

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used in this research. This chapter contains research design, research procedures, data source, procedures of data collection and analysis, data presentation, and summary of the books.

3.1. Research Design

The research is a textual analysis, describing the textual evidence by analyzing words, phrases, and sentences in the first two books of *The Floods* series (*Neighbours*, 2005; *Playschool*, 2006) by Colin Thompson to answer the research questions. A textual analysis, as McKee (2002) asserts, can be performed on a text when researchers attempt to make “an educated guess” at some of the possible interpretations that might be made of the particular text (p. 1). This method of analysis is employed because it resembles the aim of a qualitative research, which, according to Alwasilah (2002), is to provide a comprehensive understanding regarding a certain phenomenon by examining it in detail, in which context plays a critical role in influencing the meanings of such phenomenon (p. 54). Furthermore, in humor analysis, Sen (2012) argues that the attributes of typical qualitative research methods can be applied by researchers as analytical tools. These attributes include, but not limited to, the “use of qualitative data, inductive analysis, and ‘naturalistic’ orientation” (Sen, 2012, p. 2).

3.2. Data Source

The data are in textual forms, collected from excerpts, narration, and dialogues in the first two books of Colin Thompson’s *The Floods* (*Neighbours*, 2005; *Playschool*, 2006), a children’s book series about the life of a witch family. The two books were published by Penguin Random House Australia, and each book consists of 96 and 109 pages respectively. A total of 56 humorous excerpts, narration, and dialogues in the two books are used as the unit of data analysis in this study.

The Floods is particularly chosen for this study due to the humorous contents in the book series which relatively transcend times. It means that although the humor seems absurd and nonsense, readers may find it amusing to read it repeatedly. Reflecting on its acceptance in several countries, namely being translated into various languages, it is then assumed that there is a certain mechanism of humor in the book series which manages to appeal to the readers. The first two books, in this case, are then selected out of twelve books in the series because the books presumptively represent the way the author constructs humor for the rest of the series.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study are collected from excerpts, narration, and dialogues in the first two books of Colin Thompson's *The Floods* (*Neighbours*, 2005; *Playschool*, 2006) which have been validated as humorous by 10 respondents. The procedure in assembling and analyzing the data is presented as follows:

1. Identify and select excerpts, narration, and dialogues in the two texts that signify humor. The textual evidences that indicate humor, in this context, are those that carry the potential to be humorous.
2. Validate the selected data. Data validation is performed to ensure the humor in data selected for this study. The validation of data in this study involves 10 respondents, ranging from children to young adults, who have affirmed that the data are indeed humorous. The criteria of validation are based on a general agreement that the data have the potential to be humorous, regardless of the reactions and timing.
3. Classify the context of humor that circumscribes the selected humorous data. Classification of context in this study is based on Vandaele's (2002) assertions that there are contexts that bound the operation of humor. The contexts are: (1) (de-)normalization, indicated by the violation of accepted social conventions by the humorist, (2) evaluation, indicated by the use of irony by the humorist, (3) solution, indicated by the need of advanced

knowledge to understand the humor, and (4) conditioning, indicated by certain given preconditions that construct a target of ridicule. The context of each data, in this case, is described to give boundaries that are required in examining the way humor operates in a text.

4. Analyze the collected data by employing Vandaele's (2002) framework on humor operation in a text, which involve at least two dimensions: cognitive and social dimensions. In terms of cognitive operation, Vandaele (2002) argues that humor in a text may operate as (1) linguistic incongruities, (2) pragmatic incongruities, (3) narrative incongruities, (4) located incongruities, and/or (5) unlocated incongruities. Meanwhile, in terms of social operation, he believes that humor in a text may operate as (1) aggressive superiority and/or (2) affirmative superiority. Furthermore, the humor elements proposed by Mallan (1993) are also utilized to strengthen the analysis on humor operation in the texts. Mallan's (1993) humor elements, in this case, are (1) humorous characters, (2) humorous situations, and (3) humorous discourse.
5. Evaluate the analyses and discussion obtained from the examination of humor operation to reveal the humor in Colin Thompson's *The Floods*.
6. Interpret the possible meanings of the humor depicted in *The Floods* by using the latest analyses on how humor operates in the book series and relating it to other studies on humor phenomena. Several studies that are referred in this study are those that discuss the issues on humor in children's literature and the function it may serve in society.

3.4. Data Presentation

The categorized data are presented in the following table. The table is divided into five columns to provide specific descriptions on each category, namely (1) textual evidence in the forms of excerpts, narration, or dialogues, (2) the context of these humorous instances, (3) the description of each context, (4) the way humor operates in these instances and (5) the humor elements used to construct these instances.

Textual Evidence	
<p>Wizard Rules – Twenty-two players stand in the middle of a soccer field and watch as all the spectators kick a ball around the terraces. Sometimes the players get overexcited and throw things such as intestines and referees into the crowd. (Playschool, 2006, p. 10)</p>	
Context of Humor:	(De-)Normalization
Description	
<p><i>Wizard Rules</i> is one of the sport events played during Quicklime College's sports day. The sport appears to be an incongruous version of real-life football.</p>	
How Humor Operates	
Cognitively	Socially
Narrative Incongruities	Affirmative Superiority
<p>Cognitive scheme: A sport is played by the players and the spectators will watch and support them.</p> <p>Initial assumptions: <i>Wizard Rules</i> will be played by the wizard players and there will be spectators who watch and support them</p> <p>Conceptual violation: In <i>Wizard Rules</i>, the players watch the spectators compete in the sport.</p>	<p>Cuing: readers may find the right reactions to the intention behind the incongruity of the sport</p> <p>Solving: readers may be more pleased when they solve the more particular the humor behind the sport's description, making them feel superior</p> <p>Institutionalizing: readers may find that the humor is conventionalized for such sport is socially incongruous</p>

Humor Elements	
Humorous Characters	:
Humorous Situations	: Nonsense
Humorous Discourse	: Parody

Table 3.1. *Humor Operation in the Context of (De-)Normalization*

3.5. Summary of the Books

3.5.1. *Neighbours* (2005)

The Floods is a witch family who lives in Acacia Avenue, a neighborhood which is inhabited by common people. The father, Nerlin, is the descendant of the legendary Merlin, while the mother, Mordonna, is believed to be the most beautiful witch in the universe. Together they have seven children: Valla, Satanella, Winchflat, Merlinmary, Morbid, Silent, and Betty. Each child has his/her own special ability. Living in a normal neighborhood is never a problem for them. Although their surroundings seem to fear them, the Floods can actually live peacefully as a family. That is until when the Dents become their neighbors.

The Dent family consists of four members: Mr. Dent, the father, who is very lazy and grumpy, Mrs. Dent, the mother, who is overly obsessed with TV shows, and their two children, Tracylene and Dickie, who always cause problems in their school. Since their arrival, The Dents quickly become a huge nuisance to the Floods. So, one day, Nerlin Flood and his daughter Merlinmary decide to visit the Dents to see if this family can tone down their rowdiness. However, instead of obeying these powerful witches, Mr. Dent orders them to go away immediately. This becomes the beginning of the punishment plan for the Dents.

When Nerlin and Merlinmary return to the house, the Floods begin arranging a plan to make the Dents disappear. The first target, Dickie, happens to come voluntarily to the Floods' house at that very night. Dickie is angry because his favorite dog has been turned by the Floods into a poodle who constantly 'poos' on his bed. He seeks revenge on them. So, when he sees that the Floods are going out, he sneaks into their house to 'poo' in their kitchen as a payback. However, he does not realize that Betty Flood, his schoolmate, is still in that house. Dickie is then caught in the act by Betty. As a punishment, Betty turns him into a multifunctional refrigerator. Dickie feels so much better about himself after being turned into a fridge. With this, the first member of the Dents is now gone.

Tracylene Dent, the daughter, is the second target to be wiped out. Tracylene is a self-centered teenager who likes to kidnap her boyfriends. One day, when Tracylene is getting ready for her weekly hangout, she becomes curious

about the backyard of the Floods on which some tombstones lie. Unfortunately for her, a dead hand approaches her leg from below one of the tombstones. The hand belongs to the dead grandmother of the Floods, Queen Scratchrot, who is feeling hungry at that night. Tracylene is then pulled into the grave and swallowed by Queen Scratchrot. After swallowing Tracylene, the dead grandmother burps and farts a lot. This is because Tracylene is not the most digestible food. With this, another member of the Dents has now vanished.

After their two children disappear, Mr. and Mrs. Dent seem to not really notice it. They still do their routines of fighting with each other. This continues until several weeks later. One night, Mr. and Mrs. Dent are fighting over who should watch the TV. Their fight finally erupts when Mr. Dent locks Mrs. Dent outside their house. Mrs. Dent cries out loud outside until she passes out. When she wakes up, she sees Tracylene's red shoes in the Floods' backyard. After seeing the shoes, she begins to cry even harder. However, she does not cry because she has just realized that Tracylene has been murdered by her neighbors. It is because she realizes that she has just skipped her favorite TV show.

On the next day, Mrs. Dent begins to realize that there is something wrong about her neighbor. So, she calls the police, and they send Sergeant LaDouche to investigate the case. However, the sergeant is not that competent. When he visits the Floods' house, he reports to his colleague in the police car that there is a gate barking at him and that there is a dog talking to him, which is actually Satanella Flood. His colleague, who does not believe in witches, thinks that Sergeant LaDouche is mentally ill. So, he calls a mental asylum, and they take the sergeant right away.

Several months later, Mrs. Dent is still curious about her neighbor. So, she calls the police again, but after what happens to Sergeant LaDouche, the police now pretend that the Dents never exist. After watching some of her favorite TV shows, she then decides to take a look at her neighbor's backyard herself. The Floods have apparently been preparing for this moment. After some discussions, the Floods decide that Betty is the one who is going to turn Mrs. Dent into something. Thus, when she finally lands her step on the backyard, she is

immediately turned by Betty into a plasma television, the one thing that Mrs. Dent truly loves.

Mr. Dent does not notice that all the members of his family are now missing. He continuously drinks his beers and watches some TV shows. The Floods become tired of how Mr. Dent is so clueless about his missing family. So, Mordonna and Betty Flood decide to approach him directly to his house. After they confront Mr. Dent, who still does not realize what is going on, Mordonna and Betty turn him into a vacuum cleaner. Once again, a vacuum cleaner is more functional than who Mr. Dent is when he is alive.

On the next day, everyone in the neighborhood celebrates the disappearance of all the Dents. The police are seen popping up some champagne and the real estate agent is preparing for an auction to sell their house. With some magic, Betty Flood manages to win the auction and buys the house with merely \$12. After several efforts to redecorate the Dents' house, the Floods begin to live in their house. They are now the inhabitants of Acacia Avenue 11 and 13. They build connecting tunnels between the two houses upgrade the other backyard into graves for their relatives. At night, they are seen to sit and enjoy the full moon while drinking some bloods.

3.5.2. *Playschool* (2006)

The Flood children go to Quicklime College for school, except for Valla, the oldest who has graduated, and Betty, the youngest child who goes to a normal human school. Quicklime College is a school for witches and other magical creatures. It is located in a distant Patagonian valley that no one even knows and no map can locate. Five of the Flood children who go there are Satanella, Winchflat, Merlinmary, Morbid and Silent. They go to school with a dragon bus that picks them up every morning. The duration from Acacia Avenue to Quicklime College is barely a minute.

Quicklime College teaches many lessons. There is a lesson on Sport with Pain, taught by Radius Leg, where witches will try their hard to hurt others by playing gristleball. There is also a lesson on Special Breeds, taught by Miss

Phyllis, which is intended for witch students who have been turned into animals. Other lessons include Invisibility, Burglary, Elocution, Genetic Engineering, and Underwater French. The Flood children excel in every class they attend. In contrast to this, there is also one student that almost always fails at every class he attends, and his name is Orkward Warlock.

Orkward Warlock hates everyone. However, who he hates the most is the Flood family. It is because the Floods seem to be the perfect family. They have a legendary father and mother, and all of the children excel in what they do. On the other hand, Orkward never knows who his parents are. His mother is a witch who abandons him after he was born because she thinks he is ugly. Meanwhile, his father is a milkman, a normal human with no superpower. He has a sister named Primrose, who actually goes to Quicklime College too, but because Orkward is always cruel to her, she tells him that he is actually adopted.

The hatred towards the Floods leads Orkward to arrange a cruel plan to hurt them. With the help of his only friend, The Toad, a student who has no choice but befriends Orkward, Orkward comes up with an idea. This month, Quicklime College is preparing for the Sports Day, an annual event where many magical sports are contested and students' family and relatives are invited back. Orkward believes that this is the right moment to annihilate all members of the Floods in one occasion. He knows that the Floods will win all the competitions, so he plans to explode the podium on which they will stand during the medal ceremony.

To actualize his plan, he needs the help of Narled, the school janitor who is a leather suitcase. The janitor picks up every stuff that is on the ground, whether it is lost or not. Thus, Orkward believes that the janitor will be able to pick up some bombs and put them under the podium during the medal ceremony. He begins to think a way to bribe Narled. After finding out that the janitor is actually an ancient creature, Orkward promises him that he is going to rub his back with some oils and beeswaxes. Narled agrees with this. So, Orkward orders The Toad to steal the legendary magical oil from Matron, the school nurse.

After The Toad steals the magical oil, he meets with Orkward in the middle of the jungle. This is where they have agreed to meet with Narled. When Narled arrives, he brings his family members with him, who are all leather suitcases and wallets. Orkward then rubs the janitor with the magical oil, while The Toad massages his wife and children. Narled's wife and children immediately notice that The Toad is feeling guilty about having to do all these things for Orkward. They then comfort him and promise him a way to escape from this.

After the massaging session is done, Orkward returns to the school, while The Toad decides to follow Narled's family. The Toad follows them until he arrives at Narled's home, which is actually a treasure trove. The place in which Narled lives is full of gold, money, and all lost stuffs that can make everyone rich. The Toad, however, is not there for that. He comes for comfort, so he hugs Narled's family and cries. For a moment, The Toad lives there peacefully.

Meanwhile, at Quicklime College, everyone panics about the sudden disappearance of The Toad. The search for The Toad then begins. Merlinmary Flood is one of the leaders in the search. She goes through the deepest tunnels in Quicklime College and then manages to arrive at Narled's treasure trove. She sees The Toad there, sleeping comfortably. She does not want to ruin this moment, so she returns to the school and tells the headmaster that The Toad has been found.

Suspecting that Orkward is going to do something bad, the headmaster decides to clone The Toad to see what Orkward actually plans on doing. Pretending as if he is The Toad, The Faketoad approaches Orkward at night. Orkward tells the clone about the final plans. With this, everyone now knows about Orkward's filthy plan to annihilate everyone during the Sports Day. Everyone at school then decides to trap Orkward by changing the location of the bombs that he is going to detonate.

On the next day, the Sports Day begins. Participants from the entire universe join the contests. There are also many relatives and families who come to support the contestants. Mordonna Flood is honored to open the whole event. The whole day is filled with joy, and by the end of the day, The Floods manage to win all the competitions that they compete in.

When the Floods are about to go to the podium, Orkward is already up on a hill near Narled's treasure trove to see the explosion that is about to happen from above. Before he goes there, he decides to steal all the treasures from the treasure trove. When the Floods finally enter the podium, he pushes a button to detonate the bomb. However, he does not know that the bomb has actually been moved to the treasure trove. So, he explodes, with all the treasures that he has just stolen. It rains treasures at the stadium, and everyone thinks that this is the best Sports Day of all time.

3.7. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed the research methodology used in conducting the study. It consists of research design, research procedures, data source, procedures of data collection and analysis, data presentation, and summary of the books. In order to answer the research questions, comprehensive data presentations and data analyses will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

