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BETWEEN NARRATING AND NARRATED: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF WE-NARRATIVE PROPER

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The article deals with two narrative strategies: "multiperson narrative", or pronominal shifts in narratorial designation, and one type of narration in the plural – we-narrative. Whereas the latter technique will only be briefly overviewed, most of the attention will be devoted to the narration in the first-person plural, which will be considered as a development of the classical Stanzelian trinity of narrative situations and a multiperson narrative in its own right. On the basis of a typology of fictional and non-fictional we-discourses a definition of we-narrative proper, alongside a set of characteristics, will be suggested.

Key words: multiperson narrative, we-narrative, narrative situation, pronominal organisation of narrative.

The act of storytelling, if one comes to think of it in terms of its production, is an exclusively singular activity. This observation, stemming from the linguistic theories of communication, has been a firm rule in narratology for a long time, after being famously established by G. Genette in [8] and [7]. With the recent interest in narration in the plural, however, this singularity of the narratorial act as an overarching frame for the explication of literary narration becomes questionable. Thus, t**he purpose of the article** is to consider implications of this claim (i.e. the necessity to address mutiperson narratives) and to provide a definition of a we-narrative.

Multiperson narration, first defined as such in [16] and [17], is a recent focus of attention in narratology. Although it was M. Bakhtin who as early as 1930s defined the novel as a necessarily polyphonic discourse [2], classical narratology, being a development from Saussurean linguistics via Structuralism, has been incapable of theorizing a literary narrative in its polyphonic integrity: "Thus, while many typologies contain a space for both Bloom's subvocal speech and Molly's internal monologue, there is usually no place in such schemas for *Ulysses* as a whole as if the conjunction of different narrators and modes of narration were not itself of primary theoretical importance" [16, p. 312].

Following B. Richardson, I see multiperson narrative as multi*voiced* narrative which, however, does not mean a mere presence of more than one narrator. In its most limited sense, the term refers to a pronominal shift which bears thematical significance. In a broader sense, "multiperson narration" entails the conjunction of different narrators, their juxtaposition or persistent alternation between them. A common example in literary history of such an alternation is a switch between first-person and third-person pronouns with a consequent shift in narrative perspective (internal vs. external) – as in [1, 3], for example. Untypical and therefore

more compelling (and problematic at the same time) for narratology are multiperson texts with fundamentally ambiguous narration, i.e. texts where the same characters are referred to in different pronouns or where there are little textual clues as to how to identify disparate narratorial voices. Such polyphony of competing narrative voices usually entails aesthetic and ideological connotations: destabilizing alternative voices hint at the "drama of identity" and the instability of the classical ego [17, p. 63]; a single narrator shifting between different pronouns uncovers her own inability to choose between different discourses, with 'I' being too personal, 'she' too distant, thereby finally sliding into 'you' to seek readers' empathy; or, finally, there is what B. Richardson calls "impossible narration" [17, p. 76] which is composed of metaleptic transgressions and discourses that cannot be spoken by its narrators.

The connection between the two narrative phenomena discussed here is obvious: we-narratives are multiperson narratives. A we-narration is a hybrid form: on the one hand, it offers a combination of various pronouns (and, hence, narrative agents) in a 'we' – 'I,' the speaker, plus 'you' or 'they,' or any other reference group; on the other hand, it usually functions in a combination with other modes of pronominal organisation of narration. Due to these characteristics, we-narratives are difficult to isolate from other narrative modes into a rigidly delimited "we-narrative proper."

A definition of a literary we-narrative is also problematic because most of the uses of narration in the plural in fiction derives from its very widespread use in everyday storytelling. I am referring, for example, to the range of discourses from non-literary non-narrative academic 'we,' editorial 'we' or royal 'we' (pluralis majestatis) to non-literary narratives (e.g. stories of groups of friends or couples about their common adventures), to literary non-narrative productions, which use 'we' (e.g. lyrical poetry, hymns, songs of protest or solidarity). Literary narratives, being modelled on such discourses, often employ what I propose calling an unproblematic 'we.' A 'we-narrative proper,' on the other hand, by using a we-narration consistently, is an inherently problematic mode – out of reasons discussed below.

Publications on we-narratives are scarce: there are separate chapters in S. S. Lanser [9] and B. Richardson [17], and a handful of articles: M. Fludernik [5], D. Fulton [6], A. Marcus [10–12], U. Margolin [13, 14], A. Morris [15], J. Woller [21]. However, as is especially obvious from bibliographies of literary narratives analysed in the aforementioned publications under the rubric "we-narrative," what belongs to this category still remains a problem. Its definition is difficult due to the frequent occurrence of (lengthy) passages of we-discourses in multiperson or, simply, first-person narratives. To give an example: in M. Fludernik's bibliography in [5], composed of the texts analysed by A. Marcus, U. Margolin, B. Richardson and her own examples, she includes William Faulkner's short-story "A Rose for Emily", which has become a paradigmatic example of a we-narrative proper, together with his "That Will Be Fine", which is a first-person narrative (*sensu* Stanzel) with instances of an unproblematic 'we'. (In this short story, a child, the I-narrator, is describing collective actions in which he and his family is involved, and, consequently, designated as a 'we'-agent. See [4]). Similarly, the bibliography includes Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *The Virgin Suicides* and Michael Dorris's *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, the former being a we-narrative, whereas the latter is a multiperson narrative composed of three first-person narrators sequentially retelling a story, in which three of them are involved in different ways.

The reason for this is that there are at least three senses in which the term "we-narrative,"

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or "first person plural narrative situation," is currently used. The first one is its structuralist definition as proposed by U. Margolin and M. Fludernik: a we-narrative is a narrative in which a collective narrative agent occupies the protagonist role, i.e. the first-person plural narratorial pronoun comes to "operate both on the level of discourse and on that of the story" [5, p. 105] (Cf. [13, p. 591]). The term has been also used by B. Richardson and A. Marcus – however, in an ostensive fashion without an explicit definition. Both Marcus and Richardson seem to use "we-narrative" in a far broader sense than U. Margolin or M. Fludernik. A. Marcus uses the term to "refer not only to narratives told wholly or mostly in the first-person plural, but also to narratives in which there are thematically significant shifts from "we" to other pronouns and vice versa" [12, p. 2]. Finally, in one of the first studies of collective narration, S. Lanser introduces the concept of "communal voice," which she understands as meaning two things: it is a "spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority" [9, p. 21]. Thus, a *communal* voice, in S. Lanser's terminology, designates not only a more narrow we-narrative ("an authorial voice that resorts to an inclusive 'we' ", ibid.), but also multiperson narration, as in Dorris' novel *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, as well as singular narration, which creates a certain type of narrative authority – a communal one. (On the ideological implication of using "communal" rather "collective" compare the definitions of both in [20]).

S. Lanser's definition, used for her specific purpose of investigation of the authority of narrative voice, functions predominantly on the thematic, almost metaphorical level and is too broad for our purposes. Similarly, A. Marcus also incorporates multipersoned narratives, in B. Richardson's sense, under the category of we-narrative. M. Fludernik's and U. Margolin's definitions, on the other hand, while setting formal parameters for a we-narrative, cannot account for the difference between a we-narrative proper and a first-person narrative, if the latter uses a we-discourse. In its linguistic definition a first person plural pronoun designates both the utterer and the reference group. (The utterer is singular, since all the members of the we-group, when speaking in unison, cannot possibly be involved in story-telling – unlike in chanting or singing, for example.) Thus, if used in the narration, it includes a first-person narrator into the narrated story and also promotes to the level of narration, if only for a brief moment, the characters to whom the narrator refers.

In order to delimit a "we-narrative proper" I propose to combine the suggested structuralist and contextual approaches, keeping in mind the following observation by U. Margolin: "The difference between standard narrative and CNs [collective narratives] resides ... not in the very presence of a CNA [collective narrative agent] but in the reversal of the usual proportion and central/peripheral relation between collective and individual agents" [13, p. 595]. This observation can be directly linked to that made by F.-K. Stanzel with respect to the definition of the three classical narrative situations.

As is well-known, F.-K. Stanzel in his definition of narrative situations uses three elements: person (first or third), perspective (internal or external) and mode (reflector or teller) [19]. With respect to 'person' Stanzel, being perfectly aware of the problematic category "first-person/third-person narration" [19, p. 48], stresses that "[i]t is not the occurrence of the first person of the personal pronoun in a narrative outside the dialogue, which is decisive, but rather the location of the designated person within or outside the fictional world of the characters of a novel or story" [19, p. 48]. Thus, a mere quantitative observation that a we-

narrative must be "told wholly or mostly in the first-person plural" [12, p. 2] cannot serve as a defining feature of a first-person plural narrative. Since for its definition the category of 'person' is retained (despite its critique in, for example, [7]), it has to be emphasized again that "[t]he essential criterion of the [category 'person' as a] constitutive element … is not the relative frequency of occurrence of one of the two personal pronouns 'I' or 'he'/'she' [or in our case – 'we'] but the question of the identity or non-identity of the realms of existence to which the narrator and the characters belong" [19, p. 49].

Thus, I propose to view a we-narrative proper as a narrative situation in which the first-person plural pronoun is used on both narratives levels – on the level of discourse and of the story – to designate the narrating instance(s) that are also the narrated entities (cf. [5, p. 105]). To this we must add a developed Stanzelian point: a we-narrator belongs to the two realms of existence simultaneously, to that of the narrated story and to that of the narration. At the same time, because of the linguistic properties of the first-person plural pronoun (as considered in the linguistics of enunciation, in particular) and its resistance to classical narratological conceptualization in terms of person and level, a we-narrative proper is inherently problematic. Literary we-narratives, being a largely naturalised narrative technique, nevertheless "routinely (if at times barely perceptibly) make themselves strange and […] produce unlikely or impossible kinds of telling" [17, p. 37]. This manifests itself in at least three respects: 1) an absence of reference to the 'I,' 2) an uncharacteristically broad focalization and 3) impossible knowledge claims, which "produces a tension concerning the identity, speech situation, or knowledge claimed by the 'we' voice" [18, p. 144]. Finally, the absence of the "I" of the narrator signifies the reversal of central/peripheral relation of which U. Margolin speaks, thereby making the we-narrator a collective narrative agent. A we-narrative proper is a highly unstable multipersonal narrative situation, which lends itself particularly to experimentation with narration and thus to estrangement and defamiliarization of the usual, typical narratorial roles.

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БАГАТООСОБОВА ОПОВІДЬ ТА ОПОВІДЬ У МНОЖИНІ: ДО ПРОБЛЕМИ ВИЗНАЧЕННЯ "МИ"-НАРАТИВУ

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Розглянуто два способи прономінальної організації художнього твору: оповіді у множині, або "ми"-наративу, та багатоособової оповіді (тобто прономінальні зміни в разі позначення наратора чи наративного голосу). Багатоособова оповідь слугує основою для виокремлення особливого її типу – "ми"-наративу як розвитку класичної типології наративних ситуацій Ф. К. Штанцеля. Запропоновано розмежування між типовим використанням множинної оповіді в художньому творі та "ми"-наративом окремою наративною ситуацією.

Ключові слова: багатоособова оповідь, оповідь від першої особи множини, наративна ситуація, прономінальна організація оповіді.

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МНОГОЛИКИЙ НАРРАТИВ И МНОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ НАРРАТИВ: К ПРОБЛЕМЕ ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЯ "МЫ"-НАРРАТИВА

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Рассмотрено два способа прономинальной организации художественного произведения – рассказ во множественном, или "мы"-нарратив, и "многоликое" повествование (то есть прономинальные изменения при обозначении рассказчика/нарратора или нарративного голоса). "Многоликий" нарратив служит основой выделения особого ее типа – "мы"-нарратива как развития классической типологии нарративных ситуаций Ф. К. Штанцеля. Предложено разграничение между типичным использованием множественного повествования в художественном произведении и "мы"-нарративом как отдельной нарративной ситуацией.

Ключевие слова: "многоликий нарратив", "повествование от первого лица множественного числа", наративная ситуация, прономинальная организация повествования.