CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Jodi Picoult is an American novelist who is famous for her writings which mainly discuss issues which involve human emotion and complex problems in their relations. Her first novel, *Songs of Humpback Whale,* was published in 1992. Other famous works are *My Sister's Keeper* (2004)*, Handle With Care (*2009)*, Second Glance* (2003)*, Perfect Match* (2002)*, Keeping Faith* (1999) *and House Rules* (2010). Jodi Picoult has received praises from senior writers like Stephen King, who states that "Picoult writes with unassuming brilliance" ("Jodi Picoult") and they are often listed as best sellers in famous newspaper reviews such as the USA Today and the New York Times review.

The book discussed in this thesis is one of Picoult's bestselling novels, *House Rules. House Rules* is a novel which tells about a boy named Jacob Hunt who suffers from Asperger's Syndrome, which is a highly functional form of autism that limits social interaction. In order to make Jacob able to live normally with other people and be accepted, his mother, Emma Hunt, hires Jessica "Jess" Ogivly to improve Jacob's social skills. Unfortunately, things are getting complicated for Jacob and his mother when Jacob is accused of murdering Jess. With his limitation in reading social cues, Jacob tries to understand the situation

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and fights his way to get approval and understanding from his neighbors who generally have negative image on him. Picoult manages to bring the reader to understand the situation the main characters face by writing this novel in the perspective of all the main characters. She also gives detailed emotion of each of the characters, especially Jacob, a person with Asperger's Syndrome.

The main reason for me to choose this novel is that the novelist manages to tell the reader and explain to them about Asperger's Syndrome, which is classified as an "Autistic spectrum disorder which has intellectual capacity within the normal range, but has a distinct profile of abilities that has been apparent since early childhood . . . such as a qualitative impairment in social interaction, in subtle communication skills and restrictive interests" (Attwood). This means a person with Asperger's Syndrome has the same intelligence as a normal person but lacks social ability such as to communicate and understand emotion well as can be seen in the daily life and behaviour of Jacob Hunt.

The strength of this novel is the way the author describes Asperger's Syndrome through the portrayal of Jacob Hunt, the protagonist. A protagonist is "simply the central character, the one whose struggles we follow with interest, whether he or she be good or bad, sympathetic or repulsive" (Perrine 44). In this analysis, I want to show the characteristics of the protagonist and also the purpose of the author in creating such characters. That is why I am interested in analysing the portrayal of the protagonist in *House Rules.*

The character of Jacob is far from the ideal image of a good normal person because he is suffering from Asperger's Syndrome. The author creates such a character to make the reader understand more about people with Asperger's Syndrome. Although Jacob seems normal, sometimes he behaves differently from normal people. This makes Jacob as an interesting character to be analyzed. The protagonist or the main character of a literary work is the most

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attractive one. "Maybe the protagonist does not always have the good virtue but he/she needs to have compensatory value to his/her mistakes or bad behaviour so that the readers can imagine themselves in the position of the protagonist and satisfy their ego" (67-68). Although the character of Jacob is far from the image of a perfect person, by reading the story from the beginning to the end, the reader develops the feeling of sympathy towards Jacob because of his disability which makes him unable to interact well with his surrounding.

Statement of the Problem

The problems that I am going to discuss in this thesis are as follows:

1. How does the author portray the protagonist in the novel?
2. What is the purpose of the author in creating such a character?

Purpose of the Study

The analysis of the protagonist of *House Rules* in this thesis has two purposes:

1. To show how the protagonist is portrayed in the novel
2. To show the purpose of creating such a character

Method of Research

To analyze the novel, I use library research. First, I read the novel, *House Rules* and then I start to analyze the novel using formalism. I take some references and resources from the books in the library and from various sources as well as from the Internet to support my analysis of the novel and finally present my conclusion.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters preceded by the Table of Contents and the Abstract. In Chapter One, I present the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research and the Organization of the Thesis. In Chapter Two, I analyse the portrayal of the protagonist of *House Rules.* Chapter Three is the Conclusion of the thesis. It is followed by the Bibliography and the Appendices, which include the summary of the novel and the biography of the novelist.