

Towards Modeling Narrative Discourse: The Role of the Writer

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Abstract—The aim of the paper is to analyze the forms in which the author reveals his/ her presence in the text. The author may speak directly to the reader; he/ she might comment upon events and characters and interrupt the course of fictional action to express his/ her view of the situation. The diachronic analysis of English emotive prose shows that the author is always present in the text, be it the 19C, 20C, or the beginning of the 21C. Several thematic groups the writer's remarks may refer to are singled out: it may be the opinion of the author about the contemporary world and society; about peculiarities of human nature in general and women's and men's nature in particular; the opinion of the author about literary work, a work of fiction, views on creativity, on books, genres of literature, as well as the opinion of the author about some real objects and phenomena. Studying the role of the author in the narrative text with the analysis of the author's views, ideas and attitudes may help to get a deeper insight into the way the narrative is structured.

Keywords—*narrative discourse; emotive prose; modeling narrative; dialogue between the reader and the writer; fictional reality*

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of defining narrative can be viewed from different perspectives. The main trends here are as follows: narrative can be viewed as a cognitive structure or way of making sense of experience; as a type of text which is produced and interpreted as such by those who generate or navigate stories in any number of semiotic media; and as a resource for communicative interaction, which both shapes and is shaped by storytelling practices [1]. Narrative discourse is one of the most fruitful research domains, and the ideas of cognitive linguistics, especially the method of modeling, can give a new impetus here. The review of previous treatments shows that modern approaches to narrative vary significantly. As M. Jahn puts it, practically all theories of narrative distinguish between WHAT is narrated (the story) and HOW it is narrated (the discourse) [2]. We suggest that it is plausible to combine the two approaches through modeling the process of telling a tale (the process of narration). Usually the scholars center on the narrative itself with an obvious aim of getting an insight into how the text was constructed. In fact, it is decoding the message conveyed and registering the language means used for the purpose. However, narrative may be modeled as a process of

encoding. Thus, one is to analyze *how* a writer constructed his/ her story. In the “decoding” approach a researcher reconstructs the writer's vision of the events described and, as a result, the writer turns into one of the “acting personae”, i.e. one of the characters of the story told. In other words, the writer becomes “narrator” as a fictional construction, not to be (fully) identified with the thoughts and perspective of the author.

We hold that under the “encoding” approach one might try to distinguish between “narrator” and “writer” drawing a line of demarcation between them since both soles are realized in the narrative.

II. APPROACHES TO NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

A. Structural Approach

Structuralists treat narrative as a type of text which includes some kind of history, in other words a chain of events happening at a certain period of time in a certain place with certain people. The main categories of narrative from this point of view are events that are described, the plot (i.e. the succession of events described and the outcome) and the point of view from which the history is presented [3].

B. Communicative Approach

However, some linguists and literary theorists [4], [5] hold that narrative can be studied as a fuzzy set of texts produced by different protagonists and narrators, which include their thoughts, stream of consciousness, inner monologues etc. According to the communicative approach, narrative is a model of discourse in which there is contents of the story, the narrator who tells the story to the reader, and the audience. Thus, in the framework of the communicative approach one can touch upon the problem of studying different types of narrators and different types of roles the narrator might assume.

C. Cognitive Approach

Cognitive approach treats narrative as mental presentation of the world. Narratologists use the word “storyworld” instead of “story”, and “storyworld” here is not just a text but something viewed as a model of discourse. David Herman states that “narratology, like linguistics, can be recharacterized as a subdomain of cognitive-scientific

research. From this perspective, both language generally and narrative specifically can be viewed as tool-systems for building mental models of the world” [6].

M. Jahn states that narratology is concerned with all types of narratives, literary and nonliterary, fictional and nonfictional, verbal and nonverbal. But the overarching distinction lies between fictional and nonfictional narratives. A fictional narrative presents an imaginary narrator’s account of a story that happened in an imaginary world. A nonfictional narrative (also factual narrative) presents a real-life person’s account of a real-life story, though if we take a closer look it becomes obvious that factual narrative is a vision of event and thus partly fictional, rather than something perfectly matching reality and being absolutely true to life [7].

D. Dialogic Approach

It is quite obvious that emotive prose is so versatile that each piece seems bound to be considered separately and independently. However, there is one feature that unites types of emotive prose no matter how diverse they might be, and it is this feature which might be taken as a point of departure in modeling narrative. As Ronald Carter puts it, “The reader had been positioned in a creative conversation duetting or dialogue with a text; the text resonates with multiple meanings but they only resonate if they are interpreted as such by an audience” [8]. Furthermore, “the written language can be communicatively effective without the principal participants (writer and reader) being co-present. The writer has to anticipate the likely contributions or reactions of a target reader, and build these into the construction of the text”.[9] At first sight, it might seem that there is little difference between the communicative approach and the dialogic approach as both centers on the discursive aspect of writer-reader interaction. However, in our opinion, each of the approaches centers on the problem of its own. While the communicative approach comes out to analyze communication between author and reader (via the text) as a whole, the dialogic approach lays special emphasis on the writer who expresses himself choosing different ways of influencing the reader. So here narrative is analyzed as something told by your interlocutor, something giving information on some event (presumably fictional), but composed to give information about the writer and his worldview.

III. FORMS OF THE AUTHOR’S PRESENCE IN THE TEXT

It is generally assumed that in the 18th and early 19th century the writer was an active figure in narration speaking directly to his readers while the 20th century narrative saw a shift to the internal point of view with the writer receding into the background, and not being explicitly present in the narrative anymore. Now scholars proceed from the assumption that modern writers are more like objective observers and give more freedom to their characters telling a story with characters acting as co-authors.

The roles fulfilled by the writer in his / her narrative may be versatile, and a diachronic analysis is needed to model the

formation of narrative. As a point of departure, let us specify the main roles a writer may assume. Theoretically, the author may speak directly to the reader as if exchanging views on contemporary reality, on moral issues, etc; second, the writer might comment upon events and characters of the fictional world he creates and, third, what is most important, the author may interrupt the course of fictional action to express his view of the situation. As we have mentioned above, at first sight it may seem that in modern fiction the author recedes into the background and dissolves in his characters. The diachronic analysis of English emotive prose shows that the author’s voice is quite distinguishable in the text, be it the 18C, 19C, 20C, or the beginning of the 21C.

Our research is based on the works of English literature of the 18th — 21st century. Novels and collections of short stories pertaining to different time periods serve as material for analysis. The following time periods are discussed: the end of the 18th century (H. Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones A Foundling*), the middle of the 19th century (W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*), the end of the 19th century (T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), the beginning of the 20th century (D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterlay’s Lover*), the middle of the 20th century (W.S. Maugham, *Short Stories*), the end of the 20th century (J. Grisham, *The Firm*, C. Bushnell, *Sex and the City*), and finally works of fiction published in the 21st century (D. Brown, *The Lost Symbol*).

When describing events of fictional reality the author of the emotive prose does not always stay in the background. Besides telling a story the author can address the reader explicitly, expressing his point of view concerning things that are not directly connected with the narration.

We can point at several thematic groups the writer’s remarks may refer to: it may be the opinion of the author about the contemporary world and society; about peculiarities of human nature in general or of peculiarities of women’s and men’s nature in particular; the opinion of the author about literary work, about a work of fiction, his views on creativity, on books, on literary genres, as well as the opinion of the author about some minor objects and phenomena.

To support our statement with the language material we shall discuss the above mentioned groups in more detail.

A. The Writer’s Attitude to Reality

The writer’s explicit attitude to reality can be seen in the following contexts:

19th century: (1) *The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly, kind companion; and so let all young persons take their choice* [10].

19th century: (2) *It was one of those excitements which, when they move a country town, leave a permanent mark upon its chronicles, as a warm summer permanently marks the ring in the tree-trunk corresponding to its date* [11].

20th century: (3) *Nothing is ever brief in court.* An hour later, Tarrance moved his face closer to the window and studied the scattered bodies walking quickly in the distance [12].

21st century: (4) *since the beginning of time, the secret had always been how to die* [13].

The contexts (1-4) seem timeless, they are not bound to some definite time period, and sound like universal truth or the reflection of the general knowledge of the world. The writer's words are not targeted on the characters, it is obvious that they are part of the dialogue between the narrator and the reader sounding like reference to well-known facts, or common knowledge like: "... you know how it happens, you know what that is ..."

B. The Writer's Attitude to the Contemporary Society

The attitude of the author to the contemporary society can be traced in the following contexts:

18th century: (5) In like manner we shall represent Human Nature at first to be the keen appetite of our reader in that *more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country*, and shall hereafter hash and ragout it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of *affectation and vice which courts and cities afford* [14].

20th century: (6) The two girls, therefore, were from an early age not the least daunted by either art or ideal politics. It was their natural atmosphere. They were at once cosmopolitan and provincial, with *the cosmopolitan provincialism of art that goes with pure social ideals* [15].

21st century: (7) *One of the rites of passage for American college kids was a summer with a Eurorail ticket before the harsh reality of real life set in.* "It appears many more of you have visited Europe than have visited your own capital. Why do you think that is?" [16].

The phrases given in italics should be interpreted against the realia of the time the narrative refers to. However, they are clear references to the reader's attitude to the facts and customs of the world around.

C. The Author's Opinion About the Nature of Women and Men

The writer sometimes expresses his opinion about the nature of women and men:

18th century: (8) *To say the truth, nothing is more erroneous than the common observation, that men who are ill-natured and quarrelsome when they are drunk, are very worthy persons when they are sober: for drink, in reality, doth not reserve nature, or create passions in men which did not exist in them before* [17].

19th century: (9) Indeed, for my own part, though I have been repeatedly told by persons for whom I have the greatest respect, that Miss Brown is an insignificant chit, and Mrs White has nothing but her *petit minois chiffonné*, and Mrs Black has not a word to say for herself; yet I know that I have had the most delightful conversations with Mrs Black

(of course, my dear madam, they are inviolable); I see all the men in a cluster round Mrs White's chair, all the young fellows battling to dance with Miss Brown; *and so I am tempted to think that to be despised by her sex is a very great compliment to a woman* [18].

20th century: (10) But what is Sarah supposed to do? She is 38, and she's not married, and she'd like to be with someone. *And men, as we know from this column, are attracted to youth* [19].

D. The Opinion of the Author About Human Nature

The author might speculate about the essence of human nature in general:

18th century: (11) It is possible, however, that Mr. Allworthy saw enough to render him a little uneasy; for we are not always to conclude *that a wise man is not hurt because he doth not cry out and lament himself, like those of a childish or effeminate temper.* But indeed it is possible he might see some faults in the captain without any uneasiness at all: for men of *true wisdom and goodness are contented to take persons and things as they are, without complaining of their imperfections, or attempting to amend them* [20].

19th century: (12) "When America was discovered," said the Radical member – and he began to give some wearisome facts. *Like all people who try to exhaust a subject, he exhausted his listeners* [21].

20th century: (13) *It is vain to torment oneself over sufferings that one cannot alleviate.* My object here is to tell a story. As I am well aware, *one can never know everything there is to be known about human nature* [22].

21st century: (14) As the visitor fumbled to empty the pockets of his long coat with his one working hand, Nuñez watched him carefully. *Human instinct made special allowances for the injured and handicapped*, but it was an instinct Nuñez had been trained to override [23].

Another possibility in this section is disclosing the writer's own experience in different spheres of life. For instance, W.M. Thackeray often indulges in discussing his own attitude to drinks:

(15) To this truth I can vouch as a man; there is no headache in the world like that caused by Vauxhall punch. Through the lapse of twenty years, I can remember the consequence of two glasses! [24].

It is noteworthy that if taken separately from the context all the utterances italicized seem to be meant directly for the reader as part of his dialogue with the writer. This relative independence from the rest of the context is marked off by the Present Indefinite tense: The world is a looking glass; the summer marks the ring; manner in which it is found; are very worthy persons; etc. As Ronald Carter points out, the simple present tense carries the sense of a permanent, general, unchanging truth [25].

Besides there is direct address to the reader which is found in some contexts: frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly at you; or reference to the writer's personal

experience which is typical of a private conversation: to say the truth..., I am tempted to think..., as I am well aware..., I can remember....

E. The Author's Opinion About Writing and Literary Work

The contexts we have considered so far exploit the knowledge of the world shared by the writer and his readers. In this respect we agree with Florian Coulmas who states that "writing is a means of linguistic communication" [26]. At the same time there are topics in the "writer-reader" dialogue which can hardly be treated as something well known to the reader. Those are topics dealing with different aspects of writing and literary work. The problem of creativity has always been important, and not only for linguists but for writers as well. According to Ronald Carter, "creativity is basic to a wide variety of different languages uses, from everyday advertising language and slogans to the most elaborate of literary texts".[27] Here several subtopics may be singled out.

The author might speak about literary work in general:

18th century: (16) In pursuance, therefore, of her father's peremptory command, Sophia now admitted Mr Blifil's visit. Scenes like this, when painted at large, afford, as we have observed, very little entertainment to the reader. Here, therefore, *we shall strictly adhere to a rule of Horace; by which writers are directed to pass over all those matters which they despair of placing in a shining light; - a rule, we conceive, of excellent use as well to the historian as to the poet; and which, if followed, must at least have this good effect, that many a great evil (for so all great books are called) would thus be reduced to a small one* [28].

The writer might discuss literary creativity in general:

19th century: (17) *I set the two stories one against the other, so that you may see that it is not from mere mercenary motives that the present performer is desirous to show up and trounce his villains; but because he has a sincere hatred of them, which he cannot keep down, and which must find a vent in suitable abuse and bad language* [29].

The author might give his opinion of books and styles:

19th century: (18) But as we are to see a great deal of Amelia, there is no harm in saying, at the outset of our acquaintance, that she was a dear little creature; *and a great mercy it is, both in life and in novels, which (and the latter especially) abound in villains of the most somber sort*, that we are to have for a constant companion so guileless and good-natured a person [30].

20th century: (19) After all, one may hear the most private affairs of other people, but only in a spirit of respect for the struggling, battered thing which any human soul is, and in a spirit of fine, discriminative sympathy. *For even satire is a form of sympathy. It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead. Therefore, the novel, properly*

handled, can reveal the most secret places of life: for it is in the passionate secret places of life, above all, that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening.

But the novel, like gossip, can also excite spurious sympathies and recoils, mechanical and deadening to the psyche. The novel can glorify the most corrupt feelings, so long as they are conventionally 'pure'. Then the novel, like gossip, becomes at last vicious, and, like gossip, all the more vicious because it is always ostensibly on the side of the angels. Mrs Bolton's gossip was always on the side of the angels [31].

IV. CONCLUSION

The contexts cited above prove that the writer may reveal his presence in the narrative irrespective of the time the piece of narrative was written. But the quality and distinctness of the writer's voice may differ in different time periods. In the works of 18C, 19C and early 20C (Fielding, Thackeray) we can recognize well enough that there is a narrator who often addresses his reader directly. The author shows the position of absolute authority, the position of an omniscient person who knows all about the story's world, and the world outside the novel. The author directly addresses the reader: "our reader" (context 5), "very little entertainment to the reader" (context 16), "my kind reader will please to remember". In his narration the author uses personal pronouns: "In like manner we shall represent..." (context 5), "so I am tempted to think" (context 9), "we are not always to conclude" (context 11), "we shall strictly adhere to..." (context 15), "we are to see a great deal of..." (context 18). The author refers to his personal experience: "I can remember the consequence of..." (context 15).

The end of the 20C — the beginning of the 21C (Grisham, Bushnell, Brown) is marked by a shift to the internal point of view, and we are not going to argue this opinion in full. Nevertheless, cases of the author's voice in the dialogue with the reader can also be found here. They are usually represented in the form of short phrases: "Nothing is ever brief in court" (context 3), "Since the beginning of time, the secret had always been how to die" (context 4), "One of the rites of passage for American college kids was a summer with a Eurorail ticket before the harsh reality of real life set in" (context 7), and are less prominent than in the 19th and early 20th century novels.

The material collected and systematized at this stage of our investigation shows, first, that one should view the author of a narrative piece of discourse simultaneously as a "narrative construction" (i.e. one of the figures in the narrative) and as an active fully-fledged participant in the dialogue with the reader. So the "either author or narrator" model should be substituted by the "author-narrator" model for further discussion. Second, it is possible to conclude that despite differences in the English narrative writing over centuries as well as differences in literary trends the narrative set-up including storytelling on the one hand, and "talking to the reader" on the other hand, is quite sustainable.

This conclusion opens up new prospects in further discussion. For instance, it seems plausible to study changes in the topics the writer takes up in his/ her (more or less) independent dialogue with the readers. At first sight they seem similar, but, however, there are certain variations which are interesting to consider. Similarly, it would be important to investigate the interaction of storytelling and making notes in passing which, in fact, forms the narrative and at the same time accounts for its individual peculiarities.

To sum up, studying the role of the author as the “creator” and “narrator” in the narrative text with the correct analysis of the author’s views, ideas and attitudes may help to get a deeper insight into the way the narrative is structured and model the way in which narrative is formed in the process of creating a work of fiction.

This highly productive approach gives objective grounds for modeling the process of text production — the challenging task which can give important insights into the essence of narrative and its logical and semantic organization.

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