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A comparative literature study of burnout in Buchari, a character in Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945

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Abstract: *This study examines the representation of burnout in Buchari, a character in Asrul Sani's short story "Oktober 1945," through a comparative literature perspective that brings literary representation into dialogue with psychological concepts. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using close textual reading and interdisciplinary comparison. The primary data consist of narration, dialogue, metaphors, bodily imagery, and existential expressions associated with Buchari, while the analytical framework draws on comparative literature, literary psychology, Maslach and Leiter's burnout model, Frankl's existential perspective, and theories of stress and war trauma. The findings show that Buchari's burnout develops progressively from emotional exhaustion to psychological distancing, diminished agency and self-evaluation, and finally an existential crisis of meaning. Literary language renders these processes through metaphors of bodily fatigue, shrinkage, paralysis of will, estrangement from the body, and life-death paradoxes. The comparative perspective demonstrates a dialogical relationship: psychology provides conceptual categories for identifying patterns of exhaustion, whereas literature expands those categories by embodying alienation, identity crisis, and existential struggle as concrete human experience.*

Keywords: *burnout, Buchari, comparative literature, literary psychology, existential crisis*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works do not merely represent social and historical events; they also function as media through which human psychological experience in particular situations is recorded and articulated. Through characters, conflicts, dialogue, and narration, literature presents experiences of social pressure, inner struggle, emotional change, and the search for meaning. Literary psychology is therefore relevant because it enables researchers to examine the psychological layers of fictional characters more closely. In the short story Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945, Asrul Sani portrays the revolutionary period not only as an arena of heroism but also as a human condition marked by vulnerability, exhaustion, uncertainty, and internal conflict.

The Indonesian independence revolution is commonly associated with collective spirit, patriotism, courage, solidarity, and sacrifice. Yet revolutionary experience also carries psychological consequences that are not always visible in heroic narratives. Threat, loss, uncertainty, moral conflict, and exposure to violence may generate prolonged psychological strain. Literature provides a representational space for this human dimension. As a writer associated with the Generation of '45, Asrul Sani presents characters who confront not only external circumstances but also doubt, inner fatigue, and questions concerning the meaning of struggle.

Buchari is one of the characters who embodies this psychological complexity. His involvement in the revolutionary atmosphere does not automatically immerse him in

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the optimism of struggle. Instead, he appears melancholic and contemplative and, at several points, psychologically distanced from his social environment. His exhaustion extends beyond the physical level and develops into a psychological experience affecting motivation, the relationship with the self, identity, and the meaning of existence. Such characterization opens the possibility of reading Buchari through the concept of burnout.

Burnout was initially used primarily to explain psychological exhaustion in occupational settings. Its subsequent development has provided a framework for understanding conditions in which chronic pressure depletes emotional energy, increases psychological distance, and diminishes a person's sense of effectiveness. When applied interpretively to a literary character living amid war or revolution, the burnout framework can illuminate accumulated mental exhaustion, alienation, and the erosion of meaning produced by severe and prolonged situational demands.

Reading Buchari's burnout offers a humanistic perspective on revolutionary experience. The character is not positioned merely as part of a collective struggle but as an individual with limited psychological endurance. Emotional exhaustion, withdrawal, declining agency, and a crisis of meaning indicate that historical struggle also takes place within the inner life. Revolution can thus be understood not only as a physical and political conflict but also as a psychological experience that tests the continuity of human identity.

This study aims to identify and interpret the manifestations of burnout experienced by Buchari, a character in Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945, from a comparative literary perspective.The analysis focuses on the relationship between literary representations of exhaustion, the body, alienation, powerlessness, and crisis of meaning and psychological conceptualizations of burnout. Following the interdisciplinary orientation associated with the American school of comparative literature, the literary text is systematically brought into dialogue with psychology in order to identify similarities, differences, and points of convergence between aesthetic language and scientific constructions of human exhaustion. The novelty of the study lies in treating literature and psychology as two distinct yet complementary systems of knowledge rather than using the literary text merely as an illustration of psychological theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary Psychology

Literary psychology is an interdisciplinary approach that brings psychology and literary studies together to reveal psychological dimensions within literary works. Wellek and Warren (2014) locate the relationship between psychology and literature in several domains, including the psychology of the author, the psychology of characters, and the psychology of readers. In character-oriented research, fictional characters are understood as textual constructions shaped by patterns of motivation, needs, conflict, and emotional response that may be examined through psychological concepts.

The application of psychological theory to a literary character does not mean treating a fictional figure as a clinical patient. Psychological theory functions as an interpretive instrument for explaining behavioral consistency, emotional change, inner conflict, and character development on the basis of textual evidence. Literary-

psychological analysis must therefore remain grounded in language, symbol, narration, dialogue, and the context of the work. In Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945, this perspective is useful for interpreting Buchari's exhaustion, estrangement, declining capacity to act, and struggle for meaning.

Comparative Literature

Comparative literature places comparison at the center of literary inquiry. Damono (2009) emphasizes that comparative literature does not generate a single autonomous theory; theories may be selected in accordance with the object and purpose of the study. In a broader formulation, comparative literature also encompasses relationships between literature and other fields of knowledge. This interdisciplinary orientation, commonly associated with the American school, makes it possible to place a literary text in systematic dialogue with history, philosophy, the social sciences, religion, and psychology (Bassnett, 1993).

In this study, "comparison" does not refer to comparing Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945 with a second literary work. Rather, it concerns a comparison between two systems of representation. Literature articulates human exhaustion through character, metaphor, bodily imagery, paradox, narration, and symbol, whereas psychology explains it through concepts, dimensions, indicators, and models of psychological process. The comparison is therefore organized around the same phenomenon: human exhaustion under prolonged pressure.

This perspective also requires psychological concepts not to be mechanically imposed on the text. The analysis must reveal both convergence and difference. The two domains converge in their attention to emotional exhaustion, alienation, diminished agency, and crisis of meaning. They differ in their modes of articulation: psychology abstracts experience into conceptual categories such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, whereas literature concretizes experience through Buchari's subjective world, including a body that seems to shrink, a will that becomes paralyzed, and a sense of boredom or estrangement toward the body. Comparative literature thus functions as an epistemological bridge between scientific knowledge and aesthetic experience.

The Concept of Burnout

Burnout was first introduced by Freudenberger and was subsequently developed systematically by Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter. Burnout is understood as a psychological response to chronic pressure that persists without adequate recovery. In the Maslach model, burnout comprises three major dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). These dimensions may develop in relation to one another, although their intensity and sequence are not necessarily identical in every case.

Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of an individual's emotional resources. It may involve mental fatigue, reduced energy, declining motivation, and difficulty maintaining psychological engagement. In a literary text, such a condition may be represented through images of bodily weakness, fatigue disproportionate to physical activity, or narration suggesting a loss of vitality.

Depersonalization refers to the formation of psychological distance in response to continuing pressure. This distance may appear as coldness, cynicism, withdrawal, or estrangement from the environment and from one's own experience. In reading Buchari, the concept is used primarily to explain forms of subjective disconnection and the tendency to distance himself from social experience and from his own embodied self.

Reduced personal accomplishment concerns a weakening evaluation of one's competence, effectiveness, and meaningfulness in a role. Individuals may feel incapable, powerless, or convinced that their efforts do not produce meaningful change. In an extreme situation such as revolution, this experience may intersect with identity crisis and a loss of sense of agency.

Existential Perspective

Viktor Frankl's existential perspective places the search for meaning among the fundamental concerns of human existence. Human beings do not merely react to external conditions; they interpret experience and take a stance toward the situations they encounter. Meaning is personal and contextual and may be found through work or contribution, relational and value-laden experience, and the attitude chosen when confronting unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 2006).

When an orientation toward meaning weakens, an individual may experience an existential vacuum characterized by emptiness, apathy, loss of direction, and diminished motivation. In literary studies, this concept helps explain characters who question the purpose of struggle, perceive sacrifice as no longer meaningful, or experience a rupture between cherished values and lived reality. Frankl's perspective therefore extends the reading of Buchari's burnout beyond emotional fatigue toward problems of identity and existential meaning.

Stress and War Trauma

War and revolution are extreme situations that generate physical, social, and psychological pressures simultaneously. Threats to safety, uncertainty, loss, exposure to violence, and moral conflict may keep individuals in prolonged states of alertness. In Selye's theory of stress, responses to pressure proceed through alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. When pressure persists without recovery, adaptive capacity may decline and culminate in physical and psychological exhaustion (Selye, 1976).

War trauma may also transform the way individuals perceive themselves, others, and the future. Herman (2015) explains that traumatic experience may involve intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal. In literary analysis, this framework is not used to diagnose a fictional character but to understand representations of extreme pressure that may produce alienation, loss of security, diminished vitality, and crisis of meaning. Stress and trauma therefore provide a psychological context for interpreting the development of burnout in Buchari.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design with close textual reading and interdisciplinary comparative analysis. The primary source is Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945 short story as published by Pustaka Jaya (Sani, 2016). The data consist of words, phrases, sentences, narration, dialogue, metaphors, bodily imagery, paradoxes, and

descriptions of Buchari's behavior and inner experience that indicate exhaustion, psychological distancing, diminished agency, and crisis of meaning. Data were collected through repeated reading, textual identification, and classification according to literary features and relevant psychological meanings. The analysis proceeded in three stages: first, the selected textual units were interpreted through their literary devices and narrative context; second, they were related to the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, supplemented by existential, stress, and trauma perspectives; third, the literary and psychological modes of representation were compared to identify convergence, difference, and semantic expansion. Interpretive credibility was maintained by grounding each psychological reading in explicit textual evidence and by avoiding clinical diagnosis of the fictional character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The analysis identifies a progressive pattern in Buchari's psychological representation. Emotional exhaustion is expressed through intense fatigue and images of depleted vitality; psychological distancing appears through estrangement from the body, private withdrawal, and perceptual distance from others; reduced personal accomplishment emerges through metaphors of bodily shrinkage, regression, and paralysis of will; and the process culminates in existential reflections on life, death, identity, and meaning. From a comparative perspective, the literary text does not name burnout clinically. Instead, it embodies experiences that correspond to, exceed, and at times complicate psychological categories.

Discussion

Boredom with the Body as Existential Estrangement

The expression "… if this human being suddenly becomes bored with his body" (p. 52) constructs a philosophical reflection by positioning the body as a symbol of existence. The word "bored" would ordinarily refer to an activity or situation, but here it is directed toward the body itself. This choice creates a metaphor of existential disconnection: the body is no longer experienced as a source of vitality but as the medium of an existence that feels burdensome and repetitive. The hypothetical form introduced by "if" also produces a contemplative tone, as though the character were testing the deepest possibility of his relationship with himself.

From the perspective of literary psychology, boredom with the body may be interpreted as a form of weariness that has entered the relationship between consciousness and self. Prolonged pressure makes the body a site in which tension and exhaustion accumulate. The dominant burnout dimension is emotional exhaustion, but the image also suggests psychological distancing from the body and a weakening sense of purpose. The metaphor therefore marks a movement from exhaustion toward existential weariness.

The Journey Metaphor and Emotional Exhaustion

The sentence "Suddenly he felt extremely tired, as though he had been walking for days …" (p. 53) uses the metaphor of a journey to materialize an inner condition as

physical imagery. “Suddenly” signals an abrupt moment of awareness, while “walking for days” suggests an accumulated burden extending over time. Because the expression is introduced by “as though,” the fatigue does not merely refer to actual physical activity; it represents Buchari’s subjective experience of prolonged psychological pressure.

Within the burnout framework, the passage primarily represents emotional exhaustion. Buchari’s psychological energy appears to have been expended beyond his capacity for recovery. The journey becomes a symbol of the mental and moral burden he continues to carry. In terms of character development, this passage is significant because exhaustion is no longer merely implied through symbolism; it becomes explicitly recognized by the character himself.

Shrinkage, Regression, and Diminished Agency

The statement “He felt that his body was small. It was as though he had shrunk and was now no more than a slave who had only just learned to crawl” (p. 55) presents metaphors of bodily shrinkage and regression. The words “small” and “shrunk” signify a reduction in subjective strength, while the image of “a slave who had only just learned to crawl” intensifies the loss of autonomy and capacity for action. Stylistically, Buchari is symbolically moved from an adult and agentic position toward weakness and dependence.

Psychologically, the metaphor may be read as a decline in sense of agency—the subjective experience of being able to control one’s actions and direction in life. The most prominent burnout dimension is reduced personal accomplishment because Buchari experiences himself as increasingly ineffective and powerless. Emotional exhaustion is also present in the image of a body deprived of energy, while psychological distancing appears in the gap between a former identity and the identity now experienced. Burnout has therefore moved from fatigue toward an erosion of self-evaluation.

Buchari’s Burnout from a Comparative Literature Perspective

Viewed through the interdisciplinary orientation of comparative literature, Buchari’s experience brings two languages of knowledge into contact: the language of literature and the language of psychology. Literature never clinically labels Buchari as a person “with burnout.” Instead, the text constructs exhaustion through bodily metaphor, movement imagery, interior space, life-death paradoxes, and shifts in self-perception. Psychology, in turn, provides conceptual tools through which these patterns can be read as emotional depletion, psychological distancing, diminished agency, and crisis of meaning.

In relation to exhaustion, psychology uses the term emotional exhaustion to describe depleted emotional resources. The short story presents an aesthetically comparable phenomenon in the sentence “Suddenly he felt extremely tired, as though he had been walking for days …”. The similarity lies in the experience of depleted energy, but the difference is crucial: psychology explains exhaustion as a construct, whereas literature enables the reader to experience it through the journey metaphor. “Walking for days” transforms an abstract concept into a concrete sensation of the prolonged burden borne by Buchari.

In relation to alienation, depersonalization in burnout may be juxtaposed with the metaphor "… if this human being suddenly becomes bored with his body." In the burnout model, depersonalization refers to psychological distancing in response to sustained pressure. In the literary text, however, this distance becomes more complex: Buchari does not merely withdraw from his environment but appears to distance himself from the body as a marker of his own existence. Literature thus extends the psychological concept toward self-alienation and existential estrangement that cannot be fully contained within a single burnout category.

In relation to agency, reduced personal accomplishment may be compared with the images of his body becoming "small," "shrunk," and "no more than a slave who had only just learned to crawl." Psychology explains a decline in perceived effectiveness and competence, whereas literature transforms that decline into metaphors of shrinkage and regression. Literary language intensifies psychological experience: powerlessness is not merely stated but visualized through altered bodily scale and the symbolic return of a human being to an elementary stage of movement.

The comparative perspective also reveals the limits of psychological theory. Not every expression by Buchari should be forced into a burnout indicator. The paradox "life is only felt when death is present," for example, is more appropriately read as an existential reflection generated by the revolutionary situation. Burnout theory helps explain the process of exhaustion, but literature presents wider layers of meaning concerning death, identity, morality, and existence. The relationship between literature and psychology in this study is therefore dialogical rather than subordinative: psychology sharpens the interpretation of the character's condition, while literature reveals complexities of human experience that exceed psychological categories.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis Matrix of Literary Representation and Burnout Dimensions

No.	Textual Evidence	Literary Analysis	Psychological Meaning	Burnout Dimension	Indicator
1.	"The room was his heart"	Space as a metaphor for inner life and interiority	Withdrawal into a private inner space	Depersonalization	Isolation and inward reflection
2.	"My face has become an abandoned face"	The face as a metaphor for identity	Erosion of identity and vitality	Emotional exhaustion + reduced personal accomplishment	Declining energy and self-evaluation
3.	"… if this human being suddenly becomes bored with his body"	The body as a symbol of existence	Disconnection from embodied self-experience	Depersonalization / self-alienation	Emotional numbness and existential weariness
4.	"Suddenly he felt extremely tired, as though he had been walking for days"	Journey metaphor	Accumulated psychological pressure	Emotional exhaustion	Chronic fatigue and depleted energy

No.	Textual Evidence	Literary Analysis	Psychological Meaning	Burnout Dimension	Indicator
5.	"He felt that his body was small … like a slave who had only just learned to crawl"	Metaphor of regression and self-shrinkage	Decline in sense of agency	Reduced personal accomplishment	Powerlessness
6.	"Hours in which the will was paralyzed … hands hung limp"	Personification of will and bodily imagery	Loss of motivation to act	Emotional exhaustion	Weakening motivation
7.	"Life is only felt when death is present"	Existential life-death paradox	Awareness of a limit situation	Existential burnout / crisis of meaning	Crisis of meaning
8.	"My heart is wet"	Affective metaphor	Heightened emotional sensitivity	Emotional exhaustion	Emotional vulnerability
9.	"If only I had eyes like theirs"	Perspective metaphor	Perceptual alienation	Depersonalization	Psychological distance from others
10.	"Something awkward in his body"	Body as a symbol of self-dissonance	Disharmony between self and body	Emotional exhaustion + depersonalization	Awkwardness and estrangement
11.	"People grow old quickly here"	Metaphor of symbolic aging	Collective exhaustion	Emotional exhaustion	Loss of vitality
12.	"The will was paralyzed / the body could not be controlled"	Symbol of lost control	Learned helplessness / diminished agency	Reduced personal accomplishment	Passivity and powerlessness

Three patterns emerge from this comparison. First, there is phenomenological correspondence between burnout-related experiences and Buchari's representation of exhaustion. Second, the two fields differ in their modes of representation: psychology is conceptual and categorical, whereas literature is metaphorical and narrative. Third, there is semantic expansion, because Asrul Sani's text carries burnout beyond exhaustion toward self-alienation, identity crisis, and existential crisis. Comparative literature therefore does not merely confirm psychological theory through literary evidence; it demonstrates how literature can enrich psychological understanding of human experience under extreme conditions.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that burnout in Buchari is represented as a psychological process that develops progressively. It begins with emotional depletion produced by the tension between the ideals of struggle and the realities of revolution. Exposure to pressure, loss, uncertainty, and moral burden heightens the character's emotional

sensitivity while reducing his capacity for recovery. Emotional exhaustion therefore becomes a central foundation of Buchari's psychological dynamics.

Exhaustion subsequently develops into disharmony among will, body, and self-experience. Metaphors of bodily awkwardness, boredom with the body, and paralysis of will indicate that pressure has entered the character's embodied experience of himself. Psychological distance then emerges in relation to both the social environment and the self. At a later stage, Buchari's sense of agency and evaluation of his own competence weaken. Images of bodily shrinkage and regression signify an erosion of the belief that he can still act effectively and meaningfully.

At its culmination, Buchari's burnout enters the existential domain. Reflections on life, death, aging, and existence show that prolonged pressure has affected his orientation toward meaning. The pattern thus moves from emotional exhaustion to psychological distancing, diminished agency and self-evaluation, and finally a crisis of meaning that may be interpreted as existential burnout.

From a comparative literature perspective, these findings demonstrate a dialogical relationship between literature and psychology. Burnout theory provides categories for recognizing patterns of exhaustion, while Asrul Sani's Oktober 1945 gives those categories aesthetic and existential form through metaphors of the body, journey, regression, paralysis of will, and life-death paradoxes. Literature does not merely illustrate psychological theory; it expands the understanding of burnout by rendering self-alienation, identity crisis, and the struggle for meaning as concrete human experiences. The study therefore shows the value of comparative literature as an interdisciplinary framework for reading psychological experience critically and holistically.

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