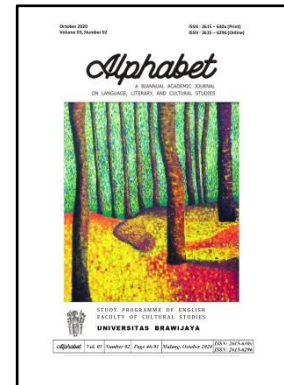


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Abstract

Sophie Anderson's *The House with Chicken Legs* is a children's novel which has distinctive character development and a story archetype. The combination of those aspects is interesting to study. Hence, this paper aims to explain the main character's development which is analyzed in the framework of one of Christopher Booker's the seven basic plots theory, namely voyage and return. The result of the study reveals that the voyage and return story archetype employed in *The House with Chicken Legs* has shaped the development of the main character of the novel, Marinka. Marinka's character has changed from being selfish and ignorant to becoming more appreciative, selfless, and open-minded. Based on the result, I suggest future researchers use the seven basic plots theory to determine intrinsic elements in novels which belong to the scope of children literature.

Keywords: Children literature; story archetype; character development

A novel may provide new knowledge, different experiences, various feelings, or values to its readers. Those can be perceived by, for example, observing how the main character's personality in the novel personality develops throughout the story. The novel discussed in this paper is *The House with Chicken Legs* written by Sophie Anderson. It is in a Middle-Grade category of children's literature targeted at children ages 8 to 13 (Sullivan, 2021). It is a retelling of Baba Yaga, the most iconic witch figure in Russian fairy tales. Baba Yaga is defined as an old woman witch, with *baba*, which means "old woman" and *yaga* which means "hag" in Russian (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998). However, the novel is not about her but her granddaughter, who would rather be anything other than Yaga. Marinka emotionally struggles with her identity and the people around her, then

evolves into someone new after experiencing different things in her journey.

Marinka is a twelve-year-old girl who is unhappy with her life because she has to fulfill the destiny of being the next Yaga after her grandmother. Yaga is a guardian who comforts and guides the dead spirit to the afterlife. However, Marinka does not want to be surrounded by the dead spirit and live in an always-moving house with chicken legs. On the contrary, she wants to stay long in one place to have lasting friends and live among people. Because of those desires, Marinka never follows her grandmother's lessons or rules. The worst rule that Marinka breaks is keeping a spirit in the living world until it almost disappears into nothingness, all so that she can have a friend. This action backfires, however, and it leads Marinka to lose Baba, her only family. Baba has to walk the spirit

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into The Gate, even though it is not a place for the living. As Baba is gone, Marinka feels all lost and confused, having no one but herself to depend on to keep going. Marinka sets on a journey to find her grandmother, and it leads her to a market. While she is there, she does not expect to have her dream come true. Marinka meets Salma and Lamya, two living girls, and befriends them. This experience excites Marinka, to the extent that she has to hide her true self to be accepted by them. In addition, Marinka's attempts to save Baba and bring her back home always fails. One day, as Marinka is blinded by her friends and frustration, she ties the house's legs to prevent it from moving. The house has always moved to different locations on its own. For once, Marinka wants to be in control of it so that she can play with her friends and find a way to save Baba in the market. Eventually, Marinka realizes that her friends are mean to her and the people around her. It shakes Marinka and makes her reconsider the dream of living among people. Then, once again, Marinka's plan to go into The Gate and find Baba is stopped by the house. It causes an emotional fight between Marinka and the house, which leads to an accident that ignites the house. Luckily, Marinka and her chicken-legged house can save themselves from the tragedy. They leave the market and return to their usual crowd-less surrounding. Once Marinka realizes that the house is only trying to protect her, she finally acknowledges it and gets back her sense of belonging to a family. At the end of the journey, Marinka learns some lessons which develop her as a person with new perspectives.

In this paper, I would like to determine how the main character, Marinka, develops in regard with the story archetype. The character development is analyzed with story archetype. Archetype study is a study about narrative designs, patterns of actions, character types, themes, and images repeated in most literature (Abrams & Harpham, 2012). A story archetype is a study that focuses on the plot pattern of stories. Among the many theories developed under this type of study, I have

chosen the theory of seven basic plots proposed by Christopher Booker in 2004. In his theory, Booker proposes that there are seven basic plots that underlie literary works, namely: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth. This chosen plot pattern to be referred to from the seven basic plots the voyage and return plot. In this plot, the characters are "out of their familiar into another world" (Booker, 2004, p.87). Another world could simply mean unusual situations for the characters or another magical world altogether. They will be trapped there until they return to where they initially come from. This plot emphasizes a personal transformation that the heroes will have at the end of their voyage as the aftermath. Hence, this plot pattern can be used to explain how Marinka develops in the novel after experiencing obstacles in her journey and after eventually returning to her familiar worlds.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The voyage and return plot has a theme of the hero's transformation. As they (the heroes) returned, they changed by their experiences in the 'other world' (Booker, 2004). Due to their selfishness, they fell into a life-threatening adventure. Marinka's desire to have friends has caused her to plunge into a realm of existence she had never previously imagined and live without Baba, her sole family. This experience has led her into a nightmare, threatening her life as the house was on fire. In the end, Marinka learned important lessons as she switched from dark to light. She has moved from ignorance to knowledge. Marinka has reached a new and much deeper understanding of the world, which led her to completely change her attitude to life, primarily in deciding her own fate. This is the pattern of voyage and return story archetype, where the heroes won over the dark forces within themselves, not the ones outside them.

Marinka's journey has developed her character in three ways. She has changed from

neglectful to appreciative, from selfish to selfless, and from narrow-minded to open-minded. Those three ways will be discussed below.

From Neglectful to Appreciative

Concerning Baba

Marinka was always rebellious when it came to Baba's cautions, wishes, or words. Therefore, when one of her actions led Marinka to lose Baba, she was completely wrecked. She felt guilty and regretful for her words and behaviors. Marinka's need to find Baba was more important than anything, and it set her on her adventure. However, Marinka's attempts to bring her grandmother back were all to no avail. That is because Marinka's intention was wrong all along. Instead of bringing Baba back, Marinka should learn to let her go. After her last trip inside The Gate, Marinka realized that Baba had truly gone. In the end, Marinka understood that it is essential to appreciate the moments while someone is still alive and not take them for granted. Marinka's changed attitude towards life, friendship, and Baba was captured in this quote:

"Baba used to say it's not how long a life, but how sweet a life that counts, and I think maybe the same is true with friendship. I'm not sure how long I will get to spend with Benjamin, but I will appreciate the time I have. I wish I had appreciated the moments I had with Baba more. Nobody is yours to keep. Nothing is for ever (Anderson, 2018:314)."

Concerning the house

Marinka hated the house as it always moved and never allowed her to have a lasting friend. It also more than once interfered her plans to save Baba. Hence, when the opportunity for those two things presented itself to Marinka, she did not hesitate to tie the house's legs to prevent it from ruining her chance again. However, as Salma mocked the house, Marinka realized she could not let the girl

speak ill about her family and stood up for it. Marinka also felt guilty after seeing how the house had cracked, wounded, and burned because of her. She then tried to look after the house, like it had been protecting her all this time. This quote showed how Marinka realized what the house had been doing for her.

"The house closed the gate to stop me going through it. The old yaga said it was dangerous to go through and I might never return. So the house was trying to protect me, even though by doing so it has ended up hurting itself (Anderson, 2018: 282-283)."

Concerning of being a Yaga

As someone who did not want to be a Yaga, Marinka avoided anything that had to do with guiding. However, through her journey, Marinka learned more about Yaga than she ever did before Baba left. She guided an old couple and discovered that there were other Yagas around the world. Marinka also found her passion so to having a life of her own. In the end, Marinka appreciated more about being a Yaga and willingly guided a few souls herself. As she said in the following quote, "I help the Old Yaga with the guidings, and sometimes I even guide a few souls myself. It turns out guiding isn't so bad when you have a life of your own, too (Anderson, 2018: 336)."

From Selfish to Selfless

In regard to keeping Nina from The Gate

Due to her wish of having a lasting friend, Marinka kept Nina from The Gate even if she knew it would harm the girl. However, when Nina almost disappeared into nothingness, Marinka felt sad and guilty. Therefore, even if she had to lose a friend, Marinka finally lets Nina enter The Gate to the realm where she belongs. The following quote showed how hard it was for Marinka to let go of Nina.

"I tell her how lonely it can be living in a house with chicken legs when you only ever meet the dead, and they have to

move on every night. I apologize over and over, but it doesn't make me feel any better. In fact it makes my insides tighten even more, hearing the truth out loud (Anderson, 2018: 119-120)."

In regard to tying the house's legs

Because Marinka did not want the house to interfere with her plans again, she tried to control it by tying its legs with wire. However, it only left the house with a scar. After seeing that, Marinka felt regret and tried to take better care of the house by guiding, even if she was not fully ready yet. Marinka set aside her ego and tried to do something for the house, as the following quote showed.

"My heart sinks. I don't want to guide. But I can't let the house continue suffering. Not when I could do something to save it. 'Fine,' I say finally. 'I'll guide the dead and I won't try to go through 'The Gate' (Anderson, 2018:283)."

From Narrow-Minded to Open-Minded

Regarding the reality of people

Since Marinka grew up in a secluded life-style, she was clueless about the many kinds of people. Yet, she still dreamed of staying among people and living like them. However, after meeting a cruel person like Salma, Marinka almost gave up her dream if not for Old Yaga's advice to be wise in choosing friends.

"'Those girls can be pretty cruel,' the Old Yaga agrees. 'Don't give up on the living though. There are more good people than bad people in this world. You just have to be careful, and choose your friends wisely' (Anderson, 2018:236)."

Regarding the stubbornness to find Baba and the fear of being alone

Marinka was attached to Baba because Baba was her only family. That was why she is very stubborn to find Baba and also afraid to

be all alone. However, after her journey, Marinka was finally able to let Baba go. She realized that she had other people on her side. Those being the new people she met in her journey, like Benjamin and the Old Yaga, and those who had been with her all along, like the house and Jack, her pet bird. The quote below described Marinka's appreciation to those around her.

"My house has chicken legs, but most of the year it is settled in a small village near a twinkling town that curves around the edge of a lake. My friend Benjamin lives across the field and the lamb Benji roams in the grass and wild flowers between us.... I still miss Baba, but she's always here, in my thoughts, whenever I need her, and I have Jack for company and my house takes good care of me. The Old Yaga watches over me too (Anderson, 2018: 334)."

Regarding the conflict between responsibility and desire

Marinka was always in a dilemma regarding her future. She wanted to live among people, but her destiny was to be the next Yaga. However, after experiencing both possibilities, Marinka discovered there was more to both worlds than she had once expected. In the end, Marinka did not choose one thing over the other, and her future remained undecided. Quoted from Marinka, "My destiny is undecided, and that's how I like it. The possibilities are as endless as the stars. They fill the living world and the Yaga world, and they even twinkle in the parties for the dead (Anderson, 2018: 335)."

CONCLUSION

Throughout the journey, Marinka learned to make her own mistakes, accepted them, and tried to be a better person to make up for them. It upgraded Marinka's character at the end of the story. She became more appreciative toward the people in her life, less selfish in getting what she wanted, and had a more open mind after she had seen the world

as it was on her journey. Marinka's character development in the story also further proves that the novel implemented voyage and return story archetype. It showed that Marinka truly learned from her journey and had a personal transformation.

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