

**Plot Structures in a Novel Entitled the Suitcase Kid Written by Jacqueline Wilson (An Analysis with a Narratological Approach)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This present research aims to analyze the plot structures in Jacqueline Wilson's novel entitled *The Suitcase Kid* (1992) by using Narratology. This qualitative research focuses on the plot of the story in order to analyze how the plot of the story is structured in the novel and to construct the meaning that can be made from the structure of the plot. The findings of this research reveal that the plot of the story is structured like a tree. The plot is developed by a major plot which gives ways for five interrelated plots and forms a story with branching plots. The finding indicates that there are two potential meaning which originated by the structure of the plot. Firstly, the story with branching plots elevates the level of suspense to the reader. Secondly, the set of events in the novel indicates that *The Suitcase Kid* can be considered as a Bildungsroman novel.

**Keywords:** *Plot structures, narratology, bildungsroman*

## INTRODUCTION

When we discuss narrative, we often associate it with stories that come in different forms, such as myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, history, tragedy, comedy, even movies, local news, and conversations (Barthes, 2008). The study about narrative is called Narratology. Narratology (Fr. *narratologie*; Ger. *Erzähltheorie*) can be described as “the science of narrative” and it is firstly introduced by Tzvetan Todorov in his book *Grammaire du “De’came’ron,”* in 1969 (Herman, 2005, p.19). Narratology is the theory of narratives, narratives texts, images, and events that “tell a story” and it constructed to understand, analyze, and examine narratives (Bal, 1997, p.3).

Fludernik (2009) describes Narratology as the study of narrative as a genre which aims to describe the constants, variables, and combinations typical of narrative and to define how these characteristics of narrative texts associate within the framework of the theory. Fludernik (2009) implied that there are two kinds of narrative structures to

analyze how the story is narrated in the novel. The first structure is external narrative structure which includes the title of page of a book, the comment about the book, short excerpts from reviews, notes about the author and his/her other works, tables of content, forewords, editorial comments, and bibliographies. The second structure is internal narrative structure which includes implied author and implied reader, functions of the narrator, narrative frame, plot, time, presentational modes (telling and showing), and focalization.

Many studies were conducted by using Narratology. Patton (2010) who analyzes Sherwood Anderson’s works entitled *Poor White* (1921), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1922), and *Dark Laughter* (1925). By using Narratology, the study reveals the connection between Anderson’s storytelling techniques and the story’s frame. The study indicates that Anderson tries a different narrative method, choosing the narrator’s perspective and presence within the story that will best reflect what the characters are experiencing.

From the study above, it can be seen that Narratology can be used to examine the way the story is narrated. This present study analyzes the way the story is narrated through the plot structures of a novel and to discover the meaning that can be made from the structure of the plot. According to Fludernik (2009), plot in a story is understood as sequence of events which consist of a beginning, a middle, and an end. It also creates suspense as a result of complications in the middle part that are cleared up when the conflicts are resolved in the end of the story.

This present study uses Narratology as a theory proposed by Fludernik (2009) to analyze a novel entitled *The Suitcase Kid* (1992) by Jacqueline Wilson. Jacqueline Wilson has written more than seventy books for young reader and won the Children's Book of the Year Award for *The Suitcase Kid*. The novel has the potential to be examined because of its unique plot structures.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Narratology**

In analyzing the plot structures in *The Suitcase Kid*, this study uses Narratology theory proposed by Fludernik (2009). Narratology is used to examine the plot structures in the novel and discover the meaning that can be drawn from the structure of the plot.

Narratology or can be described as a narrative theory is the study of narrative as a genre which aims to describe the constant, variables, and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of the theoretical models (Fludernik, 2009). According to Fludernik (2009), there are two kinds of narrative structures to analyze how a story is narrated in a novel. The first structure is external narrative structure which analyzes the title of page of a book, the comment about the book on the back cover, short excerpts from reviews on the first pages, notes about the author and his/her other works, tables of content, forewords, editorial comments, and bibliographies

The second structure is internal narrative structure which focuses on implied author and implied reader, functions of the narrator, frame narratives, plot, time, presentational modes and focalization (Fludernik, 2009). However, since the present study is conducted to reveal how the plot of the story is structured in Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid*, therefore, this study specifically uses the internal narrative structure that focuses on plot which include the narrator who sets the plot of a story.

### **The Narrator**

A narrative consists of someone who narrates an event to someone else. If narrative is a report of an act or event, we need a reporter behind it; if it is a tale, we need a teller (Margolin, 2009). In a written narrative, a person who tells the words of the story is called a narrator. A narrator is someone who recounts a sequence of events that happen to the characters in the story. Fludernik (2009) states that a narrator is a figure in a plot who describes the fictional world from his/her perspective.

Fludernik (2009) suggests three types of narrator which are first-person narrator, second-person narrator, and third-person narrator. The first-person narrator can be described as someone who narrates what he or she experiences or someone who stands apart from the world of the characters in the text and tells the story from his or her perspectives (Fludernik, 2009). First-person narrator can be recognized by the embodied 'I'. Moreover, Fludernik (2009) states that the first-person narrator is portrayed in considerable detail, such as a description of his or her physical appearance, she or he takes an active part in the story, a personal history, and a gender which is clearly indicated in the text.

In the other hand, second-person narrator can be found in a narrative text which tells the story of a narratee. Narratee (Fr. *narrataire*; Ger. *Leserfigur*) is the intrafictional addressee of the narrator's discourse (Fludernik, 2009). The second-person narrator is a particularly interesting case in a fictional world. In addition to this, Abbott (2002) states that there

have been a few experiments in narratives by using second-person narrator, such as Michel Butor's *La Modification* (1957) and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979). The works are notable achievements, but there has not been much enthusiasm to apply second-person narrator.

The last is the third-person narrator. Third-person narrator or can be described as heterodiegetic is a narrator who acts as the producer of a narrative text. Fludernik (2009) states that a heterodiegetic narrator can be signaled by the use of first-person singular pronoun (I), direct addresses to a narrate, the use of evaluative expressions (the poor fisherman, the odious fellow) and of expressive words and phrases such as 'To be sure or By God!' as well as metanarrative comments, such as 'Now, let us see what has been happening to poor Henry'.

A narrator either he or she acting as a first-person narrator, second-person narrator, or third-person narrator has an important role in a narrative text. The narrator does not only recount the events which are

happened in the story, but also become the one who determine the plot of the story.

### **The Plot**

In a narrative text, a plot is understood as a sequence of events that has a beginning, complication, climax, and resolution. The plot normally creates suspense as a result of complications in the middle part that are cleared up when the complications are resolved at the end of the work (Fludernik, 2009). Moreover, Barry (2002) states that plot may begin somewhere in the middle of a sequence of events, and may then backtrack or a flashback which tells the event that happened earlier, or a flashforward which tells the event that will happen later on.

Most of narrative texts concerned with the sequence of events as a characteristics feature of narrated worlds (Fludernik, 2009). Some of the narratives rely almost exclusively on the reader's interest in what happens next and what happens afterwards, but then the primary concern in narrative is not only the sequence of events but also the fictional worlds in which the

characters in the story live, act, think, and feel (Fludernik, 2009). Therefore, it can be assumed that the plot of a story is determined by the way the characters live, act, think, and feel in order to construct the sequence of events (beginning, complication, climax, and resolution) of the story.

Bell (2004) states that a beginning of a story is always about the who of the story where the entry point is the main character, and the writer should begin by connecting the reader to the main character as quickly as possible.

In order to introduce the main characters, Fludernik (2009) several types of opening that can be applied to introduce the main characters in a story which are emic opening and etic opening. The emic opening introduces the characters by an indefinite article and a modifying phrase, for example “Once upon a time a rich farmer lived in a small town”. The indefinite reference is followed by the use of the definite article and/or a proper name “The farmer’s name was George and he had three daughters, the youngest and most beautiful of whom was called

Arabella”. These references (‘daughter’, ‘the youngest of whom’) help the reader to recognize the characters who appear in the story (Fludernik, 2009).

On the other hand, in the etic opening it is common to give a name with no accompanying explanation, the use of pronouns without antecedents and noun phrases with definite articles before any people or objects have been properly introduced by indefinite ones (Fludernik, 2009).

Most of the plot in narrative texts consist of the beginning, complication, climax, and resolution. Generally, the complication and climax are called the middle part of a plot and the resolution is called the end part of a plot. Therefore, it may be assumed that a narrative consists of three stages of event which are the beginning, middle, and end.

The middle of a story can be defined as everything that happens in the story after the introduction of the main characters or the conflict and it appears before the climax of the story (Kress, 1993). Ideally, the middle of a story consists of some incidents that increase conflict, reveal character,

and put in place all of the various forces that will collide at the story's climax (Kress, 1993). In addition to this, Bell (2004) states that a middle part consists of the scenes that stretch the suspense, raise the stakes, keep the reader worried, and bring the suspense to the climax in ways that seem inevitable.

Suspense itself is the result of the conflicts or complications in the middle part of a story. Suspense is created when concrete events are anticipated, and the reader is curious as to how the events come about (Fludernik, 2009).

A middle part of a story also takes an essential part in order to trigger reader's curiosity regarding the issues that happen to the characters in the story. After encountering a number of conflicts that appeared in the middle part, it is the time for the story to move to the higher level which is called the climax.

According to Kress (1993), climax is the culmination of the event that brings collision for all the forces that have been set up. If the problem is going to get solved, this is where

the protagonist solves it, for instance, the climax is where the villain makes his last big fight, the lovers are united, the family tension finally explodes, the quest reaches its goal, the decisive confrontation occurs, and so on (Kress, 1993).

The last sequence of event of a story is the resolution. The resolution or it may be called as the ending part of a story comprises of the conclusion regarding all of the events, incidents, problems, or issues that happen in the story. The resolution can also be called as the denouement which describes the end result of the situation that happen in the story. Kress (1993) states that everything that appears after the climax is called the denouement, whose functions are to wrap out the story, to indicate the consequences of the plot, and to show the fate of particular character in the story.

There are various techniques that can be employed to construct a plot in order to guide the reader throughout the story line, to help the reader interprets the events that happen in the story, and make the reader experiences someone else's

life. However, narrative texts tend to have different techniques to construct its feature especially the plot. Bell (2004) states that it is impossible to get specific way about plot techniques because every plot is going to be different.

Although the narrative plot is different, every plot has its own objective as the aim to make a story becomes more interesting and can be regarded as a good story because of the plot structure. Bell (2004) also states that a good story transports its reader to a new place via experience, not through arguments or facts, but through the illusion that life is taking place on the page, not the reader's life, but the characters' lives.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study attempts to analyze the plot structures in a novel entitled *The Suitcase Kid*. The study analyzes the data with a qualitative approach. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a qualitative design is a suitable approach to understand and discover any phenomenon. In addition, Cormack (1993) suggests that a qualitative approach is an

approach to examine and produce descriptive data whether it is spoken or written words of people. The study was guided by using Narratology as theory proposed by Fludernik (2009). Narratology provides tools to analyze literary elements in a narrative text, such as plot, setting, character, focalization, and the narrator. This study focuses on the plot of the story in order to analyze how the plot of the story is structured in the novel and to construct the meaning that can be made from the structure of the plot.

In terms of data collection, the data were collected from the chain of plots of the story which consists of the sequence of events (beginning, complication, climax, and resolution). Subsequently, the data were analyzed to decide the major plot of the story which gives ways to other interrelated plots. Leggett (as cited in Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1997) suggests that plot in a story tends to come in series because each of the plot is linked to what happened before and what happened afterwards. Hence, the data were also collected by analyzing the sequence of events of each plot in order to find out the relationship



between each event that happened in the story. The data were analyzed by using Fludernik's (2009) Narratology to examine how the plot of the story is structured in the novel as well as to find the meaning that can be made from the structure of the plot.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The following section presents findings and followed by the discussions in order to answer the research questions: 1) how is the plot of the story structured in *The Suitcase Kid* and (2) what meanings can be made from the structure of the plot with reference to Narratology. The findings revealed that the plot of the story in the novel is developed by a major plot which gives ways for five interrelated plots and forms a story with a branching plots. The finding indicates that there are two potential meanings of the plot structure of the novel.

### **A Story with Branching Plots**

The findings reveal that the plot of the story is structured like a tree. It has one major plot which generates five other plots. The five other plots branch into smaller plots.

These smaller plots are driven by conflicts affected either by external or internal factors.

From the analysis, it is found that the major plot in the story is the parents' divorce because the divorce issue becomes the root of all conflicts which are happened in the story. The major plot is determined by the role of the narrator who has the power to drive the story. The following sections discuss the role of the narrator and the branching of plots.

### **The Role of the Narrator**

In a written narrative, a person who narrates the words of the story is called a narrator. A narrator is someone who recounts a sequence of events that happens to the characters in the story.

In *The Suitcase Kid*, the story is narrated by using a first-person narrator. The first-person narrator describes what he or she experiences or someone who stands apart from the world of the characters in the text and tells the story from his or her perspective (Fludernik, 2009). The narrator in the story is Andrea West, a ten year old girl. She is also the main character in the story. The narrator

does not only narrate the events that she has experienced, but she also describes her feelings, desires, and emotions throughout the story.

In the beginning, the narrator describes the background information of the story. Chatman (1978) states that first-person narrator is marked by an explicit description and direct communication to the reader about the setting of the story. From some excerpts, it can be concluded that the narrator establishes the ground for the major plot by providing an overview about the setting that the reader need to know in order to indicate that parents' divorce issue is the major plot of the story. Moreover, the role of the narrator in the story does not only establish the ground for the major plot, but also creates the conflict in her family and education.

From the analysis, it can be assumed that the narrator has a crucial role in determining the plot. The role of narrator determines the degree of involvement of the narrator to the story. Hence, it can be concluded that the role of narrator in *The Suitcase Kid* is very important because she becomes the one who drives and

determines the sequences of events which create a branching of plot.

#### Branching of Plots

The branching of plots which is initiated by the major plot is divided into a plot in a single chapter and plots developed across chapter. Plot in a single chapter consists of a plot namely "The Missing Friend". This plot is only developed in one chapter which is complemented by the sequence of events (beginning, complication, climax, and resolution). Whereas, the plots developed across chapter consist of plots namely "School Issues", "Adjusting to New Sibling", "The Birth of New Sibling", and "The Missing Toy". Each plot is developed by several chapters in which each of the chapter serves as the beginning, complication, climax, and resolution of the plot.

Plot in a single chapter consists of plot namely "The Missing Friend". In this plot, Andrea West as the narrator of the story narrates a conflict about her friendship. This conflict is only developed in a single chapter namely F is for Friend which starts with the beginning, complication, climax, and resolution.

In the other hand, plot developed across chapters consists of plot namely “School Issue”, “Adjusting to New Sibling”, “The Birth of A New Sibling”, and “The Missing Toy”. These conflicts are developed across chapters. For instance, the plot entitled “School Issue” is begin in chapter G is for Garden, whereas the complication is described in chapter O is for Old People. The climax of the conflicts is presented in chapter Q is for Questions, and followed by the resolution which is presented in chapter R is for Radish.

The structure of the conflict which is developed in four different chapters marks a change of scenes in order to show which part contains the beginning, complication, climax, and resolution of the conflict as well. In addition to this, Fludernik (2009) states that dividing text is not necessarily applied to reflect important stages in a plot but to chunk the text into bite-sized pieces for the reader. Therefore, although the structure of plot is divided into four different chapters, this strategy dramatically signals that the narrator

is trying to evoke readers’ curiosity to discover the issue and its completion.

In Wilson’s *The Suitcase Kid*, the reader will discover the other kind of plot structures in a fiction world. From the analysis, it is found that there are two potential meanings originated by the structure of plot of the novel. Firstly, the story with branching plots elevates the level of suspense to the reader. Secondly, the set of conflicts experienced by the narrator indicates that *The Suitcase Kid* can be considered as a Bildungsroman novel.

Elevating the Level of Suspense

The way a story is developed through some kind of plot structures may affect the reader to discover the sequence of events that happened in the story. Plot structures in a narrative text may evaluate the level of tension to the reader. The finding of this study reveals that the plot structures in *The Suitcase Kid* evaluates the level of suspense or tension towards its reader because the plot structures of the novel is developed by a major plot and it generates five other plots.

Since the chapter of the novel is structured in alphabetical order, thus, a conflict has to encounter another conflict to reach the next stage of its sequence of events. For instance, when the first conflict entitled "Adjusting to New Sibling" begins in chapter A is for Andy, then the conflict has to reach its resolution which is presented in chapter X is for Xmas, therefore, the conflict has to encounter several chapters in the novel as the aim to reach the final level of its sequence of events. Those chapters which are traversed also consist of another conflict. Thus, before reaching the resolution which is presented in chapter X is for Xmas, the conflict entitled "Adjusting to New Sibling" has to encounter with new conflicts which emerge from other chapters. This also applies to the rest of conflicts of the story where each of them has to encounter with the another conflict in order to reach the next level of the sequence of events.

From the analysis, it can be assumed that the structure of plot in *The Suitcase Kid* is capable to elevate the level of suspense towards its reader. The completion of each plot is

quite complex because when a plot has not reached its resolution, another plot has created events to generate new conflict. Even when the recent plot is unresolved, another new plot has already appeared. With a number of plots that have to be resolved, the reader will experience many different conflicts. This condition elevates tension or suspense because the reader becomes aware of the plot patterns, they focus more on the changing that happens to the sequence of event of each plot, and they become more curious of the event that will happen afterwards.

The Suitcase Kid as a Bildungsroman Novel

Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid* illustrates a story about Andrea West, a ten year old girl who has to deal with a family issue of her parents' divorce and remarriage. During the development of the story, the reader are invited to observe the process of maturation which is experienced by Andrea West as the main character in the story. This maturation process shows how the main character acts to resolve the set of conflicts originated by the divorce issue.

In literary studies, one of the genre in children literature which tells about a maturation process of the main character is known as Bildungsroman. Basically, Bildungsroman portrays a personal growth of the main character from his/her adolescent phase to adulthood phase. In relation to this, Au (2011) suggests that a Bildungsroman genre focuses on the coming of age of an adolescent or young adult and it shows how the genre educates its reader about personal growth and self-consciousness.

Bildungsroman is divided into three subgenres, which are Entwicklungsroman, Erziehungsroman, and Künstlerroman (Dunlop, 2002). From the analysis, it is found that *The Suitcase Kid* can be considered as a Bildungsroman novel which falls into Entwicklungsroman category because the story tells about personal growth of Andrea West as the main character in the story.

Moreover, according to Rössler (2009), the Entwicklungsroman or “novel of development” concerns with the

development of the physical, mental, relation to the society, and is often described as the term which comprises all other forms of the biographical novel. Therefore, *The Suitcase Kid* can be categorized as the Entwicklungsroman or “novel of development” because the novel can be assumed as the biographical novel which is described all of events and situations experienced by Andrea West who acts as the narrator as well as the main character in the novel.

According to Rössler (2009), there are eight characteristics of Bildungsroman genre. However, this study found six characteristics that are employed by *The Suitcase Kid*. The first characteristic shows that the main character begins to experience the first emotional development. In the beginning, *The Suitcase Kid* shows a situation where the narrator has to deal with the divorce that happened to her parents. This situation can be considered as the first emotional development where the narrator has to overcome the divorce issue that will change her life.

The second characteristic is that the novel indicates that

character's formal education is described as a frustrating element. In *The Suitcase Kid*, the description about narrator's education is presented in four different chapters namely G is for Garden, O is for Old People, Q is for Question, and R is for Radish. Each chapter describes the narrator's education which is considered as a frustrating element because it generates conflicts to the main character.

The third characteristic is that the story shows the set of conflicts which are the main character has to deal with. As the findings of this study revealed that there is a major issue in the story which generates five other issue, thus, it can be assumed that Andrea West, as the main character experiences a number of conflicts that have to be resolved as the impact of the divorce issue.

The fourth characteristic is the story shows that the main character simultaneously experiences a process of maturation and self-reflection. By a number of conflict which is experienced by the main character in *The Suitcase Kid*, it can be seen that the main character experiences the

maturation process and self-reflection in each issue that happened in the story.

The fifth characteristic is the story shows that the main character accepts values of society. During the main character experiences the maturation process, she begins to accept the value from society.

The six characteristics is that a Bildungsroman novel does not provide a detailed account of the character's life from birth to death, but it only depicts the maturation process of the character. The findings revealed that *The Suitcase Kid* does not provide a detailed account of the narrator's life from birth to death. The story began when the narrator was ten years old where she had to deal with the divorce issue. Then, the story ended with a conclusion that she agreed to live a week with her Mom and with her Dad in the following week. The end of the story does not provide any details of narrator's life afterwards. It only indicates that the story has reached its final resolution.

From the characteristics that has been found, it can be concluded that *The Suitcase Kid* is not only

capable to elevate the level of suspense towards the reader through its branching of plots, but also the novel can be regarded as a Bildungsroman novel.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it is concluded that the findings of this study have answered the research questions. The findings reveal that the plot of a novel entitled *The Suitcase Kid* by Jacqueline Wilson is structured like a tree. The plot is constructed by a major plot namely parents' divorce and branched into five other plots. The findings indicate that there are two potential meanings that can be drawn from the structure of the plot. Firstly, the story with branching plots elevate the level of suspense to the reader. Secondly, *The Suitcase Kid* is considered as a Bildungsroman novel.

The findings of this study show that a narrative text is not always developed by a linear plot structures, but it may be developed by uneven plot structures. The plot structures which is employed in the novel create a story with branching

plots which more potential to elevate the level of suspense to its reader. In this case, the level of suspense is originated in the divorce issue. The issue also provides the reader, especially adolescent, learnings about the problem surrounding a divorce.

As young adult literature, the novel can be considered as a medium for young reader to learn about what it takes to be an adult. The novel illustrates some of the processes to reach adulthood. Besides, the novel also generates reflective questions about life, such as being responsible either in family or in education. Therefore, this implies the Bildungsroman nature as the novel which aims to educate the reader about personal growth and self-consciousness of an adolescent.

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