



Co-Creation Of Meaning Through Diegetic Narration In Margo Battle's "Forgotten By The Sea"

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Abstract: Contemporary narratives focus on how stories capture the complexities of modern life and human experience. It experiments with perspective, time and memory to reflect changing social realities and personal experiences. These stories invite readers to actively engage, interpret and connect with the characters' inner worlds. Contemporary narratives become spaces for exploring emotional and cultural dimensions in innovative ways. Margo Battle's "Forgotten by the Sea" reflects on contemporary narratives very particularly the diegetic narration that immerses readers in the characters' emotional world. The narrator's perspective allows readers to interpret experiences and reflect on their own responses. This interaction co-creates meaning between the story and reader, deepening emotional and social understanding. The paper examines how "Forgotten by the Sea" employs diegetic narration to immerse readers in the characters' emotional experiences. It explores how this narrative mode encourages readers to interpret events. Over all, it demonstrates how Battle's narrative fosters the co-creation of meaning between story and reader.

Index Terms - Diegetic Narration, Memory, Emotional engagement, Character experience

Literature functions as a reflection of memory that preserves, reshapes and inquires into human experience through narrative form. Literary texts transform personal and collective memories into symbolic representations, allowing the readers to engage with the past as an interpretative experience rather than a fixed record. Literature can therefore be considered as an exploration of identity, social injustice, colonial history and the balance between tradition and life. Literature also becomes a space where memory is remembered, reinterpreted and shared across generations through its narrative style. It connects individual recollections with broader cultural and historical memories by giving voice to experiences that might otherwise remain forgotten. Literature not only preserves memory but also invites readers to reflect on how the past continues to shape present realities and future possibilities.

Memory, and its storage and recovery are impacted by emotional and environmental factors. Attention plays a crucial role in retention because people are less likely to remember things they do not focus on. Emotions have a strong impact on memory, because strong emotions can make one easily remember things, while stress and anxiety can make remembering harder. Sleep and physical health also affect how well memories are stored, especially for long – term recall. A prolific British Psychologist Baddeley states, "Working memory is a temporary storage system that underpins our capacity for coherent thought." (1). His research further demonstrates that cognitive processes such as attention and emotional regulation directly shape the efficiency and accuracy of memory storage and retrieval.

Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist, observes that, "... it is in society that people normally acquire their memories, it is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (38). He argues that memory is not created in isolation but is influenced by the social groups and communities to which the individuals belong. According to Halbwachs, personal memories are shaped and organised through collective frameworks provided by society. Therefore, remembering is not simply a private mental activity but a socially structured process. Memory functions within cultural and historical contexts that guide how people recall the past. In this way, individual recollections are continually reconstructed through shared social narratives and present experiences.

Assmann, a renowned German Professor suggests, "... interest in memory was kindled in literary studies with the rediscovery of ancient mnemotechnics" (18). Her work on cultural memory emphasises how texts act as archives that sustain historical consciousness across generations and through narrative strategies such literature reconstructs memory as a dynamic and evolving process. Thus, literary representation becomes a space where individual recollection and collective history converge, shaping cultural identity over time.

Diegetic narration, in particular, plays a vital role in creating illustrative memory by placing it within the narrator's mind. Through this kind of narration, memories are presented in a personal way, which include gaps, silences and strong emotions. Similarly, diegetic narration enables memory to be experienced from within the story world, "...the completed past of the "action" told is completed only in relation to the moment of utterance" (Genette 212). This internal perspective foregrounds the subjective and reconstructive nature of memory. Consequently, the act of narration itself becomes an interpretative process through which the past is continually reshaped in light of the present.

Diegetic narration is further exemplified in the Latin American literature that has developed through the influences of indigenous, European and African communities who depict the region's history and society. The literature of the people has its roots in the colonial era that has later developed into modernist and avant-garde movement grabbing the attention of the world during Latin American Boom. Prominent writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortazar and Isabell Allende have shaped the literature by blending magical realism, political commentary and historical reflection together in their texts.

The tradition of classic Latin American writers is reinvented in the works of Margo Battle who is a Latin American author known for the versatile genres of thriller, mystery and romance. She has written short stories that depict the struggles of adult life and the crisis that follows it. Her writing is shaped by a deep engagement with emotionally intense literature and a strong creative connection to music. Her pen name "Margo & Battle" reflects a blend of personal influences, combining her family name with her husband's. She is set to release her upcoming erotic drama thriller, *Dark Ignition*.

The short stories by Margo Battle illustrate her interest in psychological tension and emotional experience. The short story "Forgotten by the Sea", portrays a woman's struggle with memory loss and her search for identity. In "The Last Message", she explores the emotional weight of communication, absence and unresolved relationships. "The Silent Room", focusses on isolation and the unspoken conflicts that shape human connections. Across these works, Battle frequently addresses themes such as memory, identity, loss and emotional uncertainty. Her stories often emphasise atmosphere, fragmented recollections and subtle narrative gaps, encouraging readers to interpret the characters' inner struggles and the deeper meanings within the text.

"Forgotten by the Sea," a short story by Margo Battle published in 2020, begins with the protagonist Helena emerging from the sea in a state of confusion and physical distress, unable to remember how she arrived there. Stranded on a remote island, she interacts with unfamiliar locals while struggling to recover fragments of her lost identity. The narrative unfolds with brief flashes of memory, including images of a wedding ring and distant loved ones that gradually surface and create emotional tension. The story emphasises mood, sensory details and subtle interactions with the characters rather than direct explanation. The mysterious island setting creates an eerie yet intimate atmosphere where memory and reality often blur. The sea functions as a symbol of loss, concealment and Helena's unconscious mind. Helena's journey becomes an internal quest to understand her past and present. The fragmented narration of the story encourages readers to actively interpret Helena's psychological and emotional experience.

The article titled “Dialogue and Dialogism in Diegetic Drama” by Mozhdah Sameti examines how diegetic drama situated between narrative and dialogue by using Bakhtin’s theory. Gerald Prince’s article “Diegetic Narrators and Narrations in Proust Recherche” explores how various characters in Proust’s *Recherche* function as diegetic narrators, contrasting with the homodiegetic narrator to illustrate his perspective on narrative. Ole Christoffer Haga’s article “Shifting Diegetic Boundaries” explores how interactive Cinematic Virtual Reality (CVR) blurs the boundaries between diegetic and extra diegetic elements, using works such as *Agence* and *Bonfire* as examples. The article “Metaleptic and Pseudo–diegetic Narration in Karaoke/Cold Lazarus” (1996) by Silvia Van Aken and Renaat Vandekerckhof examines how Dennis Potter uses metalepsis in the television series *Karaoke/Cold Lazarus* to blur and cross diegetic boundaries. The authors analyse how this narrative technique shapes the structure of the story and influences audience engagement, while also comparing it with concepts such as *mise en abyme* and pseudo-diegetic narration.

The article “Undercover Reporting on Refugees in the European Union: Diegetic Narration” by Alexandra Milostivaya explores the use of diegetic storytelling in a German newspaper reportage. It analyses the undercover journalism of Shams Ul-Haq to show how placing the narrator within the environment of the characters strengthens the communicative, pragmatic and persuasive impact of the narrative. The article “Diegetic/Non–Diegetic: A Theoretical Model” by David Neumeyer reconsiders the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound in film music. It proposes a functional model of diegesis that connects spatial placement within the narrative world, offering a clearer way to interpret how music contributes to storytelling in films.

The existing studies has widely focussed on narratology, structural or technical aspects of diegesis rather than its role in shaping remembered experiences and internal consciousness. The way unspoken memories appear in diegetic narration has not been studied enough. There is also little research on how silence, ambiguity or omission create gaps that encourage readers to actively create meaning. The role of readers in filling gaps, silence, especially in constructing memory and character is often ignored. This gap shows how diegetic narration connects memory, character and interpretation within the story world.

The main objective of this research article is to examine how diegetic narration represents memory and contributes to character development within the story world. It also aims to explore how narrative gaps, silences and unspoken elements encourage readers to actively interpret the text. The study further focuses on how diegetic narration explains the participatory role of readers in constructing meaning. It seeks to analyse the interaction between the narrator’s voice and the reader’s interpretation. Overall, the research highlights how diegetic narration and reader engagement work together to shape meaning and represent memory within the narrative.

This research paper employs a qualitative approach to analyse patterns in diegetic narration and to explore how readers interpret and respond to narrative gaps, thereby generating in-depth insights into reader engagement. Rather than relying on numerical data, the research emphasises textual interpretation, thematic analysis and close reading of narrative strategies. Additionally, a library-based methodology is employed to review existing research on diegesis and reader-response theory. Chris Hart in his article, “...in academic research the aim is not to replicate what has already been done, but to add in some way, no matter how small, something that helps further our understand of the world in which we live” (24). This method strengthens the study by placing it within established theoretical discussions while also allowing room for critical reinterpretation and deeper analysis.

The research paper is organised into several sections to present the study in a clear and systematic way. It begins with an introduction that explains the background of the theory, its contributors and main proponents, along with an introduction to the author and a brief summary of the short story. This is followed by a review of related literature that places the study within existing scholarly discussions. The next section describes the theoretical framework and the methodology used for the analysis. Then, the paper provides a detailed textual analysis of the selected story, focusing on diegetic narration, memory, and reader engagement. Finally, the study concludes with a summary of the findings and discusses the broader significance of the research.

The readers play a vital role in diegetic narration by actively participating in the creation of meaning by filling the gaps left by the writer, thereby engaging with the emotions and experiences from the characters’

perspective. When readers delve into the characters, they can easily understand their inner thoughts, turmoils they face and also grasp what the author tries to convey without explicitly explaining the plot or directly stating the character's emotions: "The text is merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the pages as verbal symbols" (Rosenblatt 23). This perspective underscores the dynamic interaction between the text and the reader. Thus, interpretation becomes a collaborative process in which meaning is continually shaped through personal response and contextual understanding.

The protagonist of the short story "Forgotten by the Sea," Helena, is first introduced on the seashore after being rescued by a sheriff. As the narrative progresses, her psychological state becomes increasingly evident through subtle moments of silence and introspection. She does not openly articulate her grief, but the readers are able to perceive her pain of loss and alienation on the island through her movement. Her silence becomes expressive, revealing her abandonment, fragmented memories of her missing husband and her internal struggle to escape. Her unstable and confused mental state metaphorically mirrors the restless movement of the sea. The narrator observes that, "... pain reminds her that she had lost something, but she had forgotten what it was" (8). This instance underscores the fragility of memory and the incompleteness of her recollection. The narrative therefore portrays memory both as a foundation of identity and as a space marked by loss and emotional absence.

Another incident in the short story that illustrates the reader's interpretative participation which appears through Helena's fragmented recollections. The narrator presents a sudden flash of memory without explaining the emotional significance, "Suddenly, her mind was struck with a couple of memories; a marriage ring with a beautiful pearl on her finger, a wooden porch with a hanging swing moving with the air, and laughter fading away" (12). This signifies that the readers are invited to interpret these scattered fragments and reconstruct Helena's past. The image of the wedding ring and the fading laughter suggests the loss of domestic life and emotional attachment. Through these narrative gaps, the story invites readers to actively construct meaning and emotional depth by joining together fragmented and incomplete memories.

The story illustrates yet another moment that requires reader participation appears when Helena questions her own situation after waking up on the island: "What am I doing here? How did I end up here?" (2). The narration encourages the readers to utilise their imagination and form their own understanding of her situation. This gap in information enables the readers to actively engage with the text and construct possible explanations. Her confusion is also felt by the reader and creates a shared space where the reader tries to understand what is happening in the narration. This prompts the readers to actively think and form their own interpretations, instead of just accepting the given information in the narration.

Multiple meanings emerge when readers engage with a text, re-read and interpret it through their own perspectives and so meaning is not fixed, nor is it confined to what the author may have originally intended. This idea is central to the concept of the "Death of the Author," proposed by Roland Barthes. He declares, "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author." (148). This approach shows that the reader's role becomes more significant than the author's intention and interpretation is shaped by individual experiences, cultural backgrounds and emotional responses. Consequently, the text remains open and dynamic by allowing the readers to produce different meanings across time and contexts.

Helena's fragmented memory of being on a boat introduces one of the central symbols of the narrative. When she states, "I don't remember... I don't remember anything, just... that I was on a boat and then... just confusion... something happened, and I ended up in the sea" (3), the boat is associated with her trauma, uncertainty and rupture. Later, when she notices a boat near the beach, the readers are invited to interpret it in both optimistic and pessimistic ways. The boat symbolises hope and freedom the possibility of escape from the island. On the other hand, it represents alienation and entrapment, reflecting her confinement within a liminal space between life and death. The uncertainty embedded in her memory intensifies the ambiguity of the symbol. Thus, the boat becomes a shifting image that mirrors Helena's fragmented consciousness and unsettled sense of self.

The symbolic ambiguity of the island further demonstrates how the narrative invites multiple interpretations from readers. When Helena observes the island from a distance, the narrator describes the setting as, "From a high point, the island looked like it had the shape of the letter 'C' and the population was scattered all around it" (4). This unusual description encourages readers to interpret the island symbolically. The

depiction of the letter “C” reflects the characters’ confinement within the island’s boundaries. It may also represent an incomplete circle, symbolising the interrupted and unfinished lives of the inhabitants who died at the sea. The interpretation remains open to readers and the ambiguity supports Barthes’ idea that meaning emerges through the act of reading rather than through the author’s intention.

Another instance from the story that allows multiple interpretations appears in Helena’s physical condition after the incident, “...she was feeling dizzy and her body was hurting everywhere.” (3). This incident describes the physical effects of the shipwreck and Helena’s struggle to stay alive. On the other hand, it can also symbolise her inner confusion, showing a disturbed sense of identity and an unstable state of mind. Therefore, the readers are free to derive different meanings based on their perspective, reinforcing Barthes’ idea that meaning is produced through reading.

Subjective interpretation emphasises that readers actively create meaning from a text, connecting it to their personal experiences rather than passively reading, thus shaping the overall understanding of the context. Theorists such as David Bleich and Norman Holland focus on these aspects of reader response theory. A prominent American literary critic Stanley Fish introduced the idea of interpretive communities, which highlights how individual experiences derive meaning from a text: “Meaning is not the text but in the interpretive strategies” (14) of the readers.

When Helena finds an old seashell on the shore, the narrative deliberately withholds any direct statement of her feelings, allowing the object to remain open to interpretation. A reader who has experienced such a loss may perceive the seashell as a fragile reminder of memories that are slowly eroding, while another who values solitude might see it as a quiet symbol of resilience. This openness reflects the subjective process of meaning-making, aligning with Stanley Fish’s notion of interpretive communities, where readers construct significance based on shared experiences. Similarly, when the narrator observes, “She felt that cold, that wanted to get inside the chimney completely”. (2), the moment can be read either as a primal survival instinct or as a psychological withdrawal. The story encourages readers with similar emotional frameworks to arrive at comparable interpretations, while simultaneously allowing space for divergent readings and through such narrative indeterminacy, the text foregrounds the deeply personal nature of understanding trauma, memory and isolation.

The short story also presents moments of subjective interpretation that encourage readers to construct meaning through their own interpretations. When Helena observes the island’s environment, the description subtly blurs the boundary between atmosphere and perception: “The cold wind seemed to whisper in their ears... but it was only the dense fog that engulfed the whole island” (8). This imagery depicts the island’s eerie and melancholic atmosphere. It further instructs the reader about the supernatural presence hidden within the fog. The narrative of the story remains open-ended. Through such ambiguity, the story allows meaning to emerge through the reader’s subjective interpretation.

The short story, “Forgotten by the Sea” brings out yet another incident that reflects subjective interpretation. When Helena observes Anne-Marie’s behaviour: “Anne-Marie’s voice was calm, but there was something unusual in her expression.” (13) the description of the character, Anne-Marie is portrayed as caring and protective. She offers Helena comfort in every difficult situation. Readers interpret her behaviour as suspicious or secretive and suggest that she is hiding something regarding the island. As a result, readers understand her character in different ways depending on their own perspectives and experiences.

Diegetic narration rejects the idea of textual autonomy, which opposes new criticism and clearly states that a text does not have meaning independently of its reader. Meaning is not fixed within the words but it is created through the reader’s engagement with the text. Different readers bring their own experiences, emotions and cultural context, which mould how they interpret the text. According to Bleich observes, “...there is no literary text beyond the meanings created by readers’ interpretation” (87), whereas the author or the text is diminished and the reader’s interpretation becomes central to understanding meaning.

Helena experiences a profound physical and emotional ache which is reflected in the line, “... she had the strange need to cry, to get under the bedsheets and stay there until that confusing pain in her chest disappeared” (8). This moment intensifies the text’s portrayal of loss, yet the narrative does not clearly define what that loss entails. Such narrative gaps invite readers to infer the source and meaning of her pain

through their own emotional frameworks. The story thereby demonstrates that meaning is not fixed within the text but emerges through the reader's active engagement. The silence surrounding her suffering expands the interpretative space of the narrative, allowing multiple emotional readings. However, the story suggests that emotional truth is not imposed by explicit authorial explanation but constructed through subjective response.

The short story also shows how meaning depends on the reader's interpretation: The narrator describes Helena's growing uneasiness on the island is another instance that, "Helena began to have a strange feeling that someone was watching her every step... as if there were several pairs of eyes hidden inside the permanent and dense fog" (17). The story explains that the islanders are secretly observing Helena's actions. The lines also reflect Helena's fear and confusion as she struggles with memory loss. The narrator does not clearly explain this feeling. As a result, readers must interpret the situation on their own. Some readers may understand it as a real threat, while others may see it as a form of psychological anxiety. Therefore, the meaning of the scene depends on how each reader interprets the text.

The concept of the implied reader in diegetic narration refers to a hypothetical figure constructed through the textual cues of the narrative. This figure is guided by the expectations, assumptions and perspectives embedded within the text. Through narrative gaps, shifting viewpoints and structural patterns, the text subtly directs how responses and interpretations may develop. As Wolfgang Iser explains, "... the implied reader is a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him." (34). The implied reader is therefore not an actual individual but a role inscribed within the text, one that the real readers step into during the process of reading. Meaning emerges through this interaction between text and reader, as individuals either align themselves with the position offered or resist it, shaping interpretation through their own experiences and perspectives.

The sea in the story, is described through quiet and melancholic imagery. This guides the implied reader to sympathise with the protagonist. The sea is viewed as a symbol of emotional distance rather than adventure. Gaps in the protagonist's emotions invite reflection and empathy such as in the line: "I need air... I need to breathe, or I'll die..." (1). Readers are encouraged to read between the lines instead of expecting direct explanations. Meaning emerges based on how readers align with or resist the implied reader's position.

The narrative also guides the implied reader to reinterpret the story through an important revelation. At the end of the story, Logan reveals the truth about the island when he says, "We all died..." (24). This simple statement completely changes the reader's understanding of the events in the story. Until this moment, the strange happenings on the island seem mysterious and confusing. After this revelation of the truth of the island, readers realise that the island exists between life and death. The descriptions in the story, such as the thick fog, Helena's memory loss and the island's isolation, gradually become meaningful. These details can be understood as clues that reveal the true nature of the place. As a result, the reader is prompted to reconsider the earlier parts of the narrative and the implied reader reconstructs the meaning of the entire narrative.

The short story, "Forgotten by the sea" also guides the implied reader through subtle behavioural patterns of the islanders: "People avoided talking about the past and never answered directly." (18). This detail acts as a clue for the reader. It suggests that something is hidden about their existence, encouraging the reader to question their reality. The implied reader is guided to notice this pattern and connect it with other elements such as memory loss and isolation. The text prepares the reader for the final revelation. Nevertheless, the implied reader is gradually led to reconstruct the truth of the narrative.

The study has unravelled how diegetic narration represents memory and character within the story world, embedding past experiences in the narrative and it has also highlighted the role of narrative gaps in inviting readers to actively interpret and complete the story. The present research demonstrates the dynamic interaction between narrator and reader in co-constructing meaning through the employment of reader response theory. Therefore, it can be viewed as an emphasis of the combined role of memory, narration and reader engagement in shaping both characters and the story world.

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