

Comparative narrative



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Reading, for the true enthusiasts, is a time to take a break, a vacation from the everyday hum-drum life. It is a time for him or her to escape what he or she knows to experience and view life through another's eyes. For one who truly enjoys this pastime, it does not matter what the genre is. Whether short fictional tales or non-fiction stories. Whether poetry or essays the reader escapes through reading. This paper will compare the elements of narrative in two fictional and two non-fictional works, exploring such areas as the credibility, entertainment value and superiority within the distinct character of both, the fictional and non-fictional genres of literature.

The stories, *The Richer, the Poorer* by Dorothy West and *My Lack of Gumption*, by Russell Baker both taken from *The Art of Work* (LaRocco & Coughlin, 1996, p. 106 and 119) and *The Virus*, by Craig Brown and *Buy a Cellular Phone, Sublet Your Soul* by Robert Aquinas McNally both taken from *The Literature of Work* (Murphy, S. Sperling, J. , & Murphy, J, 1991, p 29 & 277) will be used for the various crossover themes that are perceptible in them. NARRATIVE Narrative is defined as “ the general term (for a story long or short; of past, present or future; factual or imagined; told for any purpose; and with or without much detail). ” (2006) In a fictional work, narrative may be used to create emotion or evoke emotional responses from the reader.

Emotions such as love, fear, anger and pain can be enhanced or exaggerated in a fictional account to pique the readers interest. In a non-fictional work narrative can be used to condense time to eliminate unimportant or uninteresting points in a story. Whole periods can be skipped so more time can be spent describing or exploring the most essential or momentous points of the true account. Facts are the basic elements upon

which a story is built. Narrative ties facts together in a meaningful and entertaining way.

It provides the connection or transitional elements which allow the facts to be related smoothly and conceivably to the reader. The four literature works explored for this paper have all used the narrative in such a way to arouse the senses of the reader. Whether told from a third person view as is the case in *The Richer, the Poorer* or the first person in *The Virus* the reader is drawn into the life of another riding the waves of change that occur in the stories. CREDIBILITY The reader needs a reason to immerse him or herself into the story that they are reading. Relating to the character in some way is a major component of the immersion into the work. The reader has to believe or except the story for it to have a true affect on him.

However, unlike a non-fictional account, in a fictional work credibility is not as important because the reader is aware that the story is made up and is not a true retelling of the facts. Authenticity gives way to make-believe and imagination. Finding true meaning in life and work is a theme that is told in both *The Richer, the Poorer* and *My Lack of Gumption*, yet they are told in both a fictional and non-fictional method. By the end of these stories these characters have found out what their purposes is in life. However the way they reached those discoveries were very different. Lottie, the main character in *The Richer, the Poorer* has lived her whole life doing everything that she was supposed to do.

Always working and not living life to the fullest. It is not until she is past sixty and her sister comes to live with her that she realizes that there is more to

life than working and she should have paid more attention life instead of letting it pass her by. She sums up her years when she says "...It was me who didn't use them I saved for them. I forgot the best of them would go without my every spending a day or a dollar enjoying them. That's my life story in those few words, a life never lived.

" (LaRocco & Coughlin, 1996, p. 109) She gets it now even when it seems too late. Yet many can learn from her mistakes to find 'it' early in life so life is not wasted. Russell, the character from *My Lack of Gumption*, on the other hand finds his true purpose early in life. It was from the A paper he wrote, when he was eleven, retelling his summer vacation and a 'suggestion' by his mother which caused him to come to the realization that he would be a writer. Why? Simply because, in his own words, "...what writers did couldn't even be classified as work... Writers didn't have to have any gumption at all.

" (LaRocco & Coughlin, 1996, p. 126) He had found the job he loved and now he did not have to 'work' anymore. Both characters have taught a valuable lesson. Finding purpose in life. Now whether one believes the account from Russell, because he is working and living his calling, or learns from the life long mistake by the fictional character Lottie.

The writing has achieved its intended purpose. EntertainmentIn non-fiction the reader is looking for believability or credibility as a logical framework for the stories, events and plot, there must be a connection to real life. The bond to real life could be the entertainment itself. The reader is looking for a way to identify with the experiences of the author. In fiction the author can transport the reader to events and periods that are outside the bounds of

real life. This often provides a transcendental experience that can be thrilling, dangerous, and humorous or evoke a number of psychological, mystical, or a purely physical experience.

SuperiorityFictional narrating is superior when dealing with facts and circumstances which are uninteresting or unimportant to the reader. Non-fictional narrative can be superior when the facts or circumstances that form the basis of the story are interesting and important to the reader. Telling the story of one who has been put out to pasture by an employer after many years of faithful and dedicated service is a fate that many hope to avoid and feel... wish... hope... that it won't happen to them. Craig Brown who wrote *The Virus* uses fictional narrating very effectively in introducing and even cautioning employers lest this same fate befalls them.

He draws the reader into an intriguing tale of suspense, drama and whodunit to find the culprit who is wrecking havoc on the employee and customer used computer terminals of a bank. His character, Terry, has found a way to kill two birds with one stone. He infiltrated the banks computer system to get back at them for losing his job and also as a way to show them that they need him to protect the system. He explains to the investigator "...what a shambles the so-called security is in. I decided to take a little chance.

Show them they needed a real security officer and not someone who just holds the title. " (Murphy, S. , Sperling, J. , & Murphy, J, 1991, p 42) On the other side of the coin, Robert Aquinas McNally uses Non-fictional narrative in *Buy a Cellular Phone, Sublet Your Soul* to show how much life and time is slipping away because man is so tied to schedules and calendars. It is such

an epidemic that man multitasks and the cell phone has become an extension of themselves. So much so that it can all be summed up in “ There is too little time to do everything because we don’t do anything.

When nothing receives full attention, everything slips past. ” (Murphy, S. , Sperling, J. , & Murphy, J, 1991, p 278) Conclusion This paper has performed a through analysis of the elements of narrative in fictional and non-fictional literary works.

Discovering connections in such areas as the credibility, entertainment value and superiority within these two genres of literature. References LaRocco, C. , & Coughlin, J. , (1996), *The Art of Work*, South-Western Educational Publishing Murphy, S. , Sperling, J. , & Murphy, J.

, (1991), *The Literature of Work*, University of Phoenix Press