

## **THE RESEARCH OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURES IN M. DRABBLE'S NOVELS AT ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSES**

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### **Abstract**

The paper is dedicated to the research of narrative structures in the work of a well-known English writer Margaret Drabble at English literature classes at university. The relevance of the investigated problem is caused by the change in traditional narrative forms in contemporary literature, where the author's subjective narrative incorporates the characters' points of view. The main goal of the article is to consider the peculiarities of narrative structures of M. Drabble's novels on the example of her novels "A summer-bird cage", "Jerusalem the Golden", "The Waterfall" and "The Realms of Gold", as well as to show the process of conducting a literary analysis of a novel in the course of classes with philology students.

To realize these goals, a thorough textual study of M. Drabble's novels has been conducted based on the comparative historical method of analysis. The former and current literary processes in Britain were taken into account, provided that a theoretical approach was combined with the literary-historical and literary-critical outlook on the issue. The provided analysis reveals a gradual complication of narrative structures from a linear first-person narrative in early Drabble's novels, in which the points of view of the author and the narrator almost coincide, to a story that combines the voices of the omniscient narrator and the protagonist, the narrator and other characters in her late novels.

The proposed methods and techniques of analysis of narrative structures in literary texts can be used by scholars, educators and teachers in both scientific and practical contexts. For teaching and learning purposes, our findings can be integrated into the university curriculum for the effective instruction design of classes and seminars on M. Drabble's and other English writers' works, contemporary English literature and stylistic analysis courses.

**Keywords:** literary studies, English literature, narrative structures, M. Drabble, novels, university, students.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Traditional narrative forms in contemporary literature are undergoing major changes. The writers of the twentieth century appeal more frequently to a personalized narrator that distances the author from the character and also complicates the relationships between them, because the author refers to unsubjective forms of presence in the text: composition, components of genre structure, system of images, leitmotifs, symbols, etc. In this regard, we will research narrative forms in the novels of a well-known English writer Margaret Drabble at English literature classes at university.

The main goal of the article is to consider the peculiarities of narrative structures of M. Drabble's novels on the example of her novels "A summer-bird cage", "Jerusalem the Golden", "The Waterfall" and "The Realms of Gold", as well as to show the process of conducting a literary analysis of a novel in the course of classes

with philology students.

M. Drabble is a famous English writer, literary critic and publicist. Continuing the tradition of her great predecessors - Jane Austen, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and other classics of English literature, Drabble became known as an intelligent and thoughtful writer with her own themes and original style, as a subtle explorer of human souls and relationships. Her work has reflected the trends that are characteristic of the modern literary process in England.

The works of Margaret Drabble have been widely discussed by critics of England and the United States for several decades. Some monographic studies have been published (works written by V. Myer, E.C. Rose, S. Roxman, J. Creighton); numerous research papers, newspaper and magazine articles have appeared. Among the Russian researches who studied this author are S. Dubovik, A. Blagoveshchenskaya and some others.

## **2 METHODS**

To realize the goals of our research, a thorough textual study of M. Drabble's novels has been conducted based on the comparative historical method of analysis. The former and current literary processes in Britain were taken into account, provided that a theoretical approach was combined with the literary-historical and literary-critical outlook on the issue.

At English literature classes the students are given a list of tasks to implement:

1. At first they have to read the whole novel at home and answer some questions on general understanding (When and where does the story take place? Name and give a short description of the main characters. What narrative types are used in the text?).
2. Afterwards the learners are to read the selected parts of the novel for detailed analysis, discuss them at the class, paying attention to different narrative techniques and viewpoints, their intersection and confrontation.
3. Finally, the students have to make a report on the research of narrative structures and their functions in M. Drabble's novels.

## **3 RESULTS**

The first three Drabble's novels ("A summer-bird cage", "The Garrick Year", "The Millstone") are written in the first person narrative form, i.e. on behalf of the main characters, who talk about their difficult moral quest. Although seemingly monosyllabic, the narrative structure of these novels appears much more complex and extensive. Undoubtedly, the voice of the main character (personified narrator) dominates in each novel. The narrator's speech tends to be literary, full of quotations in French and Italian, literary allusions and poetic symbols - as a result of the heroines' academic education.

The abundance of internal monologues, rhetorical questions and exclamations speaks of a complex internal struggle and sorrowful thoughts of the heroines about their place in life. "Why did I want to reconcile everything? Why couldn't I jump for the unreliable with both eyes shut, as Gill had done? Why did I want to have my cake and eat it, as far as Gill had done?" (Drabble, 1977, p. 44). Sometimes they openly declare their emotional state: "Depressed by this sad story" or "I was impressed by her nonchalance" (Drabble, 1977, p. 44). "As I put the letter down I felt as if I could burst into tears" (Drabble, 1977, p. 187). And in other cases, this function is entrusted to the artistic detail, which plays a large role in the early works of Drabble (Blagoveshchenskaya, Ainoutdinova, 2018).

The narration in the novel "A summer-bird cage" is close to the form of the "novel about the novel" which is very typical for the literature of the 20th century. The main character Sarah Bennett is writing a book about a short period of her life and the story of her relationship with her sister Louise. However we learn about her own art only implicitly, from conversations, that she always wanted to write a book, and from one phrase in the epilogue of the novel: "As I sit here, typing this last page, Francis is on his way home" (Drabble, 1977, p. 207). It becomes clear and quite logical for the author to introduce the form of the second person - the form of addressing the reader in the course of the narrative. For example, with a very ironic description of the actor John Connell, Sarah seeks to convey this irony to the reader. "I was quite impressed by how well-known and well-anecdoted John appeared to be: even I carried an aura of vicarious theatrical Ok-ness through being the sister of whose husband he was best man. If you see what I mean" (Drabble, 1977, p. 53). Or, describing the books of Louise's husband Stephen, which Sarah never liked, she still recognizes their merits: "So let it be said here, finally, that his books are good" (Drabble, 1977, p. 155). And in this phrase we

can catch a hidden appeal to the reader.

Some kind of invariant of the appeal to the reader is the moralistic maxims and generalizations so characteristic of the Drabble style, usually summing up the reasoning of the heroines. For example, Sarah's reflections on the place of women in modern society end with the saying: "The days are over, thank God, when a woman justifies her existence by marrying" (Drabble, 1977, p. 74). In the novel "Waterfall" we find the words of Lucy, addressed simultaneously to the main character Jane and the reader: "Who wouldn't rather be alone? ... but alas, in birth, death, old age, and infirmity, it's not possible" (Drabble, 1972, p. 17). In such statements behind the characters' voices it is not difficult to catch the moralizing tone of the author herself, however her judgments are in no way imposed on the reader, as they are perceived primarily in the context of the characters' speech.

If in "A summer-bird cage" we observe almost complete identification of the points of view of the author and the narrator ("unidirectional delegated narration"), then in "The Garrick Year", and even more in "The Millstone", there is a divergence of views, the detachment of the heroines from the author ("divergent storytelling"). Continuing the traditions of 19th century prose, Drabble uses plot collisions and devices such as coincidences, chance meetings, letters, tragic omens, moral tests (choice) of characters. However in these classic situations, the heroes manifest themselves in the most unexpected way - remember the failed adultery of Emma Evans ("The Garrick Year") or mother Rosamund ("The Millstone") "lonely" of her own free will. In addition, the writer borrows some elements and forms of narration from the classics. One can recall the first-person narration by Sh. Bronte, the omniscient narrator and internal monologues of J. Austen's characters.

The narrative form of Drabble's prose began to change from 1966, when her short story "Hassan's Tower" written in third person form appeared. Despite this, the point of view of the impersonal narrator in the story completely coincides with the point of view of one of the characters; the narrator simply captures the events and impressions of the hero. In her next work "Jerusalem the Golden" Drabble introduces the figure of a narrator who, if he adheres to the point of view of the main character, is still not identified with her. This allows the author to ensure that the narrator characterizes the heroine, revealing such details that she herself either does not know or would like to hide.

In addition, the narrator freely moves from the point of view of the heroine of the novel, Clara, to the point of view of her lover Gabriel, showing the character of the heroine from different angles, which contributes to her more objective characterization. This narrative technique also makes it possible to reveal the inner world of the male character, to tell about the life of Gabriel and his wife Phillipa what the main character does not know and does not want to notice. The reader learns that Gabriel is unhappily married; he lives with a neurotic, frigid woman out of a sense of duty, because he believes that she needs him. The contradictory thoughts and feelings in Gabriel's mind, who feels guilty for his wife's suffering and therefore does not dare to start an affair with Clara, is conveyed by a contrasting description of Phillipa and Clara. "Clara seemed to him, in his ignorance, to be everything that Phillipa was not: warm, enthusiastic, easily amused, amusing, and wonderfully, mercifully unexhausted" (Drabble, 1975, p. 140). Undoubtedly, with the phrase "in his ignorance", the narrator tells the reader that Gabriel is mistaken, that some of the qualities that he sees in Clara are not actually inherent in her. For example, she lacks "warmth", which we learn when the narrative returns to Clara's point of view again. "Gabriel wrote to Clara. She had not known what to expect from him, hardly daring to fear that there might be nothing, and then it was a letter that she received she knew there could have been nothing more satisfactory" (Drabble, 1975, p. 146). The word "satisfactory" in the above quote hints at Clara's attitude towards Gabriel, which the reader guesses later: the heroine gets more pleasure from her affair with a man than from the man himself.

Thus, in "Jerusalem the Golden", Drabble begins to distance from following the protagonist's point of view, which had prevailed in her previous novels. The introduction of an omniscient narrator's figure leads to the objectification of the narrative, and also makes it possible to complicate the language of the work, saturated with literary allusions and artistic details.

In the novel "The Waterfall" Drabble goes to more complex structural experiments: the narrative is completely built on the alternation of the first and third person narration forms. At first, the voices of the heroine and the omniscient narrator echo and complement each other, which creates the impression of a complete picture of the events taking place. The first sentence of the novel suggests that it will be narrated in the first person: "If I were drowning I couldn't reach a hand to save myself, so unwilling am I to set myself up against my fate" (Drabble, 1972, p. 3). However, as we continue reading, we discover that this opening phrase must be taken as a quotation from the protagonist, whom the narrator first refers to as "she", then "Jane", and finally, on page 15, "Mrs. Grey". The first 50 pages of the novel tell of Jane's confinement in her

home, the childbirth, and her growing passion for James Otford, her cousin Lucy's husband.

In the next part of the novel the story is again in the first person: "It won't, of course, do: as an account, I mean, of what took place" (Drabble, 1972, p. 51). The rest of the story is structured in a similar way.

The unconventional form of the novel "Waterfall" discouraged not only readers, but also critics. When asked by the latter whether the author, a follower of realism, turned to more experimental forms of writing in this novel, Drabble replied that she did not have a goal to create an experimental novel (Rose, 1980). According to the writer, having written the first piece in the third person, she realized that the chosen form did not meet the task - to show the psychology of a woman's love passion "entirely". So, already in the process of working on the novel, the author introduces the voice of the heroine into the narrative, filling the impartial story of the narrator with real feelings and emotions.

The novel begins with an omniscient narrator, who slowly and meticulously reports on a young woman, Jane Grey, abandoned by her husband, living in a large empty house with her newborn child. For several dozen pages, the thoughts and words of the heroine are transmitted using indirect speech, which is relatively small in quantitative terms. Preference is given either to direct speech - where the author needs to convey a few dialogues of the characters, often without the author's comments - or to various forms of represented speech. In this part of the novel, we find mostly short statements in which the author is the least eliminated, for example: "She wished he would do it, instead of sitting there with such indictment. As though sitting were all that one could do with one's life. And oh, what else, what else" (Drabble, 1972, p. 25). Or the type of represented speech, where the author and the hero often replace each other. For example: "It was healing, perhaps: all of her was for healing. Ah, never, damaged from birth, beyond repair, damaged before birth, an inheritance of afflictions" (Drabble, 1972, p. 22).

Unlike the restrained and measured narration of the author, the story of the personified narrator is extremely emotional and inconsistent. Here we find a huge number of exclamations and rhetorical questions, repetitions and inversions. Episodes on behalf of the heroine combine several time layers at once: present, past and future. Jane Gray leads her story ("my narrative") in the present tense; these are mainly her momentary reflections on the current situation, an appeal to the reader in search of the right decision and a fair trial.

The story of the heroine in the present tense is interrupted by retrospective episodes, the boundaries of which are very difficult to determine - the past is closely connected with the present. The use of retrospective narration contributes to the convergence and conjugation of time plans, which allows the author, firstly, to show the character's personality in development, and secondly, to make the development of the action inconsistent, zigzag, while the cause and effect are reversed, to explain the actions of the character, the entire past of the character is restored. In "The Waterfall" we see that memories of childhood, relationship with Lucy, the first acquaintance with James, marriage, etc. interspersed with the actual love story of Jane and James. The heroine declares her guilt from the very beginning and asks not to judge her strictly, although the reader still has no idea what it is about.

In the construction of "The Realms of Gold" Drabble tried to expand the number of possible viewpoints on the portrayed reality, breaking the isolation and the subjectivity of the individual consciousness, which characterized her early novels (Blagoveshchenskaya, Ainoutdinova, 2017). Undoubtedly, Frances Wingate is the main character of the novel, but only because "the moral and intellectual distance" (Booth, 1973) between her and the author is minimal. Other characters cannot be considered as minor, since they are not only the subjects of speech, as in previous Drabble's novels, but the subjects of consciousness, according to B. Korman's terminology (Korman, 1992).

The viewpoints of different characters not just change each other consistently, but come together in complex relationships. The novel includes a wide variety of viewpoints: similar to the author's (Frances's view) and opposite to it (Janet's view), complementary (Frances and Karel) as well as mutually exclusive. There occurs an intersection and comparison of different opinions. For example, the description of the town Tockley and a village Eel Cottage is given from the points of view of two characters Frances and Janet, whose views are diametrically opposed: "How beautiful England was, how lovely a place is in English town" (Drabble, 1975, p. 299) – this is Frances's viewpoint. "Janet thought to herself frequently, if this is a good address, what can be a bad one like? Her parents' home had been a hundred times more pleasant, more homely" (Drabble, 1975, p. 136) – and that is Janet's one. Here we can see that the characters' attitude to Tockley is transferred with the help of represented speech. While Frances admires the province, she finds the smallest details attractive, even a ditch, which is a symbol of home for her, Janet hates her house, which is associated for her with boredom, dullness and monotony. This change of viewpoints is achieved through the alternation of

narrative types assigned to each of the characters.

It should be noted that the omniscient author openly intervenes in the narrative and guides the reader along the path he needs, as such masters of the classic novel as Fielding and Thackeray did. None of Drabble's previous novels had such an insistent authorial presence. E.C. Rose counts about thirty-five authorial incursions in "The Realms of Gold". Some of them are short: "Doubting him, she grow ill, as I have said" (Drabble, 1975, p. 80), "as we have seen" (Drabble, 1975, p. 290). David "rubbed his glasses on his handkerchief. Remember him, for it will be some months before he and Frances Wingate meet again" (Drabble, 1975, p. 56). And some authorial incursions take up entire paragraphs. Drabble herself notes on this occasion that "the characters really behave more freely and spontaneously. But this semblance of freedom and happiness can only be achieved by numerous plot tricks" (Rose, 1980, p. 108). These are all kinds of coincidences and oppositions, subjective diversity, author's remarks, active involvement of the reader in co-creation.

## **4 DISCUSSION**

The problem of transformation of traditional forms and types of narrative, as well as the role of the author in contemporary literature is becoming extremely relevant. Many Russian and foreign scientists, such as B. Korman, N. Kozhevnikova, A. Esin, P. Lubbock, N. Friedman and others have devoted their works to these and other closely related problems. Kozhevnikova proposed the term "subjective diversity" and applied it to Russian literature. Korman classifies the subjects of consciousness in the narrative text as a narrator, a personal narrator and a storyteller. They can take different positions to the represented object. "Different points of view are fixed in certain types of narration", which differ in varying degrees of subjectivity, on the one hand, and in different degrees of approximation to the object depicted, on the other (Korman, 1992). The English literary critic Lubbock who laid down the principles of narrative typology played a major role in the development of the "point of view" theory. The purpose of his research was "to identify a limited number of narrative forms, which, however, had an infinite number of possible combinations".

## **5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Thus, in M. Drabble's novels, there is a gradual complication of narrative structures from a linear first-person narrative, in which the points of view of the author and the narrator practically coincide, to a story that combines the voices of the omniscient narrator and the protagonist, the narrator and many characters. Traditional narrative techniques borrowed by Drabble are used to create stylized fragments, parodic situations in which the heroes of the twentieth century behave in a completely different way. Commitment to tradition and, at the same time, a creative attitude towards it determine the originality of the artistic style of M. Drabble.

The proposed methods and techniques of analysis of narrative structures in literary texts can be used by scholars, educators and teachers in both scientific and practical contexts. For teaching and learning purposes, our findings can be integrated into the university curriculum for the effective instruction design of classes and seminars on M. Drabble's and other English writers' works, contemporary English literature and stylistic analysis courses.

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