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THE INTERPLAY OF PERSPECTIVES IN GRAHAM SWIFT’S NOVELS
- SUMMARY -

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- summary -

1. Table of Contents

Introduction

1. An Overview of Narratology and Perspective
 - 1.1. Premises
 - 1.2. A Structuralist Overview
 - 1.2.1. The Psychological – Perceptive Category
 - 1.2.2. The Temporal and the Spatial Categories
 - 1.2.3. The Verbal Category
 - 1.3. Temporal Displacements
 - 1.4. Reconstructing Narratologic Concepts
 - 1.5. A Short Diachronic Narratologic Synopsis
 - 1.6. Applied Narratology and Poetics
2. A Cognitive Approach
 - 2.1. Stories as Tools for Unveiling the Human Mind
 - 2.2. Experientiality
 - 2.3. Narrating Identities
3. Identity Construction – Cognitive Theoretical Aspects
 - 3.1. Premises
 - 3.2. Interdisciplinary Concepts
 - 3.2.1. The Whole Mind
 - 3.2.2. The Social Mind
 - 3.2.3. The Mind beyond Skin
 - 3.2.4. The Fictional Mind
4. Constructing Identities
 - 4.1. Premises
 - 4.2. *The Sweet Shop Owner* – The Passive Observer of History
 - 4.2.1. Structural and Thematic Embedding – The Open Letter Response
 - 4.2.2. Assuming Anonymity
 - 4.2.3. Willy Chapman – A Consciousness Filter and Objectified Self

- 4.2.4. Recounting Himself – The Interplay of Time and Space
- 4.2.5. History, Memory and Photography
- 4.3. *Shuttlecock* – The *Mise en Abyme* Identity
 - 4.3.1. Unreliability and Gapped Worlds – Means for Attaining Power
 - 4.3.2. His Father’s Son – Failed Identification
 - 4.3.3. Power and Nakedness
 - 4.3.4. Continuous-Consciousness Frame – Interpreting Dad and Himself
 - 4.3.5. The Burrowing Animal
- 4.4. *Waterland* – The History Teacher
 - 4.4.1. The Storyteller – Small Stories, Grand Stories
 - 4.4.2. Theorizing History
 - 4.4.3. Meaning and Ancestry. Memory and Forgetfulness
- 4.5. *Out of This World* – Dialogic Identity
 - 4.5.1. Common Analytical Aspects
 - 4.5.2. Harry – The Photographer of His Own Life
 - 4.5.3. Sophie – Returning to Her Former Identity
 - 4.5.4. Exceptional Consciousnesses
- 4.6. *Ever After* – Failed Identification
 - 4.6.1. Constructing Himself as Otherness
 - 4.6.2. The University Professor
 - 4.6.3. The Masks of Identity
- 4.7. *Last Orders* – Situated Identity
 - 4.7.1. General Observations (Characters, Time, Places)
 - 4.7.2. Ray – Narrating Past and Present
 - 4.7.3. Vince – a Father’s Son
 - 4.7.4. Lenny – The Concept of Duty
 - 4.7.5. Vic – The Figure of the Undertaker
 - 4.7.6. Amy and Mandy – Female Voices
 - 4.7.7. Jack – A Case of Fully Doubly-Embedded Narrative
 - 4.7.8. Spatialized Time. Configuring Identities
- 4.8. *The Light of Day* – The Light Bringer
 - 4.8.1. Bending Time

4.8.2. Displacements

4.8.3. Emotions – Generating Eventfulness and Identities

4.9. *Tomorrow* – Projected Identity

4.9.1. Paula – An Atypical Actor-Narrator

4.9.2. Spatialized Eventfulness and Identity

4.9.3. Identification and Substitution

Conclusions

Bibliography

Annexes

Annex 1 – Index of Authors and Quoted Works

Annex 2 – Schematized Narratologic Concepts

2. Key – words: storyworld, homodiegetic actorial narrative, homodiegetic auctorial narrative, monoscopic variable perspective, poliscopic variable perspective, *mise en abyme*, the fictional mind, exceptional consciousnesses, situated identity, embedded narrative, doubly embedded narrative, fully doubly embedded narrative, embedded actual encyclopedia

3. Summary

The main aim of the present paper is to analyze the manners in which Graham Swift, a contemporary British novelist, uses a complex interplay of perspectives in order to create identities (temporal, spatial, subjective, cognitive, emotional and behavioural perspectives). Moreover, these identities are always shown in a constant process of construction and self-definition, balancing the creative weight towards *the core self*, and not towards *the autobiographical self* (Antonio Damasio – the former is the changing part of the self, whereas the latter is the stable one).

In order to minutely analyze these aspects, I used the theoretical concepts offered by narratology, starting with the structuralist and the poststructuralist narratologies and ending with the cognitive narratology (postclassical narratologies, new narratologies). However, the most important type of narratology, for the present research, proved to be the cognitive narratology, offering the key-concepts in interpreting Graham Swift's novels and in understanding his characters: *storyworlds*, *experientiality*, *eventfulness*, *the whole mind*, *the social mind*, *the mind beyond skin*, *the fictional mind*, *the thought-action continuum*, *situated identity*, *embedded narratives*, *doubly embedded narratives*, *fully doubly embedded narratives* and *exceptional consciousnesses* (these will be explained further on in the present summary).

Starting from the premise according to which individual identities do not develop in an isolated, determined environment, but in an interactive one (identities interact and they encompass otherness and elements of their external world into their own creation), one of the main conclusions is that the subjectivities designed by Swift are unstable, ever-changing, functioning on recursive introspections and “extrospections”. And the result of all these analytical and self-analytical movements is the emergence of an intricate network of identities.

The first chapter deals with the theoretical analysis of the concepts belonging to the structuralist and the poststructuralist narratologies, shortly mentioning some elements of Poetics, such as *the intertextual parody* and *self-reflexive parody* (Linda Hutcheon). What is important to notice refers to the concept of *perspective* which is modelled according to the psychological-perceptive category, to the temporal and the spatial categories and to the verbal category. Even more specifically, the first category is of utmost interest as it discloses different types of perspectives. Thus, Gerard Genette distinguishes a *fixed perspective* and a *variable perspective*, Norman Friedman equals *perspective* with *omniscience* (which can be selective and multi-selective), and Tzvetan Todorov talks about a *monoscopic variable perspective* (more subjects of perception, more objects of perception) and about a *poliscopic variable perspective* (more subjects of perception, one object of perception).

In order to render all the particularities of the narrative constructions, some other narratologic concepts are detailed: *the narrative scene* (events and discourses rendered minutely), *the narrative pause* (the narrative speed reaches the zero value), *the narrative ellipsis* (suspended narrative speed), *the narrative summary*, *the narrative paralipse* (not exposing information that would be logical and coherent within the specifically adopted narrative situation), *the narrative paralespe* (any aspect that would exceed the logic and coherence of the specifically adopted narrative situation), *transfocalization*, *transvocalization*, *catalyst-events* and *kernel-events*, *singulative events*, *repetitive events* and *iterative events*, *narrator-focalizer* and *character-focalizer*, the main narrative functions, *mise en abyme*, *free indirect speech*.

The second chapter introduces the concepts of the cognitive narratology, drawing the attention to the character as a human being who is constantly writing and rewriting his/ her own identity. This process implies different acts through which the subject constructs and appropriates the surrounding world and subjectivities, entering the converse game of decoding external gestures and actions and transforming them into internal gestures and actions (intentions, reasons, emotions, cognitions, wishes, etc.). and this phenomenon is called *decoding action statements into consciousness statements*. Furthermore, one of the most important effects of this process is that characters creates

their own storyworld, and, in order to understand each storyworld (and its inhabitants), one has to individually and contextually apply general cognitive scenarios, frames and schemata.

In addition, the concept of *eventfulness* (all kernel-events and catalyst-events) is paired with the one of *experientiality*. The latter has the main role in selecting, filtering and combining the common cognitive schemes, guiding the subjects towards particular, individual cognitions and behaviours. As a matter of fact, this concept is similar to the one of *decoding action statements into consciousness statements*, emphasizing the process of identity construction through constant accumulation of both subjective and objective otherness (in time, they add to the core self).

From the point of view of the analytical comprehension of Graham Swift's novels, the third chapter is the most important, tackling the main concepts of the cognitive narratology: *the whole mind*, *the social mind*, *the mind beyond skin* and *the fictional mind*. They mark the functional similarities between the reader's mind (or any person's mind that inhabit the world we consider real) and the character's mind or the fictional mind. The epistemological and the ontological borders blur – a human consciousness tries to decode another human consciousness, beyond the limits of the worlds these two inhabit.

The first aspect that has to be explained is *the whole mind* or *the practical mind* (Lubomir Doležel). From a functional standpoint, the whole mind acts at the level of external experiences, generalizing them and transforming them into automatic mental acts (decision making, planning, cognitive scripts or scenarios, reasoning, *etc.*). The identity traits of a certain person results from the relationship between automatic cognitive and behavioural patterns and spontaneous cognitive and behavioural acts. In Damasio's terms, the whole mind serves the core self, but only after each experience fades away and is not perceived as being a novelty.

To continue with, *the social mind* underlines the common cognitive and emotional schemata. But they interact contextually and individually, exposing different particularities. Thus, the human being is perceived both externally and internally, entering a series of action and gesture decoding. Their results are represented by identity projection gestures (one projects his/ her identity onto the other), on the one hand and by appropriating external experiences and otherness, on the other hand. This complex procedure is called *the thought-action continuum* – I interpret and understand the other (living in my reality either as a reader or as an inhabitant of a fictional world; living in a fictional reality) by applying my own cognitive and emotional schemata; in turn, these schemata are extracted from my own decoding of the others' action statements. This is, in fact, an identity dialogism which everyone enters dialectically.

The mind beyond skin completes the *the social mind* by dealing with all the external aspects a person can assimilate increasing his/ her own identity. Thus, *the situated identity* emerges. Through it, the individual identity is externally disseminated, entering a dialogue with all the other individual identities onto which it projects itself, resulting in what Colwyn Trevarthen calls *intersubjectivity* (the process through which human minds are connected due to the fact that they are involved in similar mental activities).

The fictional mind applies the three concepts mentioned above at the level of fiction, perceiving the characters as being consciousnesses closely related by similar functions and dialogism. Thus, a fictional world works on the principle of *the continuous-consciousness frame*, to which *exceptional* consciousnesses are added (they exceed the epistemological and, sometimes, ontological borders of the worlds they inhabit). Moreover, the narratives are embedded due to the identity and intersubjective flux that connects them. There are also subtypes of these identity narratives, namely *the doubly embedded narratives* and *the fully doubly embedded narratives*. In the case of the former, the identity comprehension of a fictional mind is conducted from two different points of view, namely one's own (what the character knows about himself/ herself) and the others' (what the others know about that respective character). In the case of the latter, the fictional mind arises from the others' epistemological versions of the respective character (the character himself/ herself is missing).

Eventually, we suggest a terminological change regarding Lubomir Doležel's concept of *encyclopedia*. Doležel considers that encyclopedias are mental structures which accumulate and store knowledge, cognitive, emotional and behavioural patterns, cultural answers, *etc.* and they are divided into three types: *actual encyclopedias* (information about the real world, their holders being persons in the real world), *fictional encyclopedias* (information about the fictional world, their holders being both readers and characters) and *internal encyclopedias* (the storyworld encyclopedias possessed by all fictional characters and different from those possessed by the readers about the same storyworld). However, we think that our concept of *embedded actual encyclopedia* is terminologically more suitable than the one of *internal encyclopedia*. The main reason refers to the fact that the first term shows the ontological status of the possessors of this type of knowledge (characters in fictional worlds), whereas the second term exposes the characters' awareness of their world as being the real world.

The fourth chapter renders the practical analysis of Swift's novels, disclosing the ways in which all these theoretical concepts can be applied in order to interpret and comprehend the characters' identities. They (the concepts) also name the complex interaction processes that the British author uses to create his individuals. The most important aspects are the following: the interplay of perspectives, the flexible shift of narrative voices, the spatialized time and the endowment of spaces with subjective

identity traits. This analysis includes all Swift's novels, except the one published in 2011 (*Wish You Were Here*).

The first novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner*, creates the portrait of the passive observer of history, exploring the subjectivity of a potential winner eventually occupying the opposite ontological status, namely that of the loser – a loser that is incapable of both actively taking part in generating great historical events and of tailoring his own life. Willy Chapman, the sweet shop owner, is prevented from being a part of the great history, gradually objectifies his subjectivity, assimilating the others till the point of becoming an autonomous otherness. Moreover, this aspect is structurally doubled as the novel is circularly conceived, inverting the traditional narrative beginnings and ends – the tabular beginning of the novel corresponds to its thematic end, while the tabular end corresponds to the thematic beginning.

The second novel, *Shuttlecock*, is based on identity gaps and cruxes, on *power* and *gapped worlds*, on *narrative unreliability* and *nakedness*. Prentis, the protagonist of this storyworld, is captured in a continuous comprehensive gesture – he tries to understand his own identity by analyzing it from his own standpoint, from the others' epistemological versions of himself and from his comprehension of his father's real identity. Thus, the *mise en abyme* identity emerges, an identity that extends till the reader's level, and the subjectivity that Prentis exhibits is always unstable, unreliable, antithetical and aspectual.

Waterland (shortlisted for Booker Prize in 1983) draws the image of the history teacher captured by the great history. However, he is forced to invalidate it, gradually favouring the small, individual histories which unveil events having a huge generative potential, defining the experientiality that leads to identity construction. Tom Crick, the history teacher, narrates about his ancestors, both from his mother's side (the Atkinsons, living under the symbol of *land*) and from his father's side (The Crickes, living under the symbol of *water*). Uniting the two families, Tom represents the dual human being modelled by his ancestors' identity stories. In addition, he finds his ideal apprentice in one of his students (Price) and he tries to counterbalance the external school system restructuring (no place for history in the school curriculum) by transmitting his passion for small stories to Price (a creature living in the present). And, while doing that, Tom Crick becomes an actual storyteller.

Out of This World is a storyworld of dialogic identities, representing a perfect case of doubly embedded narrative. Harry and Sophie, father and daughter, are defined as being two consciousnesses that create themselves reciprocally, filling in the other's gaps or offering another perspective on the events recounted by the other. Moreover, the dialogue they both enter is conducted *in absentia*, as Harry narrates his story from England, mentally communicating with his daughter living in the USA;

Sophie does the same thing, only the orientation of her dialogue is from the USA to England. As a matter of fact, Sophie is also involved in a similar dialogue with her twins, mentally telling them the story she is not able to verbalize. From a visual point of view, this dialogue is partially transmitted through air, as Harry narrates not only from his home in England, but also while piloting an old Cessna, and Sophie recounts the last parts of her story while flying back home.

The main character of *Ever After*, Bill Unwin, is created according to the principle of assuming different identities, all of them being caught in a remodelling movement. As a matter of fact, Bill puts on various identity masks, but, in the process, he becomes a human being divided into more fragments, one of them constantly remaining empty. This empty fragment, similarly to the deconstructivist principle, is the one that allows the sequential manifestation of Bill's identity masks – a Hamlet rebelling against a substitute-father, a professor who is not comfortable with his fellow colleagues, a scholar who discovered a manuscript that could make him famous and a potential actor-storyteller who prefers the backstage to the stage. The result of this sequential identity interplay is a failed identification with oneself – Bill understands that acknowledging himself equals to the end of his individual ontology.

Last Orders (Booker Prize winner in 1996 and, at the same time, a novel accused of plagiarism related to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*) depicts an intricate narrative world, combining different narrative voices and perspectives by employing the continuous-consciousness frame principle. Narrating a funeral journey, this storyworld minutely comprises the identity of each traveller, including the dead man's (Jack Dodds). Jack's friends, Vic, Lenny and Ray and Jack's son, Vince, set off to Margate, fulfilling Jack's funeral wish (spreading his ashes above the sea at Margate). What is interesting refers to the fact that, although this journey was meant to be a simple, direct one, it gradually transforms into an identity journey, with stops and detours that are landmarks for each participant's personal history. The result is that the identity of the three friends change – they become travellers (Vince was already one, as he is the representative of the motorized generation). The temporal and spatial displays of the narrative discourses are complementary aspects to the traveller identity: the participants become travellers as they simultaneously travel to Margate and narrate their own stories – the narrative acts are mostly inwardly oriented and they acquire the status of cognitive, emotional and remembering statements. This is due to the fact that they share a common past which activates the continuous-consciousness frame. And the presence of Jack's voice in this storyworld is also due to the same aspect which, in its turn, creates a case of fully doubly embedded narrative.

The narrative consciousness in *The Light of Day* is simpler, being comprised in a remembering act which is doubly framed – on the one hand, there is the external time represented by the day in

which George Webb (the protagonist of the novel) lives his daily life; on the other hand, there is the inner time in which George remembers the eventfulness and emotions from two years ago, as well as the eventfulness of his childhood. From the point of view of his identity, he projects himself into the small stories he both gets in contact with and moulds as a private detective. But the most important such story is the one from two years ago, when he met and fell in love with Sarah Nash, all leading to his personal tragedy.

Eventually, *Tomorrow* is different from all the other novels as it displays a feminine voice as the singular main narrative voice – Paula. Her narrative act belongs to a time of transition, connecting yesterday and tomorrow, past and future. What she narrates is her past and her family's past, the form of her story being that of an inner discourse addressed to her twins and to her husband, Mike. Still, what is worth mentioning is the fact that her discourse will be verbalized by Mike tomorrow, beyond the tabular borders of this storyworld, a tomorrow that was chosen by both of them, Mike and Paula, for disclosing the twins' biological identity (they are the result of artificial insemination).

Reconsidering the theoretical aspects, Graham Swift's novels are, from a structuralist and a poststructuralist point of view, cases of homodiegetic actorial and auctorial narratives (the narrative acts are made by actors and narrators from within the narrative worlds). Moreover, the perspective is always variable, either dominantly monoscopic or dominantly polisopic (from catalyst-events to kernel-events). From the point of view of the cognitive narratology, the fictional mind is just a case of the whole mind, the social mind and the mind beyond skin combined. Thus, the identities created by Graham Swift are exceptional consciousnesses rendered as doubly embedded narratives and fully doubly embedded narratives.

In conclusion, the British author's novels can be included in flexible categories: *The Sweet Shop Owner*, *Shuttlecock*, *Waterland*, *Ever After*, *The Light of Day* and *Tomorrow* are homodiegetic auctorial narratives, the centre of focalization being the narrator (or the actor under the mask of the narrator); *Last Orders* is a homodiegetic actorial narrative, in which the actors that narrate are Vic, Lenny, Ray, Vince, Mandy and Amy; and *Out of This World* is a case of both homodiegetic auctorial narrative (Harry) and homodiegetic actorial narrative (Sophie). Thus, the uniqueness of Swift's storyworlds resides in the way in which the embedded narratives/ the embedded actual encyclopedias (the minor characters in the novels), the doubly embedded narratives (the protagonists) and the fully doubly embedded narratives (Irene and Dorry in *The Sweet Shop Owner*, Anna and Joe in *Out of This World*, Ruth in *Ever After*, Jack in *Last Orders* Kristina and Bob in *The Light of Day* and the twins and Otis in *Tomorrow*) interact.

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