

## Examining the Anti-Hero's Action in the Actantial–Tensive System of Greimas in Tayeb Salih's Novel *The Wedding of Zein*

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### Introduction

Tayeb Salih's novel *The Wedding of Zein* is a landmark work of contemporary Arabic literature that presents a symbolic and multilayered structure of human relations by portraying the social and cultural life of Sudanese villages. The character of Zein, due to his unconventional behavior, unique social position, and manner of interacting with others, deviates from the classical heroic model and emerges as a figure close to an anti-hero. While previous studies have examined Salih's works from various perspectives, a comprehensive analysis of Zein's character focusing on the interaction between the actantial system (based on action and narrative structures) and the tensive system (based on tension, emotions, and subjective states) within the framework of Greimasian semiotics remains largely overlooked. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how Zein's actions function within both systems. The research aims to answer three questions: (1) What position does Zein occupy in Greimas's actantial model, and how is he represented as an anti-hero in the narrative? (2) How can the relationship between the actantial system and the tensive system in the formation and signification of Zein's character be explained? (3) What semiotic function does the "sudden cry" (*na'rah*), as a narrative rupture and tensive phenomenon, serve in Zein's transition from one semantic system to another?

### Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical method based on the Paris School's semiotic approach, utilizing Greimas's actantial and tensive models as its theoretical framework. Data were collected through library-based sources. The analysis procedure involved: (1) identifying the narrative propositions and actions of Zein as the unit of analysis; (2) examining Zein's position within the actantial model (subject/object, sender/receiver, helper/opponent); (3) analyzing the tensive dimensions of his character, including emotional rhythms, sudden ruptures, and the concept of "presence"; and (4) investigating the dynamic interaction between the actantial and tensive systems in the production of meaning.

### Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Zein's actions in many instances do not follow the conventional heroic pattern, and his behaviors appear as a kind of rupture in the narrative order. The findings demonstrate that Zein occupies a unique position in the actantial model. Marriage functions as the central value-object (*objet de valeur*) for which he strives, yet his pursuit is characterized by suspension and paradox. Unlike classical heroes who actively overcome obstacles, Zein exhibits a form of "toleration" (*mumārasah*) toward opposition. The villagers initially mock his attempts at marriage, considering it impossible, yet he persists without resentment.

Zein's anti-heroic nature is evident in his paradoxical characteristics. He is described as physically unattractive (contradicting his name, which means "good" or "beautiful"), yet possesses superhuman strength. He engages in gluttony and morally questionable acts, yet maintains a deep connection with nature and the mystic Hanin, the village's only righteous figure. He is ridiculed by society yet serves as a catalyst for opening the fortunes of young women seeking marriage. This set of binary oppositions (hero/anti-hero, strength/weakness, sacred/profane) constitutes the foundational structure of meaning in the narrative.

At the actantial level, Zein's actions are motivated by a "desiderative modality" (*vouloir faire*) prior to his engagement with Naima. He stands indifferent to the "prescriptive modality" (*devoir faire*) of traditional society, which paradoxically makes an exception for him. The character Hanin functions as a crucial helper (*adjuvant*), providing the motivational force for change. The imam, by contrast, emerges as an opponent (*opposant*), jealous of Zein's relationship with Naima. The names of characters are symbolically linked to their actions: Hanin (compassion), Sayf al-Din (sword of religion, who repents), and Halima (forbearing, who sells milk, *halib* in Arabic).

At the tensive level, Zein is not defined by his actions but by his states of being. His "presence" (*présence*) in the world, rather than his acquisition of value-objects, shapes the narrative. Zein experiences a "post-tensive" tension (*tension post-tensive*), oriented entirely toward the future. When a beloved girl marries another, he immediately moves on to a new love without nostalgia or regret. His sudden cries (*na'rah*) function as semantic ruptures, marking the transition from one state to another.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Zein's character in *The Wedding of Zein* occupies a position distinct from the classical hero, emerging clearly as an anti-hero. Despite his marginal social status and unconventional behavior, he plays an active role in the network of narrative relations, and his actions transform the narrative trajectory. The relationship between the actantial system and the tensive system in the novel is dynamic and interactive. Zein's actions at the actantial level generate new relations among narrative actants, while at the tensive level, they alter the narrative rhythm by creating emotional and semantic tensions. This interaction shows that Zein's movement between different narrative states contributes significantly to the production of meaning. The sudden cries (*na'rah*) function as semantic ruptures that create transformations in the affective and semantic state of the narrative, revealing the connection between the two systems and facilitating the transition from one semantic state to another. Ultimately, Zein plays a crucial role not only at the level of narrative action but also at the level of emotional and semantic tensions. Thus, analyzing his character through Greimas's semiotic approach demonstrates that the anti-hero can function as an effective agent in shaping the semantic structure of narrative and expanding its interpretive capacities.

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