

# BOOK REVIEW ON JEFFREY EUGENIDES'

## *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES*

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### **1. Introduction**

Relation between parents and teenagers is very important. Parents have big influence to develop teenagers' identity. As teenagers, they want to be more independent and decide their own way without parents' interference. Meanwhile, some of parents will not agree with teenagers' mind, they tend to be more protective to their teenagers.

Parents must listen to what teenagers' want, so teenagers are willing to discuss all of their important problems to their parents which can minimize conflict that might happen between parents and teenager. That is what happens to the characters in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*. The novel tells about bad relation between parents and teenagers because of dominating parents.

The Lisbons, Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon and their five daughters, are the major characters of the novel which describe the relation between parents and their teenagers. Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon think that isolation and restriction are the best ways to avoid promiscuity. In fact, it makes Lisbon girls feel restrained from the outside world, and their emotion becomes uncontrollable. At the end of the story, Lisbons' daughters Therese, Mary, Bonnie, Lux and Cecilia commit suicide to release their emotion.

The purpose of this study is giving a review of *The Virgin Suicides* in its strengths and weaknesses. *The Virgin Suicides* has theme and point of view as the strengths and has plot and character as the weaknesses.

## **2. Summary of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides***

The story of *The Virgin Suicides* was about the Lisbon family life that was narrated by a group of middle-aged men in Michigan. The story began about twenty or twenty five years earlier when the narrators, a group of middle-aged men were still young. They told all of the Lisbon family's behaviors, especially the five daughters of the Lisbon family. They collected Lisbon girl's stuffs and always watched them because they loved Lisbon girls and felt curious about Lisbon girls' death.

Lisbon girls consisted of Therese (seventeen), Mary (sixteen), Bonnie (fifteen), Lux (fourteen), and Cecilia (thirteen). The mother, Mrs. Lisbon was a Catholic who had a strict rule that forbade them to socialize with others. Mr. Lisbon, the father, was a high-school math teacher who always obeyed his wife's words. Lisbon girls had obsession with death. They committed suicide tragically, and the reason why they did it was not revealed.

Cecilia, who died by jumping from the second floor and falling on the fence, became a provocateur for all of her sisters to commit suicide. In a year after Cecilia's death, four Lisbon girls followed Cecilia's way to end their lives. Therese took sleeping pills with gin; Bonnie hung herself; Lux inhaled gasses in the car; and Mary put her head in the oven. Although Mary could be saved, she died after taking sleeping pills a month later. After the death of Lisbon girls, Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon decided to sell their house. Later on, they decided to divorce because Mr. Lisbon could not tolerate Mrs. Lisbon's strictness anymore.

### **3. Review of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides***

#### **3.1 The Strengths of *The Virgin Suicides***

##### **3.1.1 Themes**

Family is one of dominant themes in *The Virgin Suicides*. The story of the novel concerns with the Lisbon family's life. The Lisbons can give the readers many reflections on how parents can misunderstand in applying family values to their teenagers. Mrs. Lisbon's strictness is a good way to protect their daughters from promiscuity, but she makes a mistake by increasing her strictness toward her daughters. She only allows her daughters going to school and church, and she prohibits them doing all of the things that teenagers normally do. There is another family value that is violated by the Lisbons. Mr. Lisbon does not have courage to control his wife's attitude, so Mrs. Lisbon's role is dominant in the family. In this part, the readers will learn the consequences if a mother dominates the family, and father has a passive role. Father and mother must have balanced roles, so one of them will not dominate the family.

##### **3.1.1.2 Suicide**

Suicide is the main issue that may interest the readers to read the novel. In the beginning of the story, the narrators tell about Cecilia, one of Lisbon sisters, trying cuts her wrist, and finally, she dies by jumping to the fence. A year later, her four sisters also commit suicide tragically. They cannot control their feeling anymore. In the writer analyzing, Lisbon girls might think that suicide is a freedom to release them from their mother's strictness. In this part, the readers will feel curious why teenagers like Lisbon girls decide to commit suicide. In the writer opinion, the readers can understand that suicide is probably a rebellion of Lisbon girls to go out from their house and live like other teenagers.

##### **3.1.2 The Cover and Title**

Cover of *The Virgin Suicides* shows a girl who is lying in the grass and staring to the sky. She seems hiding her sadness in her forced smile. White color dominates the cover. It might make the readers think of the relation among a

picture of the girl, her expression and the background color. Before the readers read the novel, they might think that *virgin* means someone who has never had sex. In the novel, *virgin* refers to the Lisbon girls who are still pure and innocent. The readers will guess the relation between *virgin* and *suicides*. They might interpret *The Virgin Suicides* as the pure and innocent girls who commit suicide. Therefore, the readers will consider that the title has special meaning, and the readers' interest to read the novel will increase. In a cover is also written the author's name. Jeffrey Eugenides is the author of *The Virgin Suicides*. He was born in 1960, in Detroit, Michigan. He is an American novelist and short story writer. The *Virgin Suicides* was his first novel that published in 1993. It has been translated into thirteen languages and made into a feature movie by Sofia Coppola in 1999. His second novel, *Middlesex*, released in 2002 and received The Pulitzer Prize in 2003.

### **3.1.3 The Point of View**

*The Virgin of Suicides* uses the first person point of view. The narrators, a group of young men, mention themselves as 'we' when they narrate the story. Using 'we' as the point of view makes the novel very unique because the readers can feel as if they are parts of the story. The novel brings the readers to imagine what the characters do and feel. With the chosen point of view, the novel can build the relations between the readers and the characters by taking the readers as a part of the novel indirectly. With the chosen narrator and point of view, the novel always makes the readers curious about the story, so they will keep on reading.

## **3.2 The Weaknesses of *The Virgin Suicides***

### **3.2.1 Plot**

The story is a flashback of the narrator's memories about Lisbon girls. Flashback plot in the novel makes the readers confused about the specific time of

the story. The novel does not write the years when the narrators narrate the story. It only gives the words such as ‘years later’, ‘so many years later’ and ‘years before’, so the readers do not know the specific time when the story occurs. The novel also combines past event and present even in one line. It can be seen from the narration of Lisbon family’s neighborhood boys when they see the paramedics carry Cecilia out from the house. Another weakness related to the plot is the unsolved mystery of the death of the Lisbon girls. From the beginning, there is a mystery about Lisbon girls’ death, so the readers will read continually to reveal it. In the writer’s opinion, when they reach the ending, they cannot find the reason why Lisbon girls commit suicide. The novel does not tell it deeper, whereas the reason of Lisbon girls’ death is an important point.

### **3.2.2 Characterizations**

The major character of *The Virgin Suicides* is the Lisbon family, especially Lisbon girls. There are Therese, Mary, Bonnie, Lux and Cecilia. However, the story only focuses on Lux. The novel describes Lux’s love, Lux’s behavior and Lux’s beauty, but it does not give additional information of the other Lisbon girls. Another weakness is the minimum information about the minor characters. Minor characters, such as the narrators, also have an important role like the major characters. The narrators are a group of boys who have a role to narrate all of the story’s events. *The Virgin Suicides* mentions some boy’s names, but it does not specifically tell who are included as the narrators. This really makes the readers confused about the narrators’ identities. *The Virgin Suicides* also forgets to tell deeper about another minor character, Miss Lynn Kilsem. Miss Lynn Kilsem as a counselor in Lisbon girls’ school has an important role in helping the readers to know the reasons of Lisbon girls’ suicide. If the novel gives deeper information about what she has discussed with Lisbon girls and the information that she knows about Lisbon girls, the reasons of Lisbon girls’ suicide might be revealed, so the readers will not feel disappointed about the ending.

#### 4. Conclusion

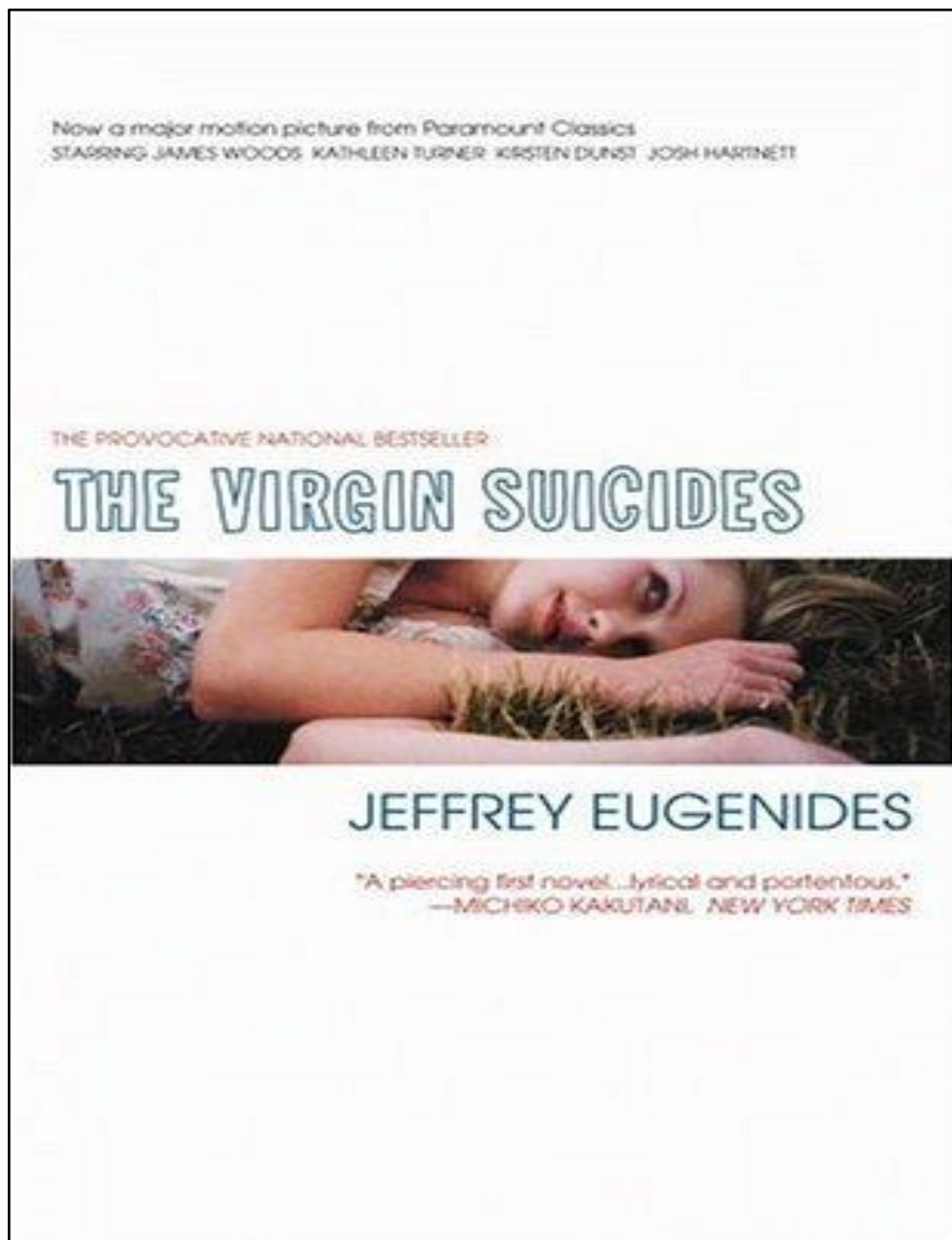
*The Virgin Suicides* is the novel that describes bad relation between parents and teenagers. The strengths of this novel make the readers more interested to read. Although the novel has strengths that make it great, the novel has weaknesses too. The weaknesses of *The Virgin Suicides* do not make it less interesting to read because the strengths can cover up the weaknesses by giving many important points. *The Virgin Suicides* not only connects the readers and the characters by using first-person-plural as its point of view but also gives them many reflections and messages about the relation between parents and their teenagers.

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## APPENDICES

### 1. Cover of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*



## **2. Publication Details**

Copyright C 1993 by Jeffrey Eugenides All rights reserved Printed in the United States of America Published simultaneously in Canada by Harper Collins Canada Ltd First edition, 1993.

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