

ang070 S/Ü "Introduction to the Critical and Scholarly Discussion of Literature"
Assignment 3: "Analysing Fiction"

This assignment is a mandatory part of your portfolio and needs to be handed in on time. It is ungraded but a sample solution will be published on the Institutswiki. Additionally, you can receive feedback in the office hours of your respective instructors.

Please make sure to submit your assignment stapled together but not bound in any folder. Every assignment must include a cover sheet and the statement on plagiarism. Present your results in complete sentences. You may write up to three pages of text, according to the formatting specifications of our style sheet. Any text beyond the first three pages will be ignored.

Analyse the following passage:

"The singular alterations of courtesy and ill-breeding [...] a true hidalgo Cereno."
("Benito Cereno" 52-3)

The text is specified according to the following edition:

Melville, Herman. "Benito Cereno." 1855. *Melville's Short Novels*. Ed. Dan McCall. New York and London: Norton, 2002. 34-102.

Formal and Media-specific Analysis: Communicative Situation, Themes, Figurative Speech, etc.

(1) Focalization: Identify and comment on the use of (and the potential shifts in) focalization in the given passage.

- dominant mode of focalization: internal focalization
character-focalizer: Captain Delano
focalized: Don Benito Cereno
passages: "The singular alternations [...] wicked imposture";
"But if not lunatic [...] his fangs"; "Glancing over [...] a true hidalgo Cereno"

Delano focalizes Cereno both from the outside, making observations about his class, his rank, his status, as well as from within, speculating about his character and indeed his identity – with ambivalent results.

Initially Delano focalizes Cereno's impenetrable behaviour from outside ("[t]he singular alternations of courtesy and ill-breeding"). As a result of that, he comes to insinuate that Cereno's inconsistencies can be accounted for by only two possibilities: madness ("innocent lunacy") or fraud ("wicked imposture"). When, a moment later, Delano convinces himself that madness is in fact out of the question, his remaining observations come to focus on the question whether Cereno is indeed a somewhat overrefined Spanish aristocrat or, possibly, a trickster, a conman, or an "imposter". While so doing, he focalizes on:

- (a) his allegedly see-through performance ("act the part now acted by [Cereno]", "masquerading as an oceanic grandee", "playing a part above his real level").
- (b) his manners and behaviour ("ignorant of the first requisites of mere gentlemanhood"; "remarkable indecorum"; "strange ceremoniousness")
- (c) his title and his origins ("a sounding name"; "a sort of Castilian Rothschild"; "a true hidalgo Cereno")
- (d) his physiognomy ("the profile, whose clearness of cut was refined [as well as] ennobled")

Judging from his name as well as his appearance, Delano – at least momentarily – comes to regard Cereno as the descendant of an influential Spanish mercantile family. In any case, however, Delano's ideas about Cereno are fundamentally informed by his limited focalizations as well as his own ideological biases ("*Glancing over once more towards his host [...] he [Delano] was struck by his profile*") As a result, Delano leaps to deceptive conclusions about Cereno. His focalizations are contradictory, inconsistent and misleading – a fact which is again betrayed by internal focalization, as Delano's own spontaneous responses emphasize his utter cluelessness as well as his unsuspecting slow-wittedness ("Never mind", "Away with suspicion").

- shift in focalization: external focalization
narrator focalizer: extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator
focalized: Captain Delano
passages: "But the first idea [...] vacated", "From no train of thought [...] its meridian"

The passage's dominant mode of focalization is interrupted twice. In these two situations, Delano himself is the focalized and the external focalizer provides a view of Delano from within, implicitly commenting on both his gaze and his thoughts.

In the first situation, the external focalizer points to the fact that Delano's view is indeed compromised by the fact that he understands Cereno's behaviour as a personal insult and a slight against himself ("he [Delano] began to *regard* the stranger's conduct something in the light of an intentional affront")

In the second situation, the external focalizer explains that Delano's views originate solely from chance observations whose significance he can neither recognize nor correlate in a meaningful way ("From no train of thought did these fancies come; not from within, but from without").

(2) Narration: Identify and categorize the narrator according to the typology of narrators.

- Extradiegetic narrator (narrating the diegetic level)
- Heterodiegetic narrator
- Perceptibility: the narrator's perceptibility in this passage is principally marked by two aspects, i.e. his *definition of the characters* and his *reports about what Delano does not think or say* ("the first idea [...] had not hitherto been wholly a stranger to Captain Delano's mind, yet [...]"; "From no train of thought did these fancies come"). As the setting and the characters have already been identified, there is little description of these two aspects in the passage. However, implicit comments as well as brief summaries ("Now that"; "Suddenly") can be found.
- Reliability: The narrator's reliability is not compromised by personal involvement, limited knowledge, or a problematic value scheme. His information management, however, is extremely calculated and (deliberately) misleading. In any case, however, this text problematizes the unreliability of the (internal) focalizer, i.e. Captain Delano, much more clearly than that of the narrator.
- Ulterior narration

(3) Characterization: Who is characterized by whom and with what technique?

In this passage, characterizations strongly depend on focalization (see above). In other words, Don Benito Cereno is characterized from the point of view of the character-focalizer Captain Delano (internal focalization), while Captain Delano himself is mostly characterized from the point of view of the narrator-focalizer (external focalization).

Don Benito Cereno

Initially, Delano's irritation with Cereno leads him to characterize the latter as

- inconsistent, opaque, untrustworthy
 - *indirect presentation through action*: "singular alternations of courtesy and ill-breeding"
- potentially insane, even though this characterization is abandoned presently
 - *direct definition*: "innocent lunacy"

After having abandoned lunacy as a possible reason for Benito Cereno's allegedly inconsistent behaviour, Delano now comes to view Cereno as either:

- a swindler, a conman
 - *direct definition*: "The man was an imposter"; "trickster"
 - acting the role of a gentleman, however unconvincingly
 - *indirect presentation through action*: "act the part now acted by his host [DBC]"; "masquerading as an oceanic grandee"; "ignorant of the first requisites of mere gentlemanhood"
 - *indirect presentation through external appearance*: "masquerading as an oceanic grandee"
 - a lower-class fraud
 - *direct definition*: "some low-born adventurer"
 - *indirect presentation through action*: "ignorant of the first requisites of mere gentlemanhood"; "remarkable indecorum"; "strange ceremoniousness"
 - a malingerer
 - *indirect presentation through action*: "even to the degree of simulating mortal disease"
 - a wolf in sheep's clothing; literally in disguise
 - *indirect presentation through external appearance*: "those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs"

or:

- a Spanish aristocrat
 - *direct definition*: "a true hidalgo Cereno"
 - a fragile, weak, overrefined dandy
 - *direct definition*: "a pale invalid"
 - *indirect presentation through external appearance*: "those velvets"
 - highborn and of high social status, an aristocratic
 - *indirect presentation through social environment*: "[Cereno] a sounding name"; "a sort of Castilian Rothschild"
 - *indirect presentation through external appearance, i.e. physiognomy*: "the profile whose clearness of cut was refined by the thinnest incident to ill-health, as well as ennobled about the chin by the beard"

Captain Delano

Delano's characterization of Cereno, however, is put into perspective by the characterization of Delano himself. The narrator (and narrator-focalizer) characterizes Delano as

- unsuspecting, simple-minded
 - *characterization by analogy, contrast*: "though it [the first idea] might naturally have occurred to an indifferent observer, and, in some respect, had not hitherto been wholly a stranger to Captain Delano's mind"
 - *direct definition*: "From no train of thought did these fancies come"
 - *characterization by analogy, correspondence*: "like hoar frost; yet as soon to vanish as the mild sun of Captain Delano's good-nature [irony] regained its meridian"
- judgemental, owing to the fact that he feels slighted and personally offended
 - *indirect presentation through action*: "he began to regard the stranger's conduct something in the light of an intentional affront"
- superficial, obsessed with appearances/social status
 - *indirect presentation through action*: "he was struck by the profile"
- untroubled; carefree; easy to appease
 - *indirect presentation through action/ 'thoughts'*: "Never mind"; "Away with suspicion"

Consequently, Delano is shown to be at a loss when it comes to 'reading' the identity of others. Confronted with 'the other' – here in terms of nationality, class, masculinity (i.e. gender) – Delano presents himself as anxious, biased and prejudiced. At the same time, however, his temperament prevents him from worrying too much about his unsound judgements – a fact that is ironically put down to his "good-nature", when it is really due to his slow-wittedness.

Functional Analysis: Toward a Problem-oriented Sample Analysis

Build your functional analysis on the data generated through your formal analysis and suggest a possible problem orientation:

- (5) Identify a research problem.
- (6) Suggest one other passage from the novel that corresponds and/or contrasts with the given passage in an aspect relevant to the research problem you have specified.
- (7) Briefly discuss how both passages relate to this problem. Address potential differences in representation and their possible functions.