

READING AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HELEN KELLER'S
THE STORY OF MY LIFE

A THESIS

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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly confirms that she compiles this thesis by herself and without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3 and in diploma degree of any university. The writer ascertains also that she does not quote any material from other publications or someone's paper except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, November 2011

Desaulia Hanandita

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

I won't be impatient
I won't be greedy
I won't give up
Because everyone takes things step by step
What's wrong with falling down?
As long as I stand up again
It will be just fine...

I dedicate this simple work
For my beloved mama and babe
I do love you both

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ABSTRAK

Membaca autobiografi adalah membaca suatu peristiwa, memori dan kenangan yang dituliskan oleh pengarang tentang dirinya sendiri. Peristiwa- peristiwa tersebut lebih banyak mengabarkan tentang sebuah kebenaran subjektif daripada fakta yang sebenarnya. Itu dikarenakan pengarang sebagai subjek yang membaca masa lalunya menjadi tokoh utama dalam autobiografi. Hal ini dapat dikaji dan dibuktikan melalui beberapa aspek di dalam autobiografi.

Ruang lingkup dari tulisan ini adalah bagaimana narrator dalam menarasikan cerita dapat membangun wacana dan berbicara langsung dengan *narratee*. Pengalaman- pengalaman yang diceritakan oleh narrator, identitas yang ditampilkan dan juga peran editor di dalam pembuatan autobiografi. Adapun tujuan dari tulisan ini adalah untuk mengimplementasikan teori *Reading Autobiography* yang digunakan untuk menganalisis *The Story of My Life* yang merupakan autobiografi dari Helen Keller.

Metode yang digunakan dalam tulisan ini adalah metode penelitian kepustakaan dan metode pendekatan teori membaca autobiografi. Metode yang pertama digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data dan informasi dari sumber-sumber kepustakaan yang mendukung pembahasan. Metode yang kedua digunakan sebagai acuan utama dalam menganalisis aspek yang dominan dalam autobiografi.

Hasil dari analisis menunjukkan bahwa teknik penceritaan yang digunakan oleh pengarang sangat mengesankan, baik dalam segi penceritaan “aku”, ideologi maupun konsep yang dimiliki banyak memproyeksikan tokoh sebagai tokoh yang sempurna secara fisik. Begitu juga pengalaman yang dialami tokoh sengaja dipilhkan pengalaman yang istimewa

Selain itu, identitas yang ditampilkan oleh pengarang bertujuan mengkonstruksikan kesan dirinya sebagai pribadi yang baik kepada pembaca. Di samping itu, adanya peran John Macy sebagai editor di dalam pembuatan autobiografi adalah untuk kepentingan sosial. Hal ini dikarenakan John Macy membantu memproyeksikan Helen Keller sebagai tokoh utama yang hampir sempurna walau dengan keterbatasan fisik. Dia juga mampu membantu Helen dalam mengklarifikasi isu negatif yang berkembang pada masa itu.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Everyone has their own knowledge and interesting experience which they save in their memory. It can be good or bad based on every event that happened in their whole life. Also, they have their own style to explore their life story, such as writing diary, recording their own voice in recorder, writing poetry and even writing autobiography.

The interesting one is an autobiography. It is a work written by someone who writes her/his own life. Autobiography can be categorized as life writing or life narrative because the story of life is written in narrative. Beside that, the autobiography is a product of someone's experience. The author of autobiography tries to explore all events in life using her/his own perspective. Of course, in writing the autobiography she/he is subjective.

The most attractive autobiography for the writer is the autobiography of Helen Keller entitled *The Story of My Life*. It was written by herself in 1903. She tells much about her struggle in dealing with her limitation. This inspiring story succeeds to appeal reader's heart and is later documented in the form of film. *Deliverance*, *The Story of Helen Keller* and *The Miracle Worker* are some of the films inspired by Helen's life. *The Miracle Worker* even manages to attain Oscar Award in 1962. In Asia, *Black*, which is a title of Hindi film, is also inspired by Helen Keller's autobiography.

Because lots of appreciations are granted to her autobiography, the writer is encouraged to analyze it further using reading autobiography theory. It is interesting to analyze Helen Keller's autobiography because she wrote it in deaf and blind condition. Many positive responses from the autobiography indicate that it is a very special work because her life story has inspired people around the world.

1.2. Scope of the Study

In this thesis, the writer analyzes the autobiography of Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* using twenty tool-kits taken from the theory of reading autobiography proposed by Sidone Smith and Julia Watson.

Actually, in this thesis the writer only takes four tool-kits out of twenty. It helps the writer to analyze the autobiography of Helen Keller so the discussion will be more focus and detail. The four tool-kits chosen by the writer are the Autobiographical "I", Experience, Identity and Collaborative Autobiography. Those points of discussion are chosen by the writer because it is the most dominant aspects in this autobiography.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this writing is to analyze the autobiography of Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*. The study implements theory of reading autobiography as proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001). The other purpose is to understand the main idea in analyzing the autobiography.

1.4. Research Method

In this thesis, the writer uses two methods:

1) Library Method

The writer uses library method of research in order to collect information and theories which might support the analysis of the autobiography from Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*. Library method as Wellek and Warren states that

Since the majority of students can find their source materials in libraries, knowledge of the most important libraries, and familiarity with their catalogues as well as other reference books, is undoubtedly, in many ways, an important equipment of almost every student in literature (1977:58).

Therefore, since the background of the writer is as literature student, she studies some books and other references to help her understanding the object analysis.

2) Literary Approach

The writer uses the theory from *Reading Autobiography* by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001). Reading autobiography is a theory that "explores the building blocks and components of autobiographical act, review the histories of autobiography and autobiography criticism"(2001:xi). Then in this book, there are twenty tool-kits used to analyze the autobiography.

1.5. Organization of the Writing

In this writing, the writer divides the discussion into five chapters:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

It includes background of the study, purpose of the study, scope of the study and methodology used in this thesis.

CHAPTER II: BIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITER AND SYNOPSIS

It contains the biography of Helen Keller and John Macy as the editor of Helen's work and also the autobiography synopsis from *The Story of My Life*.

CHAPTER III: LITERARY REVIEW

It deals with the theory of Reading Autobiography proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, supported by other theorists that support the theory of autobiography.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

It presents the main analysis of the autobiography. It includes the discussion of plot, setting, narrator who represents the subject, how the author recalls his or her experience in the past, the ideology and the identity of the author, also collaborative autobiography.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

It contains the writer's conclusion which is drawn from the analysis in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR AND SYNOPSIS

2.1. Biography of the Author

2.1.1. Biography of Helen Keller

Helen Keller was born on 27 June 1880 in Tuscumbia, she was a daughter of Captain Arthur Henley Keller and Kate Adams Keller. When she was born, she was actually a normal baby just like any other babies, but in February 1882 she was ill. The doctor said that she suffered from “brain fever” and it made her lose her hearing and sight. The doctor said that although Helen would never see or hear again, she could be taught. He advised Helen’s parents to see Alexander Graham Bell who was an expert in deaf and blind children’s problem.

Alexander suggested Helen’s parents to write a letter to Mr. Anagnos, the director of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the blind. From there, Mr. Anagnos helped Helen search a teacher. Her name was Anne Sullivan. Miss Anne was very patient to teach Helen. She taught with heart and love so Helen could read and write.

On 4 November 1891, Helen sent a short story for Mr. Anagnos as his birthday gift. The title of the story is “The Frost King”, Mr. Anagnos was very happy for the gift, but soon he realized that the story was the same as “The Frost Fairies” by Margaret Canby. Mr. Anagnos was very angry and he felt that he was being fooled, and from that he ended his friendship with Helen and Miss Anne.

In 1896, Helen entered Cambridge School for Young Ladies and in the autumn of 1900 she entered Radcliffe College. She became the first deaf and blind student who entered university and had high education. When she was graduated from the college, Helen and Miss Anne had a tour around the world. She gave seminar for deaf and blind people to struggle from their illness and to trust that someday they would become successful person.

2.1.2. Biography of John Macy

John Albert Macy was born on April 17, 1877 in Detroit United States. He was famous as an editor, writer and literary critics. In 1901, John Albert Macy helped Helen write her autobiography “The Story of My Life”. John Macy met Miss Anne, then they fell in love. On May 2, 1905 at the age of 39, they were married. He was 11 years younger than she was and both of them together with Helen lived in Wrentham, Massachusetts.

When they lived together, John Macy made Helen familiarize with “new and revolutionary” point of view to think about problems that happen in the world. From this lesson, finally she became a member of Socialist Party of Massachusetts. But, this relationship did not run well, actually Miss Anne and John Macy getting deforce. Then, Miss Anne decided to accompany Helen to devote her life for deaf and blind people around the world (www.RNIB.com).

2.2. Synopsis

The Story of My Life is divided into two sections, Part I-II is narrated by Helen Keller and Part III

is narrated by John Macy as Helen's editor.

Helen Keller was born on 1880 and become a deaf and blind at her age of 19 months. She became a wild child because she could not hear and see anything so she could not understand the way to express her feeling. She just imitated other people from their fingers which are touched in her hand. She told much about her experience when she was a child, her dog, her doll-Nancy, etc. One day, her father Arthur H. Keller came to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell and asked for a teacher for Helen. After that, Miss Sullivan came and taught Helen with love and patience. Helen has many improvements in Helen; she could read, write and count. Actually she hated algebra lesson because it was difficult for her to count. The first word that she tried to spell is WATER and finally she only made the sound "wah-wah" in spelling. Then, she loved travelling and Miss Sullivan always described the scenery and all things that she saw in the journey with fingers touched in Helen's hand.

Narrator shifted into John Macy who told many about Helen Keller; about her appearances, personality, education, and letters written by Helen Keller for other people. In that chapter, there was Miss Sullivan, Helen's teacher and friend who said that Helen's letter reflected a "demonstration of her growth in thought and expression"(179).

CHAPTER III

LITERARY REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

Abrams explain about the meaning of autobiography by comparing it with private diary or journal stated as follow.

Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself. It is to be distinguished from the memoir, in which the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private diary or journal, which is a day-to-day record of the events in one's life, written for personal use and satisfaction, with little or no thought of publication. (Abrams,1999: 22).

It means that the autobiography is different from memoir and private diary or journal. Autobiography is emphasize in author's developing self and most of it is written for publication.

Although autobiography is a history of the author, it is not merely a historical record. This is because the author narrates what might be called "facts" in her/his autobiography but it is not factual. It offers more subjective "truths" than mere "facts" (Smith, 2001:10).

When the author writes series of events, explores certain period, or portraits some community, the author basically is making history of his own self. She/he also makes some rhetoric actions: to justify his own perception, maintain her/his reputation, debate other people, make some assessment, bear cultural information, and find what she/he wants for his future (Smith, 2001:10). Therefore, autobiography can be said as the attempt of self image. The narrating "I" identifies himself or herself as the narrated "I" whose story is cited. The space between narrating "I" and image object "I" can represent the view point of the author about himself or herself in the past.

According to Wolfgang Iser (1978: 69), repertoire is called "extratextual" reality that comprises many fields of life related to the text. Some of the fields can be in the form of references of social norms, of history, or of all culture where the text derives from. The fact that this reality is taken as reference leads into double implication. First, reality is not limited only to written things. Second, elements chosen for reference are not intended as replica or mere imitation.

Therefore, repertoire has two functions. First, it is to sharpen familiar patterns in creating background in communication process. Second, it is also used to prepare general outline so that the message or meaning of the text can be organized (Iser, 1978: 81).

In *The Story of My Life*, the palpable repertoire comes from the reference of author's history. The explanation of the repertoire which is referred from author's history becomes a reference of the story-base. It is embodied in the discussion of Autobiographical "I", Experience, Identity and Collaborative Autobiography[1].

3.2. The Autobiographical "I"

The autobiography or life narrative shows the presence of a narrator. The narrator speaks in her/his proper voice, uses pronoun "I" or the like, makes interpretations, observations and so on (Chatman, 1978: 34). In the autobiography, narrator "I" is the author himself or can be called as "the producer of the story". The other party of the narrative is narrative; the counterpart of the

narrator. Narratee is to whom the narrator speaks in the discourse plane.

Based on Smith and Watson (2001: 59-63) there are four categories of autobiographical "I". First, the real or historical "I" in which it is the particular "I" as historical person who lives in certain time of period and place. Second, the narrating "I" in which it is the "I" who wants to tell, or is compelled to tell, a story about himself. The voices of narrating "I" can include the "voice of publicly acknowledged authority, innocence, wonder, cynicism, suffering, victimization, and so on". Third, the narrated "I" based on Smith and Watson is stated as follows.

The narrating "I" before the paper or computer screen or the live audience is remembering and creating the story. Even in cases where the narrator tries to reproduce the sense of what that experience might have been like, through recourse to simplistic vocabulary, to truncated phrases, to sensory description, to citations from a past diary, she can only do so as the older narrator with greater knowledge, narrative experience, and linguistic competence. (2001: 61)

It means that the author tries to recall her/his memory and to present her/his life in the past with present point of view when she/he writes the autobiography. Then, the narrating "I" tries to reimage and remember all experiences of the consciousness of the narrated "I" in the past.

Fourth, the ideological "I" is an ideological concept held by individual person that represents what culture exists when the narrator tells the story. There are actually many identities culturally available to the narrator at any period of time that includes "gender, ethnicity, generation, family, sexuality, religion", etc (Smith,2001: 62).

According to Chatman (1978: 151-152), there are at least three senses of point of view which are related to narrator's voice. The first is literal or perceptual point of view which is the sense taken through someone's eyes. The example is quoted below:

It was completely covered with vines, climbing roses and honeysuckles. From the garden it looked like an arbour. The little porch was hidden from view by a screen of yellow roses and Southern smilax. It was the favorite haunt of humming birds and bees (Keller, 2000: 5).

The second is figurative or conceptual point of view, in which someone views something from his world view (ideology, conceptual system, practical interest, etc). The example is "The Bible gives me a deep, comforting sense that things seen are temporal, and things seen are temporal, and things unseen are eternal." (Keller,2000:61)

The third is transferred or interest point of view, in which someone makes a sense through his interest- vantage (profit, welfare, well- being, etc). The example is quoted as follow:

The lectures were always interesting, vivacious, witty; for the instructor, Mr. Charles Townsend Copeland, more than anyone else I have had until this year, brings before you literature in all its original freshness and power (Keller, 2000: 54).

3.3. Experiences

Experience is skill gained by doing and seeing something. The experience itself is mediated by memory and language and interpreted by the author from present point of view. The experiences occurred from either internal or external of an individual can become a base-knowledge in knowing and comprehending the world and ourselves.

In the autobiography, narrator is the reader of his/her historical experience. She/He brings the discourse of what happened to them and how to solve it (Smith, 2001: 25). Thus the experience which is written by someone in her/his autobiography is the interpretation of her/his past experience with present point of view (Smith, 2001:24).

Experience is a process of someone to be a subject who has specific identity in social life which is shaped from material, “cultural, economy and interpsychic relation”(Smith, 2001:25). Scott defines that it is not subject who has experiences but it is constructed by the experiences. In other words, society has a big role in characterizing person’s identity.

3.3.1. Experience as Discursive

Subject learns to understand themselves through language. This is because experience is a discursive, inserted in the language and knowledge produced in everyday life. The example is as follows:

For instance, through the “discourse” of medical institutions (the language, images, metaphors, and narratives through which medical institutions produce and circulate knowledge about people), persons learn to understand themselves—“experience” themselves—as “patients” in need of healing or as “diseased” or “insufficient” bodies in need of surgical intervention. This medical discourse also becomes the language through which doctors understand themselves as “scientists” or “healers.” (Smith, 2001: 25-26)

As it is quoted above, people can understand themselves through the language that they use. They become object healer of the language and are aware of what happens to them. Experiences that they get are a medium of where they can know about themselves through the situation and condition they have.

Yet, Smith and Watson also state that there are also “human experiences outside discursive narratives, like: feeling of the body, feeling of spirituality, powerful sensory memories of events and images” (2001: 26). All of them are mixed in the process named meaning-making. People are aware that they examine those events while they are experiencing it. Through their own interpretation about events that happen to them, they may express it in varied ways, like: happy, angry, hurt, passionate and so on.

3.3.2. Experience and the Reader

Somehow, the events that take place in the autobiography are always carefully chosen by the author. He communicates the content or the story to the readers because those stories of life experience narrated by the narrator are aimed to gain the “reader’s belief”. Narrator should convince the reader that the story conceives ‘truth’. Smith and Watson stated as follows.

Persuasion to belief is fundamental to the pact between narrator and reader. Appeals

to the authority of experience bring to the fore issues of trust in autobiographical narrating, since the autobiographical relationship depends on the narrator's winning and keeping the reader's trust in the plausibility of the narrated experience and the credibility of the narrator. (2001:29)

It means that the narrator has a very important role in gaining belief and keeping the trust from the reader because they can be a judge who can examine whether the experience is potent to be hoax or not.

3.4. Identity

Actions taken by the narrator in his/her autobiography involves narrator in "identifying" himself or herself to the reader. The author let him or herself to be known through "identification, implication, and differentiation" (Smith, 2001:32). The author of an autobiography often combine identity model which is changeable in narrating story (Smith, 2001:35).

Identity or "subject positioning" is a sign pointing out someone's position in a community. It is signified by some categories, like: gender, tribe, social class, generation, family, nationality and politics ideology. These have meaning as differences in organizing human experience in the material and symbolic structures (Smith, 2001: 33).

Scott (in Smith, 2001: 34) points out that identity is provisional, which means that identity may not be culturally and personally meaningful at same moment. For instance, there are many identities linked to gender, national citizenship, work status, sexuality, class location, generational location, ethnicity, and family constellation that we found in the course of a day. They may also create potential conflict among these differences. For that reason, identities can be considered as multiple and as "contextual, contested, and contingent".

Identity is discursive, which means that it is constructed, not inherited, though social conception often leads us to take identity for given or fixed (Smith, 2001: 33). The community in social life has such identities and people who live in one social system may be influenced by ideology from the community itself. It can be her or his background identities. However, it is possible that ideology can be changed at anytime when someone has interaction and gets connected with other people or other social system different from his/her original society. This is because her consciousness is able to have a dialogue process with others. M. M Bakhtin (as quoted by Smith, 2001: 34) argues that consciousness is dialogical; which implies that it is involved in "the process of social interaction". Therefore, autobiographical narrators become such identity of who they are, of "identification or differences they are assigned through the discourses that surround them".

Therefore, the people who have experience getting along with other society are able to have new ideology and even potent to change character. This is due to dialogical process is happened along the development of the way of thinking and development of the personality from that person.

3.5. Collaborative Autobiography

It is possible that autobiography is written by more than one person and that is called collaborative autobiography. The person who helps in producing life narrative can be the editor, transcriber or the interviewer (Smith, 2001:178).

Every collaborator has certain role in the project of life narrative. They assist framing the story and also giving suggestion to the author in making the autobiography. The work of collaborator does not only check spelling and linguistic error but also tries to make this project become more interesting and livelier. The collaborator must have a good capability in order to be able to transform the text from raw-text into published edition. This is very hard because it is not merely a job but also connected to strong profession of collaborator.

Collaborator can appear in the life narrative using narrator "I" too. However they can also efface their contribution and role in producing the work which is usually known by ghost writer. Actually, whatever the role, the collaborator can not have neutral position because they have some political interest or social benefits.

In conclusion, the autobiographical "I" which includes the narrating "I", narrated "I" and ideological "I" represent the author who describes his past life with present point of view. Also, experience which is experienced by the character, later can shape the identity of the character itself. Then, the explanation about collaborative autobiography describes how exciting the role of the collaborator is.

The theories mentioned above are used by the writer to analyze the autobiography of Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*. The writer chooses those theories from 20 tool-kits to have deeper analysis in this autobiography. The fourth tool-kits are chosen because the writer considers that they are the most dominant aspects in the autobiography of *The Story of My Life*.

[1] Taken up from Reading Autobiography by Sidone Smith and Julia Watson who prepare 20 tool-kits to analyze Autobiography.