



REPERCUSSION OF HOLOCAUST IN ELIE WIESEL'S DAWN

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ABSTRACT

Elie Wiesel's novel includes psychological insight into the mind of a Holocaust survivor. Being a holocaust survivor, Wiesel, in his works, renders a clear cut picture of the haunting he had experienced in the concentration camps. He tries to bond with the readers using his character development. Wiesel's way of storytelling is quite raw, genuine and petrifying. He describes how the cruelties from the past day still petrify to haunt the present day contentment of the characters he crafted in his works. "Dawn", a novel by Wiesel is of such instance. Elisha, a holocaust survivor is haunted by the memories of his family back in the eastern Europe. His memories of them, as well as their influences, remain with him as he comes to know the the fact that he has to kill an innocent man whom he doesn't know. Elisha is afraid to know the man, but he is compelled to learn more about him and kill him by dawn, before the day breaks. Wiesel fades back and forth between the present and the past to show how Elisha's life as a Holocaust survivor affects his current situation. His experiences at Buchenwald made him witness so much death and he realizes how precious life is.

Key words: Jewish, Holocaust, Culture, War, Relationship, Values, Sufferings, Identity

INTRODUCTION

Reading Elie Wiesel's work is the backbone to comprehend the Jewish Holocaust. He has spoken at forums, international summits and in university campuses around the world. He assertively exposed the horror of the concentration camps honesty which was rare even among writers who went through the same tribulation. He has approached the Holocaust mainly from a moral standpoint, leaving legalistic and political debates to others. "Dawn" is one of Wiesel's earlier works which focuses on the life of Jews after the Holocaust. It is

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about the desire of a death-camp survivor who wishes to join the underground Jewish movement just prior to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The purpose of a death camp was to kill Jews. Wiesel's character, Elisha, faces a situation where he is ordered to kill a man he is deeply trying to hate. He wants to hate so that the pain of the kill will not be as bad. He wants to hate so that he has a reason to tell others why he had pulled the trigger. Having lived through the reign of terror in the camps, he now must gather enough courage to kill the enemies. This novel describes the thoughts that run through Elisha's head from nightfall until dawn of the next day when he had to kill a man. Wiesel creates an image that shows how the Holocaust is forever a part of life. The constant memory of a torn childhood is always within Elisha's brain. Elie Wiesel uses character development and theme to express these ideas.

Elisha is considered as a perfect example of character development by Wiesel. The torment of survival brings him to question seriously and reject the Jewish moral. Elisha shows growth over a period of time. He is the sole survivor of the Holocaust in his family. About 8,301,000 Jews were alive in 1939. 5,978,000 of those Jews died at the concentration camps, meaning that 72% of the Jewish population had been killed. When he was let out from the concentration camp of the Holocaust he was alone. "I had met Gad in Paris, where I went, straight from Buchenwald, immediately after the war. When the Americans liberated Buchenwald they offered to send me home, but I rejected the offer. I didn't want to relive my childhood, to see our house in foreign hands. I knew that my parents were dead and my native town was occupied by the Russians. What was the use of going back? 'No thanks,' I said; 'I don't want to go home'." (Wiesel, Dawn 131). Gad is seeking the Jews. His goal is to have them all come together so that they can protect themselves. Gad ends up turning Elisha into a terrorist. "If today, I am only a question mark, he [Gad] is responsible." (Wiesel, Dawn 132). Gad did not ruin a good life that Elisha had because Elisha had no life. All that Gad did was take Elisha and make him part of a Jewish group. Elisha was not forced to do anything. He never knew that by accepting Gad's offer he would become a terrorist. Elie Wiesel's novels render vividness in which situations are more realistic. Elisha's innocence had now been left behind as his character gets developed.

Elisha gets evolved when he talked about the experiences that he had with the girl at the Holocaust rescue committee. He seems to have never had anyone that he loved or really cared about, but when he finally did, he really regrets it. Her name was Catherine and she was the only other person at the camp who spoke German like Elisha. "She liked the opposite sex, and particularly she liked little boys who were thinking of death. She liked to speak of love to little boys, and since men going to their death are little boys she liked to speak to them of love." (Wiesel, Dawn 160). Elisha usually went on for walks after everyone ate dinner at the camp. One evening when he was about to go on his walk Catherine asked if she too could go



with him. They talked and it eventually got to the point where they were going on a walk together every night. They would hold hands and be very affectionate towards each other. The last night of camp Catherine wanted to make love to Elisha and Elisha all of the sudden became very nervous. "Catherine," I said, "first there is something I must tell you."..... "No, no!" she cried. "Don't tell me anything."..... "What I have to tell you is this," I insisted: "You've won the game. I love you, Catherine..... I love you."..... "Poor boy! You poor boy!"..... She liked making love with little boys who were going to die; she enjoyed the company of those who were obsessed with death." (Wiesel, Dawn 164-165). Elisha's heart had been broken that night as he ran away from Catherine. He cried thinking about the incident. He was so upset because he thought that he had found someone that loved him back. Elie Wiesel had no real love in his life after his parents died at the concentration camps. He could never adjust to loving someone because he thought that they never would love him back. This changed Elisha as a character because from this point on getting close to a female was not easy at all.

Furthermore, Elisha gets developed by changing from a victim to an assassin. Elie Wiesel himself was someone that never would become a terrorist, it is said that he wrote Dawn to see what it would feel like to be on the other side. Elisha believed Gad that he had not become a terrorist. Deep down inside Elisha knew that Gad did not want to fight for the freedom of young Jewish children. The tables had turned on Elisha as he replaced his terror of the Germans with acting like them himself. The task that he knows ahead of him was to kill John Dawson. It all related back to when he told Gad "I accept." (Wiesel, Dawn 137). He thought he had only accepted to be a fighter of freedom but what he really accepted was murdering someone he did not even hate. Elisha went from being the one murdered to the murderer all because of Gad. Elisha's whole life had changed and developed when he accepted this duty.

Several themes are prevalent in Dawn. The night leading up to the dawn of day is Elisha's hardest point in time. He knows that when dawn comes he must execute John Dawson who is a British soldier. Wiesel uses a writing technique that shows how Elisha tries to hate Dawson. Elie writes from the perspective of a witness-story teller who knows that the essence of his story is filled with unanswered political questions. The reason that Elisha has to kill John Dawson is because the English are going to execute David Ben Moshe, a Jewish leader. The Jews must show the British that they are intact by murdering someone from the British side. Elisha struggles with his duty to kill the seemingly innocent man. Wiesel creates the theme of a war hating story. "Hate - like faith or love or war - justified everything." (Wiesel, Dawn 197). This thought could not save Elisha from becoming a murderer. None of the agony of hate or war was ending. After Elisha pulled the trigger and killed Dawson, he walked off as a young man who was in confusion. He too had been killed inside. "The shot had left me deaf and dumb. That's it, I said to myself. It's done. I've killed. I've killed Elisha." (Wiesel, Dawn



203). When Elisha said that he killed himself he meant that he killed the last thing in him. Wiesel's theme was that Elisha took his own dignity which was all that he had left and killed it as he pulled the trigger. He lost all faith and thought he could not make it any further. He regrets the murder and curses himself for the way he killed John Dawson.

In this novel Dawn, Wiesel creates a theme that Elisha does not want to face the present. The present could have been the better times in Elisha's life but by not realising this Elisha only thinks of the past. He remembers Buchenwald, where his family died. Buchenwald was a concentration camp that opened in 1937 on July 16. For Elisha the world seems to contain only three classes of people, each with its own kind of guilt of complicity: executioners, victims, and spectators at the execution. For all of his life he had been the victim and it was something that he began to get used to. He was now going to be an executioner and it was a fate that he did not want to accept. The theme was that Elisha did not want to forget the past and look towards the future. He was a 'poor boy'. He accepted to become a murder and after that all he did was looking back at the past. He has no one because of the Holocaust and Elie Wiesel makes us realize that this is what life is like after the Holocaust. Elie also felt that because he had personally witnessed the most tragic moment in human history, he wanted to recapture his experiences in his works of fiction.

Wiesel, throughout this novel portrays a strong character development and the presence of theme. The novel ends where Elisha finally takes responsibility for his actions and begins to forget his past. Every victim of the Holocaust must do something like this according to Wiesel. Although Elisha did kill a man he killed for the good of the Jews. Elisha had been killed so much inside of himself that he struggled to do the same to another human. Wiesel stated that revenge is not the answer to pain. He describes it how Elisha's actions after the Holocaust only brought more confusion and wounded him. Elie Wiesel's recollection of history in Dawn incorporated strong character development and describes the state of life of a survivor before and after the holocaust.

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