



BOOK REVIEW OF KATHRYN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP*

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer says truthfully that this project is compiled by her without taking the result from any research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 Degree and in Diploma. In addition, the writer does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the reference mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, Agustus 2013

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## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

Don't worry pray about everything. Tell God what you need, thank Him for all He has done. (Philippians Ch. 4:6)

I am able to do all things through Him who gives me strength.  
(Philippians Ch. 4:13)

The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace and remain at rest. (Exodus Ch. 14:14)

*This project is dedicated to  
Jesus Christ and my beloved parents.*

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The writer realizes that this thesis is far from being perfect. Therefore, she will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this project is better. Finally, the writer expects that this thesis will be useful for all readers.

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## ABSTRAK

Project ini menganalisis tentang novel karya Kathryn Stockett yang berjudul *The Help*. Novel tersebut berisi tentang rasisme dan penjahatan secara tidak langsung oleh orang kulit putih. Di dalam *The Help* terdapat 3 tokoh yang menjadi pemeran utama yaitu Eugenia Phelan, Aibileen Clark dan Minny Jackson. Pengarang menggambarkan setting tempat di Jackson, Mississippi, pada tahun 1960-an.

Tujuan penulisan project ini untuk menjelaskan kelebihan dan kekurangan novel *The Help*. Untuk mendukung penelitian ini, penulis menggunakan unsur intrinsik novel. Kekuatan pada novel *The Help* terdapat pada tema, setting dan karakter, sedangkan kelemahannya pada bahasa dan alur cerita atau plot. Penulis mengumpulkan semua sumber data dengan buku-buku yang tersedia di perpustakaan maupun diakses melalui internet. Penulis menganjurkan untuk membaca novel tersebut, karena dari isi cerita kita dapat belajar tentang moral kehidupan yaitu pengampunan, keberanian, dan ketulusan.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.3 Background of the Writing

There are many kinds of literary works, such as poetry, prose, drama and novel. One of the most famous literary works is novel. People read novel more often than other literary works because it describes real life. According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature*, “the definition of novel is a picture of a real life and manners, and of the time in which is written” (1976: 13).

The writer chooses this novel *The Help* for her final project because this novel is interesting and contains many moral lessons. The author combines fact and fiction. The fact comes from Kathryn Stockett’s experiences of live with black people, and the fiction side is illustrated in 1960’s discrimination in Jackson, Mississippi.

We can find many moral lessons in each character. First, a strong woman who faces problem is described in Eugenia Phelan or Skeeter. Second, we learn about forgiveness in Aibeleen Clark. Finally, a brave woman is found in Minny Jackson character. We can learn and do in our life all of the positive lessons in this novel.

Other interesting thing in this novel is friendship between Eugenia Phelan or Skeeter as a white woman and Aibeleen as a black woman. Both of them are different in skin colors but Skeeter wants to be friend with Aibeleen. From their friendship Skeeter help the black maid through Skeeter’s novel.

## 1.4 The Objectives of Study

This project aims to:

- To give summary of *The Help*
- To review the strengths and the weakness of the novel

## 1.5 Biography of the writer

Kathryn Stockett was born in 1969 in Jackson, Mississippi. She was a writer and an editor. She got her undergraduate degree in English and creative writing from the University of Alabama. Stockett headed to New York City with plans to work in publishing a magazine. She spent nine years in New York, working both in magazine publishing and in marketing, before moving to Atlanta, Georgia, where she lived with her husband and daughter. Since moving back to the South, she has been focusing on writing for herself, having shifted her attention to fiction.

Amy Einhorn Books published her first novel, *The Help*, in 2009. It became one of the most popular books of the summer season. The main problem in *The Help* is the relationship between white families and the domestic servants. Black people were employed in the white's houses during the 1960s. Stockett was worried about writing the problem in a novel, because it was a controversial subject and would cause in criticism from both reviewers and from general readers.

Kathryn Stockett was growing up in Mississippi. Almost every family she knew had a black woman who worked in their house for cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the white children. This was the condition of American's life.

After she moved to the North, Stockett realized that she had grown up in a small town, and memories of her childhood were unforgettable moment. She found herself talking with other Southerners who met her in New York. Stockett told the stories about her growing up with black domestic maid. Then, those memories began to create an idea,

and she decided to write a story about her relationship with her family's maid. At the beginning of the writing process, Stockett decided to outline her story from a Black Maid's point of view (Gale: 2010).

## CHAPTER II

### SUMMARY

The story contains three main characters: Eugenia Phelan or “Skeeter”, Aibeleen Clark and Minny Jackson. The minor characters are Elizabeth Leefott and Hilly Holbrook, who are white and Skeeter’s friends. Aibeleen and Minny are black people who worked as maids in Elizabeth’s and Hilly’s house. The author takes setting in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1960 when the discrimination and racism exist.

Skeeter as a white wanted to help black people to open up the true situation in Jackson. Skeeter had a maid named Constantine who took care of her during childhood. Skeeter’s mother fired Constantine because her mother’s friend would not accept Skeeter’s mother as a leader of charity club if she still had a black maid. When Skeeter knew about it, she was angry and decided to write a novel which contained the true story of black maids in Jackson, Mississippi.

The story had begun when a woman named Eugenia Phelan or “Skeeter” had just returned to her hometown, Jackson, Mississippi, after her graduation from Ole Miss University. Skeeter came to the bridge club league in her old friend Elizabeth Leefott house. The bridge club was performed every once a month. Skeeter heard from Elizabeth that Hilly Holbrook was the most inspired woman among the society in Jackson, because Hilly was a leader in the club.

At home, Skeeter’s mother wanted her to get a boyfriend and get married. Skeeter decided to get a job, hoping her mother would not interfere her personal life anymore. While seeking for a job, she got a letter from Elaine Stein, an editor of the biggest publisher in New

York, Harper and Row. The letter contained information that Skeeter could not accept because she was lack of experience in writing. After that, she applied another job in *The Jackson Journal*, and then she was accepted as a writer for Miss Myrna's column that deals with cleaning the house.

Skeeter did not know about cleaning, so that she asked Aibileen to help her to write a cleaning article. After a very long conversation with Aibileen, she had an idea to write about a maid's life in Jackson. She told the idea to Elaine Stein, but Elaine worried about the idea because it was very risky. She decided to find the source of the stories from Aibileen. Unfortunately, Aibileen did not want to help her because Aibileen was afraid of her safety.

After some months without any significant progress in Skeeter's project, Minny, another black maid, agreed to help Skeeter. This was because Minny hated Hilly Holbrook. However, Skeeter still needed some more stories to finish the book. Aibileen had an idea to call other black maids, and they agreed to help Skeeter finishing her book.

Several months later, the book to be finally finished and would be published by Harper and Row. The maids were glad to read the book, but actually Hilly was not happy about it. She went to Skeeter's house and complained about the book. Hilly was very angry.

At first, no one bought this book. However, after the book was promoted by Skeeter in television, many people were excited to buy the books. The book became popular in Jackson. People especially the white women, who misunderstood the black, realized that it was a true story about Jackson.

At the end of the story, Skeeter was rejected by her boyfriend because of her relation with the black. She felt sad about it, but actually, she realized because she knew that the man just saw the negative point of black maids and he did not motivate her in writing the novel.

Finally, she could start a new life. Skeeter was accepted as an editor in Harper and Row and soon moved to New York. Minny has a courage to leave her abusive husband and got a comfortable job in the Foote's household. Miss Elizabeth fired Aibileen, and she got a job as a columnist to write Miss Myrna's column.

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF THE BOOK

In chapter III, the writer will discuss about the strengths and the weaknesses of *The Help*.

#### C. THE STRENGTHS

In the novel *The Help*, the writer finds some interesting points that become the strength, which are theme, characters and setting.

##### a. Theme

Theme is one of the main points in the novel. This is the definition of theme “Theme is the central idea or meaning of the story. It provides a unifying point around which plot, character, setting, point of view, symbols, and other elements of the story are organized “(Meyer,1990:196-197).

Theme becomes the strengths of *The Help*, because the reader will know the concept of discrimination and racism. There are two kinds of theme in here discrimination and racism. Actually, the theme often appears in every American novel, but the novel is different. The interesting thing is a friendship between white and black people.

The central theme in this novel includes discrimination and racism:

##### 1. Discrimination

Discrimination is does by superior people to inferior people. According to Richard T. Scafer, “discrimination is practiced commonly on the grounds of age, disability, ethnicity, origin, political belief, race, religion, sex, etc. factors which are irrelevant to person’s competence or suitability” (2000: 96).



We can see some discrimination like the white people make special toilet for black people, they eat in different place and white people live in clean and large area while Negro live in dirty and small area.. This is the quote when Skeeter knows about the Hilly plan to build a bathroom for black. “*A bill that requires every white home to have a separate bathroom for colored help.*” (Stockett. 2009: 9). Through that theme the readers know and feel the situation inside the story. This is why the author raises the theme in this novel, in order to bring the reader in the discrimination situation.

## **2. Racism**

“Racism is a doctrine of racial supremacy, stating that one race is superior to another” (Scafer. 2000: 34). The concept of racism has come in people mind reflect in this novel, which is white is superior than black.

An example of racism is that when Skeeter is rejected by her boyfriend because she helped a black maid who told the truth about what Hilly Holbrook and Elizabeth Leefott have done to them. In this situation Skeeter’s boyfriend told that it is wrong for Skeeter to help black people because Skeeter will open the bad of the white, especially that of her friends Hilly and Elizabeth. Then, it can disfigure her race, the white.

The author creates a character like Skeeter who make relation with black people, because she want to the reader know that should help each other without looking their background.

### **b. Character**

Laurence Perrine said on her book *Literature Structure, Sound, and Sense* that “reading for the character is more difficult than reading for plot. For character is much more complex, variable, and ambiguous. Anyone can repeat what a person has done

in a story, but considerable skill may be needed to describe what a person is “(1988:65).

The novel has three good characters that can be the strength of the novel. Every character has a good side that we can learn. Below the writer explains the character of each figure on this novel.

### **1. Eugenia”Skeeter” Phelan**

Skeeter as a white wants to help black maid. She is the major character and the second narrator. Skeeter is smart, friendly, kind and brave. She helped the black maids to tell the truth by writing a novel. Skeeter wants to help the black maids get their human rights. Although Elaine Stein, the publisher, doubts her writing, Skeeter does not give up. Through this character the reader get lessons which are Skeeter never give up to help black people and she fight to reach her destiny.

### **2. Aibileen Clark**

Aibileen is the first narrator, a middle age of African American who is working in Elizabeth Leefolt house, Skeeter’s best friend. She serves as the mediator between Skeeter and the other black maids needed for the project and she ask other maids to join in writing their story in the book.

*“I turn the pages a my prayer book to see who I got tonight.”*(Stockett, 2009: 22) From this quotation, we know that Aibileen is a loyal Christian, she makes a prayer list that contains the name of her friends or her family and everyday she prays for them. We can learn from Aibileen although white people hate her and her race, she tries to forgive her enemies even it is too difficult.

### **3. Minny Jackson**

She is a sassy Maid who could not keep her own mouth. She was a good friend of Aibileen. She is brave, fat, short and could not keep her job because of a sharp tongue. This is Minny words when she talked to Aibileen.

*“it’s something about that word truth. I’ve been trying to tell white woman the truth about working for them since I was fourteen years old.”* (Stockett. 2009: 129)

When she talked with Aibileen she became an honest woman. We get a lesson that although she is a woman but she is brave to tell the truth about the situation and her experiences when she worked in white woman house.

### **c. Setting**

According to William Kenny of the book *How to Analyze Fiction* “setting is divided into three parts, namely setting of place, time and environment” (1966: 54).

This is two kinds of setting to be the strengths of the novel that are:

#### **1. Setting of place**

Setting of place is “the description of place where the events happen in the story. The setting can be described in a house, market, village, city, etc “(Kenny. 1966:43). Place can be described like in the room, kitchen, dining room, basement or other place.

“Kitchen” can be one of the uniqueness of this novel because it is a place where Skeeter can meet and talk freely with black people. The reason is because the white people seldom come to the kitchen, so that black people feel free in there.

Sketter often comes to the kitchen and talk to Aibeleen, Minny or other black maids so that she gets some information about the maids: *“I walk into the kitchen, my notebook and papers under my arm. Aibeleen smiles at me from the sink, her gold tooth shining.”*(Stokett, 2009:78).

## **2. Setting of environment**

In his book *How to Analyze Fiction*, William Kenny said that “setting of environment is a description of the social status of a character or several other characters in the society around him/her, for example, high class, middle class or lower class. Setting society also describes the attitude society in a literary works such traditions, beliefs, points of view of life, ways of thinking and behavior” (1966: 39).

The novel tells that the society in this case white is very different from black. They think that blacks always to be a slave and a disgusting human. For example, Miss Leefolt wants to build bathroom for Aibileen because she think black people full of diseases, so that if they share bathroom she afraid that she will influenced the disease. This conversation above happens between Miss Leefolt and Aibileen: *“Aibileen, I have a surprise for you.” ... “Mister Leefolt and I have decided to build you your very own bathroom.”* (Stockett. 2009: 29)

This setting environment is the one of the strength because the reader will interest with the character act. The reader would be more and more curious about the next story until the reader finish the novel. Beside that, the reader knows about good and bad side of each character so they get some lesson from that.

## **D. THE WEAKNESS**

### **a. Language**

Language is used to communicate with each other. The reader should know the author's language, so that the readers understand what the author's intent. This is the definition of language:

Language are partially shaped by universal constrains on what combinations of elements occur, what historical changes occur, even on what meanings are distinguish in languages (Closs Traugott and Louise P. 1980:8).

The language in this book is rather difficult to understand because it uses a black dialect. Stockett uses a black dialect to help the readers to become a part of the story. Although all the characters used the southern dialogues, all the maids have an intense dialect and incomplete vocabularies. She tries to represent not only grammatical features of the dialect but also the phonetics feature as well. As a result, the word "going to", is represented as "gone" and sometimes as "on". She also uses "a" to represent "to" or "of" or "have". This dialect is used only the black characters and not for the white characters. "...I'm on do with the rest a my day. The rest a my life. (Stokett, 2009:11)" The word "a" in the sentence should be "of".

### **b. Plot**

Plot is "the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed and it may conclude what character says or thinks" (Perrine, 1988:41). Plot in this novel is difficult to understand because every character tells the stories that are appropriate with their point of view. Every chapter is like a puzzle, so that the reader must combine it. When the reader can combine it successfully, they can get a complete story.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

Through this analysis, we get some lessons from each character. For example, Skeeter never gives up helping black people and she fights to reach her destiny. Aibileen, although white people hate her, tries to forgive her enemies even it is too difficult. Minny is a brave woman who tells the truth about the situation and her experiences when working the house of the white.

There are two other strengths points of the novel, which are the theme and setting. The theme of discrimination opens the reader's mind that everyone has different skin color, wealth, and class. We should help each other without looking at our background. Kitchen is one of setting of place that is very comfortable for black people to have a meeting and talking. We can learn that human has bad and good side in attitude based on setting environment.

Two weaknesses in this novel are language and plot. They are difficult to understand because every character uses different point of view. However, this novel is still recommended to be read. The reader can understand the whole by combining each character's point of view to be a complete story.

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