
Narratological and Stylistic Analysis of Point of View in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"

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Abstract: Up till now, there have been numerous articles and papers concerning the issue of Point of View in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", most of which are focused on the analysis of narrator's function in the construction of narrative structure or the presentation of thematic meanings. Despite some articles' application of linguistic/stylistic research methods to the study of the story, few of them involves the analysis of point of view. Therefore, by clarifying and combining theories relevant to point of view proposed by both narratologists and stylists, the paper focuses on the analysis of point of view in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" from both narratological and stylistic perspective through the exploration of three aspects: uniqueness of first-person point of view, transition and transgression of point of view, and omission of point of view, with the findings that the use of first-person plural narrator "we" serves the narrative function and involves community issues and racial problems deep in the south after the civil war, that the transition of teller-character to reflector-character influences narrative structure as well narrative distance of the story, which are closely related to the narrator's authority and reliability, that the oscillation between third-person limited perspective and focal characters' perspective helps to achieve the effect of omniscience within limitation, that the transgression of the narrator's limited point of view into the realm of omniscient point of view creates double-layer effects of foreshadowing and self-exposure, and that the omitted point of view of Emily, Homer, and the negro servant are in close relation with the social, historical, and cultural background at the south in the first half of 20th century. Generally speaking, the paper verifies that the integrated theories of narratology and stylistics concerning point of view are of significance and innovativeness to the understanding of aesthetic effects and thematic meanings of fiction.

Keywords: William Faulkner, A Rose for Emily, Narratology, Stylistics, Point of View

1. Introduction

Ever since its publication in 1930, Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" has enjoyed great popularity among readers and critics not only for the depth of its thematic meanings about the lost aristocracy in the south but also for its innovation of writing techniques, one of which is Point of View. There are numerous articles and papers concerning the issue of Point of View in the short story, most of which are focused on the narrator's function in the construction of narrative structure or the presentation of thematic meanings: Thomas Dilworth regards the narrator as "the real protagonist of the story, which is white southern society" [1], contributing to the the homicidal complicity of the story; Helen E. Nebeker cast doubt on the general interpretation of Emily as "the proud, unbending monument of the Old South who triumphs over time and challenge" [2], and explores

thematic implications of point of view; Ji-won Kim's study especially explores "the narrative of fictional events complicated by a specific narrator" who functions as "an internal focalizer as well as an external participant" [3]; Ruth Sullivan focuses on the analysis of the narrator's function in the process of narration [4]. Different from these articles who fall into the field of narration itself, there are some scholars and critics attempting to analyze the story from linguistic or stylistic perspective, as is shown in Zong Zijiao's study of six processes by adopting Halliday's theories of Transitivity [5], Tuncay Tezcan's comparative study of the story and its Turkish translation with the use of a modified stylistic model of M. Short [6], and Alice Hall Petry's study of Faulkner's utilization of language through the analysis of the sentence from the story [7]. Despite these articles' application of linguistic/stylistic research methods to the study of the story, few of them involves

the issue of point of view, let alone an integrated analysis of point of view from both narratological and stylistic perspective. That is why this paper intends to clarify theories relevant to point of view proposed by narratologists and stylists first and verifies the theories' being complementary and instructive in the analysis of Point of View with Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" as an example.

2. Theoretical Framework of Point of View

Point of View has always been an ambiguous and sophisticated concept owing to its inclusive characteristic as well as the variety of theories proposed by different narratologists, as is shown in the definition given by Gerald Prince In his book *A Dictionary to Narratology* (1987): "the perceptual or conceptual position in terms of which the narrated situations and events are presented; FOCALIZATION; PERSPECTIVE; VIEWPOINT" [8]. Prince's definition is helpful for beginners to have a general idea about Point of View, but it is still easy to confuse Point of View with other terms. To clarify the distinction between them, Genette's two terms of PERSPECTIVE and VOICE might be helpful [9]. Perspective, one of the two aspects of MOOD, could be simply defined as who sees in a literary text, while

Voice indicates who speaks in the text. The reason to adopt the two terms is that in traditional third-person POV fiction, both the narrative perspective and voice usually belong to the narrator outside the story, but when it comes to the 20th century third-person POV fiction, especially psychological novels like *Sons and Lovers* (1913) by D. H. Lawrence and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf, it is still the narrator outside the story who speaks, but the perspective might belong to focal character(s) in the story. Therefore, this paper regards Point of View as a concept made up of Perspective and Voice, which will be of great use later in the analysis of "A Rose for Emily". Besides, Stanzel's theories about teller-character and reflector-character will also be adopted for they are closely related to POV from the angle of mediacy. The difference between the two could be traced back to Plato's concepts of *digesis* and *mimesis*, and accordingly they differ from each other in aspects of reliability and narrative distance, which are key points of text analysis. What's more, the unique situation where the two are overlapped or transformed is also of significance to explore the underlying meanings of the text.

Apart from the definition of Point of View and the distinction between teller-character and reflector-character, the classifications of Point of View made by narratologists are important as well, four typical ones shown in the table below.

Table 1. Typical Classifications of POV.

Traditional Classification	N. Friedman [10]	Genette [11]	Shen Dan [12]
First-person POV	"I" as a witness	Internal Focalization [Narrator = Character]	Perspective of "I" as a witness experiencing events at the position of story margin. First-person external POV
	"I" as a protagonist		Perspective of "I" as a witness experiencing events at the position of story center. Internal POV
Third-person Limited POV	The Dramatic Mode	External Focalization [Narrator < Character]	Perspective of "I" as a protagonist experiencing events. First-person external POV
	The Camera		Perspective of "I" as a narrator recalling the past. First-person external POV
Third-person Omniscient POV	Editorial Omniscience	Zero Focalization [Narrator > Character]	Third-person external POV
	Neutral Omniscience		Unlimited POV
	Multiple Selective Omniscience		Internal Focalization [Narrator = Character]
	Selective Omniscience	Variable Fixed Multiple	Internal POV

Based on the traditional classification, Friedman further divided the first-person POV into "I" as the witness and "I" as the protagonist, third-person limited point of view into The Dramatic Mode and The Camera, third-person omniscient POV into four types of Editorial, Neutral, Multiple Selective and Selective; Genette borrowed the term focalization from physics and proposed Internal Focalization, External Focalization and Zero Focalization; Shen Dan combined the former three classifications, putting forward Internal POV, First-person External POV, Third-person External POV and Unlimited POV. Obviously, the classifications made by the narratologists are growing more detailed and systematic, which are important for the analysis of literary texts because different POV would generate different thematic meanings

and aesthetic effects.

Different from Narratologists' concern over the relation between Point of View and the narrated events and its function in the construction of narrative structure, stylists mainly focus on the standpoint, mood and tone indicated by the narrator through the study of language styles/features, including vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, cohesion and context. For example, both Halliday's theories about system of transitivity and Paul Simpson's analysis regarding modality and psychological point of view take language styles and features as the object of study. System of transitivity is broadly defined as the way of different types of process are represented in language: noun clauses indicate the participants; verb phrases show the process; and prepositional/adverb phrases are about

environmental elements in the process. As is shown in Halliday's study of William Golding's *The Inheritors* [13], the analysis of characters' actions with theories of system of transitivity would contribute to the understanding of different points of view held by Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens*. Similar with Halliday's system of transitivity, Simpson adopts system of modality to analyze the narrator's psychological states and movements, putting forward three basic types of modal patterning which are in close relation with different points of view adopted in fiction: positive shading, negative shading, and neutral shading [14]. In addition, Leech and Short's finding that point of view greatly affects fictional sequencing, especially psychological sequencing—"the order in which a character comes to learn about the components of the fiction" [15], is another evidence showing that the analysis of point of view from stylistic perspective would generate new understandings of fiction.

To sum up, both narratology and stylistics show great interest in the study of point of view with different object of study for the former focuses on the relation between the narrator and the narrated/narratee with narrative structure as analytic target, while the later mainly concentrates on language features, exploring the narrator's standpoint, mood and tone. Therefore, the two could be integrated to make up the blank of each side, so as to analyze point of view both from narrative structure and language features, which contributes to the interpretation of thematic meanings and aesthetic effects in fiction.

3. Analysis of Point of View in "A Rose for Emily"

3.1. Uniqueness of First-person Point of View

First-person point of view is adopted in the short story, clearly shown in the first sentence: "When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral..." [16]. Here "our" and "we", which appear frequently in the following story text, indicate that the narrative perspective belongs to townspeople, or to put it another way, it is the townspeople who see. Since the townspeople are not the protagonist but the witness at the marginal position of the story events, it is reasonable to conclude that the story mainly adopts first-person external point of view, to borrow Shen Dan's term above. It is worth noting that the use of "we" in the story is different from other stories narrated from one witness-function character only, like Nick in *The Great Gatsby*, in that there is no specified narrator with a name or a title in the short story and there is only "we"—first-person plural narrator—referring to nobody but to everybody. It is owing to the use of the special first-person point of view that the narrator(s), to some extent, seem(s) to know everything yet maintaining the identity as a character in the story: he/she could be tax officials having dialogue with Emily, a woman or a man complaining about the smell of Emily's house, and even a neighbor seeing the Negro servant admit Homer into Emily's house at dusk one evening.

Compared with the single narrator "I", the plural narrator "we" contributes to the thematic and aesthetic effects of the story in following aspects. Firstly, it is the plural narrator makes it possible to narrate the whole life story of Emily, dating from the time when her father was still alive to her own funeral. A concrete single narrator is unlikely to live in the town for such a long time, knowing almost everything about Emily's family, and hence the use of abstract plural narrator "we" tactfully avoids the logical problem, endowing the author with great freedom to conceive and construct. Secondly, the plural narrator seems more authoritative and reliable than the single narrator because what "we" narrated is not somebody's opinions but a consensus agreed by the whole community. To enhance the authority and reliability, the narrator "we" is frequently used in the story, one typical example quoted below about the townspeople's opinion on Emily's refusal to admit her father's death. "We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will." [16] Through the repetitive use of "We" in this paragraph, along with the increasing length of the three sentences, it is easy to picture the townspeople's being confident and complacent while gossiping behind. Certainly, the seemingly authoritative and reliable narrator would also generate ironic effect, which will be further analyzed later in 2.2. Thirdly, the use of "we" as narrator shortens the psychic distance between the story and reader because "we" not only includes the townspeople but also the readers, who would unconsciously identify themselves with the narrator in the process of reading. Readers would follow the perspective of the narrator, take in the account made by the narrator, and even internalize the standpoint held by the narrator. The process of synchronization arises to its peak when it comes to the last part of the story when the readers would be one of the townspeople, getting close to the truth and experiencing the same degree of shock and horror as the narrator, which might be the Gothic effect Faulkner intends to achieve through the story.

Apart from the artistic application of first-person plural point of view, the transition from teller-character to reflector-character in the story also greatly contributes to the aesthetic and thematic effects of the story.

In most part of the story, "we" function as the teller-character, narrating what happened in the small town from "our" POV, giving "a generalized and compressed account" [17]. It was not until the last part that "we" appeared as the reflector-character, providing "scenic presentation of events, as it were, *in actu*" [17]. With the transition from teller-character to reflector-character, the narrator "we" who used to be a witness at the marginal position of the story events has stepped to the center, and accordingly the point of view is also transformed from the first-person external to the first-person internal, contributing to the narrative structure and distance of the story in two aspects.

Firstly, the use of tell-character in the first four parts of the story makes it possible for the whole life of Emily to be

presented because “the teller-character's main function is to tell, narrate, report, to communicate with the reader, to quote witnesses and sources, to comment on the story, to anticipate the outcome of an action or to recapitulate what has happened before the story opens” [17], or to put it simply by adopting Genette's term, the teller-character's narration equals to “summary”. When it comes to the last part of the story, the teller-character has to be transformed to reflector-character so as to involve readers to identify themselves with the narrator, breaking into Emily's secret room, scanning over the decorations and settings, spotting the dead man in bed, and finally finding “a long strand of irony-gray hair” on the pillow which belongs to Emily. The detailed description of the whole process is exactly what Genette termed as “scene”. The combination of teller-character/summary and reflector-character/scene brings about the change of narrative rhythm from fast to slow, which is in proper accordance with the narration of each part, making the whole story structure like that of mountain, solid at the foot and steep at the top.

Secondly, in the process of transition, the narrative distance between narrator and the narratee/narrated is also shortened, which influences the narrator's authority and reliability. As is analyzed before in this part, the use of “we” as the narrator would generate an authoritative and reliable image, but the degree of authority and reliability would be different in the cases of teller-character and reflector-character. Since the teller-character mainly retells what happened to others by taking the position as a witness, there would be greater distance between the narrator and the narrated, while the distance would be shorter for the reflector-character who directly presents the story events as they were because they were right at the scene of events. Therefore, it could be agreed that the teller-character would be less reliable than the reflector-character. But when it comes to authority, there arise questions because teller-character functions as the third-person narrating story events happened to others, which makes him less-informed but more objective, while what the reflector-character narrates are events experienced by himself, which makes him well-informed but more subjective. Which one is more authoritative? How could objectivity and subjectivity be maintained at the same time? The only answer is to combine teller-character with reflector character, which are complementary with each other, so as to create different narrative distance in different parts, achieving the effects of authority and reliability.

To sum up, the use of first-person plural narrator “we” is of great importance to the aesthetic and thematic effects of the story for it not only serves the narrative function but also involves community issues and racial problems deep in the south after the civil war. Similarly, the transition of teller-character to reflector-character lays foundation for the narrative structure of the story as well as the change of narrative distance, which are closely related to the narrator's authority and reliability.

3.2. Transformation and Transgression of Point of View

Apart from the transformation of “we” within the

first-person point of view where both the narrative perspective and narrative voice belong to “we”, there also exists the transformation of point of view from “we” to “they”, that is, from the first-person point of view to third-person point of view, where the narrative voice still belongs to “we”, but the narrative perspective oscillating between “we” and “they”, as is shown in the excerpt below describing the scene when tax officials went to Emily's house.

“They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. [...]

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.” [16].

Now that the narrator “we” refers to all the townspeople, “they” used here may well belong to the group of “we”. Why isn't “we” directly used here to tell/reflect the story? One of the reasons might be Faulkner's maintenance of the narrator's position as a witness relevant to story events yet at the same time keeping a certain degree of distance from story events, creating a mixed point of view which is seemingly omniscient but in fact limited. As the excerpt above indicates, “we” probably heard the story from tax officials and here “we” retold the story with “our” voice but from “their” perspective. That is why the narrator, a witness-character not at the scene of the story event, could know that the smell of the room is “a close, dank smell” and especially the second paragraph in the excerpt about the appearance of Emily, which is apparently the tax officials' impression of Emily from “their” perspective. The oscillation between third-person limited perspective and focal characters' perspective would maintain the objectivity and authority of “we” as the narrator and at the same time provide subjective and individualized account of focal character's thoughts and feelings, so as to achieve the effect of omniscience within limitation.

To some extent, the narrator of the story could be regarded as a group of townspeople, witnessing the story events with their limited point of view and after that sharing information with each other by gossiping behind. Now matter how hard they pretend to be omniscient, it is undeniable that the narrator's point of view is limited. That is why the underlined sentence in the excerpt quoted below, which is the ending of the scene that Emily went to the druggist's to buy poison, seems abrupt and discordant with the whole story.

“Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: ‘For rats.’” [16].

Although the first two sentences are described from a third-person point of view by the narrator "we" who is unlikely to be a witness right on the spot, readers would still think it reasonable because here it could be regarded as retelling of the story "we" heard from the druggist or the delivery boy. However, the information in the underlined sentence could only be known by Emily herself, and it is impossible for "us" to know what she did or saw when she got home. The only plausible explanation is that here the narrator breaks through the boundary of limited point of view and transgresses into the realm of omniscient point of view. Transgression of POV like this could also be found in many other literary works, and one typical example might be *The Weary Blues* (1925) by Langston Hughes in which first-person limited point of view is adopted in most part of the poem until the last three lines: "*The singer stopped playing and went to bed/While the Weary Blues echoed through his head./He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.*" [18] Similarly, the narrator is unlikely to know to what the singer did or thought after returning home, and here he transgresses into the field of omniscient point of view, enhancing the thematic effect that the narrator is no different from the negro player and that the destiny for all the back in the 1920s are the same. However, transgression of POV here in "A Rose for Emily" creates double-layer effects: one the one hand, it foreshadows Emily's killing of her lover with rat poison; on the other hand, it weakens the narrator's reliability through the unreasonable transgression, exposing that the narrator's POV is merely seemingly omniscient but actually limited and even biased.

3.3. Omission of Point of View

The narrator's limited and biased point of view is in contrast with that of Emily, Homer, and the negro servant, whose perspective and voice are lost in the story, that is, the Omission of POV. All through the story, Emily the heroine has always been the target or the object described, watched, and gossiped by the townspeople. Although there are two scenes in the story where Emily's behaviors and words are exposed to readers—her confrontation with tax officials and her buying poison from the druggist, they are described and retold by the narrator—"we". Following is the description about the scene when the officials came to Emily's house to collect tax.

"She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain." [16].

All the three sentences begin with pronouns or nouns as the subject, and special attention should be paid to the five verbs/verb clauses—"ask", "stood", "listened", "came to", "heard" and the two prepositional/adverb clauses—"in the door" and "quietly". Among the first three verbs which indicate the actions made by Emily, "ask" is transitive with "them" as the object, while "stood" and "listened" here are intransitive with no object. Verbs without object indicate the actor/subject's mindless or even scornful attitude to the visitor, and it is worth noting that there is negative form before the transitive verb "ask", which completely reverses the

transitivity effect and instead strengthens Emily's contempt towards the tax officials. What's more, the two prepositional/adverb clauses—"in the door" and "quietly" also contribute to the creation of Emily's image: refusing to come out to meet the tax officials and keeping silent in the process of listening. Emily's quietness and coldness are in contrast with tax officials' nervousness and uneasiness, which is shown when they "came to a stumbling halt" and "heard the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain" (Here the gold chain is the first thing catching the tax officials' attention when they saw Emily at the beginning). As transitive verb clauses, "came to" and "heard" indicate that the tax officials are always in a tense state and care about the object they are speaking to, which is in contrast with Emily's indifferent attitudes to them. Despite the detailed description and recording of Emily's behaviors and words in the two scenes, it is necessary to emphasize that it is we who narrated rather than Emily herself. Strictly speaking, there is no paragraph in the story where Emily's perspective and voice are directly conveyed to readers. That is to say, she has been blinded and silenced, so the readers could never know what she really did and said, let alone what she thought.

Compared with Emily who takes up most of the pages in the story, Homer Barron is only mentioned four times: his first appearance in the town, his falling love with Emily, his disappearance and reappearance because of the love, and his dead body found by the townspeople at the end of the story. Every time there are merely several lines summarizing his behaviors with no mention of what he said or thought. The lost of Homer's perspective and voice also creates double thematic and aesthetic effects. On the one hand, it exposes the southerner's biased attitudes towards the northerner, which is why Homer Barron was described as "a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face" [16] at his very first appearance in the story/town. Also, the contrast between Homer's absence and Emily's presence indicates the southern aristocracy's refusal to admit their defeat and desolation after the Civil War. On the other hand, omission of Homer's POV creates a kind of suspense or gap in the story. Did he really love Emily? How did it happen that he took the poison prepared by Emily? Did he have any last words? What were his thoughts as he was dying? All these questions are like blank space in a painting, inviting readers to fill by themselves with their own imagination and induction.

Similar with Homer Barron, the negro servant only appeared several times in the story and the omission of his POV is the most apparent one for following reasons. Firstly, he doesn't even have a name, the most important identity-signifier attributed to human beings. The omission of name indicates the lost of identity, and therefore he seems to be anybody as well as nobody, indicating that the history/tradition of slavery and racism still lingered in the south in the first half of 20th century. Secondly, the negro servant has lost his voice—"He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse." [16] His not talking to others is not simply because of his inability from disuse, but in fact his unwillingness to do so.

To put it another way, his lost of voice is more likely psychological than physical, which also exposes that the black people were silenced in the white-dominated south. Thirdly, the omission of the negro servant's POV also leaves blank space in the story, which not only captures readers' interests and arouses their imaginations, but also enhances the aesthetic effects of suspense in the story.

4. Conclusion

By adopting theories proposed by both narratologists and stylists, the paper focuses on the analysis of point of view in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" through the exploration of uniqueness of first-person point of view, transition and transgression of point of view, and omission of point of view, with the findings that the use of first-person plural narrator "we" serves the narrative function and involves community issues and racial problems deep in the south after the civil war, that the transition of teller-character to reflector-character influences narrative structure as well narrative distance, which are closely related to the narrator's authority and reliability, that the oscillation between third-person limited perspective and focal characters' perspective helps to achieve the effect of omniscience within limitation, that the transgression of the narrator's limited point of view into the realm of omniscient point of view creates double-layer effects of foreshadowing and self-exposure, and that the omitted point of view of Emily, Homer, and the negro servant are in close relation with the social, historical, and cultural background at the south in the first half of 20th century. Generally speaking, the paper proves that the integration of narratology and stylistics would help us better understand the aesthetic effects and thematic meanings of fiction. To some extent, the paper could also be regarded as an attempt to break the boundary between literature and linguistics, which might be in accordance with the statement made by Richard Jakobson in Stylistics Seminar in 1958 that "a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unacquainted with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms" [19]. More than 60 years later, Jakobson's words are still meaningful and thought-provoking, and there is still a long way to go to truly achieve the integration of the two.

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