

BOOK REVIEW OF *THE GUARDIAN* WRITTEN BY NICHOLAS SPARKS

Galuh Agliesta Erawati Sutopo

R.Aj. Atrinawati

S-1 Sastra Inggris

Ilmu Budaya/ Universitas Diponegoro

Jl. Prof. Soedarto, SH Tembalang Semarang Kode Pos 50275

<http://www.fib.undip.ac.id>

ABSTRACT

Book review of *The Guardian* by Nicholas Sparks is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of *The Guardian* novel. This analysis uses intrinsic aspects which are theme, character, and setting as analysis focus. *The Guardian* tells about a journey to find a true love by the main character, Julie Barenson. Although *The Guardian* has some weaknesses, the strengths of this novel make it still recommended to be read.

Key words: love, danger

1. INTRODUCTION

Love has a great meaning to every human being. It has been a good theme to make a good story in a novel. Love is a deep feeling of affection for something that can be good or bad to people's life. It can control people to avoid in doing bad things, but it can bring a danger if people are so mania in love.

The Guardian is the 7th novel by Nicholas Sparks, the international number one bestselling author. This novel was first published in 2003 and had gone into New York Times bestseller list. It is a novel about a beautiful young widow named Julie Barenson who falls in love with two men named Mike

Harris and Richard Franklin. When choosing one of them, it should bring her happiness. Instead, it brings Julie's life in a danger situation.

The writer has chosen this novel *The Guardian* because it has an interesting love story. It does not tell about woman and man falling in love and has a happy ending but it is the love story of a woman that love can bring her life in a danger situation. The purpose of this project is to make a review of novel *The Guardian* by Nicholas Sparks by exposing the strengths and weaknesses of the novel.

2. REVIEW OF THE NOVEL

After reading *The Guardian*, the writer realizes that there are some interesting points such as theme, character, and setting. Perrine explained in his book *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense* that "Theme is a controlling idea or central insight that unifying generalization about life stated or implied by the story" (1984: 91). The story without theme will be unclear and unlived. Theme in literature is an important subject and experience of our public and private lives such as love, death, marriage, hope, and so on. The common experience in life can be a theme in literature.

Characters are important in literary works as they are the foundation of the story. According to Potter in *Element of Literature*, "Character of a story can be divided into protagonist and antagonist. The protagonist is always the focal point of the action of the story, the character that the story is almost obviously

about. Meanwhile, the antagonist is the main person or thing or force that opposes the protagonist.” (1967:7).

Setting is the time and place or atmosphere that story take place. It is important element in a novel because it makes the characters of a novel more vivid the subject of the story. According to Meyer in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, it consists of governmental regulation, society custom, and religion, moral, intellectual and emotional (1990:107).

2.1. The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Novel

2.1.1. Theme

The first strength of this novel is the theme. The combination of two topics between love and danger brings someone to be a mania of love. As stated in *Colors of Love* below.

“Mania lovers lack the self-confidence associated with eros and the emotional self-control associated with ludus. This obsessive, jealous love style is characterized by self-defeating emotions, desperate attempts to force affection from the beloved, and the inability to believe in or trust any affection the loved one actually does display. The manic lover is desperate to fall in love and to be loved, begins immediately to imagine a future with the partner, want to see the partner daily, tries to force the partner to show love and commitment, distrusts the partner’s sincerity, and is extremely possessive” (Lee, 1973: 15).

Mania lovers always need their lovers. They obsess to get more attentions from their partners. They will do anything for being together with their lovers..

This love type is “*irrational, extremely jealous, obsessive, and often unhappy*” (Lee, 1973: 15). In this novel, Sparks illustrates Richard Franklin is a man who loves Julie in different way. He obsesses to get Julie’s love. However, Julie does not like the way Richard gives attention to her that she thinks it is too much for her. She gets annoyed of Richard’s attitude but Richard never gives up to get Julie’s attention in many ways such as by kidnapping Julie. The following quotations below show the contrast feeling between Richard and Julie that brings Julie into a danger situation.

The quotation below is Richard’s imagination about his happy life with Julie besides him.

“He wondered where they would end up after leaving North California. He could imagine Julie enjoying San Francisco, with its sidewalk bistros and views of the Pacific. Or New York City, where they could enjoy new theater productions every season.....even Chicago, with its spirit and vibrancy. It would be wonderful, he thought. Magical.” (Sparks, 2003: 404)

The following is the conversation between Richard and Julie when Richard wanted to take Julie with him:

“Why do you keep fighting me?” Richard asked, his voice and expression calm, as if trying to reason with wayward child. Don’t you understand that it’s over? There’s just the two of us now. There’s no reason for you to act this way.”
“Let me go!” she screamed. “Stay away from me.”
Think of all we can do together,” he said. “We’re two of a kind, you know. Survivors.”
We’ll do nothing together!” she screamed. “I hate you!” (Sparks, 2003: 437)

From the quotations above, it can be seen the way Sparks combines love and danger that is interesting. Julie's life is filled by a scared-feeling that Richard is always following her, in other side Richard never gives up to get Julie's love. It gives a deep understanding to the readers that love is not only giving happiness, but also can be dangerous to someone's life.

2.1.2. Characters

Nicholas Sparks gives a strong overview of the characters in the story, including description of behavior and action. In *The Guardian*, protagonist character is represented by Julie Barenson and the antagonist character who opposes Julie is Richard Franklin.

1. Julie Barenson

Julie is the main character of this novel. This character plays an important role because the story will tell the readers all of her life. She is a young widow whose husband died caused of cancer. At the beginning of the story, Julie is described as a brave woman. It can be seen by her coming in Swansboro for the first time.

“But a month later, considering she didn't have much scheduled on the old social calender, she showed up in Swansboro, thinking as she got off the bus, *What in the world am I doing in this nowhere town?* Nonetheless, she looked up Jim, who-despite her persistent skepticism-brought her over a salon” (Sparks, 2003: 9).

Julie does not have a plan about going to Swansboro. She does not know what she will do in that town, but suddenly she shows up in Swansboro. She also does not feel afraid to live in her house alone since

Jim has died. The following quotation shows how brave Julie is when she is in the house alone without Jim with her.

“.....Someone was knocking at the door. Julie stood, her movement lethargic. At the door, she paused to run her hands through her hair, hoping to compose herself. If it was her friends checking in on her, she didn’t want them to think she needed them to stay.....”
(Sparks, 2003: xi)

Sparks gives a well description about Julie as a brave woman. But, when Richard comes to Julie’s life and brings her into a danger situation, Julie’s trait has changed. Julie, who used to be a brave woman, turns into a woman that always needs a protection from a man. She needs Mike as her protector to safe her life caused of scared feeling that Richard always follows her everyday. It can be seen by the following conversation between Julie and Mike.

“I do trust you. But I didn’t want to hurt you.”
“You just did, Julie,”he said. “You just did.”
With that, he reached for the door and opened it, and for the first time, Julie realized that he was going to leave.
“Wait – where are you going?”
Mike raised his hands. “I need some time with this,okay?”
“Please,”she said. Don’t go. I don’t want to be alone tonight.”
Mike pause and took a deep breath. But a moment later, with a shake of his head, he was gone. (Sparks, 2003: 326)

The quotation above shows that Julie does not want to be alone in her house. She needs Mike to be there beside her. It expresses that a woman cannot live without a protection from a man. In fact, she can live like she used to be. The example below also show how Julie is scared while Mike leaves her alone in her house.

“.....Julie went through the house, making sure the windows and doors were lockedm then paced around the living room, Singer at her side. Outside, she could hear the sound of crickets chirping and a light breeze moving the leaves. Julie crossed her arms and looked toward the door.”
...

“How could Mike have left her? With Andrea missing and Richard stalking her? How on earth could he have left her alone *tonight?*”
(Sparks, 2003: 331)

The changing of Julie’s trait is not described until the end of the story. It is still unknown how Julie continues her life. The readers are curious whether she still needs a protection from Mike or turns into a brave woman as she used to be before.

2. Richard Franklin

Richard is a handsome engineer who treats Julie like a queen. He gives his full attention only for Julie. At first dating, he is described as a kind and charm person. He can make Julie’s life fulfilled with happiness. It can be seen by the following quotation below.

“...On their date, he’d opened doors for her, smiled at the right moments in the conversation, given the waiter her order for dinner, and not so much as tried to kiss her when he’d drooped her off. Best of all, he was good-looking in an artistic sort of way, with sculpted cheekbones, emerald eyes, black hair, and a mustache. After he’d dropped her off, she’d felt like screaming, *Hallelujah ! I have seen the light!..*” (Sparks, 2003: 7).

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Richard successfully shows towards Julie that he is the best looking man for Julie. Richard

never stops to impress Julie with all of his full attentions such as spending time together in almost every single day and giving a luxury thing like a locket to Julie even though she does not need it. The quotations below are the examples how Richard impresses Julie.

“...Richard, it seemed, had picked Julie up in a limousine that had been stocked with champagne; they’d gone to Raleigh for dinner. Afterward, at the civic center in front row seats, they’d watched a live performance of *Phantom of the Opera*. If that wasn’t enough, if that wasn’t quite *special* enough to *impress* her, it turned out that Richard and Julie had spent Saturday together as well, down near
Wilmington.”

...

“There they’d taken a hot-air balloon ride before picknicking at the beach...” (Sparks, 2003: 83).

The following quotation below is a conversation between Julie and Richard when Richard gives Julie a locket.

“..My birthday’s not until August.”
“So I’m a little early.” He paused. “Please.”
“Richard....it’s sweet, but I really shouldn’t.”
“It’s just a locket, not an engagement ring.”
Still a bit unsure, she finally gave in and kissed him.
“Thank you,” she murmured. (Sparks, 2003: 72)

Richard is described as an obsessed lover who will do anything to his lover. In this novel, Sparks gives a well description about Richard’s action to get Julie’s love. It makes the readers continue their reading *The Guardian* to see what he will do next to Julie.

2.1.3. Setting

The setting of *The Guardian* becomes the weaknesses of this novel. Sparks mentions some settings but he does not give clear information about each setting. For example, there is no description about the condition of Top Island, a place

where Mike and Julie stay to keep themselves safe from Richard's attitude. It can be seen from a quotation below.

“Where should we go?”
“Anywhere. Just get out of town. Stay out of sight until they catch this guy.” He pauses. “You can use the beach house in Top Island if you want. He won't find you there.”
(Sparks, 2003: 345)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that there is no description about the condition of Top Island. Sparks does not give the information such as the custom, the environment, and governmental regulations in Top Island. It is important in *The Guardian* because it can affect the story. Since Julie is being stalked by Richard, she needs to go to a safe place. It is only mentioned that the house is in island, but there is no explanation how and why Julie and Mike choose that place.

3. CONCLUSION

The Guardian by Nicholas Sparks presents an interesting theme. Sparks makes a love story in different way but interesting. A combination between love and danger becomes one of the strengths of the novel. Sparks also gives the well description of each character in the novel. In addition to having the strengths, there are some weaknesses found in the novel. First, Sparks changes the of Julie's trait as a brave woman into a woman who always needs a protection by a man. It is portrayed when Julie is scared of Richard's attitude who is always stalking her constantly, therefore she always needs Mike beside her to feel safe. Second, Sparks unclearly describes the setting used which is in Top Island. It is important

to know the situation and condition of that place since it is used as place where Mike and Julie stay to feel safe.

Finally, with many strengths and weaknesses, *The Guardian* is a recommended novel especially for those who like love story. Nicholas Sparks successfully combines the love and danger into an interesting combination. The story has a clear explanation to the readers that love is not only giving happiness, but also can be dangerous to someone's life.

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