

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research by discussing the background of the research, statement of problem, significance of research, aims of research, brief introduction to the research method, and the organization of the paper.

### 1.1 Background

According to Woodward (2002), "The identity story is one that has been told around different relationships, such as those between the personal and the social and those between self and other..." (p. 1). The title of this research is "The Portrayals of 'Journey' in John Green's Two Novels *Looking For Alaska* and *Paper Towns*." This is the theme of this research: how one's identity is shaped. In the two books, *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns* written by John Green, the main characters went through certain stages, a journey, in their lives due to the certain events that triggered the change of their identity. Therefore, there are several things that need to be considered in answering that particular question above.

First of all, it can be said that literature can give the portrayal of one's identity by creating a bridge for one to empathize with the characters inside the story, specifically the experiences that the characters went through. This identity construction process, specifically, applies to the construction of the main characters [in the two novels] through the things that surround them such as the setting and the plot. According to Woodward (2002), narratives are "relevant to the exploration of identity" (p. 28). For example, In Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, when giving advice to his daughter, Scout, about empathy, Atticus's word was that "...you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...--until you climb into his skin and walk around in it..." (2002, p. 33). It means that to understand why a person does what he or she does is not formed out of nothing. The only way to experience what a person went

through is to see through his or her perspective. In a way, literature is exactly the same thing, by giving the reader someone else's point of view, one can understand how they felt; placing oneself "in their skin." The character can be seen as the avatar in which one have placed one's perspective in, the setting as the situation in which you placed yourself in, and the plot as what you experienced throughout the story. Fludernik (2010) states that "...the language of narrative creates possible worlds... This would not be possible without the help of the reader's imagination..." (p. 40). It leads to the second point, the importance of the shaping of identity in young adult fiction.

Second, the shaping of identity is an important element in young adult fiction due to its power in making the story relatable to the target reader, the young adult, or as coined by G. Stanley Hall, "adolescent" (Benson & Collin, 2012). Young adult literature is

"...basically defined as books that are marketed towards teens and contain main characters between the ages of 12 and 18, sometimes reaching to early 20s. What young adult literature is *not* is a story that leaps into adulthood" (Mulhall, 2012).

It can be said that the young adult fiction has its tendencies in affecting the reader especially during the age at which, according to Hall cited in *Psychology Book*, the "awareness of self and the environment greatly increases; everything is more keenly felt, and sensation is sought for its own sake" (Benson & Collin, 2012, p. 47). Therefore young adult fiction is the embodiment of that particular stage in life, where there are changes happening in an individual.

In J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) for example, the main character, Holden Caulfield, constructs the experiences from his slice of life to an audience. It can be said that Salinger was trying to communicate this particular experience to the reader. The result is empathy toward Holden. In a sense,

"in telling stories... we are endeavoring to make sense of experience by putting together the often disjointed and fragmented pieces of everyday life, including the crises and traumas as well as the banal aspects of routine, into some kind of structure" (Woodward, 2002, pp. 28 - 29).

It can be said that there would be messages transferred in the text since no texts are free of ideology. This leads to the point of the connection between the text and the identity.

Third, what does the chosen texts tell about identity? And why does identity matter? This portrayal of "journey" that mirrored one another in the two books written by John Green, *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns*, represented the changes in the identity of the main characters through their experiences; that there are things influencing the main characters, shaping them as changed individuals in the long run. Woodward (2002) explains that "identities are constructed through narrative and the stories we tell about ourselves..." (p. 48). In a way, by having the main characters tell the story through their perspectives in the two books, specifically in a first person perspective, can say many things as to who they are as individuals. Identity matter due to the fact that it is what young adults search for and the reason why they "are increasingly sensitive, reckless, and self - conscious" (Benson & Collin, 2012, p. 46). According to Hall in *Psychology Book*, "adolescence is when the very worst and best impulses in the human soul struggle against each other for possession" (Benson & Collin, 2012, p. 47). The readers are most likely to have never met Salinger, Lee, or Green in person, but the readers understand what the characters went through due to the experiences that have been communicated to them through the perspectives given in those books.

From the three points above, it can be gathered that this research tries to discover the phenomenon of the changes of the main character in the two books and discover why they change, what triggers the changes in their identities, and what is the outcome of the transitions that the adolescent main characters went through. The three points is framed within the use of Narratology as the means of analyzing the two texts. In *An Introduction to Narratology*, Fludernik (2010) explained that the focus of Narratology is the building blocks of the narrative and it can be said that the way the story is told, the narrative, contributes to the main character's shaping of identity.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

The writer wishes to discover the significance of the journey which seems to mirror the stages in the phases toward adulthood during the adolescence years (or youth initiation toward adulthood) in John Green's two novels, particularly the change of one's identity as a result of a certain event. Why does someone's end can be the start of someone else's beginning? Why does someone's beginning can shape one's ending? How can a single event cause a drastic change in an individual? There should be reasons behind all of the issues asked in these questions, leading to this research question:

How do the similarities and differences in the portrayals of journey in John Green's two books (*Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns*) construct the main characters' identity?

## 1.3 Significance of Research

This research offers a more in depth look into John Green's work other than just discussing on the impacts of the books or the controversial issues inside the books. Even though this research limits itself by using only two of John Green's work, *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns*, it still contributes in giving a new perspective about the stories written by Green specifically. This research also gives the analysis of the plot using a structuralist approach using Prince's methodology called "Narratology", which has been further elaborated by Fludernik with Barthes' method of plot analysis using his two (out of five) codes on plotting.

## 1.4 Aims of Research

This research aims to discover two things based on the two young adult novels written by John Green *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns*:

1. To understand the similarities of how the two books uses "journey" to reflect the stages of change in the main characters' identity.

2. To understand the differences of how the two books uses "journey" to reflect the stages of change in the main characters' identity.

### 1.5 Research Method

This research employs a qualitative analysis. A qualitative analysis' procedure is conducted by gathering the textual evidence. Tables also are used in order to sort the textual evidence. By using a structuralist approach, the two books can be allowed to be compared and contrasted to see the similarities and the differences using specific textual evidences from the two books.

The methodology of this structuralist research is content based analysis using Narratology. Narratology is mentioned in Herman & Vervaeck's *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005): it is said that "According to [Barthes] a story contains codes that refer directly or indirectly to social values, norms, and beliefs." (p.119) Another view by Fludernik (2010) showed that,

"Narratology has traditionally been a sub-discipline of the research of literature and also has particularly close ties to poetics, the theory of genre, and to the semiotics, or semiology of literature...Narratology shares many characteristics with poetics because it analyses... the characteristics of (narrative) literary texts and their aesthetic (narrative) functions. And finally, narratology resembles semiotics in so far as it analyses the constitution of (narrative) meaning in texts..." (p. 9)

Basically, the two explanations of the term "narratology" showed how significant the structure and the way that the text is put together and told are. Also, since the data are analyzed using narratology and one of the elements analysed is the plotting of the story, the writer has decided to use Roland Barthes' code on plotting which consisted of the *hermeneutic code*, the *proairetic code*, the *semantic code*, the *symbolic code*, and the *cultural code* (Felluga, 2013). Since the analysis of the data collected from the two books uses narratology, Barthes' code on plotting allows the dissection of the narrative further. Two codes have been chosen specifically for the purpose of focusing on the causality inside the plot: The *hermeneutic code* (HER) and *proairetic code* (ACT). Further elaboration of the research method can be seen in the third chapter.

It has been indicated by the points elaborated above that the construction of the characters involves the elements inside the stories. Thus, the focus of this

research is the analysis of the plot, "...a sequence of narrated events... related by causation... Discussion of plot can emphasize narrative's complicated relations with the time (chronology), order (and disorder), and generic convention..." (Keen, 2003, p. 23) The analysis of the plot will help to see the chain of events inside the stories and how it contributes to the changes in the main characters' identity.

## 1.6 Definition and Clarification of Key Terms

There are several terms which are used in this research. The terms are **adolescence, journeys, identity, young adult literature, plot, narrative, and narratology.**

The term **adolescence** was coined by G. Stanley Hall, "adolescence is when the very worst and best impulses in the human soul struggle against each other for possession" (Benson & Collin, 2012, p. 47) and that the "awareness of self and the environment greatly increases; everything is more keenly felt, and sensation is sought for its own sake." (Benson & Collin, 2012, p. 47) To adolescent, **journey** is one of the most important process to be experienced, either literally or metaphorically. Journey can be considered as

"...character progression from one place or stage to another. The theme was identified to be present when a character in the work embarks on either a literal or physical quest or a metaphorical journey, during which time they overcome a large mental, emotional, or spiritual challenge in his or her life" (Bodart, Barrineau, & Flamino, 2011).

The search for an understanding toward **identity** is one of the goals that an adolescent is striving for. According to Woodward (2002), "identities are constructed through narrative and the stories we tell about ourselves..." (p. 48). Also, it is "... how we construct these narratives, how we put them together to make sense of ourselves. This is what is relevant to the exploration of identity." (Woodward, 2002, p. 28) Thus, in this study, identity refers to the main characters' sense of self. Therefore, a narrative where an adolescence is the main focus, like a **Young Adult literature**, is a good example to be used as a model of the construction of their journey in finding their identity. "Young Adult Literature" are literary works intended to be read by young adult readers, the

adolescence, with the main characters having the same age as the readers. In other words,

"Young adult novels can be basically defined as books that are marketed towards teens and contain main characters between the ages of 12 and 18, sometimes reaching to early 20s. What young adult literature is *not* is a story that leaps into adulthood. The majority of the stories (short of maybe an epilogue set years in the future) take place during the characters' teen years." (Mulhall, 2012)

An element crucial to the building blocks of a story is the **plot**. "Plot is a sequence of narrated events... related by causation... Discussion of plot can emphasize narrative's complicated relations with the time (chronology), order (and disorder), and generic convention." (Keen, 2003, p.23) Plot also relates to the narrative. **Narrative** can be defined as the way that a story is told. According to Fludernik (2010) "...the language of narrative creates possible worlds... This would not be possible without the help of the reader's imagination..." (p. 40). Narrative is different from "narratology." **Narratology** is the methodology of finding the underlying idea behind the structure of the story based on the "processes and structure" of the text (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005, p. 105). According to Fludernik (2010) "Narratology", first coined by Todorov, employs a structuralist approach in the area of academic narrative study and basically,

"Narratology has traditionally been a sub-discipline of the study of literature and also has particularly close ties to poetics, the theory of genre, and to the semiotics, or semiology of literature...Narratology shares many characteristics with poetics because it analyses... the characteristics of (narrative) literary texts and their aesthetic (narrative) functions. And finally, narratology resembles semiotics in so far as it analyses the constitution of (narrative) meaning in texts..." (p. 9)

It can be said that the terms defined above helped to shape the understanding that the importance of "adolescence" and their "journeys" in finding their "identity", with the help of "young adult literature", is the main focus of this research. Connecting to the research questions, the data can be gathered from the "narrative" after the "plot" is analysed and "narratology" will help in finding the underlying structure inside the narratives.

## **1.7 Organization of Paper**

### Chapter I: Introduction

The introduction consists of foundation of the research such as the background of the research, statement of research problem, the aim of the research, and research method.

### Chapter II: Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation explores the literatures that relate to the subject of research.

### Chapter III: Research Method

The research method explained the working procedure as well as the discipline in which the data are analyzed.

### Chapter IV: Findings and Discussions

This chapter discusses the data of the research as well as the analysis of the data.

### Chapter V: Conclusion and Suggestion

This chapter summarizes the entire research as a whole and give suggestions for further research.