

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF
NOVEL *IF I STAY***

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1. INTRODUCTION

The writer wants to review a novel entitled *If I Stay* written by Gayle Forman (2009) as the topic of the study of his final project report to fulfill academic requirements in achieving Bachelor degree in English Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Diponegoro.

This chapter consists of three parts namely, the background of study, purposes of study, and the author's biography. The background of study relates to his reason to use this novel as the object of his final project. The purposes of study aims to review *If I Stay* novel. At last, the author's biography deals with the life of Gayle Forman as its author.

1.1. Background of Study

The novel is a genre of fiction, and fiction may be defined as the art or craft of contriving, through the written word, representations of human life that instruct or divert or both (<http://www.britannica.com/art/novel> September 6, 2015). Nowadays, most of novels tell the story of life. The writer thinks that the work of Gayle Forman may bring the reader feelings into the story, by sensing the situations described, and looking at all the events.

Gayle Forman is the famous writer with a careful depiction of characters and events. She creates characters such as Mia in the novel *If I Stay* and Mia is described in great detail by Forman. The events described by Forman could bring the reader to feel the enjoyment, nervousness, and sadness. Many famous writers recognize the ability of the writings of Gayle Forman's.

1.2. Purposes of Study

First, the writer would like to show the story of the novel *If I Stay* through a summary of the novel. The writer realizes the novel *If I Stay* is very interesting and touching story.

Second, the writer chooses *If I Stay* as the object Final Project because it has unique theme and an interesting characterization. Characters are presented by Forman that provides lessons about the importance of the meaning of life. The main character Mia, which is described very clearly, brings the reader to feel what is

felt by Mia. And do not forget the other characters is no less important in conveying the message between the lines. Theme and character would be discussed in The Strengths of the Novel.

Third, the writer would show the weaknesses of *If I Stay*, so the reader have the reference on why this novel is suitable or not as a recommended novels. Finally, the writer hope this report can be useful for the reader.

1.3. The Author's Biography

Gayle Forman was born in California, June 5, 1970. She began her career writing for *Seventeen Magazine*. Then, she became a freelance journalist for publications like *Details Magazine*, *Jae Magazine*, *Glamour Magazine*, *The Nation*, *Elle Magazine*, and *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. The worst job Gayle Forman had was as a data-entry clerk. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayle_Forman April 30, 2015)

Gayle Forman has been to sixty four countries. She used to travel a lot. In 2002, she and her husband Nick took a trip around the world. From her journeys, she garnered a wealth of experiences and information which later served as a basis for her first book a travelogue *You Can't Get There From Here: A Year On The Fringes Of A Shrinking World*. Now she lives in Brooklyn with her family.

In 2007, Forman published her first young adult novel *Sisters in Sanity* which was based on an article she had written for *Seventeen*. In 2009, Gayle Forman released *If I Stay*, about a 17-year-old girl named Mia who has been involved in a tragic car accident. Adam from *If I Stay* was inspired by her husband, Nick. Gayle Forman won the 2009 NAIBA Book of the Year Awards and is a 2010 Indie Choice Honor Award winner for *If I Stay*. The film adaptation of *If I Stay* was released in the United States on August 22, 2014. The Sequel of *If I Stay*, entitled *Where She Went*, was released in 2011. Told from Adam's point of view, the novel is about Mia's relationship after the incident.

2. SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

The story began on a cold morning. Snow covered the city of Oregon, where Mia and her family lived. Mia, Teddy (Mia's brother), and Dad (Mia's father) got day off, because of the snow. They went to visit Henry and Willow, a friend of Mia's parents, although Mia still wanted to wait for notification about Julliard School

Audition. Many things came to Mia's minds while they were on the trip, but suddenly the car accident occurred because the road condition was snowy and slippery.

Mia woke up and found that her Dad and Mom died. Then Mia looked for Teddy, and she screamed. Mia saw someone's bracelet and thought that it was Teddy. However, that person was Mia herself. Mia's body was lying and bleeding and she was wounded on the head. Mia immediately realized that she was the spirit that came out from her own body. Mia tried to rouse herself, but nothing changed. The rescuers carried Mia's body to ambulance and took her to the nearest hospital.

When Mia arrived at the hospital, her body was examined quickly. Then the paramedics brought her to the other hospital in Portland using helicopter. Many injuries occurred in Mia's body, therefore she got assisted to breathe using a tube. Mia was arrived at the hospital, they rushed to bring Mia's body to the operation room. When the surgeons were performing their duties, Mia tried to find Ted. She discovered Gran and Gramps in the waiting room. Mia (spirit) could not decide to stay without parents or to leave Ted and Adam. Mia became restless, if she wanted to get up she should have woken up from earlier.

Adam (Mia's boyfriend) appeared in hospital, because Kim (Mia's best friend) called him when he was in Portland. Adam was worried about Mia. He tried to meet Mia. He made a fuss with friends of his band and he broke through to meet Mia. However the guards managed to pull Adam out and then they met Willow (a nurse and friend of Mia's Dad). At first Mia knew that Ted might survive from the crash because Willow guarded another hospital. Seeing Willow, Mia became very restless. Mia was aware that Ted was gone. Mia scrambled, she wanted to end all things that happened. Suddenly, the condition of Mia's body was down. When the nurses and doctors brought her body back to the operating room, Mia (spirit) became hopeless and just sat in the corner of the ICU room. Willow took over the ICU room. Gran and Gramps came over the ICU room and they told many cheerful stories as long story telling. Mia (spirit) was aware of Gramps, who was crying and his tears fell to Mia's body. Gramps whispered Mia "It's okay, if you want to go. Everyone wants you stay. *I* want you to stay more than I've ever wanted anything in my life. But that's what I want and I could see why it might not be what you want. So I just tell you have to leave us. It's okay if you want to stop fighting. ". Mia was so relieved,

because now she would go without thinking. Soon, Adam came to see Mia. Adam was very restless, he muttered the words quickly but audible. Adam begged Mia not to go, but suddenly Adam rushed out from the ICU room. One by one Mia family visited her. Then it was Kim's turn, she looked very messy. Kim told Mia how crazy the day that she passed. From the beginning, she came to the commotion because Adam wanted to see Mia. Kim kissed Mia's forehead and whispered "*You still have a family*".

In the morning, the atmosphere in the ICU room was very quiet and silent. Mia was very exhausted due to many things happened. Mia heard the voice of Adam. Adam returned, he again asked Mia to keep living. Adam knew that he could not help Mia and Ted. Adam pleaded again, he was willing to go out of the band, and staying with Mia in New York. He was willing to split up and go away of Mia's life, but not to split this way. Adam put on headphones to Mia, the sound of Yo-Yo Ma played the tone of the piano and cello sound. The voice was sounded like the blood that flows. Mia imagined the memories of his life before, and imaged of life in the future, that made Mia uncomfortable. Adam cried, Mia was unconsciousness. She felt that she required a firm grip now. Mia started to feel the grip Adam. Finally, Mia heard Adam called her name "Mia".

3. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE NOVEL

3.1. Strengths of the Novel

3.1.1 Theme

Perrine (1988:90) says that the theme of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. Theme is derives from the Latin word, *thema*, a place to put a device. The theme of the novel *If I Stay* is about choices. Mia who always faces a choice, has to leave all the people she cares about or remains with the loss of her beloved family. It's hard for Mia to decide. This is an important option for Mia. However, in the end, she realizes that she must make the decision by herself.

The theme of novel *If I Stay*, gives a valuable lessons about choices in life. Therefore, novel *If I Stay* is recommended for teenagers. They are usually difficult to make choices, it can be a regular choice or that will determine the future. There are many things that affect these choices, but in the end they will make their own choice.

3.1.2 Character

According to Wellek and Warren, character consists only of the words by which it is described or into whose mouth they are put by the author (1989:286). There are some characters in Forman's novel, entitled *If I Stay*. They are Mia, Adam, and Kim. Each character has his/her own characterization, which is different from each other.

3.1.2.1 Mia

Mia Hall, the main character, is a seventeen-year-old teenager who is studying in high school. Mia lives in a small town suburb of Portland, Oregon with her parents and eight-year-old brother. She is a cello player who loves her family, friends, and boyfriend. Mia knew the world of music from her parent. Mia chooses cello as the instrument of music which she learns and elaborates. Mia is waiting for admission to the Julliard School of Music in New York.

When I announced to Mom and Dad that I was going to become a cellist, they both burst out laughing. They apologized about it later, claiming that the image of pint-size me with such a hulking instrument between my spindly legs had made them crack up. Once they'd realized I was serious, they immediately swallowed their giggles and put on supportive faces (Forman, 2009: 22).

Mia is a type of person who does not talk much to others, she is pleased to think or imagine by herself. She is very fond of his family, especially Teddy (her younger brother) she has taken care of Ted since he was born. In the past, Mia was a shy girl, it is proven at her first cello concert recital.

Standing backstage, listening to other kids play scratchy violin and clunky piano compositions, I'd almost chickened out. I'd run to the stage door and huddled on the stoop outside, hyperventilating into my hands (Forman, 2009:24).

Mia is a girl who is very attentive to the surroundings, family, friends, and boyfriend. Mia is also kind hearted, it can be seen when she thought about the fate of the driver who crashed her car. It is one of Mia's caring attitude towards people.

the crash wasn't his fault, then he was what Kim would call "a poor schmuck," in the wrong place at the wrong time. And because of his bad luck and because he was in his truck, driving eastbound on Route 27 this morning, two kids are now parentless and at least one of them is in grave condition.

How do you live with that? For a second, I have a fantasy of getting better and getting out of here and going to Mr. Dunlap's house, to relieve him of his burden, to reassure him that it's not his fault. Maybe we'd become friends (Forman, 2009:119).

Mia is like other ordinary teenagers. She found love when she was in high school. She met Adam and became his lover. Although their relationship has begun, Mia often questioned why he chose her, not the other. Mia often questioned something that is not necessarily true. When Dad joked about the exchange of the child in the hospital where Mia was born, Mia questioned whether she was real child of her Dad and Mom, or not. Mia's attitude makes her confused in making a decision.

When I first started playing the cello, Dad was still playing drums in his band, though that all started to taper off a couple years later when Teddy arrived. But right from the get-go, I could see that there was something different about playing my kind of music, something more than my parents' obvious bewilderment with my classical tastes (Forman, 2009:125).

In the relationship with Adam, Mia thought that Adam loved the woman of rock star like him. This makes Mia irritated and indecisive.

I was getting irritated now. I'd felt so brazen tonight, like the Halloween costume had imbued me with a new personality, one more worthy of Adam, of my family. I tried to explain that to him, and to my dismay, found myself near tears (Forman, 2009:100).

3.1.2.2. Adam

Adam is Mia's boyfriend. He is handsome and a guitarist of Shooting Star Band. Adam is an honest, diligent, and hard worker. He is not able to deceive Mia about the concert tickets. Adam worked two full weeks for the concert tickets.

I thought he would laugh or throw up his arm in mock surrender like he did when I beat him in an argument. But he looked straight at me, so I could see the green and browns and grays swimming around in his irises. He shook his head. "That was two weeks of pizza-delivery tips," he admitted (Forman, 2009:38).

Adam is also a romantic person, he can make Mia feel comfortable with him. Although when Mia is in emotional state because of her hesitation, Adam could calm her down.

stroking the tendrils of my hair that had escaped from the wig. "This *is* the you I like. You definitely dressed sexier and are, you know, blond, and that's different. But the you who you are tonight is the same you I was in love with yesterday, the same you I'll be in love with tomorrow. I love that you're fragile and tough, quiet and kick-ass. Hell, you're one of the punkest girls I know, no matter who you listen to or what you wear" (Forman, 2009:100).

Adam also has a tough and emotional nature. He has a strong mind. Therefore, he did not fit with Kim. Adam's emotion was peaked when he was not able to see Mia at the Hospital.

Adam treated her the way that I'd always imagined he would treat a girl like me. He was nice enough—polite, friendly, but distant. He didn't attempt to enter her world or gain her confidence. I suspected he thought she wasn't cool enough and it made me mad. After we'd been together about three months, we had a huge fight about it. (Forman, 2009:114)

Although Adam is a hard and emotional person, he is a type of person who is not easily discouraged.

Adam keeps trying and willing to do anything for the sake of Mia. He keeps thinking of ways to be able to meet Mia, who was lying in the ICU. After managing to meet Mia, he made a promise to her.

"If you stay, I'll do whatever you want. I'll quit the band, go with you to New York. But if you need me to go away, I'll do that, too. I was talking to Liz and she said maybe coming back to your old life would just be too painful, that maybe it'd be easier for you to erase us. And that would suck, but I'd do it. I can lose you like that if I don't lose you today. I'll let you go. If you stay." (Forman, 2009:231).

3.1.2.3. Kim

Kim is Mia's best friend. At the beginning, Kim and Mia were not so get along. Once they fought each other, and this made them close. They look like sisters because of their appearance and attitudes are similar. "Kim and I had always assumed that we both belonged to the latter category." (Forman, 2009:108). Kim has a hobby in photography. She is a type of person who likes to joke, even though sometimes it contains sarcasm. Kim also tries to understand Mia. However, she does not quite fit with Adam at the beginning of the story.

Kim is so the opposite of that, so droll and funny in a low-key way that she's always having to say "just kidding" to people who don't get her sarcastic sense of humor, that I cannot imagine her ever being like her mother (Forman, 2009:64).

Kim has hard and strong character. She seems strong and tough. She does not like to cry, because she believes Mia will survive. Kim is very fond of her friend, therefore she still hopes that Mia can survive on what happened to her.

"I do have a point to all this," she continues. "There are like twenty people in that waiting room right now. Some of them are related to you. Some of them are not. But we're all your family." She stops now. Leans over me so that the wisps of her hair tickle my face. She kisses me on the forehead. "*You still have a family,*" she whispers (Forman, 2009: 220).

3.1.2.4. Willow

Willow is a woman who has been close to Mia's family. She married Henry and has a small child. They often gather to have lunch together. In hospital, Willow saved Adam and Kim when they were about to be

arrested by the security guard. Willow also helped a lot when Mia's family visited her in hospital. Willow is an important person in the story, its presence is a sign that the story rises up or goes down. Willow's sudden appearance signs that something happened to Ted in another hospital.

Now Willow is here. Willow the nurse. Willow who doesn't take no for an answer is here. She'll get Adam in to see me. She'll take care of everything. *Hooray!* I want to shout. *Willow is here!* (Forman, 2009:151).

3.2. Weaknesses of the Novel

3.2.1. Point of View

Point of view includes Objective Point of View, Third Person Point of View, and First Person Point of View. In the first-person point of view, the author disappears into one of the characters, who tells the story in the first person.

Novel *If I Stay* uses a single first-person perspective in the delivering the story. From the beginning of the story, the main character opens the story in the novel. Mia as the main character tells all the events in the novel *If I Stay*. She tells the story of other figures through the memories that she raised. So it makes the reader do not know the views of other figures, though the depiction of figures by Mia herself is enough to explain.

3.2.2. Plot

Plot is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed (Perrine, 1988: 41). When it is described in isolation, the plot bears about the same relation to a story that a map does to a journey. Novel *If I Stay* uses a Parallel Plot, namely the story in the present and sometimes back to the past and so on. When Mia recalls an incident, the storyline will go backward. After that, the story goes back to the present and the plot becomes advanced. If the reader does not really understand about this flow, it is likely they will be confused about the course of the story in this novel.

4. CONCLUSION

Gayle Forman is a famous American novelist whose works are very touching. Gayle Forman got the ideas from her traveling with her husband. Novel *If I Stay* is inspired from her husband. Novel *If I Stay* is one of her best seller in New York.

Novel *If I Stay* provides lessons for the reader. The story of *If I Stay* is about the choices. A fate cannot be dodged, but we have to choose the path that will be taken. Mia shows us that it is difficult to determine a choice but we still have to select it. This novel also gives us a lesson that is something that we have today should be kept and be grateful, because we do not know what will happen in the future.

In conclusion, novel *If I Stay* is good and suitable for teenagers who are confused. Although this novel looks boring with the theme of Mia's soul, but this novel can help us to understand the meaning of a choice.

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