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Exploring the Complexities of Narrative Structure and Cycles of Illusion and Reality in Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*

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Abstract

This paper deploys Bremond's theory, The Logic of Narrative Possibilities, to examine the narrative structure of *Night Circus*. The present study analysed the dynamic of narrative structure of the plot, focusing on the intricate relationship of micro and macro events in 'Night Circus' and how characters' lives cycled between amelioration and degeneration. This analysis illustrates how the narrative structure is made up of enclaves and couplings, and how the characters' journeys are constructed by intervention, negotiation and aggression, leading to cycles of illusion and reality. Analysis of the non-linear narrative of the novel, use of alternative perspectives and embedded timelines have been employed, to demonstrate the layered complexity of its narrative structure. Using the interpretivist methodology and narrative-structure analysis, the present research provides insight into the interaction between narrative functions and logical possibilities identified by Bremond. This study can advance the discourse in storytelling structures and analysis in narrative through Bremond's notions.

Keywords:

Narratological Analysis, Narrative Structure, Narrative Possibilities, Narrative Cycles, Illusion and Reality, Amelioration and Degradation, Literary Narratology

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1. Introduction

The current research examines Erin Morgenstern's novel *The Night Circus* (2011) through examining the narrative framework using Bremond's theory concerning the possibility of a narrative. *The Night Circus* is often viewed as a postmodern fantasy due to its complexity, extensive number of temporal shifts, many different narrative voices, and

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magical contest motif between two magicians. The complexity of *The Night Circus*' structure, in addition to its use of time confusion, circular direction of the narrative, and non-linear movement, makes it well-suited for performing narratological studies. The decisions made concerning both thematic elements and structural components within the narrative impact how virtual, actual, and resultant segments within the story are envisioned, and therefore allow us to see the creation and loss of narrative possibilities.

Like Propp, Claude Bremond considers the function to be the foundation upon which the structure of a narrative is built; nevertheless, he has substituted "function" with "role" and therefore emphasises the ongoing participation of choices made by a character which create events and that those choices can either enhance or detract from the totality of events that occur within a narrative. Through examining verbal and visual information in *The Logic of Narrative Possibilities* (Bremond, 1973), Bremond tries to develop a theory of general principles related to the construction of narratives. Narrative events are proposed by Bremond as taking place along a number of basic sequences, each containing three interconnected stages or functions: Potentiality (the definition of the objective), Actualization (the performance of the action), and Result (the success/failure of the objective). The way these narrative arc sequences are arranged in succession (forward or backwards) can be a way to help or hinder the character's participation in the cycles of fate.

This study is looking at how we can connect two different types of narrative arcs, one is a short story scenario and the other is an epic, to map out the journey of the two main characters of Celia and Marco and show how each structure is building their own personal growth as they learn how to be better or worse versions of themselves. This research looks at the ways in which amelioration and degradation can occur through sequentially connected events (impediments, eliminations, interventions, negotiations and outcomes) as well as whether these events occur in linear progression (end-to-end), through enclaves, or coupled. This is a key distinction in Bremond's theory.

Additionally, the research highlights the importance of using narrative strategies to utilize allies, eliminate enemies and the effects of making both active and passive decisions in achieving a successful outcome. The aim is to explore the way the author of *The Night Circus* illustrates the complexity and logical framework of Bremond, which he developed, through the combination of both illusion and reality. Utilizing Bremond's theory, this study highlights Morgenstern's narrative organization and explains how narrative logic influences how the reader encounters character development and thematic resolution.

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2. Literature Review

Existing studies on *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern have focused on either the thematic or stylistic aspects of the novel, usually with an emphasis on such areas as magical realism and spectacle, immersion as a reader within the competition, and the use of postmodern strategies of narration. As a result, there has been much discussion regarding the novel's affective reading experience, its use of liminal spaces, as well as its combination of illusion and reality, as part of a larger discussion about contemporary fantasies and postmodern literature (Bowers, 2012; McHale, 1987). While these critical approaches provide considerable insight into the aesthetics and themes of *The Night Circus*, they do not develop a systematic narratological analysis of the structural logic and organization of the narrative possibilities of the text.

The current research is based on extensive research into narratology, with an emphasis placed on Claude Bremond's theory of narrative possibilities. This section reviews some of the major critical interpretations and original research findings that demonstrate the potential of Bremond's method to studying more contemporary examples of literary work including Postmodernism, such as *The Night Circus* which often use non-linear, fragmented narrative forms. Postmodern writers often use several different viewpoints, date and time orders, and neither chronological nor sequential event structures. Bremond's theory allows for the examination of both 'actual' and 'hypothetical' events and is similar to this novel's unique style, whereby multiple time-lines exist for numerous events, and readers must actively piece together the story using scattered narrative threads.

The article "The Philosophy of Claude Bremond: Narrative Theory and Structural Analysis" expands on previous knowledge regarding the ways that Claude Bremond organizes narrative action systems and demonstrates how these methods are situated within the broader structuralist discourse. As an advocate of using logic-based methodologies to apply to a variety of story types, Bremond offers a model of how to structure narrative actions and how these actions can lead to different outcomes depending on the reader's interpretation. Although Bremond has defined how people create meaning through their decisions and subsequent reactions to narrative events, he does not define what constitutes a narrative in general nor his particular theories about creating narratives. Rather, he proposes that readers create their understandings of narratives by identifying the steps that lead them to their conclusions. The result is that the understanding of a narrative is partly dependent on the reader's input. This is demonstrated by using Bremond's methodology to help readers as well as researchers understand what is present in a narrative and what possibilities exist, demonstrating that narratives are rarely linear or comprised of only one outcome. Bremond's methodology facilitates the study of books

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such as *The Night Circus*, where themes are created through interconnectivity of characters and agentic sequencing.

The "From Functions and Actions to Textual Possible Worlds: Narrative Possibilities of Narrative Alternatives" (2022) by Olena Verbivska expands on Bremond's theory by applying it to interpretive varieties, and thus provides further implications of Bremond's theory. Verbivska contends that the Bremond triadic structure of potentiality - actuality - result has the potential to account for the plethora of possibilities available to a reader when encountering a narrative. Literature provides a path with many forked routes for a reader to navigate. The reader engages with the literature to determine possible ideas from the many branches that diverge from the central story. This characteristic is aligned with how we look at the postmodern use of literature where the reader's understanding of the text has an increasing role in the interpretation of meaning. Through an application of the Bremond triadic structure, Verbivska argues that reading *The Night Circus* is much more than just following a narrative, it also requires readers to engage in the investigation of the complexities of the narrative, resulting in the discovery of events and consequences occurring in an expanded number of alternate histories.

Applications of Bremond's theory demonstrate how flexible his paradigm is to other examples of literature. The analysis of the events leading to the loss of the necklace in the Maupassant's short story "*The Necklace*" (2017) highlights that, in this instance, the protagonist's decisions were based on the unrealized potential of the future. In a similar vein, Bremond recommended that all narratives consist of the success or failure of the events that were executed. The analysis of these functions demonstrates that when an event is not realized, this affects multiple aspects of the narrative, including the development of both plot and theme. Because the strategy developed by Bremond is reliable in how clearly it identifies the various functions within the text, it also lends itself to examining intricate and interrelated novel structures such as those of "*The Night Circus*."

Salehi and Mouradzadeh (2017) explored how to apply Claude Bremond's Narrative Model to analyze the Novel *The Thief and The Dogs*. New characteristics of the Protagonist are revealed throughout the novel as a result of their selections made from "possibility" and what "reality" has delivered. Salehi and Mouradzadeh use the research of character actions to correlate with Bremond's theory of Character actions having "branches" leading to other possibilities. The authors highlight how characters have many options available and choose to follow one of each path. The authors conclude that Narrative progress or decline is determined by character selections. Furthermore, Salehi and Mouradzadeh validate Bremond's model with examples that support their research.

Another relevant study include "Analysis of Characters in Zaraib al-'Abid's Novel

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based on Claude Bremond's Theory" (2022) which demonstrates how successfully he was able to utilize Bremond's logical framework for monitoring character transitions and developing character roles throughout the entire narrative of the book. This analysis discusses how Bremond's model (potentiality, actualization and outcome) can be used to measure the journeys of individual characters as they move through various obstacles and difficulties. It highlights the relationship between decision-making processes and responses which have thematic significance in both depth and result. This study provides an analytical perspective to the dynamics of character arcs since it analyses how moral choices and relationships alter a character's journey of becoming or deteriorating. The technique of Bremond's analysis will serve as an effective analytical tool when evaluating Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*, which features a non-linear plot structure with alternating figurative progression and emotional suffering of the characters. Therefore, Bremond's model provides an opportunity to trace the cyclical movement of characters throughout the contemporary narratives.

In their article, "A Structuralist Narratological Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's Novel *The Last White Man*," (2024) Anam, Ajmal, and Sharif expand on some elements of the structuralist narratological study. They do not strictly follow Bremond's theory; rather, they include some of the important topics of interest. Their findings detail the separation of plot components, transitions in tone from chapter to chapter, and the progression of a character throughout the story. They examine how the structure of *The Last White Man* influences the theme of the book and its message. Additionally, they highlight how the actions taken by the characters and events occurring in the story connect to the story's conclusion and relate to Bremond's views about the pillars of potential, actualization, and result. They indicate that the decisions made by the characters impact the development of the story, showing that the story is not just a sequence of events but is intentionally structured into a narrative form, thus making their findings relevant to a Bremondian analysis of complex literature.

Thus collectively various studies of Claude Bremond indicate that many of Bremond's theories concerning the construction and function of storytelling are still viable for today's audience; and the models created by Bremond provide a framework for understanding the construction of the plot, character's actions, and change in key themes within stories as well as illustrate how readers interpret stories. Using *The Night Circus* as an example, Bremond's explanation of the effect that time has on a reader's choices and experiences, as well as how each character interacts with the time they live in, are keys to understanding the story's complexity.

Several previous studies have focused strictly on the narrative structure, character development, and thematic progression found within multiple literary works while

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applying Bremond's framework, but very little work has charted the direction of future research with respect to *The Night Circus*. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a narrative-based study that will apply Bremond's aptly titled, theory of possible narratives, to investigate the structural logic, cyclical movement, and organisation of narrative events within the novel. The result of this study is to close a gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive, structural analysis of *The Night Circus* through Bremond's theoretical lens.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this study is built upon Claude Bremond's theory of narrative possibilities, which he developed in his book, *Logique du récit* (1973). Bremond's research utilizes these insights to propose a new narrative method to assess stories. This narrative approach considers a story's unfolding structural evolution and development (in terms of narrative) and a character's "failure" (or frustrated narrative). The result is a new conceptualization of narratives as dynamic systems dependent upon character choices and their ramifications. Furthermore, Bremond's research proposes an analytical framework for understanding the internal structure of narratives, based on character relationships; possible multiple endings and the various transformations of the narratives. This chapter will provide an overview of the main features of Bremond's model, including: narrative sequencing, cycles of progress and cycles of declining narratives, and the function of the various components of a narrative (i.e., how tasks are completed, the role of allies and adversaries, and the retribution and punishment process).

3.1 Narrative Possibilities and Structural Complexity

The Narrative Possibilities Theory of Claude Bremond enables a structural analysis and dynamic analysis of the fundamentals of narrative logic, the way in which story logical structures develop over time and across different media for storytelling purposes. The theoretical structure of the three-part relationship between the virtualization of a story and the actualization of that story, as well as the resulting effect of that actualization on the reader/audience, can be used as a framework for representing all types of narrative, or literary, themes. (Bremond, 1973). Virtuality refers to actions that may have occurred, actualization represents those actions that did occur, and result defines the consequences of those actions. Bremond's approach provides for divergent paths of narrative, such that the action could occur, but the outcome may differ based on the actions taken. In contrast to Propp, who created a linear approach to narration through functions, Bremond's approach creates multiple alternatives for decision making, and therefore, a more flexible and generative framework to understand the structure of narratives. This potentiality is expressed as follows:

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Virtuality → Actualization → Result

or

Virtuality → Absence of Actualization → Result not attained

A decision featuring a function modifies or shifts the plot. The classifications discussed above allow us to show the narrative plotted out as a series of networks of decisions and outcomes rather than a straight line.

3.2 Cycles of Amelioration and Degradation

The Bremond further encircles two basic narrative cycles—amelioration (improvement) and degradation (decline)—as structural forms that govern the course of the development of narrative events. The following cycles can occur:

1. In succession (end-to-end): In temporal order, one cycle succeeds the next.
2. By enclave: One cycle is interrupted or immersed in another.
3. By coupling: Opposing cycles occur simultaneously for distinct characters (for example, one character gains while another loses).

He illustrates this by the narrative necessity of change: a story must progress through a state of inadequacy to change, either positively or negatively. According to Bremond (1973), “Only amelioration is possible. Misfortune may, of course, grow worse... but this intermediary interruption... is functionally equivalent to a period of amelioration” (p. 64). Therefore, even apparent degradation is a foreshadowing of a further breakthrough, and development of the narrative is always cyclic, shifting between positive and negative change.

3.3 Task Completion: Agency versus Fate

The concept of Bremond states that the completion of the work is dependent on whether a goal can be achieved by agency or contingency. When the activity is implemented, it is either a success or failure. The completion process however can be stopped or stalled bringing in the ideas of frustration and protection. “The agent can be lacking these means... The recognition of this lack is equivalent to a phase of degradation... dealt with in two ways: things either work out by themselves... or an agent may assume the task of arranging them” (p. 67). This strategy enables us to understand whether narrative resolution is the product of individual action, supernatural intervention or systemic barriers. The risk of non-actualization or the failure to accomplish the task is amplified in the risk of tension and choice in the narrative.

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3.4 Intervention of Allies

The ally plays a vital role in advancing the amelioration process. Allies can also be driven by self-interest, appreciation or even expectation of a pay-off, and their intervention splits the story into interdependent, creditor and debtor roles. Bremond (1973) states: “The amelioration is obtained through the sacrifice of an ally whose interests are the same as those of the beneficiary” (p. 68). Allies are not mere supporters and usually, they are narrative catalysts who make a difference. Their role is governed using pacts; either tacit (social expectations) or expressed (negotiated agreements), making sure that there is exchange of services and narrative progression.

3.5 Elimination of the Adversary: Negotiation and Aggression

As a narrative impediment, the adversary can be annihilated through two basic tactics:

- Negotiation: involves cajoling and threatening the adversary into becoming an ally.
- Aggression: This involves physical confrontation, ambush and trickery to render the opponent incapacitated.

Bremond (1973) states: “The deception... is in itself a complex operation. It consists of... dissimulation of what is, simulation of what is not... to create a semblance of truth” (p. 73). Such processes take into account the psychological and strategic aspects of narrative conflict. Deception is not an easy task, it is a matter of simulation, dissimulation, and manipulation, this is why it is possible to make fantastic reversals and ethical challenges.

3.6 Retribution and Punishment

The last narrative role is retribution or vengeance -A form of narrative justice. Bremond divides these activities into those of the retributor who rewards service, or punishes wrongdoing. He expresses it in contractual terms: “Reward for a service rendered and vengeance... are the two faces of retribution” (Bremond, 1973, p. 74). It completes the story cycle and gives the possibility of repetition. The form promotes a process of degradation and repair ongoing, and this means that narratives are recursive systems where closure always contains the seeds of future growth.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Using Claude Bremond’s Theory of Narrative Possibility as an analytical framework, this study examines the complex narrative structure of *The Night Circus*. In this paper, we have applied Bremond's triadic paradigm (virtuality, actualization, result) to explore how story's progression through different narrative patterns, character choice and

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limitations, symbols and systems of symbols. We have found several improvements and decline cycles, have attempted to determine if the agents were able to carry out their tasks by choosing their own fates or by being fated to do so, and have examined the functional roles that allies, antagonists, and narrative justice play in determining how the story is ultimately realized. These analyses show that *The Night Circus* exists as a continually evolving dynamic system of narrative possibilities that can weave together illusion and reality in a richly complex and multilayered narrative world. Mapping the narrative performance within *The Night Circus* has allowed us to identify the logic of progression within *The Night Circus* itself; thus, allowing for a more complete understanding of the transformative nature of time and of character and event.

4.1 Narrative Possibilities and Structural Complexity

In Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*, Claude Bremond's three stages of Narrative Possibilities—virtuality, actualization, and outcome—capture the ways in which the novel's fragmented and non-linear narrative structure demonstrate the multiplicity of the stages within the narrative. Instead of following a more linear pattern, the narrative structure allows for multiple lines of navigation that influence the way the reader interprets and experiences the events in the work.

In Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* (2011, pp. 9-10), it is noteworthy that the actual narrative provides no mention of the plot until well into the novel when the reader is able to understand how the reader perceives the Circus. The opening line of the novel, "The Circus arrived without warning," is an example of this moment of great possibility. It provides a number of questions that shape the narrative as well as possible narrative paths: Who made the circus? What's its purpose? Who controls it? All these questions lead to the narrative's eventual completion or realization based on a web or network of stories surrounding it. The circus operates more like a character than simply an environment, having been imbued with life and consciousness. Therefore, it functions as a complete framework or vessel for supporting the infinite number of potential stories that can arise.

As Marco and Celia prepare for an unnamed magical competition, we are nearing the end of the story's meaning. Marco is recruited by Mr. A. H. and Celia by Prospero the Enchanter, creating a lawful contract to compete.

Using Bremond's model of subject (Marco and Celia), goal (winning the competition) and support (the mentors, the circus and allies including Tsukiko), we can see how the trajectory of Marco and Celia's narratives differ from normal victory conditions in that the culmination of the narrative ties both characters to the circus through a collective act of self-sacrifice. When viewed through Bremond's two-dimensional framework of the

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win/loss dichotomy and/or the three dimensions of the Narrative Possibilities model for non-linear narrative structures, the outcome of the story will lead to potential transformations for both the characters and the reader.

The narrative framework of *The Night Circus* is viewed through multiple perspectives and uses of third person omnibus and the second person where necessary, especially in Bailey's chapters. This multiplicity of perspectives creates many different ways of perceiving the world and results in a prolonged period of resolution for narrative action. Readers experience the circus through Bailey's experiential point of view, as in this line "You no longer know on which side of the fence you are standing or where the train starts and the world stops" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 85). As a result, readers become implicit participants via this immersive narrative strategy, increasing their ability to interpret the narrative as a whole and by doing so increasing their understanding of the narrative.

The many subplots that flow through the Circus Ecology reflect the narrative complexity that Bremond creates with every subplot representing an additional sequence of virtualities, actualities and outcomes. For instance, the subplot concerning Herr Thiessen serves to create an additional narrative loop, matching the primary rivalry. Herr Thiessen is obsessed with the circus and building the elaborate clock he has built -"The face of the clock is divided into sections that represent night and day, phases of the moon, and turning constellations" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 115). Herr Thiessen's death at the end also serves as a narrative outcome and a trigger, increasing the urgency felt by Celia and Marco to act. Although Herr Thiessen may appear to be minor, his character creates narrative and moral dilemmas and serves as a reminder to readers that all characters play into the overall web of the narrative's branches. The many micro-narratives that flow throughout the book work to establish the narrative's organization as a series of interconnected narrative possibilities.

The time separation allows the storytelling to maintain suspense for readers, as well as allow different stories to affect one another. The earlier disclosures about certain circumstances will continue to be of value to the reader as more contexts and circumstances that are new to the story unfold. For example, the history of the circus and the purpose of the tents do not come to light until the story continues to progress through time. Thus, the construction of the edifice also stands as a manifestation of the greater themes produced by the tale: Illusion, secrecy, and interdependence.

4.2 Cycles of Amelioration and Degradation

The theory developed by Bremond relates to improving (ameliorating) and degrading (degrading) cycles. Cycles are valuable analytical frameworks for analyzing *The Night*

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Circus' larger structural composition and the character development forces at play within each individual character. Viewing *The Night Circus* with this analytical framework reveals an intricate system built upon interrelated cycles of growing and shrinking cycles that find the ways individual characters have traveled. In addition to displaying character growth/development, these cycles provide a means for articulating the themes that comprise the center of the novel and the relationships between the characters that develop.

Celia's life reflects a cycle of advancement. Celia went from being raised by a very demanding father to eventually becoming a self-sufficient, caring sorceress. Celia's development was more than just magical; there was a much greater emotional and moral development throughout the course of the story. After discovering the cost of the circus humely, Celia wanted to help make the circus more humane. The climax of this cycle was reached when Celia stated, "I'm tired of trying to outdo him... I don't want to play anymore" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 312). By abandoning her rivalry for compassion, Celia has completed the cycle of improvement. Then from the child who experiences trauma to the woman with choices and compassion, Celia completed the healing process.

In contrast, Marco does not achieve a rapid decline but rather a slow and steady demise. Despite being gifted with intelligence and willpower, the emotional distance he creates himself and the way he uses people for his benefit result in his failure. When he states that "I never loved her, I just thought I should" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 289), it shows that he compromised his morals. Additionally, the development of Marco's captivity within the circus is represented both literally and figuratively through Marco's decision-making throughout his journey. Additionally, Celia's and Marco's fates have also become intertwined. The interrelationship between the two characters becomes fully realized after Marco has learned humility and released his sense of self-worth.

The cycles of ascent and descent often exist simultaneously; when one-character rises, the other will fall. The love of the two main characters attempts to transcend the cycle of rise and fall. However, the nature of the competition between the two characters requires them to continue to maintain this type of competitive posture. Therefore, their sacrifice as a couple serves as the catalyst that ultimately unites their souls with the circus. According to the theory of Bremond, cycles of rise and falls may interact or overlap, allowing them to achieve a more complex outcome. Through this way, readers can see the structural interrelationship of the text. Moreover, the degradation is not always shown in a negative way. It is often a precursor of change. In case, the feeling of being confused and discontent with his routine life is not new to Bailey when the decision to enter the circus was made. His comment, "It's not just a circus. It's a world. A living, breathing world" (Morgenstern,

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2011, p. 419), shows how the degradation of the former ideas may result in the enhancement of purpose and identity.

4.3 Task Completion: Agency versus Fate

The completion of the tasks in *The Night Circus* can vary from individual agency to the decrees of fate. Bremond's logic supports both possibilities. Apparently, Celia and Marco are supposed to emerge as winners in the magic competition. Even they are confused about what the task is. This lack of transparency provides ambiguity: are they performing a task or just playing a role? That Marco can manipulate the architecture of the circus proves his agency: "He leaves no physical footprint, but each structure is carefully crafted by his hand" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 142). Celia's use of performance and healing Magic, in contrast to Marco's more interventionist methods, illustrate how there are different ways for Magicians to utilize their Magic. While facing her own challenges related to enacting her agency within their competition, it is clear that Celia and Marco both experience a shared fate - being spiritually connected through the bond of their Magic.

A very evident illustration of fate versus choice occurs during the collapse of the circus. According to the author, balanced is all. Without balance, all falls. Therefore, we infer that it is not only through one person's effort but through how the stories of many different people work together to support the circus through collective storytelling instead of an individual story. Bailey's story shows this as well; Bailey's humble origins and spectacular future are two entirely different types of stories. Bailey isn't a magical character and does not really play a role in the story, but he becomes an important player through the act of believing and acting on that belief. Not only is Bailey's commitment to the circus an individual choice but it completes a narrative gap, enriching the structure of the novel.

4.4 Intervention of Allies

Using Bremond's narrative framework we can look at the role of allies to examine *The Night Circus*. Allies can be seen as very important narrative agents that are not only responsible for driving the narrative forward but also contribute to the thematic depth of the narrative through their experiences and contributions to it.

Throughout the story, Tsukiko, who was once Celia's rival, has evolved from being a silent enigma into a source of extreme power in the game. At first her actions are motivated by hatred but ultimately through acts of compassion when she is willing to take Marco's life to end the game because "You would let it destroy you both" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 371), she shows that there can be more to what one perceives as love. Tsukiko exists as both a warning to Celia and a catalyst for her to make her final act of sacrifice, therefore Tsukiko is one of the primary friends in the book due to the fact that her wisdom will

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impact how the resolution will occur through Celia's actions. Bailey, another improbable friend, personifies the potential for the future. His decision to take responsibility for the circus ensures that *Le Cirque des Rêves* continues to exist. Bailey's entrance into the narrative starts from the line, "The circus needs you." (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 447). While Bailey's involvement is not magical, it is more significantly symbolic. He re-establishes faith by taking an action to provide security to the circus and he'll be regarded as Propp's 'helper' but through the logic of Bremond he fulfills the narrative's resolution: Bailey re-establishes order after the climax of the story which embodies one of the essential principles of Bremond's theory of cyclicity.

Isobel also serves as an ally, although she is not clearly defined. "I just wanted to protect you from yourself. That's all I ever wanted" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 327) While her tarot spells create chaos, her intentions are good. Her defeat illustrates the risks that auxiliary positions face: either a benefit or a hindrance to the protagonists' achievement of their goals.

4.5 Elimination of the Adversary: Negotiation and Aggression

Unlike most narratives, there is no explicit antagonist in *The Night Circus*. The antagonist is abstract and takes the form of the rules of the competition and its enforcers. It is not through violence that they are removed, but rather negotiation, defiance, and change. This structure strongly supports the claim by Bremond that most stories progress through structural transformation rather than conflict.

Celia and Marco decide to leave the game by committing to the circus and making it self-sustaining. "They are no longer players. They are part of the game board" (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 386). This line captures the change from rivals to symbols. They negotiate with their fate's structure and adjust its logic. Instead of destroying the enemy, they sacrifice themselves to absorb and neutralize it.

Aggression in the novel is often internalized. When faced with great sadness, Isobel performs a tarot reading and causes disruption within the circus. While there is no physical violence associated with her actions, her mental anger leads to multiple emotional crises within the circus community. These instances of emotion-driven crisis align well with Bremond's theory on types of aggression including simulated and dissimulated aggression. The characters also use various mediums of symbolic aggression (i.e., withholding information, manipulating perceptions) or other forms of self-destructive behavior to express their anger toward one another. The absence of traditional physical fight scenes does not diminish the intensity of the work. Rather, the central conflicts of the story are of an existential/emotional nature, lending further support to the psychological validity of the

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plot. In the absence of one major, "typical" villain in the form of a horrifying monster, this creates a great deal of complexity, and therefore, ultimately reflective, work is characteristic of highly structured stories.

4.6 Retribution and Punishment

Retribution within *The Night Circus* is subtle and mainly moralistic. The mentors behind the competition are portrayed as lonely characters: Prospero, who can only watch helplessly as a ghost, and Mr. A. H—, who slips away into nonexistence. "This is not the end he expected" (Morgenstern, 2011, 403). Their punishment, whilst existing in an existential sense, is that of losing their ability to shape a story or narrative. In this way, *The Night Circus* has changed the concept of 'villainous defeat' by concentrating instead on the existential destruction of people.

This is a redemptive and self-punitive sacrifice in the case of Marco and Celia. They sacrifice their physical lives for the larger good, yet there is compensation through the survival of the circus and their love. The balance in this narrative is representative of Bremond's theory that outcomes might result in either positive or negative closes dependent on previous choices. Their punishment is a legacy that is a contrasting reward for moral clarity.

After assuming the running of the circus, Bailey gains a sense of purpose and belonging. The Circus goes on to grow in continuity and strength. The retributive and redemptive arcs are brought together in harmony and reinforce Bremond's idea of the narrative logic being cyclic and ethically ordered.

5. Conclusion

Using Claude Bremond's concepts of narrative potential, narrative actualization, and narrative consequence, this study has examined *The Night Circus* as a structurally complex work. When using Bremond's framework for analyzing narrative development—specifically, his focus on cyclical movements; transformations; and narrative choices—the overall structure of *The Night Circus* can be viewed as an interactive and evolving dynamic system where character actions and events occur and interact; both affects and influences other actions; and as such, the cyclical nature of the transformation; and the role of character agency in the narrative design of *The Night Circus*; can be analyzed through Bremond's theoretical model. The results of the analysis provided a clear demonstration of how the complexities of *The Night Circus*'s narrative organisation correlate with Bremond's understanding of narrative; for instance, that many narratives are non-linear, and that all narratives contain elements of symbolism, and that these symbolic elements

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are often encompassed by limits. Moreover, the findings of this study showed the importance of subsidiary characters and protagonists to narrative development in *The Night Circus*. In particular, Tsukiko and Bailey served to exemplify both the intersections of conflict and collaboration in adding complexity to the narrative flow of the work. This analysis has also indicated that *The Night Circus* is traditionally considered to have typical External Conflicts from Antagonists, however there are multiple Primary Antagonistic Roles and Internal. The structure of this work demonstrates the author's blending of two dimensions of perception (real and illusory) in creating a unified artistic experience. Bremond's idea of the modern magical realism narrative provides a framework within which to study classical theories of narratology applied to contemporary literature, including as an introduction to other multiple level narratives in modern speculative forms, and to explore how narrative theory can be applied to the development of contemporary speculative literature.

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