

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS* - AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Narratology is the systematic study of narratives and narrative structures. Vladimir Propp initiated this by his *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928. Gerard Genette introduces different analytical categories like narrative mood, narrative instance, narrative level, and narrative time. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* explores the horrible effects of imperialism and racism in Africa. It is written as a frame narrative. This paper analyses the various narrative techniques used by Conrad in developing the story into a narrative.

Narratology is the systematic study of narratives and narrative structures. Vladimir Propp initiated this by his *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928. Some of the significant theorists in narratology are Gérard Genette, Gerald Prince, Roland Barthes, Claude Bremond, Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman, and Mieke Bal.

Gerard Genette introduces different analytical categories like narrative mood, narrative instance, narrative level, and narrative time. Narrative mood comprises of narrative distance and functions of the narrator. Narrative instance contains narrative voice, narrative time, and narrative perspective. Narrative level contains embedded narratives and metalepsis. Narrative time comprises of narrative order, narrative speed, and frequency of events. (Genette, 1980)

Genette’s Narrative Typology

ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES	ELEMENTS ANALYZED	COMPONENTS				
NARRATIVE MOOD	DISTANCE	Narratized speech	Transposed speech, indirect style	Transposed speech, free indirect style	Reported speech	
	FUNCTIONS OF THE NARRATOR	Narrative function	Directing function	Communication function	Testimonial function	Ideological function
NARRATIVE INSTANCE	NARRATIVE VOICE	Homodiegetic narrator		Heterodiegetic narrator		Autodiegetic narrator
	TIME OF NARRATION	Subsequent narration	Prior narration	Simultaneous narration		Interpolated narration
	NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE	Zero focalization		Internal focalization		External focalization
NARRATIVE LEVELS	EMBEDDED NARRATIVES	Extra-diegetic	Intra-diegetic	Meta-diegetic	Meta-meta-diegetic, etc.	
	METALEPSIS	Breaching of narrative levels				
NARRATIVE TIME	ORDER	Analepsis	Prolepsis	Reich	Extent	
	NARRATIVE SPEED	Pause	Scene	Summary	Ellipsis	
	FREQUENCY OF EVENTS	Singulative		Repeating	Iterative	

(Lévesque & Guillemette, 2006)

Joseph Conrad is a Polish-British writer who brought non-native touch to British English fiction. His novels focus more upon Polish nationalism, nautical experiences, and effects of imperialism on non-European nations. Some of his important works are *An Outcast of the Islands*, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostramo*, *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, *The Shadow Line*, and *The Arrow of Gold*.

Heart of Darkness is a novella written by Joseph Conrad in 1899. It explores the horrible effects of imperialism and racism in Africa. It is written as a frame narrative.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad has used the two principles of combination - ‘temporal succession’ and ‘causality’ - to combine the events into sequences and to construct them into a story. He has used ‘chronological order’ in narrating the experience of Marlow. However, he has not used a strict succession of events. ‘Shift in present and past time’ is evident in the text. ‘Flashbacks’ and ‘Flash-forwards’ are used along with recurring symbols and motifs. Conrad has used ‘multilinear narrative’ in the text.

‘Posterior narration’ is identified as the events of the story are recalled and narrated by the narrator a few years after these happened.

The difference between a ‘narrator’ and ‘focaliser’ is evident in the novel. A sailor describes what/how Marlow narrates to his fellow sailors, along with his (Marlow’s) ‘retrospective’ comments. The sailor also gives his comments over Marlow and his narration: “Mind,” he began again... he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and

without a lotus-flower.” “Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.” (*Heart of Darkness*, 40)

The narrator uses ‘acceleration’ and ‘deceleration’ with respect to the duration of the narration. ‘Explicit ellipsis’ is evident as the narrator omits many events e.g., the events which occur in the ship (except Kurtz’s last days and death) during the return journey to England. He speaks more about his own thought-process rather than concentrating on the activities or talks of the fellow sailors - except the manager - during and after Kurtz’s death.

The explicit ellipsis is of ‘indefinite type’ because it is not possible to measure the elided stretch of time. ‘Deceleration’ is observed when the narrator describes the attack that leads to helmsman’s death, events that take place before and after reaching Kurtz’s station, and the last days and death of Kurtz.

Conrad has employed ‘causality’ by using ‘Analepsis’ (Flashback) and ‘Prolepsis’ (Flashforward) wherever necessary.

Marlow’s speech to the sailors start like this: “And this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.” (*Heart of Darkness*, 3) The speech continues after an interesting description about Marlow’s character: “I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago...” (4)

‘External Analepsis’ is evident here as the narrated event’s time is prior to the starting point of the first narrative. It can be considered as ‘Heterodiegetic Analepsis’ also because it pertains to a storyline different from that in the first narrative.

‘Homodiegetic Analepsis’ is evident where the narrator/character Marlow narrates his own childhood interest to the sailors using flashback technique: “Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration...” (6)

Marlow describes the pathetic story of the dead captain Fresleven in whose place he is appointed by the company: “...I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Flesleven – that was the fellow’s name, a Dane...” (8) These two events are illustrations of ‘External Analepsis’ as the narrated events’ time is prior to the starting point of the first narrative.

The narrator remembers the words of the old doctor who does medical check-up for him before taking up the voyage to Congo. “I remembered the old doctor – ‘It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot.’” (22) In the same manner, he is reminded of the two women, one fat and the other slim, sitting on straw-bottomed chairs and knitting black wool before the Company’s office entrance. “Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall...” (10) These events may be examples of ‘Completing Analepsis’, filling the earlier recognized gaps (mental changes in sailors and black wool symbolizing darkness/horror) in the minds of the narrator. These may be considered as ‘Internal Analepsis’ because their time falls within the starting point of the first narrative.

Marlow says, “I miss my late helmsman awfully... Well, don’t you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back – a help – an instrument.” (60) This is an example for ‘Internal Analepsis’ (because the event’s time falls within the starting point of the first narrative) and ‘Homodiegetic Analepsis’ (because it pertains to a character in the first narrative where it is inserted).

‘Flash-forwarding’ is used by Marlow to describe Kurtz. The helmsman dies falling at the feet of Marlow. Marlow is terribly upset and throws away his blood-stained shoe. At that

moment, he thinks of Kurtz (whom he will meet later in the story) and narrates a part of his strange experience with him. “You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory’. Oh, yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my--’” (58)

This may be considered as ‘Internal Prolepsis’ (because the event’s time falls within the end point of the first narrative), as ‘Homodiegetic Prolepsis’ (because the event pertains to the character Kurtz in the first narrative), as ‘Completing Prolepsis’ (because the event fills a later gap – to be created by the strange character Kurtz – ahead of time), and as ‘Repeating Prolepsis’ (because it is an advance narration of the last episode of Kurtz’s life which will be repeated later in the natural order of story events).

Only towards the end of the narrative (90-94), Marlow meets Kurtz’s lover. But he talks about her previously: “Voices, voices – even the girl herself – now... Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it - completely...” (57) This can also be considered as ‘Internal Prolepsis’ (because the event’s time falls within the ending point of the first narrative) and as ‘Homodiegetic Prolepsis’ (because it pertains to a character in the first narrative where it is inserted).

‘Repetitive Frequency’ is evident as the narrator talks about Kurtz’s last days and death (which occurred only once in the story) several times in the narrative.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is popular for its direct attack on British imperialism and racism. It tries to distinguish between civilized and uncivilized / barbarian / savage. It has grabbed the attention of narratologists as Conrad has used various narrative techniques in developing the story into a narrative.

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