INSTABRIGHT e-GAZETTE
ISSN: 2704-3010
Volume V, Issue II
November 2023
Available online at https://www.instabrightgazette.com

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NARRATIVITY IN STEPHEN CRANE'S MAGGIE: A GIRL OF THE STREETS

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ABSTRACT

Stephen Crane is known for his naturalist approach to writing. His early work, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* has a vivid intensity and distinctive dialects. It is centered to the theme of poverty, where a young girl whose name is Maggie was driven to an unfortunate events that leads to her downfall. It is also noted that Crane's style of writing is short, distinct, and unsentimental that contributed to his naturalistic approach to writing. Thus, this paper tried to explore the narrativity in Crane's writing, including those of what makes a narrative a narrative. With this, we can finally understand why people are drawn to stories and what it is that makes people hooked to it.

Keywords: *stories, narrativity, narration, novella, elements, style, chronological narrative*

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INTRODUCTION

Stories are everywhere in human lives, and storytelling is indeed part of all human cultures. We think in narrative, dream in narrative, and remember in narrative. People tell stories in musical forms, in pictures and in movement, in words and through increasingly diverse multimodal means. We learn through stories told in the news and in history books, we make decisions based on stories reported in criminal trials, we find it effortless to engage with the fictional stories revealed in our favorite novels and films (Popova, 2015). In short, the earth rotates in narrative, and we understand better in narrative, so they say. So, the questions are being thrown here, why are humans drawn to stories? Is it because of the plot or the way it is narrated?

According to Weitzman (2018), it is impossible to separate stories from the teller. We are initially drawn to stories because we are interested in the teller, who brings us into their world, intertwining it with our own. Plot is what happens in the story while narration is how it is being told. But in some novels, they are closely aligned. This goes to show that plot and narration come hand in hand. But to understand it fully, we must define narrative in a story. Narrative writing or narration is a method of storytelling for literary works. It is a sequence of events, not necessarily arranged in chronological order, told by a narrator, happening in a particular place at a particular time (Tiongson, 2016). A narrative can be fiction or nonfiction, and it can also occupy the space between these as a semi-autobiographical story, historical fiction, or a dramatized retelling of actual events. As long as a piece tells a story through a narrative structure, it is a narrative writing (Kramer 2021). Popova (2015) also noted that narrative doesn't solely relies on language models alone as it posits a strong connection between humankind and nature and it existed way before language.

Additionally, every narrative has five elements that define and shape the narrative: plot, setting, character, conflict, and theme. These elements are rarely stated in a story; they are revealed to the readers in the story in subtle or not-so-subtle ways, but the writer needs to

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understand the elements to assemble the story. In addition to structural elements, narratives have several styles that help move the plot along or serve to involve the reader. Writers define space and time in a descriptive narrative, and how they choose to define those characteristics can convey a specific mood or tone (Nordquist, 2019).

For example, chronological choices can affect the reader's impressions. Past events always occur in strict chronological order, but writers can choose to mix that up, show events out of sequence, or the same event several times experienced by different characters or described by different narrators. In Gabriel García Márquez's novel "Chronicle of a Death Foretold," the same few hours are experienced in sequence from the viewpoint of several different characters. García Márquez uses that to illustrate the peculiar almost magical inability of the townspeople to stop a murder they know is going to happen. Also, establishing a point of view for a narrator allows the writer to filter the events through a particular character. The most common point of view in fiction is the omniscient (all-knowing) narrator who has access to all the thoughts and experiences of each of her characters. Omniscient narrators are almost always written in the third person and do not usually have a role in the storyline. The other extreme is a story with a first-person point of view in which the narrator is a character within that story, relating events as they see them and with no visibility into other character motivations (Nordquist, 2019).

Writers also use the grammatical strategies of tense (past, present, future), person (first person, second person, third person), number (singular, plural) and voice (active, passive). Writing in the present tense is unsettling—the narrators have no idea what will happen next—while past tense can build in some foreshadowing. A writer sometimes personalizes the narrator of a story as a specific person for a specific purpose: The narrator can only see and report on what happens to him or her. In "Moby Dick," the entire story is told by the narrator Ishmael, who relates the tragedy of the mad Captain Ahab, and is situated as the moral center (Norquist, 2019).

When it comes to narration, all writers have specific styles in writing and telling of the story. Stephen Crane is of no exception. He is considered one of America's foremost realistic

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writers and his works marked the beginning of modern American Naturalism. As we go along, we are going to explore his narrative style in his novella's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

The *setting* of the story happened in Bowery, the slums of Lower Manhattan, in the late 19th century. The *plot* revolves around the poverty that takes place in the lives of the characters. The *character* introduced in the beginning of the story is the young Jimmie trying by himself to fight a gang of boys from an opposing neighborhood. He is saved by his friend, Pete, and comes home to his sister, Maggie, his toddling brother, Tommie, his brutal and drunken father, and mother, Mary Johnson. The parents, Irish immigrants, terrify the children until they are shuddering in the corner. Years pass, Tommie, and his father die. Jimmie turned into a sneering, aggressive, cynical youth. Maggie begins to work in a shirt factory, but her attempts to improve her life are undermined by her mother's drunken rages. Maggie begins to date Jimmie's friend Pete, who has a job as a bartender and seems a very fine fellow, believing that he will help her escape the life of poverty. The *conflict* arises when Nellie, whom they call "woman of brilliance and audacity" convinces Pete to dump Maggie. This drives Maggie to her doom and commit suicide. The story ended with the scene of her mother who, upon knowing that she's dead hypocritically promised that she will forgive her. The story is central to the *theme* of poverty where the plot solely revolves. The misery felt by the characters were brought by the poverty. This novella had the most vivid portrayals of lower-class life in nineteenth century Manhattan in all of American literature.

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GRAMMATICAL STYLE

As mentioned above, all writers have their own grammatical style in writing. In this section, the tone and tenses of the verb will be discussed to furtherly understand Crane's narrative style.

> *"A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devils Row, who were circle madly about the heap and pelting him. His infantile countenance was livid with the fury of battle. His small body was writhing in delivery of oaths." (Chapter 1, 1st paragraph)*

In chapter 1, paragraph 1, we can clearly see that the novella is written in the past tense of the verb. The use of the words *stood, were, and was* are the examples of past tense and it clearly denotes that the story happened in the past. In addition, a past progressive tense is very noticeable. It is used to describe an ongoing activity in the past and set the scene for another action coming. As such, the phrases '*was throwing'* and *'was writhing'* are the examples of past progressive tense. By writing in this style, Crane was able to manipulate time and show events that are concealed and revealed.

> *"Eventually they encountered a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against a hundred windows." (chapter 2, paragraph 1)*

Additionally, in chapter 2 and the rest of the paragraphs in the novella are also written in past tense, denoting that the story already happened in the past. Majority of the paragraphs in

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chapter 2 are written in past tense unlike the first chapter that has a past progressive in it. The used of past tense in his novella creates a vivid description of the story and how it happens.

> *"He strode over to the cursing circle, swinging his shoulders in a manner which denoted that he held victory in his fists. He approached at the back of one of the most deeply engaged of the Devil's Row children."*

The example above shows that Crane sets the tone of the novella in active voice. This is because of the subject He which refers to Jimmie, is followed by the verb *strode* in the first sentence and verb *approached* in the second sentence. This ensures clarity to the readers as to who is taking the action in the sentence.

NARRATION OF THE STORY

Stephen Crane is perfectly known to write in short but descriptive way. It is also noted that his straightforwardness paves the way to his realistic way of writing. He was able to inform the readers of the way people lived in the slums of lower Manhattan.

> *"In all unhandy places that were buckets, brooms, rags, and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings or screamed in frantic quarrels."*

The example above shows a perfect depiction of how poverty is described in the novella. Stephen crane did not just mention the word poverty for the readers to see that the theme is all

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about poverty. Rather, he described poverty in a way readers can see, feel, hear, and imagine what it is like living in a poor environment. At the same time, the way he narrated everything is simple and unsentimental that leads to the next point of discussion. The narration is important quality of narrativity as it is the style used by the writers to tell story. This may vary from writer to writer but in this novella, Stephen Crane obviously used third person point of view (omniscient) to narrate the story. In third-person narration, the person who tells the story is living outside the events of the story. It is usually written in third-person pronoun such as he, she, and they. One classification of a third-person narration or point of view is the capacity of the narrator to know the feelings, thoughts, and motivations of the characters despite the fact that those things are not reveal with other characters.

> *"From a window of an apartment house that uprose from amid squat ignorant stables there leaned a curious woman. Some labourers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river, paused for a moment and regarded the fight. The engineer of a passive tugboat hung lazily over a railing and watched. Over on the island a worm of yellow convicts came from the shadow of a gray ominous building and crawled slowly along the river's bank."*

The paragraph above is an example of omniscient third-person narration since the narrator is revealing the character's thought. Stephen Crane could have written that from a window of an apartment there leaned a woman. Instead, the word 'curious' before a woman in the sentence makes the readers understand what goes on the character's mind and it says that a woman is curious while leaning to see what is happening in her environment.

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CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

Stephen Crane's first novel, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is in some respects barely a novel at all. It is very short--in most editions, barely 60 pages long. The novella is short because the narrative it conveys is, in important ways, a slight narrative. His narrative falls under the linear or chronological one. Jones (2011) defines linear narrative as the most traditional and most common narrative structure. Such a story is organized around a series of events and key moments that have often been labeled and ordered as follows: the rising action or precipitating incident, the conflict, the obligatory moment, the climax, the resolution, and the falling action. It follows a straight line, starting at the beginning, moving to the middle, and proceeding to the end of the story. Stephen Crane's novella followed an in order sequence of events. It started off with young Jimmie fighting in the neighborhood until it progresses later on when he and Maggie growing up and meeting the doom of their lives. However, it is noted that in the latter part of the story, the linear narrative ceases, and we are given a series of scenes, arranged in chronological order but separated by passages of time.

CONCLUSION

Stephen Crane's narrative style is simple and descriptive as evident in his novella. His way of narrating is short and direct to the point. The sequence of the story followed a straight line and arranged in chronological order. Although not all narration follows an in-order sequence of events as Popova (2015) believes that a story does not appear to us as merely sequential but as meaningful, as a configuration the total significance of which can often be revealed only retrospectively or from a different and subsequent point in time. Crane may have arranged it in sequential order but as stated previously, not all narration is arranged that way. Narrativity explores the qualities of what makes a story a story and in this regard, Crane's narrativity consists

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of how he narrated his story and those elements as well as his grammatical style contributed to his naturalistic way of writing.

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