

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is one of the crucial things in our life as it is the system through which people communicate (Keydifferences.com, n.d.). Moreover, language operates as a representational system (Hall, 1997, p. 1). It is said so because in language, we use signs and symbols such as written words or sounds to “stand for” or represent our thoughts, feelings, and ideas to other people (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Simply put, language is “a signifying process” since its elements function as *signs* to produce and construct meanings (Hall, 1997, p. 5). If it is not for the signifying system, we will neither be able to “build up nor sustain our common-life world which we call *culture*” (Hall, 1997, p. 5).

There is an approach concerning language which shows the way culture and representation work, and this approach is known as the semiotic approach (Hall, 1997, p. 6). Semiotics is called “the study of signs as well as their general role as vehicles of meaning in culture”; however, recently its concern expands to “the role of *discourse* in culture” (Hall, 1997, p. 6).

Discourse is defined as “written or spoken communication” (Oxford living dictionaries, n.d.). By this definition, it is safe to assume that a novel is a discourse as it expresses the way its author sees things—be it in his or her realm of imagination or in the shared culture—which is communicative (Johansen, 2002, p. 15). The study of signs in literary texts has led to structural theories (Johansen, 2002, p. 15). One of the structuralists is Roland Barthes (Vogmae.net.au, n.d.). He distinguishes texts as readerly and writerly. Readerly means that readers are placed as mere readers who enjoy the text as it is whereas writerly means that readers are asked to have a perspective of the writers who go deeper into the text. Barthes also argues that there are codes containing cultural indicators to uncover in a writerly text (Arts.uwaterloo.ca, n.d.).

In this thesis, I aim to analyse a novel titled *Room*, which was written by Emma Donoghue, to derive the representation of the child in the novel. The novel was published in 2010. *Room* is a story about a five-year-old boy named Jack who lives with his mother, whom he called “Ma”, in a small room. He was born and grew up in Room; hence, for him, Room is their world. Every day for five years, Ma has been struggling to keep the bitter and painful reality at bay in order to protect Jack’s innocence. She takes care of him and makes sure that his nutrition is well-fulfilled. She plays with Jack, reads stories for him, and teaches him. Ma does her best to educate Jack within the limited resources they have in Room.

Because of his mother’s extraordinary nurturance, Jack grows just like other kids outside there do—except that he has some unique behaviours which are shaped by his environment, or the incarceration. He excels in vocabulary and is very sharp and curious. Nevertheless, to him, things which are not in Room are

“just TV”. On the one hand, he seems to grow up normally like other five-year-old kids do as he has an aspect similar to the one normal children have, but on the other hand, he has some traits due to the incarceration; one of them is his excessive attention towards small details. By using the perspective of the innocent Jack, this novel narrates the story to the readers in a Dora-the-Explorer way, which means *Room* is told in a simple, detailed, and childlike way. Jack may be naïve, but when the time comes, he is a hero in his own way. Even so, he is himself, and being incarcerated with his mother for five years has shaped him in such a way that he behaves differently than others do.

The main reason why I choose *Room* as my data is the way Donoghue portrays the child, Jack. Personally, the novel is rich of knowledge and information regarding the child who is incarcerated for five years; yet still receiving his mother’s love and care. I believe by analysing *Room*, I am able to derive the representation of the child in *Room* so as to see how incarceration affects him.

In order to derive the representation of the child in *Room*, I use Roland Barthes’ theory on the five narrative codes. According to Barthes (1974), there are five codes which can be obtained from a text: hermeneutic code, proairetic code, semantic code, symbolic code, and cultural code (p. 21). The first two belong to readerly codes whereas the rest belong to writerly codes (Barthes, 1974, pp. 29-30). However, the meaning of readerly codes is fixed and predetermined, and the codes do not allow the readers to find multiple meanings outside the texts (Arts.uwaterloo.ca, n.d.). Hence, it is impossible to completely derive one’s representation using readerly codes, and thus in this thesis, I choose to focus my

analysis on the writerly codes so that the representation can be derived thoroughly.

By analysing *Room* using Barthes' writerly codes of narrative, I hope to add to the existing literature a new light in the use of Barthes' writerly codes of narrative to analyse one's representation in a novel. In addition, I hope to encourage other researchers to conduct a similar study as I realise that there are only a few researchers who study written work under the semiotics field. Lastly, I also hope that my thesis can encourage other researchers to conduct an analysis of *Room* by using other approaches.

(total words: 923)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problems analysed in this thesis are:

1. What are the writerly codes which represent the child in Donoghue's *Room*?
2. How is the child in Donoghue's *Room* represented through the codes?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Through the analysis in my thesis, I aim to figure out:

1. the writerly codes which represent the child in Donoghue's *Room*, and
2. how the child is represented in Donoghue's *Room* through the codes.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

My thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is Introduction which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and Organisation of the Thesis. The second chapter is Literature Review, which consists of the elaboration of the theories that I use in my analysis as well as the elaboration of a previous study of the same topic. The next chapter is Methods of Research; in this part, I explain my research design, data collection technique, framework for the analysis, and data analysis. The fourth chapter consists of the findings of my analysis. The fifth chapter is Conclusion, in which I present my conclusion based on my findings. Lastly, my thesis ends with References and Appendices.

