

**ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN  
“THE SECRET HISTORY” NOVEL BY DONNA TARTT**



*An Undergraduate Thesis*

*Submitted to the Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University in Partial  
Fulfilment for The Requirement to Obtain Sarjana Degree in English*

**WRITTEN BY**

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2024**

**LEGITIMATION**

**THESIS**

**ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN “THE SECRET HISTORY”**

**NOVEL BY DONNA TART**

**BY**

**LIQORIAH NURUL QUR’ANI**

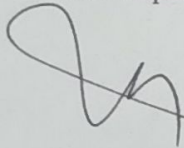
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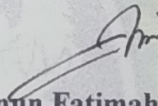
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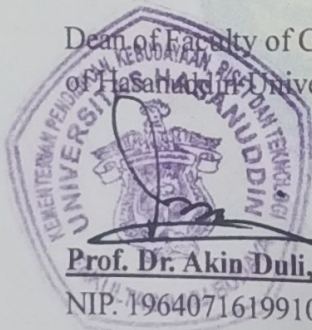
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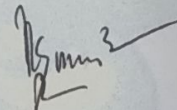
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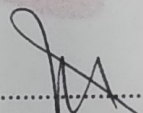
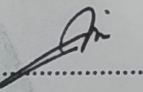
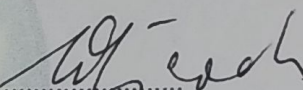
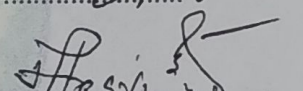
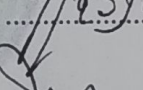
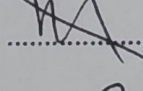
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**AGREEMENT**

On 12 July 2024, the Board of Thesis Examination has kindly approved a thesis by Liqorih Nurul Qur'ani (F041201042) entitled *Analysis of Figurative Language in "The Secret History" Novel by Donna Tart* submitted in fulfillment of one of the requirements to obtain Sarjana Degree in English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University.

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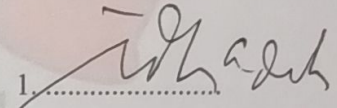
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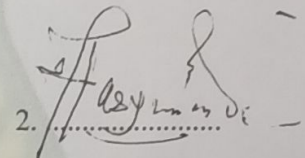
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Hereby, the writer declares that this thesis is written by herself. This thesis does not contain any materials which have been published by other people, and it does not cite other people's ideas except quotations and references.

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APPROVAL FORM

With reference to the letter of the Dean of Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University No. 1355/UN4.9.1/KEP/2023 regarding supervision, we hereby confirm to approve the undergraduate thesis draft by Liqorih Nurul Qur'ani (F041201042) to be examined at the English Literature Study Program of Faculty of Cultural Sciences.

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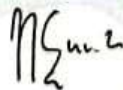
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Finally, the writer realized the thesis is flawed and needs an improvement. Therefore, the writer would love to and open for any criticism and suggestion from the readers. The writer hopes this thesis can be useful and add more knowledge for the future research.

Makassar, July 2024

Best Regards,

Liqorlah Nurul Qur'ani



## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>LEGITIMIMATION</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>AGREEMENT</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>APPROVAL FORM</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>ABSTRAK</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Identification of The Problems.....	3
1.3 Scope of the Problems .....	4
1.4 Research Questions .....	4
1.5 Objective of the Study .....	4
1.6 Significance of the Research .....	5
<b>CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 Previous Study.....	6
2.2 Theoretical Background.....	8
2.2.1 Semantics .....	8
2.2.2 Figurative Language.....	10
2.2.3 Types of Figurative Language .....	11
2.2.4 The Synopsis of <i>The Secret History</i> by Donna Tartt .....	15

2.3	Conceptual Framework.....	15
<b>CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>		<b>17</b>
3.1	Research Design.....	17
3.2	Source of Data .....	17
3.3	Method of Analyzing Data .....	17
<b>CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....</b>		<b>20</b>
4.1	Classifying Types and Define the Meanings.....	21
4.1.1.	Metaphor .....	21
4.1.2.	Idioms.....	23
4.1.3.	Hyperbole.....	25
4.1.4.	Verbal Irony .....	27
4.1.5.	Contextual Expression .....	30
4.1.6.	Indirect Request .....	30
4.2	Dominant Type.....	32
<b>CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION .....</b>		<b>33</b>
5.1	Conclusion .....	33
5.2	Suggestion .....	34
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>		<b>35</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>		<b>39</b>

## LIST OF FIGURE

<b>Figure 1.</b> Theoretical framework.....	16
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## ABSTRACT

**Liqoriah Nurul Qur'ani.** *Analysis of Figurative Language in "The Secret History" Novel by Donna Tartt* (supervised by Ayub Khan and Ainun Fatimah)

This research delves into the use of figurative language in Donna Tartt's novel, *The Secret History*. In Donna Tartt's novel, *The Secret History*, figurative language creates vivid images with a special effect, potentially adding depth to written or verbal communications.

The theory that the author used in this research was from Colston (2015), who classified figurative language into six types: metaphor, idioms, hyperbole, verbal irony, indirect request, and contextual expression. The author's goal for this research was to identify and categorize the figurative language in the novel, and then present the dominant type based on this classification.

The research findings reveal six types of Colston theory in this novel: metaphor (46%), idioms (22%), hyperbole (15%), indirect requests (9%), verbal irony (7%), and contextual expression (1%). All this data leads to the conclusion that metaphor is the dominant type in this book, accounting for 46% of the figurative language data.

Key words: Figurative Language Types; The Secret History; Herbert Colston

## ABSTRAK

**Liqoriah Nurul Qur'ani.** *Analysis of Figurative Language in "The Secret History" Novel by Donna Tartt* (dibimbing oleh Ayub Khan dan Ainun Fatimah)

Penelitian ini menyelidiki penggunaan bahasa figuratif dalam novel Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*. Dalam novel Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*, bahasa figuratif menciptakan imajinasi atau gambar hidup dengan efek khusus, yang berpotensi menambah lebih dalam untuk komunikasi tertulis atau lisan.

Teori yang digunakan penulis dalam penelitian ini adalah dari Colston (2015), yang mengklasifikasikan bahasa figuratif menjadi enam jenis: metafora, idiom, hyperbole, ironi verbal, permintaan tidak langsung, dan ekspresi kontekstual. Tujuan penulis untuk penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengkategorikan bahasa figuratif dalam novel, dan kemudian menyajikan tipe dominan berdasarkan klasifikasi ini.

Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan enam jenis teori Colston dalam novel ini: metafora (46%), idiom (22%), hyperbole (15%), permintaan tidak langsung (9%), ironi verbal (7%), dan ekspresi kontekstual (1%). Semua data ini mengarah pada kesimpulan bahwa metafora adalah tipe yang dominan dalam buku ini, yang menyumbang 46% dari data bahasa figuratif.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Figurative; *The Secret History*; Herbert Colston

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the author would introduce about fundamental ideas of how the thesis will be and how author providing an outline the structure of the thesis:

### **1.1 Background**

Language is a complex system humans use to communicate, verbally or nonverbally. Many fields or subjects, including language, have developed over time. In its modern configuration, the study of linguistics was believed to have started in the 19th century. Jacob Grimm researched the Indo-European origins of the German language, and he shaped the future of linguistics by studying a single language that gave birth to languages spoken throughout Europe and parts of Asia. The study concluded that several hundred Indo-European languages originally came from the Indo-European protolanguage (National Geographic Society, 2023).

Various scholars and linguists periodically established and refined the linguistic branches as part of modern development. Hymes (1968) was the linguist who proposed the idea of identification (Jufrizal, 1998). Moreover, as stated, the idea and advancement of linguistic branches came from different linguists, with Noam Chomsky and syntax as examples, and semantics with Stephen Ullmann.

Semantics studies the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences (Abdurrahman, 2019). Figurative language uses semantics to convey meaning. Figurative language had its types but differed according to

different linguists. Perrine (1996) analyzed ten types of figurative language: metaphor, simile, personification, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, and understatement. Besides Perrine, there was figurative language, according to Herbert L. Colston (2015, as cited in Enjelina, 2022, p. 105), which included metaphor, verbal irony, hyperbole, contextual expression, idioms, and indirect requests.

Figurative language was an everyday speech used in daily communication and literature, such as novels, short stories, and songs, and it was used for giving an imaginary sense to speech since figurative language pulled out literal meaning in phrases. According to Keraf (2010, as cited in Enjelina, 2022, p. 113), figurative language is a way of expressing thoughts through language in a distinctive way that shows the soul and personality of the writer (language users).

Rather than being real or fiction, a novel is a narrative work that tells a story. Novels could mirror the author's creativity to build the words of fantasy. Using figurative language demanded creativity and the author's writing style; it was an excellent way to convey a more profound story. However, novel readers would interpret it differently, distinct from the writer's intention. This occurred because readers struggled to distinguish between literal meaning and figurative language.

In this study, the writer used Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, a dark-academia novel. This phenomenal classic novel by Tartt was already around and is still relevant to book readers today. The novel's theme

explored a dark story with Tartt's imaginary words; this book would be good for exploring chosen figurative words. *The Secret History* novel is about students at an elite Vermont college. Richard Papen, a boy who transferred to the college and became fascinated by a unique group of students studying Ancient Greek under the charming Professor Julian Morrow, narrates the story. As time goes by, Papen realized there is a deep secret and moral ambiguity, and their bond comes to an end as a tragic event about the murder of one of their friends.

This novel revolves around the genre of an unreliable narrator. The words or message of an unreliable narrator should be questioned. Richard Papen was charmed by ancient Greek students, and it made him obsessed to being their friend because of the sense of exclusivity. It matches the psychological genre of this novel because it combines mystery, betrayal, and the characters' questionable behavior throughout.

The writer analyzes this matter because the novel matches the function of figurative language. Analyzing figurative language made the theme, symbolism, and nuance more visible in Tartt's novel as a psychological thriller genre. The writer's purpose is to delve deeper into the various types of figurative language present in *The Secret History*.

## **1.2 Identification of The Problems**

Based on the background, the writer concludes that the problem of this research as:



1. There is difficulty in classifying the right types of figurative language in a novel.
2. Misplacing phrases with other types of figurative language in the novel.
3. Difficulty to comprehend the meaning of the figurative language used in the novel.

### **1.3 Scope of the Problems**

The writer focused on analyzing types of figurative language in *The Secret History* Novel by Donna Tartt based on Colston's theory (2015, as cited in Enjelina, 2022, p. 105) that divides figurative language into metaphor, verbal irony, hyperbole, contextual expression, idioms, and indirect request. In addition, the writer also wants to find the meaning of figurative language used in the novel and find the most dominant type of the figurative language used by the author of the novel.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

According to the Scope of the Problem, the writer listed the problem that would be analyzed in this research:

1. What types of figurative language are used in *The Secret History* novel by Donna Tartt?
2. What is the dominant type of figurative language found in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* Novel?

### **1.5 Objective of the Study**

Following the research question above, the writer would work on:

1. To classify the types of figurative language found in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* Novel.
2. To reveal the most dominant types of figurative language found in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* Novel.

## **1.6 Significance of the Research**

The writer hoped this research would contribute a theoretical and practical benefit to semantics, especially figurative language. Theoretically, this would add more research about figurative language, help research out there, and be a reference for future studies. Additionally, this research will provide valuable insights into the writer's understanding of figurative language during the research process.

From a practical standpoint, this research provides insightful information on the craft of storytelling and the methods used by writers to elicit strong feelings and meaning. This real-world application can help writers improve their craft and enhance their stories, which will ultimately lead to the production of more compelling and influential literature in all genres.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature review is an essential component of any thesis, as it provides a comprehensive overview of existing research and theories related to the topic of study. In this chapter, we will explore the various studies that have been conducted in the field of figurative language and identify gaps in knowledge that our own research aims to fill.

#### **2.1 Previous Study**

In this chapter, the writer will present the previous study with similar topics about figurative language and novels.

The first was by Winda Sari Enjelina (2022), “An Analysis of Figurative Language in The Tower of Nero Novel by Rick Riordan.” The writer analyzes six types of figurative language on each page of the novel, namely metaphor, verbal irony, hyperbole, idioms, contextual expression, and indirect request. In this research, the writer found 44 total data points using figurative language. Specifically, metaphor found 8, verbal irony found 9, hyperbole found 18, idioms found 1, contextual expression found 4, indirect request found 4. Also, the dominant types the writer found are hyperbole, which is 40%, followed by verbal irony, which is 20%; metaphor, which is 18%; contextual expression and indirect request, which is 10%; and idioms, which are 2%.

The second is by Meswanti Febriyanti Safitri (2021), “An Analysis of Figurative Language in the Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaleed

Khosseini.” The writer uses figurative language, simile (8), metaphor (1), personification (2), irony (1), alliteration (1), repetition (1), allusion (2), symbol (12), foreshadowing (6), imagery (3), parallelism (2), and irony of situation (2). Thus, we can conclude that symbolism is the dominant type of writing found in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaleed Khosseiniis.

The third is from Ni Komang Dila Candra Wahyuni et al. (2020), “An Analysis of the Types of Figurative Languages Found in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer Novel by Mark Twain.” The total number of data points in this analysis was 58 figurative languages. According to the table, there were 4 types of similes, 10 types of metaphors, 15 types of personifications, 0 apostrophes, 5 types of synecdoches, 2 types of metonymies, 1 type of symbol, 1 type of allegory, 1 type of paradox, 15 types of hyperbole, 2 types of understatements, and 2 types of irony. The result indicates that this novel employs figurative language, personification, and hyperbole.

The fourth study by Arini E. Tiarawati and Tri W. Retno Ningsih (2019), “Figurative Language Analysis on The Ugly Love Novel by Colleen Hoover,” This study found 87 phrases, clauses, or sentences that contain figurative language. The dominant type is personification with 33, followed by simile with 19, irony with 11, hyperbole with 10, metaphor with 9, and the last metonymy with 5 frequencies.

The last one is from Windi Damayanti (2018), “The Analysis of Figurative Languages Used in the Novel The Book of Forbidden Feelings

Written by Lala Bohang.” In this analysis, the writer found 24 total figurative languages. This research identified five types of figurative language. The research found five instances of simile, eight instances of metaphor, seven instances of personification, three instances of hyperbole, and one instance of apostrophe. Then, the most dominant type of figurative language used in the novel is metaphor.

The previous studies above have the same similarities, such as analyzing written books and detecting their types. The authors categorize the data into distinct types, perform calculations, and then convert the data into a percentage. The difference between these various authors is that they take different theories from different linguists. Also, they had different types of figurative languages.

## **2.2 Theoretical Background**

The existing theoretical background in this research are:

### **2.2.1 Semantics**

Semantics covers a wide range of subjects centered around meanings. The goal of communication is for both the speaker and the listener to understand the same idea. However, this subject does not directly convey meaning, but semantics has a layer of elements in its structure. Start with sounds, phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, and text.

Semantics existed in the Ancient Greek era, where the biggest reputable philosopher lived in 384–332 SM, Aristotle. Aristotle explains that the word is a basic idea from and contains meaning. Ullman (1977) also

declared that Plato stated that word meaning is probably the opposite between meaning from the word itself and the word that caused the grammatical context. Plato also said in his book *Cratylus* explained the idea of how words are names or labels for things ('realists' vs. 'normalists'). In *Cratylus*, as well as in Plato, it is clear that language tones hold certain meanings. However, it's not clear yet in Plato's period about the study of the etymology of meanings and word meaning. Furthermore, early philosophers who were interested in the study of meaning

In the works of Aristotle and Plato, semantics is primarily concerned with ideas. They analyze the processing of words, context, and meaning itself. The study of semantics emerged as a term due to a French philologist (a language historian), Michel Bréal, in 1883. As a philologist, he studied how language is organized, how language develops as time passes, and the relationship between languages. Furthermore, early philosophers who were interested in the study of meaning kept a different approach until the modern development of semantic theories. They have different approaches and analyses of how semantics and meaning are presented. The various kinds of approaches are componential analysis, structuralism, and prototype theory. The most known in this modern period is Ferdinand de Saussure, who deals with meaning as a combination of signifier and signified, both of which are psychological in nature.

Meanings in words and sentences have an extensive scope. Semantics is the study of meaning, including literal and non-literal

meanings. A literal meaning refers to the actual or dictionary meaning of a word or sentence. while non-literal meaning is a word or sentence that means one thing but is used to define something else. According to Chaer in Nafunuddin, semantics has four types, including: (1) lexical semantics, which deals with the lexicon of a language; (2) grammatical semantics, a type that concentrates on grammatical meaning at the level of morphology; (3) semantics syntax, in which the research is based on things connected to syntax; and (4) semantics of intent, This type of semantics works with the use of stylistics and linguistic form, including metaphor, irony, litotes, and other forms of figurative language.

### **2.2.2 Figurative Language**

Figurative language and non-literal meaning are close concepts in linguistics. Figurative language serves as a medium for conveying non-literal meaning. For example, when someone said "you are a star," In the literal sense, those utterances mean that the speaker speaking is physically a star; however, in figurative language, those utterances mean that a person is an incredibly human being or talented.

Figurative language closely related to poems or novels that sparks a fantasy. These systems assist the reader or listener in manipulating the situation, thereby enabling them to visualize the scene clearly. This style of using figurative language makes the situation more interesting, made a statement, and a more fun impression. This combination of figurative

language and the author's distinct style would deliver such a unique style to differentiate them from the other author.

As a broad study, figurative language developed over time with various linguists and experts. The most common study was the theory of figurative language by Keraff, Leech, and Perrine. There are a huge number of studies that are born from their theory of figurative language. Later, with so many undoubtedly great linguists, the writer chose to stick with this research with Herbert L. Colston, or Colston theory.

Colston (2015), in Gunter (2019), said figurative language is not limited only to linguistic structure but also related with human cognition and social interaction. Colston highlighted the importance of figurative language functions to create humor, convey emotions, or establish a social relationship. Colston, in his book *Using Figurative Language*, said there are types of figurative language: metaphor, verbal irony, hyperbole, contextual expression, and idioms..

### **2.2.3 Types of Figurative Language**

#### **1. Metaphor**

Drewer (2003) stated metaphors as "tools of thought" and "knowledge for media" in Subagiharti et al. (2023), and offered heuristic benefits for scientific research. Metaphorization allows us to build new hypotheses and has a theory constitutive effect, offering an opportunity for science to creatively shape conceptions of the world. Junge (2010) emphasizes the role of metaphors as a means of



knowledge creation, highlighting its ability to create new ideas that direct attention to previously unnoticed relationships. Furthermore, as for Colston, he stated how metaphor is used to create vivid and expressive description, and how it can be influenced by various factors such as cognitive, social, emotional, and physical context.

Here's an example of a commonly used metaphor:

“Time is money.”

In literal meaning, those sentences would be translated into how time is physically money, but those metaphors are defined as how time is as valuable as money and should be used effectively.

## 2. Verbal Irony

Verbal irony happens when a speaker's intended meaning contradicts what they are expressing. Speakers purposefully employ humor in various forms to add levity to situations. One example is a character going out into a cyclone and exclaiming, "What nice weather we're having!" despite the storm.

In one instance, a mother said,

"Wow, you could win an award for cleanliness!" despite the fact that her child's room was disorganized. Pexman (2008:286) defines verbal irony as nonliteral language that highlights differences between expectations and actuality.

### 3. Hyperbole

Claridge in Aljadaan (2018) When the expression X means more than X, hyperbole occurs. When attempting to define the meaning that the speaker intended, hyperbole and exaggeration are both used. In the context of our conversation, the use of hyperbole indicates that the speaker is being theatrical or exaggerating a constituent or characteristic.

“She’s going to die of embarrassment.”

This does not imply that the girl will become unwell or that her heart will stop beating as a result of her humiliation. Instead, the speaker uses exaggeration to show how ashamed she will be.

### 4. Contextual Expression

Contextual expressions consist of a category of utterances that contain various structures, including denominal verbs and noun-noun combinations, and their meanings are entirely based on discourse contexts. For instance,

"Their senses are entirely determined by the time, place, and conditions under which they are uttered."

From this perspective, contextual expressions are among the sorts of figurative language that are most dependent on a shared grounding (Herbert, 2015:112).

## 5. Idioms

McCarthy and O'Dell in Wahyuni (2022) said an idiom is an expression that cannot be taken literally but contextual; also, idioms have different meanings from the individual words.

Miller (2019) provides an example titled "On the other hand". Without context, it would be difficult to understand this sentence, but Miller clarifies that it signifies "from a different point of view." Miller's other example is "to hit the book," which is defined as to study.

## 6. Indirect Request

An indirect request is a type of figure of speech used to convey a want or tendency. An indirect request is one in which a person asks another to tell, give, or request something from a third party. For example, when someone asks, "could you tell me how much you earn?" they are politely expressing their interest in knowing the person's salary.

Pradopo (2002), in Enjelina (2022), said language style is the use of a specific language to get artistic values. Authors can reveal a hidden message or social commentary that may probably be inside the text. The deeper analysis would help the reader uncover the layers of meaning and symbolism that contribute to the overall impact of the novel. By using metaphor, verbal irony, hyperbole, contextual expression, idioms, and indirect requests, readers can

discover a great appreciation for the artistry and craft of the author's work. This helps readers advance their reading experience and deepen their understanding of the complexities and nuances present in the work.

This research focused on Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and how Tartt can offer her strong use of figurative language to convey complex ideas and evoke powerful imagery within her work. Analyzing her work can help deepen an appreciation for the artistry and begin using figurative language in literature.

#### **2.2.4 The Synopsis of *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt**

*The Secret History* is a story about six classics students from Hampden College in Vermont who, under the influence of their charming professor, become involved in a murder event that has big consequences. The novel revolves around first-person view, with Richard Pape as the narrator, recounting events long past as if they were still unfolding. The remainder of the novel charts the slow splintering of the group's friendship under the pressures of fear, remorse, and sickened self-knowledge.

### **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

A framework is used as a foundation of knowledge to describe the plan that supports the research. The theoretical background, also known as the framework, forms the core of the theory, and in this case, the writer

employs figurative language research. The framework below summarizes the theoretical background of how this research was planned.

**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework

