



Specificity of Stage Directions in Yevgeniy Grishkovets Play “The City” Approach

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 06 June 2023 Revised: 05 Sept 2023 Accepted: 24 Nov 2023	<i>The article discusses the semantic device of ellipsis. This technique reflects the reflection of the feelings of a modern “city dweller”, a man “in the prime of life”, a “terry egoist”. The modern hero of the play talks more than he does. Stage directions in modern dramaturgy become not just montage sequences in the compositional structure of discourse; in some cases, the playwright introduces the plot of the work into stage directions. “New Drama”, written with different aesthetic orientations, reflects the heterogeneity of directions and trends in the development of Russian drama at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries.</i>
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	Keywords: <i>Metapause, Nominative Stage Direction, Psychological Stage Directions, Monologue, Protagonist, Psychologism</i>

1. Introduction

Yevgeniy Grishkovets' play “The City” has a traditional nominative stage direction with a list of characters. It is aimed at describing the city like semantic binary opposition. For the main character Sergey, the city is the space that he wants to leave, to move “not to somewhere, but from somewhere, that is from here”, because “in this city I can't have it any other way”, “in any other city things will change”, in this city even “the city mosquitoes” are particularly angry; but the protagonist cannot determine, which city and which way will change everything [1]. For Tatyana, the city becomes native; the warmest memories are connected with it; it is the city where she was born, became adult, was studying, and is raising her son now: “For me, the city is unique in its own way. There won't be another one” [1]. Psychological stage directions play an important role in description of Sergey's image. These stage directions are aimed at creating the image of a modern character, a middle-aged “double-dyed egomaniac”, who discusses the meaning of life, the crisis, but who is unable to overcome his own arrogance and selfishness. He seeks for “something”, but he loses the most important things in human life – his friend, his wife and his child, trusting relationship with his parents. “Takes a pen, sorts out some papers, cannot find where to write down”, “looks around seeking for something”, “turns pages of the book, papers and cards fall out, he picks them up, looks through” – these stage directions combined with actual time of action and character's speech are aimed at creating of a certain subtext in the play [1].

Sergey's memories take us away to April, when the nature wakes up, green leaves appear on the trees as a symbol of new life. Symbolically, it is the youth of the protagonist. He doesn't want this past experience: “All that I can, all my experience – all is useless” – as well as it is useless to “re-educate” him, it is useless to “train” him. Then there comes summer, the period that “fell out”, unnoticed by Sergey. He didn't notice how his son had grown up, didn't notice how he had frazzled out his wife with endless small requests, had offended his mother and disappointed his father (“you are even more selfish than I am”). And on the threshold of autumn (there are five more days) the protagonist “**suddenly, within a second**” understands that he is tired, he is “in a new state of being”, and he “can nothing in this new state of being”, feels nothing except “the process of his weakness” [1]. Sergey decides to get rid of his phonebook and of everything that connects him with “this city”. There is a symbolic detail – a phonebook with plenty of pages that constantly fall out and get lost. Similarly, to trees that shed their leaves in autumn, the protagonist is longing to shed all unnecessary things. Such unnecessary things for him are his wife and his child (“What about Tatyana... women are much more resilient creatures”), his friend, his job with high salary and flexible schedule.

Particular attention must be paid to stage directions of “silence” (“they are silent”, “she is silent”, “a small pause”, “father is silent”, “he stands still, nodding his head in silence”, “he tries to say something”) and suspension points that are spread around the text in tremendous amount (about 700) [1]. A.N. Zorin points out “contextual complexity of pauses”, that open “the way to dramaturgy of undercurrent” [2]. “In the play”, considers the researcher, “establishes correlation between moments of keeping silence on different levels of the text structure... Pauses that are able to display particular features of character or a certain way of behavior expose personal insolvency of characters, insignificance of their silence with the background of emptiness that had given birth to them [3]. Being in metapause also dictates to characters a specific psychological condition”. In “The City” the moments of silence and “she is silent” stage direction is associated with the image of Sergey’s wife Tatyana. She is silent not because she has nothing to say, not because of weak will or intimidation. Tatyana “has listened to so much that she didn’t want to listen”, “all about the same”, i.e., about “new state of being” of her husband, his desire “to be alone not for some time but for always”. The playwright allows his heroine, who didn’t find understanding from her husband, to express herself in “The Monologue”, from which it becomes clear that she doesn’t hope for understanding from her husband: for her, it is easier to keep silent, her husband “is not even a relative to her... not a relative”. They failed to become a family. There is an especially comprehensive and significant detail in “The Monologue” – that is her reasoning about a plastic mannequin. In fact, her husband is the same plastic mannequin. Sergey’s father also “keeps silent”, he tries twice to interrupt the conversation with his son, knowing in advance that his son wants not an advice, but an “approval” of his “state of being”. Sergey’s image, his monologue, his speech is literally studded with suspension points and pauses. Grishkovets uses suspension points as a semantic device that reflects consciousness of the protagonist, “twinkling consciousness” (P. Rudnev). Sergey pronounces the same words, “wanders” among them: whether he cannot express his thought, or doesn’t know how to say, or “loses” his thought – in such a way his complicated reasoning is constructed.

Pauses and high frequency of usage of personal pronoun “I” in his speech point at his arrogance. Organic alloy of nominative and psychological stage directions, pauses and suspension points not only creates the illusion of communication (in fact, Sergey’s relatives and friends cannot form real dialogical relationship with him), but also presents a new type of character – “a double-dyed egomaniac”. In Grishkovets’ play “The City” calendar time passes from April to September. For Sergey, time “falls out, remains unnoticed. The protagonist’s space of living is represented by a room, a kitchen, a bench, and an “unloved city”. The playwright fills Sergey’s space with neither everyday items nor pleasant little things, though the space of his friend is filled with “home renovation”, the space of his wife – with “pleasant little things”. The world around Sergey is overfilled with “complicated reasoning”, whims and arrogance – so it is tight for surrounding people. Chronotope of road becomes the semantic center of the play. Road gives the protagonist neither experience nor understanding of the meaning of life. Symbolism of his path is represented by the playwright as an aimless road to the unknown (“*He stops the car... I’m going to... (names a street, a station or any other place)*”). And he wants that aimless road to be comfortable (a taxi ride) and give him pleasant feeling of getting some favor “for free”. The road has neither aim nor end point (“*Driver. To the right or to the left? He. Anyway... I don’t care*”) [1]. The protagonist is left alone.

4. Conclusion

Chekhov’s traditional psychologism added to semantic device of suspension points used by Grishkovets shows self-reflection of a modern citizen, a man “in his prime”, “a double-dyed egomaniac”, who speaks and reasons more than acts.

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