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Candidate session number

Candidate name

School number

School name

Examination session (May or November)

May

Year

2012

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: English B

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: Beautiful Murder - The Paradox of the
Lovely Bones

Candidate's declaration

This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

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Date: Jan. 18th, 2012

Supervisor's report and declaration

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Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) _____

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

was thoroughly engaged with her extended essay and was genuinely moved and excited by the novel The Lovely Bones. Whilst the focus of her essay is this one text, she read quite widely before making her final selection. From the outset she was intrigued by the use and effect of a dead narrator and how a novel about crimes as repugnant as rape and murder could be described as 'beautiful' and 'compelling'. She was also fascinated that a novel being narrated by a ghost could be so credible.

had little access to secondary resources, instead having to rely on her own observations, insights and judgments. She was excited by many of her ideas and thoroughly enjoyed the discussions we had in response to them; she literally bubbled with enthusiasm for the novel and was genuinely moved by the plight of Susie Salmon, the dead protagonist.

In response to her research question she has made number of pertinent and apt observations and her use of literary terminology is appropriate; there is also some originality of thought. She really enjoyed her investigation into the use and effect of literary devices in English novels and was delighted that French and English share a number of similarities regarding literary craft.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: _____

Date: 05/03/2012

Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number

Achievement level

Criteria

	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	1	2		2	
B introduction	2	2		2	
C investigation	3	4		4	
D knowledge and understanding	2	4		4	
E reasoned argument	2	4		4	
F analysis and evaluation	2	4		4	
G use of subject language	3	4		4	
H conclusion	2	2		2	
I formal presentation	4	4		4	
J abstract	2	2		2	
K holistic judgment	2	4		4	
Total out of 36	25				

Name of examiner 1: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____

Name of examiner 2: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____

Name of examiner 3: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____

IB Cardiff use only: B:

IB Cardiff use only: A: 105273

Date: 15/05/12

Extended Essay

Beautiful Murder – The Paradox of the Lovely Bones
“Beautiful, compelling and captivating”: How is it even possible for critics to use these words to describe a novel about the vile act of the abduction, rape and subsequent murder of a young girl?

IB Candidate Number:

Word Count: 3996

Subject: Group 2, English

Session: May 2012

Abstract

This essay is an investigation into **how it is even possible that the words “Beautiful, compelling and captivating” can be used by critics to describe, *The Lovely Bones* written by Alice Sebold, a novel about the vile act of the abduction, rape and subsequent murder of a young girl.**

RQ
not well
chosen

The scope of my investigation includes the thorough analysis of the novel itself only. The core of the essay is divided into four parts. Each section is representing a word of the quotation in my research question. Characterization and Settings are analyzed to indicate the beautiful aspect of the novel. The Tension and Suspense in the plot are in relation with the novel being compelling and finally, the use of Narrative Voice is briefly explored to show the captivating aspect of *The Lovely Bones*.

approach

The answer to my question is that these words have been employed due to various reasons. Because of the way, Alice Sebold writes, the way she describes her characters, the settings, she achieved to make the novel beautiful. But also, the imagery she uses to make many moments poetic and magic. Furthermore, the suspense and tension present in the plot play a big role to making this novel compelling, as well as, the use of the narrative voice that makes the novel captivating.

covered

Word Count: 216

a poor RQ
but all elements
present
2

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✓ minimal

A. Introduction

“My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973” (5) is the opening sentence of the novel *The Lovely Bones*, written by Alice Sebold. This sentence automatically captures the reader’s attention as the author already uses the verb “was” and immediately sets the tone of the story. Indeed, the novel is mainly about murder, rape and grief. It is about the difficulty of overcoming grief after the loss of your daughter, your sister, and your friend. This novel therefore depicts horror and terrible aspects of life. However, critics described the novel to be “Beautiful, Compelling and Captivating”. Many readers as well, enjoyed reading this book and find it marvelous and fascinating. Thus, the following question arises: **How can a novel about the vile act of the abduction, rape and subsequent murder of a young girl be possibly described by these words: “Beautiful, Compelling and Captivating” by critics?**

RQ
not well
physiognomy +
leads itself to
a subjective
approach

In a world where murder and rape are considered to be awful actions, Alice Sebold achieves to transform the horror displayed in the beginning of the book, into beauty. Employing many different literary devices, she, not only makes this novel beautiful, but she also accomplishes to make it compelling and captivating. This is why this novel is memorable and so intriguing. Our moral beliefs are challenged and we discover we enjoy reading the book and we find it beautiful when at the beginning, we were repelled about the acts portrayed and we could never have thought we could describe the novel to be “beautiful, compelling or captivating”.

values
judgements
more suited
to a review

To approach my question, I will analyze each literary aspect, Alice Sebold employed, that contributed to making this novel “beautiful, compelling and captivating”. Firstly, I will explore characterization and the relationships that exist between the characters. These represent the aspect of beauty of the novel because the

characters are intensively connected to each other and express emotions such as love and solidarity towards each other. Alice Sebold also tells us the way each character deals with grief and how their understanding of death changes. Moreover, the way Alice Sebold writes and describes the settings such as heaven and the cornfield add to the beauty aspect as she uses imagery and poetry. The novel is compelling because of the plot is full of tension and suspense. Alice Sebold makes us desire revenge and justice towards the murderer of Susie Salmon. Finally, the novel is captivating because of the use of a ghost as a narrative voice. In fact, at the very first line of the book, we discover that the narrator is already dead and although she talks about what happened to her when she was alive, it is not a flashback, she tells us her story. This choice from the writer is very interesting and strange but was also very avant-garde at the time.

This is why it has been a very successful novel. Critics have said that it was "Savagely beautiful... A strange and compelling novel" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Or Kristine Huntley (booklist) said, "Few novels, debut or otherwise, are as masterful or as compelling as Sebold's... She paints, with an artist's precision, a portrait of a world where the terrible and the miraculous can and do co-exist".

poor selection for a focus

3 2
The elements are present but the 2Q as written will make it difficult to build an argument that is convincing

B. Characterization

Through characterization, Alice Sebold makes the novel 'beautiful'. The different relationships between the characters and the descriptions of their emotions towards each other are moving and sensitive. The evolution of the characters and the way, each of them, deals with grief is remarkable and is described so that we identify ourselves to them directly. The relationship Susie Salmon has with each member of her family and other relative is particular. Through these, Alice Sebold achieves to make us feel the emotions they have for Susie, such as love, compassion and loyalty. The descriptions and imageries the writer uses help to convey these emotions to us, readers. As the relatives of Susie Salmon experience grief, they find themselves able to encounter a total new perspective of life and of what death means.

Throughout the novel, Susie Salmon witnesses the different ways each of her relatives is overcoming their despair, dealing with their grief, meanwhile demonstrating their love for her. For example, she sees her father who everyday expressed his despair and sorrow that we can feel through the descriptions of Alice Sebold: "Everyday he got up. [...] At first, he couldn't even get up. [...] The guilt on him, the hand of God pressing down on him, saying, *you were not there when your daughter needed you*" (58), or when she witnesses her sister dealing with her grief as best as she can: "She would leave the dark shower [...] she either thought *Susie*, just that one word, and cried there [...] she fought back the constant question, *Where is Susie now*" (59, 60). In these two quotes, Alice Sebold put certain words in italic as they are exact words the father and sister of Susie that ring out in their ears. This makes the readers even more aware of what the characters feel everyday. Also, the fact that the descriptions are very long emphasizes the despair and the time they need to heal from their grief. This, in a way, makes the novel 'beautiful' as it demonstrates

that the father and sister of Susie are so affected by her death and are both dealing with their grief differently. Thus, we are encouraged to help them in this hard process and are moved by the sensibility of their attitude: "If the house was quiet or if she heard murmurs below her, she knew she would be undisturbed" (59). It seems they are almost scared of anyone to see their pain but Susie can see it and gets reassured when she sees they care about her. This sort of relationship is beautiful.

not convincing

*is it?
how?*

Susie also witnesses her mother that she describes to have a "stare that [stretches] to infinity" (43) and then, Susie says, "My mother's eyes were oceans, inside them there was loss. I thought I had my whole life to understand them, but that was the only day I had" (43). These quotes firstly signify the subtlety of the attention that Susie addresses to Earth and her family. This is shown because eyes are usually not the things you look at first when observing someone, they are one of the details of our physical appearance and Susie describes them. But these quotes also show the despair that her mother, Abigail is feeling towards her daughter's death. The way Susie describes it is beautiful as she uses a metaphor when she says her mother's eyes were oceans. It demonstrates how much her mother's pain is immense. And because it seems impossible for her mother to get out of this ocean of loss, Susie desires to help them: "I wanted to rush into those [her mother's eyes] ocean eyes of loss" (99). 'Rush' is a very intense word and as it is used with the metaphor of the ocean of loss, it makes this sentence very powerful. Again, we feel encouraged to hope for Susie to be able to help them even though, we know that in reality, it would be impossible. These words appeal to us and touch us as we achieve to feel the pain the mother feels as well as the desire and determination of Susie expressed in this extract. This determination that Susie has is beautiful and this causes our enjoyment when reading the novel.

some attempt at analysis

more opinion

In order to heal from her grief, Abigail, Susie's mother, has an affair with Len: "their first embrace was hurried, fumbled, passionate [...] I'm tired of thinking, she said" (152). This attempt is to deal with her grief better and she refuges herself in love, a simple pleasure of life. "Her rage, her loss, her despair. The whole life lost tumbling out in arc on that roof, clogging up her being. She needed Len to drive the dead daughter out" (152). In fact, she uses Len to overcome the situation and as weak as she is, she does find anything else to do but that: "to find a doorway out of her ruined heart, in merciful adultery" (196). The way she is dealing with grief is quite understandable and we feel sympathy for Abigail, while, through Susie's eyes, we feel disgusted and upset. Finally, for the first time she is thinking about no one else but herself and it is important for her to do that at some point in order to overcome this passage in her life. Another way she practices the simple pleasures of life is when "she [eats macaroons] greedily; they were like suns bursting open in her mouth" (62). Once again, the imagery that Alice Sebold employs in this quote makes this pleasure of life that is so simple, so beautiful and so relieving for the character.

Who's Len?

?

Abigail has lost her confidant and her only friend when she loses Susie: "When I look back now I see that my mother had become – and very quickly after they moved into that house – lonely. Because I was the oldest, I became her closest friend" (150). This explains why after her death, she is completely devastated: not only she lost her daughter, but she also lost her friend who was always here for her. When describing the relationship between the two characters, Alice Sebold uses imagery and makes their relationship very beautiful and intimate: "the laughter, the small sounds of muffled moaning, would usher me back into sleep" (151) or, "You look invincible", my mother said one night. I loved these times, when we seemed to feel the same thing. I turned to her, wrapped in my thin gown, and said: "I am." (210,

✓

211). This mother to daughter relationship is described subtly and beautifully thanks to the imagery and the words used that are strong like 'invincible'. This draws the readers into the novel even more and engages them, as they learn more about the characters and their love and admiration for each other.

suffice it to focus on how the relationship is developed.

The protagonist attempts to understand both death and life when contemplating earth: "It was a way, I now realized, to try to understand [Susie] better. A miscalculated circling, a sad, partnerless dance" (99) and "Something so divine that no one up in heaven could have made it up; the care a child took with an adult" (47) are quotes who express Susie's understanding about life and particularly, what her father is trying to achieve. Also, Susie feels alive through the happiness of the members in her family. For example, "I saw Lindsey move toward Samuel Heckler. She kissed him; it was glorious. I was almost alive again" (71). She simply says that she feels almost alive again to witness such a beautiful episode of her sister's life. This participates to create the beautiful aspect of the novel as Susie feels alive thanks to the other members of her family although she is literally dead. This is very touching to us readers as we realize there is hope and that even though Susie is dead, she still has moments of happiness.

context?

Lastly, Susie desires her father to take revenge for her and wants more than them demonstrating their love to her: "Part of me wished swift vengeance, wanted my father to turn into the man he could never have been – a man violent in rage" (58). Her father will turn out to take revenge and this is a beautiful love proof. Although, this should not be something to do in reality, as readers, we strongly encourage the father to do that and we are amazed with all the love he demonstrates to Susie by doing that. This aspect makes the novel even more beautiful as we can see a father fighting for his daughter and he will do anything to get revenge. This perseverance is

?

what permits Susie to keep hope and it makes us even more passionate about the novel.

*Some good attempts
to use text evidence,
but the point is misdirected*

C. Settings

Alice Sebold, using imagery, describes settings and moments, and is able to make these magical and poetic although murder and rape are main themes in the novel. The writer describes the cornfield in which Susie Salmon was raped and chopped into many pieces ~~into~~ in comparison with many descriptions of Susie's heaven. This contrast emphasizes the creation of the paradox of the Lovely Bones. But it also adds to the beauty of the novel.

The day of her death, "the snow was falling lightly, like a flurry of small hands" (6). Therefore every time it snowed after that, it symbolized her death. While it first snowed after her death, she describes the scene from her heaven: "I stood alone in a sea of bright petals. On Earth the snowflakes fell soft and blameless, a curtain descending" (57). The similes and metaphors in these quotes, such as "the snow like a flurry of small hands" or "sea of bright petals", lead the readers to imagine more easily the settings. The snow, which symbolizes purity and beauty, contrasts with the murder that took place in the cornfield. The petals symbolize beauty as well. And the fact that the snow creates a curtain descending is like hiding the place where she was murdered. These quotes express beauty because of the symbolism present in the words used by Alice Sebold that create as well a poetic atmosphere as snow is seen as magic and simply beautiful.

only this?
better

A special moment that Alice Sebold describes very subtly is when Holly, Franny and Susie watch life on Earth together, nostalgically. "Late at night the air above hospitals and senior citizen homes was often thick and fast with souls. [...] We came to realize how these deaths seemed choreographed from somewhere far away. Not out heaven. And so we began to suspect that there was a place more all-encompassing than where we were" (154). Holly then said: "[she] felt [souls] before

[she] saw them; small warm sparks along [her] arms. Then there they were, fireflies lighting up and expanding in howls and swirls as they abandoned human flesh" (155). To which, Franny added: "Like snowflakes, none of them the same and yet each one, from where we stand, exactly like the one before" (155). These comparisons and metaphors, once again, illicit the reader to feel engaged into the novel and to imagine the settings better. It also gives us the magic that Alice Sebold desires to express throughout the novel by the use of the words 'fireflies', 'howls', 'swirls'. But also the fact that they think about a more encompassing place is surprising for us readers. Usually we do not read about these aspects of life: the after death part. And in this novel, we are confronted to this way of thinking that is captivating in a way, as it is something we have never been facing before. Finally, it is also beautiful to see these three girls attempting to understand life.

Lastly, a very unique moment is when "Ray and Ruth [arrive] at the cornfield": "they [are] silent and [Ray] is holding her hand. [Ruth doesn't] know whether he [is] holding it because they [are] observing [Susie's] death together or because he [likes] her. Her brain [is] a storm, her usual insight gone" (203). This quote shows how these two characters became unified through Susie's grief. In despair and mourning, they found each other and together, they are stronger facing Susie's death. Walking back into this cornfield must be very difficult to do on their own. This quote, not only, shows that there is a strong and touching relationship that bloomed from the conflict, but also, the sensibility of the characters and the magic of the instant. Reading these lines, we can imagine the difficulty of the experience and the simplicity of the moment nevertheless. This shows the beauty aspect of the novel.

The setting as well as the relationship Ray and Ruth have is beautiful and this is described in a beautiful way.

[]
why not
marry?

not the
most
valid or
accurate
conclusion

D. Tension and Suspense in Plot

Tension and suspense, created by Alice Sebold, make the novel compelling. As two of the main themes are revenge and justice, we as readers want and need to know what is going to happen to the murderer and if the characters will undertake their revenge and achieve it. This is what makes us want to turn each page.

First of all, there are some passages where Susie witnesses situations that provoke our feelings. She is not able to interact with her family and thus, not able to stop them from doing anything dangerous or completely useless to do. The characters in the novel do not know many things that Susie and we, readers, are aware of and this is why the novel is so captivating for us as we desire revenge just like all the characters loving Susie. But we also hope for Susie to be able to interact with them sometimes in the novel. For instance, “so it was that, from heaven, I watched my father build a tent with the man who’d killed me” (56), is not only ironic but also provokes our feelings and make us frustrated not to be able to tell her father who this man really is. Especially, when we know that her father really wants to find out who was her murderer and is desperate that he does not even know what to do anymore to help the search: “Mr. Salmon was crazy with grief and had gone out to the cornfield seeking revenge. It fit what they knew of him, his persistent phone calls, his obsession with the neighbor” (141). In fact, he even puts his life at risk when he tries to get Mr. Harvey. He thought he saw him but it was a girl and her boyfriend injured Mr. Salmon. He then ended up hospitalized. The fact that he is constantly fighting and desiring justice so hard indicates the scale of his love for his daughter as well as his determination. This determination energizes the novel and makes it as compelling as the critics describe it to be.

✓
dramatic
irony?

constant
incidents

Lindsey, Susie's sister, also expresses this determination. She, indeed, is very much like her father and needs revenge and justice in order to deal with her mourning: "She stared at our mother and knew what she wanted most: to flee, to run out into the cornfield where my father was, where I was, where she felt suddenly that the heart of her family has moved" (143). She desires justice more than anything and truly attempts to get it. We, readers, feel like she knows who is the murderer just like her father and want to know if at some point, she is going to know for sure: "my sister had dutifully hovered for weeks now, paying court to our mother regardless of the signals she gave. There was something on the other side of the icy surface. Lindsey was sure of it. She stayed by my mother, sitting by her chair and watching our neighbors outside the window" (204). Revenge is one of the ways that she demonstrates her love for Susie. This quote shows how Lindsey is determined to find the culprit and she knows what to do to achieve so. This makes us even more anger to read the novel because we know that at some point, Lindsey will do something, we hope for it at least and this is what keeps us turning the page. This is above all, contributing to making this novel compelling.

Suddenly, towards the end of the book, "somewhere in the blue blue In-between [she] had seen her – Ruth streaking by [her] as [she] fell to Earth. But [Ruth] was no shadow of a human form, no ghost. [...] And [Susie] was in her body" (301). Susie reincarnates into Ruth's body. We do not really know how but strangely, we believe in it as we genuinely wanted her to come back to earth. "I felt something holding me down, and I felt a hand in mine. My ears were like oceans in which I had known, voices, faces, facts, began to drown. I opened my eyes for the first time since I had died [...] I was still as I came to realize that the marvelous weight weighing me down was the weight of the human body" (301), this quote expresses the magic of the

love?

rather
elementary
understanding
of suspense

instant and makes us realize that life is a gift and it is beautiful. Even though, we would not find this end credible in real life, all the horribleness we have felt before throughout the novel permits us to accept this reincarnation and to enjoy it as we read.

In conclusion to this section, readers are satisfied with the ending of the novel because they obviously hoped for Susie to be back on Earth. A sense of desire emanates from the characters as well as the readers throughout the whole novel. It is all about the process of being able to let go of earth, which is successfully achieved by the reincarnation that Susie has in the body of Ruth – it was all she always wanted. This reincarnation makes us satisfied and most importantly, makes Susie happy and ready to finally, let go of earth. And this satisfaction permits us to end the book peacefully, as the beginning was quite disturbing and horrible. Susie has gained happiness from her family's happiness during this journey and this is the reason why she is able to go on with her destiny. In other words, she can rest in what "[She calls] this wide wide Heaven because it includes all [her] simplest desires but also the most humble and grand" (325). Finally, these themes and feelings that we, readers, feel make the novel compelling.

*This section
is not as strong
as the previous*

E. Narrative Voice

The choice of the novel's narrative voice that Alice Sebold made is very interesting and captivates the readers. Since the first sentence, we know that Susie Salmon, the protagonist and narrator, is not alive anymore: she is a 'ghost'. We, however, find her credible. The advantage with this narrative voice is that she witnesses everything and Alice Sebold is capable of telling us anything about the characters' lives and even showing us what is happening in their lives. Furthermore, the fact that the narrator, who is the protagonist as well, is in heaven adds beauty to the novel. We are in fact captivated by this 'other world' that is not necessarily similar to our perception of heaven.

not developed



F. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that the words, “Beautiful, Compelling, Captivating”, used by critics to describe the novel, are vindicated. Firstly, *The Lovely Bones* is beautiful because of the way Alice Sebold writes and describes her characters, but also because of the settings and the imagery she uses to make many moments poetic and magic. The novel is compelling because of the suspense and tension present in the plot, created by the themes justice and revenge that make the readers want to know more on every page. Finally, the novel is captivating, simply because of the story itself but especially because of the use of the narrative voice of a ghost employed by Alice Sebold. This choice is definitely making the novel captivating, as it is a ghost who narrates it. As readers, we really enjoy this book as it is the kind of story who could apply to us one day and because grief is something really hard to deal with, this novel helps us to understand the nature of this and how to overcome it. Although this novel is fiction, it is entirely based on real and sincere human beings’ feelings and emotions. Throughout the novel, we can feel emotions such as, horror, despair, regret but also hope, happiness and love. This is why it affects us so much and makes us perplex when we realize that it first starts with a horrible crime but finishes with so much simplicity and happiness. As *Christian Science Monitor* says, “the book begins with more horror than you could imagine, but closes with more beauty than you could hope for”. This is the idea that we should keep in mind after having read this novel so well written.

hardly discussed

Basing the argument on the 3 adjectives from a review is not the most literary or efficient way to approach this PQ. There is an attempt to give textual evidence revealing some insight into some of the characters and relationships. The presentation is good and there is some evidence of planning.

G. Bibliography

Sebold, Alice. *The Lovely Bones*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009. Print.