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THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN *ST. PETERSBURG* BY ANDREI BELY¹

St. Petersburg by Andrei Bely is a very complex work. Its theme, plot, both only at first sight very simple, the presentation of the characters, the language - each element of the novel shows its complexity. The narration, through which all other elements come into being, accumulates all complex features of the work. The narration also shows how difficult it is, for example, to define the role of the narrator in the story. At first, he seems to be an omniscient, third-person narrator but his lack of competence and his involvement in the plot which are often revealed deny his omniscience. A close look at the narrative structure of *St. Petersburg* shows and explains, at least in part, the complexity of the work.

The reader of Bely's novel may be very puzzled at the beginning when he reads the prologue and then moves on to the first chapter of the work. In the prologue he encounters a different kind of language and a different mode of speech from those of the following chapters. The language of the prologue is very emotional - the narrator expresses his feelings through exclamation marks, questions, digressions and pauses articulated by such sayings as: "h'm... yes...", "...well..."². The prologue is written in the form of a speech addressed to an audience. All of this contrasts with the language and the form of the first and other chapters of the work. After the introductory emotional speech the reader is presented with a story told in a restrained and "objective" language. The differences between the prologue and the first chapter anticipate various narrative techniques employed throughout the work. These differences also foretell the changes in the narrator and his varying role in the story.

1. The paper is based mainly on two chapters from Bely's novel, I and V, chosen as representative of the whole work.

2. All quotations are from the following edition: *St. Petersburg* by Andrey Biely. Translated with an introduction by John Cournos. Foreword by George Reavey. New York: Grove Press inc., 1959.

What kind of narrative technique dominates in *St. Petersburg*?

On that misty morning the doors of the yellow house facing the Neva were flung wide open. A carriage drawn by a pair of spirited gray horses pulled up before the entrance. A lackey with gold galloon rushed out and gave directions to the driver. The gray horses stanced forward and pulled up the carriage. (p. 10)

The quote is one of many typical descriptions which fill the novel. These descriptions are intended to give a very objective account of the world. One who speaks in them tries to relate in a restrained way what he sees and observes. He also tries to locate himself outside the world he describes. This kind of narration which dominates in *St. Petersburg* is marked not only with such qualities as objectivity of the account and the outside position of the narrator. In fact, it possesses all other features of the third-person narration. The position of standing outside the world of the story allows the narrator to see and know more from someone located inside. The narrator knows everything about the world he describes:

Five years had passed since Apollon Apollonovich had first arrived in his carriage to rule the Department. During that time a few things had happened. China had been in turmoil, and port Arthur had fallen. (p. 16)

The narrator has full knowledge of the events past and present, even those not connected directly with the story. He is perfectly informed of the characters' lives and what is very important, he knows the characters' thoughts and feelings. Most of the insights into the characters' minds are presented through direct speech. Thus, the characters' thoughts are distinctly separated from the comments of the narrator:

Apollon Apollonovich began quickly to jot down his fleeting thoughts. This accomplished, he thought: "It's time for the office". (p. 4)
"But the money was surely sent?" he thought. (p. 8)

But next to the direct speech, the characters' thoughts are shown in a less straightforward way. Here, the narrator not only uses the indirect-speech formula: "he [the character] thought that...", but in order to depict complex psychological processes of the characters' minds, he implements other verbal forms. They are usually interconnected with the narrator's comments in the form of objective descriptions of what happens beyond the characters' minds:

Apollon Apollonovich walked back to the door and, struck by a sudden thought, stopped short. He had remembered something: (...) he remembered his son, Nikolai Apollonovich, bending over the banister, talking to someone: (...) (p. 20-21)

They sat down, resting their elbows on the table. Nikolai Apollonovich was conscious of being drunk as much from fatigue as from the vodka. (p. 162)

The position of the omniscient narrator is that of someone who is able to observe external events and have insight into the characters, minds at the same time. And when the narrator focuses only on the inside of the characters, he even more uses the powers of the allknowing observer. Therefore, it is possible for him to present many of the characters, complex processes of thinking, their conscious and subconscious stages of mind and their most sensitive feelings:

It would have been far better had Apollon Apollonovich not allowed a single idle fancy to roam beyond the confines of his skull, for his every thought evolved stubbornly into a temporary image in space and continued its uncontrolled actions - outside his senatorial head. (p. 21-22)

Although his body was missing, he still preserved a sense of his body: the invisible center, formerly his consciousness, seemed to preserve the semblance of his previous state: logic had become bone: syllogisms were wound with sinews: and the content of logic was covered with flesh. Thus, "I" again revealed its image as substance, though it was not body: and in the explosion an alien "I" was revealed. (p. 184)

These swarming thoughts were autonomous. He did not think them: they conceived themselves: they thought, sketched, and formed themselves: they thumped in his heart and drilled in his brain: (...) (p. 242)

The third-person narrator has vast access to the inside of the characters. It is shown through long and vivid descriptions of mental processes of dual personality, splits of ego, and schizophrenic stages of the characters, minds. The persuasive images of unspoken thoughts and feelings may seem to suggest that the characters themselves unmask their inside. But certain expressions like: "his every thought", "his body", "he did not think", "they thought", say that this is still a perspective of the third-person observer.

One more feature of such presentations can also be seen when the narrator, again reaching deep into the subconsciousness of the characters, describes their hallucinatory visions and dreams. The presentations of the characters, dreams are in the form of short half-realistic descriptions frequently interrupted by emotional dialogues between the

characters and their imaginary interlocutors. While the half-realistic descriptions show the inside of the characters in a figurative way, the dialogues disclose the characters, state of mind in a conceptual way. In part 10 of chapter V Nikolai Apollonovich's meeting with his imaginary figure of an old Turanian is presented in these two forms. Figurative is the scene of the appearance of the visitor:

Nikolai Apollonovich thought Kronos was visiting him in the guise of a Mongolian ancestor.(...)
The visitor, a dignified Turanian, stood there. His arms rose rythmically, and his attire flapped like beating wings: the smoky background cleared, deepened, and suddenly became the sky, streaked through gaps of air into the small study. (p. 182-183)

Conceptual is the conversation which follows the description:

"Kant. (Kant too was a Turanian.)
"Value, as a metaphysical nothing!
(...)
"Conclusion: a Mongolian affair".
The Turanian replied: "The problem has not been grasped:
Paragraph One - is the Prospect. (...) (p. 183)

Both in the figurative and conceptual forms of the presentations of the characters' dreams the presence of the third-person narrator is very strong. The perspective of someone who objectively observes things from the outside is clearly visible even at such moments as the characters' dialogues with the figures-creations of their own imagination. These moments also reveal the narrators omniscience and his vast access to the characters, unspoken thoughts.

The domination in *St. Petersburg* of the third-person narration affects most of the elements of the presentation of the world in the novel. As a result, this world then should appear - according to the definitions of the thid-person narrative techniques - as "real", explicit, self-explanatory, clear and rationally organized. In other words: it should be the world like in any realistic novel. The problem is, however, that the world of *St. Petersburg* can be attributed all features but those of the realistic novel.

Only at first sight do the arrangement of the plot and the presentation of the characters through the dominating narrative structure seem realistic. In fact, Nikolai Apollonovich's actions leading to the assassination attempt on his father create the pattern of events which is governed by the element of suspension, mystery and unclear insinuation. Thus, the plot loses its sequential character. Moreover, Nikolai Apollonovich, his father, Doodkin, Lippanchenko and all other characters ap-

pear as rather irrational individuals whose psychology and behavior bring more unaccountability to the novel. At the end, the whole content of the work proves that it is not realistic.

What causes the dissonance between the third-person narration and the "unrealistic" character of the novel? At the beginning I have pointed out that there are differences between the modes of speech used in the prologue and the following chapters. It has also been suggested that these initial differences indicate changes in the further process of narration. And indeed, the fully developed form of narration later in the story shows signs of variance.

The modifications to the objective third-person account are introduced gradually. While pursuing his usual way of telling the story, from time to time the narrator uses the pronoun of the first person plural in his speech. He says: "At this point, we can transfer our attention to..." (p. 3), or: "We have obligingly described..." (p. 23). This slight modification in the way of narrating is also visible through the use of the possessive form of the pronoun. The narrator, for example, calls Apollon Apollonovich "our stranger" (p. 38). He also uses expressions like: "our Russian Empire" (p. XXI) and "our citizens" (p. 41). The form "we" makes the narrator less impersonal and more conspicuous but one whose speech still remains within the boundaries of the third-person narration. His perspective does not change despite the fact that he attempts to refer to his own position outside the story and tries to relate himself to the reader. He does that by talking about the concrete non-fictional reality to which he and the implied reader belong.

What brings more modifications to the narration is a change in some of the narrator's statements. Suddenly while relating his story and talking about Apollon Apollonovich's consciousness the narrator says: "...an invasion has been launched into the mind by powers unknown to us". (p. 37). Another time when he again talks about Apollon Apollonovich he asks a rather surprising question:

Apollon Apollonovich was the head of a department of
some magnitude: the department of... what's its name? (p. 5)

The statements show one thing: the "omniscient" narrator acknowledges openly that something is unknown to him. Similar acknowledgements can be detected at different moments throughout the story. When the narrator talks about one of the characters and for a long time does not reveal the character's name and calls him a "stranger" instead, he admits his lack of knowledge or at least, pretends that he does not know. The usage of the key word in the story, a "bundle", serves a similar purpose. By not saying at the beginning what exactly the bundle is the

narrator exposes the limited range of his knowledge about the world in the story. This technique of not saying is an excellent device for building the atmosphere of suspense and mystery.

Sometimes the narrator tries to explain why he cannot give all information about an event, an object or a person:

One [silhouetel] was tall and burly - a hefty fellow; but it was impossible to distinguish his features (silhouettes, after all, have no faces). (p. 24)

Explanations why something cannot be fully presented are similar in nature to disclosures of upon what the narrator bases his knowledge:

With one hand he quickly grasped the handrail: the other, which held the handle, cut a zigzag. It was obvious that the stranger was anxious to preserve the bundle from any untoward accident, that he wished to prevent it striking the stone step: acrobatic agility was evident in the movement of his elbow. (p. 13)

Both explanations and disclosures of knowledge show the same kind of limitations: information about the world is drawn from this world's inside and not from any external and objective perspective. The narrator observes and then gives an account of the events based on his earlier observations.

That the narrator is an observer with limited knowledge is clearly visible in some presentations of the dialogues between the characters. The narrator is not able to present, for example, the entire conversation between the stranger and Lippanchenko which takes place in a restaurant. The conversation is constantly interrupted by voices of other people gathered at the tables and the most important part of it is whispered. As a result, all the narrator-observer can hear and convey are only shreds of what the characters say: "shoo-shoo-shoo....", "what, Abteukhov?...", etc. (p. 27). Giving an account of this conversation the narrator also comments on the characters' dialogue:

The rustle of those repugnant lips seemed to convey horrible meanings; they might have been whispering of worlds and planetary systems, but in the end the whispering dissipated itself in triviality: "Hand him a letter..." (p. 27)

Because the narrator does not have access to all the information conveyed in the dialogue, he speculates about its meaning until he has a chance to hear exactly what is said.

The limitations in the narrator's knowledge about the world in the story shown through various presentations and statements bring a big change into the narrative structure of *St. Petersburg*. First of all, the perspective of the narrator is strongly modified. He is no longer someone placed beyond the events in the story and someone with an ability to observe and judge them objectively. Instead, he almost becomes a participant in the events and his perspective nears the point of view of the characters.

The involvement of the narrator in the story is visible through the presentation of perception of the world by the characters. The narrator once standing beyond the events, now sees only what the characters do. A description of a meeting between two characters may be a very good example of how the narrator's view narrows. In chapter I, par 13 the names of the two persons who are about to meet are not revealed until one recognizes the other. Before this happens the narrator records a series of observations and impressions of the character ("the stranger") who awaits his companion ("a burly nasty fellow"). The way the observations are recorded suggest that the narrator takes over the perspective of the stranger and sees only what the other does. The narrator like the character is unable to recognize the approaching "burly nasty fellow" until the latter stands just in front of the stranger's eyes.

The involvement of the narrator in the story can also be detected in certain ways of presentation of the characters' thoughts. Here again the narrator puts himself in the position of a character and from this perspective relates the character's thoughts.

Nikolai Apollonovich remained standing by the card table: (...)

What should he tell his father? Should he lie again, even if lies were futile? Lie in his position? Nikolai

Apollonovich recalled that he had often lied as a child, (p. 174)

This new position of the narrator changes even when the elements of the third-person narration are present. Certain expressions put in the free indirect speech make a given account of thoughts very personal and subjective. They look as if they were expressed by the character himself while this is the narrator who speaks. The narrator tries to erase the border between his voice and that of the characters. He wants to think and feel the way they do. His comments are only a continuation of the characters' consciousness. How it happens can be seen in all those descriptions in which the narrator uses an emotive kind of language in the free indirect speech. In the description of what Nikolai Apollonovich imagines after starting on the mechanism of the bomb the emotive mode of the language is revealed through a highly metaphorical con-

densation of the words and underlined by a graphic separation from the rest of the text. The separated part changes into a kind of interior monologue. The arrangements of sounds and words, lack of logic in the monologue make it a record of a continuous flow of images, thoughts and impressions. As a result, many elements of the stream of consciousness can be detected in the text. The narrator makes use of these elements to obliterate the differences between his voice and that of the character. The speaker can be either of them:

A terrible dream... He could not remember it.

Nightmares of childhood returned: Pepp Peppovich

Pepp, swelling from a tiny ball, in a sardine tin -

- Pepp Peppovich Pepp was a

Party bomb: it ticked inaudibly: Pepp

Peppovich Pepp would swell and swell.

And Pepp Peppovich Pepp would explode!

"What? ...

Am I delirious?"

Again he felt a surge of dizziness. What was he to do? Only a quarter of an hour left: should he turn it

back? (p. 185)

How the narrator's comments become an extension of the characters' thoughts is especially visible when the narrator becomes moved by the story and openly expresses his emotions. The context in which these emotions are disclosed suggests that these are the emotions of the characters too.

Suddenly Nikolai Apollonovich noticed a thin little human figure hurrying along the sidewalk. He immediately recognized it as his father's! (...)

He tugged violently at the bell: why did Semenich not hurry to open the door? (p. 168)

It was an ordinary sardine tin, rounded at the corners.

"No!"

This sardine tin had terrible contents! (p. 180)

(...) through the gates one could see a section of the windswept Seventeenth Line.

Oh, Lines! You preserve the memory of Peter's city: Petersburg.

(...)

How they have changed: how the grim days have changed them! (p. 14)

Questions, exclamations and varying use of quotation marks erase the differences between those who speak. The narrator's voice and the voice of the characters seem totally unified. The emotive language of the narrator and the lack of its separation from the same language of the

characters show how deep the narrator's involvement in the story is. It is clear that he is fully participating in the events. His once third-person perspective changes into that of the first-person. Now the narrator does not restrain himself from making references to his own presence while giving an account of the story:

(...) as I have already pointed out (...) (p. XXII)
And the two shadows of my two strangers will also be
real shadows! (p. 38)

The narrator's attitude toward the story changes very much, and he emphasizes this in various ways. He becomes emotionally engaged in the story, but at the same time he also shows his engagement in the writing of the story. Through this new position an opposite feature is shown - a growing distance between the narrator and the events. By talking about the preoccupation with writing of the story he automatically places himself beyond it. It happens when he talks about the role of the word "suddenly" in his story (p. 25) and when he foretells the future events in Apollon Apollonovich's life:

Although Apollon Apollonovich is but a creature of fancy,
yet he will succeed in frightening others with his
staggering existence. (...)
Our stranger will therefore be a stranger of flesh and
blood! And the two shedews of my two strangers will
also be real shadows! (p. 37-38)

The narrator reveals his creative power of the writer. He shows that it is he who has control over the story and that the development of the plot depends entirely on him. The growing distance between the narrator and the story is clearly visible. It seems, however, that this distance is more in the location of the narrator rather than in his emotional attitude. He still remains a passionate story teller.

An objective and omniscient observer, a not all-knowing participant, an emotional character-like figure, a first-person teller and creator - these are the names of the narrator in *St. Petersburg*. They show the variety of the modifications which are introduced throughout the story to the dominating third-person narration.

Different narrative techniques employed in Bely's novel have their aim. *St. Petersburg* presents the-world on the eve of a revolutionary turmoil; it is the world of ideological chaos and political confusion; it is Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. In order to depict a convincing picture of this world of disorder Bely uses many narrative techniques. A story of a son who has been assigned by revolutionaries to assassinate his father, a Tsarist dignitary, as an illustration of the chaos

tic world, finds its expression in an account of different narrators, of the atmosphere of suspense and mystery, of a blending of psychological processes and of the literary endeavor revealing creative powers of the writer.

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STRUKTURA NARRACYJNA POWIEŚCI ANDRIEJA BIEŁEGO PETERSBURG

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule zostaje podjęta próba wyjaśnienia złożonego charakteru powieści Andrieja Biełego *Petersburg*. Szczegółowo analizowana jest struktura narracyjna utworu, to ona decyduje o tym, jak bardzo skomplikowanym dziełem jest *Petersburg*.

Analizę rozpoczyna ogólne spostrzeżenie o istnieniu różnicy pomiędzy wypowiedzią narratorską w prologu a wypowiedziami zastosowanymi w dalszych rozdziałach powieści. Fakt ten wskazuje na różnorodność zastosowanych w utworze technik narracyjnych i na stale zmieniającą się rolę narratora.

Zostaje postawione pytanie o dominujący rodzaj wypowiedzi. Zauważalne w licznych opisach takie cechy, jak obiektywność relacji, powściągliwość opowiadającego i jego sytuowanie się na zewnątrz opisywanego świata, sugerują, że dominującym typem wypowiedzi jest narracja trzecioosobowa. Potwierdza to wszechwiedza narratora nie ukrywającego znajomości przyszłych i teraźniejszych wydarzeń i wiedzącego, co myślą i czują bohaterzy. Posługuje się on nie tylko charakterystyczną dla narracji trzecioosobowej mową niezależną, ale również, próbując oddać skomplikowane stany psychiczne bohaterów, w sposób szczególny używa form językowych właściwych mowie pozornie zależnej. Zdolność wejrzenia w ich świat wewnętrzny wraz z zastosowaniem w wypowiedzi różnorodności form narracyjnych potwierdza silną obecność trzecioosobowego narratora.

Dominująca w powieści Biełego narracja trzecioosobowa decyduje o całościowym obrazie przedstawianego świata. Ów świat nie jawi się jednak jako całość zorganizowan

na, zamknięta i do końca sprecyzowana. Wbrew definicjom wskazującej tu formy narracyjnej nie jest to świat powieści realistycznej.

Dalsza część prezentowanej w artykule analizy poświęcona jest wskazaniu przyczyn dysonansu pomiędzy narracją trzecioosobową a "nierealistycznym" charakterem powieści. Dominująca forma wypowiedzi w przebiegu rozwoju fabuły zostaje poddana modyfikacji. Zaczynają się pojawiać sformułowania burzące obiektywną relację wszechwiedzącego opowiadacza. Do nich należą przede wszystkim stwierdzenia otwarcie ujawniające brak pełnej wiedzy narratora o opisywanych wydarzeniach. Zamiast wyczerpujących relacji coraz częściej w jego wypowiedziach pojawiają się – znakomicie służące kreowaniu dominującej w powieści atmosfery tajemniczości – domysły i niedomówienia. Od czasu do czasu narrator próbuje wyjaśniać, dlaczego nie może w pełni zrelacjonować wszystkich wydarzeń. Zarówno ze sposobu ich prezentacji, jak i z wyjaśnień opowiadającego wynika, że przekazywana informacja o świecie jest czerpana z pozycji kogoś umieszczanego wewnątrz tego świata, a nie z perspektywy zewnętrznego obserwatora. Widać to w szczególnym sposobie prezentacji dialogów między bohaterami. Próba zrelacjonowania rozmowy Lippanczenki z nieznanym w jednej ze scen kończy się niepowodzeniem – narrator nie jest w stanie usłyszeć zagłuszanych przez otoczenie głosów. Decyduje się więc na domysły i rozmyślanie o możliwym przedmiocie rozmowy bohaterów. Stając się kimś, kto jest bliski ich pozycji, zaczyna odgrywać rolę uczestnika wydarzeń prezentowanych w powieści.

Zaangażowanie narratora ujawniane jest najpełniej w przedstawieniach myśli i doznań bohaterów. Posłużenie się wyłącznie formami językowymi właściwymi mowie pozornie niezależnej sprawia, że głos opowiadającego zostaje "wymieszany" z głosem postaci. Narrator nie ukrywa, że myśli i czuje jak bohaterzy i że jego relacja jest kontynuacją ich procesów myślowych. Widoczne jest to w tych partiach tekstu, gdzie uruchomiona zostaje funkcja emotywna języka. Graficzne wyobrébnienie, metaforyczna kondensacja słów, brak logicznego uporządkowania przekształconej w monolog wewnętrzny wypowiedzi przyczyniają się do powstania swoistego zapisu rejestrującego swobodny przepływ obrazów, myśli i wrażeń. Dające się dostrzec elementy strumienia świadomości znakomicie służą zatarciu różnicy między głosem narratora a głosem postaci.

Brak jakichkolwiek cech wyróżniających dwa typy wypowiedzi wskazuje, jak głębokie jest zaangażowanie narratora w bieg wydarzeń. Obecnie nie ukrywa się on za przedstawianym światem, ale w nim uczestniczy i stale podkreśla swą obecność odwołując się również do swojej roli relacjonującego wydarzenia.

Postępująca modyfikacja wypowiedzi, pozycji i roli narratora przybiera jeszcze inną formę, gdy jawnie demonstrowane jest jego uczestnictwo w czynności pisania powieści. Obraz zaangażowanego w pisanie opowiadacza dystansuje go od przedstawianych wydarzeń służąc ukazaniu mocy twórczej samego autora.

Uważne przesłedzenie różnorodności modyfikacji, którym poddana została dominująca w *Petersburgu* narracja trzecioosobowa, wyjaśnia przyczyny złożoności utworu. Zmienne role narratora i różne techniki narracyjne znakomicie spełniają wyznaczony im cel: na przykładzie historii syna próbującego zamordować własnego ojca, carskiego dygnitarza, przedstawiają świat w przededniu rewolucyjnego chaosu, świat politycznego i ideologicznego zamętu, rzeczywistość Rosji na początku XX wieku.