

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAIN CHARACTER
IN MITCH ALBOM'S *THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN
HEAVEN***

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ABSTRACT**

The Five People You Meet in Heaven is a very unique and interesting novel written by a well-known author and script writer Mitch Albom. This novel tells the story about a journey of a man in his search for the purpose of his existence in the afterlife. The purpose of analysing this novel is to understand theme of the story, setting, and the development of the main character in the story. The result shows that in understanding the meaning of life, we must conceive the concrete importance of sacrifice. Albom is a very good writer in combining two dimension of time in the different world, so the reader can easily picture many places that has been described in the novel.

Keyword: Sacrifice, Heaven, Albom, Developing Character

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

End is just a new beginning. However, it is called as an end because we do not even wonder what the new beginning is after something ends in our life. This rule will also occur in human life. In some religious believes like in Moslem, Christian, Catholic and many other religious believes, after people die, they will enter the new phase of their life in another universe known as afterlife. The spirit of good people will enter a beautiful place called heaven or it is called *Jannah* in Moslem and they call it Nirvana in Buddhism.

The existence of heaven and hell in religious believes as a life in another universe of human has become encouragement of good deeds. Heaven is a result of good deeds of human, either as an individual or as God's creation. However, the fundamental question about this case is what will happen with someone who does good thing in his life but he puts his hesitation in the existence of afterlife.

The Five People You Meet in Heaven written by Mitch Albom is a story about a journey of a person in the afterlife to fulfill his destiny. The senses of an eternal world of the afterlife are easily depicted in the story. The novel begins with the death of the main character in his trial of saving a child from the accident at *Ruby Pier*. After the death, he has to meet five different people to complete the quest of authenticity in his life. This novel is full of powerful message about forgiveness, resignation, love and sacrifice.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study are to analyze the novel's main intrinsic aspect: theme and setting, and to know the development of the main character from the beginning of the story to the end of the story.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The limitation of this study is to know the intrinsic aspect of the story. The writer would like to analyze theme, setting and the main character and its development in the story. The writer chooses library research as the research method. The writer as a student also studies some books and other references to help him understand the analysis.

2. AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS

2.1 Biography of the Author

Mitchell David Albom, also known as Mitch Albom, is an American author, journalist, screenwriter, dramatist, radio and television broadcaster, and musician. He was born on May 23, 1958 in Passaic, New Jersey, as the middle of three children to Rhoda Albom and Ira Albom. He is one of the American best-selling authors. He lived in New York for a little while, until his family moved to Oaklyn, New Jersey which is close to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He earned a bachelor degree in 1979 at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

His career as a writer began when he worked as a freelance sport journalist in New York. His first full time newspaper job was as a feature writer and eventual sports columnist for *The Fort Lauderdale News* and *Sun Sentinel* in Florida. He moved to Detroit in 1985, where he became a recognized sports journalist at the Detroit free press.

In 1995, he married Janine Sabino. She was an actress who played for Albom's based on novel movie *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* in 2004. The film was acclaimed to be the most wanted movie of the year by over 18 million viewers. Albom said that the book was inspired by his uncle's real life, Eddie Beitchman, who, like the character, served during World War II in Philippines, and died when he was 83.

All of his best-selling books have successfully been turned into TV movies. *Tuesday with Morrie* was aired in 1999 and produced by Oprah Winfrey, *The Five*

People You Meet in Heaven in 2004 and *For One More Day* was aired in December 2007. All of these movies collected many awards such as Emmy Awards for the best TV film and director. At the present time he lives in Detroit with his beloved wife Janine.

2.2 Summary of the Novel

Eddie had nothing in his life. He walked around *Ruby Pier*, he rode the *Ghoster Coaster* to assure that its brakes and steering were alright, talked with Dominguez in the shop, chased teenagers off the railing, and made an animal for a little girl with a pipe cleaners. As Dominguez was getting the passengers out, Eddie noticed that the cart's cable was unraveling. Eddie yelled for Willy not to operate the cart but no one heard him. The carts began falling toward a little girl, he tried to save her but the cart killed Eddie.

Eddie was floating and he did not feel any pain. He remembered trying to save the little girl but he was not sure if he saved her or not. Suddenly, he arrived to a place that he was familiar with; *Ruby Pier* when he was young. The first person welcomed him at the gate of *Ruby Pier*, a Blue Man. He then introduced himself and began to tell his story to Eddie. Eddie felt terrible about the fact that Blue Man died because of him. The Blue Man tells Eddie that in life, there were no random encounters and all the people were connected in some way.

He met his second person at the battlefield scene, and it was the Captain. When he was younger Eddie enlisted to the army. The US army placed him in the

Philippine island during the Second World War. Eddie started remembering the last day they met. All he could remember was that he was trying to save a kid from the fire but somebody shot his legs. Captain told Eddie the one that shot his legs was him. But Captain told him if he had not shot Eddie at that time, Eddie would have died in the fire. Eddie began to understand the Captain's meaning of "sacrifice" and forgave the Captain for shooting him. Eddie asked the Captain, "Did I save the little girl at *Ruby Pier*?" But the Captain did not tell him.

Eddie found himself in a beautiful mountain range. He found a restaurant and could see all of the patrons inside. Eddie saw his father through one of the diner windows. Eddie met his third person outside the diner from where he saw his father, an old woman named Ruby. Eddie was able to see the scene the night his father caught fatal pneumonia. Ruby then told Eddie that before his father died, he had crawled out of his hospital bed and tried to crawl out the window. He was calling for his wife, Eddie and Joe. Ruby's husband, Emile, was in the hospital bed next to Eddie's father; Ruby had seen the whole thing. Ruby told Eddie that he had to forgive his father.

Furthermore, Eddie found himself in a small room. He pushed through many different doors and he saw a different wedding reception. Eddie noticed a young bridesmaid and knew that she was Marguerite, his wife, the fourth people Eddie met. Marguerite eventually died by cancer and passed away at the age of 47. Eddie and Marguerite walked through the different weddings and spent much time talking. Marguerite taught Eddie his fourth lesson, the power of love. She

told Eddie that although people might eventually pass away, their love would endure even after their death.

Eddie found himself in a purely white and silent setting. Eddie's body was old and in pain just as it was before he died. Eddie saw a young girl motioning for him to come to her. She introduced herself to Eddie, and it was Tala, the fifth and the last person Eddie met in heaven. Tala told Eddie that he had burned her with a fire. Eddie realized that there was a child crawling in the fire, during the war, and that was Tala.

Eddie told Tala how sad he was because he felt that he had not done anything important in his entire life. Tala finally told Eddie that he had saved the little girl by pushing her out of the way. It was Tala's hands that Eddie felt right before his death; she was bringing him to heaven. Eddie felt himself be pulled away under water where all of his pain, weariness, scars and bad memories were washed away. He was lifted above *Ruby Pier* and finally rejoined with Marguerite.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Theme

Theme of the story is what the story all about. According to Perrine (1988:90), "The theme of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight". The major theme of *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* is sacrificing that affect Eddie's perspective about something in life. The following paragraph will contain the explanation about theme of the story.

The Captain sacrifices his life to save Eddie and his other comrades in the Philippines. Although he lost his life because of saving his comrades, he really never doubts and regrets his action. It can be seen from sentences below:

"I didn't die for nothing, either. That night, we might have all driven over that land mine. Then the four of us would have been gone."

Eddie shook his head. "But you..." he lowered his voice. "you lost your life."

The Captain smacked his tongue on his teeth.

"That's the thing. Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else." (2003: 93)

From the sentences above, it can be seen how ready the Captain is in sacrificing his life for his comrade. In fact that, the Captain puts other before him, it means that he values other more than the life of his own. The captain's explanation about what he did in the Philippines affects Eddie's way of thinking and makes Eddie understand what the true meaning of sacrifice is.

3.2 Setting

3.2.1 Setting of Place

The story took places in both earth and heaven. At the beginning, the story took place in *Ruby Pier*, an amusement park, which is on earth. And then the setting jumps to five different places in heaven: Old *Ruby Pier*, battlefield in the Philippines, a restaurant at a mountain range, many wedding receptions, and the last is the river. As it stated in the following quotation:

‘Where am I?’....

“The blue man pursed his lips, then repeated the question thoughtfully. “Where are you?’ He turned and raised his arms. The ocean was in front of them. The sky was the color of lemons.”

“Where do you think? The blue man asked. “Heaven’.” (2003:33-34)

3.2.2 Setting of Time

The setting of time in this novel is quite interesting because the author combines two perspective of time in two different dimension, which is time in the dimension of life and time in the dimension of afterlife or it also called heaven.

3.2.3 Setting of Social

Social setting of *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* is the amusement park and its surrounding society.

3.3 Development of the Main Character

The development of the main character can be defined as journey of the character in pursuing his goals, and the experiences that changes the character throughout the story. Character’s development can be divided into three fragments:

character at the beginning, turning point (events that caused the change), and character at the end.

3.3.1 Character at the Beginning

At the beginning of the story, Eddie has been described as an old man who does not love his job even since he was young. He works because he has to, he is not happy with his life. However, as a maintenance officer in the amusement park, Eddie feels that he is trapped in the amusement park; he does not love his job. He always thinks that his job is useless and it affects his daily. He regrets working there.

The life of Eddie in *Ruby Pier* is a life of disappointment, in other word, he regrets working there even since the first day he works until his death. Eddie states about his regret to the third person he met in heaven. We can see it from the following quotation:

“Was the pier so bad?” THE OLD woman asked.
“It wasn’t my choice,” Eddie said, sighing. “My mother needs help. One thing lead to another. Years passed. I never left. I never lived nowhere else. Never made any real money. You know how it is—you get used to something, people rely on you, one day you wake up and you can’t tell Tuesday from Thursday. You’re doing the same boring stuff, you’re ‘ride man,’ just like ...” (2003: 132)

The reason why Eddie does not love his life as a maintenance officer at *Ruby Pier* is because he does not have a choice to live another life. Eddie has to continue his father’s job because his father has passed away, and he has to take care of his mother. Another reason why Eddie does not have a choice to live

another life is his feeling of incapability. Eddie's wounded leg never heals completely; it makes him feel incapable to work in another place.

3.3.2 Turning point (Event that Caused the Change)

As the writer has mentioned in the discussion before, Eddie does not appreciate his life as a maintenance officer at the amusement park. But, there are several things that changes his way of thinking about his life when he meets five different people in heaven. The writer would like to mention each event that caused change to Eddie's the way of thinking.

When he meets his first person in heaven, he learns about how human connected to each other; it changes his thought about random encounters. He learns about the cause and effect of the deeds in life. It can both profitable and not to someone else's life. And then when he meets his second person, he learns about sacrifice. It is the most important lesson that he gets in his journey in heaven. It can be seen from the quotation below:

“the blue man smiled. “No, Edward. You are here so I can teach you something. All the people you meet here have one thing to teach you. Eddie was skeptical. His fist stayed clenched.”
“what?” he said
“That there are no random acts. That we are all connected. That you can no more separate one life to another than you separate a breeze from the wind.” (2003:47-48)

The next lesson he has got from meeting the third person in heaven is forgiveness. He learns that no matter how bad someone treats you, you must forgive him. Because behind every bad that happens in our life, there always

something good comes from it. The fourth and the fifth lesson that he gets are love and gratitude. We can see it from the following quotation:

“I lost the only one I ever loved.”
She took his hands. “No, You didn’t. I was right here. And you loved me anyway.”
“Lost love is still love, Eddie. It takes different form, that’s all”
“life has to end,” she said. Love doesn’t”

3.3.3 Character at the End

At the end of the story, Eddie finally understands the answers of the thousands question in his life. But there is one question that he has not understood; the question is why he is in heaven, He does nothing in his life. He is not a good man, he never feels happy about his life, and he cursed his life at the amusement park, as stated in the following quotation:

“I was sad because I didn’t do anything with my life. I was nothing. I accomplished nothing. I was lost. I felt like I wasn’t supposed to be here.”
(2003: 191)

The fifth person tells Eddie that he just does not realize that he did something good in his life by becoming a maintenance officer at *Ruby Pier*, as expressed in the quotation below:

“Fixing rides? That was my existence?” he blew a deep breath. “Why?”
She tilted her head, as if it was obvious.
“Children,” she said. “You keep them safe. You make good for me.”
(2003: 191)

Since he hears the statement of the last person that he has to meet in heaven, he feels that his entire burden has been swept away from his head. He

accepts his destiny as a maintenance officer, and he is happy with that. However, he has learned so much from his suffering. Eddie learns through his story of life to respect a life and accept his condition. After all, he feels peaceful and starts to accept everything that he should do and should not do in his life.

4. CONCLUSION

The Five People You Meet in Heaven is one of the finest works of Mitch Albom. The story is not just about sacrifice and forgiveness but also about accepting what we have in our life. The story of Eddie teaches us to be grateful and appreciate our life. The powerful messages of this novel are shown by the development of the main character throughout the story.

In the development of the main character throughout the story, there are many occurrences Eddie experiences that bring him in completing the task to find the meaning of life which is encountering people and taking the attitude toward unavoidable suffering. Through these sufferings that come one by one into his life, he learns something that is to accept every condition that happens in his life, especially to be thankful for what he has.

The setting of places in the story makes the reader could imagine the places that does not exist in this world. The beauty of heaven has been made as easy as possible by Albom so the reader can reach his imagination, even no one can prove the actual presence of the places shown in the novel.

The writer concludes that meeting someone or something makes us learn about life. Even we have to face a bad reality in our life, it is not such a waste; it will always teach us something.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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