

The narrative conflict and structure for both the lion king and hamlet

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Narratology is the analysis of a narrative structure in primarily literature but is now being applied to multiple different media studies (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). A narrative analysis will look at elements such as the story outline and plot structure, roles of characters, and the narrative perspective or point of view (Burgoyne 3). Some other elements that play a role in narrative analysis are technical code; sound, camera angles, design and editing, verbal code; use of language both spoken and written, symbolic code; clues within narrative that give more detail such as socio-economic status, narrative conflict; the central conflict that moves the story forward (Green). With these elements in mind, the 1994 animated movie *The Lion King* can be analyzed as one of the adaptations of *Hamlet*, written by William Shakespeare, using a critical approach of narratology.

Specifically focusing on the narrative conflict and structure, the characters, and the narrative perspective or point of view. Looking at the narrative conflict and structure for both *The Lion King* and *Hamlet* we see that during the process of transformation they have maintained some similarities while also creating some deviations from the narrative. Following Todorov three key points of a structure; equilibrium, disequilibrium, and new equilibrium, one can notice that there are some similarities between the two (Green).

During *The Lion King*, Simba's birth represents the equilibrium in the beginning, and we see that he has a close relationship with his father. In *Hamlet*, it begins with his father already being dead and Hamlet mourning him, which is the equilibrium in the story. One can already see that some deviations are already made to the narrative, which may be due to who the

targeted audience is for each work of arts. What causes the disequilibrium in The Lion King is Simba's father Mustafa dying due to Scar killing him, in Hamlet the apparition of his dead father causes the disequilibrium, as he states he was murdered by his brother. In both, what occurs to the father figure is what triggers the disequilibrium.

Lastly, what causes the new equilibrium for both is a duel, in The Lion King Simba duels Scar and in Hamlet Claudius and Hamlet duel. While what triggers the new equilibrium in both tales is similar the end of the overall narrative is different, with Hamlet the tale ends tragically with everyone dead but in the adaption, The Lion King, the tale ends on a happy note with Simba being restored to power. One can see that the narrative structure in the adaption does not at all closely follow the origin tale, that it only has very few similarities when looking at the structure. Even though the narrative structures are different it still feels similar to the origin of the tale. This is “because the motifs or objects and persons can vary from tale to tale, only the actions – giving, or removing, or battling – can form the constants that trigger our intuition that two tales are similar” (Bordwell 9). This demonstrates that because the narrative conflict in both are so similar, family betrayal and father-son relationships this is what truly allows the audience to see that it is an adaptation.

Characters are also very important in an adaptation, and one can see that there are many similarities between Simba and Hamlet. Simba and Hamlet are the protagonist of their tales and share quite a few similarities, for example, both are princes who are struggling with the death of their fathers.

They also both have their uncle as the antagonist, who takes their fathers crown, by unsavory means, and exiles them. One major thing that separates them from each other is the role their father plays in the narrative. After the death of their fathers both Simba and Hamlet see apparitions of their father. What their father tells them is what separates them from one another, Hamlet's father tells Hamlet to seek revenge and avenge his death and names Claudius as his killer. In the Lion, King Mustafa has a more positive message for Simba, as he tells his son to remember who he truly is and return to his home. In both tales the message the fathers have for their sons is different, but they both lead to their sons avenging them as both the sons' duel with their uncle. This suggests that "the same character could fulfill different roles", the original purpose of the father's ghost does not transfer in the adaptation, but the narrative conflict does not change regardless of the father's appearance and purpose in both tales being different (Bordwell 6). Thus, demonstrating that if the narrative conflict is the same, it will drive the story to the same plot points but the drivers can be different.

Lastly, analyzing and comparing the narrative perspective or point of view for both The Lion King and Hamlet. Burgoyne addresses that within film narrative theory there are no agreements on the status of the cinematic narrator but discusses some of the popular theories (4). Two that relate to this adaptation analysis are the character-narrator; who "does not create a world, but simply reports", and the impersonal narrator; "it both creates or constructs the fictional world while at the same time referring to it as if it had an autonomous existence, as if it preexisted the illocutionary act" (Burgoyne

7). In both Hamlet and The Lion King, the perspective is objectively making the narrator an impersonal narrator. This is because in both works of art the audience can “ imagine that he or she is confronting the fictional universe directly” thus making their own conclusions about the narrative (Burgoyne 7).

One must also consider that within Hamlet there are some moments what the narrative perspective shifts into a character-narrator, this is done with the use of soliloquies and asides. This allows the audience to get a clearer understanding of the characters inner thoughts and the state of their mind and how they view things. For example, in Hamlet when analyzing the “ To be or not to be” soliloquy the audience can see that Hamlet is struggling with constant thoughts on death and suicide as well as demonstrating his existential crisis and how that impacts his point of view or how it may be distorting his reality (3. 1. 64-78). This does not transfer into the Disney adaptation of Hamlet, and this is due to each work of art having different target audiences. To conclude, when thinking like a narratology critic, seeing Hamlet adapted into The Lion King one can see that bare bones of the narrative is still similar, but many changes and liberties are taken when examining the two. The narrative conflicts, protagonist, and antagonist are the narrative components that really do portray the similarities to the source material. The changes are mostly due to who the targeted audience was for both works of art, for Shakespeare his targeted audience were adults and his intention was to showcase a tragedy, which may have been a result of he himself experiencing tragedy with his son’s death.

For Disney the targeted audience is children and family, so they must be mindful of what they are showcasing, which leads to this family-friendly adaptation of Hamlet. One can really see how taking the audience into consideration can really change the narrative of the story. After analyzing the two, the Lion King really does stray from its original source material, which would lead critics to believe that this is not a true narratological adaptation regardless of how successful the adaptation was. With that being said, this adaptation was a very creative take on this Shakespearean tale. It is also a good demonstrates of how a tale can be revisited and bring new meaning to the story by adapting it into an animated movie.