

UDC 801.82:808.543

**Mikula Oksana**

*Assistant of the Foreign Languages Department for Humanities*

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv*

**Мікула Оксана Ігорівна**

*асистент кафедри іноземних мов для гуманітарних факультетів*

*Львівський національний університет імені Івана Франка*

**MEANS OF BUILDING THE NARRATOR'S IMAGE IN MODERN  
ENGLISH SHORT STORY (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE LEMON  
TABLE BY JULIAN BARNES)**

**ЗАСОБИ ВИБУДОВУВАННЯ ОБРАЗУ НАРАТОРА В СУЧАСНОМУ  
АНГЛІЙСЬКОМУ ОПОВІДАННІ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ THE LEMON  
TABLE ДЖ. БАРНСА)**

***Summary.** The article summarizes the results of research on linguistic means used for building the image of the narrator in modern short story. The classification of linguistic means has been developed. The framework for future analysis of the means used for showing emotiveness has been prepared.*

***Key words:** postmodernism, short story, narrator, linguistic means.*

***Анотація.** Стаття підсумовує результати дослідження лінгвістичних засобів, що використовуються у вибудовуванні образу наратора в сучасному англійському оповіданні. Розроблено класифікацію лінгвістичних засобів. Підготовано підґрунтя для аналізу лінгвістичних засобів емотивності.*

***Ключові слова:** постмодернізм, оповідання, наратор, лінгвістичні засоби.*

**Introduction.** With the development of modern literature interdisciplinary approaches have become a usual way in literature and linguistic research. So, a comprehensive analysis of postmodern texts will require the data and methods of other humanities. It is primarily manifested in developing the notion of text interpretation within the framework of linguistics, where it came from hermeneutics. The notion of discourse, developing in linguistics and philosophy has been enriched because of their interrelations. Therefore, the analysis of any text of postmodern discourse is only possible if it is seen as a part of postmodern discourse, if the linguistic means are interpreted compared to the background knowledge of postmodern philosophy, attitudes etc. Of course, other extralinguistic factors like the author's identity, his views, the context in which he worked should also be taken into account.

**The problem.** The image of a narrator, one of the key elements in any literary text, is of a special importance and significance in a short story with its limited space. Therefore, the means used for creating it are used to render rich explicit and implicit sense. It is a challenge to study how the task of creating the image of a narrator is achieved by authors of postmodern short story with its multiplicity of narrator's egos and interpretations, mixed perspectives, and multi-layer senses. *The aim* of our research has been distinguishing ways of building the image of a narrator in modern English short prose on the example of J. Barnes' book of short stories *The Lemon Table*, which includes 11 short stories on different topics but with a common motif – the theme of ageing and people's emotional response to it. The methods of analysis include linguostylistic analysis, componential analysis, and text interpretation.

**Analysis of theoretical sources.** Postmodern short story, the genre in which J. Barnes wrote *The Lemon Table*, is hard to define and there is little agreement on its exact characteristics. Sometimes, it is defined in relation to its precursor. For example, instead of the modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic

world, the postmodern author avoids, often playfully, the possibility of meaning, and the postmodern literature is often a parody of this quest [2, p. 388].

One of the points of specific nature of postmodern short story is the frequent omission of one or several requirements inherently characteristic to the genre. Most often it is the unity of action or unity of events, absence of unexpected ending etc. The breach of these requirements might be manifested in different ways: when only one event happens (or repeats) and several perspectives of viewing it are suggested by the author, like it is the case with *A Short History of Hairdressing*; it may also be manifested in the absence of action as such, so that the fact that nothing happens substitutes the culmination of the story (as it is in *The Story of Mats Israelson*).

M. Rohrberger suggests that postmodern short story is metaphysical in its orientation and that it represents "the author's probing of the nature of the real" [5, p. 8]. Describing the features of postmodern short story, she writes: "As in the metaphysical view reality lies beyond the ordinary world of appearances, so in the short story, meaning lies beneath the surface of the narrative. The framework of the narrative embodies symbols which function to question the world of appearances and to point to a reality beyond the facts of the extensional world" [5, p. 11]. This point implies another characteristic feature of postmodernism – involvement of the reader into the narrative. While some piece of life is presented to him/her, it is the reader who is supposed to make conclusions and act – not the characters.

Postmodernist paradigm is characterized by an intended violation of traditional understanding of integrity, completeness of any system, vague boundaries of categories, denying taboos and restrictions.

This distrust of totalizing mechanisms extends even to the author and his own self-awareness; thus postmodern writers often celebrate chance over craft and employ metafiction to undermine the author's 'univocation' (the existence of

narrative primacy within a text, the presence of a single all-powerful storytelling authority).

In this respect, the image of a narrator is of a primary importance. We use this term in the meaning 'a literary subject, a person created by the author who narrates the story of events and people and who is responsible for the formation of an imaginary world of a literary text' [7, p. 388]. The distinction between the author and the narrator is a basic one with the author being real though distant while the narrator being imaginary but instantly close to the narrated events [6, p. 191]. Narrator is created within the text and is seen by the readers not as an abstract function but as a subject characterized by anthropomorphic features of thinking and story-telling. V. Schmidt distinguished the main characteristic features of the narrator: he is omniscient, capable of seeing and rendering all events, words and thoughts of characters [8, p. 64-65]. On the other hand, the narrator is both in and beyond the story due to his close connection with the author and the ability of rendering the thoughts of the latter or appeal directly to the readers.

**Results.** The narrator's image differs throughout the 11 short stories but this doesn't mean there are 11 narrators. Rather, the narrator with multi egos. Julian Barnes is a classical representative of a postmodernist – very educated and knowledgeable, intelligent and witty, recognizing no authorities and humouristic and more often ironic about anything. His narrator is very much like him, though they are not identical. So, for example the narrator in *The Revival* is apt of expressing himself in a quite vulgar way, especially if talking on the theme of love. The vulgarity does not mean low level of development – on the contrary, it combines with the use of highly formal words, professional words, stylistic devices etc. For the narrator love consists in sex; moreover, he makes accents on the physiological manifestations of sexual attraction, which are considered vulgar. However, as far as one more interpretation of love may be easily traced in the story, we may conclude that the author is of another opinion on it.

In general, the analysis allows distinguishing the following linguistic features of the narrator's speech: the use of formal words and emotive-evaluative words, author detail, and a number of stylistic devices: irony, metaphors, epithets, decomposition of set phrases, parallel constructions, and repetitions.

**Formal words** are amply represented in all short stories of the collection. Usually their function is to characterize the narrator as a highly educated person. As far as this point has already been commented on, we will limit ourselves to suggesting several samples of formal words used by the narrator, and a short analysis of one of the passages. So, some formal words used by the narrator are as follows: *presumably, allotment, terminally, malformed, complicity, exploitative, demeaning, aural, superior, valid choice, content oneself, assembly, assent, reflect upon, civic worth, whereas, deed, regardless of, succumb, frivolity, transfer ownership, itinerant, upon one's insistence, complacent, virtue, to prosper, negotiations, acquire, civility* etc.

The way of functioning of the words of this type may be observed in the following passage:

***Ownership of each individual stall was a matter of private election, either by deed of gift or by last will and testament. But whereas inside the church certain pews were reserved for certain families, from generation to generation, regardless of merit, outside, considerations of civic worth applied*** [1, p. 25].

In the given example, which is used in the beginning of The Story of Mats Israelson, the atmosphere of the whole story may be felt – so highly literary, even elevated, that it seems to be artificial. Unlike formal words in other stories, where their main function is to characterize the narrator, in this story they are also employed to create a constant background on artificiality, to incite a feeling of disruption between what is told and how it is told, to attract readers' attention to the fact that the language is not a simple instrument to say what you think – it is a powerful participant of the conversation, and it is capable of expressing not what you wanted to say.

Stylistic devices are numerous in the narrator's speech. As far as J. Barnes' texts are very stylistically rich, we have chosen only the most frequently used stylistic devices. So, for example, while we analyze metaphors and epithets, similes, hyperboles and metonymies have been left out, though some instances of each stylistic device have been encountered in the text.

**Irony** is of special importance, as in the analyzed stories it is not just as stylistic device, but also a mode of seeing the world.

On the lexical level the irony may be exemplified by the following passage: *Then he dug into Gregory's collar and shook it to make sure as much hair as possible fell down inside his shirt* [1, p. 9].

The passage describes the part of a hairdressing process, namely its ending, when the hairdresser shakes the hairs off the client's shirt. The client – Gregory, – was a young man then, and took to disliking this particular hairdresser. He disliked him because the hairdresser mocked him. It was, for example by saying that Gregory is cleverer than himself because he was at the university (this utterance is ironic, because in reality the man was of a low mind about universities, as *they teach the students to despise more things than they have a right to*). Also, the hairdresser implied that Gregory cannot judge about minuses of marriage without having been married even once, which offended the latter as well. These claims made Gregory conclude the hairdresser was of a bad disposition to him, and react to his actions accordingly. In the passage above the phrases to make sure (make a point of doing something; act purposefully and intentionally) and as much as possible to describe the way the hairdresser was shaking the hairs off render Gregory's antipathy to the hairdresser, his trying to take revenge on the man at least in his thoughts if he could not lead the conversation properly and felt humiliated or mocked at.

The following example of irony is based on cultural pre-supposition. As is generally known, Stockholm with its number of islands is considered to be a very romantic place not to mention Venice, a worldwide capital for lovers. By

mentioning these two cities the narrator compares them with the romantic aspirations of the main character of *The Story of Matt Israelson*, Mrs. Lindwall, who wanted to go to the mine in Falun.

*He remembered the way she had been facing him, her hand on the rail so that her wedding ring was not concealed, and had said, simply, "I would like to visit Falun." He imagined other women saying to him, "I long for Stockholm." Or, "At nights I dream of Venice." They would be challenging women in city furs, and they would not be interested in any response except cap-doffing awe. [1, p. 32].*

Ironic seems also the reason she wanted to go there – because she was told about it with a number of details, numbers and terminological words, and she liked *when a man tells her what he knows*. Such inconsistency between the usual ways of understanding romantics and the one adapted by Mrs. Lindwal creates irony.

*Metaphors* of different kinds are employed by the author. We will not take into account nominative metaphors, which are of no stylistic value, and discuss only cognitive and imaginative metaphors.

A number of imaginative metaphors may be found in the stories: *his mother had shaken off the effects of the magazine, hamster nests of hair on the floor, cold smoothness of scissors, greasy waterfalls down the back (about hair), indigo fingernail stumbled down a row of pencilled capitals, The man with the back-up pound coin in his pocket, we are just horses in our stalls (about people), gulping folly of anticipation, hide in the depths of the director's box, perform a sacred rite etc.*

One of the examples of the metaphor functioning in the context is as follows:

*He also had another tactic: that of **hurrying on into the future in order to confirm the impossibility of love in the present**. Already, and without "anything"*

*having happened, he is looking back on this would-have-been something* [1, p. 93].

The imaginative metaphor *hurrying on into the future*, which metaphorically compares the man's behaviour with the journey, is one of the explications of another metaphor – the cognitive metaphor of love as a journey, which is the basis on which the plot of *The Revival* is built. In the story, I. Turgenev, a sixty-year-old world-known writer arranges to meet a twenty-five-year-old actress whom he fell in love with. She was travelling from Petersburg to Odessa, he was travelling from his household to Mtsensk, boarded the train and travelled thirty miles to Oryol – with her. This actual journey is a symbol of another journey – their love, which was impossible because of difference in age, which made I. Turgenev suffer immensely. This metaphor is a basis for the narrator's and personage's reflections on what love actually is.

Among the numerous *epithets* the following may be found: *uninterested hands, indifferent hand, attempt half-heartedly, half-amused passivity, hot-eyed evangelizers, say matter-of-factly, idle eyes, grown-up phrases, alien skull, indifferent spectacles, speculative comb, dismissive flip of the comb, jerk the head revengefully, acute pang, soft-wristed jazz, soufflé effect, school-formed writing, violent self-reproach, quasi-mathematical astonishment* etc.

In the following example some epithets are used to show how the society of a small town in Sweden received the new couple, or rather, the woman who came to live there;

*...gossip wagered he would run to fat. Mrs. Lindwall was less remarked upon, being neither **menacingly pretty** nor **contemptibly plain**, neither vulgar nor *soignée* in dress, neither pushy nor reclusive in manner* [1, p. 27].

The use of the first epithet – *menacingly* (from *menacing* – threatening or foreshadowing evil or tragic developments) is ironic, as it suggests that local women could not be afraid of her as potential rival in fight for their husbands' hearts. The use of second epithet – *contemptibly* (from *contemptible* – Deserving



of contempt; despicable) is employed to show that Mrs. Lindwal was good-looking (the author is again ionizing, as he suggests that good looks is a sufficient ground for respecting people; if you are not good-looking you will cause contempt, disrespect). Using such a combination the author manages to render a lot of information – to describe the appearance of the character, to show the people's attitude towards her, and to comment on the general attitudes and viewpoints on virtues worth respect in that society.

*Decomposition of set phrases* is a comparatively rare stylistic device, and though used not very frequently by J. Barnes it is worth mentioning, as it is another manifestation of his linguistically playful style. The functions of this device may be various. They may be illustrated by the following example:

*...there stood a row of six horse stalls. Made from white fir cut and seasoned **within a gull's cry** of the town's crossroads, they were undecorated, even unnumbered* [1, p. 25].

*...his coffin, made from white fir cut and seasoned **within a gull's cry** of the town's crossroads, was placed in front of the carved altar brought from Germany during the Thirty Years War* [1, p. 48].

The two passages were taken from the beginning and the end of the story, thus, presenting a case of framing. The decomposed phrase – the combination of the idiomatic phrases *as the crow flies* and *within a walking distance* – is used to show the distance from the stables to the town. However, as far as it is repeated, and also gulls' cries are mentioned throughout the story becoming one of its background leitmotifs, the sense load it bears is much larger than simply decorative function. Firstly, it adds the expressiveness to the description of the setting – the town was near the lake, and people used to hear gulls cry. Secondly, the gull's cry is usually associated with the feeling of sadness, nostalgia etc, so it is one of the means of creating such atmosphere in the story. Finally, the gulls are present in the story due to their symbolism – the ideal, or something someone wants but cannot obtain due to life circumstances. This third reason bears directly

on the main characters' destinies – both were unable to get what they dreamt of – the real love.

**Parallel constructions** of different types are used in the novel – analogy, gradation and antithesis the latter being the most frequently employed:

*...found all they could hope for in a pharmacist: someone slow and serious, who flatteringly regarded all complaints as life-threatening, while at the same time judging them curable* [1, p. 27].

The given example describes the behaviour of Mr. Lindwal, a newcomer to a small Swedish town in *The Story of Mats Israelson*. The antithesis, based on the opposition of the meanings of words *life-threatening* (causing fear or anxiety by threatening great harm) and *curable* (Being such that curing or healing is possible) shows how much the character was willing to please the local society, and that they were ready to receive him warmly.

The following example taken from *The Revival* is employed to show the feelings the two main characters experienced when **they met**:

*He did not dare to kiss her lips: renunciation. Or, he tried to kiss her lips and she turned her face away: embarrassment, humiliation* [1, p. 91].

The old man's state is rendered by employing the word *renunciation* (1. the act or an instance of renouncing; 2. a formal declaration renouncing something from renounce – To give up (a title, for example), especially by formal announcement). The choice of the word is not random. It is used to show that I. Turgenev endured the process of ageing with great pain, as far as his age did not allow him to love and be loved by a young actress. The girl did not want to be kissed because she found it unpleasant, improper, and also was afraid of being accused of using the old man in her own private interests.

**Conclusions.** *The Lemon Table*, a collection of 11 stories written by Julian Barnes and published in 2004 may be considered a classical example of postmodern short story. Still more important and topical it is to analyze its linguistic and stylistic features – while postmodern novel has been the favourite

of both writers and researchers, the short story has received much less attention. It is partially due to the specifics of the genre – a short story may be defined as a piece of writing aimed at giving the audience a specified impression of the world. It aims at producing a single narrative effect with the maximum economy of means and utmost emphasis. Its main features are the unity of time, action, events, place, character, center, meaningful and cathartic ending. As may be clear, such a lot of requirements make writing and analyzing a short story a challenging task. With critical acclaim the collection received right after publishing we may conclude that J. Barnes has successfully coped with the task.

Despite the noticeable differences between the stories, it appeared possible to establish a range of linguistic means and stylistic devices characterizing the narrator's speech. It should be noticed that the author made emphasis to differentiate himself and the narrator, which may be seen from the feeling of the author's presence in the text when his opinion differs from that of the narrator. The main linguostylistic features of the narrator's speech are: formal words, irony, metaphors, epithets, decomposition of set phrases, and parallel constructions. The results of the research though based on restricted data build a significant basis for in-depth analysis of structural and semiotic features of modern English short story. In particular, the classification developed in the article can serve a framework for studying one of its key features: emotiveness.

### **References**

1. Barnes J. *The Lemon Table. Collection of Stories* / J. Barnes. Picador, London, 2005. 213 p.
2. Clark M. M. *After epiphany: American stories in the postmodern age* / V. Clark // *Style*. 1993. Vol. 27, No. 3. P. 387-394.
3. May C. E. *The Nature of Knowledge in Short Fiction* / C. May // *Studies in Short Fiction*. 1984. № 21/4. P. 327-38.
4. Shaw V. *The Short Story* / V. Shaw London: Longman, 1983. 294 p.

5. Speaking of the short story: interview with contemporary writers / Ed. by F. Iftekharuddin, M. Rohrberger, M. Lee. University Press of Mississippi, 1997. 216 p.
6. Новікова Є.С. Теоретичні підвалини дослідження наративу в сучасній лінг- вістичній парадигмі // Вісник ХНУ. 2010. № 928. С. 186-191.
7. Селіванова О. О. Сучасна лінгвістика: термінологічна енциклопедія / О. Селіванова. К, 2006. 716 с.
8. Шмид В. Нарратология / В. Шмид. М.: Языки славян. культ., 2003. 312 с.