



RESEARCH PAPER

A Narratological Description of *The Odyssey*

Saddaf Rashid¹ Tasawar Abbas Shah² Safana Hashmat³

1. Lecturer, Department of English, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Department of English, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of English, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

DOI [http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-II\)50](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-II)50)

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: February 03, 2022</p> <p>Accepted: May 28, 2022</p> <p>Online: May 30, 2022</p> <p>Keywords: Heterodiegetic, Histoire, Homodiegetic Recit</p> <p>*Corresponding Author mubasharnawaz92@ gmail.com</p>	<p>This study is an attempt to throw a sideways glance at the narratology of <i>The Odyssey</i>. The paper is based on some narratological concepts introduced by Gerard Genet including Recit, histoire, order, duration, frequency, mood, voice, heterodiegetic, homodiegetic and autodiegetic narrator. It further applies Bremond's three stage model of analysis of plot that includes possibility, process, and outcome and Jakobson's view of narratorial discourse performing <i>emotive, conative, and referential</i> functions to <i>The Odyssey</i>. The study focuses on only first four books of Homer's <i>The Odyssey</i>. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the theoretical concepts while the second one deals with the implication of these concepts upon the selected text. The research paper is significant as it attempts to study <i>The Odyssey</i> from less explored dimension.</p>

Introduction

An epic of wanderings, hospitality, revenge, and loyalty, *The Odyssey*, revolves around the character of Greek hero Odysseus who has proved his valor during the Trojan war. Despite being man of many turns and an expert in trickery, Odysseus has been a wanderer in known and unknown regions because of the curse inflicted upon him by Poseidon, the ruler of sea and the god of earthquakes. Poseidon revenged Odysseus of the blinding his son Cyclops. Homer has described the story of the hero in a way that the reader, ancient as well as modern, is carried away by the power of narration, by the artistry of characterization, and by the fusion of heavenly and earthly spheres (gods and men).

The Odyssey was written by Homer after the success of *The Iliad*. It has been regarded as an epilogue to *Iliad* by the critics for a long time. But this epic has unique characteristics and themes that make it differently distinct, especially its narratology has been a matter of great controversy. The story begins by the poet's invocation to the muse, a usual pattern that is followed by all epic poets. The poet narrator begins the story as homodiegetic narrator and then becomes heterodiegetic and shifts the

direct discourse to free indirect one. There is discordance between plot and story or in Genet's terms between 'recit' and 'histoire' (cited in Eagleton, 2011, p.91).

Odysseus' ten years' war plus ten years' journey to return home has been a long and torturous duration for him, but in this epic the focus is on his adventures while coming home. While describing his adventures, the language seems to perform all the three functions described by Jakobson (cited in Eagleton, 2008, p.85): emphatic (expressing emotions), conative (creating effect) as well as referential (providing contextual information).

The present study throws a sideways glance at narratology of *The Odyssey*. It focuses only on first four books of *The Odyssey*. The purpose of the study is to show how the narratology of *The Odyssey* adds value and fame to it and attracts the reader. It also shows how much variety of narratological concepts has been embedded to Homer's apparently simple but narratologically complex epic.

Literature Review

Critics and writers have commented upon narratology of *The Odyssey* from different perspectives. Some talk about its narration, others criticize the narrator while few criticize its narrative complexity. In his book, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, Jong discusses about the art of narration of the Odysseus' story. He is of the view that Odysseus begins explicitly "in a way which is typical of oral narratives, viz. by calling attention to the act of storytelling and thereby marking the transition from the real world to the story world" (De Jong, 2001, p. 5).

Talking about the narrator, Jong writes that "the Homeric narrator tends to disclose beforehand the outcome of his story or part of which is often known to the narratees" (De Jong, 2004, pp. 8-9) because the story was a traditional one. Odysseus' description of his adventures to Penelope has therefore been considered "unnecessary, cursory, selective, and even unique in summarizing his wanderings" (Kelly, 2008, p.177). However, it does not spoil the beauty of the epic as the reader finds suspense in knowing about the Odysseus' adventurous journey.

Bakker (2009) writes about the narrative complexity of *The Odyssey*. He is of the view that it does "little justice to Odysseus himself, who is much more than an 'embedded' or 'secondary' narrator who is hierarchically subordinated to Homer, the narrator of the matrix story" (p.132). Bakker thinks that Odysseus' story is not "subordinated" to Homer's, both serve as complement to each other, react to each other and even compete. So, it is important to know about the relationship between Homer and his hero before understanding the narratology of *The Odyssey*. The critics have tried to explore *The Odyssey* by applying different narratological concepts, but less research has been done on *The Odyssey* from the present perspective.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper is based on some narratological concepts introduced by Gerard Genet in his *Narrative Discourse* (1980). The study shows how these concepts are applicable to Homer's *The Odyssey*. It further applies Bremond's three stage model of analysis of plot that includes possibility, process, and outcome and Jakobson's view

of narratorial discourse performing *emotive*, *conative*, and *referential* functions. The research only focuses on first four books of *The Odyssey*.

The plot of *The Odyssey* shows a distinction between its *recit* and *histoire*, terms coined by Gerard Genette. Genette distinguishes between 'recit' and 'histoire'. 'Recit' refers to the actual order of events in the text while 'histoire' is the sequence in which these events have 'actually' occurred. These two categories resemble the Russian Formalist distinction between 'plot' and 'story': the plot of a detective story proceeds from the discovery of dead body, then moves back in finding out the answer to the question how the murder took place, but this plot is quite opposite to actual situation where planning to murder precedes the murder. In *The Odyssey* too, we find the same plot/story discordance.

The paper further applies the five main categories of narrative analysis proposed by Genette to *The Odyssey*. These categories are *Order*, *Duration*, *Frequency*, *Mood*, and *Voice*. The order of the first four books of *The Odyssey* moves from anachrony to analepsis. Anachrony refers to "discordance between 'story' and 'plot' (cited in Eagleton, 2011. p.91). 'Analepsis' refers to flashback. The 'duration' (division) of the book consists of 24 books. The 'frequency' (how frequently incident/incidents have been described) of the epic shows that the single incident of the missing of Odysseus has been discussed again and again. Voice changes and shift from the poet narrator to the characters, as the story proceeds. In other words, the poet narrator gives voice to the characters who become narrator and narratee as the epic proceeds.

According to Genette, "a narrator can be heterodiegetic (absent from his own narrative), homodiegetic (inside his narrative as in first person narratives), or 'autodiegetic' (where he is not only inside the narrative but figures as his principal character)", (cited in Eagleton, 2011, p.92). In *The Odyssey* the narrative shifts from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic to autodiegetic narrator.

Bremond's three stage model can be applied to the analysis of the plot of the first four books. According to Bremond, every story moves from 'possibility' (or potentiality) to 'process' to 'outcome' (cited in Kenan, 2003. p. 22). In *The Odyssey* book I-IV, these ideas are applicable to the character of Telemachus. The potentiality for understanding the situation (the suitors' intricacies to occupy the throne) is there in Telemachus (Odyssey's son), process of change starts with Athena's advice to call the council to cope with the suitors, and the third stage, the outcome is visualized when Telemachus threatens the leader of suitors to fight him to death and embarks upon a journey in search of his father.

In Jakobson's view (cited in Eagleton, 2008) narratorial discourse consists of many 'functions' mainly 'emotive' (of expressing the narrator's state of mind), 'Conative' (of creating effect upon addressee) and 'referential' (of referring to the context). All these three functions are quite clear in first four books of *The Odyssey*. The present study is an effort to apply these concepts given by Genette, Bremond and Jakobson to first four books of *The Odyssey*.

Material and Methods

Textual Analysis

We have used the concept of Recit, Histoire, and the five main categories (Order, Duration, Frequency, Mood, and Voice) of narrative analysis proposed by Gerard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse* (1972) cited in Eagleton (2008) to do the analysis of *The Odyssey*.

Recit

This refers to the actual order of events in the text.

Histoire

This indicates the sequence in which those events 'actually' or really took place.

The plot of *The Odyssey* shows a discordance between 'recit' and 'histoire'. The order of the incidents in book I to IV or the 'recit' proceeds in a way that Athena (the goddess) addresses the gods on Mount Olympus and reminds them of the great Trojan hero Odysseus, who has not still reached home though ten years have passed since the war ended.

"Even though we all love Odysseus,

he alone of the Greek heroes has been

waylaid on his journey home from Troy.

When he put out the eye of the giant Cyclops,

he provoked the wrath of the God of Earthquakes." (Homer, n.d.p.1)

The plot then shifts to the palace of Ithaca where Penelope is being irritated by the suitors who want to become the king by marrying the queen. Telemachus along with his mother is tormented by the plague caused by the suitors. Athena appears in disguise and advises him to call a council of men of Ithaca and to embark upon journey in search of his father: "Warn them off, / Then fit out a ship that will carry you to the mainland. / There you must seek tidings of your father" (Homer, n.d. p.2). Telemachus embarks upon his journey, meets Nestor and Menelaus and inquires about his missing father. At last, he comes to know that his father is alive. In this manner, the 'recit' or plot proceeds in book one to four.

The 'Histoire' or 'how the events actually took place' is quite different. Odysseus, a great hero in Trojan war, was returning home. On the way he was captured by the nymph Calypso on the island of Ogygia. By putting out the eye of the giant Cyclops, he earned the wrath of the God of Earthquakes. He is still captured by the nymph. Athena, goddess of war requests Zeus to send Hermes, his messenger, to the nymph with the orders of releasing him and sending him home. This is the point from where the "recit" proceeds. So, both 'recit' and 'histoire' show discordance with each other in *The Odyssey*.

After finding out the discordance between 'recit' and 'histoire', the researchers now apply Genette's five categories of narrative analysis to *The Odyssey*.

Order

It refers to time-order of the narrative or how the narrative operates. The narrative can operate in two ways:

Prolepsis

It can proceed through anticipation of upcoming incidents.

Analepsis/Anachrony

Narrative can proceed through flashback. If so, there can be discordance between the story and the plot.

In *The Odyssey* book I-IV the plot proceeds through analepsis and flash back. We find discordance between the story and the plot. Menelaus tells Telemachus the story of his past. So, does Nestor. Menelaus tells Telemachus:

"As you know, I was held down for
seven long years in Egypt. And when at
last the gods relented and sent a
homeward breeze, I only made it as far
as an island off the mouth of the Nile
before I was becalmed. A goddess took
pity on me as I paced the beach in
desperation" (Homer, n.d.p.5).

These types of flashbacks fill *The Odyssey*, and we find the plot proceeding through 'analepsis' or 'anachrony'. The second and the third type of narrative analysis described by Genette are 'duration' and 'frequency.'

Duration

It refers to the division of episodes and how the narrative expands these episodes.

Frequency

It refers to the frequency with which an incident is narrated in the poem or story. It indicates whether an incident has happened once and is narrated once/happened once and is narrated again and again/ happened several times and is narrated many times/ happened many times and is narrated only once or at a single moment.

As far as duration is concerned, *The Odyssey* consists of 24 books, and each book consists of different incidents and recollections regarding Odysseus. To divide

book, I-IV into episodes, it can be said that book I is 'Olympian episode' as in this book Athena addresses to Zeus and other gods on mount Olympia, book two consists of 'suitor vs. Telemachus episode' as it describes the suitors who have assembled in the palace of Ithaca and how they are being treated by Odysseus's son Telemachus. Book III can be considered as 'Nestor episode' as it describes Telemachus' journey to Nestor's kingdom to get some news of his father. Book IV can be considered as 'Menelaus episode.'

'Frequency' deals with how frequently one incident has been described. The whole poem revolves around the incidents and discussion about missing Odysseus. This incident has been mentioned four times in book I-IV. In book I Athena reminds Zeus and other gods of the missing and wandering Odysseus. In book II, she encourages Telemachus to embark upon journey in search of his father. In book III and IV Nestor and Menelaus inform Telemachus about Odysseus. So, the single incident has been repeated several times.

Mood

The fourth type of narrative analysis described by Genette is mood. Mood is divided into "distance" and 'perspective.'

Distance

It means whether the story or narrative is told in direct, indirect, or free indirect speech.

Perspective

It signifies that from whose point of view the story is being narrated. 'Perspective' can be of the following types:

Non-focalized 'Perspective' can be 'non-focalized'. It means that the narrative may be described by an omniscient narrator who is outside the action.

Internally focalized 'Perspective' can be 'internally-focalized'. It means that the narrative may be recounted by one character from a fixed position or from variable positions, or from several characters' viewpoint.

External focalization. In perspective it refers to the situation when a character or characters know more than the narrator.

In *The Odyssey* narrative shifts from direct to free indirect speech and perspective from non-focalized to internally focalized one. Direct speech is the speech by the omniscient narrator, and free indirect speech is the one that is shifted by the omniscient 'non-focalized' narrator (who is outside the action) to the 'internally focalized' character or characters who are the part of the poem or story or action. *The Odyssey* begins by the poet's invocation to the muse: "Oh Goddess of Inspiration, help me / sing of wily Odysseus, that master of schemes!" (Homer, n.d. p.1). The viewpoint then shifts from the poet narrator's to that of the characters' including Athena, Telemachus, Nestor and Menelaus who narrate the story of Odysseus along with their own experiences.

Voice

It refers to what kind of narrator and narratee are used in the story, who is speaking and from where is he/she speaking? A narrator's voice may be 'heterodiegetic', 'homodiegetic', or 'autodiegetic.'

Heterodiegetic

When the narrator is absent from his own story.

Homodiegetic

When the narrator is inside his narrative as in first person narratives or stories.

Autodiegetic

Where the narrator is not only inside the narrative but is also its main character.

The Odyssey (book I-IV) involves the first two types of narrator's 'voice'. The epic starts with a homodiegetic poet narrator's invocation to muse, who then turns into heterodiegetic narrator or absents himself from the rest of the epic. Athena, Menelaus, and Nestor are homodiegetic narrators. Athena addresses the assembly of gods led by Zeus in book I:

"Even though we all love Odysseus,
he alone of the Greek heroes has been
waylaid on his journey home from
Troy. When he put out the eye of the
giant Cyclops, he provoked the wrath
of the God of Earthquakes."(Homer, n.d. p.1)

In book III Nestor tells what he knows of the Greeks' return from Troy:

"It started out badly because of Athena's
anger. She caused dissension between
our leader Agamemnon and his
brother Menelaus. Menelaus was for
setting sail immediately, while
Agamemnon insisted that a sacrifice be
held first to pacify the goddess. In the

end, half the army left while the others

remained with Agamemnon. (Homer, n.d. p.3)

Nestor then shifts from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic narrator when he says: "Those of us who sailed with Menelaus, / made good speed at first, but then we, / were at each other's throats again." (Homer, n.d. p.3)

Analysis of the Plot of First Four Books of 'The Odyssey' According to Bremond's (1980) Three Stage Model

The plot of book I-IV proceeds with the change in the character of Telemachus. Bremond's three stage analysis can be applied to Telemachus' character as follows:

Potentiality

Telemachus is worried about and understands the intensity of the plague caused by the suitors (in book I).

Possibility

Telemachus calls a council of men of Ithaca on Athena's advice and asks them to prepare a ship for him, comes back to the palace with new vigor and threatens Antinous (the leader of the suitors) to kill him (Book II).

Outcome

Telemachus received the news that he had sought after. He comes to know that his father is alive. This is the outcome. Telemachus is told by Menelaus: "Odysseus lives still, though marooned, / without a crew of oarsmen to stroke him home" (Homer, n.d. p.6)

Analysis of 'The Odyssey' According to Jakobson's (1971) View of Narrative Discourse

In Jakobson's view (cited in Eagleton, 2008) narrative discourse consists of many 'functions' mainly the following:

Emotive

Language that expresses the narrator's state of mind is *emotive*.

Conative

Language trying to create an effect upon addressee is *conative*.

Referential

If language refers to the context, it is *referential*.

Language performs all these three functions in *The Odyssey* (book I-IV). Emotive function is performed when Athena expresses her sympathy for Odysseus while addressing to assembly of gods: "Even though we all love Odysseus, /He

alone of the Greek heroes has been, / waylaid on his journey home from Troy." (Homer, n.d. p.1)

Conative function is vivid in book I when Athena advises and encourages Telemachus to cope with the suitors and he acts upon his advice. Athena says: "Warn them off, / Then fit out a ship that will carry you to the mainland. / There you must seek tidings of your father." (Homer, n.d. p.2)

Language becomes referential in book IV when queen Helen in Menelaus's palace immediately recognizes Telemachus, Odysseus' son: "You must be the boy he left behind, / when he took ship for Troy - all, / because of me and my mad passion for /Trojan Paris" (Homer, n.d. p.6). She refers to the whole context of the war and the conditions in which Odysseus left his palace. Thus, the narrative discourse in Homer's *Odyssey* is emotive, conative as well as referential.

Conclusion

The Odyssey is a seminal epic. Its first four books are fabricated with multicolored narratology. Its characters move forward with potentiality, undergo the process of change, and reach the desired outcome. They change from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic narrators. The narrative shifts from direct to free indirect speech and perspective from non-focalized to internally focalized one. Its language becomes emphatic, conative, and referential. Its narratology sprinkles new colors upon the description of characters and events. Therefore, we like to read *The Odyssey* and love to re-read it.

References

- Bakker, E. J. (2009). Homer, Odysseus, and the Narratology of Performance. In Jonas Grethlein & Antonios Rengakos (Eds.), *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature* (pp.117-36). New York: Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Bremond, C., & Cancalon, E. D. (1980). The logic of narrative possibilities. *New Literary History*, 11(3), 387-411.
- Bhusry, M., & Ranjan, J. (2012). Enhancing the teaching-learning process: A knowledge management approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 26(3), 313-329. doi:10.1108/09513541211213372
- De Jong, I. J. (2001). *A narratological commentary on the Odyssey*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- De Jong, I. J. (2004). *A narratological commentary on the Odyssey*. The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Eagleton, T. (2011). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Homer (n.d.). *The odyssey*. <http://www.mythweb.com/odyssey/book01.html>
- Jakobson, R. (1971). *Selected Writings. II, Word and Language*. Mouton.
- Kenan, S. R. (2003). *Narrative fiction: Contemporary poetics*. London & New York: Methuen.
- Kelly, A. (2008). Performance and Rivalry: Homer, Odysseus, and Hesiod. *Performance, Iconography, Reception: Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin*, 177-203.