

Psychologism as an essential feature of James Lasdun's Idiostyle

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Abstract. The paper discusses psychologism as an essential feature of James Lasdun's idiostyle. It describes the notions of "idiostyle" and "psychologism", touching upon the problem of revealing the author's personality through his literary work. The paper gives detailed information about the literary technique of creating psychologism and illustrates its linguistic mechanisms in Lasdun's works through interior monologue and stream of consciousness, dreams and fantasies, detailed particularity, the preterition of concealed psychological processes, emphasizing one particular feeling of the character throughout narration.

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Introduction

Many linguists refer to the problem of idiostyle. It was thoroughly studied in the works of Russian linguists. For example, the investigations of such scientists as V.V. Vinogradov (who was among the first to define the term "idiostyle") and M.M. Bakhtin (who examined the relations between the author and the character that can be defined as a peculiarity of idiostyle [1]) seem to be consistent and relevant in this field of studies. Contemporary Russian linguists also focus their attention on this problem, for example, N.S. Bolotnova and I.A. Shchirova. N.S. Bolotnova touches upon the problem of idiostyle in the context of philological analysis of the text [2]. I.A. Shchirova investigates the ways of rendering psychologism in psychological prose through details that can be considered an extralinguistic feature of the author's idiostyle [3]. The paper aims to illustrate psychologism as an essential feature of James Lasdun's idiostyle and point out the main linguistic markers of psychologism revealed in Lasdun's works. The study is the first attempt to describe Lasdun's idiostyle since at present there are no critical works of this type, though the author is recognized as a master of psychological prose.

Discussion of the problem

Idiostyle is the author's individual style. Idiostyle is closely connected with idiolect and the terms should not be identified, though some linguists do not differentiate them. As E.G. Malisheva rightly states, idiolect is the content of the author's language in general whereas idiostyle is defined as the author's artistic system consisting of some distinguishing features typical of his literary works [4]. There are three main approaches to the analysis of the term "idiostyle". The first one is the linguistic approach,

according to which idiostyle "is a combination of language and text-stylistic peculiarities intrinsic of the author's language" [5, p.29]. The second approach defines idiostyle as a combination of extralinguistic factors that help to express the author's personality. The third approach combines linguistic and extralinguistic aspects and can be represented as "the author's creative individuality plus language means" [5, p.29]. The last point of view seems well-grounded, because reading a particular literary work we usually perceive the author's individuality through different language means and stylistic devices.

According to the third approach we can consider psychologism to be one of the extralinguistic features of the author's idiostyle. "Psychologism" is an interdisciplinary notion. Its name suggests that psychology is the basis for all the other sciences and there is a tendency to explain events in terms of psychology [6]. Psychologism can be understood in a broad and restricted sense. In a broad sense it is "a general characteristic of art that aims to reproduce human life and to show different human characters" [7, p.4]. According to this definition psychologism is related to art and to literature as a form of art. But if we understand psychologism in restricted sense, it is typical only of a number of literary works, particularly of those in which human inner world is described in details and especially vividly. In such literary works psychologism appears in two aspects: understanding of a human character as a complicated system and a detailed description of the character's inner world [7, p.9]. Professor I.A. Shchirova gives a more precise definition of psychologism in restricted sense. In her opinion, psychologism is "the combination of textual properties, including its semantic and structural peculiarities, which reveal the author's basic

intention and are functionally intended for imitating the character's cognitive independence" [8].

According to I.A. Shchirova's definition, examining psychologism in a particular story we can also discover the author's personality. As G.Y. Solganik rightly points out, the basis of any idiosyncrasy is text modality [9, p.130]. Text modality can be defined as the author's subjective attitude to reality. Such a phenomenon as psychologism helps to reveal subjective attitudes, and that is why investigation of psychologism is quite important for the description of the author's personality. But it should be noted that psychologism lets us see the "author-creator" personality, not the "author-man" [10]. The investigation of the "author-creator's" personality can shed some light on the personality of the "author-man", but there is no guarantee that the "author-creator" and the "author-man" will have a lot in common. As I.A. Shchirova says in her monograph, in psychological texts the author often tries to be evasive in his estimating the events, "the author's subjective opinion is not expressed explicitly" [11, p.20]. M.M. Bakhtin expressed similar views. Therefore, assumptions about the "author-man" personality, especially if he/she is the author of psychological texts, can be wrong.

James Lasdun is a famous contemporary British writer, who now lives in America. Critics call him "fabulous storyteller" (*Daily telegraph*), "tremendous writer" (*Geoff Dyer*), "a story master" (*Tim Adams, The Observer*), "a master at ensnaring the reader" (*The Times*). He is compared with Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka. Lasdun has already published two novels, four collections of poetry and four books of short stories. His most successful works are the novels *The Horned Man* and *Seven Lies*, the collection of short stories *It's Beginning to Hurt* and nonfiction *Give Me Everything You Have*. It is said that Lasdun "instinctively understands human psychology" (*Barbara Hoffert*), his works are referred to the genre of psychological thriller/psychothriller. That is why Lasdun's works are taken for analysis with relation to the discussed phenomenon. The authors of this paper consider psychologism to be one of the main features of Lasdun's idiosyncrasy.

There are different structural and linguistic means of expressing psychologism. One of them is a frequent use of long extracts representing the character's interior monologues. It should be mentioned first that there is a difference between interior monologue and stream of consciousness. The character's thoughts in stream of consciousness technique are usually chaotic, based on associations without logical connection while thoughts of an interior monologue are well digested according to the character's inner logic [12]. The greater part of

Lasdun's stories presents the main characters' interior monologues. There are very few dialogues and they are mostly brief. Inner speech periods include descriptions of the character's thoughts and feelings about people and different events. These episodes are quite logical, the character's thoughts flow one after another.

There are cases of stream of consciousness technique used in Lasdun's stories, when the character is surprised or shocked. For example, in *An Anxious Man* when Joseph worries about his family: "If I avoid listening to *Marketplace* for three days, the Dow will miraculously recover: it did not. If I close my eyes and hold my breath for seventeen strokes Elise and Darcy will be there on the jetty... They were not" [13, p.11]. There is an association here between the character's anxiety about his investments and his anxiety about the absence of his wife and daughter. A stream of consciousness is used in *Seven Lies* when Stefan thinks about the motifs that prompted him to go to Gloria's party. There is one phrase that dominates his mind; all other thoughts revolve around it: "Are you Stefan Vogel? Yes. *Splash!*" [14, p.4].

Sometimes brief dialogues in Lasdun's stories are accompanied with inner speech to express the character's psychological state at a certain moment. For instance, this method is used in *Seven Lies* when Stefan hears voices inside his head during health examination: "Was somebody trying to strangle you?" The Choral effect kicks in. 'No.' 'None of my business, eh?' Fifty voices interrogating me in unison" [14, p.83]. The author's presence and his way of looking at things are vividly expressed through the narrator's commentaries: "The Choral effect kicks in"; "Fifty voices interrogating me in unison".

The character's dreams and fantasies indicate psychologism. In *Seven Lies* Lasdun uses this method to show a growing gap between Stefan's strong wishes and the possibilities of real life. Stefan imagines that he spends time with a beautiful girl who really enjoys his society while in reality she always teases and insults him [14, p.70-71].

Another marker of psychologism is detailed particularity. An artistic detail can put the whole image into the smallest things. It implies individually personal and psychological characteristics, provides a valuable insight into the character's inner world [15, p.17-18]. Using of details also helps to slow down the narration in psychological texts. That is an effective way of expressing psychologism.

According to the functionally semantic classification there are four main types of an artistic detail: an emotionally neutral detail, an emotionally coloured detail, an emotionally essential detail and an

emotional symbol. An emotionally neutral detail cements the character's image, providing integrity of its perception [15, p.47]. This kind of detail does not reflect the character's feelings and emotions, but it is necessary for expressing psychologism through other types of detail. Descriptions of surroundings often include emotionally neutral details, used by Lasdun in *Seven Lies*: "The apartment itself underwent a transformation. Framed prints and reproductions went up. In time, as my mother's patronage grew, artists began presenting her with original oils and watercolours, and these joined the reproductions on the walls" [16, p.32]. "Framed prints", "reproductions", "original oils", "watercolours", "the reproductions on the walls" are emotionally neutral details here. These details reveal the main character's mother's ostentatious interest in art.

An emotionally coloured detail functions as an explication of psychological peculiarities perceived and evaluated by the character [17, p.53]. It expresses a person's emotional state or attitude to somebody/something, but does not reveal the essence of his/her character. Very often emotionally coloured details are parts of appearance descriptions. For example, such details as "black stubble glinted on his whitish skin", "the bulging roil of scar", "gleamed like satin" used in *Seven Lies* create a very deterrent image of a person who is able to commit something dreadful and express the main character's antipathy towards this person: "Black stubble glinted on his whitish skin in the artificial light of the little booth, and the bulging roil of scar tissue between his throat and ear gleamed like satin" [18, p.22]. Emotionally coloured details show the woman's purity and Stefan's sympathy towards her in another extract: "Her deep-set, blond-lashed eyes, high cheekbones and excessively pale skin gave her a wraith-like look" [18, p.106]. I.A. Shchirova notes that through emotionally coloured details you can often see the author's point of view [19, p.55-56].

An emotionally essential detail and an emotional symbol are characterized by the tendency to imply. They are the most important types of an artistic detail for expressing psychologism. An emotionally essential detail is always functionally directed at revealing a person's basic psychological characteristics and peculiarities of his/her character [19, p.59]. For example: "The sight of them convulsing and hissing over the red hot coals sent a reflexive shudder of horror through him, though a few minutes later he was happily eating his share" [20, p.16-17]. Here the image of living lobsters on the grill is a way of showing the main character's uncertainty in his opinion about other people: people may seem unpleasant for him first, but he can easily change his mind to the opposite. Such details as "the

sight of them convulsing and hissing", "reflexive shudder of horror" and "happily eating" create contrast between two psychological states of the main character. But changes of these states are not accidental; it is the basic psychological characteristic of Joseph from *An Anxious Man*. In *Seven Lies* Lasdun while describing one of the main character's mother's soirees uses the detail "posthumous form" and then repeats several times the adverb "posthumously": "It seems to me that life at home during this period was qualified by a similarly attenuating form: not the play form but posthumous form. Posthumously, people stood about at our soirees making glacial conversation. They nibbled posthumously on little underworld nuggets served by Kitty, who drifted posthumously among them like a pallid wraith" [21, p.90]. This detail reveals the main character's psychological state during quite a long and difficult period of his life. It can be considered an emotionally essential detail, not an emotionally coloured detail.

An emotional symbol is a kind of an artistic detail that replaces a corresponding feeling or notion [22, p.68]. Lasdun often uses elements of nature to create emotional symbols. In *An Anxious Man* the pond is a symbol of the main character's emotional state. In the following extract the pond symbolizes hidden anxiety: "The top few inches of water were sun-warmed; below that it was abruptly cold" [23, p.10]. In another extract it is the dynamic symbolization of the increasing anxiety: "As the sun went down behind the trees the water turned a greenish-black, with a scattering of fiery ripples" [23, p.15]. In *Seven Lies* trees can be considered emotional symbols, but as symbols they have different meanings in different contexts. At the beginning of the novel they act as symbols of a slight anxiety combined with a seeming happiness: "Maples and oaks still in their summer foliage, moving through the day like galleons in full sail. Though if you look closely the sails are getting tattered now, pocked and torn in places; nibbled by insects, the holes browning at their edges" [24, p.3]; "Trees still a dusty, steely, end-of-summer green, but on a slope below me there was a single maple with half its leaf dome turned scarlet" [24, p.10]. In Chapter 4 trees are the symbols of a new happy life that is not available for the main character: "They seemed to be concealing a vivid secret life of their own" [24, p.74]. One of the brightest symbols in *Seven Lies* is America; it is a symbol of the main character's wishes and expectations.

There is another method of creating psychologism that is contrary to detailed particularity. It is called the preterition of concealed psychological processes [25]. Using this method the

author usually does not describe the psychological state of the character in details; he makes the reader guess about it. In *Seven Lies* we can see this preterition during the conversation between Stefan and Kitty, when Kitty asks Stefan to stop being her lover: “Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes wild” [26, p.100]. There is no description of Kitty’s thoughts at the moment, but we can guess that she is in a state of tense anxiety. In the story *It’s beginning to hurt* preterition is used for showing the woman’s annoyance and anger: “She turned abruptly away, then stared back at him a moment” [27, p.240].

Emphasizing one particular feeling of the character can be referred to as psychologism, expressed through imprinting one of the character’s feelings that is the key to the character’s inner world. In *An Anxious Man* Lasdun emphasizes the main character’s feeling of guilt: “...he had felt fractionally ashamed as he left the store” [27, p.10]; “A surge of love came into him, and with it a feeling of shame” [27, p.13]; “A murky sensation, compounded of guilt and dim apprehension, stirred in him...” [27, p.17]; “...with a guilty wonder at his wife’s powers of intuition, he went uneasily back to bed” [27, p.19]; “...he was guilty and he was being punished” [27, p.21]. These expressions display the main character’s inclination to uncertainty and hesitation. In *Seven Lies* there are more feelings that are emphasized. For example, Stefan’s feeling of uncertainty and his own weakness is revealed in such phrases as “Aware of my own powerlessness...” [28, p. 40]; “I swallowed my protests” [28, p. 40]; “I felt nothing else – only a deepening of the numbness” [28, p. 56]; “I remember a kind of looseness about me” [28, p. 59]. The episode when Stefan is given a nickname “sloth” (Chapter 4) emphasizes the same feeling. Through descriptions of Stefan’s behavior we see his weakness and disability to resist. A strong desire to go to America is one of the central lines of the narration. It is mentioned in reference to the main character’s mother first: “For my mother, the idea of our being sent to live in New York played directly into her sense of our family’s innate superiority” [28, p.15]. Then it is mentioned several times by the main character himself: “for me the name of that home was always America” [28, p.76]; “The more ingenious my contributions to our campaign of defamation, the more intense my feeling of secret connection to the US became” [28, p.104]. Another feeling that is emphasized in *Seven Lies* is déjà vu. It is the main character’s reaction to something unexpected: “The shock, but then also that familiar, muffling déjà vu sensation [...] It has already happened” [28, p.8]; “After all, I told myself, feeling my familiar sense of déjà vu, this had already happened” [28, p.67]; “the

sensation, once again, that this was after all nothing new; that it had already happened” [28, p.163].

Conclusion

We have analyzed some linguistic techniques of creating psychologism in James Lasdun’s works: interior monologue and stream of consciousness, dreams and fantasies, detailed particularity, the preterition of concealed psychological processes, emphasizing one of the character’s feelings throughout narration. The outcomes of our investigation can add to the analysis of Lasdun’s idiosyncrasy, especially its extralinguistic side. The prospective area of this investigation is the study of the author’s image revealed in Lasdun’s works.

Inferences

Idiosyncrasy is a combination of linguistic and extralinguistic aspects. Psychologism can be referred to as an extralinguistic side of idiosyncrasy. Psychologism becomes a characteristic feature of British contemporary prose. James Lasdun is a master of psychological works.

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