



# The Sovereignty Of The Threshold: An Intense Study Of Body-Mind Dualism And The Separation Of Self In Gayle Forman's *If I Stay*

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## **Abstract:**

This paper delves into the dualism of mind and body in the novel *If I Stay* written by Gayle Forman. The author has beautifully portrayed the in-between state of the character in the select novel. The protagonist Mia experiences an out-of-body state, occurred as an aftermath of traumatic accident. Also, the paper clearly depicts the independency of consciousness from a physical body. The Philosophical term dualism within modern fiction by asserting through intense text analysis shows that, the identity of the character in the novel is deeply rooted in the characters consciousness rather than the body. Forman uses the threshold of liminal space as an exploration of psychological grounds. Among this the protagonist is forced to live among her absolute loss. The primary text uses the evidences to portray the survival as a radical act of human agency rather than a biological inevitability.

**Keywords:** In-between state, Heaviness, Loss, loneliness, liminal, responsible, choice, and identity.

## **Introduction:**

Gayle Forman is a renowned contemporary young adult American fiction author. Her writing carrier began by penning down in small articles and later grew towards writing novels. Forman's remarkable works are *If I Stay* and the sequel novel *Where She Went, After Life, Not Nothing*, a trilogy work *Just One Day, Just One Night, Just One Year, Frankie & Bug, The End of my Heart, We are Inevitable* and so on. The Novel *If I Stay* brought fame to Forman and was the *New York Times* bestseller of young adult fiction novel. This particular novel was also filmed in the later years. Few other awards are NAIBA book of the year during 2009 was given for the novel *If I Stay*. In the year 2010 Indie Choice Honor Award was given for the novel *If I Stay*. Forman's novels focus on themes like choice, grief, anxiety, dualism, life and death, guilt, bond, music, identity and so on.

## **Bifurcation of self and mind:**

The main protagonist of the novel is Mia Hall, a cellist abided by musical family. Her father used to play in band and as family pressure hold forces him to leave music. So, from their childhood Mia and her brother were fond of music and began to play music, where Mia chose classical music cello and her

brother chose rock music. Both Mia and her brother were attached to their family. On one fine day as a family, they planned to on a road trip, is where the tragedy begins. An unexpected twist takes place as the whole family met with a tragic accident. Mia could feel an in-between state,

I run back toward the ditch where I came from and I see a hand sticking out. 'Teddy! I'm right here!' I call. 'Reach up. I'll pull you out.' But when I get closer, I see the metal glint of a silver bracelet with tiny cello and guitar charms. Adam gave it to me for my seventeenth birthday. It's my bracelet. I was wearing it this morning. I look down at my wrist. I'm still wearing it now. I edge closer and now I know that it's not Teddy lying there. It's me. (14)

Where Mia goes in search of her family, finally she finds her own self been lying down the road. Mia was in a state where she couldn't understand anything that is happening around her. It was this particular incident where the in-between state of Mia starts to ponder over in Forman's work. "I stare down at my wrist, the one that looks fine, untouched by blood and gore, and I pinch as hard as I can. I don't feel a thing. I have had nightmares" (14). Mia tries hard to find out what is happening around her. All she could think of is a happy trip they started as a family. But here she stands on middle of road, experiencing her physical self with her own eyes. Mia could see her own trauma, yet testifies her own physical agony.

Bifurcation of self is the main focus of the paper. In this the two different words 'Me' and 'I' portrays two different views of one character. The word 'Me' denotes the Mia physical body and the 'I' denotes the Mia witnessing her own consciousness. The liminal state acts as emotional buffer in the novel. If Mia had not experienced the liminal state, then Mia's decision of survival would be fully based on physical pain, but this state gives her a chance of making decision of her own life and she could witness all the tragedy that is happening to her family and where in heaviness overtakes her power.

Mia starts to doubt her liminal state. "I start to zone out. And then I start to wonder about this state I'm in. If I'm not dead – and the heart monitor is bleeping along, so I assume I'm not – but I'm not in my body, either, can I go anywhere? Am I a ghost?" (37). Mia could see all the trauma she undergoes. "Right now, in surgery, the doctors have to remove my spleen, insert a new tube to drain my collapsed lung, and stanch whatever else might be causing the internal bleeding. There isn't a lot they can do for my brain" (34). Mia could see people around her operating her body, where understand that physical body can be fixed with the help of science, but for fixing one's soul an individual consciousness matter.

I am starting to get it now. I mean, I don't totally fully understand. It's not like I somehow commanded a blood vessel to pop open and start leaking into my stomach. It's not like I wished for another surgery. But Teddy is gone. Mom and Dad are gone. This morning I went for a drive with my family. And now I am here, as alone as I've ever been. I am seventeen years old. This is not how it's supposed to be. This is not how my life is supposed to turn out. (145)

The hospital scenario gives a picture of Mia's state and her before and after life that she's witnessing with her own eyes. Mia's loss of her family worries her a lot. Also shows that in her state of in-between dwelling she suffers from loneliness beyond the presence of doctors and relative that she sees. Though she is in a liminal state she does not experience or feel any kind of comfort. She is left to suffer alone. Though her physical body is surrounded by many people, at her consciousness she ultimately alone. In her liminal state Mia could hear the unspoken grief that surrounds her. She is able to see her grandparents, friends and Adam, also could hear their conversations but she is unable to respond to them. Even though she could stand near them they could not see or feel or hear Mia.

### ***The Density of Choice:***

Mia is forced to move from passive observation to decision making. Initially Mia thought doctors and nurses would make decision over her life. Later on, she realised that, she is the one who is only responsible in deciding her life.

I have a feeling that once you live through something like this, you become a little bit invincible.

I know that makes me a bit of a hypocrite. If that's the case, shouldn't I stay? Soldier through it? Maybe if I'd had some practice, maybe if I'd had more devastation in my life, I would be more prepared to go on. It's not that my life has been perfect. I've had disappointments and I've been lonely and frustrated and angry and all the crappy stuff everyone feels. But in terms of heartbreak, I've been spared. I've never toughened up enough to handle what I'd have to handle if I were to stay. (195)

Mia beautifully manages her maturity by accepting the pain in exchange for the possibility of future connection. She chose to fight the battle and struggle to survive her future. Though she feels orphaned, she starts to accept things and looks forward for a bright future. Mia's choice towards survival gives her a new identity and future.

### ***Conclusion:***

Mia navigates from being a spectator of herself and looks towards architecting her future life. "But I'm also feeling all that I have in my life, which includes what I have lost, as well as the great unknown of what life might still bring me" (209). Mia chooses to live and fight back the world with all her strength, Where she could feel her physical self.

I slump back, spent, unsure of whether I just did what I did. Of what it means. If it registered. If it matters.

But then I feel Adam's grip tighten, so that the grasp of his hand feels like it is holding my entire body. Like it could lift me up right out of this bed. And then I hear the sharp intake of his breath followed by the sound of his voice. It's the first time today I can truly hear him.

'Mia?' he asks. (209 – 210)

Forman says that the stay that Mia chose was not the life she had before, it was for the independent survival she chose to stay, fight the battle and survive. Though Mia's family is gone, the term 'I' shows that the will power of Mia to build a self-identity. *If I Stay* written by Gayle Foman acts as a powerful catalyst on showcasing that a person will power is the judge of life. A person's conscious mind can function independently from its physical body when it is been trapped in a threshold state between life and death.

### ***References:***

Forman, Gayle. *If I Stay*. 2009. Random house children's, 2014.