A Long and Winding Road from Narrator to Character: A Stylistic Analysis of Tom Robbins' Novel *Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates*

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Abstract

Tom Robbins' novel Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates *(2000) provides a plethora of ways to obtain an insight into his characters' minds and learn about their feelings and emotions by means of certain techniques of representing speech, thought, and perception, namely free indirect speech/thought, narrative report of thought act, and substitutionary perception/free indirect perception, to name but a few. The aim of this paper is to demarcate the boundaries between those modes of representation and through stylistic analysis to pinpoint examples of mode of representation which both reflect characters' thoughts and perceptions, while at the same time reveal the narrator's creativity while constructing the fictional world of the novel.*

Keywords

Free indirect discourse; overt narrator; speech and thought representation; Tom Robbins; *Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates*

Reading Tom Robbins' *Fierce Invalids* can be a real challenge; the stories Robbins tells are filled with the "voices" of a various nature from diverse sources – those of the characters', narrators', and author's. The question is which voice is to be attributed to which utterance or longer stretch of narrative. Applying close reading and conducting stylistic analysis (following methods of Michael Toolan and drawing on research by theoreticians, such as Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, Seymour Chatman, and many others) we will try to investigate to what extent such research can help differentiate between various modes of representation and whether difficulties with pinpointing "ambiguous" techniques, such as Free Indirect Discourse (FID), might have an effect on the reader's interpretation of the fictional world. When Paul Simpson observes that "yet it is this very indeterminacy which gives FIS its special status",[1] he is implying that in many cases such ambiguity is the writers' agenda in his/her process of storytelling and his/her pursuit to foreground an aesthetic effect. Things might become more complicated when Free Indirect Discourse (and many other modes of speech/thought representation and techniques) are juxtaposed with a narrator's own idiosyncratic language, which may, to use Tzvetan Todorov's terminology, result in the hesitation between uncanny and marvellous, in our cases between narrator's and characters' voices (not between two discourses, since in FID it is always the narrator through whom a character's voice is filtered). This mystification may happen if readers are not attentive enough in their reading practice and read "only for pleasure". Readers may not consider the role of the narrator in the fictional world, as it is the narrator who reports, but the character who feels. Although it is sometimes both personages who see/feel/hear at the same time, very often it is only the narrator who can report on feelings. On the other hand, the agent who feels is the character, someone who can never report (and indeed has never reported to anyone) his/her thoughts or feelings. Such is

1 Paul Simpson, *Language, ideology, and point of view* (London: Routledge, 1993), 21.

the case of the novel's characters, and such will be our reasoning. The authorial narrator of our story not only reports characters' feelings and emotions, but also their dreams, (drug-induced) hallucinations, and imaginations, which allows him to create a secondary story, the product of his own consciousness and creativity. Therefore, readers often vacillate as to whether the reports are to be regarded as FID. Our aim will be to trace the demarcation of various types of speech representation in the novel, along with their ultimate effect upon the story.

Introducing the narrator

Every narrative has a narrator, either apparent or "hidden". Moreover, all stories are diegetic by nature – the difference being in the degree of mimesis: some are more mimetic, others less. It often happens that readers are puzzled by who is speaking at a particular time in a story, and to whom they should attribute the ideas evoked in a passage. Such confusion may be deliberate, and stylisticians attempt to determine means and methods to uncover the presence of the narrator – often with satisfying ends. The narrator has a special position within Tom Robbins' novel *Fierce Invalids*, as the passages are interspersed with varying modes of speech representation, such as FID, substitutionary perception, and many others. These techniques are useful for writers because they enable them to report the character's speech or thought, while at the same time maintain narrative distance by using third person narration. The novel *Fierce Invalids* presents the readers with an overt narrator, who, as Manfred Jahn argues,

> directly or indirectly addresses the narratee, [he is] one who offers reader-friendly exposition whenever it is needed (using the 'conative' or 'appellative' discourse function), one who exhibits a 'discoursal stance' or 'slant' toward characters and events, especially in his/her use of rhetorical figures, imagery, evaluative phrases and emotive or subjective expressions ('expressive function'), one who 'intrudes' into the story in order to pass philosophical or metanarrative comments, one who has a distinctive voice.[2]

The narrator rarely addresses himself in the first person; however, this is not the sole factor which determines the degree of overtness/covertness in narratives. The very first encounter with an intrusive narrator occurs at the beginning of the novel, in Part 1, which starts as a sort of preface and which snapshots the four succeeding chapters. These extracts can be understood as both a narrative hook to grab readers' attention and the author's strategy to prepare his readers for a particular way of reading. By employing metafictional comments and making sure readers view the stories as pure constructs, the author highlights the artificiality of the story with metafictional commentary, including parenthetical references to his main character and to techniques as well allusion to another self-reflexive fiction:

> Now, it appears that this prose account has unintentionally begun in partial mimicry of the mind. Four scenes have occurred at four different locations at four separate times, some set apart by months or years. And while they do maintain chronological order and a connective element (Switters), and while the motif is a far cry from the kind of stream-of-consciousness technique that makes *Finnegans Wake* simultaneously the most realistic and the most unreadable book ever written (unreadable precisely because it is so realistic), still, alas, the preceding is probably not the way in which an effective narrative

2 Manfred Jahn, *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative* (English Department: University of Cologne, 2017), last modified May 2017, http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.htm.

> ought properly to unfold—not even in these days when the world is showing signs of awakening from its linear trance, its dangerously restrictive sense of itself as a historical vehicle chugging down a one-way street toward some preordained apocalyptic goal. Henceforth, this account shall gather itself at an acceptable starting point (every beginning in narration is somewhat arbitrary and the one that follows is no exception), from which it shall then move forward in a so-called timely fashion, shunning the wantonly tangential influence of the natural mind and stopping only occasionally to smell the adjectives or kick some ass.[3]

What is of a cardinal importance is the vocabulary that Robbins uses in his narrative. The phrase *kick some ass* is commonly regarded as offensive, but such idiomatic expressions and eccentric similes will be a characteristic feature of the idiolect of the narrator and some of the characters (especially the main protagonist Switters). In this opening section it is the narrator's diction which sets the tone of the story to be presented by a highly self-conscious narrator. The text is filled with subjective signals and evaluative phrases, which project a specific voice in the narrative and help Robbins convey ideas and commentaries on the narrative as such. The reader can find commentary on content, an effect which creates "appropriate voices for sad and happy, comic and tragic subjects"[4], as well as pragmatic signals, which Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short refer to as the discourse situation, i.e. the communication between an addresser (author, narrator, character and an addressee (reader, narratee, characters) in the discourse of the novel.[5]

Robbins's well-read, self-conscious narrator (in Franz Stanzel's typology an "authorial narrator")[6] is self-reflexive; he creates a bond with his characters in various ways – he addresses the narratees directly or indirectly, using commands or issuing rhetorical questions. Readers are therefore engaged in the narrative and partake in the construction of the story. The narrator comments on the story and justifies his accounts which are to come:

> That, then, was the setting for Smithe's impartation, an unusual if not outright bizarre account, which shall be summarized in the paragraphs that follow; summarized because to re-create it, to reproduce it verbatim, isn't merely unnecessary, it could be construed as an abuse of both the reader's patience and posterior. That such abuse can sometimes be rewarding—consider *Finnegans Wake* or the church-pew ass-numbing that leads to genital excitation—is beside the point. Or ought to be.[7]

Robbins often uses the images of parts of the body and human bodily functions in the story – with humorous or grotesque effect. Many humorous and often taboo images fall within the narrator's discourse (partly the main character's idiolect), e.g. the narrator remarks on his implied readers' "posterior." However, Robbins' reason for the digression in the form of the gnomic present, and for an analogy between human "posterior" and Joyce's novel, is to prepare the reader for an account which, as readers come to learn soon, is going to be "bizarre". Such direct address was typical of eighteenth-century novelists, such as Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne, and was later used by Victorian novelists and employed with comic effect by James Joyce in his *Finnegans Wake* (alluded

3 Tom Robbins, *Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates* (Harpenden: Herts, 2000), 8.

4 Jahn, *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative.*

5 Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London and New York: Longman, 1981, 2nd ed. 2007).

6 Franz Stanzel. *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986).

7 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 90.

to nearly 30 times in *Fierce Invalids*). Leech and Short refer to the same stylistic effect achieved in many Victorian novels: "George Eliot thus makes her presence tangibly felt, ostensibly guiding the reader towards particular judgments on characters and events. We are made aware of the fact that she is an addresser giving a message to us as addressees".[8]

What captures readers' attention is the inconsistency and often untrustworthiness, of the narrator throughout the novel, especially in terms of his knowledge and a lack of knowledge about the fictional world. Leech and Short argue that "most third-person narrators are […] omniscient: because they stand in the place of the implied author they take on his absolute knowledge".[9] A number of Victorian novelists employ the technique of addressing the reader with questions and statements creating a mystery or doubt in the plot. This stylistic effect may imply the lack of knowledge on the part of the narrator, which is justified by his power to grant or withhold information, slow down or speed up the pace of the story, or deliberately puzzle and mislead the reader whenever he pleases.

Robbins's narrator resembles a Dickensian narrator in many instances – he is intrusive, expressing his views and commenting on the scene and characters (often in parenthetical expressions within the text). He also takes the vantage point of the by-stander, looking at the events as a witness, who interprets the events and even pretends not to know the whereabouts of the fictional world – "sharing with his reader the role of mystified onlooker."[10] The following excerpt, in which Switters is travelling in Syria and accidently comes to an oasis and meets renegade nuns, illustrates the point:

> The distance between Switters and the oasis at last began to shrink. Quite suddenly, in fact, the compound seemed to enlarge, as if, cued by a director and strictly timed (ta da!), it had burst out on stage. It was no mirage. But what was it? It had better be good because all around it, in every direction, as far as his eyes could see, the world was as empty and dry as a mummy's condom.
>
> He was wondering if he shouldn't have remained with the Bedouins. They were a marvelous people to whom travel was a gift and hospitality a law.[11]

The demarcation of the narratorial dominance and/or character's voice/thought report are thwarted when the alienating effect is foregrounded by such markers as comparative structures (*as if, seemed*), and epistemic modal adverbs (*in fact*), denoting appearance or speculation, since there is no indication that these expressions evoke the character's centre of consciousness, although the previous context (previous events and situations) is filled with Free Indirect Discourse (FID). This is supported by Ann Banfield, who calls the first three sentences from the above excerpt a manifestation of "non-reflective consciousness" on the part of Switters.[12] The presence of the exclamation *ta da!* in parenthesis as well as the metaphorical simile *as empty and dry as a mummy's condom* call attention to a narrator (as in many cases throughout the novel), who is clearly taking an external perspective on the action. Michael Toolan states that the personalising details, such

8 Leech and Short. *Style*, 215.

9 Leech and Short. *Style*, 214.

10 Leech and Short. *Style*, 214.

11 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 216.

12 Ann Banfield, Email to Miloš Blahút, October 12, 2017.

as *ta da!* in parentheses, "make the reader sense either quite an intrusive narrator or traces of Switters' reactions".[13] Simpson adds that "this narrative technique especially when accompanied by alienating metaphors, is often reserved for a portrayal of villains and grotesques".[14] Another possible interpretation of the given passage will be provided below in the subsection "Other modes of speech/thought representation."

Between the narrator and the character: free indirect discourse as an elusive term

There are moments in the novel when the narrator's speech blurs with the speech or thoughts of the character. This technique for the representation of consciousness is generally called "free indirect discourse" (FID). This technique has presented challenges for many readers as well as problems for many critics to demarcate the boundary between the voice of the narrator and voice of the character, therefore some scholars refer to as a "dual voice", a term coined by Roy Pascal in 1977[15] and elaborated on by Monika Fludernik,[16] Stefan Oltean;[17] and many others). FID is not the only mode of speech/thought representation used by Robbins. Scholars distinguish a number of subtle differences with respect to speech/thought representation, with stream of consciousness remaining probably the most widely discussed technique in academic circles. This article will deal with those modes of the free direct style which are relevant for Robbins's novel *Free Invalids*, namely FID, free indirect perception, and the narrative report of thought.

Wallace contends that free indirect discourse "is called *style indirect libre* by the French, who first studied it in detail, and writers in English often follow them in naming it free indirect style or discourse."[18] However, the technique, also called by Dorrit Cohn "narrated monologue",[19] was already used by Jane Austen in the 19th century, and later found frequent expression in modernist literature. In many contemporary works of prose fiction, for instance the novels of Nick Brooks and Julian Barnes, to name just two, such techniques have become a conventional mode of writing. By means of FID, writers are given the opportunity to fully express their ideas in the third person narration, while at the same time reproduce the speech/thought processes and/or shift the perspective of some of their characters. Moreover, such a rendition of the speech/thought representation in narrative provides the authors with opportunities for free play with vocabulary, which is in the case of thought presentation often unverbalised. Robbins freely reports his characters' thoughts but also their speech, both of which are filled with neologisms, puns, and informal diction such as taboo words. Ultimately, the narrator has the advantage of smoothly shifting his narrative

13 Michael Toolan, Email to Miloš Blahút, May 24, 2017.

14 Simpson, *Language*, 61.

15 Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1977.

16 Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996).

17 Ștefan Oltean, "A semantic analysis of dual voice in a literary style," in *Diacronia* 3 (2016): 1–9. DOI: 10.17684/i3A37en

18 Martin Wallace, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 138.

19 Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 138.

toward his own commentary or "pure narration" (PN), while keeping the story moving forward. The most typical indicators of FID are the omission of reporting clauses, with some scholars even referring to the practice of the complete "deletion of reporting verb + conjunction 'that'".[20] Other techniques include the use of backshift tenses, third-person pronouns and past tense, i.e. markers of indirect statements and sustaining narrativity in narrative past. FID may also involve the use of "general markers of colloquialism, such as, conversion of possessive and personal pronouns, deictics referring to the character's spatiotemporal frame, […] ejaculations, and evaluative expressions."[21] Furthermore, questions, exclamations, and interrupted sentences (aligned with direct speech and indicating a character's speech/thought) can be interspersed within the narrator's discourse. Michael Toolan also includes structures of modality and dialectisms.[22]

The technique of free in direct discourse in fiction has been widely discussed by many scholars, such as Emar Maier, Michael Toolan, Paul Simpson, Dorrit Cohn, Brian McHale, Monika Fludernik, Roy Pascal, Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, Robert Adam, Ann Banfield, Mieke Bal, and many others. Critics have provided various interpretations of this hazy term, since they (like other readers) may become uncertain about whom they should attribute the voice in the narration. Sonja Bašić has pointed out that "as soon as strict borderline between author's discourse and character's speech […] delimited by quotation marks […] is abandoned, and in free indirect style it is abandoned twice over as it were, the borderlines become more or less problematic."[23] An interesting observation about the ambiguity of FID in fiction has been made by Seymour Chatman:

> Sometimes it is not possible to decide whether the words in indirect free form are the character's or the narrator's, […] this is not a negative characterisation, since the merging of the two voices may well be an intended aesthetic effect. The implication is "It doesn't matter who says this or thinks this; it is appropriate to both character and narrator." The ambiguity may strengthen the bond between the two, make us trust still more the narrator's authority. Perhaps we should speak of "neutralization" or "unification," rather than ambiguity.[24]

In the following excerpt taken from *Fierce Invalids*, a number of the aforementioned features are present, such as the use of exclamation marks:

> Bobby Case thought it was hilarious. Hilarious. Switters, the scourge of Iraq, the brave-hearted bane of the pickle factory, the poetry-spouting libertine who raised eyebrows at the C.R.A.F.T. Club, even; Switters, operative's operative and erstwhile stalwart defender of the erotic rights of the young, now a flunky at a convent, performing mundane clerical services for a gaggle of over-the-hill nuns! Hilarious.[25]

20 See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen. 1983), 115.

21 Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (University of Nebraska Press: Mouton, 1982), 35.

22 Michael Toolan, *Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics* (London: Arnold, 1996), 111.

23 Sonja Bašić, "Free Indirect Joyce: Authorial, Figural, Parodic? *(A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man),*" *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagrabiensia: Revue publiée par les Sections romane, italienne et anglaise de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Zagreb* 36–37(1991–1992): 271–272.

24 Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978), 206.

25 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 265.

What is quite obvious is the use of informal syntax (incomplete sentences, inversions), a technique observed by Alina Leskiv,[26] Mieke Bal,[27] and many others. Mieke Bal goes even further in her analysis of the syntax of FID, stating that it "articulates the 'stream of consciousness.'"[28] Such treatment of the use of FID is relevant to our analysis, since Robbins' narrative often encapsulates long stretches of Switters' musings, recollections and reported speech/thought processes. This can be seen in the accumulation of verbs or verb constructions denoting thought processes, i.e. *he mused, seemed, began to worry, dismissed, decided, needed, fancied himself,* etc. The fragments and hesitation of Bobby Case (one of Switters' colleagues) reflect his unverbalised thoughts (*Hilarious. Switters, the scourge of Iraq, the brave-hearted bane of the pickle factory, the poetry-spouting libertine who raised eyebrows at the C.R.A.F.T. Club, even*), an effect which is reinforced by an introductory indirect thought (*Bobby Case thought it was hilarious*).

Michael Toolan tackles seeming ambiguity of FID by using his "naturalness" test by which readers may distinguish "pure narrative from FID."[29] This test is

> that of seeing whether it 'sounds right' to treat the sentence you are inspecting as coming from the narrator to you, or as essentially […] coming from a character to him- or herself or to another character […], and this is best done by assessing the 'attributability' of the general wording (setting personal pronouns and tense on one side temporarily) to a character rather than a narrator. [30]

This technique can be illustrated in an example from the novel:

> Bobby is correct, he mused. To deny that young girls were throbbing hives of sexual honey was to be both sexist and ageist. […]
>
> Wouldn't it be to his betterment and, perhaps, to society's as well, to go on down to Sacramento and, in one way or another, stare that taboo in the eye? Wouldn't it? Or was this merely some elaborate Swittersesque rationalization? (The big blue nude gave nary a sign.)
>
> At 6 P.M. he began to worry. At quarter past, he revved up the fret machine. It was darker than the clam beds of Styx out there, and a needle-nose rain had commenced to fall. Where could they be? Certainly, something had gone wrong. In her frail condition, Maestra might have lost her grip and fallen off. Bobby, hardly the most cautious of bikers, might have skidded them into a lumber truck. Or a driver, typically unmindful of motorcycles and further handicapped by the gloom and the rain, might have plowed into them or run them over a curb. There *must* have been an accident. What else would have delayed them? Switters dismissed any notion of hanky-panky. There were limits to Bobby's gallantry. She was a grandmother, for God's sake! She was older than salt.[31]

26 Alina Leskiv, "The Literary Phenomenon of Free Indirect Speech," *Studia Anglica Resoviensia* 6 (2009): 51–58.

27 Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press. 1985).

28 Mieke Bal, *Narrative Theory: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 172.

29 Michael Toolan, *Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics* (London: Arnold, 1996, 3rd edition 2013), 113.

30 Toolan, *Language*, 113.

31 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 138.

In the previous extract we may notice the questions and the exclamations, which grant the reader access to Switters' consciousness (reinforced by the verbs of perception *mused, thought, Swittersesque rationalization*). The event starts with Switters worrying, which indicates narrative report with the verb of emotion *worry.* This incipit creates a frame of reference for the whole event – the questions asked by the overt narrator evoke the Switers's language and voice.

The second sentence is exclusively narrator's discourse (narrative report with the action verb *revved up*), so the third sentence containing the metaphor (*darker than the clam beds of Styx*) creates a confusion, as it should automatically be attributed to the narrator, since Switters never uses such elaborate diction. Moreover, it is the voice and diction of the intrusive narrator who makes fun, subverts, or puts to doubt some of his character's unverbalised thoughts and utterances. It is at these points that it may be assumed that Robbins returns to the character's consciousness. Such vocabulary is within the narrator's discourse, but questions and reasoning, such as *There must have been an accident*, can be interpreted as Switters' thoughts (prompted by the first sentence *He began to worry*) – therefore, free indirect thought.

The conclusion so far is that it is the narrator who speaks, and actually narrates the story, using his own vocabulary, but at the same time inserting vocabulary that Switters might be using (not necessarily thinking at the moment of action/thought process). We will refer to such rendering of consciousness later. Moreover, Emily Troscianko has noted a very important feature of FID: "The standard form of free indirect style encourages the reader to enter a cognitive continuum with the focalising character's cognition (including thought, emotion, perception, and action) but there's no definable separate narrator or focaliser to distance us from it."[32]

To answer the question as to whether some of the utterances can be seen as a direct speech (in this case, direct thought), Toolan proposes a test. Sentences indicating the presence of FID have been selected to conduct the test:

> Where could they be? Certainly, something had gone wrong.
> (I, the narrator, am telling you, the reader, that) Where could they be? Certainly, something had gone wrong. = PN
> or
> (I, Switters, am telling myself that) Where can they be? Certainly, something has gone *wrong. = FID*

It might seem awkward to think that such non-diegetic commentary can be attributed to the narrator, since the omniscient narrator assumes a god-like position outside the immediate action. It is, however, true that a fiction writer may at times delimit his own omniscience, or even pretend that he does not (and cannot) know certain things at all. In these ways the voice of the character is often felt through questions posed. As noted above, many paragraphs begin with narrative report of speech/thought act (NRSA/NRTA), indirect thought (IT) featuring verbs of perception or emotion (*mused, was fond of, gave every indication of being pensive, he thought he knew where it was coming from*), interspersed with indicators of FID. Here, the context is often a very helpful indicator, and as Brian McHale

32 Emily Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 189.

states, "manifestly, it is contextual cues more than formal features that determine, in many cases, whether or not a sentence will be interpreted as a free indirect representation of speech, thought or perception."[33]

The conclusion of the paragraph returns to Switters' consciousness contaminated with the narrator's vocabulary. Readers feel Switters' worrying through epistemic modal expressions, in which italics placed on *must* reinforce the emphasis placed by the character (*must have been;* bold italics used by the present author. to distinguish from the rest of the sentence) and the question followed by Switters' dismissal of the notion (*What else would have delayed them? Switters dismissed any notion of hanky-panky*). The final exclamation and simile reinforce the presence of Switters' voice and even language (*She was a grandmother, for God's sake! She was older than salt.*) Simultaneously, however, it is the narrator who makes himself present by his humorous metaphors, alliterative similes, digressions, metafictional remarks, and generic statements. Such renditions of mode representation add psychological depth to both character and narrator.

Other modes of speech/thought representation

Robbins's narrative mostly features narrator's discourse often giving way to other forms of speech/thought representation, such as psychonarration, free indirect speech/thought, substitutionary perception, indirect thought, and many other forms.

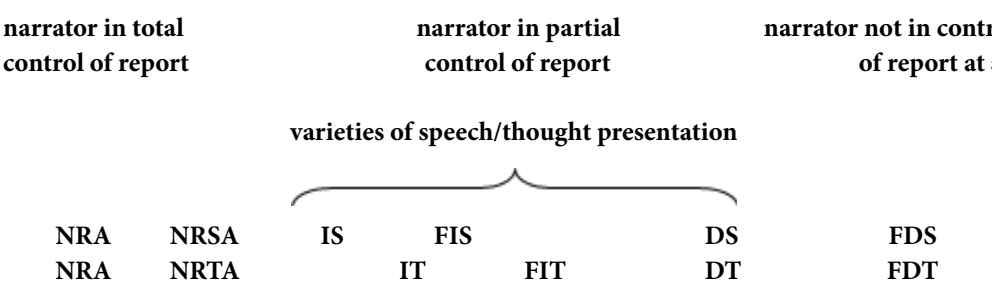

Fig.1. A scheme of modes of presentation (from *Style in Fiction,* Leech and Short, 2007)[34]

Traditionally, narratologists distinguish between various modes of speech presentation, based on the narrator's control of the action. Narrative report of action (NRA, often shortened as narrative report[35] simply "shows" observable story activities or events from an omniscient point of

33 Brian McHale, "Speech Representation," in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. P. Hühn, et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2017), http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/.

34 Leech and Short, *Style*, 260.

35 See Leech and Short, *Style*, 2008.

view, deliberately excluding speech acts",[36] a technique referred to as "pure narration" by Toolan.[37] As Suzanne Klinger notes, "The speech-presentation cline moves progressively from the purely diegetic (the narrator's pole of the cline) to the purely mimetic (the character's pole of the cline)."[38] Narrative report of speech/thought act (NRSA/NRTA) and indirect speech/thought (IS/IT) are exclusively narrator's discourse. NRSA is "useful for summarising relatively unimportant stretches of conversation."[39] Robbins's narration is marked by various modes of speech representation (outlined in fig. 1) which are used according to whether Robbins reports the inner thought of the character, or interprets the events from his vantage point using specific vocabulary, i.e. not that of a chracter. Many of the paragraphs start with narrative report, which may not seem unusual if we consider the fact that majority of the beginnings start with verbs expressing processes of verbalisation and metal processes (verba cogitandi (*he thought, it was unthinkable that he would lie to her*), verba sentiendi/percipiendi (*he saw, glanced, he noticed, observed, he gathered from his description, jumped to the conclusion, he was on the verge of bringing up…when it occurred to him, was relieved to find, what gripped him*), verba dicendi (*he wasn't about to explain , he went on to warn, he responded, he proclaimed, had to bite his tongue to keep asking… but later he did ask*), or attitudinal verbs of intent, mental rehearsal, desire, and so on (*had always loved, he liked, decided not to correct the assumption*,) in contrast with relation processes verbs (verbs of being) and material processes verbs (verbs of doing), which are used sparsely or not at all.

The narrator often adopts the language of his characters. In his narrative, he often uses the vocabulary his main protagonists might use in many situations. This is manifested in various ways, for instance, through interjections in parenthesis in which the narrator exclaims, i.e. *ta da*! or the use of the epistemic modal adverb *in fact* in a parenthetical position, which, as Michael Toolan contends, may be attributed to both the character and the narrator, and which make the reader "sense either quite an intrusive narrator, or traces of Switters' reactions or responses to their arrival at the oasis."[40] This is supported by the context, which is very important in pinpointing the source(s) of a particular voice. The sentence in one of the previous excerpts *But what was it?* is followed by the modal verb *It had better be good*, suggesting someone's (the narrator's) advice or warning about something, which implies not only the author's subjective interpretation and the character's wish, but serves as an indicator of fictionality. Emar Maier interprets the question, the modal auxiliary *had better be good* and the eccentric simile *dry as a mummy's condom* as an example of FID, but Toolan is careful in stating definitely whose viewpoint is maintained in particular statements, Toolan claims that "the mention of 'his eyes' is distancing"[41] and rejects the idea that this could be one of the characters' thoughts. He explains this mode through Bernhard

36 Christian R. Hoffmann, "Narrative perspectives on voice in fiction," in *Pragmatics in Fiction* (ProQuest Ebook Central, 2017), 169. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/seattleu/detail.action?docID=4830558.

37 Toolan, Email to Miloš Blahút, May 24, 2017.

38 Suzanne Klinger, *Translation and Linguistic Hybridity: Constructing World-View* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 49.

39 Leech and Short, *Style*, 260.

40 Toolan, Email to Miloš Blahút, May 24, 2017.

41 Michael Toolan, Email to Miloš Blahút, May 24, 2017.

Fehr's term "Substitutionary Perception."[42] — "narrating what the character sees/hears/smells, but not strictly what they are thinking".[43] Schmid argues: "If the narrator reproduces the character's perception without clothing the reproduction in that character's evaluative, grammatical and stylistic forms of expression, we are dealing with a variant free indirect perception."[44] Emily Troscianko emphasizes that "while what [Fehr] calls a 'perception indicator' (P.I.) may sometimes precede the sentence(s) of substitutionary perception (e.g. 'I looked at the count. He was sitting at the table smoking cigar', […] it may also be merely hinted or completely absent."[45] Concerning the position of the technique on the scale in Fig. 1, it is equivalent to the mode free indirect discourse. In his chapter "The interference of narrator's text and the character's text", Wolf Schmid claims that "text interference is a hybrid phenomenon, in which mimesis and diegesis (in the Platonic sense) are mixed, a structure that unites two functions: the reproduction of character's text (mimesis) and the actual narration (diegesis)."[46] Wolf Schmid concludes that SP is functionally analogous to FID.

There is, however, another viewpoint regarding the aforementioned excerpt. The narrator – the storyteller and puppeteer – unveils in a particular place and in particular time of the story the viewpoint (not thoughts) his character has, which creates not only an effect of immediacy and speaker's involvement in the story being told, but also his sympathy with his character. This "mystified onlooker" that Leech and Short observe in Dickens's novels, however, is completely detached from the characters' viewpoint and thoughts. In contrast, Robbins controls his narrative by oscillating between the implied author's creative fiction making (therefore readers are provided with such descriptions as *the world was as empty and dry as a mummy's condom*, which is the mode of pure narration, and a character's viewpoint (*It was no mirage. But what was it?*). What follows these events is a shift into more subjective representation, first introduced by indirect thought *He was wondering if he shouldn't have remained with the Bedouins*, and followed by FIT, e.g. *They were a marvelous people to whom travel was a gift and hospitality a law*.

In addition, other ways of reporting characters' thoughts verbatim are present in the narrative – direct thought (note the attributive discourse – verba cogitandi *thought*), especially within the narrator's discourse, that is, in parenthesis and orthographically demarcated by italics. In other cases, the thoughts of the characters are highlighted by Robbins in his story: *Cottage cheese with ketchup*, he thought. *Richard Nixon's favorite meal. Probably got the recipe from John Foster Dulles. Patooie!*.[47] When Robbins reports his characters' thoughts (the attributive discourse in medial position), they are not italicised: "She smiled, and it was, he thought, like a cross between the Taj Mahal and a jukebox."[48] Here, the narrator remains detached from the characters' thoughts, which allows him greater freedom to comment on and interpret his characters' thoughts.

42 The term substitutionary perception originally used by Bernhard Fehr in 1938, was adopted by Seymour Chatman (1978) and Schmid (2010), who use the term free indirect perception. Ann Banfield calls this technique "a represented perception" (1982).

43 Toolan, Email to Miloš Blahút, May 24, 2017.

44 Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 162.

45 Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism*, 188.

46 Schmid, *Narratolgy*, 137.

47 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 284.

48 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 229.

Perhaps the most intricate part of Robbins' narrative practice is his ability to fabulate and colour the story with the narrator's version of events, which often slows down the story, or even stops it completely. The aim of such practice is manifold – to create humour and a bizarre atmosphere; to characterise the protagonists; to inflate, distort, or even subvert events; to pass on ironic comments, or to communicate various interpretations about diverse issues. To put it other way, we will see how Robbins's narrator reports his character's intense feelings, but the verbalisation of the thoughts and the poetic language will be in the domain of the narrator. In one of the episodes, Switters looks at and muses about Suzy, his 16–year-old stepsister, with whom he is in love:

> Okay, where was he? Staring at Suzy, Suzy staring back, he was captivated to the extent that he failed to hear a word of his mother's prolonged greeting or to adequately return the maternal embrace; Suzy, openly curious, amused, and more self-conscious about her amusement than about her exposed breastlings, which she eventually covered almost as an afterthought. […] She stood there vacillating between poise and awkwardness, as if she were unsure just how much she had to protect.

> The ghost of the guffaw still clung to her tumid lips, causing them to quiver, and in their quivering fullness they reminded Switters of one of those marine creatures that attach themselves to rocks and dare observers to guess whether they are animals or flowers. […] Because she had experienced neither success nor failure in life to any appreciable degree, her countenance remained unwrenched by society's dreary tugs but rather was lit by the fanciful phosphors of the mythic universe. Or, so he imagined.[49]

If we look at the first sentence *She stood there vacillating between poise and awkwardness, as if she were unsure just how much she had to protect*, it shows the vantage point of the external narrator, interpreting Suzy's uncertainty in his own manner. The following statement *The ghost of the guffaw still clung to her tumid lips* is a pure narration, which is within the narrator's perception, but, and it is very important to note, also Switters' perception, making it substitutionary perception. Tom Robbins in his interview has confirmed that "Switters may be experiencing that vision, but may or may not describe it in those exact words. The character's thoughts and feelings are often polished in the lapidary of the narrator's style, his language, his imagination. Some of the thoughts are not even fully formed in the mind of the character: they are not so much a thought as a feeling."[50] The difference is again the exact poetic wording, which must be at the onset of the paragraph interpreted as preceding from the creative mind of the external narrator, our "mystified onlooker." The most intricate part comes with the statement *Or, so he imagined.* Readers are led to believe that these were the imaginations that Switters really had. However, we argue that readers may be unsure to what extent they can attribute the exact comparisons and imaginations to Switters' mind. The human mind may visualise images in metaphors, but thinking in metaphors as well as instantaneously giving them a literary form is hardly possible (the external narrator's report only reinforces the feeling of uncertainty and hesitation). The transformation of the passage into first person narration makes it a perfectly possible situation:

> (I, Switters, being a poetic soul, think): […] they reminded me of one of those […] or so I imagined […] it would be no exaggeration to say she struck me as a cross between Little Bo Peep and a wild thing from the woods.

49 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 66–67.

50 Tom Robbins, Letter to Miloš Blahút, September 4, 2018.

On the other hand, Switters never comes across as such a "poetic soul" in the narrative when he is speaking in direct speech. Therefore, such surreal metaphors are felt within the discourse of the external narrator, who, by means of exaggeration, surreal imagery and poetic language, interprets Switters' feelings and perceptions, although the concrete imagery and similes may be Switters' own (especially when his musings, dreams, sickness- and drug-induced hallucinations are concerned). Speculative as this contention may seem, it can be supported by the following excerpt from the novel:

> Did he perceive in her (or project onto her) a glimmer of primal Eve, parting the original ferns? Of salty Aphrodite, scratching her clam in the surf? Of a callow Salome, naively rehearsing a hootchy-kootch that would rattle a royal household and cost a man his head? Maybe he did, maybe he didn't go that far. Maybe he only appraised her with the dum-dum delight with which the GI Elvis must have appraised the pubescent Priscilla.[51]

Switters' perceiving in her *a glimmer of primal Eve*, for example, is thwarted by the narrator's statement: *Maybe he did, maybe he didn't go that far. Maybe he only appraised her with the dum-dum delight with which the GI Elvis must have appraised the pubescent Priscilla*. Thus, it appears that the characters are being treated by the narrator as puppets. The omniscient narrator can direct the characters, read their minds, uncover their hidden dreams and state what they would normally think or say, which is always contaminated with his own diction, not the diction of the character.

Concerning the voices which persist throughout the narrative, it may be observed that the narrator's voice is the dominant one, but the character's thoughts, perceptions, and ideology are evoked by means of free indirect thought or substitutionary perception. This enables the overt narrator to react to his character's unverbalised thoughts and manipulate readers' perception by providing speech and thought, which his characters were not necessarily aware of, but could have been.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present a stylistic analysis of Tom Robbins' novel *Fierce Invalids Home from Hot Climates*. The story, in which the main character named Switters travels across four continents, is told by a narrator, who adopts Switters' perception and thoughts by means of the techniques of free indirect discourse or substitutionary perception. However, the overt narrator makes himself present in the narration, an effect which Robbins achieves by means of idiosyncratic language, full of similes and metaphors, as well as parentheses, distinct from those used by Switters, despite the fact that a number of scholars (Michael Toolan, Ann Banfield) have suggested that such perceptions and thoughts may be attributed to both the narrator and the character. Intrusive and omniscient, the narrator participates on his own narrative another story of his own that he has invented. Often, free indirect discourse and substitutionary perception are followed by other modes of free indirect thought or perception coloured by the narrator's language. The narrator often transposes his diction, and even perceptions, e.g. interpretations, ideology, to that of his character while ostensibly retaining a separation between the two entities.

51 Robbins, *Fierce Invalids*, 67.

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