

# A STUDY OF LIFE AND DEATH INSTINCTS IN PAULO COELHO'S *VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE*

(Kajian Naluri Kehidupan dan Kematian Dalam Novel *Veronika Decides to Die* Karya Paulo Coelho)

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## Abstrak

"*Veronika Decides To Die*" adalah novel karangan Paulo Coelho seorang penulis pria Latin. Novel ini bercerita tentang Veronika seorang wanita cantik berusia 24 tahun yang telah berhasil mendapatkan seluruh impiannya. Namun, di lubuk hati Veronika, ia merasa tertekan dengan kehidupannya selama ini. Merasa tidak sanggup lagi menghadapi hidup, Veronika akhirnya memutuskan untuk mengakhiri hidupnya dengan cara mengkonsumsi pil tidur. Tesis ini menggunakan analisa Psikologi Freudian untuk memaparkan eksistensi eros (naluri kehidupan) dan thanatos (naluri kematian) dalam diri Veronika. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif yang mengaplikasikan teks terkait dalam novel sebagai data utama. Data tersebut dianalisa untuk menunjukkan alasan Veronika bunuh diri karena hilangnya sebab untuk hidup. Selama proses analisa, data menunjukkan bahwa Veronika tidak mengalami cinta yang merupakan manifestasi eros dan thanatos. Veronika di dalam novel diceritakan hidup dalam lingkungan yang memenuhi segala kebutuhannya tapi tidak dengan cinta. Motivasi yang tumbuh adalah pertentangan id, ego dan superego. Sebagai hasilnya, eros yang merupakan energy bagi id dalam Veronika muncul pada saat dia berada dalam rumah sakit. Eros dan thanatos menjadi penentu hidup dalam Veronika. Psikologi Freudian menjadi alat untuk menganalisa motivasi Veronika dalam menciptakan makna hidup yang baru.

**Kata Kunci:** Psikologi Freudian, eros, thanatos, id, ego, superego.

## Abstract

"*Veronika Decides To Die*" is a novel written by Paulo Coelho, a Latin writer. This novel tells the story of a beautiful woman, Veronika 24 years old, woman who has managed to get the whole wordly pleasure of her dreams. However, deep in her heart, she is depressed with her life. Feeling no longer able to face of her life, Veronika finally decides to end her life by consuming sleeping pills. This thesis analysis uses the Freudian psychology to describe eros (life instinct) and thanatos' (death instinct) existence within Veronika. This study uses a qualitative research to apply relevant text in the novel as the main data. The data are analyzed to show Veronika's reason to commit suicide due to the loss of motive to live. During the analysis process, the data show that Veronika does not experience a manifestation of love which is derived from eros and thanatos. Veronika in the novel is told to live in an environment that meets all their needs but not love. Motivation is growing opposition to id, ego and superego. As a result, eros which is the energy for the id appears in Veronika when she is at the hospital. Eros and thanatos become determiner of life in Veronika. Freudian Psychology eventually becomes a tool to analyze the motivation of Veronika in creating a new meaning of life.

**Keywords:** Freudian Psychology, eros, thanatos, id, ego, superego.

## Introduction

Veronika does not really seem to be missing a lot in her life despite her decision to commit suicide. Having no bad experience during her time of living, she grows a hole within her heart, she wants to feel pain, anger and other negativities then she decides to commit suicide by taking too many sleeping pills. While waiting for her death, she reads a

magazine where an article figured entitled "Where is Slovenia". She decides to write a letter to the press, justifying her death as the symbolization of anger toward a person who is asking the silliest question she ever thought. The most probable reason of her conduct is because she can not afford a slight mistake in her perfect life, hence she writes a letter for giving reason of her death attempt. Her attempt however comes into a failure as she wakes up in

Villete, a mental institution in Slovenia, and she is told to have only a little time to live.

According to Freud, people are driven by two conflicting central desires. The death instinct (thanatos) and the life instinct (eros). The death instinct or death drive is the force that makes living creatures strive for an inorganic state. It does not appear in isolation, its effect becomes apparent, in particular through the repetition compulsions, when a part of it is connected with Eros. Freud introduced the concept of the death drive as a negative term in opposition to the life drive.

With the hypothesis of narcissistic libido and the extension of the concept of libido to the individual cells, the sexual instinct was transformed for us into eros, which seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance. What are commonly called the sexual instincts are looked upon by us as the part of eros which is directed towards objects. Our speculations have suggested that eros operates from the beginning of life and appears as a life instinct in opposition to the death instinct which was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance. These speculations seek to solve the riddle of life by supposing that these two instincts were struggling with each other from the very first (Freud, 1961:55).

From the notion, it is clear that eros is a life instinct that helps to sustain life. However its existence is far different from the death instinct. In addition, the source of the death drive lies in the process of investment of mental or emotional energy of bodily zones that can generate afferent excitations for the psyche then; this certainly involves tension in the musculature determined by a biological urge. Its locus is in the id, then later under the influence of the ego, as well as in the superego, where it functions to restrict libido. Hence there are two basic instincts performed the eros and thanatos. The question will be how these two different compromise the both ideas, what factors will be the leading points to consolidate the urges.

Thus, it is interesting to study the character's behavior in the story. Veronica is a good subject to apply the theory of Freud which serves plausible explanation for the question arises from the story. This novel serves psychological matters that are faced by Veronika. Hence, this thesis is entitled *A Study of Life and Death Instinct in Paulo Coelho's Veronika Decides to Die*

### Method of Analysis

The type of research in this study is library research. Blaxter et al (1997:151) describe the library research aims at producing a critical of an existing area of research writing. The library research is collecting data in a library room. The materials that are used in this thesis are some books, journals, and dictionaries that are relevant to the topic of discussion. In addition, a number of data are taken from internet resources to support the analysis of this thesis.

The type of data in this study is qualitative data. As stated by McMillan (1992:2), qualitative data are based on a research that focuses on understanding and meaning through

verbal narratives and descriptions rather than through numbers. Descriptive method is used to analyze the data of this thesis. Descriptive method can be considered as the procedure to solve problems of the research by using current facts and phenomena, and this method describes the facts and explains the phenomena (McMillan, 1992: 12).

The thesis is composed in some ways. First, the writer collects, classifies, and verifies the data from the book as the main resource. Second, library research will be applied by gathering the information and the data from several books. Then, the writer applies the descriptive interpretative method. The writer classifies the data collected. There are opinion, argument, fact, dialogues and the statement. It goes from the very first where Veronika finds a monotonous life, she is dying of boredom. The second is where she finds more reason to live as she enters insane asylum and meets friends. The very last is she gains vision on life by falling in love with Eduard.

The research is conducted by psychoanalysis way. The research is to define instincts in Veronika. The description of mental conflict in *Veronika Decides to Die* the novel. The story is described through the point of view of psychoanalysis, eros and thanatos. The emergence of the two is however can not be separated from the idea of id, ego and superego. The action and the result are described through she has strong death instinct level so she decides to go carnal by ending her life. Boredom has taken away her sanity. The last is the recovery of life instinct where she meets a lover, but she need to let him go. The life instinct finally finds its way, however Veronika finally goes to her direction to understand the fullest meaning of life. She becomes truly understand that one cannot force her instinct and to learn from the unresolved issues she finally find out the way to live with a better insight.

### Result of Data Analysis

This thesis deals with psychology analysis which concerns on the analysis of eros and thanatos pictured in the main character of *Veronika Decides To Die*. The character analyzed in this thesis performs manifestations of death instinct and life instinct. They are boredom of life, freedom of life, fall in love and sorrow. The goal of the study is to find out the relation of the balance between the two instincts and the life motivation and meaning. In fact, the result shows that the both existence could only be matters if love is fulfilled since it leads itself to the two instincts. Hence, the aim is to find the work of the two instincts.

The data applied in this writing is qualitative data which means the data are in a form of texts. Data collection in this thesis is documentary study. The datum is documented from selected quotation of the novel. This thesis is a descriptive study which elaborates Freudian psychology theory of id, ego and superego and their relation to the production of eros and thanatos which are derived solely from id. Eros and thanatos then become an energy of life.

The result of this thesis indicates that there is connection between the balance of eros and thanatos to the meaning and motivation of life. By any means, the result indicates that happiness can only be meaningful if one

experiences sadness and vice versa. However, the existence of love is the important thing in giving motivation since it carries happiness and sadness altogether at the same time.

## Discussion

Veronika has everything she could wish for. She is young, pretty, has plenty of attractive boyfriends, a steady job and a loving family. She lives in the beautiful capital city of Slovenia. She gets bored, because she has the same routine everyday. The work she lives everyday leads her to the thought that everything in her life was the same and once her youth would be gone, it would be downhill all the way, with old age beginning to leave irreversible marks, the onset of illness, the departure of friends. She would gain nothing by continuing to live; indeed the likelihood of suffering only increased.

Her life instinct works without having interrupted by the death instinct. Freud's description of eros/libido included all creative, life-producing instincts. This life instinct is important as it promotes behaviors that help us survive. A prime example of life instinct is sex.

Veronika only experiences happiness in her life, she never feels sorrow and falls in love with, thus she becomes tired of her life. In other words, insanity is generally defined and perceived as life in balance of sad and happy moment. The mix of the two help the character to have purpose in life and this what commonly held to be or regarded as "normal." Freud put forward the Dual Instinct Theory according to eros and thanatos as the two main sources of human motivation. Eros is the source of self-preservation or the life instinct, and thanatos is the origin of self-destruction or the death instinct. All human beings were now driven by these two competing instincts.

The discussion flows to give more reason on how Veronika could have her reason to live back. It is common among whom the dying patients constituted a majority, reports that when individuals are asked what they are afraid of when they think of their own dying, most of them say that they are afraid of separation from their loved ones, pain, suffering, and some unfinished business. However, for her, these constitute are only a small part of the fear of death.

At the first few days in the hospital, Veronika's superego took control. Pervin (1984:76) states that superego controls appropriate behavior to the rules of society. Because Veronika stayed in Vilette Mental Hospital, she had to obey Vilette's rules.

Gradually, a new experience in Vilette changes Veronika's perception of death and life. In the meantime, Vilette's head psychiatrist attempts a fascinating but provocative experiment. Another way of looking at eros is love. Another way of looking at thanatos is fear. Love pushed to an extreme is liberation, but fear is what restrains love from full expression. The pursuit of a full life is the pursuit of pure being; it is a movement toward maximal allowing; it is a declaration of liberation. People who pursue it are those who desire to fully experience themselves, pushing their individuality until it expands into an universality. Most religions aim at fostering obedience, not release into true self-emancipation. They are corralled by a

Thanatos so subtle it is only discerned by the most acute, who upon suddenly discovering it may just as quickly repress it.

She finds that being in an asylum has provided her the freedom she never had. She can do whatever she likes because she is branded an insane. She finds that she is not constrained by the value structure of the society. The belief that, her death is very near brings the true Veronika out. By the presumed final day of her life she falls in love with Eduard and they escape from the asylum. However, this reaction is driven by the pleasure of sexual instinct where eros and thanatos contribute to. The quantities of the two emerge in such action where Veronika makes a giant leap in her life to feel love and run away from the asylum with her beloved mate.

Although Eros at times gives the sensation of love and thrilling experience, it cannot provide a reliable basis for building a deep and meaningful relationship since it is so fickle and dependent upon perception and circumstances. By that understanding, love can also serve sadness. Because of such things as accidents, diseases, and the fact that someone can choose to doubt or despise you regardless of your actions, it is clear that Veronika cannot determine how others will perceive her.

"But the presence of the young woman had touched a lot of people there, and some were ready to rethink their lives. At one of the meetings with the Fraternity, someone had tried to explain what was happening. Deaths in Vilette tended to happen suddenly, without giving anyone time to think about it, or after a long illness, when death is always a blessing" (Coelho, 2006:111).

Freud identifies two drives that both coincide and conflict within the individual and among individuals. Eros is the drive of life, love, creativity, and sexuality, self-satisfaction, and species preservation. Thanatos, from the Greek word for "death" is the drive of aggression, sadism, destruction, violence, and death. Freud asserts.

"Psycho-analysis, which could not escape making some assumption about the instincts, kept at first to the popular division of instincts typified in the phrase 'hunger and love'" (Freud, 1961:45).

This life instinct is important as it promotes behaviors that help Veronika survive. A prime example of life instinct is sex, this happens again when Veronika finally finds love. Love is something that never comes into something explainable since it serves many descriptions. Its peculiar characteristic serves happiness and sadness all together at the same time.

In the mental hospital she meets many unique patients. Zedka, has clinical depression, Mari a lawyer that

gets panic attacks, and Eduard a student that has schizophrenia. Throughout the book Veronika learns their backgrounds and what brought them to Vilette. Through the novel, Veronika explores a relationship with the mental patients and in the end realizes freedom and the will to live. She begins to know the reason to live. Love has come to her senses when she begins to fall in love with Eduard.

She also bonds with Eduard; her piano-playing skills give deeply feeling for the young schizophrenic. What suddenly stabs at Veronika is the realization that she has fallen in love with Eduard: primarily because once she is gone, he would be one who would not miss her. Love, hate, curiosity, sexual desires and the wish to live start clouding her. She finds her time at the Vilette to be an emotionally enriching one.

"No, I was the one who wanted to die. She turned back to the piano. In the last days of her life, she had finally realized her grand dream: to play with heart and soul, for as long as she wanted and whenever the mood took her. It didn't matter to her that her only audience was a young schizophrenic; he seemed to understand the music, and that was what mattered" (Coelho, 2006:113).

In general, Veronika's psyche when she was in the hospital was dominated by her id. Feldman (1992:355) explains that id's primitive drives include hunger, sex, aggression, and irrational impulses. When she is in the hospital, Veronika could discharge the drive of aggression. She achieves this seemingly impossible task by employing her belief. Love in its purest form, Eros if you will, is defined by the acts that one is willing to do expecting nothing in return. The lover is willing to risk that the love freely given will be unconditional.

"Veronika decided she would have to go to bed, but Eduard was still standing by the piano. "I'm tired, Eduard. I need to sleep." She would have liked to continue playing for him, dredging up from her anesthetized memory all the sonatas, requiems, and adagios she used to know, because he knew how to admire without appearing to demand anything of her. But her body could take no more" (Coelho, 2006:130).

Vilette is an asylum in the purest sense of the word: a place of protection, where one is shielded from danger. In this case the danger is society. Those who refuse to accept society's rules have two choices: succumb to the majority's perception that they are mad, or struggle against that majority and try to find their own way in the world. The place is a symbolism of sorrow, knowing that her true love must escape insanity within the asylum. The idea of sorrow becomes more complex as Veronika should get rids of her illness, and Eduard should also revive from his

schizophrenic syndrome but she has to escape from insane asylum together.

From within Vilette's controlled environment, she finally allows herself to express the emotions she has never allowed herself to feel: neglect and love, anger and joy, disgust and pleasure. Veronika also finds herself being drawn into the lives of other patients who lead constrained but oddly satisfying lives. Eduard, Zedka, and Mari have been sent to Vilette because there doesn't seem to be any other place for them. Their families don't understand them, and they can't adjust to the social structure that doesn't tolerate their individuality.

"In the obscurity that reigns at present in the theory of the instincts, it would be unwise to reject any idea that promises to throw light on it. We started out from the great opposition between the life and death instincts. Now object-love itself presents us with a second example of a similar polarity—that between love (or affection) and hate (or aggressiveness). If only we could succeed in relating these two polarities to each other and in deriving one from the other! From the very first we recognized the presence of a sadistic component in the sexual instinct" (Freud, 1961:47).

The protective walls of Vilette are liberating to its patients, allowing them to explore their insanity without criticism or harm. What they discover is both natural and startling. The plot goes to describe Veronika's conformity and madness, turns into an exploration of the unconscious choices we make each day between living and dying, despair and liberation.

"You're the only man on the face of the earth with whom I could fall in love, Eduard, for the simple reason that, when I die, you will not miss me. I don't know what schizophrenics feel, but I'm sure they never miss anyone" (Coelho, 2006:131).

Soon she begins to realize that every second of life is worth living, and against all the odds she begins to find herself falling in love with life and wanting to live again. Moreover Eduard is the person who resurrects the understanding of life in Veronika. Though he doesn't do anything, Veronika gets her sexual awakening before him, totally surrendering herself before him as she has concealed her hidden desires even from herself till now. Today, with this newfound freedom she begins to experience all the things she never allowed herself to experience.

"And I won't miss you either, Eduard, because I will be dead, far from here. And since I'm not afraid of losing you, I don't care what you think or don't

think about me. Tonight I played for you like a woman in love. It was wonderful. It was the best moment of my entire life" (Coelho, 2006:131).

Before her death comes, she comes to the Igor and makes her final wishes.

"I want to ask two favors. First, that you give me some medication, an injection or whatever, so that I can stay awake and enjoy every moment that remains of my life. I'm very tired, but I don't want to sleep. I've got a lot to do, things that I always postponed for some future date, in the days when I thought life would last forever. Things I'd lost interest in, when I started to believe that life wasn't worth living.

"And what's the second favor?"

"I want to leave here so that I can die outside. I need to visit Ljubljana castle. It's always been there, and I've never even had the curiosity to go and see it at close range. I need to talk to the woman who sells chestnuts in winter and flowers in the spring. We passed each other so often, and I never once asked her how she was. And I want to go out without a jacket and walk in the snow, I want to find out what extreme cold feels like, I, who was always so well wrapped up, so afraid of catching a cold" (Coelho, 2006:139).

The other example of her inappropriate behavior is saying things that are considered filth. Besides, she refused to be nice and talk to the others what she really wanted was to be alone. It means that she doesn't care about other people.

When Veronika wants to escape from the hospital, she realizes that leaving without having Eduard would be meaningless because she falls in love with him. Then there is a time that her ego played its role. The ego decides what instincts will be satisfied and in what manner (Hall & Lindzey, 1978:37). As explained by Peck and Whitlow (1975:25), the three components of human psyche—id, ego, and superego—are in continual conflicts. On one hand, the id continuously tries to express its instinctual drives and on the other hand, the superego always sets moral standards. Then comes the ego's effort to resolve the conflict between these two impulses.

"I've only known you a week, so it would be far too early for me to tell you that I love you, but since I probably won't live through the night, it would also be too late. But then, the great craziness of men and women is precisely that: love... "Don't be afraid.

Today I asked Dr. Igor for permission to leave here and to choose a place where I can close my eyes forever. But when I saw you being held down by the nurses, I realized what it was I wanted to be looking at when I left this world: your face. And I decided not to leave."... Then he looked at the mountains beyond the walls of Villette and said: "If you want to leave, I can take you. Just give me time to grab a couple of jackets and some money. Then we'll go... Finally, the girl with green eyes and brown hair was missing. The one who they all knew would not see out the week" (Coelho, 2006:192-195).

The twist in the tale comes when Veronika escapes from the asylum with Eduard, without her knowing that she is healthy and has long to live. Dr Igor finds out about her escape on the very morning when he plans to notify her about her health; yet he relishes the fact that Veronika unaware that she is fine again, would live each day as a miracle.

"Eduard and Veronika chose the most expensive restaurant in Ljubljana, ordered the finest dishes, and got drunk on three bottles of 1988 wine, one of the best vintages of the century. During supper they did not once mention Villette or the past or the future. "You can. And thank you for giving meaning to my life. I came into this world in order to go through everything I've gone through: attempted suicide, ruining my heart, meeting you, coming up to this castle, letting you engrave my face on your soul. That is the only reason I came into the world, to make you go back to the path you strayed from. Don't make me feel my life has been in vain" (Coelho, 2006:200).

Deep down, a fire is sparked inside of Veronika, giving her back her life, when death is only moments away. Veronika decides to take what life she has left into her hands and she once more begins to live. Veronika and Eduard decided to escape from the asylum so that she can live the remaining days of her life to the fullest. This emotion is to fulfill the pleasure principle. Freud says:

"The pleasure principle long persists, however, as the method of working employed by the sexual instincts, which are so hard to 'educate', and, starting from those instincts, or in the ego itself, it often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole" (Freud, 1961:4).

Veronika believes by following her heart to live outside with Eduard could make her life more meaningful in the very last days. She starts realizing that it is nobody's fault that she has not found meaning in life. In fact, she starts discovering quite a few things about herself, which are safely locked and buried deep inside. The turn of events in Veronika's life proved not just a valuable lesson to her, but to many people in the asylum, lost in their own worlds.

According to Freud, this final resolution of Veronika happens to accommodate the sexuality purposes, both life and death instinct. She finds a completion in her life by letting love goes to her life and feels the love enjoyment and sorrow.

“The view of sexuality we have just mentioned is of little help for our purposes. The objection may be raised against it that it postulates the existence of life instincts already operating in the simplest organisms; for otherwise conjugation, which rest works counter to the course of life and makes the task of ceasing to live more difficult, would not be retained and elaborated but would be avoided. If, therefore, we are not to abandon the hypothesis of death instincts, we must suppose them to be associated from the very first with life instincts. But it must be admitted that in that case we shall be working upon an equation with two unknown quantities” (Freud, 1961:42).

There is more to this story to say about Veronika completion during her life to fulfill the id. However sorrow is the trigger, to make her life meaningful. She finally fills a gap of her life where she could feel pain and love at the same time. The feelings are absurd but it motivates her life to go on.

"I don't know if it's too early or too late, but, just as you did with me, I want to tell you that I love you. You don't have to believe it, maybe it's just foolishness, a fantasy of mine." Veronika put her arms around him and asked the God she did not believe in to take her at that very moment” (Coelho, 2006:203).

The moral lesson is the awareness of the finite nature of life that inspires Veronika to follow her dreams, shows who she truly is and then found happiness. Love what makes her live again. In her saying she speaks as if she is going to die one day; it may not be tomorrow, in a week, or in 50 years, but it will happen, and that awareness should motivate her to live exactly the way she wants. Each day is a gift, and she knows it.

## Conclusion

This thesis has elaborated not only the traditional psychology theory of id, ego and superego, but also the branches of the id such as eros and thanatos. First, the analysis of the character of Veronika displays the conflict among the three id, ego and superego. The connection of the three focuses on how the id could be fulfilled. Here, Veronika as the subject matter could not complete her id due to the imbalance of death and life instincts. Moreover, the incomplete sense of the id brings her into monotonous life where everything is plain and boring. This suggests that all her life is meaningless than she commits suicide to make her life more colourful. This action is nothing but a seek for the lost pleasure in her life. Her life instinct is too much that she needs to destroy herself. She attempts suicide with sleeping pills but wakes up in a mental hospital with the heart damage due to the drugs, she'll die within a week. With the thought of impending death, she lives life her own way for the first time, thinking, feeling, saying, and doing everything she wants. This new found sense of freedom helps her discover who she truly is, gives her a happiness she's never felt, and gives her the will to live.

This thesis displays the analysis in the two branches the life instinct and death instinct which plays in two great scenes of Veronika life, the life before the insane asylum and the life in the insane asylum. The eros plays great significant role during the first scene by describing the worldly life of Veronika. However this leads the hunger of death instinct so she decides to kill herself. Her failure allows her to stay in insane asylum and join other patients who teach her about their story life. In her journey to find the death instinct she meets Eduard and falls in love.

The superego said that she should never speak of love directly to a man she barely knows. Yet, her id said that she had nothing to lose. Then the ego worked as the decision maker and the result was that Veronika decided to say love to Eduard. Unfortunately, love does not simply serve happiness but also sorrow. Knowing the fact that Eduard is mentally ill and she will be dead in few days make Veronika hopeless. In her sorrow, she decides to escape from the asylum which brings her the motivation of life again. After she gets fall in love, she finally completed the id, both the eros and thanatos.

Therefore, the analysis of this thesis has successfully proven that love is one of the manifestation of id. People need love as the motivation of life. Love is powerful feeling which serves pain and happiness altogether at the same time. The feeling of the two make people stronger and they can continue their life.

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