Reconciliation of Narrative and Feminist Criticism

In her work Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice (1992), Susan Snider Lanser tries to reconcile the feminist criticism and narratological views on literature and literary criticism. Being aware of the paradoxical aspect of her attempt, Lanser points out that “formalist poeties may seem to feminists naively empiricist, masking ideology as objective truth, sacrificing significance for precision, incapable of producing distinctions that are politically meaningful. Feminist criticism may seem to narrators naively subjectivist, sacrificing precision for ideology, incapable of producing distinctions that are textually meaningful” (Lanser: 4, 5). The meeting point of these two different literary approaches could be, according to Lanser, the narrative voice, if it is understood as both a narrative and political term. For this purpose, Lanser suggests the narrative voice articulate itself in three narrative modes. The first mode, the authorial voice, can be found in texts that are “heterodiegetic, public, and self-referential” (Lanser: 15). The second mode, the personal voice, refers to “narrators who are self-consciously telling their own histories (Lanser: 18). The third mode, the communal voice, refers to texts “in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textu-

Гоце Смилевски

Родовото недоразбиране во „погрешно разбрани зборови“
(третиот дел од Недогнствувалата песношти на Јосеф Шопенгауер) од Милан Кундера

Помиравање на нарратологијата и феминистичката критика

Во нејзиното дело Фикциии на автентичноста: жените, јаснинките и наративниот глас (1992), Сузан Ленсер (Susan Lanser) се обидува да ги помири феминистичката критика и нарратолошките погледи на литературата и литературната критика. Имајќи-во предвид парадоксалниот аспект на нејзиното обид, Ленсер укажува на тоа дека „формалистичката поетика може да им се чини на феминистките наивно емпиристика, маскирајќи ја идеологијата како объективна вистина, жртвувајќи го значењето за јасноста (прецисноста), без способност за создавање обележја со политичко значење. Феминистичката критика може да им се чини на наратологиите наивно субјективна, со тенденција да ја жртува пречисноста во името на идеологијата, неспособна за создавање на обележја со текстуално значење“ (Lanser: 4, 5). Допирната точка на овие два различни пристапи на литературата би можел да биде, според Ленсер, наративниот глас, доколку тоа би се наставило едновремено и како наратолошки, и како политички термин. За таа цел, Ленсер предлага наративниот глас да биле согледан низ његовата артикولاцис во три наративни модели. Првият модел, авторскиот глас, може да биде...
Kundera and the Creation of Literary Characters

"It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived. They

Maybe it was Lanser's paradoxical, and in some way utopian project, to reconcile narrative and feminist criticism that inspired me to use her theory on narrative voice in a paradoxical way. To apply it to an author that is not only non-female (Lanser's book title suggests, although does not limit, applying the theory on narrative voice to women's writers), but is also highly discussed concerning his narrators' notions towards the women. At the same time, I feel "allowed" to do this analysis by Lanser herself, as she points out that describing the "complexities in some women's writings I am not, however, suggesting any kind of 'authentic' female voice or arguing that women necessarily write differently to men. Rather, I believe that disavowed writers of both sexes have engaged in various strategies of adaptation and critique that make their work 'dialogical'"..." (Lanser, 8).

Кундер и создавањето на книжевните ликови

"Би било бесмислено доколку авторот би се обидувал да го увери читателот дека неговите јуници навистина

tightly inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community" (Lanser: 21).

Можеби токму парадоксалното и на некој начин утописки проект на Ленсер за једноставнање на наратологијата и феминистичката критика ми инспирираше да ја употребам нејзината теорија за наративниот глас на парадоксален начин – да ја применам на автор кој не само што не е женски пол (насловот на книгата на Ленсер сугерира, како не лимитира, употреба на теоријата на наративниот глас на женски-авторки), туку е воедно проблематизиран неговиот однос како наратор кон жените. Во исто време, чувствувам дека ми е "допуштено" да го сторам тога токму од страна на Ленсер, бидејќи самата таа потенцира дека описувајќи ја "комплексноста во некои дела на женски-авторки сепак не заговарам некаков вид на 'автентичен' женски глас ниту пак докажувам дека жените секогаш ихтуваат различно од мажите. Всушност, верувам дека непознатите автори од двата пола се вклучуваат во разни стратегии на адаптација и критика што ги чини нивните дела 'дијалогични'("..." (Lanser, 8).
were not born of a mother's womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation" (Kundera, 1990: 39).

One can say that these words of Kundera are simplifying the alchemic process of creating a character. I would agree that he is simplifying the process, but I would add that he is also honest. And, if we want to be simplifying and honest towards the writers the same as Kundera is towards the way in which he creates his characters, we would say that they (the writers) are born out of stimulating writers - ancestors or from basic novels of these parent writers. Kundera (as a writer) is, for example, born out of Sleepwalkers by Herman Broch and Man without Qualities by Robert Musil. He would certainly add a few more crucial authors (Cervantes, Rabelais, Diderot, to name but a few), but his explanation of his notion towards the creating of characters that is quoted above can be linked precisely to the two aforementioned novels. His theory that characters are constructed out of a stimulative phrase can be linked with the third part of Broch's Sleepwalkers, where in one of the five narrative streams, titled "The Decay of Values" Broch, in a philosophical manner, explains the deep, social, psychological, even metaphysical background on which are drawn the stories of his characters. It can also be linked with Musil's Man Without Qualities, because of the wish (even desire) of Ulrich to define the problems, to explain the condition, in which he or the other characters are in, that leads towards the explanation of himself. Kundera's wish to give birth to the character out of a stimulating phrase, i.e. to define the character with such phrase, leads the reader towards exploring how the authorial voice of the narrator in Kundera's novels is connected to that process of giving birth, and its specific way of choosing exact phrases or a basic situation for creating particular characters.
The Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words

The narrator in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* has an authorial voice. The novel is divided into seven parts, and is narrated by a reliable narrator that has access into the consciousness of the four main characters. In each of the seven parts the narrator chooses a different character to whose consciousness the narrator has access. In the first part it is Tomas’s consciousness, in the second it is Tereza’s, in the third one Sabina’s and Franz’s, in the fourth it is Tereza’s, in the fifth it is Tomas’s, in the sixth - Sabina’s and Franz’s, and in the seventh again Tereza’s consciousness. This method allows the narrator to narrate different sequences from a different point of view, but also represents different opinions of the characters on the same subjects.

Not that the authorial narrator only mediates the voice of the characters, but also interprets their experience. The ‘authority’ of the authorial voice is the least and the most visible ‘authorial voice’ in the third part of the novel, called “Word Misunderstood”. It contains a subchapter divided into three parts, titled “A Short Dictionary of Words Misunderstood” that expresses the notion of Sabina and Franz towards the same subjects/terms, presenting also events of their past that played a role in the forming of their notion towards these subjects/terms. Although it can seem that the narrator here simply stands back telling the characters’ opposing opinions, at the same time the authorial voice says ‘the last word’, and is linking the past events to the actual situation of misunderstanding. It is
rality: „postapki so kon heterodiegetskite, javni, autoreferencijsalni naratorini gizveduvat ovine ‘ekstrarepresentativni’ funkciini kon ne se neophodni za raskazhuvaneeto na prikazatna” (Lanser: 17). Naratorot e ono koj vo romanot na Kunndera suterira deka „dodeka lugeto se ushte mlaadi i dodeka odsvonuvata pochetnite faktovni na muzikata kompozicija na nivinito život, mojkta te kompozicija da ja pisuvata zaedno i da gi razmenuvata motivite, (...) no ako se zapoznata kog se veke postari, kako Franz i Sabina, nivnite muzikchi kompozicii se povekse ili pomalka zaokrugheni i sekoj motiv, sekoj predmet ima ponakdo znachenje vo sekoja od niv” (Kundera: 88-89). Ottuka, ovoo del od romanot ne e neophod na raskazhuvaneeto na prikazatna, no vo isto wreme e esencijslen za razbiraane na nedorazbiraeto pomesevu Sabina i Franz, a autoriski raskazuvach e dirigent na nivnite muzichka kompozicija, razmenuvajki gi mozivnite na ovine razlicchi, kompleksirani muzichchi kompozicii so pretostavenot citatel, dodeka likovite ne mogat da gi razmene tite motivini megu-sebeno.

The first subchapter of “A Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words” discusses the term ‘woman’. The crucial point in analyzing this subchapter is that the characters that have different notions towards the term and are differently positioned towards it, partly through biological differences. One of them, Sabina, by definition of her gender is a woman. As the narrator points out in the very first sentence of the subchapter, “Being a woman is a fate Sabina did not choose”. Being indifferent towards ‘being a woman’, she will not understand the solemnity of Franz when he will tell her “Sabina, you are a woman!” Only later she will realize that being a woman for Franz does not signify “one of the two human sexes; it represented a value” (Kundera: 89). But, what the character will never know (and what the narrator knows and lets be known) is
Го сознаат (а што нараторот го знае и му го дозвоjuва на претпоставеното читател тоа знаеше) e причината зошто да се биде жена е вредност за Франц и зошто секоја биолошка жена не може да биде жена. Авторскиот глас не води кон минатото на Франц, кога тоj и неговата мајка биле оставени од татко му. Во секавањето од детството, неговата мајка јa задржуvala смртеноста во негово присуство и тоа остава силна импресија кај него, откако тоj го солидува нејзиното силно страдање преку нејзината неможност да се концентрира додека сe обува, и таа оди низ градот со различни чевли. Читателот може да заклучи: жената која е жена не само по случајност (биолошки), тук и како личност која вреди да биде жена, е жена личност која умеет да страда, но во исто време и да го скрие своето страдање. Ваквинот однос кон жената и кон страдањето бо можел да биде силно критикуван од феминистички детерминирани критичари(ки), но во истото време може да биде и ценет - Кундер, во повеќето од неговите романи, покажува наклоност кон стишната, неизговорена тага и страдање.

Додека првата разлика во разбирањето на зборовите беше основана пред сè на биолошко ниво и исто на различните минати искусства на лично ниво (мајкадете), во останатите потпоглаваја голема улога во ова недоразбирање игра разликата во нивниот класен, национален и брачен статус.

Во потпоглавјето „Верност и предавство”, нараторот раскажува за односот на Франц кон неговата мајка. За Франц, верноста е љубов која ведно трае, како што тоj ја љубел својата мајка - до нејзината смрт и по неa тоj продолжил да јa сакa во своите спомени. Раскажуваjќи јa за неa честo на Сабина, Франц се надева дека таа „каj биде магенирана од неговата способност да биде вечен, дека тоj ќe јa освои”. Во тоj миг нараторот прави рез во објаснувањето на односот на Франц кон

the reason why to be a woman is a value for Franz, and why every biologically woman cannot be a woman. The authorial voice leads us to Franz’s past, when he and his mother have been left by his father. In the child’s memory the way his mother was keeping herself calm in the presence of the young son left a strong impression, as he realized her great suffering through her inability to concentrate while putting on shoes, so she walks in the city with different shoes. A reader can conclude that a woman that is a woman not only by coincidence (biologically), but also as a person that is worth to be a woman is a female person who knows how to suffer, but at the same time knows how to hide the suffering. This can be strongly criticized by feminist determined critics, but at the same time it can be prized. Kundera, in many of his novels, shows some sympathy towards the subdued, unuttered sorrow and suffering.

If the first difference in understanding the words was based mostly on a biological level, and also on a different past experience on an individual level (mother-child), in the other subchapters a big role in this misunderstanding is also the difference in their class, national and marital status.

In the subchapter “Fidelity and Betrayal” the narrator talks about the notion of Franz towards his mother. For Franz, the fidelity is a love that lasts forever, as he loved his mother – till her death, and after that he continued to love her in his memories. Speaking often of his mother to Sabina, Franz hopes that she “would be charmed by his ability to be faithful, that it would win her over”. At this moment the narrator makes the cut in explaining Franz’s notion towards fidelity, and, mostly addressing the reader,
The difference in Sabina and Franz's notion towards the opposite fidelity/betrayal, unlike the previous one, has nothing to do with the gender difference, but most of all with their individual and national difference. Franz connects it with his individual experience of love towards his mother, that is empty of any ideological or political connotation, while Sabina's experience is ideologically colored. As a part of the Czech nation, she has experienced pressure towards her personal relationship – her father did not let her go out of the house after he heard she has a boyfriend which is part of growing in patriarchal surrounding, and a pressure in her creative work – it was forbidden for her to paint in the manner she liked (which was related to studying painting in a socialist country). Hence she connects betrayal with the rebelling against these authorities and borders, for her “betrayal means breaking the ranks” (Kundera: 91).

Even when the characters communicate some of the terms of misunderstanding, they do not discuss it till the last
point and thus the misunderstanding continues. It is the case in the subchapter "Music". After Sabina says to Franz (that adores every kind of music) that she may like music if she lived in some other time, she remains silent—silent for Franz, although not silent for the reader. The narrator has an additional explanation for the reader: "She was thinking of the days of Johann Sebastian Bach, when music was like a rose blooming on a boundless snow-covered plain of silence" (Kundera: 93). The narrator then makes a passage from the idea born in Sabina's imagination while discussing her notion towards the music with Franz to her past and the reason of her aversion towards the music, the reason that will be unknown to Franz. The music reminds her of a time when she was forced to spend whole summer vacations at a youth camp, working with other students on a steelwork construction site. During this time they were forced to listen to the joyful music celebrating the socialism from dawn till dusk.

"Parade". At this subchapter of "The Dictionary of Misunderstood Words" we can hear the authorial voice the most intensively: "I may put it another way: Franz felt his book life to be unreal" (Kundera: 100). This sentence, this part of the sentence, gives us an inspection how big a role the narrator has within the story, over what is told and how is it told. "I" (it depends on me) "may" (it depends on my will, I may, and I may not) "put it" (it is me that speaks, and what I say belongs to me) "another way" (for me there are always different possibilities to tell the story, I always choose the one). So, he puts it (the reason why Franz loves parades) in two different ways. If in the first case Franz was attending the parades as he wanted to rebel against the predetermined life, in the other
(причината зошто Франц ги сака парадите) на два различни начини. Ако во првот случај Франц ги посетува парадите заради желбата да го изрази својот бунт кон предетерминираноста на животот, при второт начин (кога нараторот го кажува што на инаков начин) Франц е во потрага по вистински живот надвор од неговиот книшки живот.

Најинтересно за интерпретација од феминистички аспект би било потпоглавјето „Сила“. Во него Сабина е опишана како жена која не знае што точно сака и во исто време како жена која сака да се почувствува како потчинета во одреден степен и во одреден миг (кога не знае што сака). И додека сепак постоише објаснување за неизнената фасинијација со предавството преку односот со неизненотот татко во минатото, неизнената фасинијација со силата изгледа дека е sui generis и без објаснување. Таа се чувствува сребра кога гледа колку е силен Франц кога тој го подига со една рака тешкиот стол високо над својата глава, но во исто време таа чувствува разочарување затао што тој е слаб кон луѓето со кои е близок и жали што никогаш не би ја наредувал.

„Сабина продолжи со своето меланхолично размишлување: што би било кога би имала маж кој би ја наредувал? Кој би сакал да господари со неа? Колку долго би можела да го издржи? Ни пет минути! Од што произлегува дека ниту еден маж не ја одговара. Ни силен ниту слаб.

‘Зошто не ја употребиш некогаш силата врз мене?’ рече таа.

‘Бидејки љубовта значи одрекување од силата,’ рече Франц нежно.

way (when the narrator puts it another way) Franz searches for real life out of his book life.

The most interesting for interpretation from a feminist point of view would be the subchapter “Strength”. In it Sabina is represented as a woman that does not know what she wants, and at the same time, as a woman that wants to feel submissive to some point and at some point (when she does not know what she wants). If there was an explanation for her fascination with the betrayal before through the relation with her father in the past, her fascination with the strength seems to be sui generis, and without explanation. She feels happy to see how strong Franz is when he raises with a hand a heavy chair, high above his head, but at the same time she feels disappointed that he is weak towards the people he is close with, and she regrets that he would never give her orders:

“Sabina proceeded with her melancholy musings: What if she had a man who ordered her about? A man who wanted to master her? How long would she put up with him? Not five minutes! From which it follows that no man was right for her. Strong or weak.

‘Why don’t you ever use your strength on me?’ she said.

‘Because love means renouncing strength,’ said Franz softly.
Sabina realized two things: first, that Franz’s words are noble and just; second, that they disqualified him from her love life” (Kundera: 112).

By the way the authorial voice presented Sabina’s thoughts, the reader can conclude that the narrator wants to create an image of Sabina as of a person that: 1) loves strength; 2) is disappointed when a strong person does not give orders; 3) at the same time, she would not be able to be with such a person, “not for five minutes”; 4) despite it, she wants a strong man to use his strength on her; 5) when a strong man refuses to use strength on her as “love means renouncing strength” she agrees with that idea, but at the same time disqualifies him from her love life 6) which means that she needs strength in her love life; 7) but as “love means renouncing strength”, there is no love in Sabina’s love life. The final conclusion of the reader, lead by the authorial voice of the narrator, is that what Sabina calls her own life having nothing to do with love, but with sex only.

It could be supposed that some of the misunderstood words played a role in naming a character. “Living In Truth” is a subchapter in “Words Misunderstood”, and it is a formula that Franz found in some of Kafka’s diaries, and that captivated him. For Franz living in truth means “not lying, not hiding, and not dissimulating”, although since the time he met Sabina he has to lie to his wife (Kundera: 112). Sabina believes that living in truth is “possible only away from the public”. The similar attitude towards the truth of Kafka and the character of Kundera’s novel may be crucial for naming the Swiss professor Franz. The same as Kafka, Kundera’s Franz is postponing the telling of the truth, although it is of prime importance to
Заключок

Дејот од Нешоднословава лесно лесно на посебеното кој го анализира во овој текст не е само објаснување на различните светови во кои живееа ликовите од романот, нако живееа еден покрај друг, туку е и во цврста спречева со романот како целина. На пример, потпоглавјето „Гробишта“ го осветлува крајот на Франц и можните краи на Сабина. Објаснувајќи го нивниот однос кон гробовите, нараторот вели: „За Франц гробиштата се градко складиште на камења и коски“, додека пак Сабина има поинаков однос кон неа, и „кога се чувствување слаба (...) таа шетање по некое од селските гробишта кон толку многу ги сакаше. На позадината од свири ридови, тие беа убави како заспивалка“ (Kundera: 104). Франц, кој се пораздоаш посакувал да живее во вистина, со цел да ја исполнат оваа желба оди во Камбоџа и таму умира во вистина. Врзаното натпис на каменот над неговиот гроб — „Враќање по долго скитање“, е ехо пронизано со иронија, ехо на парадоксот дека тој сакал да живее во вистина, а при крајниот обид да најде живеење во вистина ја наоѓа сопствената смрт. Сабина, која сака да биде крај гробови се пораздоаш кога ѝ бил потребен мир, решава да го напушти Париз заради страхов од

him, and it will take a long time before he will tell his wife he has a mistress. Franz Kafka has never sent to his father the letter he wrote for him, a letter which reveals the truth, maybe the most important one for understanding Kafka’s personality, his introversion, a struggle with authorities, and, I would suggest, his refusal to publish his novels.

Conclusion

The part of The Unbearable Lightness of Being that I analyzed in this text is not only an explanation of the different worlds in which the novel’s characters live, although they live by each other, it is also in a strong connection with the novel as a whole. For example, the subchapter “Cemetery” lightens Franz’s end and the possible end of Sabina. Explaining their attitude towards graves, the narrator says: “For Franz a cemetery was an ugly dump of stones and bones”, while Sabina has a different attitude, and “when she felt low [...] she would walk through one or another of the country cemeteries she loved so well. Against a backdrop of blue hills, they were as beautiful as a lullaby” (Kundera: 104). Franz, who always wished to live in the truth, in order to fulfill this wish goes to Cambodia, and there he dies in truth. The inscription adorning the stone over his grave — “A return after long wandering”, echoes with it’s irony the paradox that he wanted to live in truth, and in the final attempt to find a life in truth he finds his own death. Sabina, that always liked to be near graves whenever she needed peace, decides to leave Paris in fear of facing the vision of herself under a gravestone: “Yes, it was too late, and Sabina knew she would leave Paris, move on, and on again, because were
she to die here they would cover her up with a stone, in the mind of a woman for whom no place is home, the thought of an end to all flights is unbearable” (Kundera: 125). The gravestone here is a symbol of rest that is opposite of Sabina’s adventurous nature – she liked cemetery only when she felt low.

In his book The Art of the Novel, Milan Kundera claims that “all novels, of every age, are concerned with enigma of the self” (Kundera: 1989, 23). Later in the book, he stresses: “To apprehend the self in my novels means to grasp the essence of its existential problem. To grasp its existential code...” In the part called ‘Words Misunderstood’ I examine the existential codes of Sabina and Franz by analyzing a number of words [...] Each of these words has a different meaning in other person’s existential code” (Kundera: 29-30). What Kundera forgets is to mention the way how he structures the existential code of the characters of his novel, and how he structures their life stories in order to oppose each other. He forgets to mention his authorial voice that from behind leads a construction of the interaction of these existential codes.

In Fiction of authorities Susan Lanser suggests that personal voice is “less formidable for women than authorial voice, since an authorial narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgement, while a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person’s right to interpret her experience” (Lanser: 19). Kundera, although constructing an authorial voice for narrating his novel, wisely
 Mits to judge his characters often – he leads the narration in the way the reader could judge the characters in the way the narrator wants.

Translated by the author

References


Notes

1 John O’Brian’s discusses this problem (or ‘problem’) in the first part of his book Kundera and Feminism, called “Mis(representing) Women”.

2 In the Croatian edition of The Man without Qualities there is a large appendix with Musil’s remarks on writing the novel and drafts of the ideas of the work in progress. One of these texts is titled “The Method of Deduction” as a method of Ulrich’s thinking, and can be linked with what Kundera calls an existential code, that I will discuss in the conclusion of the paper.
"A Short Dictionary of Words Misunderstood" is, again, divided in subsubchapters (we will call them simply subchapters) and are named: "Woman", "Fidelity and Betrayal", "Music", "Light and Darkness", "Parades", "The Beauty of New York", "Sabina's country", "Cemetery", "The Old Church in Amsterdam", "Strength" and "Living in Truth".

3 "Краткиот речник на нераабраани зборови" е, одново, поделен на подотдвлажа (ние ќе ги наредуваме едноставно потподвлажа) кои се наречени: "Жена", "Верност и предавство", "Музика", "Светлина и темпина", "Паради", "Убивната на Њујорк", "Земјата на Сабина", "Гробишта", "Старата црква во Амстердам", "Сила" и "Живеење во вистина".