
HIDDEN MOTIVES BEHIND THE WHITE'S DEFENCE TOWARDS THE BLACK IN GRISHAM'S *A TIME TO KILL*

Anna Sriastuti
annasriastuti@yahoo.com
Language and Literature Faculty
Satya Wacana Christian University Indonesia

Received: 10 July 2015. Revised: 10 August 2015. Accepted: 25 August 2015

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reveal the hidden motives of the White behind race and class struggles in Carl Lee's case of murdering two local young white men who had raped his 10 years old daughter, Tonya, and left her bruised and bloodied. Lee, a black man, who used to have good relations with the White stood against the White at the court when he decided to kill the rapists in his own hands as his revenge to his daughter. The story was not simply telling readers about the races and classes struggles between the Black and the White but another important point to notice was the willingness of some white people who posted themselves in Lee's side that led further conflict of the White against the White.

Keywords: motives, race, class

How to Cite: Sriastuti, Anna. 2015. Hidden Motives behind the White's Defence towards the Black in Grisham's *A Time to Kill*. *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, X/1.

INTRODUCTION

Literature can give us something to learn about life. It can be used to portray all the things that occur in reality. There are fictions, which are made, based on true story and have a close relation with reality. Besides, there are also fictions that tell us about love, war, poverty, and all the things that we can actually seen in the real world. Pickering and Hooper (1969:11) say that fiction is the relationship between the created world of the given work and the real world art objective experience.

Novel *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham is a story about race discrimination between the White and the Black which happened in 1960's in America, this novel

was written based on the event that happened that time as Grisham got inspired by a true story of a teenage girl. It became the starting point of the novel when a ten-years black girl, Tonya Hailey, was raped by two young white men and left neglected in a terrible condition. Grisham's background in law practices seemed to stir the plot of the story in which he came out with an idea of the revenge of the raped-girl father toward the rapists which then led the conflicts into law matters happened in and out the court. The purpose of this paper is to find out the hidden motives of the defence of the White toward the Black who took revenge toward

two white rapists. The setting of the story, Mississippi, was both influenced by the place where unequal treatment applied to the Black by the White and also it was the place where Grisham himself got his degree on law from Mississippi State University. Identifying and analyzing the root of the main problem that was the revenge of the rape itself would lead to the next analysis toward the motives of the defence. Likumahua (2001:78) noted that life was not complete unless there were conflicts. It was supported by Bohner (1986:2) that stated no conflict mean no growth, no movement, even no story. Theories about conflict was used in identifying conflicts experienced by Carl Lee Hailey. Hailey's conflicts in order to get justice for his daughter put him into a serious crime which aroused both hate and sympathy from the White. Some of the White people sued him with death penalty whereas others stood for Lee and struggled to get him released. The war of the White against the White in which each party of these white people stood for their own motives became a very interesting issues to be analyzed. What were the motives behind their acts?

ANALYSIS

Revenge Led to A Death Penalty

Conflicts seem to be an inseparable part of human lives. Everybody in this world has their own conflict, no matter how, is also one element that completes our life. Conflicts helps us to shape our ways of thinking and also have better understanding our life. *"Conflict is not only important but also inevitable, that is it can make a story become interesting"*. (Likumahua, 2001:81). Moreover, Kirzner and Mandell (2000:67) state that *"Conflict is the struggle between*

opposing forces that emerged as the action develops".

Carl Lee Hailey's conflict started internally when he got his daughter raped. He was coming home when he found a crowd huddled above a small figure lying on the couch. He was shocked when he saw his little daughter's condition. *"Her face was bloody pulp covered with knots and lacerations; both eyes were swollen shut and bleeding from ankles to forehead"* (p.7). He could not believe that something horrible had happened to her daughter. One of his wife's cousins and some people who fished down by Froggy Creek saw Tonya lying in the middle of the road and calling her daddy's name. This conflict shocked Carl Lee, his mouth kept silence while carrying his daughter to the hospital. He failed his words and never spoke from the first time he arrived at the hospital. He could not sleep because of all the tragedy that happened to his little daughter. It was beyond his imagination and understanding that people could do such an immoral and nasty thing toward a child which happened to be his daughter. It made him confused, and instead of saying a word, he only stared blankly at his daughter. It showed that Carl Lee Hailey really had a bad traumatic feeling and he could not accept it, *"He had difficulty sleeping, subdued; motionless, unable to do anything but stare blankly at the small figures surrounded by machines, tubes and nurse"*(p.26). Just because of some teenagers got drunk and smoke marijuana caused his daughter badly injured and having deeply traumatic and lost her future. Handling this case himself to revenge for his daughter was the most logical action since let the rapists arrested would not guarantee that the fair justice would be earned. After

the rapists got arrested, Carl Lee started to find a way to make revenges. Although his lawyer forbid him from doing it, but he stayed to his decision to kill the rapists in the towncourt. *"I have no choice, Jake. I'll never sleep till those bastards are dead. I owe it to my little girl, I owe it to myself, and I owe it to my people. It'll be done"*(p.48). It indicated that Hailey really hated those boys badly, that he wanted to kill them for what they had done to his little daughter. To take the revenge, he made up his mind to kill those boys in the towncourt and waited there until the boys walked through the alley and surprised them from the janitor's closet door and kill them with a gunfire. *"Carl Lee Hailey sprung from the darkness with an M16 and he opened fire, loud, Rapid, clapping, popping gunfire shook the courthouse and explode the Silence"* (p.72). His revenge toward the rapist was successful. He killed those boys and leaf them with a laughing voice full of satisfaction. He felt relief and satisfied, because his revenge had paid off. He was willing to take the consequences and was sentenced to death.

The other external conflicts toward Carl Lee Hailey happened at the court room between him and the jurors. Though the policy of freedom for slaves was declared in 1865, the real freedom was never earned by black people. The oppression of white people as the powerful party that had happened for centuries did not automatically end was hardly removed. White people still claimed themselves as higher class people or superior race toward the Black. Even though the practice of black enslavement, the selling and whipping of slaves had been outlawed, black people still found it hard to live a good life. Oral laws placing black

people in lower racial caste and legal segregation had given them no choices expect to work as blue collar workers who depended a lot on white landlord and burdened by everlasting debts and often got unfair punishments in case of crime. Some of the black people managed to socialize well with white people and got some respect from them. Like in this novel, it was told that in his neighborhood many people knew Carl Lee Hailey as a person who liked to interact with other people. Almost the entire neighborhood knew Carl Lee Hailey and his family, because when Hailey interacted with other people he never chose with whom he would like to interact whether is it white or black person. One of the white person he liked was Jake Brigance, his lawyer. He loved Jake because Jake knew all Carl Lee's family and Jake represented them. *"Sure. Know Carl Lee well. I know all the Haileys and I represented most of them"*(p.23). That fact, however, did not guarantee that he would get special treatment after he murdered the white rapists. Even after he knew that more of the jurors were white, he knew that he would not have a fair trial. *"Some prospective jurors were white and some were black, there would be more white ones in ford county than the surroundings counties"*(p.236). In his trial he found many difficulties from other white people because in this situation he was black and was standing in white court trial. It made his position became worse and it was hard for Hailey to have any ease for his case. Moreover, all the mass media already knew about the cases and it made unfair trail, because many of white people were mad at him. They could not accept the fact of a black man murdering two white boys in front of them, failing to notice of what the

boys had done to Lee's daughter. *"Well, I watched as much of it as I could. There were news report from the local stations in Memphis and Tupelo. So I watched the news out of New York, Chicago and Atlanta, just about every channel had something about the shootings and the arrest, there was footage from the courthouse and jail. It was a biggest thing that ever happened in Clanton, Mississippi"* (p.243).

Two White Opposing Parties

A Black committing a murder toward white men could be categorized as a fatal crime since it lighted racial war between the black people and the white people. For white people, if this case was not taken into account seriously it could be a negative trigger of the Black's struggle toward the White. The previous long terms domination over black people has strengthened the higher position of the White. Naturally, white people claimed themselves as the 'good' or 'right' party and the Black as the opposite party. Murdering white men in a white course was no longer a matter of killing the rapists, it was more about underestimating, furthermore humiliating white people in general as a race. What made it worse was that Hailey also tacked the Deputy of the town. Those two incidents were fatal for Lee. Deputy was a symbol of law himself. Attacking him meant attacking the law which same as attacking the White. It became obvious why the jurors who mostly White decided Hailey must stand trial and sued him with the death penalty which observed further was not a matter of taking one's life but more to gave model for other Black as a declaration of what might happen to black people if they dared to go against white people. Then, this was about

maintaining power and class of a race. Through this description, it was clear that there was a party of the White whose motif was maintaining power as rulers from higher class to the lower one.

A different party of white people stood for Carl Lee Hailey, the black murderer, were Jake Brigance and his crew. Jake was a lawyer and once was successfully won three cases for three back murderers though he knew that to help black people did not give him a great deal of money to earn which at the same time he got his family to support. He was still willing to be Lee's attorney since he knew that this case was a mass scale which led hm to popularity and profit. The payment he wanted from his client was nothing compared to the attention he got from one interview after the others. To win over this case, Jake planned a claim of insanity over his client. His motive was clear that was to win the case. The interesting point here was Jake cared about saving Lee from any possibility of unfair judgement from the White or gaining his own fame. At least he admitted to his wife, Carla, that he urged for more popularity and financial orientation. There were some interesting things of Jake's plan to win the case which became interesting to be analyzed. First was his smart but risky idea of having Dr. Bass, a psychiatrist, who will prove Hailey was insane at the time of the shooting. This was brilliant because there seemed to be no other way out to bring Carl Lee Hailey out of the court alive after killing two white men and wounding a deputy. However, the psychiatrist had stopped practicing for a long time which meant his validity of his words were hardly proven right and worse was that he was a drunken man himself. Jake was so determined to win

the case that he took a risk to hire a drunken psychiatrist to give a professional proof toward Hailey's insanity. Having Dr. Bass was not the only think step he took, he also asked his lawyer friend's help, Harry Rex Vonner, to pick up the jury for his client's trial. Although Voner was a lawyer, his speciality was handling divorce cases so once again Jake took another risky and haphazarded step to win this case. A further analysis about Jake's risky steps would be about the involvement of these two men to the case. Firstly, it was the psychiatrist himself. Having a conviction from a drunken doctor whose practice licence was not valid could not be said as a legal action. Under the influence of alchohol, one probably could not state responsible statements. The worse was the plan to make the doctor give a false statement of Hailey's insanity that drove his crazy murder. Apart from his revenge, Hailey was guilty of committing murders. He deserved a punishment since it was not a self defence. It became bias to see who took advantages toward the other; was it Hailey who wished to be freed from his punishment or was it Jack who wished to be famous and got some financial reward after winning the case. Apart from it, asking a lawyer's help whose speciality was not in criminal cases was not a guarantee of winning a case. Then what would be Jake's consideration of making up his choice of this lawyer; was it all about frienship since he was his friend or was it all about hiring cheaper help? The obvious conclusion was that Jake seemed to be blinded with his goal of winning the case that he permitted all efforts regardless the truth. There was a great possibility that he broke the codes of a prominent lawyer. Along with Jake, Ellen Roark, a student of

law would also take a benefit of this by offering to be Jake's law clerk for free as his way of gaining expensive but free experience of a tough criminal case. Hailey was then becoming a willing victim od others' needs and interest.

From the previous explanation, it was clear that there two opposing parties of the white people; one party went against Hailey and arranged a plan to their own benefits. It became puzzled to know where Hailey's position was. He was trapped in the middle of two opposing parties, both taking advantages on him for their own needs.

CONCLUSION

In the novel *A Time to Kill*, Tonya Hailey was not the only victim. Her family was all suffering from the incident where Tonya was the victim of the rape. Her father who took a revenge for her was jailed and sued for a death punishment by a big group of white people who thought that his action of murdering two white young men in the town trial was a humiliation of the black race toward the white race. Other white people who were willing to defend him sued him a big deal of money Hailey could afford to win his case and made his case a golden ticket to gain fame and experience. The last shot would be a bit of focusing Tonya's mother who also suffered from taking a family burden after her husband was imprisoned, "*The job is gone. The money is gone. His wife must now find a job to support them, and she have to beg and borrow from friends and relatives in order to survive*"(p.162). Analyzing John Grisham's *A Time to Kill* ones need to be sensitive on hidden factors laid beyond the rape and the murder. One of them is the motives of the white people who support

and go against Carl Lee Hailey, the black suspect.

REFERENCES

- Bohner, C.H. 1989. *Short Fiction: Classic and Contemporary*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. Inc.
- Forster, E.M. 1962. *Aspect of the Novel*. Harmonds Worth: Penguin.
- Grisham, John. 1989. *A Time to Kill*. Press Wynwood: Arrow edition.
- Koesnosoebroto, M.A, Basuki, S.1988. *The Anatomy of Prose Fiction*. Jakarta: Dept Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Kirzner and Mandell. 2000. *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. Forth worth: Compact Fourth Edition. USA: Harcourt College Publisher.
- Likumahua, N.A. 2001. *Sastra.. Suatu Sarana Pendidikan Informal*. Salatiga: Karya Mandiri.
- Perrine, Laurence. 1978. *Structure, Sound and Sense*. 3rd ed. USA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Roberts, E. V., Jacobs, H. E. 1989. *An Introduction to Madding and Writing*, 2nd ed. New Jersey: Precentice Hall.
- [http:// www.answers.com/topic/ racism# Racial-dicrimination](http://www.answers.com/topic/racism#Racial-dicrimination).