



IDENTITY AND MORAL CONFLICT IN EMILY SHORT'S GALATEA AND VICTOR GIJSBERS' DE BARON: THE STUDY OF INTERACTIVE FICTION IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis dua karya fiksi interaktif, *Galatea* (2000) karya Emily Short dan *De Baron* (2006) karya Victor Gijssbers, untuk memeriksa bagaimana identitas dan konflik moral dibangun dalam narasi interaktif. Studi ini menggunakan analisis wacana, terutama yang berfokus pada konsep identitas Stuart Hall, serta prinsip-prinsip pemosisian dan representasi dalam wacana sosial. Metode kualitatif dengan teknik close reading diterapkan pada kedua teks untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana karakter membangun dan menegosiasikan identitas mereka dalam kaitannya dengan karakter lain dan ekspektasi sosial. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa *Galatea* menekankan masalah identitas melalui struktur naratif non-linier, sementara *De Baron* menyoroti konflik moral yang dibentuk oleh pemosisian karakter dan representasi sosial dalam narasi linier. Temuan-temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa fiksi interaktif dapat terlibat dengan isu-isu kompleks identitas dan moralitas dengan cara yang sebanding dengan sastra konvensional.

Keywords: *Analisis wacana, Fiksi interaktif, Identitas, Konflik moral, Penempatan, Representasi*

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes two works of interactive fiction, *Galatea* (2000) by Emily Short and *De Baron* (2006) by Victor Gijssbers, to examine how identity and moral conflicts are constructed within interactive narratives. This study employs discourse analysis, particularly focusing on Stuart Hall's concept of identity, as well as the principles of positioning and representation in social discourse. A qualitative method with close reading techniques is applied to both texts to explore how characters construct and negotiate their identities in relation to other characters and social expectations. The results indicate that *Galatea* emphasizes identity issues through a non-linear narrative structure, while *De Baron* highlights moral conflicts shaped by character positioning and social representation within a linear narrative. These findings suggest that interactive fiction can engage with complex issues of identity and morality in ways comparable to conventional literature.

Keywords: *Identity, Interactive fiction, Moral conflict, Discourse analysis, Positioning, Representation*

INTRODUCTION

Digital literature is a category of literature that includes literary works that can be found in the digital space. According to Engberg and Bolter (2011), digital literature is literature that

is born and developed in digital form. These literary works utilize digital elements such as multimedia and interactivity. Some examples of digital literature are: Wattpad, an online platform that allows anyone to write and read digitally; Insta poetry, short poems shared through platforms such as Instagram and Tumblr, usually using audio and visual elements to convey emotional messages; Fanfiction, literary works that are usually created by fans and published on digital platforms; and Interactive Fiction, literary works that combine narrative and interactive elements so that readers can also actively shape the story.

Interactive fiction, or IF for short, is a type of digital literature that allows readers to take part in how the story develops. According to Ziegfield (1989), unlike conventional works that have a linear narrative, IF utilizes interactive elements to allow the reader to actively participate. This is what makes it feel more personal and sometimes more emotional. This is because the reader not only sees the characters in the story, but is also involved in determining how the characters develop. IF started in the 1960s with adventure text-based games like ZORK (Costanzo, 1986), and since then, the genre has evolved into something deeper and broader. Today, IF is used to explore all kinds of stories, from simple adventures to serious questions of identity and morality that exist in social life.

Ryan (2001) explains that interactivity in IF creates an atmosphere that makes readers feel as if they are entering the story world and can understand the narrative better. This is in line with Richard Gerrig's (1993) theory of Narrative Transportation, which states that when readers can get into the narrative of the story, they will understand the characters and plot better. Interactivity in interactive fiction (IF) allows readers to actively participate in the course of the story, so that they are not only passive observers but also feel the various choices and consequences experienced by the characters. In this way, IF helps readers understand human experiences more deeply, even if they do not experience them directly in real life.

The interactive elements present in IF (Interactive Fiction) are not merely digital systems; they also serve as a medium for agents to directly experience and understand moral dilemmas and identity construction through the choices they make. In this context, Emily Short's *Galatea* and Victor Gijbbers' *De Baron* become highly relevant examples for analysis. Both works utilize complex interactive narrative structures where readers are confronted with various moral choices and the dynamic development of character identity. *Galatea* (2000) is an early IF work created by Emily Short. *Galatea* tells the story of a statue named Galatea that is alive and capable of two-way dialogue with the agent. According to Short (2000), unlike conventional literary works in general, *Galatea* possesses a multilinear narrative. This means many possible storylines and endings can be reached, depending on the questions posed by the

agent. Galatea is inspired by the Greek myth of Pygmalion. Pygmalion was a sculptor who fell in love with a statue he created and then prayed to the gods for the statue to come to life (Shopin, 2023). Beyond having a multilinear narrative that aligns with the concept of interactive fiction, the theme of Galatea, a statue that comes to life, can also serve as a relevant example in the context of identity and consciousness. Furthermore, the complexity of dialogue in Galatea can also be highly representative for analysis using the Discourse Analysis approach.

On the other hand, De Baron (2006) challenges agents with morally ambiguous choices. De Baron by Victor Gijssbers (2006) is an interactive fiction that explores themes of morality and inner conflict through a single narrative with branching choices. The story focuses on a father attempting to save his daughter, who has been kidnapped by a wicked nobleman, the Baron. However, behind this rescue story lies a darker and more complex layer, depicting the human side and profound moral dilemmas that can be navigated through branching choices. Despite the limited narrative paths and lack of multiple endings, De Baron challenges agents to confront an unavoidable fate and explore questions about human nature and moral responsibility. An interesting aspect of De Baron is the absence of right or wrong choices. All decisions depend on how the agent understands and interprets the narrative. With a narrative approach that emphasizes moral conflict over puzzles, De Baron becomes a highly suitable example for analysis using the Discourse Analysis approach. The use of the close reading method for interactive fiction raises several questions and doubts. The analysis of interactive fiction using the close reading method focuses on discourse analysis, particularly through the concepts of identity, positioning, and representation. The researchers' lack of attention to applying discourse analysis to interactive fiction as part of digital literature is a research gap. Therefore, this study aims to apply discourse analysis to Galatea and De Baron, demonstrating that interactive fiction, like conventional texts, contains rich literary qualities and is worthy of academic analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study analyzes issues of identity and moral conflict in Galatea and De Baron through discourse analysis, a method that examines how language constructs social realities. Emerging from Michel Foucault's work in the 1970s and later expanded by Teun van Dijk, this approach views language as a social practice shaping both reality and identity. To discuss identity, this research applies Stuart Hall's theory, which emphasizes that identity is dynamic and formed through social processes and representations. The analysis also draws on Post-Structuralism, a

movement that rejects fixed meaning and stable structures in texts. Thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Kristeva, and Deleuze highlight how meaning and identity are fluid, shaped by discourse, power, and context. This framework enables a flexible and critical analysis of literary texts to reveal how discourse constructs identity and moral complexity.

Discourse analysis, first introduced by Zellig Harris (1952) and developed further by scholars like Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk, goes beyond sentence-level study to examine how meaning and identity emerge within broader social and cultural contexts. In this study, discourse analysis is used to explore how characters in *Galatea* and *De Baron* construct and represent identity through interactions, self-reflection, and social influence. In interactive fiction, every dialogue and narrative choice functions as discourse that shapes interpretation, meaning that identity is never fixed but continually negotiated.

The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to allow an in-depth analysis of how language and narrative strategies create meaning. The primary data consist of multiple playthroughs of *Galatea* and *De Baron*, emphasizing situations that reveal moral struggle and identity formation. Each text is examined to identify and interpret discursive elements that reflect the processes of becoming and being, following Hall's theory of identity. Analysis results are presented thematically supported by textual evidence to illustrate how narrative elements shape these issues. Through close reading and discourse analysis, this study aims to demonstrate that interactive fiction, despite its nonlinear form, employs complex literary strategies and should be recognized as a legitimate form of literature.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Galatea* (2000) by Emily Short and *De Baron* (2006) by Victor Gijsbers demonstrates that identity and moral conflict are discursively constructed through language, representation, and power relations. In both narratives, identity is shown not as a fixed essence but as an unstable process shaped by interaction and perception. In *Galatea*, the protagonist's ambiguous position as both artwork and conscious being exposes the fragility of selfhood and the moral tension that arises from it. Her struggle to be recognized as human, while knowing she was created from another's fantasy, reveals deeper questions about rights, freedom, and ownership. Her consciousness becomes both her liberation and her curse, as it leads to Pygmalion's rejection and her resulting inner conflict.

Similarly, *De Baron* presents identity as a site of paradox and ambiguity, where a father's self-image as protector and loving parent conceals his identity as a perpetrator of violence.

Through symbolic actions, fragmented discourse, and shifting perspectives, the text reveals how identity is constructed through denial, justification, and the manipulation of power. The mirror scene, in which the protagonist sees the Baron's reflection instead of his own, becomes the moment of self-recognition that exposes the instability of his moral and personal identity.

Both narratives depict moral conflict as the inevitable outcome of identity shaped through discourse. In *Galatea*, the desire for recognition leads to alienation; in *De Baron*, the desire for justification leads to self-destruction. Each text situates morality not in fixed ethical categories but within the dynamic interplay of power, representation, and self-perception. Through ambiguity, tension, and irony, both works reveal that identity and morality are never complete or stable but continuously negotiated through the discourses that define and confine them.

Identity in Galatea

The findings from *Galatea* extend Stuart Hall's theory of identity as a discursive construction by demonstrating how interactive narratives make that process visible through dialogue and player interaction. Previous research on Hall's concept often emphasized collective or cultural identity within social contexts, but *Galatea* translates those theoretical dynamics into an intimate, individual experience mediated by language and power. This study thus advances the understanding of identity discourse by showing how digital interactivity can enact, rather than merely represent, the negotiation of selfhood.

The story also expands on feminist reinterpretations of the Pygmalion myth. By giving *Galatea* a voice, Short's work functions as a counter-discourse to traditional narratives that objectify women. The analysis reveals that *Galatea*'s self-awareness is both her liberation and her suffering, a paradox that aligns with Hall's notion of identity as "becoming," always in process and never complete. This insight highlights the instability of subjectivity under systems of power and representation, a theme consistent with but also deepened beyond previous discussions of poststructural identity theory.

Furthermore, the narrative's interactivity demonstrates that identity is co-created between character and player, suggesting that digital discourse can reproduce or challenge hierarchical power structures through engagement itself. This introduces a new layer to identity studies: that discourse operates not only through representation but also through interaction.

However, the study's limitation lies in its focus solely on textual discourse without deeper analysis of technological mediation or audience reception. Future research should address how player agency and interactive design further shape identity and morality in digital fiction, extending Hall's theory into new media contexts.

Moral Conflict in Galatea

The moral conflict in *Galatea* advances the understanding of identity discourse by demonstrating that morality, like identity, is constructed through language, representation, and power relations. Using Stuart Hall's concept of identity as an unstable and discursively produced position, the narrative shows that moral experience also emerges through discourse not as a fixed ethical truth, but as an ongoing negotiation between self and others.

In prior theoretical frameworks, morality often assumes agency within stable identity categories. *Galatea* challenges this by presenting a subject whose moral awareness is inseparable from her fragmented identity. Her pain stems from realizing that freedom within an unequal discourse can lead to exclusion rather than liberation. This deepens Hall's view of subjectivity by revealing how self-recognition, when constrained by power, becomes a moral burden rather than fulfillment.

The narrative also functions as a critique of creator-creation dynamics, echoing posthumanist and feminist readings that question authorship and control. Pygmalion's rejection of his sentient creation illustrates the moral contradiction within patriarchal and artistic power: the creator desires beauty and life but rejects autonomy. In giving *Galatea* a voice, Short transforms a myth of possession into a discourse on ethical recognition, showing that moral agency depends on the capacity to be acknowledged as a subject.

This study thus contributes a new understanding of moral conflict in digital interactive fiction. It reveals how interactivity intensifies moral ambiguity: the player's questioning can comfort or wound *Galatea*, highlighting that ethical meaning arises through participation in discourse. Future research could further explore how interactivity reshapes moral subjectivity, extending Hall's theory into digital narrative contexts where language and agency intersect.

Identity in De Baron

The representation of identity in *De Baron* extends Stuart Hall's notion of identity as a discursive construction by exposing how language and power relations can mask violence beneath the façade of affection. While Hall emphasizes identity as continuously shaped by

representation and difference, De Baron dramatizes this instability within the psychology of an abuser who constructs his own narrative to preserve authority and deny guilt. The result is an identity that is performative and self-defensive sustained through discourse rather than truth.

Previous studies on identity discourse often highlight marginalized subjects seeking recognition; however, this text reverses the lens by focusing on a perpetrator whose power is built on self-justification. The story thus challenges moral binaries of victim and oppressor, revealing how discursive identity can conceal exploitation within the rhetoric of love and care. Through this inversion, De Baron contributes a new dimension to Hall's theory: identity as a moral mask that both sustains and destabilizes power.

Moreover, the interactive nature of the narrative implicates the player in constructing and revealing this false identity. Each choice mirrors the process of interpretation, forcing the reader-agent to engage with the ambiguity of guilt and self-perception. This participatory element demonstrates that identity within discourse is not only represented but enacted, aligning with Hall's claim that identity is "a production, never complete, always in process."

The unresolved ending where the protagonist remains trapped in repetition, underscores that discursive identity cannot achieve closure when built upon denial and manipulation. This contributes to a broader understanding of how narrative interactivity can reproduce psychological structures of repression and guilt.

However, the analysis remains limited to textual and symbolic levels, without deeper engagement with the medium's procedural mechanics. Future studies could explore how interactive systems, choice structures, and player agency further articulate moral responsibility and self-deception in digital narratives, thus expanding Hall's framework into the ethics of interactive storytelling.

Moral Conflict in De Baron

In De Baron, the moral conflict revolves around the tension between guilt and the persistent urge for self-justification. The protagonist carries the burden of an unspoken past, yet the narrative withholds direct explanation, allowing meaning to emerge through fragmented dialogue, symbolic imagery, and narrative silence. Rather than offering a moral resolution, the text constructs conflict through paradox, ambiguity, and irony, compelling readers to interpret what remains unsaid.

The central paradox lies in the opposition between confession and justification. In his confrontation with the Baron, the protagonist expresses remorse and a desire to end his

suffering, yet he simultaneously rationalizes his actions through the analogy of an eagle preying on a lamb, portraying his wrongdoing as an inevitable part of nature rather than a conscious moral failure (Gijssbers, 2006). This duality reveals a fractured moral identity: he recognizes his guilt but refuses full accountability, transforming repentance into another act of self-deception.

The circular narrative structure further amplifies this moral entrapment. After seemingly defeating the Baron, the story loops back to the beginning, where the protagonist once again faces Maartje's door and his reflection in the mirror. The mirror, showing the Baron instead of himself, symbolizes the inescapability of guilt and the futility of redemption. His moral struggle thus becomes cyclical with a performance of contrition that leads back to denial.

Ambiguity remains a key narrative device that sustains this conflict. No action or dialogue offers a clear moral choice. Whether he surrenders Maartje's doll, confronts the wolf, or yields to death, each decision is met with the same moral uncertainty. This structural ambiguity destabilizes the reader's ethical expectations, reinforcing the idea that genuine repentance is unattainable within the protagonist's self-constructed discourse.

Irony holds the narrative together. The protagonist claims to act out of love for his daughter, yet this affection manifests as manipulation and control. The carved image of a burning man on Maartje's door turns fire into one of obsessive desire, suggesting that his suffering is not a form of guilt but unfulfilled craving. Even when he pleads for forgiveness, his confession remains incomplete, shadowed by excuses that demand understanding rather than accountability.

The multiple endings reinforce this moral instability. Whether he seeks help, begs forgiveness, or commits murder, none of these outcomes resolve his inner conflict. Instead, each represents a variation of discursive self-fashioning, where guilt, justification, and paternal identity are continually renegotiated. The text ultimately portrays moral conflict as a process rather than a conclusion, an endless cycle of confession and denial that blurs the line between redemption and self-destruction.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes identity and moral conflict in Emily Short's *Galatea* and Victor Gijssbers' *De Baron* through discourse analysis, confirming that interactive fiction holds literary value comparable to conventional works. Both texts demonstrate that identity and morality are discursively constructed, fluid, and negotiated through language, power, and perception. In *Galatea*, the protagonist's struggle between self-awareness and objectification reveals that

freedom can lead to suffering when recognition is denied. Meanwhile, De Baron portrays a paradoxical identity shaped by guilt and justification, where the absence of resolution underscores the instability of moral consciousness. Together, these works illustrate how interactive fiction transforms reading into an interpretive and ethical experience, inviting reflection on how identity and morality are continuously shaped within human discourse.

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