

The functions of the narrator of the novel 'The Time of the Goats' by Luan Starova



Literature

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Abstract

According to the renowned French researcher Gerard Genette, the narrator has five functions: the narrative function, the directing function, the communication function, the testimonial (emotional) function and the ideological function. The novel "The Time of Goats" will be initially, in the first and second part of the paper, analyzed for the type of narrator and the intervention of the implied author. In this novel we have an interesting combination of narrative levels: extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels which are translated in relation to the narrator of the story: he is involved in the story, (homodiegetic) but also, in large parts of the novel, we find him recounting things that he may not know, so he becomes a heterodiegetic narrator. The story starts in the first person plural, based on childhood memories, but quickly the narrator continues to narrate in the omniscient third person. I call such a narrator in this novel "the double narrator". This kind of narrator uses childhood memories as the basis for the launch of the narrative, but it is the authorial narrator who takes charge. I will consider whether the author manages to justify this 'violation' of narrative. In the third part of the paper I will deal more extensively with the functions of "the double narrator". For example, the child-narrator has a more testimonial and emotional function, whereas the authorial narrator has a communicative and ideological function. All these issues will be explained based on the theory of narratology and methods arising from this theory, accompanied by illustrations from the text of the novel.

Introduction

The novel 'The Time of the Goats'¹ is a work with a very interesting topic. This is a story about the period after the World War II, the time when the communist regime in Tito's Yugoslavia had launched the country's industrialization program. This meant the destruction of the rural economic base, which was mainly based on farming and especially on keeping many heads of goats. The decision to get rid of goats is a stimulus for the beginning of plot, which is narrated by a narrator characterized by a range of features. In the first section I discuss the type of narrator, in the second, implied author intervention; and in the third, the functions of the narrator.

The type of narrator

The novel begins in the first person plural: a child-narrator who speaks on behalf of the collective. For example:

As we put down roots beside the river, the castle drew our gaze and took root deep in our souls. We often looked up from the stone quay towards the citadel, and our gaze would rest on the remains of the last war, the old cannons now fired to mark the important holidays of the victors: May Day, the Day of Victory, the Day of the Army, the Day of the Republic. (*Koha e dhive*, 2004, p. 13)

From this quote we can draw the conclusion that the narrator is a homodiegetic one, a narrator who observes and acts as a witness, but not a direct participant in the event, so there is no autodiegetic narrator, who confesses about his life stories. A few pages later, the type of narrator begins to change. The first person plural child-narrator is still in the castle from where he watches and observes, but this doesn't continue for long. For example:

We who were in the castle, did not understand what was happening, but it seemed clear that it was something very big, historical, as the elderly say to us, something that we will understand later, over time.

¹ Luan Starova, *Koha e dhive*, Logos-A, Shkup, Prishtinë, Tiranë, 2004.

From the highlands around, villagers who had not been to the cooperatives of "volunteer" workers, came down to the city with goats and their followers as the authorities hoped that these goatherds would turn quickly into the working class, which had been charged with accomplishing the socialist revolution. Here's what would be revealed in time. But who could understand it? (p. 19)

These two paragraphs contradict each other. In the first, the child-narrator says that he did not understand what was happening below the castle, in the town square where many pastors and goats have gathered. In the second paragraph the narrator knows exactly what was going on. Furthermore, for certain words he uses quotation-marks: for example, for the word "volunteer". The transformation of the narrator, a few pages later, becomes complete. From childish ignorance, the narrator of "The Time of the Goats" becomes an omniscient narrator, who penetrates even the minds of people. So, the process of transformation occurs very quickly: from the castle to the mind and the consciousness of the Party secretary. For example:

The secretary of the party was warned to conceal the guidance, but he brought once more to his mind its content. He kept the text in his office, in the big locker, where he left his revolver ... (pp. 29-30)

The republic capital's Party secretary and the chairman of the executive committee are in trouble about the goats and their herders who have broken into the capital with their families, in response to the decision to create the working class from the peasantry. The conversations between Çanga, the leader of the peasants and communist functionaries of the city, the narrator gives from the third person perspective. It should be remembered that the narrator, a little earlier, was in the castle, as a small child, narrating in the first person plural "we".

In this novel, the combination of the homodiegetic narrator (observer and witness) with the heterodiegetic narrator who knows almost everything, occurs in this manner through the whole narrative structure of this novel. The above examples are illustrative of what happens next. This is done without questioning. But, this is a narratological violation. How is this justified?

The Implied Author Intervention

This combination, a difficult and seemingly unjustified one, is accomplished by the real author, perhaps unconsciously, through the use of the implied author, or the authorial "second self"², an implicit textual instance, who sits behind the scenes and is responsible for designing the cultural values and norms to which it belongs.³ According to the renowned Chicago school researcher, Wayne C. Booth, the implied author should be distinguished from the real author, but also from the narrator, the instance who tells the story.⁴ Narrator recounts the events and situations, and the implied author is responsible for their selection, distribution and combination. However, it is not often easy to make such a distinction, especially between the narrator and the implied author, and especially in texts such as the novel under review, when the real author introduces ideas without the mediation of the fictional instances. The novel "The Time of the Goats" is a literary work that shows this very clearly: the mixing of fictional and empirical instances. The novel starts in the first person plural (the child-narrator), but immediately we face the thoughtful author, and a little bit further, we have the open interference of the implied author who combines events and situations, having access to the thoughts of the characters and giving opinions on the time of events which have a historical reference. Therefore, seen from the wide angle, the story of this kind appears justified. So, this way of building the text's narrative appears as its novel feature.

² Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago&London, Second Edition, 1983, p. 71.

³ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Revised Edition, University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln & London, 2003, p. 42.

⁴ Wayne C. Booth, op. cit., 1983, see Chapter three "All Authors Should Be Objective", pp. 67- 86.

By combining the narrator and the implied author and by not making the necessary distancing of these fictional instances from the real author, a specious narrator, which I call "the double narrator" emerges from the text. This dual narrator also has its functions.

The functions of the narrator

According to French renowned researcher, Gerard Genette, the narrator has five functions: the narrative function, the directing function, the communication function, the testimonial (emotional) function and the ideological function.⁵ The first function is necessary for each narrative text. The directing function appears when the narrator interrupts the story to comment on methods of text organization and articulation; in other words, the directing function means involvement. The communicative function has to do with cases where the narrator speaks directly to the implied reader; and this feature has to do with involvement, too. The testimonial (emotional) function occurs when the narrator affirms the truth of his story, including the narrator's emotions recounting the events; here, we are dealing with affective connection, but also moral and intellectual connections. And the ideological function of the narrator is realized through interventions, direct or not, in the sense the story can also take the didactic form of comment, authorized for certain actions. Genette, in his *Narrative discourse*, said that such interventions are not necessarily the author's; so, the narrator's comments may not be the opinions of the author. Booth also thinks in approximately the same way, but he makes the distinction between the narrator and the implied author, as the authorial "second self" within the text, as well as from the real author. In this way, the thoughts of the narrator, of the implied author and of the real author may not be the same. I think that in the novel "The Time of the Goats" there is no such kind of confusion, because from the beginning we see the interventions of the implied author and even the real author, even within a paragraph. Let's reconsider one of the examples above:

We who were in the castle did not understand what was happening, but it seemed clear that it was something very big, historical, as the elderly say to us, something that we will understand later, over time... (p. 19)

Until the words "we will understand later" we have the child-narrator narration. From these words "we will understand later" and on, we have the implied author interference which also expresses the real author's attitude.

Another example:

My father followed the flow of his slow thoughts, when the solution could not have been easier: he had to buy a goat, like the others. The sudden entry of mother encouraged him to think about the problem of goats, not only philosophically, but in a more concrete form, as realistic as life itself. (p. 63)

Until the word "problem", the narrator has completely a naive perspective of a child; after this word the implied author interferes. This is expressed by phrases - such as "philosophically", "concrete form", "as realistic as life itself." These terms cannot be from the child narrator.

⁵ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse, An Essay in Method*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1980, pp. 255-256.

Another example, some pages below:

Dad has bought a goat! Dad has bought a goat! - We cried louder so our cry would be heard by mother, as well as by neighbors, other goats, the whole Goat neighborhood, the city, the Party, the State and the entire Balkans ... (p. 67)

As in the preceding sentence, the beginning of the passage quoted above belongs completely to the child-narrator and the function of the narrator is a testimonial-emotional one, while, the words "Party", "State", "The Balkans" are the implied author's words, and the function of the narrator becomes ideological. Quite a few pages later, the beginning of the chapter six, belongs completely to the voice of the implied author:

Before he bought that goat, my father was in deep and long meditations about the consequences of "class struggle" in the Balkans. He could not understand the reason why this idea, brought to the Balkan Peninsula since the French Revolution and the October Revolution, degenerated so deeply, causing many victims. In the name of the "class struggle" the human being never was humiliated so much before. (p. 73)

The paragraph cited above needs no further explanation. The combination of childlike perspective with authorial attitudes, expressed by the "second self" within the text, occurs throughout the whole story of this novel. And, from the five functions, the ideological function is the most clearly expressed in this work.

We identify the narrator's ideological function when we face authorial thoughts and assertions about the goat issue, the Party, the communist state, the secretary of the Party and other functionaries.

The emotional function, which is the second most widely used, is expressed when the authorial narrator, a term coined by the German narratologist, Franz Karl Stanzel,⁶ confesses about his father, his father's books, his mother, brothers and sisters, the birth and death which frequently visit the narrator's home and so on. I think these are the most beautiful parts of the novel, parts which are expressed with strong emotion in another Starova novel, "The Books of my Father".⁷

In this novel we also find the communicative function of the narrator very frequently used. In this particular novel, however, I would call it the informative function, and this has to do with the direct information that the authorial narrator gives about wars, the Balkans, Yugoslavia, Albanians, Macedonians, the relations between them and so on.

Thus, the first function, which was the narrative function, indispensable for any narrative text, in this novel is not of a "pure" nature.

The directing function is almost inscrutable in this novel because the author does not intervene to explain how he built the text, but only to give opinions and assessments on contextual issues.

And, from the five functions of the narrator, the three most frequent functions of the narrator in this novel are the ideological function, the emotional function and the communicative-informative function.

⁶ Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009, p. 88.

⁷ Luan Starova, *Librat e babait*, Libraria e Çarshisë, Shkup, 2013.

Considering all this, we can conclude that this novel is interesting and such prose lies on the not clearly defined borders between literary texts that are entirely fictional and texts characterized by forceful authorial interventions, where we also find a great amount of essayistic and particularly ideological thoughts.

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