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EVENTFULNESS AS THE MAIN FEATURE OF NARRATIVE (A CASE STUDY OF R. DAHL'S FAIRY TALE "BILLY AND THE MINPINS")

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The research focuses on the substantiation of eventfulness as the peculiarity of narrative, its requirements and gradation criteria, a case study of R. Dahl's fairy tale "Billy and the Minpins". A brief analytical analysis considering the specificity of fairy tale events, peculiarities of plot and placing of events in R. Dahl's fairy tale "Billy and the Minpins" and the requirements and criteria of eventfulness gradation applying to the fairy tale's main events has been foregrounded. The article examines the views on the main properties of narrative. We consider an event to be a change of state that is not a part of an everyday routine. Events can be active and stative. Genres of narrative with the predomination of active events are more dynamic. Fairy tales also belong to this type of narrative. Fairy tales present unusual and fantastic events, but it is implied that they can happen to a child reader as well. The problems depicted in fairy tales reflect real children's problems, so it is easier for readers to imagine themselves in the characters' shoes and empathise with them. The plot of fairy tales mostly consists of a mundane and ordinary beginning (Billy is bored and watches the Forest of Sin through the window), fantastic events in the body (escaping from the Gruncher, meeting the Minpins, defeating the Gruncher and flying on the Swan) and a soothing return to reality (Billy returns home and eventually grows up). To be considered an event, a change of state must be real (valid for the characters of the fictional world) and resultative (ending within the narrative text). W. Schmid lists five additional criteria for assessing eventfulness: relevance, unpredictability, persistence, irreversibility, and non-iterativity. The most important of these are relevance and unpredictability, while persistence, irreversibility and non-iterativity may be unevenly present in different events. Unpredictability is specific to R. Dahl's fairy tales, as the author combines traditional fairy tale moves with unexpected elements.

Key words: change of state, child reader, event, narrator, non-iterativity, plot, reality, relevance, resultativity, unpredictability.

ПОДІЄВІСТЬ ЯК ОСНОВНА ВЛАСТИВІСТЬ НАРАТИВУ (НА ОСНОВІ КАЗКИ Р. ДАЛА “BILLY AND THE MINPINS”)

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Наукову розвідку присвячено обґрунтуванню подієвості як головної ознаки наративу, її умов та критеріїв градації на прикладі казки Р. Дала “Billy and the Minpins”. Відповідно, нами поставлено завдання з’ясувати специфічні риси казкових подій, виявити особливості побудову сюжету казки Р. Дала “Billy and the Minpins” та місце подій у ньому, визначити відповідність основних подій казки Р. Дала “Billy and the Minpins” умовам та критеріям градації подієвості. У статті здійснено критичний огляд поглядів на основні властивості наративу. Подією вважаємо зміну стану, яка не є частиною буденної рутини. Події можуть бути активними та статичними. Ті жанри наративів, у яких переважають активні події, є більш динамічними. До цього типу наративів відносимо і казки. У казках зображуються незвичні та фантастичні події, однак імплікується, що вони можуть статися і з читачем-дитиною. Проблеми, зображені у казках, є відображенням реальних дитячих проблем, тому читачам легше уявити себе на місці персонажів та співпереживати їм. Сюжет казок здебільшого складається з приземленого і буденного початку (Біллі нудьгає та спостерігає у вікно за забороненим лісом), фантастичних подій в основній частині (втеча від Гранчера, знайомство з Мінпінами, перемога над Гранчером та нічні польоти на Лебеді) та заспокійливого повернення до реальності (Біллі повертається додому та дорослішає). Для того щоб вважатися подією, зміна стану має бути реальною (дійсною для персонажів вигаданого світу) та результативною (закінчуватися в межах наративного тексту). Окрім цього, В. Шмід нараховує п’ять критеріїв оцінки подієвості: relevance, unpredictability, persistence, irreversibility, non-iterativity. Найважливішими з них є релевантність та непередбачуваність, в той час як стійкість, незворотність і неповторюваність можуть бути нерівномірно присутніми у різних подіях. Непередбачуваність є специфічною для казок Р. Дала, адже у них автор поєднує традиційні казкові ходи та елементи з неочікуваними.

Ключові слова: зміна стану, наратор, непередбачуваність, неповторюваність, подія, реальність, результативність, релевантність, сюжет, читач-дитина.

Introduction. With the development of narratology in the 1960s, a new object of research was introduced to the scientific community – narrative. Although there is currently no single universally accepted definition of this term, narratologists agree that a narrative can be considered a fictional text based on the sequence of events or a change of state (Abbott, 2002; Chatman, 1980; Genette, 1982; Fludernik, 2009; Prince, 2003; Rimmon-Kennan, 1989; Tsapiv, 2020). There is no upper limit for the number of events in a narrative, but each narrative must depict at least two events that are not anticipated or entailed by each other (Prince, 1982: 63; Rimmon-Kennan, 1989: 2–3). According to S. Rimmon-Kennan, the sequence of events differentiates narrative fiction from genres such as expository literature or lyrical poetry (Rimmon-Kennan, 1989: 2–3).

The main properties of narrative have been the subject of scientific research by many scholars, including M. Bal (Bal, 2017), S. Chatman (Chatman, 1980), and W. Schmid (Schmid, 2010). According to S. Chatman, the main features of narrative are order and selection (Chatman, 1980: 28). M. Bal identifies three main requirements for a narrative:

1. it can be divided into three layers (the text, the story, and the fabula);
2. the narrative should consist of signs uttered by two types of speakers: one related to the fabula, and the other not;
3. the content of the narrative is made up of events that are interconnected and caused or experienced by the characters (Bal, 2017: 8).



In our article, we attempt to take a closer look at eventfulness, considered the main feature of narrative introduced by W. Schmid (Schmid, 2010: 9). The research focuses on substantiating eventfulness as the peculiarity of narrative, its requirements and gradation criteria, using a case study of R. Dahl's fairy tale *"Billy and the Minpins."* Accordingly, we set the task to find out the specific features of fairy tale events, identify the peculiarities of the plot and placement of events in R. Dahl's fairy tale *"Billy and the Minpins,"* and determine the compliance of the main events in R. Dahl's fairy tale with the requirements and gradation criteria of eventfulness.

Chapter 1. The specificity of fairy tale events.

The concept of **eventfulness** is a historically variable and culturally specific phenomenon within narrative representation. Authors across different genres, literary movements, and historical periods hold distinct perspectives on what qualifies as an event. Therefore, interpreting and analyzing a specific narrative and its events requires prior knowledge of the event code within the corresponding genre, movement, or era (Schmid, 2010).

Every event signifies a change of state, yet not every change of state can be deemed an event. According to W. Schmid, an **event** is a distinctive phenomenon that transcends everyday routine (Schmid, 2010: 8). A **state**, in the narratologist's understanding, encompasses a set of properties associated with an agent or an external situation at a specific point in time. The **change of state** may not necessarily be linked to external factors; it can also be internal or a combination of the character's internal properties and features of the external situation (Schmid, 2010: 2). In literary texts for children, particularly in fairy tales, a change of state can encompass a journey, new acquaintances, or the character's maturation, significantly impacting their psychological state (Tsapiv, 2020: 64).

G. Prince categorizes events into active and stative. A narrative with a higher proportion of active events compared to stative ones is considered more dynamic (Prince, 1982: 63). According to A. Tsapiv, a fairy tale is a distinct type of fictional narrative characterized by the dynamic development of events. The protagonists of fairy tales embark on journeys in search of destiny, happiness, treasures, etc., and upon their return, they are transformed – happier, wealthier, and wiser (Tsapiv, 2020: 64).

The events unfolding in the lives of fairy tale protagonists are inevitably extraordinary and incredible, yet they are consistently portrayed

as if they were ordinary (Bettelheim, 1991: 51). Even the most astonishing encounters in fairy tales are intertwined with mundane affairs. Fairy tales suggest that similarly remarkable events could happen to the readers themselves. This narrative strategy heightens the engagement of child readers in the story, enabling them to envision themselves in the protagonist's shoes, fostering a deeper understanding and allowing them to experience the adventures alongside the character.

The challenges depicted in fairy tales and the events connected to them symbolically reflect real-life issues that readers may encounter. B. Bettelheim (Bettelheim, 1991: 54) provides the example of Cinderella, who faces bullying, envy, and discrimination from her closest relatives, her sisters, and stepmother (Grimm & Grimm, 2011). In R. Dahl's fairy tale *"Billy and the Minpins"* (Dahl, 2016), Billy, the protagonist, is an ordinary young boy residing with his mother near the vast and intimidating Forest of Sin, a place even feared by adults. Despite being an obedient boy who follows his mother's instructions diligently, Billy is irresistibly drawn to exploring the world around him: *"Little Billy's mother was always telling him exactly what he was allowed to do and what he wasn't allowed to do. All the things he was allowed to do were boring. All the things he was not allowed to do were exciting. One of the things that he was NEVER NEVER allowed to do, the most exciting of them all, was to go out through the garden gate all by himself and explore the world beyond"* (Dahl, 2016: 1). This situation may resonate with the child reader, who is also restricted from certain activities by their parents. The dangers Billy encounters in the Forest serve as a cautionary tale, warning readers about the consequences of disobedience to their parents.

While examining the similarities and differences between myths and fairy tales, B. Bettelheim also emphasized the events portrayed in these two genres. Both mythical and fairy tale events are fantastical and compel the narrative hero to overcome challenging obstacles. The distinction lies in the fact that, no matter how peculiar the events that unfold for the fairy tale hero, they do not endow him with superhuman qualities, as is often the case with the mythical hero. This inherent humanity conveyed to child readers implies that, regardless of the fairy tale's content, it represents a whimsical elaboration and exaggeration of the problems they must solve, their hopes, and fears (Bettelheim, 1991: 54).

Billy, the protagonist in *"Billy and the Minpins,"* exemplifies this human aspect. He aspires

to assist the Minpins by eliminating the monster known as the Red-Hot Smoke-Belching Gruncher, who terrorizes them and disrupts their peace. Don Mini elucidates to Billy that the only way to defeat the Gruncher is if it falls into deep water: *“The only time a Gruncher dies ... is if he falls into deep water. The water puts out the fire inside him, and then he’s dead. The fire to a Gruncher is like your heart is to you. Stop your heart and you die at once. Put out the fire, and the Gruncher dies in five seconds. That’s the only way to kill a Gruncher”* (Dahl, 2016: 57). Recognizing his own limitations as just a little boy, Billy devises a strategy to lure the Gruncher into the lake, showcasing the relatability of the fairy tale hero’s approach to problem-solving.

Fairy tales typically follow a pattern of a mundane and ordinary beginning, fantastic events in the body, and a reassuring return to reality at the end of the narrative (Bettelheim, 1991). In the initial stages of the narrative, Billy experiences boredom in his room, gazing out of the window, and daydreaming about venturing into the perilous forest: *“On this sunny summer afternoon, Little Billy was kneeling on a chair in the living room, gazing out through the window at the wonderful world beyond. His mother was in the kitchen doing the ironing...”* (Dahl, 2016: 1). *“But Little Billy was awfully tired of being good. Through the window, not so very far away, he could see the big black secret wood that was called the Forest of Sin. It was something he had always longed to explore”* (Dahl, 2016: 2). The fantastic events in the body of the narrative encompass Billy’s escape from the Gruncher, his encounter with the Minpins, their way of life, meeting Don Mini, and his flight on the fairy Swan, all culminating in Billy’s triumph over the monster.

While Billy undergoes these extraordinary adventures, his mother remains oblivious to his absence, continuing to iron the laundry. Upon his return home, Billy explains to his mother that he has been climbing a tree in the yard, and he resumes his life as if it were ordinary. In reality, he flies on the Swan every night, exploring the world and its wonders around him: *“Oh, it was a wondrous secret life that Little Billy lived up there in the sky at night on the Swan’s back. They flew in a magical world of silence, swooping and gliding over the dark world below where all the earthly people were fast asleep in their beds”* (Dahl, 2016: 84). This narrative structure aligns with the traditional fairy tale format, blending the extraordinary with the mundane and offering a comforting resolution.

Chapter 2. Reality and resultativity of an event.

A change of state must fulfill two primary requirements – **reality** and **resultativity** – to be considered an event (Schmid, 2010: 9).

The **reality** of the event implies its validity within the fictional world inhabited by the characters. Changes of state that a character imagines or experiences in a dream are not considered real and, therefore, cannot be deemed events (Schmid, 2010: 9). Although the Minpins and the Gruncher are fictional characters to the child reader, within the fairy tale *“Billy and the Minpins”* (Dahl, 2016), they are real entities in the narrative world. Billy encounters these adventures in real life, making the threat of being eaten by the Gruncher a genuine peril for him: *“He smells you... He knows you aren’t far away. He’ll wait forever to get you now. He adores humans and he doesn’t catch them very often. Humans are like strawberries and cream to him”* (Dahl, 2016: 48).

Resultativity is a correlate of the reality of an event. The change of state constituting an event cannot be merely initiated or endless; it must reach completion within the fictional world of the narrative. This means that a character’s attempt to do something cannot be considered an event because no result is achieved (Schmid, 2010: 9). The culminating event in the fairy tale is Billy’s triumph over the monster. Billy successfully lures the Gruncher into the lake, where it meets its demise. Thus, this event satisfies the requirement of resultativity. Billy’s nocturnal travels on the Swan’s back also achieve their anticipated result: the boy grows up, and he can no longer partake in these incredible adventures: *“You are growing up fast, Little Billy. I am afraid that soon you will be too heavy for Swan”* (Dahl, 2016: 92).

Chapter 3. Eventfulness gradation criteria.

Trivial changes of state in a narrative can also possess reality or resultativity, but not all of them qualify as events. Therefore, in addition to these two requirements, W. Schmid introduces five additional gradation criteria that a change of state must satisfy to be deemed an event: **relevance**, **unpredictability**, **persistence**, **irreversibility**, and **non-iterativity**. These criteria are listed in a hierarchical order based on their significance. Relevance and unpredictability are considered mandatory, while persistence, irreversibility, and non-iterativity can be realized to varying degrees in several events (Schmid, 2010: 9–12).

The change of state must be **relevant**. The eventfulness of the narrative increases to



the extent that the change of state is perceived as an integral part of the story world in which it unfolds. In contrast, mundane changes of state do not give rise to events (Schmid, 2010: 9). The relevance of Billy's victory over the monster can be examined from two perspectives. In the fictional world of people where Billy and his mother reside, nobody is aware of the existence of the Minpins and the Gruncher. Initially, Mum frightens Billy with tales of monsters inhabiting the forest and preying on those who enter: "*That wood ... is full of the most bloodthirsty wild beasts in the world. Whangdoodles are worse ... and Hornswogglers and Snozzwangers and Vermicious Knids. And worst of all is the Terrible Bloodsuckling Stonechuckling Spittler. There is one of them in there, too*" (Dahl, 2016: 6). As the story progresses, both the readers and the protagonist discover that these creatures are fictional, and the real threat, the Gruncher, is far more perilous: "*The one waiting for you down there is the fearsome Gruncher, the Red-Hot Smoke-Belching Gruncher. He grunches up everything in the forest. That's why we have to live up here. He has grunched up hundreds of humans and literally millions of Minpins. What makes him so dangerous is his amazing and magical nose*" (Dahl, 2016: 45). It was the Gruncher who devoured millions of Minpins and hundreds of people who ventured into the forest.

After returning from the forest, Billy chooses to keep the adventures he had a secret, safeguarding the Minpins' confidentiality. While the forest becomes a safer place, the human world, in general, remains largely unaffected by the demise of the Gruncher. However, for the Minpin society, this event marks a pivotal moment. It heralds a new era for them, one in which they can once again traverse the land, gather berries, and grow up without the constant fear for their lives: "*The murderous Gruncher, who has gobbled up so many thousands of us Minpins, is gone forever! The forest floor is safe at last for us to walk on! So now we can all go down to pick blackberries and winkleberries and puckleberries and muckleberries and twinkleberries and snozzberries to our heart's content. And our children can play among the wildflowers and the roots all day long*" (Dahl, 2016: 77).

The level of eventfulness proportionally increases based on the extent to which the change of state is **unpredicted** within the narrative world. The essence of an event lies in its divergence from the expectations of the characters, introducing a sense of paradox. A change of state that catches the characters in the narrative world

off guard may, however, be quite predictable for an experienced reader if it aligns with genre characteristics (Schmid, 2010: 10). If a change of state adheres to the customary rules of the story world, it is considered predictable and, consequently, possesses a lower level of eventfulness, even if it holds great importance for the individual characters involved (Schmid, 2010: 10).

The uniqueness of R. Dahl's fairy tales lies in the amalgamation of traditional fairy tale elements with unexpected twists (Tsapiv & Andrieva, 2023: 86). A child reader might anticipate the typical triumph of Good (Billy) over Evil (the Gruncher), but Billy's encounter with the Minpins introduces an element of surprise. When Billy's mother warns him about the creatures in the forest, she doesn't suggest the possibility of encountering anything good or pleasant there. Both narratees and Billy are primed for the potential presence of monsters, but the revelation of a society of tiny anthropomorphic creatures dwelling in tree flats comes as a complete shock: "*Little Billy sat staring at this extraordinary thing. And all at once, a strange uncomfortable feeling came over him. It felt as though the tree he was sitting in and the green leaves all around him belonged to another world altogether and that he was a trespasser who had no right to be where he was*" (Dahl, 2016: 32).

Relevance and unpredictability are contingent on the subject assessing the change of state, their norms, and expectations. The characters within the story world, the narrator, the abstract author, or the abstract reader may evaluate the relevance and unpredictability of a state change differently. Real readers may have individual perceptions of relevance and unpredictability that do not align with those of fictional and implicit subjects. A change of state that surprises a character may not have the same effect on a reader because they may be prepared in advance (Schmid, 2010: 14–15).

The eventfulness of a specific change of state is directly proportional to its consequences for the thoughts and actions of the subject it impacts within the story world. W. Schmid (Schmid, 2010: 11) terms this criterion **persistence**. Eventfulness increases with the **irreversibility** of a new state that emerges due to a particular change. According to this requirement, we can assert that eventfulness attains its highest level if the initial state cannot be restored. The final requirement for eventfulness in W. Schmid's gradation is **non-iterativity** because repeated changes of the same type lack a sufficient level of eventfulness, even if they are relevant and unpredictable for the characters. Repetitive changes cannot be categorized

as events, and the portrayal of repetition aligns the narrative more closely with descriptive texts (Schmid, 2010: 12).

Billy's victory over the Gruncher is characterized by persistence, irreversibility, and non-iterativity. Don Mini informs Billy that their forest is not the sole Minpin habitat: "*This is a Minpin forest. And it's not the only one in England*" (Dahl, 2016: 40). However, it is the only forest where the readers encounter the Gruncher, and Billy successfully eliminates this unique threat. The Gruncher cannot survive after plunging into the lake, ensuring that it no longer poses a menace to the Minpins. The interaction between the human and the Minpins is also exceptional, prompting Don Mini to urge Billy to keep this encounter a secret: "*And then the secret would be out and you would be forced to tell people all about us. That must never happen. If it did, crowds of enormous humans would come clumping all over our beloved forest to look for Minpins and our quiet homeland would be ruined*" (Dahl, 2016: 79). Billy remains the sole human to have ever witnessed the Minpins, and he continues to safeguard this secret. However, the narrator promises child readers the opportunity to encounter the Minpins, similar to Billy's experience, if they believe in magic and actively seek it in their surroundings.

Conclusions. Eventfulness serves as a central feature of narrative, exhibiting variations across different genres, literary movements, and historical periods. In our context, an event is perceived as a change of state that transcends the boundaries of everyday life and routine.

Fairy tales, characterized by unusual and dynamic events, cleverly intertwine with real-life problems that child readers may encounter—issues like bullying, prohibitions, and parental control. This narrative strategy aims to facilitate a child reader's imaginative immersion into the shoes of fairy tale heroes, allowing them to vicariously experience these incredible adventures. Notably, the fantastic events in fairy tales are presented as ordinary, contributing to a specific plot structure encompassing a mundane beginning, a sequence of extraordinary events, and a comforting resolution that brings the hero back to reality.

Examining the events in the fairy tale "*Billy and the Minpins*," they fulfill the two fundamental requirements of eventfulness: they are real for Billy and the Minpins, and they conclude within the narrative. Furthermore, eventfulness can be evaluated through five criteria: relevance, unpredictability, persistence, irre-

versibility, and non-iterativity. The narrative culmination in "*Billy and the Minpins*," Billy's triumph over the Gruncher, holds relevance for the Minpins as it grants them the freedom to live without fear. While predictable for an advanced child reader due to its alignment with the stereotypical fairy tale pattern, R. Dahl's fairy tales are distinctive for blending traditional elements with unexpected twists. The encounter with a society of little anthropomorphic creatures is surprising for both the child reader and Billy.

The persistence, irreversibility, and non-iterativity of the fairy tale events hinge on the narrative concealing the existence of other Grunchers. The single known Gruncher is unequivocally dispatched by Billy, and he becomes the sole keeper of the Minpins' secret. However, the narrator subtly hints to readers that similar extraordinary events can unfold for them if they believe in magic and explore their surroundings.

Future research avenues could delve into the cognitive and narratological analysis of fairy tales by R. Dahl and other postmodern British authors. This exploration aims to identify fundamental events and dominant narrative models in fiction texts for children during the relevant period.

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