

Naoko Yamada's Film, A Silent Voice and the Redemption Arc

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Abstract: Literature takes form in a multitude of mediums. It conveys human experience through narrative elements, whether it takes the form of prose, poetry, drama, or film. The theme of redemption is one of the recurring human conditions depicted for centuries in both literary and visual texts. *A Silent Voice*, a Japanese-animated film directed by Naoko Yamada, exhibits the theme of redemption. This study investigates the characters' transformation from their faulty disposition to atonement. The assumption of this study is supported by Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative and Carl Jung's Archetypal Criticism. This study incorporates the discourse analysis approach of the qualitative method. The salient findings of the paper illustrate the significance of the characters' motivations, the characters' types, and the settings to the tendency of the characters to transform throughout the narrative. Familial and platonic relationships and backstory are the main drives of the characters' transformation. While the Jungian archetypes, the jester and the ruler, are the most frequent types of characters that undergo redemption. Lastly, the environmental and individual elements of the settings mainly influence the characters' change. This paper recommends further investigation of other tendencies of character transformation in the film. It is further recommended for literary researchers to study redemption as a literary theme and to study films as a literary medium.

Keywords: A Silent Voice, film, Naoko Yamada, redemption arc.

1. Introduction

A film or movie is a recording of moving images that tells a story, which people watch on a screen or television [11]. It combines images of time, space, sound, and story. Like written literature, movies can be evaluated and interpreted [12]. New media such as television, radio, movies, and etc. are based on old media like literature, painting, music, and others in many respects. Over time, new and old media affect each other and interact continually [7].

The film *A Silent Voice* is a 2016 Japanese animated film adapted from a graphic novel of the same name [3]. The story proper begins at elementary school when Nishimiya Shoko arrives as a transfer student. The film traces how social ostracization doesn't happen overnight, but begins with the victim's 'difference' which triggers minor irritation, impatience and eventually intolerance. Deafness becomes a metaphor for isolation and miscommunication in the film [9].

Naoko Yamada is a Japanese animator, television and film director. Working at Kyoto Animation, she directed the *K-On!*, *Tamako Market* anime series and the anime films *A Silent Voice*, *Tamako Love Story* and *Liz and the Blue Bird*. Her most noticeable signature direction quirk is using legs to show the spectrum of human emotion [13].

The outcome of this study will be beneficial to students, teachers, and researchers in the field of literature. The scope of this study centers on the film, *A Silent Voice* directed by Naoko Yamada. This study looks into the redemption arc of the film with the aid of Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative and Carl Jung's Archetypal Criticism. This study is limited to the characters' motivations, character types, and settings in the film, *A Silent Voice*.

This study investigates the redemption arc in the film *A Silent Voice* directed by Naoko Yamada. Specifically, it looks into the characters' motivation, character types, and setting. This study is supported by Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative and Carl Jung's Archetypal Criticism.

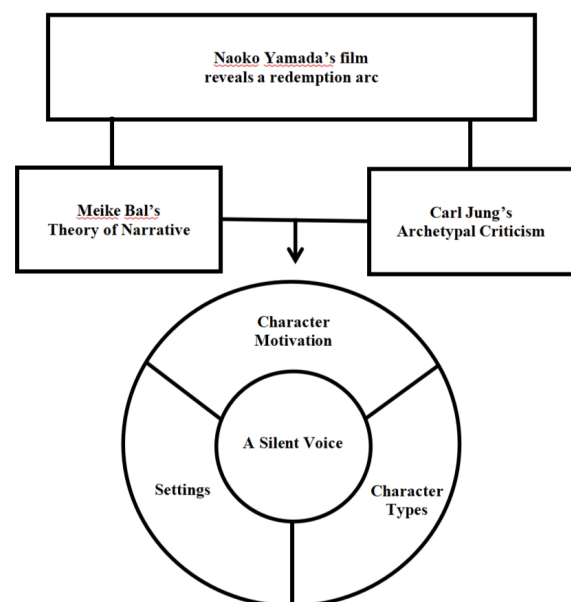


Fig. 1. Schematic presentation of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

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The first theory is Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative. In his work *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, he states that a text does not have to be a linguistic text. In non-linguistic literature, a sign system, namely, the visual image is employed. Meike Bal's theory of narrative illustrates three concepts for analysis namely the text, story, and fabula. According to Bal, a narrative text refers to narratives in any medium. It is a text conveyed by an agent in any form to an addressee. A story, herein, is the content of that text. And the fabula pertains to a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors [4]. The theory of narrative is used in this paper to discover the transformation of the characters in the film. Moreover, this theory is used to look into the characters' motivations, and the settings.

The second theory is the Archetypal Criticism typified by the writings of Carl Gustav Jung. He theorized the existence of discrete and interrelated symbols, including narrative forms and character types, in ancient and traditional myths, and examines their recurrence in and uses them to critically interpret later literatures and cultures [6]. According to Cherry [5], archetypes are innate, universal representations of individuals, actions, and personalities that have an impact on how people behave. Archetypal criticism, on Jung's psychology, searches texts for collective motifs of the human psyche, which are held to be common to different historical periods and languages, it denotes recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature [2]. Archetypal criticism is used in this study to determine the character archetypes present in the film. This theory is used to understand and categorize characters' to their types.

2. Methodology

This paper applies the discourse analysis of the qualitative method. Discourse analysis is a qualitative and interpretive method of analyzing texts in relation to its social context [10].

The primary data source of this study is from an online streaming service, Netflix. The film was produced by Kyoto Animation Studio, first released in Japan on the 17th of September 2016 and on the 2nd of April 2019 in the US and is directed by Naoko Yamada [8]. The secondary sources are taken from online articles, blogs, reliable web pages, e-books, and published and unpublished theses and dissertations.

This study follows three phases. Phase 1. Characters' motivation, Phase 2. Character types, and Phase 3. Settings.

Phase 1 concentrates on the assessment of the characters' motivations. With the application of Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative and the online article 5 Places to Look for Your Character Motivation [1], the characters' previous and present behaviors are assessed to identify their motivations that led to their redemption.

Phase 2 centers on the analysis of the character types using Carl Jung's Archetypal Criticism. The character types are identified using Lily Yuan's online article, Guide: 12 Jungian Archetypes as Popularized by The Hero and the Outlaw [15] by examining each characters' distinctive traits.

Phase 3 pivots on the evaluation of the setting. This phase is examined through Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative and Lehman's online article on Elements of Setting which includes: Temporal, Environmental, and Individual setting. The settings in the film are identified to understand their influence in the transformation of the characters.

This study is qualitative in nature. It applies the discourse analysis approach. The study concentrates solely on the featured film and does not involve or violate the rights of any individual or living entity. In addition, the study acknowledges the works of the authors contributed in the paper by adequately citing their works and publications. Moreover, the sources of data used in this study are obtained from a public domain wherein users can access a copy. Thus, the paper does not violate any laws concerning intellectual property rights.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the data in order to answer the sub-problems raised in the study generated through the literary method used.

A. Character Motivation

Table 1 demonstrates the assessment of characters' motivations using Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative.

Table 1
Character motivation analysis

CHARACTERS	PAST BEHAVIOR	MOTIVATION	PRESENT BEHAVIOR	REDEMPTION ARC
Ishida Shōya	Bullied and	Relationship with his mother and Shōko	Make amends with Shōko	Makes amends with Shōko
	Ostracized Shōko			Saves Shōko from suicide
	Socially anxious		Reconciles with his friends and develops friendships	Overcomes his social anxiety
	Suicidal			Survives suicide
Nishimiya Shōko	Self-loathes	Relationship with Shōya	Reconciles with her classmates in elementary school	Reconciles with her classmates in elementary school
	Suicidal			Survives suicide
Ueno Naoka	Bullied and	Relationship with Shōya	Reconciles Shōko	Reconciles with Shōko
	Ostracized Shōko			
	Self-righteous		Learns sign language	
Nishimiya Yuzuru	Resentful and	Relationship with Shōko	Befriends Shōya	Forgives and
	Cautious towards Shōya			Befriends Shōya
Nishimiya Yaeko	Resentful and	Relationship with Yuzuru and Shōko	Reconciles with Shōya	Reconciles with Shōya
	Hostile towards Shōya		Reconciles with Shōya's mother	Reconciles with Shōya's mother
Shimada Kazuki	Bullied and	Backstory with Shōya	Indifferent towards Shōya	Saves Shōya's life
	Ostracized Shōya		Saves Shōya's life	

Ishida Shōya bullies and ostracizes Shōko when she transfers to his elementary school. His relationship with Shōko and his mother prompts his transformation in the present. Years following the bullying incident, Shōya reunites with Shōko after he suspends his suicide attempt. He returns the notebook Shōko used to communicate in elementary school and asks her if they can become friends in sign language.

After being bullied in sixth grade, Shōko shows signs of suicidal ideation. When she ultimately decides to commit suicide in their family apartment, Shōya sees her and comes to her rescue.

After being ostracized by his friends in middle school, Shōya

develops signs of depression and social anxiety in high school. In several scenes, he is shown having difficulty seeing people's faces and has a negative perception of himself. As a result, Shōya has difficulty socializing with his classmates. By the film's conclusion, Shōya reconciles with his friends from elementary school, and he is able to see and hear everyone around him clearly.

Shōya's suffering from the guilt of his past culminates to the point of him attempting to commit suicide. After his mother catches on to his motives, Shōya swears to stop trying to kill himself [14].

Five years later, Shōko and Shōya reunite. With Shōya's effort to make amends to Shōko, the two of them reconcile from their past. Her friendship with Shōya enables her transformation in the film from previously being self-loathing and suicidal to reconciling with her past.

While recovering from her injuries, Shōko resolves to restore the friendships Shōya worked hard to create [14]. With each of her friends, Shōko reconciles with them one after another.

At the hospital, Shōko determines to make right the conflict between Shōya and the others. Being at the center of the conflict, she decides to face the disagreement head-on. This portrays Shōko's resolve to live as she transforms from passively allowing atonement to actively changing herself.

By the time Shōya recovers from a coma, Ueno explains to him how she still couldn't come to like Shōko [14]. At the school festival, however, Ueno shows that she's been learning sign language.

Shōko's younger sister, Yuzuru, despises Shōya to the point of causing him to be suspended from school. After Yuzuru learns about Shōya's intentions, she discloses her true relationship with her sister to him. This behavior shows Yuzuru's trust towards Shōya and her implicit forgiveness towards him.

After Yuzuru and Shōya reconcile, she is seen hanging out with Shōya and her sister several times. On a few occasions, she visits Shōya in their house to bond. This transformation signifies Yuzuru's redemption motivated by her relationship with her sister.

After Shōya recovers from his injury from saving Shōko, Shōko's mother, Yaeko, apologizes to him. Her behavior, driven by her relationship with her daughters, displays a significant step in her transformation as a character.

When Shōya gets hospitalized, Yaeko apologizes to Shōya's mother, Miyako. Ultimately, after Shōya recovers, Yaeko visits Shōya's house and gets a haircut from his mother.

Shimada Kazuki is a friend of Shōya from elementary school. Among the bullies of Shōko, he ostracizes Shōya in return after making him the scapegoat of the entire incident. Years passed when Shōya gets home from the hospital, Ueno reveals that Shimada and the others are the ones that pulled him out when he fell from the river [14].

The redemption arc in the characters' motivation reveals that Shōya makes amends with Shōko and saves her from suicide. Shōya overcomes his social anxiety and dismisses the idea of killing himself. Shōko reconciles with Shōya and her classmates in elementary school and resolves to live by

changing. Ueno reconciles with Shōko. Yuzuru forgives and befriends Shōya. Nishimiya Yaeko reconciles with Shōya and his mother. Shimada saves Shōya's life. This phase shows that the characters' motivations are their familial and platonic relationships with other characters, and their backstory.

B. Character Types

Table 2 presents the analysis of character types using Carl Jung's Archetypal Criticism.

Table 2
Character types analysis

CHARACTERS	CHARACTERISTICS	CHARACTER TYPES	REDEMPTION ARC
Ishida Shōya	Mischievous	Jester and Caregiver	From being mischievous
	Self-sacrificing		To being self-sacrificing
Nishimiya Shōko	Self-critical	Innocent	From being self-critical resolving to change
Ueno Naoka	Imputing	Ruler	From being imputing to being forgiving
	Self-righteous		From being self-righteous to being understanding
	Mischievous		From bullying to reconciling with Shōko
Nishimiya Yuzuru	Protective	Hero and Creator	From protecting her sister to becoming her own person
	Artistic		From dissuading her sister to becoming her own person
Nishimiya Yaeko	Rigid	Ruler	From having a rigid perception of Shōya to apologizing to him
	Protective		From being protective to being permissive
Shimada Kazuki	Mischievous	Jester and Magician	From bullying to saving Shōya
	Deceitful		

Ishida Shōya is a mischievous bully from sixth grade. After Shōko transfers to their school, she becomes a target of bullying orchestrated by Shōya's group of friends, including Ueno and Kazuki.

When Shōko's bullying incident reaches the teacher's attention, Shōya becomes everyone's scapegoat and receives the consequences by himself. Years later, Shōya reaches out to Shōko, changed from the years spent on her shoes. He makes amends to Shōko and resolves to make her like herself [14]. Later on, when Shōko steps off the ledge, Shōya rescues her almost at the cost of his own life. Shōya's behavior in the present displays a major shift from being categorized primarily as a jester to transforming as a caregiver.

During their Ferris wheel ride at the amusement park, Shōko exclaims how she does not hate Ueno but herself for what occurred in sixth grade. Shōko's self-criticism leads her to believe that Shōya will only be unhappy around her and decides to end her life. After Shōya gets hospitalized, Shōko expresses to Nagatsuka how she ruins the friendship Shōya built with others; and resolves to restore what she destroyed [14].

Ueno primarily blames Shōko for ruining the friendship she had with Shōya and the others in elementary school. Inside the Ferris wheel, Ueno confesses how her adverse actions in the past have something to do with Shōko's personality; and the involvement of the adults only causes Shōya to lose his friends. After Shōya recovers from a coma, she opens up to him about how she still couldn't come to like Shōko [14]. Despite that, Ueno shows implicit signs of forgiveness at the end by communicating to Shōko in sign language.

When a sign language session is introduced to their class, Ueno refuses to learn it and explains how she prefers to write instead of communicating with Shōko. Her growing aversion towards Shōko further manifests in portraying hostility towards Sahara who tries to learn how to sign. By the time Shōya and the others reconcile during the school festival, Ueno, despite disliking Shōko, shows that she's been studying sign language.

Ueno's aversion towards Shōko begins with the difficulty of communicating with her. During their confrontation on the Ferris wheel, Ueno discloses to Shōko how she dislikes her and how they didn't try to understand each other well enough five years ago (14). After Shōya gets hospitalized, Shōko tries to make amends with Ueno. Later on during their school festival, Ueno communicates to Shoko by hand signing.

Nishimiya Yuzuru is the younger sister of Shōko. Although significantly younger, Yuzuru is instinctively protective towards her older sister. Her characteristics consistently fall under the archetype hero which is characterized by having a goal to rescue people. After Shōya comes back from the hospital, Yuzuru expresses her desire to start studying again. This signifies Yuzuru's significant step towards self-actualization and ultimately her redemption as a character.

Throughout the film, Yuzuru is often depicted with her camera capturing photographs of dead animals. After Shōko tries to end her life, Yuzuru takes down her photographs in their house expressing how her hobby is an attempt to dissuade her sister from suicide. This incident shows Yuzuru ceasing her attempts to rescue her sister and in turn her transformation in the film.

Shōko's mother, Yaeko, portrays an upfront hostility and a rigid perception of Shōya. When Shōya once walks Yuzuru home, she hits him and forbids Yuzuru to associate with him. In reference to Jungian archetypes, her characteristics aligned with that of the Ruler; with a distinctive desire to uphold structure and order [15]. After Shōya saves Shōko from the ledge, Yaeko apologizes to him. This crucial change in Yaeko's character indicates her redemption.

Yaeko is inherently protective of her daughters. In one instance, she opposes Shōya's presence in her daughters' lives and actively forbids them to associate with him. When Yaeko observes the friendship of her daughters with Shōya, she becomes permissive towards them.

Shimada's mischievous and deceitful behavior is consistent with the archetype of the jester and the magician. When Shōya gets exposed for bullying Shōko, Shimada is the first one who betrays him and denies his involvement in the incident. As a passive tormentor, he makes Shōya believe that he is an ally and supports his error without question. After Shōya's recovery from a coma, Ueno discloses that it is Shimada who saved Shōya when he fell from the river.

The redemption arc in the character types portrays Shōya transforming from being mischievous to being self-sacrificing. Shōko changes from being self-critical to resolving to change. Ueno atones from being imputing, self-righteous, and bullying, to displaying forgiveness, understanding, and reconciliation with Shōko. Yuzuru redeems herself by becoming her own person. Yaeko transforms from having a rigid perception of

Shōya to apologizing to him, and from being protective to being permissive towards her daughters. Shimada transforms from bullying Shoya to saving his life.

C. Settings

Table 3 exhibits the evaluation of settings through Meike Bal's Theory of Narrative.

Table 3
Settings analysis

SETTINGS	ELEMENTS OF SETTING	CONTEXT	REDEMPTION ARC
High School	Environmental Setting	Where the Shōya reconciles with his friends	Shōya reunites and reconciles with his friends
		Where Shōya overcomes his social anxiety	Shōya transforms from being a social outcast to developing friendship with his peers
Bridge	Individual Setting	Where Shōya and Shōko reconciles	Shōya and Shōko reconciles
Ishida Household	Environmental Setting	Where Shōya resolves to dismiss his suicide attempt	From plotting his suicide, Shōya resolves to dismiss his suicide attempt
		Where Shōya and Yuzuru becomes friends	Yuzuru became friends with Shōya
		Where the parents of Shōko and Shōya reconciles	Shōko and Shōya's mother reconciles from their previous conflict
Nishimiya Household	Environmental Setting	Where the Nishimiya family bonds with Shōya	Nishimiya family's relationship with Shōya transitioned from hostility to friendship
		Where Shōya saves Shōko from suicide	Shōya pays for his mistakes in the past by saving Shōko's life
Hospital	Environmental Setting	Where Nishimiya Yaeko made amends with Shōya's mother	Yaeko apologizes to Shōya's mother
		Where Shōko resolves to make amends with her friends	Shōko resolves to make amends with her friends

After drifting apart following the bullying incident in sixth grade, Shōya reunites with Miki Kawai in their high school homeroom. Their reunion leads to reconciliation as Kawai helps Shōya become friends with his classmate, Mashiba. Soon after, Shōya reconciles with Shōko from their unpleasant past, and the two of them reunite with their classmates from elementary school. By the time Shōya recovers from a coma caused by a subsequent incident related to Shōko's suicide attempt, the conflict between all of them resolves at once.

At the beginning of the school year, Shōya is constantly isolated and distant from everyone around him due to trauma from being ostracized at school. He cannot look at people's faces and struggles to socialize. However, after he helps Nagatsuka Tomohiro during a bike robbery, they become immediate friends. Kawai also assists Shōya in befriending Mashiba. On the day of their school festival, Shōya hangs out with his friends and classmates, overcoming his fear of others and gaining the ability to see and hear everyone around him clearly.

Days after Shōya resolves to live, he meets Shōko again at the bridge, opening up about friendship and his reason for seeking her out. They begin meeting at the bridge every Tuesday to feed bread to the carps. On the night Shōya wakes up from a coma, he coincidentally encounters Shōko at the bridge, apologizing for past actions and asking for her help to move forward. In turn, Shōko apologizes for not changing and nearly causing Shōya's life-threatening situation when he saved her.

The morning after Shōya's suicide attempt, his mother Miyako confronts him, discovering his room bare of furniture, a non-functional phone, and a torn-off calendar in the attic, used by Shōya to track his potential suicide. Threatening to burn his

saved money, Miyako prompts Shōya to promise not to take his own life.

When Yuzuru runs away, Shōya finds her sleeping in a park and takes her into his house, previously knowing her as Shōko's sibling and caring for her sake. Yuzuru doubts his kindness and changed personality but eventually confides in Shōya about her true relationship with Shōko. Afterward, Yuzuru spends time at Shōya's place and seeks his help with her studies after his recovery from the coma.

Upon Shōya's return home from the hospital, Yaeko visits and gets a haircut from his mother. Seeing Shōya, she also apologizes to him.

During summer vacation, Shōko and Yuzuru invite Shōya to their mother's birthday celebration. Despite Yaeko's initial reluctance, Yuzuru's assurance persuades her to let Shōya join.

During a fireworks festival, Shōya saves Shōko from falling off a balcony but falls into a river himself, leading to hospitalization.

Yaeko and Yuzuru apologize to Miyako at the hospital for their past actions.

Ueno's resentment towards Shōko intensifies upon learning about Shōya's condition, leading her to restrict Shōko's visits to the hospital. Meanwhile, Shōko expresses her desire to restore Shōya's friendships in a conversation with Nagatsuka.

The narrative features themes of reunion, reconciliation, friendship development, overcoming suicide attempts, life-saving actions, apologies, and making amends, all representing the redemption arcs within the story's settings. Furthermore, this phase illustrates how environmental and individual elements in the setting significantly influence the characters' redemption.

4. Conclusion

With the findings of the study, it is inferred that Naoko

Yamada's film *A Silent Voice* reveals a redemption arc.

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