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Narrative Structure in Megg Shaffer's *The Wishing Game*

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Abstract. *The Wishing Game* with a focus on the psychological transformation of the main character, Lucy Hart, in her struggle to become a mother. The problems raised in this study are how the phases of narrative structure according to Tzvetan Todorov's theory form the tension of the story and character development, as well as how Lucy experiences the transformation of identity as a mother through her narrative experience. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with structuralism and psychological approaches. Data were collected from the text of the novel and analyzed with reference to Todorov's theory of narrative structure, the theory of matresence by Dr. Aurelie Athan, and the theory of narrative identity by Dan P. McAdams. The analysis shows that Todorov's five stage narrative structure of equilibrium, disruption, recognition, attempt to repair, and new equilibrium forms the flow of Lucy's character development gradually. Disruption occurs when Lucy fails to adopt Christopher due to economic conditions, which triggers inner conflict and the urge to change. Her attempt to repair is seen in her participation in a competition that symbolizes her struggle as a mother to be. Matresence theory shows that Lucy experiences an emotional and identity transition towards motherhood, even though it is not yet legal. Meanwhile, through McAdams narrative identity theory, it is revealed that Lucy rewrites her life narrative from a past full of wounds to a story of love, hope and forgiveness. The conclusion of this research is that the narrative structure in *The Wishing Game* not only functions as a series of events, but also as a place for the emotional development and identity of the main character.

Keywords : narrative Identities, narrative Structure, psychological transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Narrative structure is an important element in literary works because it serves to organize the storyline, shape the characters, and convey the author's message coherently.¹² In Meg Shaffer's *The Wishing Game* (2023), narrative structure not only provides chronological order to the storyline, but also builds emotional tension and guides the development of the main character, Lucy Hart, throughout the story. The theory of narrative structure developed by Tzvetan Todorov divides narratives into five main stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition of the problem, attempted repair, and new equilibrium. In *The Wishing Game*, these five stages are evident in Lucy's journey from a stable and limited life to a significant emotional and psychological transformation. In addition to the narrative structure, Lucy's emotional and psychological experience as a mother figure is a key component of this analysis.

To explore this dimension, this study uses Dr. Aurelie Athan's theory of matrescence, which defines motherhood as a process of psychosocial development, not just a biological or legal status. Lucy's identity is also analyzed through narrative identity theory proposed by Dan P. McAdams. McAdams states that identity is formed through personal life stories that individuals construct to make sense of their experiences. By combining Todorov's narrative structure, Athan's concept of matrescence, and McAdams' theory of narrative identity, this study aims to examine how the story structure shapes character development and how Lucy Hart undergoes transformation as an individual and as a mother.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research refers to three theories that become the basis for analyzing the narrative structure and psychological development of the main character in the novel *The Wishing Game*, the main theory is the narrative structure of Tzvetan Todorov, the second is the theory of matrescence from Dr. Aurelie Athan, and the theory of narrative identity from Dan P. McAdams. Tzvetan Todorov (1971) suggests that narratives in literary works generally follow a pattern of five stages, namely: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, attempt to repair, and new equilibrium. This theory is useful for mapping the development of the storyline and the transformation of the main character from the beginning to the end of the story. In the context of this novel, each stage helps identify the psychological changes and motivations of Lucy as the protagonist. Furthermore, Dr. Aurelie Athan (2020) introduced the concept of matrescence, which is the psychological and emotional process that women experience when entering motherhood. Athan emphasized that motherhood is not only a biological process, but also involves changes in identity, inner conflicts, and profound adjustments. In Lucy's case, matrescence is seen in her struggle to establish a maternal identity even though she is not the legal or biological mother. Meanwhile, Dan P. McAdams' (2019) narrative identity theory states that individuals form self-identities through narratives or life stories that they build themselves. Through these narratives, a person gives meaning to past experiences, personal conflicts, and future life goals. In this novel, Lucy rebuilds her self identity by transforming a story of past wounds into a story of healing and hope through her struggles. These three theories Todorov's narrative structure, Athan's matrescence, and McAdams' narrative identity complement each other in analyzing the main character's transformation structurally and psychologically. They show that the storyline is not just a series of events, but also a reflection of the main character's inner growth process.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. The main data source is the novel *The Wishing Game* (2023) by Meg Shaffer. The data includes dialog, narration, and events relating to Todorov's five stages of structure, supported by Lucy's internal development through Athan and McAdams' theory. The data was collected through careful reading, annotated based on thematic stages and functions, and analyzed using structural and psychological approaches.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes narrative structure of the novel *The Wishing Game*, based on Tzvetan Todorov's theory and Lucy Hart's identity transformation as a mother. The analysis also employs Dr. Aurelie Athan's theory of matrescence and Dan P. McAdams's concept of narrative identity to highlight the main character's psychological transformation.

Equilibrium

This section, the story begins with Lucy Hart living a stable life as a preschool teacher's assistant. Although her life seems orderly, she desperately wants to be the mother of a boy named Christopher. However, her situation does not allow for this due to financial constraints and her legal status.

Disruption

In this stage, the disruption stage refers to when the initial equilibrium is disrupted by an event that changes the course of the narrative. Lucy's sense of balance in life began to falter when her desire to adopt Christopher was rejected. This rejection was not due to a lack of love, but rather her financial inability and inadequate living conditions to adopt a child. At the same time, she had the opportunity to participate in a competition organized by a famous author named Jack Masterson on an island offering a prize in the form of a valuable book that could change her fate.

Recognition

In this stage is when the main character, Lucy Hart, begins to realize that her life is being disrupted by an inevitable conflict. In *The Wishing Game*, this realization comes when Lucy understands that love and affection alone are not enough to legally adopt Christopher. She begins to realize that the obstacles she faces are not only external factors, such as the adoption system and financial limitations, but also internal factors, including fear, past trauma, and doubts about her ability as a prospective mother.

Lucy no longer lives in hope alone she begins to accept the reality that to become a mother, she must meet certain requirements that she has not yet achieved. This process of awareness becomes an emotional turning point that shapes a new resolve within her. Therefore, the introduction stage in the narrative structure plays a crucial role as a reflective moment that drives the main character to transition from passive acceptance to active pursuit of her maternal identity.

Attempt to Repair

In this attempt to repair stage where the main character, Lucy Hart, begins to take concrete actions to resolve the existing conflict. In *The Wishing Game*, this phase is reflected through Lucy Hart's active efforts to win custody of Christopher by participating in a competition organized by Jack Masterson. Lucy's participation in the game is not only to win the prize but also to prove that she is worthy of being a mother, both emotionally and morally.

During the competition, Lucy demonstrates perseverance, resilience, and sacrifice, which are hallmarks of the maternal figure that has developed through matrescence. Every challenge she faces reflects the internal and external struggles she undergoes for a better future for herself and Christopher. According to Todorov's theory, this phase is the primary driving force toward a new equilibrium, as it is here that the protagonist truly fights for change and takes control of her own destiny. Therefore, the effort to improve oneself becomes the core of Lucy's transformation, both narratively and psychologically.

New Equilibrium

This section explains and analyzes the forms of final the stage in *The Wishing Game*, this stage is marked by Lucy Hart's success in winning the competition on Jam Island, which opens up opportunities for her to realize her dream of becoming Christopher's mother. The new equilibrium that has been formed not only shows the achievement of external goals, but also reflects Lucy's internal transformation. She is no longer in a passive position limited by circumstances she has developed into a more emotionally and psychologically mature person. The struggles she has endured have shaped her new identity as a mother, not only legally but also personally and narratively. With the formation of this new equilibrium, the story structure does not return to its original state but moves toward a more meaningful and stable condition. This phase also affirms that Lucy's journey is a process of identity reconstruction rooted in love, struggle, and personal growth, as emphasized in the theories of matrescence and narrative identity.

Matrescence Process

Dr. Aurelie Athan introduced the term "matrescence" to describe the psychosocial development process experienced by women in transition to motherhood. This concept emphasizes that becoming a mother involves more than just a biological or social status change it is also a complex, ongoing process of emotional, identity, and self meaning transformation. Lucy's experiences illustrate matrescence, the psychological and emotional transition a woman undergoes on her journey to becoming a mother. Although Lucy is not yet legally recognized as a mother, her attitudes, thoughts, and actions demonstrate the emotional maturity of a caregiver. She shows sacrifice, love, and the ability to prioritize her child's needs over her own. This process involves a profound transformation of identity due not only to her social role, but also to her emotional involvement.

Narrative Identity

Personality psychologist Dan P. McAdams introduced the concept of narrative identity, which explains that a person's identity is shaped not only by personality traits or social roles, but also by how individuals construct and narrate their life stories. From this perspective, identity is viewed as a narrative individuals create to give meaning to past experiences, understand present circumstances, and imagine the future. Lucy's identity as a mother is shaped by the life narrative she has constructed for herself. Her painful and rejection filled past forms the backdrop that shapes her views on love and family. Through her struggle to adopt Christopher, Lucy rewrites her life story. She no longer sees herself as a victim of the past but as someone with purpose, hope, and a deep love.

This process reflects the concept of narrative identity, in which individuals make sense of their lives by constructing stories based on their experiences, challenges, and dreams.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this analysis of *The Wishing Game* adheres to Tzvetan Todorov's five stage model: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, an attempt to restore equilibrium, and a new equilibrium. These stages systematically shape the plot and reflect the psychological development of the main character, Lucy Hart, as she struggles to become a mother. Lucy's transition into motherhood can be understood through the concept of matrescence, proposed by Dr. Aurelie Athan. Matrescence suggests that becoming a mother is a complex and profound identity journey, even if it is not based on legal or biological status. Additionally, Dan P. McAdams's narrative identity theory portrays Lucy as a character who rewrites her life story, transforming it from one of past trauma into a narrative filled with hope, love, and meaning as a mother. Thus, *The Wishing Game* presents an entertaining fictional story while addressing emotional and existential issues relevant to real life, particularly the meaning of motherhood and shaping one's identity through personal narrative.

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