

Language in the
possibility for
spontaneity,
unpredictability, and



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Language works at a basic level to construct meaning and, in turn, the reader uses language to construct the reality of a story. This makes language one of the most important systems in shaping perceptions, values, thoughts, and experiences. However, in post-modernistic literature, the translucency of language often causes stories to feel ambiguous and confusing to the reader. Whereas modernists often would see ambiguity as a sign of faulty knowledge, a lack of knowledge, or a lack of clarity, post-modernists generally look for these elements as the inevitable product of post-modernistic literature (Hill). One of the biggest causes for ambiguity in post-modernistic literature is the existence of an unreliable narrator (Hill).

In unreliable post-modernistic literature the reader's attention is drawn away from the story itself, which, due to the narrator's inconsistency, may be entirely false. A narrator's unreliability could be caused by misguided or inaccurate information due to outside influences, bias, or incorrect perspective. This ambiguity within a piece of literature results in the possibility for spontaneity, unpredictability, and unlimited interpretation.

Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride", Luisa Valenzuela's "I am Your Horse in the Night", and Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" all feature narrators who tell unreliable accounts of stories due to outside and inner influences and biased perspectives. Therefore, all three of these stories can be considered to be post-modernistic pieces of literature due to their abundance of ambiguous elements and unreliable narrators. Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" can be considered to be a post-modernistic piece of literature due to the existence of an unreliable and naive narrator who presents her world and experiences through a narrative story. Carter's use of a first

person narrator is more dynamic, yet less stable and reliable than the typical omniscient third person narrative voice that fairy tales most commonly have.

In “ The Tiger’s Bride”, the narrative’s focal points change various times, which gives the reader an unsettling, ambiguous, and unreliable effect.

For example, this can be seen in the beginning of the narrative when the narrator begins her story with, “ My father lost me to The Beast at cards” and then suddenly changes her focus to describe the setting in the North (Carter). This sudden change of focal point gives the reader a sense that the narration throughout the rest of the story might also be distorted, or out of chronological order, from the way that the narrator seems to be easily distracted. This distortion of time is confirmed by how the narrative does not flow chronologically. The edges of space and time become blurred as Carter shifts between the past, present, and future tense. For example, this can be seen as the narrator varies in tense when she states, “ There’s a special madness that strikes travelers from the North when they reach the lovely land where the lemon trees grow...We come from countries of cold weather; at home, we are at war with nature but here, ah! you think you’ve come to the blessed plot where the lion lies down with the lamb.... Everything flowers; no harsh wind stirs the voluptuous air...The sun spills fruit for you... But then the snow comes, you cannot escape it, it followed us from Russia as if it ran behind our carriage, and in this dark, bitter city has caught up with us at last” (Carter). The narrator’s sarcastic tone throughout the story also contributes to her questionable reliability. These sarcastic tones could potentially mean that the narrator is not supplying information that is fully true, since these tones add to her dramatization of the story.

For example, when the narrator speaks about her father's choice to gamble her away to The Beast she states, " Who could refuse the invitation his valet brought to our lodging...Not my profligate father, certainly" and " You must not think my father valued me at less than a king's ransom; but, at no more than a king's ransom" (Carter). Similar to her sarcastic tone, the reader can also pick up on the narrator's immature tone throughout the story. This immaturity adds to the narrator's unreliability because it affects the way that she sees and understands the events happening around her. For example, when she is getting ready to be taken away to the beast her focus is on something irrelevant. This is seen when getting into The Beast's carriage she states, " I had always held a little towards Gulliver's opinion, that horses are better than we are, and, that day, I would have been glad to depart with him to the kingdom of horses, if I'd been given the chance" (Carter). Time is also not alluded to by the narrator throughout the telling of this story, which adds to the story's ambiguous and unreliable aspects. The reader is unaware of time passing or the amount of time that the narrator is in The Beast's possession. The only mentioning of time is when the narrator states, " I might have slept an hour, a night, or a month but his sculptured calm, the stifling air remained just as it had been" and " And in my room for hours I hear those paws pad back and forth outside my door" (Carter).

The story's ambiguous ending also contributes to the narrator's unreliability. The narrator adds unrealistic elements that are almost magical and dreamlike as she seems to have been transformed into a beast when she states, " I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur" (Carter). Overall, the narrator's unreliable narration of the story and ambiguous ending allow " The

"Tiger's Bride" to be considered a post-modernistic piece of literature. Chiquita's unreliable and ambiguous narration throughout the telling of "I am Your Horse in the Night" cause this story to have multiple interpretations, which allows it to also be considered a post-modernistic piece of literature. This short story follows a woman named Chiquita and her love for a man on the run for his life. This man, known simply to the narrator as "Beto", shows up at her door unexpectedly in the night. After they make love and he leaves, she is arrested, tortured, and interrogated by the police concerning his whereabouts. However, the narrative, told from her point of view, is affected during Beto's visit by her sleepiness, by alcohol, and by her decision that the best way to deceive her captors about Beto's visit is by deceiving herself.

This unreliability throughout the story forces the reader to question if Beto is even real, or if he is just a dream or a spirit. The first instance of Chiquita's unreliability occurs with her and Beto's disagreement over the meaning of Gal Costa's song lyric, "I'm your horse in the night" (Valenzuela). Chiquita takes an "esoteric" approach to the lyric saying that it represents spirituality and someone who is "in a trance", while Beto limits the meaning of the statement to sexual intercourse (Valenzuela). Chiquita's dramatization of the song lyric, which is also the title of the story, can be seen as an unreliable quality, because the reader can infer that she is talking about herself when she speaks about a person "in a trance" (Valenzuela). The continuation of Chiquita's "trance" and unreliability can be seen when her vivid encounter with Beto seems to end when the phone rings. Here, the reader can begin to wonder if Chiquita was narrating a real life encounter with Beto, or just

recalling a dream. For example, this is shown when Chiquita narrates, “ The goddamn phone pulled me out in waves from a deep well...I walked over to the receiver, thinking it could be Beto, sure, who was no longer by my side, sure, following his inveterate habit of running away while I’m asleep” (Valenzuela).

Chiquita’s reliability of Beto’s encounter is doubted even further when the police enter her home. For example, when the police arrive the story becomes even more vague as Chiquita shuts down and excludes everything but what seems to be her in-head narration. Chiquita seems to grimly deny the reality of her night with Beto as she admits, or pretends, that it was only the product of a dream. For example, this is shown when Chiquita narrates, “ They wouldn’t find a thing...My only real possession was a dream and they can’t deprive me of my dreams just like that...My dream the night before, when Beto was there with me and we loved each other...I’d dreamed it, dreamed every bit of it” (Valenzuela). Chiquita also narrates that the police are asking for “ reality, tangible facts, the kind I couldn’t even begin to give them” (Valenzuela). The reader can wonder if Chiquita cannot give the police real statements because she does not have any or because she wants to protect her lover.

Both of these interpretations can be seen by the way she answers the police by narrating, “ I haven’t seen that so-called Beto in more than six months, and I loved him. The man simply vanished. I only run into him in my dreams, and they’re bad dreams that often become nightmares” (Valenzuela). The story begins to end with Chiquita in jail, thinking of that night, remembering the phrase of Gal Costa’s song, and now accepting her unbounded
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interpretation of it. Beto, dead or alive as he may be, now seems to be a spirit and Chiquita, behind bars, is his possession. For example, this is seen when she narrates to an absent Beto, " You can inhabit me whenever you wish" (Valenzuela). At the end of the story, Valenzuela seems to give Chiquita the power to establish a new reality more to her liking.

For example, this is shown when Chiquita narrates, " And if by some wild chance there's a Gal Costa record and a half-empty bottle of cachaca in my house, I hope I'll be forgiven: I decreed that they do not exist" (Valenzuela). She reconstructs herself, fabricates for the police, and tells her own new tale, which the reader must believe is an accurate statement of her mental processes and recount of the night. " Bluebeard's Egg" can also be considered to be a post-modernistic piece of literature because the unreliable, third person narrator allows the reader to see into Sally's mind, however, it is never confirmed whether her feelings and fears are genuine or the result of paranoia and fantasy. Throughout the story, Atwood uses a restricted internal focalization, making Sally the only agent of focus.

However, the narrator inserts extradiegetic comments or impressions that discredit the protagonist's reliability, which urges the reader to doubt Sally's attitude and immediately perceive that her imagination has been nourished on happily-ever-after stories. This can be seen by the way that Sally wants herself to be the " princess" of a romantic fairy tale (Atwood 157). For example, the narrator describes how Sally compares her and Ed's relationship to an Agatha Christie murder mystery by stating, " If it weren't for her, his blundering too-many-thumbs kindness would get him into all sorts of quagmires, all sorts of sink holes he'd never be able to get himself of <https://assignbuster.com/language-in-the-possibility-for-spontaneity-unpredictability-and/>

out" (Atwood 133-134). The narrator's continued knowledge of Sally's thoughts allows the reader to see that she is very impressionable, dramatic, and fantastical. This is seen when the narrator provides insight on the reason why Sally wants a new desk; so she can " sit at it in something flowing, backlit by the morning sunlight, gracefully dashing off notes..

She saw a 1940's advertisement for coffee like this once, and the husband was standing behind the chair, leaning over, with a worshipful expression on his face" (Atwood 135). Atwood's shifting narration perspective adds to the ambiguity and allows the reader to see that Sally's story is not entirely accurate. The narrator deliberately writes that Sally continually worries about her marriage and believes that perhaps she does not know everything about Ed.

For example, the narrator explains that " Ed is a real person, with a lot more to him than these simplistic renditions allow for; which sometimes worries her" (Atwood 158). Another example of this shift occurs when Marylynn seems to know more about Ed than Sally does. This is seen when Marylynn is shown saying, " Ed is cute as a button...In fact, he's just like a button: he's so bright and shiny...If he were mine, I'd get him bronzed and keep him on the mantelpiece" (Atwood 160). Ed's occupation as a " heart man", or a doctor, contradicts with Sally's view of him, which also add to her unreliability.

Since Ed is a doctor, the reader can infer that he has a high level of intelligence, yet, the narrator shows how Sally continuously puts down Ed's intellect by stating, " Sally is in love with Ed because of his stupidity" and "

Edward Bear, of little brain” (Atwood 132). The narrator also shows how Sally complains that although Ed may be a heart man, he does not understand real hearts, the ones “ symbolized by red satin surrounded by lace and topped by pink bows” (Atwood 160). Throughout the story, the narrator continues to allude to the fact that there is another perspective in the story that Sally, and the reader, do not know; Ed’s own point of view. He talks in succinct sentences when conversing with other characters, but what he reveals leaves Sally wanting much more. She wants to explore “ Ed’s inner world, which she can’t get at” and it completely frustrates her (Atwood 169).

Therefore, the reader becomes aware that Ed will remain a mystery, to both Sally and the reader, because he is “ a shadow” to her and, therefore, the narrator (Atwood 176). Throughout this story, the narrator demonstrates how Sally assumes that she knows everything relevant to her situation, but she eventually questions her own beliefs after the incident between Ed and Marylynn at the end of the story.