

**FOCALIZATION IN MUNRO'S
"SOMETHING I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU" –
COGNITIVE POETICS IN PRACTICE**

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Abstract

The paper explores the dimensions of focalization from the point of view of cognitive poetics leaning on the idea that focalization directly affects the reading experience and, therefore, the reception of the narrative discourse. The importance of deixis, their referential value in the storytelling process and reception, is illustrated on the example of the short story "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You" by Alice Munro. Focalization is treated as a rhetorical instrument modifying various layers of the narrative discourse and strategically guiding the process of reception. The first section presents the theories relevant for the understanding of the concept of focalization, and it includes a short overview of deixis from the point of view of cognitive poetics. The analysis of the short story by Alice Munro follows to serve as an illustration of the rhetorical flexibility of storytelling. Finally, the concluding remarks offer arguments against the conventional comprehension and interpretation of third-person narration.

Key words: focalization, cognitive poetics, storytelling, deixis, rhetoric, short story, Alice Munro, Canadian Literature

**ФОКАЛИЗАЦИЈА У КРАТКОЈ ПРИЧИ АЛИС МАНРО
„НЕШТО САМ ХТЕЛА ДА ТИ КАЖЕМ“ –
ТУМАЧЕЊЕ ИЗ УГЛА КОГНИТИВНЕ ПОЕТИКЕ**

Апстракт

У раду се испитују димензије фокализације из угла когнитивне поетике, и то полазећи од идеје да фокализација директно утиче на искуство читања, односно на рецепцију дискурса наратива. На примеру кратке приче ауторке Алис Манро, „Нешто сам хтела да ти кажем“, показује се важност деиктика и њихове референцијалне вредности у процесу приповедања, а самим тим и у рецепцији текста. Фокализација се на овај начин третира као реторички инструмент који

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утиче на различите слојеве наративног дискурса, а стратешки наводи процес рецепције наратива. У првом делу рада представљају се теорије релевантне за разумевање концепта фокализације. Затим се даје кратки преглед погледа на деиксе из угла когнитивне поетике. Овај део прати анализа кратке приче Алис Манро као илустрација реторичке флексибилности приповедања, и на крају, у закључку се дају аргументи против конвенционалног схватања приповедања из трећег лица.

Кључне речи: фокализација, когнитивна поетика, приповедање, деиксе, реторика, кратка прича, Алис Манро, канадска књижевност

INTRODUCTION

The paper examines a peculiar case of third-person narration focalized from within the consciousness of the protagonist of Alice Munro's short story, "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You" (first published in 1972), with the view of explicating how the subtlety in the use of deixis renders the narrative discourse an interpretative challenge for the reader in transgressing literary conventions. In the introductory section, the paper presents valuable insight from cognitive poetics, and contemporary studies of rhetoric inspired by an interdisciplinary approach based on poststructuralist narratology and cognitive sciences. On the one hand, cognitive poetics offers insight into the mechanisms of storytelling and reception focusing on deixis as discourse-building elements upon which reception itself relies heavily, and the rhetorical approach to text that offers explanations so as to the effects the discourse produces. The sections on deixis and focalization are followed by the analysis of the short story, with the focus on the manner in which the author designs an enigmatic discourse. The concluding remarks summarize points against conventional third-person narration interpretation.

Considerations from Cognitive Poetics

Cognitive poetics focuses primarily on the process of reading, the very experience of the process, but by extension, it examines those aspects of cognition involved in the practice of storytelling. In *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* (2003), Gavins and Steen see cognitive poetics as methodologically equipped to consider the processes whereby art is experienced in a unified way – by examining the cognitive aspects of the experience regardless of the medium of transmission. Their argument is that art forms, "the structures of work of art" (2003: 1) should be examined in the effects they produce as a means to reach a greater insight into how the process of reception functions. In *Cognitive Poetics* (2005), Peter Stockwell sets the objective of this interdisciplinary approach to be the experience pertaining to the active process of reading and interpretation (1) and further defines this experience as something that happens "when we want

to *think about what we are doing* when we read, when we want to reflect on it and understand it" (2). Moreover, he distinguishes between active participation in the reading process that involves interpretation, "the science of reading" (Stockwell 2005: 2), and active (emotional and intellectual) participation that does *not* necessarily involve critical analysis of the narrative in question. We can notice that the two modes of reading happen simultaneously, but to different degrees depending on the literary competence of the reader. What Peter Stockwell calls "deliberate control over what we read" involves knowledge not only of conventions present in the specific genre – anticipation of sorts typical to the nature of literary work being read, but also "attentiveness" (2005: 20) on the part of the reader that is "partly a matter of experiential learning, and, with certain patterns [...] a skill" (2005: 20). Stockwell's attentiveness implies a process whereby the reader is guided through an array of figure and ground elements with the aim of keeping attention alive and facilitating the understanding of the narrative. Saliency, or the capacity of the reader to distinguish the 'important' from the 'less important', relies on many factors, among which are: the reader's previous knowledge on the subject, emotional investment of a specific kind – or the psychological effect that the narrative has on the reader; but also the successful use of deictic cues in the narrative, which is precisely the focus of this paper.

In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Richard Walsh argues that fictionality, as a narrative feature, presents a resource utilized by speakers to put into a specific structure, intentionally, the content of their thoughts by means of rhetorical devices (2007). Fictionality, in Walsh's terms, along with typically structuralist narrativity or cognitivist emplotment, almost coextensively reflects the human ability to shape their thoughts and feelings into creative and novel cognitive structures and mental spaces colored by individual and personal motivations. Walsh argues that storytelling, as a process, does not directly present the reader with a story in structuralist terms. In the process, the reader encounters a discourse that may motivate a specific understanding of the text by use of various rhetorical devices in different degrees, but it is the reader's sense-making capacity that enables the formation of the so-called cognitive structure. This does not, however, mean that the implied author, or author, bears no responsibility for the overall interpretation of the text. Margaret Freeman, for example, notices that both literary criticism, New Criticism, post-structuralism, etc., attempt in their own specific ways and for their own reasons, to deny the author any intentionality (Freeman 2009: 5) considering that the author is not the character or story she or he creates, nor do they need the first-hand experience to relate an event or idea. However, the author ultimately is the creator of the text and it is the "author's conceptual attitudes and motivations" (Freeman 2009: 5) that are the sinews of the discourse, and the process and mode of narration are particularly

important from both these authors' this point of view. The reading experience could be viewed as the other side of the storytelling coin. The rhetorical approach to narrative, and especially Richard Walsh's theory of the reader actually extracting his own story from the offered discourse (2007) which is coextensive with Peter Stockwell's among others, presents yet another important aspect of cognitive linguistics that cognitive poetics and narratology utilize for in-depth analysis of narratives. The manner in which the process or experience of reading works, as argued in cognitive poetics, has direct correlation to propositional attitudes studied by the philosophy of language and cognitive linguistics. According to John Searle in his study *Intentionality*, propositional attitudes, such as thoughts, beliefs or desires among other, possess a kind of motivation to be directed at one thing rather than another (1983) whereas sentences themselves, the ink on the paper that they are written or typed in, etc. are not by themselves propositional attitudes, and therefore do not possess the feature of intentionality. Once they are perceived or experienced by a subject, it is only then that they are given meaning. Essentially, the narrative discourse itself is an object, whereas the reader or the subject experiencing it is the source of the cognitive structure that would be known as the story. However, the very experience of reading must be examined with the view of two processes: reading the narrative discourse – the sequences of sentences whereby the subject employs a specific cognitive ability enabling them to position them temporally and spatially, but also, the process of immersion by which the subjects, albeit knowing that it is not real-life communication, allow themselves to experience the narrative as if it were true. In his study *Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Walsh sees this "suspension of disbelief"¹ as fictionality (2007). Basically, fictionality as a resource is recognized by the experiencing subject in the form of genre-specific, cultural practices associated with literature, etc. The subject is well aware of the fictional nature of the world of the narrative discourse, but consents to disregard it and perceive it as a real communicative act.

DEIXIS AND FOCALIZATION – THE CLUE IN THE TITLE

Cognitive poetics sees deixis, or patterns of deictic expressions, as "the capacity that language has for anchoring meaning to a context" (Stockwell 2005: 41) stemming from the idea of the embodiment of perception. Moreover, deixis do not simply refer to those aspects of the context that pertain to space and time and enable the positioning of the characters and narrators, but rather, deixis implicitly regulate the position of

¹ A term coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 to stand for the voluntary effort on the part of the reader to suspend their critical judgment on the possible implausibility of the narrative.

the author and reader in the reading process. More precisely, deixis here will be examined with regard to focalization: the point of view from which the narrating instance tells the story and strategically uses deixis – purposefully, in order to manipulate meaning in such a way that one subjective perspective, of the character or narrator, is put forward rather than another; or, to create such rhetorical effects whereby a certain interpretation is imposed on the reader by means of interpellation, etc. Specifically, when the narrator addresses the narratee in the second person (interpellation), or when the author intrudes by making a comment that is visibly addressed at the reader in order to influence the overall interpretation of the text, it is achieved by deixis. Basically, the use of deictic expressions shifts the reference point of view in the relation of the reader to another (focalizing) subject or object in the narrative discourse, thereby enabling, first of all, for the narrative discourse itself to progress from one point to another; and, second of all, the productive involvement in the discourse on the part of the reader – their being able to follow the sequencing of events, characters and their relations successfully.

Focalization has been one of the most problematic areas in both structuralist and post-structuralist narratology as it seeks to systematize the modes in which what is referred to in the narrative discourse is presented – from which point of view, vantage point, perspective, voice, mode, etc. – all being highly recycled, reformulated and often disputed terms. One of the most systematic structuralism-inspired approaches is that of Gérard Genette who sees the problem as that of “whose point of view orients the narrative perspective” (Genette 1980: 186) – who the speaker is, whether this entity belongs to the story world or not (homodiegetic and heterodiegetic; internal and external focalization, zero focalization, etc.), and Genette's criterion is that of knowledge-information relation. Namely, the narrator(s) possesses certain knowledge of the story-world, the characters and events, and the nature of the narrator's role can be assessed by examining what kind of information this entity² provides and whether it is natural or plausible that the entity has knowledge of it. However, such classifications prove to be inadequate or offer an incomplete account of the process of narration since one of the often encountered issues pertaining to focalization is narration from the third person perspective. In situations where the story is told by a seemingly unidentified narrator, but from a specific perspective of a character, or even multiple perspectives, Genette's roles cannot fully account for the created effect, and Alice Munro's short story “Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You” serves as an excellent illustration of this kind of

² Gerard Genette does not consider the narrator to be an entity per se, but for lack of a more appropriate term, the author of this paper will loosely keep ‘entity’ to stand for the narrating instance.

perspectival ambiguity. Granted, many a theorist has proposed specific models or different terminology regarding this and other focalization issues. For the purpose of the analysis in this paper, Mieke Bal's model is used because it recognizes focalization as the "layer between the linguistic text and the fabula" (1999: 146). In other words, focalization represents the manner in which the reader is allowed to follow the narrative progression from one spatial or temporal, or perspectival, point to another, by means of subjects referring to specific perceptible or imperceptible objects. In her reformulation of Genette's model, this author focuses on who 'sees' and 'speaks' as well, but she distinguishes between the focalizing subject, and the content of focalization of the very subject – the focalized object. One of the differences in Bal's viewpoint against Genette's, and the one that can be discussed further in relation to Munro's short story, is whether there is such focalization without the focalizer. Namely, Genette does not see the necessity for an instance of the focalizer per se, while Bal's conception of focalization clearly distinguishes this instance – be it unidentified or somehow mutable. Furthermore, in Munro's "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You," the problematics of focalization reveal the plasticity of the narrating modality – the focalizing perspective belongs to the focalizing subject, whereas the voice producing the focalization, with regard to deixis, suggests an unidentified heterodiegetic source, or rather strives to produce that particular effect. Mieke Bal's theory of focalization, the conception of focalization as co-extensive with the process of perception, implies the idea that perspective "covers both the physical and the psychological points of perception" (1999: 143), which further leads to the conclusion that any form of focalization, and even hypothetical, must be considered a subjective account, even if the subject is unknown or imperceptible to the reader. The question that follows is how it is that the readers decide, in these cases, where the zero referent point is, and whether it has any relevance to the reading process. Even descriptive elements in narratives can have rhetorical effects, that is – be shaped in such a way so as to present one aspect on the account of another, which further indicates a subjective perspective and a deictic center. In such cases where no clear indication of the focalizing entity's identity is given, we can also notice a tendency of the reader to override this obstacle in the gap filling process (schemata, or scripts, but also typical situational patterns containing cultural or stereotypical ideas about things in general). This is particularly relevant not only for the short story genre per se, as a genre that relies heavily on open-ended framing and reader's gap-filling, but the aforementioned story which clearly illustrates the extent to which interpretation depends on the reader's subjective experience. In the rhetorical sense, the deictic center may also be the overall cultural or ideological, or other, pattern in the absence of a perceivable entity so its relation to the known narrator(s) or characters can then be inferred based on the overall attitude.

MUNRO'S "SOMETHING I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU"

In *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, Hilary Dannenberg discusses readerly immersion – a particular aspect of the reading experience in terms of “the reader’s belief in the narrative world” (Dannenberg 2008: 21), and more precisely the cognitive ability to transfer oneself into a mental environment generated by the narrative discourse. The “mental environment” (Dannenberg 2008: 21), generated by a very specific mode of description, recollection, etc., in terms of the diegetic and the non-diegetic, narrative and non-narrative elements, provokes suspicion in the case of Munro’s short story and precisely because of the deictic ambiguity of the narrator. Dannenberg notices that the reader’s recognition of the subgenre occurs in the very process of immersion (Dannenberg 2008: 19), so the question is how it is possible for the reader to make such classifications that distinguish between what is, as Dannenberg notes, “realism” or “metafiction”. In other words, this author problematizes what text elements define the manner in which the reader makes connections between the narrator, characters, the events of which they may or may not be participants, the role of the implied author, the awareness of the narrator that they are telling the story, etc. Therefore, this paper focuses on deixis as text-elements that do not only facilitate and guide the reader’s role as the addressee or implied reader, but also their role against the text with regard to what is story-real, story-fictional or meta-fictional. In the case of “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You,” it is not the fictionality of the story itself that comes to the forefront, but the fictionality of the account of the episodes within the story – it is the problematics of narration that provide grounds for the open-ended interpretation and invite suspicion in terms of its meta-quality.

The story of “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You” is set in a small town, Mock Hill, and it features a number of characters whose lives, over a span of three decades, are intertwined in a tragic love story and an unrequited-love story. The story seemingly explores the complex relationships between the four characters (Et, Char – the sisters, and Arthur and Blakie Noble, Char’s husband and possibly lover). However, upon close reading, it becomes apparent that the accounts featuring these characters are actually episodes related from the perceiving ‘eyes’ of one of the characters, Et. The accounts highlight events from the period of when they were teenagers, throughout their adult life, and ultimately, in their old age when one of the characters, Char, eventually dies, and her sister moves in with her husband, almost as if taking the deceased woman’s role. The thread around which the narrative revolves, the two sisters’ relationship, becomes disturbingly problematic due to the suspicious circumstances of her death, but the problem is that outwardly the account provided via third-person narration, from a seemingly extra-diegetic position, conceals the actual focalizing subject – the possibly devious, Et.

This third-person narrative begins almost as if in medias res, with the account of a field trip organized by Blakie Noble, a character whose description, background and motives are provided by the narrator using both narrative and dramatic elements. It is particularly important to note that dramatic elements also represent debatable memories of the focalizing subject, but present a challenge upon first reading because of the convention of the mode of representation. Whereas the deictic references would normally reinforce the interpretation of the narration being performed by an omniscient entity, potentially an external (heterodiegetic) one to the characters' world, this mechanism soon turns into an ambiguous mode of operation of the narrative flow. More specifically, it becomes evident that the focalizing subject of the narrating entity is, in fact, Et – the character not only implicated directly or indirectly in the related episodes, but rather the voice behind the entire story. One of the cues that particularly unmasks the 'true identity' of the narrating voice, is the chronological inconsistency or simply the absence of chronological order that resembles the flow of consciousness, and in this case, of the character, who has potentially caused a tragic death.

In *The Fiction of Alice Munro – An Appreciation* (2008), Brad Hooper suggests that narration in "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You" is not fixedly focalized. Specifically, that "the title story is a third-person narrative, with alternating points of view, including omniscient views" (Hooper 2008: 46). The problem with this interpretation of focalization in the story is that such a loose perspectival anchor would provide for a clear variety of potentially conflicting or disparate accounts or views, and yet nowhere in the narrative discourse can such instances be found. In other words, the reader is only allowed accounts of events witnessed, heard of or contemplated by one character in particular, which is clearly supported by the fact that even descriptive portions of the discourse are related against the already-in-the-past contemplations by one character – the focalizing subject, Et. Clearly, being told from a third-person perspective, the narrative discourse merely masks the motivation behind the ambiguous storytelling thereby slightly entering the space of the detective or whodunit subgenre, but also, as mentioned earlier in terms of Dannenberg's explication of readerly immersion, allowing this playfulness to unmask the narrator and their metafictional moment in the story. As Dannenberg mentions on the account of the connection-making strategies inside the text, "plotting principles" (2008: 26), in terms of their rhetorical and immersion-enabling functions, show that both immersion (and expulsion) and interpretation of the narrative discourse largely depend on causal relations between elements in the text – "world-cohesive causation patterns" (2008: 42) which are socially and culturally dependent factors in the text. We may, therefore, safely assume that the entire narrative discourse represents the world-view of Et, which renders the

third-person mode a mere ruse. The events and characters pertaining to the narrative discourse do not actually exist *there*, in the discourse narrated, but are merely referred to as fragments of the character's consciousness.

Generally speaking, the interpretation of the text, as well as the satisfaction upon reading it, does not only emerge out of the plausibility of the given story, but rather the possibility of its having alternative endings. It seems that the significance of the linguistic skills pertaining to understanding deictic relations corresponds to the human cognitive ability to "generate multiple-world versions" (Dannenberg 2008: 47), or conceive and anticipate, multiple possible outcomes of the story. In the case of Munro's short story, which heavily relies precisely on the readers' willingness to not only accept the plausibility of the third-person account (initially), but also to themselves experience an epiphany of the open-end upon the realization that the deictic center of the narrator, the third person, may be understood as a maneuver. This narrative strategy, the ambiguity achieved by disguising the focalizing subject, allows the narrating entity to develop a rhetorical position in favor of the focalizing subject, at the expense of the objects. This is possible because deixis serve as connectors operating both locally, on the level of the discourse, but also externally. However, even if we consider the non-linguistic basis for deixis to be the embodied experience of the world, or if we consider them as a closed set of words, language tools, to be used with the view of fulfilling a grammatical function, it also seems plausible that they depend largely on the "psychological, cultural, and sociological conditions" (Fauconnier 1994: 10), and thus influence our comprehension of linguistic phenomena in specific ways. Surely, deictic expressions are not uniquely accountable for the general ability to follow narrative progression and interpret it successfully, but they set the groundwork for meaning generation on the basic linguistic level. Furthermore, as is the case with Munro's short story masterpiece, the use of deictic expressions in a particular context enables overall comprehension. Without expressions that would establish the zero-point of reference (Stockwell 2005: 43), expressions such as 'I' and 'you' or 'here' and 'there', the building of context itself would not be possible, and meaning would not be achieved considering that cognitive structures would simply flow aimlessly, unspecified in terms of what it is that they relate to. Therefore, the initial strategic use of third-person narration promises objectivity and guides the reader in the direction of suspending suspicion towards the supposed naiveté of the character of Et. And yet, ultimately, it is the deictic marking in the very title of the short story, and at the end of the narrative discourse, the 'I' (referring to Et, the character and the focalizing subject) that reverses the strategy and destabilizes the credibility and believability of all of the episodes, by extension allowing for a number of alternative interpretations not only of the end-

ing, but the episodes themselves. Postmodern writing, it could be mentioned, thrives on such indeterminacy, overflowing the reader with purposefully destabilized cognitive structures.

In “Narrative Comprehension and the Role of Deictic Shift Theory,” Erwin Segal suggests that narrative discourse can be analyzed in terms of “sentence and paragraph structure, tense, intersentential connectives, lexical choice, pronominalization, and other textual details” (in Duchan et al. 2009: 16), which is not entirely novel in narratological investigation of literary works. Such discourse analysis pertaining to literature has been done almost intuitively. Segal explains the ability of the readers to immerse themselves in the fictional world as the “deictic shift” that enables them to “get inside of stories and vicariously experience them” (Duchan et al. 2009: 14-15). Stockwell explains this on the basis of the ability to project deixis (2005: 43) by which the reader can follow multiple reference points at once, as well as be aware of their interrelatedness. Furthermore, the characters in narratives are not relationally fixed to the narrative discourse itself, but rather their reference points flow according to the relations they bear to events, other characters, or socio-cultural phenomena. In the said story, the deictic center can, again, be found only in Et, which also works on the thematic levels – both the overt and covert. Deictics enable the readers to temporally, spatially and person-wise, navigate events in the world of the story:

[I]n fictional narrative, readers and authors shift their deictic center from the real-world situation to an image of themselves at a location within the story world. This location is represented as a cognitive structure often containing the elements of a particular time and place within the fictional world, or even within the subjective space of a fictional character. (Duchan et al. 2009: 15).

Ultimately, deixis are in the service of positioning the reader against the narrative-specific notions pertaining to the real world, but also against the narrator, characters and the very story world of the narrative. Segal’s, and others’, interpretation of the value of deictic centering is particularly useful in determining the *fixedness* of interpretation, and “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You” is illustrative of how the deictic shift, relying on the reader’s experience and expectations of the genre, can be manipulated in order to rhetorically, or otherwise, disturb interpretation.

Whereas the deictic center is kept out of plain sight of the reader until the very end of the narrative discourse, both the timing of the particular episodes related in the course of the narrative discourse, and their lexical and attitudinal characteristics suggest a deictic center within the character of Et, and therefore, ultimately, reveal an entirely subjective and rhetorically charged account – contradictory to the convention implied by the superficial deictic reference strategy.

The short story in question has its chronological order, the narrative discourse does not. It is a stream of contemplations and memories of the main character, as if glued together by her erratic and obsessive memory. These events or memories seem unrelated if the supposedly naively truthful narrative of Et is taken uncritically, and since they are presented in episodes triggered by particular diegetic stimuli, their order in the narrative discourse must be analytically assessed by the reader in terms of their rhetorical dimension. The narrative discourse begins in the past already – thirty years after Blaikie and Char had had a romantic relationship, and ends with Et and Arthur living together after Char's death, which is the time many years after the moment of the beginning of the narrative. The episodes that make the narrative, however, cover the span of the period before Blaikie Noble or Arthur ever came into the picture. The 'photograph' that triggers Et's memory and the account of the washing day are together, chronologically, the first event in the story. The transition of Et from being the younger sister of Char, into awareness of her sister's beauty, as well as jealousy that would, in the next thirty years, evolve into a devious provocation, possibly murder or suicide, but certainly Char's death. The description of the photograph, as well as the overall atmosphere and 'feel' of the occasion and situation (Munro 2004: 7) allows the insight into the source of the entire story. The narrator uses the third-person strategy to relate Et's innermost thoughts, and in those terms, the maneuver operates perfectly in creating the illusion of objectivity since the characters are observed as if from a neutral standpoint – the episode being a contemplation about a photograph. However, the focalizing subject's perspective is revealed through the choice of scenes and imagery: Char is described through the eyes and mind of Et in her movement, but also in relation to Et's perception of her sister's personality and sensibility. At the same, Et's thoughts, unavailable when it comes to other characters, are revealed by the voice of the narrator. This would not problematize objective third-person narration, nor omniscience, if the story was not told exclusively from one focalizing diegetic position. What potentially complicates the interpretation of the narrator's perspective are the non-narrative elements, such as the reported conversations (dramatic elements), such as in the scene with the reference to Arthur's, one of the character's, namesakes from a legend (Munro 2004: 4). Even though dramatic elements normally provide a more accurate account of the events – from the perspective of the omniscient narrator – these bits pertain to the specific scenes related from the point of view of Et, or, more precisely, from her intentionally or unintentionally faulty memory. The question that becomes foregrounded is whether the non-narrative elements actually occur in the reality of the story-world, or whether they are fragments of Et's memory – possibly compromised by her emotions, motivations, the rhetorical strategy used to cover up a guilty conscience, or

other. The use of deixis in both narrative and non-narrative elements of the story creates a superficial feeling that the narrator is unequivocally relating an account uninspired by the particular intention of the character. However, the deictic center of the title itself, as well as the very closure of the story, reveal that the uncritical approach to the narrative discourse might limit the scope of interpretation. In the title, “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You,” the deictic reference *I* subtly nudges the reader in the direction of thinking that there might be a confession by one of the characters solving the puzzle of the open-ended story. Additionally, it also retrospectively calls for an assessment of the focalizing positions – both at the level of individual sentences, and then, at the level of the entire discourse.

The chronology of the narrative segments suggests a rhetorical intent on the part of the focalizing subject. More specifically, Blaikie Noble (the first focalized object in the narrative) is from the very beginning presented as a womanizer, which is clearly both Et’s impression and rhetorical goal in interactions where she mentions him, especially to her sister Char. Interestingly, she would comment of the said character somewhat differently when it comes to Arthur. The object-bound accounts are only subtly re-examined, again from the focalizing eye and mind of Et, as her memories progress.

Char and Blaikie seemed to her the same kind of animal – tall, light, powerful, with a dangerous luxuriance. They sat apart but shone out together. Lovers. Not a soft word, as people thought, but cruel and tearing. There was Arthur in the rocker with a quilt over his knees, foolish as something that hasn’t grown its final, most necessary, skin. Yet in a way the people like Arthur were the most trouble-making of all. (Munro 2004: 16)

Third-person narration, although it need not necessarily remain objective or one-subject-bound, in this particular narrative discourse, offers no insight into the focalizing perspectives of other characters. Char and Blakie remain “the same kind of animal” throughout the discourse, enabling the focalizing subject to create a suitable background to explore the short story convention by leaving it open-ended, considering the meta-fictional character of the narration. Moreover, the *whodunit* impulse that the strategic narration achieves relies heavily on the focalizing center never shifting: it is Et’s perception of Arthur that leads to an alternative interpretation of the poison bottle that she supposedly discovers in the cupboard – it is the ambiguous narrative voice that complicates the reliability of narration. For illustration, in the scene where the protagonist smells the rodenticide (Munro 2004: 15), the supposed spontaneous insight covertly alludes to her previous mention of Char and Blakie as animals (Munro 2004: 16).

Likewise, in the episode where Et's traumatic experience revolving her brother's death becomes known, the omniscience of the narrator reveals ambiguity that can be interpreted only in two ways: Et is the only focalizing subject, and object at the same time since it is only her inner world that is related by the narrator; or that the strategy used to tell the story of Et is based on a simple narrative trick relying on intentional deictic obscurity. The purpose of such a ploy in this case, then, is to achieve the typically postmodern effect of the short story – one that opposes resolution and keeps the reader in the process of the story. Such an effect would not be possible had Munro allowed her focalizing subject, the diegetic entity – the protagonist, Et – to address the reader openly through the voice of the narrator.

She [Et] didn't like the bleak notoriety of having Sandy's drowning attached to her, didn't like the memory people kept of her father carrying the body up from the beach. She could be seen at twilight, in her gym bloomers, turning cartwheels on the lawn of the stricken house. She made a wry mouth, which nobody saw, one day in the park when Char said, 'That was my little brother who was drowned.' (Munro 2004: 8)

Instead, the protagonist's inner world is indirectly revealed to the reader through narration that stimulates doubt precisely through imitating objectivity. The resistance to closure, which would be the resolution of the circumstance of Char's death, relies on a single thought by the protagonist, which is, incidentally, the title of the story indicating that focalization is sourced from this particular character. Furthermore, the crafty manner in which characterization is achieved indirectly through Et's experience of the other characters suggests that even generalizations come from this character's perception of herself, other people, and her projections onto them. The representation of all the other characters – Char, Arthur and Blakie – is achieved through the prism of the focalizing center of the story, which is not the omniscient narrator, but a diegetic entity – Et.

To illustrate, the story opens with an inherently dramatic and non-narrative element per se, guiding the reader to decode this particular narrative element in terms of an objective account of the event in the story. However, even if this instance, as well as other dramatic ones, might be interpreted as related by an external source, it still supports character-bound focalization, to use Bal's term. The very choice of the dramatic bits comes from Et's own memory, and the experience of the dramatic elements is expressed through one single character's internal comprehension and judgment of the circumstances. Et remembers what she has told her sister after a fieldtrip organized by Blakie, as well as her sister's reaction to it – one that is clearly contrasted with her own evaluation of Char's mental state:

‘Anyway he knows how to fascinate the women,’ said Et to Char. She could not tell if Char went paler hearing this, because Char was pale in the first place as anybody could get. She was like a ghost now, with her hair gone white. But still beautiful, she couldn’t lose it. (Munro 2004: 2)

The estimation of Char’s physical reaction, and therefore the focalizing subject, can only be retrospectively ascribed to Et, considering the illusion of the dramatic, non-narrative, opening of the story. However, the texture of the narrative discourse is such that it subtly evades overtly relating the descriptions seemingly external to Et (focalized objects), while in fact translating her projections of them as representation. Essentially, then, it is her internal perceptions which are related as external pertaining to characters as focalized objects, but also herself. However, the narrative strategy sidesteps this observable foregrounding of a single character by avoiding direct referencing – instead of clearly attributing the deictic center of the focalizing subject to Et, the narrator increases tension by disallowing the reader a clear referencing source.

A very good example of an internally focalized object would be the protagonist’s contemplation of the moment she understood she was jealous of her sister (Munro 2004: 8), and this moment again focalizes the internal world of Et exclusively. In this instance, as Et recognizes her internal conflict about her sister’s beauty, Et not only focalizes Char, but her own perceptions of her sister as well, playfully revealing the narrating strategy emphasizing the disdain for contradictions, ‘things out of place’ and “mysteries or extremes” (Munro 8). Hooper considers this to be the instance of omniscient narration. However, it is clear that the distribution of Et as the focalizing subject is such that she is absolutely dominant among the characters, or rather, the deictic center of the third-person narration only relates perceptions *about* or *her* experience of other characters.

Et does not figure in the story as the focalized object, unless she positions herself as such. Instead, her experience of other characters’ qualities strategically blends into third-person perspective. It is Et’s perception of Blakie as attractive, yet “corrupted by charm” (Munro 2004: 9), as is the absence of corruption in Char, and the deictic strategy in narration adds another layer to the narrative – the dissociation of Et from the suggested involvement in the death of her sister. The maneuver, the covert metafictional nature of the narration allows for the slips or the incongruities to provide more information than the character, as the focalizing subject, actually wants to reveal. Absences, though not ellipses per se, are a distinguishing feature of Munro’s storytelling technique, for these provide additional clues on the narrative flow and the culmination that resists denouement.

Another straightforward example of an external focalized object is the already mentioned bottle of rat poison Et finds in the kitchen cup-

board while making Arthur's eggnog (Munro 2004: 15). The "strange liquid" (Munro 2004: 15) is the expression of Et's perception of the bottle and not necessarily the intrusion of omniscient narration. All the information provided, all the details, are available from Et's vantage point. Et as the focalizing subject gives the physical description and the assessment of the perceptible qualities of the focalized object in her hand. Similarly, a keen observer that she is, she will give her account of Blaikie Noble's behavior with women on the tour bus (Munro 2004: 3) she herself is on, and these observations are undoubtedly infused with her internalized values and beliefs. In other words, it is Et who evaluates women as "scrawny or silly" (Munro 2004: 3), as well as his look as "a gentle and laughing but ultimately serious" (Munro 2004: 3). Even though Char is on the bus, with the protagonist, her perception never breaks through to the narrative discourse, and this is because she, ironically, much like the other two characters, represents only the object to Et's *mind's eye*. The additional layer to the already focalized scene is contained in the brackets where Et's thought process is presented (Munro 2004: 3), and all of these support the angle here that narration is done exclusively from her own vantage point. As the focalized object, in this case Blaikie, is spatially in proximity to the focalizing subject (Munro 2004: 3), Et observes his movements and body language, and yet the focalization then shifts to Blaikie's "look" – or what she believes is the "look" in his eyes – the imperceptible focalized object. So, the focalized object would have been external in the case of third-person narration, but here, it is entirely internal because it refers to Et's understanding of his motivation to find a connection to every one of the women present. By extension, the object of focalization is Et's understanding of passion. Et remarks a "look" that she believes might be the "look" that a man could have looking into the eyes of a woman whom he desires sexually, and this conclusion is based on her observing him with her sister. The use of modal verbs also goes in favor of the proposition that narration is never omniscient in "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You" – poly-modality implies hypothetical reasoning on the part of Et who does not describe or relate a direct account of her memory, but reveals her own process of piecing together the puzzle that are her sister and her former lover.

The open-ended closure of the story containing the dramatic element that is the title (Munro 2004: 26), produces the final effect in that it reverses the deictic center of the entire narrative process even though at the level of the sentence it persists. What becomes evident is that the sole source of representation is the protagonist herself – the narrator, masked as character, the focalizing subject.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, third-person narration usually creates the illusion of reliability, which in the case of “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You” simply does not work, despite the intentional deictic centering at the sentential level of the discourse. The narrating instance voicing Et as the focalizing subject does not only rely on the literary convention promising reliability, but the flow of the discourse cleverly *guides* to conclusions about its veracity within the story-world, especially in combination with anachronous episodes which gradually provide additional information about whether the narrator is to be *trusted*, or whether there might be any manipulative strategies shaping the discourse. This also emphasizes the metafictional quality that the third-person narration should conventionally strive to disguise. In the case of “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You,” the narrator purposefully allows for the events to be incompletely communicated – as a subjective account of one character’s life is presented, but in such a way so as not to persuade, but rather to dissuade, awaken suspicion and, ultimately, to create the singular effect that characterizes the short story as a genre, and in this case, in a typically postmodern manner. Considering that the narrator must be the filter of what is related to the reader, the dominant and exclusive focalization of a single character’s consciousness suggests the complex plotting scheme of the implied author, which is another argument against understanding third-person narration in this story as extra-diegetic and omniscient.

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**ФОКАЛИЗАЦИЈА У КРАТКОЈ ПРИЧИ АЛИС МАНРО
„НЕШТО САМ ХТЕЛА ДА ТИ КАЖЕМ“ –
ТУМАЧЕЊЕ ИЗ УГЛА КОГНИТИВНЕ ПОЕТИКЕ**

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Резиме

У раду се испитују димензије фокализације из угла когнитивне поезике, и то полазећи од идеје да фокализација директно утиче на искуство читања, односно на рецепцију дискурса наратива. На примеру кратке приче ауторке Алис Манро, „Нешто сам хтела да ти кажем“, показује се важност деиктика и њихове референцијалне вредности у процесу приповедања, а самим тим и у рецепцији текста. Фокализација се на овај начин третира као реторички инструмент који утиче на различите слојеве наративног дискурса, а стратешки наводи процес рецепције наратива.

Кроз дискусију која се бави, како прегледом литературе из области когнитивне поезике, тако и деиксама, а затим и рецепцијом текста, рад се фокусира на реторичку димензију фокализације у процесу приповедања ослањајући се на појам фикционалности, и истражује лингвистичке, али и друштвено-културолошке димензије текста које могу утицати на разумевање представљеног дискурса. Дискурс наратива у књижевности посматра се као свет који се тек референцијално ослања на реалност, односно на конвенције света чији искуствени квалитет користи у стварању фикционалног света. У том смислу, на примеру кратке приче Алис Манро „Нешто сам хтела да ти кажем“, конвенционални поглед на фокализацију из трећег лица тестира се кроз примену инструмената које нуди теоретичарка Мике Бал, што доводи до закључка да структуралистички поглед на фокализацију не може нужно објаснити пластичност наративног поступка. Ова постмодерна кратка прича пример је метафикцијског наратива, и показатељ да на самом лингвистичком нивоу, кроз пажљиво читање и анализу деиктика, јесте могуће препознати мета-фикционални тренутак који конвенцију нарације и проповедања из трећег лица руши. У конкретном примеру приче „Нешто сам хтела да ти кажем“, приповедање из трећег лица које обећава објективно (или барем екстра-диегетичко) сагледавање света наратива, односно лажно ослањање на конвенцију која се код читаоца схвата као својеврсни код за тумачење, представља само облик реторички усмерене фокализације чији је центар, фокализацију субјекат, главни лик приче.