

A Narrative Analysis of the Movie Black Panther

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Abstract: *This study presents a narrative analysis of the movie Black Panther using Propp's narrative theory. The study focuses on the seven narratives of Prop namely hero, villain, dispatcher, helper, false-hero, princess and donor. The primary data the movie is watched severally to help narrate the movie using props narratives. The data is presented and analysed simultaneously. The findings of the study reveal that all Propp's seven narratives are actually found in the movie and are used to send message to the audience on African characters. The characters in the movie are predominately representation of African characters in real life. It is concluded that narratives play a very important role in making meaning in movie; it easily shortens the distance between the movie and the audience which helps to understand the intention and the message the movie is trying to pass.*

Keywords: *narratives, black panther, hero, villain, characters*

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Introduction

Movies are not just to entertain, but usually serve as a meaning making and message sending medium, some of which can be in form of signs, *Black Panther* is a movie with many messages which can be unnoticed but which a narrative study can uncover. In this regard, it is a movie needing narrative analysis.

Black Panther is film directed by Ryan Coogler and produced by Walt Disney. It is based on Stan Lee's book *Jungle Action*. It has won many awards and grosses a lot of money.

The study will be important because it will provide tools in identifying and creating patterns which reveal hidden meaning. The study will also be important to students of language and linguistics, because it will reveal the meaning making potential of narratives in movies. It will significance to researches in language and related fields because it will help when they want to carryout researches on movies.

The study focuses on the seven narratives of Propp namely hero, villain, dispatcher, helper, false-hero, princess and donor. It also focusses on the characters and the message they convey.

Literature Review

This comprises a review on narratives and studies on movies.

Narratives

Narratives is simply any multimodal means of telling a story. It can be in the form of speech, Images, gestures among others. In narratives characters in plays, novels, films are often used to tell the story. These are communicated through the seven narratives of Propp namely: hero, villain, dispatcher, helper, false-hero, princess and donor are used narrate and analyse the data.

Hero: this is the main character in a play, poem, movie or novel. His job is to save the day.

Villain: this is usually the bad actor or actress in movie, play, novel among others. He or she always causes problem.

Dispatcher: this is the person that sends the main character (hero) on his quest.

Helper: this person actually helps the main character in his/her time of need.

False Hero: a character in a play drama, movie who pretends to be good but later reveals his or her true colour.

Princess: this is the price (female) made of the main character

Donor: this character enables the main character in his/her quest.

(Narratology, 2019)

Studies on Movies

Studies carried out on movies are reviewed as follows. Parsa (2004) analyses the 2005 hit movie *Titanic* using Propp's Theory of Narratives as the theoretical framework. According to Propp, there are thirty-one narratives for analysing movies. He calls these narratives "Functions" which are used to narrate movies. The analysis is based on Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic approaches in which the syntagmatic approach focuses on surface structure of the movie by using Propp's thirty-one functions to narrate the movie, while the Paradigmatic approach focuses on the deep structure of the movie. From the findings, all of Propp's thirty-one narratives are found in the movie. It is concluded that the movie has a deep meaning of injustice between classes

Similarly, Setia et al. (2009) analyses a movie, *The Lord of the Ring: Fellowship of the Ring* which is based on a book - "The Lord of the Rings" by J.R.R. Tolkien. The data (images) is collected from the movie for presentation and analysis using qualitative method to analyse the signs. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is that of Saussure which the Signifier and Signified of the signs in the movie are identified and analysed. Three codes (technical code, social code and representational code) are also used to describe the signs in the movie. The findings of Setia et al. (2009) show that the signs employed in the movie construct a media text such as technical code, social code and representational code. Social code includes gesture, language, dress and makeup. Technical code includes music, sounds, lighting effect and mood of the audience. Representation code includes narrative structure and dialogue makes the audience feel what the director wants.

Another study on film is Winona (2018). She analyses gesture in the movie *Marlina the Murderer in Four Acts*. Gestures used by the major character Marlinia are identified and analysed. Images are collected as data from the movie qualitative descriptively method is used to describe the gestures in the movie. Saussure's theory is adopted as a theoretical framework. The signifier and signified of the gestures are identified and described. The findings show that negative emotions such as suspense, terror, mystery and disgust are found represented by the different signs. She concludes that only a few of the gestures are related to reality.

Also, there are other studies adopt a different theoretical framework in analysing movies. For example, Nisa (2017) in his work analyses semiotic signs in the movie *Colombiana* focusing on explaining "Cattleya Orchid" signs that appear in the scenes of the movie. "Cattleya" is a Colombian female assassin who became a killer to avenge the death of her parents. He uses qualitative method and descriptive analysis technique to analyse the movie. Barthes' Theory of Denotation

and Connotation is adopted as a theoretical framework. Nisa's findings show that each orchid sign reflects Cattleya's self-identity in the movie. The signs are used as messages to her targets, the people who killed her parents.

Lastly, Alfian (2018) analyses the movie *John Wick* from the semiotic perspective by using Peirce's Triadic theory as a theoretical framework. He identifies Icons, indices and symbols in the movie. Qualitative analysis of the signs in the movie reveals that all the three signs (icon, index and symbol) are found there. From the result, sixteen (16) icons, twelve (12) indexes and nine (9) symbols are found. Thus, Alfian (2018) concludes that Peirce's Theory can be used technically to explain the meaning of signs in movies.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data is presented and analysed simultaneously. The seven narratives of Propp namely hero, villain, dispatcher, helper, false-hero, princess and donor are used to narrate and analyse the data. The characters in the movie actually represent different Propps' Narratives.

Hero in the Movie

This is the main character in a play, poem, movie or novel. His job is to save the day. T'Challa's character is that of a hero in the movie. He is the king and leader of Wakanda his home. He is seen throughout the movie protecting Wakanda and his people. His character represents Martin Luther King Junior with his philosophy of non-violence in achieving Black's freedom. As king of Wakanda, he treats his people with patience, generous and tolerance. He also finds a way to unite his people peacefully and treats men and women equally. His goal, like Martin Luther King, is to achieve Black freedom in a non-violent way.

Villain in the Movie

This is usually the bad actor or actress in movie, play, novel among others. He or she always causes problem. Klaw's character is that of a Villain in the movie. Every scene where Klaw appears in the movie always leads to disruption. His character represents a white man's dominance in South Africa during Apartheid where injustice between Black and White exist. This can be seen throughout the movie where he (Klaw) is a dominant force over his black friends in crime.

Dispatcher in the Movie

This is the person that sends the main character (hero) on his quest. The queen (T'Challa's mother) is actually the dispatcher in this movie. She actually sends her son to retrieve vibranium (Wakanda's most prized asset) from Klaw. She clearly knows that Vibranium is the source of power and technology in Wakanda and losing it to the wrong hands like Klaw will do lead to immense danger to both Wakanda and other nations. Her character represents strong African women who protects their sons on the right course.

Helper in the Movie

This person actually helps the main character in his/her time of need. Okoye's character in Black Panther represents the helper. Herself and other Wakandan warriors actually help the main character T'Challa in his time of need. Her name also represents an igbo (a tribe in southern part of Nigeria) name called Okoye. She is a leader and member of the Dora Milage, the warriors of Wakanda. The warriors represent the strength of Wakanda. They are responsible for protecting Wakanda during the time of War.

False Hero in the Movie

This is a character in a play drama, movie who pretends to be good but later reveals his or her true colour. Erik Killmonger character on the other hand represent that of a false hero. At first, Klaw is seen taking the villain role, but later in the movie after Klaw is eliminated, it becomes obvious that Killmonger is the main Villain. Even though he intends to dethrone T'Challa because he also believes he has a claim to the throne, he took a violent way which eventually led to his downfall. Erik Killmonger's character actually represents Malcolm X's violence philosophy. He is seen in the movie as a violent character who is a dictator to his people during his short reign as King of Wakanda. He also abuses his power by making changes to their long-standing traditions and treats women violently.

Princess in the Movie

This is the price (female) made of the main character. The princess in *Black Panther* is Nakia. She is actually King T'Challa's love interest. She is also seen very close to T'Challa throughout the movie. She also represents African who are dedicated to their lover even in the most difficult times.

Donor in the Movie

This character enables the main character in his/her quest. Shuri's character in the movie represents a donor. She enables the main character T'Challa her brother to carry on his quest on retrieving vibranium from Klau. Additionally, she represents an intelligent African woman for African women are mostly intelligent.

Based on the analysis, the main message to the audience according to Ryan Coogler, being a Black American himself, is that Blacks are underrated by the rest of the world. To him, Blacks can offer more than what the world could imagine. This is justified by the American agent, Ross, who prior to his visit to Wakanda called it a "*third world country*" but was shocked to see that Wakanda, which represents an African country, has much to offer with its natural resources to the rest of the world as opposed to the wrong image of Africa being depicted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that narratives play a very important role in revealing the main message in movie that Blacks are underrated by the rest of the world and can offer more than what the world could imagine. Propps' Narratives easily shortens the distance between the movie and the audience which helps to understand the intention and the message the movie is trying to pass.

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