

Reading Response to Discourse in the Novel

These heterogeneous stylistic unities, upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it. [p.262]

This reading response aims to elaborate on this sentence, explaining how unities combine to form a whole unity which transcends its subordinates in the novel. Note that subjective interpretations may be used, as this is a personal response involving individual opinions.

Bakhtin suggested several unities which form the novelistic whole. Here, we elaborate on certain unities, defining each unity and how they form a novel.

Firstly we have narration. It is the author's third person account of the events in the novel. It is the glue of the novel, stringing together pieces of all the other unities to form a coherent narrative. It is often used to inform readers where other stylistics do not make logical sense, such as events unknown to characters, or the foreshadowing of events yet to occur. In other cases, narration is used to describe events in a concise manner, where other stylistics may struggle to reach such brevity, or when distinction of importance between different events is desired. Free from logical constraints, the author is able to vary language and tone to suit the purpose.

Secondly is the written narration, in the form of letters and diaries. More modern examples include advertisements, text messages, lyrics, etc. Semiliterary accounts provide a formal description of events, and often carry the emotions, biases, opinions, and other qualities of the writer. Although their modern counterparts are much less formal, and may even appear to be more informal than everyday speech, they are inherently exaggerated pieces of writing. Due to the limitations of conversation in a textual format, users often heighten their emotions to get a message across. They are also influenced by internet culture such as memes and acronyms. Lyrics usually convey emotions where words fail. In addition, they may appear vague and address several issues. As lyrics are usually quoted from existing songs, one has to differentiate between the underlying messages brought out by the artist and the purpose of the character (or narrator) who quotes it. In any case, this is an important nonverbal basis for fleshing out characters and revealing their inner qualities, e.g. thinking, values, emotions.

Thirdly, there is speech of characters. They are used to capture the most immediate and instinctive aspects of characters. Unlike its written counterpart, speech is usually impromptu, without having gone through significant edits or revisions. Consider "bah humbug!" for example. One cannot take back a comment similar to how one can discard a written draft. Additionally, speech has an inherently social function, as noted by how self mumbling is inherently different from speech meant for any audience. Informal speech such as small talk, banter, and gossip reveal the characteristics and interests of the speaker,

whereas formal speech including announcements, meetings, and public speaking project a preferred image of the character. It can also reveal the motivations behind actions, and convey the gravity of the situation.

All of these heterogeneous unities differ from each other, and can form individual bodies of literature, such as records, plays, poetry, and so on. However, once combined, they become the novel, which evolves past its constituents.

“The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.” [p.262] It is the artistic organisation of different unities, some of which are listed above. The surface goal of a novel is to artistically tell a story through interweaving between the author’s narration, and the use of language of characters, verbal or written. A distinct characteristic of the novel is the natural and rapid flow between different stylistics. This is often used to take advantage of what different stylistics offer. One can use speech of characters to directly supply information and tell a story as it is happening. Narration can be sprinkled in between speeches, to inform readers of details without shifting the focus. It can also signify a change in setting, such as time and location. Written narration such as letters and diaries can lay characters bare, revealing their more vulnerable aspects. Yet at the same time, depending on circumstances, formal writing may shed a light on how characters view themselves, and how they sculpt an outwards appearance. These contrast with speeches, or other forms of narration, to construct a character with depth. This differs the novel from poetry, which focuses on the idealogical, and other forms of literature whose stylistics limit or strongly influence the focus of the work.

There is also a deeper motivation behind the novel. It is written to convey a message. Novels are social in nature, where all of the stylistics above can be reanalysed through a social lens. Narration is the author’s direct way of communication with the reader, and it can guide the reader in criticising political ideologies, evaluating moral principles, questioning dogma, and asking questions. Ultimately, the reader is persuaded to accept or reject an idea. At the very least, the reader should be provoked into discussion. Speeches of different characters, in addition to representing the inner and outer thoughts, are often used to speak for social classes or groups. When *Oliver Twist* asks “Please Sir, I want some more”, he is not speaking for himself only. Such speeches are useful tools in verbalising and elaborating on the viewpoints of different groups, transforming abstract ideas into realistic debates. Finally, written narration can be used as a formal medium to record and detail ideas. Goldstein’s book, “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism” tells the reader how Orwell pictures a Communist Government. It is free from the limitations of speeches, such as vocabulary preference, limited knowledge of characters, logicity of actions, and frequent interjections found in conversations.

The above paragraphs describe several examples of each stylistic, and suggests how they are fused and used in novels. Through comparisons with other forms of literature, the novel is shown to be free from the limitations and foci of specific

stylistics, and hence is independent of each of its components. This briefly expands on the quoted sentence, and forms a subjective interpretation of it.