Charles University

Faculty of Education

Department of English Language and Literature

BACHELOR'S THESIS

The Ambiguity of the Narrative Structure in Daniel Keyes'

Flowers for Algernon

Nejednoznačnost struktury vypravování v díle Daniela Keyese

Růže pro Algernon

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Study Program: Bachelor

Branch of Study: Specialisation in Education (AJ–RJ)

2022

I hereby declare that this bachelor's thesis on the topic of The Ambiguity of the Narrative Structure in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* is my work in its entirety and I only used the works and materials cited within this thesis. Furthermore, I confirm that this thesis has not been used to obtain a different or identical title.

Prague, 10th July 2022

I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Bernadette Higgins, M.A., for her invaluable insight and guidance I received while composing this thesis. I would also like to thank my mother, my brother, and all of my friends for their support of this endeavour. Without all of them, this thesis would not come to fruition.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to discuss the key narrative features in the short story and novel Flowers for Algernon through the lens of two different narrative frameworks. The first will focus on the traditionally established three-act structure widely recognised as standard in Western fiction. The second will analyse the work from the angle of kishotenketsu, the four-act structure of Oriental literature. The theoretical part will contain a brief description of both narrative structures, noting their main properties. In the practical part, the story will be analysed using both of the described frameworks to highlight the ambiguous nature of its plot progression.

KEYWORDS

Science fiction, Flowers for Algernon, 20th century, narrative structure, literary analysis, Daniel Keyes

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce pojednává o klíčových rysech vypravování v povídce a novele Růže pro Algernon skrz hledáček dvou rozdílných strukturních rámců. První se soustředí na tradičně využívanou strukturu o třech dějstvích, jež je obecně považována za standard v západní literatuře. Druhý analyzuje dílo z úhlu kišótenkecu, struktury o čtyřech aktech používané v orientální literatuře. Teoretická část obsahuje stručný popis obou struktur vypravování a poukazuje na jejich hlavní vlastnosti. V praktické části práce bude dílo analyzováno při pomoci obou popsaných rámců za účelem zvýraznění nejednoznačného vzoru výstavby jeho příběhu.

KEYWORDS

Science fiction, Růže pro Algernon, 20. století, struktura vypravování, literární analýza, Daniel Keyes

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INTRODUCTION

Narrative structure in English-language literature has gone through many forms and variations throughout the years, and many prominent authors utilised distinct literary devices to reinvent and enrich fiction in ways unseen before. Such devices included variations on the progression of the plot of their stories, and many are employed to this day.

Codifying narrative structure itself has gone overlooked for many years, however. In the Western tradition, these efforts were spearheaded by Joseph Campbell's Monomyth and Syd Field's Three-Act Structure, works of the 20th century. On the other hand, Oriental literature's approach to plot construction has gone largely unchanged since its conception in ancient China, and as such, the two styles differ significantly.

This dichotomy garnered my interest, and the aim of this thesis is to highlight the different tactics that both literary traditions employ when building a story from beginning to end. For the sample, Daniel Keyes' short story/novel *Flowers for Algernon* was chosen as the perfect candidate because of its simple to follow plotline and unconventional format, and because I found it fitting to compare two versions of the same story.

The theoretical part of this thesis aims to describe the fundamental features of the aforementioned three-act structure, which is generally regarded to be the most general template of modern fiction, as well as its Oriental counterpart chiefly used in Chinese and Japanese literature, Kishotenketsu, to provide an alternative interpretation of the work at heart of this paper, *Flowers for Algernon*.

The practical part of this thesis will then apply the theoretical knowledge described previously to highlight features specific and unique to both narrative structures within the source text itself, thereby aiming to emphasise the deviations from the three-act template. The goal of the analysis is to confirm that *Flowers for Algernon* diverges from the trends observed in Western literary tradition and utilises a fresh approach to plot construction.

1. THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

1.1 Overview

Formally pioneered by Syd Field in his book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* in the year 1979, the three-act structure was initially invented to aid scriptwriters to construct plots for the big screen. Thanks to its simple but effective design, the paradigm was quickly adopted to characterise the construction of modern written fiction, and it has also been subsequently used to map works that predate the framework itself. The structure itself had gone through many edits before it became what Field popularised in his book, however.

In spite of its use in charting contemporary Western literature and filmmaking, the origin of the three-act structure with a driving conflict at the helm of the narrative only dates back a century at most, while it has been misattributed to several different authors throughout history. The first such case was Aristotle, who is wrongly credited with the invention by many to this day – while in fact, he proposed that a story has two acts called desis and lysis (or complication and dénouement). (Kim Yoon Mi, European Three Act)

The true basis for the modern three-act structure would be found later in Gustav Freytag's five act pyramid. Freytag, a German novelist and playwright, proposed the scheme to be as follows in his book *Technique of the Drama*: "These parts of the drama, (a) introduction, (b) rise, (c) climax, (d) return or fall, (e) catastrophe, have each what is peculiar in purpose and in construction" (Freytag 115). This paradigm does not entirely fall in line with the current interpretation, as he never mandated the use of a central conflict.

Only in 1921, the English intellectual, literary critic and essayist Percy Lubbock introduced the idea of the driving conflict—one that the main bulk of the plot is written around—and provided the literary world with the core of what constitutes today's primary narrative paradigm. In his work *The Craft of Fiction*, he notably mentioned conflict as what creates drama within a story:

> "What is the story? There is first of all a succession of phases in the lives of certain generations; youth that passes out into maturity, fortunes that meet and clash and re-form, hopes that flourish and wane and reappear in other lives, age that sinks and hands on the torch to youth again—such is the substance of the drama" (Lubbock 29).

The idea was then redone by Kenneth T. Rowe, Iowan native and professor at the University of Michigan, into five acts once again in his book *Write That Play*. Rowe took inspiration from both Freytag and Lubbock, the latter clearly visible in this quote: "In the conflict must be found the first principle of the drama, a unity" (Rowe 29). He reverted back to the five-act structure mandated by Freytag, dubbing the main stages introduction, rising action, crisis, falling action, and conclusion. (59-61)

The American-Hungarian playwright, Lajos Egri, argued for an extremely similar paradigm sans an altered naming convention for the acts, found in *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. Ultimately, Syd Field edited the framework passed down from author to author into what we know as the three-act structure – trimmed down the number of stages, including the central conflict that has been somewhat ignored since Lubbock, and the system caught on. (Kim Yoon Mi, European Three Act)

Compared to the original idea presented by Freytag, the resolution of Field's paradigm combines the crisis, return and catastrophe of the Pyramid into one act – resolution, while adding subdivisions within each act to further focus the plot. The finalised form of the narrative structure therefore bears the three acts of setup, rising action and resolution, with two plot points that mark the transitions between them, and an inciting incident as the focal moment of the first act that serves as the catalyst for the plot. (Field 21–30)[1]

Independently of this process, the American writer Joseph Campbell invented the Monomyth (also called Hero's Journey), a narrative template in seventeen stages grouped

[1] See Figure 1 in the Appendices section for a visual representation.

into three ‘acts’. First found in the book *A Hero With a Thousand Faces* and applied by the author himself to compare religions, the framework was soon retroactively applied to fiction as well, most notably by Hollywood scriptwriters Christopher Vogler and Stuart Voytilla, who further defined each of the stages and the three main acts of departure, initiation and return in their books *A Writer’s Journey* by Vogler and *Myth and the Movies* by Voytilla, respectively. While not directly related to Field’s three-act structure, the paradigm of Campbell’s can be considered its analogue for fiction of heroic and epic nature.

1.2 Act One – Setup

The setup functions as the introductory stage of the narrative. Here, the readers get acquainted with all the necessary attributes that make the story come alive. “The reader must know who the main character is, what the dramatic premise is, what the story is about, and the dramatic situation—the circumstances surrounding the action. (...) It must be designed and executed with efficiency and dramatic value because it sets up everything that follows” (Field 107).

This means that the setup is the primary stage for both introducing the main elements of the story and initiating plot threads relevant to the main character, all within the span of roughly the first 20–25% of the runtime; Field goes as far as to claim that “it becomes essential to introduce your story from the very beginning (...) As mentioned, you've got about ten pages or less to grab your reader, so you've got to set up your story right away” (106). It must be pointed out, however, that his suggestion primarily pertains to screenplay construction and is not essential to follow for written fiction.

There are three key features that usually figure throughout the first act: the exposition, the inciting incident and the first plot point. From the point of view of the three-act structure, while it is not necessary for all three to be present in act one to make it complete, a lack of one or more of these properties may lead to pacing issues further down the line.

Exposition. The most flexible of the features inherent to the first act is exposition, which supplies the story with background information such as the setting, the names and basic characteristics of the protagonist and the supporting cast, the time frame and placement of the story, and the basic context in which it plays out. Due to its nature, however, exposition can be used fairly freely at the author's discretion over the course of the narrative.

Examples of that include introducing an amnesiac character who does not recall their significance in regards to the overall plot, or the true nature of the setting can be shrouded in mystery to mislead the readers. Another option is to delay the exposition stage—usually by utilising an in medias res opening—until a later point in the first act or until after its end. Negative examples of delayed exposition include so-called information dumps, which usually occur before a critical point in the story and disrupt the pacing and progression.

Since the vast majority of stories require some sort of expository introduction, instances of this feature are plentiful. A fine sample can be found in Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather*, which first opens with a scene of three men requesting favours from don Corleone, establishing the setting and tone of the story, and then moves on to describe the wedding of the his daughter, introducing the family, its key characters and their background.

Inciting Incident. A certain literary device is oftentimes utilised to drive the narrative forward after the exposition stage concludes. "One incident (...) is called the inciting incident, because it sets the story in motion; it is the first visual representation of the key incident, what the story is about, and draws the main character into the story line" (Field 129). The inciting incident is what sets the events of the plotline in motion – from this point onwards, most of everything that occurs throughout the story can be related and traced back to this point. Generally speaking, the common course of events is for the protagonist to be exposed to the inciting incident directly and then favourably respond to its call, setting off on the journey to overcome the antagonistic force. However, that is not wholly necessary for the plot to

progress: “Whether the protagonist accepts it or not, it doesn't matter; events are set in motion causing the protagonist to follow the path of the narrative, whether they want to or not” (TV Tropes, Three-Act Structure).

A very famous instance of this feature can be found in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. After being introduced to the title character and his life with the Dursley family, the inciting incident occurs when he is informed of his admittance to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry by its gamekeeper, Rubeus Hagrid, with the iconic line: “You’re a wizard, Harry!” This sends Potter on the magical adventure that would end up spanning seven books in total, making it a franchise-wide inciting incident.

First Plot Point. The final piece of the puzzle that concludes the introduction is the first plot point. The purpose of the plot point (both first and second) is, in Field’s words, rather rudimentary: “It moves the story forward. Plot Point I and Plot Point II are the story points that hold the paradigm in place. They are the anchors of your story line” (Field 143). This is also considered “the point of no return for your characters” (Weiland, The First Plot Point).

Most importantly, the first plot point often coincides with the key incident of the story – the moment when the main character becomes involved in the overarching conflict. To a lesser degree, it also marks the departure from the pre-established status quo of the setting, or it is the direct catalyst for its change. A solid example can be found in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. The opening act of the story ends with Oliver fleeing the orphanage—this being the first plot point—and his solitary arrival in London, a completely different world in comparison, marks the key incident of the plot.

1.3 Act Two – Rising Action

The turn marked by the first plot point leads the story into the second act, which has become generally known as rising action (or, alternatively, as confrontation). Here, the main body of the narrative is developed, and this part takes up roughly the second and third quarter of the

story's runtime: "[It] is the longest, generally twice as long as the other two acts, or the second and third half-hours in a two hour movie" (TVTropes, Three-Act Structure).

In Weiland's words, "This first half of the second act is where your characters find the time and space to react to the first major plot point" (Weiland, The First Half of the Second Act). This lays down the foundation for the most important aspect of the middle act of the story, which is the character arc (also called character development). The character arc is vital to complete the protagonist's/supporting cast's journey from beginning to end while expressing the elasticity and malleability of the characters.

Furthermore, rising action also serves as the stage for the conflict to develop and expand its influence on both the setting and the characters involved, while the narrative is steered towards the confrontation with the source of the conflict, be it an event the hero must overcome or the antagonist of the story. (The First Half of the Second Act)

Moment of Truth (Midpoint). Around the halfway mark of the plot, a phenomenon known as the moment of truth often serves as a turning point for the story's direction. Usually, the protagonist's progress is a series of reactions to the actions stirring the driving conflict – or as Weiland puts it, "Your character will act out in response to the events of the [first] plot point (...) The antagonistic force responds, and again the character is forced to react. The cycle repeats itself (...) until the story reaches the midpoint" (The First Half of the Second Act).

This generates momentum for the protagonist; their ability to navigate the obstacles brings them closer to the fulfilment of their purpose. However, at the moment of truth, "the protagonist will seem to be close to accomplishing the ultimate goal, but events will conspire to prevent success. (...) As a result, the protagonist will reach their lowest point and will often temporarily give up in despair" (TVTropes, Three-Act Structure). The positive development of the situation turns on its head, leaving the hero to renew the push towards the climax.

Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* has its midpoint in the moment when Onegin's only real friend, the poet Lensky, challenges him to a duel to the death. The already apathetic Onegin resigns himself and, against his better judgement, accepts. Additionally, in certain plots, the trope of the midpoint is invoked, but inverted: the main character(s) stagnate throughout the second act, culminating in their near-defeat – however, the situation pans out favourably and they are able to gain lost ground.

Disaster and Crisis. The aforementioned lowest point sends the story into the stage of disaster. Here, as said by Hardy:

> "It all goes horribly wrong for the protagonist, and is often the result of them trying to fix whatever went wrong at the Midpoint. The big plan to save the day fails miserably and the protagonist is worse off now than they've been the entire novel. The stakes are raised yet again, and it all becomes too much for the protagonist to handle" (What You Should Know About the Three Act Structure).

The disaster often follows the protagonist's own unsuccessful attempt at remedying the situation that arose during the midpoint. This personal failure causes the main character to question the purpose and point of their journey, and giving up the cause. However, the surrounding circumstances have changed drastically and it is no longer possible to return to the status quo. The combination of the two narrative devices forces them into introspection, and they form the plan to right their wrongs.

White Fang by Jack London features a splendid case of the disaster and crisis: the title character, White Fang, gets sold by his former owner Grey Beaver to a man named Beauty Smith who organises an illegal dog fighting ring. The wolf suffers extensively because of the maltreatment by Smith's hand as well as in the arena, and ends up losing all of the hard-earned trust he harboured towards humans, and even nearly loses his life.

Second Plot Point. The transition into the final act and the catalyst of the hero's decision to take a stand against the antagonistic force is materialised into the second plot point. In the words of Field, "Plot Point II is really the same as Plot Point I; it is the way to move the story forward, from Act II to Act III. It is a story progression" (Field 28). Therefore, it can be characterised as an event which prompts the character into action by means of an irreversible change in the balance of the narrative.

This summary encapsulates the second plot point rather well:

> "The main character must finally face (and presumably overcome) the antagonistic force by way of first learning from and then overcoming his own internal conflict (...) This plot point, more than any of those that have preceded it, will set the protagonist's feet on the path toward the final conflict in the climax" (Weiland, The Third Act).

An example of this occurs in *Of Mice and Men*, written by John Steinbeck: the scene during which Lennie accidentally kills Curley's wife marks the moment when George realises the inevitable resolution of the incident which leads to the climax. He must confront his emotional connection to the man and decide what course of action is the best when his fate is sealed, no matter how tragic his decision may turn out to be.

1.4 Act Three – Resolution

"Act III is that unit of action that resolves the story" (Field 26). The plot threads that have been set up and developed as well as the character arcs that have been advancing find their finalisation in this concluding stage. This means that the setup and resolution stage share a rather intimate connection – "Endings are manifested in the resolution and the resolution is conceived in the beginning" (101). In other words, everything in need of resolving by the end had to have been established in the beginning; if this continuity is lacking, plot holes arise, undermining the cohesion of the story as a whole.

Although the resolution does lead the narrative to its conclusion, the matter of the plot's accumulated momentum is yet to be resolved. As such, the final act begins with the stakes raised to an all-time high and the protagonist aiming to finally overcome the root of the conflict, in a narrative feature that has become an absolute staple of modern storytelling and which lies at the heart of nearly every major story.

Afterwards, all that remains is to tie up the loose ends and showcase the consequences of the story's events on the cast and the setting, and send the protagonist off in a meaningful, memorable way. As Weiland posits, "All the threads we've been weaving up to this point must now be artfully tied together. (...) By the time the third act is finished, all the salient questions must be answered, the conflict resolved one way or another, and the reader left with a feeling of satisfaction" (The Third Act).

Climax. Perhaps the most important and defining feature of a narrative structured in three acts is the climax, which marks the point at which the protagonist—with everything they strive for on the line—clashes with the antagonist (or the core cause of the driving conflict) in hopes of prevailing over them. Depending on the nature of the conflict, the stakes may be anywhere from the personal level (fighting for one's own freedom, for example) to the global/cosmic level (saving the world/universe from impending doom).

Therefore, the outcome of the climax determines the fate of all characters and parts of the setting explored over the plot's runtime as the culmination of the efforts of all parties involved. "The point is to bring the story and its primary conflict to its expected moment of irreversible resolution in a way that fulfils our book's every promise to our readers" (Weiland, The Climax). After the climax, the momentum of the narrative finally winds down to slowly lead the reader into the closing pages.

Occasionally, a trope by the name of faux climax can be invoked. This occurs in close proximity to the real climax—sometime after the second plot point—and serves as a fakeout

for the protagonist(s): they clash with an opposing force only to realise that this specific confrontation will not end the conflict and, in truth, the true main obstacle still lies ahead. "...the protagonist thinks he's ended the conflict, only to realise he hasn't addressed the true antagonistic force standing in between him and his goal" (Weiland, The Climax).

A remarkable example of a climax done right takes place in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The readers follow the protagonist Raskolnikov through his mental struggle after murdering a greedy pawnbroker. After all the anguish he endures because of his guilty conscience, and with his hopes shattered by the burden he consciously put on himself, the climax sees him finally confess his crime and face the consequences in full.

Dénouement. After the momentous showing that is the finale, the story is heading towards its true ending – and this last stage is called the dénouement. Originating from French (literal meaning "unknotting"), the word encompasses what this final feature entails: it attempts to untie all remaining knots in the story, that being unresolved plot threads, minor conflicts between characters, or the question of their respective futures.

The atmosphere and mood of the dénouement are imperative to its successful construction. After the emotional stress of the climax, the reader wants to see the results of the hero's efforts in the aftermath of the conflict, and to know where their life is headed in the wake of their adventure. (Weiland, The Resolution) That, naturally, extends also to the minor, supporting characters and the world at large. The dénoument should be emotionally charged in a way that corresponds to the overall tone of the story.

J. R. R. Tolkien's send-off to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is an exemplary case of the dénouement in its own right. Frodo Baggins, the unfortunate bearer of the Ring's curse, understands that his place is not in the Shire anymore, as he has become tainted. In the poignant closing scenes, he entrusts Samwise with the responsibility over the land of the hobbits, and departs Middle-earth along with Gandalf and Bilbo to find peace in Valinor.

2. FOUR-ACT STRUCTURE (KISHOTENKETSU)

2.1 Overview

The Oriental storytelling technique largely unknown to the Western writing tradition, kishotenketsu, is mostly prominent in the cultural sphere of the Far East, serving as the primary narrative structure of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean fiction. The four stages of kishotenketsu (or kishoutengou[2], as it is referred to within Japan itself) have been interpreted in slightly varying ways by all three relevant countries that use this type of story structure. For the purpose of this thesis, only the Japanese variant will be focused on, as it is the one primarily suited for works of fiction.

Kishotenketsu finds its roots in old Chinese poetry under the name qǐ chéng zhuǎn hé (起承转合). The original four stages were "qǐ – start/introduction (...) the reason something started, chéng – handling, process, or hardships, zhuǎn – turn, crescendo, hé – result" (Kim Yoon Mi, East Asian 4-Act). Qǐ chéng zhuǎn hé doesn't have conflict at its heart, the key to the story is the development. While conflict may be present during the third act, it is usually sidelined in favour of character arcs and introspection. (Kim Yoon Mi, East Asian 4-Act)

Afterwards, the structural paradigm made its way over to Korea, where it is known as gi seung jeon gyeol (기승전결). These four acts were described as "gi –: raising issues and introducing characters; seung – the beginning of the action; jeon – a change in direction or reversal; gyeol – the thing to be concluded and any lessons gained" (East Asian 4-Act). For

[2] Notice the different transliteration of both terms: while *kishotenketsu* has been anglicised with a simple o, the word *kishoutengou* is generally transcribed with two 'ou' clusters according to the standard Hepburn romanisation. The same rule later applies to the act name, *shouku* (ou), which also follows Hepburn's paradigm (alternatively, all of the aforementioned long vowels would be written with a macron, including the one within *kishotenketsu*).

these two variations, examples include the poem Farewell by Wang Wei for Chinese and Escort by Jeong Ji Sang for Korean poetry.

The type most relevant for the purpose of this paper, kishotenketsu (起承転合), was the last of the trio to be established. The four acts found therein retain many of the features of the style utilised in Korea, from where it was adopted, with a distinct difference at the third stage: instead of "the character returning to a previous point in their life, re-examining it" as in gi seung jeon gyeol, in kishotenketsu, Japanese authors "put in something that you didn't expect to happen, or a revelation about the past that makes everything before change and reveal the core of the problem (Kim Yoon Mi, East Asian 4-Act).

As for the acts themselves, the quartet goes in order of kiku (introduction), shouku (development), tenku (twist) and kekku (conclusion).[3] Kiku introduces the setting and the characters, and can thus be considered analogous to the Setup; shouku brings forth the development of characters and the situation while forgoing the use of a driving conflict to catalyse them; tenku breaks the established pattern and provides a twist to the continuing narrative and kekku describes the influence of the twist on the characters' lives and feelings.

The influence of kishotenketsu and its associated Chinese and Korean siblings does not end in literature. Senko Maynard in his work *Japanese Communication: Language and Thought in Context* posits that the template directs far more than just the construction of narrative as "a model organisational structure for expository (and other writing)" (159). Within the same section, he mentions that kishotenketsu permeates the entirety of the system of Japanese discourse down to the elemental level, as its progression matches the language's sentence structure. (161)

Remarkably, the original Chinese idea of the template was born of the ideals of buddhism and confucianism (Rivera, Western vs Eastern Storytelling) as well as the political

[3] See Figure 2 in the Appendices section for a visual representation.

situation in the country at the time – everything essentially boiled down to internal conflict being detrimental to running the state, and policies were created to ensure that conflicting interests of the factions would be minimised. (Cecil, Chinese - Languages And Literature)

2.2 Act One – Introduction (Kiku)

For the uninitiated, the opening stage of a four-act story may appear deceptively similar, if not downright identical, to the setup of a narrative in three acts. It is true that both approach the initiation of the plot from the same angle – they establish the main cast and the backdrop for the story. However, the chief distinction between the two introductory acts to a work is their attitude towards the very subjects they are describing: the setting and the characters.

While the setup mainly serves to create a brief, concise view into the main hero(es) and their traits and motivations before quickly unleashing the driving conflict, kishotenketsu delves much deeper into the mind and soul of the cast, providing a comprehensive look into their mentality, habits and outlook on life. A conflict in these stories may be present, but it is never necessary. (Rivera, Western VS Eastern Storytelling)

Comparison with the Three-Act Structure. The short summary of the two approaches to constructing the narrative has been noted above, but the differences do not stop there. For a better demonstration of where kishotenketsu deviates from the Western standard, one can isolate the key features of the setup of the three-act structure and attempt to apply them to a four-act-structure framework to find out whether these properties are applicable.

Starting with exposition, this feature is nearly identical in both narrative paradigms when it comes to its role in the plot. While the content differs slightly in substance, it largely achieves the exact same results in both structures: sets the stage for the story to develop and progress, and introduces the main cast which will follow the story to its conclusion. From here onwards, the two principles begin diverging.

The inciting incident serves an invaluable role in establishing the importance of the driving conflict in a three-act story, while the conflict is embedded into the structure of the narrative itself. As stated by Rivera above, Kishotenketsu does away with this notion completely: the conflict does not need to serve a major role for any of the cast members, and it does not need to fuel the characters' motivation whatsoever. It may exist, but it can be simply omitted – and the same can be said about the inciting incident itself.

With no central conflict to force the characters into, kishotenketsu's first act eases the readers into the story's setting, brings forward a deeper understanding of the thoughts of the main cast, and provides a more detailed look into the mundane aspects of the world. The first act doesn't end with a clear-cut transition akin to the first plot point in Field's paradigm, but rather, it flows fluently into the next stage.

2.3 Act Two – Development (Shouku)

The pace of the first act is maintained through the seamless transition into the second act. Translated as development, this stage makes up the brunt of the story once again – up to three fifths of the plot is spent in this stage. What separates development from the three-act structure's rising action is how each of the acts manipulates the plot's momentum.

In both cases, as the story progresses, the momentum rises steadily as more details and plot beats are uncovered and elaborated upon. In shouku specifically, this corresponds to a more detailed and thorough depiction of the main cast's situation and problems, rather than a series of events stirred by the driving conflict. The Art of Narrative blog points out that "The important thing to remember about this stage is that it is about expansion, but not change. No major changes occur during this development stage" (Kishotenketsu – Exploring the Four Act Story Structure).

Thus, the development stage fleshes out the known and the familiar without challenging the balance in a major way. Depending on variations, there may be impeti that

put the characters' arcs into motion, such as problems that need solving or a new revelation that the cast must adapt to. In any case, these serve to deepen the reader's understanding of the characters themselves, and do not necessarily drive the plot forward.

Expansion. The widening of the scope of comprehension (be it of the setting, the characters, or their aspirations) is formally known as expansion, and it can be considered the key feature of the second act. Where the three-act structure emphasises the interaction between the protagonist and the central conflict or its proxy in the antagonist, kishotenketsu highlights the role of the main cast in the wider world, with an emphasis on the people.

That is because traditionally, there is no one single 'hero' or 'protagonist' in a story following the Oriental plot structure. Enter the nakama – a group of individuals that form the main cast alongside the viewpoint character who have similar ideals or aspirations (Rivera, Western VS Eastern Storytelling). Not all stories built on the paradigm of kishotenketsu employ a nakama, and there are notable works of Western literature that have an ensemble cast (a splendid example would be *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding), but the involvement of a multitude of personages that are unique and on equal standing with the main character is a staple in Japanese fiction.

S. Rivera, in his video essay Western VS Eastern Storytelling, also posits that "conflict and other elements can become a vehicle for something else" – instead of anchoring the plot and causing it to revolve around it, the obstacles the cast encounters can serve as a distraction from their routine, drive them apart or, conversely, bring them closer together.

Introspection Over Conflict. The blog group Still Eating Oranges suggests that "kishotenketsu relies on exposition and contrast rather than conflict" (The Significance of Plot Without Conflict), that is to say, character development and complex worldbuilding take precedence. Where, then, does the narrative technique generate suspense, tension, or interest?

In absence of a central obstacle, the plot usually delves down the path of introspection; a thorough exploration of the characters' relationships, sentiments towards the progressing situation around them, and the influence of both the people and the environment on them are very prevalent. This analysis of human nature harks back to the philosophical teachings of buddhism and confucianism which greatly influenced ancient Chinese poetry – the cradle of kishotenketsu. Readers are not drawn in by the external nature of the battle between the hero and their enemy, but the internal struggle of the people involved, their feelings, fears, doubts, joys and hopes. (Rivera)

2.4 Act Three – Twist (Tenku)

Despite the apparent inertia, the story and its plot do build up towards a point at which the momentum peaks: tenku, or the twist. While drawing a parallel to the climax seems rather tempting, both are intrinsically different down to their foundation, much like the structures themselves. (Rivera) Where the climax marks the zenith of the conflict between the protagonist and their antagonistic force, the twist quite literally flips the story on its head.

A very common way of introducing the twist is switching the point of view from which the narrative is told entirely. The reason why that happens is to enforce a shift in perspective; perhaps the event/issue that has been observed by the main cast can be seen differently by a newly introduced third party – and that is the point: the sudden revelation of a new element that recontextualises the story. "They put in something that you didn't expect to happen, or a revelation about the past that makes everything before change and reveal the core of the problem" (Kim Yoon Mi, East Asian 4-Act).

David Reinhart, Ph.D., from the University of Wisconsin-Madison puts forth an example of the four-act structure applied to Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour*, and he considers the tenku of the plot to be the moment Louise's husband returns home alive despite

the reports that he passed. Certainly enough, that point entirely changes the context and leads the story to a twist conclusion. (Using Narrative Structures – Kishotenketsu)

Reversal (Reexamination). Occasionally, instead of offering the reader a shift in perspective or new shocking information that turns the story around, the twist takes the form of a reversal – also called a reexamination. (Kim Yoon Mi, East Asian 4-Act) In this case, the plot is recontextualised using a fact or an event that is not a sudden new development of the present situation, but rather a past experience, often remembered by the narrator/POV character, which is relived to provide the necessary twist to the story that takes place in the present.

This is very reminiscent of a common narrative device called the flashback, however, the chief distinction is that within kishotenketsu, reexamination exists at the peak of the story's momentum – all the knowledge gained throughout the narrative regarding the characters and the setting is either refined by the experience of the past, or juxtaposed with what the memory contains, bringing the culmination of the plot in either completely dissonant or harmonic fashion.

2.5 Act Four – Conclusion (Kekku)

After the twist that presents an unexpected change in direction for the narrative, the pace of the story winds down to bring it to a close. Kekku, the final act, serves a slightly different role to the resolution of three-act structure yet again: the major twist has already occurred, and in the absence of a driving conflict, there is no battle of fate to be fought. Instead of the hero overpowering the antagonist and the world being saved or changed, the conclusion unites the diverging perspectives/plot threads and presents them side by side, prompting the audience to interpret the ending for themselves. (Reinhart, Kishotenketsu Stages)

Although the backdrop for these events usually remains in the same state as in the beginning for narrative continuity (as the lack of a major conflict does not warrant a drastic reshaping of the setting), not everything that composes the story remains inert in its status

quo: the change comes from within the characters themselves, and the internal problems they faced are usually taken care of by the time of the conclusion.

However, the fact that the main cast underwent personal development does not imply that all plot threads have been resolved. A distinct feature of kekku is that it reunites whatever plot threads remain – both completed and loose. “The twist may create an unresolved tension in the place of a resolved conflict. This is what makes the story interesting to the reader. (...) This lack of resolution makes Kishōtenketsu stories appealing in an important way. They are true to life” (The Art of Narrative, Kishotenketsu – Exploring the Four Act Story Structure).

Reconciliation. With the third act concluded, the story is, unlike in its Western counterpart, still left wide open. The climax paves the way to a specific ending with a specific mood, a notion to which kekku appears rather antithetical. There are as many possible outcomes as there are variants of tenku itself, be it the point of view change, the revelation or the reversal.

Similarly to that, the characters may react to the situation at hand in various ways. Some may choose to leave the newfound tension behind and continue on with their lives. Others may erupt in a freshly sparked confrontation with their peers, spurred by the new perspective the twist brought up. They could also finalise their introspection, see into their past mistakes, and learn to become better through revisiting their old selves.

The phenomenon is called reconciliation – as it combines the experience acquired during the twist with all that was learned over the course of the development. It describes the impact that tenku had on both kiku and shouku, and how the ideas presented in all three intertwine in the aftermath of the plot’s course, kekku. (Ödlund, Kishotenketsu for Beginners)

3. THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Written in 1958 by Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon* is a short story about a mentally disabled janitor Charlie Gordon who undergoes an experimental surgery in order to artificially increase his intelligence. This piece of fiction is composed in the form of diary entries—falling under the epistolary umbrella—and concerns itself with following Charlie's intellectual development and eventual regression over the course of the experiment.

The novel of the same name, released in 1966, is an expanded retelling of the same narrative, with additional scenes further fleshing out the main character's background, relationships with the people both in his present and in his past, and delves deeper into the details regarding the experiment he has undertaken, the effect of it on himself and Algernon the lab mouse, and the changes in his behaviour and attitude.

Considered a distinguished work and a staple of American sci-fi literature, Keyes obtained the Hugo Award for the best science fiction short story for *Flowers for Algernon* in the year 1960, and later, the novel version was awarded the Nebula Prize in 1966. The work remains his most acclaimed release to this day, and it has been translated to almost thirty languages and taught in schools over the world, including the Czech educational system.

3.1 The Early Life of Daniel Keyes

Born in Brooklyn, New York on the 9th of August, 1927 to Willie and Betty Keyes, he and his family were all of Jewish heritage. Keyes grew up in the Brownsville neighbourhood, and due to the impact the Great Depression had on American society, the family was not well off. (Keyes 2004, 11–13) The author himself remembers that "my father Willie once [admitted] to me that when he had been looking for work during the Great Depression, he would walk the ten miles from our two-room apartment (...) each morning and back home each night to save two nickels" (11).

Not much is known about Keyes' childhood beyond that; the next notable milestone was his attending the New York University after graduating from a local high school. He was enrolled in a pre-med major, but due to a lack of interest, he enlisted in the US Maritime Service as the Second World War began. The spiel with the navy confirmed in him that instead of medicine, he wanted to pursue the career of a writer. (Woo, Keyes' Obituary)

To that end, he began working as an associate fiction editor at Marvel Science Stories, took night classes in literature and psychology, and later graduated from Brooklyn College in psychology in 1950 and obtained a licence to teach English at local schools, worked as a fashion photographer, then professor at two universities until finally settling for the role of a high school English teacher. (Chambers VII)

3.2 Keyes' Literary Career

Daniel Keyes acted upon his ideas for the story of a mentally disadvantaged man whose intelligence dramatically increases thanks to experimental surgery in 1958. Originally dubbed *Brainstorm*, he contemplated pitching the premise to Stan Lee at Marvel, but dismissed the notion as he thought "it should be more than a comic script" (Keyes 2004). Instead, he composed the short story under the name *Flowers for Algernon*, and began looking for a publisher that would release the work for him.

He was approached by Horace Gold from the Galaxy Science Fiction magazine, who approved of his work, but suggested several edits – among them were that Charlie must remain a genius, he shall marry Ms Kinnian and the story has a happily-ever-after ending. (Locus, 40 Years of Algernon) Keyes, however, did not agree to such fundamental changes to his plot and sold his story to The Fantasy & Science Fiction magazine instead. The short story was released therein, appearing in the April 1959 issue. In 1960, the story's success yielded a Hugo Award, and after the expanded novel version was published by Harcourt in 1966, it was awarded a Nebula Prize.

Following the success of *Flowers for Algernon*, Daniel Keyes wrote several other literary works – the thriller *The Touch* (*The Contaminated Man* in the UK), *The Fifth Sally* and the non-fiction novel *The Minds of Billy Milligan*. (Locus, 40 Years of Algernon) While none reached the same fame as his début piece, Keyes still remained a thoroughly respected author, and *Billy Milligan* in particular was given high praise as being an apt account of the happenings surrounding the title character whose case was "so unreal no fiction writer would even attempt to imagine it" (Thoughts on Papyrus, Review: The Minds of Billy Milligan).

3.3 Flowers for Algernon's Contemporary Context

The science fiction genre had enjoyed its first rise to eminence with the literary career of H. G. Wells at the close of the 19th century. However, the movement was relegated to the backstage for the early years of the 20th century, often only represented in the circles of pulp fiction magazines. Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* and Karel Čapek's theatre plays *R.U.R.* and *War With the Newts* brought the genre back into the fray. (Taormina, A History of Science Fiction)

Within America, science fiction finally took root with John W. Campbell's contributions as both writer and editor of Astounding Science Fiction. Along with him, the literary movement of Futurists significantly boosted the progress of the genre, and the golden age of science fiction took place. Young writers like Frederik Pohl, Robert A. Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, and Isaac Asimov made a significant impact and became household names in the sphere of science fiction in the years to come. (Taormina, A History of Science Fiction)

Keyes's short story was born shortly after the end of the golden age, which declined along with the popularity of pulp magazines. By 1959, when *Flowers for Algernon* débuted, several major figures of the genre (Asimov and Pohl in the USA, Arthur C. Clarke in the UK) have already earned their fame and thus, despite the relative success of the short story, Keyes never truly became one of the greats of his genre like the authors that came before him.

4. ALGERNON IN THREE ACTS

Daniel Keyes' first foray into literature deals with the treatment of intellectually disabled people, juxtaposes intellect and emotion in regards to their importance to a person's system of values, describes their influence on a person's happiness and contentment, and shows how past experiences mould someone into the person they become. (Bujalski 13-14) The theme that firmly establishes it as a story of the science fiction genre is the central premise behind the narrative – the artificial increase of intelligence in a human being who has already grown beyond their developmental years.

The story's protagonist is Charlie Gordon, a 37-year-old (32-year old in the novel version) man with an initial IQ value of 68 who works as a janitor in the Donnegan Plastic Box Company (changed to Donner's bakery in the novelisation). Charlie is a simple-minded but kind and honest man who attends evening classes for adults led by Ms Alice Kinnian, at the 'Beekman College Centre for Retarded Adults' (which goes unnamed in the short story). He is recommended by his teacher to become a test subject for an experimental surgery, supervised by Dr Nemur (Professor in the novel) and Dr Strauss.

Throughout the narrative, the readers follow Charlie's journey from the mental evaluation tests carried out to measure his eligibility to become the subject of the surgery over his meeting and observation of Algernon the lab mouse—the first successful subject of the surgery that survived and retained its intelligence for a prolonged period of time—to the rapid rise of his intellect, accompanied by social alienation from everyone he knew, and the eventual regression back into his original state, with naught but his memories remaining.

4.1 Composition

The story of Charlie Gordon is written from the main character's perspective – both in the short story and the novel version, Keyes employs first person narration. This type of narration

lends itself well to the way in which the story is composed, as the entire work takes the form of diary entries (titled Progress Reports by the protagonist, as they are required by the scientists in charge of the experiment), making *Flowers for Algernon* an example of epistolary fiction. To this effect, each entry is marked by a date on which it was written down, and the narrative takes place over a period of several months, beginning on March 1st and ending on July 28th (November 21st in the novel to accommodate for the additions).

The plot is constructed in a linear fashion in the short story, following a simple chronological composition, however, that changes in the novelisation. Several flashbacks, mostly in the form of dreams, give an insight into Charlie's childhood life and relationships with his family. Beside that, there are very few diversions from the established linear progression, and the plot stays focused on its main thread, that being the observation of Charlie's ever-changing intellectual prowess.

Keeping in line with the premise of the plot, the language in *Flowers for Algernon* fluently changes from extremely simplistic with numerous spelling and stylistic mistakes over exceedingly punctuated fragments of formally neutral sentences to highly verbose and complex constructions, utilising a wide variety of academic and scientific and technical terms and expressions. Charlie is distinctly the only character in the work whose speech style evolves (and later devolves) during the story; the other characters have a constant style.

4.2 Features of the Three-Act Structure in the Story

Given that the work at the heart of the matter had been released roughly twenty years before Field's paradigm was published, it is natural to point out that the features that are present therein or absent therefrom shall be applied retroactively. It is not entirely without merit – K. M. Weiland on her website Helping Writers Become Authors maintains a rather exhaustive list of literary works which she has dissected according to the principles of the three-act framework, from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to *Jane Eyre*.

That said, there are two basic properties of a work following Field's paradigm that do influence its narrative structure, but for all ends and purposes stand a level above it. The first one of these is the central conflict. As discussed earlier, the conflict stands at the core of the plot and without it, the three-act framework can be considered incomplete. Secondly, the role of the protagonist has greater significance here. While a story may concern itself with several subplots that involve major or minor characters, the protagonist's arc is always the main focus of the narrative, and it is heavily intertwined with the conflict and its influence.

In *Flowers of Algernon*, the undisputed main character is Charlie Gordon. The reader sees the story from his perspective, and most of the action over the course of the story involves him, directly or indirectly. The main conflict that drives the plot forward thus must also be clearly tied to Charlie – however, determining its exact form is slightly more difficult.

Due to the way *Flowers for Algernon* is constructed, the main conflict isn't explicitly manifested as an antagonistic force or character of any kind. Rather, it is the nature of Gordon's changing intellect; Charlie has to overcome the woes that come with both rapidly gaining unforeseen amounts of mental capacity, and later on, losing it just as unexpectedly, and this strain placed on him creates the basis for the driving conflict of the plot.

4.3 Act One, or the Setup

To begin with, a brief outline of the theoretical background shall serve as a reminder of the features that will be analysed within the source text. The setup is the first act of the three-act structure, and its key points are the exposition, the inciting incident and the first plot point. The setup should take up no more than the first quarter of the story, and it establishes all of the fundamental facts, character arcs, and plot threads that are to be followed through. That having been said, the examination shall begin with the initial stage – exposition.

Establishing the World. Due to the limited length of the short story, Keyes wastes no time here, as he succinctly and sharply delivers all the necessary information that sets the tone and

the direction of the narrative in one single paragraph. The reader immediately learns of Charlie Gordon, the protagonist, and two members of the supporting cast, Dr Strauss and Ms Kinnian, are also introduced. Furthermore, they both hold relevance to Charlie's main motivation of becoming smarter: Ms Kinnian as the middle link between him and Dr Strauss, and Strauss himself as the reason for the short story's existence in-universe, as he urges Charlie to write the reports.

This is then followed upon in the very next passage, which describes the initial testing of Charlie's mental capacity and psychological state. "What happind is a nice young man was in the room and he had some white cards with ink spillled all over them. He sed Charlie what do you see on this card" (Keyes 1959, 1). Through the style and substance of his writing, the reader quickly catches on that Charlie suffers from an unspecified kind of intellectual disability. Later on in the same part, more is uncovered regarding Ms Kinnian and her role as the teacher of a night class for adults: "Im a slow reeder too in Miss Kinnians class for slow adults but I'm trying very hard" (1).

In only the two initial diary entries of the short story, the reader learns of the main character, his motivation, and the immediate cast of people that surrounds him – with the exception of Dr Nemur, who is mentioned in the first sentence of the next progress report. The novel version adds a bit more detail – Charlie mentions his workplace, the name of the institute where he is being educated, and namedrops Prof Nemur along with Dr Strauss and Ms Kinnian. In either version, however, the exposition stage successfully introduces all initially relevant elements of the plot and directs the momentum of the narrative towards the next key feature of the first act.

A minor continuation of the exposition stage occurs a little later, immediately preceding the inciting incident. The introduction of the title character, Algernon the lab mouse, is a case of delayed exposition – and here, it is initially downplayed as naught but a

preliminary comparison between the protagonist and a lab animal. In a sense, however, Algernon can be considered the antagonist of this story – that is because Charlie himself views the mouse as such. He is compared to the mouse in a series of puzzle tests that determine the mental acuity of the subjects, losing out every time, and these tests serve as an important benchmark throughout the story.

It is also valuable to note the emotional and attitudinal response of Charlie to each of the other actors. The reader can easily glean that his initial feelings are very one-dimensional: admiration for Ms Kinnian, fear and distrust of Dr Strauss and Dr Nemur by proxy due to fear of the experiment as a whole, joy from his workplace and colleagues, and anger towards Algernon as he considers himself inferior to the rodent.

The Conflict. With the fundamentals set in stone, the story progresses with relative ease towards the next pinch point, which is the inciting incident. As mentioned earlier, this marks the point of the plot where the protagonist is forced to break out of their status quo, voluntarily or not, and sets out on the path towards fulfilling their goal.

The inciting incident itself is the moment when Charlie is accepted as the subject of the experiment. From here on out, his former life as an unassuming working class member will end; once he undergoes the surgery, his world will change. “Dr Nemur said remember he will be the first human beeng ever to have his intelijence trippled by surgicle meens” (Keyes 1959, 3). He is supported in this endeavour by Miss Kinnian, who considers him the best of his pupils, and even Dr Strauss: “Dr Nemur was worryed about using me but Dr Strauss told him Miss Kinnian rekemmended me the best from all the people who she was teaching. (...) Dr Strauss said I had something that was very good. He said I had a good motor-vation” (3).

This event sets the plot into motion: Charlie is determined to take part in the experimental surgery, and the development of his intellectual capacity will be observed and

documented in future progress reports. Also, Charlie's perceived rivalry with Algernon will continue as they are both to be subjected to more comparison tests by the research team. "If the operashun works Ill show that mouse I can be as smart as he is. Maybe smarter" (Keyes 1959, 3). His relationships with the supporting characters are also subject to change.

In the novelisation, the same event marks the inciting incident as well. Notably, however, this occurs rather early on in the first act in comparison (within the first 5% of the plot, marginally earlier than in the short story), which could be considered a premonition of the deviation from the structural paradigm. This is due to the fact that the beginning does not contain much additional content compared to the short story.

The inciting incident is followed by Charlie's disheartenment, as the effects of the surgery are not immediate, frustrating him: "Nothing is happining. I had lots of tests and different kinds of races with Algernon. I hate that mouse. He always beats me" (4). Not only is this an omen of the internal conflict he will face down the line, but it can also be observed that Charlie perceives his progress in an absolute way – as long as he cannot see any improvement, there is none.

The First Transition. The momentum of the narrative keeps steadily building throughout the rest of the first act. The reader can catch glimpses of progress on Charlie's part from this point on. His recovery is speedy, signs of improvement begin to manifest, and he is given further stimulation by Dr Strauss, who provides him with a sleep learning kit. He also notes another vital change in his routine – he will not be attending Ms Kinnian's night class anymore, as he has grown past the need of it.

All this culminates in the first plot point that concludes the opening act – Charlie finally manages to prevail against Algernon in one of the puzzle tests that the researchers compare them with. The protagonist is notably conflicted on the matter as a whole: "I must

be getting smart to beat a smart mouse like Algernon. But I dont feel smarter" (Keyes 1959, 6). The fact that Gordon does not acknowledge the fact that his intellect is steadily improving is the aforementioned first sign of the conflict between his conscience and his rising intelligence – at heart, Charlie still feels the same ordinary factory worker, but the results he achieves—"after that I beat him 8 more times" (6)—say otherwise.

After his victory, it is revealed for the first time that Algernon is a survivor of the same experiment as Charlie. He is touched when he hears that the rodent must pass a test in order to be fed: "I dont think its right to make you pass a test to eat. How woud Dr Nemur like it to have to pass a test every time he wants to eat. I think Ill be frends with Algernon" (6). This may be understood as the catalyst which kickstarts Charlie's slow but steadily rising resentment of the experiments, while at the same time evidently creating the emotional connection to the mouse based on their shared fate and the man's empathy towards it.

In the novel, the reader is provided with a more thorough look into Charlie's thought process regarding his relationships at work and with his family in flashbacks, before he defeats Algernon for the first time, building the foundation for their development. This occurs particularly early (as it marks the end of the first tenth of the novel's runtime, remarkably short for an opening act), and as such, the structure begins to deviate significantly from Field's framework, which puts the Plot Point I at the 25% mark.

4.4 Act Two, or the Rising Action

The lead-in for the second act, rising action, has been firmly established – and as such, the plot's momentum continues its ascent; the fact that the rising momentum coincides with Charlie's rising intelligence could be considered emblematic. The key features to look out for in the middle act are the midpoint, the disaster/crisis combination and the second plot point. The second act of the short story mostly continues the trend initiated by the inciting incident,

as Charlie's mental acuity is on a consistent upwards curve aided by Dr Strauss and Dr Nemur to unlock and maximise his intellectual potential.

In contrast to that, Charlie still visibly struggles with comprehending many basic emotional and behavioural cues. While his learning curve is rather steep—noted by Ms Kinnian in one of their classes—he fails to pick up on the subtext and psychological impact of the situations he gets into (or those he recalls and recounts to his teacher), which is something Ms Kinnian swiftly realises: "I said all my frends are smart people but there good. They like me and they never did anything that wasnt nice. Then she got something in her eye and she had to run out to the ladys room" (Keyes 1959, 7).

The Midpoint. Unfortunately for Gordon, this uneven development becomes evident during the moment of truth. In *Flowers for Algernon*, this is when the protagonist misses a day of work because of what happened at a party the previous evening. Charlie is mistreated by his coworkers and for the first time, he exhibits an emotional response to it: "I feel sick inside. Not sick like for a doctor, but inside my chest it feels empty like getting punched and a heartburn at the same time" (8). The main character realises that he has always been abused by his so-called friends. "Now I know what it means when they say "to pull a Charlie Gordon." I'm ashamed" (9).

The next scene perfectly underlines the explicit presence of the otherwise inner conflict that the protagonist has to fight. Despite the almost tangible progress visible in the narration itself (the text is stylistically neutral with a minimum of spelling mistakes, mostly proper punctuation, and richer vocabulary), Charlie cannot help but feel not only stupid, but also too oblivious to even realise the extent of his foolishness: "I think it's a good thing about finding out how everybody laughs at me. (...) It's because I'm so dumb and I don't even know when I'm doing something dumb" (9).

Following this personal debacle, Charlie is averse to participation in more tests, and refuses to go to work. His response to the traumatic revelation of all his treasured friendships being disingenuous is withdrawal into himself and wallowing in self-pity. This state of emotional vulnerability is juxtaposed with an air of confidence regarding his intellectual progress, however: “Anyway, now I know I'm getting smarter every day. I know punctuation and I can spell good” (Keyes 1959, 9).

Once it appears at last that Gordon will settle back into his rhythm, as he becomes more focused and driven on the matters regarding the experiment and his cognitive improvement while attempting to move on from the hurtful experience, several events prevent the plot from reaching that direction, seamlessly transitioning it into the next stage.

The novelisation does not stray from this turn of events, only interspersing them with more scenes – however, it becomes obvious that to name the party scene as the midpoint is nigh on impossible, as it takes place at around the 15% mark. The background characters are heavily expanded upon, Ms Kinnian is introduced as a love interest, many flashbacks with Gordon as the narrator are added, and the plot slows down to nearly a halt, causing the novel’s second act to not conform with the paradigm.

The Brink of Despair. As was mentioned, the scenes that trail the midpoint instil a false sense of the plot getting back on track and in the protagonist’s favour. It quickly turns out to be quite the opposite, as Charlie is forced to go through a series of events that significantly undermine his confidence and nearly isolate him from all he had once taken for granted. The disaster strikes at an opportune moment, falling neatly in line with the three-act framework as the short story moves forward.

The first of these situations concerns his employment. Mere days after improving the efficiency at his factory, he is laid off as the union of his coworkers rallied together to essentially oust the protagonist; Charlie feels indescribable loneliness as the only company he

had for years on end has decided they had enough of him, and seemingly only because he had begun surpassing them in terms of intelligence – a further confirmation of the betrayal he felt earlier at being ridiculed, and of the falsity of his former friendships.

Gordon's next discovery plunges him even deeper into isolation as he finds that his intellect alienates not only the common folk at his former workplace, but Dr Nemur, as he is "uncomfortable around me" (Keyes 1959, 14) and after Strauss tries to explain the situation, Charlie estranges him as well. The realisation that Miss Kinnian, too, fails to understand him completes his descent into seclusion. In his moments of mental instability, he has no one to fall back on, as his extraordinary intelligence prevents him from connecting with people.

Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the blame for this development falls on both sides. Charlie's abrupt and rapid surge of intelligence combined with his relative inexperience with relationships and dealing with the emotions of others blinds him to the effect of his words and actions on others. This is clearly expressed in one of his reports where he openly criticises the two doctors for their apparent lack of wider knowledge despite their social status as geniuses, giving off the arrogant air of superiority.

The crisis is finalised when Charlie witnesses a scene in a restaurant where a young boy dropped a tray of dishes. The ensuing ridicule made the protagonist realise that he had been in the same situation before: "They were laughing at him because he was mentally retarded. (...) In looking at that boy, for the first time I saw what I had been. I was just like him" (15). Charlie realises his folly and vows to improve the world using his newfound intelligence to help those like him. "Let me use my gift to do something for them" (15).

It is the moment of 'rebirth' for Gordon, who is spurred from his emotional stupor. He understands that in his current state, the only one who can reasonably offer him comfort is himself, and to that effect, he decides to immerse himself in further studies to keep his fragile mind from being affected by psychological distress.

The Second Transition. This newfound determination is juxtaposed by the sudden turn in the other test subject, Algernon. Right after Charlie declares his intent to conduct research, the lab mouse kickstarts the transition into the third act with something as minuscule as a bite: "It happened today. Algernon bit me. I visited the lab to see him as I do occasionally, and when I took him out of his cage, he snapped at my hand. I put him back and watched him for a while. He was unusually disturbed and vicious" (Keyes 1959, 16).

Algernon's outburst of aggression marks the second plot point fantastically. It is here the author unveils a dramatic shift of development—an unexpected plot twist—and presents the new reality: the only creature Charlie can relate to is inexplicably changing. Soon, more information is uncovered: "He is less co-operative; he refuses to run the maze any more; general motivation has decreased" (16). Everything points to one undeniable fact – the surgery's effects are not permanent.

In addition to this revelation, Gordon himself is being deterred from finding out the real cause of this incident, despite his confidence that his intellect would lead him to the truth. Both Dr Strauss and Dr Nemur "have asked me not to come to the lab any more" (16), deepening the adversity between them and Charlie, who acts upon his motivation and ignores their request as the momentum builds up in preparation for the last act.

The novel takes a rather roundabout approach to the second act as a whole, adding an entire subplot revolving around Charlie and Algernon living together after escaping from a scientific convention. The scene with Algernon's bite still takes place, albeit heavily altered. The plot is sidelined in favour of providing complexity to many of the main characters. Despite all of the differences, however, the diverging paths the two versions take do meet at roughly the same spot structure-wise (three-quarters mark for the short story, 65% mark for the novel). Both of the two Charlies face the same problem: they need to find out the cause of Algernon's sudden change of behaviour and extrapolate whether it will affect them as well.

4.5 Act Three, or the Resolution

In the wake of the second plot point's revelation, the stage for the final act is set, and the dice are cast. The main question that needs resolving—whether Algernon's mental deterioration is predetermined or not—weighs on the mind of not only the protagonist, but the reader as well. The build-up to the emotional climax of the piece has been steady, much like the accrual of momentum, and Charlie's search for answers will serve as the lead-in to the finale.

The Climactic Moment. Algernon's condition is worsening, and Charlie himself appears to begin manifesting similar symptoms. In spite of the better judgement of the researchers, he keeps on overworking himself, feeling a compulsive need to know the inevitable result of his study, which may border on obsession: "I know I should rest, but I'm driven on by something inside that won't let me stop. I've got to find the reason for the sharp regression in Algernon. I've got to know if and when it will happen to me" (Keyes 1959, 17).

The climax is then brought on by two successive events: Gordon finalises his research and sends the findings to Dr Strauss and Dr Nemur, his fears confirmed. The procedure to artificially increase intelligence is not without fault, and the effects of the surgery are not permanent in either animals or humans. Right afterwards, he is forced to accept a bitter truth, for as his own wit is beginning to leave him, Algernon's regression reaches a critical point and the mouse passes away.

The death is rather symbolic, as Algernon was the de facto antagonist in the initial stages, but over time, as Charlie lost all of his former human connections, the mouse became the only relatable being in his world. The loss of Algernon is both a loss of a nemesis and a friend, and it cements the complete isolation of Gordon as a man who has no equal in the world, both as an experiment and as a person.

It is also significant from a different perspective: The hero usually confronts the source of conflict and prevails during the climax. Here, the protagonist survives his so-called

rival, but there is no victory to be celebrated, as he realises he will soon suffer the same fate. Instead of Charlie being able to overcome his obstacles and defeat the source of his conflict, the impending reversal of his intellect signifies that the completion of his reformation will always be out of reach.

The moment sets up the ending of the story with a clear tone in mind – one of unavoidable tragedy. The complete regression back into a mentally disabled man is not a matter of if, but when for Charlie, and he knows it is coming soon. All that remains is for the reader to follow the flow of the plot into a poignant conclusion, where no real surprises await, but it is all the more memorable for it.

The Unknotting. The final few pages maintain a melancholic timbre as the reader witnesses the deterioration of the protagonist's mental faculties. It begins somewhat inconspicuously, as he himself observes: "I have become touchy and irritable. (...) It's a strange sensation to pick up a book that you've read and enjoyed just a few months ago and discover that you don't remember it" (Keyes 1959, 18). What makes the progression all the more heartbreaking is that Charlie is still desperately clinging onto the hope that he will retain at least some of his knowledge. "I've got to try to hold on to some of it. Some of the things I've learned.
Oh, God, please don't take it all away" (18).

Soon enough, he begins to display the same kind of lethargy that Algernon had been manifesting before passing away. He also forcefully pushes away all of his former associates related to the research centre, feeling strongly about the fact that he was let down in a way: "Dr. Strauss comes around almost every day, but I told him I wouldn't see or speak to anybody. He feels guilty. They all do. But I don't blame anyone. I knew what might happen. But how it hurts" (19). His isolation has an underlying reason, though: Charlie does not wish to be pitied, and he cloisters himself intentionally, slipping into depression and suicidal thoughts because of the tragic circumstances surrounding him.

On the last couple of pages, the reader can notice the story come full circle: Charlie's diary entries become much shorter and littered with basic grammatical mistakes. The process has been entirely reversed, and Charlie has returned back to his old self. Even though the man retains trace memories of the time his intellect was increased, he seems to be driven back to the status quo of the beginning of the narrative. His emotional awareness has reverted as well, leaving the protagonist in a limbo state where all of his gained understanding is forever locked away behind a veil of amnesia.

Gordon's last decision is a solemn one, as he elects to leave his former life behind completely and depart New York City for good (in the novelisation, he opts to move to the Warren State Home to live out his days there). It is a symbolic act of detachment from the environment that was his only home, with hope of a fresh start as a new person. The last words are a tribute to the one who went through the same tragedy as Charlie: "Please if you get a chanse put some flowrs on Algernons grave in the bak yard… (Keyes 1959, 22).

5. ALGERNON IN FOUR ACTS

In the previous part of this paper, *Flowers for Algernon* was analysed from the perspective of the three-act structure. Because of the fact that both versions of the story were written before the structural framework was formally codified, all of the features were de facto applied retroactively; the author's work could not be a conscious effort to follow the paradigm of Syd Field (as opposed to, for example, the original Star Wars trilogy, whose author George Lucas openly admitted to being heavily inspired by Campbell's Monomyth).

Kishotenketsu, on the other hand, has been a part of the Eastern literary world for centuries, along with its other two regional varieties. Regrettably, these three frameworks were largely isolated from the eurocentric sphere of literary analysis, and as such achieved very little renown in the West. That led to the significant divide on the role of conflict within the narrative – and given the lack of its incorporation into the paradigm itself, two questions arise when considered for *Flowers for Algernon*.

The first of these queries is, what exactly could even suggest that the structure of Keyes' work could be interpreted using an ancient Oriental story construction framework? At first glance, the two have nothing in common. However, an interesting fact can be traced back to an interview in the Locus Magazine that featured Mr Keyes. According to the author himself, "In both Japan and Germany, all my books have been published and never gone out of print. When I went to Tokyo, they drove me past the department store where I was going to go for signings. The line was wrapped around the block three times" (40 Years of Algernon).

Between this and the fact that a sequel to *The Minds of Billy Milligan* called *The Milligan Wars: A True-Story Sequel* was released exclusively in Japan, it could be readily suggested that his work garnered quite some popularity in the land of the rising sun. It could then be extrapolated that his fiction gained a following because it resembled the traditional

literature over yonder in some way, shape or form – such as by being written in a way that adheres to their narrative structure. The second question then remains: Can *Flowers for Algernon* truly be interpreted with the notion that conflict is unnecessary for the plot to develop? The upcoming analysis will attempt to find the answer.

5.1 Features of the Four-Act Structure in the Story

Much like with the three-act structure, certain overarching features of kishotenketsu can be pointed out to have a permanent presence in *Flowers for Algernon* – meaning, they are not tied to a specific act, but rather, appearing throughout the plot. Although the occurrence of these properties is mutually exclusive with the features in Field's paradigm, as they are directly opposed to one another, this manifestation is heavily dependent on perspective, as the contrast between the two narrative structures begins at the fundamental level.

The first of these is the switch from the protagonist to an ensemble cast. In the short story, this feature is greatly diminished. Because of its brevity, that format heavily favours the three-act interpretation as there is simply not enough time to fully develop the nakama of Charlie Gordon. The novelisation fares far better, as Charlie's companions are fleshed out and each have an important plot moment to themselves that underlines their complexity.

The second of these is the absence of the central conflict. In the previous analysis, the argument was made that the only driving force of the plot is Charlie's own internal conflict. However, in kishotenketsu, internal conflict is only one part of the deep introspection that characters undergo throughout the story and usually does not directly impact the events thereafter. This is where the difference in perspective comes into play, and Charlie's dilemma can, indeed, be looked at from two different points of view, depending on the format.

That said, it becomes clear that the incidence of the features of kishotenketsu is version-specific. The novel's divergence from the three-act structure has already been noted,

and this is why. While the previous part of the analysis focused more on the short story, this part will be concerned with the novel, which exhibits the features of kishotenketsu better.

5.2 Kiku, or the Introduction

As detailed earlier, the introduction stage of kishotenketsu does not differ too much from the setup of the three-act structure, and as such, the deviations are few and far between. The change in perspective does have an influence on how future plot points are perceived, however, and as such, it is important to note even the few minor variations, especially in regards to the characters' interpersonal development.

First off, there is the concept of the nakama established in the theoretical part. While the focus on the cast surrounding Charlie is not quite up to par when compared to authentic Oriental literature, especially in the short story version, the fact remains that the supporting characters are not simply cardboard cutouts with one-note personalities, serving as plot devices for the protagonist. The novel version bodes very well in this regard, as it establishes the main group of Charlie, Dr Strauss, Prof Nemur, Ms Kinnian, Burt, and Fay as the people whose actions and emotions drive the story forward.

Furthermore, as kishotenketsu's first act is generally concerned with delving into the minds of the characters, more emphasis is put on observing the emotional state and development of the cast. To start with, Charlie is, by all accounts, a simple-minded character. Due to his low intellect, he does not burden himself with complex feelings or relationships. Every change in attitude is described in simple terms; when he finds out that he has been selected for the experimental surgery, his reaction is a mix of excitement and fear. His goal is similarly simple – to be a smarter person.

That translates to his interpersonal intelligence as well. Nearly all of the connections he has with the people that surround him are incredibly simple, bordering on shallow. Ms Kinnian is the good teacher who recommends him for the experiment, Dr Strauss and Dr/Prof

Nemur are the two geniuses responsible for making him cleverer, and his coworkers are ‘friends’ because they laugh whenever he is around, and he laughs along with them. Gordon does not realise the full depth of these relationships just yet.

The initiation of Dr Strauss’ and Prof Nemur’s character arcs is notably postponed. The two scientists stand ‘above’ Charlie, so to speak, because of their role as observers in the experiment that the man undertakes. As such, their interactions with Gordon are simply formalities, concerned with the process leading up to the surgery and its aftermath; there are no glimpses of Strauss and Nemur the people, only Strauss and Nemur the researchers so far; of the two, Strauss is the more sympathetic towards Charlie from the get-go.

On the other hand, both Alice Kinnian and Burt Selden have a neatly defined foundation of their relationship with Charlie: the former feels pride for having him selected as the subject of the experiment, as she is his teacher, and the latter is distinctly patient and empathetic in his dealings with the man, which prompts Charlie to proclaim his trust in the young protégé. Both of the two have a positive initial disposition towards Gordon, who readily accepts their support, however limited his understanding is.

5.3 Shouku, or the Development

Charlie Gordon. Gordon’s journey to become a fully realised individual begins at the same moment that marks the first plot point in the three-act structure, that being the win against Algernon in the puzzle race. The significance of this event from kishotenketsu’s perspective lies in a completely different direction from the Western interpretation. In Field’s framework, the protagonist comes face to face with the source of conflict for the first time. Here, it begins the path to self-realisation that Charlie has been longing for, even though he does not perceive any difference yet.

Shouku is the part of the story where no major changes to the plot occur – and while that cannot truly be said about the short story version, the novel is absolutely excellent at

portraying the internal development of Gordon and his progressing state as well as the relationships that become more complex and intricate as time goes on. The reader is also given quite a lot of additional context for his behaviours through the flashbacks to his family life and the side adventures that occur.

The flashbacks themselves are paramount to Charlie's development. The ramifications of the events Charlie relives manifest later on in the second act, and it soon becomes apparent that the majority of these memories are traumatic, describing the loveless environment in which he grew up, the thinly veiled abuse by his mother and the resignation of his father. They also uncover the strained relationship between him and his coworkers; soon enough, Charlie realises that most of the people he considered friends were only keeping him around for their own entertainment.

As his intellect rises, Gordon begins to find that he is capable of comprehending the situations from his youth that he had compartmentalised in his head. He also begins to understand the emotions these memories make him feel: the shame of being made fun of, the disappointment in how his naïveté made him a target for bullying, and the internalised guilt that was talked into him by his mother Louise whenever he tried to approach a girl.

Doctor Strauss soon notes that "the more intelligent you become, the more problems you'll have, Charlie. Your intellectual growth is going to outstrip your emotional growth" (Keyes 1966, 28). Strauss then also explains the other side of the coin to Gordon – his sudden awareness of his carnal desires, specifically of the sexual kind. Because of his relative mental immaturity, Charlie is left to process this change without knowing how, because it is as if he was now seeing a side of himself that was previously completely concealed from him.

The unveiled details provide valuable context for what crystallised Charlie to be the man he is when the story takes place. Even though his intelligence keeps progressively

increasing, he still does struggle emotionally just like Dr Strauss predicted. The two sentiments most thoroughly explored are Charlie's idea of love and his sense of inferiority.

The Emotions of Charlie. Charlie's inability to properly handle his feelings is most evident when he comes to the conclusion that he had fallen in love with Ms Kinnian. Despite the fact that she does reciprocate the attraction and the two are very close to becoming an item, Charlie's stunted emotional growth kills any kind of development on their part. The years of past abuse coupled with his simple, almost sheltered personal life made him incapable of comprehending the intricacies of an intimate relationship.

The pair drifts apart further once Charlie surpasses Ms Kinnian intellectually. Once he reaches his own zenith, it becomes impossible for Alice to still consider him the same person that she fell for: "You're different. You've changed. And I'm not talking about your IQ. It's your attitude toward people – you're not the same kind of human being" (Keyes 1966, 77). In Kinnian's view, Gordon's intelligence also changed his personality: he became colder and more arrogant: "I mean it. There was something in you before. I don't know... a warmth, an openness, a kindness that made everyone like you and like to have you around" (77).

The relationship breaks off for the time being, and Charlie notes feeling relieved and free – and believes that his "confused feeling for her had been holding me back" (80). Even though he is saddened by the turn of events, he understands that despite his wishes, "Now it's impossible. I am just as far away from Alice with an IQ of 185 as I was when I had an IQ of 70. And this time we both know it" (80).

However, that makes Gordon ignore the underlying issue, as he does not concern himself with finding out the root of his problem. The realisation comes only during the first meeting with Kinnian since they got separated, and Charlie makes the culprit crystal clear: "I thought my intelligence created the barrier (...) But that's not it. It's Charlie, the little boy who's afraid of women because of things his mother did to him. (...) I've still had the

emotional wiring of the childlike Charlie" (Keyes 1966, 129). Despite the knowledge in hand, Gordon cannot find a way to overcome this.

Charlie the Inferior. The problem of Charlie's inferiority to the people around him had taken root all the way in the beginning of the story already in his belief that the surgery did not make him any smarter initially. This facet of Charlie's subconscious fears is further explored in several different avenues over the course of the second act, with each of them adding up to the reason why Gordon experiences a change in his personality come his intellectual apex.

The first of the causes was his strained childhood, much like with his issues regarding love. Throughout the flashbacks that occur, the reader learns that Charlie has been mistreated by his mother ever since his sister Norma showed signs of having normal intelligence. He notes how " It was as if her magnetic poles had reversed and where they had once attracted now repelled (Keyes 1966, 107). Even his father Matt notices the change in his mother Rose's attitude towards the child: ""Now that you've got her, you've decided you don't want him any more" (108).

Charlie recalls being punished for things out of his control and the amount of times his mother slighted him when he was little, and realises that after all this time, he genuinely hates her for what she had done to him. He also dislikes his sister for using their mother's bias to her advantage and attempting to set her against him as the spoiled child she was. Despite that, he voices his wish to meet them – if only to show and prove that he is no longer the mentally disabled boy who he once was.

Another cause of his low self-regard is the way he was treated by Professor Nemur in particular. Over the course of the second act, as his mental acuity improves, Charlie notices that while Dr Strauss and Burt treat him with respect and understanding of his condition, Nemur often disregards Gordon as little more than a guinea pig that he evolved into a genius: "It may sound like ingratitude, but that is one of the things that I resent here (...) Nemur's

constant references to having made me what I am, or that someday there will be others like me who will become real human beings" (92).

The implication that Harold Nemur did not even consider Charlie to be a person of his own before he had undertaken the surgery to improve his intellect weighs heavily on the man's mind, and he makes no secret of the fact that he loathes him for it: "I resent Nemur's constant references to me as a laboratory specimen. He makes me feel that before the experiment I was not really a human being" (71). It is the professor's unrestrained egotism that causes Charlie to interrupt his presentation and escape the convention with Algernon.

Alice Kinnian. Arguably the deuteragonist to Charlie, Ms Kinnian goes through strong emotional distress over the course of the man's experiment. Her pride and joy from seeing her student being chosen as the test subject changes over time as Charlie insists on spending more time with the teacher outside of the time allotted to research. The feelings of endearment towards the quickly learning Charlie soon turn to romantic interest.

The attraction is two-sided, but Gordon's underlying mental trauma drives a wedge between the two on several instances. Alice soon grows disillusioned with the behavioural shift that Charlie goes through due to his skyrocketing intelligence, and his apparent ignorance or disregard of her own feelings on the matter truly wounds her. It clearly implies that Kinnian has been torn between her fondness of Charlie and the obligations she had as one of the experiment's key figures, and later on, when her guidance is not needed, it is his own morphed personality that causes her heartache.

Therefore, it sounds reasonable to assume that the moment she meets Fay, who has been living by Charlie's side since his escape, it is shocking for her to imagine that the man she has grown attached to could possibly move on from his alleged infatuation so easily. Even with Gordon's explanation: "I know it's not important with her. It doesn't mean

enough for Charlie to panic" (Keyes 1966, 151), regarding his anxiety attacks in intimate moments, Kinnian feels embittered, because he essentially admits to her that he has been seeing another woman while reportedly in love with her.

It is only after the free-spirited Lillman finds another partner and Charlie breaks the news of his impending reversal back into a simpleton that Alice gets her chance to be with the man that she fell for, even though by this point, they both realise that their time together is greatly limited. For Kinnian, however, it is a meaningful choice, as Charlie finally lets himself be emotionally dependent on her as an equal, and not just someone that he needs to vent his frustrations and fears to.

The Researchers. The trio of scientists that Charlie regularly gets into contact with—Prof Nemur, Dr Strauss, and Burt Selden—each have an important role during shouku, and while their own development is not as thoroughly inspected as with Charlie and Alice, they each find themselves in the spotlight during the second act, which gives the reader more insight into what lies behind the characters.

Professor Nemur is easily the most intriguing case out of the three. His overt declarations that he is Charlie's creator as well as his general arrogance over the course of the plot make him a particularly unsympathetic character. However, there is a hidden side to him that is only uncovered by Burt during the convention in Chicago. Nemur, for all of his flaws, feels a desperate need of affirmation and craves respect and renown among his scientific peers, and this stems from his relationship with his wife Bertha.

It turns out that Nemur is under significant pressure to create results, as his wife was the person who stands behind most of his current status: "Did you know she's got him his professorship? Did you know she used her father's influence to get him the Welberg Foundation grant? Well, now she's pushed him into this premature presentation at the convention" (Keyes 1966, 97). Naturally, she only influenced the professor's course of action

only partly, as a lot of it is driven by his own hubris, but it shows that the man, unpleasant as he has been in his dealings with Charlie, also has his problems to contend with.

Dr Strauss serves as a mediator of sorts between Nemur and Gordon. He stands against the professor on the matter of the premature presentation, and attempts to direct Charlie's intellectual progress from the sidelines, serving as the man's psychotherapist starting here until the end of the book. The only major confrontation he has with Charlie is, paradoxically, in Nemur's defence at the convention. Strauss divulges that Gordon's surging intellect causes the professor to suffer from an inferiority complex (rather ironic considering the circumstances) and intends to back his colleague up.

His concern is justified as soon as Charlie, in an attempt to discredit Nemur's expertise, inadvertently attacks Strauss himself. In Charlie's eyes, they are "Frauds - both of them. They had pretended to be geniuses" (Keyes 1966, 96). The reader never hears the opinion of the scientist, but it is safe to assume that these vitriolic comments left a mark even on the normally stoic Dr Strauss – as the man who was formerly a mere janitor now ridiculed the life work of both him and his closest associate.

As such, it falls to Burt Selden to attempt to get through to Charlie after the two overseers of the project failed to make him realise his folly. And fortunately, the man that Charlie trusts the most out of the researchers does open his eyes at least a little bit: "As shocking as it is to discover the truth about men I had respected and looked up to, I guess Burt is right. (...) Their ideas and brilliant work made the experiment possible" (98). He manages to talk Charlie down and make him realise that just because he has surpassed Nemur and Strauss, he should not do unto them as he would have them do unto himself.

All of the aforementioned arcs help Charlie finally reach the climax of his own emotional growth – it could be said that the collective development of the nakama brought the man to his full potential. The second act is finalised when he returns from his self-

imposed exile away from the laboratory, intent on resuming work on the experiment in lieu of Algernon's strange behaviour. Gordon decides to put these minor conflicts with the others to rest as he now has a clear goal in mind.

5.4 Tenku, or the Twist

As Charlie hits the apex of his character arc in terms of his maturity, the side of him that has been juxtaposed to it over the course of the plot meets a sharp decline. Marked by Algernon's bite incident followed by its own rapid deterioration, the twist in *Flowers for Algernon* is one that turns the story upside down in a dramatic fashion: Charlie finds out that his journey towards self-realisation and self-comprehension will be cut short. The time he has left until he regresses back into his simple-minded state is constantly ticking down, and all the effort to become the man he wanted to be will amount to nothing.

Charlie decides that instead of sinking into self-regret, he will make a mark on the world while he still has time, all the while trying to lift the burdens that weighed him down for so long. He delves deep into the research of the effect that causes both Algernon and himself to lose their gained intelligence, and then decides to visit both of his parents to make peace with them before it is too late to do so.

The third act's twist may not be as strong as in established works of Oriental literature, but its description is quite apt for the turn of events in this part of *Flowers of Algernon*. The shift in perspective is very symbolic – instead of a feeble-minded man who strives to be smarter, the reader now follows a genius who knows of his impending descent of intellect. The hope of the first is replaced with the silent acknowledgement and acceptance of the second. Indeed, without ever truly seeing it, Charlie has grown wiser than he perhaps hoped for. Tenku recontextualises what becoming smart truly meant in this story.

This realisation is most apparent during the scene at the party thrown by Professor Nemur's wife Bertha. Charlie gets into an argument with Nemur, and finally voices his

disdain for the man's methods in handling him over the course of the experiment. Nemur, on the other hand, calls out Charlie's lack of gratitude and his callous treatment of everyone after he reached his intellectual acme: "...you've developed from a likeable, retarded young man into an arrogant, self-centred, antisocial bastard" (Keyes 1966, 158).

After this confrontation with the professor, however, Charlie confronts his greatest enemy: himself. He knows that his time as Charlie Gordon the genius is limited, and he speaks to his other self in a last act of defiance: ""I'm not your friend. I'm your enemy. I'm not going to give up my intelligence without a struggle. I can't go back down into that cave. There's no place for me to go now, Charlie. So you've got to stay away" (161).

As the reader then heads into the final act, another feature of kishotenketsu becomes apparent with the twist taking place: in the end, the only ones going through any significant amount of change are Charlie and his nakama after all. While the character development is much less prominent in Dr Strauss or Burt, Charlie's own personal journey influences Alice Kinnian and Prof Nemur greatly. However, the impact the experiment had on their lives ultimately meant very little to the world at large.

5.5 Kekku, or the Conclusion

The curtain is soon to close on the plot of the story, and Charlie regresses further back into his old self. However, before that, the reconciliation of the final act comes in full swing. Charlie remembers and comes to terms with all that he has learned and subsequently repressed as a child and young adult, utilises his waning intelligence to complete the work he set out to do, and combines both into a heartwrenching finale that takes the reader full circle. His case is unique – the central goal of his journey, which would be the end prize in a three-act narrative, has been attained as early as the middle part of this story – and yet, his dreams remain intrinsically unfulfilled as he drifts back into simplicity by the end.

The scene that describes this in the novel is very powerful. “I was seeing myself as I really had become: Nemur had said it. I was an arrogant, self-centred bastard. Unlike Charlie, I was incapable of making friends or thinking about other people and their problems. I was interested in myself, and myself only. For one long moment in that mirror I had seen myself through Charlie's eyes, looked down at myself and saw what I had really become. And I was ashamed” (Keyes 1966, 162).

Charlie, for all his brilliance during the majority of the story, has not become a good person – acting in self-interest most of the time, not truly realising how his actions influence the people around him. The reader sees these events, like when Strauss calls Charlie out on worsening Nemur’s inferiority complex, or when he inadvertently drives Ms Kinnian away from himself, which have been described above. It is here that he understands the mistakes he had been making all along, and that there is too little time to make amends.

The end is not a happy one by any means. In the novel, Charlie relives his childhood trauma when he visits his elderly mother with dementia and his sister who takes care of her. After that, he shuts himself away from the world because he does not want the people he considers the closest to him to see him sink back into oblivion. Once that happens, all that remains for Charlie is his limited, mentally disabled conscience and the memories of a life he once had – and he finalises his isolation by leaving everything behind for good.

The one consolation he has and which he expresses in his farewell letter is that thanks to the experiment, he did feel like a complete individual:

> “Im glad I got a second chanse in life like you said to be smart because I lerned alot of things that I never even new were in this werld and Im grateful I saw it all even for a littel bit. And Im glad I found out all about my family and me. It was like I never had a family til I remembird about them and saw them and now I know I had a family and **I was a person just like evryone**” (Keyes 1966, 198).

Despite Charlie's belief that leaving for good is the best option for everyone involved, it can be argued that the others did not feel the same way, particularly Dr Strauss and Alice. Even when Charlie isolates himself the two of them regularly attempt to get him to talk to them, perhaps hoping to save him from self-pity and regret. However, they are both met with cold rejection, and their efforts are in vain. The only reconciliation Strauss and Kinnian are offered is the return to their routine life, only this time, it will be without Charlie.

The story ends exactly where it started, which is another prominent feature of kishotenketsu: Dr Strauss and Prof Nemur continue their research, continuing from Gordon's findings; Ms Kinnian remains a teacher for adults at the Beekman institute; Burt becomes a full-fledged researcher at the laboratory. Their place in the world has not changed.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was to discern if *Flowers for Algernon*, given its nonstandard format of composition in diary entries and character-driven narrative, qualifies as a work that follows the three-act paradigm invented by Syd Field, which is considered a standard in analysing contemporary fiction, or if it deviates from this framework and thus can be considered an outlier in modern English language literature. To that effect, the Japanese structural paradigm kishotenketsu was utilised as a means of comparison to determine which of the two does the story follow more closely.

Both the short story format and the novelisation were taken into account, and that proved to be a significant factor of the analysis. The three-act structure features were soundly present in the short story version of *Flowers of Algernon* despite minor deviations, making it a rather convincing case for the paradigm to be applicable. However, the novelisation took much greater liberties with the pacing and structuring of the story to the point it tended to resemble the four-act framework of kishotenketsu to a remarkable extent.

The main crux of the matter was the ambiguity of the presence of a central conflict. In the case of *Flowers for Algernon*, it can be argued both for and against its existence. The difference was made in what the plot was focused on for the majority of the narrative: while the short story mostly explored the struggle between Charlie Gordon's emotions versus his intellect, the novel explored a wide variety of issues surrounding both the main character and the supporting cast, which was also given a greater amount of story time.

Given the cyclical nature of the plot and the emphasis on introspection and exploration of the human psyche, the parallel to kishotenketsu's philosophical inspirations becomes more apparent. If conflict was the crux of this story, would it be so concerned with the state of mind of the main character, or with the sentiments of the people around him? The spiritual journey is what matters here, not the destination.

Therefore, it appears that the story finds itself somewhere down the middle: the short story's structural integrity largely follows the framework in question, while the essence of the plot finds itself without need of a driving conflict. The novel, on the other hand, adds numerous minor conflicts that serve to further the development, but they never take centre stage, and the sequence of events is much less defined due to the emphasis on emotional deliberation.

Because of this rather paradoxical dichotomy between the novelisation and the original short story, the proposition that Daniel Keyes' plot is ambiguous from the standpoint of narrative structure seems quite incontestable – as they share the same storyline, the two versions must diverge mainly in their composition and construction, and this observation has been confirmed. In conclusion, the status of the three-act structure as the definitive narrative paradigm of Western literary fiction can thus be called into question.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1: Diagram of the three-act structure

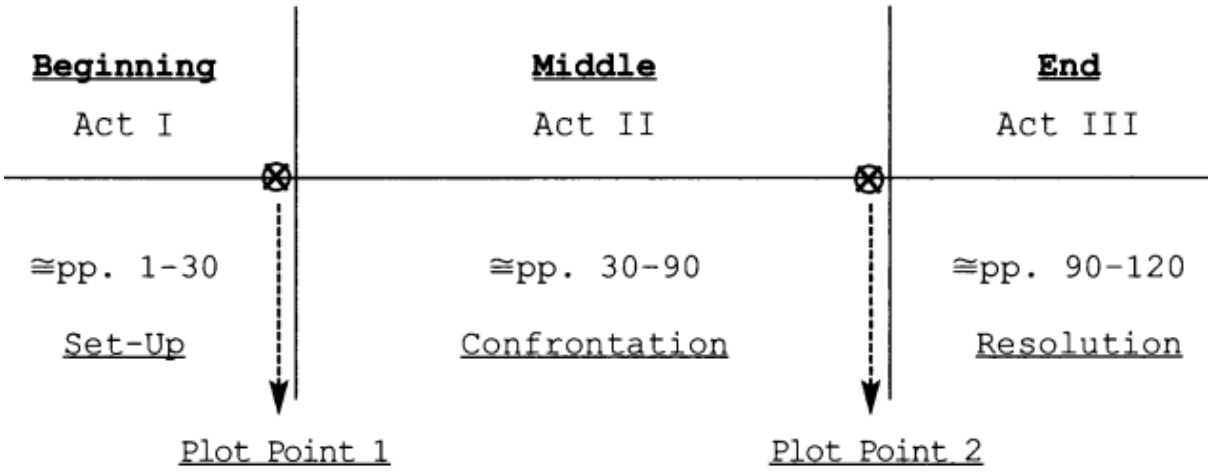

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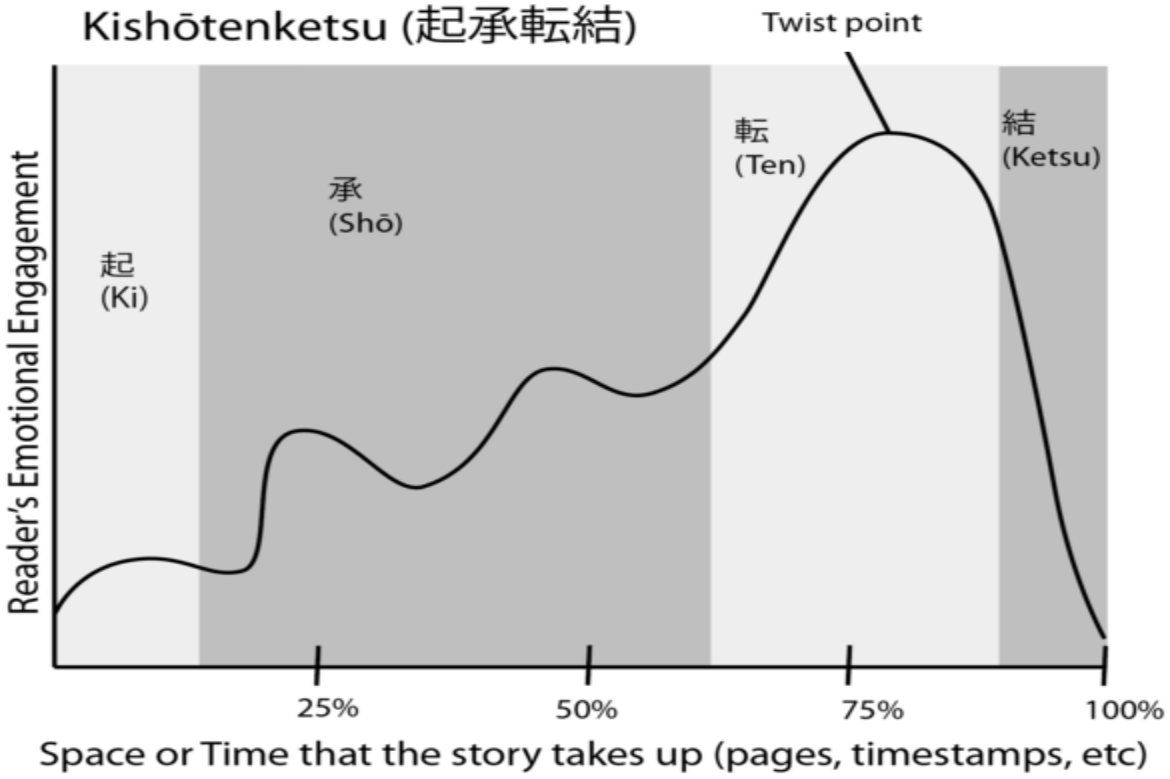
Figure 2: Diagram of kishotenketsu



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