

The Search for Narrator in Oscar Wilde's The Nightingale and The Rose

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Abstract

The study is based on a search for narrator in Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and The Rose". In the notion of modern narratology, narrator is one of the most important divisions in the structure of narrative. It refers to the "the entire set of ways in which a story is actually told" (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005, p. 80). It can be explained more that the narration is actually the voice or the source that tells the story. Further, the narrator is the actual figure that tells the story in a narrative. It can be said that the narrator puts the events or the happening into words and tells the reader how an event takes place, what is the setting or the background view, who is the character and how that character looks or behaves. The study explores the various types and properties of narrators and justifies that the narrator is an important in the story or novel. Further the study is based on the qualitative method of research that is considered very suitable for the analysis of various literary texts and involves the interpretative method that is considered to be the proper method for the literary texts. In this research study, the researchers have searched for the narrator in the Oscar Wilde's short story "The Nightingale and the Rose." For this analysis, they have adopted the method from Herman & Vervaeck's (2005) book Handbook of narrative analysis. This method involves the search for narrator on two grounds i.e. temporal relations which the time of narration and the time when actually the event takes place and the visibility of narrator in which character acts either 'covertly' or 'overtly'.

Keywords: Narrator, Narratology, Oscar Wilde, Structuralism, Interpretative method, Extradiegetic, Intradiegetic, Temporal

1. Introduction

In the notion of narratology, the narrator is one of the most important divisions in the structure of narrative. It refers to the "the entire set of ways in which a story is actually told" (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005, p. 80). It can be explained further that the narration is actually the voice or the source that tells the story. It can be said that the narrator puts the events or the happening into words and tells the reader how an event took place, what was the setting or the background view, who was the character and how that character looked or behaved.

The phenomenon of the narrator is not that much simple. The modern narratology identifies various types and properties of narrator that have been used in the stories and novels. The narrator is an important figure in the story or novel in the sense that it adds novelty to the story and makes even the simple things or events quite interesting. In this regard, the first important thing in the narrator type is whether a narrator is 'extradiegetic' or 'intradiegetic'. The extradiegetic narrator, according to Genette is the one that is 'above' or superior to the story he narrates" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 97). This type of narrator is commonly used in the novels. Such a narrator can be mostly found in the early period of novels or short stories and the Victorian novelists also commonly used this type of narrator. The prime examples of 'extradiegetic' narrators are Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of D'Urbervilles*. The other type of narrator is the 'intradiegetic' narrator. This narrator is the one that is present inside the story or is the part of the fictional world. Mostly the 'intradiegetic' narrator is the character; however, it is not in all the cases. The modernist novels are full of such examples. The prime example of this 'intradiegetic' narrator is Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. In these novels the narrators are the characters, and they exist inside the fictional world.

The next important part in the analysis of narrator in a novel or short story is the extent of participation of the narrator in the story. In this regard both the 'extradiegetic' and 'intradiegetic' narrators can be "either absent from or present in the story they narrate" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 98). If the narrator does not take part in the story is 'heterodiegetic' and if it takes part in the story it is called 'homodiegetic' narrator.

For examples the narrators in the *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Tom Jones* do not participate in the story or do not appear in the fictional world in any form, therefore they are 'extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators. In a similar way, the extradiegetic narrator can also be homodiegetic or heterodiegetic which means that it can either participate in the story or not but it belongs to the fictional world. This can be understood with the example of *Scheherazade* that is a fictional character in a story narrated by an extradiegetic narrator. However, in the stories she herself narrates and does not appear as a character" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 98). This way, the narrator in *Scheherazade* is 'intradiegetic and heterodiegetic'. However, in the case *A Farewell to Arms* the narrator is Henry who is part of fictional world and present in

the story, therefore he is intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrator. Furthermore, the 'homodiegetic' narrator may be either 'autodiegetic' or 'allodiegetic'. The 'autodiegetic' narrator is the one who plays the central role in the story, however, the 'allodiegetic' narrator is the one who only witnesses the events and does not play the central role in the story.

The next important phase of narrator analysis is the properties of the narration. In this regard the temporal properties of the narrator are rather very important. The temporal properties refer to the "temporal relation between the moment of narration and the moment at which the narrated events take place" (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005, p. 86). In this case, the first type of narration is the subsequent narration. This narration refers to the telling of events after they take place. This is the most traditional form of narration and is found in most classical and modern as well as postmodern novels. Hardy's *Tess* or Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* are the most popular examples of the 'subsequent narrations. The second type is the 'prior narration' that involves predictions. Although this mode of narration is rather very rare, there are some popular novels and stories where the 'prior' narration is used. In this regard the example of Nobel-Prize winning author Jose Saramago's novel *Double* is very important. This novel is mainly written in subsequent narrations. However, there are various passages in this novel that involve prediction or 'prior narrations. The third type is the 'simultaneous narration' that involves the "the perfect coincidence of action and narration" (Herman& Vervaeck, 2005, p. 98). The type of temporal type is the interpolated. This type of narration uses the letters as the medium to tell the story. This type of narration can be found in *Sophie's World* and the early novels of Henry Fielding. This type has also been used in Elif Shafak's charming novel *Forty Rules of Love*.

The visibility of the narrator is another property of the narrator that is part of narrator analysis. In this context two terms are used for the narrator. A narrator may be 'covert' or 'overt'. The covert' narrator is different from the 'overt' narrator in the sense that the covert' narrator does not appear in the first person in the fictional world or story and quotes a lot. On the other hand, the 'overt' narrator presents itself in the first person and appears as part of fictional world or the story.

Oscar Wilde was a great poet, novelist and playwright who was born in Ireland. He is best known for his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, story collection *The Happy Prince and other stories* etc. *The Nightingale and the Rose* is a short story that is intended for children; however, it is written in a very serious tone. It is one of the most popular stories of Oscar

Wilde that deals with the theme of love, gratitude, sacrifice and kindness. The current study explores narrator and its types in his short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What type of narrator is involved in *The Nightingale and the Rose*?

2. Literature Review

Various research studies have been conducted in the field of narrator analysis in novels and short stories. These studies mainly focus on the structure of stories specifically how the stories are told or the type of narrator they use to tell the story. In this regard the research study conducted by John (2014) is rather very important. He made an analysis of Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*. In this research study John (2014) discovered three different layers of narration in the novel. The first layer was based on the pattern of fairytales that involve expressions such as 'once upon a time' and refer to a remote place and time. This layer mainly embodies the romantic aspect as well. The next layer of narration is set on the pattern of autobiography. In this layer the character is the narrator whose name is Salim Sanai and who tells his own life story. The third layer tells the readers the political history of the subcontinent.

Another important side of narration in this novel is that this novel intermingles these three layers of narration in such a way that it seems difficult to identify which layer started from what point. John (2014) further came up with the findings that the narrator of this novel is also the main character, or the protagonist of the novel and his layer of narration also inclined the fantasies that he has in his subconscious mind.

Further, this novel also includes the technique of memory as the mode of narration. However, this notion of memory that comes out of the mind of the protagonist seems very unreliable. This is the reason that John (2014) says that the narrator in this novel is unreliable. The narrator makes many factual errors specifically in the context of the political history of subcontinent. For example, the death of Gandhi is not represented in the proper manner. In a similar way there is also factual error in the exact date of election.

The protagonist also confesses at one point in the novel that whatever he narrates may not be accurate and based on facts and it may be that he will make more mistakes in future because he himself believes that his memory is not that reliable. Nonetheless, his narration is rather very important in reference to the political history of sub-continent, and he matches his narration with the religious texts.

The research study made by Jeremic (2014) is also very crucial in the context of narrator analysis. He analyzed the notion of narration in the novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* that was written by Salman Rushdie. Jeremic (2014) discovered that in this novel the writer has used the technique of Katabasis that refers to the narration of the internal journey of the person who tells his or her inner experience. This story also includes the events of the underworld. Furthermore, Jeremic (2014) came up with the finding that this novel in the context of narration embodies two aspects. The first aspect is of myth and the other is of history. However, the way these two aspects have been intermingled in the novel it is rather very difficult for the reader to separate one from the other. Moreover, the narration in this novel also gives a good space to the small stories of minor characters. However, these small stories increase the interest of the readers. Further, the knowledge of the narrator is very extensive in comparison to the minor characters, specifically in the context of names of places and people. The narrator knows very well the secret adventures of minor characters that are something that is really a surprising thing for the readers.

The researcher further came up with the finding that that the narrator in this novel is Ria who is also the character in this novel. The narrator of this novel makes an attempt to rewrite the story of his life. However, his narration is more subjective and less objective as he adds more and more events from his own life. Further, the narrator of this novel is rather very nostalgic and this yearning for past increase more when he recalls about the events in India. The narrator is rather very expressive in his emotions; however, he is very critical about other characters. He openly brings out the demerits of other characters.

The research study made by Jarandikar (2006) is also very important in the context of narrator analysis. He conducted this research study over the novel *The Narrator* that was penned down by Makarand Paranjape. This research study involved theory of narration that was put forward by Genette (1983). The researcher discovered that this novel has includes three level of narrations. At the first level there is extradiegetic narrator whose name is Rahul and who tells the readers his personal life experience. At the second level there is an intradiegetic narrator with the name Badri Dhanda who also shares his personal experiences of life. However, the third level is different from these two levels in the sense that this level involves the narration of a play titled 'Manpasand'.

Jarandikar (2006) further came up with the findings that there is hierarchy of narration in this novel in which one level of narration stands above the other level. However, such a hierarchy of narration makes this novel a difficult reading as the readers find it is very troublesome to separate one voice from the other. However, Jarandikar (2006) comes up with the conclusion that this novel is an excellent experiment in the context of narration.

3. Methodology

This study is based on the qualitative method of research that is considered very suitable for the analysis of various literary texts. Gay (2009) states that “qualitative research data is collected on many variables in a natural setting and in this study ideas and things are studied in their natural being and existence.” Various methods are available in qualitative research for the analysis of literary texts. Among those methods, researchers have selected the interpretative method that is considered to be the proper method for the literary texts. Bryman (2004) and Silverman (2005) also support this method and consider it proper for the analysis of literary texts.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In this research study researchers have searched for the narrator in Oscar Wilde’s short story *The Nightingale and the Rose*. For this analysis they have adopted the method from Herman & Vervaeck’s (2005) book *Handbook of narrative analysis*. This method involves the following aspects of narrator.

This method first of all shows the relationship between the narrator and what he or she narrates. In this regard there may be either ‘extradiegetic’ narrator or ‘intradiegetic’ narrator. The ‘extradiegetic’ narrator does not belong to the fictional world and remains outside it. However, the intradiegetic narrator remains inside the fictional world sometimes as a character and sometimes as an invisible figure. The next level in this method is the involvement of the narrator in what he or she narrates. In this regard, the narrator may be either ‘homodiegetic’ or ‘heterodiegetic’. The ‘heterodiegetic’ narrator goes through the experience of what she narrates, however, in the case of ‘homodiegetic’ narrator, she does not experience whatever he or she narrates. Moreover, the ‘homodiegetic’ narrator may be either ‘autodiegetic’ or ‘allodiegetic’. These two types of narrators can be explained in the sense that ‘autodiegetic’ narrator is the main characters of the story, whereas in the case of ‘allodiegetic’ narrator, she narrates as the witness of the events.

The second level in this method is of properties of narrations. In this context the first part is of temporal relations which the time of narration and the time when the event takes place. At this level there are three temporal relations. The first is 'subsequent' which involves the narration after the event and the second is 'prior' narration that involves the prediction of the events. The third type is the 'simultaneous' narrations in which the narrations go at the same time when the event takes place. The last temporal type is the 'interpolated' narrations that involve the use of letters for narration.

The last part in this method is the visibility of narrator. In this part the narrator may be either 'covert' or 'overt'. A 'covert' narrator is not visible in the fictional world whereas an 'overt' narrator is visible in the story.

4. Analysis and Interpretations

The idea of narration in a story or novel refers to all the ways through which a story is told. In this regard, for the analysis of narrations the first important aspect is the identification of narrator that whether he/she is extradiegetic or intradiegetic. The 'extradiegetic' narrator does not belong to the fictional world whereas the 'intradiegetic' remains inside the fictional world as its part.

"She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses," cried the young Student; "but in all my garden there is no red rose."

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

"No red rose in all my garden!" he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched."

"Here at last is a true lover," said the Nightingale. "Night after night have, I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have, I told his story to the stars, and now I see him." (p. 21).

"The prince gives a ball to-morrow night," murmured the young Student, "and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in me garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break."

"Here indeed is the true lover," said the Nightingale.

"What I sing of, he suffers—what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold." (p. 22)

From these passages it is clear that the type of narrator in *The Nightingale and the Rose* is extradiegetic as the narrator does not belong to the fictional world and is not present in the story. The narrator can't be identified explicitly within the text. The narrator remains entirely outside of the text.

The next level of analysis of the narrator is her involvement in what she narrates. In this contact she may be 'homodiegetic' or 'heterodiegetic'. The 'homodiegetic' narrator has two types. The first is 'autodiegetic' and the second is 'allodiegetic'. In the context of involvement, the narrator in *The Nightingale and the Rose* is 'heterodiegetic' as she does not experience what she narrates. The experiences are being narrated by extradiegetic narrator who stands out of the text.

In the context of the properties of narration, the first important aspect is the temporal relation between the time of narration and the time when event takes place. In this regard the temporal relations may be subsequent, prior, simultaneous and interpolated. The narrator appears to be a third-person invisible narrator, with knowledge of the inner thoughts and emotions of both the young Student and the Nightingale. The narrative perspective is predominantly external, providing an observational lens into the thoughts and emotions of both the young Student and the Nightingale. The narrator's tone exhibits empathy towards the young Student, recognizing

the anguish and yearning he experiences in his quest for love. The narrator maintains a sense of detachment when discussing the young Student's emotions. The portrayal of the character's feelings establishes a profound bond, particularly in conveying the depth of affection and the possibility of emotional devastation. The narrator demonstrates credibility in portraying the characters' emotions and desires, providing the reader with a glimpse into the young Student's inner realm.

The paragraphs lack several narrative levels or intricate narrative systems. The text appears to adhere to a direct and uncomplicated storytelling approach. This passage does not exhibit any evident metafictional features. The narrator lacks self-awareness and does not engage the reader by explicitly acknowledging the narrative nature of the text. In this section, the narrator assumes a compassionate and perceptive role, leading the reader through the emotional terrain of the young Student and contemplating the essence of love as conveyed by the Nightingale.

The Nightingale and the Rose involves the subsequent narrations as the narrator narrates the events after they take place. This can be understood from the following passages.

"Why is he weeping?" asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

"Why, indeed?" said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

"Why, indeed?" whispered a Daisy to his neighbor, in a soft, low voice.

"He is weeping for a red rose," said the Nightingale.

"For a red rose?" They cried; "how very ridiculous!" and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student's sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden." (p. 23)

"Death is a great price to pay for a red rose," cried the

Nightingale, "and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?"

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his beautiful eyes.

"Be happy," cried the Nightingale, "be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood" (p. 26)

From these examples it is clear that the narration is subsequent as it takes place after the events because past tense is used for the narration.

The next part in this analysis is of visibility of the narrator. In this regard she may be with 'covert' or 'overt'. In the context of visibility, the narrator in "*The nightingale and the rose*" is 'covert' as she is not part of the story or does not appear in the fictional world. It can be understood from the following examples.

"The student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

"Sing me one last song," he whispered; "I shall feel very lonely when you are gone."

So, the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar." (p. 27).

“She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good.” And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep. And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rose-tree, and set her breast against the thorn. She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the top-most spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvelous rose, petal following petal, as song followed song.” (p. 28)

Based on the given passages, it seems that the narrator is not overtly present and functions surreptitiously. The passages lack a discernible narrator who directly engages with the listener or interjects personal observations. The narrative centers around the characters' actions, ideas, and dialogue. The narrator does not offer any authorial comments or convey personal opinions regarding the events or characters. The narrator appears to prioritize the presentation of the developing plot. The focal point of the tale revolves around the characters, with particular emphasis on the Nightingale and her deeds, as well as the musings and sentiments of the unidentified character who is pondering love. The storyteller refrains from drawing emphasis to their own presence or viewpoint. The narrator assumes a clandestine role by presenting the story without explicitly interjecting themselves into the narrative. The emphasis lies on the progression of events and the characters' encounters, rather than on the viewpoint of the narrator. In conclusion, according to the traits identified in this passage, it can be argued, using Herman & Vervaeck's (2005) framework, that the narrator is absent from the story and works in a hidden manner, allowing the events and characters to be the main focus without direct narrative interference. From these passages it is clear that the narrator is not visible in the story, therefore she is 'covert' narrator.

5. Findings

From the above analysis of the narrator in *The Nightingale and the Rose* the research study brings out the findings that the narrator in this story is extradiegetic as the narrator remains outside the fictional world. Further, in the context of involvement the narrator is 'heterodiegetic' as she does not experience what she narrates. In reference to the temporal relations, this story involves the 'subsequent' narration as it takes place after the events. Further, the visibility of the narrator is 'covert' as she does not appear in the fictional world.

The analysis accurately identifies the narrator as extradiegetic, indicating that the narrator exists outside the fictional universe. This is apparent as the narrator possesses knowledge about the thoughts and actions of the characters yet remains detached from the events themselves. The storyteller assumes the role of an impartial observer from an external perspective. The analysis correctly identifies the narrator as heterodiegetic. The implication is that the storyteller lacks direct involvement or firsthand experience in the events being recounted. However, the narrator assumes the role of an external storyteller, presenting the story with a sense of detachment. The narrator lacks a shared perspective with the characters.

The data indicates that the temporal relations in the story are sequential i.e. taking place after the happening of events in real time. The narration is set in a chronological order that follows the real events it depicts. This is apparent in the passages where the narrator describes the Nightingale's acts and the blooming of the rose. The narrator is contemplating past events. The analysis accurately identifies the narrator's visibility as covert. The narrator maintains a concealed position and refrains from exerting their influence within the realm of fiction. The narrative lacks direct engagement with the characters, instead prioritizing the presentation of events and characters while minimizing the narrator's perspective. The narrator adopts a detached and objective perspective, recounting past occurrences. The absence of direct involvement or presence in the narrative strengthens the external, third-party, later, and concealed characteristics of the narrator, conforming to the analytical framework proposed by Herman & Vervaeck (2005).

6. Conclusion

From the analysis and findings, it can be concluded that the 'extradiegetic' narrator of this story makes the narrations quite interesting. Further, the subsequent narrations that are given in past tense do not involve multiple voices and make this story a very easy reading and does not confuse the readers. The study recommends that this method should be applied to other stories and novels to search for their narrators.

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