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**Narrators and Authorial Persona in *The Princess Bride*: The Novel and the Movie**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation carries out a narratological analysis of the metanarrative frame in William Goldman's novel *The Princess Bride* (1973). Once concepts like "metanarrative" and "metafictional" literature are defined and differentiated, and also "frame story," narrative structure, and diegetic levels, the analysis addresses Morgenstern and Goldman as a fictional narrator and a literary persona of the author respectively. Their dynamics invoke aspects reminiscent of Roland Barthes' death of the author. All these narratological features of the novel are then compared to those in its film adaptation, whose narrative structure and narrator go through significant changes in the transposition.

**KEYWORDS:** *The Princess Bride*, William Goldman, metanarrative, metafiction, literary persona, narratology.

## RESUMEN

En este Trabajo de Fin de Grado se lleva a cabo el análisis narratológico del marco metanarrativo de *La princesa prometida* (1973), de William Goldman. Una vez definidos y diferenciados conceptos como literatura "metanarrativa" y "metaficcional", así como el "relato-marco", estructura narrativa y niveles diegéticos, el análisis aborda a Morgenstern y Goldman como narrador ficticio y autor sustituto, respectivamente. Su dinámica invoca aspectos que recuerdan a la muerte del autor, de Roland Barthes. Todos estos rasgos narratológicos de la novela se comparan luego con los de su adaptación cinematográfica, cuya estructura narrativa y narrador sufren cambios significativos en la transposición.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *La princesa prometida*, William Goldman, metanarrativa, metaficción, autor sustituto, narratología.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION: *The Princess Bride*

*The Princess Bride* is a fantasy-comedy film directed by Rob Reiner and released in theaters by Twentieth Century Fox in 1987. The story revolves around Buttercup, the titular main character, Westley, the farm boy who she is in love with, and the circumstances under which they are separated. Broken-hearted by her lover's death on his way to America, she accepts a loveless marriage with the hunting-addicted Prince Humperdinck of Florin; only to be kidnapped by a Spaniard swordsman who fell from grace trying to avenge his dead father, a Turkish wrestler with a love for rhymes and their Sicilian genius of a leader. These events are presented in the form of a fairytale being read by a grandfather to his sick grandson.

Despite its modest success in theaters, thanks to its mixture of genres, its subversion of the viewer's expectations, and charming and memorable characters, it has become a 1980s classic with a very loyal cult following. With its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary around the corner, the misadventure of Buttercup and Westley has cemented itself into pop culture amongst other fantasy works such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*.

The famous tongue-in-cheek script by the American screenwriter William Goldman (1931-2018) did not originally start as to how it is most well-known today. In reality, as is the case with Tolkien's and Rowling's most iconic works, such a simple framed story is the cinematographic adaptation of the 1973 novel of the same title by Goldman himself. Because it is common in these book-to-film adaptations, the core story is left unchanged; but, by reading the novel, it is noticeable that the frame was simplified when taking *The Princess Bride* to the big screen.

The original version begins with a fictional autobiography of William Goldman himself, as his father read Simon Morgenstern's *The Princess Bride* back when he was sick with pneumonia as a child, and how he credits this experience as the reason he became a novelist. In the novel, in the author's words, the story played out in the film is his abridgment based on his father's reading, often referred to as "the good parts." His justification revolves around the hypothetical original manuscript not being an adventure-based and action-packed fairytale, but a historiographical satire on European royalty that leaves Westley and Buttercup's story as a secondary element.

Despite the film's cult status and notoriety, in this dissertation, I will examine the narratological characteristics and metanarrative potential of Goldman's original novel *The Princess Bride* (1973). This will be conducted in two sections. First, it will be necessary to establish the metalanguage that will be used throughout the narratological analysis of Goldman's work. Throughout the novel, Goldman repeatedly interrupts the plot as he commentates on Morgenstern's narrative in the form of abridging comments. This makes his role as a commentator metanarrative. For example, understanding what I mean by "metanarrative" will be pivotal to what makes William Goldman's novel so interesting from a narratological perspective.

For the second section, it is important to state that the focus of the analysis will not be placed on the plot of *The Princess Bride*'s story, but the narrative frame surrounding it. This section will delve into the novel as a frame story with a Chinese box narrative, and it will focus on Goldman's side of the story with very brief mentions of Buttercup and Westley's side. Having the novel as the primary object of study does not mean that the film will be omitted from the scope of this paper. Quite the contrary, a segment of the narratological analysis will be dedicated to a comparative analysis of its narrative frame with that of the novel.

This dissertation intends to bring the attention of narratologists, literary theorists, and readers alike to Goldman's work as a novelist. It is meant to illustrate how he plays with many narrative concepts and ideas that were only shown interest during the Postmodernist period. Along with Kurt Vonnegut and Paul Auster, he might be another interesting author from this 1970s literary movement worth studying. My reasoning, moreover, is the result of yet another case of overshadowing. *The Princess Bride*, as in Goldman's work of literary fiction, is often only remembered by his screenplay of the cult classic 1987 film.

## 2. METANARRATIVE & METAFICTION: Two Thorns on Narrative Theory's Side

Historically speaking, the term "narratology" –as the field of the scientific study of the narrative representation, and a branch of narrative theory–, was only popularized in the 1970s by members of the Structuralist movement. It was established in the 1920s with the publication of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), and its 1968

English translation, and saw support in the Russian formalist circles. Like many other fields of literary theory that saw their foundation during the emergence of contemporary critical theory, this is a young field of study which is constantly evolving and has seen revisions even in recent years. As a result, the specialized terms “metanarrative” and “metafiction” have historically always been an issue for narratologists.

Before conducting the narratological analysis of *The Princess Bride*, it is necessary to take a step back and define and understand the terminology. The purpose of this section is to analyze and explain the terms “metanarrative” and “metafiction,” as well as give an overview of the history behind them. According to Fludernik (2003), “in English narratological criticism, the terms metanarrative and metafiction are ... used interchangeably” (1). And it is only in recent times that an effort has begun to be made to define and make a clear distinction between metanarrative, metafiction, and other forms of self-reflective narration (Fludernik 2003, 3–11). Since I will be using her article as a reference, I will attempt to establish a distinction between these two terms, and it will be maintained throughout the entirety of this undergraduate dissertation.

## 2.1. The Grammar of the Terminology: Metanarrative and Metafiction as products of affixation

Preliminary to the analysis, it is necessary to look into the terms “metanarrative” and “metafiction” from a grammatical point of view, to understand these words on a fundamental level. In English grammar and morphology, “metanarrative” and “metafiction” are two terms that fall under the category of affixed words –lexemes, or words, which have had their meanings altered by the addition of one or more prefixes and/or suffixes–. The prefix “meta-,” according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, means “higher than, transcending, overarching, dealing with the most fundamental matters of”. The Cambridge English Dictionary, moreover, defines it as synonymous with “self-referential” –“(of something that is written or performed) referring to itself or to something of its own type”–, which, in itself, would be an appropriate definition pertaining the main subject of this dissertation.



Many terms within narratology, or literary theory in general, are sometimes not too clearly defined and, more often than not, used interchangeably with other terms. Such a trend of misinterpreting words applies to “narrative” and “fiction,” and it is important to create a distinction between them.

“Narrative” is a term frequently used in literary studies, but to date, there is no consensus, or at least there is often disagreement, about what constitutes a narrative. Prince (1987) defines it as “the recounting ... of one or more real or fictitious EVENTS communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATEES” (58). Despite this definition being often disputed by scholars concerning whether or not the figure of the narrator is mandatory for a work to be labeled as a narrative, it is also one of the most widely accepted in the field. Moreover, it refers specifically to *how* the story, the event or sequence of events themselves, is conveyed (also known as “narrative discourse”). For this reason, conflicting “narrative” and “story,” when the two are two parts of a whole, is problematic, and this is also the reason why, rather than focusing on the plot of *The Princess Bride*, the focus will be on its narrative.

A second, yet more peculiar distinction must be drawn between “fiction” and “novel,” two terms that, while closely related, are not interchangeable. My dissertation is concerned with “prose fiction” –where “fiction” is understood as a narrative that deals in some capacity with imaginary and invented events, with its combination with prose resulting in a fictional work that is presented in a narrative form–. By contrast, the novel, to be more precise the prose novel, is defined by Ignasi Ribó in his *Introduction to the Semiotics of Narrative* (2019) as a prose fiction genre in the same manner as the short story (XI). “Density, concentration, and precision are essential elements of good short-story writing,” whilst in the case of the novel, those essential elements are “scope, breadth, and sweep” (7). While the question of length is primarily a subjective one, all fictional prose novels are works of prose fiction, yet not vice versa as a result of this arbitrary difference in length and presentation; hence why both terms cannot be used interchangeably, as one is a subset of the other.

## 2.2. The Semantic Dilemma of Metanarrative: the many definitions behind a misunderstood term

While the importance of the concept of “metafiction” has been widely recognized in narratology, “metanarrative” is often only mentioned by some narratological studies in passing or, reiterating in this section’s introduction, used interchangeably with metafiction, if not seen as subordinate or as part of the “metafiction” umbrella.

Due to reasons ranging from multilingual, to grammatical, to transdisciplinary, defining “metanarrative” is a widespread concern that narratologists such as Nünning (2001), Fludernik (2003) and Pier (2005) have all called out with little to no impact in their field. For this reason, the purpose of this subsection is to explain “metanarrative” as a polysemic term in an attempt to nail down a definition that can be applied to the extent of my dissertation.

The term “metanarrative” was originally developed by Jean-François Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition* as the English equivalent of the term *métarécit* –or the overarching narratives used since the times of the Enlightenment to understand the movement of history–, thus as a synonym of the term “master narrative.” This version of the definition could be summarized in “narrative about narrative.” While on paper it aligns with our understanding of metanarrative, this definition is used within a branch of literary theory known as “critical theory.” Critical theory has its roots in literary criticism, rather than narratological analysis, focusing on the contents of a work of literature. For this reason, Lyotard’s definition of “metanarrative” will not be referred to as such at the moment of conducting the narratological analysis of *The Princess Bride*. Instead, the term “master narrative” will be used.

There is a linguistic problem when translating the work of non-English speaking narratologists into English. The English translation of Gerard Genette’s *Discourse du récit* (1972), *Narrative Discourse* (1980), generates a confusing narrative in which the term “metanarrative”, while applicable to narratology, is used to define two different ideas: on one hand, about the internal organization of the text, as an umbrella term for different forms of self-reflexive narration; on the other hand, as a narrative within the narrative. Both definitions, moreover, limit “metanarrative” exclusively to the narrator’s “function of choosing and directing the narrative” (162), another issue considering the

nature of this field. For these reasons, Genette's work must be complemented with a broader definition.

The language barrier between narratologists needs to be considered. This is emphasized by Fludernik (2003), as she admitted to "translate Nünning's [German] noun *Metanarration* with the English noun "metanarrative" and not with "metanarration" (13) as a result of the latter going underused in English and being replaced by the adjective "metanarrative". It is for this reason that this dissertation will continue to refer to the English noun "metanarration," metanarrative comments, as "metanarrative," a nominalization of the adjective.

Only one narratologist has dedicated his time to research and defining metanarrative comments in his work, Gerald Prince. Nünning (2001) and Pier (2005) praise Prince for dedicating two entries to it in his *Dictionary of Narratology* (1987). He defined a metanarrative as "a narrative referring to itself and to those elements by which it is constituted and communicated, ... a SELF-REFLEXIVE NARRATIVE," and a metanarrative sign as "a sign explicitly referring to ... the CODES ... in terms of which the narrative signified" (51). However, as Fludernik (2003) argues in her article, this definition does not cover an abstract concept, but a specific form of narrative, the self-reflexive narrative, falling into the same incongruence of equating "metanarrative" to "metafiction". This is worsened by the lack of examples in Prince's dictionary, making it impossible to guess what literary works he had in mind when writing his definition (14–15).

Historically, what can be drawn from looking at these instances is that there has been a lack of distinction between what narratologists understand as "metanarrative" and "metafiction." None of these definitions can be taken as definitive. It is for this reason that establishing the definition of "metafiction" is needed.

### 2.3. Metanarrative and Metafiction: two related, yet very different forms of literary self-referentiality

"Metanarrative" and "metafiction" are two expressions that have been used interchangeably in English since the 1970s. As a result of this early phenomenon,

metanarrative and metafiction are viewed as umbrella terms for all self-reflexive utterances and devices –comments referring to the manipulation of how the story is presented in the narrative (discourse) rather than the story in itself–. Despite metanarrative being an underused word in the English language, these terms must be distinguished from each other.

Instances of reflection on the fictionality of the narrator or the text being narrated –or, as Pier (2005) further explains, “discourse which makes the recipient aware of the fictionality (in the sense of imaginary reference and/or constructedness) of the narrative” – corresponds to “metafiction” (16); whilst instances in which the narrator reflects on the act or process of narration, and not the fictionality of it, without necessarily breaking the illusion of fictionality, fall under “metanarrative”. Both are part of a whole; they share one characteristic in common and for that reason are confused. Another reason for that confusion may stem from the fact that the aesthetic illusion that fiction is meant to create, including metafiction, is sometimes lost to narratological analysis.

Fludernik (2003) believes that the English term “metafiction” first emerged in 1970, in Scholes’ essay of the same name, and Gass’ book *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (12). Moreover, Scholes (1979) would later define this term to describe a work of fiction that “assimilates all the perspectives of criticism” –those being formal, behavioral, structural, and philosophical criticism– “into the fictional process itself” (14). Coincidentally, the conceptualization of the wide range of forms of metafiction evolved during the mid-1970s and 1980s, during the heyday of Postmodernism, and it became a historical element of narrative fiction related to the movement.

While historically associated with this literary period, and popularized by it, a work of metafiction, and/or a work that includes metanarrative comments, is not inherently postmodernist. The first instances of the study of metafiction were conducted on Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767). This is an experimental novel that parodies the autobiographical genre by having the story, narrated by its protagonist, begin at the moment of his conception. As the narrator diverges into endless digressions, interruptions, stories-within-stories, and other narrative devices, his autobiography barely covers his early infancy despite its length. What defines the foundation of the theory of

metafiction is the act of narrating itself, as it is made part of the narrative. It also introduced and helped define many metanarrative devices.

The main theoretical difference between metanarrative and metafiction is the breaking of the aesthetic illusion of authenticity that literary fiction is known to build. Metafiction, moreover, can only be defined under the context of fiction, whilst metanarrative comments, as they only focus on the narrative discourse of a work, can be used in non-fictional narrative genres as well as other forms of media. “Directing functions, flash-forwards, and flashbacks, as well as other metanarrative utterances of the narrator, do not just lead to a higher degree of self-reflexibility: they also foreground the act of narrating” (Pier, 18). It is this accumulation of comments in a novel that builds the illusion of the figure of the “teller,” or the narrator’s voice, further away from the idea that, as metafiction, metanarrative comments, inherently break with the illusion of fictionality.

But, as Fludernik (2003) and Pier (2005) point out, not all self-referencing comments must be necessarily metanarrative comments. *Mise-en-abyme* –Genette’s (1980) definition of “metanarrative” as the insertion of a story within a story– is self-reflexive, but it does not refer to the act or process of narration. “Metalanguage” –“a language in which one speaks of another language” (Genette, 255)–, and “metalinguistic comments”, are also self-reflexive comments, but focus on the language in itself. For the present dissertation, the narratological analysis of *The Princess Bride* will address it as a *metanarrative* novel, rather than as an adventure novel or a fairytale.

### 3. ANALYSIS: The Metafictional Bride

My narratological analysis of *The Princess Bride* will be conducted in two sections. In the first section, I will analyze the elements in the novel which are metanarrative and/or metafictional within the first four chapters. To accomplish this, I must begin by defining the frame narrative genre and establish Goldman’s novel’s narrative structure. After drawing a chart that structures a novel, each level will be defined based on Genette’s concept of diegetic levels. From that point, I will explain the reasoning behind Morgenstern and Goldman as narrators, and how their dynamic draws parallels to Roland Barthes’ death of the author. Finally, I will draw examples of how the novel’s narrative

is both metanarrative and metafictional. In the second section, the points drawn from the first analysis will be put into contrast with the film adaptation of *The Princess Bride* (1987). Elements to highlight include how the metanarrative frame was simplified; who are the new narrators and their diegetic levels; how the master narrative, and general narrative, are controlled by them; and events and elements in the novel which were changed, summarized, or omitted from the script. To conclude, the reasoning behind these changes will be given.

### 3.1. Narratological Analysis: William Goldman’s Chinese Box

The plot of the film adaptation of *The Princess Bride* can be summarized in a grandfather reading a fairytale to his sick grandson. Both from these two characters’ and the audience’s perspective, the focus is on the fairytale’s events, with the occasional reminder of these being the product of the grandfather’s storytelling. This is also applicable to the source material, William Goldman’s novel of the same name; and it is on this narrative strategy where I first intend to begin emphasizing.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is a prime example of a frame story, which is also known as a multilevel narrative. While Genette (1980) defined “metanarrative” as a “narrative within the narrative” (162), such a definition aligns much more accurately with the concept of the “Chinese box narrative”: the literary phenomenon in which a primary fictional narrative is used to present other narratives within it (Irwin 1995, 28). Such an idea only works on paper, however, when compared with the original frame story, *One Thousand and One Nights*, its narrative structure is very straightforward (Benford 2010, 326) and an anomaly within the genre. The reason is that Shelley’s Chinese box narrative has a structure that can be defined thanks to its three narrators –Robert Walton’s journal recounting his encounter with Victor Frankenstein, a word-by-word retelling of Frankenstein’s oral narration, and a word-by-word citation of the creature’s narration–. The resulting, visual representation, as presented below, would be a literal nested narrative.

<i>FRANKENSTEIN; OR, THE MODERN PROMETHEUS</i> (1831)	
CHAPTERS	NARRATOR

VOLUME I, LETTERS I-IV	<b>ROBERT WALTON'S JOURNAL</b>
VOLUME I-II, CHAPTER II	<b>VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN'S ORAL NARRATION</b>
VOLUME II, CHAPTERS III- VIII	<b>THE CREATURE'S ORAL NARRATION</b>
VOLUME II-III, CHAPTER VII	<b>VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN'S ORAL NARRATION</b>
CONTINUATION OF LETTER IV	<b>ROBERT WALTON'S JOURNAL</b>

Figure 1. Framing of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or the modern Prometheus* (1931).

The plot of *Frankenstein* omits Mary Shelley's introduction due to being an extratextual element, and thus being found outside the fictional frame of the text. However, this is not the case with *The Princess Bride's* introductory section, and it is comparable to how Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1400) manages its narrative structure. In the "General Prologue," Chaucer meets a large group of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. He also introduces each of them "[a]ccording to profession and degree" (22), from their background to their physical appearances, and the host of the inn they were staying in before starting their journey. The latter suggests the pilgrims engage in a storytelling contest of which he will be the judge, and the group agrees to participate by telling a tale each. Limiting ourselves to Group A, Chaucer's nested narrative contains as many narrators as there are pilgrims, including himself. However, each of the tales shares the same narrative level, and the frame does not only include the contents of the "General Prologue," but also each tale's.

<i>THE CANTERBURY TALES</i> (1400), GROUP A	
CHAPTERS	NARRATOR
<b>GENERAL PROLOGUE</b>	<b>GEOFFREY CHAUCER</b>
<b>THE KNIGHT'S TALE</b>	<b>THE KNIGHT</b>
THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE	<b>GEOFFREY CHAUCER</b>

THE MILLER'S TALE	<b>THE MILLER</b>
THE REEVE'S PROLOGUE	<b>GEOFFREY CHAUCER</b>
THE REEVE'S TALE	<b>THE REEVE</b>
THE COOK'S PROLOGUE	<b>GEOFFREY CHAUCER</b>
THE COOK'S TALE	<b>THE COOK</b>
<b>GROUP B, THE MAN OF LAW'S PROLOGUE</b>	<b>GEOFFREY CHAUCER</b>

Figure 2. Framing of Group A in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1400).

While Chaucer's *General Prologue* shares with Goldman's *Introduction* the usage of and overall story's fictional frame, *The Princess Bride* has a narrative structure that is even more complex in comparison. This introduction depicts William Goldman delving into his infancy and, according to him, how he was read a story from a Florinese author, S. Morgenstern, by his father. Such an experience had an impact on him that made him pursue his career as a novelist. Now married and with a son about to turn 10 years old, his fascination with the story leads him to track down a copy of the book to gift him on his birthday; only to discover that Morgenstern's original version was actually a satire of Florinese royalty, and "[his] father only read [him] the action stuff, the good parts. He never bothered with the serious side at all." (29). Because his son is dissatisfied with the novel, he sets about publishing the version of the book we are reading now: "THE 'GOOD PARTS' VERSION ABRIDGED BY WILLIAM GOLDMAN."

Such first-person, autobiographical narrative is not only framing Buttercup's and Westley's story—as we are meant to believe that Goldman is nothing other than a fan and abridger of *The Princess Bride*, a novel written by a mysterious author known as Simon Morgenstern—, but also interrupts it whenever it is convenient for him. This is seen as early as in the beginning pages of the first chapter, "THE BRIDE" (33–62).

"In sum, the Rugens were Couple of the Week in Florin, and had been for many years. ...



\* \* \*

*This is me. All abridging remarks and other comments will be in this fancy italic type so you'll know. When I said at the start that I'd never read this book, that's true. My father read it to me, and I just quick skimmed along, crossing out whole sections when I did the abridging, leaving everything just as it was in the original Morgenstern.*" (Goldman 1973, 41).

Using paratextual elements – “this fancy italic type” and the use of asterisks to draw a visual line between the novel and his “abridging remarks and other comments”– Goldman’s narrative is set apart from Morgenstern’s in a similar manner as to how Chaucer differentiated between tales and tale prologues through the use of titles. As a result, except for the introduction, Goldman’s framed narrative is not defined by chapters, but by page numbers.

<b>THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1973), CHAPTER 1, “THE BRIDE”</b>	
<b>PAGES</b>	<b>NARRATOR</b>
INTRODUCTION	<b>WILLIAM GOLDMAN</b>
pp. 35–41	<b>SIMON MORGENSTERN</b>
pp. 41–42	<b>WILLIAM GOLDMAN</b>
pp. 42–62	<b>SIMON MORGENSTERN</b>
p. 64	<b>WILLIAM GOLDMAN</b>

Figure 3. Framing of “The Bride” in William Goldman’s *The Princess Bride* (1973).

The line separating Goldman from Morgenstern’s narrative is blurred out, and these interruptions are the primary reason *The Princess Bride* has such a complex structure. No chapter will have the same number of interruptions, and neither there is a consistency in-between them. Moreover, what we can take from the first citation alone is that Goldman’s narrative is a combination of autobiographical elements and metanarrative comments – the latter of which he refers to as “abridging remarks and other comments”–, setting his role as a narrator apart from Morgenstern’s. While the latter limits himself to detailing the events in the novel in a third-person, omniscient narrator fashion, the former not only establishes the frame, but also addresses the reader directly, commentating on the former’s act of narrating, merging both into one.

Genette’s idea of a “narrative within the narrative” should serve as the introduction to a concept that is closely–related to the frame story: narrative levels. According to him, the narrative level is one of the three categories which forms the instance of narrating –with the other two being the “time” of the narrating, and the “person,” the relationship between the narrator and the story being told by him– (1980, 215). Narrative levels are used to describe the hierarchical relations between instances of narrating, and Genette defines such as follows: “any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing the narrative is placed” (228).

If we put the concept of the frame story aside for the time being, what he means by this is, that a story has an average of three narrative, or diegetic, levels. From bottom to top, these are called: the ground level or the diegesis –standing for the story in itself, its characters, its setting, and the timeline of events–; the diegetic or intradiegetic level – associated with narrative discourse, a level above the diegesis and concerned with the act of narrating and presenting the story–; and, depending on whether the third level takes place above or below the two aforementioned levels, the extradiegetic level –what we understand today by “metanarrative”: instances or comments regarding the act of narration–, or the hypodiegetic level –Genette’s understanding of “metanarrative”, in which the events are narrated by a character inside the diegesis–. Ergo, there might only be two narrators, and not a consistent narrative structure in–between chapters, but their roles are sufficient to help define the novel’s diegetic levels.

<i>THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1973), CHAPTER 1, “THE BRIDE”</i>		
NARRATOR	NARRATOR’S PURPOSE	DIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>WILLIAM GOLDMAN</b>	ABRIDGING REMARKS & OTHER COMMENTS	META-DIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>SIMON MORGENSTERN</b>	NARRATION OF THE EVENTS	INTRADIEGETIC LEVEL
	<i>THE PRINCESS BRIDE:</i> CHARACTERS, SETTING, EVENTS.	DIEGESIS

Figure 4. Diegetic structure of “The Bride” in William Goldman’s *The Princess Bride* (1973).

All eight chapters can be simplified under a single diegetic structure which consists of three levels, with the lowest level, the diegesis, involving *The Princess Bride*'s plot. A level above it, as he is the author of this novel and controls how the diegesis is presented to the reader, he represents the intradiegetic level. Goldman, in comparison, only focuses on Morgenstern's act of narrating; not only by abridging it, but also by dedicating commentary to it. By definition, he would represent the metadiegetic level.

However, the novel version of *The Princess Bride* is not limited to the misadventures of the stranded lovers Buttercup and Westley. Its diegetic structure can be defined as a battle between two forces trying to control the grand narrative –as defined by Lyotard's (1984) understanding of the word “metanarrative”–, as narrative voice carries its own: Morgenstern's original vision did not focus on “the action stuff”, or “the good parts” –as that is how Goldman refers to both his father's reading of and his abridged version the novel–, but on “a kind of satiric history of his country and the decline of the monarchy in Western civilization” (29), “not Buttercup and the remarkable things she endures but, rather; the history and the monarchy and other such stuff” (65). Goldman himself admits that he expected his version, upon release, to cause Florinese experts and historians to slaughter him for a simple reason: while he does not mean to destroy Morgenstern's vision, he, or his father, believes that the moments cut from his abridgment are meant to have a positive effect on how the novel is received by American readers (Goldman 1999, VII). To understand his point, we must see what content did not make it to the final cut. This information is provided by Goldman to the reader through his abridging remarks.

Chapter one, “THE BRIDE” (33–62), outside of the remark quoted above, is left intact. The same cannot be said about chapter two, “THE GROOM” (65–68), being one of the more extreme cases of abridgment in the entire novel due to only four pages making the cut. We already had some context in the first three chapters through Goldman's introduction to the novel, and it was the second chapter where he “began to realize the problem” as “*Morgenstern ... [opened] this chapter with sixty-six pages of Florinese history*” (65). It is because of this chapter that he decided to take on the abridgment in the first place.

Each time there is an interruption, Goldman takes the time to address it in a comment by giving a brief synopsis of what is being excised, as well as his reasoning behind it. We

also see this in chapter three, “THE COURTSHIP” (69–79), the most satirically-rich chapter based on the opinions of Florinese experts. In sum, fifty-six and a half pages of packing and unpacking scenes were taken out of the abridged version (73–74). These were meant to be a satire on Florin’s misbelief of being a more sophisticated country than its neighbor country, Guilder, despite the lower quality and quantity of Florinese women’s clothes. Finally, to highlight the most drastic example of this phenomenon, one must look into chapter four, “THE PREPARATIONS” (81–83). It is barely represented in the final version of the novel, besides from a page-long comment and Goldman summarizing “the longest single chapter in the book” into “what with one thing and another, three years have passed” (83). Despite the abridger’s original intention, what can be deduced in the span of the first four chapters of Goldman’s abridgment is that there is an active rejection of the original master narrative.

By trimming down Morgenstern’s sociopolitical commentary under the pretense of only presenting “the good parts,” Goldman’s father’s reading of the text is a clear representation of Barthes’ concept of the death of the author (McKinney 2007, 27). An author’s intentions and background –including both his history and political or religious beliefs– do not inherently hold special weight in determining the interpretation of a work. In other words, the author’s point of view about his work is no more accepted than the interpretation of the reader. Such a conflict of interest between perspectives opens to the question of to whom the story truly belongs to, and whether any of them has the authority to decide on how to read *The Princess Bride*.

In *The Princess Bride*, the death of the author is also presented in a literal manner. This is not simply because Morgenstern was deceased at the time of Goldman’s abridgment but, quoting Barthes (1977) himself, “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (148). While, in context, this statement intends to dismiss the literary author’s authority over the text, in the novel this translates into a noticeable absence of Morgenstern at the intradiegetic level, which is the result of Goldman’s involvement. In chapter one, “THE BRIDE,” the reason why he first intruded into the text was to point out Morgenstern’s repetitive use of metafictional comments in the original manuscript:

“My intrusion here is because of the way Morgenstern uses parentheses. ... ‘How can it be before Europe but after Paris?’ ... ‘When does this book take place? I don’t understand

*anything.’ ... maybe it was just the author’s way of telling the reader stylistically that ‘this isn’t real; it never happened.’” (Goldman 1973, 41–42).*

Barthes begins his essay by referencing Honoré de Balzac's story *Sarrasine*, questioning who is behind the narrative voice describing the castrato disguised as a woman. Whether it was the main character of Balzac himself, one is not meant to know, for “[a]s soon as a fact is narrated ... outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, ... the author enters into his own death, writing begins.” (142) Similarly, Goldman, by pointing at “the author’s way of [speaking to] the reader stylistically,” establishes Morgenstern to only exist within the realm of these parentheses. Therefore, the death of Simon Morgenstern begins with him being isolated and set apart from his novel, dividing what was first believed to be the intradiegetic level.

<i>THE PRINCESS BRIDE</i> (1973), CHAPTER 1, “THE BRIDE”		
NARRATOR	NARRATOR’S PURPOSE	DIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>WILLIAM GOLDMAN</b>	ABRIDGING REMARKS & OTHER COMMENTS	META-METADIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>SIMON MORGENSTERN</b>	PARENTHESES	METADIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>NARRATIVE VOICE</b>	NARRATION OF THE EVENTS	INTRADIEGETIC LEVEL
	<i>THE PRINCESS BRIDE:</i> CHARACTERS, SETTING, EVENTS.	DIEGESIS

Figure 5. Revision of Figure 4, the diegetic structure of “The Bride” in William Goldman’s *The Princess Bride* (1973).

After chapter one, there is a noticeable decrease, and even lack of, the use of parentheses in the remaining chapters of the novel. In chapter five, “THE ANNOUNCEMENT” (85–192), Goldman, admits to cutting most of Morgenstern’s interruptions out of his abridgment due to, in his own words, “continually referring to his wife in the unabridged book” (171).

“(At this point in the story, my wife wants it to know that ... My reply to her—

\* \* \*

*This is me, and I'm not trying to be confusing, but the above paragraph that I'm cutting into is verbatim Morgenstern;*" (Goldman 1973, 171).

*The Princess Bride*, even before its abridgement, already resulted in a narratologically complex work of metafiction. Not just that, but the original manuscript could have still contained a frame narrative in the form of Morgenstern's wife's metanarrative comments on his act of narration.

If an uncut version of *The Princess Bride* by Simon Morgenstern had existed, and a comparison had been made between how each version of the book manages its narrative, it would have been possible for us to notice how similar Morgenstern and Goldman are as narrative voices. Both are reminiscent of *Tristram Shandy's* titular character, often intruding into the story to address the reader and comment on what is being narrated. The format in which this intrusion is done grants the novel a "surfictional" element, causing the focus to turn from the plot to the narrator himself (Waugh 1984, 14).

However, it cannot be said that such an element makes these two narrators, these two authors, different from homodiegetic narrators. The reason as to why depends on which figure are we analyzing. Like how *Tristram Shandy* is meant to be the author of his autobiography, Simon Morgenstern, is a fictional author created by Goldman, yet another character in *The Princess Bride*. In the novel's "William Goldman", also known as "Bill", is a literary persona of the author. Chaucer also used the same strategy when he inserted himself in the frame of *Canterbury Tales*. Akin to Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), this "autobiographical" information turns Bill into an unreliable narrator from which a line cannot be drawn between the autobiographical and the fictional. The real Goldman never had a son named Jason; instead, he was the father of two girls, Jenny Rebecca and Susanna. Neither was he ever married to a children's psychologist named Helen, but to a former model named Illene Jones.

It can be argued that leading the reader to believe otherwise was exactly what William Goldman intended, however. If we return to Bill's citation about Morgenstern's use of parentheses, he states that "*maybe it was just the author's way of telling the reader stylistically that 'this isn't real; it never happened.'* ... *even though if you read back into Florinese history, it did happen*" (42). The first sentence is a clear metafictional sign,

because the aesthetic illusion built around the reader is shattered by the text itself. At the same time, the second sentence implies that such a sign is not metafictional, but a simple reality within the book's frame. Bill's metanarrative commentary paradoxically helps build upon the illusion of reality the reader is meant to dive into when reading fiction. At the end of the day, Florin and Guilder are not real Eastern European countries set somewhere between Sweden and Germany, there have never been any Florinese experts in universities all across the United States, and *The Princess Bride* is not a book of Florinese origin but, instead, it was written by an American author (whose father is also not Florinese, for that matter). Paraphrasing Waugh (1984), metafictional novels are works sustained on the contradictory relationship between creating a fictional world and commenting upon the creation of it; and, in his position as an unreliable narrator, that is exactly what Bill does throughout the narrative.

There are several instances in which Bill also offers his analysis of the novel by pointing out the wide range of literary devices and tropes the author uses to engage with the reader. He does so by combining his metanarrative commentary with his childhood memories as a reader (or rather listened to his father's reading) of *The Princess Bride*. This use of the flashback as a metafictional device only starts to manifest itself from chapter five, "THE ANNOUNCEMENT" (85–192), and onwards. The first instance, and one of the most interesting in the entire novel, of such a combination, happens during the scene in which Buttercup had just escaped from her kidnappers by jumping into the Florin Channel's waters in an attempt to swim for safety. Her plans would be foiled upon finding out, as the Sicilian would inform her about sharks populating the area. With the scene's tension escalating as a result of the sharks finding her, Bill finds it necessary to intrude into the narrative. He does so to put himself into the hypothetical reader's place and attempt to connect with them by relating his experiences reading the shark scene.

"There was the splashing sound of liquid landing on liquid.

Then there came a pause.

The sharks went mad—

\* \* \*

*'She does not get eaten by the sharks at this time,' my father said.*

*I looked up at him. 'What?'*

“You looked like you were getting too involved and bothered so I thought I would let you relax”  
(Goldman 1973, 95–96).

Pointing out tropes in a story is another strategy for fictional characters to break the fourth wall. As the term indicates, it was originally used to describe those instances in theater in which an on-stage actor breaks the conceptual barrier between a work of fiction and its viewers by acknowledging and/or addressing them, and it is yet another metafictional device (Davis, 201). Despite not offering a metanarrative analysis of this scene, he comments on Buttercup’s position as the main female character and her inherent plot armor. As he explains, because Buttercup is the protagonist of *The Princess Bride* (and this is the fifth chapter out of eight), no matter how many times she is in danger it should not be expected for her to die in this scene. Albeit indirectly, this is another instance of the aesthetic illusion being overridden by Bill as he relates to the reader that he was so invested in his father’s reading of the scene that, as a young boy, he needed his father to tell him that the main character was not going to die, or he would have believed otherwise (96).

In the end, *The Princess Bride*’s narratological changes in the abridged version serve as proof of Bill’s life philosophy: life is not fair. Every work of fiction has had editorial interference to some degree, and, in this case, it sacrificed Morgenstern’s master narrative to bring Buttercup and Westley’s story to the spotlight.

### 3.2. Comparative Analysis: Transferring the Metafictional Bride to the Big Screen

The film adaptation’s success helped to bring Goldman’s fiction into the spotlight. Both on its theater and home releases, those who have seen the movie’s opening credits will know that William Goldman himself was behind the screenplay of the adaptation. In the introduction of the novel’s 25th Anniversary Edition, he explained his motifs for writing a version for the screen. He bought the novel’s rights back from Twentieth Century Fox because he did not want “the most important thing he would ever be involved with” to be “destroyed” by somebody who was not him (Goldman 1999, XI). However, the irony comes from the fact that not only had he already “destroyed” Morgenstern’s original



vision with his abridgment, but, subsequently, he would also do the same through this film adaptation.

This comparative analysis will examine the literary narrative devices. The focus will be placed on the film’s narrative frame and structure, the characters (and narrators) who participate in it, and the control that the narrator(s) have over how the plot of *The Princess Bride* is presented. My analysis will not dwell on the narratological analysis from a filmographic perspective, for which I will rely on Kaitlin Knyf’s *A Framework for the Fairy Tale Film* (2009).

From the beginning of the film, the first narratological element to highlight is how the frame is presented. In the novel, the three diegetic levels result from Goldman’s use of the introduction to present the frame. He used a combination of the above and the meta-metadiegetic level in the form of Bill’s abridging remarks and use of the flashback. This is not the case in the film adaptation, where references to the abridgment of the novel are omitted. Instead, the movie starts with an unnamed sick child in bed being visited by his grandfather to read him “*the book [his] father used to read to [him] when [he] was sick and [he] used to read to [the child’s] father when he was sick*” (Reiner, 00:00:55–00:01:45). In other words, the narrative structure is simplified, and two reasons can be given as to why. Firstly, as it has already been stated, Bill’s background, life, and motivation to abridge Morgenstern’s novel are left out of the film. Second, and most importantly, the figure of Simon Morgenstern is only briefly mentioned in the movie to give credit to the author of *The Princess Bride* (00:02:14), leaving the sole role of narrator and storyteller to the unnamed grandfather.

<i>THE PRINCESS BRIDE</i> (1987).		
NARRATOR	NARRATOR’S PURPOSE	DIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>GRANDSON &amp; GRANDFATHER</b>	PROLOGUE, INTERRUPTIONS & COMMENTS ABOUT EVENTS IN THE NARRATIVE	METADIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>GRANDFATHER</b>	NARRATION OF THE EVENTS	DIEGETIC LEVEL
<b>THE PRINCESS BRIDE</b>	CHARACTERS, SETTING, EVENTS.	DIEGESIS

Figure 6. Diegetic structure of Rob Reiner’s *The Princess Bride* (1987).

As a result, the narrative frame revolves around the grandfather's recounting as he reads to his grandson. While it is almost identical to the novel –where Bill's father reads to him during several flashbacks–, Goldman's literary persona has completely detached himself from the adaptation. To accomplish this, he chose to not name these two characters, setting their narrative level in the story's present time and centering the frame around them. Setting him apart from Bill and Morgenstern, the grandfather's role as the narrator is defined by his capacity to alternate between being a homodiegetic narrator –when he and his grandson are on-screen– or a heterodiegetic narrator –when he is the voice-over when Buttercup and Westley are on-screen (Knyf, 56)–.

Just like Bill's father had control over *The Princess Bride's* master narrative, the grandfather has control over Buttercup's and Westley's story –the visual narrative in the case of the film– by only reading what his grandson wants to be read to him: “fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes” (00:01:47), or this adaptation's idea of the novel's “good parts”. As Knyf points out, at the beginning of the film, when his grandson asks him whether he is reading him “a kissing book” (00:04:10–00:04:25), the story is altered so that kissing scenes will no longer appear. This affects the final scene of the novel, which depicts Westley and Buttercup kissing after successfully escaping Prince Humperdinck's castle, as it was almost left unread because “it was kissing again, [his grandson] didn't wanna hear that” (1:32:00–1:32:17). While the ending does not include the factor of uncertainty in Morgenstern's original vision (Goldman, 316–317), the final kiss was allowed to take place once the grandson, wanting to listen to the book's conclusion, allowed his grandfather to continue (55–56). Such a moment would not have taken place in the film had the grandson not protested his grandfather's reading of the romance scenes between the main two characters, thus questioning whether they should be placed under the “good parts” category. Just like its literary counterpart, this conflict develops throughout the film as the boy shows further investment in Buttercup's struggle to find and marry Westley, instead of Prince Humperdinck, as the story gets closer to its end.

The grandfather and grandson, despite Bill's omission from the film adaptation, are still used as a device to represent the reader/audience. The scene pertaining to Buttercup not being eaten by the sharks (or, in the film's case, screaming eels), and the interruption that follows, still uses the same metafictional device of highlighting the female protagonist's

plot armor as the grandfather comforts his grandson after noticing how engaged he was with the story (00:12:11–00:12:39). However, the difference between the film’s grandson and grandfather and the novel’s younger incarnation of Bill and his father is the perspective being used. In the latter, he employs the perspective of an adult man struggling with his marriage to comment on his childhood memories. Such perspective is absent from the film (Alfonso & Frago, 7). As a result, the presentation of the frame revolves around the idea of experiencing *The Princess Bride* for the same time –as Bill would have done when he was a child–, rather than as a retrospective on past experiences –as Bill does in the source material–.

Moreover, while the omission of Goldman’s editorial persona has resulted in the omission of the majority of his abridgment comments, it could be argued that the film adaptation can be considered an abridgment of the novel’s original abridgment. Such a phenomenon is most noticeable at the beginning of the film, as the grandfather summarizes chapter one, “THE BRIDE” –the only chapter that was left intact in the novel–, in under three minutes (00:02:20–00:05:40) by skipping Buttercup’s budding feelings for Westley (Goldman, 42–60). Then, he skips the following three chapters by simply saying “five years later” and opening chapter five, “THE ANNOUNCEMENT” (00:05:44). In other words, chapter one is turned into a prologue for chapter five. Speaking of chapter five, this change also affects how Inigo’s and Fezzik’s subchapters are presented in the film. The former is summarized by Inigo before his sword fight with the Man in Black (00:19:44–00:21:37), while the latter was omitted.

What can be taken from this comparative analysis is that the key difference between the novel and the film is how each structures the narrative. Other differences exist but, in comparison, these are few and far in between. These include the aforementioned screaming eels instead of sharks, the Thieves Quarter being renamed and turned into the Thieves Forest, and the Zoo of Death being reduced to the Pit of Death –for budgetary reasons (Goldman 2000, 38)–. But, in the same vein as Bill’s abridgment of Simon Morgenstern’s novel, the events are played out just as he wrote them. The dialogues are spoken word-by-word and scenes play out as if the novel had always been their script. This also applies to the moments between the grandson and his grandfather, as they are just as faithful to Bill’s flashbacks with his father.

There is a reason behind these changes, and a similar argument is made in the novel. When Bill interrupts Morgenstern talking about his wife in chapter five, he not only does this to explain that he has omitted every other related “*intrusion*” in the abridged version. He also does this to “agree with Mrs. Morgenstern,” as “[he] think[s] it was unfair not to show the reunion” (Goldman, 171). It is a moment the metanarrative frame makes special emphasis on as, yet again, Bill breaks the fourth wall by asking the reader to “*drop a note or a postcard*” to his publisher's address for a copy of his version of this scene. Other than to spite his publisher, his reasoning was the result of negotiations with his editor. “[I]f [he was] going to abridge a book in the author's own words, [he couldn't] go around sticking [his] own in” (171–172). This is a reality we also find in the world of cinematographic adaptations.

Cinema in the 1980s was dictated under Don Simpson's “high concept” (Fleming, 1998), where films were expected to be easily marketable and understandable by the public. This meant that Goldman could not risk boring movie-goers with a “verbatim” film adaptation of his work, similar to how Bill started working on his abridgment because his son Jason found Morgenstern's original manuscript to be boring (65). Other than further summarizing events in *The Princess Bride*, the solution to this was to rewrite the overall frame as a grandfather reading a fairytale to his grandson. In the end, “the good parts” would still be projected on the big screen as such, just under the pretense of fantasy rather than as the abridgment of a socio-politically satirical recount of historical events (ignoring that Florin is a fictional country).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has aimed to conduct a narratological analysis of strategies used by Goldman in *The Princess Bride* (1973). After discussing the terminological differences between “metafiction” and “metanarrative,” my dissertation has analyzed *The Princess Bride* as a frame story, or a multilevel narrative or “Chinese box” narrative, where a primary narrative is used to contextualize other narratives within it (Irwin 1995, 28). The novel is introduced by William “Bill” Goldman as he uses his present and past life to justify his abridgment of Morgenstern's satire on Florinese history (Goldman 1973, 13–1). The presence of Morgenstern in the novel results in its narrative structure containing

four diegetic levels, as the metadiegetic and meta-metadiegetic levels correspond to Morgenstern and Bill, respectively. However, as Bill and his abridgment are omitted from the film adaptation, the film only contains three diegetic levels, with the metadiegetic level corresponding to the grandfather. In comparison, the film opens with a sick and bedridden child being visited by his grandfather with the intent to read him a fairytale by S. Morgenstern (Reiner 1987, 00:00:25–00:02:25).

As a result of my analysis, it is possible to establish each narrative structure through the narrators –and how they were presented within the narrative– as a guideline. Both in the novel and the film, William Goldman’s metafictional and metanarrative take on the frame story could be likened to Postmodernist icons like Vonnegut’s and Auster’s intrusions in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and *The New York Trilogy’s City of Glass* (1987) respectively. Goldman’s usage of popular genres like the fairy tale, pirate adventures, and romance bring *The Princess Bride’s* narratological features to a more popular audience.

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