

Abstract

Literature should not be considered as a mimetic representation of reality, but rather as a form of communication that involves a sender, a receiver and a certain context. Thus, literature becomes an intentionally structured dialogue meant to arouse a specific response. The present article analyzes the dialogical essence of Dorothy Parker's short story "New York to Detroit". The undertaken study reveals the existence of a literary dialogue (between the writer and the reader), which is shaped around a literary-communicative intention.

The fundamental question: "What is literature?" still remains unanswered. Nobody can deny its existence, and, at the same time, nobody has come with a concrete definition to delineate what literature is. The literary critic, Tzvetan Todorov, asserts that "in the broader system of a given society or culture, an identifiable element exists that is known by the label *literature*" [9, p. 2], which, in Dines Johansen Jørgen's opinion, is "risky business" [5, p. 97] to define.

In his book *Discourse and Literature*, Guy Cook examines literature from a social perspective: "some texts become literary when presented as such by institutions or when read in certain ways by readers" [2, p.1]. This idea is close to Terry Eagleton's opinion who viewed literature as constituted of historically variable value-judgments which have a "close relation to social ideologies" [3, p.14].

Thus, undertaking the "risk" of assuming that literature is "primarily a mode of **social interaction** [underlined V. C.], reflecting and creating its own institutions and power relations" [2, p. 1] we believe that the literary text is a means of communication in which the writer aims not only at mirroring his perception of the world, but also at involving the reader in a dialogue. Hence *dialogism* should be regarded as a literary universal. Dialogism is a term associated with Mikhail Bakhtin's work, who maintained that any specific utterance is a contribution to a continuing human dialogue—that is, it is both a response to past uses of the language and an occasion for future uses: "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly oriented toward a future answer word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" [7, p. 117]. We assume that the author of a literary work attempts to provoke an answer in his reader through his text. He structures the text in the answer's direction so that the reader is able to decode the intended meaning.

The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin was the first to emphasize that the human life itself is dialogic in its essence: "To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to „Strategii actuale în lingvistică, glotodidactică și știință literară”, Bălți, Presa universitară bălțeană, 2009.

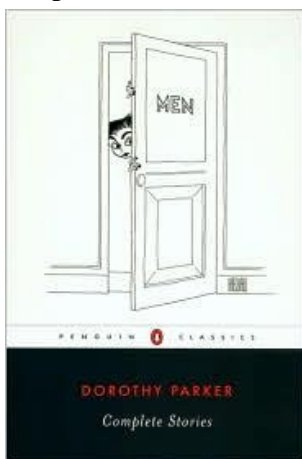
respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium” [1, p. 293].

Dwelling upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s perception of literature, Michael Holquist comes to the conclusion that “literature is another form of communication” [4, p.66]. The researcher asserts that “literary texts, like other kinds of utterances, depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when it is consumed” [ibid.].

Proceeding from the assertion that “life by its very nature is dialogic” [1, p. 293], and believing that literature is an attempt at reflecting this life, we regard reading of literature as participating in dialogue. The author intentionally communicates specific issues which are questioned, heeded, responded to, and agreed with by the reader.

Such a dialogue does not occur spontaneously. On the contrary, it is a well-planned discourse following a particular structure where the writer makes use of specific strategies which in his opinion are best suited to render his literary intention. Deborah Tannen’s premise is that “literary genres elaborate and manipulate strategies that are spontaneous in conversation” [8, p. 86]. Thus, literature is another form of dialogue, a more elaborate one.

In order to prove our thesis statement we analyzed Dorothy Parker’s short story *New York to Detroit*, where the author engages her reader in a dialogue through her main characters’ telephone conversation.



The first information was drawn from the paratext – “a concept related to published literary works that provides a framework for the written text” [10, p.1]. It includes “elements typically added during the distribution process by editors, printers, and publishers. It provides a reference for the authorial text” [ibid.]. Here, the Penguin publishing group appears as a third part in the author-reader dialogue whose primary role is to facilitate the understanding of the literary discourse and to ensure the right interpretation of the author’s intention. The cover depicting a young woman trying to peep at men’s world highlights the gender issues of the short stories collection. Extremely curious, the woman does not enter the room she just furtively looks at what it contains. This leads us to the conclusion that the stories deal with the gap existing between the sexes and that the book might be an attempt to bridge these two different worlds.

This idea is reinforced in the Introduction, which is an overall analysis of Dorothy Parker's works. The publishers also make Suggestions for Further Reading, give a Chronology, and A Note on the Text. This "third-part" provides additional information by means of pictures and criticism. Yet, the main source is to be found in the short-story itself where the author selects specific literary communicative strategies meant to arouse a specific response from the part of the reader.

The author-reader conversation is structured as follows:

- opening section (The title of the story *New York to Detroit* introduces the place and generates specific expectations, which are reinforced by the first line: "All ready with Detroit", said the telephone operator" [6, p. 102]. Thus, the reader is told that the story will focus on a telephone conversation);
- substance section (The topical organization of the story in which the author tries to realize her literary intention. She unveils a telephone conversation between a young woman and a young man expecting the reader to respond to her message framed in the literary text. Thus, the addressee becomes actively involved in a literary dialogue reacting to what he is reading. This kind of dialogue is to be considered as an indirect verbal interaction between the writer and the reader.)
- closing section (The outcome of the telephone conversation, where the girl's helplessness reveals the author's sympathy towards her, is meant to arouse the reader's empathy, i.e. to imagine how it must be like to be used and then dumped. In doing so, the reader, alongside the author, condemns the man's behavior, which will account for a literary communicative success.)

Dorothy Parker meticulously selects her communicative strategies. The author converses with the reader through:

- metonymy;
- framing;
- repetition;
- indirectness;
- the character's antithetic dialogue.

The opening is rendered by the metonymy: "New York to Detroit" [6, p. 102] where the girl from New York desperately tries to reach the young man from Detroit. Dorothy Parker inserts her message into a frame: she starts the story with the telephone operator telling the girl „Strategii actuale în lingvistică, glotodidactică și știință literară”, Bălți, Presa universitară bălțeană, 2009.

that the connection is ready and ends up with the same operator asking if the conversation is through: ““All ready with Detroit”, said the telephone operator” [6, p. 102]; ““All through with Detroit?” said the operator” [6, p. 104].

Repetition is a leading communicative strategy in this text. It is extremely significant as every repeated word or clause carries a new shade of meaning which is emotionally colored. For example, the girl’s constant usage of terms of endearment like “darling” (7 times), “dear” (8 times), its superlative “dearest”(2 times), and “sweetheart” (2 times) reflects her attitude towards Jack, her beloved. Her speech full of caring words is opposed to the young man’s rude, foul language which represents his annoyance with Jean. The first pleads for love, the second tries to get rid of it. In this way the writer indirectly unveils a woman’s desperation in contrast to a man’s cynicism.

Jean appears as the pleader who is begging for affection (she repeats the word “please” 8 times) whereas Jack is the accuser: he repeatedly cuts her short blaming the bad connections (“This is the damnest, lousiest connection I ever saw in my life” [6, p. 103]; he seems to be more engrossed in the party he is throwing than in the conversation with his girlfriend (“And there’s so much racket here” [6, p. 104]); he even manages to put the blame on her (“I give up. First you mumble, and then you yell” [6, p. 103]).

The young girl desperately needs to be reassured otherwise she’ll go “crazy” or even she’ll “die”. She implores him: “Help me, darling. Say something to help me through tonight. Say you love me, for God’s sake say you still love me. Say it. Say it” [6, p. 104]. The repetition of the directive “say it” highlights that she is close to a nervous breakdown. The man does not care in the least: “Ah, I can’t talk. This is fierce. I’ll write to you first thing in the morning. ‘By. Thanks for calling up” [ibid.].

Jean is ready to acquiesce to any terms provided Jack confirms that he still loves her: “Jack, don’t go. Jack, wait a minute. I’ve got to talk to you. I’ll talk quietly. I won’t cry. I’ll talk so you can hear me. Please, dear, please—“ [ibid.].

The girl herself is half aware that he does not love her anymore: “I thought you’d telephone to say goodnight, sometimes, - you know, the way you used to, when you were away” [6, p. 103]. Yet, she refuses to believe that everything is over. That is why she cries at the end: “No! No, no, no! Get him, get him back again right away! Get him back” [6, p. 104]. Once again, the repetition reveals the girl’s anxiety. However, her last utterances stand for her resignation: “No, never mind. Never mind it now. Never –“ [ibid.].

The main characters' conversation consists basically of the adjacency pair: plea – denial, where the girl implores and the young man rejects. Her pleas gradually become more and more desperate till her final “Please, dear, please” [6, p. 104]. In this way the author communicated the despair of being rejected which young women are prone to feel. She wants her reader to sympathize with her female character that is why Jean holds the role of the victim (Jean does not only plead for love but also for life: “I’ll die if I don’t talk to you. I tell you I’ll die” [6, p. 104]).

Jack is the executioner, the one who breaks the girl’s heart. Thus, Dorothy Parker revealed the sex discrimination of her time when women were completely powerless in a male dominating society. Because of lack of education and the long established patriarchal tradition women were doomed to suffer. She shared her viewpoint with her reader, engaging him in a literary dialogue. This dialogue takes place on many levels: between the writer and the reader, the writer and her characters, the reader and the characters, the reader and his own experience, the reader and the society, the reader and the author.

If the addresser has succeeded in realizing her literary intention, it implies that she has got a preferred response from her addressee. Yet, she might get a dispreferred response if the addressee fails to decode the addresser’s intended meaning. This will imply a literary communicative failure. Thus, the literary dialogue appears as an intimate dialogue between two parties where the author tries to reveal her communicative intention and arouse a specific response in her reader. In his turn, the reader engages in this conversation open to accept or reject the message. Their dialogue takes place indirectly through the literary text.

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