

THE UNIVERSE IN A SHELL

Luiza Şosu

Abstract

There is a stylistic device which, regretfully, is undeservedly neglected by some beginners in their stylistic analysis of the text nowadays. There are several reasons for this but the major one, to my mind, is the lack of reading habits. It is a device which really does not catch attention at the first reading – the artistic detail. As shells on the sea shore which are of no much interest for those who have come to the beach to enjoy the sun and the waves, so this device very often escapes students' notice. Yet, the simple shell for a philosopher's eye, as our great linguist, Eugenio Coseriu teaches - is a symbol of the whole universe. Similarly, the artistic detail, inconspicuous, as it may seem, can create the image of a whole through its insignificant trait. The reader may even co-participate in the author's creative process. Moreover, the artistic detail is a key to the subtext. That is why the present article (applying E. Coseriu's theory and V. Kuharenco's practical classification in the analysis of E. Hemingway's story "A Day's Wait") tries to revivify the interest for it.

Keywords: *stylistic analysis, artistic detail, symbol, subtext.*

According to Eugenio Coseriu the most important principle in scientific research lies in the concrete possibility, limited by the specialty. Glancing upon Hegel he liked to reiterate the latter's affirmation that Aristotle was capable of grasping the entire universe by studying a simple shell. Eugenio Coseriu expressed the same idea in the following statement: "One can see the entire man in a single phoneme... I think that this fact is the essence of any science"¹.

Adapted to the text linguistics this famous quotation refers to nothing else but to the artistic detail, a stylistic device which aims at representing a whole through a part and which is classified between metonymy and symbol.

In his works dedicated to text interpretation E. Coseriu very often touches upon this device: "There exist among the greatest writers of the world two great creators of context with the simplest means possible. These are Plato and Shakespeare. They do not describe the context, they create it. Shakespeare reduces the scene indications to minimum because he creates them via the dialogues. For example, if it is night, the protagonists are behaving accordingly: are close to each other and do not see each other, shout as if they were far, stumble etc. If night is necessary for the scene, Shakespeare makes it. And makes it through the protagonists' (actors') behavior"². Here are some examples of details taken from "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare. Marcellus says: "It faded on the crowing of the cock"³ - instead of saying it was midnight. The details of the Holy Night: "The bird of dawning singeth all night long... then the planets strike... No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm"⁴.

"With Plato we do not have even this, because actors do not exist. Everything must be involved in the dialogue. After having read two pages from Plato you can see clearly the protagonists, you begin understanding everyone's attitude and foreshadowing (predicting) their further behavior"⁵. For example in "Dialogues", Plato portrays a very significant situation:

Euthyphro is proceeding against his father, while Socrates is a victim of denunciation, i.e. a defendant. From their dialogue we can infer that Euthyphro protects the traditional, old view about piety as an external worship. He is benevolently disposed towards Socrates, though he does not quite understand him. This small detail foreshadows his and other Athenians further behavior during the trial when they will fail to fathom Socrates new views on Gods because they believe only in the outer rituals as the essence of faith. In the same dialogue Plato gives some character details: "What are you saying? Some one has been indicting you, for I can not believe that you are a prosecutor of another" – says Euthyphro to Socrates. And some lines below: "My opinion is that in proceeding against you he is barely aiming a blow at the state in its very hearth"⁶. These two details are enough for the reader to comprehend how highly Socrates was appreciated (it is widely known that he was proclaimed the wisest among men by the oracle of Delphi).

The potentiality of artistic detail in literature was expounded also by the great Russian writer F. Dostoyevsky: "Follow up some fact of real life, even one that is not so vivid at first glance, and if you have the strength and the vision you will find in it a depth denied even to Shakespeare. But the crux of the matter is: who has that vision and capabilities? It is not only in creating and writing works of art that one has to be an artist in one's own way, but in being able to notice the fact" (F. Dostoyevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, p. 18). He himself was a great master of details. For example, in the "White Nights", on the second page there is a predicting detail. It foreshadows that the main character will remain an incurable dreamer. His rage upon finding that his beloved "sweet little house" of a pale pink color has been painted the color of the Celestial Empire, which of course, has nothing to do with the capacity of the dreamers.

Professor Valeria Kuharenko in her book "Text Interpretation" expounds her views on the artistic detail. She states that the artistic detail is very often identified with metonymy, the synecdoche mostly. This happens because of their exterior likeness – both synecdoche and artistic detail present something big through something small, a whole through its part. However, linguistically and functionally they are two different phenomena. In the former there is a transfer of denomination from a part to the whole. In the latter the direct meaning of the word is used. With synecdoche the most vivid or expressive part is used to represent the whole and its main purpose is to create an image through economy of expressive means. On the contrary, with artistic detail the most insignificant feature is used which underlines not the exterior but the inner relationship of phenomena. That is why the artistic detail does not catch so much attention, it is introduced casually so that the reader gets aware of it and grasps the reality scene behind it. In the artistic detail we do not have the replacement of a whole by

a part but an expanding, an unfolding. There is no synonymous equality while decoding an artistic detail. Its implied content may be interpreted by different readers with a various degree of depth, depending on their personal thesaurus, attention, their mood while reading and other qualities and conditions of perception.

Thus, the artistic detail is the representation of the outer characteristic of an object or phenomenon as a basis for further reproducing of the whole and integral picture of the represented by the recipient, i.e. the reader. Valeria Kuharenko gives a classic example of artistic detail we can find in A. Chekov's play "The Seagull", in the fourth act where Treplev says about Trigorine: "A neck of a broken bottle is glittering on his dam and the shadow of the mill's wheel is thickening - here the night full of moonlight is ready"⁷.

The artistic detail is very often treated as a sign of laconic, economical style. However, if we compare Checkov's description with the phrase it projects, "it was a moonlit night", it is obvious that the latter is much more shorter, consequently, more economical. What is more economical - to make a full description of the phenomenon or express it through a detail? In Eugenio Coseriu's works we can find an answer: "The speaker always makes all 'efforts' necessary for the realization of his communicative and expressive finality, and the listener creates ('learns') the language he needs. This principle, for certain, may be interpreted as the principle of 'instrumental economy', i.e. of intelligent utilization and creation of expressive means. So, we have to deal with a finalist principle of the practical intelligence which can involve a smaller 'effort' in efficient utilization of the traditional means... A. Martinet's assertion (in Function) that the linguistic evolution could be apprehended as being 'regulated by the permanent antinomy between the expressive needs of man and his tendency to reduce his mental and physical exertions to a minimum' can not be accepted, as in the case of creative intellectual activities such a tendency has not been positively stated. In this domain to 'economize' does not mean to reduce to minimum"⁸.

The detail economizes the figurative language, crates the image of a whole through its insignificant trait. More than that, it facilitates the reader to share author's creative process, by completing the image which has not been fully represented. A short descriptive phrase really economizes the words, but these automatic words do not create a perceptible imagery. The detail, on the contrary, is the actualization of the lexical unit and a powerful signal of imagery. It arouses in the reader not only the co-participating feeling but his creative aspiration. It is not by chance that the images re-created by different readers from the same artistic detail did not differ in the main orientation and mood but differed tangibly in thoroughness and depth of the portrayal or representation.

Besides a creative impulse the artistic detail bears a feeling of individuality in the image which the reader constructs. The reader, not taking into

consideration that the whole is constructed on the detail (conscientiously chosen by the author), is sure that he is independent of the author's point of view. This apparent self-dependant development of the reader's thought and image gives the narration a tone of detached reality. The detail, due to all these causes, is a very important component of the text. All the great artists give it an earnest and thorough thought.

The functional load of the detail is quite various. Valeria Cuharenko traces several types of detail in accordance with their functions: *figurative*, *specifying*, *implicit* and *character-drawing*. One more detail - a *foreshadowing* or *predicting* detail - should be added to this classification. Two such details are mentioned above in the examples taken one from Plato's dialogue "Euthyphro", predicting the behavior of Athenians at Socrates' trial and the second from Dostoyevsky's "White Nights". There are many cases of such details in fiction. S. Maugham most often uses this kind of detail in his novels. A detail cursorily touched in a chapter becomes the subject-matter of a succeeding one. E. Hemingway's story "A Day's Wait" which we analyze with second year students presents all these details. So the classification proves to be very helpful (in fact, no other English sources contain any classifications, in order to make a comparison).

The *figurative detail* creates the visual image of the description. Most often it is a component part of a scene of nature or person's appearance. Both the scenery and the portrayal are to gain much vividness with the detail. It attaches individuality and concreteness to the described frame of nature or to the portrayal. It is important to underline that the choice of the detail renders author's point of view, because the detail bearing the concentrated imagery, is always emotional, i.e. subjectively marked and allots the description with emotional and evaluative connotations. An example of figurative detail is the last sentence in Ernest Hemingway's story "A Day's Wait": "And the next day it was slack (the hold over him) and he cried very easily at little things that were of no importance". It is about the main character, a nine year-old boy who has been waiting to die for the whole day. The severe nervous strain he has undergone is rendered through the above mentioned detail and we can sympathize with him and share his appeasement.

The main function of the *specifying detail* is to create the impression of trustworthiness via minute touches on the facts or phenomena. This very detail is the privilege of the dialogue or reported speech. An example of a specifying detail in "A Day's Wait" is in the very first sentence: "He came into the room to shut the windows" - it is late autumn and most probably he has caught a cold because the windows were open during the night. Then comes the dialogue between the narrator and the boy at the beginning of the story: "You better go back to bed. - No. I am all right". Some lines beyond: "You go to bed, - I said, - you're sick. - I am all right, he said". The boy is evidently sick, however, he does not wish to obey his father. There is an

estrangement between them – this repeated detail is a proof. Another specifying detail is also repeated – the boy stares blankly at the foot of the bed. It reveals his aloofness, noninvolvement into what is going on.

The *character-drawing detail* moulds the image of the personage not in an indirect way as the figurative and the specifying ones but directly, thus fixing separate features of the described character. It is characteristic of this detail to be found throughout the whole text. The author does not give a complete, concentrating description of the protagonist, instead he sets up marks – details. Shakespeare, for example, does not indicate Hamlet's age in the tragedy. Instead he scatters some details: "I pray thee, stay with us, go not to Wittenberg" (these are queen's words, they reveal he is still a student); The second detail – "I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student"⁹ – these are Hamlet's words. And the third one: "For nature crescent does not grow alone/It thews and bulk; but, as this temple waxes,/The inward service of the mind and soul/grows wide withal"¹⁰. These are Laertes words and witness that Hamlet is still young and growing in body and mind.

These details never have the role of the rheme in the communication and are spread casually as something which is known. These kinds of details, scattered throughout the text, aim either at full characteristic of the protagonist or at the repetition of the same main feature. In the first case each separate detail discloses a different trait of the character, while in the second case – all of them contribute step by step to the development of the main feature.

The character – drawing detail creates the impression of the detached author's point of view and that is why it is very often used in modern prose. In the same story, E. Hemingway does not describe the narrator. However from some details which the author scatters throughout the text we can infer that the narrator does not empathize with his son during his illness. The black areas under his son's eyes are not symptoms of influenza, but of insomnia. He notices it but does not give it too much attention. Then he reads for himself, another detail of his not participating in the boy's fears. The comic details that happen during his hunting: "...was difficult to stand or walk on the glassy surface... I fell twice, dropping my gun... it was necessary to jump on the ice-coated mounds of brush... poised unsteadily on the icy, springy brush". They contrast vividly with his son's state of mind, lying in bed, waiting courageously for his death.

The *implicit detail* aims at the outer characteristic of the phenomenon and through which the deep meaning of it can be traced. The main role of this detail, as it is seen from its name is the creation of the implicitness, i.e. the subtext.

The implicit detail in "A Day's Wait" makes a parallel of quite different emotions, opposing ones even, which both son and father experience during the day of description: "I killed two (quail), missed five, and started back pleased to have found a covey close to the house and happy there were so many left to find on *another day*". The above detail deepens the gap which

exists between a happy father who has another day in store for him with all pleasures of hunting and his son waiting for his death this very day. It gives an insight into the author's strong position, into the subtext.

In fact all four types of detail participate in the creation of the subtext, because every one embraces a wider and deeper range of the comprehension of the fact or phenomenon. Yet, every type presupposes its own functional and distributive specificity, what enables us to regard them separately. The figurative detail creates the image of the nature, appearance and it is of a single use. The specifying ones create the image of a thing, situation or circumstance and are distributed in clusters, sometimes 7 or 10 units in a descriptive paragraph. The character-drawing one participates in the molding of a character and is scattered throughout the text:

Type of detail	Distribution in the text	Expressive functions
<i>Figurative</i>	Single use	Creates the impression of physical tangibility of the perceptible object and the co-participating of the reader at its direct perception.
<i>Specifying</i>	Distributed in clusters (7-10 units)	Creates trustworthiness, objectivity of the described events.
<i>Character-drawing</i>	Scattered throughout the text	Involves the reader into the process of co-creation, gives the impression of the author's detachment from the final conclusion.
<i>Implicit</i>	Single and concentrated use	Gives an insight to the inner essence of the phenomenon.

Figurative words may be also regarded as details. These words are tugged with additional expressiveness even in isolated form. Most often these are verbs expressing certain action and simultaneously informing about the way it proceeds. For example, *to sprint* (=to run fast); *to gobble* (=to swallow in big lumps). These figurative verbs are not stylistically marked but they are emotionally colored due to the established collective attitude to the certain, qualitative expression of the action.

The verb *to flush* may serve as an example of a figurative word in "A Day's Wait". It is used twice in different contexts: "we flushed a covey of quail" and in the "the boy with his cheeks flushed... ". And there is one more implicit detail. Father comes home from his joyful hunting with a game of four quail, supposedly, with his cheeks *flushed* by fresh air and pleasant motion. The color of their flushes is red, the Irish setter is also red. This detail is also important, it signalizes something. But this is already the scope of the symbol.

Thus, it could be concluded with Eugenio Coseriu statement who in “Lingvistica Integrală” emphasizes that “everything that a text suggests is motivated in that text”¹¹.

Notes

- ¹Coseriu, 2004, p. 50.
²Coșeriu, 1996, p. 127.
³Shakespeare, 1985, p. 9.
⁴Shakespeare, 1985, p. 9.
⁵Coșeriu, 1996, p. 127.
⁶Платон, 1986, с. 250; Coseriu, 2004, p. 51.
⁷Кухаренко, 1978, с. 40.
⁸Coșeriu, 1997, p. 178.
⁹Shakespeare, 1985, p. 13.
¹⁰Shakespeare, 1985, p. 16.
¹¹Coseriu, 2004, p. 165.

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