



COPING WITH THE HARDSHIP OF LIFE IN RUTA SEPETYS' *BETWEEN SHADES OF GRAY* (2011)

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Abstract

The purpose of this analysis is to expose the issue of coping with the hardship of life which is done by the protagonist and to know the contribution of the plot, setting, and character in revealing how to cope with the hardship of life. This analysis is related to the concept of life instincts by Sigmund Freud that is supported by the text and context-based interpretation. The result of this analysis shows that the protagonist cope with the hardship of life through two things; socializing with others and drawing pictures.

Key words: Coping, hardship, deportation, socializing, drawing

A. INTRODUCTION

People tend to face hardship in their life. The type and the cause of the hardship will vary for each person. There are hardships that come from themselves, family, surrounding environment and from the country. The difficulty level of each hardship will be different too. Hardship will certainly feel even harder if it comes from other countries that occupy our motherland and make it their own. They take over the government and totally controls the citizens lives in education, art, literature, and religion. It certainly makes the citizens feel uncomfortable. The citizens who carry out the resistance to the government will be considered as enemies. In order to make them obedient, they can be tortured, killed or deported. For people who experience the deportation, life is no longer easy. It has affected all aspects of their lives and makes it harder than usual.

The result of being deported made people strive for their life. They did their best effort to cope with the hardship they were facing. According to Merriam Webster (2017), the term cope means to deal with and attempt to overcome problems and difficulties. In other words, coping with the hardship can refers to an individual process and effort to deal with difficult situations in order to not feel stressed, depressed and eventually give up.

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In reality, there are several people who succeed to cope with the hardship of the deportation. For example, Tuvia Bielski, he is a survivor of the Holocaust. According to Peter Duffy in *The Bielski Brothers* (2004), when Germany invaded his country in 1941, Tuvia Bielski with his three brothers avoided the ghetto by running into the forest. They hid deep in the woods and set up a partisan camp that guided many escaped Jews into their encampment. They have saved about 1,200 Jews from the Holocaust by building a good connection to people who were saved and other people who were sympathetic to them.

The efforts to cope with the hardship of life can also be seen through the character who appears in the novel *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Ruta Sepetys. The novel tells about Lithuanian people who suddenly snatched away from their comfortable life by being deported from their own city under Stalin's reign. Although they have to face the dehumanization of the Soviets, they do not lose their spirit to fight for their life. Coping with the hardship in this analysis refers to the protagonist's efforts to get their freedom as a human being through actions and thoughts in order to achieve their goals.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of novel *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) by Ruta Sepetys is done through text and context-based interpretation. It is done by analyzing fictional devices such as characters, plot (conflicts) and setting. These devices are related to each other. Characters and conflicts are used to reveal the way to cope with the hardships by analyzing the character's reactions toward the conflicts. Then, the setting deals with the circumstances and atmosphere during World War II. It gives contribution in process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. In addition, this analysis is dealing with the theory of life instinct from Sigmund Freud.

C. DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses the fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict) and setting to reveal about *coping with the hardship of life*. In this analysis, coping with the hardship of life can be seen through two ways; socializing with others and drawing pictures.

1. Socializing with Others

Socializing with others is one of the strategies that is done by the protagonist to cope with the hardship. She keeps reminding herself that she is not alone. She affiliates with other deportees and tries to have a good relationship with them. She helps others physically and mentally. She keeps remembering the old days and shares the past stories with others. She attends a meeting to discuss and solve their own problems together. She and her fellow deportees resist the cruelty and hold on tightly to their identity as Lithuanian people.

The protagonist affiliates with other deportees and tries to have a good relationship with them. It appears in the following quotation:

People I didn't know formed a circle around me, sheltering me from view. They escorted me safely back to our jurta, undetected. They didn't ask for anything. They were happy to help someone, to succeed at something, even if they weren't to benefit. We'd been trying to touch the sky from the bottom of the ocean. I realized that if we boosted one another, maybe we'd get a little closer. (p.200)

The text above explains that incorporating with each other helps the deportees to build their hope. The setting refers to the tense condition in the labor camp. This is caused by the act of the NKVD that guard and monitor the life of the deportees. These conditions lead to the internal conflict that they feel pressure and scare due to the total control of their life. It makes them lose their freedom as a human being. These internal conflicts trigger them to centralize their mind to keep moving forward. In order to break the oppression, they start to affiliates and open up toward other. The utterance *People I didn't know* points out that they have never known personally before, but in the camp they shared feelings, emotions, and expectancies together. They keep thinking about each other and become solid. The utterance *We'd been trying to touch the sky from the bottom of the ocean* shows that freedom is not easy for them to achieve. In other words, that difficulties can be a motivation for them to fight for their life and to achieve their goals. They have to restrain the griefs deep inside and keep the strength with them along with the pain.

Another quotation that supports about affiliates can be seen in the following quotation:

“Hey,” he whispered to me. I looked up. Something rolled across the grass and hit my leg. It was the stone with the sparkles he had found that day when he jumped off the train.

“The crown jewel from the train car princess,” I whispered, smiling.

He nodded with a laugh. I picked it up to roll back to him.

“No, you keep it,” said Andrius. (p.71)

The setting here refers to the warm feeling of the protagonist. The word *smiling* and *laughing* shows that she feels relaxed, quiet, and comfort. The cruelty and inhumanity of labor camp do not necessarily make the deportees to lose their spirit. It points out that they still have hope in themselves. The protagonist releases the tense condition in the camp by building a strong brotherhood with

other deportees. They need to stay together to make things less heavy. From the text, it can be seen that both of the characters are grateful to have each other and their brotherhood gives them a break from their anxious life. The word *stone* can be seen as a symbol of property. It shows that being in a labor camp makes the deportees lose all of their possessions. They do not have anything else even the stones in the text can be very valuable to them. It can be useful for them in a precarious situation. Having a strong brotherhood not only offers support to the sorrowful souls, but it also offers them a company who can cooperate with and doing something together.

To cope with the hardship is by helping each other physically and mentally. It is shown through the following quotation below:

The man from the bank approached an NKVD officer. "We have people who need medical attention. Please, get a doctor." The officer ignored the man. "Doctor! Nurse! We need medical assistance!" shouted the man into the crowd.

A woman stopped and said she was a nurse. She began tending to Ona and the bald man while we all stood in a circle around them. (p.30)

The quotation above shows that every deportee has different pieces of knowledge and skills that are useful in different ways. The word *nurse* points out that the deportees are intelligent people who have a role in society. The setting refers to a serious medical situation. The conflict is the refusal of the NKVD to treat the deportees as a human with the basic right. They do not get the medical attention from the NKVD. Helping each other can be a way to release their conflict. They put aside their personal things and show that togetherness is more important. It also shows their strong bond. The utterance *She began tending to Ona and the bald man while we all stood in a circle around them* shows an act of coalition. The deportees actively try to recognize with one another and show kindness to those who are weak or ill. In addition, the nurse immediate willingness to help shows that in the atmosphere of horror and terror, some victim will not lose their humanity. They do not just ignore one another because they have fostered a sense of brotherhood.

Another quotation that supports about helping each other physically and mentally appears in the following quotation:

Miss Grybas lectured us on the pace of our work. She told us that on the first day, someone leaned on the handle a moment to wipe their brow. The Soviets made them saw

the handles off. I realized how difficult it was for Miss Grybas to steal beets for us. Armed guards stood watch. Although they seemed more interested in smoking and telling jokes, slipping a beet into my underwear unnoticed was no easy task. (p.71)

The quotation above shows how the brutal conditions of the labor camps also threaten to strip away the deportees' basic humanity. The setting refers to the difficult conditions in the labor camp. The deportees have to work hard most of the time without getting enough food in return. They have to obey the NKVD and follow the order and the rules. It means that they do not have much decision and opportunity. The conflict within themselves encourages them to show their kindness. They release that by not being selfish. The utterance *I realized how difficult it was for Miss Grybas to steal beets for us* shows that they do not only act according to their own advantages but also act to save others although putting themselves at risk. They believe that their kindness will back to them in different ways and it is an important act to help them survive.

To cope with hardship is by keeping remember the old days and shares the past stories with others. It appears in the quotation:

The approach of Christmas bolstered spirits. We gathered in each other's shacks to reminisce about the holidays in Lithuania. We talked endlessly about Kucios, our Christmas Eve celebration. It was decided that Kucios would be held in the bald man's shack. He grudgingly agreed. (p.134)

The text above shows that the deportees still keep their culture and apply it to their new life in the labor camp. The setting here refers to a gloomy Christmas Eve celebration. The deportees are so far away from their own homes. They cannot celebrate the Kucios celebration with all of their family members. The limitations they have in the labor camp also make them unable to run Kucios properly. The longing to their previous happy life triggers them to the internal conflict. They feel the need to hold the Kucios because it is their culture in Lithuania. The word *endlessly* shows how much they want to forget their suffering in the labor camp. They release their conflict by gathering together with other deportees and talking about each other story. They present warmth in their former home into a narrow and shabby shack. They hold on tightly to their culture to keep them remember who they are. It also helps them to realize that they are not alone.

Another quotation that supports about keep remembering the old days can be seen in another quotation:

We gathered each night to hear about someone's holiday celebration. We grew to know each other through our longings and cherished memories. Snow fell and the temperatures plummeted, but work and the cold felt tolerable. We had something to look forward to—a small ritual that brought relief to our gray days and dark nights. (p.134)

The setting here refers to the longing atmosphere of the deportees. The NKVD take the deportees away from their comfortable home lives into the horror of the labor camp. The external conflict of being the deportees lead to the internal conflict that they get homesickness. They release their conflict by gathering together, share photos and stories of their families and their previous happy life. The utterance *We grew to know each other through our longings and cherished memories* show that in the camp they create a new family or community to shared feelings together since they experience the same things. They remind one another about who they are and where they have come from. Their strong desire to get back together with family and neighbors in their motherland give them a reason to not surrender. It can be seen in the utterance *We had something to look forward to—a small ritual that brought relief to our gray days and dark nights*. It explains that sometimes in a hard situation, people need the company to lean on and the love of the family can give the suffering people a reason to fight and transfer their sorrow into perseverance.

The deportees discuss their own problems together can be a useful alternative in coping with the hardship of life. It can be seen through this following quotation:

“So we shouldn't sign?” someone asked.

“No. I believe we should sit down in an orderly manner. Mrs. Vilkas will explain that we are not ready to sign paperwork.”

“Not ready?” said Mrs. Rimas.

“I agree,” said Mother. “We must not completely refuse. And we must show that we are not hysterical. Form three lines.”

The NKVD held up their rifles, unsure what we might do. We sat down in straight lines in front of the desk, under portraits of Russia's leaders. The guards looked at one another, dumbfounded. We sat calmly. We had regained a slice of dignity. (p.101)

In this context, the setting refers to the noisy condition in the NKVD's office. The deportees have to sign a paper that consists of approval to join the collective farm, pay a war tax of two hundred rubles per person and agree that they are criminals who are sentenced twenty-five years of hard labor. The external conflict of being forced to admit something they do not do leads them to the internal conflict. They became confused and angry due to the unfair treatment they get. They release their conflict by thinking rationally and not becoming hysterical. They discuss their problems by being open-minded. They talk about their problems quietly and try to find the best solution together. The utterance *We sat calmly. We had regained a slice of dignity* points out that they still cling to their national pride together. They do not allow the atrocities of the Soviets to take over their sanity. They are not scared and refuse to give the NKVD anything even their fear.

The protagonist along with her fellow deportees resists the cruelty and hold on tight to their identity as Lithuanian people. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“Listen,” I said. “The men.” It grew louder. Louder. They were singing, singing at the top of their lungs. Andrius joined, and then my brother and the gray-haired man. And finally, the bald man joined in, singing our national anthem. *Lithuania, land of heroes....*

I wept. (p. 51)

The text above shows that the deportees hold on tightly to their identity as Lithuanian people. The setting refers to the touching atmosphere in the train. They have to face the dehumanization of the Soviets. They travel to an unknown place without giving enough food, water, and space. The external conflicts that come from the Soviet lead the deportees to their internal conflict. It triggers them to express their patriotism. They release the conflict by singing their national anthem while their train taking them to an unknown future. It is a brave act since it might catch the NKVD's attention and causes troubles for them. Yet, they still choose to fight the Soviets in their own way. The utterance *They were singing, singing at the top of their lungs* shows that the love of the country gives them a reason to fight for their motherland. It makes people put nationality unity in front of personal interest, and encourage people to stand up against injustice and strive for their own nations. Even though, singing the anthem cannot cause any harm to the Soviet, but it gives them hope. The Soviets may have taken over their country and taken them from their homes, but the Soviets cannot take their sense of common identity.

In summary, socializing with others is an essential thing the person needs to cope with the hardship of life. The dominant setting here is the terrible and tense conditions in the labor camp. The tense condition refers to the physical oppression such tortures, starvation, and sickness. The internal and external

conflicts can be seen in the way the characters' suffering to survive. They have faith within them even though they are in the shackle situation. They learn to put aside their personal importance and embrace each other as one unity. It proves that the deportees have a good sense of brotherhood toward each other. They develop themselves to be a better person and also try to find goodness in others in the sake of survival.

2. Drawing Pictures

Drawing pictures is another way to cope with the hardship of life. The novel shows that the protagonist is a young girl who loves and has a passion for drawing pictures. In order to prevent her from a mental breakdown, she distributes her anger, pain, and fear through her drawings. She spends her spare time by studying painting. She learns to get the meaning of her favorite painter's painting in order to get motivation and understand herself better. She draws her experiences every time she has the chance. She keeps track of their captivity by drawing pictures. At the same time, she uses her skills in drawing to get more information and uses her skill in drawing to give help to other people.

In order to prevent her from a mental breakdown, the protagonist distributes her anger, pain, and fear through her drawings. It is shown in this quotation below:

I grabbed my writing tablet. I sat down to finish the drawing of Jonas's room. At first, I was conscious of the silence. It hung heavy, awkward. As I continued to sketch, I slipped into my drawing. I became absorbed with capturing the folds of the blanket perfectly, softly. The desk and the books had to be just right. Jonas loved his desk and his books. I loved books. How I missed my books. (p.132)

The setting here refers to the condition of a labor camp which is designed like a deadly place. The deportees do not get a proper place to stay. They have to share small and narrow shack with several other people and without enough stuff. The external conflict of not being treated like humans lead her to the internal conflict within herself. It causes her to become exhausted and depressed due to the lack of rest she gets. The utterance *As I continued to sketch, I slipped into my drawing* points out that drawing can be a tool for her to reduce the burden she feels. It can be a pleasant distraction for her to not always think about the pain. It helps her to express herself when there is little else to think about and believe in. It can be seen in her word *I became absorbed with capturing the folds of the blanket perfectly, softly*. It means that she keeps her mind stable by imagining something beautiful. Something that is very different from the real situation. In other words, drawing is her way to process her situations and is her best way to express herself.

She spends her spare time by studying painting. She learns to get the meaning of her favorite painter's painting in order to get motivation and understand herself better. It appears in the following quotation:

“I found a sliver of light outside in back of our hut. I held the stolen pen above the paper. My hand began to move in short, scratchy strokes. I took a breath. Fluid strokes. Mrs. Arvydas slowly appeared on the page. Her long neck, her full lips. I thought of Munch as I sketched, his theory that pain, love, and despair were links in an endless chain.” (p.121)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist favorite's painter has influenced herself. The setting here refers to the sad feeling of the protagonist. She finds out that one of her fellow Lithuanian spies on them and informs the information to the NKVD to get more food and a decent place to stay. The external conflict leads to the internal conflict that she feels sad and angry. She feels that she has been betrayed. She releases the internal conflict by remembering the theory of Munch's art as her favorite's painter. The utterance *I thought of Munch as I sketched, his theory that pain, love, and despair were links in an endless chain* points out that her memory and knowledge of the Munch's art helps her to see clearly when the meaning of life becomes difficult. Munch's art, in all of its darkness helps the protagonist to understand the world around her. She starts to realize that people will experience both sadness and happiness in their lives. She convinces herself that she is not the only one who experiences the difficult things.

Another quotation that supports the situation can be seen in the following quotation:

We steeped the leaves in the water I had boiled. Jonas drank it. Mother stayed propped at his side. I lay down but couldn't sleep. Each time I closed my eyes, I saw the painting of *The Scream* in my head, but the face was my face. (p.133)

The text above shows that the protagonist's admiration of Munch gives her perception into her horrific circumstances. The setting here refers to the struggle the deportees have to face. The youngest children are affected the most by the harsh conditions in the labor camp. Almost all of them were sick. Their bodies were swollen and covered with ulcers caused by malnutrition. The external conflict of being the deportees evokes the internal conflict. She releases the conflict by having awareness about her condition. She realizes her own situation and finds something which increases her self-motivation to survive. The utterance *Each time I closed my eyes, I saw the painting of The Scream in my head, but the*

face was my face shows that Munch's works help the protagonist to see the world in a way that makes sense. As she pictures her face in Munch's painting, she can understand her own situation a bit more clearly. She realizes that she is in a rotten place with heavy security guards. She understands that there are only two possible outcomes. Success mean survival. Failure mean death. Since she has the desire to live, she chooses not to easily give up.

She draws her experiences every time she has the chance. She keeps track of their captivity by drawing pictures. It appears in the quotation below:

“You have to keep drawing. My mother says the world has no idea what the Soviets are doing to us. No one knows what our fathers have sacrificed. If other countries knew, they might help.”

“I will,” I said. “And I’ve been writing it all down. That’s why you have to keep these safe for me. Hide them.” (p.160)

The setting refers to the dangerous situation the protagonist has to face. In this context, the conflict is when the character has to face the NKVD that may catch her when she keeps her drawing. However, it does not scare her. It gives her more desire to draw. The utterance *That’s why you have to keep these safe for me. Hide them* points out that the Soviets will destroy something that dangerous for them. The character realizes it and attempts to keep drawing their experiences. The external conflict that comes from the NKVD makes her want to tell the world about them being the captives. She realizes that drawing pictures can be a way to document their tortures. She also realizes that it can be their way to communicate with outside the labor camp. It gives her hope that one day her pictures may reach someone attention. She hopes that through her pictures the deportees can be free from the deportation and go back to their country.

The protagonist uses her skills in drawing to get more information. It can be seen in the following quotation:

“They’ll pay two cigarettes for someone to copy a map and a photograph—”

“I’ll do it,” I said quickly, dropping my hoe.

“No, Lina!” said Mother, grabbing my arm.

“Mother, a map,” I whispered. “Maybe it will bring us news of the war or the men. And I won’t have to be in this field.” (p.117)

The text above shows that the protagonist uses her skill in drawing to find the pieces of information she needs. The setting here refers to a dangerous situation. In this context, the conflict happens when the protagonist might have to face the NKVD that may do bad things when she goes to their place. She releases the conflict by being brave. The utterance "*I'll do it*" *I said quickly, dropping my hoe* shows the protagonist's braveness and strong intention. Her constancy to draw for the soldier shows that she understands what she has done and she knows the chance must be very important. She has a strong intention to take real action to find a way out from the labor camp. She believes that she can learn something from the map and confront the entire obstacle. In other words, knowledge and skill can be a weapon and a key to get information that is useful to get out of the terrible miseries.

The protagonist uses her skill in drawing to give help to other people. It can be seen in the following quotation:

I recounted stories from our childhood and described our house, room by room. I took Mother's Bible and prayed for God to spare my brother. My worry made me nauseous. I grabbed my paper and began to sketch something for Jonas, something that would make him feel better. I had started a drawing of his bedroom when Andrius arrived. (p.130)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist's drawing can be a tool for her to help other people feel better. The setting refers to the hopeless feeling of the protagonist. Her brother is very ill due to the lack of nutrition he gets in the labor camp. They do not have something to cure him since the NKVD refuses to give proper medical treatment. The external conflicts that come from the NKVD lead to internal conflicts that she has a feeling of fear and anxiety about losing her brother. The utterance *My worry made me nauseous* shows how hopeless and desperate she is. She has nothing to do since they do not have anything left with them. She releases the conflict by drawing pictures. She draws something nice to help her brother survive. She tries to present the warm of their house into a picture to make her brother do not lose his desire to live. In addition, the utterance *I took Mother's Bible and prayed for God to spare my brother* points out that God is their spiritual guidance and reliance during the hard circumstances. They believe the God has the power to deliverance and will bring justice back to them. It means that believing in God also gives them both the hope to live and the courage to fight.

Another quotation that support about that the protagonist uses her skill in drawing to give help to other people can be seen in the following quotation:

“I have something for you, too,” I said. I reached into my suitcase and pulled out a sheet of paper. I handed it to Andrius.

“It’s not very good,” I said, “but it’s a better angle. Smaller nostrils.” “It’s great,” said Andrius, looking at my drawing.

“Really? ”

His eyes flashed up, locking on mine. “Thank you.” (p.139)

The setting here refers to the sad Christmas celebration. The deportees still have to work hard in the Christmas day even the young people. The young people do not have time to celebrate it and having fun with their peers on this special day as they used to be. It triggers them to the internal conflict. They feel the need to celebrate it in a way that they can. She releases their conflict by exchanging a small gift to keep the tradition alive. In this text, the drawing can be seen as the protagonist pride. The utterance *His eyes flashed up, locking on mine* shows that even a drawing, despite the imperfectness, can be a valuable gift she can give to others. She makes others happy through her drawing. It what she can do to celebrate a Christmas day in a place full of terror and inhumanity. She realizes that she has the responsibility to share the spirit and her optimism to other even though she is in the same situations.

In summary, drawing pictures can be another way to cope with the hardship of life. The dominant setting refers to endless suffering in the camp labor. The inhumane treatment in the labor camp has destroyed both of her physical and mental. Her love and skill for drawing help her survive and give her a sense of pride within herself. She also uses her pictures to help other people. The conflicts the protagonist face during the deportation make her aware of what makes her comfortable. Drawing can be a pleasant distraction for her to not only focus on the pain. It helps her to express herself when there is little else to think about and believe in.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Novel *Between Shades of Gray* (2011), written by Ruta Sepetys, reflects the issue of coping with the hardship of life. Coping with the hardship in this analysis can refer to an individual process and effort to deal with difficult situations in order to not giving up. It is revealed through text-based and context-based interpretation by focusing on fictional devices such as character, setting, and conflicts. The dominant conflict here is the terrible and tense conditions in the labor camp. The efforts to cope with the hardship of life are done through, socializing, strengthening the sense of brotherhood and having positive activities. This is a common situation that often happened in a real life. People can cope with

the hardship of life if they have awareness and strong willingness. They can get out from the difficult situation by centralize their mind to keep moving forward and not only seeing that difficulty as a reason to surrender.

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