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NARRATIVE GAPPING IN P. AUSTER'S NOVEL "4321": TOWARDS THE PROBLEM OF "NONNARRATED" IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

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Abstract. Narrative gapping is one of the debated issues in contemporary narratology. This is evidenced by the recent work (2023) of G. Prince and W. Schmid: the first author complements his own classification of gaps already including "disnarrated" and "alternarrated" types with new types of narration – "undernarrated" and "overnarrated" ones. The second scholar suggests focusing on the "nonnarrated" - that which is not presented in the narrative, but is relevant to the story being told. The study of narrative gaps is especially urgent in relation to the modern forms of narration which have not received due scholarly attention yet. Among them is a forking-path narrative presented in the novel "4321" by P. Auster (2017). This narrative can be regarded as an example of "overnarration" (in the terminology of Prince): it tells the reader not about one life of the character, but about four lives at once. Each new "life" of the character in the novel is a separate storyline that comes into conflict (from the point of view of unfolding events) with other "lives" (in one life the character dies, in another he is still alive, etc.). At the same time, at the level of the reader's perception, such "autonomy" of each storyline is not preserved: interacting with all of them, the reader inevitably correlates these lines with each other, and the events presented in them inevitably (in his imagination) overlap one another. How do narrative gaps function in this kind of narration? And what effect do they produce? The more storylines narrative produces, the wider the gaps zone expands: thus, the reader's growing knowledge about the character is followed by an increasing, limiting their abilities "ignorance". Moreover, as long as each line, in spite of being "autonomous", still tells the reader about one and the same character, the appearance of new events in each subsequent line inevitably has the effect of filling gaps in the previous line. Narrative gapping on the level of the plot and on the level of the reader's perception in such a narrative differs: on the level of the plot, the gaps remain "permanent" (in Schmid's terminology), and on the level of the reader's perception – "temporary". The novel of Auster, as an example of a forking-path narrative, only metareflexively intensifies this narrative specificity: several chapters conclude with the narrator's indication of gaps that will not be filled in the oncoming chapters of this storyline. Thanks to these cues, the reader's attention focuses on these gaps, and their "temporary" nature becomes ever more salient while correlating various storylines.

Keywords: gaps; the nonnarrated; blanks; forking-path narrative; the disnarrated; gapping; the overnarrated

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НАРРАТИВНЫЕ ЛАКУНЫ В РОМАНЕ П. ОСТЕРА «4321»: К ПРОБЛЕМЕ «НЕРАССКАЗАННОГО» В СОВРЕМЕННОМ ПОВЕСТВОВАНИИ

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Аннотация. Исследование функционирования лакун в повествовании можно рассматривать как одну из актуальных задач современной нарратологии. Об этом свидетельствуют и недавние работы (2023) нарратологов Дж. Принса и В. Шмида: первый дополняет собственную типологию лакун, уже включающую «дизнаррацию» и «альтернаррацию», новыми способами наррации – «недорассказанным» и «сверхрассказанным». Второй предлагает сконцентрироваться на «нерассказанном» – том, что не представлено в повествовании, но имеет отношение к рассказываемой истории. Исследование лакун тем более актуально в применении к современным повествовательным формам: не получившим пока должного внимания исследователей. Среди них – разветвленное повествование, представленное в романе «4321» П. Остера (2017). Особенностью этой формы становится ее ориентация на «сверхнаррацию» (в терминах Дж. Принса): она рассказывает читателю не об одной жизни героя, а сразу о четырех. Каждая новая «жизнь» героя в романе – отдельная фабульная линия, вступающая (с точки зрения событийности) в противоречие с другими (в одной герой умирает, в другой – еще жив и пр.). При этом на уровне читательского восприятия такая «автономность» каждой из линий не сохраняется: читатель неизбежно соотносит эти линии между собой, и события, в них представленные, неизбежно (в его воображении) накладываются друг на друга. Как в таком типе современного повествования функционируют нарративные лакуны? И какой эффект производят? С увеличением фабульных линий прогрессивно расширяется и зона лакун: так, за умножением «знания» о герое следует и увеличивающееся, ограничивающее его возможности «незнание». Более того: поскольку каждая линия, хоть и является «автономной», по-прежнему рассказывает читателю об одном и том же герое, появление новых событий в каждой следующей линии производит на него эффект заполнения лакун в линии предыдущей. Функционирование лакун на уровне фабулы и на уровне читательского восприятия в такой повествовательной форме разнится: на уровне фабулы лакуны остаются «постоянными» (в терминах В. Шмида), а на уровне читательского восприятия – «временными». Роман П. Остера, являясь примером разветвленного нарратива, метарефлексивно интенсифицирует эту его особенность: несколько глав романа заканчиваются указанием нарратора на лакуны, которые в последующих частях, соответствующих этой линии, заполнены не будут. Читательское внимание – благодаря таким «указателям» – концентрируется на этих лакунах, и тем заметнее становится их «временный» характер при соотношении разных фабульных линий.

Ключевые слова: лакуны; нерассказанное; пробелы; разветвленное повествование; дизнаррация; гэппинг; сверхнаррация

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In recent decades (since the 1980s), narratology has been increasingly interested in what is not only directly represented in the narrative, but also what turns out to be hidden, but is still belonging to the story being told. Along with the events represented in the narrative, there are also "gaps", "omissions", "blanks" that are open for filling by the reader, enhance the immersion in the narrative world, allow – within the narrative – to control the reader's attention and reader's emotions, participate in the sequential unfolding of the story. Narrative gapping, thus, is one of the engines driving narrative sequencing and progression.

Lacunae in the narrative can be understood and described in different ways: in the broadest sense according to W. Iser [Iser 2004] - as any gap that connects the reader's imagination to the fictional world, involves him in what is happening, thereby - along the way - turning reading into a "process of constant choice" [Iser 2004: 209]. Lacunae are regarded as a means of narrative imagining and researched in this direction by R. Gerrig [Gerrig 2010] with close attention paid to readers' experiences. Such a lacuna is described by narratologists using the concept of gapping [Herman 2005: 193] and can be understood very broadly: as the omission of one or another element of representation (characters, space...), as the omission of an explanation of the motivation of the hero, as the omission of what they said or thought, as the omission of events (related to the past or present), as the omission in time ("ellipsis" according to G. Genette [Genette 1998]), etc. Gaps can be significant and insignificant [Sternberg 1985], noticeable and unnoticeable, temporary and permanent [Schmid 2023], and at the same time they can be mutable, changing their status in the process of the reader's interaction with the story being told.

According to M. Sternberg, narrative omissions include "gaps" and "blanks" [Sternberg 1985]. The first presuppose the omission of information, which is noticeable (because it is significant) to the reader, the second denote what is omitted, but is not significant. Both the first and the second, as emphasized, for example, by W. Schmid [Schmid 2023], are changeable: the reader's awareness of the significance or insignificance of this or that information may change during interaction with the narrative, and even more so - if we continue this reflection - it may be even more changeable in the process of rereading / revising the same story. R. Warhol refers to this type of gaps as "unnarratable": information may be omitted due to prohibitions or other cultural restrictions unrelated to the promotion of eventfulness in the narrative [Warhol 2005]. Prince identifies a special type of lacunae -"disnarrated" [Prince 1988; Prince 1992; Dannenberg 2014] - which enables to point out what did not occur within the narrative world, but could have happened; point the reader to an alternative version of the events. It is supplemented by B. Richardson, reflecting on the

"denarrated" [Richardson 2001]. "Denarrated", in contrast to "disnarrated", can designate an event that first occurs within the narrative world, and then is refuted by the narrator, as if (thereby) "extracted" from the plot, that is, the occurrence of this event results in its absence (gap). In recent years, studies of gaps in narratology have only intensified. Therefore, in an article published in 2023, G. Prince complements the already introduced types of narration with what he describes as "undernarrated" and "overnarrated" [Prince 2023]. Both the first and the second are characterized by the narrator's indication of the insufficiency or redundancy of the information provided, thereby emphasizing the avoidance of conventional representation, allowing the reader to draw attention to certain events in the narrative that need this attention.

The narrative gapping is also researched in detail by the narratologist W. Schmid [Schmid 2023], who examines it through the concept of the "nonnarrated" – what is relevant to the story told, correlates with it, but is not included in the fabula and remains unrepresented at the level of plot. Such gaps, according to Schmid, can participate in the creation of suspense, distract the reader's attention from some events and draw attention to others, create "false paths" in the story progression, control the reader's emotions when perceiving the story told to him, etc.

Studies of narrative gapping, as we have seen, are conducted in different directions: narratologists view narrative gaps as a tool for constructing a story; others emphasize its impact on the intersubjective interaction of the reader with the narrative; finally, researchers refer to its affordance to examine the connection between the actual and the virtual in the narrative. The "nonnarrated" proposed by Schmid seems to be relevant for considering gaps at the level of constructing a story: they are not represented in the narrative, but are challenged by the multilinearity of the narrative. And this approach seems appropriate in the study of multilinear narratives. At the same time, the multilinear narrative form imposes its own requirements for its description: therefore, it seems pertinent to add a pragmatic perspective to the method of describing narrative gaps proposed by Schmid, suggesting an emphasis on the reader's interaction with gaps and on the experience that these lacunae shape.

At the same time, fictional works examined in "The Nonnarrated" are limited to examples from the literature of the XIX-XX century (among them – the prose of A. P. Chekhov, F. M. Dostoevsky, W. Faulkner, J. Joyce, A. Robbe-Grillet), while contemporary narratives remain (yet) on the sidelines. But in which way do narrative gaps function in the literature of the XXI century? How do they interact with other types of narration – for example, with the "overnarrated"? Do their functions change, are they endowed with new – other – features and affordances? How does the functioning of gaps relate to the changes that are taking place in contemporary storytelling in general? How do they now participate in modeling the reader's experience, how do they allow the story to be told differently, but also to perceive it differently?

Contemporary literary narratives are often characterized by researchers as "complex" [Willheim, Kiss 2020]: they encompass such narrative forms as "reverse narratives" [Brutsch 2012], "modular narratives" [Cameron 2008], "maze narratives" [Eckel 2012], "network narratives" [McFarlane 2022], "chaotic narratives" [Dillon 2011], etc. Forking-path narratives, named after J.-L. Borges's famous story "The Garden of Forking-Paths", are also becoming widespread among them. Such narratives are based on the principle of consistently presenting to the reader variations of those events that happened to him, but only about what could have happened, but did not happen, leaving the reader trapped in variations of the life of the same hero.

Such a narrative form is unusual in itself: instead of one hero's life, the reader sees a scattering of options, several lives at once that can be lived "together" with the hero, simultaneously comparing them with each other. This form is therefore excessive from the point of view of representing events in the narrative: the plot in it becomes multilinear [Richardson 2019] and even multiversion [Richardson 2023], not reducible to a single chronological chain of events, and the reader is offered, along with different variants of the hero's life, several "possible" plots at once (as if "to choose from"). Such a multilinearity at the level of the plot is a sign of "overnarration", which G. Prince writes about: the hero chooses all the paths that open up before him at once, and not a single road, if we recall R. Frost, remains "not taken". But what is specific in a forking-path narrative is not only the functioning of the represented events, but also the functioning of narrative gaps. To examine narrative gapping in this type of contemporary narrative therefore seems to be a logical continuation of research on the "nonnarrated" and its functions in the history of narrative forms.

If the forking-path narrative, operating with variations, is excessive in terms of information provided to the reader about the hero, then it is excessive in another way: consistently expanding the knowledge about the hero, offering more and more new variants of his life, it inevitably expands the area of gaps – what accompanies the "narrated", but remains unrepresented and it is left to the reader's imagination.

We will examine the functioning of such narrative gaps on the example of the novel "4321" (2017) by Paul Auster. This novel, as an example of a forkingpath narrative form, has not yet been examined from a chosen perspective. It's a *bildungsroman*, telling us (as its generic convention prescribes) about the growing up and coming of age of a hero, but its peculiarity is that the hero lives four "lives" at once, and the variants of each stage of life are revealed in the novel sequentially. At the same time, the hero himself does not know about the existence of "other" lives, only the reader knows about them. Each new version, thus, excludes and refutes the previous one: storylines become contradictory, operated by "denarration" (in terms of B. Richardson) – this is what happens from the point of view of the plot. But how do these "options" relate to each other in the reader's imagination?

The second "life" of the main character ends in his youth – he dies, as described in chapter 2.2., and all subsequent chapters corresponding to this storyline (3.2., 4.2., 5.2., 6.2., 7.2.) remain empty. But the reader is not allowed to forget about this path of the hero, although interrupted early: he constantly encounters empty pages replacing the narrative that could have been if the hero had not died. The chapters are both present (indicated by a chapter number and a white sheet) and absent at the same time (they don't narrate anything). An empty sheet is a constant reminder to the reader about a lacuna, about an intentional omission, its material expression.

Such a material expression of a lacuna in the novel is not accidental: it once again points the reader to the mechanism that turns out to be significant for the functioning of this type of narrative and which goes hand in hand with another – "overnarration".

The novel is constructed in such a way that every 4 new chapters return the reader to the same period of the main character's life (for example, the novel presents 4 versions of the hero's childhood, 4 versions of youth, then university years, etc.), but this does not mean that all the events in them are repeated. Only the key (turning) elements are preserved, while the rest – for the reader – are based on the principle of filling narrative gaps. What does it mean? What remains unknown about the hero and his surroundings in one variation can be told in another. Yes, each variation is a "new" life of the hero, but the main character and some secondary characters for each of the variations are common. Therefore, new events that are described in each subsequent storyline fill in the gaps from the previous one in their own way. In other words: new events not only fill each of the variations, but also refer the reader to the preceding variation, now acquiring a new quality, "finishing" for the preceding storyline what it (the preceding) did not narrate.

The general backbone of the characters is unchanged, while each new variation can add new ones that were not found in previous versions. Variations highlight, like a spotlight, the ratio of the hero to different characters, leaving others in the shadows. For example, at the end of the first part, it is said about the robbery of a store – but the circumstances of the robbery, as well as the causes and consequences, are not discussed in any way. Another variation returns to this aspect of what happened: and here everything that precedes the key event is described in detail, as if "complementing" the events that actually occurred in another "life" of the hero.

In another part of the novel, the presence of the main character's mother is very noticeable, but we, as readers, in general, do not learn anything about her: she remains in the shadows, whereas another variation brings her line to the fore, making it a point of both reader attraction and attention of the hero, describing his life through a relationship with her.

There would be nothing special in such work with

narration and filling in gaps if we were talking about a traditional narrative that consistently reveals the entire space of the hero's life, outlines his relationships and connections with other characters, and fills (as a result) the entire "network" map in which the main character lives. But in the forking-path narrative, the functioning of gaps becomes more complicated: the reader is now asked to compare several variants of the development of the same events, and each new variant produces the effect of "complementation" in relation to the previous one. If the novel splits into four lines (and four "lives") at once, then for the reader they inevitably intersect, overlap each other; the readers inevitably compare and even "mix" them. The principle of "either, or", launched in a forking-path narrative at the level of the plot, is not respected when the reader interacts with all the storylines at once.

As a result, such work with narrative gapping has the exact opposite (compared to the traditional) effect: filled gaps do not so much "complete" the story, making it clearer and more coherent, as they disorient the reader, throwing more and more new details, each of which is related, in fact, to different "lives" of the hero, and not to a single one, which he (the reader) would have to build, reconstruct. Variations are based not so much on returning to the same events as on multiplying new ones, coupled with the creation of new storylines. And thus it becomes increasingly difficult for the reader to see the similarities and keep his attention on them: instead, he plunges into more and more new differences, which, in turn, imply the creation of new gaps. The introduction of additional characters or a change of focus leads to the fact that highlighted storylines bring the reader not only new events (they should also be mentioned!), but also new narrative gaps associated with them. As a result, filling in the previous gaps multiplies new ones, expanding the already multiple (multilinear) plot to the limit or completely depriving it of this limit and any boundaries. The reader may not have thought about the creative life of the hero's mother (she is a photographer in all four versions), limiting himself only to a modest knowledge of her profession. But here comes a new variation and makes her storyline central – seemingly filling a gap in the storyline of the mother, but at the same time posing the question to the reader: and in those other "lives" how does the professional and creative life of the mother turn out? How could this gap be filled there?

As a result, what happens is this: gaps that are permanent at the plot level [Schmid 2023], i.e. not filled in as the action develops in each of the storylines, at the level of reader perception (i.e. when the reader relates these storylines to each other) they become temporary [Schmid 2023] – those that are first opened and then filled in. The functioning of lacunae at the level of the plot, thus, comes into conflict with the functioning of lacunae at the level of reader perception: and this is what in a forking-path narrative enables to achieve the effect of disorientation of the reader, to create a sensation of the fundamental incompleteness of the story being told to him.

The situation is complicated by the abundance of secondary characters: the novel begins with a detailed

description of the entire family tree of the main character. The reader is told about the grandfather, and about the hero's parents, about many of their relatives. Therefore, already at the beginning of the novel, the reader understands perfectly well: there are innumerable of them, and probably sighs with relief when in the first variation he discovers only a narrow circle of all the characters indicated at the beginning. But his hopes are not justified: further variations remind him of these intended characters, and together with this reminder they force him to keep in mind all and mentally build their storylines for each of the variations, simultaneously filling in more and more gaps, encountering new and new questions, branching the tree (from the beginning of the novel) all more and more active. It seems that the task for the reader is not easy, assuming both his extreme concentration (which, in general, can not always be counted on), and the ability to keep the plenitude of events and multiple characters in memory at once – not one, not two, but a dozen, at least! In such an abundance of information, growing with each new variation, the effect of recognition (from filling in gaps) inevitably coexists with the effect of forgetting: the bitter realization that it is simply not possible to reconstruct this entire network and keep attention on all its elements. Such work with filling in narrative gaps is a test for the reader's memory, and with the stringing of new periods of the hero's life, these tests only increase. Not only because new gaps are multiplying (according to the principle that has already been described), but also because these new chapters often refer the reader to those additional characters who were before (and long ago) introduced, but their storylines were quickly cut off. A strange reminder (as if it were not motivated by a plot!) and an indication to the reader of the very forgetting that inevitably accompanies his journey through such a perplexing narrative world.

The effect of forgetting extends to those events that are just not added to each of the variations, but are repeated. There are not many of them. But even about them, immersed in the thick of "news" and other details, it is not difficult to forget, "drowning" in the multiplying space of additional storylines and details. This is paradoxical in itself, because similarities are probably always easier to see – but is it easier to keep them in the focus of your own attention?

Finally, filling in the gaps leads to another effect. There are many "new" characters in the variations, which then do not appear in any other, i.e. they are significant only for one fork along which the hero passes. Their appearance – detailed, bright, promising for the reader – is accompanied by their rather rapid disappearance: in none of the other variations do they exist anymore, as well as in the "continuation" of a specific line of the hero. As soon as they appear, they dissolve, their storylines break off, do not find continuation, simultaneously deceiving the reader's expectations, and his attention, too, which seemed to be riveted to them, and now seems to have been "wasted". However, Auster also works differently with this kind of "disappearance": in other words, "sometimes they come back." As a reminder to the reader - "you probably forgot about them..." - or as a violation of already new expectations associated with the developed habit of "broken" storylines in Auster's novel. This happens, for example, with the main character's friends, Noah and Paul: at the end of chapter 1.4. the hero seems to part with them forever. No wonder: this is not the first time this has happened in the novel. But when this storyline is resumed again (in a few chapters), a truly wonderful return occurs: the world, which, it would seem, once again turned into "nothing", into "emptiness", into a "lacuna" open to new fillings, suddenly actually fills up, but in exactly the same way, as it was filled before. Noah is back with the hero, Mildred and Paul are also back and even got back together. Such a plot "trick" resembles the effect of "rewinding", in which an object divided into parts suddenly re-forms from these parts into a whole. So it is here: the destroyed and lost turns out (thanks to the narrative power and fiction, of course) to be collected and glued together again - in violation of all expectations. But this example is rather an exception, confirming another narrative rule. The storylines break off, turning into nothing, and disappear without returning.

As we can see, the narrative gaps functioning in the contemporary forking-path narrative are undergoing changes and significantly expand the range of their functional capabilities: they oscillate between different storylines within the narrative, sometimes completing each of them, then, on the contrary, destroying; as a result, expanding the horizon of the "nonnarrated" for the reader. The excess of narrative information ("overnarration") characteristic of this type of contemporary narrative is complemented by a progressively expanding zone of gaps: and the more the reader learns about the hero, the more actively he realizes the expanding ignorance about him. The ratio of lacunae at the level of the plot and at the level of the reader's perception of the narrative is also changing: a multilinear plot consisting of "autonomous" lines operates with permanent (in Schmid's terms) lacunae; whereas these same lacunae (due to the reader's comparison of different storylines) become temporary for the reader. Therefore, the reader's experience also changes when interacting with such a narrative: filling in narrative gaps no longer contributes to creating the effect of a clear, coherent, completed story, just the opposite: such an unusual functioning of the gaps simulates the effect of the incompleteness of the story, its "retelling" in each new storyline.

The story of Archie, which Auster offers to his reader, is thus "rewritten" in each new storyline. The author's intention is to create this flexibility in both the fabula and the "I" of the main character. And the narrative gapping in Auster's novel only intensifies this effect: chapters contain the narrator's indications of omitted information or events, and these cues are indispensable to draw the reader's attention to the gaps. The gaps in the novel are highlighted through the representation of the main character's experience which additionally (affectively) draws the reader's focus on the gaps in the story. Auster's implementation of the forking-path narrative form therefore emphasizes its main affordances: through the narrator's cues, but also - to a significant extent - by shaping and engaging the reader's experience of interacting with these gaps.

The forking-path narrative, thus relying on excess as a narrative mechanism, immersing the reader in the thick of what is happening and overloading him both informatively and affectively, includes the mechanism of lacunarity in its functioning, and one thing follows from the other: the more detailed and variable the narrative world it creates, the more it generates gaps; the more it allows the reader to learn, to experience, to see and to feel, the more it hides from him, the more it closes access to. The production of new variations and new experiences for the reader in this form is therefore accompanied not only by the feeling of omnipotence granted to the reader, but also by the inevitable experience of one's own limitations: in cognition, in experience, in time, and in access to other worlds.

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