

Book Report of *Night* by Elie Wiesel

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Abstrak

Penulisan tugas akhir “Bedah Buku *Night* karya Elie Wiesel” bertujuan untuk mengungkap simbol yang banyak digunakan oleh pengarang yang bertujuan untuk mewakili perasaan yang ingin disampaikan oleh pengarang yang tidak dijabarkan. Selain itu, tugas akhir ini juga menilai kelebihan dan kekurangan dari novel *Night*. Penulis memutuskan untuk membedah novel *Night* karena sebagai karya sastra novel ini merupakan sebuah karya sastra yang mengandung unsur sejarah sehingga bisa berperan ganda sebagai penyegar kalbu dan sumber wawasan. Penulis menggunakan metode membaca cermat untuk menemukan simbol, kelebihan dan kekurangan dari novel ini. Setelah dianalisis ditemukan bahwa ada beberapa simbol, yang sebagian merupakan simbol di agama Yahudi, yang digunakan untuk lebih menekankan penderitaan dari para korban Holocaust yang segala hak mereka telah dirampas oleh Nazi. Novel ini mempunyai kelebihan dalam temanya yaitu mempunyai tema tentang kejadian yang besar dan terkenal sehingga bisa dijadikan sebagai salah satu referensi kesejarahan yang didukung dengan penggunaan bahasa denotatif yang tidak ambigu. Kedekatan batin antara Eliezer dan ayahnya yang berkembang di kamp konsentrasi juga merupakan nilai lebih dari novel ini. Namun, hal yang menyulitkan dalam mendalami novel ini adalah beberapa istilah agama Yahudi dan bahasa Jerman sehingga diperlukan referensi lain untuk memahaminya. Dari segi penokohan, penulis menganggap bahwa tokoh Eliezer mempunyai karakter yang jauh lebih dewasa dan tidak sesuai dengan umurnya yang sebenarnya yaitu 15 tahun.

Kata kunci: Holocaust, Kamp Konsentrasi, Nazi, Yahudi

1. Introduction

War is one effective way to “reduce” the population of people in the world. The number of people decreases because of the suffering

caused by war itself. War takes not only the soldiers’ souls but also the souls of innocence or civilian.

World War II that happened in 1939-1945 was also caused a lot of

people lost their soul and life. The most popular event was Holocaust or the genocide of European Jews by Nazi German, led by Adolf Hitler. The victims were Jews and non Jews. Nazi grouped them as German and non-German, in Eastern and Center Europe. The chosen people were sent to the concentration camps to be killed directly or they had to be slaves until dying before they really died.

One of the survived victims in this catastrophe that succeeded to live until the war ended is Elie Wiesel. He cures his trauma and endurs his fear to tell what happened when he was imprisoned in concentration camps, Auschwitz and Birkenau, and wrote it in a memorial novel *Night*.

Night is a story of a virtuous Jews teenager that has a problem with his relation with God because of the torture after he is sent to concentration camps for being a Jew. This book shows to the world that Holocaust seizes everything; family, friends, right, live, and faith. Beside all controversy of Holocaust that lasted until this era, this book also reveals the evidence that the story of "sacred" Holocaust is not only a myth. The story from the point of view of a fifteen year old teenager is told honestly and unexaggeratedly. The writing technique used makes a balanced feel to the readers. It can grab readers' sympathy but does not make them too pitied of it. The writer reviews this book to improve the skill in literature project. The writer hopes that this review can help the reader to get more understanding about the messages of this book.

2. Objective

In composing this project, the writer determines to discuss two problems related to the topic and to be revealed in later discussion, among them are:

2.1 To reveal the symbols and allusions used in *Night*, in order to ease the reader to grab deeper understanding of the messages that are conveyed by the author.

2.2 To give the review of *Night*, those are the strength, weakness, and personal opinion of the writer.

3. Biography of The Author

Elie Wiesel was born in the town of Sighet in Transylvania. He was still a teenager when he was taken from his home to the Auschwitz concentration camp and take to Buchenwald. His memoirs of that experience the unforgettably recorded in *Night*, which became a worldwide bestseller.

After the war, Wiesel learned that his mother and younger sister had died in the gas chambers, but that his two older sisters had survived. Elie lived in a French orphanage for a few years and in 1948 began to study literature, philosophy, and psychology at the Sorbonne in Paris. He is the author of twenty one books. Wiesel's other novels include *The Gates of the Forest*, *The Oath*, *The Testament*, and *The Fifth Son*. He has written plays, including *Zalmen*, or *The Madness of God* and *The Trial of God*, and his essays and short stories are collected in the volumes *Legends of Our Time*, *One Generation After*, and *A Jew Today*. In addition, he has written collections of Hasidic tales and Biblical stories, and the English translation of his memoirs was published in 1995 as *All Rivers Run to the Sea*. Wiesel continues to write in French, but his wife Marion,

who he married in 1969 and who also survived the concentration camps, collaborates with him his books' English translations. Wiesel's books on the Holocaust have helped win him an international reputation.

Wiesel has lectured at colleges around the country and has been Andrew Mellon Professor of Humanities at Boston University since 1976. In 1978 he was appointed Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council by President Jimmy Carter, and in 1985 he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement by President Ronald Reagan. In 1986 Wiesel received the Nobel Prize for Peace. Currently, Elie Wiesel lives in New York City with his wife and son Elisha.

4. Summary

Moshe the Beadle was an orphan that was loved by the people who worked in Hasidic synagogue in Sighet, Transylvania (now becomes a part of Romania) where Eliezer and his family and other Jews lived. His father was a man who did not have a close relationship with his family but he was very respected by the Jews in their neighborhood. Eliezer had two older sisters, Hilda and Bea, and a younger sister, Tzipora.

One day, all Jews foreigners were deported by cattle car by Hungarian police, and Moshe was included in that group. A few months later, Moshe went back to town and told the story about his suffer that people had to dig their own graves and sacrifice their own necks. He also warned the people in Sighet to escape. Yet they did not believe him and even said that he was insane.

Along the year of 1943, the situation was normal. In 1944 after Fascist party won the election, the commando of deportation was issued. Jews had to wear the yellow star. Two ghettos were started to set up in the town. The people thought that ghettos were the save place at least until the war ended. When the day of the deportation came, they marched to the station and were brought with cattle cars 80 people in each car.

In Eliezer's train there was Madam Schachter who always screamed that she saw fire, a nerve-racking waiting for departing to the unknown destination. After a few days, they arrived at Birkenau, the reception center of Auschwitz, and they really smelled burnt flesh from the furnace.

Right after they arrived in the concentration camp, there was a command from the Schutzstaffel (SS) that man should go to the left and women to the right. The notorious Dr. Mengele examined the people. Those that were considered weak would be killed. At this time Eliezer was still together with his father. At the same time he started to accuse God that he was not with the people who believed in His existence.

The barrack was like hell. It was full of madness, scream and brutishness. The officers made them stripped. At this time self-defense instinct and pride have lost from their soul. The selected people were sent to work in the furnace and the rest, including Eliezer and his father, is moved to the main camp Auschwitz. The officers gave them clothes, black coffee, tick soup, and bread to eat. Afternoon roll call gave them a number for each person, Eliezer is A-7713. After

three weeks in Auschwitz they moved to Buna.

Some people said that Buna was the “best” concentration camp. After three days the doctor came to examine but actually he only came to look for golden teeth. Eliezer has a golden tooth, and he could not save it any longer after some postponements. Eliezer worked in the warehouse next to a French girl that is told they would meet some years later in Paris. On Sunday Buna was stricken, Eliezer hoped that Buna was totally ruined. A week later a black gallows give more frightening experience but at least it felt like freedom for those who dead there.

In the end of the year, the Jew should have fasting, but some of them did not do it as a rebellion. The first selection came, Eliezer’s father did not make it and bequeathed a spoon and a knife, but fortunately he passed the next selection. In the winter, they were given thicker stripped pajamas, and it made a new mockery for the SS “Now, you’ll really getting a taste of the camp!”. Eliezer had swollen foot and had to have an operation. In his recovery time, the Red Army was getting closer, and all prisoners had to be evacuated to the depth of Germany.

Evacuation was started the next day, under thick snows they had to run. The SS also run beside them with the guns in their hands, and they would shoot the weak. On the way Eliezer met his comrade that left his weak father and he thought that he would never do it since he only had his father in this world. After this long journey prisoners reached Gleiwitz, but a lot of people died. Three days in Buna without food and drink, then they tried to eat snow.

They were brought to Buchenwald with the rattle without roof. Eliezer’s father got dysentery, once he thought that he would let him die so he would lost this burden but as soon as he regretted it. Three days later he could not find his father on his bed. Maybe he still breathed when he was brought to crematory. Eliezer regretted since the last word his father said was his name, and he ignored it. After that, there was no story about Eliezer since the only reason of his life was his father. Eliezer was sent to children block, and in April the American soldier won the battle over SS and released all prisoners.

5. Review

5.1 Symbols

In “Night”, Elie Wiesel as the author uses several symbols as well allusions to deliver the intended meaning which considered more accurate than common words. Those symbols, which were often mentioned, have important role in *Night*. Those symbols are Night, Fire and Prisoner’s Number.

Night

The word “night” is mostly used to represent something dark that can also mean the end of the days. In Jewish doctrine, night also has a certain meaning. According to Rabbi Louis Jacobs in the encyclopedia entitled “What is Jew?” , in *Talmud*, the collections of rabbinic commentary on biblical texts that form, and *Torah*, the foundation for the religious laws of Judaism, “night” means “the world of error and darkness”. It is not surprising if Wiesel as a pious Jew uses Jewish symbol and allusion and even uses ‘night’ as the title of this novel.

The author mentions some “last night” in the story. For example, the main character Eliezer always tells about the last night before the scene moves to the next one as another last night. He even compiles all his ‘last nights’ experiences in one scene when he states, “The last night in Buna. Yet another last night. The last night at home, the last night in the gettho, the last night in the train, and, now, the last night in Buna” (Wiesel, 1960:100).

By gathering the whole last nights he experienced, it seems like Eliezer hopes that his nightmare will end up soon. Deep in his heart, he hopes that tomorrow will be better as the sun will rise brightly and his old life will come back to him. He never stops to believe that his nightmare will end soon, even when he finds that the next day is worst than his last day.

Fire

The word “fire” appears first when Madam Schachter screams like crazy in the carriage that bring them to Buna. In Talmud, fire is called “aish” which has a mystical and spiritual negative meaning that is, “a chaotic and intimidating natural power”. In some religions, fire is decrypted to hell as people often say, “If you do bad things, you will be burnt in hell”. The power mentioned in “Night” is not the power of nature as it refers to the power of Hitler that will send them to one of greatest tragedy in humankind history.

Prisoner’s Numbers

In Buna, all prisoners are given a number to replace their name. It shows that their right is really being seized even for their right of their own names. In general, a name is

beautifully given from the parents for their children. It is reasonable if they are disappointed when those beautiful names are changed into those numbers. For example, Eliezer means ‘God is my Savior’ in Hebrew. After imprisoned in the notorious concentration camp, their beautiful name is changed into a meaningless number such as A1773

5.2 The Strengths of *Night* The Historical Theme

This novel has historical theme as it talks about the struggle of a boy in concentration camps in Holocaust era. Therefore, this book can be used as guidance for the readers to study about history, especially Holocaust and World War as two of the greatest human tragedy in the world. This novel is also beneficial for students who study literature to study the deeper meaning of a literary works since the author gives some clues that should be analyzed by a literary approach. In literature, this novel can be explored by using Historical Approach because it contains social document.

The Use of Denotative Words

Another strength of this novel is in the diction or the word choice. Wiesel writes “Night” as a memoir. He uses Eliezer as the main character and the first person narrator. His double roles makes the readers catch the whole messages of the story easily. As a man who produced literature works, Wiesel does not make his writing complicated by employing connotative words. He delivers his purpose by telling about an unpleasant experience of how his character tries to be tough without begging people to pity on him.

Father and Son Relationship

In the novel, the relationship between Eliezer and his father is growing closer so that they become inseparable. The strong bond between Eliezer and his father is an interesting topic since it gives a moral value of a father and son relationship. Both of them are in the process to learn how to resist their hard time that they never imagine before as Eliezer's father is still doing his role as a guidance and protector of his son. This relationship influences Eliezer's mental development because, without his father, he would be as cruel as German people since his desire to save the only remaining family member makes him not to act wild and greedy like other prisoners.

5.3 The Weakness of Night Germany and Jewish Terms

For non-Jewish and non-Germany people, it is rather hard to translate some words in the novel. For example, *Achtung* is a Germany word which means 'attention' in English. Another example is *synagogue* in Jewish which means a house of worship and learning and *kaddish* that means Jewish prayer recited in the daily synagogue services and by mourners after the death of a close relative. However, in this novel those terms are important since it shows how the people's loyalty to God starts to fade away by gradually neglecting God's commands one by one as the result of their suffering in the camps.

Eliezer's Early Maturity

In this novel, Eliezer as a fifteen-year-old boy seems to be too mature in facing all his problems. It is probably more sensible if his strength comes in the middle of the story. But,

in this story he is strong enough when he still lives free and fearless with his family and neighborhood in his hometown, Sighet. He does not even show his fear when the Jews started to be evacuated from their environment. It might happen as the effect of studying Talmud that contains the collection of Rabbis' discussion since a very young age that makes a boy has a man's thought.

5.4 Personal Opinion

The controversy about the fact of the real number of murdered Jews in the tragedy of Holocaust is still interesting to be debated even though The World War II that marked this tragedy has ended in 1945. While reading this book we can set aside this case so that this book will drive our attention to the suffered victims. For the common readers who do not learn Jewish or Germany, the Germany and Jewish terms might be rather hard to understand.

The biggest question that comes in common readers' mind should be "Why the Jews did not pretend to be non Jews?". After reading another memoir book about Holocaust from another Holocaust victim Thomas Buergenthal the writer found out the reason why Jews cannot pretend to be non Jew is because they have a certain physical characteristics that differ them from the common Eastern European that is they have black wavy hair and brown eyes that identified their Jewish blood (Buergenthal, 2007:32).

The interesting phase of this novel is when Eliezer's father says, "I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people."(Wiesel,

1960:97). This phase touches the writer's deepest heart since it shows how great Hitler's will is to reach his dreams that makes the Jews think that he is the real 'death angle' as when he releases a command to kill Jews, they will die in time. It shows that in the hard time to save his life he does not even have time to think about God's purpose that God puts people in the hard time is to make they think about His presence.

Night is the first memoir about Holocaust that the writer read. This book makes the writer more curious about the Holocaust and look for other stories about the victims of Holocaust. Among those stories the writer thinks that *Night* is the one that appropriate to be reviewed for this paper. The book shows the character development of a child that is being force to be a premature adult. This book also teaches about the important of family members' support for their living. It is not only telling about personal experience but this book also tells about the historical event that is written chronologically.

6. Conclusion

This paper shows that the author's background as a loyal Jew influence him a lot in writing his literary work. The allusions and symbols in this novel help him to explain the hidden feeling that is never completely shown. The elements that reinforce this novel are the historical theme that makes it worth to be a document social, the word choice that makes the readers get the story clearly, and moral message that is delivered from father and son relationship. On the other hand, there are two weaknesses of "Night" are also

analyzed in this paper. First, there are several Germany and Jewish words that are not familiar for readers that do not learn about Germany and Hebrew. Second, Eliezer looks more mature than his actual age.

There are a lot of books written by the ex-prisoner of Nazi, but this novel is different since it is not only about physical and mental struggle of the victim but also their spiritual struggle as a prisoner that asks for God's existence when Nazi tried to annihilate Jews. The surprising thing about "*Night*" is the fact that Eliezer does not have such a passion to take revenge after he had released from those concentration camps. The author who writes this novel some years after he released from the notorious concentration camps, Birkenau, Auschwitz and Buna, shows his mental maturity by not showing his exploding anger and writes this book wisely.

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