“The Lovely Bone” By Alice Sebold

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Introduction

“The Lovely Bones,” written by Alice Sebold and published in 2002, was made available to readers as one of her first published novels. The book received an immediate response from the readers and sold over three million copies. It was rated as one of the best sellers of its time and nominated to appear on the bestseller list for the New York Times. Due to its immense fame, the book was later translated into forty languages and made available to readers all over the world.

The story in “The Lovely Bones” starts with the story of Susie Salmon, who was murdered on December 6th, 1973. Her neighbor, George Harvey, lures Susie into a hole that he had recently dug in his cornfield. Growing suspicious of Mr. Harvey’s intentions, Susie tries to break free and run away, but her attempts are to no avail as her neighbor grabs and tears her clothes, gagging and raping her. Eventually, it leads up to Mr. Harvey killing Susie after he’s done hiding all of the evidence and attempting to dump her body.

Discussion

Life and death are topics that are quite complex, and their enumeration here relates to the circumstances faced by the ghost of Susie as she refuses to move on to the afterlife. Her refusal to move on is largely based on the fact that she’s more interested in knowing what impact her death has brought on her loved ones and seeing the fate of her killer. Readers are left horrified knowing that her ghost still watches over the living, mortified that a helpless child has been physically abused for the killer’s sexual desires and then brutally murdered. The true horror arises in the reader’s mind as they learn of the killer’s method of disposing of the body.

The contents of the book leave the reader truly horrified, as it discusses the murder of a fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon and the events that follow, inclusive of the tragedy that befalls the family after they come to the realization that their young daughter has been missing. Sebold walks the readers through everything from Susie’s perspective when she is murdered and the events that unfold after. In the story, Susie narrates her story from Heaven.

Thematic Study

An analysis of the book “The Lovely Bones” brings a reader to the question: who is haunted? Who are they haunted by? How do they find this out? Did they find relief? What lesson does the reader incur from this? Numerous enumerations throughout horror plots bring the reader to these questions, but in the context of this book, the answers present themselves on a closer analysis. Susie, being a ghost, provides the element of haunting as she is found lingering about the living. The people she loves can be related to the explanation of being haunted. However, relief in this context will refer to Susie’s ghost eventually finding comfort after leading the investigation to her neighbor, who had previously murdered other innocent girls like her as well. Lastly, getting to the point of the lesson learned, one can present the conclusive judgment based on the dark elements of society, obscured by ignorance yet very much effective on those targeted by it. Susie is one such example, an entity of innocence that was subjected to cruelty. Her death brings forth an understanding of how vicious these elements in a society can be and to what extent they can affect people (Susie’s family in this context). According to Aristotle’s opinion on tragedy-based plots, tragic heroes are people who enjoy fortune and all things good in life till misfortune crosses their path and leads them to their eventual downfall. In this case, Susie’s downfall is her kindness (Rietveld 2016, 105-117). At the time when her neighbor told her to stay in the hideout, she was quite uncomfortable, but the kindness within told her to respect him (Mr. Harvey), and she obediently stayed. This decision quickly turned out to be her one and only misfortune, capable of ending her life.

Comparison Study

The story of Susie comparatively has a striking resemblance to Babadook, too. Babadook, a monstrous figure, enters the house of a widow living with her son. He gains passage through a children’s storybook, and despite the warnings of the child, the mother is hesitant to believe it till she experiences his presence. The true comparison of Babadook with The Lovely Bones lies in the fact that Susie dies and is able to re-enter the lives of her family. She attempts to assist in the investigation and lead the police to her killer. Suffering through the inability to be physically present, Susie’s experience is similar to Babadook’s as he lingers among the living while not owning a physical form. However, Susie’s character contradicts that of Babadook in terms of her intentions. Susie merely wanted the killer to face judgment for his actions and to suffer the same way she had.

The comparative analysis provides a descriptive meaning to the realm of the living. Susie’s wish to be among the living, to assist her murder case, to be able to touch and hold her dog, to be with her family and to be able to walk among the living, describes her longing for a world she can no longer be a part of. Although Susie is able to acquire everything in heaven, she describes it the way her grandfather mentioned it, to be a place of comfort. However, in comparison to a horror-based genre, the book satisfies the needs of a well-fabricated plot based on tragedy, fear and pity, but despite keeping the reader traumatized with a well-weaved visual representation of a horrific theme till the

end (as most horror genre-based books aim to serve), The Lovely Bones is focused more on the concept of presenting the perspective of a child. Susie, facing a horrible demise at the hands of a sexually frustrated predator, was left with the only choice of struggling towards a predestined end. The element of haunting presents the notion of a ghost narrating her story to the readers, walking them through her story of life after death, the experiences she gained and describing her emotional state (Rajagopalan 2013, 175-179). She narrates it further with the story of her family, the tragedy that befell them after they found out about their daughter's murder, the events leading up to the boy "Ray Singh" being considered a suspect but later released on the basis of an alibi to prove his innocence, the unread note left in her book, the life she wanted to live.

Hamlet's Tragedy Vs. The Lovely Bones

Shakespeare's Hamlet presents a remarkable resemblance to The Lovely Bones, and the similarities are outstanding as well. Both plots are centered on teenagers who are sexually frustrated and quite smart but vengeful. In the case of Hamlet, after his death, he only desired to get revenge for his father's death and sought to see it till the end, but Susie, after her death, only sought revenge for her own death rather than anything else. Hamlet employs the use of cunning means and his witty skills to achieve his revenge, whereas Susie is stuck with the role of an observer. In terms of sexuality perspective, Hamlet appears to be confused about his sexual preference since, in Shakespeare's writing, Hamlet regards women to be disloyal and untruthful but acts normally around Horatio. This is a possible sign of homosexuality being aroused in him, but there are evident signs that Hamlet shared a perfectly healthy sexual relationship with his female companion, Ophelia. In Susie's case, she is found to be frustrated because she dies before any hope of having a healthy sexual relationship with the boy she loves. The thought of everything coming to an end before things even began between her and her lover frustrated her at the thought of it.

Conclusions

In the book "The Lovely Bones," Alice Sebold presents the concept of life after death from Susie's point of view and presents the suggestion that the dead and the living share a complex relationship. This concept contradicts the general idea that the living share a one-way relationship with the dead, requiring them to undergo a similar experience of grief to better understand it. Based on the setting of a tragic plot, the element of fear makes the novel a worthwhile read and discusses the story of Susie and her beyond-the-grave experience. The narration of the book provided the readers with the notion of their loved ones, although dead, having the ability to still be with them.

Considering the setting for the plot, the character and the pattern that unfolds as the story progresses, it can be said that the book is in a close comparison to that of "To Kill a Mocking Bird." The Lovely Bones exhibits several elements in the plot that depict a similarity to Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mocking Bird" regarding the way that they both are centered around the narrator being a small girl.

The police also find a book by the murder scene, and evidently, it is “To Kill a Mocking Bird” as well since it was being taught in her class. The mention of this book conveys the meaning that the writer was heavily inspired by the book and wanted to relate and credit it in some manner.

Works Cited

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