



BOOK REVIEW OF GAYLE FORMAN'S

I WAS HERE

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
For S-1 Degree in American Studies
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities
Diponegoro University

AldeanaRoefmelinda

13020111140146

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY

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PRONOUNCEMENT

I state truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I do not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, 3 August 2016

AldeanaRoefmelinda

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Never be satisfied easily in learning, because to have knowledge is to know true ends from false and lofty things from low”

(Aldeana R.)

“It’s never too late to make things right”

(Anonymous)

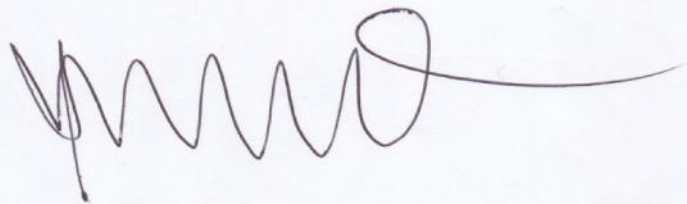
“Life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it”

(Dennis P)

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved family.

APPROVAL

Approval by
Advisor

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Hadiyanto, S.S, M. Hum
NIP. 197407252008011013

VALIDATION

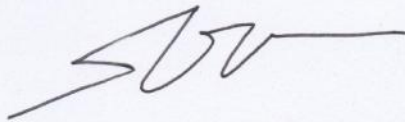
Approved by

Strata 1 Final Project Examination Committee

Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University*

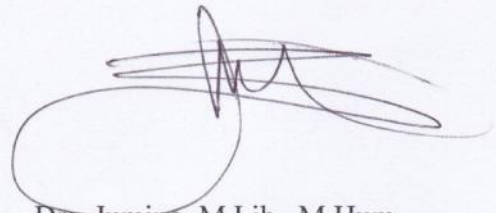
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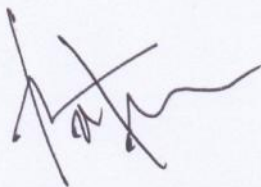
Drs. Siswo Harsono, M.Hum
NIP. 196404181990011001

First Member



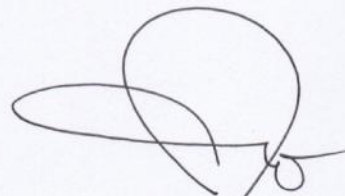
Drs. Jumino, M.Lib., M.Hum
NIP. 196207031990011001

Second Member



Arido Laksono, S.S., M.Hum
NIP. 197507111999031002

Third Member



Ayu Ida Savitri, S.S., M.Hum
NIP. 197908222008012013

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I realize that this project is still far away from perfect. Therefore, I will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this thesis better. I expect that this thesis will be useful to the readers who wish to learn something about the novel and its effect for the society.

Semarang, 3 August 2016

AldeanaRoefmelinda

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Writing

Suicide derives from Latin word *suicidium*, from *suicaedere*, ‘kill yourself’. Suicide is a deliberate act that causes death to oneself (Douglas, 2001). It is often done as a result of, for examples, despair, depression, mental disorders, bipolar disorder, alcohol dependence or drug abuse. The factors that also causes suicide include financial difficulties or problems in interpersonal relationship. Efforts to prevent suicide among other things are by limiting access to firearms, caring for mental illness and drug abuse, as well as improving economic conditions.

According to Varnik, about 800,000 to one million people die by committing suicide. It is the 10th position as the largest cause of death in the world. The suicide rate is mostly done by men than women, with the possibility of three to four times bigger (Varnik, 2012).

A perspective on suicide has been influenced by the existence of broad concepts, such as religion, honor, and the meaning of life. Traditionally, religion assumes that suicide is an act against God because they believe that life is sacred. Formerly, in most western countries, suicide or attempted suicide is a criminal act that can make person punished, but now the law is no longer valid. However, in most Islamic countries, these actions are still considered to be unlawful (Fleischmann, 2002:181-5).

Factors that affect the suicide are mental disorders, drug abuse, and psychological conditions of families, communities, and genetics. Other factors are once attempted suicide; there is an available facility for suicide or a suicide incident in the family history. For example, the rates of suicide for someone who owns guns are greater than those who do not have. Social and economic factors such as, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and discrimination can lead to suicidal thoughts. Approximately 15-40% of people who kill themselves left suicide note. Generic factors seem to be responsible for suicidal behavior by 38% to 55%. The war veterans are at greater risk of committing suicide. This is partly due to the high rates of mental illness and physical health problems related to the war.

A number of psychological states also increase the risk of suicide, such as hopelessness, loss of pleasure in life, depression, and anxiety. The lack of ability to solve problems, the loss of the ability by a person which they have ever had, and lack of impulse control also play a role. In elderly adults, the perception of being a burden to others is important.

The stress of life that occurs in the recent past, such as the loss of a family member or friends, losing a job, or social isolation (such as living alone) and people who have never married are also increasing the risk. Being religious may reduce the risk of a person to commit suicide. This is associated with a negative outlook that most religions oppose the act of suicide which is in a greater sense of attachment can be provided by

religion. Some people may want to commit suicide to escape bullying, charges, and depression as described in the novel *I Was Here* written by Gayle Forman.

In brief, this novel is chosen to be reviewed because this novel is based on true suicidal story. *I Was Here* tells about a nineteen-year old girl, Suzy, suffering from depression. She puts her trust with a suicide “support” group, which both applauds her impulse to end her life and gives her advice on how to do it. Decimated by her best friend’s death, Cody is *I Was Here*’s heroine and she is the main character of this novel.

1.2. Purpose of writing

The purposes of the writing are:

1. To describe theme of *I Was Here*
2. To describe strength and weaknesses of *I Was Here*

1.3. Gayle Forman and Her Works

Gayle Forman was born on June 5, 1970. She is an [American young-adult fiction](#) author, best known for her novel *If I Stay* which topped the [New York Times](#) best sellers list of Young Adult Fiction and was made into a [film](#) of the same name. Forman resides in [Brooklyn, New York](#) with her husband and two daughters, one of whom is adopted. At the 2010 annual [Los Angeles Times Festival of Books](#), Forman participated in panel discussions. She was on the panel “Young Adult Fiction: Teens and Turmoil” with [Jandy Nelson](#), [Cynthia Kadohata](#) and moderator [Sonya Sones](#).

Forman began her career writing for [Seventeen Magazine](#). Later she became a freelance journalist for publications like [Details Magazine](#), [Jane Magazine](#), [Glamour Magazine](#), [The Nation](#), [Elle Magazine](#), and [Cosmopolitan Magazine](#). In 2002, she and her husband Nick took a trip around the world which later served as the basis for her first book, a travelogue, *You Can't Get There From Here: A Year On The Fringes Of A Shrinking World*. In 2007, she published her first young adult novel *Sisters in Sanity* which she based on an article she had written for *Seventeen*.

In 2009, Forman released [If I Stay](#), a book about a 17-year-old girl named Mia who has been involved in a tragic car accident. The novel follows Mia's experience as she lies in a coma fully aware of what is going on around her and everything her visitors say and do.

In January 2013, Forman released *Just One Day*. The novel follows Allyson Healey, who, on the last day of a post-graduation European tour, meets a Dutch vagabond actor named Willem. The sequel to *Just One Day*, titled *Just One Year*, was released in October 2013. The final installment of Allyson and Willem's story, titled *Just One Night*, is a 50-page novella that was released in ebook format on May 29, 2014.

In January 2015, Forman released *I Was Here*, about an 18-year-old girl dealing with the sudden suicide of her best friend. Movie rights to the book were picked up by [New Line Cinema](#) one month later. Forman is

currently working on her first adult novel, titled *Leave Me* and due to be released in 2016.

2. Summary

The main character in this novel is Cody Reynolds, who acts as narrator. Cody is Meg's best friend. She works as a housekeeper around her lives – Washington. Cody had a closer relationship with Meg's parent. When Meg end herlife by drinking cleaning fluid, Meg's parents trust Cody to pick up any important stuff's Meg in Tacoma where Meg studies. When she goes to Tacoma, she finds that many things that Meg did not tell her, such as roommates, two kittens named Pete and Repeat, Meg used to take care and Ben McAllister, cynical guy that was good at playing a guitar, who make her heart broken.

Shortly, Ben and Cody became a friend that wants to solve Meg's suicide act. There is somebody who helps Meg to get a poison. Cody starts from the Meg's Laptop that Garcia's family give to her. Cody finds a website named, Final Solution. Cody had a difficult problem about finding Meg's archive. Then, Cody remember that Meg might use 'Firefly' as her username ID because Meg once tells about how lucky they were for being Firefly. Cody goes to the oldest one and finds the subject line read by Baby Steps.

In Final Solution, Meg gets a lot of responses about her Baby Steps. Meg get involved with these lunatic who preys upon vulnerable

people like Meg, encouraging them to commit suicide. One of them is All_BS as a username. The person behind that username is Bradford Smith. He is the one who helps Meg, pushes her. He is like her death mentor. He coaxes her and offers her advice. Cody spends weeks on the boards, trying to smoke him out. He is careful about it, calling via Skype on a tablet, but she is able to trace the call and from there figure out where he works and he lives.

Cody tells Ben about Bradford, and then Ben realizes the time when Meg try to tell him about the Final Solution. Ben cries in sofa and Cody calm him down by claiming that it is not his fault but Ben punches the wall until his fingers bleed. Cody means to hug him and wipe his tears, but they kissing. By that moment, Cody feels that there is something wrong to kiss and hug Ben, but Cody could not deny it; she has a different thing called love.

After Ben drive Cody to Laughlin, where Bradford lives, they sleep together in a motel and they making love. Next day, Cody going back to Washington by plane and meet Garcia's family and tells them about the report that she had been looking for, that is, Meg's death. Later on, Cody continues her life and forgetting about Meg's case.

At the end of the story, Ben miss Cody, so he decides to drive away from Tacoma to Washington for Cody. In Washington, it is not difficult for Ben to looking for Cody's house because Meg once tells him about the

city. Feeling surprise, Cody did not believe that Ben in Washington and claims himself that he loves her.

3. Review of The Novel

3.1. The Strengths of Gayle Forman's *I Was Here*

3.1.1. Major and Minor Theme

According to Dixon, theme is defined as a main idea or an underlying meaning of a literary work that may be stated directly or indirectly. There are two types of themes in this novel that appears in a literary work called major and minor themes. A major theme is an idea that a writer repeats in his work, making it the most significant idea. A minor theme refers to an idea that appears in a work briefly and gives a way to another minor theme (Dixon, 2007:4).

The major theme of *I Was Here* is about a long journey from a best friend that wants to solve a suicidal case which causes her best friend to die, Megan Louisa. Cody, as Meg's best friend, is looking for any reason about Meg's suicidal case by open Meg's laptop. Then, Cody finds that there is somebody else who affects Meg to kills herself. True friendship is when a friend always stands beside them when they need a support, life or death.

The minor theme of *I Was Here* is about the true suicide story of Suzy Gonzales. The author said that Suzy is the spark of inspiration for the fictional character of Meg, and after Meg, Cody appears as *I Was Here's*

heroine. The author could not stop thinking about Suzy and her depression. She gets a proper treatment for the condition and put her in such pain that end her life seems like the only way to relieve it.

The theme in this novel becomes its own strength because this novel teaches the importance of a friend who wants to fix the suicidal case of her best friend even she has to drive thousand miles away from home. Another moral value is that suicide does not solve any problems. The strengths of friendship in the novel is shown when they care for one another. Cody as a good friend could not understand why her best friend is dead, so Cody is going to another city to see Bradford Smith, the person who gives Meg information about how to kill herself.

At the end of the story, Meg suffers from a disease that could make her sleep all day long. Meg's mother said that a disease has been in the family through generation and the disease usually passes from the mother to her daughter. The family tries to solve Meg's problem, but it does not seem working. Besides, Meg falls in love with a guy that she cannot have, Ben McCallister. After Meg and Ben make love, Ben tells her not to disturb him. Meg feels depressed about that event and looks for any solutions to end her life until Meg joins "Final Solution", a forum that supports suicidal act.

3.1.2. Strong Character

According to Wiehardt, Character is a person in a novel. Character is the only important part to influence within the plot. The main character is someone who dominates from the beginning to the end of the story. Character is revealed by how a character responds to conflict, by his or her dialogue, and through descriptions (Wiehardt, 2016).

The main character of this novel is Cody because she is the only character that always mentioned by the author. Cody's character becomes strength because she does not give up solving her best friend's case from the beginning to the end of the story. Cody is such a nice person that devotes to her best friend by sacrificing herself to run away for thousand miles to know who the person that provokes Meg to kill herself. Cody also helps Garcia's Family in packing up all of Meg's stuff in Tacoma and taking care the kittens too. Cody is a tough, sexy girl, whom Meg loves as a friend, and she is virgin too. "Meg loved that I seemed tough and sexy, and was a virgin. And now I'm not "(Forman, 2015: 554).

Another character is Ben. Ben is such a charming prince with blue eyes that makes anyone fall in love with him. As a guitarist, he has his existence by his surroundings. Living in an urban town, western life, and wild habit makes him look like a playboy.

Ben's character also becomes strength of this novel because his kindness to help Cody by always accompanying and being Cody's hero. The responsibility of Ben's character describes how a man is supposed to

do in the real life. Ben concerns with the Meg's case because he was the only last person he has in connection with Meg.

Ben used to live in a club to perform his band and deal with night life and alcohol or drugs. Playing a role as a playboy; it is not difficult for Ben to flirt anyone because he is handsome. Being a playboy usually refers to a negative side because he will take advantage with his charm to sleep with any girls in the town. Nonetheless, Ben has his own positive side. He is such a caring person; by taking care of Meg's kittens.

“The next morning, Ben comes by the house for the cats as I'm finishing taping up the last one of the boxes. I put Pete and Repeat into their carrier, collect all their toys, and hand them over”. (Forman, 2015: 151)

Based on the quotation above, Ben is actually a nice and good man. At the beginning of the story, Forman describes Ben as a playboy and a bad person because he may be the reason why Meg died. Miscommunication between Ben and Meg brings Ben's character as a bad one. With such a character, it can be concluded that what is the outside is not always described in the inside. Everyone has his/her good things instead of his/her bad things that they may not show us.

3.1.3. The Cover of the Novel

This book covers with a piece of picture of girl, Megan Luisa Garcia, in four pieces. The cover of the novel is connected with the entire of the story so it becomes one of the strength of the novel. The first picture is Megan hugging and laughing with Cody Reynold, her best friend to

show their friendship. Another picture is Ben, with his deep blue eyes, describing his charming. The third picture is a piece of the latest email from Meg before the day she died. The last one is the picture that describes a loner girl in gray (See Appendix 1). She is also depressed with her life by doing nothing. Pictures of the novel indicate a problem that she is facing. The memories that she will never forget also appear in the cover. By showing a lot of pictures in the cover, it will make the readers guess easily about the story without curiosity in the first impression.

There is also a piece picture of a pink rose in the cover of this novel that will describe love. In Greek mythology, the pink rose means to achieve the protective right of women. Pink roses have a sense of grief at that time, which makes the pink rose is often used in the event of death. However, later by the time, the mythology will change and develop, so it can be a different meaning today. Pink rose has soft colors and synonymous identical with something feminine. These flowers can be given to women to show appreciation and elegance as well as to express feelings of love. Additionally, roses with this color also have a meaning as awe and gratitude. Therefore, the reader can easily conclude that the theme of novel is either about romance or death

3.1.4. Natural Sex Scene

Some novel has a sex scene. The author of a novel usually puts a sex scene in order to build a sweetener story. Sex scene in *I Was*

Here becomes strength of the novel because the author describes the sex scene of the main character brief and natural. The author does not represent the sex scene in detail, so the writer thinks that it is the strength of the novel. The sex scene only happens twice through the story. Though it seems so gray, readers will know why it happens naturally.

When Cody visits Ben's house in Tacoma, Cody informs him when Meg is going to kill herself. With that information, Ben realizes when Meg tries to inform Ben about that, but Ben regrets it and goes to hit the wall until his fingers bleed. Cody sits next to Ben, tries to make Ben understand if it is not his fault in tears and hug, they suddenly kiss each other as quoted below.

“Stop it! It wasn't your fault. It wasn't your fault. It wasn't your fault.” I repeat the words that I wish someone would say to me, and then suddenly we are kissing. I taste his grief and his need and his tears and my tears” (Forman, 2015: 314).

I Was Here has a tendency of a lot of sex scenes because it only contains teenagers in western culture by using kiss scene to describe love. The sex scene only happens when the moment supports it and in this novel it happens naturally. However, the novel is tucking a love story. It will not affect the interest for the reader even though there are sex scenes. The sex scene shows that humans have feeling and passion for sex.

Another sex scene appears in chapter 38. After Cody claims herself that she hates Ben before, there is always something about Ben that

makes her feel better. That is why she hates him. It is not supposed to be better and is certainly not with him. Cody likes Ben as quoted below:

“Inside our overheated room, we start to kiss. This one is as hungry as the one at his house months ago, but it’s different, too. As if we are opening ourselves to something. We kiss. My shirt falls to the floor, then Ben’s does too. The feel of his bare skin against mine is astonishing. I want more. I tug off his jeans. I unzip my skirt”. (Forman, 2015:550)

The quotation above describes that sex scene in this novel comes naturally, so that it becomes the strength of the novel. Forman uses a simple word to describe a sex scene that happens casually.

Cody, as Meg’s best friend, tempted by Ben, is a handsome guy that Cody has ever met, and then Cody loses her virginity as quoted below: “I don’t want him to stop. Though it is painful – more than I expected it to be – I’m not crying because of how much I hurt. I’m crying because of how much I feel” (Forman, 2015: 551). “There’s achiness between my legs, my virginity freshly gone” (Forman, 2015: 554).

3.2. The Weaknesses of Gayle Forman’s *I Was Here*

3.2.1. A Flashback Plot

According to Perrine, Plot is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed (Perrine, 1998). Plot of *I Was Here* makes the readers know about the past. The plot of this novel becomes one of the weaknesses because there is no connection between plot, theme, and sex scene.

The plot would be better if the sex scene is one of the factor that makes Meg depression. Betraying best friend is kind of a negative manner in the real life. So, if the plot of the novel is beginning with a sex scene between Cody and Ben, it would have a climax plot with the conclusion in the end of the story. And, the novel is connected with the plot then becomes a love affairs novel.

3.2.2. The Title of the Novel

The title is not interconnected with the story of the novel. Therefore, it becomes the weaknesses of the novel. The title *I Was Here* only appears twice, which is in the middle and the epilog of story. The term *I Was Here* means to be a term that Meg and Cody have ever visited a place then Meg writes that term in the stone. People usually write the term *I Was Here* too when visiting any lovely place or feels so means by leaving their names there. Still, the title is easy to remember and it consists of three simple words in order to attract readers. It will make the reader curious when the reader sees it for the first time.

3.2.3. The Ending of *I Was Here*

The ending is a conclusion from the climax of the story. *I Was Here* gives the reader a suspend ending. The ending of this novel becomes one of the weaknesses of the novel because the author does not explain where Cody and Ben will go. It makes the reader confused with the

decision of Cody, in the phrase “We take off walking. Toward my past. Into my future.”, the reader can interpret that she decides to live with Ben. By Cody’s decision, the reader can get upset about the character because Ben is her best friend’s lover. A true friend will not hurt his/her friend no matter what the reason is. Though, Meg is already died and everyone deserves to be happy, but Cody does not have to take a chance of it. Falling in love is never wrong, but it will go wrong if one falls in love with somebody of one’s inner circle.

4. Conclusion

I Was Here is a suicidal story based on true story. The affection of the suicidal story becomes a fiction mystery and detective story. This novel has a power to attract the readers. The strengths of the novel are theme, character, sex scene and the cover of the novel. The minor theme of suicidal act teaches the readers not to do this act even they get the same disease and problem like the true story above.

The theme of friendship, which as a major theme, teaches the reader about the importance of friends. Good friend is a friend who always accompanies the joy and sorrow. The strengths of the relationship between plot and theme make the readers follow the story so easily that as if it is real. Cody brings a strong character as a hero to solve her best friend’s suicidal though in the end she betrays her best friend by falling in love

with the same guy. The cover of the novel is also become a strength of the novel because the picture in the cover is connected with the entire of story.

I Was Here builds a good imagination about a will to sacrifice of a best friend who is in grieves. This novel gives a thought about a best friend who finally falls in love with her best friend's lover. Nowadays, there are some people who betray their best friend and it is not accepted by a friendship rule. However, everyone deserves to be free, loved, and happy. This novel is worth reading because people can take some moral values and learn some moral lessons from this novel.

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