

Structuralist reading of Marquez's *LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA* (1985)

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Abstract:

Narratology underlines the way a story is told and studies structures and devices, 'system of figures and conventions' which enable works to have specific form and meaning. Point of view and perspective are redefined and studied under the heading of 'Mood' i.e., the regulation of narrative information. In this article Genette's analysis of 'point of view' has been kept in view while analyzing the structure and devices of the novel for a better understanding of the text and the meaning it has. The inner-workings of storytelling are minutely scrutinized and studied.

Key Words: Point of View, Focalization, Narratology, Mood etc.

Introduction: The position from which a story is told is called point of view. Henry James was the first critic who formally discussed about 'point of view' making it one of the major concerns for the writers of fiction and literary theory. James wrote many prefaces wherein he sporadically talked about it in. The series of these prefaces to his novels were later compiled as *The Art of the Novel* (1934). Susana Onega in his essay "Narrative theory before 1950" writes that James differentiate between what is called 'voice' and 'point of view' emphasizing that a novelist must not tell rather show the story to the readers. James was against the narrator's coming in between the story and the readers because it, according to him, compromises the transparence of the story. According to him, there is a sense of immediacy in showing the story through the third person narration. He calls this kind of narration 'centers of consciousness', 'vessels of sensibility' or 'reflectors', and which Genette studies as 'focalization'. Percy Lubbock and Wayne Booth added to this scholarship and continued to work on the footsteps of Henry James. But it was G. Genette's phenomenal book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* which embodied the culmination of structuralist narrative theory and also constituting the holistic work on the systematic study of 'point of view' which Genette calls 'focalization'. He studied it under the heading of 'Mood' (161) having 'distance' and 'perspective' as its chief modalities. It was Genette who, for the first time, differentiated between the position of the narrator (the point from which the story is told) and the position from which events of the narrative can be viewed. In other words, he differentiated between 'focalization' and 'narration' (189). Focalization dealt with 'who is the character, whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?' and narration analyzed 'the other question, 'who is the narrator?'" (186). He further exhorted that the eyes through which the reader sees the narrative is perspective which, he said, is the research area of 'mood'. On the other hand 'who speaks?' is voice (186) which deals with how a narrator is implicated in a narrative. Genette introduced the term 'focalization' to clear the terminological and conceptual confusion. He uses this term for the analyses of narrative perspective. He classifies focalization under three categories. These are 'non-focalized narrative', 'internal focalization', 'zero focalization'. 'Non-focalized' narrative or narrative with 'zero focalization'

(189) is usually found in classical narratives where the omniscient narrator, who knows more than any other character, is employed (ibid). Secondly, in 'internal focalization', the vision of the narrator is equal to that of the character who speaks (ibid). The narrator tells only what the character knows. Genette has also categorized 'internal focalization' as 'fixed', 'variable' or 'multiple' (189, 190). The narrative where everything is narrated through the eyes of a single character is said to have 'fixed internal focalization' (189). If the character through which action is narrated or in other words if the focal character changes through the course of the novel, then it is 'variable internal focalization' (ibid). In such focalization different perspectives are employed for different situations and events. Genette further introduces the concept of 'restriction', a key term used to make the reader realize focalization. With respect to restriction Genette calls 'internal variable focalization' "omniscience with partial restrictions of field" (194). Moreover, 'restriction' is the key term used to make the reader realize focalization, and to distinguish 'variable focalization' and 'non-focalization' (192). Further, 'focalization' is also defined as a restriction imposed on the information provided by a narrator about his characters. The narratives with 'multiple internal focalization' narrate the same event several times through the eyes of different characters (190). Lastly, the third type of focalization is 'external focalization' (ibid) where the narrator does not know much about the characters. His knowledge remains limited (189) and follows the actions of the characters but does not know their thoughts and feelings (ibid). The narratives usually regulate information 'according to the capacities of knowledge of one or another participant in the story (a character or group of characters), with the narrative adopting or seeming to adopt one or another perspective – participant's "vision" or "point of view" (ibid).

STORY: The novel tells the story of Tranzito Ariza and his daughter Fermina Daza who left their native place and shifted to Macondo where Fermina fell in love with Florentino. This infuriates her father as he had never imagined her to fall in love with poor man. He considers it below his dignity and puts her under the the care and guardianship of his sister, Aunt Escolastica who usually remains so lenient towards her niece that she also becomes an accomplice in her secret love affair. One day Tranzito discovered all this and felt deeply cheated. He banished Aunt Escolastica from the town and sent her to an unknown far off village. But he could not distract his daughter from her obsession with her lover. So, he decides to take her to a far off village where Fermina's maternal parents lived. On their way to the village, he becomes nostalgic and remembers that Fermina's mother had married against the wishes of her family. He feels some sort of affinity between the behavior of his daughter and his wife as Fermina's love was against the wishes of her father as his wife's affair was against the wishes of her parents. Tranzito Ariza felt his own past repeating in Fermina and Florentino's love relationship. He felt haunted by his own past.

Finally, Fermina agrees to marry a wealthy doctor Urbino as per the wishes of her father. This news devastates Florentino and who for his whole life spends time in her memory. He halfheartedly runs into 622 affairs, yet he reserved his heart for Fermina with a hope that one day

her husband will surely die to enable him to purpose to her one more time. His prayers are finally heard as Fermina's husband did die at last. After fifty-one years, nine months and four days later, he again goes to Fermina to purpose her once more on her first night as a widow. Against the background of this love story the story also gives us the glimpses of civil war, the disease cholera that throws a sort of colouring on the structure of society that was changing at a great pace at the advent of modernism.

MOOD: Distance and Perspective: The two concepts of 'distance' and 'perspective' as the chief modalities of 'mood' are simultaneously interrelated, interconnected and interdependent. In *Love in the Tie of Cholera*, the realistic distance between the narratee and the story and the narrator is determined by 'free indirect style' which is similar to that of James Joyce's concept of showing the action of the story rather telling it. Looked from this perspective, it appears like a form of interior monologue where the readers are given the direct access to the characters' psyche without narrator's coming in between. However, in the novel there is a presence of the narrator but this presence is so scanty and impartial that it does not at all interfere with the content of the story. Narrator maintains an aesthetic distance from the story world. The narrator's use of 'declarative verbs' and third person narration but it does not, however, interfere with the reader/story interface. Marquez's fiction is experience centric valuing situations of all sorts creating conditions where the reader is called upon to participate in the experienced realities of the characters. The panoramic view of the text makes the novel look like a 'mental hodgepodge' representing experiences which are in constant flux and simultaneously magical and real. These magical experiences are intrinsic to the life in the Caribbean. In an interview, Marquez was seen saying, "It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes from the imagination, while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality. The problem is that Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination" (Stone). The text of the novel makes one of the interesting cases of 'heteroglosia' making the text strewn with multiple narratives without any hierarchical positioning among them. The novel is heteroglosiac bringing both the mini-narratives and metanarratives at the same pedestal.

In the terms of Genette the novel is a 'pure narrative' because the style of telling the story is such that there is no scope for the telling to be taken control by any particular character. The style of telling adopted here is 'free indirect style' which is akin to 'immediate speech' where the distance between the reader and the story reaches zero and the narratee himself sees the story action as it was perceived by the characters. But, the narratee shares the same position with the narrator and is able to form his own perspectives about the reality/authenticity of the story. The focalization in the novel also remains zero owing to the omniscient nature of 'telling'. The finer form of the novel remains that of thought and perception, a simultaneously impersonal meditative reflection upon past, present and future. The narrative, therefore, can also be considered as untold and unspoken but merely perceived. The narrator mirrors the story as he sees it and leaves it up to the readers to interpret the narrative as per their view and perspectives. The text can also be called as a copy of the memory which takes on the shape of interior

monologue. At one level of analysis it appears that the novelist has applied 'free indirect speech' to the representation of inner thought process of the characters which Pie prefers to call second form of interior monologue or 'narrated monologue' (Pie, 100). Commenting on the aesthetics of 'indirection' (free indirect style), Genette claims that it is "Indirection and condensation" ". . . the two distinctive features of "pure narrative," in contrast to "mimetic" representation borrowed from the theatre. In these terms, adopted provisionally, "pure narrative" will be taken to be more distant than "imitation" because it is the limitation of showing through language that cannot imitate the way dramatic action does and this also what distinguishes drama from the novel as well.

The beginning paragraph of the novel shows the whole of the life of Saint Jeremiah but in extremely condescend way and partially with less of the background information:

IT WAS INEVITABLE: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love. Dr Juvenal Urbino noticed it as soon as he entered the still darkened house where he had hurried on an urgent call to attend a case that for him had lost all urgency many years before. The Antillean refugee Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, disabled war veteran, photographer of children, and his most sympathetic opponent in chess, had escaped the torments of memory with the aromatic fumes of gold cyanide (*LITC* 3).

In this passage, the speed of the narrative is very high and the reader's view is obstructed by too panoramic the focus and simultaneously condensing a large amount of information. Gradually, as the narration progress, the narrative opens up telling, retelling the same story from multiple perspectives enriching the reader information and enhancing the mimetic effect. The narrator of the novel has no personality/self to express. He merely acts as a catalyst voicing the views, thoughts, perceptions and perspectives of the characters that are oppress and denied access to language and speech thereby empowering the powerless. The narrator repeatedly turns to tell the same events and unravel deeper and broader information making the narrative self-reflexive and 'metafictional'. The repetitive and circular nature of story-time makes the story too detailed and rich in information. This also increases the density of the text making temporal speed almost zero and rendering the time atemporal. The repetitions and the circular nature of events and incidents of the story reflect upon the nature of time which no more passes rather repeats and recycles. According to Genette, the temporal 'speed' of the narrative affects the narrative 'mood' as more of the speed results in less of the narrative information which also depends on the degree of the presence of the narrator in the form of 'voice' i.e., a different narratological concept. Free indirect style makes the narratee witness the narrative action is witnessed himself. This way of telling the story is very near to showing it to the readers which means to say that the mimetic quality of the narrative is quite high in degree. The omniscient narrator a disembodied voice i.e., 'the narrating instance' assimilates the voices and the perspectives of the characters reporting them in their nascent and immediate form. There is no temporal distancing between the story

experienced and narrated. This sense of immediacy is maintained throughout leaving no scope for the narrator to temper with the originality of the story. This immediacy give the story the form of 'interior monologue' where thought and narration are simultaneous giving full and access to the consciousness and thoughts of characters. Following is the illustration from the novel which proves that the narrative is intensely mimetic in the manner of 'immediate speech' which is traditionally called interior monologue:

Although she was as free as he was, and perhaps would not have been opposed to making their relationship public, from the very first Florentino Ariza considered it a clandestine adventure. He would slip in by the back door, almost always very late at night, and sneak away on tip toe just before dawn. He knew as well as she that in a crowded and subdivided building like hers the neighbours had to know more than they pretended (*LITC* 197).

The magic of 'free indirect style' is such that here, the character's thoughts are reproduced 'directly' though the narrator continues to talk in the third person. The thoughts, views, perception of the character have been rendered audible through the momentary merging of the narrator and the character's voice. The passage is in an interiorized form with no strict line of separation between 'narrating' and story action creating an effect of immediacy. The narratee sees the action of the story through the eyes, thoughts and memories of characters. But, sometimes, at the syntactic and syntagmatic level the narrator's omniscience is restricted to the characters' knowledge. The narrator tells that

Their love affairs were slow and difficult and were often disturbed by sinister omens, and life seemed interminable.... In any case, Dr. Urbino was not when he returned home that morning before ten o'clock, shaken by the two visits that not only had obliged him to miss Pentecost Mass but also threatened to change him at an age when everything had seemed complete (*LITC* 17-20).

The use of the phrases 'seemed interminable' and 'seemed complete' show narrator's limited information and hint at his seeming ignorance signified by the word 'seemed', which the narration employs many times during the narration. Free indirect style is called 'free indirect perception' by Jean Louis Ska (77). He maintains, "Such a narrative does not contain a potential verbal message but the registration of a character's perception" (*ibid*) with the narrator as a reporter. This is also true in the case of *Love in the Time Cholera* where the characters' points of view are literally and anonymously reproduced. To use Genette's words, the mood of the narrative is 'zero focalization' as the narratee perceives the action through the consciousness of the characters, as it impinges upon that consciousness, thus avoiding that removal to a distance..." (168). By this unique way of telling a story, Garcia Marquez gives voice to the complex inner world of feelings and psyches where the very rules of what is real and unreal, truthful and untruthful are existent in memory. This view sees and conceives the human personality as a bolus like mixture of constantly shifting impressions and perceptions. One way

of analyzing the narration can also be that while telling the story the omniscient narrator disappears and the point of view shifts to inside the characters' minds in the form of flashbacks, associations of ideas, momentary impressions presented in/as a continuous flux. The reader is deftly installed in the thoughts/consciousness of the characters from the first line on, and it is the uninterrupted unfolding of that thought which apprises us of what the character does and what happens to him. Marquez's artistic handling of narrative speech i.e., 'inner speech' shows text as a replica of a 'mental hodgepodge' leading to representation of 'thought in a dawning state' represented by language and syntax that is symptomatic of memory-structure and form. The narrator also keeps mobilizing his position shifting from internal to external focalization. As already discussed, the repeated use of phrases like 'seemed' reflect that the narrator is external, otherwise the focalization remains internal, that of the character. Barthes uses 'personal mode of narrative' for 'internal focalization' and also suggested a method to find out whether focalization is internal or external. This method is based on the ... rewriting of the narrative section under consideration into the first person (if it is not in that personal already) without the need for 'any alteration of the discourse other than the change of grammatical pronouns.' (193) Thus, a sentence such as "[James Bond] saw a man in his fifties, still young-looking..." can be translated into the first person ("I saw. . .")—and so for us it belongs to internal focalization. On the other hand, Barthes continues, a sentence like "the tinkling of the ice cubes against the glass *seemed* to awaken in Bond a sudden inspiration" cannot be translated into the first person without obvious semantic incongruity". Here we are typically in external focalization, because of the narrator's marked ignorance with respect to the hero's real thoughts. (qtd. in Genette 193-94) Similarly, the narrator of the *Love in the Time of Cholera* constantly keeps his position shifting from internal to external focalization. The narrator does not reveal everything at once rather reveals the information in uniquely round about manner. The returns and repetitions also hamper the amount of information to be gives to the reader. For instance, in the few lines of the opening paragraph of the novel the whole of the life of Saint Jeremiah, the main themes of the novel are introduced. In other words, it can be said that the readers are given very less information which raises our curiosity which is constantly satisfied and raised at the same time. The author delays information to produce specific aesthetic effect on the reader. This delaying of information is called 'omission or paralipsis'. The repetitive nature of the story gives us more detailed or complete information. The narrator also uses the technique of 'paralepsis' which is to give us information more than needed. For instance, after the death of Jeremiah is reported the narrator goes into unnecessary details of the description of the room where suicide was committed i.e., the description of his bedroom: his dog, his bed, the complexion of his face, the medical follow ups and so on, which for the time being take us off the main thread of the narrative. These kinds of descriptions are not the narrator's intrusions into the narrated, as they seem, rather they show the way memory works which determine the 'paralytic' or 'paraleptic' narrative unfolding.

Largely, the focalization remains internal in the novel as a dominant mode/'mood', but rarely the narrator breaks the momentum without actually contesting/compromising the tonality of the

whole, to give us more or less information than is necessary. 'Paralipsis' means giving less information than is necessary. For example, in the story of the noel we are told that 'the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love'. After raising our curiosity about memory of unrequited love, the narrator silently shifts his narration to tell us about the death/suicide of Saint Jeremiah and completely frustrates the reader's expectations. The narrator constantly evokes many such moments in the novel without readily narrating them to satisfy the reader. Another such moment occurs in the story as the narrator keeps the reader ignorant and guessing about what happened fifty years ago:

Florentino Ariza never had another opportunity to see or talk to Fermina Daza alone in the many chance encounters of their very long lives until fifty one years and nine months and four days later, when he repeated his vow of eternal fidelity and everlasting love on her first night as a widow" (*LITC* 103).

Genette supports Barthes' designations of such omissions as 'cheating' as way of creating interest and suspension in the story. Like a detective story, the narrative hides from us a part of story until the final revelation and, to complicate the matter further, omits from the thoughts of the characters their memory as, for instance, Fermina Daza could not remember when she had also begun to help him dress, and finally to dress him" (*LITC* 26). Using this technique, the narrator also tests our memory while telling the story about Urbino who saw a boy whom he had met at the residence of Saint Jeremiah. The narrator reports that Urbino "had seen him somewhere, no doubt about that, but he could not remember where" (*ibid*). Urbino actually saw the boy when he went to diagnose Fermina who was ill. We stress our memory and readily remember it and feel victorious as Urbino cannot remember it. At another occasion when Fermina and Florentino's love affair was discovered by Fermina's father who went to Florentino to settle the matter. We as readers, during first or second reading, also do not know where and how, in the past, had he seen Florentino. But, finally the narrator reveals that Fermina's father had seen Florentino when the latter had been to his house to deliver mail and where he and Fermina fell in love at first sight and Urbino was also there but the narrator does not mention his name this time.

According to Genette, "narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says" (198). Fermina came back to her village after almost two years. One day Florentino runs into her in a market. "She just managed to think: My God, poor man! Florentino Ariza smiled, tried to say something, tried to follow her, but she erased him from her life with a wave of her hand" (*LITC* 102). The story reads as 'she erased him from her life with a wave of her hand' which is external focalization which constitutes the excess of implicit information over explicit information. The narrator does not interpret/comment anything. It seems that the narrator and Florentino could not understand what she meant. But the reader is free to interpret in supposed conformity with the author's intentions that she was a changed woman then, had also forgotten him and did not love him anymore. The narrator of the novel defies the conditions of

the realistic illusion: “it also transgresses a ‘law of the spirit’” requiring that one cannot be inside the mind and outside it at the same time. This analysis of the novel also shows that Marquez challenges that Western view that out unconscious is structures like language. These infractions (paralipsis and paralepsis) which Genette defines as ‘alterations’, are a mode where no method/code prevails anymore. This position seems non-organized which also characterizes the system of focalization and the entire modality of the ‘Mood’ of the novel.

Abbreviation

LITC: Love in the Time of Cholera

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