

PLEASURE IN JOHN BOYNE'S DARK-THEMED NOVEL ENTITLED THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS

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Abstract

The aims of the research are (1) to define the dark themes contained in John Boyne's The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, and (2) to reveal how the dark themes represent the pleasure of the main characters. Therefore, the researcher applies children's literature and pleasure of children's literature theories. The findings of the research show that there are five dark themes found in the novel. They are the children's anger, people's oppression toward children, children's sadness, children's insecurity, and children's dark environment. The dark themes represent the oppression toward the main characters and their response upon it. The researcher found three main categories on how pleasure is embodied in the novel. They are the pleasure of observing, the pleasure of learning, and the pleasure of understanding. Therefore, pleasure becomes an important element in children's literature.

Keywords: John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, children's literature, dark themes in children's literature, pleasure of children's literature.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is different from adults' literature because they have different audience. Children's literature is literature dedicated to children. They might contain the same elements of complexity, resonance, insight, wit, and artistry with adult's literature. However, children's literature needs to consider its audience because the writers need to provide a form of understanding for

children (Lukens, Smith, & Coffel, 2003:6).

Children's literature comes as the help of adults to accompany their children to go through the hard phase of growing up. Through children's literature parents are able to touch the unseen emotion of children. Moreover, the stories in children's literature provide a form of experience for every reader, especially children who need to learn about the complexity of life. Stories contain the journey of life and

they could be a perfect place to learn. Life is so much complicated to tell to children. Children will not understand unless they actually feel the emotion of such condition in life. Thus, children's literature is the perfect medium to educate children about the values of life and the things they cannot learn physically but emotionally. According to Karl (1971:6), the author of children's literature creates an experience for its reader. It means that children need to be opened up and start to discover new things from the stories they already read. The discoveries of new things also include the experience of bitter sweet things in life.

To see so many children's books contain dark themes nowadays, parents might think that dark themes in children's literature seem more varied and darker. However, the readers might not realize that the dark themes have been a part of children's literature since a long time ago and even folklore of children also brought dark side of life as a themes in a story. Bates (2007:48) argues that the children's classic folklore has been started with

the universal dark themes of separation. There are many classic works of children's literature that brought separation as a theme. The separations are usually between children and parents or step-parents. Some of classic stories are *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum and *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Both stories depict the main character whose separated from their family and had to deal with the current condition to survive.

The research is done to counter the opinion that children should be away from dark themes contents in literature. As Nodelman (1992:2) said that every subject about things people have no wish to hear about should be silenced and that we think children with such concern are abnormal. The important message author and scholars would give to children is to make them understand that dark side of life is normal because it happens to anybody. Thus, children should prepare for every possibility to cope with those feelings.

Children need to learn and understand about the dark side of life because sooner or later children will face the dark side of life and it is unavoidable. Southhall (1975:12) states that children live in a world, not in a pedestal and they are out among people and interact with each other. Death might still look far away for them but coping with death might happen anytime and they should be prepared to feel the fear, pain, and loneliness as a part of the emotion.

Reading dark themed novel would be one of the examples on how adults introduce realism stories to children. It is the one very close to everyday life. The fiction of realism probably has a wider range of possibility in making children feel connected to the story. Although it is fiction, the realism is still the essence of the story. The stories, characters, and events might be fictional but they develop to make every element logical and come close to the real reality. Wald (1975:923) explains that realism involves possible people involved in the struggles and complexities of life,

so children are expected to relate to the stories. The fiction of realism is the source of learning about the complexity of life.

Children's literature is meant to please children. The reading activity can arouse their curiosity in understanding a whole new world they have never been. The way children enjoy literature might be different from adults. Adults develop the ability of enjoying literature simply from reading a lot of books while children might have different ways of enjoying literature through their limited experience. Nodelman and Reimer (2003:21) give an example on how children find pleasure in reading literature, the pleasure of having their emotions evoked: laughing at a comical situation, being made to feel pain or joy character experiences. Though children and adult have different ways of enjoying literature, reading literature still enriches their understanding as a whole.

The simplest pleasure might be found in enlightenment when children read literary works. It could be the

pleasure of knowing simple words from the text or might be a pleasure comes from the background of the reader while reading particular events which evoke the past memories (Lukens, Smith, & Coffel, 2013:2). In relation to the simple pleasure, every story could give emotions to children. Events and emotions in life are also parts of pleasure children should enjoy and discover. Pleasure is not only found when they read certain stories but also when they have vicarious experience and try to deal with it.

Nodelman and Reimer (2003:23-24) already listed the outlines of pleasure on how pleasure could be achieved by all children when they experienced events in their life. One of the examples is the pleasure of experiencing. He explains that every kind of life experience is meaningful to children and they should learn based on their experience. To be examined as pleasure, children do not have to understand the whole meaning of a life journey. Children will naturally learn how to deal with the current situations and find the pleasure. This is how a

simple event of life could give a pleasure to children.

As one of the most recommended books for children, the researcher tries to unveil every detail of the dark themes embodied in the novel. The variety kinds of dark themes will be an interesting topic to unveil. Moreover, the pleasure of the main character is the crucial part to be analyzed despite the dark emotions and treatments. By analyzing the dark themes and literary elements in the book, the researcher would like to reveal the pleasure of the main character in the dark themes novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

The aims of the research are (1) to define the dark themes contain in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, and (2) to reveal how the dark themes represent the pleasure of the main characters.

The research is significant to give a better understanding and deeper knowledge about English Literature especially in children's literature, dark themes in children's literature, and pleasure of a text and to give benefit

for the further research done by students, lecturers and future researchers in providing examples of pleasure in dark themes novels and guiding further analysis about the relevant topic.

RESEARCH METHOD

The term research design is important to define to guide the researcher in doing research. According to Cheek (2008:761) research design refers to and encompasses decisions about how the research is conceptualized and how the research is intended to make contributions towards development of knowledge in particular area. Furthermore, Cheek also mentions the process to develop a research to gain the most important value. The research design is expected to guide the researcher prioritizing the decisions during the research and help the researcher to answer those objectives. Thus, research design is expected to guide this research effectively.

Content analysis uses as the design of this research. The researcher

did content analysis to seek trustworthiness and credibility in finding the data by conducting a deeper analysis, to find the contradictory examples, to seek confirmatory data, and provide supporting examples to conclude the data analysis. The data of this qualitative research are in the form of narrative texts which means it cannot be measured by numerical numbers since it deals with literary text. The content analysis of this research also referred to analytic method in reducing the data to find the meaning of the data to support the result of the research.

Data are the important elements to conclude the research. Vanderstop and Johnston (2009:176) explain that qualitative research uses a narrative form to find the data and explain the phenomenon in the research. In conclusion, this research used narrative expression of the novel as the data of the research. The narrative expressions of the novel are in the form of words, sentences, and paragraphs related to dark themes elements in *The Boy in The Striped Pyjamas*.

The data source of this research were collected from any kinds of sentences, expressions and paragraphs related to the research upon pleasure in dark themes novel by John Boyne entitled *The Boy in The Striped Pyjamas*. All the data sources that have been mentioned above must relate to the aspects of the research. 1) the dark themes of the novel, 2) how the dark themes represents the pleasure of main characters. The novel of John Boyne entitled *The Boy in The Striped Pyjamas* was originally published in English. It was published in 2006 by Black Swan and consisted of 20 chapters and 215 pages.

The researcher plays a center part of the research instrument. Lincoln and Guba statement cited in Vanderstop and Johnston (2009:201) they believe that the best instrument for qualitative naturalistic inquiry is human. In this case, the researcher's interpretation played a significant part to the research. The data table provided by the researcher would be the secondary instrument to this

research. There are two data tables to help the researcher interprets the data.

The technique of data collection is needed to help the researcher to obtain the data and to classify the data. There were two step done as part of data collection. The first step referred to close reading and re-reading the novel as an effort to find the significant data. The second step was done to categorize the raw data.

To obtain authentic and trustful data, the researcher needs to provide triangulation to guarantee the quality of the data. In ensuring the data trustworthiness Julien (2008:121) states that validity and reliability is the key to gain prominent result of content analysis. In this research, the researcher's first and second supervisors helped in checking the data. In addition, to provide data trustworthiness, the researcher was helped by two scholars under the same concentration in literature and used children's literature as their thesis topics.

Vanderstop and Johnston (2009:267) agree that in obtaining the

data, the reader of the research should agree and understand how the researcher find the data, and trust the procedure enough to agree that the result found in the research are valid. There were some steps of data analysis done by the researcher. The steps are listed in the following: (1) obtaining the raw data from the novel by close reading, re-reading and taking notes; (2) classifying the raw data into two categories made by the researcher to sort them based on their category; (3) identifying the classified data into more specific details of sub-categories; (4) re-examining classified data by checking, comparing and combining the data in the two categories; (5) interpreting classified data into a new form of understanding, and (6) reporting the data analysis into a narrative form to gain a deeper understanding upon the text.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher finds five major dark themes in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and the pleasure of

the main characters. These data are divided into two tables explained in the following:

Kinds of Dark Themes

There are five dark themes found in the novel: children's anger, people's oppression toward children, children's sadness, children's insecurity, and children's response in facing dark environment. Those five dark themes are considered as the main data classification of the research.

The first dark theme found in the novel is children's anger. The first theme found in the novel is anger. Anger has been one of the most natural expressions of frustration. Children are not excluded from the expression of anger. Some children will let out their anger and some others decide to keep their anger inside. Many of them let out their anger without even realizing it. Therefore, it is a form of a spontaneous action when they feel shocked and angry.

'I don't want to accept it!' shouted Bruno, blinking in surprise he hadn't known he was going to shout out loud. (In fact it came as a

complete surprise to him.) (Boyne, 2007:52)

The data above shows how Bruno lets out his anger spontaneously. This is a result of his suppression of anger. Anger supposed to be released as a part of self-satisfaction and learning. Thus, anger is part of children's dark emotion which needs to understand in order to control it.

The second dark theme revealed from the novel is people's oppression toward children. The oppression refers to people around the main characters. Those people are including adults' way of treating children and bullying done by the main characters friends. The situation is reflected in the following quotation.

'You open your mouth and speak like an adult. The last thing we need is for either of you to start behaving like children. If the fury ignores you then you do not say anything either, but look directly ahead and show him the respect and courtesy that such a great leader deserves.'" (Boyne, 2007:120)

From the quotation above, Father wants Bruno to keep quiet and to never

bother the meeting. Bruno should stay quiet and behave like an adult. The way Father talks to Bruno is already inappropriate at the first place. Bruno's father should give a proper explanation to Bruno on why he should behave nicely instead of strictly telling Bruno to behave like an adult and stay quiet. Bruno's father even justifies the fury's action if he ignores Bruno.

Third, children's sadness is one of the dark themes. It refers to the main characters emotion as they face different situation and environment. The quotation below shows the sadness of Shmuel.

„And Mama was taken away from us, and Papa and Josef and i were put into the Huts over there and that's where we've been ever since."

Shmuel looked very sad when he told this story and Bruno didn't know why; it didn't seem like such a terrible thing to him, and after all much the same thing had happened to him. (Boyne, 2007:130)

Shmuel shows his sadness when he tells the story to Bruno. He could not hide his feelings and expressions. Nonetheless, Bruno as the innocent character cannot fully relate with

Shmuel's feeling as he does not share the same experience with him. Shmuel's sadness is the example of the sadness that is too painful for children.

Fourth, children's insecurity is the feeling of dominated. Most of the times the feeling of insecure comes as the main characters are pressured by others. The feeling is shown as the following quotation.

Bruno's mouth dropped open and he tried to remember the way you used your mouth if you wanted to say the word „yes“. He'd never seen anyone look so terrified as Shmuel did at that moment and he wanted to say the right thing to make things better, **but then he realized that he couldn't; because he was feeling just as terrified himself.** (Boyne, 2007:170)

From the above quotation, it shows how Bruno is terrified of Kotler's action. It also illustrates the way children feel scared when they are oppressed. In this situation, children could also have flaws when they are too scared to say the truth and they choose to give the expected answer instead of telling the truth.

Fifth, Children's dark environment refers to the main characters environment. The drastic change of the environment is one of the important points in this novel, in which the safe and stable environment to the dull and dangerous environment. The dark environment is shown in the below quotation.

Some days later Bruno was lying on the bed in his room, staring at the ceiling above his head. The white paint was cracked and peeling away from itself in a most unpleasant manner, unlike the paintwork in the house in Berlin, which was never chipped and received annual top-up every summer when Mother brought the decorations in. (Boyne, 2007:55)

From the datum above, it shows how Bruno feels the gloomy atmosphere of the house just by looking at the ceiling of his new house. The rustic vibe of the house gives the gloomy atmosphere to the family.

The Pleasure of the Main Characters

The researcher categorized three kinds of pleasure. Those three pleasure

represent the children's main characters in learning and encounter the new experience. They are the pleasure of observing, the pleasure of learning, and the pleasure of understand.

First, the pleasure of observing refers to the way the main characters found the pleasure from observing. Observing could be one of the perfect way for children to learn based on their instinct and also capability. They will learn through their own discovery and experiences on how to deal with the newness they found in their surroundings. The datum could be seen below.

To begin with, they weren't children at all. Not all of them, at least. There were small boys and big boys, fathers and grandfathers. Perhaps a few uncles too. And some of those people who live on their own on everybody's road but don't seem to have any relatives at all. They were everyone.

„Who are they?“ asked Gretel, as open-mouthed as her brother often was these days. „What sort of place is this?“ (Boyne, 2007:30)

In above datum, Bruno and Gretel start to observe people from the other side

of the fence. Although this is the first encounter of Bruno and Gretel to see such place, they feel the pleasure from the sight they see. They are able to feel such strange things that actually exist in their new house.

Second, the pleasure of learning refers to things the main characters learned along their journey. The learning process includes the exploration they make during their play and interacts with others. The process of learning could be seen as below.

‘All right’, said Bruno, pleased that he had it settled in his head at last. ‘And the Opposite live on this side of the fence and the Jews live on that.’

„That's right, Bruno.“

„Don't the Jews like the Opposite then?“

„No, it's us who don't like them, stupid.“ (Boyne, 2007:182)

On the above datum, Bruno learns that the Jews are the people from the other side of the fence who wear the striped pyjamas. Before he knew that they are Jews, Bruno keeps addressing them as the people who wear the striped pyjamas. Bruno also learns that his

side of the fence does not like the Jews.

Third, the pleasure of understanding is the highest form of pleasure as children are able to understand the learning process and the situation that they live in. These important understandings need to be gained as they interact with other people and make discoveries. Children's mistakes and failures include in the process of understanding. The pleasure of understanding could be seen in the situation below.

Bruno got to the end of his sentence and realized that his voice had gone very quiet. These were things that Shmuel *had* told him, but for some reason he hadn't really understood at the time how sad that must have made his friend. **When Bruno said them out loud himself he felt terrible that he hadn't tried to say anything to cheer Shmuel up and instead talking about something silly, like exploring. I'll say sorry for that tomorrow, he told himself.** (Boyne, 2007:158)

After quite some time Bruno realizes that his best friend's story should not be responded in a casual way. Bruno

understands that his actions and responses never show his best friend support. Bruno takes Shmuel's problem too casually without considering Shmuel's feeling as he was not able to relate to him. He should have been more supportive to Shmuel when he listens to his stories. The situation shows that Bruno finally understand how he should be supportive to his best friend and find the pleasure in the new understanding he gained.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the research are divided into two parts according to the research questions. The first is the dark themes of the novel and the second is the proof how the dark themes represent the pleasure of the main characters. Dark themes are now commonly found in children's literature as the depictions of real life. Dark themes even expected to help children to prepare for their future encounter of dark side of life. In addition, the researcher is able to prove

the child character's pleasure on their experience with dark topics.

The dark themes of the novel are children's anger, people's oppression toward children, children's sadness, children's insecurity, and children's dark environment. The five dark themes are found in the novel. The themes are not only revealing the children's dark emotions but also unveiling people's oppression toward children. Children's dark emotions are mostly displayed by the main characters.

Moreover, children need to embrace their own dark emotions in order to learn about their own self. The changing environment also affects children's emotions. The explorations of the new surroundings in the novel is not only about the environment but also the self-discovery. The experience of dark emotions is part of the discovery. Children's experience of dark emotions are also affected by people around them. The adult's behaviour toward children in the novel reflects the actual situation in the real

world on how children are still seen as the inferior one.

The pleasure in John Boyne's dark-themed novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* falls into three categories. They are pleasure of observing, pleasure of learning, and pleasure of understanding. The pleasure in the novel reflects the main characters' pleasure as a child character. The stage of the pleasure also reflects children's way of perceiving pleasure in their life. Every single lesson they gain is the pleasure for them. The researcher is able to prove that in every dark emotion and dark side of life, children learn and gain knowledge from it. Children learn how to deal with the dark emotions and situations. The process of learning and understanding is part of the pleasure in their life.

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