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Use of a Narrator in Medieval Literature

Spotlighting *Melusine*

Ciana Konyha



INTORDUCTION

The narrator is a character that does not get the shine that they deserve. This character is in most texts and sets up the story and guides the reader through the events and challenges of the other characters. The narration is a delicate process and can change the feel of the story. With the narrator being a character, it gives the opportunity to be analyzed and examined for their actions or the lack thereof. As with all texts, having a reliable narrator provides an authentic and natural feel to the plot line. With the narrator interjecting at certain spots, it interrupts the flow of the story, or the narrator will mention something and leave it as a cliff hanger.

Within *Melusine; or, the Noble History of Lusignan* by Jean d’ Arras, there are spots where the narrator explicitly intrudes in the story without adding to it. For example, “It happened that the lady and the knight quarreled, I know not about what” (27, d’ Arras). The narrator gives this information and leaves it, but the information that they do give is sparce and mimical, leaving the reader to question the validity and honesty of the narrator.

MAJOR QUESTIONS AND GOALS

- What is a narrator and types of narrators?
- How the narrator change the authenticity of the story?
- How does Medieval literature use narrators?

My main goal is to discuss the how the narrator removes or adds to the story presented, if this was purposeful to remove or add to the story, and if it defines the narrator as unreliable or not.

- Other goals include:
- Medieval Narrators and commonalities of them
 - How do these narrators compare to today’s
 - How does this text apply Narrator Theory

METHODOLOGY

- Close reading of *Melusine; or, the Noble History of Lusignan*, with close attention to how the narrator speaks in the text.
- Review of narrators and narrator theory.
- Examination of Medieval narrators and how they effect the story.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Narration Definitions:

- Reliable Narrator: When the narrator speaks or acts in accordance of the work, with the authors intensions in mind.
- Unreliable Narrator: The narrator goes against the work and or the author.
 - Fallible Narrator, sometimes it is almost impossible to infer whether or to what degree a narrator is fallible.
- Denarrated: Erased, Example: “Outside, it is raining. Outside, it is not raining” (Richardson 387).
- Unnatural Construction: Texts constructed to be processed in surprising and unexpected ways, particularly those that invert or defy conventional reading practices (Richardson 391).

With these definitions in mind, recognizing what the narrator is doing will allow for understanding the narrator’s intentions. In turn, this allows the reader to evaluate the narrator as a character. One of the main ways this happens is through denarrated events. Richardson applies denarrated events with “In the storyworld, unnatural elements may be present as events, figures, settings, and frames. There are also cases in which the discourse alters the storyworld” (389). This is what happens in *Melusine*, the authenticity of the storyworld is fractured through denarrated events.

Another way that the reader can evaluate the narrator is through irony. Olson describes a strategy for identifying the type of narrator, through irony, the reader needs to read between the lines and understand what is underneath the written text. Olson also talks about the appropriate use of an unreliable narrator uses subtle notions rather than challenging or flattering the reader (94).

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing a narrator can change the reader’s view of the text and the authenticity of the story. Whether proving that the narrator is honest and providing to the story, or if the narrator is fallible or discredits the story, that is a challenge that can present itself or be something that one has to search.

The degree of how much the narrator changes the text will cause the reader to determine how much they must work with the text to fully understand the narrator’s intentions. Within Medieval literature, there are plenty of texts that show narrators being against the reader or making the reader work to understand the text.

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