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THE DUALITY OF APPEARANCE AND REALITY AS A STRUCTURING PRINCIPLE OF AGATHA CHRISTIE'S DETECTIVE FICTION

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The article examines the duality of appearance and reality in Agatha Christie's detective fiction as an important element of her narrative poetics. Although Christie's narrative techniques and detective strategies have attracted considerable scholarly attention, the duality of appearance and reality has rarely been analyzed as a coherent organizing principle of her works. The purpose of this study is to investigate how the opposition between appearance and reality functions at the levels of narrative structure, characterization, and reader perception. The analysis is based on Christie's novels "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd", "Murder on the Orient Express" and "And Then There Were None" and employs structural, narratological, and interpretative methods. The results suggest that the opposition between appearance and reality functions as a key organizing principle of Christie's detective fiction, shaping narrative structure, characterization, plot construction, and reader perception. The study shows that dualism is not only a theme in Christie's detective fiction but also a significant element of its narrative organization.

Introduction. The majority of Golden Age detective novels followed a relatively stable narrative pattern in which a crime was introduced at the beginning of the story and

subsequently investigated until its solution was revealed. As a result, the genre primarily emphasized logical problem-solving and the reconstruction of events rather than the exploration of characters' psychological complexities. Yet reducing Agatha Christie's fiction to a conventional detective puzzle would be an oversimplification, as her novels frequently operate on multiple narrative levels simultaneously.

Behind the apparent order, respectability, and transparency of Christie's fictional world lies a hidden reality characterized by deception, concealed motives, and unexpected criminal identities. In many of her works, the opposition between appearance and reality extends beyond the level of plot and becomes an important organizing principle of characterization, narrative structure, and reader perception. In the present study, dualism is understood as the interaction of two opposing semantic, psychological, or narrative dimensions within a literary text. From this perspective, the opposition between appearance and reality may be regarded as one of the central manifestations of dualism in Christie's detective fiction.

Despite the fact that Christie's works have been widely studied by international scholars such as Charles J. Rzepka [4], Merja Makinen [5], and Susan Rowland [6], various aspects of her detective fiction continue to attract scholarly attention. In Uzbekistan, Christie's works have also become the subject of academic research. In particular, M.Abdullayeva examined the problems of translating phraseological units reflecting national colour into Uzbek based on Uzbek translations of Agatha Christie's works [9], while other researchers have focused on issues such as gender problems, motives of crime and punishment, and lexical structure of Agatha Christie's detective novels. Among international scholars, British scholar John Scaggs emphasizes the compositional significance of the classic detective duo (the sleuth and their companion), treating it as an instrument to intensify reader focalization [7, p. 32-40]. The socio-cultural and spatial dimensions of this issue are examined in detail by Alison Light, who focuses on the implicit psychological dualism of the writer's artistic world; her work demonstrates how the outwardly static and secure space of the English countryside enters into an irreconcilable conflict with the hidden destructive impulses of the characters [8, p. 88]. These studies implicitly point to the tension between external appearance and hidden reality that characterizes Christie's detective universe.

Despite extensive scholarship on Christie's detective techniques, narrative deception, and characterization, the duality of appearance and reality has rarely been examined as a coherent poetic principle underlying plot construction and reader manipulation. Existing studies tend to focus on individual narrative devices or detective strategies without considering how the opposition between appearance and reality operates across different levels of the text.

This article aims to fill this gap by examining the contrast between appearance and reality as a structural principle in Agatha Christie's detective fiction, with particular attention to characterization, plot development, and reader perception. To achieve this, the study employs a structural-poetic approach and analyzes select novels, particularly "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" [1], "Murder on the Orient Express" [2], "And Then There Were None" [3] which most vividly illustrate the operation of this narrative principle.

Methods. The present study primarily relies on the structural-poetic method, as the duality of appearance and reality in Agatha Christie's detective fiction is not merely an isolated textual element; rather, it is one of the key structuring principles of the author's poetics. This narrative principle can be observed across multiple levels of narrative construction, including narrative organization, plot development, characterization, and readers' perception. Therefore, the structural-poetic approach provides an effective framework for analyzing how the opposition between appearance and reality affects different levels of narrative structure.

Additionally, the following methods were employed in the course of the research:

The narratological analysis helps examine important aspects of Agatha Christie's poetics, such as unreliable narration, withholding of information, focalization, and the manipulation of reader perception. The interpretative approach was applied to analyze the hidden meanings and underlying oppositions in Agatha Christie's detective novels.

Results and discussion. Detective fiction, according to many researchers, engages readers in a special way and assigns them a more active role than other genre fiction does. This effect is achieved by using various narrative techniques, one of the most significant of which is the duality of appearance and reality. As Tzvetan Todorov notes, "at the base of the whodunit we find a duality" [10, p.295], namely the coexistence of the hidden act of the crime and visible story of the investigation. Although Todorov refers primarily to the contrast between crime and investigation, this principle can also be observed across multiple levels of Agatha Christie's detective novels, including the opposition between appearance and reality.

In the context of Agatha Christie's detective fiction, the structural opposition between appearance and reality is reflected in various elements of narrative construction, such as characterization, plot construction, misleading clues, setting and reader perception. For instance, at first readers are presented with a particular version of events, which is perceived as plausible, however the investigation gradually reveals inconsistencies and the final revelation uncovers the hidden reality.

The duality of appearance and reality constitutes an important feature of the character system in Christie's detective fiction. It manifests itself in many of Christie's works. This is

particularly evident in the novels “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd” and “And Then There Were None”.

In “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd” this principle finds clear confirmation, as the narrator himself is the murderer. Dr. James Sheppard appears to the reader as an ordinary country doctor, a respected member of society, and a close acquaintance of Hercule Poirot. He looks like a reasonable, calm, and objective observer of events. Since the narrative is told in the first person, the reader perceives him as a reliable intermediary between themselves and the events taking place. Readers trust him because in a classic detective story, the narrator traditionally acts as the detective’s assistant (like Hastings to Poirot or Watson to Sherlock Holmes). The reader is accustomed to considering such a character an honest witness. Also, Sheppard constantly reports facts, participates in the investigation, and does not arouse suspicion with his behavior. His social status as a doctor also reinforces trust in him. Christie uses first-person narrative and carefully controls the flow of information. Sheppard does not report direct lies, but deliberately omits important details and formulations of some events in such a way as to direct the reader's attention elsewhere. That is why the reader is sure that they know the whole picture of what is happening, although in reality they receive only a part of the information. In the finale, Poirot reveals that the murderer of Roger Ackroyd is Dr. Sheppard himself. After this, the reader is forced to rethink the entire novel. Those episodes that previously seemed to be the ordinary narrative of a witness acquire a completely different meaning. It turns out that the narrator was not just observing the investigation, but hiding his own guilt. It is here that, the opposition of appearance and reality is manifested with particular clarity:

appearance — an honest doctor, an assistant in the investigation, and a reliable narrator;
reality — a murderer who manipulates the reader's perception and hides the truth.

A similar mechanism can be observed in “And Then There Were None”. At the beginning of the novel, Justice Wargrave is presented as a rational, impartial, and respectable older man. His behavior does not arouse suspicion among either the characters or the readers. However, the final revelation demonstrates us that this character himself is the organizer of all murders. Therefore, the image of a respectable and decent judge is undermined by his true nature as a cold-blooded murderer. This demonstrates that duality of appearance and reality plays crucial role in characterization of Christie’s detective novels.

The duality of appearance and reality can be observed not only in characterization, but also it is one of the major principles, organizing reader manipulation mechanism. Firstly, the reader is presented with a particular version of events, where part of the information

intentionally is concealed. Based on the available facts, the reader draws their own conclusions, but subsequently, these conclusions prove to be incorrect.

Agatha Christie skillfully employs red herrings to manipulate readers' perception. When Marc Alexander discusses Christie's *Orient Express*, he remarks that detective fiction could be considered a "core genre of manipulative writing" (11, p.13). A similar use of red herrings can be observed in the "*Murder on the Orient Express*" as well as in "*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*". In both novels detectives compile lists of suspects or records of the movements of characters. Since such lists are visually distinguished from the main text, the reader perceives them as a reliable source of information and attempts to construct a logical version of events on their basis. However, it later becomes apparent that this information does not lead to the true solution of the mystery. Thus, the presentation of information in the form of lists creates an impression of reliability, while the actual solution remains concealed. This shows that the appearance of reliable clues is challenged by the reality that they are merely red herrings used to manipulate readers' perception.

The duality of appearance and reality can also be observed in the spatial organization of Christie's detective fiction. The setting in which the main events of the novel unfold is initially perceived in a particular way, it creates in the reader a sense of safety or predictability. As the plot develops, its hidden function is gradually revealed, turning out that the actual significance of the space is opposite to the initial impression. For instance, Indian Island in the novel "*And Then There Were None*" initially seemed as a beautiful place for recreation that appears safe and peaceful for characters and readers, in reality, it is revealed to be an enclosed trap and a site of execution. Similar spatial duality can be observed in other Christie's novels, for example, "*Murder on the Orient Express*". At first glance the train *Orient Express* appears to be a comfortable and secure means of transportation, the journey seems ordinary and predictable. However, after the murder, the train becomes an isolated and confined space, transforming setting into a closed environment where the investigation takes place. Thus, space in the novel performs not only a decorative function but also contributes to the creation of the opposition between appearance and reality.

At the level of plot construction, the tension between appearance and reality becomes especially prominent. According to Peter Huhn, detective fiction is based on reconstruction of a hidden story, which is gradually revealed through the process of investigation [12]. In many detective works, readers are initially presented with only a partial version of events, which appears plausible. However, in reality, important information remains concealed, and the true picture is revealed only at the end. This narrative strategy can be found in Agatha Christie's

detective fiction. In “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”, the duality of appearance and reality constitutes a fundamental principle of plot construction. Readers are initially presented with a version, where Dr. Sheppard is an ordinary narrator and a witness to the investigation into Roger Ackroyd’s murder. All suspicion is directed toward other characters. It appears convincing because the narrative is presented in the first person. The reader receives information directly from the narrator and therefore perceives him as a reliable source of information. The fact that Dr. Sheppard himself committed the murder is concealed. Moreover, he deliberately omits certain details of his actions and thoughts, creating a false impression of the events for the reader. In the final part of the novel, Hercule Poirot establishes the true sequence of events and exposes Dr. Sheppard as the murderer. As a result, the initial version of events proves to be false, while the hidden reality becomes known to the reader. A similar plot construction can be observed in “And Then There Were None”. At the beginning of the novel, the characters believe that the murderer is among them and attempt to identify the guilty person. However, the true organizer of the murders has already carried out his plan and remains undiscovered. Only in the final part of the novel is the actual sequence of events revealed, exposing the hidden reality behind the crimes. Thus, the opposition between appearance and reality manifests itself not only in characterization, reader manipulation, and spatial organization, but also in plot construction, where the reader is initially presented with a plausible version of events, while the hidden reality is revealed only at the end of the narrative.

Conclusion. The purpose of this study was to examine the duality of appearance and reality in the poetics of Agatha Christie’s detective fiction. The analysis showed that this narrative principle manifests itself at various narrative levels, including the character system, the manipulation of reader perception, spatial organization, and plot construction. The results suggest that the opposition between appearance and reality serves not only a thematic function but also contributes to the organization of the narrative structure of the novels. In many of Agatha Christie’s novels, the initial impressions of characters, settings, and events are subsequently contrasted with their true nature, serving as a vital mechanism in constructing the detective plot. Thus, the duality of appearance and reality functions as one of the major structuring principles of Christie’s detective fiction poetics. Further research could explore other forms of duality in the author’s works and their role in shaping the detective narrative.

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