

# AN ANALYSIS OF GEMMA'S MORAL QUALITIES IN LIBBA BRAY'S *A GREAT AND TERRIBLE BEAUTY*

(Analisa Kualitas Moral pada Gemma dalam Novel *A Great and Terrible Beauty* oleh Libba Bray)

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## Abstract

*A Great And Terrible Beauty* is a novel written by Libba Bray telling about an exploration of human morality and it presents a constant conversation regarding the inherent goodness or badness of people. This thesis studies about the moral qualities of Gemma's character. The aspects including solidarity, bravery, responsibility, care, and love are categorized into good morals while disobedience, rudeness, stubbornness, and violation are included in bad moral. Later, these morals are sorted into two leading factors, they are hereditary factor coming from parental issues and environmental factor which is closely related to social activities. In the end, the discussion is ended with the analysis of Gemma's morals that bring consequences to her life. Hence, using moral theory by Immanuel Kant, such as theory of reason and freedom, consciousness, good will, and duty, Gemma's good and bad moral quality is analyzed.

**Keywords:** *Literary work, moral quality, theory of moral.*

## Abstrak

*A Great And Terrible Beauty* adalah sebuah novel yang ditulis oleh Libba Bray yang menceritakan tentang eksplorasi moralitas manusia dan menyajikan percakapan konstan mengenai kebaikan atau keburukan yang melekat pada manusia. Tesis ini membahas tentang kualitas moral yang dimiliki Gemma. Aspek-aspek yang meliputi solidaritas, keberanian, tanggung jawab, kepedulian, dan cinta dikategorikan ke dalam moral yang baik; sebaliknya, ketidaktaatan, kekasaran, keras kepala, dan pelanggaran termasuk dalam moral buruk. Moral ini dipengaruhi oleh dua faktor utama, yaitu faktor keturunan yang berasal dari masalah genetik dan faktor lingkungan yang berkaitan erat dengan kegiatan sosial. Oleh karena itu, diskusi ini diakhiri dengan analisis moral Gemma yang membawa konsekuensi untuk hidupnya. Dengan menggunakan teori moral oleh Immanuel Kant, kualitas moral baik dan buruk yang ada dalam diri Gemma dianalisis.

**Kata kunci:** *Karya sastra, kualitas moral, teori moral.*

## Introduction

Moral has strong relationship with humanism, in which novel as the vehicle of moral has a great deal to set certain definition about the good and the bad within morality. Moral is derived from the Latin word 'mos' which has meaning as attitude and habits. This attitude is based on the determination of right and wrong. Thus moral quality is an abstract system to define whether a person is bad or good in conjunction with social convention

In this thesis, moral qualities which found in the main character, Gemma, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* by Libba Bray is stressed to give a new understanding of morality within literary criticism framework. The main character in this novel is Gemma Doyle. However, people carry morals like two sided coin, they always have the good and the bad within them. The moral qualities in this novel

deal with the human problems in life where the main character in this novel tries to build up her own moral then compare it with the outside morality, people morality.

From the explanation above, the story exploits Gemma's

positive moral, such as solidarity, bravery, responsibility, care, love, but it also shows Gemma's negative moral such as disobedience, rudeness, stubbornness, violation. This moral is acquired before and after Gemma had magical powers, and certainly there are some factors that influence Gemma to behave in such ways. They are hereditary factors which are coming from parental issues and environmental factors which are closely related to social activities. As the result of her conducts, Gemma faces some consequences such as possessing magic power and losing one of her friend. Realizing that she has supernatural powers

such as making her attitude continues to move and change as the plot is told.

Thus, these morals become interesting to discuss because it can support a better comprehension about moral problems especially the ones that are carried by Gemma as the main character. This thesis is expected to give a broader explanation about morality in the novel and to give a new insight for common readers to be more critical in reading novel from the view of literary criticism, in this case moral theory.

### Method of Analysis

Since this research is the qualitative research, the data obtained will be a qualitative one. The qualitative data is the one that cannot be counted. It is used in order to understand the meaning of verbal words or description. The data are acquired from various written texts with no involvement of numbers or statistic. In this case the data will be in the verbal form. Primary data in this study are taken from the novel of *A Great and Terrible Beauty* that was written by Libba Bray. The data of this study are sentences, paragraphs, or dialogues that illustrate moralities in *A Great and Terrible Beauty*. The data taken from the novels, internet websites and books will be the main focus of the resources.

The approach used is moral approach. This approach tries to discuss the relation of literary work and moral norms prevailed in society. Moral approach is used to find and understand moral norm that are shown through characters' behavior. Therefore, the analysis is narrowed on studying moral qualities of the main character. Furthermore this analysis will also answer why such character behaves and acts in such away. By using this approach, the analysis falls to study a deeper moral relation which happen in Gemma as the main character.

The method of writing this thesis is inductive method. It begins from specific idea to general conclusion. Shaw (1972:107) says that inductive method is a form of reasoning that begins from specific detail to formulate a general idea. It tries to establish a general truth from the observation of specific facts. In analyzing moral qualities on Gemma's character in "*A Great and Terrible Beauty*", the initial stage is exploring and analyzing some particular events, features, and statements that are cited and acted by Gemma and other characters. Hence, using moral theory, the moral is analyzed in accordance with the qualities. Next, Gemma's moral qualities that include the aspects of solidarity, bravery, responsibility, care, love are categorized into good moral while disobedience, rudeness, stubbornness, violation belong to bad moral. Later, these morals are sorted into two leading factors, they are hereditary factor which are coming from parental issues and environmental factor which are closely related to social activities. In the end, the discussion is ended with the analysis of Gemma's morals that bring consequences to her life. She gets magic power and she also loses one of her friends. The general conclusion drawn from the study shows that moral is divided into good and bad qualities that are established from

hereditary and environmental factors of the society and it shapes the way a person faces the life.

### Result

The result of this study shows that Gemma has good and bad moral qualities. Next, her moral qualities include some aspects. First, the solidarity happens when it comes to the feeling of friendship and the same feeling of being oppressed by the norms in the Victorian period. Second, bravery happens when she has to make decision in seeking for the ultimate magic power since many problems and danger will fall upon her during the journey of magic. Third, there is responsibility for every power, then Gemma share a secret by making a promise that Gemma and friends will live in a secret and belong to take care for each other. Fourth, care happens when gemma helps Pippa when she is drowning in the lake. Fifth, love comes when Gemma express her most bold sexuality to Kartik by kissing him first. Those are categorized into good moral but Gemma as human being can not be apart with bad moral like disobedience, rudeness, stubbornness, violation belong to bad moral. The disobedience comes when she disobeys her mother not to go to Spencer. Next, being rude when she has to be more like a lady in her time but she copies a lot from her father and uses many rude words and even she acts like boy. Being stubborn appears when she argues a lot with her mother and she insists to go to London. The last bad moral is violation, it happens when she steals the wine from the church just because she wants to join Felicity's group. That aspects are influenced by hereditary factor which are coming from parental issues and environmental factor which are closely related to social activities. In the end, Gemma's morals that bring consequences to her life.

### Discussion

In the story, Gemma loses her mother, but her mother's death is explained to be peculiar and mysterious. By this strange death of events, Gemma obtains a crescent shaped amulet. After that, Gemma starts having strange delusions of frightening images. Long before her mother passed away, she is been told not to attend a boarding school in London called Spence Academy, but she disproves her mother's will by going to England with her father and enters the school. At the boarding school, she meets more girls like herself who have broad-minded and radical views about the world and its ways.

By this upcoming event, her bad nature is strengthened. She feels that the new environment could be accepted her. There, she meets her roommate Ann Bradshaw, Felicity Worthington and Pippa. The girls then uncover a dark and magical world into which they get hopelessly entwined after finding a rather hideous book. During her time of studying at the schools, Gemma figures out her true self little by little and she comes to realize that she is different. Finally, Gemma makes a lot of friends. The time goes by and they quietly meet in a secret place every night and let go of all their inhibitions. Gemma discovers the

power of freedom when she and her friend “enter the realms” where the fantasy part of the book comes in. Once she gets hold of that magical power, she is able to control it as she wants to. She enters the magical realms where life is a perfect paradise. There, each of their greatest dreams and wishes come true. Gemma is free to do as they please. They can create illusions, an alternate world where she can get anything she want. In the end of the story, Gemma should be lost one of her friends.

From the explanation above, Gemma has good and bad moral characters showing that she is the main character in the novel *A Great and Terrible Beauty*. Moral is described to be something that represents society but not people in their respective nature. It is more like a set of belief to make people accepted, moralized and seemingly-good. By this consideration people start to adjust themselves to this moral in order to improve their characteristic into one that is good. Having known that moral is set up belief, here are some selected data of the story that represents people’s belief as goodness. The data are highly selected from the novel to depict the good side of Gemma as the main character. The story exploits Gemma’s good moral, such as solidarity, bravery, responsibility, care, and love.

First, Gemma’s high sense of solidarity that she actually cares for her roommate. There is also another scene when Gemma shows her higher solidarity to Ann. This time, Felicity accuses Ann of stealing her ring, a gift from her father. Gemma helps Ann again to get away with the problem by standing for her and replying Felicity’s cunning, which makes Felicity turn into rage. The truth is that Felicity traps Ann by inviting her to the group.

The action is indeed in the form of solidarity which derives from the theory of Good will. The principle is clear since Gemma have a relation friendship with Ann, the bond between the two triggers a good will of Gemma to help Ann. This act will result into good moral which is called as solidarity because strong affection grows within their heart. In different angle, this good moral is also derived from the theory of duty since it is relatively required for a friend to help another friend in need. Interestingly, the good will also appears in another form of action but this idea abandon the theory of duty. Hence, it is purely good will.

The next good moral is bravery, it is an action where person can obviously do something after gathering so much thought and strength though there is a risk as the return of this conduct. In *Great and Terrible Beauty* bravery comes with power. Bravery in Gemma’s thought requires power hence she will not be underestimated. Though, by the time she gets power it is just escapism for her life. It is even strengthened by Miss More analogy, Gemma eager to find away the truth and to reaches an ultimate power. Having known that they meet the right person for the journey of power, they are brave enough to take the consequence. This is closely related to the theory of reason and freedom, where Gemma really knows that she has to liberate herself from any concerns to win a greater experience of magic. There will be truth after she conducts the journey of magic. Her reason dictates her to go forth and freedom has overcome her heart so she does not really worry about what happen next because she is well prepared. In the journey to seek for

bravery, Miss More explains to Gemma about the old story of legendary sorceress possessing huge power to open the realm.

The third is responsibility, it is widely known as task which people should carry till finish or someone who should be responsible for his actions. In this novel, Gemma has responsibility when she has promise of the Order between Felicity, Ann, Pippa and Gemma take their level of friendship into a higher one and they must take care to each other for everything that has been started. This scene is the ultimate example of moral, since vow is not a cheap word to say or to do. It needs solidarity, responsibility, good will and care for each other to hold on together. Good will refers to the idea that everyone in the member should have strong willingness to keep their vow together. In other side the responsibility needs to be carried for everyone to remember the place for them standing together.

The previous good moral also contains the moral lesson of care, but in this moral, care is beautifully described. The feeling of care and needs of friendship revolve in Gemma as she goes with her friend to the grass field. It is related with theory of duty because care with holding each other’s hands and they believe that they actually belong together as friend, and what comes after friend is care. The surrounding is illustrated to be a supporting background of their friendship.

The last good moral of Gemma is love. In the magic realms, Gemma finds love of her life. Unfortunately in the magic realms, there is nothing real, the expectation and wishes would be granted in the realms of magic. Gemma meets Kartik and imaginative man from the magic world. Even she imagines a lot about her intimacy with Kartik.

Gemma is actually dying for Kartik, she demands him the most. Her feeling says so, even she does not feel afraid to expose her sexuality before Kartiks and she kisses Kartik because she can not wait no longer. She does not want to prolong the situation of hiding the feeling; she does not want to be modest. This moral occurs when theory of reason and freedom applies in the context. Gemma takes the liberty to express her feeling to the feeling since in th realm of magic no one is watching her with a strict rule. Her reason dictates her to show her feeling, and freedom is just another instrument to support it.

Bad and good are like two sided coin. In many social life, people live with this two concepts. To see what is bad and wrong, people use their knowledge to study them, but no matter how far the study has developed, knowledge can never understand the two. In the simplest meaning, the good thing is something that brings benefits but the bad thing is something that makes people loss something, or having an unwanted effect. From that idea, bad moral is defined as a peculiar behaviour which results in violating the laws and norms of the people in a certain circumstances. Thus, to study the bad moral of Gemma is like to study people’s behaviour in accordance with their duty in their surrounding. People can be said doing bad moral according to the context and who they are. Kant gives more emphasizes to the understanding of bad moral in a more contextual situation. He asserts reason and knowledge as tool to determine people

behaviour, in this case bad moral of Gemma's such as disobedience, rudeness, stubbornness, violation..

In the story Gemma is a student who violates many rules, in which a student must obey any dictates for the sake of knowledge, and as a daughter, she also fails since he has done bad things to her mother, even she does not follow her mother words. Here are the examples of the bad morality based on respective context.

The first bad moral of Gemma is disobedience, it is defined as misbehavior or noncompliance with rules. This moral is also considered as refusal to perform a conduct which has been convented by the people. In the story, this moral is shown in first chapter of the book as the tension and nerves of Gemma and her mother go high. Gemma and her mother get into a huge argument because Gemma wants to go back to England but her mother wants her to stay in India

By this case, it is clear that theory of duty is violated. As a daughter, gemma should obey the order from her mother, but she does the opposite. The duty of a daughter is to obey a will of a mother, since mother always has good reason to do so. This moral is then considered as bad moral.

The second of Gemma's bad moral is rudeness, it is an adjective to describe a character who is offensively impolite or ill-mannered. From the definition above, Gemma has rough nature and often uses harsh words that are less worthy and less polite and rude as a respectable young lady. When Tom, Gemma's brother, drove her to the Spence Academy Gemma said something inconsequential like the sound of laughter and howls. Tom warns her to control herself and watch her language in the Spence Academy. Spence is famous for good manner. It requires the students to watch their manner. By this case, Gemma will be expelled from school, if she can not maintain her mannerism.

By any means, the theory of duty is always a failure for Gemma to accept. Her rebellious act yet retaliation could not be endured by strict rules in Spencer. Thus society judges her much more like a boy because of her uncanny ability to behave.

The third is stubbornness, it means being determined not to obey or yield or someone who is determined to do what they want. In this case, Gemma is portrayed as a stubborn girl because her decision is difficult to be changed. It is shown when she has a quarrel with her mother at the market. She still insists that she comes home with her mother and celebrates her birthday but for some reason her mother puts it off, and she is angry at her mother and says "I do not care about you will come home or not."

Gemma is indeed stubborn. She does not care or listen to the reason given by her mother. She only concerns with herself. In any moral teaching, it is not allowed for daughter to dispute her mother. For the result, this causes the relationship between Gemma and is not get along. Furthermore, the main problem is because Gemma still insist to go to school. Gemma is a very determined girl, but her determination comes a risk to cross the theory of duty like what has been described. The more she does not accept her own existence as a daughter, the more she will go rebellious. Stubborn is a just a mere manifestation of violating the duty.

In relation to the theory of duty, Gemma's behavior is indeed showing her true colour as a rebellious girl. She

lets her mischievous mind to confront her mother. In many aspects of life, this violation to a parent should be mistreated as a social outlaw.

The last is violation, it is a breach of a law or a code of behavior. This actions has strong association with breaking or dishonoring of law, or contravention of a duty or right. However, a violation is not automatically a crime. For example, Gemma's stubbornness and rudeness are the triggers for violation. This is shown when she steals the communion wine from the chapel. It is prohibited because the communion wine is used only for the sake of the church. Therefore, it is forbidden to steal. Her violation even goes beyond any comprehension, since she dares to steal something from the church, because everyone knows church is a sacred place. This sin is committed because of her friend's persuasion, Felicity. Gemma is required to steal in order to become a member of her group. It is surely out of reason. She has to steal something in the church just because she wants to be accepted.

The conflicting of reason and freedom as well as consciousness to suppress her internal desire to know the truth has made her to sacrifice the theory of duty. She approves her friends willing to steal the sacred items of the school. Bad moral indeed is shown through Gemma's action by doing all means to fulfill her own desire.

Later, these morals are sorted into two leading factors, they are hereditary factor which are coming from parental issues and environmental factor which are closely related to social activities.

Heredity is the passing on of characteristics from one generation to the next. It is the reason why offspring look like their parents. The process of heredity occurs in Gemma as to why she copies a lot from her mother. Her mother tends to have strong headed mind. This also explains why Gemma shows many rebellious conducts in the story.

Besides heredity can strongly influence moral qualities of Gemma, her environment shapes her moral character even more strongly. During her study in Spencer Academy, the rigid environment there forces her to consolidate her aspect good and bad moral in accordance with those morality. The tension goes high as Victorian era is rich with rules where girls are supposed to perform noble gesture to address her environment.

Finally, Gemma gets some consequences from her good and bad moral qualities. Gemma gets the magic power, she tastes liberty; the liberty to do whatever she wants. She also lost on of her friends.

## Conclusion

The central issue of *A Great and Terrible Beauty* by Libba Bray is a young lady named Gemma Doyle, who is attending a Victorian girls' finishing school called Spence. Gemma lost her mother in a mysterious attack of a supernatural creature. She still has a father who is addicted

to opium and it is not a good option for her to live with her family. Gemma has several friends who share a journey of magical adventures

This is an adventure in which Gemma's mistakes teach her heartbreaking lessons about moral. In the final chapter, the lesson which can be taken is that with power comes a great responsibility. It is enough to know that Gemma experiences love and loss, strange visions and creepy mysteries, daring capers and horrors in the night, battles in magical world. The study of Gemma's life implies various morals that can be taken as the moral messages of the story.

Moral qualities are the essence of this research. Moral lesson functions as something useful and beneficial for the people who live in Victorian society. The moral lesson usually can be identified from the character's action in the entire story. As the plot unfolds, many moral values can be drawn from Gemma using moral theory. In analyzing moral values on Gemma's character in *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, the initial stage is exploring and analyzing some particular events, features, and statements that are cited and performed by Gemma. Next, her moral qualities include many aspects. The aspects include solidarity, bravery, responsibility, care, and love that are categorized into good moral; while disobedience, rudeness, stubbornness, and violation are included in bad moral.

As the result, only the good morals share the idea of consciousness, good will, duty, reason and freedom in which the bad morals are the deviation of the good morals. In the final discussion, these morals are driven by two leading factors, they are hereditary factor which are coming from parental issues and environmental factor which are closely related to social activities of the Victorian period. By this leading factors, Gemma's personality can not endure the consequences in the end of the story. Gemma indeed now possesses magic power but she loses one of her friends as a payback. Her great power comes a great responsibility. New finding is gained, the conclusion is written to answer all problems related to character's moral.

After analyzing the moral qualities of the main character in Libba Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, it can be drawn a conclusion that every person has good moral and bad moral. Each of them will appear in accordance with the context of situation, by seeing one of them does not make person as whole. Gemma has bad nature like stubbornness, rudeness etc, but behind her bad deeds, there are also moralist actions that she does to compensate her darkest side. It can be examples for us to elevate our moral quality.

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