
An Analysis of Theme and Characterization in Jean Webster's "Daddy-Long-Legs"**Luviana¹, Theodore Alexander Atmaja²**

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This analysis examines the theme and characterization of Jean Webster "Daddy-Long-Legs". This analysis focused on how the author used characterization to find the theme of the novel. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through intensive reading and by applying Abrams and Harpham's (2015) theory of characterization to explore how themes and characters are portrayed in the novel, especially the main character Jerusha Abbott. The researcher discovered the theme of the novel is personal-growth and the characterization of the main character changed from insecure girl into mature woman, and how the related character played important roles in her transformation. This analysis also highlights how an opportunity and support can help individuals overcome struggle and achieve personal growth. This analysis is not only recommended for anyone who is interested in the same topic, but also for students or learners further understanding.

Keywords: *theme, characterization, maturity, self-discovery*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are human creative structures used to express ideas, emotions, and feelings. Literary works have some similarities in general as literary forms, that is, the language used to transmit expression, thought, and culture. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2016), all these genres are forms of storytelling, engaging readers with narratives that address themes such as love, conflict, and identity.

Novels are special among various literary genres since they are more than just entertainment. They provide readers with an insightful way to explore the complexity of human life. Gill (2020) explains that novels are especially powerful because they can capture the small, often unnoticed moments of personal change, as well as the bigger social influences that shape a person's journey. With their extended storyline and in-depth character development, novels help readers connect emotionally with fictional lives, offering a deeper understanding of people's choices, struggles, and transformations. Besides, among literary works, novels play a special role in developing elaborate stories and characters.

Among novels that represent these qualities, *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster is one of them, written in an epistolary format through a series of letters. The themes and characters in *Daddy-Long-Legs* significantly contribute to the novel's engaging quality. According to Abrams and Harpham (2015), themes are the underlying ideas in a novel, whereas characterization is how the author builds the characters. A character is a person, figure, or being that appears in a story, especially in literary works like drama, novellas, or novels. The actors who experience events, deal with conflict, and engage with others to develop the plot are known as characters.

According to Šušić (2020) characterization is the total of the literary processes that go into creating a work of literature. It is a complex process that involves other literary components and is shaped by other literary processes. Characterization plays a crucial part in how well readers understand the characters and the morals of the story. It allows readers to understand not just the actions of the characters, but also their thoughts.

In literature, theme is the central or main idea that is used by the authors to convey thoughts or emotions through the story. Wahana and Johan (2022) state that a theme is defined as the main idea that the author chooses when preparing the work of literature. Theme explains why the story matters, while the storyline explains what happens in the story. Character growth, decisions, and difficulties frequently serve as the foundation of the story's theme.

In addition, the theme helps organize the meaning in a text. It plays an important role in how readers receive and understand the message. Theme also goes beyond the grammar of the sentences and helps connect different parts of the text into a clear idea. It guides readers to see not just what happens in a story, but why it matters.

From examining the characterization and theme of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, the research will explore the way Webster demonstrates personal growth and social change through Jerusha's life. These parts of the novel make readers aware that fiction can reflect genuine problems and aspirations. In addition, the novel informs readers about the status of women in literature, the importance of self-expression, and the mobility of Long-Legs offers a spotlight on the dreams and difficulties faced by young ladies in the early 20th century. Based on this consideration, this analysis aims to examine the themes and characterization in Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

A novel is a form of extended narrative fiction that is typically written in prose and published as a printed work. The word "novel" is used to describe a wide range of works that are all characterized by the fact that they are extended written in prose (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). A novel, as an extended narrative, is distinguished from the short story and from the work of middle length called the novelette or novella; its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of character and motives than do the shorter, more concentrated modes (Abrams & Harpham, 2015).

Novels often address lots of themes with several plot lines. The novel's focus on character development, which illustrates how people change morally and emotionally, is one of its main characteristics. According to Bandyopādhyāy (2004), a theme is a unique way to express or personalize a motif. The theme is the result of turning a broad concept into a more focused one. This enables authors to transform abstract concepts into narratives that readers can relate to. Holman and Harmon (2009) state that the central or main idea in literature is called theme. It can be regarded as the main topic of discussion, the subject of discourse, or the thesis in nonfiction prose. It is an abstract idea that is given concrete form in poetry, fiction, and theater through the use of characters, actions, and images. Authors convey underlying themes through characters and events.

According to Abrams and Baldick (as cited in Wardani, 2019), characterization is when a character appears in a drama or fictional story, either directly or indirectly, and allows readers to infer the character's traits from their actions and words. The term "character" in English literature interestingly refers to two constraints namely as a person or actor who is involved in a story and as an attitude, desire, emotion, and moral principle which belong to a certain character (Nurgiyantoro, as cited in Wardani, 2019). Booth (1983) also stated that "Characterization... is the creation of persons (or sometimes creatures) who are interesting and believable in themselves, and who function convincingly within the fictional world of a novel, play, or poem."

In line with Eagleton, Abrams and Harpham (2015) in their book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, the authors stated that theme is a primary comprehensive concept in a literary work. Perrine and Arp (2002) also stated that the theme is the main concept or

realization that guides and connects a whole literary work. While characterization is the easy way for an author to bring their character to life in a story. It is the process of creating and portraying the characteristics, motivations, and personalities of the characters.

Steering the Craft by Le Guin (2018) gives a little insight into characterization. Throughout the book, Le Guin incorporates her knowledge of crafting credible people. One of the main themes that appears is the importance of “showing, not telling” in character development. Le Guin argues that it is important to give the characters life through their words, actions, thoughts, and relationships with others.

The analysis of Daddy-Long-Legs and an understanding of how literature contributes to meaning are based on this theoretical framework. This analysis also attempts to show how the novel presents its ideas by using the concepts of theme and characterization, especially through the main character, Jerusha Abbott.

1. Theme in Literature

According to Abrams and Harpham (2015) the theme of a literary work is its main idea. Eagleton (1996) also states that themes are not fixed but come from how readers understand the story. In Daddy-Long-Legs, the theme of self-discovery emerges as Jerusha Abbot confronts her challenges in college and explores her identity. This illustrates how literature can inspire individuals to reflect on themselves and grow academically or emotionally.

2. Characterization and Its Function

Abrams and Harpham (2015) suggest that characterization is the way authors create convincing and emotionally interesting characters in the story. According to them, there are two methods used for characterization:

a. Direct Characterization

Direct characterization is when the author clearly conveys to the reader the character's traits, thoughts, and motives in a straightforward manner. For example, in the Daddy-Long-Legs novel, page 11:

“Jerusha had an imagination—an imagination, Mrs. Lippett told her, that would get her into trouble if she didn't take care—”

In this line, we can see that the author directly informs readers about Jerusha's imaginative characters. So, readers do not have to guess or figure it out by themselves.

b. Indirect Characterization

Indirect characterization is when the readers are allowed to assume the character's traits, thoughts, and motives. The readers have to figure out what the characters thought through the clues in the story by themselves. For example, in the Daddy-Long-Legs novel, page 13:

“Jerusha's anxious frown gave place to quick laughter. She was by nature a sunny soul, and had always snatched the tiniest excuse to be amused.”

In this line, readers can see how Jerusha transitions from feeling worried to happy and how she finds joy in the little things. This indirectly shows that Jerusha is a cheerful and positive person, based on her actions and reactions. These two methods of characterization are essential tools for authors to build convincing and engaging characters. By understanding this, readers can discern the character's traits, thoughts, and motives through the clues provided by the author.

3. Objective of Characterization

Booth (1983) also highlights that the objective of characterization is to connect its purpose in storytelling. Characters should not only play a role in the storyline but also need to evoke emotions and thoughts in readers, allowing authors to share their perspective on human nature and society through their characters. In Daddy-Long-Legs, Jerusha's

character is designed to challenge social expectations and make readers consider issues such as social class and opportunity.

Webster uses both direct and indirect characterization to make the story more realistic. By using the epistolary form, Jerusha reveals her personality through her letters, allowing readers to experience her growth in real time. Her transformation from an insecure girl into a strong, independent woman reflects the novel's message about the importance of confidence and self-development.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative research as the method. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is designed to understand and interpret the meaning of phenomena that occur in a particular context. Yin (2011) states that qualitative research emphasizes the understanding of social phenomena from the perspective of the participants. The data of this research was taken from a novel entitled *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster which was first published in 1912. The novel consists of 193 pages. The object of the research is the theme and characterization in the novel.

The data collecting technique that the researcher used in this research is documentation. The researcher read the novel intensively and identified the passages which show the theme and characterization. The researcher underlined, marked, and wrote down the quotations that contained the data needed. The data analysis technique that the researcher used in this research is descriptive analysis. The researcher analyzed the data by classifying, describing, and interpreting the data based on the theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the researcher presented findings along with related discussions. The findings are based on the analysis of Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*, especially focusing on the theme and characterization. The analysis highlights how the novel delivers its main ideas through Jerusha Abbott's letters and her development as the main character.

A. Findings

1. Theme

The theme of *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster is personal growth and exploration of identity. This emerges through Jerusha Abbott's development as revealed in her letters. Her journey shows that the primary aim of the story is self-improvement and emotional growth. At the beginning, Jerusha is a miserable and insecure girl who hates her name and changes it to Judy. Although she faces struggles in her college life, she adapts and grows. Through her scholarship and experiences, she transforms into a confident and independent woman.

In conclusion, with all the chances to study and explore, Jerusha grows into a young woman who is full of ambition, thoughtful, and mature. Her growing process is earned through her mistakes and experiences. The novel demonstrates that personal development encompasses not only internal change but also the impact of external factors, such as motivation and meaningful relationships. Through this combination, Jean Webster delivers a powerful message about the journey toward self-discovery and empowerment.

2. Characterization

This section discusses the characterization of the characters in *Daddy-Long-Legs* novel. It focuses on how their actions contribute to the theme of the novel.

a. Jerusha Abbot

Jerusha Abbott, the main character, is a bright, imaginative, and energetic young woman who undergoes significant change during her time in college. Through education, new friendships, and her own inner strength, Jerusha begins to grow beyond her early

insecurities and confusion about her place in the world. Her development serves as a clear example of the novel's central themes of independence and self-discovery.

b. Jervis Pendleton

Jervis Pendleton, a generous and anonymous trustee often referred to as "Daddy-Long-Legs," sponsors Jerusha's education. His support plays an important role in giving her the freedom to grow, even though he remains hidden for most of the story. The novel's theme of unexpected kindness and emotional connection becomes more powerful when it is revealed that Jervis is not only her anonymous trustee but also the man she has come to love and admire.

c. Mrs. Lippett

The tough matron of the John Grier Home is Mrs. Lippett. She represents a strict and heartless environment in which Jerusha was raised. Her lack of support and cold attitude stand in direct opposition to the warmth Jerusha later discovers in other people, showing the deep impact that kindness and support can have on a person's development.

d. Julia Pendleton

Jerusha's wealthy and initially arrogant roommate is Julia Pendleton. She comes from a privileged family and at first appears distant and proud. But as time goes on, Julia transforms, opening up and becoming supportive of Jerusha. Her transformation shows how friendship and understanding can be found among people from various social backgrounds.

e. Sallie McBride

Jerusha's kind and positive roommate is Sallie McBride. She respects Jerusha as an equal and accepts her right away. By inviting Jerusha into her house over the holidays and giving her a sense of belonging she had never known before, Sallie offers Jerusha social and emotional support.

B. Discussion

This analysis reveals several themes of Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* novel. Personal growth, self-discovery, and social class. The novel illustrates how an individual can endure significant change when provided with the right opportunities. Jerusha Abbott, who begins the story as a miserable and insecure girl, is given the chance to pursue higher education. These opportunities initiate a transformation in her life, demonstrating that when individuals take full advantage of opportunities and are motivated to grow, the outcomes can be both positive and transformative.

The characterization in the novel primarily revolves around Jerusha. As she experiences college life, she progressively evolves from an uncertain adolescent into a mature, independent young woman. Her development is not solitary; several supporting characters, such as Jervis Pendleton, Mrs. Lippett, Julia Pendleton, and Sallie McBride, also play significant roles in her transformation.

Through these relationships and her everyday experiences at college, Jerusha's character deepens and evolves significantly. Her journey highlights the importances of encouragement, acceptance, and positive interpersonal connections in personal growth. Jerusha's character develops and changes a lot. Her experience serves as a reminder of the critical importance that acceptance, support, and healthy interpersonal relationships have in personal development. In conclusion, *Daddy-Long-Legs* is a compelling story that combines themes of personal growth and self-discovery with dynamic character development, demonstrating how significant life events and societal relationships can influence a person's journey into maturity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the collected data and the analysis conducted throughout this research, the conclusions of this research analysis are as follows:

A. Theme

The themes of *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster are personal growth, self-discovery, and social class. This novel highlights how opportunities, effort, and encouragement can help individuals overcome struggles and achieve personal growth. The novel also shows that with support and guidance; people can discover their potential and develop a stronger sense of identity and purpose.

The novel encompasses more than just academic and social achievement. It also involves moral and emotional development. It has been shown that this type of development is important for understanding relationships and life. Through Jerusha's experience, the novel illustrates the importance of self-awareness in overcoming challenges and forming meaningful relationships. It implies that, in addition to achievements, morals and introspection are necessary for true success.

B. Characterization

The characterization of this novel is focused on Jerusha Abbott's journey. While the characterization of this novel primarily focuses on the main character, Jerusha Abbot. Through Jerusha's experiences in her daily life, she grows into a mature and thoughtful woman. Other characters, such as Jervis Pendleton, Mrs. Lippet, Julia Pendleton, and Sallie McBride, also play a significant role in her personal growth.

Together, these personalities influence Jerusha's journey by offering support, challenges, and opportunities that shape her character and refine her perspective on the world. Their interactions demonstrate the importance of education and social connections in an individual's development. In conclusion, Jerusha's journey serves as a meaningful example of how someone can rise above their conditions when given the chance and support to succeed. Both theme and characterization in this novel work together to demonstrate the profound impact of education, opportunities, and support from others.

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