



BOOK REVIEW ON JEFFREY EUGENIDES'

THE VIRGIN SUICIDES

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement

For S-1 Degree in Literature

In English Department, Faculty of Humanities

Diponegoro University

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SEMARANG

2015

PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer states truthfully that this project is compiled by her without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, the writer ascertains that she does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in reference.

Semarang, September 2015

Anisa Fauzia

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

No matter how long you've been at it, you always start from scratch

(Jeffrey Eugenides)

This project is dedicated to my beloved parents and my friends

for their motivation and support

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise be to Allah, who has given the writer strength and spirit to complete this “Book review of Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Virgin Suicides*”. On this occasion, the writer would like to thank all those people who have contributed to the completion of this final project.

The deepest gratitude and appreciation are extended to Mrs. Eta Farmacelia Nurulhady, S.S., M.Hum, M.A. as the writer’s advisor who has given her continuous guidance, helpful correction, moral support, advice and suggestion, without which it is doubtful that this final project comes into completion.

The writer realizes that the final project is still far from perfect. The writer, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendations to make this final project better.

Finally, the writer expects that this final project will be useful to the readers who are interested to read Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Virgin Suicides*.

Semarang, September 2015

Anisa Fauzia

TABLE OF CONTENT

TITLE.....	i
PRONOUNCEMENT.....	ii
MOTTO AND DEDICATION.....	iii
APPROVAL.....	iv
VALIDATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT.....	vii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. SUMMARY OF JEFFREY EUGENIDES' <i>THE VIRGIN SUICIDES</i>	3
3. REVIEW OF JEFFREY EUGENIDES' <i>THE VIRGIN SUICIDES</i>	4
3.1 The Strengths of <i>The Virgin Suicides</i>	4
3.1.1 Themes.....	4
3.1.1.1 Family.....	4
3.1.1.2 Suicide.....	5
3.1.2 Cover and Title.....	6
3.1.3 Point of View.....	7
3.2 The Weaknesses of <i>The Virgin Suicides</i>	8
3.2.1 Plot.....	8
3.2.2 Characterization.....	10
4. CONCLUSION.....	11
REFERENCES	
APPENDICES	

Book Review on Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*

1. Introduction

Relation between parents and teenagers is very important. Parents have big influence to develop teenagers' identity. As teenagers, they want to be more independent and decide their own way without parents' interference. Meanwhile, some of parents will not agree with teenagers' mind, they tend to be more protective to their teenagers. They will control what teenagers do and often forbid them to do what they want. It is because parents want to give the best thing for their teenagers. Although parents have a good reason why they are strict in their protection, teenagers will still feel restrained. Adolescence is a period when teenagers make their own decision, live independently and socialize with their peers. Therefore, when parents do not understand what teenagers want, there will be misunderstanding between parents and teenagers.

Relation between parents and teenagers will be going well if they can maintain communication and support each other. Parents must listen to what teenagers' want, so teenagers are willing to discuss all of their important problems to their parents which can minimize conflict that might happen between parents and teenager. Conflict that might happen is often related to family's rules. Parents who always control their teenagers will make strict rules, such as prohibiting them to have a date. If teenagers feel restrained, they might get depressed. That is what happens to the characters in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*. The novel

tells about bad relation between parents and teenagers because of dominating parents. First published in 1993, *The Virgin Suicides*, has been translated into thirteen languages and adapted into a movie by Sofia Coppola in 1999. The novel is interesting because it features emotional abuse in family that is caused by bad relation between parents and teenagers.

The Lisbons, Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon and their five daughters, are the major characters of the novel which describe the relation between parents and their teenagers. Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon think that isolation and restriction are the best ways to avoid promiscuity. In fact, it makes Lisbon girls feel restrained from the outside world, and their emotion becomes uncontrollable. At the end of the story, Lisbons' daughters Therese, Mary, Bonnie, Lux and Cecilia commit suicide to release their emotion. The description of the relation between Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon and their five daughters can give the readers reflections and important messages about family values. Those reasons make *The Virgin Suicides* chosen as the object of this study.

The purpose of this study is giving a review of *The Virgin Suicides* in its strengths and weaknesses. *The Virgin Suicides* has theme and point of view as the strengths and has plot and character as the weaknesses. From the uniqueness of *The Virgin Suicides* as a family novel, this study is entitled "Book Review of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*".

2. Summary of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*

The story of *The Virgin Suicides* was about the Lisbon family life that was narrated by a group of middle-aged men in Michigan. The story began about twenty or twenty five years earlier when the narrators, a group of middle-aged men were still young. They told all of the Lisbon family's behaviors, especially the five daughters of the Lisbon family. They collected Lisbon girl's stuffs and always watched them because they loved Lisbon girls and felt curious about Lisbon girls' death.

Lisbon girls consisted of Therese (seventeen), Mary (sixteen), Bonnie (fifteen), Lux (fourteen), and Cecilia (thirteen). The mother, Mrs. Lisbon was a Catholic who had a strict rule that forbade them to socialize with others. Mr. Lisbon, the father, was a high-school math teacher who always obeyed his wife's words. Lisbon girls had obsession with death. They committed suicide tragically, and the reason why they did it was not revealed.

Cecilia, who died by jumping from the second floor and falling on the fence, became a provocateur for all of her sisters to commit suicide. In a year after Cecilia's death, four Lisbon girls followed Cecilia's way to end their lives. Therese took sleeping pills with gin; Bonnie hung herself; Lux inhaled gasses in the car; and Mary put her head in the oven. Although Mary could be saved, she died after taking sleeping pills a month later. After the death of Lisbon girls, Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon decided to sell their house. Later on, they decided to divorce because Mr. Lisbon could not tolerate Mrs. Lisbon's strictness anymore.

3. Review of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*

The Virgin Suicides has many interesting points that is divided into two parts: the strengths and weaknesses of the novel.

3.1 The Strengths of *The Virgin Suicides*

The Virgin Suicides has themes and point of view as the strengths. Those strengths make the novel more attractive to read. The explanation of themes and point of view can be seen below.

3.1.1 Themes

According to Holman, "Theme is the control or dominating idea in a literary work..." (1980: 443). Theme has an important role in the story because theme is the main idea that constructs the story. There are some themes that dominate *The Virgin Suicides*, but family and suicide can be said as the most dominant themes in the novel.

3.1.1.1 Family

Family is one of dominant themes in *The Virgin Suicides*. The story of the novel concerns with the Lisbon family's life. The Lisbons can give the readers many reflections on how parents can misunderstand in applying family values to their teenagers. Applying family values is parents' way to prevent the teenagers from promiscuity and crime. For example, parents do not allow their teenagers to have a date, so they can concentrate in their study. Some parents are unfortunately unsuccessful in applying their family value, such as the Lisbon family. Mrs.

Lisbon's strictness is a good way to protect their daughters from promiscuity, but she makes a mistake by increasing her strictness toward her daughters. She only allows her daughters going to school and church, and she prohibits them doing all of the things that teenagers normally do. As teenagers, Lisbon girls must have a freedom to socialize with their peers. They need to get support not only from their parent, but also from their outside world.

There is another family value that is violated by the Lisbons. Mr. Lisbon does not have courage to control his wife's attitude, so Mrs. Lisbon's role is dominant in the family. She controls all of her daughters' activity and does not allow her husband to interfere with her rules. Mr. Lisbon never warns her to be gentle to their daughters. After their daughters' death, Mr. Lisbon decides to divorce because he cannot bear his wife's stubbornness anymore. In this part, the readers will learn the consequences if a mother dominates the family, and father has a passive role. Father and mother must have balanced roles, so one of them will not dominate the family.

3.1.1.2 Suicide

Suicide is another dominant theme in *The Virgin Suicides*. Suicide is the main issue that may interest the readers to read the novel. In the beginning of the story, the narrators tell about Cecilia, one of Lisbon sisters, trying cuts her wrist, and finally, she dies by jumping to the fence. A year later, her four sisters also commit suicide tragically. They cannot control their feeling anymore. In the writer

analyzing, Lisbon girls might think that suicide is a freedom to release them from their mother's strictness.

In this part, the readers will feel curious why teenagers like Lisbon girls decide to commit suicide. They can get emotional feeling of Lisbon girls who feel depressed and decide to end their lives. The readers will continue to read until the end of the story because they want to know why Lisbon girls commit suicide tragically. In the writer opinion, the readers can understand that suicide is probably a rebellion of Lisbon girls to go out from their house and live like other teenagers.

3.1.2 The Cover and Title

The readers can guess how the story will occur from the cover and the title. The unique cover and title can attract readers to read the novel. Cover of *The Virgin Suicides* shows a girl who is lying in the grass and staring to the sky. She seems hiding her sadness in her forced smile. White color dominates the cover. It might make the readers think of the relation among a picture of the girl, her expression and the background color.

What makes it make more interesting is that the writer gives title "*The Virgin Suicides*". *Virgin* is a conspicuous word in the title that attracts the readers' attention. Before the readers read the novel, they might think that *virgin* means someone who has never had sex. In the novel, *virgin* refers to the Lisbon girls who are still pure and innocent. Adding the word *suicides* makes the title more fascinating when it is combined with the word *virgin*. The readers will guess the

relation between *virgin* and *suicides*. They might interpret *The Virgin Suicides* as the pure and innocent girls who commit suicide. Therefore, the readers will consider that the title has special meaning, and the readers' interest to read the novel will increase.

In a cover is also written the author's name. Jeffrey Eugenides is the author of *The Virgin Suicides*. He was born in 1960, in Detroit, Michigan. He is an American novelist and short story writer. He graduated from Brown University in 1982 and from Stanford University in 1986. Jeffrey Eugenides began famous because of his shorter fictions, such as *Granta*, *The Yale Review* and *The Best American Short Stories*. *The Virgin Suicides* was his first novel that published in 1993. It has been translated into thirteen languages and made into a feature movie by Sofia Coppola in 1999. His second novel, *Middlesex*, released in 2002 and received The Pulitzer Prize in 2003. Eugenides also received some awards including fellowship from the Ingram-Merrill foundation in 1992, the Guggenheim foundation in 1994 and the National Endowment for the Arts in 1995.

3.1.3 The Point of View

The Virgin of Suicides uses the first person point of view. The narrators, a group of young men, mention themselves as 'we' when they narrate the story. Using 'we' as the point of view makes the novel very unique because the readers can feel as if they are parts of the story. The perspective of 'we' can make the readers act as the

narrators that always observe, love and admire Lisbon girls. The readers will follow every story's plot enthusiastically as parts of the novel's characters.

The novel brings the readers to imagine what the characters do and feel. With the chosen point of view, the novel can build the relations between the readers and the characters by taking the readers as a part of the novel indirectly. If the novel uses one of the Lisbons as the narrator, the readers may not feel curious anymore. Plot of the story might be known by the readers because the story's point is about the Lisbons life. Automatically, if the Lisbons are narrators, they will reveal all of the events that occur in their family life, and the readers can predict the story without reading *The Virgin of Suicides* until the end. With the chosen narrator and point of view, the novel always makes the readers curious about the story, so they will keep on reading.

3.2 The Weaknesses of *The Virgin Suicides*

Although *The Virgin of Suicides* has strengths the novel has some weaknesses in points, the weaknesses are the plot and characterizations.

3.2.1 Plot

The story is a flashback of the narrator's memories about Lisbon girls. Flashback plot in the novel makes the readers confused about the specific time of the story. The novel does not write the years when the narrators narrate the story. It only gives the words such as 'years later', 'so many years later' and 'years before', so the readers do not know the specific time when the story occurs. It can be seen from the narration of the story. "When we spoke to her years later, however, Mrs.

Lisbon maintained that her decision was never intended to be punitive” (Eugenides, 1993: 103). From that narration, the readers may feel confused about the specific time that character ‘we’ talks to Mrs. Lisbon.

The novel also combines past event and present even in one line. It can be seen from the narration of Lisbon family’s neighborhood boys when they see the paramedics carry Cecilia out from the house.

“Cecilia, the youngest, only thirteen, has gone first, slitting her wrists like a stoic while taking a bath...The Lisbon girls were thirteen (Cecilia), and fourteen (Lux), and fifteen (Bonnie), and sixteen (Mary), and seventeen (Therese). Mr. Lisbon taught high-school math...Only one boy had ever been allowed in the house. Peter Sissen had helped Mr. Lisbon...And then Paul Baldino told how he had stepped into the bathroom and found Cecilia, naked, her wrists oozing blood...” (Eugenides, 1993: 3-5).

The narration shows about Cecilia’s first suicide attempt. After that, the narrators introduce Lisbon family’s members and suddenly narrate about Peter Sissen who becomes the first boy visiting Lisbon’s house. Unexpectedly, the story goes back to an event before Cecilia’s suicide when Paul Baldino, one of neighborhood’s boys, visits Lisbon’s house secretly and finds Cecilia in the bathroom with bloody wrist. The readers forcedly read intensively, so they can understand the story’s plot.

Another weakness related to the plot is the unsolved mystery of the death of the Lisbon girls. From the beginning, there is a mystery about Lisbon girls’ death, so the readers will read continually to reveal it. In the writer’s opinion, when they reach the ending, they cannot find the reason why Lisbon girls commit suicide. The novel does not tell it deeper, whereas the reason of Lisbon girls’

death is an important point. It causes many questions in the readers' mind. The readers' expectation of Lisbon girls' death is not solved, and it makes them disappointed.

3.2.2 Characterizations

The major character of *The Virgin Suicides* is the Lisbon family, especially Lisbon girls. There are Therese, Mary, Bonnie, Lux and Cecilia. However, the story only focuses on Lux. The novel describes Lux's love, Lux's behavior and Lux's beauty, but it does not give additional information of the other Lisbon girls. The characters of Therese, Mary, Bonnie and Cecilia can actually be an interesting part of the novel. If their love, their behavior and other important information are provided to help the readers figure out the characteristic of the Lisbon girls not only from Lux side, but also from other Lisbon girls' side.

Another weakness is the minimum information about the minor characters. Minor characters, such as the narrators, also have an important role like the major characters. The narrators are a group of boys who have a role to narrate all of the story's events. *The Virgin Suicides* mentions some boy's names, but it does not specifically tell who are included as the narrators. This really makes the readers confused about the narrators' identities. The narrators are also unreliable because they do not accurately narrate the story. They only tell the story based on their investigations such as collecting Lisbon girls' stuffs and interviewing their neighbors. It will make the readers feel hesitate. The readers might not believe

what the narrators say, and they will begin to express their own opinion about the story.

The Virgin Suicides also forgets to tell deeper about another minor character, Miss Lynn Kilsem. Miss Lynn Kilsem as a counselor in Lisbon girls' school has an important role in helping the readers to know the reasons of Lisbon girls' suicide. When Lisbon girls meet Miss Kilsem, they look better and more enthusiastic. They could tell their problems to Miss Kilsem, and she gives them solution and support. Unfortunately, after Lisbon girls' suicide, Miss Kilsem disappears, and no one knows where about her. If the novel gives deeper information about what she has discussed with Lisbon girls and the information that she knows about Lisbon girls, the reasons of Lisbon girls' suicide might be revealed, so the readers will not feel disappointed about the ending.

4. Conclusion

The Virgin Suicides is the novel that describes bad relation between parents and teenagers. The strengths of this novel make the readers more interested to read. Themes that consist of family and suicide give the readers many reflections about the relation between parents and their teenagers. Cover and title of *The Virgin Suicides* can make the readers curious about the content of the novel. Using 'we' as the point of view also makes the novel very unique because the readers can feel as if they were parts of the story.

Although the novel has strengths that make it great, the novel has weaknesses too. *The Virgin Suicides'* plot does not mention the story time

specifically, so it makes the readers confused when the story occurs. The readers have to read with full of concentration because sometimes, the novel combines past event and present even in one line. Another weakness related to the plot is the unsolved mystery of the Lisbon girls' death. When the readers reach the ending, they cannot find the reason why Lisbon girls commit suicide, and it makes them disappointed. In addition, the story only focuses on Lux, and it does not give additional information of other Lisbon girls. The readers are confused about narrators' identities because the novel does not specifically tell the characters that are included as the narrators. *The Virgin Suicides* forgets to tell deeper about another minor characters, Miss Lynn Kilsem. If the novel gives deeper information about her, the reasons of Lisbon girls' suicide might be revealed.

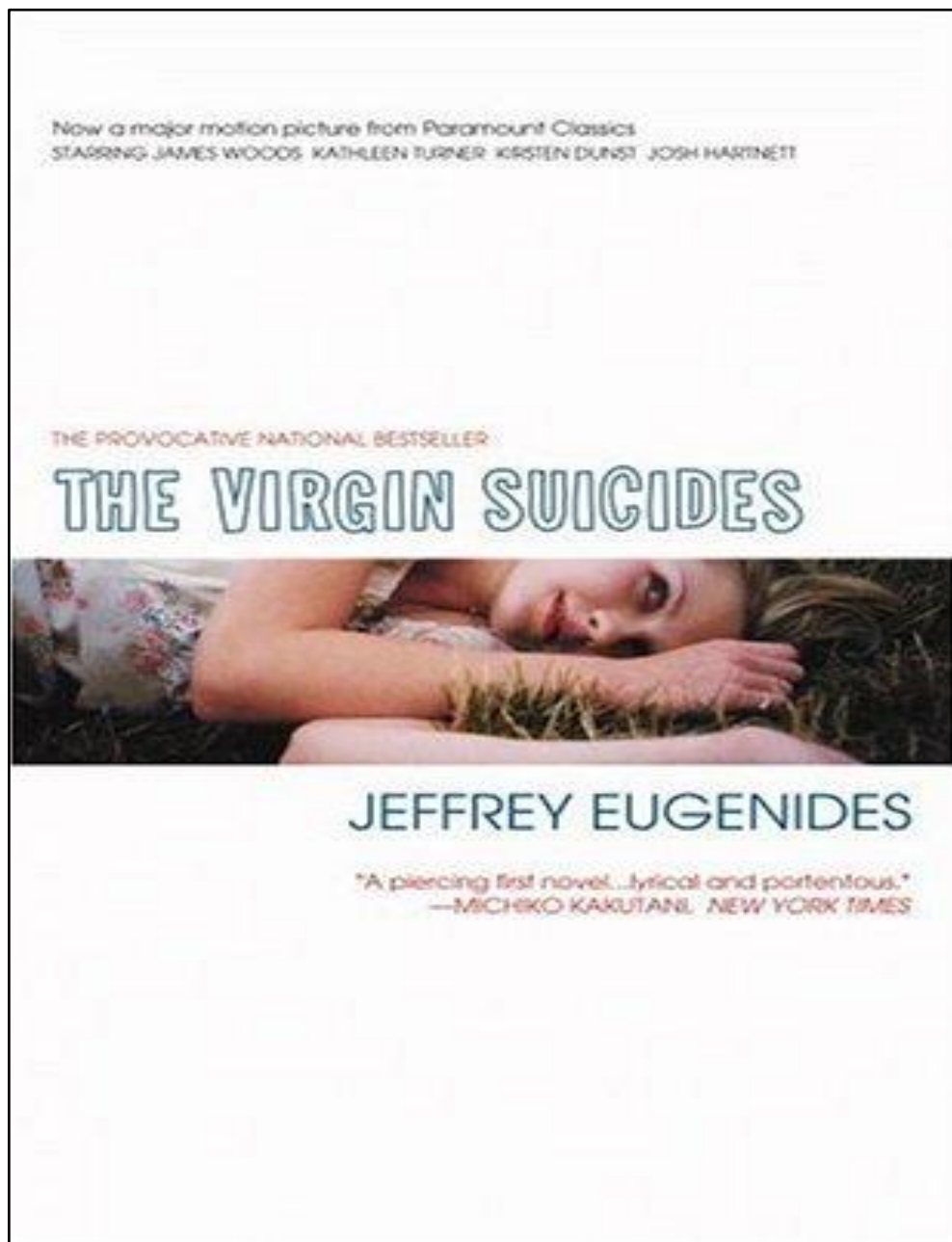
The weaknesses of *The Virgin Suicides* do not make it less interesting to read because the strengths can cover up the weaknesses by giving many important points. *The Virgin Suicides* not only connects the readers and the characters by using first-person-plural as its point of view but also gives them many reflections and messages about the relation between parents and their teenagers.

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APPENDICES

1. Cover of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*



2. Publication Details

Copyright C 1993 by Jeffrey Eugenides All rights reserved Printed in the United States of America Published simultaneously in Canada by Harper Collins Canada Ltd First edition, 1993.

A portion of this novel appeared in The Paris Review. The author wishes to thank the editors of that publication and to express gratitude for support received from the Ingram Merrill Foundation. Most of all, thanks go to Margot Frankel, for encouragement, discernment, and patience.

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