The Meanings of the Broken Tree, River and Bridge in Katherine Paterson’s

Bridge to Terabithia

THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Sarjana Pendidikan

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Abstract

The Meanings of the Broken Tree, River and Bridge in Katherine Paterson’s

Bridge to Terabithia

Taufiqi G. Utomo

This paper examines the meaning of the broken tree, river, and bridge in Katherine Paterson’s Bridge to Terabithia by using one of the branches of Semiotic literary approach, Symbolism. Starting with Reat’s concept that a tree is a source of life and togetherness, this paper compares the idea of the separation of death symbolized through broken tree whose idea is proposed by Emberson. Furthermore, this paper applies Joseph Panek’s concept that a river can be a boundary or a transcendence passage to the world beyond human understanding. Despitefully, this paper also exerts Sanda Badescu’s concept that a bridge can be a sacramental passage between past and present and a safe connector between two separate places. By understanding above scholar’s framework, this paper concludes that the existence of symbols both in real or literary worlds shapes humans to give thought about a greater existence beyond their own.

Key words: Semiotic and symbols
Introduction

A symbol generally stands for something that stands for something else. In the one hand, as stated by Meyers, to man, everything is symbolic, and the employment of symbolism is what makes us human (qtd. in Anderson 2). Human being always sees things in symbolical order, and this order is helping them to understand the world. In the other hand, according to Eliade, a symbol can help human to awake their individual understanding and transmute it into a spiritual act, and the society where human live, with the highest spirituality by understanding symbols (qtd. in Anderson 2). By applying his idea, I conclude that the possible meaning of roasted turkey for American societies means the Thanksgiving day, because of it applies to celebrate a good harvest time and thanking The Lord for all the blessings.

Since Eliade argued that symbol can awake human individual understanding and turn it into a spiritual act, the way symbols awaken human understanding into a spiritual act must have certain values, and these values are even greater than their existence. Following his argument that stones and trees become sacred to humans, because humans believe that there is something (spiritual) that lies inside them, McCarthy, in the other hand, will argue that stones or trees that are sprinkled by a blood can be something supernatural (McCarthy 170). In an equal opinion, Reat argued that having created a symbol with correspondence to the Supernatural Realm, Allâh explains the symbol through revelation so that man may perceive the deepest layers of meaning in the world around him (Reat 2). By comparing the arguments, I conclude that the three opinions share a mutual understanding that by understanding symbols a human will find a way to understand the existence beyond them.

The existence of symbol also appears in the literary world; as Perrine argued that a literary symbol is something that means more than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation,
an action, or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story, but suggests or represents other meanings as well (qtd. in Fadaee 20). In another point of view, it can be inferred that a literary symbol can be anything inside a literary work, and by following her argument, I conclude that by understanding a literary work through its symbolical orders, a reader can comprehend the meaning of literary work better.

By understanding Perrine’s point of view, Badescu argued that in his Le Chevalier de la Charette (The Knight of the Cart, better known as Lancelot), Chrétien de Troyes portrayed the journey to save Queen Guinevere as a treacherous journey when the two knights, Lancelot and Gawain, had to cross a dangerous bridge (2). By synchronizing Perrine’s idea, Badescu stated that the meaning of bridge in the story of Lancelot and Gawain was a separation that divides the world into two different conditions, the place where the princess was detained and the place where Lancelot and Gawain were (2). In order to save the queen, they had to cross the bridge and paid the cost. According to Badescu, the meaning of the bridge in the story also appears as some kind of dangerous symbolical passage that mostly appears in numerous medieval stories that always separating two kingdoms (2). In my personal point of view, I agree with her opinion because many of old stories that I read, such as The Wizard of Oz and The Journey to The Center Of The Earth, used river or bridge as a dangerous boundary that the heroes had to cross in order to defeat the darkness or to get to the safer place.

Moreover, Badescu added that Lancelot’s bridges in the story are powerful examples that open to a series of explorations on the symbolism of the bridge in numerous fields of studies (3). In addition, the idea of bridge from the story tells that when people are trying to move from one side to another that is separated by something, seen or invisible, it is considered as connecting two worlds into one easy or hard passage. She argues that history offers powerful examples of
voyages by ocean that tried to create a bridge between the known and the unknown. Thus, I agree with Badescu that the idea of bridging different places or cultures is the best example from the history, because since the beginning of civilization, ancient people were bridging their existence with an invisible powerful existence above them by worshiping nature. Of course, it is truly correct, because when we take a look at the symbolism of a bridge in historical events, globalization is believed to have started when Columbus sailed to the new world and brought western people to America, which can be considered bridging one culture to another. The journey abridged two different poles, Europe and America that is became interconnected one to another.

However, according to Anderson, many of literary works included tree as a symbol of sacredness and life (2), and by understanding his idea, many folklores, stories, movies stated a tree as a something wise and as a dwellings of supernatural beings. By understanding the idea, J.H Philpot believed that there was not a little doubt that most all races in the world have regarded tree as the home of spiritual beings and closely connected with spiritual potencies (qtd. in Anderson 14). In my personal opinion, we can look at the Ydgrassil tree in Nordic Mythology that is believed to have seven branches which leads to different worlds and became sacred to all dwellers of those world. Following his idea, according to Reat, the tree by its nature destined to be a symbol for man; it appears universally in cosmological myths and superstitions: home of supernatural powers, pillar of the sky, and core of the universe (Reat 4).

However, Reat also argued that without water trees would never live because trees are always associated with water, according to him, water is an original symbol of life, the blood of the universe that gives birth to many living creatures (Reat 3). He claimed that the special connection between tree and water is paralleled by the conceptual association, through
verticality, of trees with mountains and rivers. In the same understanding, Herendeen argued that along with the idea of water as the source of life in the universe, a river where water is flowing keeps the idea of the origin of all things in the world (108). By understanding their ideas, the meaning of mountain and river cannot be separated because if the mountain (lots of trees) is the symbol of life and the center of the world, then the river (water) is the source of all life. Finally, I conclude that the meaning of tree, mountain, water and river are always connected with the idea of life, sacredness, and spiritual potency, which allows human to perceive something beyond their understanding in order to get closer to the existence beyond.

As human beings, we sometimes do not understand or realize about how symbols work around us, and perhaps we might not have an adequate understanding to realize it. As in Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*, the broken tree, the river, and the bridge must have certain values in the story whereas, without their appearance, the story would be less meaningful. By understanding Perrine’s idea that a symbol represents a meaning beyond the symbol itself, I am certain that those symbols can help readers to understand the existence beyond their understanding, especially to understand what the symbols mean in Jess Aaron’s life when they read the story.

Moreover, the objective of the study is to understand and reveal the meaning and function of the broken tree, the river and the bridge in Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia* using textual analysis. Textual analysis is the best way to understand the symbols’ representation in the narration, and of course to achieve the goal, which is to read the piece intensely and thoroughly to get a better and more comprehensive meaning in a text. In the end, hopefully, this paper will raise readers’ awareness when they see or read about the symbols of broken tree, river and bridge.
In order to understand the meaning of the symbols found in Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*, the field of semiotics has taken its important place in the discussion. In my personal point of view, it is because semiotic is the root of symbolism, and without the knowledge of semiotics, people might not understand the importance of symbols. Emerging in the 19th century as a systematic way to study signs, both individually and as they appear in groups of symbol systems, semiotic is a broad, cross-disciplinary endeavor that spans fields, such as philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and literature. The name itself originated from the ancient Greek word that has meaning of “mark” or “sign”, from the word *semeion* (Chandler).

Semiotics, the study of signs, was pioneered by the great Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure. He stated that the sign is the association of the signifier with the signified and the relationship between them is called as 'signification'. The sign according to Saussure must have both a signifier and a signified because we cannot have a very meaningful signifier or a completely formless signified (qtd. in Chandler). It means that if there is a signifier, there must be a signified, because they are inseparable, and we can see the connection between signifier and signified through the figure of Saussurean diagram below:
Saussure said that a signifier is commonly interpreted as the material (or physical) form of the sign - it is something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted (qtd. in Chandler). On the top of that, the study of signs is very interesting to discuss because it has contiguity to our life, more importantly, the study of signs has spread to the world of literature. Speaking of which, in a literary world, symbol is more common than sign because of sign is a linguistic term. Symbols are almost the same thing with sign because we often realize a sign also as a symbol and a symbol also as a sign. Wang explains that a symbol is something concrete that represents or stands for something else, usually intangible concept idea. It can be an action, a sound, a thing, a movement. Seeing from the common understanding of symbol that people might understand that a symbol is always representing something that lies beneath the water level, symbol is distinguished into two kinds, conventional and literary symbol (Wang 95). Following his argument, in the one hand, a conventional symbol is a symbol that has been widely understood or accepted. Wang further explained that the heart, for example, is a conventional symbol of love (Wang 95). Besides, in the other hand, a literary symbol is a symbol that has a possibility of multiple interpretations that he further argued that for example, water could be used in the same story as both a redemptive and destructive forces (Wang 95).

Building on Wang’s idea of literary symbol, I should refer back to Perrine’s idea, which she described a literary symbol as something that means more than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other items that has a literal meaning in the story, but suggests or represents other meanings as well (qtd. in Fadaee 20). Drawing a line from what she stated, it is true that in a literary work everything is written and every single words in a story connects one through another to create a whole story and there are some occasions where one word has meaning to tell the hidden meaning in the story.
We should look at some of the universal symbols that we might find in literature such as the sea. According to Gostaniong, sea is the symbol of purity, innocence and sacredness of man (qtd. in Fadaee 20). Moreover, by drawing an understanding from his idea, I argue that, in myths, most of heroes and prophets in their childhoods were overthrown into the sea to become purified. For example, in the prophet Noah, the Al-Quran tells that when Allah was angry to all humankind on the earth because of their sins were unforgivable; Allah the Almighty sent a very terrible flood that covered the land. Noah and his followers sailed on a gigantic ship for many days on the angry ocean until the water was gone and found them on the top of a big mountain. The idea of the terrible flood to punish and purify earth from the sinners in Noah’s time is like the idea that the sea is as a place for someone to purify their life from sins.

In addition, symbol is important because the story of the prophet Noah and his incredible ship comes from the Al-Quran and we know that it consists of constructed words. The symbol of a sea is not only found in the story of Noah and his incredible ship, but it is also mentioned in many stories like Sinbad, Moby Dick or the tale of the lost city Atlantis. In the lost city of Atlantis, it is told that this grandiose city was swept away by a single hit by Poseidon’s power and sunk it to the bottom of the ocean because of the misdeed of its people, and by understanding the meaning of sea, I conclude that the representation of sea in the story was as a purifier (Hefner, "Atlantis: the Myth").

In another point of view, Shamisa classifies symbols in literature into two types: Arbitrary symbols and personal symbols. Arbitrary symbols are those common and familiar ones that the reader simply can recognize their meanings, like stone as symbol of boldness and strength. However, in the other hand, personal symbols are those fresh and new ones, which the writer or the poet newly created, and in contrast to arbitrary symbols, their recognition is maybe
difficult for the reader (qtd. in Fadaee 20). As for the example, Shamisa further explained that a Lion is the symbol of bravery, and in my personal opinion, it synchronizes with the lion in Narnia.

In the same understanding, Rokni, distinguished symbols into four kinds. The first one is significative symbol, and according to him, a significative symbol is an arbitrary symbol that is common in each particular field of study. In another word, everyone generally knows this symbol without requiring a deeper thought, like, for example, the symbol of “@” which is easy to be recognized as a symbol used in email addresses. The second is a metaphoric symbol that is explained as a significant symbol used for natural phenomena, like a lion that is a symbol of courage or an eagle as the symbol of freedom. After the metaphoric symbol, Rokni offered a commemorative symbol, a symbol that adds a real event to a memory (qtd. in Fadaee 20). In the manner of his idea, I argue that the Garuda Wisnu Kencana monument in Kuta Bali is categorized as a commemorative symbol because it commemorates the Kuta bomb incident in 2004, and the monument was built in the exact place where the happening was. The last distinction of symbols offered by Rokni is a sacramental symbol that the symbol is casually used in myths and customs (qtd. in Fadaee 20).

In my views, the classification of symbols into different regions is very important to know because in order to understand what it means, we have to know which kinds of symbols we are dealing with. Moreover, a symbol has different ways to be explained, but however, a symbol is always the representative of ulterior the meanings that in order to understand that, we have to dig hard. Therefore, by absorbing the idea, it is important for readers to read the text closely in order to get the intended understanding from the text, because without it, readers will never know the true meaning.
Summary of the book

The story is about Jess Aarons, a 10-year-old who lived in impoverished surroundings in rural northern Virginia. One morning he met a strange girl who looked like a boy. She was Leslie Burke, who apparently was his new neighbor. Her parents bought old Perkins’ house across the street. Leslie went to the same school as Jess, and soon they became close friends. In the beginning of their wonderful friendship, they decided to look for secret place only for them and finally discovered Terabithia.

After they found their secret places in the woods, both of them became very excited after school and always went to their place to share happiness and joys. It was lamentable that on a spring vacation day, Jess got a phone call from his art/music teacher that asked him to give her company to Washington art galleries. When he came back, his family was gathering in the living room and glad to have him back. Her sister told him that Leslie was killed when the rope they used to swing across the creek (separating the "Kingdom" from the "mainland") broke. In a state of denial, Jess did not believe that and he decided to run to the old Perkins’ house where there were police and people in grieving around Leslie’s house. In a state of unstable emotion, Jess tried deny that his beloved best friend was gone, so he ran as fast as he could to Terabithia only to find the tree that they used to swing was broken.

After going through a period of intense denial and anger because of his loss, Jess began to live with the death of his close friend and fellow "ruler of Terabithia." As the commemoration of his very best friend, he built a bridge over the river so everyone was welcome in safety to come to Terabithia.
The story offers us a view of how a friendship can change everything, including someone’s life. The idea of the bridge in the story is dim to grasp, because readers do not know whether the bridge is intended to abridge the route to Terabithia, or connect between his life in present to the past. Moreover, the idea of the broken tree that took down Leslie and drowned her to death in the river are also confusing because the true representation is still at vague. Frankly, we are not explicitly told about the importance of the meaning of bridge, broken tree, the river or even Jess’s denial in the story, and that is why this paper attempts to apply the underwater phenomena by revealing the meaning of those symbols in the narration.

Discussion

After Leslie’s death, Jess Aarons had a very rough time, because Leslie was such a good friend to him, and he just could not accept the fact that she had already died. M. Tyler Sasser, in his thesis on The Advent of Denial of Death in Children’s Literature argues that “Leslie’s death is immediate, unalterable, and accidental”, which means that the death unexpectedly happened (Sasser 98). Therefore, because of the queen’s sudden and unexpected death, the king was unprepared to experience the real and permanent loss of his friend: “Leslie could not die any more than he himself could die” (Sasser 98).

According to Sasser the thing that made Jess suffers a very great loss is because Leslie was his savior. Sasser stated that, “Jess needs a savior because of his family contemptuously overlooks him and his art. His sisters torment him, his mother constantly pesters him and his father provides him with little attention” (Sasser 94). In other words, Jess had very little attention from his family. He was being neglected and his family did not care about what he wanted. In
my opinion, when Leslie came to his life, she brought a new wave that changed every part of his life. However, Misheff argued that, “Leslie creates a safe place for Jess and herself from her imaginative powers. She chooses a secluded spot in the woods, and although Jess helps with the building, it is Leslie who names the place, creates a language to be used there, and defines their roles in Terabithia” (Misheff, qtd. in Sasser 95).

By comparing their arguments, I conclude that both of the characters had some kind of mutual tendency to express their feeling and imagination. In the one hand, Leslie was somewhat hard to socialize with her school environment that stamped her as a weird girl, because she had a boy haircut and did not look like a girl. In the other hand, Jess was somewhat reserved to people around him because his family always neglected him. Their meeting in the barn was the beginning of their relationship, and the time when they found the tree on the side of the riverbank, was the beginning of their bond.

The tree they discovered in the first place before entering the woods (Terabithia) had some kind of symbolism toward their bond. It is because after they found the tree, they discovered the passage to Terabithia. Following Reat’s argument, a tree has been some kind of link between two worlds throughout Earth and history (2). Moreover, and in the case of Terabithia, the tree became the symbol of a link that connected Jess and Leslie to their imaginary place.

The meaning of the tree in the narration also appeared in a form of something that connects human mind to their thought beyond understanding that, according to Reat, a tree is a tool that the wise always used to turn humans’ mind to overstep their usual cogitation (Reat 2). By understanding the idea, I can presume that in one side, Leslie was the wise person in the
narration, because she was the one who created and claimed the tree as the passage to Terabithia by swinging over the river. In the other side, Jess was the ordinary human that was being shaped by the wise. In the narration, Jess confessed that Leslie was more than everything for him, because she was his other more exciting self - his way to Terabithia and all the worlds beyond (44; ch. 4).

The appearance of the tree in the narration also turned up in the depiction of the woods Leslie claimed as Terabithia. In one side, Jess thought the tree was as mysterious as diving under the water and unconsciously, he felt unsure of getting in (39; ch. 4). His feeling of uncertainty to enter further to the woods was synchronized with the idea of the tree as a home of supernatural powers that stated by Reat (2). Contrasting the idea, Emberson stated that the tree(s) is a symbol of strength, continuity and family (336), which from the narration, Jess and Leslie were the rulers of Terabithia (the woods) and possessed a power to overcome fear. In addition, the relationship between them somehow became closer than a friend and more to become like a family, because when they were in school, they tried to look for a quiet place far from crowd to talk (43; ch. 4).

Moreover, by concluding all the examples of the possible meaning of tree in the narration, I would like to emphasize that the meaning of tree is a very broad topic to talk about in this paper. Otherwise, I found it interesting that the tree that they used to use to swing across to Terabithia was broken and caused Leslie’s death. She was drowned in the river and died. The meaning of the broken tree in the narration contrasts the idea of tree as a source of life, so when the tree is broken, it can infer to something related to death. According to Emberson “the idea of the broken tree as something that represents separation, disunity, destruction and families at odds with other families or divided within themselves” (336). From the narration, Leslie’s death was such a big punch to Jess because they were united when they found the tree as the passage to
their secret and imaginary place, Terabithia. As it synchronizes with Emberson’s idea that the tree they used as the passage was accidentally broken and caused Leslie death (155; ch. 10), the broken tree in the narration disunited their closeness because of the death of the loved one.

Suffering from the death of his best friend and family, Jess had some kind of denial that led him to suffer more pain of loss. According to Sasser, Jess was neither shocked nor sad when he heard the news, but instead he showed denial. He describes that the moment when Jess walks in the kitchen, he immediately notices that something is amiss. His mother is trembling, begins to sob repeatedly “O my God. O my God” (154; ch. 10). After a few seconds, his sister, Brenda, blurts out “Your girl friend’s dead, and Momma thought you was dead too” (154; ch. 10). Moreover, his father bluntly adds, “They found the Burke girl this morning down in the creek” (155; ch. 10). The news was unexpected and shocking to Jess because he has just experienced a perfect day, but it ended in grieving for Leslie.

In a state of denial that Leslie could not possibly die and leave him alone in either real life or Terabithia, Jess was introduced to the real life of adults (Sasser 101). In a contrasting idea that, the life Jess and Leslie had in Terabithia had been such a perfect imaginary life without grief, loss and always full of togetherness, the idea of perfect life that Jess imagined was turned upside down because of Leslie’s sudden death. According to Sasser, “As a result of believing all the terrors of the world disappear in Terabithia, when tragedy occurs, Jess quickly turns to denial” (101) as the form of the denial is mentioned in the narration:

"…No!" Jess was yelling now. "I don't believe you. You're lying to me!" He looked around again wildly for someone to agree. But they all had their heads down except May Belle, whose eyes were wide with terror. But, Leslie, what if you die...”

(103; ch. 11)
For a ten-year-old boy like Jess, it must have been hard for him to accept the fact, even though his family seemed not joking about the news, but he still denied the truth. Jess decided to run as if it could cancel Leslie’s death and bring her to life again (104; ch. 11). The idea of Jess running to bring back Leslie from the dead is similar with Sasser’s argument that children mostly are unaware about the idea of death and they do not get the matters. Following his idea about factors that caused children denial, Sasser argued that when children face someone’s death, mostly those who are close to them, they would tend to promote avoidance and denial of the finality of death, and of feelings in relation to it (101). His point of view is similar with Chaston who stated that Jess is unprepared for the “purposeless” and “accidental” death of Leslie and as such, lack of preparation and understanding further fuels his denial (qtd. in Sasser 98).

Leslie and Jess were really close to each other when she was alive, and that made Jess turned to denial after knowing the truth of her death. However, although he denied the news because he believed that Leslie would never die, through the narration, Jess unconsciously began to accept the truth. He was confessing his guilt of not asking Leslie to come along to Washington in the night after he received the grief news. In my personal opinion, this acceptance was unconsciously struck Jess because, after trying to avoid the fact that Leslie has actually gone for forever, Jess would definitely reach the acceptance of reality.

Moreover, the hard days of accepting Leslie’s death seemed to dim slightly, and Jess began to absorb the truth. There was a time when Jess picked up the Christmas gift, which Leslie had given to him, and brought it to the side of the creek. Jess’s expression of accepting Leslie’s death is shown intentionally by allowing the paints and papers to drift away (115; ch. 12), which must have been hard for Jess.
“... He screamed something without words and flung the papers and paints into the dirty brown water. The paints floated on top, riding the current like a boat, but the papers swirled about, soaking in the muddy water, being sucked down, around, and down. He watched them all disappear...”

(115; ch. 12)

However, when Jess flung the papers and paints in the water and watched them being sucked down and disappearing shows how complicated the feeling was before Jess could accept the truth. By understanding the acceptance, I noticed that the river in the narration has some kind of meaning for Jess. Through Joseph Panek’s point of view toward the meaning of a river, I am having a notion that that the river in the narration was a boundary (Panek, “The meaning of river-part 1”), which a river is actually separating two places and become an edge those places. Furthermore, I am interested in Panek’s concept of a river as a transcendence passage (Panek, “The meaning of river-part 1”), which a river is carrying something and passing it to another part of the river because of the stream is always flowing. By understanding the two distinctions of the meaning of river in the narration, I am certain that there must be a connection between Leslie’s death, being drowned in the river, and Jess’s acceptance of flinging over the gift to disappear in the stream.

"You can never step into the same river; for new waters are always flowing on to you."

-Heraclitus of Ephesus-

According to Panek, a river has represented natural borders since the beginning of time (Panek, “The meaning of river-part 1”), and the river in the narration was exactly a boundary between their village and Terabithia. By synchronizing his idea, the meaning of a river as a natural border is seen when Jess and Leslie went to Terabithia on the rainy day and the water was
depicted as awful as the disaster in the water came rushing into the dry path of Moses and swept away all the Egyptians (88; ch. 9).

“…When they got to the bank of the creek, they stopped. It was an awesome sight. Like in The Ten Commandments on TV when the water came rushing into the dry path Moses had made and swept all the Egyptians away, the long dry bed of the creek was a roaring eightfoot-wide sea, sweeping before it great branches of trees, logs, and trash, swirling them about like so many Egyptian chariots, the hungry waters licking and sometimes leaping the banks, daring them to try to confine it…”

(88; ch. 9)

By understanding the quotation above, I infer that the river can represent a boundary between two places, but in another point of view, the depiction of a river can also be a sacred passage to the world beyond. According to Panek, in his idea of river as a symbol of transcendence brought up by the myth of Charon, the man who brought human souls to the realm of the afterlife in the ancient Greek mythology (Panek, “The meaning of river-part 1”). I verify that when Jess plucked down the gift from Leslie to the water and watched them all disappear was some kind of disengaging from past memories. In my personal point of view, the disengagement seemed personal for Jess and by doing so he can let go of Leslie’s death. I am certain that the meaning of a river in the narration also can be a cycle of life, which lets the past go and in Jess Aaron’s case, it has changed his life.

Looking back to Jess’s old life before he met Leslie, his family neglected him and even his older sisters never respected him. In the contrary, after Leslie died, everything changed in Jess’s life, his sisters became gentle to him, his dad and mom paid more attention to him and everyone seemed to be more caring, even Janice Avery and Mrs. Myers (116; ch. 13). In my view, the changing in Jess’s life synchronizes with Panek’s idea that a river is a cycle of life, which is refashioning old life to new one, and in the Jess’s case, it changes everyone’s reaction
to him after he let go of the Christmas gift, which disappears in the stream. Thus, the connection between Leslie’s death and Jess’s acceptance by drifting away the Christmas gift in the river is bringing a new wave to Jess. This wave empowered him to face reality and to overcome fear by himself without someone helping him.

By summarizing the previous discussions about the meaning of tree and river from the narration, I emphasize that the meaning of tree and river are so vast to cover. However, from the narration, the meaning of the broken tree is contrasting the idea of a tree in general, which provides a relation to death and disunity instead of life and unity. Moreover, the meaning of river in the narration is synchronized with Joseph Panek’s idea that river can have a meaning as a natural boundary or as a cycle of life in a fact that a stream will not remain the same. Thus, the idea of the stream is that it always moving forward, which relates to the idea of Charon, the man who brought death to the afterlife by canoeing through the stream of stygian river. The discussions about the meaning of tree and river in the narration are important to know because the narration mainly deals with those things. By understanding the meanings of those two, I hope that reader will understand how the tree and river take part in the narration. Last but not the least, the tree and river in the narration are actually bonded to another form in the narration, the form that built the story in such way so it can be called as Bridge to Terabithia.

To cross a bridge, a river or a border is to leave behind the familiar, personal and comfortable and enter the unknown, a different and strange world where, faced with another reality, we may well find ourselves bereft of home and identity.

—Jean-Pierre Vernant—
In the narration, the idea of building the bridge happened after Jess accepted Leslie’s death. He came after school bringing lumber and carrying a couple of boards at a time to the creek bank (127; ch. 13), and began to make the bridge. According to Badescu, the history of bridge is so old to trace back in time because every bridge in this world has its own stories (1), and the bridge in *Bridge to Terabithia* must have its own story. Jess would not have built the bridge without a reason; he must have built the bridge for purpose, because, by referring back to the previous discussion, Leslie meant everything for him.

However, the first thing that I noticed from the narration about the meaning of the bridge is that it has a commemorative meaning. According to Rokni, a commemorative symbol is a symbol to commemorate something, someone, or happenings with something that will always be remembered (qtd. in Fadaee 20). In my personal point of view and understanding about the novel, the place where Jess built the bridge was at the exact location where the broken tree was, and it connects to the Terabithia, his place with Leslie. Moreover, in the narration it is said that when Jess brought lumbers and boards, “He put the two longest pieces across at the narrow place upstream from the crab apple tree, and when he was sure they were as firm and even as he could make them, he began to nail on the crosspieces” (127; ch. 13).

By understanding the discussion, the reason Jess built the bridge in the one hand was to commemorate the place where Leslie died. In the other hand, the meaning of bridge in the narration also can be a safe connector between one place to another place that is separated by something. Following this idea, Badescu points out that a bridge can be something that connects two worlds, and brings those two worlds nearer to each other (1), in another comprehension, the meaning of bridge in *Bridge to Terabithia* was to bring Terabithia and the place where Jess lived become nearer and granted with safety.
By synchronizing her idea that the meaning of a bridge can be a safe connector between two places, I notice that Jess got the idea to build the bridge when he helped his sister May Belle who was hanging on the side of the broken tree that crossed the riverbank. In a state of just losing Leslie who fell and drowned because of the broken tree, Jess eagerly saved his sister because he did not want to lose someone close to him anymore.

"I'm right here, May Belle. You think I'm gonna let you fall? Here." He put out his right hand. "Hold on to me and slide sideways on the thing."

She let go with her left hand for a moment and then grabbed the branch again.

"I'm scared, Jesse. I'm too scared."

"Course you're scared. Anybody'd be scared. You just gotta trust me, OK? I'm not gonna let you fall, May Belle. I promise you."

(121; ch. 13)

The reason why Jess eagerly wanted to save May Belle was because he should have done the same thing to Leslie when she drowned. Fortunately, when May Belle almost fell down to the river from the broken tree, Jess was there to help her and unfortunately, he wished that he was there too when Leslie fell so he could help her like he helped May Belle. However, what happened in the past, stays in the past and according to Badescu a bridge can be a sentimental passage between past and present (1), and in the case of Bridge to Terabithia, it becomes a passage that made Jess learn from his mistake in the past.

By understanding how a bridge can be a sentimental passage between past and present, I noticed that it was written when Jess and Prince Terrin visited Terabithia, he could feel the atmosphere that Terabithia never changed (119; ch. 12). It has not changed even though he came there without Leslie. Following Badescu’s opinion that a bridge can be a passage between life
and death (1), I am certain that, by building the bridge to Terabithia, Jess wanted to always be close to Leslie. Moreover, I can say that the bridge that Jess built has the utility to offer such a way that can connect him with Leslie. Hence, Terabithia was once their playground, a place to share happiness, a place to share feelings and a place to overcome fear. Even though Leslie has died in the “real world” where Jess still breathes the air and is growing up, Jess believed that Leslie’s presence would never disappear in Terabithia.

**Conclusion**

A symbol always has meaning to someone regarding something, and in order to understand the meaning, it is required to think critically beyond mainstream. After all, a same symbol doesn’t always have the same meaning for everyone, because each person perceives symbols from different sides. By understanding that, the meaning of the broken tree, river and bridge in Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia* also works in the same way, so other researchers might value it differently. The meaning of the broken tree in the narration is as a symbol of a disunity in Jess and Leslie’s friendship because before the tree is broken, they used it to swing across to Terabithia where they were united as a friend or family. So, when the tree broke, Jess was disunited from Leslie and had to live alone without her.

The river in the narration is a symbol of transendence passage and boundary, like when Jess plunged the precious Christmas gift from Leslie to the river and let it disappears. Even though it was hard for him, he started to accept the loss after he suffered the intense denial. Moreover, Terabithia and the rural neighborhood where Jess lived was naturally separated by the river, which can be interpreted as the boundary of those places.
The meaning of bridge is as a safe connector from the rural neighborhood to Terabithia, because it is written Jess’s little sister May Belle almost fell when she followed Jess into the woods. In the state of just losing Leslie, Jess was aware of losing someone close to him again, and so he was inspired with the idea to build the bridge that will grant safety to anyone who wants to cross it. The bridge in the narration also can be a sentimental passage from past to present, which is implicitly stated that when Jess arrived at Terabithia, he could sense the presence of the Queen, as if Leslie did not die in there. Arguably, the bridge is bridging his past life to life at present.

After all the discussion, the meaning of symbols found are really important for readers to know because by understanding the meaning of symbols can help readers to understand the narration better. By understanding Semiotic and Symbolism in literary criticism, readers will achieve the goal to comprehend the meaning of symbols found in a literary works or in a real life condition. Readers will be aware and think critically of the presence of symbols in their life in order to understand something beyond their understanding and existence.

Branching from my research about the meaning of the Broken Tree, River, and Bridge in Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*, I strongly hope that in the future research this paper will be helpful and useful for other researchers when they do another focus analysis like the depiction of Leslie Burke as a female character through feminist perspectives or Jess Aaron’s denial through Psychoanalism on *Bridge to Terabithia*. 
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