



Application of Journalistic Style of Narration in Marquez's Novels

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Abstract

The journalistic style of narration that Gabriel Garcia Marquez has applied in most of his novels is a prominent feature of his literary discourse. He employs this style along with other literary techniques, especially magical realism and symbolism. By combining the journalistic style with these techniques, he constructs an exclusive craft of writing that distinguishes his works from that of others. This type of style actually offers his works literary richness because it enables him to convey the realities in a framework of surrealism that enhances the aesthetic value of his works. On the other hand, most importantly, it teases the reader with provocations and paradoxes by drawing his attention on certain important parts of the message, mainly those parts representing a contradictory reality involving the period of colonization. Therefore, the article surveys this style of Marquez who has employed for the narrative organization of his novels.

Key words: Journalistic techniques; “He-she-they-told-me” narrative technique; Genette’s analepsis

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INTRODUCTION

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's professional experience as a journalist had a great influence on the writing of some of

his novels like *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, *No One Writes to the Colonel*, *News of a Kidnapping*, *Of Love and Other Demons* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The origin of these novels basically emphasizes on the dual forces of journalism and fiction. In *New York Times Book Review*, Robert Stone gives *News of a Kidnapping* as example of Marquez's journalistic/fictional activity for reflecting the social realities and declares that it resembles newspaper journalism of the better sort, with a quick eye for the illuminating detail and a capacity for assembling fact (Stone, 1997, p.17).

Marquez's journalistic experience was indeed an essential part of his life in writing these novels. He says that journalism kept him in contact with reality. He wrote a weekly syndicated column for ten newspapers and a magazine. It was like a pitcher keeping his arm warmed up (Bell-Villada, 1983/2006, p.139). Therefore, because of his journalistic experience, he has given his narrative structures a journalistic style that is a kind of the reportorial and interviewing form of presentation of the story; in fact, it is a kind of ‘he-she-they-told-me’ narrative technique. He has also blended the journalistic style of narration with magical realism. In an interview with Marlise Simons, he says that “The tricks you need to transform something which appears fantastic, unbelievable into something plausible, credible, those I learned from journalism...The key is to tell it straight. It is done by reporters and country folk”. (Simons, 1982, p.7) The novel *Of Love and Other Demons* is an example of the blending of his journalistic style with magical realism.

The journalistic style of narration is also more apparent in his novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Indeed, this novel occupies a unique place among his works because the narrative is based on both “journalistic” and “fictitious”. Throughout the entire novel, he acts like a reporter who is reporting an event in details based on his direct observation and interviewing with the witnesses.

At the end, the novel becomes as a parody of newspaper stories and also as a perfect union of journalism and literature. In an interview with Simons, he says that “journalism and literature were almost joined. I have never been able to completely separate them.” (Simons, 1988/2006, p.159)

Basically, the journalistic style of narration is an effective way for representing a story in an accurate and well-researched form. It portrays a real situation of the story in details and motivates the reader’s interest. On the other hand, it represents the past by blending the reportage of facts with the writing style of fiction and also reflects the author’s own personal view of the story.

1. JOURNALISTIC STYLE

Marquez’s journalistic style consists of some features that give specific characteristics to his literary discourse: The first is that the “voice” of the storyteller is presented in the narration. It gives factual details to the story so that the reader impressively and emotionally feels himself as a part of the story as in *Of Love and Other Demons*. The second is that the ‘characters’ are placed in a contextualized discourse within which their actions or the story events are often narrated in a chronological order as it was apparent in the manner of murdering of Santiago Nasar in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The third is that the ‘context’ of narrative is provided with rich underlying meanings. It means that the character’s names, behaviors, mental conditions are revealed through literary allusions, metaphors and symbolism like the symbolic names of the characters Pedro and Pablo in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, metaphorical representation of the character Jeremiah de Saint Amour in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, the mental conditions of Bolivar, the Colonel and Aureliano Buendia in *The General in His Labyrinth*, *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, respectively. The fourth is that he applies a minimum amount of words, adjectives and almost avoids hyperboles, cliches, slang, and flowery phrases, mostly in the novels that have been narrated in the journalistic style. The fifth is that, at the end of reading, the reader comes to a ‘significance’ of whole text; theme, purpose, reason and destination. Therefore, through the journalistic style, Marquez clearly represents a detailed perspective on the scenes and characters of the story, unfolds events over time and, finally, makes it easy for the reader to establish a meaningful communication with the story.

The novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a straightforward narrative; it has a perfect and clear plot structure; Santiago Nasar deflowering Angela is going to be killed by her brothers in front of everybody in Sucre in 1951. From the beginning, everything is clear that something is going to happen. It is Santiago Nasar who is going to be killed. This appears to conform to the journalistic style of narration that is commonly

characterized as ‘*what, who, when, where whom, how and why*’ technique. It means that the reader gets informed in advance what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, to whom it is going to happen and where it is going to happen. But, only the perpetrator, Santiago Nasar, does not know what is going to happen. It means that the *why* of his death and the complex social milieu that despises the murder are not so clear. This is a lead, in fiction and in Genette’s term, that is called the ‘*prolepsis*’ that is the narration of story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. It actually keeps in suspending the reader trying to know how it is going to happen. The reader comes to know the story through the linearity of events. He follows the story step-by-step through the successive events. In this case, the narrator gives a minute by minute progression of the events that lead to Santiago Nasar’s murder.

Another important technique of this novel is that the story is contextualized by “backgrounding”—backgrounding refers to the recalling of the past in relation to the events. So, it is because of this technique that the narrator in the fiction has to shift back and forth in time in order to explain *how* a foretold death is going to happen. On the other hand, in order to fictionalize the story, from the beginning, he clarifies what kind of personality and features the characters have, what kind of relation they have with each other, what kind of life they lead and eventually what the supporting events of the main event are. All these elements were arranged in a coherent and logical textual discourse. This arrangement actually serves as the backgrounding of story. It is almost synonymous of Genette’s “*analepsis*” that is the narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told.

Therefore, due to the continuous application of flash back and forward techniques, the structure of book does not follow a chronological order of events; that is, the narrative does not present the events chronologically: The first chapter concentrates on Santiago’s final ninety minutes of his life; the second is about Bayardo’s wedding night and returning Angela to her family; the third concerns with Vicario brothers’ decision for killing Santiago Nasar; the fourth deals with Santiago Nasar’s autopsy, report of murder and leaving of Bayardo and Angela’s family from the town. The fifth deals with the townspeople’s neutral reactions to the murder.

For the narrative organization of *Love and Other Demons*, Marquez has blended the journalistic style with magical realism that is a style of writing that combines realistic phenomena with fantasy. He always emphasizes that the fantasy in his writing is derived from his journalistic approach to the realities of his society. It means that “surrealism comes from the reality of Latin America.” (Kennedy, 1973, p.56) Therefore, like many of his earlier works, he also colors this novel with magical elements. By this way, he actually muddies the water of reality from the beginning of the novel. In the preface to

this novel, he says that he as a journalist witnessed the transferring of the remains of tombs; on the other hand, he says that he saw a skull of a girl with twenty-two meters hair. It indicates that he blends the reality with fantasy; in fact, his presence in the crypt is a *reality* of his life, but skull with such a long hair is *fantasy*. There are also other magical elements such as “the smell of onions in girl’s perspiration” (p.31), changing of “color of blood” (p.87) or “exceptional size and color of flower” (p.80). Actually, the magical scenes are parts of this story and provide a basis for unfolding the tale of a haunting, bittersweet romance between a young girl and a bookish priest.

The relationship between author, narrator and reader is also apparent from the initiation of the story. The author clearly explains the reality of the event in the preface to the novel. Although he states that the novel is based on his experience, it begins with an unbelievable fact so that even a less skeptical reader would have difficulty in believing. In fact, he builds a novel which is at once straightforward and at the same time utterly magical. He faces the reader with his own judgment what is real and what is not. This is more intensified by the traditional style of its narration that creates an uncertainty about the interpretation of the reality.

2. NEWS OF A KIDNAPPING

The book *News of a kidnapping* is a real story happened in Colombia in 1990. It describes the event of a kidnapping of ten journalists and prominent Colombian men and women by Pablo Escobar, head of the Medellin drug Cartel. He wanted to force the government to change its policy about the extradition of criminals to the United States and indeed to gain an assurance that he and other traffickers would not be extradited to the United States if they were surrendered to the Colombian authorities. The story deals basically with the negotiation among the official authorities, kidnappers and hostages’ families for their rescue. It describes the ordeal of the hostages, their efforts to survive and also their daily negotiation with the kidnappers. It also describes the efforts of their families to negotiate with both the kidnappers and the government for releasing the hostages. At the end, some of hostages are released and some are shot to death and the main head of kidnappers, Escobar, is surrendered and killed as fleeing from the prison.

The book *News of a Kidnapping* resembles a reportage of a newspaper that gives a detailed and comprehensive report of a real kidnapping. It depicts

“the huge wave of violence and kidnappings that Colombia continues to face....It follows the government’s response under President Cesar Gaviria’s term in office (1990-1994) and examines the psychology of the people involved: those kidnapped, their families and friends, and the nation at large” (Pelayo, 2001, p.13).

About the structuring of the book, Marquez says that

“throughout the book I use not one single fact that is not truthful and documented, and the language that I use has not one single metaphor so as to keep the austerity of language in journalism” (ibid. p.13). It indicates that the story has basically written in journalistic style; it explains the event in detail, like a report, with short sentences, fewer adjectives and more nouns. The following paragraph is the beginning of the story that clearly illustrates Marquez’s prose style in the writing of this book:

The men opened Maruja’s door and another two opened Beatriz’s. The fifth shot the driver in the head through the glass, and the silence made it sound no louder than a sigh. Then he opened the door, pulled him out, and shot him three more times as he lay on the ground. It was another man’s destiny: Angel Maria Roa had been Maruja’s driver for only three days, and for the first time he was displaying his new dignity with the dark suit, starched shirt, and black tie worn by the chauffeurs who drove government ministers. His predecessor, who had retired the week before, had been the government agency’s regular driver for ten years (p.1).

This paragraph reveals that the book has a straight forward and plain-speaking style of a newspaper rather than the allusive and magical style that Marquez is famed. Therefore, the book is not a fiction, but should be read like a fiction.

The novel has a clear narrative structure: The chapters are arranged in the form of odd-even; the odd chapters deal with the hostages and kidnappers and the even chapters deal with the hostages’ families and the government. As a whole, although the story is composed of a series of negotiations between the kidnappers, hostages’ families and the government for the releasing of hostages, the real negotiation was between the kidnappers and the government because the kidnappers tried to put the government under pressure to change the rule of delivering the drug traffickers to the United States.

The characters, the hostages, deal with their captivity in various ways; some of them have some sort of feeling of understanding and forgiveness towards the kidnappers, some got extra-weight due to the sedentary way of living in captivity and others lose weight due to the bad food and the constant stress. As the hostages, the kidnappers themselves are also in a fearful condition. The story actually represents a little of their lives and personalities. In the book, Marquez mostly concentrates on the four key figures; Maruja, Marina, Diana and Pachito. Of the four, only Maruja and Pachito survived and released at the end of chapter eleven and Marina and Diana were killed in chapter six. The book ends with the conclusion in chapter eleven with Maruja’s joyful return and greeting with her family and friends. It comes to a happy ending.

CONCLUSION

For the narrative organization and development of his novels, he has not applied a shared style and fixed

techniques; rather his styles and techniques depend on the message he intends to convey to the reader, a kind of texture and value that he wants to give to his literary discourse and the origin and nature of the event or phenomena that he wants to present. Because of the specialty of figural devices in creating a multiple layer of meanings in the text, he has also applied them more than other literary techniques. In fact, he never treats a reality in a simple mood or transfers it to the reader directly; rather he mostly makes it more complicated by applying these devices. So the reader is left with his own ability to exploit the intended meaning through searching or analyzing the textual clues. On the other hand, the magical elements that most often convey extra-implications are also more dominant and remarkable in his literary discourse. He actually applies these elements due to the socio-cultural condition of the Caribbean zone where superstition and fantastic things are common and easily believable in the community.

Another style that he has skillfully applied for the narrative organization of the novels is the journalistic style of narration. Many prominent writers such as Hemingway have applied the journalistic style for narrating their story. But, in comparison with these writers, Marquez is more successful in applying this style because he has dexterously employed it along with other literary techniques, mainly with magical realism and symbolic expressions, making it a more effective literary tool for presenting his intended messages. He has mostly applied this style in those novels that are based on the factual events of his society. This style provides a clear and comprehensive picture of the settings, characters and events of the story. The settings primarily refer to the places in his native land such as villages, farming areas, towns and ports placed in the line of the Caribbean Sea. The characters range over different social classes such as politicians, militants, emigrants and historical heroes, rich, poor, old, and young. Therefore, his literary discourse is rich with a diversity of characters coming from different

cultural backgrounds, symbolizing Latin America with its identity and culture. Finally, the novels mainly depict the significant historical and political events of his native land and Latin America.

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