

Ideological Revelations in Narratives: A Perusal of *The Mark on the Wall*



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ABSTRACT: This text delves into the realm of narratology, examining the structuralist perspective in understanding narratives and their inherent connection to cultural and societal ideologies. Gerard Genette emerges as a key figure for his comprehensive representation of narratology, emphasizing the importance of analyzing the system (langue) rather than individual texts (parole). The structuralist approach posits that stories derive from a general system, reflecting the unconscious molding of authors by society over time. Vladimir Propp's work on fairy tales and Lennard J. Davis's analysis of novel structures further contribute to the exploration of narrative elements. The study highlights the significance of narratology in uncovering the ideological motives behind texts, emphasizing its utility in understanding cultural concepts. By examining Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall," the analysis reveals how the absence of a clear story mirrors the chaotic ideologies of the time, while narrative and narration expose conflicting perspectives. The abstract concludes by underscoring the essential role of narratology in deciphering the complexities of narratives, serving as a crucial tool for diagnosing the working ideologies of texts and enhancing our understanding of the world.

KEYWORDS: Narratology, Genette, Woolf, Structuralism

INTRODUCTION

Narrative has been of an anxiety provoker pain in the neck for several theorists. They have allotted a respectable amount of their intellectual efforts to the study of narratives. One fundamental aim could be that "structuralist analysis of narrative examine minute detail inner "workings" of literary texts in order to discover the fundamental structural units or functions that govern the texts' narrative operations" (Tyson: 224) undergoing the label of 'narratology'. There are several theorists illuminating in this field, chiefly among which are A. J. Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Jonathan Culler, Ronal Barthes, and a long list of other theorists. However, I have chosen to adopt Gerard Genette for his comprehensive representation of different aspects of this theory, relatively proper for a better understanding of the ideologies that underlie the entire heritage of narratives.

This study adopts a qualitative approach rooted in narratology to investigate the structuralist perspective on narratives and their entwined cultural ideologies. The methodology involves a thorough literature review encompassing seminal works by key theorists such as Gerard Genette, Vladimir Propp, and Lennard J. Davis, along with critiques and interpretations. Texts for analysis are thoughtfully selected to represent diverse genres and periods, with Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" serving as a focal point for illustrative purposes. The narratological analysis focuses on Genette's three levels—story, narrative, and narration—examining tense, mood, and voice to unveil the nuanced narrative structures and their ideological implications. Comparative analysis is employed to identify commonalities and differences among theorists, emphasizing the versatility of narratology in decoding narratives across cultural and historical contexts. The study contextualizes narratological findings within socio-cultural and historical landscapes, exploring external factors' contributions to narrative structures, particularly in the case of wartime ideologies. Interdisciplinary insights are drawn from literary criticism, cultural studies, and philosophy to provide a holistic understanding of the interplay between narratives and ideologies. Ethical considerations prioritize a respectful and responsible approach to literary texts, ensuring a nuanced analysis that appreciates the artistic and intellectual dimensions of the narratives while avoiding reductionist interpretations. This methodology aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on narratology, enriching our understanding of how narratives reflect and shape cultural ideologies.

The idea behind this structuralist perspective at dealing with narratives is to propose a theory that define all stories told and written in the world. Structuralists believe that instead of analyzing all stories (parole), the critic must investigate the system that gives rise to the stories (langue). By analyzing a fixed set of rules, one may comprehend a limitless number of stories and tales. These narratologists believe that a writer, after all, undergoes the pressures of culture, society, moral values of that specific society. No write is able to transgress the borders of the culture that gave birth to his mentality, no matter how revolutionist he might be. Despite rejecting the moral values of the society and criticizing the community, the writer remains chained to the ideas that have

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been unconsciously imposed upon his mentality and worldview. The system, narratologists claim, is the goal of interpretation rather than individual texts. These productions stem from the unconscious of authors, the forgotten structure that is created by the society through time. These ideas and convictions never appear due to immediate mediations and thinking, rather they are the product of long molding of the unconscious that has been under the supervision and creation of the society. In other words, the unconscious, or the source of ideas, is crafted by the system in which the writer lives. Accordingly, critics must divert from analyzing individual texts to analyzing the system that surrounds and creates the mental framework of the author. As Bressler puts it:

Since an individual work can express only those values and beliefs of the system of which it is a part, structuralists emphasize the system (langue) whereby texts relate to each other, not an examination of an isolated text (parole). They believe that a study of the system of rules that govern literary interpretation becomes the critic's primary task. (Bressler 99)

Analyzing narrative can be a useful method at uncovering the ideological motives behind any text. Narrative quilts all cultural concepts and phenomena of a specific society. It can be a path to the exploration of the ideologies that dominate and specific mindset or people. It is the paradigm through which people make sense of the world and interpret the mysteries that surround their life. Narratives keep chaining our minds since the early years of life. Because they are inherited from previous generations, they play a role at forming the mind of the consequent decades depending on the dominant social and cultural ideologies.

Structuralist narratologists propose that individual stories and texts develop from the general system and structure, or the langue, rather than from isolated individual texts that are produced by writers. "Narratology's overriding concern is the narrative structure of a text" writes Bressler, "What is the interrelationship of a narrative's constituent parts, ask narratologists, and how are these parts constructed to shape the narrative itself? What are the rules that govern the formation of plot? Of point of view? Of narrator? Of audience?" (102).

Vladimir Propp in his famous work *Morphology of the Folktale* investigates a comprehensive heritage of Russian fairy tales. He aims to find the commonalities between these stories, and how the overall structure play a role at driving and developing theme towards similar ends. He, then, proposes thirty-one elements or building blocks of the story, he calls narratemes or narrative functions. Each narrateme functions in a predictable manner that puts the characters in a particular progress towards developing the overall plot.

Lennard J. Davis proposes his analysis on the ideology in novel. He believes that all novels, including those that are radical in their social critique, are bourgeois in the structure. He does not analyze the content, rather he believes that this ideology lies in the form. For example, in characterization, he claims that all types of characters, regardless of their type, class, and origin, he still strives to become triumph, signaling and giving weight to the individualism that the bourgeois ideologies promote. "Anagnorisis can obviously be shown to embody a general point about all change from ignorance to knowledge, hence its turning up in the bourgeois novel, where it becomes a part of the mystification." The writer continues: "The problem then becomes how to regard a formal feature present in all ideology, whether in a positive or a negative guise". (Wright 439) This shows that ideologies dominate all types of narratives. It becomes impossible for an author to escape the chains of ideologies or think beyond the limits of this framework.

Another famous narratologist, Gerard Genette, proposed his unique methodology at predicting the progress of the plot. He built upon the ideas of previous narratologists. He added valuable ideas to the literary criticism field by further enriching narratology. "He believes that tropes, or figures of speech, require a reader's special attention". However, these narratologists provide us with various approaches to texts, all furnish us with a metalanguage- words used to describe language- so we can understand how a text means, not what it means" (Bressler 104).

Genette proposes three levels of narrative: story, narrative, and narration, each subcategorizing other crucial branches. He, moreover, believes that these three levels of narratives interact with each other by means of three qualities: tense (order, duration, and frequency), mood (distance and perspective), and voice (Tyson: 228-9). All these concepts cooperate to represent the ideological perspectives of the author.

In Virginia Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall*, the ideological aspects seem to be slippery and unclear. According to Genette, the story, which is "the most abstract level of a narrative" consisting of actions, actants, and setting (Herman and Vervaeck: 220) is totally absent in Woolf's text. There are no action, actant, or setting, including the temporal aspects. For instance, the speaker initiates the so-called story by questioning the time: "Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall". This temporal disorder and absence of story reflect the chaotic situations of the conflicting ideologies, surrounding WWI. There was no concrete reality confirming the ideologies of the time. Concerning the space of the setting, it does not give any proof of its existence, as if located in a tranquilizing post-war dystopia. Space and time collaborate to reflect the devastating condition of those ideologies.

Pertaining to narrative, it comes to be perceived more concretely than story, which is "the actual way on which events and characters are presented" (Herman and Vervaeck: 223). The presentation of the events and sequence of internal conflicts lack coherence and unity. In fact, this type of narrative clouds the majority of literary texts of the twentieth century. There is an irrelevant movement in thoughts and mental events of the character in the text. The chaotic philosophization of the mark on the wall seems to

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represent the illogical theoretical trends of the current ideological movements. They lack coherence in structure and cohesion in thoughts, colliding internally and constantly, as the narrative in Woolf's text.

The third level of Genette's theory is narration, which "deals with the narrator and with speech representation" (Herman and Vervaeck: 226). In narration, the narrator can exercise power over the reader. As Bennett and Royle beautifully put it: "narrative power then, may be the only strategy left for the weak and dispossessed: without narrative power, they may not be heard" (Bennett and Royle: 60). Narration becomes the only tool of the author to reject the dominant ideologies and replace them with a falsifying one that he/she deems right as in Woolf's text: "Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours". The speaker (implied author) accuses the contemporary ideologies of horror, while projecting her own version of reality (ideology). Thus, narration has become a tool of power exercise for the weak.

The three primary levels of narrative interact with each other through tense, mood, and voice. As for tense, subcategorizing order, duration, and frequency, it lacks the unity used to be present in pre-war literature. The working of ideologies deprived the text of its tense. Order is replaced by disorder, duration by discontinuity, and frequency by unusualness. As for mood, including distance and perspective, there is a confusing paradox, like the predominant social system of the time. The author distances herself from the misconception of the story, wearing objectivity's garment, as in the following text: "The novelists ... leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories ... taking a knowledge of it [the world] for granted". The author distances herself as if unaffected by the shameful predominant ideologies, while she has already adopted a doubtful perspective, unsure of anything outside her mind: "I might get up, but if I got up and looked at it, ten to one, I shouldn't be able to say for certain, because once a thing's done, no one ever knows how it happened". This uncertainty mixed up with objective authority reflects the inner working of all ideologies, and the paradoxes they suffer from. Concerning the last quality, voice, it is no exception. The voice of the author seems paradoxical, acting variously, as uncertain as the pre-war ideologies.

Thus, narratology could be employed as a keen tool of diagnosing the working ideologies of the text, which might be unobservable when put under perusal by other structural theories. Narratology is crucial for a better understanding of the world, because narratives exist "in all cultures, all histories and all languages as a primal method of communication and the expression of experience" (Mcquillan: 2) dominated by the hegemony of paradoxical ideologies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of narratology and its structuralist perspective provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between narratives and cultural ideologies. The theorists discussed, including Gerard Genette, Vladimir Propp, and Lennard J. Davis, contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how narratives are shaped by broader societal forces.

The structuralist lens encourages a shift from analyzing individual texts to scrutinizing the overarching system that influences authors' unconscious minds. The examination of narrative elements in Virginia Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall* illustrates how the absence of a clear story reflects the tumultuous ideologies of the era. This analysis extends beyond Woolf's work, demonstrating the broader application of narratology in decoding the ideological underpinnings of diverse texts.

Furthermore, narratology proves to be a valuable tool for uncovering the ideological motives inherent in storytelling. By revealing the structural components and underlying patterns, narratology allows for a deeper comprehension of cultural concepts and societal norms embedded in narratives. The work of these theorists underscores the enduring influence of cultural and societal ideologies on literary creations.

In essence, the study of narratology enriches our understanding of narratives as a fundamental method of communication and expression, showcasing their prevalence across cultures and histories. As a pivotal aspect of literary criticism, narratology facilitates a nuanced exploration of the paradoxical ideologies that shape and permeate the narratives we encounter, ultimately contributing to a more profound comprehension of the world we inhabit.

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