ABSTRACT

SELECTED JOURNALISTIC FICTION OF JOHN HERSEY, TRUMAN CAPOTE, NORMAN MAILER AND DON DELILLO: A NARRATOLOGICAL AND RHETORICAL STUDY

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Journalistic fiction is a borderline case between narrative fiction and journalism. Therefore, it is a fertile ground for examining the characteristics of narrative and distinguishing characteristics of fiction. Literary journalism/nonfiction can be defined as a prose form whose verifiable content is shaped and transformed into a story by the use of narrative and rhetorical techniques generally associated with fiction (see Connery 1992: xiv). My research analyses the famous journalistic novels in America in order to establish their character as narratives in which features of fiction, history and journalistic presentation are present. A narrative is a semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and casual way and, alternatively, as a complex phenomenon which can be analyzed from an infinite number of perspectives. The rhetoric of narrative is its power. It has to do with all those elements of the text that produce the many strong or subtle combinations of feeling and thought that we experience as we read. Gerard Genette, in his book (Narrative Discourse 1972), asks six questions about the act of narration, providing the idea that narrative is a discourse that follows conventions and rules like focalization, kind of narrator, narrative time, etc. Rhetorical approach is a reader-oriented criticism which has an acute sense of the audience as well as the process of communication. In its most classic (Aristotelian) sense, the study of rhetoric means an emphasis on figures and tropes, whereas in a broader sense it means looking at how texts affect readers and how narratives act as communication between author and reader (Kearns 1999: 6). In the study of nonfictional narratives, where the author deals with a “shared”, often publicly known events
or subject matter, and communicates his or her “vision” to the reader who then responds, the rhetorical approach is particularly important. It is my contention that the complex and less than clearly defined field of literary nonfiction/journalism requires a multilayered and many-sided theoretical-methodical approach. I will attempt to study how the themes have been rendered artistically as fiction rather than as journalism or history from the perspectives of narration.

The journalistic novels studied are those written by John Hersey, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Don DeLillo. The texts under study would be John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946), *The Wall* (1950); Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1966), Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* (1968), *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970) *The Executioner’s Song* (1978) and Don DeLillo’s *Libra* (1988), *Underworld* (1997) and *Falling Man* (2007). None of these authors’ works have previously been studied with a narratological approach concentrating on the ways in which they narrate and represent the real life events as history in fictional form. In each of the selected texts theoretical issues connected to their journalistic nature are analysed. The methods of research come mainly from narratology, and rhetorics being its essential element. Yet, narratology is not only a methodology used, but also an object of critical scrutiny. The theory of journalistic fiction as a genre is also discussed. In addition to analyses of the novels my research has two focal points: the poetics of the journalistic novel/ literary journalism, and the benefits and restriction of narratology in the American postwar twentieth century.

The novels analyzed also call into question the principal opposition between referentiality and fictionality. The narrator’s relationship to the story and the narratee is homodiegetic (narrator being a character of narration) in some cases and heterodiegetic in others. This effect of homodiegesis is created in Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* as the narrator assumes the same diegetic level with the historical characters depicted. Yet the narrator is not restricted by rules
normally governing homodiegetic narration. The narrator’s retrospective look at the story-world populated by the characters allows him to penetrate the character’s minds and also to move freely both in time and place. Still, the narrator is not “omniscient”, as he is not the creator of the world depicted. Truman Capote also appears to adopt an omniscient narrative voice in his book, occasionally entering the minds of his characters and describing their feelings and attitudes (Anderson 1987: 53). Zaverzedah speaks of the “bireferential” nature of (post)modernist “nonfiction novel”, which means that their texts combine an in-referential creation of a world “mapped out within the book” as well as out-referential “external configuration of facts verifiable outside the books” (1976: 55). If nonfiction is partly defined through its referentiality, fiction can be defined on the basis of nonreferentiality: “[W]hen we speak of the nonreferentiality of fiction, we do not mean that it can’t refer to the real world outside the text, but that it need not refer to it”.

Free indirect discourse (FID) is a narrative mode often discussed in connection with the fact/fiction dichotomy. All the novels analyzed in my research include passages of FID, and the mode is used in several ways. In some cases it is strongly contextualized by a narrator, other times not; some occurrences indicate sympathy, others irony between a narrator and a character. The narrative mode of Mailer’s book is based more on ID and FID than on DD, so that the “original” utterances of real-life characters are mediated and filtered through an artificial voice. This voice is an aesthetic construction governed by the artistically self-conscious author-narrator. The “Western voices” and the “Eastern voices” of The Executioner’s Song therefore emerge from taped interviews; these real-life voices are the actual materials upon which the book is constructed. With journalistic novels it is of particular interest that FID is often seen as a mode which makes it possible to present a fictional mind in an immediate present position. As the
deictic indicators of time in FID belongs to a character’s discourse, but the tenses to a narrator’s, the mode moves between there points of time and is able to mediate them. Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* has indirect means of narrating and representing in order to depict history which includes interpretative conflicts and open questions. The same is true of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. Mailer’s methods are more self-reflexive, on the other hand Capote follows “mimetic” practice.

The semiotic or narratological studies of the point of view or visuality of literary texts have traditionally focused on fictional narratives; it could be argued that nonfictional narratives like Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* can be equally interesting and complex in this regard.

*The Armies of the Night* serves as an example of narrative texts in which the character “sees” the story-world and the author-narrator “reports it”, for they are ontologically on different levels. Mailer’s subsequent *Of a Fire on the Moon* appears to be seeing the fragmented reality from various viewpoints simultaneously, and therefore disposing of illusion of one-dimensional mimesis traditionally connected with realistic or factual narratives. DeLillo, in *Libra* also uses narrative gaps and different viewpoints, still constructing a vivid picture which visualize that there is not only Oswald in the sixth floor window but other assassins, too, in the grassy knoll.

Each selected text for research has its own importance from the journalistic point of view in the literature. In the form of *Hiroshima*, Hersey has produced a masterpiece of unbiased journalism, and a modern classic which records the story of six people who had experienced the bomb. *In Cold Blood* describes the murder in 1959 of an affluent farmer, his wife, and his two teenage children, in a quiet part of Kansas, by a pair of petty criminals. It is subtitled “A true account of a multiple murder and its consequences”. A historical novel *The Wall* is about the Nazi destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. The novel was critically acclaimed and is considered to
be the first American novel about the Holocaust. *The Armies of the Night* is a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning non-fiction novel written by Norman Mailer and is a narrative, split into historicized and novelized account of the October 1967 March on the Pentagon. *The Executioner’s Song* is a 1980 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Norman Mailer that depicts the events surrounding the execution of Gary Gilmore by the state of Utah for murder. *Of a Fire on the Moon* is a work of non-fiction by Norman Mailer, first published in 1970. It is an extensive coverage of the Appolo 11 Moon landing (Project Appolo) from Mailer's distinctive point of view. A book about the history of event, and the John F. Kennedy assassination, *Libra* is also a study of the men who shape history, and the men who record history. *Libra* is a text that offers a threefold narrative structure: a "biography" of Lee Harvey Oswald; a plot to make an attempt on the life of President Kennedy, which is designed to be a "spectacular miss" (Libra 51); and the efforts of the retired secret service agent Nicholas Branch, who is trying to write a secret history of the assassination for the CIA.

Thus this study attempts to place the selected novels into a reflexive, reciprocal and rhetorical relationship with the *Theory of Literary Nonfiction*, while also examining the relationship between authors, texts, readers and subjects belonging to “the actual world”.