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Narrators in Narration in Fiction and Film: Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is the author of the 1975 novel *Heat and Dust*; she is also the screenwriter of the 1983 film adaptation. Jhabvala began her collective work with producer Ismail Merchant and director James Ivory in 1963 with a screenplay of her 1960 novel, *The Householder*. Although she is better known for her screen adaptations of literary works by other authors (E.M. Forster, Henry James, Jean Rhys, Kazuo Ishiguro), there is a unique relationship between novel and film when they share the same author. It gives the writer control over her work, style and conveyance of ideas that very seldom exist in film adaptations of literary works.

The first collaborations of Merchant/Ivory/Jhabvala had India not only as a setting but also as center in the characters' lives. Merchant and Jhabvala's knowledge of the place gave them an advantage. They never attempted to compete with the Indian film production companies (Bombay musicals), but by incorporating Indian actors and an Indian production company, they offered an alternative to a foreign audience (mostly British) and to Anglo-Indians. The sixties were formation years: they combined details such as music, dance, costumes, different languages (English and Hindi), different class systems and cultures, photography of interiors and exteriors: rooms, houses, villages, towns, cities. As an independent company, they had the advantage of selecting their own stories, cast, and locations, but they had the disadvantage of always having to raise money and sometimes of not getting their film distributed. Critical acknowledgment of their existence varies, for example, *Jane Austen in Manhattan* (1980) and *Heat and Dust* were reviewed, yet *Quartet* (1981) passed unnoticed. *The Europeans* (1979) had a wide distribution and made critics take notice. *The Bostonians* (1984) had Vanessa Redgrave working for the first time after her dispute with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the adaptation of James's book was attacked both by liberals and conservatives, but it also received Oscar nominations. Then came the success of *A Room with a View* (1986) and Merchant/Ivory/Jhabvala were no longer unknowns. In the late eighties, Merchant and Ivory worked without Jhabvala in two productions, but in the nineties, they have teamed together again for such fine work as *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge* and the excellent productions *Howards End* and *The Remains of the Day*.

This work team has developed a particular discourse that can be described as *auteur* films. They recreate a particular time and space by choosing the most representative in sets, costumes, dance, music, and language. Actors develop their characterization within this proper setting. Their movements, as well as their behavior and ideas, are directly influenced by the setting, thus the setting becomes a true frame for the story. All their stories have a literary connection: based on a book, an undeveloped story, or an original screenplay by the novelist (Jhabvala). With the exception of *Maurice*, time is limited to a short period (weeks, months, a couple of years), make-up and costume change very little. Most of the action takes place in closed quarters where colors and design set up the action and characterization. A brilliant example of this is the book scene in *The Remains of the Day*. In such rich visual setting, characters carry on long and important conversations that depict their inner turmoil. The adaptations they make of known literary works are faithful to the environment, but not necessarily to the story. There seems to be a thorough knowledge of the writers' work and a tendency to incorporate some of their ideas from later works into these earlier ones. Because of this, endings tend to shift the authors' view. For example, in *Quartet* the lost Marya of the novel becomes the shifting one in the film, thus anticipating Rhys's later heroines. In *The Bostonians*, the view shifts from the young woman to the elder feminist, and in *A Room with a View* from Aunt Charlotte to Lucy. In their last two films, Merchant/Ivory/Jhabvala have centered their story on the immense possibilities of characterization by Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala has been writing fiction for almost forty years; she has published eleven novels and five collections of short stories. She has been a screenwriter since 1963, almost exclusively for Merchant/Ivory Productions. In a symposium in 1983 on writers and the cinema, Praver Jhabvala spoke about how the experience of writing for the screen has affected her own fiction:

Another kind of advantage that I have gained through films has been in the editing room, where I have learned a whole new method of narration by watching scenes being moved to and fro in various juxtapositions, and time-schemes manipulated through flashbacks and flash-forwards. It has been a two-way traffic for me — what I have learned in films I have put back into my books, and what I have learned about characterization, relationships, happenings, and everything else that goes into writing fiction I've put to use in writing films.

Precisely because of the medium in which each work is written, the development and adaptation of the narrator or narrative voice is the key element in *Heat and Dust*. To convey the story, the novel uses journals, letters, reconstruction of the past, testimonies, ellipsis, and speech presentation. The film uses flash-forward, flashback, scene, ellipsis, pause, and voiceover. There is an ulterior narration in the novel in both stories since the homodiegetic narrator's own story

is also a memory, although of a more recent past. In the film, the narrator's story is simultaneous, since she is telling what is happening at that precise moment. There is also interrelated narration since the stories alternate with each other. Through the exploration of the reliability and unreliability of these narrators, the story of two Englishwomen and their experience in India is told.

A British woman in her late twenties sets out for India to reconstruct the story of her grandfather's first wife, Olivia Rivers. Her sources are Olivia's letters to her sister Marcia, testimonies from relatives, acquaintances, or friends who knew Olivia. In the process of discovering Olivia's motives for destroying her "perfect" image and eloping with an Indian prince, the narrator relives Olivia's story and stays in India with her own child. Olivia's story is set in 1923 and the frame story takes place in 1973, during exactly the same months: February to September.

I rely on several theoreticians of fiction and film in my approach to the narrator in *Heat and Dust*. The terminology used is Gerard Genette's, even if to critics such as Sarah Kozloff it may seem awkward. The use of the terms for film is based on Seymour Chatman and David Bordwell's work. The latter critic writes in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, that "Diegesis has come to be the accepted term for the fictional world of the story" (16). This "teller" or narrator can take on several roles in the story. The *extradiegetic* narrator is external, impersonal. He/She expresses itself through a range of cinematic codes and channels of expression, which in fiction would be the frame story and in film comprises shot composition, editing, lighting, image texture, color, sound, music, voiceover. The *intradiegetic* narrator is the character-narrator who tells a story within the frame of the fictional world. He/She is a *homodiegetic* narrator when he/she appears as an actor in the story, or he/she can be *heterodiegetic* when he/she does not appear in the story recounted (Genette, Chatman, Kozloff, Stam). The novel begins by giving the impression that a heterodiegetic narrator will tell Olivia's story. In the second paragraph, however, the narrator reveals herself as a homodiegetic narrator elaborating on how she will tell Olivia's story, although her own story is intricately entangled with Olivia's. The time set is the not too distant past and encompasses perhaps a year.

Shortly after Olivia went away with the Nawab, Beth Crawford returned from Simla. This was in September, 1923.... In course of time she became my grandmother — but of course by then everyone was back in England.... I don't remember Douglas at all — he died when I was three.... That was how I first came to see these letters which I have brought with me to India.... Fortunately, during my first few months here, I kept a journal so I have some record of my early impressions. If I were to try and recollect them now, I might not be able to do so. They are no longer the same because I myself am no longer the same. India always changes people, and I have been no exception. But this is not my story, it is Olivia's as far as I can follow it. (*Heat and Dust* 1-2)

The journals are dated by day and month, not year, and are written in the immediate past or present. Journals include the direct ("Thirty years ago I might have said there is hope: but today — none," 4), indirect ("She tells me she has been in India for thirty years," 4), and free indirect discourses ("On the other hand, if He wants to bring her home first, she will do that. It is His will, and for thirty years she has lived only in His will," 4) of characters she meet. The narrator also quotes from Olivia's letters and reports on how her research is coming along. She compares what she had imagined with what she now sees: Olivia's residence, the Nawab's palace, Douglas's office.

Using the year 1923 as a heading, the heterodiegetic narrator reconstructs Olivia's story at the beginning with frequent diegetic summaries: "Olivia first met the Nawab at a dinner party he gave in his palace at Khairn. She had by that time been in Satapur for several months and was already beginning to get bored" (14). The narrator also uses the different discourses (direct, indirect, free indirect) to probe into Olivia's character and learn about the customs and prejudices of the times. At the beginning the narrator's journals are longer than the 1923 story, then this trend is reversed. To recreate time and place in 1923, the sections are filled with scenes (dialogues) which allow for needed information which at times is kept hidden so as to be discovered by Olivia, although the narrator knows the truth since she is reconstructing the story from information gathered before.

The progression of time is not marked by events, but by meteorological changes in the weather, since nothing significant happens in their daily lives; and the journals do not have consecutive dates. The spaces or gaps are explained by pilgrimages and changes in people's character, or by illness or death. The heading 1923 for Olivia's story ends when she has an abortion. From there on the narrator reconstructs Olivia's whereabouts with very little information, so the gaps are filled by the narrator's own experience. Thus, the division between the heterodiegetic and the homodiegetic narrator becomes a blur.

A key element in the film is the use of voiceover which Sarah Kozloff formally defines as "oral statements, conveying any portion of a narrative, spoken by an unseen speaker situated in a space and time other than that simultaneously being presented by the images on the screen" (5). She is quick to add that distinctions blur by the many uses of voiceover. The film version of *Heart and Dust* begins with a scene from 1923: the doctor informs Douglas that his wife has left the hospital. The doctor comments that he always knew she was rotten. The viewer does not know why she was in the hospital. In the next scene, Douglas goes to the house looking for his wife; does not find her and cries. The next shot is contemporary London; a voice that then reveals a face is the narrator of the events in the past. But Harry is not a witness; this is what he heard or speculates that happened when all involved found out what Olivia had done. In the next shot, Anne (the heterodiegetic narrator who becomes homodiegetic and now has a name) is walking down a street in India with a voiceover to fill the

gap from London to India and introduce her landlord's family and her living quarters. She starts reading Olivia's letter and immediately Olivia appears on the screen addressing the camera/viewer.

From this moment on, the story develops in chronological order. The transitions from one story to the other will be signaled by the characters, costumes, and settings. There are also fadeouts, and at other times objects and places are used as transition markers. The genealogy of the characters has changed: Anne is Marcia's granddaughter because Douglas married Olivia's sister. The purpose for this change is to have a family resemblance and an emotional inheritance. The narrator has a taperecorder with Harry's interview. When there are no more letters, she listens to the recording and Harry's voice becomes a voiceover for the images on the screen.

The film begins with a flash-forward, but as the viewer finds out that Anne is doing a reconstruction of the past, the whole 1923 story becomes a flashback. Harry's words played back in the recording machine at the beginning of the film and Olivia's words facing the camera will be heard again in the correct sequence in the retold story. The narrator's emotional involvement with Olivia's story makes her an unreliable narrator in both the novel and the film. Yet, Olivia is presented as a more assertive and sound person in the film since the narrator herself is a self-assured woman who is not just wandering in India trying to make her life like someone else's.

In the novel, the narrator attempts all the time to efface herself by giving importance to Olivia's life and narrating hers as a matter-of-fact (even being sexually used by Chid and Inder Lal is narrated in the same unconcerned tone as describing the landscape). The only emotional involvement in her own life is her concern for an old woman dying on the street; and this particular scene is deleted from the film.

In the film Anne works for the BBC, has had a string of unsuccessful love affairs, and has gone to India as a result of her wish to learn about Olivia and because of her fascination with this country. She does not allow Chid to impose himself on her, she shrugs off Inder Lal's first advances, and only consents when she is ready. There is no hesitation about not informing him about her pregnancy because she considers it her affair. She knows that there is little information to fill in an accurate picture of Olivia's years up on the mountains, but she firmly believes that she was happy because she was free and with the man she loved.

In the novel there is an evident irony in the way the extradiegetic narrator has portrayed the hetero/homodiegetic narrator through her journals. The reader perceives her as weak, insecure, with no purpose in life, in search of living someone else's life. She ends up in the mountains with a child, no responsible father, no apparent source of income, and following a swami:

Next time I meet a swami I shall speak to him and ask for permission to come up. I don't know yet how long I shall stay. In any case, it will have to be some time because of my

condition which will make it more and more difficult to get down again, even if I should want to. (*Heart and Dust* 181)

Knowledge of the career author helps to interpret the narrator's apparent positive decision to follow a swami. In Jhabvala's previous and later novels and stories, swamis are portrayed as non-spiritual men, out to exploit young European and North American women and men who in their insecurity cling to these "holy men" and surrender their will to them.

By studying the diegetic narrators in Praver Jhabvala's novel and film, we see how the same story is told in different ways using the same characters, events and setting. It is precisely the combination of the heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrator that allows the writer to "break the sequence" of the story and use narrative elements such as direct, indirect and free indirect discourse, and the cinematic elements of voiceover, ellipsis, pause and scene to question the reliability of the narrators chosen to tell the story. This approach gives the reader/viewer another insight into a narrative text that has a parallel in a cinematic text.

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The Spirit of Australia in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*: A Case Study in Film Adaptation

Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was published for the first time in 1967, then by Penguin in 1970, and has been reprinted many times since Peter Weir's acclaimed film appeared in 1975. Unlike the film, Lindsay's work is a nostalgic novel, a Victorian melodrama. In fact, this is a nineteenth-century writing, certainly aesthetically surpassed by its filmic adaptation.

Lindsay's novel is a characteristic literary example of the way in which British encounters with an alien land (in this case Australia) has been presented in various forms of artistic expression. The novel's major theme is the European (British) intrusion into an unfamiliar environment. Lindsay shows the incompatibility of both the British and Australian orders. The intruders are either rejected or defeated. Desperate and unsuccessful attempts to preserve old orders in alien circumstances and to impose them onto the new land end in disaster.

This novel tells the story of a group of schoolgirls from an elite private school, Appleyard College, who, on St. Valentine's Day in 1900, take a field trip to Hanging Rock, a sacred Aboriginal ground located on the edge of the Australian bush. Two of the girls and their math teacher never return. In spite of the frantic search and persistent investigation by the police and by the locals, the mystery at Hanging Rock is never resolved. Many questions are raised in this novel but no explanation is provided.¹

There is a conscious attempt in the novel to convince the reader to believe that the events at Hanging Rock really happened. At the beginning Lindsay points out: "Whether *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is fact or fiction, my readers must decide for themselves. As the fateful picnic took place in the year nineteen

1 The most intriguing, "final" chapter of the novel, was revealed when Joan Lindsay died in 1984. Her former agent, John Taylor, stated that he was in possession of the last chapter that was not to be released during Lindsay's lifetime. The final chapter appeared in the 1987 edition (on St Valentine's Day!) as *The Secret of Hanging Rock*, published by Angus and Robertson. The cover of the book depicts a reproduction of McCubbin's "The Lost Child." The final chapter contains the "solution" to the mystery: the girls and Miss McCraw follow a small snake through a hole into a cave. Irma cannot follow her companions; the hole closes before her (see Barrett 1987, 85).