

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the study

Throughout history, human beings love expressing themselves in a beautiful way. When alphabets were yet to be found, people passed their stories verbally. However, as alphabets were found and people started to read and write, literature was developed. While literature may be based on humans' own experiences in life, Wellek and Warren (1949) says that literature is produced by imagination of author and not just a document of facts. It means that a piece of literature comes from real events which are happening in real life, but then an author presents it with his/her own perception. That makes an author differ from a journalist in reporting the same event. Not only is the event recreated based on the author's perception, it is also expressed in beautiful way.

In general, literature is divided into 3 categories; prose, poetry, and drama. While all of them can be a narrative text, prose has the most space to detail an event. Prose itself has 3 types based on length; the longest one is novel, the shortest one is short story, and novella stands in between. This study explores Kafka's novella which title is "Metamorphosis". Typically, novellas dramatize individual events, or a short series of events, such as a day in the life, or an important turning point in a character's life (Springer, 1975). By studying a novella, the writer can focus on certain issues coming up deeply since it is not only less complex than a novel which

may involve many characters, but also has more complex event than a short story which usually only discusses a single event.

Franz Kafka, a well-known author, is widely regarded as one of major figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. His writings, many people claim, are usually nightmarish and surrealistic. Even though some may consider it as confusing, the writer finds his writing is intriguing. The one interests the writer the most is “Metamorphosis” which was written using symbolism which people rarely understand. To support the statement that the novella is indeed confusing, Vladimir Nabokov, the author of the controversial “Lolita”, even once said in his lecture that it is rare for people to understand Franz Kafka’s Metamorphosis more than a fantasy story.

The story of “Metamorphosis” starts when Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, ‘metamorphosed’ into a large insect in his bedroom for no reason. To his family—his parents and sister—Gregor was the only one who provided money for them. The story mainly described Gregor’s frustration due to the fact that he could no longer pay his family’s bill again as now he had turned into a monstrous insect. Once respected for his financial support, Gregor now was a disgrace to the family. The story then ends when the sister wished for Gregor’s death, which then was also supported by the father. Gregor, whom they thought could not understand what they said, apparently heard how they wished for his death. The next day after that incident, Gregor passed away and the family became livelier. Gregor’s death brought happy ending to his family.

The reason why the writer interested to take this peculiar story to be analyzed for her thesis is due to the majority which does not understand it. The writer attempts to understand the symbolism, or in other words, analyzing the symbols, interpreting them, and understanding the actual meaning of the story through the analyzed symbols. Eventually, this study also discusses how existential nihilism is represented in this novella as many people who have read this story believes that this writing attempts to imply existential nihilism. Therefore, in this study, not only the writer shall discuss the symbolism and the meaning of the story, but the writer shall also analyze how nihilism is represented through the meaning of the story.

Knowing Franz Kafka's paranoia through reading his biography in the past, the writer believes that it is unlikely for him to express this controversial view openly. Should he want to try expressing existential nihilism, he would most likely use symbols to cover it. Other than this assumption, the previous studies also implied that "Metamorphosis" is indeed a nihilistic writing. With these two reasons, the writer assumes that the writing is nihilistic.

According to Alan Pratt (2001), existential nihilism is a philosophical theory which claims that life has no intrinsic meaning or value. It is identified by meaninglessness, purposelessness, and one's feeling of being born into the universe, yet not knowing why. This view was quite controversial in late of 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

As mentioned above, this study aims to find out the symbolism used in Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and how the symbolism represent nihilism. Below are the formulated research questions:

1. What are the symbols found in Metamorphosis? What are the meaning of each symbol?
2. What is the interpretation of Metamorphosis (as a whole story) based on analyzed symbols?
3. How does the story's interpretation represent concept of nihilism?

## 1.3. Objective of the study

Based on the questions, this study will find out:

1. The symbols used in "Metamorphosis" and their meaning
2. The meaning of the entire story based on analyzed symbols
3. How nihilism is represented through the story's meaning.

#### 1.4. Significance of the study

Many Widya Mandala college students take literature for their thesis, yet it is very rare to find those who relate either symbolism or philosophy with literature. Therefore, this study's purpose is to offer a new way of analyzing literature. In addition, this study is also hoped to open other people's mind that if a writing is confusing, then there is a chance that the author uses symbols in the story—which means that the story tells more than what is literally written. This study is not only written for those reasons, but also to introduce philosophy, especially nihilism. Eventually, this study is also hoped to open people's mind about the others' perspective about life and to respect the others' perspective.

#### 1.5. Theoretical Framework

This study uses three basic theories for the analysis. The first theory used is objective theory of literature; Abrams (1953) states that objective theory is a literary approach of which major point is to see the work (the art) as the way it is. While a literary analysis can use extrinsic analysis by connecting the literature with the writer (biographical approach) or the universe (sociological approach) or the readers (reader-response approach), this thesis focuses on intrinsic analysis which uses data from the novella itself. In this case, the writer explores the symbols in it.

Since the focus of the study is the symbols used in the novella, the writer uses the theory of symbol. According to Duckart (2007) in literary usage, symbol

is a manner of representation in which what is shown means. Different from literal meaning, symbol wants to convey meaning in symbolic way in which readers have to catch its figurative meaning.

The third is theory of existential nihilism. According to Alan Pratt (2001), existential nihilism is a philosophical theory that claims that life has no intrinsic meaning or value. It is identified by meaninglessness, purposelessness, and one's feeling of being born into the universe, yet not knowing why. This view was quite controversial in late of 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century

#### 1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Considering that "Metamorphosis" has many aspects to be discussed, the writer decided to discuss only the symbolism, their meaning, the meaning of the story, and how existential nihilism is represented by the story.

Considering that concept of nihilism is very broad, the writer only takes the most common concept of nihilism in her Chapter Two; existential nihilism. Other than that, the reason why the writer only relates the meaning of the story with existential nihilism is because the previous studies' conclusions complement with the concept of existential nihilism.

## 1.7 Definition of Key Terms:

Following are definition of important key term in this thesis:

1. Novella: a narrative work of prose fiction shorter in both length and breadth than a novel, but longer than a short story.
2. Symbol: a thing which suggests more than its literal meaning.
3. Symbolism: the use of symbols to represent ideas.
4. Existential nihilism: a philosophical theory that claims that life has no intrinsic meaning or value.