

THE VOLUME AND INSULARITY OF THE LITERARY TEXT

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Abstract. Literary text has been an issue of extensive research in numerous linguistic traditions. However, it remains a category open to further investigation. In this article we will mainly consider the seemingly simple issues of the literary text's volume and insularity. These will be regarded in the perspectives of text linguistics and decoding stylistics. Starting from the definitions suggested in the text linguistics of the 1970s and in Yu.M. Lotman's semiotic conception, which presents the text of art through the criteria of expressiveness, insularity and structuredness, we will focus on the contemporary treatment of the literary text as a complex sign that triggers the reader's reflection due to the transparency of its semantic structure. Our theorisation will be supported by textual analyses, mainly by an analysis of J. Joyce's story "Clay" from the "Dubliners" collection. The procedure involves identifying the semantic links between the title, the beginning and the end of the narrative and the symbolic context of the entire story, which, in its turn, interacts with the thematic structure of the "Dubliners" cycle in the whole. The results of the study demonstrate the relativity of the notions of the text's volume and insularity, as well as their high potential for further research in the field of cognitive stylistics.

Keywords: literary text, literary communication, decoding stylistics, text's volume, text's insularity, positional theory of the text, J. Joyce, "Dubliners", "Clay".

Basic provisions

Art in general and literary art in particular have always been indispensable forms of human communication. Imaginative literature has retained its importance till the modern era of consumerism and Big Data. Yu.M. Lotman, a renowned cultural theorist, explained this fact quite straightforwardly: while particular information data within economics, informatics, political science, etc. are stored and transmitted through specific codes, the universal language of art is "*a wonderful generator of languages of a particular type, which do mankind a unique favour by attending to the most complex and mysterious aspects of human knowledge*¹" [1, p. 9]. A literary text is a carrier of particularly complex information and if mankind would fail to process it, important communication mechanisms would be deformed meaning that our chances for survival would decrease. An organism maladjusted for reacting to complex signals from the environment is destined to extinction. The significance of artistic communication, as follows from Lotman's definition, may be even greater than communication within the spheres of natural sciences or economics. This explains the need to further develop the tools and methods of text interpretation on which truly intelligent reading rests. Such tools and procedures are investigated by various linguistic and literary disciplines.

Methods

¹ Hereinafter the translation from Russian into English is ours (L.K.)

In this article we will undertake an enquiry with the specific trend in literary stylistics which has dominated stylistic research within the last fifty years or so and which is known as the stylistics of reception or the stylistics of decoding. In Russia, it was pioneered by Irina Vladimirovna Arnold, who developed her own groundbreaking conception of stylistics in the 1970s, quite independently from a parallel research carried out by Michael Riffaterre, Geoffrey Leech, Teun van Dijk, Roger Fowler and other Western semioticians and structuralists [2, 3].

The logic of a decoding textual analysis follows the direction opposite to that of traditional literary criticism and poetics. It springs off the reader's perception of the graphical, lexical and syntactical signs, proceeds to interpreting the emotive content of the imagery to arrive eventually at the author's ideology and world mapping. It is rather the textual structures than the writer's individual style and biographical context that matter, though the latter are not to be disregarded. It follows from what has been said above, that the primary subject-matter of decoding analysis and of the present article is the literary text and its linguistic categories.

Introduction

Being "the primary reality of the whole humanitarian-philological thinking" [4, p. 281], text has been studied by numerous linguistic traditions, beginning from those of Ancient India and Greek rhetoric up to contemporary cognitive studies and discourse theory. Text linguistics of the 1960-1970s defined its central object as "a succession of sign units (letters, words, phrases, supra-phrasal units, punctuation signs, etc.), connected by semantic links [5, p. 507]. Text linguistics sprang off the structural-communicative definition of the text as a sequence of coherent sentences ("Der Text ist eine kohärente Folge von Sätzen"), which Klaus Brinker criticised as quite limited [6].

In the 1970s text became the object of semiotics, cybernetics and informatics. This approach was grounded in the cultural text theory pioneered by Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman who regarded any work of art, literature including, as a type of language, that is, as "*an ordered system of signs serving as a means of communication*" [1, p. 11]. Today's semiotics assumes that various sign systems like a geographical map, a collection of butterflies, algebraic or musical notations and so on and so forth are *texts*.

Thanks to the efforts of many smart scholars, we have now at our disposal a whole arsenal of text definitions and categories, such as cohesion, coherence, divisibility, integrity, modality, etc. However, there has also been a growth in contradictory or too far-going statements. As a sad consequence, by the 1990s text linguistics nearly came to a deadlock, as far as we can judge from expert opinions: "No exhaustive and terminologically grounded definition of the very concept of 'text' has yet been given" [7, p. 11]; "Text linguistics is becoming whatever you may think of but a linguistics, while the concept of text is being less and less clearly defined" [8, p. 64].

Contemporary cognitive text theory presents its object as a dynamic unit of communication organised into a complex system of functional elements; the

material and the product of the author's speech-mind activity, calculated to evoke a feedback on the part of the reader/listener [9, pp. 5-21].

Discussion and Materials

The definitions we have discussed above, indeed, can hardly be exhaustive and need further elaboration. Let us consider, for one, the three characteristics of the text suggested by Yu.M. Lotman: 1) expressiveness (*vyrazhennost'*), that is, the option of fixing textual meanings in a system of signs; 2) insularity (*otgranichennost'*): presence of clearly marked borders like the beginning and the end of a text, the frame of a canvas or a theatrical stage, etc.); 3) structuredness (*strukturnost'*), that is, a particular organisation of interconnected and interdependent elements within a text [1, pp. 67-69].

Insularity of a text is quite a controversial issue today, while the seemingly unpretentious trait of a text's volume was not considered by professor Lotman to be an issue at all. However, when we ask, "How long or short can a succession of language signs be to be a text?" and then, "Does a text necessarily have clear-cut borders?", we open quite a wide perspective for possible answers.

Considering the issue of the volume, we can refer to an example suggested in I.N. Gorelov and K.F. Sedov's "Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics": "No exit" ("Vykhoda net") [10]. This phrase may seem to be taken from a rather pessimistic context, but it can also be a sign in the metro or in the cinema telling the visitors that they only need to seek another way to get out. "Exit" is just a word, but it is a *text*, too, as it signals quite meaningful information, like many other texts we see in the streets: "Zoo", "Milk", "Push", "Pull", "No smoking", etc.

And now, can a text be as small as one letter? Take the Russian letter "M" – it can inform us that we have reached a metro station or found a men's toilet. Consequently, "M" is a text, too, carrying meaningful information.

Moreover, a text can be reduced to a punctuation sign! Victor Hugo once sent a letter to his publisher with just a large question mark: "?". His addressee wrote the answer: "!". To both the messages were crystal clear. Hugo's question mark meant: "How is the sale of 'Les Misérables' going?" The exclamation mark informed the writer that his novel was being sold out perfectly well.

If we go a little further and think, whether a text can be yet *smaller* than a graphical sign, we will have to admit that zero sign also carries information. Consider an example: in 1913, the avant-gardist poet Vasilisk Gnedov published the cycle "Death to Art" [11]. Each of the fifteen "poems" consisted either of an abstruse line (e.g., «Бубчиги Козлевая – Сиреня. СКРЫМЬ СОЛНЦА»), or of one letter («Ю»). The concluding "Poem of the End" was just a blanc page with nothing but the title on it:



This blank page is also a text, a message to be interpreted. The poet Vladimir Pyast, Gnedov's contemporary, explained in his memoirs that it was a visual text and a performance, that is, "a gesture of the poet's hand raised above his hair, then lowered sharply down, and then to the right" [12].

And how large can a text be? Actually, it can be extended *ad infinitum*. Remember the concept of *hypertext* – a text containing references to an infinite number of other texts. The Bible is a hypertext. During the 2000 years of its existence, this book has extended itself endlessly thanks to translations into hundreds of languages (every new translation = a new text); 2) religious and philosophical commentaries, theoretical and artistic interpretations and so on. The term "hypertext" has entered the thesaurus of the Internet user as an interactive medium programmed by the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML). It allows the user read a text full of references to other data, multimedia, etc.

As far as the text's insularity is concerned, should we say that it begins with the first phrase, the paratext or with the title? The answer is, its borders can be opened up with any of these structural elements.

If we take the title, a considerable corpus of research will inform us, that it marks *the strong position* of the text and acts as *its semantic dominant*. The title represents a piece of condensed information, which bears direct or indirect references to the topical words of the text. Besides, the words connected with the title semantically or by associations, belong to one referential sphere and form a unique context, in which the title word(s) obtain additional, often symbolic meanings [3, pp. 131-139;13, pp. 43-45].

At first occurrences in the text, title words are normally used in their primary, logical meanings. But "simple" words are mostly polysemantic, and, as the text unfolds, they tend to reveal new facets of meaning and acquire new ones. This ability given to words by the literary text may be called *meaning augmentation*.

To illustrate this point, we will take the story "Clay" from J. Joyce's collection "Dubliners". The title word itself never comes up in the narration until the climactic scene of fortune-telling where it is paraphrased: "*She felt a soft wet substance with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage*" [14]. "She" is the central character, Maria, an elderly lonely laundry woman. She used to nurse two brothers, Joe and Alphy, who are grown up now and who invite her for a Hallow Eve party to Joe's house.

During the game of fortune-telling, Maria is blindfold and her hand touches the saucer with clay (“*a soft wet substance*”). Clay is contextually related to “death”. In fact, “death” is one of the central leitmotifs of the “Dubliners”. It is introduced in the first story of the book where the word “*paralysis*” refers to the illness of which an old priest dies. On the other hand, the reader notices that “death” in the stories is dialectically connected with its opposing concept of “life”. The thematic opposition “Life – Death” is exposed to the reader’s mind thanks to a constant repetition of the words “*life*”, “*death*”, “*hope*”, “*mother*”, “*sin*”, “*memory*”, “*the past*” and their contextual synonyms. Such lexical repetitions tend to attract the reader’s attention to the ideological plane of the story. They are interwoven into threads (topical chains) penetrating the whole text of the book to create an interplay of the three subtopics: 1) family life of ordinary Dubliners; 2) their social life; 3) their religious life.

In “Clay”, the reader notices repetitions of words referring to these subtopics: 1) family relations and private affairs (*mother, brother, children, wife, the break-up at home, his own flesh and blood...*); 2) Maria’s and Joe’s minor positions in Dublin’s society (she is boarding in the laundry while Joe is a clerk at an office); 3) words of religious semantics (*the Protestants, the mass, the prayer-book, a convent*). The very name of the protagonist – Maria – associates her with the Mother of Christ. Indeed, Maria is the only female character in “Dubliners” who really has Christian traits such as kindness, modesty and self-sacrifice. The matron of the laundry says, Maria is “*a veritable peace-maker!*”. Joe tells of her: “*Mamma is mamma, but Maria is my proper mother*” [14]. Maria’s presumed virginity is another trait that relates her to the Holy Mother.

All the three topical chains co-occur with the theme of death: the central scene is set at the holiday, which is the time to remember the dead. The fact that it is the “holy” Maria who happens to get an omen of death during the game of fortune-telling becomes symbolically suggestive. When Maria is made to do it over again, she gets a prayer-book – the sign telling that she would enter a convent. Considering all the signs of meaningful reverberations of the text’s semantic structure, “clay” results in symbolising the spiritual death of the most holy female protagonist of the story and of the book.

The first phrase is no less important than the title, as it occurs in the text’s strong position. The first phrases normally function as an exposition, which comes handy to better understand the events that will follow. But not all stories have such a beginning. “Clay”, e.g., begins in this way: “*The matron had given her leave to go out as soon as the women’s tea was over, and Maria looked forward to her evening out*” [14]. The use of pronouns and definite articles introduces the characters as those already known to the reader. By doing so, the narrator reaches a psychological effect of submerging the reader into the atmosphere right away.

The final “border” of the text may be open, inclining the reader towards speculating on a possible continuation of the story. The final may be conventional, like “*And that’s the end of our story*”. There is also a typical way to conclude the story: “*And they lived happily ever after*”, etc. It happens more often than not that the beginning and the end are crossed out, because a wrong modulation, rhythm or

length in these positions can spoil the whole effect. Whatever the type of the final, it is to be interpreted as the text's strong position that carries its semantic dominant.

The end of the story "Clay" is certainly open to the reader's conjectures. In fact, in Joyce's terms it is an *epiphany*, that is, a short concluding paragraph conveying a moment of revelation, a brief manifestation of the truth of life. With "Clay" it is notable that it is not the protagonist, Maria, but a minor participant, Joe, whose mind is chosen as a lens refracting the dominant ideological point of the story. This choice informs the reader, firstly, of the shift in the perspective where Maria is not the actor any more. Secondly, the reader cannot but notice the leitmotif of nostalgia for the past pervading the whole narrative of the "Dubliners" collection in parallel with the topic of death: "*He said that there was no time like the long ago <...>; and his eyes filled up so much with tears that he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was*" [14]. And when the reader encounters the key words conveying Joe's deep emotions in the epiphanic lines of the story, he also notices that they are ironically and bitterly scaled down by the alcohol he somewhat overdosed that night.

Results and conclusion

To sum up our reasoning, we can stress once again that the issues of the text's volume and insularity deserve closer attention when it comes to defining the notion of the literary text. This article did not make any references to intertextuality which gives another ground for considering a text of literature (and of other verbal registers, too) as a terrain of rather transparent borders. With the advance of digital media, any text, irrespective of its length, can easily be transformed into a hypertext and grow in size to infinity. The conception of the text's strong positions that provided a ground for the present research, highlights the importance of the text's opening and final elements as the dominant semantic points of its structure. These elements, however, are never limiting the text within its "insularity". On the contrary, they trigger the reader's vision of a broader context surrounding the text one is reading. A decoding approach, which opened the way to the analysis of the text's positional structure, is being developed within the new and rapidly expanding field of cognitive stylistics which focuses on the reader's perception of text's meanings.

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КӨРКЕМ МӘТІННІҢ КӨЛЕМІ ЖӘНЕ ШЕКТЕУЛІЛІГІ

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Андатпа. Көркем мәтін көптеген лингвистикалық дәстүрлердің зерттеу нысаны болып табылады. Дегенмен, ол әрі қарай зерттеу үшін ашық санат болып қала береді. Бұл мақалада мәтін лингвистикасы және декодтау стилистика тұрғысынан оның көлемі мен шектеулілігі сияқты қарапайым көрінетін мәтін сипаттамаларын қарастырамыз.

1970 жылдардағы мәтін лингвистикасында және көркем мәтінді экспрессивтілік, оқшаулану, құрылымдық критерийлер арқылы қарастарған Ю.М. Лотманның семиотикалық концепциясында берілген анықтамалар негізінде оқырманның ой-өрісін оятатын күрделі белгі ретіндегі мәтіннің заманауи түсінігіне тоқталамыз. Көркем мәтіннің бұл қасиеті оның дербестігімен емес, семантикалық құрылымының ашықтығымен қамтамасыз етіледі деп есептейміз. Біздің теориялық тұжырымымызды мәтіндік талдау, негізінен Дж.Джойстың «Дублиндіктер» жинағындағы «Күл» әңгімесін талдаумен

нығайтылады. Рәсім тақырып, әңгіменің басы мен соңы және барлық әңгіменің символдық контексті арасындағы мағыналық байланыстарды анықтауды көздейді, ол өз кезегінде дублиндік циклдің барлық әңгімелерінің тақырыптық құрылымымен өзара әрекеттеседі. Зерттеу нәтижелері мәтіннің шектеулілігі мен көлемі ұғымдарының салыстырмалылығын және олардың когнитивтік стилистика саласындағы одан әрі зерттеулер үшін олардың жоғары әлеуетін куәландырады.

Тірек сөздер: көркем мәтін, көркем коммуникация, декодтау стилистикасы, мәтін көлемі, мәтінді шектеу, мәтіннің позициялық теориясы, Дж.Джойс, «Дублиндіктер», «Күл».

ОБЪЕМ И ОТГРАНИЧЕННОСТЬ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОГО ТЕКСТА

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Аннотация. Художественный текст является предметом исследования многих лингвистических традиций. Тем не менее, он остается категорией, открытой для дальнейшего изучения. В данной статье мы рассмотрим с позиций лингвистики текста и стилистики декодирования такие, казалось бы, простые характеристики текста, как его объем и границы. Отталкиваясь от определений, предложенных в лингвистике текста 1970-х годов и в семиотической концепции Ю.М. Лотмана, которая представляет художественный текст через критерии экспрессивности, изолированности и структурности, мы сосредоточимся на современном понимании текста как сложного знака, пробуждающего читательскую рефлексию. Мы полагаем, что данное свойство художественного текста обеспечивается не столько автономностью, сколько прозрачностью его семантической структуры. Наша теоретизация будет подкреплена текстовым анализом, главным образом анализом рассказа Дж. Джойса «Прах» из сборника «Дублинцы». Процедура предполагает выявление смысловых связей между заголовком, началом и концом повествования и символическим контекстом всего рассказа, который, в свою очередь, взаимодействует с тематической структурой всех рассказов дублинского цикла. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют об относительности понятий отграниченности и объема текста и об их высоком потенциале для дальнейших исследований в области когнитивной стилистики.

Ключевые слова: художественный текст, художественная коммуникация, стилистика декодирования, объем текста, отграниченность текста, позиционная теория текста, Дж. Джойс, "Дублинцы", "Прах"

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