
Holocaust Narratology: A Cognitive Analysis of the Narrative Features in Elie Wiesel's *Hostage*.

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Abstract:

The paper “ Holocaust Narratology: A Cognitive Analysis of the Narrative Features in Elie Wiesel’s *Hostage*” discusses the features of cognitive narratology on the basis of the cognitive narrative theories by David Hermann. Cognitive narratology is a postmodern concept in analysing the narrative features of a literary work in collaboration with the cognitive process of the human brain. It studies the importance of aspects of the human brain in decoding and grasping the content through the narrative. Hermann’s work, *Story logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* provides a wide exploration into the topic. The paper studies the aspects of cognitive narratives through the novel *Hostage* by Elie Wiesel. It discusses how Wiesel applies a specific narrative technique to arouse empathy among the readers. The paper employs a clear textual analysis approach to critically evaluate the work. It examines the intensity and the power of narrative structure in the work to engage the readers and prompt them to comprehend and interpret the content creatively. The paper examines the role of the readers’ active participation to comprehend the ideas put forward by the literary works so that they can update their knowledge, analyze the truth behind the social stigmas, and fight against segregation and violence in the world. Reading and comprehending the content effectively provides a better understanding of the world. By analysing distinctive narrative aspects the paper helps the readers to comprehend the novel in an effective way.

Key Words: Narratology, Cognitive Narratology, Trauma Narrative, Mental Model.

Introduction - Cognitive Narratology

The postmodern approach to literary studies provides a new perspective on narratology. Narratology has now functions as an innovative branch literary as well as cultural studies to comprehend the complete meaning of the texts. In literary studies, narratology enables various narrative strategies to assume, interpret, and shape the meaning of a literary work according to the changing temporal and cultural contexts. In cultural studies, the role of narratology differs from the traditional standpoint of literary studies.

Through multiple perspectives in cultural studies, it helps to frame and reframe cultural ideologies. Narratology functions both as producer and distributor in varying cultural contexts through its capacity to accommodate multiple perspectives. The complexity of human cultural, political and scientific developments necessitates diverse approaches. Narratology changes according to the varying genre and movements of literature.

Cognitive narratology is one of the major theoretical narrative approach introduced in the postmodern era. It emerged as a subdomain of post-classical narratology by combining the features of classicism and structuralism. This approach integrates Cognitive psychology with narrative analysis. The term cognitive was first used in narratology by Manfred Jahn in 1997 in his essay "Frames, Preferences and Reading of Third-Person Narratives : Towards a Cognitive Narratology". Through the essay, he examines how cognitive process inform narrative analysis. In the essay he says: " the contribution of mainstream narratology to a dedicated cognitive approach is meager and often counterproductive. In the light of cognitive frames and preferences, much of the mainstream narratology is pre-occupied with bottom-up analyses" (Jahn 1997, 465). Later, David Herman in his essay "Narratology as a Cognitive Science " elaborates the concept of cognitive narratology. Through the essay, he makes a theoretical inquiry to find an answer to the scope and complexity of the issues that include cognitive features in narration.

David Herman defines Cognitive narratology as a study of how mental process shape narrative experiences. He says, "cognitive narratology shares a focus on mental states, capacities, and dispositions that provide grounds for-or conversely are grounded in--narrative experiences" (Peter 2014, 46). David Herman tries to clarify the doubts of narratologists in incorporating the cognitive elements of the human brain to interpret the story. He adopts a multidisciplinary approach to analyse the narrative techniques. He argues that since the human brain has the capacity to interpret things in a divergent way on the basis of his experience, influence, knowledge, and memory, it can provide a strong foundation for the cognitive comprehension of the narratives. He examines the capacity of the human brain to evoke emotion and stimulation. These cognitive capacities produce rich and comprehensive understanding of the plot, characters, events and settings with multiple perspectives. He demands the need for further research and theoretical study in the field of cognitive sciences and narratology to effectively integrate these two fields.

Cognitive narratology study the various aspects of narration by getting into the insights of the human mind. It examines the complex, unconscious and rapid cognitive processes that help the individuals to comprehend the story. Gabriela Tucan, in her essay, "The Reader's Mind Beyond the Text: The Science of Cognitive Narratology" quotes Fauconnier and Turner, " the study of the literary mind has revived the interest in the narrative thinking towards the rehabilitation of imagination as a fundamental scientific topic, since it is the central engine of the meaning behind the most ordinary mental events" (Tucan 2013, 299). Cognition and the imaginative process work together in constructing the meaning of the stories. Narrative function as a tool for readers to structure understanding through their

experiences. Hermann introduces mental models to explain the process of interpretation. He says, “both language generally and narrative specifically can be viewed as tool- systems for building mental models of the world” (Herman 2000, 1). The mental models help the readers to construct a better understanding by sensing the story on the basis of their prior experiences as well as knowledge. Tuccan explains the concept of Hermann as “narrative understanding as a process of building mental models as a result of text interpretation, process of reconstruction, the interpreters rebuild roughly the same mental models that appear in story production”(Tuccan 2013, 300). The rebuilding occurs in accordance with the time and space mentioned in the story world. Cognitive narratology employs deictic shift to modulate the time and space to structure the thought process of the readers to construct the sense of the story world.

Cognitive Analysis of Narrative in Elie Wiesel’s Hostage

Cognitive narratology draws insights from various fields of knowledge like linguistics, philosophy, psychology, computer science, neuroscience and anthropology to facilitate the hermeneutical process to construct the cognitive structure of the human brain. Cognitive narratological approaches are particularly suited to analyzing the features of narrative perspectives, characterisation, interpretation, structure, narrative inference, memory, mental simulation and conceptual blending. The study also focuses on the distinguishing features of cognitive narratology in framing an identity while comprehending the narrative from the other narrative techniques in literature.

The cognitive features of narratology are more useful in analysing and interpreting psychological narratives. In trauma narratives, such narrative analysis is more productive because it can give space to the readers to interpret and treat the story with empathy for the victims. Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust writer of twentieth century literature in America, demonstrates exceptional narrative skill in his trauma-centered memoirs and novels. As a socially committed writer, he writes against the injustices and inequalities of society, especially on the issues related to anti-Semitism and religious terrorism. He is a Nobel Prize Laureate in Peace. By appreciating his lifetime commitment to humanity the Nobel committee honoured him with the title “Messenger to Mankind” (161). He is known all over the world for his masterpiece, *The Night Trilogy*. His other important works include *A Beggar in Jerusalem*, *A Mad Desire to Dance*, *The Fifth Son*, and *The Oath*. His last fiction, *Hostage*, is also a significant one that explains the relevance of the art of storytelling in the anarchic world.

Hostage powerfully articulates Jewish experiences after the Holocaust. It provides profound insights into the complexities of trauma, memory, moral dilemmas and identity crisis among the Jewish refugees. It directs the readers’ attention to the uncertainties of the present world where religious extremists exploit devotees’ beliefs to incite violence and hatred through terrorism. By examining the psychological mechanisms underlying religious extremism, the narrative warns the readers to be conscious of the politics of religious fanaticism. The political ideas of Wiesel are also discussed in the fiction. In the article “Wiesel’s Political Visions in Dawn, The New Testament and Hostage” (2019) by Rosemary

Horowitz comments, “Hostage is a treatise on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict as expressed through a kidnapping incident”(250). He presents the novel as a captivity narrative by highlighting the struggles and trauma of the hostage.

Captivity narratives typically accentuate the themes of captivity crises and escape with reference to cultural conflicts but in *Hostage*, the author concentrates more on the involvement of religion into politics to critique the contemporary society. He narrates the story through the elements of captivity struggles and trauma with a special focus on the attitude of the character’s transformation and redemption. As a spokes person for Jewish spirituality, he associates the situation with his spiritual thoughts so that he can frequently examines the moral as well as the psychological traits of the characters. It also brings out the problems of identity crisis experienced by both the fugitives and the abductors out of trauma and spiritual transformation. The novel takes the form of an enquiry to find out the exact psychological reason to motivate people to commit such an acts. The novel is a multi-layered journey into the trauma, memory, and moral dilemmas of the hostages. In this sense, the fiction invites a cognitive narrative analysis to comprehend the wholeness of the literary work.

Hostage tells the story of a Jew, Shaltiel Feigenberg, who became a victim of religious terrorism. The novel is set in the form of a narrative of biographical memoir by Shaltiel. The author uses the protagonist, Shaltiel, as a narrative vehicle, and through Shaltiel’s gifted art of storytelling, Wiesel exhibits the power of narratology. Through Shaltiel, Elie Wiesel employs a special narrative technique that can engage the readers’ cognition. He uses Shaltiel as a perfect example to exhibit the multifaceted impacts of psychological and cognitive power of narratology. The author’s narrative technique proves innovative: the main plot of the novel unfolds through the mythological stories of the hostage Shaltiel. Elie Wiesel uses the mythological stories of Shaltiel as a symbolic and structural representation to keep a deep bond with the religious spirit. As a religious writer, Wiesel deliberately integrates spiritual and mythical bond in Shaltiel’s stories to reveal the power of spirituality in transforming the human mind.

Cognitive narratology and interpretation are more relevant to manifesting the multiple aspects of such complex narratives. In the novel, Elie Wiesel incorporates the narrative elements of memory and flashbacks. He constructs a plot with a nonlinear structure by including features of fragmentation. By adding parallel story lines, Elie Wiesel makes his plot construction more interesting. He employs multiple narratives with dialogues to accommodate to various perspectives on violence, memory, and justice. In order to express the trauma and the intense mental sufferings, he uses first-person narrative, for example, “I feel an obscure desire to compare my imprisonment and my abductors’ death threats to the sufferings of my father, my mother and their parents. But I fight against compassion” (Wiesel 2012, 47). The subjective narration often employs authenticity through unfiltered expressions. It often reflects the natural outburst of emotions. Wiesel applies the technique of stream of consciousness and memory flashbacks in subjective narration to catch the

attention of the readers. By reading through the disjoint mode of construction, readers easily capture an awareness about the intensity of the pain which continuously tortures the mind of the author. It helps them to experience the pain as it swiftly falls into memory flashbacks. Such plot construction represents the genuine flow of the human mind.

In certain situations the authors provide a general statements of plot construction through third-person narratives for example, “To escape from the present, Shaltiel takes refuge in the delirium of the past: his father so pure in his occupations: his friends so compassionate: One –Eyed Paritus and his secrets; his brother, Pavel, and his metamorphoses; Blanca and lost happiness, unfulfilled love ” (Wiesel 2012,47) .The third person or the objective representations in *Hostage* encourage the attitude of hermeneutical analysis and inferential thinking. Wiesel often mixes objective statements with external sources by connecting the features of intertextuality. Such connections ensure a critical analysis of the subject matter through proper comparisons and interpretations. The detached tone evokes the cognitive process of the readers through observation and critical thinking. *Hostage* provides an active reading experience, which helps readers understand the plot and the social stigmas associated with the story. The thorough reading of the work helps the readers comprehend the isomorphic features of religious extremism and terrorism present in the Holocaust as well as the apocalyptic world. In order to create awareness about the heinous act of racial or religious segregation, the author employs such objective statements by connecting them with myths and religions. Thus, by switching between the first and third person narrative, the author tries to give a detailed study of the emotional as well as the general overview of the protagonist. The subjective and emotional narratives of the first person and the objective narrative of the third person provide a nuanced and multifaceted view of the story.

The author employs a unique sense of dialogue formation. He applies three different frames for dialogue formation. The first frame carries the normal conversation format, where two or three persons are involved in performing the dialogues to display the actions in present. In the second frame, he makes the protagonist dwell on his memories and create flashbacks. In such a situation, the protagonist reports the conversations by including the features of stream of consciousness. “A shiver runs down my spine when we’ve arrived. It’s the end of the afternoon. In the coolness dusk a little wind is blowing in from the mountains... Memories of chess games bought anguish. I recalled the fear of winning and the fear of losing: How was I to guess the mood and thoughts for my opponent, my enemy?...” (Wiesel 2012, 79). In the third frame, he combines the elements of narration with the mythological stories. He uses these stories as symbols to represent the truth of spirituality, truth, and kindness. He recreates the mythological stories to frame mythopoeic narration to remove the darkness of revenge, and ignorance from the mind of the audience. In one such story, he says to Luigi, “ You are not blind; it is that you have a heart of stone. You became indifferent to pain, poverty, and the misfortune of your subjects. You forgot that each one of them-each of us-is a universe that deserves your attention and compassion” (Wiesel 2012, 194). The

assimilation of all these narrative frames in a single plot provides a complex structure to the novel.

Characterisation matters a lot in framing the plot structure of a novel. In *Hostage*, the author employs a psychoanalytical way of storytelling by focussing on the emotional as well as physical trauma experienced by the protagonist. He applies indirect characterisation methods to dwell deep into the insights of trauma. Such characterization in *Hostage* explicits authenticity to the subject matter discussed in the work. It will give a chance to the readers to read, assess, analyse, and interpret each character according to their perspectives. The freedom offered by this type of characterisation makes the readers more curious about the plot. It promises active participation of the readers throughout the plot. The character analysis of Shaltiel is possible through the perusal understanding of his stories, mannerisms, dialogues and attitude. He never gives a chance to provide a literary description to explain the character of Shaltiel. On the other hand, the fiction provides so many contextual as well as subjective narrative strategies to explain the strengths and weaknesses of Shaltiel. The characters of Lungi and Ahmed are also presented through indirect characterisation. The active participation and the conversations among them motivate the speakers to understand the psychological transformation of religious extremism. Ahmed's character gives a clear picture of the wrong side of religious fanaticism and politics.

Wiesel metaphorically creates these characters to portray the two perspectives of terrorism. Shaltiel represents the mental conflicts and sufferings of the victims of terrorism, while on the other side, Lungi and Ahmed speak the politics of the assailants. Wiesel uses perfect portrayal in them to present the selfish politics of the fanatics. He applies ideal mannerisms, dialogues, and emotions in both to capture the contempt of the readers so that they will also criticise the autocratic policies of religious terrorism. Ahmed always repeats the words, "you're done for, you're all done for, the Jews're done for" (Wiesel 2012, 39). The words express his hatred and anger towards the Jews. While going through the characters of Lungi and Ahmed, it becomes more clear that they are not exactly the assailants of fanaticism; instead, they symbolise the emotional outburst of the innocent people who were psychologically trapped by the fanatics to execute their selfish political goals. They were cunningly trapped in by fanatics through the banner of revolution. Wiesel portrays Lugi and Ahmed to provide awareness about the deceits of religious termism. The dialogues of Ahmed make the readers enquire about the real meaning of revolution. Wiesel gives a conflict in the concept of revolution through the dialogues of Ahmed and Shaltiel. For Ahmed, "...The revolution requires a state of permanent warfare. Whoever is not with us against us" (Wiesel 2012, 144). The crookedness of the fanaticism emotionally hijacks their consciousness and transforms their beliefs. Thus, without understanding the real sense of the term, they add violence to it. Ahmed says, "The revolution isn't a game... As every revolutionary is prepared to sacrifice his own life for an ideal, why should he refrain from sacrificing the life of his enemy" (Wiesel 2012, 145)? Without realising the selfish politics behind religious fanaticism, he revolutionises it and adds violence as its motto. On the other hand, Shaltiel, through his experience, says, "revolution is merely a reflection of evil in the whole gamut

of theories invented by men who use their power to dehumanize history”(Wiesel 2012, 164)? Thus, throughout the work Wiesel provides divergent perspectives to comprehend meaning. The confusing conflicts put forward by him make the readers think and analyse the content deeply. He invokes the cognitive intelligence of the readers to take a decision of their own without authoritative them. The arguments make the readers vigilant to handle the context and the conflicts consciously without the interference of the emotional outbreaks.

The monologues and memory flashbacks of Shaltiel reveal his physical and emotional anxieties about the Holocaust victims. His recollections and emotional outbursts express his inner struggles. It also limelights the identity crisis experienced by him. His fears reveal the natality anxiety in him. The author portrays such fears of Shaltiel through his rhetorical questions. In one such statement, he asks, “ Why give life to children when the destiny of men is in the hands of executioners” (Wiesel 2012, 174)? It provides space for the readers to critically evaluate the context according to the prevailing situation in the world. Such forms of rhetoric help the readers to stimulate their thought process and be conscious of the violence around them. The writer gives more emphasis to this kind of narrative framework to fight against the attitude of indifference.

Wiesel fixes his characterisation mode particularly to evoke empathy among the readers. He applies the divergent forms of trauma narrative techniques like fragmentation, repetition, incoherence, and memory flashbacks to reveal the transgenerational trauma experienced by the victims of the Holocaust. By implementing these narrative techniques, Wiesel tries to create transgenerational empathy among the readers. He collaborates history with memory flashbacks and presents through the forms of fragments in *Hostage* to directly get into the psyche of the readers. The fragmented stories and memory flashbacks of the life of Shaltiel in the ghettos evoke pity and fear among the readers. The sensitive or emotional approach towards the childhood memories of Shaltiel is obvious from the presentation memory flashbacks. The memory flashbacks and fragments are proceeded with utmost care to make the readers conscious towards the posttrauma of the author. The post-memory elements are more active in the novel.

The structure of the plot is maintained in *Hostage* according to the cognitive processing of a traumatic patient. As the story centres on the life of Shaltiel, the plot delineates in accordance with his problems. It keeps a non-linear structure of construction because of the involvement of the psychological elements. It blends with history, memories, sufferings, and longings to make the reader's experience the trauma of Shaltiel. According to the cognitive aspects of narratology by Hermann, the nonlinear structure of the plot assures a complex structure in which the readers often engage with active cognition to reframe the order so that they can trace out the content. It makes them think deeply by reconstructing the story timelines to prove sense to the story according to their individual experience, social involvement, and cognitive structure. The historical elements in the novel often figured through the memory flashbacks of Shaltiel. More than the factual history, he emotionalises the content to represent collective trauma of the event. The particular historical event remains

as a background setting for the novel. The setting of the story is immersed in the Holocaust attacks and Arab-Jewish struggles. But the author keeps justice to both sections of the world by pointing out the flaws of violence. By generalised statements and ironies, he symbolises the heinous acts of religious extremism. The readers with such knowledge and experience can easily correlate these elements of the story with their memories. Memories get triggered to arouse the same emotional stress that they had experienced in the past. The recollection of the pain and trauma will create emotional anxiety. It slowly turns into empathy towards the characters. So according to the cognitive framework of the reader, the narrative structure transforms. Those who have experienced the pain will feel more than the one who witnessed the trauma. While going through the various parts of the plot, the background setting stands as a witness to remind the readers of the facts of history. It provides a transgenerational appeal to the trauma by evoking the transgenerational empathy. Thus, without pointing out the facts, history endures along with the plot.

The Holocaust episode presented in *Hostage* provides a meticulous examination of the sufferings of the victims. Wiesel provides memory flashbacks to describe the childhood trauma of Shaltiel. Through the realistic presentation of the events, he gives a detailed portrayal of the physical and mental trauma of him. Wiesel portrays a pathetic version of an existential crisis in this section. Through his majestic presentation, he elaborates on the stumbling struggles of the Holocaust confronted by children. Wiesel's creativity reaches its exuberance when he converts the innocent passion of the boy into an escaping tool to save the family from the dangers of genocide. Wiesel offers a chance to the readers to comprehend the intensity of the brutalities of Nazi soldiers by describing the incident.

The prime analysis of the details the story worlds constructed in the novel gives a model to the readers to access its events, characters and settings and The creative elements and imaginative content to fictionalise the event make the readers curious about the plot. In *Hostage*, Wiesel fictionalised the terrorist attack at the Munich Olympic Games in 1975. He tries to keep an isomorphic relationship in the novel by keeping the story in a parallel line with the particular event. More than worshipping the heroism of violence, he uses it as a parallel act to defend against the brutalities of violence. He let the protagonist live in the violence to portray the horrors of it. He uses appropriate situations and dialogues to construct the plot so that it will provide a detailed analysis of the trauma of war and violence.

In order to produce a comprehensive understanding of the brutal faces of oppression, war and violence, the author draws an accurate portrait of all these through the life of Shaltiel. The agony of the war victims, along with the critical comments of the Holocaust victim, help the reader gain a perfect understanding of it. Through this technique of narration, he creates empathy in them. Wiesel creates some narrative inferences in *Hostage* to make the readers use their conscious thinking to find a clear solution to the problems of racial as well as religious segregation. By creating situational dialogues with critical comments he offers space for mind reading. It helps the readers to understand and interpret the content according to their desires, beliefs and emotions. In an emotional exploration Shaltiel says:

“Home? Poland? Hungary? Romania? Lithuania? Those who did return home were greeted with hostility and, in some places, with pogroms. You’re Italian. Don’t tell me you’re a Holocaust denier. Are you aware of our history? We are almost annihilated in Europe. So many of the survivors in camps for displaced persons encountered closed doors in America and the Holy Land, and had only one alternative: to fulfill their ancestral dream and restore Jewish sovereignty in the Promised Land” (Wiesel 2012, 133).

Such passages in *Hostage* infer the readers and prompt them to know the facts about the Jewish history of exile and displacement. The comments like ‘pogroms’, ‘Holocaust denial’, and ‘annihilation in Europe’ work as cognitive tools to engage the readers and enhance their skills in interpretation to comprehend the content by filling in the missing information.

The techniques of cognitive narratology unveil such complexities through the features of literary interpretations. It assures thinking and rethinking processes in order to get into the details of the plot. It helps the readers to build new lines of communication by constructing a supercoding structure for interpretation. It assists the readers to construct mental models according to the actual world. While explaining the features of cognitive narratology in the essay, “The Reader’s Mind Beyond the Text-The Science of Cognitive Narratology” Gabriela Tucan, Senior Lecturer of Modern Languages at West University Timisoara, says: “cognitive narratologists have tried to identify exactly that set of cognitive tools that interpreters use in order to recognize stories, for instance, of short fiction and then differentiate them from the ones in the more complex novels”(Tucan,2012,p.301). In order to explain the complexities of narration explicit by the author, cognitive narratology helps to redefine the process of interpretation. Cognitive narratology analyses the narrative strategy in accordance with the human mind. The narrative features nourish the cognitive aspects of the human brain to add some new impulses to promote the active participation of the readers. It does not simply talk about the narrative structure of a work of literature; instead, it talks about how the narrative of the particular work restructures the cognitive process of the human mind. The narrative process influences the mind to boost its cognitive activities by encouraging various dimensions of thinking. It is highly interdisciplinary. Hermann’s ideas on cognitive narratology give importance to the concept of narration, cognition, and interpretation to merge the themes of the texts with the realities of the surroundings to sense out new meanings. It helps to reconstruct the representations of the readers’ mind to infuse with the divergence of storytelling. The various methods of psychological as well as the multiple perspectives of narratology explicated by Elie Wiesel in *Hostage* provide a perfect room for readers to open the doors of cognitive narratology to understand the concepts in a new visionary gleam.

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