

EXISTENCE OF PARALLEL UNIVERSES AS SACRED TIMELINES: NARRATIVE CONCEPT IN MODERN FICTIONAL WORKS

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Abstract

Multidimensional or often referred to as the vast and countless universe (multiverse) is currently a hot issue in modern society and many people believe that the existence of this diverse universe is real. The representation of the existence of this diverse universe has been shown in the television series which is an adaptation of the comic series titled 'Loki', then a collection of fairy tales traveling to a fantasy world titled 'The Chronicles of Narnia' which in the big screen version consists of three main series namely The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe, Prince Caspian and The Voyage of The Dawn Treader, then a novel titled 'Dark Matter' and a film entitled 'Everything Everywhere All at Once'. These works of fiction are similar to the concept of emphasizing the process of transformation from the real world as it is today and then moving to other universes in the story. The main character in the story experiences a multi-dimensional journey that is difficult to explain logically. This study uses qualitative descriptive methods using a comparative literary approach combined with semiotic theory and the concept of equilibrium in narrative theory to dissect and analyze the hidden meanings that appear in these works of fiction. The results obtained from this study are that the idea of multi-dimensional life, multi-universes and parallel universes has become a very popular thing in various works of modern fiction. The superiority of storytelling techniques like this gives the author freedom and flexibility in creating a work, and the idea of storytelling like this will trigger tremendous curiosity for the reader or audience.

Keywords: modern fiction, multi-dimensional Journey, parallel universe, sacred timeline

INTRODUCTION

Fiction is a form of real-life representation that undergoes a process of transformation into an imaginative form in accordance with the wishes of the author. Film is one of them as a special media in fiction that displays a story that is presented in the form of audio visuals such as theater performances and plays. A work can have a variety of interpretations for readers or viewers. Rosenbaum (2000) suggests that films in the 1980s era can no longer be categorized as a 'masterpiece' because of the elements of duplication so that the average has similarities. This certainly caused saturation among film lovers and critics because the course of film development from the 1960s to the 1980s tended to be monotonous and often contained propaganda and commercial elements.

Anxiety about the quality of storytelling and plot ideas in the film that did not develop until the 1980s has then been treated with the presence of new concepts on the concept of narrative ideas and the application of more innovative shooting techniques in the 1990s era. Story innovations that focus on paradoxical time patterns, inter-dimensional travel, futuristic settings to complex plots are key elements in the development of stories in modern fiction. Such new forms are certainly like two sides of a coin, can bring tremendous interest from the audience or even be hated by the audience. Experiments on complex storytelling patterns that are still new still maintain the classic tradition of Hollywood films as in the early era of its success in the 1960s, but wrapped with new innovations in the concept of narrative presented. This formula turns out to be very speculative, but it turns out that these new things are very liked by the audience (Bordwell, 2006).

Moving from the curiosity of a very large community in the world, the film di-

rectors began to work on his works with the genre of science fiction. These science fiction films began to appear on the big screen such as *The Extra-Terrestrial (E.T.)* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *The Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Judge Dredd* (1995), *The Matrix* (1999), *Inception* (2010), and others. In addition to the science fiction genre, fantasy movies are also gaining immense attention from audiences around the world. Favourite fantasy films include *Lord of the Rings* (2003), *Harry Potter* (2001), *Spiderwick* (2008), *Percy Jackson* (2010), *Gulliver's Travel* (2010), *Journey to the Center of the World* (2008), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and many more. These genres of science fiction and fantasy are new creation idea, and the presence of these genres give a new insight in the film industry and its presence is very admired by fans of the genre.

Science fiction films and fantasy films have identical patterns of similarity, namely the existence of a transition of nature from the real world and then transformed to another world that is very different from existing reality. The concept of storytelling that exists can be in the form of natural transition, or the entire setting in pure storytelling is in the middle of nowhere. Referring to this, this study focuses on the journey of exploring dimensions that are not limited to space and time in several works of fiction titled *Loki: The Series*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Dark Matter* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. These works of fiction have similarities to the transition process of change between dimensions and the universe by using media in the form of special portals as a medium to be able to move to different dimensions and universes. Implicitly what is depicted in the storytelling built from these films seems to describe the process of moving humans from the real world to the infinite non-linear dimension.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method by displaying evidence of modern fiction that increasingly emphasizes the elements of parallel worlds and other dimensions in the narrative game created. This phenomenon was analyzed using the narrative theory of Tzvetan Todorov and semiotics theory to examine the pattern of storytelling in works of fiction in the form of films and novels in the modern era today. This research is a literature study where the main focus is to uncover the message of the emergence of the existence of movement or travel between dimensions and time in a fictional storytelling.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Method

This study used descriptive qualitative method. Berg (2001) The use of qualitative methods is more appropriate applied to social research because it does not use statistical data in the form of numbers and formulas that require mathematical calculations. The data obtained can be processed directly using literature studies and can be found problems and solutions using theories obtained from reference sources in the form of books and articles from various sources. Qualitative techniques can make it easier for researchers to submit their research results based on the suitability of procedures for findings that are not in the form of numerical data. Research using this method has a basic purpose that the scientific research carried out starts from the process of collecting data, carrying out research procedures in a scientific and systematic manner, then finding the answers and writing them in a structured manner in a writing with the rules of scientific articles.

Steven J. Taylor., Robert Bogdan., Marjoire L. De Vault (2016) also explained that qualitative descriptive methods are

very suitable to be applied in social research in order to uncover social phenomena in more detail and depth that are displayed in symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so on.

Science Fiction and Fantasy

The science fiction genre is synonymous with stories that can be said to be beyond the bounds of human reasonableness or logic. Hollywood has successfully implemented this concept of space mystery and travel to other dimensions through several popular fiction works, *namely Star Wars, Star Trek, E.T., Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Independence Day, Quantum Leap* and many more. This category of science fiction is very popular to the audiences around the world who seem to thirst for curiosity from unanswered questions about inter-dimensional and intergalactic travel (Barsanti, 2015).

Susan Sontag in Barsanti (2015) stating that in fact a science fiction film has absolutely nothing to do with science. The process of creation and production of a science fiction film is purely an imaginative idea of a story writer or a director. These ideas arise as an effect of anxiety, and criticism of things that are happening around him. By the end of the 1990s, Computer-Generated *Image* (CGI) technology had played an important role in the process of creating the imagination of science fiction films into a visual impression that was exciting and fun to enjoy. Through the many advanced technologies that support the creation process of a film, it is certainly an advantage for science fiction films to be able to interpret visually about visionary thoughts. In the current era of computerization and digitization, science fiction films have certainly become a medium for directors or story writers to describe their visionary ideas and thoughts about things such

as: unsolved mysteries, alien invasions, civilizations in other galaxies, and the emergence of zombies (Hassler, 1991).

John Pierce in Malmgren (1991) stating that science fiction works have penetrated the boundaries of past rules and come up with new ideas that run on modern concepts that transcend boundaries. Science fiction has always been story-oriented with concepts of technological progress, political manifestations of power and cultural domination. Scientific work is a representation of the existence of ideas in an idea, Pierce through the next statement also mentions that science fiction works are literary ideas that are very systematic and not boring. Through the work of science fiction, the audience is truly hypnotized as if they are in astonishing nature. The world of science fiction is a plot creation that explains the existence of aliens, time travel, underworlds that have their own characteristics that are very strong and distinctive. Science fiction is thus heterotopic; it incorporates supernatural, alienated, or non-empirical elements, but bases those elements in a naturalization discourse that presupposes an explanation of the universe.

Science fiction and fantasy films do not serve as mere entertainment for the audience, but many brilliant thoughts that arise from a science fiction work are then transformed or adapted into real life. Pagan (2014) in providing a review of the work entitled *Star Maker* (1937) explains that in the story the protagonist has managed to travel into space and open his mind about how vast the universe is. On his journey, he encounters a life called 'another world' that is technologically, culturally and physically very different from life on earth. The thoughts and concepts created by Olaf Stapledon in *Star Maker* are able to arouse the imagination of readers to imagine further about life out there that is

still a mystery to this day. Science fiction works (UFO-themed, zombie, *time travel*) are also referred to as *paranormal folklore* has become a product of popular culture worldwide (Lewis, 2000).

The fantasy genre is also a major attraction in the concept of modern storytelling. Fantasy genre has different characteristics, the existence of value and quality is not high or has less quality than other literary works. This is because literary critics consider that the work of fantasy fiction genre is not high prestige. Fantasy fiction is considered less desirable by adults and tends to be liked by children. When one reads a work of fiction the fantasy genre is considered as someone who does the wrong pleasure. This stigma is what makes fantasy fiction less desirable because it exists only as entertainment and light reading. The development of fantasy genre fiction is gradually accepted by the public and in the end these fantasy genre works have been able to capture the hearts of readers with the uniqueness of storytelling and the complexity of the author's imagination that is difficult to guess making this fantasy literary work popular (Bechtel, 2004).

Inter-Dimensional Travel

Modern fiction often tells of a trip across dimensions or even teleportation 'jumping' from the reality of the present time to the past or future. The idea of the transfer of dimensions, time and universe in this fantasy and science fiction film bears a resemblance to our understanding of the concept of the human journey after death. The process of moving from one world to another may still be considered taboo and scary for most people, but the actual picture of the transition from one world to another is often raised in fictional storytelling. It is this concept that bears resemblance

ce to the concept of death in the principle of human belief.

This process of death is like that Kaku (2005) revealed by Nordic mythology where there will be an end day filled with battles with the gods against giants, monsters and other ferocious creatures. This battle is not only a feud between the gods against the forces of evil, but it is a battle involving all living beings in this universe and the battle of the last days is called 'Ragnarok'. The world will become dark, extreme winters will destroy the world, monsters and giants will appear, Loki will lead the attack to destroy the earth. Odin as the leader of the gods will be the leader of the best warriors to fight the enemy forces namely giants and fire monsters led by Surtur. This war was the last war to go to Valhalla, until finally Surtur spewed fire that destroyed the entire world. Surtur has produced such a tremendous devastation that it has reduced the world to ashes. The ashes of the final destruction of the world slowly form a new universe and a new universe that is different from the previous universe, from which a new life emerges in an entirely new universe. This concept of Nordic mythology implies an analogy about the changing concept of life transformation, destruction and the reappearance of a new world.

Based on the stories that have been experienced by people about near-death experiences, all of them experience the same thing, which is like walking down a hall that looks like a worm hole. This hallway is the link between the realms of life to the realms of death. At some point they will be asked to continue their journey or want to return to complete their business. This is very difficult to explain scientifically because this experience is a secret in life (Eaton, 2011). This transfer from the realm of life to the realm of death is certainly not realized by someone who experiences it,

and this journey becomes a mystery that cannot be explained and solved until now.

As explained above, the concept of modern storytelling by creating the idea of inter-dimensional travel is inspired by the transition from the phase of human life in this world and to the next realm when he has died. In modern fiction, this is called dimensional travel. Traditional storytelling concepts that tend to be linear and structured storytelling today have undergone a massive evolution. The idea of modern fiction that is currently very famous is to create the concept of a non-linear or branched storytelling structure. This non-linear narrative plays with time and sequences, the plot or plot created is not sequential and is presented in a diverse perspective. The application of this modern narrative form creates new problems, tensions and deeper explorations in storytelling so as to enhance detailed character development.

With reference to the concept of a diverse theory of the universe can produce a non-linear or multi-linear flow. In modern fiction works with science fiction stories in the form of inter-dimensional travel, it is as if the main character walks across different dimensions and is like being reborn in a world in the middle of nowhere, from which the story then develops into more and more complicated. The power of modern storytelling like this is a harmony and beauty of the author's imaginative ideas in creating a fictional story in accordance with the times. This inter-dimensional travel technique is based on the belief in the concept of universal diversity in this world.

Comparative Literature

Comparative Literature is an appropriate 'tool' for examining a work intellectually and in detail. Referring to its development, comparative literature was

initially popularized by French thinkers by carrying the French influence (initial concept) and immediately spread throughout mainland Europe to America. Comparative literature studies that originally compared two literary works from one country, until finally this pattern of comparative literature studies underwent a significant evolution. Comparative literature studies are currently no longer studying two literary works from two works in one country, but comparative literature can be studied in a broader scope. The views of the thinkers of the new influence (American influence) of comparative literature open the boundaries that comparative literature can be used to study literary works with other works of art or other fields. The French initial influence of comparative literature eventually followed the American influence of thought as a new comparative literature concept (De Zepetnek & Mukherjee, 2013)

Comparative literature is able to become a 'bridge' to analyze cultural, linguistic, social, political and artistic differences from different countries. Comparative literary study is a study which is an analytical approach to a work in terms of the various things that support it. The history behind a work can be a point of interest in analyzing a work. The transformation journey of literary works, which at first always had to be a work of imaginative fiction that was written and printed, is now a literary work that has entered the contemporary era, namely using digital media as a basis for its creation process. The uniqueness of the development of this literary work can be investigated using a comparative literary approach, because comparative literary study is a study that is very flexible in examining the phenomena of new works in accordance with the times (Behdad & Thomas, 2011)

Semiotics

Understanding a work of art is a challenge in itself. The resulting meaning of a story can give birth to new opinions and theories that are very diverse, because this is everyone's interpretation in understanding a work. Cobley (2001) explains Peirce's statement about symbols, that symbols are complicated. Symbols are linguistic signs associated with semiotic objects. The form is conventional (generally understood and agreed upon). Chandler (2007) also further explains Peirce's statement that symbols refer to an object that usually has a close correlation with conventions in the wider community, symbols refer to the existence of the object. Symbols are always associated with all the objects we see and then processed by our mind so that it can interpret the existence of the object.

On the other hand, besides symbols, another thing that we need to pay attention to in analyzing a work is the focus of finding icons that are displayed both literally and implicitly. Chandler (2007) states that according to Peirce the terms icon and icon are things that have different meanings to the terms used in everyday life. Icons don't always have to be visually visible; signs are also icons. Peirce also stated that the image can also be categorized as an icon according to mutual agreement in the wider community. On the other hand, an iconic is something or someone that is expected to be instantly recognizable or instantly recognizable within a particular cultural sphere. Peirce expresses the meaning of the iconic sign is to represent objects, especially in the similarities that are formed. Cobley (2001) explains that icons are signs that have correlations that are interrelated with the similarity of existing semiotic objects.

This research focuses on the emergence of various symbols and icons that appear along the storyline that show the existence of symbols and icons as depicted in the film *Loki: The Series* in the form of a dimensional portal resulting from the mysterious energy of the tesseract stone and the presence of trains, wardrobes and paintings in *The Chronicles of Narnia* that connects one dimension or world with other worlds, and mysterious inter-dimensional transitions in *Dark Matter* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Transition or can be called the transition from one universe to another universe represents the process of transition of a person from one dimension to another dimension.

Equilibrium in Modern Story Concept

The concept of narrative in modern fiction certainly cannot be separated from the existence of the thinking pattern of the Russian formalist character, Vladimir Propp, which is used to analyze the narrative structure in a story and can be applied to examine storytelling techniques in literary works from various media. The initial concept of Vladimir Propp was later developed by Viktor Shklovsky and Boris Tomashevsky to be more perfect and follow the development of literary works. Vladimir Propp suggests the existence of 'Fabula' and 'Sjuzhet' which are used in analyzing a work. Fabula refers to the chronology of an event. Fabula is a pattern of narrative structure that includes all scenes, events and characters in a story and has a causal relationship. Fabula tried to present a story exactly like what had happened. Sjuzhet is how a story is presented to the reader according to its narrative. Sjuzhet can modify the display of events based on their order (as presented according to the 'Fabula' rule). Sjuzhet gives variations of other forms of author storytelling using the

concept of plot games that are not always linear and simple.

Referring to the Russian concept of Formalism above, then we can relate how to present the story of the author to the reader by using the narrative theory of Tzvetan Todorov in the form of the concept of equilibrium in the narrative concept of a work. This narrative concept according to Todorov can be categorized into three main levels, starting with the first phase called equilibrium, which is the beginning of a story that is disturbed by the presence of an extraordinary event and then challenging a situation that is initially normal and fine. The next phase is disruption, in this second phase there is a disturbance that increases the tension of the story because there is tension and uncertainty due to strange things that contradict the rational explanation. At this stage Todorov called it 'fantastic', this gave rise to two options, namely the presence of a rational solution in solving the fantastic thing or the presence of this fantastic thing changing the world fundamentally and inexplicably. The third or final phase is called the return to equilibrium phase (also called 'resolution' which is almost similar to the Freytag Pyramid concept of plot sequence in narrative). This phase restores equilibrium at the beginning of the story (restores equilibrium at the beginning of the story) or this equilibrium still leaves the events present unexplained and produces a new equilibrium that incorporates fantastic things into everyday life in the storytelling (Todorov, 1971).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A work by C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a compilation of several novel series which were later adapted into films, namely *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Trader* have a storytelling concept about the

existence of a magical portal that became a medium to transform from the real world to the realm of *Narnia*. This magical portal can not always be used to traverse to other dimensions because of age constraints that are too mature or old, this certainly has the message that a fantasy work should be devoted to children, but through the film version is shown different from the concept of the original story that the journey to another dimension using this magical portal can be done by anyone. This concept means that the *Narnia* story is made for all ages (Fowkes, 2010). C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* recounts the adventures of Peter Pevensie, Susan Pevensie, Edmund 'Ed' Pevensie, and Lucy Pevensie in the fantasy land of *Narnia*. The four children accidentally enter a fantasy world and discover another universe filled with creatures like animals but able to speak like humans. According to the narration, this *Narnian* universe is a real universe and goes hand in hand with the real-world universe today. The concept of fantasy has defined a state of reality, where the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Fantasy works tend to be absurd and full of strange imagination, but in the end the message you want to convey can be understood along with following the story (Syahrullah, 2012, pp. 25).

This *Narnia* story is an example of an adaptation concept that is able to turn a written fictional story into a stunning audio-visual form. According to Davidson (2014) and Safdari et al (2013), an adaptation process is certainly experiencing additions or subtractions as a form of modification of a work so that it has more variety in conveying the purpose of its storytelling (Nugrahani et al., 2019, pp 222). This mysterious experience of Peter, Susan, Ed and Lucy is a testament to the diverse concept of the universe in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. *Narnia* shows two very different realms,

namely the real world which is connected to the occult portal which then leads to the fantasy world with all the absurdities that exist so that it contradicts the logic and reason that exist in life in the real world.



Figure 1 & 2: The Depiction of transformation from the real world to the fantasy world in *Narnia*

A similar concept is also found in the modern work of fiction, *Loki* (adapted from Nordic mythology). A god who was then described as a weak and helpless being. He has managed to steal a Tesseract that is able to take him to a completely new place, and *Loki* does not realize that he has been caught by the *Time Variance Authority* or abbreviated as *TVA*. *TVA* is an organization that monitors the timelines in this diverse universe. The *TVA* has the ability to prevent something bad from happening by cutting or deleting an existing timeline. This organization has the authority to capture and punish creatures from various universes that have the potential or act to damage the timeline. Basically, this diverse concept of the universe is called the mul-

tiverse in modern storytelling. Each of us has various duplicates that share the same characteristics but are spread across different universes in this life. This twin concept was introduced in the *Loki* series and is called the 'variant'. Marvel Comics storytelling models that are also adapted into animated films or feature films feature the idea of storytelling across alternate realities as shown in several of his works, namely *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse*, *America Chavez*, *Cable* and many more.



Figure 3. Loki and his variants from all over the multiverse

The storytelling technique by taking the multiverse concept certainly gives a great curiosity effect to the reader or audience, this certainly provides an advantage for the author to be able to develop stories with variations of various characters. Novelists, comics and film directors can take this momentum to diversify the story by discussing or telling the characters from different perspectives. This technique can make the complexity of the story more complicated and character development in the story can produce a non-linear plot. For example, Loki's story consisting of several variant characters in a story is then discussed one by one existing characters will appear endless new possibilities that

can create curiosity, surprise and other effects on the reader or audience.

In the realm of novels, *Dark Matter* by Blake Crouch (2016) is one example of a novel that combines elements of science fiction, thriller, mystery and adventure, telling Jason Dessen who experienced an extraordinary experience of interacting directly with the existence of parallel worlds or can be called the multiverse. Jason Dessen is a physics professor who one night is mysteriously kidnapped and when he wakes up, he is in a parallel world with a different life. Jason then realizes that in this alternate reality he is slowly realizing that his life has changed drastically, the existence of his position between reality and illusion is very blurred. From where Jason Dessen's adventure begins, he must find a way out to escape this alternate reality and return to the universe he once belonged in. Jason Dessen's eccentric experiences force him to travel between dimensions and meet other versions of himself and strangers. Every natural reality he encounters has a variety of diverse consequences, every time Jason Dessen tries to move to another dimension to find a way home, he encounters increasingly complicated problems.

Another modern work of fiction that also takes the theme of alternative reality and the main character is an ordinary human, namely the film entitled *Everything Everywhere All at Once* by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert. This film has the power of storytelling about the reality of parallel worlds that are described in detail and complicated. It begins with the journey of Evelyn Quan Wang whose life is filled with problems that come repeatedly. Evelyn who is an ordinary middle-aged woman accidentally experiences an extraordinary event, unwittingly she travels between dimensions of various realities and timelines. Evelyn had an amazing experience as she

encountered different versions of herself from different dimensions. He experiences events beyond logic as Evelyn must face a threat from an inter-dimensional super villain ruler named Jobu Tupaki and accidentally enters into a cosmic battle in a mysterious dimension. Evelyn is not alone in experiencing this mysterious experience, she is helped by a variant of her husband in another dimension. Evelyn eventually realizes that she must focus her mind to be able to control various versions of herself in order to defeat the evil power of Jobu Tupaki. This fictional work of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is one example of the many works of modern fiction that have a similar formula that starts from everyday life which then escalates to the plot with the experience of entering a parallel world and the story runs with full absurdity until it ends peacefully.



Figure 4. The depiction of the transition from one universe to another universe in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

CONCLUSION

The concept of the multiverse in modern fiction is a product of the imagination and creativity of the author or director in building storytelling. This concept has become popular culture in modern works of fiction and the popularity of this idea of creation is used as a narrative device because it allows the author or director to explore the infinite possibilities and variations of reality in their fictional world. The idea

of the multiverse has become prevalent in modern fiction for several reasons, including: giving the author or director the freedom to create fiction stories, the expanding universe of course provides endless complexity of storytelling, the presence of the multiverse is able to increase philosophical and scientific exploration. Various works of fiction such as novels, comics and films have used this idea of parallel and multiverse life stories. The idea of a story about the adventure of exploring the vast universe and consisting of various dimensions has a similar pattern, namely about an admiration and curiosity about the complexity of simultaneous life from various dimensions. The life of each of these dimensions runs side by side and each has different problems and consequences. The product of this popular culture idea cannot be separated from technological developments that certainly affect a work produced.

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