

**A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS ON THE NOVEL *PAPER TOWNS* BY
JOHN GREEN (2008)**



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for Getting Bachelor Degree of Department in English Education
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by:

WULAN RACHMAWATI

A320140085

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURAKARTA**

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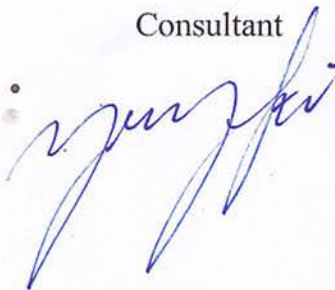
By:

WULAN RACHMAWATI

A 320 140 085

This publication article has approved by:

Consultant



Yeny Prastiwi, S.Pd., M.Hum, Ph.D

NIK. 1047

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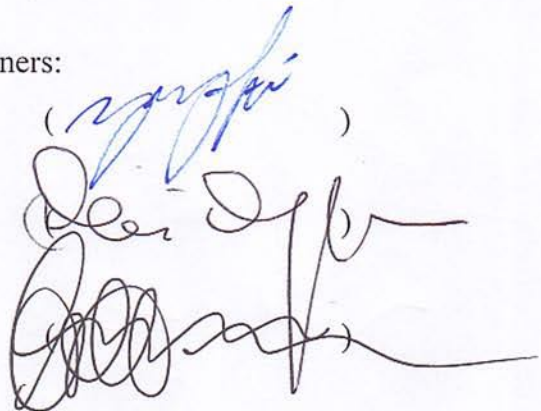
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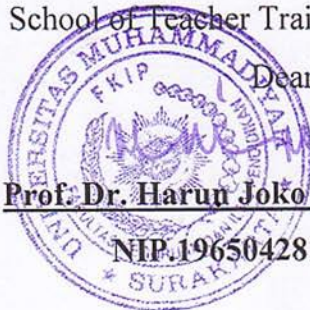
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A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS ON THE NOVEL PAPER TOWNS BY JOHN GREEN (2008)

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendiskripsikan tanda dan artinya melalui analisis semiotika pada novel *Paper Towns* karya John Green. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah (1) untuk mendiskripsikan tanda-tanda yang dapat ditemukan di novel *Paper Towns* karya John Green dan (2) untuk mendiskripsikan berbagai makna dari tanda-tanda dengan menggunakan analisis semiotika Peirce. Jenis penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis sastra dengan teori semiotika. Peneliti menggunakan dua sumber data, yakni sumber data primer yang diambil dari novel *Paper Towns* karya John Green (2008) dan sumber data sekunder yang diambil dari website, dictionary, dan beberapa buku yang mendukung penelitian ini. Peneliti menggunakan penelitian pustaka sebagai metode pengumpulan data. Teknik yang digunakan oleh peneliti yakni analisis deskriptif yang berhubungan dengan analisis semiotika pada novel *Paper Towns* karya John Green (2008). Berdasarkan analisis, peneliti mendapatkan beberapa kesimpulan. Tanda-tanda yang ditemukan di novel *Paper Towns* karya John Green digambarkan pada petunjuk-petunjuk yang ditinggalkan oleh tokoh utama bernama Margo Roth Spiegelman. Makna dari tanda-tanda dapat dihubungkan pada konsep interpretant dari teori semiotika Peirce.

Kata Kunci: *Paper Towns*, tanda, makna tanda, teori semiotika Peirce

Abstract

This study aims at describing the signs and the meanings in semiotic analysis on John Green's *Paper Towns* novel. The objectives of the study are (1) to describe the signs which can be found in John Green's *Paper Towns* and (2) to describe the meanings of the signs by using Pierce's semiotic theory. The type of this research is a qualitative research which has purpose to analyze literature using Semiotic Theory. The researcher uses two data sources, they are primary data sources which is taken from the novel by John Green entitle *Paper Towns* (2008) and secondary data sources which are taken from website, dictionary, and some books which support the research. The researcher uses a library research as the method for collecting data. The technique which is used by the researcher is descriptive analysis which is related to a semiotic analysis on John Green's *Paper Towns* (2008). Based on the analysis, the researcher gets some conclusions. The signs which are found on the *Paper Towns* novel are reflected in the clues which left by the main character named Margo Roth Spiegelman. The meanings of the signs can be related to the concept of interpretant in Peirce's semiotic theory.

Keywords: *Paper Towns*, sign, meaning of sign, Peirce's semiotic theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Novel is a part of literary work which tells a story about life, such as a social problem in a certain society where the author lives. The author can write the novel in many ways. In analyzing a literary work like novel, the researcher can start it through the intrinsic or extrinsic aspects of the novel. Characterization is one of the elements of intrinsic aspects of novel. This characterization comes from the psychological development of the character which appears in the series event or its plot. Novel is also usually called as world of words. Words in novel include as structure of signs which have the meaning. Thus, it is believed that signs are connected to semiotic.

Paper Towns is John Green's novel which has a unique story. It tells about a journey by adolescents to find their friend who escapes from her hometown, with the clues which left by her. Thus they must find the meaning of the clues. This novel was published by Dutton Books on October 6, 2008. The main character named Quentin "Q" Jacobsen. Q is the narrator of the story. He loves his neighbor named Margo Roth Spiegelman. The girl is assertive and she loves traveling. Q knows everything about Margo even though she is a mysterious girl who has a struggle to finish her missions. The character that brings by Margo is unique.

The reasons why the researcher take this title are because of the novel has a unique story and the researcher wants to know the meaning of the signs which are found in *Paper Towns* novel clearly. The problem statements of the study will focus on the signs and the meanings on *Paper Towns* novel by John Green. The objectives of the study are (1) to describe the signs which can be found in John Green's *Paper Towns* and (2) to describe the meanings of the signs by using Pierce's semiotic theory.

The researcher found some previous researches which are relevant to this research. The first was conducted by Rendila Restu Utami from Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia entitled *The Potrayals of "Journey" in John Green's Two Novels Looking for Alaska and Paper Towns* on 2015. This research tries to discover the phenomenon of the changes of the main character in the two books. It uses Narratology as the means of analyzing the two texts. The second research

was conducted by Lilis Yulianti from Universitas Andalas entitled *Images of Women in John Green's Novels Looking for Alaska and Paper Towns: Challenging the Image of Manic Pixie Dream Girl* on 2016. In conducting the research, the researcher uses the characteristics of Manic Pixie Dream Girl that was coined by Nathan Rabin. Rabin described the characteristics of MPDG as a women who is attractive, mysterious, and she exist to 'fix' these lonely men to embrace their lives through some adventures and uncover some mysteries. The third was conducted by Ratna Vivi Rahayu from UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya entitled *Margo Roth Spiegelman's Self Disclosure in John Green's Paper Towns* on 2016. The researcher uses John Crowe Ransom's New Criticism which emphasizes explanation or close reading of the work itself. It used the psychological approach: Self-disclosure to analyze the actions and motivations of characters in a work as supporting theory to analyze the novel. The fourth was conducted by Emik Tri Safitri from Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta entitled *Revenge Reflected in John Green's Paper Towns Novel (2008): A Behaviorist Perspective* on 2016. The major problem in this study is about revenge. It used Behaviorist Perspective for analyzing the novel. The fifth was conducted by Kasih Ratnaningtyas from Sanata Dharma University entitled *The True Meaning of Margo Roth Spiegelman's Big Decision to Leave the Town as Seen in John Green's Paper Towns* on 2016. The goal of conducting this study is to identify the true meaning of Margo Roth Spiegelman big decision to leave her hometown. This study uses psychological approach to answer the questions.

2. METHOD

In analyzing *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008), the researcher uses qualitative research which has purpose to analyze literature using Semiotic Theory. The researcher uses two data sources, they are primary data sources which is taken from the novel by John Green entitle *Paper Towns* (2008) and secondary data sources which are taken from website, dictionary, and some books which support the research. The researcher uses a library research as the method for collecting data. The steps of data collection are as follows: reading *Paper*

Towns novel, determining the characters of the novel, taking the important things from both of primary and secondary data sources. The technique which is used by the researcher is descriptive analysis which is related to a semiotic analysis on John Green's *Paper Towns* (2008).

3. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

The analysis John Green's *Paper Towns* novel is based on Semiotic theory by Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) which is related to the concepts of sign or representamen, object, and interpretant.

3.1.1 Sign or representamen

It is something that can be perceptible. Representamen in the book *Semiotic: The Basics* means the form which the sign takes. It is not necessarily material (Chandler 2002).

3.1.2 Object

The object is related to which the sign refers. According to Merrell in Cobley, "the semiotic object can never be identical to the 'real' object, since according to Peirce the knowledge is never absolute" (2001:28).

3.1.3 Interpretant

It is related to the sign's meaning. Merrell in Cobley stated that Interpretant also "relates to and mediates between the representamen and the object which produce an interrelation between them at the same time and in the same way" (2001:28).

The researcher presents the findings in tabulation. The collected data are from John Green's *Paper Towns* (2008). It can be described below:

No.	SIGN (Representamen)	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
1.	The poster of Woody Guthrie in Margo's window	Quentin, Ben, and Radar	• Woody Guthrie is a folksinger, 1912 to 1967. • The person who is in the

			poster which attached in Margo's window. • The eyes of Woody Guthrie in the poster seems staring at them (Quentin, Ben, and Radar) from the Quentin's room.
2.	<i>Walt Whitman's Niece</i> song which is circled	Quentin, Ben, and Radar	• Walt Whitman is a poet in Nineteenth century. • There is correlation between the other of Walt Whitman's poems.
3.	Walt Whitman's <i>Leaves of Grass</i>	Quentin, Ben, and Radar	• A year book which on the Margo's bookshelf.
4.	<i>Song of Myself</i> poem by Walt Whitman	Quentin, Ben, and Radar	• Margo left the clues in the poem. • There were two lines which in the poem that were highlighted in green. <i>"Unscrew the locks from the doors!</i> <i>Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!"</i> (Green 2008:116)
5.	A sliver of <i>Orlando Sentinel</i>	Quentin, Ben, and Radar	• <i>Orlando Sentinel</i> is a newspaper. • Margo wrote a message on the sliver of <i>Orlando Sentinel</i>.

			• The message was “8328 <i>bartlesville Avenue</i>”. (Green 2008:134)
6.	Graffiti letters by Margo <i>“YOU WILL GO TO THE PAPER TOWNS AND YOU WILL NEVER COME BACK”</i> (Green 2008:149)	Quentin, Ben, and Radar	• There is a message that left by Margo in her graffiti letters. • There is correlation between the words <i>Paper Towns</i> and Agloe, New York.
7.	A recent comment by an anonymous user; <i>“fyi, whoever Edits this- the Population of agloe Will actually be One until may 29th at Noon.”</i> (Green 2008:236)	Quentin, Ben, Radar, and Lacey.	• Q recognizes from the capitalization that it was Margo who commented on the Agloe page. • Margo is in Agloe, New York.

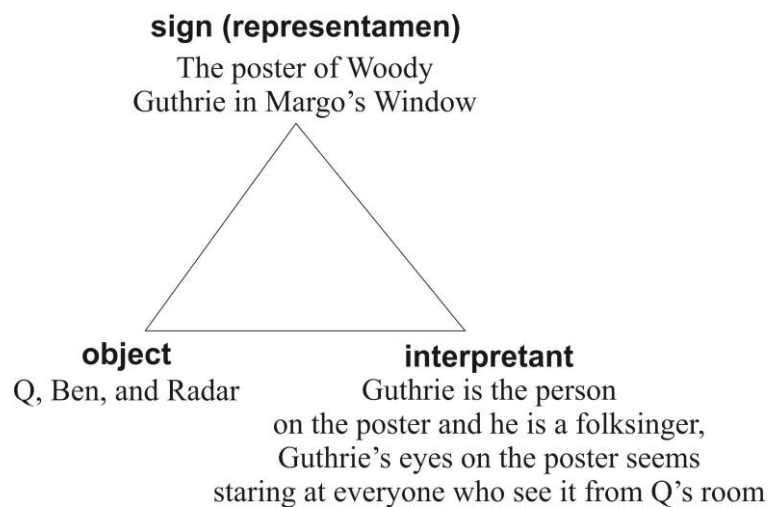
3.2 Discussion

In the discussions, the data findings will analyzed by using Peirce’s triadic concepts of semiotics (1931) which includes the sign, the object, and the interpretant. The mystery of the major character in Paper Towns named Margo Roth Spiegelman who is gone and left her friends Quentin “Q”, Lacey, Ben, and Radar can be analyzed through the Peirce’s triadic concepts. Q, Lacey, Ben, and Radar must find Margo by the clues that left by her. The seven clues that left by Margo can be the signs because all of the signs have the meanings which can be understood by someone (Peirce in Krampen 1987), it can be seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted, it stands and addresses to somebody, it is perceptible, and signs have interrelation between the object and the interpretant.

Based on the relationship of triadic concepts by Peirce, the data can be analyzed as follows:

3.2.1 The first clue (The poster of Woody Guthrie in Margo's window)

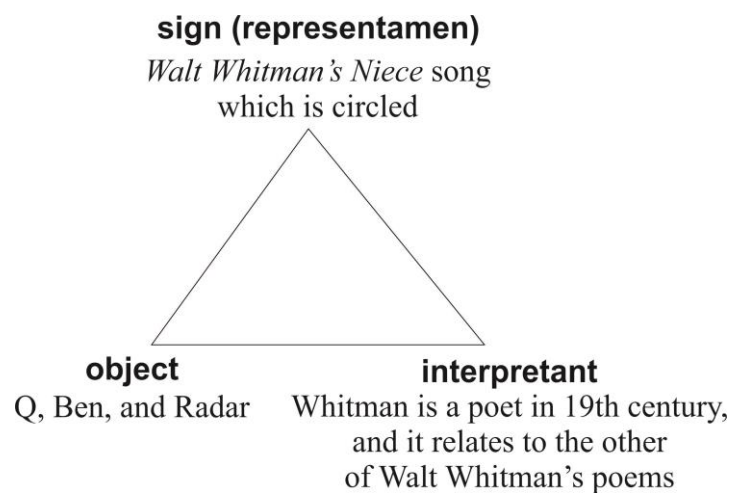
The first clue which they found in Margo's window is the poster of Woody Guthrie. The poster of Woody Guthrie can be concluded as a sign. The three-part model of sign by Peirce (1931) can be seen as follows:



The triangle above shows that there is correlation between sign or representamen, object, and interpretant. The poster of Woody Guthrie in Margo's window can be a sign or representamen. Margo attached the poster of Woody Guthrie at her window that can be seen from Q's bedroom. The objects of this sign are Q, Ben, and Radar. The interpretant of the sign is Woody Guthrie who is a folksinger in 1912 to 1967. He is a person who is in the poster which attached in Margo's window. It can be seen from Q's bedroom. Q needs his friends, Ben and Radar to help him to find Margo. It can be proved that he calls them and tells what is happening. They find something that is mysterious, when they are in Q's bedroom. The eyes of Woody Guthrie in the poster seem staring at them (Quentin, Ben, and Radar). Q considered that Margo wants him to find her. Ben and Radar try to find the reason of Margo attached the poster of Woody Guthrie be like that. Based on the signification of the picture of Woody Guthrie in Margo's window in *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008), the Guthrie's picture is a sign which refers to Q, Ben, and Radar to give information about Margo who is left home with some clues.

3.2.2 The second clue (*Walt Whitman's Niece* song which is circled)

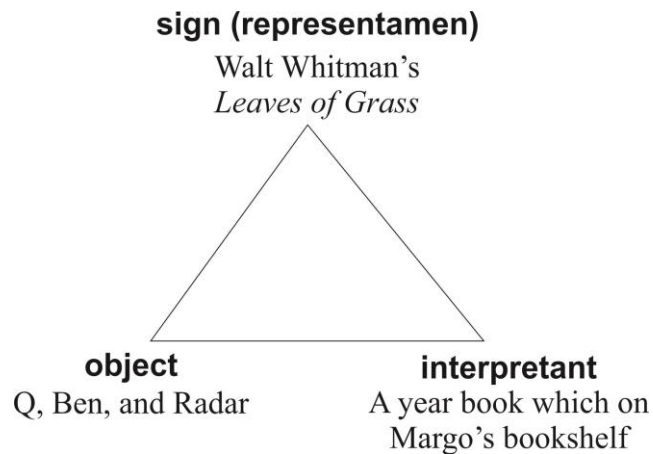
Ben finds the second clue when he is seeing the song list in Billy Bragg's *Mermaid Avenue*. In the album of Billy Bragg entitled *Mermaid Avenue*, it can be seen that there is *Walt Whitman's Niece* song which has been circled in thin black pen by Margo. It can be included as a sign because it is pointed to Q, Ben, and Radar as an object which is related to the meaning of the sign itself that there are facts behind of *Walt Whitman Niece's* song. The triadic concepts of signs by Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) can be seen below:



The triangle shows that there is correlation between sign or representamen, object, and interpretant. Based on the Peirce's triadic concepts above, it can be concluded that the sign or representamen of the second clue is *Walt Whitman's Niece* song which is circled with the black pen by Margo Roth Spiegelman. The objects of this sign are Margo's friends; they are Q, Ben, and Radar. The interpretants of the sign are Walt Whitman is a poet in Nineteenth century, and it has correlation between the other of Walt Whitman's poems, the next clues from Margo. It can be interpretant because Margo's friend; Q, Ben, and Radar as the objects of the sign think that the clue which is concluded as the sign includes the facts behind of *Walt Whitman Niece's* song. Based on the signification of *Walt Whitman's Niece* song which is circled by Margo Roth Spiegelman in the novel by John Green entitled *Paper Towns* (2008), *Walt Whitman's Niece* song is a sign which is referred to Q, Ben, and Radar in order to give information about Margo through the sign's meaning.

3.2.3 The third clue (Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*)

The next clue that has correlation between the clues that they found before is a year book entitle Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Ben finds it in the bookshelves in Margo's room. The third clue, the book of *Walt Whitman Leaves of Grass* which addresses to Q, Ben, and Radar, can be called as a sign or representamen, because it has more developed sign that is fact that it is a year book by Walt Whitman entitle *Leaves of Garass*. There is the correlation between sign/representamen, object, and interpretant by Peirce which is called as the triadic concepts:

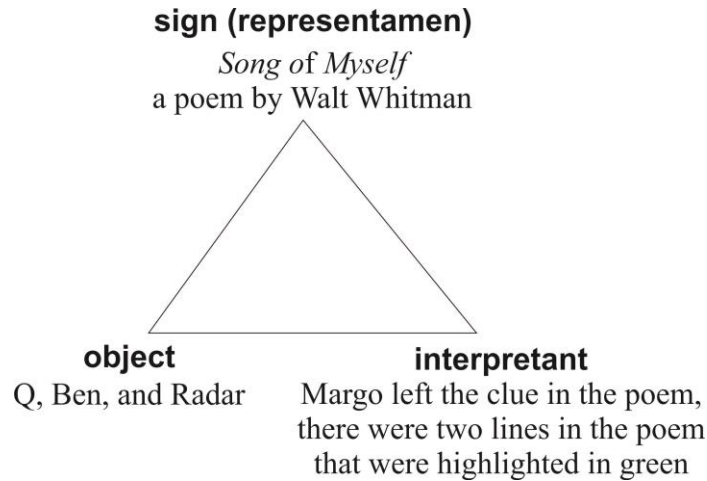


The Peirce's triadic concepts above show the correlation between sign, object, and interpretant. It shows that Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is a sign or representamen. This sign has correlation to the objects; they are Q, Ben, and Radar. The interpretant of the sign is related to the fact of what Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is. The fact shows that Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is a year book which found on Margo's Bookshelf. Based on the signification of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* book which found in Margo's bookshelf in the novel by John Green entitled *Paper Towns* (2008), the Whitman's book is a sign for Q, Ben, and Radar to give information about Margo with the clues she left.

3.2.4 The fourth clue (*Song of Myself* poem by Walt Whitman)

The fourth clue that is found by Q is *Song of Myself* poem by Walt Whitman. Whitman is a poet that has created many of poems. *Song of My self* is the one of Whitman's poem. This poem is in the Walt Whitman *Leaves of Grass* book. Q

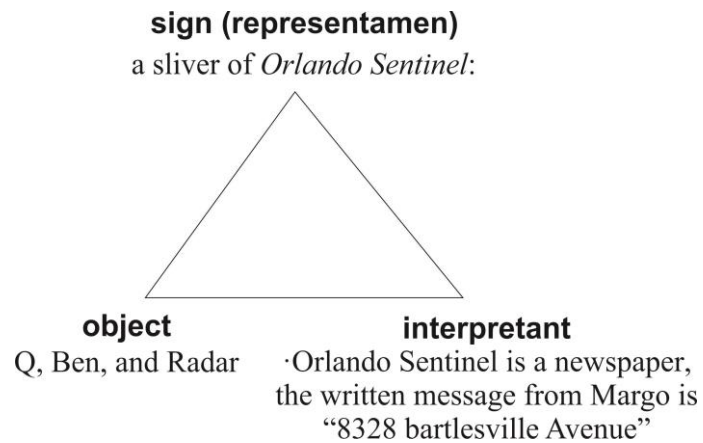
finds the two lines from the poem that were highlighted in green. The three-part model of signs by Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) can be shown as follows:



The triangle is related to the correlation between sign or representamen, object, and interpretant. Based on the Peirce's triadic concepts above, it can be concluded that *Song of Myself* poem by Walt Whitman can be a sign or representamen. The objects of this sign are Q, Ben, and Radar. The interpretants of the sign are Margo left the clue in the poem and there were two lines in the poem that were highlighted in green by Margo. It can be related to the next clues that left by Margo. Based on the signification of *Song of Myself*, a poem by Walt Whitman in *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008), Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* is a sign for Q, Ben, and Radar to give them information about Margo who is left home with some clues such as the two lines in *Song of Myself* which is highlighted in green.

3.2.5 The fifth clue (A sliver of Orlando Sentinel)

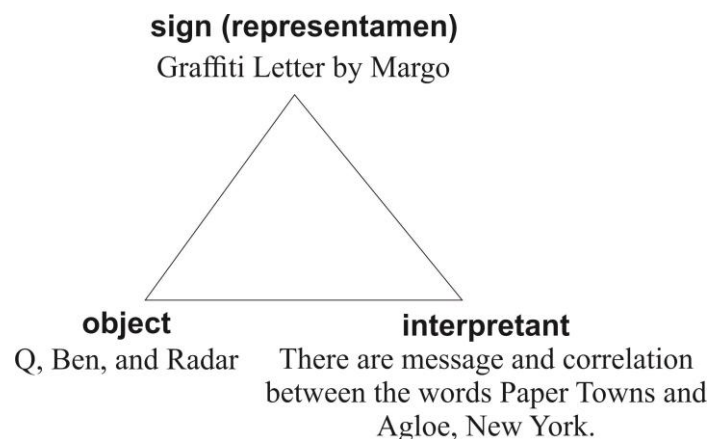
The fifth clue that left by Margo is a sliver of *Orlando Sentinel* which found in Quentin's door. The triangle below shows the triadic concepts of signs by Peirce (1931):



Based on the signification of the sliver of *Orlando Sentinel* which found in Quentin’s bedroom door in *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008), the sliver of *Orlando Sentinel* is a sign for Q, Ben, and Radar. It gives some information about Margo who gives the message in the sliver of the newspaper of *Orlando Sentinel*.

3.2.6 The sixth clue (Graffiti letters by Margo)

The sixth clue that left by Margo is graffiti letters which found in souvenir store. It can be the sign or representamen because it has interrelation with the object; Q, Ben, and Radar, and the interpretant or the meaning of the sign which can show the facts behind the clue that left by Margo. The theory of signs by Peirce (1931) is divided into three-part that can be related to the triadic model of sign:

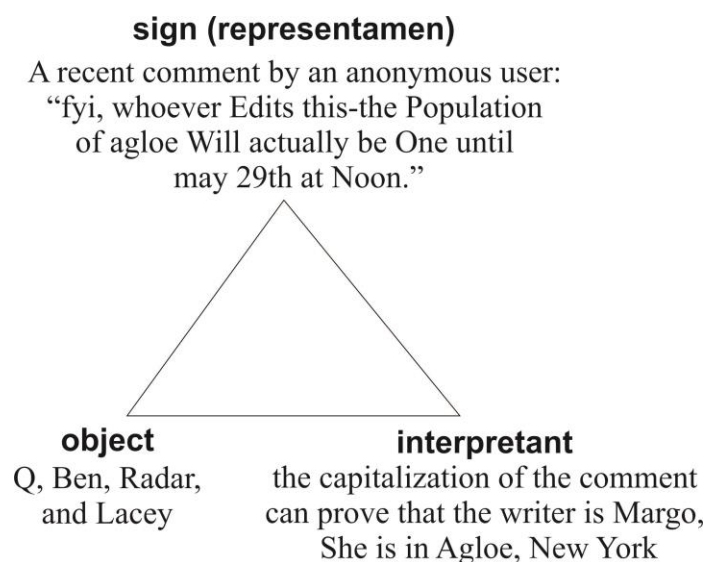


Based on the signs theory by Peirce (1931) above, the triangle shows that there is correlation between sign or representamen, object, and interpretant. The object is related to which the sign refers. The objects of the sign are Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey. The clues are intended to them. The interpretant of the sign that there are

message in Margo's graffiti letters, and also there is correlation between the words in graffiti letters, *paper towns* and Agloe New York. Q finds the explanation of Agloe, New York in Omnictionary. It tells that Agloe, New York is a fictitious village which was created by the Esso Company in the early 1930s. Based on the Peirce's triadic concepts above, it can be concluded that the graffiti letters by Margo can be a sign or representamen. Based on the signification of the graffiti letters by Margo on the wall in souvenir store which in the story of *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008), the graffiti letters is a sign or representamen for Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey, to give them a message from the letters that there is correlation between the words paper towns and Agloe, New York.

3.2.7 The seventh clue (A recent comment by an anonymous user)

The seventh clue that left by Margo is a recent comment by an anonymous user in page of Agloe, New York. The person that wrote the comment is Margo. The Peirce's theory of signs (1931) can be called as triadic concepts which include sign/representamen, object, and interpretant. It can be illustrated by the triangle below:



The triangle by Peirce above shows that there is correlation between sign or representamen, object, and interpretant (1931). Based on the Peirce's triadic concepts above, it can be concluded that a recent comment by an anonymous user is a sign or representamen. The comment is on the Agloe, New York page in Omnictionary and it uses an unusual capitalization. The comment is “*Fyi, whoever*

Edits this-the Population of agloe Will actually be One until may 29th at Noon.” The object is to whom the sign refers. Thus, the objects of the sign are Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey. The interpretants are the capitalization of the comment can prove that the writer or user who wrote it is Margo and because of that Q believes that she is in Agloe, New York. Finally, Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey find Margo in Agloe’s General Store. Based on the signification of a recent comment by an anonymous user on the page of Agloe, New York in Omnictionary which found in the story of *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008), the comment is a sign or representamen for Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey, to give them a message from the comment that the characteristic of the comment which used unusual capitalization is wrote by Margo, so she is the anonymous user who left the comment in the page of Agloe, New York in Omnictionary. It can be proved that she is in Agloe and finally Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey find Margo in Agloe’s General Store.

From the explanation above, everything can be sign as long as they have characteristics of the sign itself. The meaning of the signs which are reflected on the clues that left by Margo to Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey can be analyzed through Peirce’s semiotic theory. Therefore, it can help in analyzing the literary work such as *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008) clearly.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the semiotic analysis by Charles Sanders Peirce theory, the novel can be analyzed by using Peirce’s triadic concepts which includes sign or representamen, object, and interpretant. There are seven signs which found by the researcher in *Paper Towns* novel by John Green (2008). Every sign has the object and the interpretant. (1) The first clue (The poster of Woody Guthrie in Margo’s window) means that the clue shows the identity about Woody Guthrie who is a folksinger in 1912 to 1967. He is a person who is in the poster which attached in Margo’s window. The eyes of Woody Guthrie in the poster seem staring at them (Quentin, Ben, and Radar), (2) the second clue (*Walt Whitman’s Niece* song which is circled) means that the clue shows the identity of Walt Whitman, he is a poet in Nineteenth century, and it has correlation between the other of Walt

Whitman's poems, the next clues from Margo, (3) the third clue (Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*) means that there is the fact of what Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is. The fact shows that Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is a year book which found on Margo's Bookshelf, (4) the fourth clue (*Song of Myself* poem by Walt Whitman) means that Margo left the clue in the poem and there were two imperative lines in the poem that were highlighted in green by Margo, those are the instruction for Q to find another clue which in a door, (5) the fifth clue (A sliver of *Orlando Sentinel*) means that Orlando Sentinel is the newspaper and there is a written message from Margo. In a sliver of *Orlando Sentinel* is written an address of the street "8328 Bartlesville Avenue", (6) the sixth clue (Graffiti letters by Margo) means that there are message in Margo's graffiti letters, and also there is correlation between the words in graffiti letters, paper towns and Agloe New York. Q finds the explanation of Agloe, New York in Omnictionary. It tells that Agloe, New York is a fictitious village which was created by the Esso Company in the early 1930s, (7) the seventh clue (A recent comment by an anonymous user) means that the capitalization of the comment can prove that the writer or user who wrote it is Margo and because of that Q believes that she is in Agloe, New York. Finally, Q, Ben, Radar, and Lacey find Margo in Agloe's General Store.

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