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AUTHORS: Lindita TAHIRI,Nuran MALTAMUHAXHERI

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CRITICAL THINKING IN LITERATURE TEACHING

EDEBİYAT ÖĞRETİMİNDE ELEŞTİREL OKUMA

Lindita TAHİRİ*, Nuran MALTA-MUHAXHERİ**

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the concept of panoptical narration based on the idea of Foucault about panopticon which is this case is applied in the teaching of literature. Comparably to the scheme of the disciplined society envisaged by Foucault, where people are observed by a powerful guard that remains invisible himself, this concept is applied to the relations between narrators and fictional character. This kind of Foucauldian reading of the novel has been in particular applied to the writers belonging to realism, whose works have been qualified as panoptical (Dorrit Cohn, 1999). This paper proposes the usage of the concept of panoptical narration as a strategy for teaching literature in order to challenge students for opened and liberated interpretations of meaning. The paper argues that the pedagogical stylistic by means of linguistic analysis of narrative strategies avoids prescriptive readings and encourages students to sharpen their critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Perspectival narration, Active reader, Multiple interpretations, Pedagogical Stylistics.

ÖZ: Bu makale, edebiyat öğretiminde de uygulanan Foucault'nun panoptik fikri üzerine panoptikon anlatı kavramını tartışmaktadır. Foucault tarafından öngörülen disiplinli toplum yapısına benzer bir biçimde, insanların, kendini görünmez kılan güçlü bir muhafız tarafından gözlemlendiği kavramı, anlatılar ve kurgusal karakterler arasındaki ilişkilere uygulanır. Romanın bu tür bir Foucault-cu okuması, özellikle, çalışmaları panoptikal olarak nitelendirilen gerçekçi yazarlara uygulanmıştır (Dorrit Cohn, 1999). Bu makale edebiyat öğretimi hususunda panoptik anlatım kavramının kullanılmasını, anlamın açık ve özgür yorumlarına öğrencilerin meydan okuması için bir strateji olarak önermektedir. Bu makale, pedagojik üslubun anlatı stratejilerinin dilbilimsel analizi yoluyla, kuralcı okumalardan kaçındığını ve öğrencilerin eleştirel düşünme becerilerini geliştirmelerini teşvik ettiğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Perspektif anlatım, Aktif okuyucu, çoklu yorum, Pedagojik özellikler.

* Prof. Assoc. Dr., University of Prishtina, lindita.tahiri@uni-pr.edu, ORCID:0000-0002-9679-6589.

** Prof. Assoc. Dr., University of Prishtina, nuran.malta@uni-pr.edu, ORCID:0000-0001-7147-2556.

1. INTRODUCTION: STYLISTICS AND CRITICAL LITERACY

Discussing critical literacy, the scholar Pam Green (2001: 7-12) says that there is a duality about literacy, and in the context of the school literacy can limit students instead of liberating them. Green considers that traditional literacy practices often reduce literacy to portray only the mainstream view of the world, and for him this kind of literacy is exploitative. He calls instead for means of developing critical literacy and for a system of education that would arouse skills and competences associated with critical thinking.

In this light of the need to arouse critical thinking skills amongst students, the teaching of literature acquires a particular importance. In teaching of literature, the field of stylistics is a helpful and valuable tool. The teacher in a stylistic class does not only interpret messages of the literary work, but As the scholar Simpson says (2004), the teacher in a stylistic class does not only interpret messages of the literary work, but brings out interpretation as an effect of textual features, such as lexicon and syntax, depicting their function towards producing the literariness of a text. Furthermore, Simpson states that stylistics has pedagogical usefulness because it of its basic principles such as being rigorous, retrievable, and replicable and in this way it enables students to avoid impressionism during literary interpretation and to use the literary text as an argument for this interpretation.

The stylistic approach towards teaching literature is compatible with the development of literary criticism in the couple of last decades. In particular due to the influence of linguistic studies, literature scholars are not seeing literariness as a special trait of literature but rather a potential of all language which may be present in different kinds of discourse. Furthermore, this potential for creativity in language has been associated in cognitive linguistics as linked to the basic cognitive processes in language usage.

As in past decades literary criticism has challenged the notion of a single predetermined meaning of the text, the scholar Ann Kempe (2001: 40-57) considers that it is important to find ways of minimizing the role of the literature teacher as the source of authoritative knowledge. This teaching strategy engages students in the pursuit of knowledge and in practicing critical reflection towards the literary text. This methodology of teaching literature also prevents students to accept passively the interpretation of the dominant culture and stimulates them to produce readings of their own. This teaching style corresponds with developments in reader response criticism, with representatives such as Stanley Fish. This literary school moves away from both intention and text, focusing on the reader as producer.

However, as McIntyre (2011:9-30) argues, stylistics often struggles to find a place in the curriculum as it occupies a middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism due to the tension between these two fields: linguists see it as subjective, whereas literary critics consider it formalist. Therefore, there is a need to improve the integration of pedagogical stylistics in the curricula of teaching literature, in particular taking into consideration the recent approaches of language of literature in relation to other discourses in terms of intersection and similarities rather as opposed to each other. As Weber says (1996), this perspective integrates the linguistic and literary study and develops the awareness of literature as language, which is beneficial both to teaching of language and teaching of literature. Furthermore, he states that the focus of stylistics is in the text of literature, rather than in vague and impressionistic judgments, makes it a useful pedagogical tool in both language and literature studies.

The methodology of analysis in this paper belongs to stylistics and the interpretation of the literary text is an outcome of the analysis of the formal and semantic patterns of the literary samples given in the text. We consider that the linguistically based approach to literature analysis has the great advantage of applying precise grammatical and lexical criteria, rather than relying on vague impressionistic terms.

2. LITERATURE AS PRISON: PANOPTICAL NARRATION

In his famous work *S/Z*, Roland Barthes (1974) makes the distinction between *readable* and *writable* texts, as opposed poles, the first standing for all that is traditional, systematic, analyzable, and ultimately of limited interest, the second for all that is modern, elusive, open, fluid, plural. Typically, the socialist realism writers are considered as belonging to the first category, and typically scholars take the example of the literary convention in former socialist countries to illustrate the ideology of the literary texts in such cultures. However, it should be taken into account that the so-called dissidents in socialist cultures prove the reverse of this bipolar division. The examples of reputational writers within the socialist realism prove the existence of the hybrid possibility and of the subversive ‘singular’ texts, which displaces the attention from interpretation of ideology into the analysis of literary techniques which have enabled writers to create *writable* texts even in strict dictatorial regimes, as for instance is the case with the Albanian writer of international reputation, Ismail Kadare who managed to create internationally reputational artistic work in the midst of one of the most authoritarian communist regimes in the world. The hybrid character of literature presents the tension between two oppositions, between *writable* and *readable*, the first one working with multiple meanings, the second one working with certainties.

According to the American scholar Susan Rubin Suleiman (1983) the roman a these, or novels with clear ideological message are a clear manifestation of the realist and didactic impulse that lies at the origin of the novel, because one of the components of the realist impulse is the desire to make others see, to make the reader understand something about him or herself, or about society and the world. She sees the possibility of escaping the moralization in this kind of literary works, because some of them may display a paradox, such as in cases when in order to condemn the character's words, the narrative is obliged to report them; if it reports them, however, with sufficient detail and precision, those words can acquire an authentic tone that will counteract the condemnation they are supposed to provoke. There results an internal contradiction or blurring, since the reader is attracted by words he "should" be rejecting. The negative character acquires thereby an ambiguity that can in the long run subvert, or at least put into question the very doctrine whose validity the work seeks to demonstrate. Suleiman thus suggest that narrative techniques could be the reason for the hybrid character of literature and for the intermingling between *writable* and *readable* texts.

Dorrit Cohn (1999) points out the negative connotations and ideological interpretation of the Foucault's concept of panopticon, which has been added to the optical imagery of the language of literary critics, such as mirroring, reflection, transparency, lens, perspective and focalization, all these terms sharing in common the descriptive nature of their labeling. As Cohn notices, according to Foucault, the scheme of 'the disciplinary society' which is observed by a powerful guard that remains invisible itself, is applicable to the formal relations between narrators and fictional characters, and this Foucauldian reading of novels has been in particular applied to the writers belonging to realism, whose works are qualified as 'panoptical narration. (1999:165) She argues the case of D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* where the novel in realist prose writing equals policing. Realist fiction, a genre that exists only to wield absolute cognitive control of the lives of the characters, which is a replication of the malevolent power structures of a society that both produces and consumes is conceived as a prison whose character subjects are governed by the omniscient narrator.

3. THE RELATION OF THE NARRATOR WITH THE CHARACTERS

The literary terminology regarding the perspective of narration, as Cohn points rightfully has retained the figurative quality of optical imagery, such as is the metaphor of focalization, a coinage of the French scholar Genette (1980). The narrating voice and its relation with the characters of the novel, might correspond

not only to two different narrative types but also to different ideological orientations.

Some critics believe that novels of the panoptical type, in particular when they are told by an intrusive narrator who does not hide the judgmental and moralizing tone, are apt to spread clear and conclusive values, beliefs which are articulated with authority and with obvious didactic aim. On the contrary, novels of multiple perspectives are associated with a liberal stance that allows for multiple and ambiguous meaning. However, Cohn (1999:177) says that she is skeptical for this correspondence, because the judgmental narrator is not necessarily understood as spokesman for the author but as a fictional voice, whose comments may not be reliable. There is not a mode and meaning correspondence, because the figural focalization may transmit decisive values, and an eloquent narrator may transmit ambiguities.

The literary critic Jesse Matz (2004) states that one of the important new developments of the modern novel is the replacement of a belief in absolute, knowable truth with a sense of relative, provisional truths, with the awareness of ‘reality’ as a constructed fiction. Modern writers do not aim to give a full or neutral version of a story, but they emphasize the limited perspective of the personal point of view. As Matz puts it: “...we have to do the work an omniscient narrator would otherwise have done for us, and the participation gives objective knowledge the feel of subjective involvement” (2004 :52). This scholar concludes that “perhaps the main talent of the modern novel... is its power to question the margins and contents of the self”, and hence modern fiction ‘has helped us to determine the very nature of selfhood’ (2004:181). What Matz calls ‘the main talent of the modern novel’, may be crucial for the contemporary reader, who lives within the uncertainty of the modern age, where everything is opened to redefinition, even to ‘fakeness’. Within the today’s doctrine of relativity, the subjective position has been gripped by the immense number of mass messages, which foreground the multiple choice of the ‘right self’, changing endlessly within the vast space of virtual technology.

As Todorov (1966) claims, the classic narrative most often uses the formula of the narrator standing behind the characters. In this case, the narrator knows more than his character. He does not care to explain how he acquired this knowledge: he sees through the walls of houses as well as through the skull of his hero. His characters do not have any secrets from him. Obviously, this form exists in different degrees. The superiority of the narrator can be clear, let us say, in a knowledge of someone’s secret desires (that the person himself does not know), or in the simultaneous knowledge of the thoughts of several characters (of which none

of them is capable), or simply in the all-knowing narration of event. According to Todorov, the point of view from the perspective of the character is widely prevalent in literature, above all in the modern era. In this case, the narrator knows as much as the characters, he cannot supply an explication of events before the characters have discovered it. Todorov mentions the differences between the narration in the first person and in the third person, but always according to the point of view the same character has of events: the result, obviously, is not the same. He mentions the case of Kafka who began *The Castle* in the first person, and he modified this point of view only much later, changing to the third person but always in the aspect of the character who is equal to the narrator. On the other hand, the narrator can follow, systematically or not, a single or several characters, and in this case, the narrator knows less than them. He can describe only what he sees, hears, etc., but he does not have access to any consciousness of the other characters. This classification of Todorov matches the position of Bakhtin (1981) who regards novels as ideological ‘polyphony’ which are incapable of indoctrinating the reader’s perception and interpretation, due to the impossibility of transparent interpretation and the interrelation of social styles and voices within language.

4. THE MIND STYLE OF THE CHARACTERS

Dorrit Cohn in her book *Transparent minds* (1978) discusses techniques of presenting the consciousness of the characters and the foregrounding of language in novels in order to allow the text to penetrate to silent thoughts and feelings of its characters, suggesting also emotional extra linguistic processes. As Cohn says, fiction enables the reader to undergo the fictive journey inside the world of the other which can never happen in the real world.

When analyzing the presentation of the consciousness of the characters with free indirect discourse, scholars have continuously associated the effect of this technique in arousing the empathy of the readers. On the other hand, there are scholars such as Joe Bray (2010: 56-67) who argue that empathy needs to be considered as a construction of the reader rather than as an intrinsic feature of the text. His study shows how complex the response to the representation of the consciousness of the characters is and how it combines both with contextual and non-linguistic factors. However, studies as this can arouse doubt about the literary competence of the readers, which again points the need for the sharpening of the critical skills of the students and their potential for multiple interpretation.

An author of reputation within the field linguistic criticism, Roger Fowler coined the term of character’s mind style (1983), implying linguistic devices responsible for creating the illusion of inner speech typical for the character and

still within the framework of the narrator's language. He uses the tools of functional systemic grammar, developed by M.A. K. Halliday, who integrates form and function within the same model. In his analysis of *The Inheritors* by Golding, Halliday analysis the linguistic representation of experience mainly through syntactic resources of transitivity. He sees grammar as part of the story, reflecting the multiple values of the text.

In order to illustrate the usefulness of linguistic approach to the literary analysis in teaching literature with the aim of sharpening the critical literacy of students, we will analyze two passages from the novel *Im atë donte Adolph* (My father liked Adolph) by the contemporary Kosovo writer Mehmet Kraja (2005), where the perspective of narration encourages alternative readings of history:

He had seen one at the customs in Virpazar, where he had been taken by the Montenegrin police officers... Nonetheless he did not like the photograph hanging in the wall opposite himself sitting there. Puffed up and adorned with decorations, he was looking like an unripe rooster, who the chickens of the neighborhood make fun of. Whereas in the picture that crazy Zef held under his shoulder he looked rough and stern as if he had drank saffron. The picture had a gilded frame, carved delicately in shape of leaves and small flowers with rings of yellow petals, and it was covered with thin smooth glass, alike those mirrors of brides that are sold in the women's Market. (p.23, translation by L.T.)

The narrator presents the history of his father, who had admired the model of Hitler's mustache, without knowing who he was and what ideology did he present. The above passage represents the memory of the character: the image which is inserted in his memory is transmitted with the shift of tense into past perfect (had seen, had been), the aspect of continuity is indicated with past continuous tense (was looking) reinforced with the universalizing present (make fun of). This image of the past is differentiated from the image given by the neutral narrating perspective (crazy Zef held, he looked). The opposition of the two pictures of Hitler becomes a portrayal of the moral values of the character, who when finding himself in an unfamiliar and military setting (customs, Montenegrin police officers) did not like the likewise decorated pose of the person in the photograph, but in the mess of the end of the war, at the crowded streets of his admired Shkodra, the picture of the same person seemed to him manly and dignified. The narrating context when the reader knows more than the character, who is not aware of the identity of the person in the picture and regards him as embodiment of masculine virtues, produces sharp irony. Through the novel there are similar passages where the narrator and the character are not aware of the information that the reader has, with the similar effect of absurdity and contradiction:

Whatever the circumstances had been, it is confirmed by now that my father, precisely at the street which brings you at the Big Café, met crazy Zef, who had a huge military coat which was crawling behind him, wearing his pants tied up with a wire, walking up and down while counting his steps and hitting the cobblestones on the street, stopping and walking again, looking up and talking to the clouds, turning on his right and standing upright, saluting, shouting death to the fascism, afterwards turning sharply behind and shouting to the other half of the world standing behind him, freedom for the people! (p.23 translation by LT)

The sentence starts with an estrangement expression (whatever the circumstances had been), typical for the distanced posture of the narrator in this novel. However, immediately after the imprecision of the indefinite account, the authenticity and reliability are hinted, with intensifying deictic 'by now' and in particular with the verb 'confirmed' and the existential auxiliary 'to be' in the universal present (is). The suggested facticity of the narrated event is undisputable with the intensifying deictic 'precisely', to continue with the foregrounded paratactic organization depicting visually the scene from the interior focalization of the character, where the words of the other are given in free direct speech (death to the fascism, freedom for the people), in order to transmit the sensory experience of the character. The realistic registration of the speech of the other represents the communist slogan, which could be unknown for the character and therefore might not provoke the same ideological connotations as to the reader. Furthermore, the irony and absurdity become stronger when a crazy person screeching the victorious slogan that has shaped the mentality of on large part of humankind.

When discussing the text with the students, the teacher may focus on multiplying the reading perspectives challenging the students with contradictory and unsettled interpretations. In particular in this case when fiction is interwoven with a period of history which is very important for Albanians, students may start challenging illusions and concepts of the truth and reality, questioning the possibility of complete and accurate communication, and eventually producing liberated and open readings of their own. In such a case pedagogical stylistics becomes a tool for critical approach towards ideological interpretation of history and a tool for students to become aware of the intrusive mainstream interpretations of history.

5. THE MORALLY PRESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

Teachers can also use works of popular culture, which are widely read by the student population, in order open up alternatives of critical readings of these texts. By using pedagogical stylistics students will learn to point out the differences between the one-dimensional readings and open readings, such as is the case with

the passage below: “Bill had been fascinated by her stories, just as she was by his, and over the next months, an odd but comfortable friendship had formed between them, via telephone and letters. He had found some rare art books to send to him, and the next time he came to Paris, he called her and asked if he could take her to lunch. She hesitated and then couldn't resist, it was one of the rare times when she left Theodore at lunchtime. Their friendship had begun nearly four years before, and Teddy was ten then. And over time, their friendship had flourished. He called from time to time, at odd hours for him, when he was working late, and it was early morning for her. She had told him that she got up at five to tend to Teddy every morning. And it was another six months before he asked her if Gordon objected to his calling her. In fact, she had never told him.” (Fragment by the novel *The Kiss*, by Danielle Steel)

The students can focus on analyzing the summarizing style (four year before, six months), highly informative (hesitated, couldn't resist, never told him), the abundance of evaluating adjectives (fascinated, odd, comfortable, rare art), leading to the overall impression that in one paragraph everything is clearly known about these two characters, and in fact the reader can clearly foresee the development of the story. The students may be encouraged to consider how unrealistic and sad such a quick and judgmental portrayal may be if it happened in everyday life, and there could be discussion about the lack of the encouragement for the response of the reader, who have in front of them the complete examination of the characters in just a couple of sentences, the characters laying down bare within the prison of the panoptical narration.

This passage can be contrasted with a different kind of style, as the following example shows.

Gerard Van Bever wore a herringbone overcoat that was too large for him. I can see him standing at the pin ball machine in the cafe on the Rue Dante. But Jacqueline is the one playing. Her arms and shoulders scarcely move as the machine rattles and flashes. Van Bever's overcoat was voluminous and came down past his knees. He stood very straight, with his collar turned up and his hands in his pockets. Jacqueline wore a gray cable-knit turtleneck and a brown jacket made of soft leather.

The first time I found them at the Cafe Dante, Jacqueline turned to me, smiled, and went back to her pin ball game. I sat down at a table. Her arms and her upper body looked delicate next to the huge machine, whose jolts and shudders threatened to toss her backward at any moment. She was struggling to stay upright, like someone in danger of falling overboard. She came to join me at the table, and Van Bever took his turn at the machine. At first I was surprised by how much time

they spend playing that game. I often interrupted their match; if I hadn't come, it would have gone on indefinitely. (*Out of the Dark*, by Patrick Modiano, p.8)

The students can focus on the descriptive adjectives (herringbone, large, voluminous, straight, turned up, gray, cable-knit, upper, brown, soft, first, huge) in comparison to the evaluative style of the passage of Steel. One of the rare evaluative adjectives such as 'delicate' is accompanied with the modality of doubt suggested by the verb 'look', and also acquires traits of description due to the comparison with the non-animate noun (huge machine). She is portrayed as an object rather than subject (whose jolts and shudders threatened to toss her) but this is not articulated directly or with a comment, but through grammar, by using syntax. The students are encouraged to discuss the effects of such style, which suggests, shows rather than tells about the characters, encouraging readers to engage themselves actively in producing meanings.

6. CONCLUSION: FREEDOM OF THINKING AS AN EFFECT OF LITERATURE TEACHING

Stylistic analysis as a way of reading can be of direct use to students and teachers. As students nowadays are faced with the saturation of language by mass media and with the plentitude of world voices which tend to invade their subjectivity, teachers can point out during the literature teaching the literary techniques of the perspectives of narration in order to encourage the multiple interpretation of meanings. The teacher does not only interpret messages of the literary work as traditional methodology would expect, but instead points out textual features to students, in different levels of language such as phonology, lexicon and syntax, depicting their function towards producing the literariness of a text.

By focusing on the perspective of narration, the stylistic interpretation of the novel could help students become aware of the ideological position of propagators of clear and absolute values and authoritative beliefs, and could enable them directly experience the internal representations and thoughts, therefore offering a more revealing experience of reality than everyday life does.

This strategy of interpretation which is interconnected with concrete linguistic analysis helps the teacher to keep away from the morally prescriptive language and allows students to be able to grasp the plurality of interpretation and readings. This kind of pluralistic perspective is compatible with the ambiguity of the modern-day era, where everything is opened to redefinition. The stylistic approach focuses on the text and literary strategies rather than training the student to mechanically to state a trans-historical essence of literature which is difficult to explain and may even create resistance and awe during the teaching of literature.

Therefore, the perspectival narration may be used by teachers to help students grasp the idea of the content of subjectivity in the midst of the information chaos. The perspectival narration appears as an aesthetic strategy of individuality which helps readers grasp the idea of the content of subjectivity in the midst of the information chaos. The linguistic approach to literature and pedagogical stylistics is able to give students the skills to do the work that otherwise the omniscient narrator would have done for them, in this way fostering their critical thinking skills.

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