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НЕНАДІЙНИЙ ОПОВІДАЧ ТА СУМНІВ У «ПОВОРОТІ ГВИНТА»
ГЕНРІ ДЖЕЙМСА
НЕНАДЁЖНЫЙ РАССКАЗЧИК И СОМНЕНИЕ В «ПОВОРОТЕ
ВИНТА» ГЕНРИ ДЖЕЙМСА
UNRELIABLE NARRATOR AND DOUBT IN *THE TURN OF THE*
***SCREW* BY HENRY JAMES**

У даній статті досліджуються наративні особливості новели Генрі Джеймса «Поворот гвинта». Цей твір вважається одним із найсуперечливіших відносно авторського задуму та характеристики персонажів. Донедавна суперечки точилися лише стосовно того, чи є події у новелі дійсно містичними (в реальності тексту), чи привиди, яких описує героїня, є витвором її уяви. Протягом останніх років з'явилася тенденція розглядати цей твір у світлі наратології та структуралізму. Ми вважаємо такий підхід доречним, адже для Генрі Джеймса як письменника й літературного критика форма та зміст тексту були нерозривно зв'язані, а в своїх пізніх творах він часом надавав перевагу формі над змістом. Новела «Поворот гвинта» відома передусім своєю двозначністю. Написана у жанрі «страшних історій», вона не лише розкриває події у мастку Блай, а, що характерно для Джеймса, малює психологічний портрет головної героїні. Наративні особливості «Повороту гвинта» створюють ефект «ненадійного оповідача», і саме це спричинило суперечки у літературному середовищі відносно того, чи є привиди, про яких розповідає гувернантка, реальними, або породженими її хворобливою уявою; чи Флора і Майлз – невинні діти, чи вони вже зіпсовані розпусними слугами, від впливу яких вона намагається їх захистити. Ми схилиємося до думки, що двозначність новели і була задумом автора. Розглядаючи фокалізацію твору, ми доходимо висновку про двошаровість твору. На поверхні знаходиться страшна історія про привидів, а під нею – алегорія гніту вимушеної респектабельності, від якого потерпає протагоніст.

Ключові слова: двозначність, ненадійний оповідач, фокалізація, історія з привидами, сумнів.

В данной статье автор исследует нарративные особенности новеллы Генри Джеймса «Поворот винта». Это произведение считается одним из самых противоречивых относительно авторского замысла и характеристики персонажей. До недавнего времени споры велись только о том, являются ли события в новелле действительно мистическими (в реальности текста), или

привидения, которых описывает героиня, являются плодом ее воображения. В последние годы появилась тенденция рассматривать это произведение в свете нарратологии и структурализма. Мы считаем такой подход уместным, ведь для Генри Джеймса как писателя и литературного критика форма и содержание текста были неразрывно связаны, а в своих поздних произведениях он порой отдавал предпочтение форме над содержанием. Новелла «Поворот винта» известна прежде всего своей двусмысленностью. Написанная в жанре «страшных историй», она не только раскрывает события в имении Блай, а, что характерно для Джеймса, рисует психологический портрет главной героини. Нарративные особенности «Поворота винта» создают эффект «ненадежного рассказчика», и именно это повлекло споры в литературной среде относительно того, являются ли привидения, о которых рассказывает гувернантка, реальными или порожденными ее болезненным воображением; являются ли Флора и Майлс невинными детьми, или они уже испорчены порочными слугами, от влияния которых она пытается их защитить. Мы склоняемся к мысли, что двусмысленность новеллы и была замыслом автора. Рассматривая фокализацию произведения, мы приходим к выводу о двухслойности произведения. На поверхности находится страшная история о привидениях, а под ней - аллегория гнета вынужденной респектабельности, от которого страдает протагонист.

Ключевые слова: двусмысленность, ненадежный рассказчик, фокализация, история с привидениями, сомнение.

In this article we explore the narrative features of *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. This work is considered to be one of the most controversial in relation to the author's design and description of the characters. Until recently, the controversy was focused only on whether the events in the narrative are really mystical (within the reality of the text), or the ghosts described by the heroine are the product of her imagination. In recent years there has been a tendency to consider this work in the light of narratology and structuralism. We consider this approach to be appropriate, because for Henry James as a writer and a literary critic the form and content of the text were inextricably linked, and in his later writings he sometimes favored a form over content. *The Turn of the Screw* is known primarily for its ambiguity. Written in the genre of "scary tales," it not only reveals the events in Bly, but, which is typical of late James, draws a psychological portrait of the main character. The narrative features of *The Turn of the Screw* create the effect of an "unreliable narrator", and this has caused controversy in the literary environment as to whether the ghosts that the governess speaks about are real or generated by her sick imagination; whether Flora and Miles are innocent children or they have already been spoiled by the vicious servants, whose influence the governess is trying to protect them from. We are inclined to believe that the ambiguity of the novella was the author's intention. Considering the focusing of the work, we arrive at the conclusion that the work is double-layered. On the surface, there is a scary ghost story, and beneath there is an allegory of oppression of forced respectability from which the protagonist is afflicted with.

Key words: ambiguity, unreliable narrator, focalization, ghost story, doubt.

In the last couple of decades the interest of literary critics to the genres which were previously treated as minor has grown. While realistic novels by Henry James are well known and well studied, his novellas and stories about the supernatural were ignored by Ukrainian scholars for a considerable period of time.

The Turn of the Screw still remains the most fabulous piece of work by Henry James, causing literary observers and critics to argue about its ambiguity. This novella depicting mysterious and horrible events became a mystery itself. Written in 1897, it survived numerous perceptions, from taking the entire story as a tale of the supernatural to Freudian interpretations, claiming that the heroine suffers from hallucinations as a result of the repression of her erotic fantasies aroused in her by the attractive owner of Bly (and applying other minor sexual contexts). We daresay that a bulk of critical works dedicated to *The Turn of the Screw* considerably exceeds the factual size of James' novella. Still, there is no common point of view about the narrator's reliability. Moreover, its ambiguity evoked over twenty screen and scene versions and about a dozen literary re-workings.

As it stands, there are three main streams in the interpretation of the novella: 1) apparitionist, or metaphysical, which argues that it is a ghost story and all the things that happen are true within the framework of the narrative (W. Booth, A. E. Jones, D. Krook, K. B. Vaid, T. J. Bontly); 2) non-apparitionist, or psychoanalytical, which says it is a story of madness (E. Wilson, H. C. Goddard, E. Kenton, T. M. Cranfill and L. C. Clark); 3) seeing the governess as an unreliable narrator, which is supposed to be initiated by E. Wilson, one of the first critics who doubted the reliability of the governess as a narrator. This point of view supposes that the novella is an ambiguous narration meant to confuse the reader (I. V. Golovacheva, T. L. Selitrina, E. J. Parkinson, J. A. Á. Amorós).

While the first version is quite clear as it flows from the novella form and plot, the psychoanalytical interpretation appeared equally important due to Henry James' interest to psychological studies. Both Henry James and his brother William were members of the Society for Psychical Research, and William served as its President in 1894-1896. Together with human psychology, the members of the society were

interested in “supernatural phenomena”. However, James provides his reader with numerous keys that lead us to the conclusion about the intended ambiguity of the novella.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the connection between the narrative construction of *The Turn of the Screw* and its ambiguous perception, as well as investigate the ways of manifestation of fantasy as a category of artistic thinking in *The Turn of the Screw*.

Kimberly C. Reed summarized all criticism on *The Turn of the Screw* saying: “It is neither novel nor short story, neither ghost story nor realist narrative, recounted by a woman neither servant nor family member, featuring (in part) beings neither living nor dead” [6, p. 100]. Indeed, the ambiguity of this piece of work is still the subject of discussion.

The reliability of the narrator was questioned seriously for the first time after World War I. After *The Ambiguity of Henry James* by E. Wilson was published in 1934 the review of the history started. Wilson’s Freudian interpretation, which suggests that the governess is a sexually suppressed hysteric, and the ghosts are merely the result of her excessively excited imagination, repeated what was previously claimed by critics like Henry Beers, Harold Goddard and Edna Kenton in the 1920s [5]. Throughout his life, Wilson continued to reconsider and reinterpret his interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw*, but all criticism from that time was supposed to resist the central ambiguity of the narrative. Is the governess a hopeless neurotic, to whom the figures of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel appear or is she really a courageous woman struggling to save her wards from the curse? Both viewpoints have many supporters, although the first one is continuously losing its popularity. Other critics (and this viewpoint seems to be optimal) argue that the beauty and horror of the story lie in its extraordinary ambiguity, and therefore both preliminary interpretations are possible and indeed necessary to make *The Turn of the Screw* a manifestation of the author’s talent.

Speaking about doubt considering the reality of the events of the story gives *The Turn of the Screw* as an illustration of ambiguity as a condition of the fantastic which

may exist not only in some part of the narration, but also through its whole body and thus, outside of it [11, p. 40]. Indeed, there are some levels of a doubt: the governess doubts the children's morality and sincerity as well as Mrs. Grose's attitudes, the reader doubts the morality of the governess herself (whether she is a guardian angel for Flora and Miles or their enemy, whether the ghosts are the reality or hallucinations).

In the post-soviet countries Henry James was generally known as an author of realistic novels, while realistic genres were traditionally preferred to non-realistic ones. According to T. L. Selitrina, once a "serious" author had added the fantastic element to his narration, it was treated as a parable, which had the purpose to "rehabilitate" him in the eyes of strict literary critics. [10, p. 98]. However, as Henry James was thought to belong to "Genteel tradition", his works were not considered to be important for the mass reader, therefore his name is still unfamiliar to the general public.

T. Selitrina relegates mysterious novels and short stories written by James in the 1890s to romantic traditions of E. A. Poe and N. Hawthorne. She condemns Freudists for voluntaristic reading of these works, but at the same time she assumes that Henry James' heritage cannot be placed in the framework of one peculiar artistic method. T. Selitrina believes that the very interest in the mysterious and extraordinary in the mental life of people constituted one of the organic traits of James' psychologism as a kind of reaction against flat bourgeois positivism. Comparing "horrors" in his works with those of R. L. Stevenson (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) and of O. Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*), she argues (supporting A. Yelistratova) that they are original projections of conflicts and contradictions hidden in the depths of human consciousness and interprets all the above as moral allegory [11, p. 97].

B. Rusina investigates the category of uncertainty as a means of creating the plot ambiguity in *The Turn of the Screw*. With the help of linguistic analysis of the text she proves the unreliability of the narrator (the governess) [9].

O. Bieliakov analyzes *The Turn of the Screw* from the point of view of narratology and cognitive linguistics (or "cognitive narratology"). We find this

approach very useful for revealing the author's intention, as the methods of narratology demonstrate how the reader is led to the conclusion about the unreliable narrator.

James wrote ghost stories before *The Turn of the Screw*. As Tsvetan Todorov noted, James was around twenty-five when he wrote *De Grey: A Romance* (1868); and *The Jolly Corner* (1908) was one of his latest works [12, p. 82].

This was a popular form, especially in England, where, according to the prologue to the novel, meetings for telling ghost stories were a Christmas tradition. The novelty James implied gave everything – ghosts' presence, their obscenity, their intentions about children – an air of a mere gossip. As an attentive reader can notice, the ghosts are seen by only one person in the novel – the governess who is both the narrator and the main character at the same time.

The ambiguity of the novella is created by making the reader doubt. This doubt is a product of the narrative structure. While reading *The Turn of the Screw*, we don't stop questioning the reliability of the story told by the governess, and this happens in no small degree due to unreliability of the narrator and variability of time coordinates. We are parted from the main narrator in considerable time and distance. There are two more narrators and over fifty years between the governess and the reader. Moreover, she and another narrator are dead for the time of telling the story, namely, we are deprived of any witnesses.

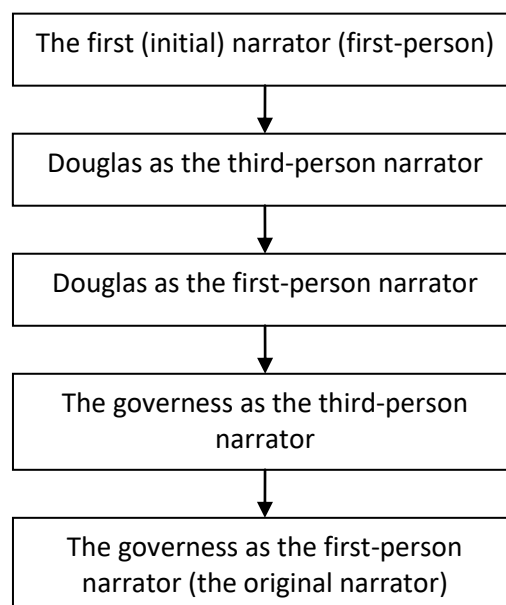
At the beginning of the story, the narrator is looking forward to a ghost story, which is to be read by a man named Douglas. The action takes place on Christmas Eve, and the narrator is one of several listeners waiting for a scary story. Douglas backs up his story using the diary of some woman who had been dead for twenty years at the moment and who had experienced the depicted events. Thus, we gradually forget that this is a manuscript that is being read aloud, and Douglas, along with the original narrator, completely disappears from the reader's mind, and their place is occupied by the governess.

For Henry James the best narrative form was what N. Friedman called "the story told as if by a character in the story, but told in the third person" [3, p. 113].

G. Genette refines this statement specifying what was meant by this – a focalized narration told by the narrator who is not a character himself, but accepts the character’s point of view [8, p. 187]. Moreover, as Ann Heilmann remarked, in *The Turn of the Screw* we deal with “triangular first-person account, which moves from the unnamed frame narrator through Douglas to the governess” [4, p. 112].

So, we have three narrators of the story: the first narrator, Douglas and the governess. Considering the story level, the first narrator and Douglas are extradiegetic (as they are introducing the narrator of the main story) and the governess is intradiegetic (the one who tells the main story). According to the participation of the characters in the story they are telling, we also have both types of narrators: heterodiegetic (the first narrator and Douglas) – not participating in the story, and homodiegetic (the governess) – the participant of the story being told. At the same time Douglas is partly intradiegetic, as he reads the story from the manuscript to his friends aloud, and homodiegetic in relation to the first narrator who introduces him. The complex narrative composition of the novella (the first narrator tells about Douglas, who represents the diary notes of the governess, and she becomes the following narrator) demonstrates a shift from the third-person to the first-person narrator.

The Narrators Shifts in *The Turn of the Screw*



As the governess is an intrahomodiegetic narrator, as well as an autodiegetic one (i.e. the narrator who is the protagonist of the narration), she is what W. Booth called “unreliable narrator”, the type of a narrator that appeared in the 20th-century fiction as a result of rejecting the omniscient author. Kristen E. Elia states that for James the separation of narrator and author is crucial for his creation of narrative ambiguity [2, p. 2]. Indeed, if the story is mediated, the reader is not obliged to believe it. Wayne Booth gives a very appropriate description of James’s narrative purposes by saying: “There can be no intensity of illusion if the author is present, constantly reminding us of his unnatural wisdom. Indeed, there can be no illusion of life where there is no bewilderment...and the omniscient narrator is obviously not bewildered” [1, p. 45].

We tend to mistrust the governess not just because she is the direct participant of the story she tells, or because the story itself is mediated, but because she is too biased. Moreover, she is trying to project a strong bias onto the reader, to make the reader believe that the children are spoiled and haunted, as they respond fiercely and aggressively to her attempts to save them from the impending disaster. We are forced to see the whole story with the governess’s eyes, and while her attitudes are firm, other characters’ comments are very contradictory, which adds to the reader’s doubt.

Together with the complicated point of view, which makes the narrator of the main story (i.e. the governess) inaccessible and the story itself look like one retold by several people, James separates the reader and the events in the mansion of Bly with a firm time distance. O. Bieliakov, studying the variable time coordinates in *The Turn of the Screw*, notes that the effect of unreliability of the narrative is achieved by James with the help of time shifts and change of time distance from “zero vector” (the term by G. Genette). The scheme of these shifts proposed by O. Bieliakov [7, p. 15] is a perfectly accurate demonstration of what G. Genette called the difference of time of narration and time of action [8, p. 313]. We have made some changes in the table created by O. Bieliakov for the sake of its compactness.

Time Shifts and Change of Time Distance from "Zero Vector" (O. Bieliakov)

Time of events in Bly:	In 10 years	In 20 years	In 20 years	In an undefined time period
The governess is about 20, Douglas is 10	Douglas meets the governess, who is 30	Douglas receives the manuscript from the governess before her death	Douglas reads the story to the first narrator	Douglas dies. The first narrator receives the manuscript and tells the story in his book.

In the conclusion we would like to emphasize the importance of analyzing the novellas and stories of Henry James, whose literary experiments were followed and developed by later authors and formed modernist literary tradition. James was one of the first major novelists who applied stream-of-consciousness techniques. Rethinking the role of the point of view for a story perception, he perfected an aesthetic approach that rejected a conventional omniscient narrator.

The Turn of the Screw might be a subject for the further study from the narrative and structural aspects, which will help to realise the author's intentions better and give a sound base for its analysis. We believe that a complex analysis – historical, stylistic, narrative and structural – would be helpful in realising the author's intention in *The Turn of the Screw*.

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