

# *A Study on the Similarity of Literary Symbols Used for Social Modelling and Characterisation in Niche Cultures*

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**Abstract:** With the development of contemporary cultural industries, people have more choices of cultural entertainment. Therefore, more niche cultures came into views of the crowd. However, despite the fact that niche cultures were born to meet the specific needs of different groups of people, the author discovered that many of the literary symbols used in the cultural products that are well received by consumers have something in common, such as drawing on historical events and mapping realistic symbols, characterisation of symbols that rebel against stereotypes and status, seeking the most idealised story structure within a realist framework like romanticised symbolic representations of violent means. This reminds the author that the similarity of literary symbols in niche cultures may have something to do with real life social environment and other more realistic reasons. Therefore, in this study, the author will focus on social modelling and characterisation of the niche cultures to explore the similarities of literary symbols used for social modelling and characterisation in niche cultures, using observational method, documentary research method and Information research methods.

**Keywords:** cultural entertainment, literary symbols

## 1. Introduction

With the progression of socio-economic development, the entertainment industry has experienced significant growth, driven by the increasing disposable income of citizens seeking to fulfill their spiritual and cultural desires. Simultaneously, the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted travel activities worldwide, leading to a surge in the modern entertainment industry's online communication sector. This has allowed a broader audience to engage with niche cultures within the cultural industry's various segments.

The author's exploration delves into the narrative elements and character portrayals found in a range of niche cultures, including Arknights, a tower defense game within the quadratic gaming segment, as well as musicals like *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Six*, and *Hamilton*. Through this examination, commonalities emerge within these cultural works, particularly in the utilization of symbolic representations. One of the most notable shared features is the incorporation of real-world mapping, prompting the author to question whether adverse events like the COVID-19 pandemic have eroded people's trust and confidence in society and government. As a result, an increasing

number of individuals turn to virtual works to seek solace and find a more embellished sense of rational comfort within the realm of display.

Consequently, the author has chosen to embark on a journey that involves drawing inspiration from historical events and employing realist symbols. This exploration aims to challenge established stereotypes and social norms by characterizing symbols that rebel against convention. Additionally, it seeks to identify the most idealized narrative structures within a realist framework. This pursuit involves the romanticized symbolic representations of both non-violent and violent means. By comparing the commonalities across various examples of niche cultures, the author endeavors to shed light on the socio-human motivations underlying these creative expressions.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Semiotics, rooted in structuralist thought, was originally conceptualized by Saussure a century ago as "the study of signs" [1]. Roland, a prominent interpreter of semiotics, emphasizes that the relationship between symbols should be seen as reciprocal rather than equal. This perspective shifts the focus from analyzing sequential elements to understanding the interconnections that bind them together [2].

Zhao Yiheng further elaborated on the interpretation of symbols, defining them as perceptions that convey meaning [3]. This definition paved the way for exploring the intrinsic connection between semiotics and literature, enabling an analysis of how the establishment of literary symbols within semiotics impacts individuals.

Semiotics encompasses a wide spectrum of symbols, ranging from global events to minute details like characters, ornaments, verbal communication, or physical actions [4]. Roman Jakobson categorizes symbols into signs, which are directly perceivable, and signs, which can be inferred and understood. Artistic symbols, such as external features of characters, fall into the sign category, while character traits, displayed through individual actions, and social attributes, conveyed through group concepts and actions, belong to the sign category [5].

Peirce's focus lies in the foundations of logic, which exist independently of reasoning and facts. He distinguishes between logic as a symbolic science and other forms of reasoning based on definitions and divisions rather than axioms [6]. Peirce introduces the concepts of object and interpretant, suggesting that symbols represent a consensus to refer to a specific object. This relationship typically involves three elements: representamen, object, and ground, often existing in a triadic state [7].

Peirce's argument posits that anything capable of independent existence, interconnection with other elements, and interpretability can function as a symbol [8]. This perspective leads to the core of the thesis on semiotics, which aims to study not only concrete concepts like figurative representations and objects but also abstract notions such as social patterns and historical impressions.

## **3. The Social and Historical Nature of Literary Symbols**

In the context of narrative analysis, examining the game *Arknights* provides a compelling case study. One of the most captivating aspects of this game is the intricate storyline set in a fictional nation called Ursus, reminiscent of Tsarist Russia. The narrative unfolds across nine main chapters and two side stories, offering players a deep immersion into the world of Ursus.

Central to *Arknights*' narrative is the concept of oripathy, a fictional disease that serves as an abstract symbol within the game. Oripathy is portrayed as both contagious and incurable, drawing parallels to real-world diseases like HIV. This allegorical approach allows the game to explore the triggers of prejudice and conflict between nations and individuals. Much like in the real world, where the means of transmission of diseases like HIV may not be fully understood, the characters in

Arknights exhibit a strong rejection of the infected, driven by survival instincts. This rejection even extends to discrimination at the national level, mirroring real-world stigma associated with diseases.

Within the game's narrative, there are harrowing instances of infected individuals being confined to warehouses in small suburban settlements, left to starve to death. Despite the bleak circumstances, some infected individuals, like those associated with Rhodes Island, a medical company, still hold onto hope. Rhodes Island not only seeks a cure for oripathy but also addresses the broader issues faced by the infected population. Conversely, others infected with oripathy resign themselves to their fate, either passively awaiting death or extracting every last drop of support from their families.

The symbolism of oripathy in Arknights extends beyond its parallels with HIV. It also reflects real-world diseases such as pneumoconiosis and pyrexia, conditions that are challenging to treat due to prolonged exposure to hazardous work environments lacking proper protective measures. In many cases, individuals contract oripathy through unprotected originiums mining, where they are exposed to active originiums for extended periods. The game draws a parallel with the real world as it underscores how capitalist motives often lead to cost-cutting measures that compromise workers' safety, emphasizing the harsh side of human nature in both the game's fictional world and reality.

In contrast to Arknights, musical productions like *SIX* and *Hamilton* are also rooted in history, but their narrative approach differs significantly. Rather than using history as a backdrop for an abstract allegory, these musicals engage in a more direct and historically relevant retelling, akin to a calendar of historical events. This distinction leads to delve into the concept of the "Idealized Narrative Approach" in the subsequent chapter of the analysis.

#### 4. Idealised Narrative Approach

In the previous chapter, the discussion centered on Rhodes Island, a prominent pharmaceutical company. This chapter continues to explore the narratives of two accomplished individuals within the company and draws comparisons between their stories and musicals.

In the side story titled "Come Catastrophes or Wakes of Vultures," the character Jessica appears, assuming the role of a symbolically hired gun. Simultaneously, she hides her identity as a young woman seeking to escape her affluent and influential family. This narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Colombia, where a marginal plot of land undergoes infrastructural refurbishment, mirroring the realities of Europe and America. Upon completion of the renovation, the bank, which had assumed control of the land following the government's collapse, faces the task of evicting the original laborers. The story delves into the bank's manipulation of landowners, capitalizing on human greed through aggressive loan advertising. It also sheds light on the darker facets of society, including bankruptcy-induced suicides. However, the story does not culminate in complete devastation. Jessica joins a group of pioneers to steal her mercenary company's owed funds from the bank, subsequently transferring it to provide financial security for the displaced pioneers, legitimizing the source of the money through money laundering. This act offers them a fresh start and diminishes the tragic elements of reality. The character of Jessica, in this context, shapes an adult fairy tale situated in the ethical and legal gray areas, illustrating how people resort to immoral means within the framework of the flawed legal system.

Turning the attention back to "*SIX*," this musical draws inspiration from the historical account of Henry VIII and his six wives. Nevertheless, it accentuates the historical significance of the six queens and their feminist symbolism, mitigating the portrayal of their rivalry for Henry VIII's affections. Instead, it constructs a platform from which they can narrate history through the lens of oppressed women, invoking empathy among the audience. In the denouement, the six queens recognize that the competition among women for male attention should not be endorsed, leading them to unite in advocating feminist ideals to the spectators. This serves as a noteworthy endeavor to influence the

audience's perspective by infusing feminist ideas into historical events, employing the Idealized Narrative Approach [9].

Taking the musical "Hamilton" as an illustrative case, it, too, is based on historical facts. However, it simplifies the multifaceted nature of historical figures by exalting them while exposing their imperfections, such as Hamilton's extramarital affair. This approach intensifies the emotional impact of the musical and ensures the restoration of the historical dimension, all while conveying a cohesive spirit of the American dream.

## 5. The Real-World Impact of the Use of Literary Symbols

These niche cultures fulfill a vital role in contemporary society by offering a unique perspective on reality and compensating for emotional voids created by societal imperfections. By mapping and idealizing elements of reality, they provide individuals with a means to express their emotions, serving as an emotional outlet. This emotional release enables individuals to re-engage with the demands of real-world society. A noteworthy aspect of these cultural expressions, selected and supported by consumers through financial transactions, is their potential to contribute positively to societal development [10].

Simultaneously, these works of art play a crucial role in enlightening the masses. Through their accurate analysis of reality, they shed light on aspects of life that often go unnoticed by the general populace. These cultural expressions bring attention to marginalized and disadvantaged groups, fostering awareness among a broader audience. Consequently, they stimulate human empathy, potentially leading to support, aid, or even policy changes benefiting these disadvantaged groups.

In contrast, musicals like "Hamilton" exemplify a different approach by simplifying the complexity of historical symbols. These productions concentrate on highlighting the positive values and aspects that resonate with the audience. In doing so, they make historical knowledge more accessible and engaging to the general public. By combining entertainment with educational content, these musicals provide a source of intellectual and emotional stimulation, catering to both the mind and body.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, this study embarked upon a comprehensive exploration of the use of literary symbols within niche cultures. The initial step involved establishing the research's foundation by highlighting the shared characteristics in the utilization of these symbols across various cultural contexts. Subsequently, the research direction and scope were meticulously defined by an in-depth examination of semiotic theories, which furnished the analytical framework for this investigation. Through a comparative analysis of cultural artifacts such as "Arknights" and musical productions, it was evident that there are distinct commonalities in the application of literary symbols, underscoring their social and historical significance. Moreover, it is noteworthy that both phenomena idealize the Narrative Approach, emphasizing its pervasive influence.

This study's culmination led to a profound investigation into the implications of these shared characteristics on society. The overarching conclusion drawn from this exploration is that these commonalities exert a predominantly positive influence on society and contribute to its overall development. By fostering a shared understanding and appreciation of literary symbols, they promote cultural cohesion and enhance the collective narrative consciousness. This, in turn, fosters greater social harmony and encourages the evolution of a more enriched and nuanced societal discourse.

In essence, the convergence of literary symbols in niche cultures underscores their intrinsic value and societal significance. Their idealization of the Narrative Approach serves as a testament to their enduring relevance in shaping collective understanding of the world. Navigating the ever-evolving

landscape of culture and communication, it is imperative to recognize and appreciate the role these shared symbols play in advancing societies towards a more cohesive and enlightened future.

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