

The Narrative Characteristics of *The Da Vinci Code*

Peng Zhao 

Lecturer in British and American Literature at Zhongbei College, Nanjing Normal University, Danyang City, Jiangsu Province, China

Email: promisingscholar@163.com

How to cite this paper: Zhao, P. (2020). The Narrative Characteristics of *The Da Vinci Code*. *Advances in Literary Study*, 8, 119-132.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2020.83010>

Received: April 15, 2020

Accepted: May 8, 2020

Published: May 11, 2020

Copyright © 2020 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

The paper attempts to reveal the narrative characteristics of *The Da Vinci Code* from the perspective of feminist narratology. Based on interpretation of embedded narrative, the author discovers that structure of the story is covertly inscribed with male domination over female character. In analysis of sequential communal voice, it is proved that Langdon collaborates with Teabing to indoctrinate Sophie with patriarchal ideology, which further demonstrates the novel is fraught with textually marked male hegemony and female marginalization.

Keywords

Embedded Narratives, Actantial Model, Sequential Communal Voice, Female Marginalization, Patriarchal Domination

1. Introduction

Dan Brown's multi-layered fiction starts from deconstructing the traditional interpretation of Leonardo's artistic works, develops by self-reconstructing the symbolic system of the artistic and religious world, and terminates with an indefinite, thought-provoking ending. The novel purports to expose an ancient conspiracy of Vatican and the Priory of Sion, which according to Dan Brown conceals the marriage and offspring of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. In the critical circle of *The Da Vinci Code*, most of scholars tend to label *The Da Vinci Code* a feminist text in post-modernistic literary context, regardless of various perspectives and theories adopted by them. Under such academic circumstances, the author applies the feminist narratology to analyze the narrative characteristics of *The Da Vinci Code*, to justify that female character in the text is dominated by male narrators, and is suppressed to be speech-absent and consigned to

an objective, marginal status in the narration. This thesis attempts to interpret the narrative structure and voice of the novel from feminist perspective on three levels: “story”, “narrative discourse” and “narrating”. The feminist interpretation of the novel is not to reduce its literary value to political value but to be of great help to further studies on this novel.

2. Brief Review of the Feminist Narratology

For some twenty years in history, feminism and narratology have entailed separate inquiries of antithetical tendency: the one general, mimetic and political, the other specific, semiotic and technical. Robyn Warhol illustrates some compelling reasons in *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* as accountable for their incompatibility. At first, the technical vocabulary (neology) of narrative poetics has alienated feminist critics who maintain special political concerns. Secondly, feminists are distrustful to the conceptual universe which is organized into the neat paradigms of binary logic in the traditional theory. Then “It is readily apparent that virtually no work in the field of narratology has taken gender into account [...]. This means [...] the narratives which have provided the foundation for narratology have been either men’s texts or texts treated as men’s” (Warhol & Diane, 1991: p. 612). This indicates the canon on which narrative theory is grounded has been relentlessly, if not intentionally, man-made. If the two domains converge on some common issues, a double-edged effect would be achieved. On the one hand, the introduction of gender factor and social properties in the interpretation of narrative discourse can make up for the deficiency of narratology in its ideological orientation. On the other hand, the application of the techniques of narrative poetics in the exploration of feminist writing will make the feminism more objective. In 1980s, Feminist narratology entered the critical arena in North America as an interdisciplinary criticism that draws on both structural narratology and feminist criticism. “Feminist narratology shares some common grounds with traditional rhetorical narratology, such as concerns for the intention of author’s creation and the rhetorical effect of narrative structure, but their distinction is quite obvious for feminist narratology emphasizes in addition the “sexual politics” of the narrative structure” (Shen et al., 2005: p. 276).

American scholar Susan S. Lancer is regarded as the initiator of feminist narratology on account of her research on the issue, and her *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* published in Princeton University Press in 1981 was the first to associate the narrative forms with feminist criticism, which inaugurated the practice of feminist narratology although the term was not formally adopted in this book then. As a formalist scholar, Lancer is deeply influenced by feminism, Marxism and speech act theory and she is the first to propose the theoretical framework of feminist narratology, besides some practical analyses. Her studies were succeeded by some academic papers on feminist narratology by Brewer, Warhol and Mieke Bal, whose concerted efforts helped to

bring feminist narratology in to bloom in 1980s. “Maria Minich Brewer is one of precursors of feminist narratology, and he criticizes the structural narratology for the overlook of social, historical context in its practice, in his article titled *A Loosening of Tongue: From Narrative Economy to Women Writing* published in 1984. He examines the narrativity of women writing and associates it with “sexual politics” in the analysis. In 1986, Robyn R. Warhol published *Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator*, in which he discusses narrative strategy from feminist perspective. In the interim from 1980s to 1990s, there appeared two important works on feminist narratology—one was *Gendered Intervention: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* by Robyn R. Warhol, the other was *Toward a Feminist Narratology* by Susan S. Lanser. The two American scholars made further explorations on the main objective of feminist narratology, basic standpoint and research approaches and carried out more systematic practical criticism in these books. Since 1990s, feminist narratology has flourished for its disputatious nature in a macro-political scope and concrete scientific studies in the forms and structures of literary works. The conflict and fusion between the two provide a new vision on the traditional narratology with consideration to the social and gender significance in the narrative analysis, and the employment of narratology in the feminist criticism enlarges the perspectives to the interpretation of literary works. Their interdependence and counterpoint not only enable the structural narratology to survive but also make the feminist narratology one of the most influential branches of postclassical narratology.

In *Toward a Feminist Narratology*, Lanser argues “feminism interprets a literary work from mimetic perspective, while narratology analyzes a literary text from semiotic perspective. Literature is an interwoven area between the two: it is representation of reality from mimetic perspective, and the reconstruction of language from semiotic perspective” (Lanser, 1992: p. 613). Realizing the duality of a narrative discourse, feminist should pay attention to the structural characteristics to make more scrutinous and minute analysis of the narrative by applying narrative theories. But some feminist scholars regard literary theory as the phallogocentric discourse of the patriarchy, which is to be subverted in feminist criticism, thus they are likely to resist the structural narratology. To erase the skepticism of some feminist to structural narratology, Warhol asserts, in *Gendered Intervention*, narratology does not essentially entail gender bias. His argument bases on three aspects:

- 1) Narratology aims to analyze the structural features of a literary work but not to make comment on it, which does not necessary involve hierarchical relationship typical of patriarchy;
- 2) Narratology is a dynamic and open system and a diversity of literary texts are to be included into its scope to enrich the theory, although the early theoretic framework is constructed on the male literary texts;
- 3) The construction of the ‘gendered-discourse poetic’ consists of two steps: narrative analysis serves as the first, and the second step is to associate narratology with historical context to examine

the relationship between the characteristics of literary works, and the gender concept in historical context (Warhol, 1989: pp. 14-16).

The often-asserted goal of feminist criticism has been to reveal, criticize and subvert the “patriarchal discourse”. In terms of feminism, discourse designates that the language as semiotic system, writing techniques, thinking system, philosophical system and symbolic system of literature, and discourse represents an implicit mechanism of power-relationship, which has received a great deal of attention by feminists. Dale Spender’s *Man Made Language* (1980), as the title suggests, considers that “women have been fundamentally oppressed by male-dominated language. If we accept Foucault’s argument that what is ‘true’ depends on who controls discourse, then it is apparent that men’s domination of discourse has trapped women inside a male ‘truth’” (Selden et al., 2004: p. 128). From this point of view some feminists strive to contest men’s control of discourse and some advocate women writers to adopt the “stronger” discourse of men if they wish to achieve social equality with them. In narrative poetics, discourse represents the technique level: the written words or the means by which the content is communicated as discussed in the introduction of this thesis. There lie obvious differences between feminism and feminist narratology in terms of the subject matters considering the analysis of the three-level of a narrative: story, narrative discourse, and narrating. Feminism tends to focus on the story level to reveal the distortion of female characters, the expression of female experience, female consciousness, position, identity, and the reconstruction of female subjectivity in the process of reading. “But on the story level feminist narratology mainly concerns the structural features and relationship: 1) the sexual discrimination embodied in the structure of men’s literary works; 2) the differences in structures between stories written by men and those by women” (Shen et al., 2005: pp. 284-285). Contrary to feminism, the focus of feminist narratology mainly dwells on narrative and narrating level for which feminist narrative poetics bridges the polemic feminism with the systematic and scientific studies of narrative poetics, and makes the two mutually reinforced.

3. The Narrative Structure of *The Da Vinci Code*

The Da Vinci Code follows the traditional principles of thriller fiction by starting with a ruthless murder and developing with suspense through the detective process. The narrative mode of classical detective fiction provides *The Da Vinci Code* with sophisticated clues and breathtaking suspense emerging in the process of deciphering the mysterious, symbolic codes in the paintings of Leonardo and in the anagrams of Sauniere. The renowned curator Jacques Sauniere is interrogated by an albino monk for the whereabouts of something mysterious his brethren possess. Sauniere lies to the albino about the hiding place of the object that his brethren guard, only to be shot on the chest and informed of the death of the other guardians of his brotherhood. Deceived by Sauniere, the albi-

no monk is set on his quest of the object that Sauniere's brethren try to protect, as he confirms the whereabouts given by the four guardians refers to the identical place. In the fifteen minutes before his drawn-out death, Sauniere tries to pass on the secret to finish the mission with which his brethren have been entrusted for centuries. He spends the last minutes of his life arranging his own body in strange fashion: stripping off every shred of clothing, arms and legs sprawling outward like Da Vinci's *The Vitruvian Man* surrounded by a large circle, drawing with his own blood a five-pointed star, the pentacle centered on his navel, and writing a bizarre message with series of numbers and three lines of words. The last line of the message goes like this: "P.S. Find Robert Langdon" (Brown, 2003: p. 74). It is the last sentence on the parquet floor of the Louvre's Grand Gallery that involves Sophie Neveu and Robert Langdon into the inquiry of the symbolic world and the Holy Grail quest.

The summary made in the preceding paragraph is the first-degree narrative because other narratives are embedded in it and it serves as the primary structure of the story. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, "Gerard Genette has illustrated the basic structure of embedded narratives with the help of a naive drawing using stick-figure narrators and speech-bubble narratives" (Genette, 1988: p. 85). In **Figure 1** below, first-degree narrative A contains a second-degree narrative B.

If the underlying structure of the novel is generalized in a sentence, it should be "Jacques Sauniere wants Sophie Neveu to reveal the secret". Some critics recommend that the generalization of the first-degree narrative be "Jacques Sauniere hands down a secret to Sophie Neveu". The former designates that the secret is still left to be interpreted and revealed by Sophie, while the latter means the secret is crystal clear to her. If the primary structure of the story is generalized with the second sentence, it is needless for Dan Brown to continue the story any longer concerning the purported theme of *The Da Vinci Code*. Thus in *The Da Vinci Code*, the first-degree narrative A in **Figure 1** is "Jacques Sauniere wants Sophie Neveu to reveal the secret", and the second-degree narrative B should be "revealing the secret" or the "Holy Grail quest".

The actantial grammar with its discussion on the semantics of event and role

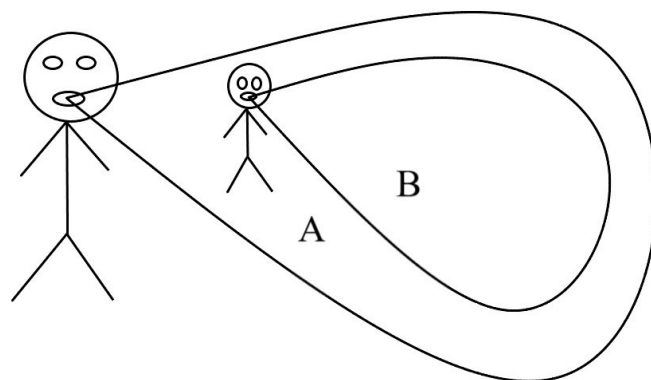


Figure 1. Structure of embedded narrative.

relationships in sentence and the examination of textual unfolding of action as a pattern of practical reasoning provides a suitable springboard from which to launch an analytical overview of the narrative structure. “Algirdas J. Greimas points out that actants and predicates are two big classes to make up the ‘semantic syntax’, and they combine with each other to form the semantic kernel or nucleus of a textual micro-universe” (Budniakiewicz, 1992: p. 75). The actantial grammar is an extrapolation of the syntactical structure which cast subject, verb, and object as roles in a kind of dramatic representation. “A semantic micro-universe can only become or be defined as a meaningful whole insofar as the underlying structure can rise into view as ‘a simple spectacle’, as an actantial structure” (ibid 76). “An actant is a class of actors whose members have an identical relation to the aspect of telos (teleology of the fabula) which constitutes the principle of the fabula (Russian formalist term for story), and the shared relation is called the function” (Bal, 1985: p. 26). The most important relationship is between the actor who follows an aim and that aim itself, which may be compared to that between subject and direct object in a sentence. The subject-actant aspires towards a goal or an object-actant, and the intention of the subject is in itself not sufficient to reach the object, so there are always positive powers to facilitate the achievement of the aim or negative powers to block it. The power in many cases not a person but an abstraction: e.g. society, fate, time, human trait, cleverness, etc. “In principle the subject and the power predominate more, or are more active in a grammatical sense, than object and the receiver, because they are the agent, or the (grammatical) subject, either of the function of intention/evasion or of giving/receiving” (ibid 28).

In the first-degree narrative of *The Da Vinci Code* as generalized in the preceding paragraph, the subject actant is Jacques Sauniere who aspires to bring about Sophie Neveu’s revealing of the secret. And the object actant is a matter or a state Jacques Sauniere aspires to reach—Sophie Neveu’s revelation of the secret. In this sense, the sender is Jacques Sauniere, and the receiver is Sophie Neveu, and the primary structure of *The Da Vinci Code* is characterized as male characters’ domination over female character. The male characters are depicted central, active, while the female character marginal, passive.

The positive power represented by Jacques Sauniere’s intricate, symbolic clues can facilitate Sophie’s achievement and govern the whole process of the “Holy Grail quest”. The negative power represented by the albino monk’s intervention tries every means to prevent Sophie’s “Holy Grail quest”. If these power blocks are considered in the “sexual politics” of the narrative structure, Sophie is further marginalized to take an objective position in the primary structure. The positive power represented by the subject actant—Sauniere remains in the background to govern and guide the Holy Guest throughout the whole story.

A second-degree narrative is a narrative that is embedded in the first-degree narrative. In *The Da Vinci Code*, “Sophie Neveu’s striving to reveal the secret”

serves as one half of the second-degree narrative while the albino monk's intervention occupies the other. As a result, the second-degree narrative is made up of a parallel narrative structure. The two parallel narratives of the second-degree narrative are constructed in the story consecutively. The same argument is held by Fu Hui on the construction of the second-degree narrative: Sophie's Holy Grail quest is the main narrative clue to promote the diachronic development of the story and the albino monk's intervention is the subordinate to enrich the synchronic expansion of the story. In the second-degree narrative Sophie's role changes from object actant into subject actant for she causes or undergoes functional events to some extent in the second-degree narrative. The last line of Sautiere's message: "P. S. Find Robert Langdon" entails that Robert Langdon is to enter the stage as a helper to Sophie in their quest of the Holy Grail in the second-degree narrative. It is the presence of helpers and opponents that makes a story suspenseful and readable. In the parallel narrative, the object both the protagonists and the antagonists endeavor to get is the truth of the Holy Grail, therefore it is important to understand the positional meaning of the object as an intersection of relationship lying on two relational axes (see **Figure 2**). The achievement of the object in the story indicates the terminal of the main dramatic movement of the story, the Holy Grail quest and the peak of the narrative. The object is the site of conflict and competition between protagonist and antagonist, which may serve as one instrument for generating the global unity of the story.

The actantial model is a "staggered" system of relations that telescopes the passage of all actantial situations into one spatial summation. Within this passage two situations, in particular, stand out as representing the most important meanings of the model and they both start from the decisive culminating point, one looking backward to the initial situation and the other forward to the final situation (Budniakiewicz, 1992: p. 217).

The construction of the second-degree narrative of *The Da Vinci Code* follows the principle of the actantial model. The true nature or the whereabouts of the Holy Grail takes an object actant position, an object of conflict and competition between protagonist and antagonist. Urged by the murder of Louvre curator, the protagonists Sophie and Langdon with the ambiguous Leigh Teabing set out to reveal the truth of the Holy Grail; contrary to them the albino monk Silas, and bishop Aringarosa ordered by the Teacher try every means to conceal the truth of the Holy Grail. The parallel structure is constructed in such a way as The Priory of Sion vs. The Vatican, and Good vs. evil. In *Narratologies* edited by David Herman, the first article entitled "Not (Yet) Knowing: Epistemological Effects of

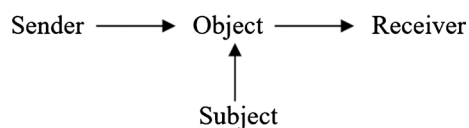


Figure 2. Syntactic & semantic relations.

Deferred and Suppressed Information in Narrative” is written by Emma Kafalenos to analyze the influence of deferred and suppressed information in narrative discourse on the interpretation of the story. Without considering readers and contexts, Kafalenos formulates the following narrative paradigm to describe the common structural features of narratives:

The Initial Equilibrium [not a function]

- A (or a) The Destructive Event (or Reevaluation on Certain Circumstance);
- B Somebody Summoned to Solve A;
- C C Actant Determined to Solve A;
- C' C The Primary Action Taken by C Actant to Solve A;
- D C Actant Being Tested;
- E C Actant's Responding to the Test;
- F C Actant's Getting Authorized;
- G C Actant Getting to Special Spatio-temporal Position for H;
- H The Major Action Taken by C Actant to Solve A;
- I (or Negation of I) H's Success or Failure;
- K Final Equilibrium (David, 1999: pp. 33-65).

In this narrative paradigm, Kafalenos adopts some concepts from other narrative grammars such as “actant” of Greimas, “overall development of a narrative” of T. Todorov, and “functions model” of Vladimir Propp. By applying Kafalenos narrative paradigm to analyze the second-degree narrative in *The Da Vinci Code*, the main narrative clue—Sophie and Langdon's Holy Grail quest comes under scrutiny in the follow paragraph to reveal the relative narrative lengths and status of the characters:

The Initial Equilibrium [not a function]:

The reconciliation between the Priory of Sion and Vatican

- A (or a) The Destructive Event: The mysterious murder of Jacques Sauniere, the Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, who leaves a maze of cryptograms to be decoded.
- B Sophie and Langdon are summoned to solve A in a bizarre set of circumstances.
- C C Actant (represented by Sophie and Langdon) Determined to Solve A: They are involved into deciphering the enigma left behind by Sauniere.
- C' C The Primary Action Taken by C Actant to Solve A:

C Actant	{	Sophie's deciphering of the third anagram : Madonna of the Rocks	}
		Langdon's deciphering of the 1st & 2nd anagrams : Leonardo da Vinci and The Mona Lisa	

—obtaining the key to a deposit box in a Swiss bank.
- D C Actant Being Tested: C actant is challenged to open the deposit box transferred to them by Sauniere.
- E C Actant's Responding to the Test: They figure out Fibonacci are the account numbers and extricate the “cryptex” or the “keystone” from the

bank.

- F C Actant's Getting Authorized:
- 1) Mutual recognition of each other's status (receivers of the mission entrusted by Sauniere);
 - 2) Realizing their being on a Holy Grail quest (chapter 51).
- G C Actant Getting to Special Spatio-temporal Position for H:
- 1) Sophie & Langdon get to Chateau Villette to find Leigh Teabing, with the help of whom they crack the first code—SOFIA of the “cryptex”.
 - 2) C Actant (represented by Sophie, Langdon and Teabing) flies to Great Britain the next morning.
- H The Major Action Taken by C Actant to Solve A:
- C Actant (represented by Langdon only) figures out the final code—APPLIE of the “cryptex”.
- I (or Negation of I) H's Success or Failure: Langdon's epiphany leads him to the final resting-place of Mary Magdalene (Langdon succeeds in locating the whereabouts of the Holy Grail).
- K Final Equilibrium: The true nature of the Holy Grail and its final whereabouts remain hidden to the public.

In the narrative paradigm above, the components of C Actant undergo changes during the overall development of the story. By analyzing the narrative lengths of each component, readers will realize Langdon goes further in the Holy Grail quest than the other characters—Sophie, Teabing etc. Starting from the same critical point, Sophie gradually lags behind Langdon and totally lost in the end of revealing the whereabouts of the Holy Grail. This kind of arrangement of the narrative indicates that female character is marginalized to obscurity in the narrative. In the process of decoding the intricate maze of cryptograms, Langdon outwits Sophie; therefore the male character in *The Da Vinci Code* is superior to the female character. The structure designed by Dan Brown relegates the female to a subordinate and inferior status compared with the males'.

The embedded narrative structure of *The Da Vinci Code* can be generalized to great accuracy by the following “Chinese-boxes models”:

The “Chinese-boxes models” indicates both the relative lengths of the various narratives as well as their potentially “open” status. In **Figure 3**, A is the first-degree narrative, and B embedded in A is the second-degree narrative. B is constructed on a parallel narrative structure: B2 represents albino monk's intervention, and B1 represents Sophie & Langdon's Holy Grail quest. Furthermore, y

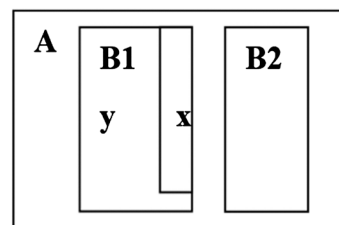


Figure 3. Chinese-boxes models.

with a larger area indicates narrative directed to Langdon, but Sophie accounts for much smaller area labeled with x. From the analysis above, it is safe to say that the structure of the story in *The Da Vinci Code* is covertly inscribed with sexual discrimination and male domination over the female character. The structural arrangement is implicitly influenced by the patriarchal ideology of the male author.

4. The Narrative Voice in *The Da Vinci Code*

“Voice” has been a heated topic in the feminist narratology but it has been ignored in conventional narrative poetics. As a narratological term, “voice” attends to the specific forms of textual practice and avoids the essentializing tendency of its more casual feminist usage. As a political term, “voice” rescues textual study from formalist isolation that often treats literary events as if they were inconsequential to human history. The concept of “voice” in feminist narratology is adopted from classic narratology for its technical categorization of narrative voices. This concept is applied in feminist narratology to reveal its social and political indication by combining the technical studies of classic narratology with the political and ideological concerns of feminism. Feminist narratology is committed to discovering the historical and contextual reasons for the author’s choice of specific narrative voice in literature. In feminist narratology, voice focuses on examining the intertwined relation between social status and textual structure, and serves as the chief technique to express ideological orientation. Structuralists consider the relation among narrator, narratee, and narrative object only structural, but “Lanser regards it as the site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge that is manifested in and sometimes resolved through ideologically charged technical practice” (Lanser, 1992: p. 7). For feminists, the choice of an appropriate narrator, who takes control of the right of “voicing”, has become the signifier of achievement of women’s social status and power in the hierarchical power system. Lanser argues, “Despite compelling interrogations of ‘voice’ as a humanist fiction, for the collectively and personally silenced the term has become a trope of identity and power: as Luce Irigaray suggests, to find a voice (voix) is to find a way (voie)” (Lanser, 1992: p. 3).

Lanser’s originality on the subject of narrative voice is manifested in her distinction of three molds of narrative voice: authorial, personal and communal voices in *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992). In this book, Lanser explores certain configurations of textual voice in fictions by women of Britain, France and United States, writing from the mid-eighteenth century to mid-twentieth, and she defines that “female voice—a term used here simply to designate the narrator’s grammatical gender—is a site of ideological tension made visible in textual practices” (Lanser, 1992: p. 6).

In Lanser’s distinction, “authorial voice” identifies the narrative situations that are extradiegetic, public, and potentially self-referential, and the authorial mode is directed to a narratee who is analogous to a reading audience; “per-

sonal voice” refers to narrators (autodiegetic or extra-homodiegetic) who are self-consciously telling their own histories; “communal voice”, a category of underdeveloped possibilities that has not even been named in contemporary narratology, means a spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority (Lanser, 1992: pp. 15-21).

To differentiate the authority of the narrators and narrating characters, Lanser’s distinction is to be applied in the successive parts. Dan Brown relates *The Da Vinci Code* from omniscient points of view and he adopts a “public voice” that suggests the narration directed toward a narratee outside the fiction. The omniscient narrator is not present as a character in the story, and even outside the fiction; thus the narrator of *The Da Vinci Code* is an extradiegetic narrator. In the first-degree narrative of the novel, readers cannot discover the textual distinction between the author and a public, heterodiegetic narrator; so it is safe for readers to equate the narrator with the author, because “Lanser argues if the distinction between the (implied) author and a public, heterodiegetic narrator is not textually marked, readers are invited to equate the narrator with the author and the narratee with themselves (or their historical equivalences)” (Lanser, 1992: p. 16). The omniscient narrator, the author Dan Brown claims the “authorial voice” in the first-degree narrative. The second-degree narrative is also unfolded from omniscient points of view, but the voice is shared among diverse narrating characters. The omniscient narrator attends to the synchronic and diachronic development of the whole story, while the narrating characters focus on the diachronic development of the Holy Grail quest. “Moreover, since authorial narrators exist outside narrative time (indeed, outside fiction) and are not ‘humanized’ by events, they conventionally carry an authority superior to that conferred on characters, even on narrating characters” (Lanser, 1992: p. 16). As a result, the male author, Dan Brown as an omniscient narrator is superior to those narrating characters in the novel. The salient narrative feature of the parallel narratives in the embedded narratives is the alternation of the role of narrator and narratee among protagonists in the process of searching for the truth of the Holy Grail. Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon serves as the initial narrating character for he is the first among the protagonists to emerge on the scene of the murder. Langdon is a heterodiegetic narrator in that he is not present as a character in the story he narrates. Langdon takes a private voice and directs his narration toward the narratees who are fictional characters. The first narratee of Langdon as a heterodiegetic narrator is Captain Bezu Fache, to whom Langdon explains the symbolic implication of Pentacle in the pagan religion, the harmony between male and female indicated by The Vitruvian Man exhibited by Sauniere. Langdon’s symbolic interpretation becomes more and more complicated as the narrative develops, so that Sophie as a more adequate narratee emerges in the narrative. Although Sophie is a cryptologist, she is much less sophisticated compared with Langdon in terms of the interpretation of religious symbols. From Lang-

don's narration, Sophie acquires the knowledge about the "sacred feminine", AMON L'ISA symbolizing union between male and female, Vatican's conspiracy in early Christianity, Holy Grail as Sangreal, Knight Templar, and the Priory of Sion. Robert Langdon's narration actualizes the indoctrination to Sophie with the worship of the "sacred feminine" and on the symbolism of the Holy Grail, but his narrating declines after he and Sophie manage to extricate the "cryptex" from the Depository Bank of Zurich. Incapable of deciphering the first code to the cryptex, they seek help from Leigh Teabing. Teabing succeeds Langdon's role of heterodiegetic narrator to Sophie. If Langdon acquaints Sophie with the feminine symbolic indication of the Holy Grail, Teabing is the terminal narrating character who persuades Sophie to accept the connection between The Last Supper and Mary Magdalene, Council of Nicaea and Jesus' divinity, royal blood-line (Sang Real) and the Holy Grail, the womb and the holy vessel (the chalice), Mary Magdalene and the sacred feminine, as well as the subversive interpretation of some Christian documents. In the second-degree narrative Langdon collaborates with Teabing to indoctrinate Sophie besides readers to accept the patriarchal ideology of the male-centered community. The ideology coincides with the three major premises on which *The Da Vinci Code* is constructed.

In communal narration, narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voice or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community. According to Lanser's further distinction, "a singular form in which one narrator speaks for a collective, a simultaneous form in which a plural 'we' narrates, and a sequential form in which individual members of a group narrate in turn" (Lanser, 1992: p. 21). Based on Lanser's distinction, readers can discern that Langdon is allied with Teabing to constitute a sequential communal voice in the embedded narrative, which is quite contrary to Lanser's observation, for she argues "unlike authorial and personal voice, the communal mode seems to be primarily a phenomenon of marginal or suppressed community; I have not observed it in fiction by white, ruling-class men" (ibid 21). The sequential communal voice is most obviously embodied in Chapter 56 of the novel:

Sophie stared at Teabing a long moment and then turned to Langdon. "The Holy Grail is a person?" [...] Langdon could tell they had already lost her. [...] Teabing apparently had a similar thought. "Robert, perhaps this is the moment for the symbologist to clarify?" He went to a nearby end table, found a piece of paper, and laid it in front of Langdon. [...] "I should add," Teabing chimed, "that this concept of woman as life-bringer was the foundation of ancient religion." (Brown, 2003: pp. 257-259).

Sophie's narration is characterized by flashback and recalling of her former personal experience with her grandfather so she is an extra-homodiegetic narrator. Her narrative is trivial, tentative, hesitant and emotional, which covers a diversity of life details: Using Fibonacci numbers, playing Tarot cards for fun, the Divine Proportion, PHI, cryptex, P.S. etc. Sophie adopts a personal voice to tell

self-consciously her own stories, but some of her recollection of the past experience is interior monologue which should be excluded in the exploration of personal voice based on Lanser's theory, such as recalling her experience of Hieros Gamos in Chapter 32. The "authorial voice" (re)produces the structural and functional situation of authorship. The authorial narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgment, while a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person's right to interpret her experience. Unlike authorial and personal voice, whose singularity corresponds to that of conventional authorship, communal voice arrogates to an individual author the self-reinforcing pretense of multiplicity. In *The Da Vinci Code*, the male narrators are privileged to take structurally superior position and to constitute narrating community, while female character is limited to the narrow scope of her life experience. Based on the analysis of narrative voice, the novel is characterized as textually marked men's hegemony over women. Female character's voice is suppressed under the pervasive male voices. If the controlling of the right of "voicing" signifies the achievement of women's social status and power in the hierarchical system, women in *The Da Vinci Code* are apparently lower, weaker than man in these respects.

5. Conclusion

The Da Vinci Code is a story of the Holy Grail quest, or according to Dan Brown, a story to rediscover the "sacred feminine" to revive the "Goddess Worship" and to subvert the traditional Christian culture. On account of the acclaimed theme of the story, some critics take it for granted that the novel is a feminist text that strives to rediscover the identity of the female. To erase the ambiguity concerning the story that purports to do justice to women, the author of this thesis applies feminist narratology to examining the structure of the narrative and the voice of female character in the novel. The novel is interpreted not only on its political orientations but also on the narrative structure in which the political concerns are encoded. To the disappointment of those credulous critics, the female marginalization and patriarchal domination are pervasively embodied in the structure of the story designed by the male author. The patriarchal domination deprives female character of the rights of "voicing" in the narrative, thus woman in the novel is speech-absent and obscure. The male characters occupy the subjective position and the female character is forced to take an objective position. Feminist literary critics regard literary discourse as the site of power struggle; therefore woman in *The Da Vinci Code* loses the fight against the oppression of the patriarchy because her voice is suppressed by the male characters in the process of narrating. Outside the fiction the male author claims the authorial voice, and inside it the male narrating characters constitute a sequential communal voice. The female voice is suppressed under the pervasive male's hegemony over the narrative voice. Sophie is taught, in the process of being indoctrinated, to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology and so she is conditioned to derogate her own sex and to cooperate in her own subordination.

Three major premises serve as the foundation to the construction of the novel: 1) The worship of sacred feminine precedes the monotheism of early Christianity. 2) The Vatican has conspired to conceal the marriage between Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. 3) The Holy Grail symbolizes the seeded womb of Mary Magdalene, who carries the divine ancestral bloodline of Jesus Christ. The novel purports to rediscover the “sacred feminine” to revive the “Goddess Worship” and to subvert the traditional Christian culture. But the patriarchal domination represented by the religious organization, the police and powerful men historical and present, makes it inconceivable for a male author to fulfill the prescribed theme of the novel. It is strongly recommended that further studies of *The Da Vinci Code* should be carried out from the perspective of deconstructionism to evoke an insightful interpretation of the multilayered story.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Bal, M. (1985). *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (C. van Boheemen Trans.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Brown, D. (2003). *The Da Vinci Code*. New York: Doubleday, Random House, Inc.
- Budniakiewicz, T. (1992). *Fundamentals of Story Logic: Introduction to Greimassian Semiotics*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- David, H. (1999). *Narratologies*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State UP.
- Genette, G. (1988) *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (J. E. Lewin Trans., 1983). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lanser, S. S. (1992). *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Selden, R. et al. (2004). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Shen, D., Han, J. M., & Wang, L. Y. (2005). *Narrative Theories of British and American Novels*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Warhol, R. R. (1989). *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Warhol, R. R., & Diane, P. H. (1991). *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.