the interview with Sparks, connected to the result of *The Notebook*'s publication, Sparks mentions that he believes that *The Notebook* has a chance to be very successful even before he writes the first sentence.² Sparks further says:

“The story struck me as truly memorable, and I knew the structure would work. And yet, I wasn't sure I would be able to pull off the actual writing of the novel. It's one thing to have a great story, but it's an entirely different thing to commit the proper words to paper.”

“I was certain, however, that the emotional intensity of *The Notebook* occurred in the final third of the novel. For that reason, I wrote the final section first, and then I wrote the majority of the story about Noah and Allie's young love. I wrote the prologue last. My thinking went something along these lines: The final third of the novel has to be great, but I don't know if I have the ability do that, so I'll write the last section first. After all, there's no reason to labor over the beginning if I'm not going to be able to pull off the ending. It took a while and a ton of editing as I wrote (I remember cutting and pasting full paragraphs and tweaking Noah's voice for weeks until the pacing and tone felt exactly right). But once I had it, I knew it.”³

From the Sparks' statement, it can be assumed that he makes an attempt in finishing this novel. He does make the storyline of the novel carefully and details. Thus, this novel is able to arouse the readers' emotion when reading this novel.

The popularity of the text is coming due to the story of the novel is sweet, touching and romantic. This novel is mostly very popular among girls and women. Girls and women

¹ The data is taken from goodreads.com

² The interview is taken form cliffnotes.com

³ http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/the-notebook/an-interview-with-nicholas-sparks.html

very much like romantic story and they do like a story which is able to make them crying. Inside *The Notebook*, they find out the figure of perfect man in Noah, whose love is sincerely. This point causes this novel popular and many readers want to feel the deep love of Noah by reading this novel. As Pie⁴ once mentions that *The Notebook* is a novel that a person can read very quickly because it is engrossing and very light, also *The Notebook* is a romantic drama that absorbs the reader.

Besides, *The Notebook* becomes easily popular and becomes best seller in its first release is because the name of the author itself. Nicholas Sparks is already well-known as the writer who is able to write romantic fiction well. Sparks already has a name and position in his readers' hearth who really loves romantic fiction and romance genre.

Above all, we can say that *The Notebook* becomes so popular because Sparks is able to provide the readers with a story which is sweet, romantic, and sentimental. He is able to give details to the readers so that the readers come into the deep side of the story as if they experience their selves into the story.

2. *The reasons and the effects of popular romance novel readership by women using The Notebook as the Representation of the Popular Romance Novel.*

Aforementioned, the consumers or the readers of popular romance novel is mostly women. They come from all ages, careers and ethnicities. The readers of popular romance novels are not only housewife but also those who work outside the house. Based on the results from survey done on Harlequin readers, romance readers are virtually a 'cross-section of the whole female population' (Bun, 2007:5). In relation to their work life, 58% work outside of the home. The women who read these romance novels come from all types of professions: Lawyers, professors, or even manager. In relation to relationship status, about 60% of these readers are married.

Many of *The Notebook*'s readers are women. The romantic love story tells by Sparks attracts many women to read it. Dachely⁵, a secretary, mentions that:

Amazing Book :) All Should Read!

"One thing I liked about this book was the story. I personally have read this book five times because the love story never gets old. It is such a powerful book and it is sure to touch your heart, it might even make you

⁴ <http://sweetiepie.hubpages.com/hub/The-Notebook-Is-The-Movie-Better-Than-The-Book>

⁵ <http://www.barnesandnoble.com>

tear up. There is honestly not one thing that I dislike about this book; it is absolutely my favorite book. 'The Notebook' is a book that I would recommend to anyone that loves to read about love and romance. The book is only 248 pages so it is an easy read. I would personally give this book 5 out of 5 stars for the beautiful story it tells and how it is written, you feel like you knew these people and their story.”

There must be reasons why many women love to read popular romance novel. If we analyze deeper we will come to know that it can be influenced by their psychological factors, women are sentimental. Bun (2007: 6) explains that women may be drawn to romance novels because they allow them the opportunity to confront messages and meaning that have value to their lives. Janice Radway in her study of romance readers (in Bun, 2007: 8-10) concludes that romance novels provide readers with the opportunity to experience the type of care and attention that they give to others. Radway further says that reading romance novels provides vicarious emotional nurturance by prompting identification between the reader and a fictional heroine whose identity as a woman is always confirmed by the romantic and sexual attentions of an ideal male. When she successfully imagines herself in the heroine's position, the typical romance reader can relax momentarily and permit herself to wallow in the rapture of being the center of a powerful and important individual's attention. This attention provides her with the sensation evoked by the emotional nurturance. Radway also believes women read these novels in order to escape from their oppressive social responsibilities; children, family, and less than satisfying love lives.

Related to *The Notebook*, it is a novel full of emotions. This novel is able to arouse the emotions from the women readers. The women readers see the happiness, the disappointed and sadness in the story of this novel. The plot of this novel is unique because at the first time the readers read the novel they will not understand that the old couple is married. It is because the woman is suffered from Alzheimer and she cannot recognize her own husband. This novel is very touching, romantic, and somehow in some part is hurting.

The readers who are in the real life their love story is not as sweet as the love story of Allie and Noah, will see this novel as something precious. It is because they find a great love story inside this novel. They will interpret this novel as something inspiring and

motivating, that true love does exist. It gives them understanding that they do not need to give up with their love. As Pavlucik remarks:⁶

Only with Nicholas Sparks as the author, this story is different. You are immediately captivated into the story, reliving it, feeling it and savoring each and every emotion. It is a sensory experience reading this story and you feel like you become Noah or Allie, the main characters, the soul mates. By the end of the book, tears are sure to be shed, deep sighs emitted and then one is left thinking is such a love possible and where does one find a love like this?

This is a beautiful love story, with all the emotions to hook you from the get-go. The sensitivity of the author is clearly portrayed in Noah and Allie. Nicolas Sparks weaves his magic with this story, which is based on his wife's "beloved grandparents."

I absolutely loved this story and I am not a big romance reader. But I do love Nicholas Sparks' books and now have read all of them. If you are a hopeless or a hopeful romantic, then this book is a must read! As with all of Nicholas Sparks' books, keep a box of Kleenex handy - you are sure to use them!

It can be said that mostly a woman who reads popular romance fiction is due to the reasons that they want to find something they don't get in real life through the story. They get their desires, dreams, and expectation, especially related to the love story inside this kind of novel. It is suitable with the conception of psychoanalysis study in popular fiction. Furthermore, the reading of popular romance novel is also having impacts on the women readers' psychology. The understanding they get after reading this novel, will shape them as someone strong and confidence, whether they realize it or not. It happens because this novel inspires and motivates them so much especially connected to love story. However, the story of this novel also shapes them to be a sensitive person. They will be easily crying when reading this novel because the story is so much touching. They mostly give the same response when reading this novel.

Furthermore, this novel contributes a lot to their reader's knowledge mainly about the concept of true love. The readers who first do not believe with love and the existence of true love will change their mind after reading this novel. Love is not something impossible; it can be real if we struggle for it. Bun (2007: 10) states romance novels help to promote the idea that love is great that love is fulfilling and blissful. Finally, this novel contains many moral messages which are really inspiring and motivating for the readers. Thus, we

⁶ <http://www.amazon.com/The-Notebook-Novel-Learning-Series/dp/1455515590>

can say that literary work in this context is popular literature consciously and subconsciously is able to shape the readers who read the novel.

III. CONCLUSION

The Notebook is a kind of popular literature using romance as the genre. The theme elaborates inside the novel is actually very simple and readers do not need to think hard to understand the storyline of the novel, yet the novel is able to arouse the readers emotion. It is due to Sparks as the author provides good details of the story which makes the readers able to feel and to see what is going on in the novel as if they were there.

Spark ability to present good details of this story makes this novel very popular. Sparks works very carefully in this novel, so he can provide the readers with good scene of the story. Aforementioned, the novel is based on the true story; it makes this novel sold out in its first release. It is because the readers feel curious with the content of the novel. Besides, Sparks is already have name and is well known with his specialty in writing romantic fiction. Thus, readers will always waiting for his writing; once he release a novel, readers will immediately buy it.

This novel contributes a lot to their readers' knowledge about the concept of true love. This novel contains many moral messages which are really inspiring and motivating for the readers. Thus, we can say that literary work in this context is popular literature consciously and subconsciously is able to shape the readers who read the novel. Because the knowledge they get after reading a novel can influence and shaping their thinking. Besides, many of the readers of popular romance novel like *The Notebook* are women. They read popular romance novel because they want to find something they don't get in real life through the story. They get their desires, dreams, and expectation, especially related to the love story inside this kind of novel. It is suitable with the conception of psychoanalysis study in popular fiction.

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