



Extended Abstract

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An Investigation of the Extent and Manner of the Narrator's Presence in the Story of "Rostam and Sohrab" in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*

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Introduction

The narrator is one of the oldest elements of literature, with a history as long as human culture itself. In ancient narrative traditions, the narrator was not merely a literary device but also a bearer and transmitter of collective memory, national traditions, and cultural values. Narrative therefore played a central role in preserving earlier poetry, and epic literature became one of the oldest narrative forms among nations. Like modern writers, ancient storytellers used narrators to convey events and organize the story world. The narrator may thus be regarded as the author's representative in the text: the figure who recounts the story and sets it in motion, although he/she is not necessarily its creator. In classical narrative texts, the narrator often occupies a transcendent, almost godlike position; in later periods, especially after the Renaissance and with the rise of the modern novel, this position becomes earthlier and more artistic. Theorists have accordingly classified narrators according to their narrative level, point of view, degree of knowledge, and distance from events. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, as a foundational work of Persian literature, has a strong narrative structure and can be productively examined through modern narratological concepts.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is a foundational text of Persian literature whose narrative structure combines epic, mythological, and historical elements. For this reason, each of its stories displays different patterns of narrator presence and narrative technique. Among these stories, "Rostam and Sohrab" holds a special place because it joins epic grandeur with tragic intensity. In this story, the narrator moves through several layers, from external narration to the internal narration of characters.

This study is descriptive-analytical and is based on classical narratology and its later developments. Its purpose is to analyze the layers of narration in the story and to determine the type, level, and function of the narrator in selected parts of the text.

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The research begins with an examination of the story based on Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh's critical edition of the *Shahnameh*. The sections in which the narrator's presence is more prominent are then selected and analyzed through concepts such as point of view, degree of knowledge, narrative distance, type of report, and the narrator's manner of evaluating characters and events. This method makes it possible to trace changes in the narrator's role from scene to scene and to clarify how narrative authority is distributed throughout the story.

Discussion

The analysis shows that the narrator in "Rostam and Sohrab" can be studied in two main forms: extradiegetic and intradiegetic. Ferdowsi, as the overall organizing voice of the *Shahnameh*, begins the work in the name of God and often narrates through voices that he occasionally mentions, thereby distinguishing his position as author from the position of the narrator. In "Rostam and Sohrab," the dominant narrator stands beyond the story world and possesses an almost godlike awareness. He knows the scenes, time, characters, and their thoughts; therefore, he functions as an omniscient narrator. At the beginning of the story, he uses an apt opening to prepare the audience for the tragic atmosphere and to reveal his superior knowledge of the narrative outcome.

At certain moments, this narrator is interventionist. He judges, advises, interprets causes, and comments on life, death, destiny, and divine will. These interventions show that the narrator is not always a neutral reporter but sometimes guides the reader's understanding of events and frames the tragedy within a broader moral and philosophical horizon. Yet the narration is not limited to this mode. In many scenes, the narrator records actions, dialogues, and inner states with relative impartiality. In such cases, he appears to withdraw from the scene and becomes what may be called an absent narrator. This withdrawal allows the characters' motives and viewpoints to emerge more clearly and gives the narrative a dialogic quality.

The story also includes moments in which narration is entrusted to characters within the story. These intradiegetic narrators temporarily replace the omniscient voice. For example, when Rostam sends Goudarz to Kavus for the healing potion, or when characters report what they have seen, the narrative perspective becomes limited and character-based. In monologues such as Sohrab's words after the death of Zende-Razm, the hero reveals his own thoughts and feelings directly. Likewise, in dialogues such as Rostam's exchange with Hojir and Sohrab's encounter with Gordafarid, the narrator reports the scene with minimal intervention, and the dramatic quality of the story becomes stronger. As a result, the narrative moves beyond a single voice and approaches a relatively polyphonic structure. The coexistence of these levels shows that Ferdowsi's narration is not static; rather, it changes according to the emotional, dramatic, and interpretive needs of each episode. This layered movement also explains how the story combines epic distance with personal and tragic immediacy.

Conclusion

This study examined the tragic story of "Rostam and Sohrab" from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* in terms of the narrator's position and participation in narration. The results show that the story begins with an omniscient narrator who speaks from a metanarrative position. He is aware of all events, sometimes anticipates or recalls them, and in some cases intervenes by taking a clear stance. In descriptive and purely narrative sections, however, he mainly represents the speech, thought, and action of the characters, a technique that helps preserve the documentary and epic character of the story. In other sections, the characters themselves become narrators of parts of the event, and the narration shifts from omniscient reporting to direct character-based speech. This shift reveals the interaction between external and internal narration in the *Shahnameh*. Therefore, although the dominant narrative mode in "Rostam and Sohrab" is extradiegetic, omniscient, and often interventionist, the story also contains clear signs of intradiegetic narration. The narrator's presence is thus flexible, layered, and central to the tragic effect of the narrative, because it both organizes the events and deepens the reader's emotional response to the inevitable catastrophe. Overall, the narrator functions as a structural, interpretive, and emotional mediator between the poet, the characters, and the audience.

Keywords: narrative, narrator, Rostam and Sohrab, *Shahnameh*.

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