A Description of Main Characters in Mitch Albom Novel, The First Phone Call from Heaven

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A DESCRIPTION OF MAIN CHARACTERS IN MITCH ALBOM NOVEL, THE FIRST PHONE CALL FROM HEAVEN

A PAPER

BY

HERRY R TARIGAN

REG NO. 132202005

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It has been approved by:

Supervisor,

Dra. Swesana Mardia Lubis, M.Hum
NIP: 195710021986012003

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Approved by

Head of English Diploma Study Program,

Dra. Swesana Mardia Lubis M.Hum
NIP: 195710021986012003

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Dean,

Dr. Drs. Budi Agustono, M.S.

NIP. 19600805 198703 1 001

Boards of Examiners :

1. Dra. Swesana Mardia Lubis, M, Hum (Supervisor)

2. Drs. Siamir Marulafau, M, Hum (Examiner)

3. Riko Adika Rahmat Pohan, S.S M, Hum (Examiner)
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

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ABSTRAK


Kata kunci: The First Phone Call From Heaven oleh Mitch Albom, karakter, Alternbernd dan Lewis
ABSTRACT

Character is one of the most important elements in a fictional story and one of them is novel. The characters are divided into two types, there are main character and minor character. This paper is entitled “A Description of Main Character in The Novel The First Phone Call From Heaven by Mitch Albom”. The purpose of this study is to describe the characters of Sully Harding and Katherine Yellin that are found in the novel. This paper uses descriptive qualitative research method by analyzing the data that is in the novel. The theory used is theory of Altenbernd and Lewis (1998). The data used is a novel entitled The First Phone Call From Heaven by Mitch Albom. The result of this study is the description of the main character (protagonist) Sully Harding a pilot who has lost his good, just released from prison and minor character (antagonist) is Katherine Yellin who church congregation. In this study the author also describes several other elements that plot, point of view, and setting, to support the description of the characters in the novel.

Key word : The First Phone Call From Heaven by Mitch Albom, character, Altenbernd and Lewis.
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In completing this paper, the author runs many problems, but with the help of many people, all problems are passed, and Ia write with the patience on to complete the paper. However, the writer also realizes that this writing is still far from being perfect. Therefore, all criticisms and suggestions will be appreciated therefore, the authors ask for suggestions and criticisms that are constructive for the sake of perfection and may be useful for all of us especially English majors. Amin

Medan, The Written

Herry R Tarigan
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is writing that is considered to be an art form, or any single writing deemed to have artistic or intellectual value, often due for ordinary usage. According to Robert and Jacob (1995:2) says that literature is refers to compositions that tell stories, dramatize situation, and analyze and advocate ideas and literature may be classified into four categories or genre: (1) prose fiction, (2) poetry, (3) drama, (4) nonfiction prose. From the classified, the writer decides to discuss the prose fiction, which is novel.

According to Alternbernd and Lewis (1996: 14) that novel is fiction interpreted as prose narrative, it’s imaginative, usually is logical and contain the truth of dramatization in the relationship of human being. Fiction is not created by dreaming at all, but using the comprehension of narrative prose in life. And the environment is a background or setting which characterizations to be spoken of. Most novel are concerned with ordinary people and their problem in the societies in which they find themselves. The novels reflect a move away from an essentially religious view of life towards a new interest in the complexities of everyday experience. Novel is an immensely challenging task, as used in a broad sense, the term nonfictional proses literature here designates were intended to instruct, to persuade, to convert or to convey experience.

Novel are containing of myth, history or fiction story. Although this is a fiction story, sometimes novel could content from the realistic treatment of life and human being.
According to Culler (1975:192) says that if fiction is a system, the most important subsystems in it is plot, themes, and characters. Character is one of the most important element in fiction, especially in novel. This element is the center role which the story will live, be understood, and enjoyed by the readers. In a story emphasizing a major character, you may expect that each action or speech, no matter how small, is part a total presentation of that complex combination of both the inner and outer self that constitutes a human being. Character can be good or bad people. Character has an important role in a story, without character, readers will not understand why the action happens and novel is meaningless.

Character’s appearance in terms of how she or he acts and what other characters in the story say is the point of understanding the story and its conflict as a whole. The main characters have important role in a novel which appear in every part and also dominate in the story. There are two types of main character which are round character and flat character. The writer only emphasizes the main character and the round character that contain in this novel.

Robert (2003:133) says that the round character is usually the main figure in a story, profit from experience and undergoes a change or alternation, which may be shown in an action or actions, the realization of new strength and therefore the affirmative of previous decisions, the acceptance of new condition, or the discovery of recognized truths. The round character usually plays a major role in a story. Round characters are often called the hero or heroine.

According to Alternbernd and Lewis (1998:170) says that protagonist is character who is admired by the readers or watchers, popularly he or she called as hero because he or she always does ideal role and follows the rules and values in society. Protagonist is character who is loved by the audience. He or she likes a hero and always gives sympathy emphasis. One of the
The protagonist character in this novel is Sully Harding, a person who is really curious about the First Phone Call From Heaven.

The writer chose “The First Phone Call From Heaven” novel by Mitch Albom because the writer is interested in the story. The main characters in this novel are Sully Harding, Jack Seller and etc. The author is really creative in composing the novel so that messages of the story can be accepted by the readers. This novel tells about a religion, so much miracle and hindrance too. The writer would like to describe the main characters in this novel because the writer is really interested and the characterization are unique.

1.2 Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the analysis about, the problem of the study may be recognized as follows:

How the main characters portrayed in the novel?

1.3 Scope of Study

In writing this paper, the writer decides to only discuss about the main characters found in Mitch Albom novel ‘The First Phone Call From Heaven’ which are Sully Harding, and Katherine Yellin.
1.4 **Objective of Study**

To describe about the main characters portrayed in the novel ‘The First Phone Call From Heaven’ by Mitch Albom.

1.5 **Method of Study**

In writing this paper, the writer used descriptive-qualitative method by reading the novel and collecting the data. Next step is the writer spent time in library to search some book storead the book swich is relevant to the topic that can support the description of character, inorder to finish out this paper. And also find information in Internet. According to Djajasudarma (2006:11), “*Metodologikualitatismerupakanprosedur yang menghasilkan data deskriptifberupa data tertulisataulisan di masyarakatBahasa*”. (Qualitative merhod is a procedure resulting descriptive data in of written text or spoken in language society). She also says, “*Data yang dikumpulkanbukanlahangka-angkadapatberupa kata-kata ataugambaransesuatu*”. (Djajasudarma, 2006:16). (The collected data are not in the form or number, but words or description of something)
2. REVIEW RELATED OF LITERATURE

2.1. Novel

In this paper, novel is the source of the data. Wellek (1989) says that a novel is the pictures of humanity that written by its author which he or she wants to send to his or her readers. The events written in the novel is fiction. It can be used as the mirror to the readers. The author wants to let his or her readers understand about the possible manner, habit, imagination, etc. written in a novel. Messages written in a novel for readers can help peaceful among the society. A novel is picture of human habits, manners, attitudes, etc. of humanity, therefore the event can be drawn negatively or positively by the authors.

According to Peck (1984:102), most novel are concerned with ordinary people and their problem in the societies in which they find themselves. It means that novel present a documentary picture of life. Taylor (1981:46) says the novel was the first of the two to develop end of the Neo-Classical period it was recognize as a major literary form. It is normally a prose work of quite some length and complexity which attempts to reflect and express something of the quality or value of human experience or conduct. Novel’s subject may be taken from patterns of life or as an exotic and imaginative time or place. The work may create the illusion of actual reality or frankly admit the artificiality of its fictional world in order to direct our attention to an imagination relationship between the subject matter or theme of the work and the real world in which we actually live.

Peck (1984: 1030) adds that novels, however, are long works with a great amount of detail in every page. They thus present all the complicating facts that need to be taken into
account before we can reach any sort of judgment. The effect of this detail is what we come to recognize the complex reality of a character or event in the story.

2.2. **Intrinsic**

The intrinsic elements are the analysis of the literature itself without looking the relation with the external aspect (Robert, 1965: 11). The elements of prose which build up a complete and good story are theme, character, plot, setting, point of view, structure and style (Roberts and Jacobs. 1993:51). These seven elements are regarded as a tool to analyze the structure of a novel. In this research, the writer just explained some elements which support this paper.

2.2.1. **Theme**

Theme is one of the fundamental components in a story or fiction. Theme is the basic story that dominated the subject matter of literary work. The theme is the first point in compiling the work of literary authors. This theme is to be conveyed and solved by the author through his story. According to Robert Stanton (2007: 7) stated that theme gives a strong explained about the unity of what is happening in the story and tell about the story of life in a common context. The purpose of theme is to give a shape and effect in our mind, to make the story easy to remember.

Peck and Coyle (1984:141) says that theme of work is the large idea or concept it is dealing with. In order to grasp the theme of work, we have to stand back from the text and see what sort of general experience or subject links all its detail together. The theme of a work is generalization: an idea that can be broadly applied both to the work itself and to real-life situation outside the work.
A good theme has to represent the entire story in the novel. Sometimes, the theme shapes into the fact that comes from human experience. The theme ease readers to understand the main character’s conflict and emotion that has written by the authors. Through theme, the authors try to give his readers an insight into how the world works or how he or she views as human being.

2.2.2. Plot

Plot is a literary term defined as the event that make up the story, particularly as they relate to one another in a pattern, in a sequence, through cause and effect, how the reader views the story, or simply by coincidence.

Robert and Jacob (1995:88) says that plot is stories are made up mostly of actions or incidents that follow each other sequentially. Finding a sequential or narrative order, however, is only the first step toward the more important consideration. The plot, or the controls governing the development of the actions. In a well-done story, all the actions or the incidents, speeches, thoughts and observations are linked together to make up an entirety, sometimes called an organic unity. The essence of the unity is development and resolution of conflict or conflicts-in which the protagonist, or central character, is engaged. The pattern in which the protagonist meets and resolves the conflict is called the plot, which has been compared to the story’s map, scheme, or blue print. The plot is based on the interactions of cause and effect as they develop sequentially or chronologically. That is, the story actions follow one another in time as the protagonist meets and tries to overcome the forces of opposition.
2.2.3. **Character**

Literature is a story which tells the story of human life with all the miscellaneous life. With that understanding, there would have been requites as a manifestation of the human figure and his life to be told. The character in this story will do its job to be a source story. In a story emphasizing a major character, you may expect that each action or speech, no matter how small, is part of a total presentation of that complex combination of both the inner and outer self that constitutes of human being.

Some character may be given some traits, which make them more attractive or unattractive to the better than the watcher. Such trait practically always be assigned to the protagonist (hero or heroine).

Reader and Woods (1987:4) says that, the character in a good novel are interesting, intriguing consistent, convincing, complex and realistic. If the author has created a particularly vivid or individualistic character, then we, as readers, will find that character interesting regardless of whether or not sympathize with him or her. There are some explanations about the way to express a character with same points that consist of:

- Why they say about themselves
- What others say about their character
- What is said by the narrator or the author of them
- The reaction of another character
- The figures reaction to a particular situation
- The character reaction to their environment
- Physical characteristic and the shape of their bodies
- How to dress them
• Accent or their social position
• The attitude of their lives
• Habits and their mental condition

2.2.3.1 Protagonist

Protagonist is the major character with whom we generally sympathize. A protagonist is considered to be the main character or lead figure in a novel, play, story, or poem. According to Alternbernd and Lewis (1998:170) said that protagonist is character who is admired by the readers or watcher, popularly he or she called as a hero because he or she always does ideal role and follows the rules and values of society. The character that is focus of interest traditionally has positive qualities such as high ethical standard, commitment to duty, perseverance and courage. The self-identification toward the character is an empathy given by readers or watchers. A fiction must have a conflict and pressure had by the protagonist.

2.2.3.2 Round Character

Character can be either static or developmental character, depending on whether or not they change over the course of the story. Round character includes that fictional creation who have complex many faceted personalities and in independent inner life which itself invites our interest. Robert (2003:133) says that the round character “usually the main figure in a story” profits from experience and undergoes a changed or alteration, which may be shown in an action or actions, the realization of new strength and therefore the affirmation of previous decisions, the acceptance of a new condition, or the discovery of unrecognized truths. Round characters however present us with more facts that is, their directors portray them in greater depth and in
more generous detail. Such as a round character they appear to us only as he appears to the other
color character in the story, if their views of him is differ, we will see him more than one side. In other
stories, we enter the character’s mind and come to know him through his own thoughts, feelings
and perceptions.

2.2.3.3 Antagonist

Alternbernd and Lewis (1998) says that antagonist is also called the figure who caused the conflict. The antagonist figure, perhaps can be called and opposition to the protagonist,
directly or indirectly, physically or mentally. The conflict experienced by the protagonist must
not only be caused by the antagonist of an individual (several) individuals who can be clearly
appointed. It can be caused by other things that are beyond the individuality of a peson, for
example natural disasters, accidents, natural and social environments, social rules, moral values,
higher power and strength, and so on.
3. DESCRIPTION

In this paper, the author will describe the characters such as the main character and minor character. The writer will also analyze the plot, point of view, and setting to clarify and to support this research in the novel.

3.1 The Character of Sully Harding

Sully Harding is the main character in a novel written by Mitch Albom. He always exist from beginning to the end of story. In this novel, the character of Sully Harding is protagonist. Protagonist is a character that shows the positive attitude.

Sully Harding was an atheist man, he live with his parents and he is a pilot who just lost his good name. He lives in a small town named Coldwater, Lake Michigan. And he was released from prison and found his hometown in a miracle fever.

Sully harding wanted the real facts from which came his phone from heaven that. Even her young son was carrying a toy phone because he hoped to call her mother from heaven. For his a world of sadness, and he was determined to prove it, for his son and for himself.

“He felt two small arms wrap around his legs, felt this hands sink into a mop of the boy’s curly hair. He saw his parents mother in a navy windbreaker, father in a light brown suit their face collapsing as they fell into a group embrace. It was chilly and gray and the street was slick with rain. Only his wife was missing from the moment, but her absence was like a character in it.”
Sully Harding was a man who had a high self confidence. He believed in what he believed was right. Sully Harding wanted to say something profound, but all that emerged from his lips was a whisper. Moments later, their car disappeared down the road. It was the day the world received it’s first phone call from heaven. What happened next depends on how much you believe.

“Sully Harding was walking. He could have borrowed his father’s car, but after ten months of confinement, he preferred the open air.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:6).

“Sully’s wife was gone. She’s died after a long coma. According to the hospital, she slipped away during a thunderstorm on the first day of summer. Sully was still in prison, nine weeks from release.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:13).

Sully Harding was walking, wearing a ski cap and an old suede jacket, he passed the high school he’d attended twenty years ago, the lumberyard that had closed last winter, the bait and tackle shop, it’s rental rowboats stacked like clamshells, and the gas station where an attendant leaned against a wall, examining his fingernails my hometown. And he thought about constantly now, even thought brought with it the shadow of their last day, the crash, the fire, how everything he’d known changed in one bumpy instant. Didn’t matter. He draped himself in her
sad memory, because it was the closest thing to having her around. He placed the angel urn on a shelf by a couch where jules, two months shy of his seventh birthday, lay sleeping.

“Sully never stopped trying. Even in prison, he would sit alone, eyes closed, reciting memories as if his thoughts could somehow fly to her hospital bed”. (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:106).

“Sully hurried by crowds on Lake Street with his hands dug into his pockets, passing a group of young people sitting on a car hood, singing spirituals. He was heading to the Coldwater Public Library, a single story white brick building with an American flag by the front entrance and a swinging sign that featured a different message each week”. (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:115).

Sully had already tried, he called out of her. Nothing came back, there was heaven. Dead was dead, it was time everyone accepted that. And Sully was glad to see the lights still on. With no internet service at the gazzete being out of the question, this was his best and only option for doing research a place where he once wrote grade school book reports. He stepped inside it seemed deserted. Sully clicked the mouse. He rubbed his eyes. It was midmorning in the library, and he did been here since dropping jules at schools. He was amazed at what he’d found just researching “contact with the afterlife”. Sully did a double take. Although her face was the picture of young, attractive health, her left leg was bent and she walked with a serve wobble that came down hard on her right foot. Her arms seemed slightly short for her body.
“The first time Sully ever made a newspaper was for the worst thing that ever happened to him. Pilot crashes plane after midair collision, read the top headline. And underneath, in smaller letters: wife and controller in fatal accident”. (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:177).

Sully saw the paper in the cafeteria of the Ohio hospital where Giselle lay in a bed, hooked to tubes and intravenous drips, bruised to purplish, orangish colors that didn’t look human. Sully’s plane had been destroyed, his wife had been in a catastrophic accident, the recordings from the air traffic tower were indecipherable, and the man whose voice was on them the only man who could vindicate Sully’s actions was dead and buried, his body too mangled, they said, to even have the coffin open at his funeral.

“He jumped from the chair and put his palm in hers. Sully watched with mixed emotions. Sully realized local paper, local library. He entered details now on his yellow pad”. (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:184).

“Sully marked his yellow pad with the heading details? He reviewed the names on his list”.
(The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:216).

The details in those would be even greater, enough to paint a truly complete portrait of the people who died and perhaps reveal a link that sully had been missing. The real mystery, of course, remained the voices themselves. He looked at the display. And he sure this is a hoax. He watched her awkward leg and hip movements, he wondered if there would ever be a cure for her.
“Sully had never meet anyone on the editorial side. He didn’t want to. Given his past, and the nature of the news business, he only figured to encounter a bunch of questions he didn’t care to answer. (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:231).

Sully never read those stories. But every night he sat in prison, he thought about that transmission, the words twenty seven right, and how a human voice, speaking through wires a technology unimaginable if not for the telephone had changed his life forever. But sully was already out the door. He saw a blue car pulling away, he scrambled back inside.

“Sully heard it in the basement. Katherine heard it in her ear. And people worldwide heard it on tv sets or computers thanks to a signal being sent from equipment, received through a cell phone, bounced through an amplified board, and cast out through a network audio feed.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:307).

Sully stepped into the basement, he did not know he was staring at such technology. He simply saw Horace in high backed chair, amid a bank of tv screens showing the stage at coldwater football field. He was surrounded by computer monitors, several keyboards, and multiple racks of electronic equipment. He pressed a final key, and on the screen, Katherine yellin could be seen looking at her phone. Her voice boomed over the basement speakers, making Sully snap back. He saw Horace reading from a list on a screen.
3.2 The Characters of Katherine Yellin

Katherine Yellin is one of the supporting characters in the novel by Mitch Albom. Her characters just to support the main character in this novel so that the story is more interesting to read. Her is figure with antagonist character. Antagonist is one part of a characters which shows bad character. Antagonist is very closely connected with the minor character.

“She was already past him, her coat half buttoned, her rededish hair frazzled, as if she’d dashed out, of the house. She sat on the couch, rose nervously, then sat again.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013:3).

She gripped her handbag and began to cray. Warren wondered if he should call someone for help. She told me not to worry, she said she was at peace. She smiled, a beatific smile, a smile Warren had never seen on her face before.

“I received a call from my older, Diane. She tells me she is happy in heaven, she says that she’s waiting for me, that they are waiting for all of us.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:49).

I believed, she just tells me she loves me, she tells me about heaven, she says everyone you lose here, you find again there. Our family is all together.

“Katherine looked straight ahead, her hands on the desk, she said the time has come. Don’t keep it a secret. Tell everyone, the good will be welcome in heaven.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:87)
Katherine had dropped on the desk, tell everyone, Katherine repeated dreamly not realizing that, thanks to the blinking red light on amy’s camera, she was. Katherine lowered the phone, then dropped back slowly, as if pushed with an invisible pillow.

“Katherine smiled, her mood had improved since the last call from diane, it came just us she prayed it would.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:140).

Katherine repeated the words to herself, knowing heaven is what heals us on earth, she had hoped to keep a lid on this story, perhaps win a award, pique the interest of a larger market, that was a pipe dream.

“Katherine waved her hands, as if trying to convince an invisible witness, she squeezed her pink phone, she rolled it over in her palm, she stared at it for several seconds, then her tone changed.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:165).

She started to cry, she cried so hard she could no longer speak. I didn’t ask for this blessing. God sent my sister back for a reason, that people don’t believe me, they are ones missing out, they are the ones not hearing God message that heaven is real, and that none of us should be afraid anymore, she is so certain of the messages, she is willing to do something no one else has.
“Katherine poured it all out. She expressed her frustration, the doubters, the nonbelievers. Diane, will you speak with me in front of everyone? Let them know this is real? That we were the first.” (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:230).

They want to do it next Friday. I don’t know. These men. Is it good or bad diane, I feel lost. Katherine smiled through her tears. Even in heaven, was concerned with her sister’s needs. Katherine knew it wasn’t true. Diane could swim laps around any girl in Coldwater. But what mattered was boosting her kid sister’s confidence. God, how Katherine longed for that. Sometimes what you miss the most is the way a loved one made you feel about yourself.

“Katherine Yellin lay back on the bed, her red hair flattening against the pillow. She crossed her arms and squeezed the salmon-pink flip phone that had once belonged to sister. It was a Samsung model, with a glitter sticker of a high-heeled shoe on the back a symbol of sister love for fashion”. (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:11).

Katherine Yellin most loved in that sentence was we, the yellin sisters had a special bond like tethered children scaling small-town life together. They cried together when their parents died. Katherine smiled, we through the pink flip phone she held to her chest, she had rediscovered the sister she could never lose, and she would not be silent about it.

“Katherine would later reason that if anything were going to take away her beautiful, funny, precious older sister, it would be that her heart was so big, it exploded”. (The First Phone Call From Heaven 2013:55).
She slipped on her robe and walked nervously downstairs. She pulled the curtain from her living room window. She put a hand to her chest, on her lawn in the early-morning light, she saw five people in their overcoats, on their knees and holding hands, their eyes closed.
4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Conclusions

The conflict in a novel is necessary. Conflict adds excitement and suspense to a story. The conflict usually becomes clear to the beginning of a story. As the plot unfolds, the reader starts to wonder what will happen next and how the characters will handle the situation. Many readers enjoy trying to predict the final outcome. The conflict also needed in order to of plot faster to the next order. After analyzing the conflict of the main characters found for the novel of Mitch Albom The First Phone Call From Heaven, it can be drawn that the external conflicts of the Rahmad Priadi: The Description Of The Main Characters In Mitch Albom The First Phone Call From Heaven, 2013. main characters tends to the opposition between the main characters against other people ideas, modes of behavior, culture, and public opinion. This external conflict of Sully Harding out because he has different way of thinking about his view of life from the other people commonly. Then this difference of way of thinking will cause the disagreements which finally will bring out the conflicts, and the external conflicts of Mitch is his relation with his brother that his brother tries be independent person that he does not want Mitch to see him anymore, since he got the cancer. Meanwhile, the internal conflict is the opposition between a person against him/her self, it is also known as the inner conflict. Referring to the main characters’ internal conflicts found from the novel, the internal conflict for Sully, as one of the main character in this novel, his internal conflicts are most from his struggle against his deadly diseases, his disease asthma and the amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) have change his entire life to be more difficult to get trough, and finally Sully
presume that he is surrender with the diseases he faces, and finally bring him to death. And as for Mitch, his internal conflicts are from his way of life and his opinion for choosing which one is seems right for him about other people, how to live his life and overcoming his materialistic life, and also he learns the difficulties to keep all his promises to all the people he loves. Finally, based on the characteristic of the novel itself, that the novel is also the pictures and as the representatives of human real life, it seems that the conflicts which found from the novel then it is being analyzed it can be a lesson for the reader to know what to do, how to behave, and what decision should we choose when a person encounter the conflicts in their life.

2. Suggestions

Based on the analysis of this thesis, it can be found a moral suggestions concern with how should the characters face their conflict. The conflict that found form the novel is triggered by a natural events that really exist in our real life. The conflict cannot be avoided, but it must be faced wisely. The external conflict that a person encounter will push them to learn and to understand to each other, they will learn to respect the different opinion and behavior from the other, although the other view of opinion might be wrong or contradiction from the character view, it is a natural that every human has their own way of life. Meanwhile, the internal conflict can build the person to be a better individual for the future. This is because the internal conflict offers the lessons to think and to consider about the decision that should they take and the action that should they make. So it can be drawn the characteristics of the conflicts itself are able to comes out at any time, and it is obviously inevitable. In this novel, the
writer also shows that the motif of the conflict is by look no age, position, religion, and no matter who is the person, everyone has to encounters conflicts in their life.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHY OF MITCH ALBOM

Mitch Albom is an internationally renowned and best-selling author, journalist, screenwriter, playwright, radio and television broadcaster and musician. His books have collectively sold over 28 million copies worldwide; have been published in forty-one territories and in forty-two languages around the world; and have been made into Emmy Award-winning and critically-acclaimed television movies. Mitch was born on May 23, 1958 in Passaic, New Jersey, the middle of three children to Rhoda and Ira Albom. The family moved to the Buffalo, N.Y. area briefly before settling in Oaklyn, New Jersey, not far from Philadelphia. Mitch grew up wanting to be a cartoonist before switching to music. He taught himself to play piano, and played in bands, including The Lucky Tiger Grease Stick Band, throughout his adolescence. After attending high schools in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, he left for college after his junior year. He earned a bachelor’s degree in 1979 at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, majoring in sociology, but stayed true to his dream of a life in music, and upon graduation, he worked for several years as a performer, both in Europe and America. One of his engagements during this time included a taverna on the Greek island of Crete, in which he was a featured American performer who sang Elvis Presley and Ray Charles songs. He also wrote and produced the recording of several songs. In his early 20’s, while living in New York, he took an interest in journalism and volunteered to work for a local weekly paper, the Queens Tribune. He eventually returned to graduate school, earning a Master’s degree from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, followed by an MBA from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Business. During this time, he paid his tuition partly through work as a piano player.
Mitch eventually turned full-time to his writing, working as a freelance sports journalist in New York for publications such as Sports Illustrated, GEO, and The Philadelphia Inquirer. His first full time newspaper job was as a feature writer and eventual sports columnist for The Fort Lauderdale News and Sun Sentinel in Florida. He moved to Detroit in 1985, where he became a nationally-acclaimed sports journalist at the Detroit Free Press and one of the best-known media figures in that city’s history, working in newspapers, radio and television. He currently hosts a daily talk show on WJR radio (airs Monday through Friday, 5-7 p.m. EST) and appears regularly on ESPN Sports Reporters and SportsCenter. In 1995, he married Janine Sabino. That same year he re-encountered Morrie Schwartz, a former college professor who was dying of ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. His visits with Schwartz would lead to the book Tuesdays with Morrie, which moved Mitch away from sports and began his career as an internationally recognized author. Tuesdays with Morrie is the chronicle of Mitch’s time spent with his beloved professor. As a labor of love, Mitch wrote the book to help pay Morrie’s medical bills. It spent four years on the New York Times Bestseller list and is now the most successful memoir ever published. His first novel, The Five People You Meet in Heaven, is the most successful US hardcover first adult novel ever. For One More Day, his most recent, debuted at No.1 on the New York Times Bestseller List and spent nine months on the list. In October 2006, For One More Day was the first book chosen by Starbucks in the newly launched Book Break Program, which also helped fight illiteracy by donating one dollar from every book sold to Jumpstart. All three of Albom’s best sellers have been turned into successful TV movies. Oprah Winfrey produced the film version of Tuesdays With Morrie in December 1999, starring Jack Lemmon and Hank Azaria. The film garnered four Emmy awards, including best TV film, director, actor and
supporting actor. The critically acclaimed Five People You Meet in Heaven aired on ABC in winter, 2004. Directed by Lloyd Kramer, the film was the most watched TV movie of the year, with 19 million viewers. Most recently, Oprah Winfrey Presents Mitch Albom’s For One More Day aired on ABC in December 2007 and earned Ellen Burstyn a Screen Actors Guild nomination. An award-winning journalist and radio host, Albom wrote the screenplay for both For One More Day and The Five People You Meet in Heaven, and is an established playwright, having authored numerous pieces for the theater, including the off-Broadway version of Tuesdays With Morrie (co-written with Jeffrey Hatcher) which has seen over one hundred productions across the US and Canada. Mitch is also an accomplished song writer and lyricist. Later in his life, when music had become a sideline, he would see several of his songs recorded, including the song “Hit Somebody (The Hockey Song)” which he wrote for rock singer Warren Zevon. Albom also wrote and performed songs for several TV movies, including “Cookin’ for Two” for Christmas in Connecticut, the 1992 remake directed by Arnold Schwarzenegger. He has founded three charities in the metropolitan Detroit area: The Dream Fund, established in 1989, allows disadvantaged children to become involved with the arts. A Time to Help, founded in 1998, brings volunteers together once a month to tackle various projects in Detroit, including staffing shelters, building homes with Habitat for Humanity, and operating meals on wheels programs for the elderly. S.A.Y Detroit, Mitch’s most recent effort, is an umbrella program to fund shelters and care for the homeless in his city. He also raises money for literacy projects through a variety of means including his performances with The Rock Bottom Remainders, a band made up of writers which includes Stephen King, Dave Barry, Scott Turow, Amy
Tan and Ridley Pearson. Mitch serves on the boards of various charities and, in 1999, was named National Hospice Organization's Man of the Year.