# PRESENTATIONAL MODES IN LITERARY NARRATIVES

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Presentational or narrative modes are important aspects of narrative structure that refer to ways in which an episode is rendered. The classification is based on the traditional distinction between *showing* and *telling*, otherwise referred to as *mimesis* (imitation) and *diegesis* (narration) respectively. According to S. Rimmon-Kenan, *showing* is defined as "direct presentation of events and conversations, the narrator seeming to disappear (as in drama) and the reader being left to draw his own conclusions from what he 'sees' and 'hears'", whereas *telling* "is a presentation mediated by the narrator who, instead of directly and dramatically exhibiting events and conversations, talks about them, sums them up, etc." [1, p. 107].

The above-mentioned polarization correlates with two major constitutive modes of presentation: *scenic* and *reporting* (summary). The connection between the two pairs of concepts is based on the notion of *durational aspect*, i.e. the relationship between *story time* and *discourse time*. The former refers to the fictional time taken up by an action episode, or, more globally, by the whole action; the latter is the time it takes an average reader to read a passage, or, more globally, the whole text and can be measured in the number of words, lines, or pages of a text.

*Scenic presentation* is a showing mode which denotes a direct rendering of action events combined or not with a direct rendering of character's words. Hence, we distinguish between the scene of non-verbal events (detailed action presentation) and the scene of characters' discourse (dialogues and monologues). It is characterized by *isochrony*, i.e. story time and discourse time are approximately equal [2]. An eloquent example of literary work that employs scenic presentation is Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills like White Elephants". The content of the story which includes the dialogue between the two main

characters, the American and his lady companion, about having an abortion, unfolds while the couple are waiting for the train and having a drink. The description of the station is the only telling mode of presentation employed in the text. Hemingway uses the cinematic technique of recording character's motion and words without any intervention on the narrator's part to comment, at least, on who utters the lines of the dialogue. In the fragment presented below, the only signs of narratorial mediation are the recurrence of the neutral reporting verb *to say (the man said, the girl said)* and the scarce description of the girl's movement (*The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on*). Since gestures and facial expressions are not available, readers have to infer the emotions from the content of the dialogic lines. Therefore, they are constrained in the interpretation of the story by its brevity and almost total lack of description or explanation.

'The beer's nice and cool,' the man said.

'It's lovely,' the girl said.

'It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig,' the man said. 'It's not really an operation at all.'

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

'I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in.'

The girl did not say anything [3, p. 15].

In the next sample, Susan Hill resorts to a different combinations of narrative techniques to achieve the scenic mode of presentation, namely free indirect discourse (the first sentence), free direct discourse (the second and fourth sentences), and direct discourse (the third sentence). Besides, the character's emotions and feelings are revealed to the reader at length. Although we, readers, can identify evidence of narrator's presence in the character's speech and thoughts rendered *in extenso*, such as the use of third person, the quotation marks and the introductory reporting clause *she said, she thought*, the effect of actors speaking directly to us is rather obvious.

Now, standing in the doorway, smelling lavender polish and dust, she felt ashamed, as if she wanted to get rid of all memory, as though she had wanted her mother to die. She said, but that is what I did want,

to get rid of the person who bound me to her for fifty years. She spoke aloud into the bedroom, 'I wanted you dead.' She felt her hands trembling and held them tightly together, she thought, I am a wicked woman ... [4, p. 124].

*Summary* is a telling mode in which the narrator compresses a conversation or a sequence of action events into a thematically linked and orderly account. The durational aspect that determines this mode of presentation is *speed-up/acceleration*, i.e. an episode's discourse time is considerably shorter than its story time.

In addition to the major modes presented above, there are two supportive modes of presentation: *description* and *comment*. Description is a telling mode in which the narrator presents a character or describes the setting. During the description, story time stops as no action actually takes place. Hence, the durational aspect is *pause*. Descriptive sentences typically rely on stative verbs as predicates, such as *be* and *have*. Commentary is another telling mode in which the narrator comments on characters, the development of the action, the circumstances of the act of narrating, etc. The durational aspect is also *pause*.

Mr and Mrs Bixby lived in a smallish apartment somewhere in New York City. Mr Bixby was a dentist who made an average income. Mrs Bixby was a big vigorous woman with a wet mouth. Once a month, always on Friday afternoons, Mrs Bixby would board the train at Pennsylvania Station and travel to Baltimore to visit her old aunt. She would spend the night with the aunt and return to New York on the following day in time to cook supper for her husband....

As it turned out, however, the aunt was little more than a convenient alibi for Mrs Bixby. The dirty dog, in the shape of a gentleman known as the Colonel, was lurking slyly in the background, and our heroine spent the greater part of her Baltimore time in this scoundrel's company [5, p. 60-61].

The third fragment, selected for exemplification from R. Dahl's short story "Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat", exhibits the co-occurrence of several telling modes. It opens with the description of setting elements and characters (the first three sentences) and, then, shifts to summary, i.e. the concise presentation of action events which

take place iteratively *year after year,* as it follows from the subsequent part of the short story. The strong condensation of events impairs the readers' mental visualization of the story. In the second part of the quoted paragraph the presentational mode changes to the narrator's explicit commentary on the main character's travels to Baltimore. This intrusion in the main line of the narrative, to betray Mrs Bixby's adultery, hidden under the pretext of visits to her aunt, effects the telling agency's overt control of action presentation.

The types of speech presentation can also be classified according to the distinction *showing vs. telling*. Following a progressive scale ranging from the purely diegetic to the purely mimetic, dialogue, monologue, direct speech, in general, can be ascribed to the mimetic/showing mode, whereas indirect speech – to the diegetic/telling mode [6, p. 109].

From what has been presented above, it can be concluded that a text largely using the showing mode of presentation represents the fictional world as quasi-immediate with the reader not being told things but being shown them and, therefore, solicits a greater degree of reader's involvement as they are left to draw their own conclusions from the dialogues, free indirect discourse, descriptions, etc. Conversely, texts shaped in the telling mode are mediated by the narrator who intrudes into the story to pass his comments on or sum up the events and conversations, thus limiting the reader's co-participation in the meaning-making process.

***References:***

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