

BOOK REVIEW *I WAS HERE* BY GAYLE FORMAN

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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.

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western countries, suicide or attempted suicide is a criminal act that can make person punished, but now the law is no longer valid.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).

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 trustCody 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 gets involved with these lunatics who prey 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.

At the end of the story, Ben misses Cody, so he decides to drive away from Tacoma to Washington for Cody. In Washington, it is not difficult for Ben to look for Cody's house because Meg once tells him about the city. Feeling surprised, Cody did not believe that Ben was 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 appear 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.

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 devoted 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.

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.

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.

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.

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*

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. 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.

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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