

FEATURES OF THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN INTELLECTUAL DETECTIVE (BASED ON D. BROWN'S NOVELS)

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ABSTRACT

This Article Discusses The Features Of The Narrative In The Modern Intellectual Detective. An Analysis Is Made Based On D.Brown's Novels.

KEYWORDS: *Embedded Narratives, Actantial Model, Sequential Communal Voice, Female Marginalization, Patriarchal Domination.*

INTRODUCTION

Dan Brown's multilayered fiction starts from deconstructing the traditional interpretation of Leonardo's artistic works, develops by self-reconstructing the symbolic system of the artistic and religious world, and terminates with an indefinite, thought-provoking ending. The novel purports to expose an ancient conspiracy of Vatican and the Priory of Sion, which according to Dan Brown conceals the marriage and offspring of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. In the critical circle of *The Da Vinci Code*, most of scholars tend to label *The Da Vinci Code* a feminist text in post-modernistic literary context, regardless of various perspectives and theories adopted by them. Under such academic circumstances, the author applies the feminist narratology to analyze the narrative characteristics of *The Da Vinci Code*, to justify that female character in the text is dominated by male narrators, and is suppressed to be speech-absent and consigned to an objective, marginal status in the narration. This thesis attempts to interpret the narrative structure and voice of the novel from feminist perspective on three levels: "story", "narrative discourse" and "narrating". The feminist interpretation of the novel is not to reduce its literary value to political value but to be of great help to further studies on this novel.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For some twenty years in history, feminism and narratology have entailed separate inquiries of antithetical tendency: the one general, mimetic and political, the other specific, semiotic and technical. Robyn Warhol illustrates some compelling reasons in *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* as accountable for their incompatibility. At first, the technical vocabulary (neology) of narrative poetics has alienated feminist critics who maintain special political concerns. Secondly, feminists are distrustful to the conceptual universe which is organized into the neat paradigms of binary logic in the traditional theory.

American scholar Susan S. Lancer is regarded as the initiator of feminist narratology on account of her research on the issue, and her *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* published in Princeton University Press in 1981

was the first to associate the narrative forms with feminist criticism, which inaugurated the practice of feminist narratology although the term was not formally adopted in this book then. As a formalist scholar, Lancer is deeply influenced by feminism, Marxism and speech act theory and she is the first to propose the theoretical framework of feminist narratology, besides some practical analyses. Her studies were succeeded by some academic papers on feminist narratology by Brewer, Warhol and Mieke Bal, whose concerted efforts helped to bring feminist narratology in to bloom in 1980s.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Da Vinci Code follows the traditional principles of thriller fiction by starting with a ruthless murder and developing with suspense through the detective process. The narrative mode of classical detective fiction provides *The Da Vinci Code* with sophisticated clues and breath taking suspense emerging in the process of deciphering the mysterious, symbolic codes in the paintings of Leonardo and in the anagrams of Sauniere. The renowned educator Jacques Sauniere is interrogated by an albino monk for the whereabouts of something mysterious his brethren possess. Sauniere lies to the albino about the hiding place of the object that his brethren guard, only to be shot on the chest and informed of the death of the other guardians of his brotherhood. Deceived by Sauniere, the albino monk is set on his quest of the object that Sauniere's brethren try to protect, as he confirms the whereabouts given by the four guardians refers to the identical place. In the fifteen minutes before his drawn-out death, Sauniere tries to pass on the secret to finish the mission with which his brethren have been entrusted for centuries. He spends the last minutes of his life arranging his own body in strange fashion: stripping off every shred of clothing, arms and legs sprawling outward like Da Vinci's The Vitruvian Man surrounded by a large circle, drawing with his own blood a five-pointed star, the pentacle centered on his navel, and writing a bizarre message with series of numbers and three lines of words. The last line of the message goes like this: "P.S. Find Robert Langdon" (Brown, 2003: p. 74). It is the last sentence on the parquet floor of the Louvre's Grand Gallery that involves Sophie Neveu and Robert Langdon into the inquiry of the symbolic world and the Holy Grail quest.

If the underlying structure of the novel is generalized in a sentence, it should be "Jacques Sauniere wants Sophie Neveu to reveal the secret". Some critics recommend that the generalization of the first-degree narrative be "Jacques Sauniere hands down a secret to Sophie Neveu". The former designates that the secret is still left to be interpreted and revealed by Sophie, while the latter means the secret is crystal clear to her. If the primary structure of the story is generalized with the second sentence, it is needless for Dan Brown to continue the story any longer concerning the purported theme of *The Da Vinci Code*.

The actantial grammar with its discussion on these mantics of event and role relationships in sentence and the examination of textual unfolding of action as a pattern of practical reasoning provides a suitable spring board from which to launch an analytical overview of the narrative structure. "Algirdas J. Greimas points out that actants and predicates are two big classes to make

up the ‘semanticsyntax’, and they combine with each other to form the semantic kernel or nucleus of a textual micro-universe”.

“Voice” has been a heated topic in the feminist narratology but it has been ignored in conventional narrative poetics. As a narratological term, “voice” attends to the specific forms of textual practice and avoids the essentializing tendency of its more casual feminist usage. As a political term, “voice” rescues textual study from formalist isolation that often treats literary events as if they were inconsequential to human history. The concept of “voice” in feminist narratology is adopted from classic narratology for its technical categorization of narrative voices. This concept is applied in feminist narratology to reveal its social and political indication by combining the technical studies of classic narratology with the political and ideological concerns of feminism. Feminist narratology is committed to discovering the historical and contextual reasons for the author’s choice of specific narrative voice in literature. In feminist narratology, voice focuses on examining the intertwined relation between social status and textual structure, and serves as the chief technique to express ideological orientation. Structuralists consider the relation among narrator, narratee, and narrative object only structural, but “Lanser regards it as the site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge that is manifested in and sometimes resolved through ideologically charged technical practice” (Lanser, 1992:p.7). For feminists, the choice of an appropriate narrator, who takes control of the right of “voicing”, has become the signifier of achievement of women’s social status and power in the hierarchical power system. Lanser argues, “Despite compelling interrogations of ‘voice’ as a humanist fiction, for the collectively and personally silenced the term has become a trope of identity and power: as Luce Irigaray suggests, to find a voice (voix) is to find away (voie)” (Lanser, 1992:p.3).

To differentiate the authority of the narrators and narrating characters, Lanser’s distinction is to be applied in the successive parts. Dan Brown relates *The Da Vinci Code* from omniscient points of view and adopts a “public voice” that suggests the narration directed toward a narratee outside the fiction. The omniscient narrator is not present as a character in the story, and even outside the fiction; thus the narrator of *The Da Vinci Code* is an extradiegetic narrator. In the first-degree narrative of the novel, readers cannot discover the textual distinction between the author and a public, heterodiegetic narrator; so it is safe for readers to equate the narrator with the author, because “Lanser argues if the distinction between the (implied) author and a public, heterodiegetic narrator is not textually marked, readers are invited to equate the narrator with the author and the narratee with themselves (or their historical equivalences)” (Lanser, 1992: p. 16). The omniscient narrator, the author Dan Brown claims the “authorial voice” in the first-degree narrative. The second-degree narrative is also unfolded from omniscient points of view, but the voice is shared among diverse narrating characters. The omniscient narrator attends to the synchronic and diachronic development of the whole story, while the narrating characters focus on the diachronic development of the Holy Grail quest. “Moreover, since authorial narrator exists outside narrative time (indeed, outside fiction) and are not ‘humanized’ by events, they conventionally carry an authority superior to that conferred on characters, even on narrating characters” (Lanser, 1992: p. 16). As a result, the male author, Dan Brown as an omniscient narrator is superior to those narrating characters in the novel. The salient narrative feature of the parallel narratives in the embedded narratives is the alternation of the role of narrator and narratee among protagonists in the

process of searching for the truth of the Holy Grail. Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon serves as the initial narrating character for he is the first among the protagonists to emerge on the scene of the murder. Langdon is a heterodiegetic narrator in that he is not present as a character in the story he narrates. Langdon takes a private voice and directs his narration toward the narratees who are fictional characters. The first narratee of Langdon as a heterodiegetic narrator is Captain Bezu Fache, to whom Langdon explains the symbolic implication of Pentacle in the pagan religion, the harmony between male and female indicated by The Vitruvian Man exhibited by Sauniere. Langdon's symbolic interpretation becomes more and more complicated as the narrative develops, so that Sophie as a more adequate narratee merges in the narrative. Although Sophie is a cryptologist, she is much less sophisticated compared with Langdon in terms of the interpretation of religious symbols. From Langdon's narration, Sophie acquires the knowledge about the "sacred feminine", AMON L'ISA symbolizing union between male and female, Vatican's conspiracy in early Christianity, Holy Grail as Sangreal, Knight Templar, and the Priory of Sion. Robert Langdon's narration actualizes the indoctrination to Sophie with the worship of the "sacred feminine" and on the symbolism of the Holy Grail, but his narrating declines after he and Sophie manage to extricate the "cryptex" from the Depository Bank of Zurich.

CONCLUSION

The Da Vinci Code is a story of the Holy Grail quest, or according to Dan Brown, a story to rediscover the "sacred feminine" to revive the "Goddess Worship" and to subvert the traditional Christian culture. On account of the acclaimed theme of the story, some critics take it for granted that the novel is a feminist text that strives to rediscover the identity of the female. To erase the ambiguity concerning the story that purports to do justice to women, the author of this thesis applies feminist narratology to examining the structure of the narrative and the voice of female character in the novel. The novel is interpreted not only on its political orientations but also on the narrative structure in which the political concerns are encoded. To the disappointment of those credulous critics, the female marginalization and patriarchal domination are pervasively embodied in the structure of the story designed by the male author. The patriarchal domination deprives female character of the rights of "voicing" in the narrative, thus woman in the novel is speech-absent and obscure. The male characters occupy the subjective position and the female character is forced to take an objective position. Feminist literary critics regard literary discourse as the site of power struggle; therefore woman in *The Da Vinci Code* loses the fight against the oppression of the patriarchy because her voice is suppressed by the male characters in the process of narrating. Outside the fiction the male author claims the authorial voice, and inside it the male narrating characters constitute a sequential communal voice. The female voice is suppressed under the pervasive male's hegemony over the narrative voice. So she is taught, in the process of being indoctrinated, to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology and so she is conditioned to derogate her own and to cooperate in her own subordination.

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