

# BOOK REVIEW OF *LOVE STORY* WRITTEN BY ERICH SEGAL

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, the writer will analyze the novel *Love Story* by Erich Segal by using the intrinsic theories. The purposes of this study are to analyze the main characters and to reveal the strengths and the weaknesses of Erich Segal's *Love Story*. *Love Story* tells a romantic story of two main characters, Oliver Barret IV and Jennifer Cavileri who are from different social and culture background. Although *Love Story* has some weaknesses, the strengths of this novel make it still be recommended to be read.

**Keywords:** character, strength, weakness

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Literary works are the result of people's creation. Literary works can be novel, drama, short story, and poetry. Literary works are created by the author to entertain the reader. Through literary works one will be able to develop one's creativity. Someone can be inspired after reading a work of literature and imagine the characters in the story. One of the literary works that the writer chooses in this final project is novel. In *Theory of Literature*, Wellek and Warren say:

Another way of defining literature is to limit it to 'great books', books which, whatever their subject, are 'notable for literary form or expression'. Here the criterion is either aesthetic worth alone or aesthetic worth in combination with general intellectual distinction. Within lyric poetry, drama, and fiction, the greatest

works are selected on aesthetic grounds; other books are picked for their reputation or intellectual eminence together with aesthetic value of a rather narrow kind: style, composition, and general force of presentation are the usual characteristics singled out (Wellek and Warren, 1976: 216).

Erich Segal's *Love story* is one of the famous and legendary literary works. It is a novel about a wealthy and a clever man named Oliver Barrett IV who falls in love with a poor Italian-American girl named Jennifer Cavilleri. When they decide to get married, Oliver's father disapproves and ends his financial support. Oliver and Jennifer are working together to support their marriage. They seek for a medical help because they are unable to have a baby. However, they are informed that Jennifer is ill. Jennifer dies not long after that.

The writer has chosen this book *Love Story* because it is a romance novel as its title suggests. It is very different from such modern romance novels. It does not tell about woman and man falling in love, getting married, and having a happy ending but it is the love story between married couple and it has a sad ending. The novel also reveals the different ethnic background between the main characters.

### **1.2. The Objectives of Study**

The objectives of this final project are:

1. To analyze the main characters, Oliver Barrett IV and Jennifer Cavilleri, of Erich Segal's *Love Story*.
2. To reveal the strengths and the weaknesses of Erich Segal's *Love Story*.

### **1.3. Erich Segal and His Works**

Erich Segal was an American author who was born on June 16, 1937 and died on January 17, 2010. He was also a screenwriter, and Classics Professor. *Love Story* was his best seller novel which was published in 1970. His novel, *Love Story* was made into movie. The movie which has the same title as the novel was nominated for 7 Academy Awards and he won a Golden Globe for his screenplay. Segal was a talented man with a passion for teaching and writing. He taught Classics at Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

He also wrote musicals and songs. In December 2011 the audio and the eBook of *Love Story* were re-launched in the US. Throughout his life, Segal wrote many great novels. His major novels include *The Class*, *Doctors*, *Acts of Faith*, *Prizes*, and *Fairy Tale* (Segal, <http://www.erichsegal.com> accessed on February 24, 2015).

### **2. Summary**

The story begins when Oliver Barrett IV meets Jennifer Cavilleri at the library on the Radcliffe University. Oliver is a wealthy man majoring in Law studies. He is also clever and good at sport. Jennifer is a poor Italian-American girl and majoring in music at Radcliffe. Oliver feels that Jennifer is different from other girls and he has a feeling for this girl. Oliver has a bad relationship with his father. Jennifer sees this condition when Oliver takes her to meet his parents. Oliver's father disapproves their relationship and tells that he will end his financial support if Oliver dares to marry her. Because Oliver really loves Jennifer he decides to marry her and begins his life separating from the Barrett family. Oliver and Jennifer live by Jennifer's income as a teacher in Shady Lane School while Oliver is still in law school. Oliver's father wishes to reconcile

with Oliver by inviting Jennifer and Oliver to his birthday party, but Oliver refuses to go.

After Oliver graduates from law school, Oliver accepts a job from a law firm in New York City. Oliver and Jennifer enjoy their new wealth. Their life was a struggle at first but they can go through it. They seek for a medical help because they are unable to have a baby. However, they are informed that Jennifer is ill, she has leukemia and her life is short. Jennifer becomes so ill that she goes to the hospital. Oliver stops going to work and is at Jennifer's side every day. Oliver does anything he can to save Jennifer's life; he brings Jennifer to the hospital. The cost of Jennifer's therapy is very expensive and it is unable to afford. Oliver goes to his father and asks for five thousand dollars without telling his father about Jennifer's condition. Finally Jennifer dies in hospital not long after that. She leaves Oliver alone and makes Oliver promise that he will be strong and be merry after she has gone. When Oliver leaves the hospital after Jennifer's death, he finds his father comes in. Oliver's father has just learned of Jennifer's illness and wants to support his son. Oliver and his father are reconciled.

### **3. Review**

#### **3.1. Character**

The writer will analyze the characters of Oliver Barret IV and Jennifer Cavilleri in *Love Story*. According to *A Handbook to Literature*, the readers can understand character through a brief description contained in the novel (Thrall and Hibbard, 1960: 79). The explanation of character stated before leads the writer to analyze the characters in *Love Story*. This novel has two main characters and the author explains their background and personality, so that it is easy to be understood by the readers.

The first character is Oliver Barrett IV who is the protagonist of the novel. Oliver is the son of a very wealthy American family. His great-grandfather gives the Barret Hall to Harvard (Segal, 1970: 3). This is the quote when Jennifer reads Oliver's description in the book event of the hockey match, "Oliver Barrett IV. Ipswich, Mass. Age 20. Major: Social Studies. Dean's List: '60 '62 '63. All-ivy First Team: '62, '63. Career Aim: Law" (Segal, 1970: 4). The quotation shows that Oliver is clever and good at sport. Furthermore, Oliver is an ambitious person that can be seen in the following quotation

when Oliver asks Jennifer about the order of her musical types:

...Either way I don't come first, which for some stupid reason bothers hell out of me, having grown up with the notion that I always had to be number one. Family heritage, don't you know? (Segal, 1970: 1).

The quotation above shows that Oliver feels he should be the number one to Jennifer because he has been a number one since he was a child. There is another event that also shows that Oliver is an ambitious person. The readers can see when Oliver takes Jennifer for coffee in order to get the book that he needed (Segal, 1970: 2). Oliver does everything he can to get what he wants.

Oliver is also described as a person who really respects Jennifer. The way Oliver treats Jennifer is totally different from the other girls that Oliver ever dates. It can be seen from the following quotation:

...If you were to tell any of a dozen girls at Tower Court, Wellesley, that Oliver Barrett IV had been dating a young lady daily for three weeks and had not slept with her, they would surely have laughed and severely questioned the femininity of the girl involved. But of course the actual facts were quite different (Segal, 1970: 20).

The quotation above describes how Oliver usually does when he dates a girl.

Previously, love is not important in his relationship, it is only about sexual activity. Oliver feels that his relationship with Jennifer is quite different. However, Oliver's father disapproves and ends his financial support (Segal, 1970: 35).

Oliver is a responsible person. After leaving his father, Oliver works hard to graduate so that he can support his life with Jennifer. Oliver graduates as the top three in the Law School. Then Oliver becomes a lawyer and he gets a high salary (Segal, 1970: 57).

The second character is Jennifer Cavilleri who is also the protagonist of the novel. Jennifer introduces herself to Oliver that she is an Italian American girl and she is studying music in Radcliff University (Segal, 1970: 2). Jennifer is poor and she lives with her father because her mother died. Jennifer has a good relationship with her father who is a baker (Segal, 1970: 17).

Jennifer is described as a smart woman. It can be seen from the quotation below when Oliver tells about his own feeling to Jennifer:

Jenny was so smart that I was afraid she might laugh at what I had traditionally considered the suave romantic (and unstoppable) style of Oliver Barrett IV. I was afraid of being rejected, yes. I was also afraid of being accepted for the wrong reasons.

What I am fumbling to say is that I felt different about Jennifer, and didn't know what to say or even who to ask about it... (Segal, 1970: 20).

As stated in the quotation above, Jennifer is different from the other girls that Oliver has ever dated. Jennifer is a person who makes Oliver think twice before he wants to do something with her.

She is also described as a powerful woman. Her marriage with Oliver is not easy. She is willing to support Oliver's study as a teacher in Shady Lane School until he graduates and becomes a successful lawyer (Segal, 1970: 46). When they plan to have a baby, Jennifer is diagnosed by the doctor that she has leukemia which makes her life short (Segal, 1970: 62). After she knows that she will die soon, Jennifer refuses to go to Paris with Oliver although Paris is a place where she really wants to go (Segal, 1970: 66). Jennifer prefers to spend the rest of her life with Oliver. She also suggests to Oliver that he will be happy after she dies. Jennifer tries to be strong to face the fact that she will die soon. In the end of the story Jennifer dies and leaves Oliver alone.

The characters of Oliver Barret IV and Jennifer Cavillieri in *Love Story* are interesting. These characters are from

different background but they fall in love and get married.

### **3.2. The Strengths**

The strengths of this novel include plot, theme, conflict, and language style as follow:

#### **3.2.1. Plot**

According to Perrine, "Plot is the sequence of incident or events which the story is composed and it may conclude what character says or thinks..." (1988: 41). The plot of *Love Story* is easy to understand for the readers because it uses flash forward plot. It can be seen from the first chapter until the last chapter of the novel. Every chapter is connected and in good order. The readers can enjoy the story from beginning to end without feeling confused. Oliver Barret IV tells about his true love with Jennifer Cavillieri, his relationship problem with Jennifer and his father, and how he fights through Jennifer illness until she dies. The author also gives suspense in the story to make the readers interested and curious about the course of the story. The suspense can be seen when Jennifer is diagnosed that she has leukemia (Segal, 1970: 62). The readers wonder what will happen to Jennifer after she knows that she is sick, can she fight her sickness or not. The readers also wonder what will Oliver

does when he knows the person that he loves so much will die soon.

### 3.2.2. Theme

In *A Handbook to Literature*, Thrall and Hibbard describe:

Theme is the central or dominating idea in literary work. In non-fiction prose it may be thought of as the general topic of discussion, the subject of the discourse, the thesis. In poetry, fiction, and drama it is the abstract concept which is made concrete through its representation in person, action, and image in the work (Thrall and Hibbard, 1960: 486).

The first theme of *Love Story* is love, the same as the title. The romantic element on this novel makes it perfect. Oliver who is wealthy shows his true love to Jennifer who is poor. He expresses his feeling to Jennifer and gets married without Oliver's father agreement. Ray Stratton who is his roommate comes in Oliver's wedding ceremony and carries Oliver's wedding ring, as can be seen in the following quotation:

I finished, and there was a wonderful hush in the room. Then Ray Stratton handed me the ring, and Jenny and I-ourselves-recited the marriage vows, taking each other, from that day forward, to love and cherish, till death do us part (Segal, 1970: 43).

As stated above, Oliver and Jennifer are officially married. They show that love is strong enough to go through

their hard times. They sacrifice everything and they must support themselves financially to go on their marriage. The novel also includes a love between son and his father, as we can see at the last chapter of the novel. Oliver's father realizes that Jennifer has leukemia and Oliver borrows money for her. Finally he comes to the hospital and finds that Jennifer dies. Oliver forgives his father. After that Oliver cries in his father's arms. Oliver and his father are reconciled (Segal, 1970: 75).

The second theme of this novel is religious issue. The characters often say Christ, Jesus, and God when they have conversation in every chapter in this novel. Oliver is previously not a religious person and he does not belong to any church. After he knows that he will no longer live with Jennifer, he begins to feel the presence of God. He says,

I began to think about God. I mean, the notion of a Supreme Being existing somewhere began to creep into my private thoughts. Not because I wanted to strike Him on the face, to punch Him out for what He was about to do to me-to Jenny, that is. No, the kind of religious thoughts I had were just the opposite. Like when I woke up in the morning and Jenny was there. Still there. I'm sorry, embarrassed even, but I hoped there was a God I could say thank you to. Thank you for letting me wake up and see Jennifer (Segal, 1970: 63).

Based on the quotation above, Oliver wants to say thank you to God for the moment he has with Jennifer. Although it is embarrassing, Oliver looks for God and realizes that God is real. Oliver is not angry to God because Jennifer is sick, on the other hand he feels blessed by God. He begins to cherish the last moment he has with Jennifer.

Jennifer's father is also a religious person. He is a Catholic and he talks about Oliver's church when Oliver says he wants to marry Jennifer (Segal, 1970: 39). In addition, he has the porcelain statue of the Virgin Mary on a shelf in his dining room (Segal, 1970: 39).

In the last chapter, Jennifer and Oliver are talking about Jennifer's funeral. Jennifer says, "I told him he could have a Catholic service, you'd say okay. Okay?" (Segal, 1970: 73). From that quotation Jennifer wants a Catholic service when she dies and she already talks about it with her father. She begs Oliver to say that he wants it too.

*Love Story* is not only a novel about love but also includes religious issue. The themes of this novel can teach the readers that love will conquer all the problems and we have to learn to surrender ourselves to God.

### 3.2.3. Conflict

The writer will discuss Oliver's conflict in *Love Story*. In *Elements of Literature*, Potter states:

A story is not said to be plotted unless that cause stems from a conflict which is worked out deliberately in the story. The principal cause, that is, resides in the conflict that is the basis of the plot. The terms 'conflict' is familiar; it is the result of an opposition between at least two sides (Potter, 1967: 25).

There are two kinds of conflict that the writer will discuss, internal conflict and external conflict. The internal conflict is about Oliver and his mind. Oliver suffers because of Jennifer's illness. They consult a doctor because they want to have a baby. After that, the doctor informs that Jennifer has leukemia and instructs him not to tell Jennifer. It can be seen from the following quotation:

...Finally I realized that I couldn't just sit in this man's office forever. So I asked him what to do. I mean, what I should do. He told me to act as normal as possible for as long as possible. I thanked him and left. Normal! Normal! (Segal, 1970: 63).

Based on the quotation, the readers can see that Oliver tries to hide Jennifer's illness from her as suggested by the doctor. Oliver is sad because he knows Jennifer's condition and he has to pretend normal in front of Jennifer. When Mr. Jonas who is Oliver's boss tells Oliver to handle the case

of Robert L. Beck who is a photographer, Oliver tries to refuse it but he cannot say the reason because he is not allowed to tell anyone about Jennifer's illness (Segal, 1970: 64). Knowing the fact that Jennifer is beginning to lose her weight makes Oliver afraid to go home because only Oliver who knows the reason and notice what happen to Jennifer (Segal, 1970: 65).

Furthermore, the external conflict is about Oliver and his father. Oliver's father wants his son to live by Barret Tradition and having the name Oliver Barret IV. The numeral after his name is to mention the generation of Oliver Barret's family (Segal, 1970: 18). Oliver's father also dominates and controls Oliver's life and it is shown in the following quotation when Oliver argues with Jennifer who is in the side of Oliver's father:

...Jenny would understand that to be Oliver Barrett IV doesn't just mean living with that gray stone edifice in Harvard Yard. It involves a kind of muscular intimidation as well. I mean, the image of athletic achievement looming down on you... (Segal, 1970: 18).

As stated in the quotation above, Oliver does not like living under his father's control that makes him feels intimidated. Afterwards, his father's disagreement to his marriage makes him and Jennifer struggle to pay their debt. As Oliver's

father says to Oliver, "Marry her now, and I will not give you the time of day" (Segal, 1970: 35). The quotation shows that if Oliver dares to marry Jennifer, his father will stop calling Oliver as his son. Oliver does not give up because of the problem. He still married to Jennifer although he has to leave his father.

Oliver's conflicts that the author gives in the novel are interesting and make the readers want to read from the beginning to the end of the novel.

#### **3.2.4. Language Style**

According to *Theory of Literature*, "Language is quite literary the material of the literary artist. Every literary work, one could say, is merely a selection from a given language, just as a work of sculpture has been described as a block of marble with some pieces chipped off" (Wellek and Warren, 1976: 174). The language style that the author used to narrate *Love Story* is simple and easy to understand. The author uses modern English to narrate the story which is shown in the quotation bellow:

In the fall of my senior year, I got into the habit of studying at the Radcliffe library...The place was quiet, nobody knew me, and the reserve books were less in demand. The day before one of my history hour exams, I still hadn't gotten around to reading the first book on the list, an endemic Harvard disease. I ambled over to the reserve

desk to get one of the tomes that would bail me out on the morrow. There were two girls working there. One a tall tennis-anyone type, the other a bespectacled mouse type. I opted for Minnie Four-Eyes (Segal, 1970: 1).

The quotation above shows that the author explains the narration specifically, so it helps the readers who still learn English to enjoy reading the whole story in this novel.

### 3.3. The Weaknesses

Although *Love Story* has some strengths, it also has some weaknesses. First, this novel does not explain about Jennifer clearly. As a narrator, Oliver brings the story from the beginning to the end. It tells about Jennifer just by Oliver's narration. The story reveals about Oliver's feeling that is shown in the quotation below:

...From somewhere inside me came this devastating assault to make me cry. But I withstood. I would not cry. I would merely indicate to Jennifer-by the affirmative nodding of my head-that I would be happy to do her any favor whatsoever...I put my hand on her forearm-Christ, so thin and gave it a little squeeze...Next to I was very, very careful-of the tubes and things- as I got onto the bed with her and put my arms around her... (Segal, 1970: 74).

Based on the quotation above the readers' attentions only focus on Oliver's emotion and his reactions to events that happen around him. The readers feel only

what Oliver feels, and that is not easy for the readers to get to know the character of Jennifer.

Second, some of the dialogues in this novel are written in slang words and unclear words. The author writes the word "wouldja" instead of "would you" (Segal, 1970: 1), "yer" instead of "your", and "diya" instead of "do you" (Segal, 1970: 7). The readers can find the unclear words when Oliver meets Jennifer in Radcliffe Library, Jennifer calls Oliver as "preppie" (Segal, 1970: 1). And then Jennifer also says "tough luck" and "helluva" to Oliver in the hockey game (Segal, 1970: 3). Those words are not clear for the readers who do not know the meaning and do not familiar of those words.

Third, for the readers who are not critical, this novel may become an inappropriate novel. In this novel, the author describes Oliver's bad relationship with his father. Oliver opposes and leaves his father because of his love (Segal, 1970: 35). The readers are shown that parents' blessing is not important. It will not be suitable because it is impolite for children to oppose their parents especially in Eastern culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

*Love Story* is one of Eric Segal's great works. *Love Story* tells the story of Oliver Barret IV and Jennifer Cavillieri, two college students, who get married. They have personal struggles but they can go through all of the problems until they know that Jennifer has Leukemia, and then she dies and leaves Oliver alone.

In this final project the writer analyzes the characters of Oliver Barret IV and Jennifer Cavillieri. *Love Story* also has four strengths and three weaknesses that make it good to read. The four strong points of this novel are the plot, theme, conflict, and language style. While the weaknesses of this novel are this novel does not explain about Jennifer's clearly, dialogues in the novel are written in a slang words and unclear words, and for the readers who are not critical, *Love Story* may become an inappropriate novel.

Through this review the readers can learn that *Love Story* is different from other modern romance novel which are mostly about woman and man falling in love, getting married, and has a happy ending but it is the love story between married couple and it has a sad ending. Oliver and

Jennifer are the spirit of true love from different world. Their love which must end too soon has changed everything. This novel is still recommended to be read. The readers can enjoy the whole of the story. Moreover it can touch the reader's heart.

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