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## A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF MITCH ALBOM'S TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE

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### ABSTRACT

The novel Tuesdays with Morrie conveys people way to value life even though in bitterness and sadness. These values of life are taught by Morrie, a professor who is dying because of his disease Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). In his last breath, he is never afraid of death and he accepts his life without complains and regrets. He keeps on having good spirit, does his best, never changes and be a motivator for many people especially for Mitch. This is library research where all data are taken from the library and internet browsing. This research applies the deconstructive Theory proposed by Jacques Derrida in order to find the Binary Opposition and the hierarchy of meanings contained within the novel. It is concluded that from the two binary opposition that has been analysed that there is a fluidity and instability of system of meaning in the novel.

Key words: Life Values, Binary Opposition, Fluidity of Meaning

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Research

Literary works are portrait of human social condition. It analyses social and moral conditions which exist on such certain age through literary works. Literature represents live, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural and the in or subjective world of individual have also been objects literary imitation. Thus, literature concerns with all aspects of human life and human life and the universe in it is entirety, including the relationship between the individual and society, people and situation of the environment. It is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific work, but the term is most commonly used to refer works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama fiction, and nonfiction. Literature introduces us to new world of experience (Wellek and Warren 44).

Novel is a world specially made in words by an author. A novel exists in the way it does because an author has chosen to put it together in that particular way. This means that novels are not real life, novels are fictional; that is to say, they had been made up. A character in a novel can't be compared

to a real person from whom he or she had been copied (Gill, MLA 77).

The existence of the literary works can be separated from the writers and the societies the presents of two things undeniable and inspirable. The writer may approve and support the condition or instead they may disapprove and reject the condition through their criticism (Encyclopedia 1).

Mitch was born on May 23, 1958 in Passaic, New Jersey, the United State before moving back to Haddon Township, the middle of three children to Rhoda and Ira Albom. In 1995 he married Janine Sabino and lived with his wife in Suburban Detroit, Michigan, and they currently had no children. After attending high school in Southern New Jersey and Philadelphia, including Akiba Hebrew Academy in Lower Merion, Albom went to Brandeis University Waltham, Massachusetts to learn a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. Pursuing his dream to become a musician, he worked after graduation for several years in nightclubs in the US and Europe. He discovered an aptitude for writing and eventually returned to graduate school, learning a Master Degree from Columbia University graduate school for journalism, followed by an MBA from Columba



University's Graduate School of Business (Encyclopedia 2).

Mitch Albom was Morrie's former student at Brandeis University. After having abandoned his dreams of becoming a famous musician, Mitch entered the real world, these experiences, along with the death of his uncle, caused him to forget those things that once important to him. Mitch fulfilled his desire and love in financial success and material wealth, though neither fills the void and unhappiness he felt. He has been working himself nearly to death and suddenly found himself out of a job when the staff at the newspaper he wrote, decided to strike. Each Tuesdays, he learned from Morrie that he needed to reassess his life, and to value love or family and friend over money and happiness over success (Blackplume 1).

It should be noted that Albom was one of numerous friends, family and acquaintances who travelled to visit Morrie during his last months of life. Mitch, a workaholic, focused on success and having little time for much else, slowly changed to a man who began to realize the important of the little things in life. The purpose of Morrie's lesson was to teach Mitch that true happiness won't come from success or money, but rather from appreciating the simple things in life and loving closed to him. As Mitch watched Morrie wither away, he learned lesson in acceptance, love, communication, and openness. The life lesson that Morrie imparts were meaningful and poignant although they are nothing new. While Morrie comes across as a remarkable human being that obviously touched the lives of many and it is evident that the lesson he imparted on the author has changed and developed Mitch own characters, Tuesdays with Morrie was a little self-indulgent and is not the life-changing book it has been touted to be (Goli).

Mitch Albom is the author of the international best seller. A nationally syndicated columnist for the Detroit Free Press and nationally syndicated radio host for ABC and WJR-AM, Mitch Albom has for over and decade, been named of sport columnist in the nation by the Sport Editor of

America, the highest honour in the field. A panellist on ESPN's Sport Reporters, Mitch Albom also regularly serves as a commentator for the network. He serves on numerous charitable boards and has founded two charities in Metropolitan Detroit: The Dream Found, which helps under privileged youth study the arts, and A Time to Help, a monthly volunteer program. He lives with his wife, Janine (Autobiography 1).

Mitch paints a poignant story about the relationship between an old man, a young man and life's greatest lesson in Tuesdays with Morrie. The book is based on the premise that relationship live forever and only individuals in it pest away after a while. On his graduation day, Mitch Albom bids adieu to his professor Morrie Schwartz promising to keep in touch forever. Twenty year later, Mitch is a successful sports newscaster and writer, married and happily living a jubilant life. One night, on the television broadcast, Nightline, he sees the interview of his long-forgotten professor and learns that he is dying of some disease. On knowing about the tragic news Mitch gets in touch with Morrie. Delighted to hear from his student Morrie invites him over to his place. Thus begin a fourteen-week visit, on Tuesdays with Morie and life's greatest lesson. During this visit, Mitch learns the difference between life and death, different viewpoints of life, and the one he is currently at (Goli 2).

The object of this study, Tuesdays with Morrie, was published in 1997 by American writer Mitch Albom. It tells the true story of sociologist Morrie Schwartz and his relationship with his students. One student in particular (Mitch Albom) plays an important part. The book chronicles the lessons about life that Mitch learns from his professor. It tells about the values of life. Mitch learned to make peace with living and to cherish the time you have. Morrie would tell him about his life and how hard it was growing up without a mother, having to verify his father's body at the morgue, dealing with this crippling disease, his brother, his wife and his struggles. He explained how people of today



just focus on thing on the outside and of interest than on oneself. Because of Morrie, Mitch became a whole new person, he learned to love, to embrace aging and most of all: "there is no such thing as too late in life (Willis).

This novel has been studied by some students; they are Titi Irene Nazara with the topic "Mitch Albom's View on Life in His Tuesdays with Morrie" and Louis Pastor with the topic "Love in Mitch Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie". Considering the fact above, I choose Tuesdays with Morrie as the object of my study. Through this novel, I want to discuss the values of life.

### **1.2 The Objective of the Research**

The research is intended to reveal whether or not there is a fluidity of meanings in Mitch Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie.

### **1.3 The Scope of the Research**

This research is focused on two values of life in Mitch Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie, the binary opposition and hierarchy of those two values.

### **1.4 Research Question**

In order to reach a comprehensive conclusion these 3 questions are formulated:

1. What are the life values in the novel Tuesdays With Morrie?
2. What are the binary opposition of the values?
3. Do the hierarchy of the binary oppositions shows a stability of meaning in the novel?

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **A. The Basic Value of Life**

Value is a concept that describes the beliefs of an individual or culture. A set of values may be placed into the notion of value system. Values are considered subjective and vary across peoples and cultures. Types of values include ethical or moral values, ideological values, social values, and aesthetic values. It is debated whether some values are innate (Susan).

Values are the things that one attach importance to and think highly of. A value is

a person's judgment of what is valuable or important in their life and how they feel about a belief that they hold. Values give meanings to our lives, allowing us to see reality with understanding and the passion to carry out our plans. Education, upbringing, culture and external influences play a large part in our values choices (Tabrina).

The values of life are immense and not able to be numbered, some of them are strong will and forgiveness. Our life is worth of great value. We may have accomplished much and we may be happy with our life, choices, beliefs and standard, some people feel of no value. Dangers stand everywhere. Poor decision making sometimes follows us around. When we learn how powerful our choices are we can decide to make our lives valuable. Be aware and aware of pitfalls and potholes and avoid them. We must stand for something lasting and make excellent choices through thought and research. Material items are fleeting and can be gone in a minute. We've probably met people who love to show that they have obtained and not who they really are. We've most likely heard of women and men who only think about the next party, the next social hour or the next weekend. Values that surround you will set a standard for your life. You can have values that transcend material goods, wealth or decadence. There is nothing wrong with looking good, having wealth and loving life. In fact, these are great advantages for us (Susan 2).

The two basic values of life that will be focused in this study are strong will and forgiveness.

### **B. Deconstruction**

Deconstruction is a text analysis method proposed by Jacques Derrida. This method tries to prove that every text does not have meaning but instead a fluid and constantly changing system of meaning. This in turn can be equated to the process of destruction of meaning hence the name deconstruction. (Derrida)

The term itself, as in the methodology, has been making its way into



popular culture. One can find the term being talked about quite often from an one on one discussion to a video essay on video streaming sites. In a lot of case deconstruction is understood as the process of destroying meanings but it can also be applied as a method of understanding. It is as such one cannot understand the mechanical process of a machine without first taking the machine apart. As such, one also need to take apart the system of meaning in a text to understand how the system operates.

According to Derrida, deconstruction has several main concepts which are: Difference, Binary Opposition, Trace, Supplement and Aporia. In the context of this study, the focus would be Binary opposition. Binary Opposition is process in which Deconstruction finds the inherent binary oppositions in a text and then flip the hierarchy of the binary opposition. (Derrida 50)

### III. THE ANALYSIS

Mitch Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie, a novel about 192 pages talks about the values of life which is we can see by a professor Morrie Schwartz. Morrie was a professor in Brandies University who was dying and had been diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Mitch Albom was Morrie's students in Brandies University. Since his graduation, Albom promised to continue contacting Morrie but he never did it over sixteen years. After sixteen years lost contact with him, Albom accidentally saw Morrie in the nightline show which hosted by Ted Koppel in a television. Albom contacted him and began to visit him every Tuesdays for many lessons. In their lessons, Morrie gave the most important thing in life, to still value his life although in his dying. Morrie told Albom that to value this life in every condition is important, because by this we can appreciate our life better and we can see how awesome we are. In their meetings, Morrie wanted Albom to refocus on his life and relatives just like him. In his dying, Morrie did not afraid with dead, but he accept his condition without complain and even let

people into his life and with his dying, he give love, compassion, affection, to Albom and people. Albom wanted to make again his relationship with his brother Peter by contacting him who life in Spain and diagnosed Pancreatic Cancer.

The major characters on this novel are Morrie Schwartz and Mitch Albom. Morrie is round character. He spent most of his life as a professor of sociology at Brandies University, a position he has fallen into only by default. He is an excellence teacher, and retires after he begins to lose control of his body to Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Albom serves as a vehicle through which he can convey this wisdom personally and more indirectly to a larger audience which he reaches after his death by means of the book itself. He is also able to reach a vast audience through his interviews with Ted Koppel, which is broadcasted on nationwide on ABC-TV's Nightline. Having always lived as a fiercely independent man, it is difficult for him to rely on others for all his basic needs, though he refuses to be embarrassed by his physical shortcoming, and tries in earnest to enjoy being a baby again. At the end of the story, he died of the ALS.

#### 3.1 Life Values

##### 3.1.1 Strong Will

Strong will is toughness, not willing to waiver on one's ideas or principles, and unbending to the will of others. Our will is our desire or drive to do something, so a strong-willed person is someone with a powerful will (Morgan).

In this novel, people who have strong will in his life are represented by Morrie. The author creates Morrie to show that every life is meaningful, no matter what condition we have, if we want, we can do everything although in bad condition. Just try and don't stop to walking until we get what we want. Through Morrie, the author says that we can do everything if we want and still fight with the condition. It is very important because by this we can value our life more. It is started:



My friends, I assume you are all here for the Social Psychology class. I have been teaching this course for twenty years, and this is the first time I can say there is a risk in taking it, because I have a fatal illness. I may not live to finish this semester (Albom 9).

Morrie has known his disease; he is very sad. But he tried to receive his new condition. He knows that, there is no one can change his life, and he tried to live in new life. After making peace with himself, he told to his students about his disease. Morrie's doctor suggested he had two years left. Morrie know it was less. But Morrie had made a profound decision that he would not wither. He would not be ashamed of dying. One day, using his cane, stepped onto the curb, and fell over into the street. But, for all that was happening to him, he was never being a passive person, his mind was vibrating with a million thoughts. He was intent on proving that the word dying was not synonymous with useless. He had discussion about dying, what it really meant, how societies had always been afraid of it without necessarily understanding it. He told his friends that if they really wanted to help him, they would treat him not with sympathy but with visits, phone calls, a sharing of their problems, the way they had always shared they problems, because Morrie had always been a wonderful listener.

When Ted Koppel, the host of ABC-TV Nightline was interviewed him about his spirit and his life, Morrie said:

Accept what you are able to do, and what you are able not to do. Accept the past as past without denying it or discarding it. Learn to forgive yourself and to forgive others. Don't assume that's too late to get involved (Albom 18).

Even in his condition, Morrie still value his life, he never regrets his past, and also

never afraid about his future. To do something is better than nothing, no matter what we are will do, do not be afraid about the result if we want, we can do everything that we need. For him, to disappear with something is better than disappear with nothing. His spirit never changes, he still the same but have different condition. He said:

I decide I'm going to live or at least try to live the way I want, with dignity, with courage, with humour, with composure. There are some mornings when I cry and cry, and mourn for myself. Some mornings, I'm so angry and bitter. But it doesn't last too long. Then I get up and say I want to live. So far, I've been able to do it. Will I be able to continue? I don't know. But I'm betting on myself than I will (21).

It was said if Morrie never feel sad. Sometimes, he feels very sad, angry and bitter. But he never let the sadness come to him too long, he tried to erase that feeling. He knows he would fight it. As long as he can, he will do, it was not a problem although he never knows how long he has time more.

When Mitch and Morrie keep talking about the values of live, Morrie said:

Well, I have to look at life uniquely now. Let's face it. I can't go shopping, I can't take care of the bank accounts, I can't take out the garbage. But I can sit here with my dwindling days and look at what I think is important in life. I have both the time and the reason to do that (49-50).

Although Morrie cannot do something by himself again, it was not a problem for him. Nothing changes about Morrie, he still the same, and still cares about everything, especially about the world. He



also read his daily newspaper and always need the new information about everything. He never feels down too long, although he is in bad condition, it was never making him not care to others but because of his disease, it makes him more care to others, because he can feel what others feel, he said:

But, it's hard to explain, Mitch. Now that I'm suffering, I feel closer to people who suffer than I ever did before. The other night, on TV, I saw people in Bosnia running across the street, getting fired upon, killed innocent victims and I just started to cry. I feel their anguish as if it were my own. I don't know any of these people. But how can I put this? I'm almost drawn to them (50-51).

For Mitch, Morrie is a great person. He always works in the news business, and covered stories where people died. When he interviewed grieving family members, even attended the funerals, he never cried. But, Morrie, although by TV, he can feel the sadness of others. And when Mitch asked about caring for people he does not even know, Morrie answered:

The most important things in is to learn how to give out love, and to let it came in. his voice dropped to a whisper. Let it come in. We think we don't deserve love; we think if we let it in, we'll become too soft. But a wise man, named Levine said it right. He said, love is the rational act (Albom 55-56).

When they continued their meeting, Mitch asked him if he felt sorry for himself. Morrie said:

Sometimes, in the mornings, he said, that's when I mourn. I feel around my body, I move fingers

and my hands whatever I can still move and I mourn what I've lost. I mourn the slow insidious way in which I'm dying. But then I stop mourning (57).

Morrie knows that he will die, but when he thinks again, there is no reason to mourn his life, he never needs that disease, but he knows that there is no one can change it, and he tried to receive it.

Shortly, there is no changes about Morrie, he still the same although he had a serious disease and death agony. In his last breaths, he is always being a motivator especially for Mitch Albom. Morrie was showed that there are so many reasons why we have to love ourselves no matter what condition we have. We still can do many things that we need. For Morrie, dying cannot kills his imagination and his desirous of made something good, not only for him but also for others.

I give myself a good cry if I need it. But then concentrate on all the good things still in my life. On the people who are coming to see me. On the stories I'm going to hear (57).

Morrie tells this to Albom during the second Tuesday. Through this novel, Morrie emphasize that it is no problem if we cry, because when we crying, we had thrown away something that make we feel suppressed. Sometimes, Morrie feels sad, he never expected that the disease will come to him and he feels frustrated with his condition. Every morning, he let himself to feel the true condition that he had. He let himself to think the real. But it was not so long, he tries to positive thinking and reminds on everything that can make him feels better and happy. He does not allow himself more self-pity than that.

Morrie and Albom keep talking, and in the second Tuesday, Morrie tells Albom that it was important if we really know about everything about us. If we had known, we can receive all things that happened to us even



though the sadness. Morrie said to Algom, “It’s horrible to watch my body slowly wilt away nothing. But it’s also wonderful because of all the time get to say good bye (57).” Morrie is a very active person before, but when the disease was attacked him, everything has changed. Instead of walking, he cannot even stand on his feet. Everything was helped by Connie, his health aide. But, on his condition, he still can thank God because he can waste the sort time to making something good. Morrie told to Mitch that he ever seen peoples that spent their time to feeling sorry for themselves.

For him, his short time is like gold, he never wasted it with plain. He can more value his life even he knows the dying will come. He had known how he will die so that he can make his life more meaningful and more useful. He said, “I’m going to say it again, he said. Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live (82).”

When Morrie had known about his disease, he tries to change his life. He surrenders with his condition although sometimes he feels so sad. He was making a decision to stop teaching. But by that, he knows what he will do in his life to fills his short time. One of his actions is he had discussion group about dying, and what it really meant.

You have to finds what’s good and true and beautiful in your life as it is now. Looking back makes you competitive. And, age is not a competitive issue (120).

Everybody knows that not only the goodness, happiness and beautifulness in their life. But Morrie said that we have to finds only the goodness to get the happiness. Do not look back if it was not the goodness. Because if we remind that, we will feel that we have failed and the past never comes and never can change it.

Remember what I said about finding a meaningful life? I

wrote it down, but now I can recite it: Devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you to purpose and meaning (127).

Morrie also helps Algom to control his emotion by detaching mind from fear, hesitation, sickness and troubles. By throwing himself into these emotions, by allowing himself to dive in, all the way, over his head even, he experiences them fully and completely. Morrie teaches Algom saying that: You know what pain is, you know what love is, you know what grief is, and only then can you say, all right. I have experienced that emotion. I recognized that emotion (103).

Morrie had told to him, “I think marriage is very important thing to do, and you’re missing a hell of a lot if you don’t try it (149)”. He was conscious that he had very bad for his wife. He had known that he never makes Janine happy. By Morrie, Mitch can understand what family is and what marriage is.

### 3.1.2 Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person who has harmed. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt. Forgiveness does not mean that you deny the other person’s responsibility for hurting you, and it does not minimize or justify the wrong. Forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger.

Morrie then speak about forgiveness to Algom. He said “Forgive yourself before you die. Then forgive others (Algom 175)”. On the twelve Tuesdays, Morrie and Mitch discuss about forgiveness. Morrie sees no point in holding any kind of vengeance or stubbornness. He admits that had some pride in his life and regrets it. He recalled a story about his old friend, Norman, with whom he



used to spend much time. After Norman and his wife moved to Chicago, Morrie's wife, Charlotte had to undergo serious operation. Norman never contacted Morrie and his wife even though they knew about the operation. This hurt Morrie and Charlotte so much that they decided to drop their relationship with Norman and his family. Norman tried to apologize and reconcile, but Morrie never accepted his apology. But, after Norman died because of cancer, Morrie regretted how she never forgives him. Morrie therefore agrees that we need also forgive ourselves for the things we have done. That explains that we cannot get stuck on regrets of what should have happened. He advises to make peace with ourselves and those around us.

Morrie had known that there is a problem with Albom's family, he asked Albom about his family and he said:

The bad news was, my brother did not want me around-not me, or anyone in the family. Much as we tried to call and visit, he held us at bay insisting this fight was something he needed to do by himself. Month would pass without a word from him. Massages on his answering machine would go without reply. I was ripped with guilt for what I felt I should be doing for him and fuelled with anger for his denying us the right to do it (97).

Albom explains that his relation about him and his brother, Peter is not good. Peter lives in Spain. He was diagnosed Pancreatic Cancer. Mitch so missing his lovely younger brother, but also, he was angry to his brother because he never gives the information of himself and his disease. Mitch things that he has to know everything about him because Mitch is the only one brother he has. He thinks that Peter was ignored his cares and his love, Mitch has done everything for Peter, he working hard for Peter, but he never knows that. Morrie knows that he is very angry, but he tries to

make Mitch more understands about his brother and their relationship can better. He said:

Mitch, I know it hurts when you can't be with someone you love. But you need to be a peace with his desires. Maybe he doesn't want to interrupt your life. Maybe he can deal with the burden. I tell everyone I know to carry on with the life they knowing, don't ruin it because I'm dying (177).

Through Morrie, Mitch can understand many things in this life, includes about the relationships with his brother, Peter. He can change his view and he more understand about him. He tries to recall his brother and finally he can call him. Mitch very happy, he has been waiting this moment so long. He cannot imagine how happy he is. For him, everything had changed better and he wants to meet his brother sooner. He said, "You're my only brother, I don't want to lose you. I love you (191)." And a few days later, he receives a massage from his brother on his fax and he was very happy.

### **3.2. Binary Oppositions**

Based on the life values described there are 2 binary oppositions that will be discussed. They are: Strong Will vs Resignation and Forgiveness vs Vengeance.

#### **3.2.1. Strong Will and Resignation**

In the novel the aspect of strong will can be seen from both Morrie and Albom. Both of them struggles with their life issues and both of them shows their respective strength of will while facing their struggles. Meanwhile on the opposite side of the binary opposition there is the concept of resignation. Where someone, in a lack of better term, give up on the struggle. This aspect can also be seen from both of the characters. Where at a certain point in their life they resign to their fate. In a sense giving up to find a cure for their respective diseases. Essentially, making peace with life.



It is also should be noted that in this binary opposition strong will is has the superior position compared to resignation. In essence, society is more favourable towards someone who struggle against impossible odds instead of someone who just give up and take whatever the world throws at them. However, as it has been stated before, their resignation brings them peace. Something that the two characters strive to achieve.

### 3.2.2. Forgiveness and Vengeance

The second binary opposition that can be found from the novel is Forgiveness and vengeance. In this binary opposition forgiveness has the superior hierarchy compared to vengeance. People and society tend to view forgiveness more favourably when compared to vengeance. Forgiveness itself can be seen from the character Morrie who then also pass it on to Albom. Both of the characters also achieve peace during the rest of their days due to forgiveness.

On the other side of the binary opposition there is vengeance. It can be observed plainly in Morrie, where he and his wife, Charlotte, hold a grudge against Norman all the way until Norman's Death. However, it can also be observed, although less plainly, through other actions of the character, their struggle to find a cure or remedy for their conditions. It is true that this concept of vengeance is more closely related to indignation. However, we may not fully assume that the two character don't hold any indignation towards their sickness. They resent it therefore they try to find a cure or at least a relief so that their lives can still continue.

## IV. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that there are two life values in the Novel Tuesday with Morrie. These two values are Strong Will and Resignation. However, there are also two Binary Opposition in the novel. These two binary oppositions are Strong Will – Resignation and Forgiveness – Vengeance.

From the analysis of the Binary opposition, it can be seen that Strong Will and

Forgiveness are the two superiors in each respective Binary Opposition. However, it has also been shown that their opposition also exists within the novel and also play an integral part in the lives of the two main characters.

Furthermore, from the previous two conclusion it can also be concluded that the novel Tuesdays with Morrie does not have a stable concept of meaning. The meanings that can be found in this novel is fluid and unstable.

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