



Narrative Analysis of Gender Construction in Modern English Literature

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the construction of gender in modern English literature through a narrative analysis of the representation and negotiation of gender identity in contemporary socio-cultural contexts. The approach used is a qualitative analysis with a focus on works of modern English literature published in the late 20th to early 21st centuries. The theoretical frameworks used include feminist theory and narrative theory to examine how gender is formed through characterizations, storylines, points of view, and symbolic structures in texts. The results suggest that modern English literature tends to represent gender as a dynamic social construct and is no longer seen as a fixed biological identity. The authors utilize a variety of narrative strategies, such as fragmented plots, unreliable narrators, and perspective shifts, to deconstruct traditional gender norms as well as display the complexities of identity formation. In addition, dominant themes such as resistance to patriarchal structures, the redefinition of masculinity and femininity, and the emergence of non-binary gender representation were found. This research also confirms that narrative techniques have an important role in shaping readers' understanding of gender issues. Thus, narrative analysis makes a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of gender construction in modern English literature as well as the development of gender discourse in contemporary contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of gender in literature has undergone significant development along with the paradigm shift in humanities studies, particularly in the context of modern English literature (Budilova et al., 2024). Gender is no longer understood as a fixed biological category, but as a social and cultural construct formed through discursive practices, including through literary texts (Aivelo et al., 2024). In this context, literature not only serves as a reflection of social reality, but also as an active medium in forming, reproducing, and challenging prevailing gender norms in society.

Modern English literature, especially those that have developed since the late 20th century, shows a strong tendency to represent gender identities in a more complex and fluid way (Yeasmin et al., 2024). These changes were influenced by various developments in critical theory, such as feminism, post-structuralism, and queer studies, which emphasized that gender identity is performative, dynamic, and contextual (Olasolo et al., 2026). Through this approach, literary texts become an important space to explore how characters, narratives, and story structures contribute to shaping understandings of gender.

Within this framework, narrative analysis is a relevant approach to examine gender construction in literature. Narrative not only conveys the story, but also organizes the experience, forms points of view, and mediates the relationship between the reader and the text (L E R I A C A M P O R E S I Para Grandes Y Chico, 2024). Elements such as characterization, plot, point of view, and narrative voice play an important role in establishing gender representation and influencing how those identities are understood (Waheed et al., 2025). Thus, narrative analysis allows the disclosure of textual mechanisms that are often not explicitly visible, but have a significant impact on the construction of meaning.

Although various studies have examined gender representation in literature, most still focus on thematic or ideological analysis, while narrative aspects as a medium of gender construction have not been fully explored in depth (Roberts et al., 2023). This gap demonstrates the need for a more integrative approach that combines the analysis of narrative structures with a gender perspective. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by placing narrative as the center of analysis in understanding how gender is constructed in modern literary texts (Ojochegebe et al., 2024).

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how gender constructions are shaped through narrative strategies in modern English literary works. In particular, this study examines how narrative elements are used to represent, negotiate, and deconstruct gender identity (Belhamidi, 2025). In addition, this study also aims to identify emerging patterns of gender representation and their implications for gender discourse in contemporary social and cultural contexts (Belhamidi, 2025).

With this approach, the research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of literature, especially in enriching the understanding of the relationship between narratives and gender construction. In addition, this research is also expected to make a practical contribution in opening up new perspectives on the role of literature as a critical space in reflecting and shaping gender discourse in modern society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a narrative analysis method to examine gender constructions in modern English literature. The qualitative approach

was chosen because this study focuses on the interpretation of meaning, symbolic representation, and dynamics of discourse contained in literary texts, which cannot be measured quantitatively (Novosad et al., 2022). Narrative analysis is used as the primary framework to understand how story structure and narrative elements play a role in shaping gender representation.

Research Design

This research is designed as a textual analysis study with an interpretive-critical approach. The focus of research is directed at how gender is constructed through narrative strategies in modern English literary works. The analysis was carried out by integrating feminist theoretical perspectives and narrative theory to uncover the relationship between narrative structure and gender representation in texts.

Data Sources and Research Corpus

The source of research data is in the form of modern English literary works published in the late 20th to early 21st centuries. The research corpus is selected purposively based on certain criteria, namely: works that explicitly or implicitly represent gender issues; works that show complexity in narrative structure; and works that have relevance to contemporary gender discourse. The main data is narrative text, including dialogue, character descriptions, storylines, and narrative viewpoints related to gender representation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through library research techniques by reading, identifying, and classifying parts of the text that are relevant to gender construction (Cartwright & Nancarrow, 2022). This process involves coding narrative elements such as characterizations, plots, points of view, and symbols that represent gender identity. In addition, important quotations were recorded that showed gender-related discursive practices in the text.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out in stages using a critical narrative analysis approach. The first stage is the identification of the narrative structure, which includes the plot, point of view, and narrative voice (Syed & McLean, 2021). The second stage is the analysis of gender representation through characterization and interaction between characters. The third stage is the interpretation of meaning by using feminist theoretical frameworks to identify forms of construction, negotiation, and deconstruction of gender in the text. The analysis also pays attention to how narrative strategies, such as the use of unreliable narrators or fragmented plots, contribute to shaping gender discourse.

Data Validity and Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses validation techniques in the form of theoretical triangulation and interpretation. Theoretical triangulation is carried out by integrating various theoretical perspectives, such as feminist theory and

narrative theory, in the process of analysis (Syed & McLean, 2021). In addition, close reading is carried out to ensure consistency of interpretation of the text (Mohajan et al., 2024). This approach aims to minimize subjectivity bias and increase the credibility of research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research reveals that the construction of gender in modern English literature is no longer represented as a stable and essential identity, but rather as the result of complex, dynamic, and contextual narrative processes. Through an analysis of narrative elements, several key patterns are found that show how gender is formed, negotiated, and deconstructed in modern literary texts.

Gender as a Dynamic Narrative Construct

The results of the analysis show that gender in modern English literature is not represented as a stable and essential identity category, but rather as a dynamic and contextual narrative construction. Gender identity in the text is formed through the interaction between characterization, plot development, and social relations that change throughout the narrative. Thus, gender does not exist as a fixed attribute inherent in the figure, but as a performative process that is constantly negotiated within the narrative space.

Characters in modern literary texts tend to be presented in an ambiguous and complex form, which rejects the binary classification between masculinity and femininity. Shifts in gender identity often arise through internal conflicts of characters, experiences of marginalization, and social pressures that challenge dominant norms. In many cases, the narrative shows how gender identity undergoes transformation as the story progresses, thus confirming that gender is a process of "becoming" that is temporal and situational.

In addition, narrative structure plays an important role in shaping these dynamics. Non-linear plots, shifting points of view, and representations of subjective experiences allow readers to see gender identity as something that is not singular, but rather layered and open to interpretation. Thus, the construction of gender in the text is determined not only by the characters, but also by the way the story is structured and delivered.

These findings confirm that narratives function as a discursive space that allows for the deconstruction of normative gender identities. Through narrative strategies, literary texts not only represent gender, but also actively shape and redefine the understanding of gender in a broader social context.

Table 1.
Gender Construction as a Dynamic Narrative Process

Narrative Aspects	Manifestations in Text	Gender Construct Mechanism	Theoretical Implications
Characterization	Ambiguous and complex figures	Non-fixed identity	Rejection of binary gender
Plot	Identity changes throughout the story	Gender as a process	The concept of <i>becoming</i>
Social Relations	Interaction between characters	Identity negotiation	Gender as a social construct
Internal Conflict	Identity struggle	Self-instability	Performative identity
Narrative Perspective	Diverse viewpoints	Multiplication of meaning	Gender relativity

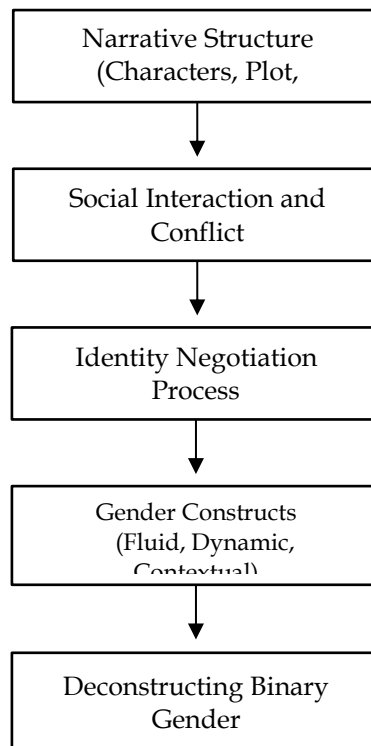


Figure 1.
Gender Construction Models in Literary Narrative Structure

Narrative Strategies in Deconstructing Gender Norms

The research findings suggest that modern English literary texts actively use narrative strategies as a discursive tool to deconstruct traditional gender norms. Narrative no longer functions as a neutral and linear medium of storytelling, but rather as a mechanism that consciously disrupts the stability of meaning and opens up space for alternative interpretations of gender identity.

Table 2.

Narrative Strategies in the Deconstruction of Gender Norms

Narrative Strategy	Manifestations in Text	Deconstruction Mechanism	Implications for Gender
Narrators are unreliable	Ambiguous/inconsistent information	Interfering with a single permission	Gender as a subjective construct
Fragmented flow	Non-linear structure	Breaking identity continuity	Gender is unstable
Perspective shift	Multi viewing angles	Unlocking a plurality of meanings	Gender relativity
Symbolic narrative	Metaphors & implicit representations	Hiding ideological significance	Criticism of gender norms
Chronological disruption	Time jump	Disrupting narrative logic	Non-fixed identity

One of the main strategies found is the use of unreliable narrators, which creates ambiguity in the delivery of information and encourages readers to question the veracity of the narrative presented. In this context, gender identity is not presented as an objective fact, but as a construction susceptible to bias, perception, and subjective limitations. In addition, the use of fragmented narratives contributes to breaking down the linearity of the story and, at the same time, undermining the assumption that gender identity is fixed and consistent. Narrative fragmentation creates disjointed representations of experiences, reflecting the complexity and instability of gender identity in social reality.

Shifting perspective is also an important strategy in presenting a plurality of gender experiences. By presenting a variety of perspectives, literary texts allow marginal voices that were previously marginalized in the dominant narrative. This not only enriches gender representation, but also challenges the hierarchy of knowledge that has always prioritized a particular perspective as the sole truth. Furthermore, these narrative strategies work collectively to disrupt gender norms that are binary and normative. Narratives become spaces where gender identity is not only represented, but also negotiated and questioned. Thus, literary texts serve as a critical arena that allows

for the deconstruction of the ideological structures that govern the understanding of gender.

Representations of Resistance to Patriarchal Structures

The results of the analysis show that modern English literature consistently represents resistance to patriarchal structures through a variety of complex and layered narrative strategies. This resistance not only emerges as a form of direct opposition to dominant norms, but also as a discursive practice manifested in language, narrative structure, and character construction. Thus, literature serves as a critical space to uncover, negotiate, and deconstruct gender-based power relations.

In Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), resistance to patriarchy is articulated through intellectual arguments about women's limited access to space and knowledge production (Konain, 2025). Meanwhile, in *Orlando* (1928), Woolf used the gender transformation of the main character to uncover the social constructs that structurally differentiated the experiences of men and women (Mohajan et al., 2024).

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), resistance is manifested through the transformation of Celie's character from a subordinate position to an agent who has autonomy (Ullah et al., 2025). A similar thing can be seen in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), where the traumatic experiences of black women become a form of criticism of the intersection of patriarchy and racism. Morrison's narrative shows that resistance is not only personal, but also historical and collective (Ghassan et al., 2025). In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), resistance to patriarchy emerges in the form of an internal narrative that maintains self-consciousness in the midst of a repressive system (Eerika Lukkarinen, 2021). This narrative shows that even in conditions of extreme control, subjectivity can be a space for resistance.

Furthermore, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) presents resistance through the reinterpretation of previously marginalized female figures in the literary canon, thus challenging the colonial patriarchal perspective (Azad, 2025). Meanwhile, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) shows more subtle resistance through the exploration of women's inner experiences that are not fully represented in dominant social structures (Kamal, 2023).

In a more contemporary context, Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) displays resistance through the plurality of female voices from various racial, class, and gender identity backgrounds (Evaristo & Sabir, 2025). *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi expands this discourse by presenting a non-binary identity that challenges normative Western gender concepts (Language et al., 2020). In addition, Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018) shows how patriarchal relationships still operate in modern interpersonal relationships, although they are not always explicitly apparent.

Works such as *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith and *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali also show resistance in the context of diaspora and migration, where

women negotiate their identities amid layered patriarchal cultural pressures . Meanwhile, Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) radically reverses the patriarchal structure by imagining a world in which women have physical dominance of power, thus highlighting the social construction of gender power relations .

These findings suggest that resistance to patriarchy in modern English literature is not singular or linear, but rather intersectional, contextual, and evolving. Narrative becomes a medium that allows various forms of resistance, both explicit, symbolic, and structural, to emerge and interact. Thus, literature not only reflects social realities, but also plays an active role in shaping and challenging gender discourse in society.

The Role of Narrative in Shaping Readers' Perceptions of Gender

The results show that narrative structure has a significant role in shaping readers' perceptions of gender construction, and these findings are reinforced by empirical reports from independent institutions in the field of literacy. One of the relevant studies was conducted by the National Literacy Trust (2017) in the UK, which examined the relationship between fictional reading habits and the development of empathy in readers.

Tabel 4.
Pengaruh Membaca Fiksi terhadap Tingkat Empati Pembaca

Respondent Group	High Empathy Rate (%)	Characteristics
Active readers of fiction	74	Getting used to understanding the character's perspective
Non-active readers	56	Limitations of exposure to complex narratives

Source: National Literacy Trust (2017)

The report showed that readers who regularly read works of fiction had higher levels of empathy compared to individuals who rarely read. Quantitatively, about 74% of respondents who actively read fiction showed a high empathic ability to understand the perspective of others, compared to 56% in the non-active reader group. These findings suggest a significant difference in the ability to understand complex social experiences.

In the context of literature, this increase in empathy is directly related to the way the narrative is structured. Narratives that use internal perspectives, psychological exploration of characters, and complex identity conflicts encourage readers to engage emotionally and cognitively. This allows readers to understand gender experiences that differ from dominant norms, including marginal and non-conventional experiences.

Furthermore, the report also emphasizes that reading literary works not only increases empathy, but also broadens readers' perspectives on social issues, including

gender equality. Readers tend to be more open to alternative perspectives and more critical of normative gender stereotypes.

Narratives in literature serve not only as a medium of representation, but also as a mechanism that shapes the social consciousness of readers. The interaction between narrative structure and reader responses suggests that perceptions of gender are the result of interpretive processes that are significantly influenced by literary reading experiences.

The Rise of Non-Binary Gender Representation and Alternative Identities

The results show that modern English literature increasingly represents gender as a broad spectrum, transcending the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity. This representation is seen in works such as *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi, which presents non-binary identities explicitly, and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo which displays the plurality of gender identities through multi-perspective narratives. Meanwhile, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) shows that the concept of fluid gender has been part of narrative experimentation since the dawn of modernism.

These works were chosen because they directly represent the fluidity and diversity of gender identity, while challenging fixed gender norms. Through innovative narrative strategies, literary texts place non-binary identities as a legitimate part of the human experience. These findings suggest that literature not only reflects social change, but also plays an active role in shaping a more inclusive and plural gender discourse.

Table 5.

Non-Binary Gender Representation in Modern English Literature

Works	Forms of Representation	Reasons to Set an Example	Implications
<i>Freshwater</i> (2018)	Plural & non-binary identities	Challenging Western gender concepts	Gender as multidimensional
<i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> (2019)	Queer & non-binary identity	Plural & inclusive representation	Normalization of diversity
<i>Orlando</i> (1928)	Gender transformation	Early experiments of gender fluidity	Gender is not fixed
<i>Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl</i> (2017)	Body & identity changes	Exploratory of performativity	Identity as a construction

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the construction of gender in modern English literature cannot be understood as a static entity, but rather as the result of dynamic and contextual narrative processes. The representation of gender as a fluid

identity shows that the characters in the text are no longer tied to a fixed masculine or feminine category, but are formed through social relations, internal conflicts, and storyline development. This confirms that gender operates as a process that is constantly negotiated within the narrative structure.

In this context, narrative strategies play an important role in deconstructing traditional gender norms. The use of unreliable narrators, fragmented plots, and shifting points of view suggest that the meaning in the text is not singular and stable. Such a narrative structure opens up space for plural interpretations, thus allowing for the emergence of more complex and non-normative gender representations. In other words, gender deconstruction occurs not only at the thematic level, but also at the level of the narrative form itself.

The representation of resistance to patriarchal structures in modern literature shows that texts serve as a critical space to uncover unequal power relations. Resistance is not always present in an explicit form, but also through symbolic and narrative practices that subtly disrupt patriarchal dominance. This shows that literature not only reflects social realities, but also plays a role in challenging and reconstructing these structures.

The role of narrative in shaping readers' perception is also an important aspect that strengthens the findings of this study. Narratives that present depth of character and intimate perspectives have been proven to increase readers' empathy and encourage critical reflection on gender issues. In this case, the experience of reading becomes an active process that involves emotional and cognitive engagement, thus contributing to shaping a more inclusive understanding of gender identity.

Furthermore, the emergence of non-binary gender representations and alternative identities suggests a shift in gender discourse in modern English literature towards a more inclusive direction. This representation not only expands the spectrum of identities presented in the text, but also challenges the normative assumptions that have dominated the understanding of gender. Thus, literature serves as a medium that not only reflects social change, but also promotes transformation in the way gender is understood.

Overall, these findings suggest that the relationship between narrative and gender is interdependent. Narratives shape the way gender is represented and understood, while the development of gender discourse also influences the narrative forms and strategies used in texts. Therefore, narrative analysis is an important approach in uncovering how gender identity is constructed, negotiated, and represented in modern literature.

This research contributes by emphasizing that gender studies in literature need to focus not only on thematic aspects, but also on narrative structure as the main medium for the formation of meaning. This approach opens up the possibility of a more

comprehensive analysis of the relationship between texts, readers, and social contexts in contemporary literary studies.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the construction of gender in modern English literature is no longer understood as a fixed identity, but rather as the result of a dynamic, contextual, and continuously negotiated narrative process. Through narrative analysis, it was found that story structure, storytelling strategies, and character representation play an important role in shaping and deconstructing gender meanings in texts. Narratives have proven to serve not only as a medium of representation, but also as a mechanism that actively challenges traditional gender norms. The use of narrative strategies such as multiple perspectives, unreliable narrators, and non-linear structures allows for the emergence of more complex and plural gender identities. In addition, the representation of resistance to patriarchal structures shows that literature becomes a critical space to uncover and disrupt unbalanced power relations.

Furthermore, the interaction between narrative and readers shows that the experience of reading literature contributes to forming empathy and critical awareness of gender issues. This reinforces the role of literature as a medium that not only reflects social realities, but also influences the way those realities are understood. The emergence of non-binary gender representations and alternative identities confirms a shift in discourse towards a more inclusive understanding. As such, modern English literature plays an important role in expanding the boundaries of gender representation while challenging established normative frameworks.

Overall, this study confirms that narrative analysis is an effective approach to understanding gender construction in literature. The main contribution of this research lies in the affirmation that gender is not only present as a theme, but is shaped through complex narrative mechanisms, thus opening up space for a more integrative study of literature between texts, readers, and social contexts.

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