

NARRATIVE TRANSFORMATION IN BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE: A STRUCTURALIST APPROACH

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Abstract

This study aims to find the character Winn-Dixie's narrative function in Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* using A.J. Greimas' actantial model. While previous research often focused on the novel's emotional and psychological themes, this paper offers a structuralist approach to highlighting how narrative functions operate beneath the surface through the usage of actantial models and isotopes. The study uses descriptive qualitative method to examine narrative sequences to show how Winn-Dixie facilitates Opal's movement from loneliness to connection, and from emotional fragmentation to relational wholeness. The findings demonstrate Winn-Dixie's structural role as a helper actant and catalyst for the protagonist's emotional transformation and that Winn-Dixie is not merely a symbolic or emotional figure but an essential structural force that shapes the novel's progression and coherence. This research contributes an innovative perspective by applying classical structuralist theory to contemporary children's literature, thereby enriching both narrative studies and literary criticism in the field.

Keywords: *actantial model; because of Winn-Dixie; children's literature; isotopies; structuralism; transformation*

1. Introduction

Children's literature frequently explores themes of emotional growth, resilience, and self-discovery (Nel, Paul, & Christensen, 2021). Stories in this genre often follow young protagonists as they navigate personal challenges, such as loneliness, loss, or change, and gradually learn to connect with others. Through the story, children's literature often provides readers with models of empathy, friendship, and emotional intelligence, thus helping the readers to connect with and understand the world (Christiansen, 2021; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017). In addition to that, a single agent of transformation plays a pivotal role in reshaping the protagonist's emotional and social landscape (McDonough, 2017; Vaughn, Sotirovska, Darragh, & Elhess, 2021). These stories highlight that relationships with their surroundings have the power to change or transform and thus help the readers to make sense of the world.

Animals often play a crucial role in children's literature, serving as companions, guides, or catalysts for change towards the better (Nel et al., 2021; O'sullivan, 2023). Often in the form of talking animals, loyal pets, or mystical creatures, they frequently serve as

helpers to protagonists, or sometimes as the protagonists themselves, to navigate emotional and social challenges (Arafah, Abbas, & Hikmah, 2021; Zito, 2018). The presence of animals in literature symbolizes comfort, resilience, or change, reinforcing key themes of friendship, healing, and emotional connection. In many narratives, the relationship between a child and an animal serves as the foundation for the protagonist's journey toward understanding themselves and the world around them (Elick, 2015).

Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2000) is a profound example of how one animal can serve as a catalyst for transformation in children's literature. The novel follows ten-year-old India Opal Buloni, who moves to a small town in Florida with her father, a withdrawn preacher. Having the difficulties and hardships of loneliness and the absence of her mother, Opal finds Winn-Dixie, a stray dog she adopted after a chance encounter at a grocery store. As the story progresses, Winn-Dixie becomes more than just a mere pet; the dog helps Opal's relationships with the townspeople, helping her form connections and uncover their personal stories. Through this narrative, the novel explores themes of loneliness, belonging, and emotional healing (Wilburn, et al., 2021).

Winn-Dixie in the story becomes the central element that drives the narrative's emotional and narrative progression. His playful and charismatic nature attracts people to Opal, which makes her breakthrough social barriers around her surroundings and thus builds relationships with other individuals in the community. Through Winn-Dixie, Opal befriends other characters, such as the shy librarian Miss Franny, the misunderstood witch Gloria Dump, and the quiet ex-convict Otis. Each of these relationships impacts Opal's emotional growth, demonstrating how Winn-Dixie functions as a bridge that connects Opal to her community (Cheng, 2020). His presence in the story raises important questions about agency in children's literature and the role of animal characters in shaping human experiences.

While most existing interpretations of the novel focus on its emotional and thematic dimensions, especially its treatment of grief, friendship, and healing (Nesanargunam & Anand, 2021; Wilburn et al., 2021), few have applied structuralist approaches to examine the text. Therefore, this study proposes a structuralist perspective that maps how meaning is constructed through functional character roles. The structuralist lens not only enhances the critical understanding of DiCamillo's work but also demonstrates the continued relevance of classical narrative theory in analyzing modern children's literature. Therefore, the study provides a new lens for scholars interested in the mechanics of storytelling, character function, and semantic coherence in literary texts aimed at younger audiences.

To analyze comprehensively the role of Winn-Dixie in the story, this study applies Algirdas Julien Greimas' actantial model, a structuralist framework that analyzes character functions within a narrative. Greimas' model identifies six actants which are subject, object, helper, opponent, sender, and receiver; these actants, Greimas claims, interact with each other to drive the story's progression (Saraswati, 2022; Supiastutik, WSWW, & Ramadani, 2023). Rather than focusing on individual character traits, the model is used to examine how characters function in relation to the protagonist's goals. By mapping the roles of Opal, Winn-Dixie, and the supporting characters within this framework, this study tries to uncover the structural dynamics that shape the novel's exploration of loneliness, friendship, and transformation.

Applying Greimas' actantial model to *Because of Winn-Dixie* allows for a deeper understanding of how the novel constructs its narrative of transformation. Within this framework, Opal functions as the subject, pursuing the object of emotional connection and

belonging. As the helper, Winn-Dixie actively facilitates this pursuit, breaking down social barriers and fostering relationships that aid Opal's journey. Other characters, such as the preacher and certain townspeople, may serve as opponents—whether through emotional distance or initial skepticism—while figures like Gloria Dump and Miss Franny act as receivers, benefiting from the connections Opal forges. This structural analysis highlights the novel's intricate portrayal of social healing and personal growth.

Despite previous studies exploring emotional themes, few have applied Greimas' model to this text. By analyzing Winn-Dixie's role through the actantial model, this research aims to highlight the mechanisms which construct the novel's themes of companionship and transformation. In doing so, this research provides a new lens for understanding how animal characters can be a force of transformation and change in children's literature. This study argues that Winn-Dixie serves as a helper actant in Opal's pursuit of emotional connection and belonging and thus cementing his role as the catalyst of change and transformation. Through the structural relationships between the subject, object, and other actants, the novel constructs a narrative in which Winn-Dixie plays a pivotal role in transforming Opal's relationships and easing her loneliness. This structuralist analysis demonstrates how the novel's underlying actantial framework reinforces its thematic concerns, offering a new perspective on the function of animal companions in children's literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Greimas, Todorov, and Propp's Narratology

Narratology is a field of study that encompasses various aspects of storytelling, including the sequence of events, the relationships between those events, narrative techniques, point of view, and the role of the narrator. Several key figures have contributed to the development of the narrative model, including Tzvetan Todorov, Vladimir Propp, and A. J. Greimas—each offering distinct approaches and analytical perspectives.

Tzvetan Todorov views the narrative as a structure that progresses from an initial state to a final state through a series of transformations. He highlights the importance of chronological sequence, motif and plot, as well as causal relationships between events in shaping a narrative (Kristianto, Leba, & Elvina, 2022). In his narrative model, Todorov outlines five stages: the initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of the disruption, attempts to repair the disruption, and a new equilibrium (resolution). In this sense, the narrative is not merely the presentation of events but a reflection of structural transformation within the story world. Vladimir Propp, on the other hand, adopts a different structural approach by focusing on the functional actions of characters in Russian folktales. Propp argues that the fundamental elements of a story are not the characters themselves, but rather the narrative functions—that is, the actions performed by characters, irrespective of who performs them (Trisari, 2021). Thus, the focus lies on what is done, not who does it. A. J. Greimas later simplified and expanded upon Propp's ideas by introducing the actantial model as a tool for analyzing narrative structure. He proposed that narratives are built upon six abstract roles known as actants (Yuniasti, 2019). These actants function as syntactic units that generate meaning through the relationships between roles within narrative actions, thereby allowing for the construction of a more universal and flexible narrative structure.

In conclusion, while all three scholars examine narrative structure, their approaches differ: Todorov emphasizes the transformation of narrative structure from beginning to end;

Propp focuses on the functional roles of actions within the plot; and Greimas introduces an abstract and universal relational schema through his theory of actants.

2.2 Actantial Model

Greimas' actants serve along three different axes: the axis of desire (subject-object), the axis of communication (sender-receiver), and the axis of power (helper-opponent) (Qasim & Qasim, 2022; Saraswati, 2022). The axis of desire revolves around the relationship between the subject and object (junction), whether it is positive (conjunction) or negative (disjunction). The second axis is the axis of communication which relates to the relationship between the sender and receiver, the elements that ask and receive the junction. The third axis is the axis of power, which revolves around the relationship between the helper, the aspects that want to ensure the junction, and the opponent, the aspects that want to hinder or thwart the junction. These axes help reveal how characters function within a story rather than focusing solely on their personalities or actions. Applying this model to *Because Winn-Dixie* enables the examination of the relationship of Winn-Dixie as Opal's companion and how he affects Opal's transformation.

2.3 Isotopy

Additionally, Greimas' concept of isotopies plays a crucial role in structural analysis by identifying recurring semantic elements that reinforce meaning throughout a narrative. Isotopy, according to Greimas, is the repetition of semantic units which create coherences, thematic unity, and meaning within the text (Karnanta, 2015). These isotopes will lead to four terms of homology, macro-level structural relationship within the text. Homology is built upon oppositional relations and contradictions in the text, and this will uncover the inherent values and ideologies of the text. For example, the thematic unity of self-control in the novel *Lelaki Harimau* is demonstrated by one of the homologies found in the text by tracing the isotopes of aggressive – passive – not aggressive – not passive (Aulia, 2020). By tracing these isotopies that leads to the homologies, this study can examine how motifs of loneliness, companionship, and emotional healing emerge across different actantial roles. The use of these two concepts, in addition to actantial model, enables a broader understanding of the novel's thematic structure, illustrating how transformation and change are embedded not just in the plot but in the deeper linguistic and narrative patterns of the text. Applying this model to *Because of Winn-Dixie* allows for an analysis of Winn-Dixie's role in Opal's journey while also uncovering the structural mechanisms that shape the novel's depiction of personal and communal transformation.

2.4 Previous Research on Winn Dixie

Previous studies on Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* have primarily focused on its thematic and emotional representations of human life. Wilburn et al. (2021) conducted a study aimed at identifying and analyzing thematic patterns by using language charts as instructional tools. This approach was designed to enhance students' comprehension and engagement with the novel. Their findings indicate that structured scaffolding, such as language charts, significantly deepens literary engagement. By guiding students beyond basic textual understanding, this method fosters more insightful and meaningful interaction with the novel's themes.

Meanwhile, Nesanargunam and Anand (2021) explored the dual emotional themes of sweetness and sadness as fundamental, inseparable aspects of human experience. Through close reading, the authors examined the symbolic significance of the Littmus Lozenge—a fictional candy in *Because of Winn-Dixie*—as a central metaphor for the intertwined nature of happiness and sorrow. The candy's effect on different characters reveals how grief is a universal emotion, deeply embedded in personal memory. Additionally, their study highlights the novel's portrayal of the protagonist, Opal, as she navigates her mother's absence and her father's emotional distance. Her journey from loneliness to connection is shaped by compassion, resilience, and the relationships she cultivates—especially with Winn-Dixie and supportive figures such as Gloria Dump and Miss Franny.

Despite the valuable insights these studies provide, neither incorporates literary theory in their analyses of the novel. The first study focuses on instructional tool for thematic exploration, while the second relies exclusively on close reading to examine emotions and character development. To address this gap, the present study applies Greimas' structural framework to offer a comprehensive analysis of character functions within the narrative. By utilizing Greimas' actantial model, this research aims to uncover the structural dynamics that shape *Because of Winn-Dixie*'s exploration of loneliness, friendship, and transformation. Through this theoretical lens, the study seeks to enrich literary discussions surrounding the novel, demonstrating the relevance of structural approaches in children's literature analysis.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with the method of closed reading to gather and analyze the data. The primary data source for this study is the novel *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo (2000). The data gathered are the narrative sequences of the story, particularly those relating to the role of the character Winn-Dixie.

The study examines the narrative sequences to identify the actants as well as the actantial scheme of the story. The actantial schemes were then used to analyze the role of Winn-Dixie as the catalyst for change and transformation. This method ensures that the objective study of this study, which is finding the role of Winn-Dixie as the force of transformation and change, can be achieved.

To systematically analyze Winn-Dixie's function within the narrative, this section is structured into three parts. First, the overall actantial scheme will be presented, mapping all key actants and their roles. Second, specific narrative sequences will be examined, demonstrating how Winn-Dixie functions as a helper, with textual evidence supporting his catalytic role. Lastly, the homological structure of the novel will be analyzed using the four terms of homology, identifying the key semantic units that reinforce the theme of transformation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Actantial Scheme in *Because of Winn-Dixie*

Literary narratives often rely on structured relationships between characters to drive transformation and thematic development. A.J. Greimas' actantial model provides a framework for understanding these relationships beyond surface-level character analysis. Instead of merely classifying characters by their roles in the plot, the actantial model puts them within a system of functions which is going to reveal the deeper structural dynamics. In

Because of Winn-Dixie, the structured relationships, especially through the relations and interactions between Opal and Winn-Dixie, show the emotional depth of the story and how profound the characters' transformation.

Winn-Dixie's role in the novel is more than just a mere pet, but rather his function as an agent of change which enables Opal's emotional and social transformation. His presence shapes and influences the dynamics between the characters within the narrative. Winn-Dixie acts as a catalyst for Opal to connect with others, including her father and the townspeople. Through Greimas' actantial framework, Winn-Dixie occupies the helper position, assisting Opal (the subject) in her pursuit to overcome loneliness (the object). Below is the actantial scheme of the novel:

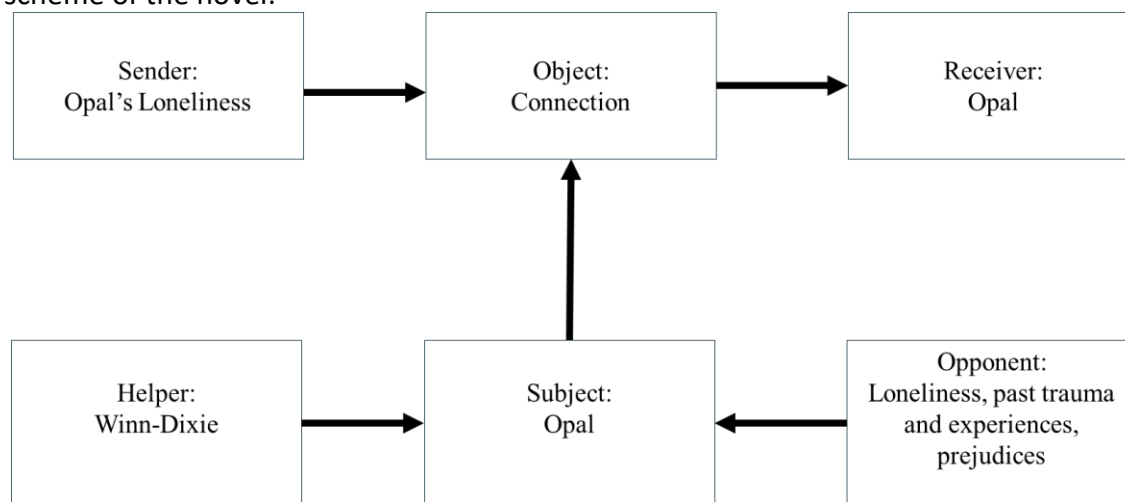


Table 1. Actantial Scheme of *Because of Winn-Dixie*

Applying Greimas' actantial model to *Because of Winn-Dixie* reveals the structured interactions between characters and their narrative functions. At the core of the actantial scheme is Opal as the subject, whose primary goal (or object) is overcoming loneliness and fostering connections in a new environment. The sender in this case is arguably Opal's internal longing for companionship and understanding, while the receiver is Opal herself, as she ultimately benefits from the fulfillment of her quest.

The helper-opponent dynamic is where Winn-Dixie's importance becomes evident. As the helper, Winn-Dixie facilitates Opal's journey by drawing people toward her, fostering interactions that she might not have initiated on her own. These findings are consistent with what previous study has explained that Winn-Dixie acts as a helper to Opal in her quest (Roy, 2024). His presence enables friendships and helps bridge emotional gaps, particularly between Opal and her father. Conversely, the opponents in the narrative include internal struggles (Opal's doubts and insecurities) and external factors (the loneliness and social barriers in the town). This finding also aligns with a previous study that reports that the author of this novel, Kate DiCamillo, always employs the story of spiritual journeys (Calabria, 2015).

This actantial scheme establishes the foundation for analyzing the specific sequences in which Winn-Dixie enacts his helper role. In the next section, a closer examination of key narrative moments will highlight how Winn-Dixie's actions directly influence Opal's transformation, reinforcing his role as a catalyst for change.

4.2 Winn-Dixie as Helper and Catalyst: Key Narrative Sequences

Winn-Dixie's function as a helper actant becomes apparent immediately upon his entrance into Opal's life. Their first encounter at the grocery store is not only the beginning of their familial and friendship bond, it also initiates the narrative. At the start of the story, Winn-Dixie is claimed and named by Opal. By doing this, Opal now has a new sense of responsibility and purpose. This moment marks the initial junction between the subject (Opal) and her object (connection and belonging), mediated by the helper (Winn-Dixie). From this point, Winn-Dixie becomes the medium through which Opal navigates her emotional terrain and expands her social world.

In this story, Winn-Dixie functions as a helper actant through his emotional intelligence, disarming and comforting presence, and the ability to create social openings. His friendly, curious, and non-threatening demeanor breaks down the barriers of other characters and eases tense situations, thus enabling opportunities to connect and dialogue. Winn-Dixie acts as a buffer, the connector between Opal and her surroundings. This allows her to approach people and spaces that at first are hard to approach and connect with. Furthermore, his consistent warmth and loyalty help Opal feel grounded and brave enough to reach out. These qualities make him an agent of social cohesion in the narrative, an enabler of emotional and relational junctions. His helper role operates on both the interpersonal level by bringing people into Opal's life and the intrapersonal level by supporting her own emotional stability and growth.

Winn-Dixie's role in forming Opal's bond with Miss Franny Block, the town librarian, demonstrates his ability to bridge generational gaps. As shown by the excerpt below:

"Yes ma'am," I told her. "He has a large heart, too." "Well," Miss Franny said. She bent over and gave Winn-Dixie a pat on the head, and Winn-Dixie wagged his tail back and forth and snuffled his nose on her little old-lady feet. "Let me get a chair and sit down so I can tell this story properly."
(Because of Winn-Dixie, Chapter 6)

The excerpt shows that Miss Franny lets her barrier down when she is approached by the friendly Winn-Dixie, showing that Winn-Dixie becomes a helper in Opal's effort to start connecting with Miss Franny. As Miss Franny recounts stories of her past, including her long-standing loneliness, a connection begins to form between her and Opal, grounded in shared affection for Winn-Dixie. The dog acts as a catalyst and a bridge that connects Miss Franny and Opal, bonding the two lonely people together as friends. Through this interaction, Opal begins to recognize that the pain of others, as lonely as she is, is a key step in her emotional development.

Winn-Dixie also facilitates Opal's relationship with Gloria Dump, an elderly woman suspected by others as a scary and threatening witch. When Opal ventures into Gloria's yard, it is Winn-Dixie's carefree and warm affection for her that reassures Opal and invites trust. Here, the story shows the contrast between the dog's open-minded attitude with the town's judgmental whispers and rumors about Gloria's past. In the end, Gloria becomes a maternal figure for Opal, one who listens, advises, and provides a safe space for her to express vulnerability. This relationship helps fill the emotional void left by the absence of Opal's maternal figure and deepens her understanding of forgiveness, acceptance, and change. This instance again shows how Winn-Dixie acts as a helper actant in bridging the connection between Opal and Gloria Dump.

Winn-Dixie's role as a helper is also exemplified by the interaction between Opal and the pet store worker Otis. Otis is a reclusive, socially awkward man with a criminal background, making him another character toward whom others are often guarded. Winn-Dixie's calm presence during Opal's work at the pet shop helps put Otis at ease. One key moment is when Winn-Dixie lies down and peacefully listens to Otis play his guitar, a quiet yet powerful affirmation that helps Otis feel seen and accepted. Through Winn-Dixie's steady companionship, Opal begins to understand Otis's inner turmoil and to advocate for him in the face of societal judgment. This relationship introduces Opal to the themes of redemption and understanding, contributing further to her emotional maturity.

Another great moment that shows Winn-Dixie's role as a catalyst is the scene at the garden party which Gloria and Opal organize. Almost all characters that have met and been transformed by Winn-Dixie attended the party, further show how great Winn-Dixie's role as a helper to help Opal achieve friendship is.

So my daddy started humming something and Otis started picking it out on his guitar, and Winn-Dixie wagged his tail and lay back down underneath Gloria's chair. I looked around the room at all the different faces, and I felt my heart swell up inside me with pure happiness.

"I'll be back in a minute," I said. But they were all singing now and laughing, and Winn-Dixie was snoring, so no one heard me. (Because Winn Dixie, Chapter 25)

This party becomes the symbolic culmination of Winn-Dixie's role as a helper bringing these people together. All the people that she has made connection with the help of Winn-Dixie are there and Winn-Dixie is there too and become the center of attention when he was thought missing. It has this symbolic meaning of emotional growth and manifested connection with Winn-Dixie as the thread that binds them all.

Through these individual relationships, Winn-Dixie helps Opal transform from a lonely girl longing for connection and relationship into someone who understands grief, extends compassion, actively builds community, and bridges different people together. By performing the role of the helper in Greimas' actantial model, Winn-Dixie doesn't just support the subject's quest, but also redirects it to turn a simple summer into a meaningful transformative experience for Opal's growth. Through his affective labor and warmth, Winn-Dixie reveals that healing and change are possible when we open our hearts to connection, however unlikely the source, sometimes with the help of an unexpected entity.

4.3 Four Terms Homology and Isotopes

In order to deepen the structural analysis of *Because of Winn-Dixie*, this section explores on Greimas' concept of isotopy in relation to the four terms homology. Isotopy refers to the recurrence of semantic elements across a narrative, creating coherence and directional meaning. When combined with Greimas' semiotic square and the four-term oppositional logic (such as happy vs. sad, and not-happy vs. not-sad), isotopies reveal underlying thematic patterns that shape the narrative. In this novel, these recurring semantic elements help foreground the central theme of transformation, particularly the journey from loneliness to connection, and from emotional fragmentation to wholeness.

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1. Lonely – Together – Not Lonely – Not Together
2. Sad – Happy – Not sad – Not Happy
3. Silent – Expressive – Not silent – Not expressive
4. Emotionally broken – Emotionally whole – Not broken – Not whole
5. Fearful – Trusting – Not fearful – Not trusting

The homology of loneliness and togetherness is central to the emotional journey of *Because of Winn-Dixie*. Opal begins the story entrenched in loneliness, which is shown by being new in town, not close to his father, feeling the loneliness from the absence of her mother. Winn-Dixie's arrival in her life triggers a gradual movement toward togetherness for Opal and other characters like Miss Franny, Gloria Dump, and Otis. However, the narrative doesn't simply flip from lonely to together; instead, it gradually shifts the transition. Many characters, thanks to Winn-Dixie's presence, experience being not lonely yet not entirely together in the full sense of emotional union. This movement across all four terms shows how the novel frames connection as a nuanced journey rather than just simply a binary, further underlining Winn-Dixie's helper role in facilitating these subtle shifts from loneliness to togetherness.

The second homology found in this novel's narrative shows sad, happy, not happy, and not sad. The novel avoids portraying emotional healing as a simplistic journey from sadness to happiness. Instead, it often portrays the states of not-sad and not-happy, illustrating a more realistic portrayal of grief and emotional repair. This agrees with the findings from previous studies that say sweetness and sadness cannot be detached from one another (Nesanargunam & Anand, 2021). As an example, Opal does not become entirely "happy" by the story's end due to the absence of her mother, but she is also no longer consumed by sadness. This subtle emotional space is enabled through her relationships with others, in which Winn-Dixie plays an important role in sparking or deepening the connection. Winn-Dixie's presence allows Opal to feel joy in small, everyday moments, such as laughing with Miss Franny or listening to Otis play music. These small moments accumulate into a state of not-sad, a state where lingering wounds are still there, but the feeling of contentment is also present.

The third recurring pattern throughout the narrative involves the homology of silent, expressive, not silent, not expressive. As the story progresses, many characters in the story move from emotional withdrawal towards communication and openness. Opal's father at the start of the story rarely talks about Opal's mother or his own feelings and Otis is socially awkward and withdrawn. Through Winn-Dixie's comforting and disarming presence, these characters begin to open up. Miss Franny also lives a life of quiet routine until Winn-Dixie's curiosity prompts her storytelling. These gradual transformations do not leap straight into full silence into full expressiveness, but rather they progressively shift towards the state of not-silent and not-fully expressive. In the end, the characters completely open up as

exemplified by the breaking down of the preacher in tears and confessing his sadness to Opal. This slow movement across reflects the emotional realism of the novel, which means that communication is earned through trust, and trust is built through sustained acts of kindness and presence.

The fourth homology in this novel is the state of emotional contentment, which is, emotionally broken, emotionally whole, emotionally not broken, and emotionally not whole. Many characters in the novel suffer from emotional fragmentation, carrying grief, guilt, or shame. Opal's emotional state of loneliness stems from her parents' separation and the uncertainty of her place in her father's life. Other characters also feel the emotional turmoil. Otis feels the weight of his past mistake; Gloria carries memories of addiction; and Miss Franny holds onto loneliness from decades past. Winn-Dixie becomes the stabilizing force that allows this transformation to happen. His unconditional affection and ability to bring people together offer each character moments of emotional rest and affirmation.

The fifth homology revolves around fear, trust, not fearful, and not trusting. These fears are rooted in gossip, social stigma, or past trauma, something which appears as a persistent theme in the novel. Gloria Dump is mischaracterized by neighborhood children as a witch and thus makes the kids in the community fearful of her. Otis is viewed with suspicion because of his criminal record in the past. Winn-Dixie's presence helps dissolve these barriers, starting the transformation from suspicion and fear to trust and acceptance.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* through the structural lens of A.J. Greimas' actantial model, focusing on the role of Winn-Dixie as the helper actant and catalyst for transformation. By applying this model, the analysis has highlighted how the narrative is not merely a collection of heartfelt moments, but a structured system of relationships that shape the emotional journey of the protagonist, Opal. Winn-Dixie, as a narrative device and symbolic figure serves as an entity to enable Opal's shift from isolation to connection, and from emotional uncertainty to a growing sense of relational wholeness.

The actantial scheme has demonstrated that Opal, as the subject, pursues the object of belonging and emotional clarity. Her journey is facilitated by Winn-Dixie, who serves as a physical companion and acts structurally to bridge gaps between characters. Opal's friendships with Miss Franny, Gloria Dump, Otis, and even her father are made possible through Winn-Dixie's presence. In each case, the dog helps dismantle barriers, invite vulnerability, and foster empathy, confirming his status as a functional helper within the axis of power.

The study further expands the analysis through the application of four-term homology and isotopies, revealing semantic patterns that reinforce the narrative's thematic structure. Isotopies such as loneliness, vulnerability, or fear, reoccur throughout the novel. The four-term homologies show that characters do not simply move from one binary pole to another, for example, from sad to happy, but often stay in transitional states like the state of not-sad or not-happy. This reflects the complexity of real emotional growth. These deep structures affirm that *Because of Winn-Dixie* is a narrative of gradual transformation rather than dramatic resolution.

This study has shown that Winn-Dixie is not just an endearing figure in a children's novel, but a central structural component that orchestrates emotional movement and social repair. Through Greimas' framework, the novel's simple charm proves to be grounded in

something much deeper, one that values connection, storytelling, and the quiet power of kindness. By exploring and analyzing these structural and semantic dynamics, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how children's literature can meaningfully represent emotional development through its narrative structure. This study also shows that the structuralist approach, particularly Greimas' actantial model, can be used to analyze children's literature to examine how characters in the story occupy different roles in relation to the human character.

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