

BOOK REVIEW OF ALICE SEVOLD'S "THE LOVELY BONES"

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Each human being has different life journey and experiences. In this life, sometimes there are times when people feel happiness, excitement, joy, the warmth of love, and perfection. However, there are also times when people feel the opposite, such as falling into ruin, sadness, sorrow, grief, pain and suffering. When people feel one of all those things, they need the touches of others in order to share and get through it. One of the touches that people really need is love.

Sebold's has a bitter experience about herself about rape and violence. As a victim, she knows well the feelings resulted from this experience, and it motivates her in writing her novel, *The Lovely Bones*.

The Lovely Bones is interesting to read because the reader can follow the plot, theme, and conflict inside the story easily. The story is about Susie Salmon, a girl who is raped and murdered by her neighbor. She comes to afterlife and sees everything that she wants to see. She watches how her family confronts the tragedy of her death. She also watches her murderer, her friends, and a lovely boy that she puts heart on. The police cannot find the murderer of Susie because he covers his crime as well as possible. Susie's father, who loves her so much and would do anything to get

her back in his arm, is trying to reveal the mystery of her daughter's death. This action affects the family because he cannot move on as he gives less attention to carry on his life with his family. Susie's family has to face some problems that appear after her death. One by one the problems are solved and Susie's family can understand.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to give a review of "*The Lovely Bones*", especially to describe the strengths and weaknesses of this novel through the analysis of its intrinsic elements, namely theme, plot, character and style.

2. Biography of Alice Sebold and Summary of *The Lovely Bones*

2.1. Biography of Alice Sebold

Alice Sebold was born on 6 September 1963 in Madison, Wisconsin. She spent the childhood years in suburban Philadelphia. She attended Great Valley High School in Malvern, Pennsylvania and graduated in 1980. She then registered in Syracuse University. In May 8, 1981, she was raped while walking home through a park off campus. Her attacker dragged her into a tunnel and brutally raped her. She reported the crime to the police, who took her statement and investigated, but could not identify any suspects. Some months after the accident, on October 5, 1981, while walking down a street near the Syracuse campus, she recognized her rapist.

In 1995, Sebold applied to graduate study at University of California, Irvine (UCI). While at UCI, She began writing *Lucky*, a memoir of her rape. In *Lucky*,

Sebold confronted her rape tragedy head on. She revealed how her life completely changed after the tragedy. After *Lucky*, in 2002, Sebold published the bestselling novel *The Lovely Bones* that was a surprise success when it was first published.

2.2. Summary of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*

The story begins with Susie Salmon, a fourteen-year-old girl and her own neighbor, Mr. Harvey, who rapes and murders her. When Susie comes home from the school, she takes a shortcut through a cornfield. In the middle of her walking home, Susie meets with Mr. Harvey who offers her to see something that he has already created. After they reach the destination, Mr. Harvey shows a hiding room in the ground, a secret room that is not visible from the outside. In that small room, Mr. Harvey rapes and murders Susie.

In the afterlife, Susie meets a girl named Holly. Susie and Holly becomes friend and often play together in the afterlife world. In this place, any desire that they want can appear immediately except going back to life on earth. In the afterlife, Susie can see the ongoing life on earth, and she watches her family confronts tragedy of her death. She can also see her murderer, her friends, and the boy that she loves. Her sister, Lindsey, still holds the grief but continues to stand for strong. Lindsey handles her own grief and never cries. She even goes back to school where she meets her friends and carries on her life.

When her father is alone at home, he stares at the bottle that contains a miniature boat. Then his vision recalls him back in the days when he made it. It

reminds him of his dead daughter, Susie. After that, her father loses control and breaks all the bottles in the room. Susie suddenly can show herself through broken glasses of the bottles. Although it is a quick moment, her father clearly sees Susie's face upon the broken glasses.

Susie keeps watching her family and people that she knows until she finally leaves the afterlife and goes to heaven. Her murderer disappears and the police cannot find him. From heaven, Susie sees Mr. Harvey trying to catch his next victim. Suddenly, the frozen water in a tree falls down and hits him. He loses his balance and falls down to the rocky valley. His body is covered with thick snow.

3. Review of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*

This reviews consists of the strengths and weaknesses of *The Lovely Bones*. The strengths of *The Lovely Bones* include themes, point of view, plot, and character. In the other hand, some of these strengths also become the weaknesses to this novel include one of its theme, point of view and plot. The following discussion will explain these strengths and weaknesses of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*.

3.1. The Strengths of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*

The first strength of *Lovely Bones* is the themes. There are themes of family relationship, grief, love, and death. In this novel, Sebold describes that there are some unexpected situations in life.

A struggle of love is one of the themes that appear in this novel. From the story the readers will find various kind of love. "Everyday my father got up, he can

not sleep well because thinking at me so much” (p. 270). Love from parents to their children is the greatest love ever. Parents always do anything to give what is best to their children. Moreover, they never want bad thing happen to their children. Susie’s parents love their children very much and they always love Susie eventhough she is already dead. This strong love that gives Susie’s father power in order to find the murderer of his daughter. There is also a love story from the main character, Susie who feels love toward one of her school friend, Ray. Susie loves this boy so much and Ray loves her back.

The third strength from *The Lovely Bones* is the plot. The plot of the story is forward and backward. It is because the narrator Susie Salmon is already in the afterlife and sometimes she recalls her memories in the past life. It makes the story more interesting because the plot runs on Susie’s point of view.

The last strength is the characters. Some important characters make the story more interesting. First is Susie Salmon. Susie is a good girl who is always nice to other people. Unfortunately, her kindness leads her to the death. It happens when she meets Mr. Harvey on the cornfield. “I knew he was going to kill me. I did not realize then that I was an animal already dying.” (p.191). In addition, Susie is a curious girl who wants to know everything.

The next important character is Jack Salmon, which is Susie’s father. Jack Salmon loves his family so much. This strong love makes him crumble down when he finds out that Susie is dead. He is different from his wife. His wife can let go of

Susie quickly, but he is can not. This makes the story becomes interesting because what Susie's father does actually causes conflict to his family.

The next character is Susie's sister, Lindsey Salmon. Lindsey is described as a strong, smart and brave girl. Lindsey does not cry when she finds out Susie is dead. She stays strong and then tries to find Susie's murderer. "It was Lindsey who had to deal with what Holly called the Walking Dead Syndrome-when other people see dead person and don't see you." (p.56). Lindsey is an interesting character because she becomes the center of attention by the people around her after Susie's death. Susie's case of the death makes people see Lindsey as a dead girl.

The next interesting character is Ruth Connors, one of Susie's friends in school. "I loved Ruth on those morning. We were born to keep each other company. Odd girls who had found each other in the strangest way – in the shiver she had felt when I passed." (p.79). The character of Ruth Connors becomes important because Susie's spirit connects to her. Ruth believes in ghosts and life in another world. The belief makes her obsessed with Susie's death because she sees the ghost of Susie. In addition, Ray, a boy who is loved by Susie, gets closer to Ruth. Susie watches them from time to time.

One more character that is interesting is Susie's murderer, Mr. Harvey. Mr. Harvey is a rapist and psychopath who is heartless and cold-blooded. "You aren't leaving Susie. You're mine now." (p.169). He rapes and murders Susie in the place that is secretly arranged by him. He is very neat when planning his bad action. Even when in his neighborhood he disguises as a normal good person with no wife. His

house is near the house of the Salmons. His action to bait and catch his victim is well planned. He records his victim's daily activities and makes a good plan to do his crime. After doing his action, he gets rid off and cleans the evidences from the crime scene. He also makes good alibi to cover his crime so no one know that he is the villain behind. The crime that he does contributes to the element of suspense in *The Lovely Bones*.

3.2. The Weaknesses of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*

Although *The Lovely Bones* has a number of strengths, it also some weaknesses. There are some points from the strengths that also become the weaknesses of the novel. The weakness from the strength such as, the theme of death will raise the reader faith but also can disturb the reader's belief. The following discussion will explain these weaknesses.

The first weakness is the first person point of view. By using character Susie Salmon as the narrator of the story, the reader just gets one side perception from every case in the story. The reader also will find difficulty to understand the other characters. The emotion and feeling from each character viewed from Susie's character. Moreover, the reader does not really know about emotion and feeling from the others character.

The second weakness is the story of experience by a dead person. It is somewhat hard because the reader does not really know about the afterlife, though it

is just a fictional novel. Death is a mystery of nature and some people believe in the existence of afterlife. It means they believe death is not the ending but a gate to the afterlife that is immortal.

The last weakness of *The Lovely Bones* is the jumping plot. Although this makes the novel interesting because gives another stories from the past, but this will distract the reader to follow the ongoing story. The jumping plot happens because the narrator, Susie Salmon, sometimes goes back to the memories in her past life. When Susie tells the ongoing story, suddenly she connects it to the experience or past event.

4. Conclusion

The Lovely Bones is a fiction novel that tells story of a poor girl who is raped and murdered by her neighbor. After her death, she watches the life of her family and people she knows from the afterlife.

This novel has some strengths that make it as a good reading. The strengths inside the novel are theme, point of view, plot and character. The various themes inside the story bring the reader to experience many situations and emotions. The theme of love makes the reader feel the joy and warm of love. The theme of death gives the perception of death and value of life. The first point of view makes the reader feels as the character of Susie Salmon.

The Lovely Bones is a recommended novel to read by people, especially people who love fiction novel. *The Lovely bones* build a good imagination but still

relates to the human's belief. After all, by reading this novel the readers will experience many emotions and situations that could happen in real life.

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APPENDIX

FRONT COVER OF ALICE SEBOLD'S *THE LOVELY BONES*



