

**BOOK REVIEW OF *MY SISTER'S KEEPER*  
WRITTEN BY JODI PICOULT**

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**ABSTRACT**

My Sister's Keeper adalah salah satu novel karya Jodi Picoult yang mengisahkan hubungan persaudaraan dan kekeluargaan dalam hidup keluarga Fitzgerald. Tokoh utama dalam novel ini adalah Anna, gadis berusia 13 tahun. Sejak lahir dia berperan besar dalam keluarga sebagai tumpuan harapan atas kesembuhan Kate - kakak perempuannya yang mengidap leukemia. Suatu ketika, Kate mengalami gagal ginjal dan Anna diminta mendonorkan ginjal oleh ibunya. Sementara itu Kate tidak lagi mau menjalani operasi. Anna pun dilema, antara menuruti keinginan saudaranya atau orang tuanya. Hingga kisahnya pun berakhir dengan sangat tragis dan mengejutkan.

Novel ini ditulis dengan gaya imajinasi tinggi karena Picoult menggunakan alur maju mundur dimana dia selalu bermain dengan memori masa lalu dan juga pemikiran-pemikiran internal tiap tokoh. Meskipun hal ini cukup merepotkan pembaca, namun novel ini tetap menarik karena kisahnya sangat menyentuh dan tidak mudah ditebak sehingga menimbulkan rasa ingin tahu untuk terus membaca dan membaca hingga menemukan akhir ceritanya. Novel ini juga memiliki banyak pesan moral dan nilai-nilai berharga yang dapat menjadi inspirasi bagi pembaca.

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background of the Writing**

Novel has long been the favorite of both prose writers and readers. As far as we can tell from sales figures, the novel has far outdistanced the popularity of other prose forms. Broadly defined, a novel is a book-length story in prose, whose author tries to create the sense that while we read, we experience actual life (Kennedy, 1983:180)

In essence, the basic structures of the novel are similar with other forms of prose. However, the character, setting and plot of novel is more rich than the other forms of prose. There are many types of character such as protagonist, flat round, dynamic, etc. The setting is more than two places with different time, atmosphere and may be society. The plot can be simple or not, flashback, back or forward. In those points, the author creates the story freely as far as her/ his

imagination. Such as *My Sister's Keeper* written by Jodi Picoult.

The writer is interested to review this book as one of the line on the novel is very interesting as it says "Jika kau menggunakan cara yang salah secara moral untuk menyelamatkan hidup anakmu. Apakah itu menjadikanmu ibu yang buruk?"

This book contains many good values for the readers. Behind its amusing story the readers can get some moral messages that are implied in the story, such as how to be a good sibling, how to love the people we love as good as we can, how to solve the problem and make the final decision which is crucial for all, and how to control our ego.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Writing**

The main purposes of the writing are to summarize and to review *My Sister's Keeper* (Penyelamat Kakakku) novel which is written by Jodi Picoult and translated to Indonesian by. The review includes theme, character, plot, style, and technique of using irony to make an unpredictable story that proves Picoult a talented fiction author who make great imaginative stories with moral values.

### **1.3 Short Biography of the Author**

Jodi Picoult was born and raised in Lesconset, New Island, United States on 14 May 1966. As a teenager, she had a dream of becoming a great writer. She studied at Princeton University and got her degree in creative writing. She has occupied many different jobs like a

technical writer, copy writer, editor, and English teacher – before she entered Harvard University to pursue a master's in Education. In 2003, she was awarded the New England Book Award for Fiction Seller. Many awards after that comes to her. Recently, she received an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Dartmouth College in 2010 and University of New Haven in 2012.

She currently lives in Hanover, New Hampshire, with her husband and her three children. By the age of 44, there are nineteen novels of her that had been publicated. Most of her novels talk about personal relationship, family, and love. To start this book review, the writer presents the summary of the novel followed by the review as well as the strength and weakness of the novel.

## **SUMMARY**

At the beginning, Brian and Sara Fitzgerald lived peacefully with their kids, Jesse, and Kate. Catashrope came into their life. When, this family was surprised by bruises like clover on Kates's shoulders. Sara took her to the hospital to get her cured and got very surprised when hermatologist said that Kate had suffered an acute promyelocytic leukemia or APL.

Doctor said that she needs blood cells, and bone marrow donor, but no one is suitable with her not even her family. Sara then decide to get pregnant for a baby that can be genetically programmed to be a suitable donor for Kate. It was a baby girl named Anna.

Over the years, Anna has always been as a donor for her sister. She has gone through many times of injection, blood transfusion and surgery to donate her blood cells, and bone marrow for Kate to fight her APL. Unfortunately, Kate's condition is getting worse so that she gets kidney failure. Anna then was asked to donate one of her kidneys. Now, she started to balk.

Anna begins to questioning her goal of her life. How long does she have to be a donor for her sister? Being sick of spending time in the hospital during the medical procedure which was done not for her benefit and living in her sister's image. Anna decided to hire a quite famous lawyer named Campbell Alexander to sue her parents for getting a medical emancipate .

Anna's parent was surprised when they received a petition from the court about Anna's said. Sara gets very angry so that when the family realized that they need a lawyer, Sara, who is a lawyer, decided to the opponent lawyer. Sara thought that Anna is doing to get her attention as she care enough for Kate. As a mother, she believes that she can convince Anna to cancel the lawsuit. Campbell was afraid of Anna changing her mind because of the influences of her parent. He explained about Anna's condition in court and asked the court to sent Anna to live separately from her mother, Sara disagreed. As a mediator, the judge appointed guardian ad litem for Anna. Julia Romano, Campbell's ex-girlfriend when he studied in the Wheeler School is chosen, what she

must do is basically to represent the best interest of children who perhaps don't understand with decisions they take.

By this story we can see that Anna felt guilty about her decision prosecuting her parent. She did not want to hurt her family. Her father, Brian, who is aware of Anna's condition, took initiative to bring her to live with him in the fire department basecamp so that she is far from any pressure. Anna feels much better after staying there. She has good relationship with her mother and still intend to continue the trial.

In the first trial, when Brian was waiting for his turn, he suddenly got a service call because there is a school building burned. In the scene, Brian and his crews discovered interesting facts which can be used as evidence of the accident, it is a Merit cigarette. A secret investigation leads Brian to conclude that Jesse was the one who made the school burn as he found the same cigarette. Jesse cannot deny anymore the fact. He cried in the arms of his father. This incident was not reported to the police because he knew Jesse was not entirely guilty.

In the last trial, Anna witness that it was Kate who push her to refuse donating her kidney to her. Anna never have any problem to give one of her kidneys, but Kate convinced her to not to do this and got the lawyer. Kate is tired of the whole surgery and she knows it is also the best thing for her sister to stop her donating her kidney who has sacrificed a lot.

Anna and Campbell won the case. She received a medical emancipation. Unfortunately, on the way to visiting Kate in the hospital, Anna and Campbell got an accident. Their car was struck by a truck. Campbell is fine, but Anna suffered brain death, she could not be saved. Therefore, Anna's organs are donated to people who need it, mainly Kate who needs her kidney.

Long after Anna passed away, everything goes normal. Kate is alive because the kidney transplantation was successful, Jesse becomes a cop, Julia and Campbell get married, Brian and Sara are still grieved.

## **REVIEW**

"My Sister's Keeper" is one of the novels which are interesting to read. Jodi Picoult as the author of this novel shows off her ability towards the reader. She has done a great job in presenting the dilemma and conflict in this novel. She takes the conflicting issue and handles it with compassion, sensitivity, and an infinite amount of grace.

However, every literary work has the strength points and also the weakness points. I would like to give a short discussion about it.

### **3.1 The Strength**

#### **3.1.1 Theme**

Theme is the central idea or meaning of a story. It provides a unifying point around which plot, characters, setting, point of view, symbols, and other elements of the

story are organized. The statement of the theme should be responsive to the detail of the story. It must be based on evidence within the story. (Meyer, 1990:196-197)

The theme of *My Sister's Keeper* itself is siblinghood. I have never read a novel which raised siblinghood as its theme before. This book tells the story of a child who is genetically programmed and born to help her / his sibling. And the main plot of this novel is about the journey of that child, named Anna, to get medical emancipation of her body.

*My Sister's Keeper* examines what it means to be a good parent, a good sister, a good person. Is it morally correct to do whatever it takes to save a child's life, even if that means infringing upon the rights of another? Is it worth trying to discover who you really are, if that quest makes you like yourself less? Should you follow your own heart, or let others lead you? Whatever it is, there is no easy answer to this case.

The idea to create this story came up when Picoult discovered news that there is a family in America who had a baby made to save a sick brother. For Picoult, researchers and politicians are stuck in the ethical and scientific details that they forget completely we're talking about human beings with feelings, emotions, hopes and fears. And then, she began to think more deeply on siblinghood and family

dynamics and how stem cell research might cause an impact.

She believes that in the future, people will be forced to think about this issue, so we as the reader why not try first through the fiction to prepare ourself to face this controversial issue. Because this story contains good values and moral messages about family and siblinghood which are implied in the story, it is also good to be read by the reader from all age.

### **3.1.2 Character**

Character is the nature of an individual. It includes all the personality traits which make the person unique. (Podis an Podis, 1984: 291) In fictional literature, authors use many different types of characters to tell their stories. Different types of characters fulfill different roles in the narrative process.

In *My Sister's Keeper*, there are main characters. They are Anna and her mother, Sara. The protagonist is Anna. This young girl begins to question her destiny in her own family. She exists because her sister needs her. Now, her decision for getting medical emancipate is questioned right or wrong, and she enters into a dilemma and draws the people surrounding her into it.

Picoult plays nicely in moving the characters. She explores the dimensions of emotional and moral dilemma in which Anna has

been around through different perspectives from Anna itself, her parents, her brother, her attorney, her guardian.

For me, Anna is the most interesting character. Her spirit and affection to her family, especially her sister really touch my heart. This character teach me how to be a good sibling and love my family. I also have sibling but I can't act as well as what Anna did. She is really willing to help. She accepts the fact that she was born to help her sister and takes that role with all of her heart and soul. It gives me motivation to be a better sister.

Another important figure is Sara, the mother. She takes a big role in developing the story as an opponent or antagonist character. Sara is a complex character. She's not a perfect mother; she only intends to do what must be done to keep her family intact. Doing her best to be a good mother to her children, she is being too focus on Kate. The dilemma which is experienced by Anna and her mother is quite similar, choosing between what is considered right and what is morals.

### **3.1.3 Style**

Style refers to the individual traits or characteristics of a piece of witing; to a writer's particular ways of managing words that we come to recognize. (Kennedy, 1983:75)

Jodi Picoult employs a unique style in ordering each chapter. She uses first person narrator who says "I" along the story who participates in the events he recounts. All of the characters have ever been a narrator. It because in each chapter, she uses one of the characters as narrator depends on who is the character that becomes the title of the chapter.

On the first chapter, she draws on Anna as the narrator. And then, on the second chapter, she draws on Sara as the narrator. On the next chapter, she employs Campbell, Julia, Brian, Jesse and Kate as the narrator. This method tries to show the characteristic of each character, to show his / her role in developing story but still rises Anna as the main character who set the story.

This unique style in ordering chapter also makes the style and characteristic of male characters is felt so strong. By this way, Picoult was success to transcend gender line in her writing. Somehow, when the reader get into the men chapter, the atmosphere and tone will be directly formed in accordance with the typicality of the character.

More over, Picoult often uses quote from Milton, Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence at the beginning of each section for allusions to fire, flashes, and stars, as the imagery that might connect a family which is figuratively burning itself out. This is also unique.

In my opinion, this is an innovative style. Employing this style is a smart move because it makes the novel turning into an interesting novel.

#### 3.1.4 Irony

Irony is a device that reveals a reality different from what appears to be true. It may appear in fiction in three ways: in a work's language, in its incidents, or in its point of view. But in whatever form it emerges, irony always involves a contrast or discrepancy between one thing and another. The contrast between what is said and what is meant (**verbal irony**), what is expected to happen and what actually happens (**situational irony**) or between what a character believes or says and what the reader understands to be true (**dramatic irony**). (Meyer, 1990: 232-233)

Picoult uses the situational irony, it means the irony occurs when surprising details, often revealed near the end of a story, are unexpected or contradictory, makes the reader surprised, previously had no idea that this story will end tragically like these. Situational irony occurs twice in this novel, first when Anna admits that Kate who push her to refuse donating her kidney to her and to sue her own parents. Since the beginning we suspect that her refusal to donate her kidney was purely her own, but it turns out that all is requested by Kate. They played a play for the

good of each other and for the sake of their family.

*“Anna,” kata Campbell, “siapa yang meyakinkanmu?”  
Aku merasa kerdil di kursi ini, dalam keadaan ini, di planet yang sepi ini. kukaikkan kedua tanganku, didalamnya kupegang erat-erat satu-satunya emosi yang berusaha kujaga agar tidak lepas: penyesalan.  
“Kate.” (Picoult, 2010: 468)*

Second is when Brian got a call to handle a car accident. The victim is a person who never he expects at all, she is Anna. We always hope Anna gets happiness and lives normally like other teenagers after winning the court and her family finds another way to heal Kate but Anna does not survive in that accident and her kidneys are donated to Kate. Winning the court or not, it doesn't affect the destiny of Anna cause in the end she still donates her kidney.

*“Kepala Anna membentur jendela dengan keras, Mrs. Fitzgerald. Benturan itu menyebabkan luka kepala yang fatal. Respirator membuatnya tetap bernafas saat ini, tapi otaknya tidak menunjukkan tanda-tanda kehidupan---otaknya mati. Saya ikut prihatin,” kata*

*dokter. “Sungguh.” Dia tampak ragu, memandangkan lalu Sara, “Saya tahu ini sesuatu yang tidak ingin kalian pikirkan sekarang, tapi ada kesempatan yang sangat kecil... apakah kalian mau mempertimbangkan donor ginjal?” (Picoult. 2010: 512-513)*

This irony makes the plot works beautifully and unpredictable. In my opinion, I really enjoy this part when I can not presume what will happen or how is the end of the story at all. I think the author is very good in ordering the story so make the reader keep on reading curiously.

### **3.2 The Weakness**

#### **3.2.1 Plot**

Plot is the author's arrangement of incidents in a story. It is the organizing principle that controls the order of the events. A chronological arrangement begins with what happens first, the second, and so on, until the last incident is related. The component of plot is exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. (Meyer, 1990: 38, 43-44)

There are several techniques of plot: suspense, flashback, foreshadowing, and interior monologue. Picoult uses flashback from the beginning to the end of the

story. Flashback is a device useful for writers to fill in what happened earlier, a scene relived in a character's memory. (Kennedy, 1983: 9) This method has a complexity that is quite high because the author must expertly manage the memory of the series of events and figures. (Kennedy, 1983:9) The author waits until the story is moving, presenting some exciting or significant moment and then flashes back to reveal biographical data or deep psychological reasons why a character acts as she or he does. It usually focuses more on why things happen, rather than on what happens.

For the example, in the opening of the book, the reader is treated with incident where Anna sells her necklace and goes hire a lawyer to sue her parents for medical emancipation. Then in the next chapter, we are explained about past events in 1990 where Kate was diagnosed with leukemia and Sara decided to follow the program of engineered children to provide a supply of infant donor for Kate's healing.

This technique is not easy. It is quite difficult for most reader because it requires the power of memory and a deep understanding so the reader did not lose the order of the story when he / she suddenly forget certain events or data. Moreover in a particular chapter there is often a flashback in flashback, in which these chapter

recounting the past of the characters or the narrator's memory itself.

We can see it when reading the chapter of Sara or Campbell and this is enough to make our brain work hard to digest one chapter even a whole chapter. The writer admits the use of this method can also cause dizziness and even confused the reader. Sometimes when we go on to another chapter we still feel that the narrator is the narrator of the previous one, whereas they are different. At some point, somehow we will realize that we do a blunder either because the different font of letter or anything, and then our brain will try to repeat our memory or repeat some dialogues so that everything becomes clear and these needs a work hard because this book is not easy.

### 3.2.2 Style

Specific terms are carried according to the background of each character, such as a legal term "*pro bono, law review*" that brought by Campbell, and medical terms "*platelet, kateter Hickman, panel koagulopati, etc*" that brought by the doctors through Sara, or terms brought by Jesse or Brian "*pretcel, mangkuk pyrex, fase tonic, fase clonic*". But unfortunately, so many uses of these particular terms become useless because there are no explanations or footnotes that can help readers to understand what it means. There should be a footnote



about the meaning of the term. The rest, we have to find by self in the dictionary or internet and this makes the reader disturbed because the concentration will be split up on searching the meaning.

## CONCLUSION

*My Sister's Keeper* is a great novel written by Jodi Picoult containing a powerful story and message. This novel, in general, tells about the story of siblinghood and family. This novel shows how strong sibling tie affect them, Kate and Anna. How the main character, a teenager, is willing to help her sister although she has to sacrifice her normal life as a teenager.

Many social values are taught about family and siblinghood in this story. When we reach at the end of the book, we will realize that there are no easy or even right answers. There is no one can be judged for what they think, what they do is moral or ethical or even justifiable. Sometimes, you don't know what the right thing is but as a mother, a child, a lawyer, and even as a sibling; or what you really are, except you do what you think is right for you and for the others.

As a great novel, *My Sister's Keeper* has several strength and weakness inside. However, the weak points has been covered by the strong points. Therefore, the readers still can enjoy this novel so I conclude this as a good book.

Furthermore, I recommend this novel to those who has not read this novel yet. And I hope that this review will be useful for the reader.

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