

## **Narrative Analysis of Oscar Wilde's Short Story "*The Happy Prince*"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses the basic elements of a narrative by analyzing the short story "The Happy Prince" written by Oscar Wilde. The study, evaluation, and understanding of narrative are called narratology. Here in this paper, the narrative pattern of a short story is analyzed to elaborate narratology and its usage in narrative analysis. In the narrative analysis, the main focus is on the art of characterization, plot construction, narrative pattern of story, point of view and speech, thought presentation to make this short story more comprehensive and understandable for its readers. Special observation is made by representing some dialogues from the source text "The Happy Prince" by Oscar Wilde. In narratology the ideas of its main proponents such as Aristotle, Gerard Genette and Vladimir Propp are applied on source text to articulate the desired upshot. The aim to conduct this research is to illustrate narratology, narrative patterns and its application on literary text for its readers especially for the teachers and learners so that they can better interpret any narrative piece of writing.*

**Keywords:** narration, narrative patterns, narratology, focalization, short story

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### **Introduction**

The narrative is an art of representing stories and events. A story can be in written form or spoken. So the narrative is the process or technique of narrating. More precisely one can say any account of connected events, presented in a sequence of written or spoken words or in a sequence of pictures, is called narrative.

The study of a narrative and its form is called narratology. Flaudernik (2009) called the study of narrative theory or narratology, as "genre". It is an emerging term of the 21st century and a branch of structuralism. Flaudernik (2009) also states that narratives are based on cause and effect relationships which help in sequencing the plot, events and also provide a "fundamental epistemological structure". Hogan (2008)

called narratology an area of literary study that is closely connected to cognitive science. Hogan (2008) has also discussed the classical and post-classical narratology in this regard. Classical narratology comprises the works of fundamental structuralist narrative theory.

The main proponents of classical narratology (Genette, Barthes, and Greimas) use Saussurean linguistics to analyze narrative structures. While post-classical narratology has broadened the sources of narrative analysis. Here the main proponents are Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault. They use new theories particularly deconstruction to analyze the narrative text. So the main focus of narratologists is on narrative structures. Many national and international scholars are applying narratology to interpret all specific ingredients of a narrative and its form and structure. Dromnes (2010) has analyzed a short story that aims to simplify the theories of narratology and he has made the theories more accessible and to use the findings practically in the analysis in the classroom. Martelli (2012) has analyzed narrative to bring out possible interrelation and encounter of two areas, possible-worlds theory and speech and thought presentation, within narratology.

The major aim of this paper is to let the readers get a deep understanding of basic narrative elements, forms, and structure of a short story and its interpretation according to narratology.

The data has been obtained through frequent reading that helps the researcher as an instrument to analyze the proposed text. The researcher will apply the narrative approaches by Vladimir Propp (1928) and Gerard Genette (1930) related to narrative analysis. The procedures and steps that are involved in this research work are data collection and provision, analysis of data, discussion and results. The text has been analyzed in the light of narratology and narrative patterns.

### **Narrative and Narratology**

Any account of connected events, presented in a sequence of written or spoken words or a sequence of pictures, is called narrative. While according to Bal (2009) narratology is a group of narrative theories such as narrative text, images, events, scenes and cultural aspects that tell a story<sup>7</sup>. It helps in the analysis, evaluation, and understanding of the narratives and its structure. There is a slight difference between narrative, story, and plot. According to Barry, (2002) "The 'story' is the actual sequence of events as they happen, whereas the 'plot' is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented in what we recognize as a narrative"<sup>8</sup>. "Narratives are based on cause and effect relationships that are applied to the sequence of events"(Fludernik, 2009).

About narrative Toolan (2001) says that a narrative is a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected

events, typically involving, as the experience agonist, humans or quasi-humans, or other sentient beings, from whose experience we human can 'learn'.

The idea brings out three chief features,

- Sequenced and interrelated events
- Foregrounded individuals
- Crisis to resolution progression

As our concern is to study narratology to analyze a short story, so there are very lucid and clean images of the structure and framework of narratives in his book, "Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction".

"The poetic of narrative, as we might call it, both attempt to understand the components of narrative and analyses how particular narratives achieve their effects" (Culler, 1997). Narratology, even though a sub-branch of structuralism, still has achieved certain independence. In narratology one may define the basic mechanisms and procedures that are common in acts of storytelling. In brief, "Narratology is the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that 'tell' a story. Such a theory helps to understand, analyze, and evaluate narratives" (Bal, 1997)

**Short Story.** According to Bal (1997) "a *Fabula* [story] is a series of logically and chronologically, related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (Toolan, 2001).

According to Bal, (1997), there are several processes involve in arranging a story;

- Sequence of events
- Determined time
- Distinctive traits of characters
- The location where events take place
- Other relationships (symbolic, allusive, traditional, etc.) may exist among various elements.
- Point of view and focalization

Then there is a difference between an ordinary story and a narrative text. "A fabulous that has been ordered in a story is still not a text. A narrative text is a story that is 'told', conveyed to the recipient, and this telling requires a medium; that is, it is converted into signs". (Bal, 1997)

So the plot has its concern with well-knitted events, the story is a sequence of events whereas a narrative is a technique to narrate and narratology is a term through which we analyze form and structure of a narrative. A shortened history of narratology follows three important proponents who work for narrative structure. Those are Aristotle, Vladimir Prop and Gerard Genette.

**Aristotle.** Aristotle is one of the important proponents of narratology. Barry (2002) says that Aristotle considers character and action are necessary elements of a short story. According to him, characters are

disclosed through their actions and it happens through the aspects of the plot. Then he points out three main elements in a plot,

- Hamartia
- Anagnorisis
- Peripeteia

Hamartia refers to any error of judgment, sin or fault in the protagonist. It is also known as a tragic flaw in the hero that brings his tragedy. On the other hand, anagnorisis refers to recognition or realization. It is the situation where the protagonist realizes the truth and this truth leads him to recognition or self-recognition. Peripeteia means the reversal of fortune. It happens when the situation turned around dramatically in which the protagonist falls from high to low estate.

**Vladimir Prop.** Vladimir Prop is a second important narratologist, who mainly concentrates on events rather than characters in a narrative. He is a "Russian Formalist" critic and works on Russian folk tales. He identifies situations and recurrent structures in such tales. He has published his findings in his book "The Morphology of Folktales" (1928). The book is about the structures and plot formation of folk tales. He has described 31 functions to start or begin a story in different situations, some are given below;

- (i) One of the members of the family absents himself from home.
- (ii) The hero leaves home.
- (iii) The hero and villain join in direct combat.

- (iv) The hero is branded.
- (v) The villain is defeated
- (vi) The villain received information about his victim.
- (vii) The hero returns.
- (viii) The hero leaves home.
- (ix) The hero reacts to the actions of a future donor.
- (x) The task is resolved

He has described seven 'spheres of action' to generate a plot. Such as

- (i) The villain
- (ii) The donor ( provider)
- (iii) The helper
- (iv) The princess and her father
- (v) The dispatcher
- (vi) The hero
- (vii) The false hero

A plot can be generated effectively by applying these seven spheres of actions and from the 31 functions (necessarily not all) in a narrative.

**Gerard Genette.** Gerard Genette is the prominent narratologist, whose concern is with the process of telling a story itself. His focus is not only the story but also how it is told. He has discussed six particular areas to form or analyze any structure, in his book, "Narrative Discourse" (1930).

- (i) Narrative Mode (What is the basic narrative mode?)
  - Mimetic (showing, dramatizing or slow telling)

- Diegetic (rapid, panoramic or summarize way)

(ii) Focalization (viewpoint or perspective) (How is narrative focalized?)

- Internal
- External
- Zero

(iii) Authorial Persona (Who is telling the story?)

- Overt (the narrator is dramatized or intrusive)
- Covert (the narrator is non-intrusive, non-dramatised, effaced)

(iv) Control of time (How is time handled in the story?)

- Analeptic (back take, or flashback)
- Prolepsis (fore-take or flash forward)
- Chronological (time order)

(v) Packaging and frames (How is story packaged?)

- Primary
- Secondary

(vi) Speech Thought Presentation (how are speech and thought represented?)

- DS, IS, FDS, FIS, NRSA

### **Research Methodology**

This work is based on qualitative descriptive research. The main object of this study is to interpret the story with the spectacles of narratology and observe narrative forms and structures. The

research will unfold the following questions,

(i) What are the basic elements involved in a short story?

(ii) How narratology helps us in analyzing narrative form and structure?

So the subject of this study is a short story by Oscar Wilde “The Happy Prince”. The data has been obtained through frequent reading that becomes helpful in unfolding the queries lying around. The text has been analyzed in the light of narratology and narrative patterns. Moreover, the ideas of main proponents of narratology, Aristotle, Vladimir Prop and Gerard Genette, are applied to attain desired results.

### **Oscar Wilde (1854- 1900)**

Oscar Fingal O 'Flahertie Wills Wilde was an Irish author, poet, short story writer, and playwright. He was born in Dublin. His father was a famous doctor and his mother, Jane, was a poetess. He also wrote one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), which became one of the most famous works of his life. His play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) was also the cause of his fame. He belonged to the Victorian era and famous for his wit and humor. People used to call him to their parties and enjoyed his jokes. He could bring laughter on any melancholic face with his jokes and witty humor.

Oscar Wilde was grown up in a prosperous family. He had seen many intellectuals of his time dining with his

parents and took great advantage from their company. He was awarded a royal school scholarship in 1871 and got his education from Trinity College from where he was awarded by a famous honorary award for undergraduates in 1872. He took great interest in poetry and wrote a poem "Ravenna" in 1878 and won a Newdigate prize for composing the best English verse. He published his first collection of poems in 1881 and after seven years of his poems' publication, he published a collection of stories for children named, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888). At the peak of his fame, he was victimized for homosexuality and convicted. He had to spend two years in jail and afterward, he went to France. He had produced great work and known for his masterpieces even up till now. All his tales are the source of entertainment and moral awakening not only for children but also for adults.

### **The Happy Prince**

This is a beautiful tale that differentiates real beauty from outward beauty in a very lucid and effective way. It is the inner beauty that makes a person beautiful and priceless. This was a story of a prince who was living a very happy life in worldly pleasure and thus entitled as "the Happy Prince". He never had a direct or indirect link with any suffering, misery or poor condition of his country and its residents. So due to this unawareness, he was unable to imagine any sorrow and misery. He was a *happy* prince who knew nothing but happiness

and laughter. But soon after his death, he realized the truth of this worldly beauty and bitter realities that were prevailing all around him in the shape of miseries and sorrows. His heart was broken at this worst sight of the world and his eyes were burst into tears but he was unable to do anything because he was merely a statue now. So he took the help of a little innocent bird that stayed with him for a night during his journey toward Egypt. Little swallow promised to help the prince in this hour of sorrow.

The prince saw a poor seamstress with her little ill boy and requested swallow to give them a ruby from his sword. The next night the prince saw a man who was in difficulty and unable to write a play due to cold. The prince requested swallow to give a sapphire of his eye to the poor fellow so that he can buy woods. Then the next day he helped a weeping girl with another sapphire from his second eye, who had lost her matches and was afraid of her father's anger. Now prince became blind and swallow used to wander around the city to see any needy. In this way, the prince with the help of little swallow helped the needy by giving them all his belongings such as ruby, sapphires, golden leaves, and gold.

In the end, swallow died of cold and the prince's leaden heart was broken. Now the statue had lost its worldly beauty and as per the Mayor order was melted in a furnace as it was no more useful and beautiful. The leaden heart was not melted and they threw it away in a heap of garbage where the dead body of

swallow was lying. On the decree of God Almighty, both were declared as the most precious things of the world and placed into a high place of heaven. Both were liked and blessed by God for their love and affection for humanity and became immortal.

### Results and Discussion

Besides the main story of The Happy Prince and the little Swallow, the sub-story of the life of little Swallow is also developing. In the first part of the main story, the Prince is the narrator who is telling his story and little Swallow is narratee who is hearing the story of happy Prince. The story started “**exposition**” with the introduction of characters “high above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince” and “on the night there flew over the city a little Swallow” (p. 1). The story developed with the interaction of the prince and the swallow. The **conflict started** when the Happy Prince was watching the miseries of the people and felt helpless and the little swallow, who was deceived by Reed, cried and stayed at night with the statue. The **action aroused** when both have shared their stories and promised to help. “It is very cold here, but I will stay with you one night, and be your messenger”(p. 5). The story leads towards the **climax** when the little Swallow became a helper and tried to sort out the miseries of the people, according to the wish of the Happy Prince. The action leads towards the **resolution** when the Happy Prince became a “*poor Prince*”

and divided all his jewels into needy. Both the characters meet their death at the end. The story **ended** with the hope and satisfaction for the readers, “It is not the Egypt that I am going; I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?”(p. 11). God has rewarded them with these words, “you have rightly chosen for my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing always, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me”(P. 13).

According to Gerard Genette (1930), the process of telling a story is more important. The story opened with the description of the statue of the Happy Prince and the speaker is omniscient. The little swallow is a *Heterodigetic or internal* focalizer in the story. He besides his personal experience describes other characters as well. The Happy Prince is also an internal focalizer as he also feels the sufferings and miseries of others and gives words to his feelings by narrating each condition to the little Swallow. The story is gliding between two modes “**mimetic**” (slow telling) and “**Diegetic**” (summarizing way). The personal story of both the characters is presented in a diegetic mode while role-playing is presented in a mimetic way.

**Authorial persona** is found covert, non-intrusive and unnamed in the very beginning of the story,

High above the city, on the tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he has two

bright sapphires, and a large ruby glowed on his sword-hilt (p. 1)

Here there is only the voice of a person who is not known. It seems as the author is narrating the story but it is not like that. The speaker is neither the author narrating the character of the story. While there are some overt and named characters too who according to Barry (2002) are present in the story with personal history, gender, social class, and their likes or dislikes. The Prince and the Swallow are overt characters in the story as each presents his personal story after the meeting. Sometimes the story will flesh back to link an event of past to present time and that technique is called **analeptic**. The prince has used this flashback technique when he narrates the story of his happy days, "When I was lived and had a human heart, I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans- Souci, where sorrows are not allowed to enter (p. 3)

The writer has used both frameworks of narratives to package, **primary and secondary**. The primary narrative is found in the story of the Happy Prince after his death. The whole story deals with the character of Swallow, the statue of the happy prince and their missions to help needy. The secondary story is the story of Prince that he narrates to the Swallow about his life before his death. Another secondary story is the story of little Swallow and his broken heart. The secondary story is also called an embedded story or meta-narratives,

which means "a narrative within the narrative" Berry (2002).

### **Characters of the story**

There are round about ten characters, two major and eight minor, in the story.

- 1- The happy prince (the main hero)
- 2- The little swallow (the Bird, Helper, the second hero)
- 3- Town mayor
- 4- Town councilor
- 5- The seamstress lady
- 6- The play writer
- 7- The match girl
- 8- The Reed
- 9- God
- 10- The angels

According to Vladimir Prop (1928), the roles are more important than characters. He reflects the subordination of characters to action. Here the character of Prince is playing the role of "*the Hero*" and little swallow is playing the role of "*the helper*". When the prince was a prince and the swallow was a little bird they were alone and did get nothing but voidances in their life but when they were transformed into "the hero" and "the helper" they became precious in the eyes of God and Heavenly creature. "Bring me the two most precious things in the city", said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird" (p. 13).

The Happy Prince and the little Swallow both are playing the role of protagonists in the story. There is no villain or antagonist but miseries and



sufferings of people. The Prince has shown dual personality, one in life as a living being, other after his death as a statue. In his life, he was called "Happy Prince" because everything around him was so beautiful and he was living in immense pleasure of life. But right after his death, he was placed high as a statue and he could see the miseries and ugliness of his city that had made him sorrowful. He tried to satisfy himself by playing the role of a donor and donate all his belongings to needy people. While on the other hand there is a little Swallow who is little but in reality having a large heart for desperate people. It is a simple and innocent bird who is ready to sacrifice its life for the sake of humanity. It helped Prince in his plan to remove miseries from the city. The Swallow was fallen in love with the Prince in the name of humanity. Both have sacrificed their lives and rewarded by God in Heaven.

### **Setting and Atmosphere**

The weather and atmosphere are very cold and dark from the start of the story until the end. That shows the pessimism of the story but it leads to a complete optimistic image at the end. The words like '*cold*' and '*night*' are used severely in the story. The weather is also shown through this description, "*then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost*". So the weather is indicating the mood or tone of the story.

### **Style**

High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin

leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt. He was very much admired indeed. He is as beautiful as a weathercock," remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes; "only not quite so useful," he added, fearing lest people should think him unpractical, which he was not. (p. 1)

Oscar Wilde has personified the statue by giving the qualities of a living being to a statue. He has presented a magnificent statue with all his pomp and show. The height of its pedestal and its splendid looks has made it a symbol of prestige and honor. He is admired by others. His ceremonial presence is shown through his gilded body with priceless jewels. Wilde has used similes and metaphors to make his appearance more effective. In the above passage, the Happy Prince is described as follows: "He is as beautiful as a weathercock." Here through simile, the splendour of the statue of the Happy Prince is shown. These expressions are very unique and interesting even though the story has been written more than a hundred years ago. "Who are you? 'I am the Happy Prince...' 'Why are you weeping then?'" (p. 3)

This introductory dialogue of the Prince to the Swallow is a projecting paradox. He tells his name "Happy" Prince while he is weeping. So happiness and weeping both are paradoxical words. "Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, said the Prince, "will you not stay with me for

one night, and be my messenger? The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad."(p. 5)

Wilde used such expressions repeatedly to emphasize the depending friendship and love between the Happy Prince and the Swallow. The Prince wanted to help poor people by giving them jewels that were shining on his sword and gold leaves that covered his body but he could not move as he was not a living being but a statue, so he had to ask a favor of the Swallow who could move and was alive. The Prince's affectionate words, "Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow ---" have a great effect on the heart of little Swallow and those words soften the stiff and selfish heart of the Swallow. He has used his name Swallow thrice to show his deep affection and the importance of swallow's presence for him. Then he states his request for the stay of the swallow. These words and tones sound affectionate to us and make us happy in the same way.

The main element of figurative language Wilde has used in his short story is;

Simile, there are some examples of sentences, in which simile has been used by the writer, given below:

Table 1. Simile used in the story

|                                      |                                 |                                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| as beautiful<br>as a<br>weathercock' | Hard like<br>withered<br>leaves | 'lips are red<br>as<br>pomegranate' |
| a mystery so<br>great as<br>misery'  | as black<br>as ebony'           | eyes like<br>green beryl's          |

By using it, he has made his style more effective and unique.

### Speech and Thought Presentation

There are five modes of speech and thought presentation:

Table 2. Five Modes of Speech

|       |                                      |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| (i)   | Direct Speech (D.S)                  |
| (ii)  | Indirect speech (I.S)                |
| (iii) | Free direct Speech ( F.D.S)          |
| (iv)  | Free Indirect Speech (F.I.S)         |
| (v)   | Narrative Report of Speech Act(NRSA) |

And five modes of thought presentation:

Table 3. Five Modes of Thought

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| (i)   | <i>Direct Thought (D.T)</i>                  |
| (ii)  | <i>Indirect Thought ( I.T)</i>               |
| (iii) | <i>Free direct Thought (F.D.T)</i>           |
| (iv)  | <i>Free Indirect Thought (F.I.T)</i>         |
| (v)   | <i>Narrative Report of Thought Act(NRTA)</i> |

Some sentences are analyzed in the story "The Happy Prince" that reflect Speech Thought Presentation.

Table 4. Speech & thought Modes used in the Story

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| (i) <i>She said, "She has no money".</i> | (Direct Speech)   |
| (ii) I admit that she is domestic        | (Indirect Speech) |

|  |               |        |
|--|---------------|--------|
| (iii) "She has no conversation", he said.                              | (Free Speech) | Direct |
| (iv) "The Reed used to like the rain. Or, He prepared to go to sleep." | (F.I.S)       |        |
| (v) "Ah! But we have in our dreams".                                   | (NRSA)        |        |
| (vi) I am afraid that she is a coquette                                | (I.T)         |        |
| (vii) "When I was alive or had a human heart" answered the statue"     | (FDT)         |        |
| (viii) "I did not know what tears were"                                | (F.I.T)       |        |
| (ix) "The king is there himself in his painted coffin"                 | (NRTA)        |        |
| (x) "It is ridiculous attachment"                                      | (F.I.T)       |        |

### Conclusion

As Bal (2009) states that narrative theories are used to evaluate, understand and study narrative patterns and structure. So narratology plays a vital role in understanding the connotative and denotative meaning of a short story. The chief motive behind the present analysis is to show how narratology can be used for the analysis of any narrative text/short story and how it contributes to the

structure and form of a narrative text. Observation has been made to make the readers aware of the facts related to the basic elements of a short story and narrative analysis. This research will play a worthwhile role in illustrating the structures of a short story and is useful for the learners and teachers respectively.

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