Minor Characters' Influences on Belly's Emotional Maturity in *Jenny Han's The Summer I Turned Pretty*

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ABSTRACT
Emotional maturity plays a significant role in the behavior of individuals. Jenny Han's novel *The Summer I Turned Pretty* depicts emotional maturity through its characters. This study aims to analyze the influences of minor characters on the main character's emotional maturity, formulated through the question: "What are the influences that the minor characters bring toward Belly's emotional maturity?". To answer the question, the writers applied the theory of emotional maturity. This study employed the New Criticism approach along with the close reading method, as it dealt with the theory of emotional maturity. Data were collected using a library research technique, in which the novel served as a primary source, while supporting books, journals, and articles were used as secondary sources. The findings of this study revealed that Conrad, Jeremiah, and Susannah, as the minor characters, significantly influenced Belly's emotional maturity. Belly underwent five levels of FitzMaurice's emotional maturity, namely: emotional responsibility, honesty, openness, assertiveness, and understanding. These five levels of emotional maturity experienced by Belly were influenced by Conrad, Jeremiah, and Susannah. By understanding the development of Belly's emotional maturity, the readers can reflect on themselves and apply the positive behaviors exhibited by Belly.

Keywords: emotional maturity, influences, minor character, *The Summer I Turned Pretty*

INTRODUCTION

All humans experience emotions. In daily life, emotions can be expressed in various ways, both verbally and nonverbally. Emotions can arise from thoughts, appraisals, or physical responses to specific events and situations. Therefore, learning how to respond to situations maturely and responsibly must be developed in individuals' lives. Emotional maturity is regarded as one of the major determinants in shaping an individual's personality, behavior, and attitudes. It helps them to be responsible in making decisions, improving healthy relationships with others, and enhancing self-worth (Anand et al., 2014). In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, people had to adjust to the new environment and new habits for about two years. Since the pandemic affected people around the world, the primary concern was how to ensure that individuals experiencing adjustment disorders received appropriate psychosocial support (Kazlauskas & Quero, 2020). During the challenging and potentially distressing period, people were forced to adjust to a new way of life shaped by the fear of contracting and spreading the virus (Chen & Bonanno, 2020). Over time, they had to readjust themselves in the post-COVID era.

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Nathial (2014) mentioned that life revolves around adjustment and also stated that adjustment empowers individuals to implement meaningful changes in response to environmental conditions. Adjusting to various circumstances may be difficult; therefore, emotional maturity plays a significant role in developing the capacity to make effective adjustments with individuals, family members, peers, society, and the environment (Jobson, 2020). In addition, Kumar (2014) emphasized that genes and hormones significantly influence the growth and development of children and adolescents. Once adolescence is surpassed, individuals must make the conscious decision to pursue maturity. Understanding the importance of emotional maturity, the writers believe that its study deserves deeper exploration through literary analysis. Studies show that analyzing emotional elements in literature not only reveals the psychological depth of characters but also highlights the values and lessons conveyed to readers, especially regarding emotional regulation and wise decision-making (Khairunnisa et al., 2018; Junjunan & Mustika, 2020). This can shed light on how characters' emotional growth is depicted, the impact of emotional maturity on the storyline, or the influence of minor characters. One literary work that explores emotional maturity through its characters is Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty* (2009).

In addition to the novel's popularity among young adults (Scattered Books, 2023; The Summer I Turned Pretty, n.d.-a, n.d.-b), its critical acclaim (American Library Association, n.d.), and the release of its three seasons on Amazon Prime Video in 2022, 2023, and 2025, the writers choose Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty* because this novel not only focuses on Belly's love story with characters named Jeremiah and Conrad but also represents the growth of the emotional maturity of Belly as the main character throughout the narrative. In this novel, Belly undergoes her life surrounded by characters who significantly impact her, including her emotional development. In everyday life, people are influenced by those around them. The way people perceive, act, and think about something can be influenced by the people around them. Emotional maturity plays a significant role in the behavior of individuals. According to Alexander (1967), the term "maturity" refers to an important stage in the development of a living organism. Maturity is reached when individual growth is accomplished, and the organism is ready to reproduce. In addition, FitzMaurice (2012) stated six levels of emotional maturity: 1) emotional responsibility, 2) emotional honesty, 3) emotional openness, 4) emotional assertiveness, 5) emotional understanding, and 6) emotional detachment.

The first related study is a master's thesis written by McClelland (2023), entitled *The Commercialization and Imposed Voices of Femininity in The Summer I Turned Pretty*. In her research, she tried to uncover several topics, such as the concept of a formulaic text in romantic fiction, the commercialization of femininity, the heteronormative romantic narrative, conceptions of motherhood and adult romance, comparing the show to the novel, and also the importance of the soundtrack. According to her thesis, Belly, as the main character, changes in this specific summer. She often experiences insecurity about her appearance, and she struggles with her newfound attention and sense of maturity. She constantly seeks validation and the superficial. When Danielle compares the show and the novel, she states in her research that both in the show and novel, Belly's desired view of herself and femininity often conflicts with how others view her, causing anger and frustration within herself.

The second study is entitled *An Effect of Psychological Conflict to Elsa Personality Development in Frozen: Psychological Approach*. This journal article is written by Goh & Arianto (2019). The psychological conflicts that had a huge effect on Elsa's personality development are examined in this study. Goh and Arianto apply two theories to answer their research problems. The first theory is about psychological conflict, which is proposed by Kurt Lewin, and the second theory is about personality development, which Elizabeth B. Hurlock proposes. This study also applies the descriptive qualitative method to collect the data, which consists of some steps. The first step is to read the novel; the second is to collect the essential parts related to the issues; the third step is to analyze the data; and the final step is to conclude. Goh and Arianto find out that approach-avoidance conflict and avoidance-avoidance conflict

are two kinds of psychological conflicts shown in Elsa's character. Other than that, emotional, aspiration and achievement, intellectual, social, and family are five determinants that Goh and Arianto found regarding Elsa's personality development.

The third study is a study conducted by Kindangen et al. (2022) with the title *The Significance of the Minor Character in Rowling's Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. This study aims to examine the minor character, Luna Lovegood, utilizing a qualitative research method based on Robert Stanton's theory. In addition, the intrinsic approach that deals with characters, plots, themes, settings, styles, and other elements, according to Wellek & Warren (1963), is applied in this research. According to the findings of this research, Luna Lovegood possesses characteristics such as admiration of beauty and excellence, which are conveyed through the character's words. Kindness is earned because of the character's actions. Character dialogues resulted in bravery, curiosity, and humility. Kindness and bravery are also discovered due to the character's actions.

The fourth study is a study by Nihaayah et al. (2018) entitled *The Emotional Maturity of Jesse Aaron in Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson*. The purpose of this study is to look into the emotional maturity of Jesse Aaron in the novel Bridge to Terabithia. This study employs the psychological theory of Kevin Everett Fitz Maurice's Six Levels of Emotional Maturity from his book The Secret of Maturity: Or How Not to be Codependent (1989) and Self-Concept: The Enemy Within (1989). It analyses the character of Jesse Aaron's personality based on its development. The discovery demonstrates that Jesse experiences all six levels of emotional maturity. The findings are as follows: Jesse can acknowledge his feelings (level 1), tell his feelings honestly (level 2), be open about his thoughts and feelings (level 3), ask for and receive nurturing from himself and others (level 4), able to realize his good abilities (level 5), as well as learn a value from incident (level 6).

The last study was conducted by Sagimin & Damayanti (2019). It is a journal article entitled *Interpersonal Relationship and Personality Development on the Main Character in R.J. Palacio's Wonder Novel*. The purpose of this research is to discover the personality development of August Pullman, the main character in R.J. Palacio's Wonder. How August's interpersonal relationships in the novel influenced his personality development is discovered in this study. Harry S. Sullivan's theory about interpersonal relationships is applied in this study to analyze how August's social interaction with others affects his personality development. In addition, this study also uses Elizabeth B. Hurlock's theory of personality development to discover the factors of personality development. The result indicates that there are three conditions in August's personality changes. Those are changes in environment, social pressure, and self-concept. August's personality in Wonder is portrayed as unconfident and weak, and having limited social interaction. He then develops into a confident, brave, and independent kid.

There are similarities and differences between those studies and the writers' study. The first study is significant to this study because it discusses the same object of study. Still, it focuses more on the commercialization and imposed voices of femininity. The second study discusses the personality development of a character using a psychological approach. The third study analyzes the significance of a specific minor character in a literary work. The fourth study fits the writers' need in conducting this study because it discusses the emotional maturity experienced by a character. The last study focuses on interpersonal relationships that influence the main character's personality development. The writers attempt to discover something new that differs from previous studies. The writers focus on determining the influence of minor characters on Belly's emotional maturity in Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty*, which differs from the previous studies that have not explored this topic.

Existing studies on *The Summer I Turned Pretty* have primarily focused on themes such as the commercialization of femininity, while other literary analyses have separately explored emotional maturity, the significance of a single minor character, or the impact of interpersonal

relationships in different novels. Although these studies are valuable, a clear research gap remains, as no prior research has specifically investigated how the constellation of minor characters in Han's novel collectively influences the protagonist's emotional maturation. This study addresses that gap directly. While previous studies have explored emotional maturity or the role of minor characters in isolation, this study's novelty lies in its synthesis—it is the first to analyze the dynamic interplay between the supporting cast and the protagonist's developmental journey in *The Summer I Turned Pretty*, offering new insights into the book's thematic depth.

As a result of the aforementioned discussion, this study examines Belly's emotional maturity and how the minor characters influence her emotional maturity. By taking Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty*, the writers aim to explore not only the individual journey of the main character but also the broader themes, considering the role of minor characters that make it a standout example of literature exploring emotional maturity. Through this study, the writers believe that the readers of Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty* can gain a deeper understanding of the development of Belly's emotional maturity as influenced by several minor characters rather than focusing solely on Belly's love story. The writers also expect that this study can contribute to English teaching and learning since emotional maturity plays a major role in building students' character and attitudes. Furthermore, students are able to learn from the characters of a novel and implement positive behavior from what they have learned from the characters in their everyday lives. This study may also serve as a valuable reference for future research in the same field. Thus, the research question is: What are the influences that the minor characters bring toward Belly's emotional maturity?

METHODOLOGY

The writers use library research as the method of this study. Library research is a study that examines a variety of books, references, and research findings from previous similar studies to obtain a theoretical foundation for the issue that will be investigated (Sarwono, 2006). The data and resources to analyze the problem formulation are gathered from primary and secondary sources. The primary source of this study, Jenny *Han's The Summer I Turned Pretty* novel will be closely examined to understand how Belly's emotional maturity is depicted in the narrative, also focusing on how minor characters influence her emotional maturity. Meanwhile, the secondary sources of this study are taken from previous studies related to this study and several books, such as Henkle's *Reading the Novel: An Introduction to the Techniques of Interpreting Fiction*, Koesnosoebroto's *the Anatomy of Prose Fiction*, FitzMaurice's *the Secret of Maturity*, and Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today*. Secondary sources were selected based on their relevance to the study. Those secondary sources will enrich the analysis by offering additional insights and theories to enrich the analysis of Belly's emotional maturity in Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. Therefore, both primary and secondary sources help the writers to analyze the problem formulation of this study.

To effectively analyze and evaluate a literary work, it is essential to employ an appropriate literary criticism approach. The approach used can help the writers guide the analysis and make the findings more accessible to readers. Therefore, the writers decided to use the New Criticism approach to examine the issue because it was well-suited to identifying the solution to the problem formulation presented in the first chapter, since the analysis only focused on the literary work itself. Tyson (2006) stated that New Criticism emphasizes the close analysis of individual literary works without considering external factors. It focuses on the text itself as the primary source of evidence for interpreting its meaning. Tyson also mentioned, "For New Criticism, a literary work is a timeless, autonomous (self-sufficient) verbal object. Readers and readings may change, but the literary text stays the same." (p. 131).

To apply this approach in this study, the writers not only employed several steps mentioned in the previous part but also applied a close reading method. Close reading is a focused, disciplined reading of an object to gain a deeper knowledge of its meanings. That knowledge is frequently communicated with others in the form of critique or critical analysis

(Brummet, 2018). Therefore, by closely reading the novel, the writers found information, such as the main character's emotional maturity and the influences of minor characters on Belly's emotional maturity.

Then, the next stage was expert validation, in which the writers consulted with a subject matter expert to verify the accuracy of the analysis and the validity of the results. In the present study, the expert validator is an active lecturer in the English Language Education Study Program with a bachelor's and master's degree in the literary field. The function of expert validation is to ensure that the data analysis is rigorous and that the findings are credible. In the final step of this study, the writers drew a conclusion based on the findings presented by summarizing the study's results, including Belly's emotional maturity and the influences of minor characters on Belly's emotional maturity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the writers analyze how Belly's emotional maturity is described in the novel. Belly herself is the major character of the novel, and everything revolves around her. Major characters are the most important and complex characters in a novel and play a crucial role in developing the plot and theme (Ardana & Mulatsih, 2023; Henkle, 1977). The writers try to unravel who gets the most attention from the other characters to find out who the main character is. In Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty*, Belly is the narrator, and all the narratives are told from her point of view. Therefore, it is clear that Belly is the only main character in the story.

First, the writers analyze Belly's emotional maturity using a theory of six levels of emotional maturity by FitzMaurice (2012). Those six levels are emotional responsibility, emotional honesty, emotional openness, emotional assertiveness, emotional understanding, and emotional detachment. Then, the writers also analyze the influence of minor characters on Belly's emotional maturity using the same theory.

Emotional responsibility

Experiencing heartbreak in life, especially the first time, can have a tremendous impact on someone's life because it can change how someone thinks and acts toward something. Belly already experienced her first heartbreak when she was twelve. It started when Belly and Conrad went to the boardwalk, just the two of them, and then a girl named Angie stole Conrad's attention in a ring toss. Conrad seems to have forgotten Belly's presence because of Angie, and when Belly asks him whether he would like to get to know her, he says, "I guess" (FitzMaurice, 2012, p. 14). This arouses jealousy inside Belly. However, it did not last long, for she could have blamed Conrad or Angie for her first heartbreak; instead, she walked away and cried (p. 15).

Emotional responsibility happens when someone realizes that their feelings are not the responsibility of external factors. Meanwhile, their feeling is their own responsibility (FitzMaurice, 2012). Here, Belly's emotional responsibility is depicted when she acknowledges her feelings that she felt jealousy and felt her first broken heart. She did not blame Conrad or Angie in that situation. Meanwhile, she chose to leave them and feel her feelings of jealousy. What's significant here is that Belly chooses a more grown-up way to handle her pain; instead of blaming others like a child might, she deals with it privately.

Emotional honesty

Emotional honesty deals with a person's willingness to acknowledge his or her feelings, which is necessary for self-acceptance and self-understanding (FitzMaurice, 2012). Belly's emotional honesty is depicted in "The Belly Flop" tradition, where Belly is thrown into the swimming pool by her brother, Steven, and her close friends, Conrad and Jeremiah, every summer.

> "The Belly flop was something they'd started about a million summers ago. Probably it had been Steven. I hated it. Even though it was one of the only times I was included in their fun, I hated being burnt of it. It made me feel utterly powerless, and it was a reminder that I was an outsider, too weak to fight them, all because I was a girl. Somebody's little sister." (p. 17).

Belly was honest with her feelings about "The Belly Flop." She thought it made her feel powerless, an outsider, and too weak to fight the boys. She used to cry about it and being a tattletale. By being honest with her feelings, Belly at least did not hide or suppress her feelings. She was honest with herself about how she hated "The Belly Flop." This is important because "The Belly Flop" is more than just a game; it is a symbol of her role as the powerless "little sister." By being honest with herself about hating it, Belly recognizes that she wants to change how the boys see her. This part of the story is key because it explains her reason for wanting to transform herself this summer.

Emotional openness

Confession has to start somewhere. Bravery for ventilating feelings to let go is one of them. The willingness of a person to share his or her feelings shows how emotionally open someone is. A person with emotional openness is aware of the dangers of hiding feelings from self and others (FitzMaurice, 2012). Belly, after realizing that summer was almost over, had no other choice but to let out the feelings she had toward Conrad.

> "I've loved you since I was ten years old." "You're the only boy I've ever thought about. My whole life, it's always been you…...You know everything about me, even this, which is that I really love you." (p. 243-244).

Belly's confession to Conrad shows that Belly is being open about what she feels towards Conrad. She had to confess because she did not want to torture herself by living another whole year not telling her feelings to Conrad. This confession is a key moment in Belly's development. It stands in direct contrast to how she felt during "The Belly Flop"; instead of feeling powerless, she is now taking control by openly sharing her deepest feelings.

Emotional assertiveness

Emotional assertiveness means being able to ask for and receive the nurturing that they need and want (FitzMaurice, 2012). Belly experienced her emotional assertiveness when her close friend, Jeremiah, taught her to drive a car. She could not believe that Jeremiah was willing to spend his day off to teach her how to drive a car, for she had been begging him since last year to teach her (p. 80). Belly also expressed what she felt toward Jeremiah after they got home.

> "It had been nice of him to take me out driving when no one else would. Just because I'd banged up the car a few times, it didn't mean that I wasn't going to end up being an excellent driver like everyone else. Thanks to him, I could drive stick now. I was going to be one of those confident girls, the kind who knows what she's doing. When I got my license, I would drive up to Susannah's house and take Jeremiah for a drive, to thank him." (p. 85).

Belly was entering emotional assertiveness in this phase since Belly was asking Jeremiah to teach her, and she was receiving the nurturing that she wanted and needed from Jeremiah, as well as expressing her feelings. This scene is significant because learning to drive acts as a symbol of Belly gaining independence and control. Her stated goal to become a "confident girl" is directly tied to mastering this new, adult skill. It is also important for the story that Jeremiah is the one who teaches her.

Emotional understanding

Emotional understanding deals with self-concept, where someone understands his or her identity. At this level of emotional maturity, they understand that their potential and the reactions they choose determine the kind of people they are (FitzMaurice, 2012).

Belly starts to understand herself when Cam asks her to go to a party with him. In the middle of the party, Belly heard pissed-off and belligerent voices coming from the deck outside, and she realized that one of them was Conrad's pissed-off, belligerent voice. Cam and Belly decided to check what happened, and they found Conrad was arguing with some guy with a barbed wire tattoo on his forearm. Belly looked worried since they looked like they might kill each other, but Cam said that it was fine and asked Belly to get out of the situation. However, Belly said to Cam that she is not leaving. She felt that it would not be right to leave Conrad there. She saw that Conrad did not seem fine at all. He was wild and out of control. Belly said that she had to help; she just had to. However, she had no idea what to say once she got there because she had never tried to break up a fight before.

> "Um, hi," I said, standing between the two of them. "We have to leave."
> Conrad pushed me out of the way. "Get the hell out of here, Belly."
> "Who is this? Your baby sister?" The guy looked me up and down.
> "No. I'm Belly," I told him. Only, I was nervous, and I stuttered when I said my name (p. 149).
> …
> "Can we please just go home," I pleaded. But it was like Conrad didn't even see me standing there or feel my hand on his chest.
> "Listen to your girlfriend, kid," the guy said.
> "I'm not his girlfriend," (p. 150).

From the conversation above, Belly has a good self-concept. She understands who she is and does not hesitate to express it. She is Belly, and she is not Conrad's girlfriend. Even though Cam asks Belly to get out of the situation, Belly consciously cares about Conrad, so she decides to help him in her own way. This moment is a major step for Belly because she puts her understanding of herself into action.

The influences of minor characters

In this section, the writers aim to answer the second problem formulation, which covers the influences made by the minor characters on Belly as the main character regarding her emotional maturity. It emphasizes how Belly's relatives influence her emotional maturity.

According to Koesnosoebroto (1988), minor characters make the story more believable as well as engaging for the reader. He stated that minor characters cannot be ignored in the narrative, even though their roles are less important. Therefore, the writers only choose minor characters who have significant effects on the story of Belly, which are Conrad Fisher, Jeremiah Fisher, and Susannah Fisher. Those characters have the most interaction with Belly throughout the narrative.

The influences of Conrad Fisher

Conrad Fisher has been Belly's close friend since they were kids. He is also Jeremiah's older brother, and Belly has had a crush on Conrad since she was ten years old. Conrad himself already influenced Belly to develop emotional responsibility when Belly was ten years old. Belly watched Steven, Jeremiah, and Conrad planning for the camping, and they excluded Belly because Steven said that it was for boys only. Steven and Jeremiah were dancing a jig together to mock Belly, then Conrad tried to defend Belly by saying, "Leave her alone" (p. 28) and "You guys are so immature" (p. 29) to Jeremiah and Steven. Then, in the end, Conrad said

good night to Belly, and it was the first time Belly fell in love with Conrad. Emotional responsibility was depicted when Belly admitted her feelings that she was in love with Conrad (p. 29). Being in love was Belly's response to Conrad's behavior. Love can be a part of someone's development in life because love can teach many things, including being emotionally mature. Through Conrad's influence, Belly could acknowledge her feelings.

This moment is important for the story because it establishes the foundation of Belly's deep feelings for Conrad. Her love for him does not begin randomly; it starts specifically because he is the one who defends her and treats her with respect when others dismiss her. This event acts as the starting point for the novel's main emotional plotline, giving a clear and meaningful origin to the crush that drives much of Belly's development.

Besides emotional responsibility, Conrad helps Belly develop her emotional honesty. It started when Conrad taught Belly how to dance for the first time. It was when Belly was eleven years old. It was because his mom, Susannah, urged him to dance with Belly. Conrad seems very patient in teaching Belly how to dance. He gave his hand and pulled Belly up, not letting go of her hand.

> "This is how you shag,"
> "One-two-three, one-two-three, rock step."
> …
> This is called the cuddle." (p. 194).

The way Conrad taught Belly to dance made Belly honest with her feelings. She was being true to what she felt. Besides, she honestly experienced what she felt.

> "The cuddle was my favorite part. It was the closest I had ever been to him."
> "He spun me around, and I felt dizzy. With pure, absolute joy." (p. 194).

Another example of Conrad's influence on Belly's emotional honesty happened when Belly was doing her night swimming routine, and Conrad was there. He was smoking a cigarette.

> "How did you know I was out here?"
> "You always swim out here at night, Belly. Come on"
> "He knew I swam at night? I'd thought it was my special secret, mine and Susannah's. I wondered how long he had known. I wondered if everyone knew. I didn't even know why it mattered, but it did. To me, it did." (p. 38).

From the conversation between Conrad and Belly, Conrad noticed that Belly who always swum at night for quite a long time. Conrad's existence in the swimming pool and his interaction with Belly made Belly honest with her feelings that the way Conrad looked at her drove her crazy. Besides, Belly expressed that it mattered to her when Conrad knew she always swam at night. Both of these moments are important because Conrad's actions make Belly feel seen and validated. Whether by teaching her to dance or revealing he knows her secret routine, his focused attention makes her feel like she matters to him. This is key for the story because it shows that Belly's intense feelings are a direct response to these small, private moments.

In addition, emotional assertiveness that is influenced by Conrad happened when Belly found Conrad, who was sitting at the beach and staring out at the ocean. Belly sat down next to Conrad. He looked so lost sitting there because he knew that Susannah's cancer had come again.

> I spoke first. "I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry. I wish I had known–"
> "Please stop talking," he said.
> "I'm sorry," I whispered, starting to get up. I was always saying the wrong thing.

"Don't leave," Conrad said (p. 261).

Belly was wondering if it was possible to take someone's pain away with a kiss because that was what she wanted to do, and then she finally kissed Conrad. He was the one to break away. "I'm sorry," he said, his voice raw and scratchy (p. 263).

> I touched my lips with the backs of my fingers. "For what?" I couldn't seem to catch my breath.
> "It can't happen like this." He stopped, then started again. "I do think about you. You know that. I just can't…Can you…Can you just be here with me?"
> I nodded. I was afraid to open my mouth. I took his hand and squeezed it, and it felt like the most right thing I had done in a long time (p. 263).

From the evidence above, Conrad was influencing Belly about emotional assertiveness by showing her that Conrad has emotional assertiveness. The emotional assertiveness that Conrad had depicted that him was able to ask for nurturing from Belly, and then he also received the nurturing that he wanted from Belly. Conrad wanted Belly to be there with him, and Belly was being there with Conrad. This is a key moment because the roles between Belly and Conrad are reversed. In that situation, Conrad is the one who is vulnerable and asks for support, and Belly is the one who provides comfort.

Lastly, Conrad influences Belly to develop her emotional understanding. Conrad's influence is indirect since his influence in this emotional step does not directly engage with Belly; rather, it is through an accident that happened during the summer when Conrad was arguing with a tattooed guy.

> "Conrad didn't seem fine at all. He didn't seem like the Conrad Fisher I knew, all wild and out of control. What if he got himself hurt? What then? I had to help, I just had to" (p. 149).

From Belly's point of view above, Conrad's influence on Belly's emotional understanding is depicted indirectly by fighting with the tattooed guy. Throughout the narrative, Conrad significantly influences the growth of Belly's emotional maturity until she can reach her emotional understanding. Conrad's fight with the tattooed guy becomes the reason that makes Belly realize that it would not be right to leave Conrad there (p. 148). She felt that she had to help Conrad even though she had never tried to break up a fight before, and apart from Belly, who is not Conrad's girlfriend (p. 149).

This indirect influence is important because it forces Belly to move from passively having feelings to actively taking responsibility. Conrad's reckless behavior makes her understand that caring for someone means stepping in to help, even when it is difficult. This event is key to the story because it shows Belly becoming a more active character who makes her own choices, rather than just reacting to others.

The influences of Jeremiah Fisher

Jeremiah Fisher is one of the minor characters examined next. Jeremiah is Conrad's little brother and Belly's close friend since childhood. Jeremiah is the one who also influences Belly's emotional honesty. It happened when Belly was thirteen years old. Conrad and Steven decided to go fishing, but Jeremiah declined because he was not in the mood. Instead, he and Belly stayed to watch TV and play cards. They were doing things together during the summer, just the two of them. From that summer, Belly expressed that she felt closer to Jeremiah than she did to her brother.

> "Jeremiah was nicer. Maybe because he was somebody's little sibling too, or maybe just because he was that kind of person. He was nice to everybody. He had a talent for making people feel comfortable" (p. 62).

Jeremiah influenced Belly by being there for Belly for the whole summer. Spending time together with Jeremiah allowed Belly to be honest with her feelings. This is important because it establishes the core difference between Jeremiah and Conrad in the story. While Conrad often causes Belly emotional conflict, Jeremiah provides a safe and comfortable friendship. This feeling of emotional safety is what allows Belly to be honest and simply be herself without pressure.

Another level of Belly's emotional maturity that is influenced by Jeremiah is emotional openness. Conrad, Jeremiah, and Steven were going to sleep on the beach with sleeping bags and make a fire. At that time, Belly was ten years old. Belly seemed jealous because she watched them plan and pack things.

> "Jeremiah, don't forget the cards," Conrad added, rolling up a sleeping bag.
> Jeremiah saluted him and danced a little jig, which made me giggle, "Sir, yes, sir".
> He turned to me on the couch and said, "Conrad is bossy like our dad. Don't feel like you have to listen to him or anything."
> Jeremiah talking to me made me feel brave enough to say, "Can I come too?" (p. 28)

From the narrative above, Jeremiah's little gesture made Belly feel brave enough to ask the boys whether or not she could join the little camp. Emotional openness is depicted when Belly says, "Can I come too?" because she is willing to say what she feels, that she actually wants to join the little camp with the boys. It was because of Jeremiah talking to Belly that she was finally able to be open. By having the bravery to say what she feels, as time goes by, Belly is having emotional openness. Therefore, Belly is able to share her feelings with others.

Another emotional openness influenced by Jeremiah is when Jeremiah confesses his feelings toward Belly. It happened when they were watching TV together.

> "Belly…"
> "Just let me get this out."
> "You've always been my best friend. But now it's more. I see you as more than that."
> "You're cooler than any other girl I've ever met, and you're there for me. You've always been there for me. I… I can count on you. And you can count on me, too. You know that."
> "And I know you've always liked Conrad, but you're over him now, right?" (p. 237).

Belly could not believe that Jeremiah had feelings for her. Jeremiah was Belly's buddy, best pal, and practically her brother during this time. She did not see him as a lover because, for her, there was only one person, and that person was Conrad. She felt terrible because she did not answer him the way he wanted her to. Here, the point is that Jeremiah was trying to let out her feelings toward Belly. Knowing that Jeremiah was able to share her feelings makes Belly brave enough to confess her feelings toward Conrad. Before Belly confesses her feelings to Conrad, Belly says, "We would drive away, and I would never have told him. Jeremiah had laid it all out on the line. Now it was my turn." (p. 242). Therefore, it is clear that Jeremiah influenced Belly to have the bravery to let out her feelings to someone. In both examples, Jeremiah acts as a catalyst for Belly's bravery. His actions, whether a small kindness or his own emotional confession, make it easier and safer for Belly to be open about what she wants.

Jeremiah also influences Belly to reach emotional assertiveness by teaching her how to drive a car. Jeremiah clearly stated that he was going to teach Belly how to drive a car, and Belly was so excited since it was a perfect day for driving and it was Jeremiah's day off. Belly could not believe that Jeremiah was willing to teach her, for she had been begging him to teach her since last year (p. 80). Jeremiah's influence is depicted in his willingness to help Belly by

spending his time and making an effort to teach Belly how to drive a car. Belly's emotional assertiveness is proven when she expresses her feelings that Jeremiah is great.

> "It had been nice of him to take me out driving when no one else would. Just because I'd banged up the car a few times, it didn't mean that I wasn't going to end up being an excellent driver like everyone else. Thanks to him, I could drive stick now. I was going to be one of those confident girls, the kind who knows what she's doing. When I got my license, I would drive up to Susannah's house and take Jeremiah for a drive, to thank him." (p. 85).

After Jeremiah taught Belly how to drive, Belly displayed emotional assertiveness by asking Jeremiah for guidance to teach her and receiving the nurturing she desired from him, while also expressing her feelings. This moment is important because Jeremiah's direct support helps Belly become more confident and independent. His willingness to teach her shows a healthy and supportive dynamic where she can ask for help and receive it.

Lastly, the level of emotional maturity that is influenced by Jeremiah is emotional understanding. The same as with Conrad, Jeremiah's influence on Belly's emotional understanding is indirect. Jeremiah's influence is depicted by his attitude. At that moment, Conrad and Jeremiah told Belly that their parents were getting a divorce. Belly was really surprised since she thought their parents were really in love (p. 165). Jeremiah felt sad knowing their parents were going apart.

As Conrad left, Jeremiah said to me, "Before we left, our dad had been sleeping in the guest room for weeks. He's already moved out most of his clothes. Did they seriously think we wouldn't notice?" His voice cracked at the last part (p. 166).

> …
> I grabbed his hand and squeezed it. He was really hurting. I guessed maybe Conrad was too, even if he didn't show it. It all made sense when I thought about it. The way Conrad had been acting, so different, so lost. So un-Conrad-like. He was suffering. And then there was Susannah. The way she'd been spending so much time in bed, the way she seemed so sad. She was hurting too (p. 166).

Jeremiah's attitude evokes a feeling of sympathy and compassion in Belly. Belly showed her empathy toward Conrad, Jeremiah, and Susannah by recognizing their emotions and behavior. Belly understands how they feel since she had experienced the feelings of her parents' divorce back then. Belly's understanding is evident in her compassionate behavior and ability to empathize with their feelings. Jeremiah's influence here is key because his openness about his pain is what allows Belly to understand the entire family's hidden suffering.

The influences of Susannah Fisher

Susannah Fisher is the last minor character who is being analyzed by the writers. Susannah Fisher is the mother of Conrad and Jeremiah, as well as a best friend to Belly's mother. The relationship between Belly and Susannah is like mother and daughter.

> "Susannah was much more affectionate than my mother in those kinds of ways, and she was always calling me the daughter she never had. She loved sharing me with my mother, and my mother didn't mind. Neither did I."
> "How are you liking Emma so far?" she asked me.
> Susannah had a way of focusing on you that made you feel like the most interesting person in the room." (p. 56).

Susannah's gestures and affection develop Belly's honesty with her feelings. She can be honest with her feelings that Susannah is even more affectionate than her mother, and even Belly feels appreciated, thus creating emotional honesty within Belly. This is important because Susannah provides Belly with an "emotional safe space" that is different from her relationship with her own mother. Because Susannah is so affectionate and focused on her, Belly feels comfortable enough to be honest about her own feelings of self-worth.

Besides emotional honesty, Susannah also develops Belly's emotional openness by asking her a question about her summer date with Cam, Belly's short-term lover during that summer.

> "I wanted to tell her everything about Cam. everything. Susannah had that way about her, where you wanted to tell her all your secrets and everything in between." (p. 162).
> "Well, he's different from anyone I've ever met,"
> "How so?"
> "He's just so smart, and he doesn't care what people think. And he's so good-looking. I can't even believe he pays me any attention."
> Susannah shook her head. "Oh, please. Of course, he should pay you attention. You're so lovely, darling. You've really blossomed this summer. People can't help but pay you attention."
> "Ha," I said, but I felt flattered. She was so good at making people feel special. "I'm glad I have you to talk to about this kind of stuff." (p. 163).

With Susannah, Belly felt safe and comfortable talking about anything, even her secrets. Susannah was Belly's safe place to talk about anything. Belly was able to be open about her feelings with Susannah. Therefore, it is clear that Susannah influenced Belly to be able to be open about her feelings. Susannah's role as a confidante is important here, as she gives Belly a safe person to practice being open with. By talking about her feelings for Cam with Susannah, Belly is able to explore and understand them herself without fear of judgment.

The last influence that Susannah gives is emotional assertiveness. It was when Belly met Susannah this summer. They hugged each other, and Susannah showed her admiration for Belly.

> She shook her head and said, "When did you go and grow up? When did you turn into this phenomenal woman?"
> I smiled self-consciously, glad that the boys were upstairs and not around to hear this. "I look pretty much the same."
> "You've always been lovely, but oh, honey, look at you." She shook her head like she was in awe of me.
> "You're so pretty. So pretty. You're going to have an amazing, amazing summer. It'll be a summer you'll never forget." (p. 21).
> ….
> "It was the summer everything began/ It was the summer I turned pretty. Because for the first time, I felt it. Pretty, I mean. Every summer up to this one, I believed it'd be different. Life would be different. And that summer, it finally was. I was" (p. 21).

The conversation above makes Belly realize that Susannah was right. It was a summer she would never forget. Susannah showed that she adores Belly for saying that Belly is lovely and pretty. It means that Belly received nurturing from Susannah. After Susannah said that, it made Belly realize that she was indeed pretty this summer, and she felt it. This is a crucial moment because Susannah's words are what finally allow Belly to believe she is pretty. It shows how powerful validation from a trusted adult can be in shaping a young person's self-image. Structurally, this scene is one of the most important in the book because it directly

connects to the novel's title. Susannah's praise is the trigger that makes Belly feel pretty for the first time, giving the central theme of the novel its meaning right from the start.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Belly encounters five out of six levels of emotional maturity: emotional responsibility, honesty, openness, assertiveness, and understanding. In this novel, Belly does not experience emotional detachment, the sixth level. The analysis demonstrates that Belly's emotional maturity is influenced by the minor characters, specifically Conrad, Jeremiah, and Susannah. Conrad, a close friend of Belly since childhood, influences her experience of several levels of emotional maturity, including emotional responsibility, honesty, assertiveness, and understanding. Similarly, Jeremiah, Conrad's younger brother and Belly's close friend, contributes to influencing her emotional honesty, openness, assertiveness, and understanding. Lastly, Susannah, a loving maternal figure, fosters Belly's emotional honesty, openness, and assertiveness.

The significance of these findings is that they reveal the thematic depth of Jenny Han's work beyond a surface-level romance. For literary study, this analysis shows that the minor characters are not merely plot devices but are structurally essential for the protagonist's development. For readers, the conclusion offers a deeper awareness of how emotional maturity is rarely achieved in isolation; instead, it is profoundly shaped by the dynamics of one's interpersonal relationships. Considering the popularity of the series adaptation on Amazon Prime Video, future research can conduct a comparative study analyzing both the book and its adaptation. This approach may offer fresh insights into Belly's narrative across different media, and could be supplemented by gathering feedback from readers and viewers to provide insights into audience perceptions.

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