

Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotic Analysis in Erika Johansen's Novel "The Queen of The Tearling"

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Received: 15 January 2025; Reviewed: 01 February 2025; Accepted: 05 February 2025

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Abstract

This study explores how Erika Johansen's novel *The Queen of The Tearling* (2014) conveys hidden meanings through a semiotic approach. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study applies Charles Sanders Peirce's theory—which includes icons, indices, and symbols—to understand how various signs in the novel form deeper messages. This analysis finds that Kelsea Glyn is not just a main character, but also symbolizes resistance against injustice. Her journey reflects the struggle of a young leader in facing tough challenges, while the Tearling Kingdom depicts an oppressed world, full of inequality and social conflict. The sapphire that Kelsea inherits is not only a magical artifact, but also a symbol of wisdom and the great responsibility she must bear. More than just story elements, these signs form a sharp social critique of power and injustice. Using a semiotic approach, this study reveals how the novel speaks to readers about courage, sacrifice, and the struggle for change, showing that its meaning is much deeper than it appears on the surface.

Keywords: Semiotics; Pierce's Theory; Symbol; Power; Gender; Social Justice

How to Cite: Nasution, Z., Rosliani & Erwany, L., (2025), Semiotic Analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce in the Novel "The Queen of The Tearling" by Erika Johansen. *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences (JEHSS)*. 7(3): 997-1005

INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is a discipline that focuses on the study of signs. The term comes from the Greek word Simeon, meaning "sign." In general, semiotics can be defined as the science that studies signs in relation to social conventions and the meanings they contain. In this field, semiotics connects an entity called representamen with another entity called an object. According to Sobur, semiotics is a science or method of analysis used to study signs. (Sobur, 2002) Signs are expressed through signifiers, so in semiotic analysis, signs in a text are given deeper meaning. Semiotic studies focus not only on the sign itself but also on how the sign functions and forms meaning in a communication system. Each sign has a certain meaning according to the context of its use, so that everything that can be observed can be considered a sign.

Peirce in Sobur argues that humans always reason through signs. According to him, the concept of semiotics is closely related to logic because humans use logic to understand the world through various signs around them. In addition, symbols play an important role in connecting thoughts between individuals, allowing for broader communication and understanding in everyday life. (Sobur, 2002)

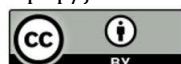
According to Wiyogo, semiotics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the process of creating and using signs and their meanings. Simply put, semiotics can be understood as a discipline that studies symbols and the meanings they contain. Thus, a sign can be interpreted as something that functions to represent or convey meaning to a particular object or concept. (Wiyogo & Kumala, 2023). Signs as research objects can be in various forms that are analyzed based on their characteristics, such as patterns, movements, or types. In cultural studies, signs are often understood as a "script" that coherently composes a series of markers, thus forming a meaning that can be understood in a particular context. (Mudjiyanto, 2013)

Peirce classifies signs into three main categories to give meaning to an object, namely icons, indexes, and symbols. In a study presented by Puspitasari, Charles Sanders Peirce divides signs as follows: An icon is a sign that has a direct relationship with an object or reference based on similarities, either in form, nature, or certain characteristics. An index is a sign that has a natural relationship with its object, where the relationship is causal or shows a cause-and-effect relationship. An index can also be understood as a sign that directly refers to reality. A symbol is a sign that connects the signifier, and the signified based on convention or social agreement so that its meaning is understood in a certain cultural context or communication system. (Ratih Puspitasari, 2021).

This research will focus on the theory put forward by Charles Sanders Peirce in his view of semiotics in the form of icons, indexes, and symbols in the novel *The Queen of Tearling* by Erika Johansen as the object of research. *The Queen of Tearling* Novel (Johansen, 2014) contains Princess Kelsey's efforts to fight injustice and restore the Tearling Kingdom to its former glory. This novel tells the story of Kelsey Glynn, a young leader who fights against tyranny to restore justice in the Tearling Kingdom. This novel tells the story of Kelsey Glynn, a young leader who fights against tyranny to restore justice in the Tearling Kingdom. When Princess Kelsey was a baby, her mother, Queen Elissa, hid her in the countryside to protect her until she grew up. Elissa died at the age of 28, leaving the kingdom in chaos in the novel. The study of semiotics in this novel is hoped to provide readers with an understanding of the signs used by the author. Through this framework, this study aims to understand how the meaning in this novel is constructed through various signs and how the relationship between signs and objects enriches the reading of the themes raised. In addition, this writing can also be useful in helping readers understand the novel and increasing readers' thinking insights.

Several previous researchers have conducted sign analysis with a semiotic approach to novels. One study conducted by Alifatul Qolbi Mu'arrof (2022) discussed the novel "Gadis Pesisir" by Nunuk Y Kusmina by utilizing Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory. This study highlights the representation of coastal communities in the context of limited conditions or poverty. (Alifatul Qolbi Mu'arrof, 2022).

Lestari et al. (2022) conducted a study entitled "Roland Barthes' Semiotic Narrative Codes in Mira Widjaja's Novel *Dari Jendela SMP*." Code is a method of combining symbols that have been



socially approved so that messages can be conveyed to certain individuals. In this novel, Widjaja concludes that several types of codes appear, namely hermeneutic codes, semiotic codes, symbolic codes, protistic codes, and gnomonic codes. (Lestary et al., 2022)

Salsa Billa Fauziah Tamami and Endang Susilowati examine the meaning of various symbols found in the character Santiago in the novel *The Old Man and The Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. They highlight symbols that depict the spirit of life in American society in the 1980s in an effort to achieve their ideals. This article analyzes the novel using a semiotic approach to reveal the meaning hidden behind the signs and symbols in the work. Various symbols can be found, including the character Santiago, which is taken from the concept used in the novel by Hemingway (Tamami, 2022).

Muhammad Tamimi (2022) in his discussion of several symbols in the novel "Surat Kecil Untuk Tuhan" by Agnes Davonar identified various icons, including onomatopoeic icons, topological icons, diagrammatic icons, and metaphorical icons. Furthermore, there are 20 statements that describe the index, 21 quotes that describe the symbols. The symbols reflect various things, namely the representation of the solar system, characteristics, abbreviations, and physical aspects of individuals.

Charles Sanders Peirce, as explained by Ambarini, developed a semiotic theory that divides signs into three main classifications: icons, indices, and symbols. According to Ambarini, an icon is a sign that resembles its original object, while an index is a sign that reflects a cause-and-effect relationship with the object. On the other hand, a symbol is a sign whose meaning is determined by social agreement or convention. (AS Ambarini, 2020). The novel *Queen of The Tearling* has a plot that is full of symbols and events that provide direction to the meaning of the story.

Based on research conducted by several previous researchers, who identified language as a sign or symbol to convey the author's ideas in a novel, it appears that there has been no study examining semiotics in Erika Johansen's novel *The Queen of The Tearling*. Therefore, the author is interested in conducting research that focuses on the semiotic analysis of this novel.

RESEARCH METHODS

The approach applied in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that qualitative research adopts an interpretive and naturalistic approach. This shows that qualitative research analyzes various aspects in a natural context and attempts to understand or interpret phenomena based on the meaning given by the individuals concerned. (Denzin, Norman K, Lincoln, 2018). This descriptive qualitative method can be used to describe semiotics, which are divided into icons, indexes, and symbols. (Sobur, 2002). Because the sign marks something important, then what is sought are meaningful signs. The method applied in this study is Semiotics developed by Charles Sander Peirce. The researcher uses the novel *The Queen of The Tearling*, written by Erika Johansen, as the main data source. Secondary data includes information and theories obtained from previous research. This book was first launched in 2014 by the publisher HarperCollins Children's Books, based in New York.

According to Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, a sign is something that leads to something else that allows the writer to analyze how signs in the text function to convey meaning. Charles Sanders Peirce developed a theory about signs that are divided into three classifications: icons, indexes, and symbols.

1. An icon is a symbol that has a direct similarity to the object it represents.
2. An index is a symbol that has a causal or existential relationship with the object it represents.
3. A symbol is a sign whose meaning is determined through agreement in society or convention. It is something that has a physical form that can be felt by the senses, understood by the mind, and felt by human emotions. It also has a role in replacing or representing something else as a symbol.

Using this approach, this study investigates icons, indexes, and symbols in characters, events, and objects in the novel *The Queen of the Tearling* to find deeper meanings.

Peircean semiotics provides a unique approach to text analysis because it allows symbols to be analyzed into different categories based on the relationship between the sign and the object. This study focuses on the analysis of signs in the categories of icons, indices, and symbols according to Peirce's theory. The Peircean approach is often applied in literature to explore deeper meanings, not just by recognizing characters but also by understanding how interactions between characters can explain the context and themes of the story being analyzed.

Ambarini explains that semiotics is the study of signs that considers communication phenomena in social, societal, and cultural contexts. (AS Ambarini, 2020). This is seen as a semiotic indicator in studying various systems, norms, and conventions put forward by the founding figures, such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sander Peirce (1839-1914). Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a Swiss linguist, broadly laid the foundation of linguistics on phenomena that he thought could be used as research subjects. One of Saussure's basic thoughts is that language needs to be studied as a system of symbols, although it is not the only symbol that exists. These two philosophers have different names for the science of signs; where Pierce calls it semiotics, while Saussure calls it semiology. Saussure's understanding is influenced by Pierce's thinking about the science of signs because all discussions on semiology and semiotics began with linguistic experts. Thus, semiotics is divided into two main schools, namely language (as explained by Pierce) and language as a guide. (AS Ambarini, 2020)

From Littlejohn's point of view, semiotics has a very interesting purpose, as recorded in the book *Communication Theory: Theories of Human Communication*, 9th edition. (Littlejohn, 2009) namely to reveal or interpret the meanings contained in the symbols so that the communicator can understand how to construct messages constructively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis and research findings on the novel *The Queen of The Tearling* include several things, namely (1) icons, (2) indexes, and (3) symbols.

Semiotic analysis in icon perspective: Tearling Pendant as a symbol of strength and courage.

Kelsey's Pendant is more than just a piece of jewelry; it is a sacred symbol, a legacy that ties the past to the future of the Tearling kingdom. It is given to each heir to the throne as a legitimate sign of their power. Kelsea, as heir to the throne, inherited the pendant from her mother, Queen Elyssa, who also wore it as a sign of her authority. But the pendant is more than just a symbol of power. It holds incredible magical powers. It serves not only as a symbol of the kingdom but also as a guardian capable of influencing the destiny of the Tearling kingdom. On Kelsea's journey, the pendant serves not only as a reminder of the heavy responsibility she bears but also as a force that helps guide her steps. With each challenge Kelsea faces, the pendant's power is revealed more and more, becoming a vital part of her quest to protect and rebuild the long-fractured kingdom.

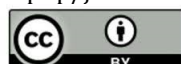
Kelsea's pendant is an iconic sign that represents strength and courage. This pendant is a real object with magical powers that often helps Kelsea in facing threats, and makes it an icon for strength and hope within herself. This pendant also represents the hidden potential within Kelsea as a leader. In Peirce's context, the pendant becomes an icon because of the pendant's ability to be seen directly, which can signify strength and courage in a form that Kelsea can see and feel.

A quote that contains the semiotic meaning of the teardrop pendant icon as an icon of strength and courage as can be seen in the novel quote below,

She held up the new necklace again, watching the jewel swing back and forth, puzzled. Carlin had told her that each heir to the Tearling throne wore the sapphire from the day they were born. (p.33-34)

She lifted the new necklace again and seeing the gemstone swinging, Kelsey felt confused. Carlin had told her that every heir to the Tearling throne would wear the sapphire from the moment they were born. (p.33-34)

And then Javel saw something extraordinary: the Queen's jewel, almost invisible moments ago, now flared a bright aquamarine, so bright that Javel had to squint, even at this distance.



The necklace swung, a glowing blue pendulum over the Queen's head, and she seemed to grow taller, her skin lit from within. She was no longer a round-faced girl in a worn cloak; for a moment she seemed to fill the whole world, a tall, grave woman with a crown on her head. (p. 106)

And then Javel saw something extraordinary: the Queen's jewel. The jewel, which had been almost invisible a moment ago, now radiated a bright ocean blue light, so bright that Javel had to squint, even from this distance. The necklace swung, revealing a glowing blue pendant above the Queen's head, making her look taller, and her skin glows from within. The Queen was no longer a round-faced girl in a shabby robe; in an instant, she seemed to fill the entire world, becoming a tall, majestic woman with a crown on her head. (p. 106)

She reclasped the necklace around her throat and found that she hadn't imagined it: the sapphire was burning as though it had been heated in a forge. (p.108)

She took off the necklace she was wearing and found something she had never imagined before: the sapphire was glowing as if it had been heated by fire. (p. 108)

So from this icon it can be seen that the pendant is an icon because its physical form directly connects Kelsea to her past and the kingdom she must lead. Its shape and radiance become a visual sign of her destiny and the burden she bears as a queen.

Semiotic analysis reviewed from the aspect of Index: Red Queen as an Index of Tyranny and Injustice

The Red Queen, the main antagonist in the story, serves as an index of injustice and oppression in the Tearling Country. As an authoritarian and cruel ruler, the Red Queen has a direct impact on the suffering of her people. The Red Queen is a symbol of tyranny, depicting a ruler who uses her power to oppress and control the people for personal gain. The Red Queen's tyranny illustrates the abuse of power and the stark contrast between a ruler who treats the people as objects and a leader who sees them as partners in building a just society.

The Red Queen's tyranny is very prominent in this story because she has created a world of oppression, where her people are trapped in a very oppressive social system. The Red Queen uses her power to maintain her position and uses the people as tools to perpetuate her power. This adds complexity to the character of Kelsea, who must deal with this legacy of tyranny—where on one hand, she inherits a kingdom destroyed by the Red Queen, but on the other, she fights to bring justice and change for the better.

According to Peirce's theory, the Red Queen is an index because it directly shows the existence of tyranny and oppression in the government. This can be seen in the following quote,

If the shipment did not come, the Red Queen would invade. (p.112)

If the shipment does not arrive, the Red Queen will attack. (p. 112)

"Too bad. Where's the Mort Treaty?"

"Outside, waiting for your inspection. But I think you will have to reconcile yourself."

"To what?"

"War," Mace replied flatly. "You've effectively declared war on Mortmesne, Lady, and believe me, the Red Queen will be coming."

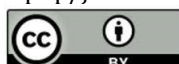
"It's a gamble, Lazarus, I know." (p.181)

Too bad. Where is the Mort Agreement?"

"Outside, waiting for your examination. But I think you should reconcile yourself."

"What for?"

"War," Mace replied flatly. "You have declared war on Mortmesne, Lady, and believe me, the Red Queen is coming."



"This is a gamble, Lazarus, I know that." (p. 181)

"So what will the Red Queen do first?" she asked.

"Invade our borders."

"Full invasion?"

"No. A few villages only, at first." (p. 232)

"So what will the Red Queen do first?" he asked.

"Invading our borders."

"Is it a full invasion?"

"No. At first, there were only a few villages." (p. 232)

The Red Queen is an index of the chaos and battles to come. The actions and decisions made by the Red Queen have a direct impact on the lives of Kelsea and the Tearling people, making her an indicator of a future filled with uncertainty.

The semiotic analysis reviewed from the aspect of symbols

a. The Tearling Kingdom as a Symbol of an Oppressed Country

The Tearling Kingdom, as the main setting, is a symbol of an oppressed society. In this novel, Tearling is described as a place where people live in fear and poverty under a cruel government. In Peirce's semiotic perspective, the Tearling Kingdom is a symbol because it does not directly show signs of oppression, but is interpreted as a representation of the condition based on the reader's perception and understanding. So, Tearling reflects a society that needs a just and strong leader. This can be seen in the following quote,

"What about the Mort Invasion?"

" Kelsey asked curiously.

Carlin had never properly explained the invasion and its causes.

Twenty years ago, the Morts invaded Tearling, forcing their way through the land and reaching the fortress walls.

Then. There is nothing.

(p. 36)

"What about the Mort invasion?"

Kelsey asked curiously.

Carlin never explained the invasion and its causes precisely. Twenty years ago, the Mort kingdom invaded the Tearlings, forcing them through the land and reaching the fortress walls. Then..... there is no continuation (p. 36)

Charges of abortion, once proven, carry a death sentence for both mother and surgeon. The wealthy could buy their way around these rules, as always, but the poor were stuck, and it aggregated into an old problem: there were simply too many poor children. (p. 210)

Now the Tear's worst dies regularly from botched appendectomies conducted at home. (p. 210)

Abortion charges, if proven, can carry the death penalty for both mother and surgeon. The rich can buy their way out of these laws, as usual, but the poor are trapped, and this is the age-old problem: too many poor children. (p. 210)

Today poor people in Tear die regularly from botched appendectomy operations performed at home. (p. 210)

The Tearling Kingdom is a symbol of an oppressed nation as this kingdom has fallen into ruin and misery under bad governance. But it is also a symbol of the possibility of resurrection and liberation if changed by a just leader, like Kelsea.

b. Kelsea's Character as a Symbol of Change and Liberation

As a symbol of change and liberation in this story, Kelsea Raleigh plays a major role. As the protagonist, she is a sign of hope to end injustice and restore truth in Tearling. Her courage and determination in fighting for justice make Kelsea not only the main character but also a symbol of resistance against tyrannical power.

According to Peirce's theory, Kelsea is a symbol because, as a young queen, she not only fights injustice directly but also represents the freedom that her people long for. This can be indicated by the following excerpt from the novel,

"All's not lost, Lady," Mace said unexpectedly, putting a hand on her arm.

"I swear to you, you're nothing like her."

Kelsea gritted her teeth. "You're right. I won't allow this to continue." (p. 97)

"It's not over yet, Lady," Mace said suddenly, placing a hand on her arm.

"I swear to you, you are not like him."

Kelsea gritted her teeth. "You're right. I won't let this go on." (p. 97)

Right or wrong, Lady, I see that you mean to take action. Hold this."

Kelsea took the hilt in her hand, liking its heft, although the blade was too long for her build.

"What about you?"

"I have many weapons, and we have friends here. The sword is for appearance only." (p. 98)

Whether right or wrong, I feel that you must take action, Queen. Hold this."

Kelsea took the hilt of the sword, and she liked the weight of the sword, even though it was too long for her. "What about you?"

"I have many weapons, and we have many friends here. This sword is just for protection." (p. 98)

"I will end this.

"Are you sure?

" Mace asked.

"I am sure of it.

"Then I swear to protect you from death.

(p. 99)

I will end this."

"Are you sure?" Mace asked.

"I am very sure."

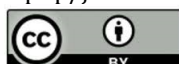
"Then, I swear to keep you alive." (p. 99)

With the symbols contained in these sentences, it shows that the Tearling kingdom, which is oppressed by unjust power, is a symbol of the struggle for freedom and justice. Kelsea becomes a symbol of hope for its people to escape from suffering.

Symbolic Relationship Analysis of Icons, Indexes and Symbols

The symbols in the novel, namely the pendant, the Red Queen, and the oppressed nation, depict a deep theme where the Pendant as an icon depicts a strong visual connection to Kelsea's heritage, her personal identity, and the burden she must bear as a leader. The Red Queen as a direct index points to the consequences of her devastating actions, signifying the increasing conflict and tension in the Tearling kingdom that Kelsea must face and the oppressed nation in the form of the Tearling kingdom becomes a symbol of the suffering experienced by the people, as well as the hope for liberation and improvement that comes with more just leadership.

CONCLUSION

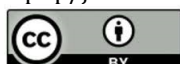


By using semiotic analysis based on Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, this study can indicate that in the novel *The Queen of Tearling*, elements such as icons, indexes, and symbols. These elements work together to provide depth to the story. Kelsea's pendant functions as an icon that connects her to her destiny as a leader. The Red Queen functions as an index because her presence signifies a direct threat that leads to instability and major changes. Where her actions always have an impact on the kingdom. The Red Queen is also a symbol of corrupt and destructive power, as well as injustice that must be stopped. Her role is very important in building the dynamics between Kelsea and the Tearling kingdom, thus adding layers of complexity to the major themes in the story, such as power, sacrifice, and liberation.

With Kelsea's struggle to defeat the Red Queen, the story is not only about defending the throne but also about fighting oppression for a better future for the Tearling people. The oppressed country, depicted through the Tearling kingdom, is a symbol of the suffering felt by the people and their hope for liberation and justice. Through these characters, Erika Johansen conveys a moral message about the importance of fighting for freedom and justice and gives readers insight into the dynamics of power and its impact on society. Icons, indices, and symbols contribute to the development of characters and themes, creating an immersive reading experience. This novel is not just a fantasy story, but also a reflection on power, identity, and responsibility.

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