

**BINARY OPPOSITIONS DEPICTED IN THE  
CHARACTERIZATION OF LEMONY SNICKET'S *ERSATZ*  
*ELEVATOR***

**FINAL PROJECT**

**Presented as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
to obtain *Sarjana Sastra* Degree in English Literature**



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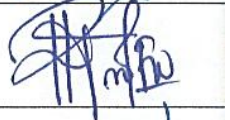
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Hereby, I honestly declare that the undergraduate thesis I wrote does not contain the works or part of the works of other people, except those which were cited in the quotations and the references, as a scientific paper should. If my statement is not valid in the future, I absolutely agree to accept an academic sanction in the form of revocation of my paper and my degree obtained from the paper.

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Sheila Larasati

## MOTTO

“There are certain things in life where you know it’s a mistake but you don’t really know it’s a mistake because the only way to really know is a mistake is to make mistake and look back say “yep, that was a mistake.” So really, the bigger mistake would be not making the mistake because you’ll go through your whole life not really knowing whether it’s a mistake or not, and I made no mistake. I’ve done it all. My life, my relationship, my career, mistakes free.”

- Lily Aldrin in *How I Met Your Mother*



## DEDICATION

Dedicating this research to myself who against all odds could sit and finish this study and also fellow students who are in the stage to finish their undergraduate thesis, this too shall pass.

## ABSTRACT

Larasati, Sheila. 30801900043. Binary Oppositions depicted in the characters of *Lemony Snicket's Ersatz Elevator*. Final Project of Language and Communication Science Faculty. English Literature Study Program. Sultan Agung Islamic University Semarang. Advisor: Riana Permatasari, M.A., M.Pd.

*Lemony Snicket's Ersatz Elevator* was the object of this research. This study aims to analyze the characterization of the characters. The characters were analyzed and categorized into different traits which then later be contrasted with each other forming binary oppositions. This study used qualitative methodology where the primary data were taken from the novel in the form of dialogue and narration. The secondary data were gathered from various sources such as textbooks, journals, and several relevant sources that could support the study. The data were later identified, classified, and then reduced for better understanding. This study concluded with two results. The first result is the characterization found in the characters of the novel. The author used characterization through appearance. The traits shown in the study are grateful, greedy, caring, indifferent, brave, and coward. The second result is the findings of the binary oppositions. The traits were then later paired with their respectful opposite to form a binary opposition. The binary oppositions found in the novel were then later further analyzed and interpreted. The study shows a power imbalance between the adult and the children characters as they have opposite traits with each other along with their responsibilities as their respected roles. The power imbalance shown in the characters are made more prominent by how the children are portrayed to be the hero by the writer while the adults are portrayed to be reckless.

Keywords: ***Binary Opposition, Lemony Snicket, Characterization***



## INTISARI

Larasati, Sheila. 30801900043. Binary Oppositions depicted in the characterization of Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator*. Tugas Akhir Fakultas Bahasa dan Komunikasi. Program Studi Sastra Inggris. Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang. Pembimbing: Riana Permatasari, M.A.M.Pd.

Objek dari penelitian ini adalah novel berjudul *Ersatz Elevator* karya Lemony Snicket. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa penokohan pada karakter novel yang kemudian dikategorikan dalam beberapa kategori yang akan dikontras sehingga membentuk oposisi biner. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan data primer diambil dari dalam novel yang berupa narasi dan dialog. Data sekunder diambil dari berbagai sumber seperti buku, novel, jurnal, dan beberapa data terpercaya yang dipercaya dapat membantu penelitian ini. Data kemudian diidentifikasi, diklasifikasikan, dan direduksi untuk pemahaman yang lebih dalam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan dua hasil. Hasil yang pertama adalah penokohan yang dilakukan pada karakter-karakter novel mengarah pada beberapa sifat-sifat karakter seperti bersyukur, tamak, peduli, tidak acuh, pemberani, dan pengecut. Hasil kedua adalah penemuan dari oposisi biner. Sifat-sifat tersebut kemudian dipasangkan dengan lawannya untuk membuat sebuah oposisi biner. Oposisi biner yang telah ditemukan dalam novel kemudian ditafsirkan dan dianalisa. Dari penelitian ini, dapat disimpulkan bahwa terdapat ketidakseimbangan kekuasaan antara karakter dewasa dan karakter anak-anak yang dibuktikan dengan sifat-sifat mereka yang berkebalikan dan kewajiban mereka masing-masing. Ketidakseimbangan kekuasaan dibuat semakin jelas dengan cara penulis menampakkan karakter anak-anak sebagai pahlawan sedangkan karakter dewasa sebagai karakter yang ceroboh.

Kata kunci: **Oposisi Biner, Lemony Snicket, Karakterisasi**

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I am most aware that this project is nowhere near perfect, thus I accept any forms of suggestions and criticism. I sincerely hope that this project will enrich and give a better nuance to academia.

Semarang. August 16<sup>th</sup> 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sheila Larasati', written in a cursive style.

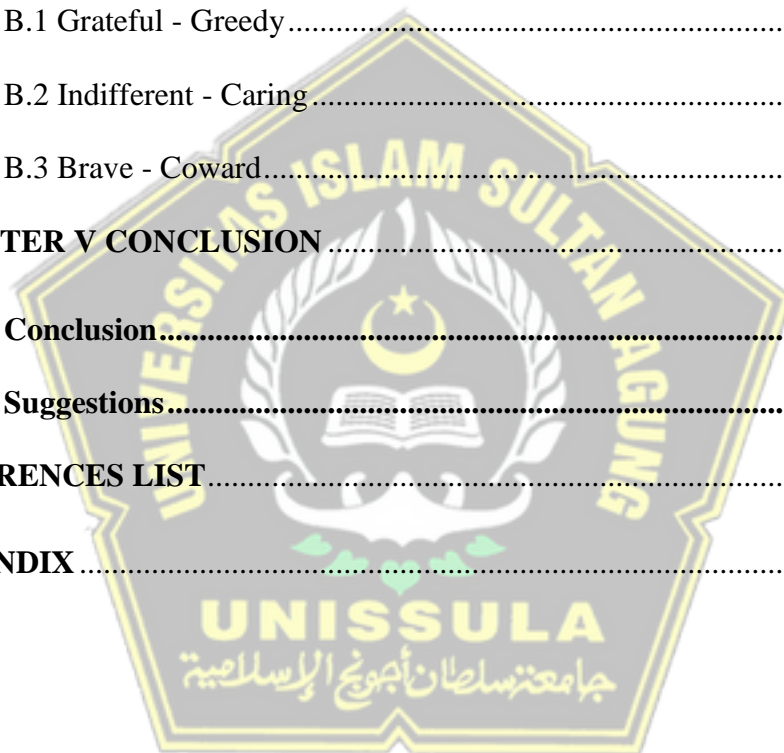
Sheila Larasati

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

Deconstruction is a term coined by the philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Derrida was born to an Algerian-Jewish family in El- Biar, Algeria back in 1930 and was a philosopher who graduated from École Normal Supérieure. In his works, Derrida is mostly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure and Heideggerian Phenomenology in a manner that he was not aligned with their ideas. Derrida is not something to be taken lightly in a literary field as he is one of the most notable literary figures in postmodernism who has published dozens of works.

Deconstruction is a tricky subject due to its claim that “*According to Derrida, it is impossible to define the word ‘deconstruction’*. In fact, he said that any sentence that takes the form ‘deconstruction is...X’ misses the point.” (Powell, 15). *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs, Writing and Difference*, and *Of Grammatology* were few of Derrida’s most notable works. Etymologically, the word ‘deconstruction’ is derived from the French verb of ‘deconstruire’ which means to dismantle an improvement (Gnanasekaran, 212). Deconstruction believes that in order to understand a text, one can not only rely on reading the text and the structure, but from neither of those and outside the context of the text (Aprilia & Arianto, 66). Even though deconstruction is difficult

to define, and it actually is not an examination on how to dissect a text, it is rather a method to read a text. Deconstruction challenges the idea that there is only one truth out there (logocentrism) and thus believes that truth is something very personal and could vary within each person. Derrida had always rejected the western philosophical belief that there is only one truth in the universe. This logocentrism creates privileges on something and marginalizes the other things for instance the society tends to give the privilege to the male and dismiss the female, black over white, rich over poor, and etc (Powell, 26). Binary opposition is a concept that puts two completely different concepts against each other (Smith, 383) i.e men/women, tall/short. In this research, binary opposition acts as a tool to dissect a novel as binary opposition “aims to open the reader's mind to see other meanings and not stick to one thing only” (Aprilia & Arianto, 66). Plenty of the research that has been previously done talked about the relation between binary oppositions and characterization in a literary work because the main object of the binary opposition is the opposition in between the traits of the characters.

According to Pickering & Hoepfer, Character is “any individual in a literary work”. Characterization is an act written by the author in the text to give a meaning of how a character is portrayed to be (quoted in Reams, 4). In a literary work, there are two types of characters; the flat characters and the round characters. The flat characters are those characters with a set of traits that do not change, while round characters carry more complex



traits within them. The majority of the research revolves around binary oppositions and is focused on adult literature. Unfortunately, little to no research has been done in children literature analysis of binary opposition and characterization and this is the main reason the researcher wants to do the research.

Karen Lesnik Oberstein in *Understanding Children's Literature* edited by Peter Hunt (1998:15) stated that “*The definition of ‘children’s literature’ therefore is underpinned by purpose: it wants to be something in particular, because this is supposed to connect it with that reading audience— ‘children’..*”. The object of this research is a children's literature namely Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator*; the sixth out of thirteen books written by Daniel Handler under the pseudonym of Lemony Snicket. The novels tell about the struggle of Baudelaire orphans trying to save their life from the chokehold of their greedy and evil previous guardian, who only after their fortune namely Count Olaf. Children's literature is judged to be a perfect object of binary opposition analysis due to its tendency to contrast between the good and bad. Throughout the novel, there are few characters that are strikingly different in terms of characterization and would make a great analysis for the binary opposition. On top of organizing the binary opposition shown in the characters, characterization is chosen as a tool to analyze this novel because children's literature tends to go overboard with the writing of the characters, making it easier to sort them. Another reason why the

researcher chooses to do this research is due to the limited research that has been done about children's literature in correlation with binary opposition.

In conclusion, the researcher correlates binary opposition with characterization as plenty of research has been done using that pattern with the object of the binary opposition itself is the characterization from the characters which are disclosed on the second chapter. Unfortunately, there has been little to no amount of research regarding binary opposition related with children's literature when children's literature is perfect for this analysis due to its nature of contrasting characters. Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator* is deemed to be a fit choice for this research by the researcher due to its witty and clever plot and interesting characters.

## **B. Problem Formulation**

There are two problems that will be analyzed in this study:

1. How is the characterization portrayed in the novel?
2. How does the characterization apply onto the Binary Opposition?

## **C. Limitation of the Study**

Due to the complexities of Deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida with its wide arrays of discourses, the research is limited to the analysis of the binary opposition in the novel. The analysis will focus on all the characters and the characterization that are deemed to fit into the binary opposition analysis.

**D. Objectives of the Study**

There are two objectives of this study:

1. To find out the characterization in the novel.
2. To find out the binary oppositions depicted in the novel.

**E. Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to add research regarding binary opposition in the field of children's literature and is hoped would later be beneficial for students who want to study about this topic.

**F. Organization of the Study**

The study is presented into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. This chapter covers the background of the study, problem formulation, objectives of the study, significance of the study and organization of the study. Chapter two is about synopsis and theory of the deconstruction, binary oppositions, along with characterization theory. In addition, chapter three contains research methodology that consist of types of research, data organizing, types of the data, and analyzing the data. Chapter four contains discussions and analysis. Chapter five are about conclusion and suggestions.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### A. Synopsis

Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator* is the sixth book out of thirteen book series written by Daniel Handler under the pseudonym of Lemony Snicket. The main point of the book series is the unending struggle of Baudelaire Children to save themselves from the chokehold of the greedy man namely Count Olaf. Each book has its own distinction by who their guardian is. In the preceding book, the children are sent to the Austere Academy where the Baudelaire children have to tackle Count Olaf and unfortunately lost their new friends, Quagmire triplets, to Count Olaf hence the *Austere Academy* title. In this book, *Ersatz Elevator*, the Baudelaire children are sent to yet another guardian, the wealthy Esme and Jerome Squalor whose penthouse is in front of the ersatz elevator in which will become a major part of the story.

Esme Squalor and Jerome Squalor live in an enormous penthouse at 667 Dark Avenue. Apparently, the citizens of 667 Dark Avenue follow a specific societal rule where the society defines what is 'In' and what is 'Out'. In this context, 'In' is considered to be something popular at the moment, something people should do or should own at the very moment. 'Out' means something that is outdated, it is something that is impossible to do or use or own. The societal rule of defining what is In and what is

Out is very extreme that if for example an elevator is deemed to be Out, then people would have to climb hundreds of stairs to go up. When the Baudelaire children arrived in 667 Dark Avenue along with their financial banker who takes care of the guardian affairs, they had to climb hundreds and hundreds of stairs due to the elevator being Out at that moment.

Esme Gege Genieve Squalor is what is usually referred to as Esme Squalor by Lemony Snicket, is the sixth most important financial advisor in the city. She is a quite stylish woman and is very keen on being on trend by always knowing what is In and what is Out. Orphans are In, which is the reason why they are the Baudelaire children's new appointed guardians. Jerome Squalor, job not described, is Esme's husband who seems to be rather submissive in the dynamics of the relationship. He does not say no to her oblivious requests. Both Esme and Jerome Squalor are very wealthy. They have an enormous penthouse that could get someone lost in it.

On the outside, the Baudelaire children might seem lucky that they are now being taken care of by such wealthy and important figures, but Baudelaire children are worried about the whereabouts of the Quagmire triplets whom Count Olaf successfully kidnaps. As always, the adult dismisses their worries. Another worry for the Baudelaire children is the re-appearance of Count Olaf. Please note that in every book, in every new guardian, Count Olaf will appear with disguises as if he is anyone but Count Olaf himself. The adults often fell for it, however the Baudelaire

children did not and will never be. In this book, Count Olaf is disguised as a Bidder Gunther, with broken English so that people think he is from far far away, when in fact he comes from a few blocks away.

The Baudelaire children are suspicious of the existence of two elevator doors when there is only one on the ground floor. With Violet's machinery skills, she manages to open the escalator and thankfully with her makeshift tool, the Baudelaire children could climb down the empty elevator and find out that the Quagmire triplets have been captured at the bottom of the ersatz elevator. The Baudelaire children have to climb up and go down once again because they have to make a tool to open the cage but when they come back, the cage is empty. Since Esme is about to do an In Auction with Gunther as the bidder, the Baudelaire Children go to look for the auction catalogs to find what possible things Count Olaf must have smuggled the Quagmire triplets into. Baudelaire children's hypothesis falls into the thing on the catalogs named as V.F.D which is a term that kept coming up in the book series and the Baudelaire children know it must have something to do with Count Olaf. However, as they work on their plan, Esme comes and traps them inside the ersatz elevator.

Baudelaire are Baudaire children after all. They immediately come with a new plan that could get them out of the ersatz elevator. As it turns out, the bottom of the ersatz elevator leads through something and it's their parents house which by the time of their visit, was burned to ashes. Covered with dust and ashes, they rush to the Veblen Hall, the



place where the auction takes place. When they arrive at the Veblen Hall, they ask help from Jerome Squalor to bid the V.F.D thing which is just a box. The bid is not easy. Once they get it, they open it and it is filled with tissue paper, not Quagmire Children. Eventually, Count Olaf's disguise as Gunther is revealed and he flees with Esme Squalor, along with Quagmire children who are hidden in the salmon statue.

## B. Related Literature

### B.1 Deconstruction

The term 'deconstruction' arose during the 1960s in the American literary field of study when a paper entitled *Structure, Sign, and Play* written by Jacques Derrida was read at John Hopkins symposium. In that specific paper Derrida talked about arguments regarding the metaphysical assumptions believed by plenty of scholars in the past and now the paper is thought to be the kickstarter of a new way of analyzing literary text (Bressler 107).

Despite deconstruction being infamous for its unstable literal definition, Jacques Derrida would like to believe that deconstruction is not a method on how to dissect a literary work, but rather an activity of reading (Sikirivwa 47) or something that goes along the line of "*In Derrida's view, deconstruction is neither a philosophy, nor a doctrine, nor a method, nor a discipline, but "only what happens if it happens"*" (45). According to Derrida himself in *Of Grammatology*, deconstruction focuses on what is not on the text than what is in the text

A deconstructive reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of patterns of language that he uses...[It] attempts to make the notseen accessible to sight (158-163).

Initially emerged as a reaction to structuralism, deconstruction is broad in spectrum because it coexists in both postmodern and poststructuralist discourse. Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, in the 1960s to this day, declared the end of “objective truth” (Bressler 89). According to the mentioned postmodernist thinkers, modernism met its doom due to its tendency to look for external being or truth. Because according to postmodernism, there is no such thing as absolute truth hidden in the universe (Bressler 89). As Maurizio and Segre stated that deconstruction primarily is the end result of modernism deconstructed (18).

Prior to the appearance of deconstruction or postmodernism, structuralism was the norm in the 1950s and 1960s. Structuralism believed that meaning could be achieved through linguistic signs and symbols (Bressler 105). Despite both schools of thought studying literary features, deconstruction only focuses on its rhetorical context unlike the structuralism which focuses on the grammatical ones. Deconstruction gives credit to the analogy text to syntax brought by Saussure but instead of finding meaning in the structure of the text, deconstruction tries to find its disorder and a language’s tendency to make no sense (Guerin

377). Norris stated that deconstruction has been upfront about its being structuralist due to its disapproval of structure (3).

Based on some research about Deconstruction there are some terminologies that often appear. The terminologies are Transcendental Signifier, Logocentrism, Phonocentrism, Metaphysics of Presence, and lastly the main topic for this research, Binary Opposition.

Firstly, Transcendental Signifier points out that there has been an 'error' in the western philosophy tracing back to Plato's times. Western philosophy believes that people should look for something that is called transcendental signified. Transcendental Signified, is "an external point of reference upon which one may build a concept or philosophy" (Bressler 109). To put it simply, according to western philosophy, people should look at external beings that are not on the same level as us humans such as god, truth, or other entities that are deemed to possess a key to the universe. Since transcendental signified is believed to be the source of everything, origins, it carries a meaning to humanity to give structure to their life. Unlike the other concept of signified, transcendental signified can not be compared with something else, thus it has to stand alone on its own. Transcendental signified can not be included in the structural analysis because once its status as a transcendental signified to another center (Bressler 110). To put it simply, transcendental signified is the signifier that does not have any opponents as it is standing on its own.

Secondly, Logocentrism asserts that western philosophy tends to favor the 'logos' as something to the center of human's life i.e god, essence, truth, etc. Logos could serve as a transcendental signified because each logo could stand on its own and is self-originating. The tendency of human beings to look for the center or the truth is what Derrida calls logocentrism (Bressler 110).

The third is Phonocentrism that deals with the concept of privileging speech over writing. According to Bressler, putting speech on the privileged position and writing on the unprivileged position is because words (spoken by the speaker) insinuated presence, and that writing insinuated absence of the speaker (111). Writing is deemed to be a secondary type of speech because it is the written form of speech.

The fourth is Metaphysics of Presence that is the overall ideas of logocentrism, phonocentrism, binary oppositions, and all the other western philosophies that Derrida wanted to dismantle its unstable foundations.

The last is Binary Opposition. In establishing the center, the other part of the center autonomously becomes decentered. The concept of one center being the center while the other is being decentered is what Derrida called 'binary oppositions' (Bressler 10). Between the two oppositions, there is always the center. It is the center that is given a privilege i.e man/woman, tall/short, big/little, black/white, and etc (Bertens 139). Derrida argued that the concept of giving a privilege (superior

position) to one thing and not on the other (inferior position) is problematic at best even though this act has been done since the time of Plato (Bressler 111).

In this research, the main topic is Binary Opposition. In the following sub-chapter it will be further explained about binary opposition's stance in deconstruction theory.

## **B.2 Binary Opposition in Deconstruction Theory**

According to Derrida, the most violent type of binary opposition is the privileging of speech over writing due to the belief that speech implies presence and writing implies absence or just merely symbols of the speech form, a second hand information. The concept of binary oppositions dates back to Plato times where he considered writing to be far less superior than speech. Plato believed that writing is detached from real life and is prone to be misinterpreted (Zima 32).

A text can continue to be read after its author has disappeared or died - which is why Socrates condemns writing in the Phaedrus.

Writing breaks with the context of communication, if by the latter one understands the intersubjective communication of conscious, co-present subjects. Writing also breaks with the limited concept of context, because the written sign always exceeds its context; for it must, by virtue of its iterability, perdure beyond the present moment of its inscription and even after the death of its author.

Furthermore, a text can be quoted in other contexts, and enter into new contexts. (Critchley 33-34)

Binary oppositions stand on its notion that a word can not merely stand by itself. It has to be contrasted with other words that would later form a binary opposition naturally. "A single word does not have any meaning on its own; it can only be defined through association with other words." (Papadelos 73). For instance, the word 'tall' can not be comprehended without the word 'short', the word 'deep' can not be called 'deep' without the existence of the word 'shallow'.

The initial stage of doing deconstructive reading is to acknowledge the existence of binary oppositions in our mind. Once the binary oppositions have been determined, then it is ready to be reversed. Such reversal is possible because according to Derrida, truth is ever elusive. With that being said, we can always replace the center with another. In reversing hierarchy, one cannot just substitute one hierarchy with a new one in a negative way, Derrida advised to do it in a way so that we will be able to examine and give rise to the new hierarchies (Bressler 112).

### **B.3 Characterization**

As stated in Chapter 1, this research focused on finding the binary oppositions shown in Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator* through methods of characterization. Methods of characterization according to James Pickering and Jeffrey D. Hoepfer are divided into two; telling (direct) and



showing (indirect). With telling or the direct ones, the author tells the audience through their commentary of the character through their writing. This method is popular in many older fictions. The second method is showing or the indirect ones, with the author stepping aside and the burden of analyzing characters befall on the reader based on the provided narrative through subtle hints on the dialogue and explanation. Though direct method of characterization is more popular within literary works, not one of the two is necessarily better than the other. The method used by the author relies on the author's circumstances i.e philosophical belief, well-being, preferences, and etc.

In the book of *Concise Companion to Literature* (1981) by James Pickering and Jeffrey D. Hooper, there are certain way to analyze characterization through the direct method which are as follows:

### **B.3.1 Characterization through Names**

Names are often a subtle hint given by the author about the character's characterization. Characters with mean or evil demeanor are often given names that carry an evil demeanor to it i.e Roger Chillingsworth in *The Scarlet Letter*. To put it simply, the name of the characters foreshadow the characterization of the characters.

### **B.3.2 Characterization through Appearance**

In real life we might have the belief that appearances are often deceiving, that's not always the case with fiction because oftentimes, how the characters are portrayed give significant hints of the character's characterization.

### **B.3.3 Characterization by Author**

Author holds a massive power in telling the story, especially on the characterization of the characters. In the conventional way of writing, the author has the freedom to interrupt the narrative and reveal details or commentary about the characters. Not only directing our attention towards the character that's being talked about, the author also dictates how we should feel towards the specific character.

### **B.3.4 Characterization through Dialogue**

Talking and conversing are essential to us human beings in real life. But so is in fiction. But the art of giving characterization hints through dialogue is not simple because some characters are careful with what they say. Hence, for that reason the reader must analyze the dialogue in a number of different ways which are as follows:

- What is being said

- The identity of the speaker
- The occasion
- The identity of the person or the persons the speaker is addressing
- The quality of the exchange
- The speaker's tone of voice, stress, dialect, and vocabularies

### **B.3.5 Characterization through Actions**

Characterization through actions is not simple because we not only have to pay attention to the major actions that the characters are doing, but oftentimes we have to also pay attention to the minor actions the characters are doing because every action counts. In order to make it easier for the reader to analyze the characterization is through paying attention to the character's motives because it could be overwhelming if we have to pay attention to every single action done by the characters.

### **C. Previous Studies**

There are some research that have been done in the field of binary oppositions in literature, for example Radiaska Karistantya Putra wrote his bachelor thesis in English Literature entitled *A Deconstruction of the Binary Opposition on the Male and Female Characters in Susan Glasspell's Trifles* in 2016. Putra used binary oppositions to read Susan

Glasspell's *Trifles* as well as theory of characterization, theory of gender stereotype, and theory of patriarchy. He asserts that the binary oppositions found in *Trifles* are the binary oppositions amongst men and women where men are deemed to be the privileged ones which correlates with the other theories used which are theory of gender stereotype and theory of patriarchy.

Next, a research entitled *Binary opposition of the characters in Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men: From Derridean perspective* written by Khair UI Basar and Alam Zeb explains the postmodernist analysis of the novel *Mice and Men* which revolves around the gloomy folktale. The author finds that the binary oppositions found in the novel (George/Lennie, Carlson/Candy, Slim/Crooks, and Curley/Curley's wife) are related with master and slave ideology.

From the two studies explained above, it can be concluded that talking about binary opposition is closely related to characterization. This research will also take characterization into account. However, this research differs from the various kinds of previous research dealing with the same theory of binary oppositions. This research primarily focused on the binary oppositions shown in the characterization of the characters in the Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator* which happens to be a children's novel. A children's novel is deemed to be suitable for this research due to its nature of contrasting the characterization in between the characters.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHOD

#### A. Type of Study

The research was done with a descriptive qualitative study. Descriptive qualitative is crucial for research that is focused on textual analysis to extract meaning from the text as a descriptive qualitative method is able to scrutinize a text. The focal point of the research was Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator* which served as the textual basis of the research. Descriptive qualitative study was deemed to be perfect for this research because it produces data that report the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' in a subjective manner (Kim et al as quoted in Doyle et al 3).

#### B. Types of the Data

To conduct the research comprehensively, the data were classified into two types; primary data and secondary data. Primary data refers to first-hand sources as the main information related to the object of the study. The primary data were narrations, dialogues, and descriptions shown in Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator* novel. *Ersatz Elevator* is the sixth book out the thirteen book series. The book was published on March 2001 by HarperCollins Publisher under the category of Gothic Fiction Absurdist Fiction Mystery. The secondary data included a wide range of scholarly studies related to deconstruction, binary oppositions, and characterizations throughout books, journals, previous studies, and textbooks related to the study. The sources were

attentively selected to support the explanations and interpretations of primary data being used in the analysis process.

### **C. Data Collection Method**

The data are collected with the method of qualitative research because qualitative research surrounds itself with multiple data such as examinations, observations, records, photographs, and documents (Lamber 255). Among various kinds of data in qualitative research, the research used documents and in this case, documenting data found in the novel. This section aimed to further elaborate on the data-collecting steps which conducted in the systematic steps as follows:

#### **C.1 Primary Data Collection Method**

##### **C.1.1 Reading the Novel**

The first step in data collection in this research was reading the primary source which is a novel. The novel was the sixth out of thirteen series of novels written by Daniel Handler under the pseudonym of Lemony Snicket. Fortunately, the researcher had read the preceding novels in which references would make an appearance in the primary source which would be helpful to understand more about the plot. The researcher had read the primary source dozens of times to better understand the plot, characters, characterization, settings, dialogues, and narrations.



### **C.1.2 Identifying the Data**

After reading the primary source, the researcher annotates and highlights some parts to determine which parts would be deployable in constituting the research. After the raw data were compiled, the researcher then sorted the raw data with the existing related theory from the secondary.

### **C.1.3 Classifying the Data**

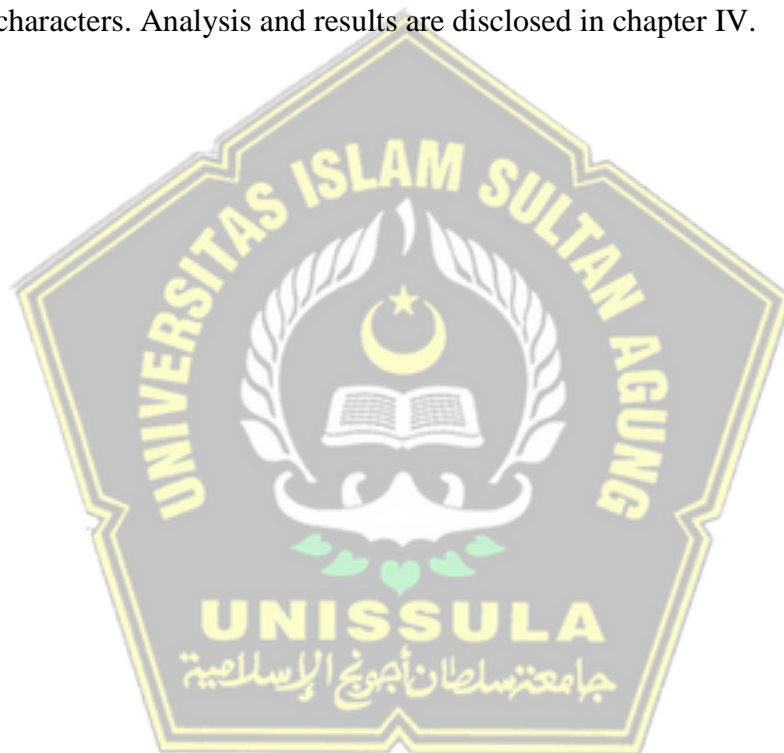
Classifying data was conducted by grouping the primary data with the existing problem formulations. Prior the classifying process, the researcher classified the traits of the character first. Given that the research has two problem formulations, hence the data classification was divided into two tables. The first table was made to answer the first problem formulation and the second table was made to answer the second problem formulation.

### **C.1.4 Reducing the data**

The data was then processed and went through eliminations which means weak data will not make it to the finalized list of data. The finalized data made it into the table along with the relevant secondary data added accordingly. The data reduction was needed to be done in order to simplify the later discussion and analysis

#### **D. Analyzing Data and Formulating Finding(s)**

In this section, the finalized primary and secondary data were thoroughly analyzed in a manner that is most detailed. As the method used was a qualitative descriptive approach, binary opposition theory by Jacques Derrida and characterization theory by Jeffrey D. Hoeper and James Pickering were used on a narrative basis especially on the characters and dynamics between the characters. Analysis and results are disclosed in chapter IV.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The fourth chapter further elaborates the discussions mentioned in the first and second chapters. There are two focuses that will be discussed, the characterizations of the characters in Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator*, and the correlation between Characterization found in the previous problem formulation with binary oppositions.

#### A. Characterization in Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator*

##### A.1 Greedy

Count Olaf is the main antagonist in Lemony Snicket's *Ersatz Elevator*. Ever since the parents of the Baudelaire children died, he has been trying to make the Baudelaire children under his wings as a guardian, and wait until Violet comes of age and snatch their fortune. In the first series of the book, for unexplained reasons in the book, Count Olaf became the first guardian after the Baudelaire couple's death. He fooled Mr. Poe, a person who is in charge of Baudelaire children's inheritance before Violet comes of age. The crime that Count Olaf committed back in the first book was that he tried to marry Violet Baudelaire so that he could have their fortune early as he is both her legal husband, and her guardian who gave permission on the marriage. Fortunately, the marriage was canceled with the Baudelaire children's clever tricks. In the novel used as the object, Count Olaf is described as

follows: **“He had one long eyebrow, a tattoo of an eye on his ankle, and two filthy hands that he hoped to use to snatch away the Baudelaire fortune that the orphans would inherit as soon as Violet came of age.”** (Snicket 7). According to James Pickering and Jeffrey D. Hoeper, one of the ways to distinguish the traits of the characters in the characterization is through the writer’s way to describe the character’s appearance. Though often deceiving in real life, the appearance of a character in the book could give away its characteristics (29). He is depicted to be greedy as the suggests that Count Olaf has a bad intention of owning the Baudelaire children’s wealth.

Another character who showcases greed is Esme Squalor who has a condominium with so many rooms that people can get lost in, and also is the city’s sixth most important financial advisor but despite being obviously well-off, she never says no for more wealth. It is understandable that she gets money from her honest hard work, but in the quotes that will be shown below, she auctions items as a decoy to trick the Baudelaire children so that Count Olaf can move the Quagmire triplets into somewhere far away once again. In this characterization, the author uses characterization through author where the author narrates her as a greedy woman by giving the following sentence **“Esme clapped her long nailed hands together with glee. “Me! Every last bit of money that people pay at the auction goes right to me! Isn’t that smashing?”** (Snicket 45). It seems like Esme Squalor can not get enough of money

and she is willing to do such dirty work for a villain like Count Olaf and elope later with him, leaving Jerome behind.

## A.2 Indifferent

The misfortunes that befall on the Baudelaire children are not without the indifference of the adults. Mr. Poe is a banker who is in charge of Baudelaire children's fortune's affairs. Mr. Poe simply is not the best at his job because if were good at it, Count Olaf would not have been able to get close to anywhere near the Baudelaire children or I must prefer the term, imprisoned. The fact that the Baudelaire keeps experiencing unfortunate events one after another, it is Mr. Poe is to blame for his poor performance. **“ I am sorry to say that Mr. Poe had not done a very good job so far, and the only thing they could rely on with Mr. Poe was that he always had a cough,** (Snicket 4). The author uses narration to describe a character's traits which is a common method in characterization (Pickering and Hoepfer 30).

The place where Squalors live, 667 Dark Avenue, has six hundred and sixty-six stairs that need to be used if the Baudelaire children want to reach their new home since the elevator is Out. Having to walk that many stairs in pitch darkness with only a few candles, it is most humane for Baudelaire children to be scared, they are children after all. It is also most understandable for them to ask whether the person in charge of their guardian placement will walk them to their new guardian, after so many errors prior to this event but Mr. Poe's response is cold. **“You're not**

**going to accompany us?” Klaus asked. “I simply don’t have the time to accompany you,” Mr. Poe said, “and that is that”** (Snicket 15). The characterization is given with clear dialogue that Mr. Poe simply feels no sympathy at all towards the Baudelaire children.

Prior to their arrival in the Squalor condominium, the Baudelaire children spent time in Prufrock Preparatory School where they met their new best friends; the Quagmire triplets. The unfortunate part is that the Quagmire triplet were kidnapped by Count Olaf and that destroyed the Baudelaire children to pieces. The Baudelaire children can not stop asking for new information about their best friend’s whereabouts which is often dismissed by the adults. **“Well, if they find them soon,” Esme said, “maybe we’ll adopt them, too. Five orphans! I’ll be the innest person in town!”** (Snicket 31). Esme Squalor only cares about something if it benefits her. Esme is benefitted from this because she will do anything to follow the novel’s societal standards to know what is currently In (popular) or Out (not popular) so the fact that she could adopt 5 orphans when they are currently In, would make her the most In person in the city and not because she cares about the Baudelaire children’s concern or the fact that there are poor orphans out there being kidnapped by a villain who is after their wealth. Another quote that showcases Esme’s lack of sympathy towards the children is shown below.

**“Even though I am unbelievably wealthy, you may call my**



**name Esme. I'll learn your names later. I'm very happy you're here, because Orphans are in, and when all my friends hear that I have three real live orphans, they'll be sick with jealousy, won't they Jerome?"** (Snicket 28)

Even though it is the most comfortable place for the Baudelaire children since they have been sent to numerous guardians, it is still sad to know that Esme's reasoning to adopt them is not based on sympathy but for social status.

### **A.3 Grateful**

Despite their continuous misfortunes, the Baudelaire children came from a wealthy family. But thanks to their parent's good parenting, they do not end up being snotty demanding children, in fact, they are very polite and adaptable.

**"The Baudelaire stood together for another moment and nodded resolutely, a phrase which here means "tried to make themselves stop feeling ungrateful and put on the suits."** But even though they did not want to seem spoiled, even though they knew the situation was not a terrible one at all, and even though they had less than an hour to change into the suits, find Jerome, and walk down all those hundreds and hundreds of stairs, the three children could not seem to move. (Snicket 53)

When their custody belongs to the wealthy couple the Squalor, the Baudelaire children are forced to live the life according to Esme Squalor, who dedicates her life to following what is In (popular) and

what is Out (no longer popular). At the time of the arrival of the Baudelaire children, pinstripe suit is In. The Baudelaire children are given pinstripe suits so that they suit what is currently In. The Baudelaire then are disheartened to find out that none of the pinstripe suits do not fit with their body so much that Sunny is drowning in it. The Baudelaire children soon come to the realization that they should not feel sad or disappointed after everything that has been given to them considering their dear best friends whom they met at Prufrock Preparatory school are being kidnapped by Count Olaf. The characterization used in the above quotes is characterization through the narration where the author has the freedom to stop the plot and gives narration (Pickering and Hoepfer 30).

#### A.4 Brave

After being on the run to avoid Count Olaf, this time around, in order to save their dearest friend from Count Olaf's chokehold, the Baudelaire children are looking for Count Olaf. A very brave decision made by them considering how they almost lost their lives to him. **"I cant believe that now we're trying to find him."** **"Me neither,"** Violet agreed. **"If it weren't for the Quagmires, I wouldn't go down there at all."** (Snicket 134). Baudelaire children put their suspicion on the ersatz elevator which has 2 doors in front of the condominium, but only has 1 door in the first floor. In order to find out, the Baudelaire children need to climb down the dark and empty elevator shaft with a makeshift torch made by random metals found in the Squalor condominium. **"Hold**

them very, very, carefully,” she said, giving an ersatz welding torch to each of her siblings. “They’re hot enough to melt metal, so just imagine what they could do if they touched us. But I’m sure we can manage.” (Snicket 157). By making an ersatz rope from ties, the Baudelaire children gather their courage to go down the dark and deep elevator shaft with their ersatz scorching torch. “Hold them very, very, carefully,” she said, giving an ersatz welding torch to each of her siblings. “They’re hot enough to melt metal, so just imagine what they could do if they touched us. But I’m sure we can manage.” (Snicket 157), and “We’ll each have to keep one hand free to hold the torch. But I’m sure we can manage.” (Snicket 158). The Baudelaire children put aside the fact that they are scared to climb down into the pitch-black darkness to save their best friends and that is the epitome of bravery.

#### A.5 Caring

Violet Baudelaire is a gifted inventor and her inventions are what saved them from Count Olaf all this time. This time around, instead of saving themselves, Violet uses her invention to save their best friends who are being held hostage by Count Olaf. Violet makes an ersatz torch which could also be used to melt the cage where the Quagmire triplets are kept. After arriving in the bottom of the elevator shaft, to their surprise, the Quagmire triplets are no longer there. Their finding breaks Violet apart.

**“They’re gone!” Violet said “They’re gone, and it’s all my fault!”** She threw her welding torch into the corner of the tiny room, where it sizzled against the floor. She turned to her siblings, and they could see, by their white glow of their tongues, that their older sister was beginning to cry. **“My invention was supposed to save them,” she said mournfully, “and now Gunther has snatched them away. I’m a terrible inventor and terrible friend.”** (Snicket 135).

The Baudelaire children then deduce that the Quagmire triplets are put on one of the items for the In Auction, where they auction In items. To their dismay, they fail to save them as they guess incorrectly on which item to auction resulting the Quagmire triplets are successfully once again kidnapped by Count Olaf and his troops and this time with Esme Squalor too. At the end of the book, Jerome Squalor offers them to live with him. An offer which has to be rejected by Violet after finding out Jerome will not help them scheming to catch Count Olaf. The Baudelaire children refuse to hide and live comfortably when their best friends are in danger hence they choose to refused Jerome Squalor’s offer.

“We’re not going to track down Olaf,” Jerome said, shuddering at the thought. “We’ll be lucky if he doesn’t track us down. As your guardian, I cannot allow you to try to find such a dangerous man. **Wouldn’t you rather live safely with me?”**

**“Yes,” Violent admitted. but our friends are in grave danger. We must go and rescue them.”** (Snicket 257).

Throughout the novel, it is obvious that Jerome Squalor has no ill intention whatsoever. He always wants peace and the best for everyone. Despite having a morally corrupt wife, he still tries his best to make her look less morally corrupt shown in the quote “I thought if I bought you something you really wanted,” she said, “you might stop all this chatter about Quagmires”

**“What Esme means,” Jerome added hurriedly, “is that we want you to be happy here in our home, even when you’re worried about your friend.”** Jerome possesses no control in the couple dynamic between him and Esme Squalor as he is easily dismissed and is a coward but that do not discredit the fact that Jerome Squalor is a one kind man who wants the best for everyone.

#### A.6 Coward

Jerome Squalor is indeed a one kind man, but what is kind without the existence of bravery in him. After offering the Baudelaire children to live comfortably under wings, an offer with they reject, he continues to admit that he is in fact a coward. Jerome sighed, and kissed each Baudelaire on the forehead. **“You children are very dear to me,” he said, “but I don’t have your courage. Your mother always said I wasn’t brave enough.”** (Snicket 257). His noble intention to take the

custody of the Baudelaire children is hindered by his cowardice and that makes the Baudelaire children once again, by themselves.

Even prior to that, Jerome Squalor has shown the non-confrontative quality. For example, when Esme sent him and the Baudelaire children to eat at Cafe Salmonella, and they Baudelaire children talks about how they are worried about Count Olaf disguising as Gunther the auctioneer but Jerome dismisses their concern simply because he does not want to confront Esme about it. **“I can’t think of a single argument that would be useful or necessary.”** Jerome said. **“For instance, Esme made reservations for us here at Cafe Salmonella, and I can’t stand the taste of Salmon. I could have argued with her about that, of course, but why would it be useful or necessary?”**. Another example would be when he is told by Esme to get yellow paper clips, to which he replies that he needs to send the Baudelaire children to the auction hall, which is then again dismissed by Esme. Jerome then replied with **“Well, I don’t want to argue,”** **Jerome said shrugging and giving the children small smile** (Snicket 121).

## **B. Binary Opposition found in the Characterization**

### **B.1 Grateful - Greedy**

Though having a poor fate and going through a series of unfortunate events, it is clear that the origin of the Baudelaire children was comfortable. They used to live in a massive mansion and inherit



large sums of wealth, so much that their safety is always in constant danger. The Baudelaires were also blessed with amazing parents who taught them well when they were alive thus making the Baudelaire children grow up to be compassionate and resilient people. After the fire incident that took their parent's life, Baudelaire children had to start from zero. In the technical sense, they do not possess any money because none of them are adults yet, hence the existence of Mr. Poe is needed to take care of that affair even though it would be hard to say that he has done a good job. Baudelaire children are now orphans living one guardian from another. Despite the sudden massive change in their life, they are still collected and calm amidst the chaotic adults. After experiencing several guardians, Baudelaire children are placed under the custody of Esme Squalor and Jerome Squalor, a wealthy couple living in 667 Dark Avenue. Esme Squalor loves following in what is considered to be In and considered to be Out. During the arrival of the Baudelaire children, pinstripe is currently 'In' hence she gives them pinstripe suits for Baudelaire children to wear. She is nice enough to give them pinstripe suits, but does not care enough about their sizes that it barely fits them.

**“The Baudelaire stood together for another moment and nodded resolutely, a phrase which here means “tried to make themselves stop feeling ungrateful and put on the suits.” But even though they did not want to seem spoiled, even though**

**they knew the situation was not a terrible one at all**, and even though they had less than an hour to change into the suits, find Jerome, and walk down all those hundreds and hundreds of stairs, the three children could not seem to move. (Snicket 53)

Prior to them trying to cheer them up with the suits, they found out that Count Olaf has once again returned in their life disguising as Gunther, Esme's auctioneer. They are so anxious about what is going to happen as good things never happen when Count Olaf is in sight. They do not feel good at all but they have to obey Esme's order to go to Salmonella Cafe with Jerome. Amidst their panic, the Baudelaire still find time to be grateful for what they have.

On the other hand, Esme Squalor is also a wealthy woman experiencing no unfortunate events in her life other than being her annoying self. Esme is the sixth most important financial advisor in the city, making her a notable figure but all that wealth does not humble her at the slightest, she always wants more. Esme Squalor goes as far as making a fake auction as a way to gain foolish amounts of money with foolish things to sell, she also uses the decoy auction to fool Baudelaire children and later elope with Count Olaf and his crews, along with the Quagmire triplets leaving Baudelaire children feeling devastated after failing to save their friends.

Esme's attitude towards money speaks volume on her character as it shows with **“Esme clapped her long nailed hands together with**

glee. “Me! Every last bit of money that people pay at the auction goes right to me! Isn’t that smashing?” (Snicket 45). The fact she deliberately work in Count Olaf to set up such a detailed plan to fool Baudelaire children and probably kidnap them too (which they fail to do), shows that Esme Squalor is as greedy as Count Olaf when she has a lot of money to begin with. To put it simply, she is greedy not because she needs wealth, she just loves having more and more wealth. The striking contrast between the characters is their attitude towards the comfort of this world, the Baudelaire children are grateful for what they have despite the conditions, while Esme is never enough of it. This kind of contrast shows a binary opposition concept between grateful and greedy in which one key term is the opposite of another in a way that “If the question is being, then one can establish "being" against "non-being" (Leung 8).

## B.2 Indifferent - Caring

Another binary opposition shown in the novel is between Indifferent and Caring. Indifferent trait comes from Mr. Poe, despite being the adult whose job is to ensure the Baudelaire children’s safety, his indifferent nature has led so many unfortunate events to happen to the Baudelaire children. Caring trait comes from the Baudelaire children who are willing to do everything they can to save their friend from the chokehold of a person who is also after them. Mr. Poe indifferent trait could be seen in few quotes such as; “ **I am sorry to**

**say that Mr. Poe had not done a very good job so far, and the only thing they could rely on with Mr. Poe was that he always had a cough.** “ (Snicket 4) and **“You’re not going to accompany us?” Klaus asked. “I simply don’t have the time to accompany you,” Mr. Poe said, “and that is that”** (Snicket 15). Mr. Poe does not want to take extra steps to make sure that the Baudelaire children safely arrive at the front door of the Squalor condominium because of its stairs. He simply does not care and want to go about his day leaving Baudelaire children alone in their new home.

**“They’re gone!” Violet said “They’re gone, and it’s all my fault!”** She threw her welding torch into the corner of the tiny room, where it sizzled against the floor. She turned to her siblings, and they could see, by their white glow of their tongs, that their older sister was beginning to cry. **“My invention was supposed to save them,” she said mournfully, “and now Gunther has snatched them away. I’m a terrible inventor and terrible friend.”** (Snicket 164)

Violet is willing to risk her safety to help the Quagmire triplets from being held captive by Count Olaf at the bottom of the Ersatz elevator and when all her effort and her inventions fail, she blames herself too badly for not being able to save their friends. The binary opposition shown in this novel is such an irony because it is between adults and children. Between the two oppositions, there is always the

center. It is the center that is given a privilege i.e man/woman, tall/short, big/little, black/white, and etc (Bertens 62) and in this example, the adults are supposed to be the responsible ones. The adult (Mr.Poe) simply does not take extra steps to make sure that Baudelaire children are safe, or listen to them. Baudelaire children on the other hand, even though they are just children, are willing to take extra steps even if it harms them to save their friends.

### **B.3 Brave - Coward**

Bravery is something that is always associated with the Baudelaire children throughout their book for their never-ending battle and struggles with Count Olaf and how they escape from it. When Baudelaire children realize that Count Olaf has once again entered their life, this time they want to find his hiding place because they want them to find the Quagmire triplets whom he successfully kidnapped. Baudelaire children do the unusual by actively looking for him instead of hiding like it always was. “I can't believe that now we're trying to find him. **“Me neither,” Violet agreed. “If it weren't for the Quagmires, I wouldn't go down there at all.”** (Snicket 134).

Jerome Squalor is indeed a sweetheart. One of the best Baudelaire guardians but he is terribly lacking in bravery. He never confronts anything. He never says no. He just wants to make both parties happy. Even after being left alone when his wife elope with Count Olaf, he still chooses to live in his comfort zone and refuses to help Baudelaire

children to help them catch Count Olaf shown in the quotes “Jerome sighed, and kissed each Baudelaire on the forehead. **“You children are very dear to me,” he said, “but I don’t have your courage. Your mother always said I wasn’t brave enough.”** (Snicket 257). Between the two oppositions, there is always the center. It is the center that is given a privilege i.e man/woman, tall/short, big/little, black/white, and etc (Bertens 62) and adult are deemed to be more powerful often times prove they are not like what they should behave towards children.

In conclusion, the binary oppositions shown in the characterization of the characters formed a pattern. Each of the binary opposition pairings is between the adult characters (Count Olaf, Esme Squalor, Mr. Poe, and Jerome Squalor) and the Baudelaire children which are children. The pairings mentioned show that the adults are being neglectful of the children who are clearly in need of help. The adults, who are supposed to look after them and take care of their safety, are in fact the ones who caused the Baudelaire children’s misery all along. The researcher admits that the pattern of the children characters being the hero in the story is not unheard of, but binary opposition was used to do a deeper reading activity to know that despite the pattern, binary opposition still can be used.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### A. Conclusion

This study analyzed the binary oppositions found in the characterization of the characters in the novel *Lemony Snicket's Ersatz Elevator*. The researcher used Derrida's concept of Binary Opposition which was first brought up in his book entitled '*Of Grammatology*'.

The object of the study, *Lemony Snicket's Ersatz Elevator* is about the orphans namely the Baudelaire Children who are always on the run due to Count Olaf's evil intention to capture them in order to gain their wealth. In the first book of the series, the Baudelaire children's parents were killed mysteriously on a fire and since then, the Baudelaire children are moving from one guardian to another, and in each guardian, Count Olaf will appear to disturb their peace and also steal their fortune. The object used in this research is the sixth book out of the thirteen-book series. In this novel, the Baudelaire children's guardian are the wealthy yet eccentric couple, Esme Squalor and Jerome Squalor who live in the condominium of 667 Dark Avenue. Despite having a rich guardian this time around, the Baudelaire children feel uneasy because the best friend, Quagmire triplets were captured by the Count Olaf. In this novel Count Olaf disguises himself as Gunther the auctioneer.

There are two points concluded from the findings. The first point is related to the characterization found in the characters. The characters are; the

Baudelaire children whose characterization is caring, brave, and grateful, Count Olaf whose characterization is greedy, Esme Squalor whose characterization is greedy and indifferent, Jerome Squalor whose characterization is coward, and Mr. Poe whose characterization is indifferent.

The second point is related to binary oppositions found in the novel; Greed – Grateful, Indifference – Caring, and Brave – Coward. All the pairings are between the adult characters and the Baudelaire children which further proves that even though adults are deemed to be more logically developed and are the protector of children, they don't always good at keeping children safe. On the other hand, children who are deemed to be weak, in this novel are proved to be the ones having the most common sense and dozens of times could save themselves from danger. It is most expected for the cliché pattern of the children are portrayed to be the hero of the story, but in any way, it could give a depth to the analysis that at the end of the day after thorough analysis that the true nature of binary opposition still persists.

## **B. Suggestions**

It is important to set limitation as Derrida's theory is wide. Derrida's binary opposition concept could be applied in various novels or movies to contrast characterization amongst other things. Children's literature is a good example due to its tendency to contrast the good and the bad. Literature that contains oppositions within its plot also makes binary opposition more prominent.

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