

# HYPertextUALITY AND THE FALL OF THE STRUCTURALIST PARADIGM: A GENETTIAN READING OF THE ODYSSEY'S SELECTED HYPertextS

## HIPERtextUALIDAD Y CAÍDA DEL PARADIGMA ESTRUCTURALISTA: UNA LECTURA GENETIANA DE LA ODISEA Y LOS HIPERtextOS SELECCIONADOS

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### ABSTRACT

Man's natural ability to tell stories was not hidden from literary critics' speculative eyes. Oral and written storytelling has been around for thousands of years. The fascination with ontological and epistemological questions regarding being and the unknown has prompted the man to use his imagination motor to explore and dwell simultaneously in both real and fictional worlds, actual and virtual ones. This article is an attempt to connect different interpretations of trans-textualized hypertexts or retellings that have emerged as a result of the contemporary movements of structuralism and poststructuralism in the light of Gerard Genette's narrative theory, in order to emphasize the dialectic of assumptions and positive expectations. Structuralist narrative theories prove inapt to justify the thematic modifications of the hypertexts created as the result of trans fictionality. To meet the aim of the study the descriptive method is utilized, which seeks to explore the narratological dimensions of the four retellings above of the Odyssey, based on the structuralist view. Considering the results, narratological reading based on the overall structure of a narrative, or langue, cannot justify the changes that hypersexuality is responsible for, and the reading has to be in line with the parole, or the specific style of each hypertext.

**Keywords:** Hypertext; Narrative; Narratology; Structuralist Narrative Theory; Trans textuality.

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## RESUMEN

La capacidad natural del hombre para contar historias no estaba oculta a los ojos especulativos de los críticos literarios. La narración oral y escrita ha existido durante miles de años. La fascinación por las cuestiones ontológicas y epistemológicas sobre el ser y lo desconocido ha llevado al hombre a utilizar su motor de imaginación para explorar y habitar simultáneamente en mundos reales y ficticios, actuales y virtuales. Este artículo es un intento de conectar diferentes interpretaciones de hipertextos transtextualizados o recuentos que han surgido como resultado de los movimientos contemporáneos de estructuralismo y postestructuralismo a la luz de la teoría narrativa de Gerard Genette, con el fin de enfatizar la dialéctica de supuestos y expectativas positivas. Las teorías narrativas estructuralistas se muestran incapaces de justificar las modificaciones temáticas de los hipertextos creados como resultado de la transficción. Para cumplir con el objetivo del estudio se utiliza el método descriptivo, que busca explorar las dimensiones narratológicas de los cuatro relatos anteriores de la Odisea, con base en la visión estructuralista. A la vista de los resultados, la lectura narratológica basada en la estructura global de una narración, o *langue*, no puede justificar los cambios de los que es responsable la hipersexualidad, y la lectura debe estar en consonancia con el *parole*, o el estilo específico de cada hipertexto.

**Palabras clave:** Hipertexto; Narrativa; Narratología; Teoría Narrativa Estructuralista; Transtextualidad.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a lot has been done on retelling classical mythology, and the epic poems of *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, have been retold and transfictionalized by numerous authors and poets, and playwrights (Doležel, 1979; Jameson, 2020); besides, several movie adaptations were also filmed, in different languages, especially in English. The number of English adaptations, regardless of the genre, is great proof to show that these classics are still at the center of attention for literary society. Therefore, it is worthwhile to take into account a thorough reading of these literary works. Under the light of narratology, on the one hand, this research aims at showing that structuralist narratology proves fruitless to be applied to all narratives, in other words, structuralist narratology is not a universal idea to be applied to all narratives, and on the other, it aims at analyzing the changes and fluctuations a hypotext may go through each time it is retold (Baudin, 2021).

To reach this, the researcher has selected four following transfictional retellings of the epic poem *Odyssey*, as the literary works: M. Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, M. Miller's *Circe*, C. Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, and Zachary Mason's *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* among the abundance of retellings, 86 fictions for *Odyssey*, regardless of the genre (Genette, 1980). It has to be noted that all these works are considered modern and post-modern fiction since one of the attempts of the present study is to speculate on the changes brought by modernism and post-modernism. Besides, to confine the content, one single concept of Genette's viewpoint is taken into consideration.

## METHODS

The methodology applied in this research is descriptive. It seeks to explore narratological dimensions of the four aforementioned retellings of *Odyssey*, based on the structuralist view, besides, the changes

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and fluctuations hypertextuality may compel upon the original narrative are analyzed based on structuralist narratology. As the very title suggests, the structuralist view has prepared a safe ground for a structural evaluation of the four selected fictions, based on the fact that structuralist narratology was developed based on different structural concepts to remodel the classical narratological reading. Gerard Genette is one of the leading figures of this view. For Genette, every narrative must include these elements: the story, which is the actual order of events in the text, narrative discourse, and the narration, which is the telling of the story (Genette, 1980). Some of his proposed concepts are order, duration, frequency, voice, and mood, which mood is the focus of this paper.

Narratology as an approach has always been accompanied by outstanding names such as Levi-Strauss, Ronald Barthes, Mieke Bal, and Gérard Genette. The term narratology was first introduced by French Tzvetan Todorov, and seemingly, after World War II, all of its premises are divided into three categories. The main representatives of the first category are Vladimir Propp and his followers, Levi-Strauss, Todorov, and early Ronald Barthes. For them, a narrative is a sequence of events independent of its genre. The second group includes names such as G. Genette, M. Bal, and Chatman, who see a narrative as a discourse. Finally, the third group finds narrative as a much more complex artifact in which its meaning is discovered by the receiver. The practitioners of this group are later Ronald Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Jean Francois Lyotard (Herman, 1998).

- **Genettian Narrative Theory**

According to Genette, all narratives of any genre can be analyzed based on his proposed model (Genette 1980). His five concepts are as follows:

1- Order: The way the events are arranged in the story and their turn of happening in the narrative is called order. The narrator is free to choose to disclose the events chronologically or out of order. Genette has his own technical term for diving back and forth in time, anisochrony, which is divided into two types: “a. *Analepsis (flashback)*... b. *Prolepsis (flashforward/ foreshadowing)*”.

2- Duration: Differentiating the storytime and the discourse time, the relation between story time and discourse time is what Genette called duration. Ellipsis, summary, scene and pause are the four categories of duration.

3- Frequency: The relation between the number of times an event takes place in the story and the number of times the author mentioned that event in the narrative, is frequency.

4- Voice: The concept of voice deals with two questions, who narrates and from where, therefore, the narrator’s being a character of the story or not, matters a lot. “ In his view, narrators should be distinguished according to their participation in narrated action. The homodiegetic narrator participates in the events being narrated, while the heterodiegetic narrator does not participate in them” (Herman ,1998; Goodrich, 2020).

5- Mood: In his article in the book, Genette claimed that “As with music, narrative mood is influenced by the narrator’s ‘distance’ and ‘perspective’. It has to do with voice. As speech is narrated, transposed, and reported the narrator’s distance changes. Narrator focalization refers to the narrator’s perspective. There are three types of narratives: non-focalized, internally focalized, and externally focalized.” By referring to the above-mentioned statement, the next concept to discuss is detected, which is

focalization. A term coined by Genette, that is widely used in modern narratology, it is completely served as a substitution for the terms point of view or perspective. The term focalization refers to the sphere in which the narrator presents narrative information. It is classified into three types or degrees: zero, internal, and external. The first term [zero focalization] corresponds to what English-language critics call narrative with an omniscient narrator and Pouillon's 'vision from behind' as Todorov represents in his formula Narrator > Character (where the narrator knows more than the characters, or, more precisely, says more than the characters know). [Internal focalization] Narrator = Character means the narrator only tells what the character knows; this is narrative with 'point of view' after Lubbock, or with 'restricted field' after Blin; Pouillon calls it 'vision with'. This is the third term [external focalization], Narrator = Character (narrator tells less than the character; this is what Pouillon calls the 'behaviorist' narrative or 'vision from outside'").

- **Narrative and narratology**

Encompassing such a huge scope as large as the history of human life, the systematic *study of narrative as an autonomous whole has made this effort much more comprehensible and graspable under one internationally accepted term, narratology. "Narrative theory – or to use the internationally acknowledged term narratology – is the analysis of narrative as a genre. The primary objective of this paper is to describe the constants, variables, and combinations typical of narrative texts and to clarify how these characteristics relate to theoretical models (typologies)."* (Fludernik, 2009). Lots of theorists attempted to define the term, beginning by Tzevan Todorov, and moving towards Phelan, Prince, and Bal. Narratology is the study of narrative text, according to Mieke Bal. Theoretical statements describe a specific segment of reality in a systematic way. Narratology attempts to make pronouncements about the narrative text as part of the corpus of reality. (Salgado, 2021). Accordingly, it can consequently be said that narratology is the study of a narrative, and since the focus of this study is Gérard Genette's narrative discourse theory, the term narrative is defined from his perspective.

The term narration can be taken synonymously with the term narrative when it refers to the act of producing a kind of narrative. Narration is one of three levels of narrative: accompanied story, and narrative discourse, according to Genette. In its broadest sense, the narration is a complex subject, containing a wide range of narratological concerns: prolepsis, analysis point of view, view, suspense, surprise, distance, and omniscience, among many others. (Ryan, 2014).

Genette, who is considered one of the most influential narratologists, is a member of post-classical narratology. By bringing in his structuralist view of narratology, he actually made it possible to analyze a narration based on reading models. He introduced five concepts to remodel the classical narratological reading, these five concepts are order, duration, frequency, voice, and mood. For Genette, every narrative must include these elements: the story, which is the actual order of events in the text, narrative discourse, and the narration, which is the telling of the story (Genette, 1980; Walsh, 2019).

- **Trans fictionality or Trans textuality, Hypo text, and Hypertext**

What is known as transfictionality, or transtextuality, to borrow Genette's term, happens when elements such as characters, plot, or setting migrate from one fiction to another one, which can be considered as the correspondence between possible worlds. "Transtextuality is textual transcendence and cuts across genres" (Genette, 1980). "Transfictionality is a phenomenon as old as print narrative....,

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perhaps even as old as narrative itself” (Ryan, 2014), but it has become particularly prominent in postmodern culture. Doležel was the first one to deliver a theory of what he has called “postmodern rewrites” which can be extended to all forms of transfictionality. “This theory distinguishes three types of relations between fictional worlds. The first, “expansion,” “extends the scope of the proto-world by filling its gaps, constructing a prehistory or post-history, and so on” (Doležel, 1979). The manifestation of this type can be found in prequels, sequels, or narratives in which a secondary character from another work becomes the main character. Another type of transfictional relation is displacement, where characters, settings, and most of the plot are taken from another fictional world, but their fates are modified. Thirdly, a story’s plot can be transposed to another historical or geographical setting.” (Yu et al., 2020).

“Hypertextuality refers to the act of uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to a earlier text A (which I shall call the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary,” Genette explained, introducing his two technical terms for what he called the act of hypertextuality. Thus, Graham posits that hypertexts are derived from hypotexts through a process called transformation, in which text B “evokes” text A without directly mentioning it. There is no doubt that hypertext can become original text in its own right” (Herman, 1998).

- ***Odyssey* and its Selected Retellings**

The four selected literary works taken from a list including 86 books are expected to prove the three forms of transfictionality, since one of the major concerns of this research is how the concept of transfictionality, if possible, makes changes on the appreciation and metamorphosis of the original narrative or the hypotext, here *Odyssey*. According to Ryan, “transfictionality builds storyworlds through multiple texts” (Walsh, 2019). It is not unknown to anyone that Homer’s one of the two greatest epic poems, *Odyssey*, tells the story of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, returning home after the ten-year Trojan War, encountering lots of perils and witnessing his men being killed. His wife, Penelope, is the target of suitors’ rivalry, informed of her husband’s death, holds fast to the throne, and stayed faithful to his husband and the throne. When it comes to narrative, there would be no difference between types or genres, according to Mieke Bal, “a narrative text is text in which an agent relates (‘tells’) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, a building, or a combination thereof” (Salgado, 2021), or according to Fludernik, “In addition to what we often think of as the prototypical kind of narrative, literary narrative as an art form, the narrative is a widespread and often unconscious spoken language activity that encompasses a wide variety of text types, such as journalism or teaching. (Doležel, 1979). Consequently, though the original work is an epic poem, the retellings are picked up from the category of novel, to prepare a safe ground for analyzing them in the light of narratology. It has to be clarified that David Bruce’s novel, *Homer’s Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose*, came to great help whenever the hypotext is being referred to. The selected novels are as followed: *The Penelopiad*, *Circe*, *Cold Mountain*, and *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The inevitable structural changes brought about by the act of retelling and authors’ stylistic preferences, do not necessarily terminate in the homogeneous thematic signification. *The Penelopiad* is an adaptation based on Odysseus’s wife’s, Penelope, point of view. *Circe* is another adaptation, this time from the point of view of a witch called the same name. *Cold Mountain* is a novel about a veteran coming home from war to his beloved wife who is still waiting for his return. *The Lost Books of the*



*Odyssey* is a modern re-imagination of Odysseus's return to home. All these four novels are based on a common narrative which is *Odyssey*, but the degree of resemblance differs in each of them.

*Penelopiad* is a distinctive retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*, in the sense that the narrator is Penelope, Odysseus's wife, and her twelve maids who were hanged, accusing Odysseus of what happened to them. The story has a retrospective viewpoint and is told way after their death, while they dwell in the after/underworld. The story begins in a way that Penelope decides to retell the old story of getting married to Odysseus, starting from an account of her childhood to her last day. The presence of the maids is by the help of the chorus, they comment on Penelope's account. After the narrator's account of her childhood is over, the marriage's running contest and how Odysseus cheated over the other suitors to win the contest, are opened. After she gave birth to their son, Odysseus was summoned to the Trojan War, and the long journey home started. The story is mainly the account of Penelope's plan to defend the kingdom and get rid of the suitors. In the end, Odysseus managed to reach Ithaca, killed all the suitors, and hanged all the maids.

*Circe* is a re-narrating of numerous Greek mythologies, naming *Odyssey* as the most outstanding one. The novel is an exploration of Circe's life from her origin and childhood till her romantic period with Odysseus and his son, Telemachus. This exploration starts with Circe proving to be unlikeable and isolated as a child, which justifies her applying witchcraft to herbs and animals to attain her demands. Once her black magic is revealed, she was exiled eternally to an island called Aiaia, where she avenged the sailors coming to her island by ship, turning them into pigs with the help of her witch power. Once, Odysseus and his crew sailed into her island, since he appeared charming to her, and appealed to her feelings, she agreed to host him and his crew for the winter. Love grew between the two, and by the time he was leaving, Circe was carrying his son, Telegonus.

*Cold Mountain* bears much resemblance to the story of Odysseus, with a big difference being that this novel starts in medias res, which means Inman, the hero protagonist, is in the middle of the war, but Odysseus was summoned to the Trojan War while he was living his routine life. Inman resembles Odysseus, and Ada, the heroine, Penelope. While Inman is trying to desert the war, he does not even believe in it, like Odysseus who pretended to be mad in hope of not attending the Trojan War since basically, he did not accept the cause, he started a long and difficult journey towards home on foot, like what happened to Odysseus. Meanwhile, Ada tries to defend her territory or home, Black Cove from all the threats and dangers around her with the help of a loyal friend, Ruby, which reminds us of Penelope and her twelve maids who sincerely helped their queen to survive the circumstances and keep the kingdom safe for the king to return. When the lovers encountered, they could barely recognize each other, the same thing was devised when Odysseus disguised himself as a beggar, by the end Inman was killed while failing to kill a Home Guard soldier, leaving alone the pregnant Ada to raise her daughter at Black Cove, but Odysseus revenges all the suitors by killing them together with the twelve maids, and he sailed again for redemption (Stroobant, 2019).

The *Lost Books of the Odyssey* is more likely to be considered a collection of fragmented short stories than a novel. The book is presented in forty-four fragmented short stories, or better to say variations of what happened to Homer's character Odysseus, in the *Odyssey*. The author claimed that he juxtaposed together those myths about Odysseus, which Homer did not take into account about Odysseus, which is why he called them 'The Lost Books'. Mason did not make benefit from any new writing style, instead, he retold and remixed the original version by bringing in new and modern visions to the original myth. Generally speaking, the majority of these forty-four lost books

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are alternative versions of Odysseus's return to Ithaca, to encapsulate, they are all what-if questions that have occurred to Odysseus's mind, all the long years he was trying to reach home. Therefore, the characters and the plot are the same, hence the fate of the characters is modified.

According to what was discussed above, the first two hypertexts, *The Penelopiad* and *Circe*, are considered examples of the first type of transfictionality, which is 'expansion', since a secondary character, Penelope and Circe, are taken from the hypotext, *Odyssey*, and are changed to the protagonists of the two novels. *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* is an example of the second relation, which is 'displacement', which signifies the fact that most of the characters, setting, and the plot is taken from the original plot, and the fate of the characters, here Odysseus and Penelope are modified. Finally, the last one, *Cold Mountain*, is an example of the third relation, which is 'transposition', in which the characters are taken to the modern historical and geographical setting.

The findings of this research aim to show that structuralist narratology proves meaningless in analyzing modern and postmodern hypertexts, in other words, comparative structuralist reading of hypertext is not a fruitful idea, since it can barely justify the changes or modifications brought by transfictionality, therefore, is not universal or inclusive enough to encompass all sorts of narratives, especially the modern and postmodern retellings which are the focus of this research. Therefore, the structuralist paradigm in narratology is not an authentic paradigm. The conspicuous discrepancy between the narrative structure of the hypotext, *Odyssey*, and those of the selected hypertexts, compel us to step out of the structuralist standpoint, and this is the very fall of the structuralist paradigm. Meanwhile, scrutinizing the metamorphosis that hypertextuality may bring about to the hypotext, and the prospective changes or modifications it may cause to the literary work according to the narrative discourse adds to the significance of this research which reveals itself when it is shown that the narratological elements or the structure of the primary narrative or the hypotext, *Odyssey*, went through considerable changes in the process of re-narrating or retelling. The authors of these selected novels, M. Atwood, M. Miller, C. Frazier, and Z. Mason have taken the hypotext basically and adapted it to updated versions of the narrative, structurally and thematically.

One concept regarding the structuralist narrative theory is focalization. With respect to *The Penelopiad*, the book is divided into 29 chapters, 18 of which are narrated by Penelope, and the other 11 ones by the twelve hanged maids in the form of a commentary chorus alternatively. The novella starts with Penelope narrating in the first-person point of view. Penelope is the heroine and the narrator of the story at the same time; besides she is the character whose perspective orients the narrative, therefore, she is the focalizer, and consequently, the focalization is internal, because the narrator (Penelope) knows more than the character (Penelope) since she is dead. The parts narrated in the form of a comment on Odysseus's deeds by the twelve hanged maids' chorus are external or objective focalization according to Bal, and according to Genette, are zero focalization because the maids already know more than the characters, specifically Odysseus, therefore we can observe that the focalization in the novel, is the blend of both internal and external ones. With respect to *Circe*, it is also the same, the entire story is told from Circe's point of view, in the first person, which is why Circe is appeared as highly urging, propelling, and immersive. Circe is the protagonist and doubtfully the heroine, and at the same time the narrator of the story, besides, she is the character whose perspective orients and controls the narrative, therefore, she is the focalizer, and consequently, the focalization is internal, since the narrator, Circe, has the access to the feelings and thoughts of the other characters as well. With respect to *Cold Mountain*, all the chapters are narrated from the third person point of view, and the chapters alternatively move from Inman's stories to Ada's ones. The narration takes

the omniscient type since the narrator freely depicts the action, thoughts, memories, and feelings of both protagonists, Inman and Ada. In Genette's words, the focalization is that of internal focalization throughout the novel. Finally, *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* is a novel in forty-four sections, those sections which are narrated by Odysseus himself in the first-person point of view, for instance, sections three, seven, eleven, thirteen, and the last forty-four, bear the internal focalization based on Genette's claims, because Odysseus is both the narrator and the protagonist (he can barely be considered as a hero), a character whose point of view forms and reforms the narrative. Regarding those sections that are narrated in the third person, it is worth mentioning that the focalization is partly external since the focalizer presents a series of objective information about the characters, and partly internal since with an omniscient point of view, the narrator deals with the feelings and thoughts of Odysseus. To summarize, one single point, focalization, of a single concept, mood, can vary from one hypertext to the other.

With regard to these selected novels, Odysseus can hardly be considered a hero, since he lacks the heroic characteristics that Homer donated to him. In *The Penelopiad*, Odysseus is presented more as a brutal debauchee who is not able to discern right from wrong, also he is always in seek of redemption since he is always guilty of making wrong decisions. In *Circe* also, Odysseus is a famous character who once sailed toward Aiaia, where Circe, the witch, resides. He appeared appealing to Circe, he bears no heroic features and he left her impregnated. Similarly, in *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, he is not depicted as a hero, he is a wrecked man who tries to return home, but he is challenged by illusions, and by the end of the novel, he is a broken aged man, who does not seem to be once a great hero called Odysseus. The only time that a transfictional character appears heroic, is in *Cold Mountain*. Inman, the protagonist, fights to return home, on the way home, he managed to help other people and by the end, he is shot since he could not compel himself to kill a seventeen-year-old soldier from the Home Guard, and he is shot in return, therefore, Inman proves even more heroic than Odysseus. These thematic significances are the ones that a structuralist reading cannot justify, and the changes that transfictionality cannot impede.

## CONCLUSION

Under the light of narratology, on the one hand, this research aims at showing that structuralist narratology proves fruitless to be applied to all narratives, in other words, structuralist narratology is not a universal idea to be applied to all narratives, and on the other, it aims at analyzing the changes and fluctuations a hypotext may go through each time it is retold. To reach this, the researcher has selected four transfictional retellings of the epic poem *Odyssey*. The author of the present research delimits this narratological reading of the metamorphosis of the hypotext *Odyssey*, to those retellings that are in minute accordance with the three aforementioned transfictionality types, which are expansion, displacement, and transposition. The four selected retellings, *The Penelopiad*, *Circe*, *Cold Mountain*, and *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* are thoroughly adaptable to the three above-mentioned transfictional types; respectively, the first two fictions can be considered as representative of the first type of transfictional narrative, and the third and fourth ones encompass both the second and the third types. A single structural element, focalization, fluctuates from one retelling to the other, which shows what is left behind by the structuralist narratology is to elaborate on the changes and modifications retellings go through, therefore, narratological reading based on the overall structure of a narrative, or langue, cannot justify the changes that hypertextuality is responsible for, and the reading must be according to the parole, or the specific style of each hypertext.



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