

Book Review of Bette Greene's Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

According to Yudiono K. S (2009:40), literary criticism gives information to the readers whether a literary work is good or bad. Literary criticism can help the author to develop the quality of his/her works. One of the examples of literary criticisms is book review. Book review is an activity of analyzing the strengths and the weaknesses of a book. Book review can help digging the author's message to the readers manifested in his/her ideas, feeling, or social and cultural background in a literary work. The way the author develops his/her idea in a literary work can be shown in a theme.

The theme is used by the author to attract readers' attention. In fiction books, friendship is an interesting theme, for example, friendship in the novel *Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe*. This novel is very touching, as it explores solidarity in a friendship between Elizabeth Lambert and his friend, named Philip Hall.

The writer intends to review this book because the book is short and interesting

enough to keep readers' attention. The story of the book is also easy to understand for readers in any kind of age. The writers also enjoy the settings and the characters because they represent black people living in Arkansas. Based on this background, the writer is interested to review *Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe*.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The writer intends to review the novel and it will be limited in terms of form, picture, theme, and moral and social values. The purpose of this book review is to describe the strengths and the weaknesses of Bette Greene's *Philip Hall Likes Me. I Reckon Maybe*.

1. Review of the book

2.1 The Strengths of the book

There are four interesting points as the strengths of this novel, i.e. form, picture, theme, and moral and social values.

2.1.1. The Form

The novel has a form like a diary. It is written in an episodic plot. It makes the story more coherent and concise. It will not make the readers confused and bored when they read the book. The novel's form makes the readers know the setting of time in the novel easily because it is written clearly in the beginning of the story. It makes the readers understand when the story happens without looking for an explanation. The novel's form also makes this novel different from other novels. That is why the novel's form becomes strength in this novel.

2.1.2 The Picture

Another strength point of this novel is the picture. The pictures of the novel reflect the story of each month. The pictures are funny in black and white, but it helps the readers to imagine the characters' appearance, or the situation that happens that time. The pictures can entertain the readers, so they will not feel bored just by reading the novel with full texts from the beginning until the end of the story.

2.1.3 Theme

The theme in the novel is friendship. It can be seen in the friendship of Beth, Bonnie, and Philip. Friendship can be a very touching story because it can remind the readers that friendship has priceless value. Moreover, friendship is a relationship between two or more people that we like. It is about having a friend who is always there when we need him/her. It is all about togetherness with the person who always accompanies us in happiness or sadness. It is a picture of friendship between Beth and Bonnie. Bonnie never leaves her behind, and always supports her when she gets a problem. It can be seen when Philip decides to no longer be friend with Beth. Beth feels disappointed and lonely. However, Bonnie asks Beth to be her friend, as seen in this line:

“You promised you’d get Phil to invite me to his birthday party, didn’t you? Didn’t you promise?”

“He didn’t invite me either, “ I told her.”

“Bonnie eyes grew big and round. “But, you is his best friend.”

“No more,” I said. “I haven’t been over his farm for three days.”

“After school on Monday,” said Bonnie, “you come on over to my farm.” Suddenly she pointed a finger at my nose. “You can be my friend, OK?”

“OK,” I said. “OK.” (1974:15)

After what had happened, they become friend until they make their own gang, named ‘The Pretty Pennies’. It shows that friendship between Beth and Bonnie is

priceless, because they have a deep connection that makes their relationship strong and special.

Second is the friendship between Beth and Philip. From the friendship between Beth and Philip, it can be seen when they are confronting and resolving problems together. They have a unique friendship. Even though Beth and Philip have a fight because of misunderstanding, but they still help each other sincerely because they realize that their friendship is more important than anything. As shown, when Beth tries to solve the mystery of her father's turkeys that are missing, Philip helps her. Philip helps Beth by staying around Beth's farm; he tries to catch the thieves of turkeys of Beth's father. It is proven in the following quotation.

“When he reached my tree, he handed up his flashlight and his battered BB gun for me to hold until he seated himself into the Y-shaped branch opposite mine. “Your pa’s turkeys are going to sleep tight tonight,” he said, patting the barrel of his gun.” “Cause I’m a-going to shoot anything that moves.” (1974:28)

Not only Philip helps Beth, but Beth also helps Philip. When Philip climbs the mountain, he falls against a rock because of a branch tripped him. It makes his foot half crippled, then, Beth helps Philip to go down. She said that:

“I’m going to be it. So just flop your arm around my neck and lean on me.” And we started out, with him raising his bad left foot slightly off the ground. “One good step, one bad step, one good step, one...” (1974:106)

From the explanation above, the friendship between Beth and Philip is valuable because it can inspire the readers to help each other.

2.1.4 The Moral and Social Values

This story has several values; that are moral value and social value. The first

one is moral value. Moral value is people's principle to make judgement between right and wrong of a behavior. Moral value can be seen from the character of individuals in making daily decision. The following comment is an example of moral value.

“Old Putterham is so cheap he wouldn't give nobody nothing, not even a kind word.” (1974:63)

The quotation above shows that Old Putterham does not care to the other. He just care about his interest. Old Putterham behavior can be included as a bad behavior because it does not illustrate a good manner.

Second is social value. Social value relates to humanity and solidarity of humans in social life. Social value can be seen in human interaction between him/her self to other people, such as in friendship. In the novel, friendship has social value because it describes human's behaviour, which is non-individualist. That is why friendship in the novel is priceless. It can be seen when The Pretty Pennies gets a problem and The Tiger Hunters helps them. Even though they often argue or compete in the same competition, they never hate each other because they are still friends anyway. When The Pretty Pennies challenges The Tiger Hunters to do relay competition, they want to prepare themselves by wearing a costume. However, they buy T-shirts, which are easy shrinking. They do not know about that, so they decide to demand their money back. The unexpected thing is The Tiger Hunters has a desire to support and help them. As followed:

“I broke into a run, followed by Philip Hall, followed by the rest of them. In front of the Busy Bee, we all formed a loose line—a Penny, a Hunter, a Penny and so forth. “Pretty Pennies and Tiger Hunters. When we're working together we'll call ourselves the great Penny Hunters.” (1974:84)

Based on the quotation above, it shows that Philip and his gang have big solidarity. They do not set any boundaries to help people, even though their rivals. They still help The Pretty Pennies in struggling because they feel that The Pretty Pennies are still their friends.

Finally, after reading the story, the readers can learn about the important values of friendship and kindness through literary work.

2.2 The Weaknesses of the book

There are two weaknesses of this novel. First is black language or often called Black English. According to Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition, “*Black English usually refers to the everyday spoken varieties of English used by African Americans, especially of the working class in urban neighbourhoods or rural communities...*” (2011) According to Marlene Gail Fine in *Building Successful Multicultural Organizations: Challenges and Opportunities* (1995:79), “*Black English Vernacular (often called Black English or black dialect)... BEV, however, is not a substandard version of standard English; it is instead, a different version of English. BEV is a complete linguistic system. It has its own syntax (grammar), semantics (meaning system), phonology (sound system), and lexicon (vocabulary)...*”

In this novel, the author uses Black English in order to help the readers to illustrate a black community in a rural area. However, it can make the readers a little bit confused because there are some readers who do not understand Black English. It can be seen in this book that Black English has different substandard grammar from British English, for example, “...you *is* mad, Beth Lambert...”

(1974:9). Therefore, the readers must read it carefully, so they would understand the meaning of that language.

Second, this novel has a flat and straight story line. Although the theme is interesting, but the story line is flat and predictable. The reason is, the novel tells about the story of daily activities, which are experienced by some readers, so the readers, can easily guess how the story turns out. Furthermore, the story has only one obvious solution, so the readers will quickly understand the story. If the story is predictable, it becomes boring. The story should be described in a more interesting way, so the readers will be satisfied when they read the story. Those explanations are based on the reviewer's view, who is an adult. However, the impression will probably different if it is read by children. It is because the conflict in the novel is light to children, who are in the same age as the characters.

2. Conclusion

Bette Greene has developed her idea in a nice story. She has given something different from others to her novel. That makes the novel interesting. There is a number of strengths that make it a unique story. First, the novel has a form like a diary. Second, the novel has pictures. The pictures are funny in black and white color. Third is theme. The novel's theme is friendship, as it explores solidarity in a friendship. It is a picture of friendship of Beth, Bonnie, and Philip. The last is value. There are two values in this novel, that are: moral and social value. Both moral and social values teach us to always forgive and help each other.

However nothing is perfect, this novel also has some weaknesses. One of the weaknesses can be seen in the Black English, which has different substandard

grammar from English British. It will make the readers little bit confused because there are some readers who do not understand Black English well. Furthermore, the story line is another weakness as it is flat and straight.

This novel makes the readers realize that life has not only one colour. There are many differences of people, culture, ethnic, and language in the world. The readers can learn about the differences among them because the differences are unique. It will make the readers aware and respect black culture. Moreover, this novel also tells a story about kindness and friendship, it can give positive impact to children's life to spread kindness too.

In despite of the weakness, supported by funny illustration, a neat form, a light conflict and good moral and social values, makes this book is highly recommended for children.

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