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FOCUS DISSIPATION AS A NARRATIVE AND MIMETIC TECHNIQUE: A CASE STUDY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S "BLUE & GREEN"¹

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of focus dissipation as a narrative and mimetic technique based on ludic transformations of Figure/Ground correlation in literary text. Such transformations are triggered by text-driven attentional shifts that violate, shatter, or split the integrity of focal elements in literary texture, thus generating a range of verbal and/or multimodal stylistic effects. Woolf's "Blue & Green" (1921) suggests a sample of condensed mimetic and diegetic manifestations of focusing/refocusing/defocusing, which heightens textual ambiguity caused by temporal, spatial, epistemic, colour, and substance oscillations. The split of initially focal elements into a set of microfoci, accompanied by the interaction of sensory (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and kinesthetic) modes, gives rise to what is known as verbal holography in literary mimesis. The motion of foci, highlighted by the wave-like chains of short nominative sentences and excessive syntactic parallelism, creates a narrative construal of dynamism vs. stability as an iconic trigger of the readers' emotional response.



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1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a radical twist of research interest in ludic phenomena, whether verbal proper (Iriskhanova 2014), thus “playing with this wondrous nominative faculty” (Huizinga 1949/1980: 4), or textual (Bolotnova 2009) and narrative (Iriskhanova 2014; Izotova 2018), that permeate various types of discourse, including literary. The phenomenon of *verbal* (Iriskhanova 2014) or *narrative* (Iriskhanova 2014; Izotova 2018) games has caused a new wave of scholarly interest, initially provoked by Johan Huizinga’s (1949/1980: 1–4) conception of play as a cultural and social – not just biological, i.e. instinctive and irrational – phenomenon, and further developed, among others, along linguistic (Chrzanowska-Kluczevska 2004; Radzijevs’ka 2014) and linguopoetic (Ljuksemburg 1999) lines. One of such *textual* or *discursive* games, widely employed in modernist and postmodernist literary narratives, results from the inversion of the Figure/Ground correlation (Stockwell 2002: 13–20), when the background elements, however diffuse, gain a special relevance and a particular prominence in literary texture. Such instances of “refocusing”, or “defocusing”, in Olga Iriskhanova’s (2014: 14, 32, 278, etc.) parlance, are based on intentional text-driven attentional shifts that violate, shatter, or split the integrity of the focal elements, thus blurring their contours and making them part of the background, which might become narratively foregrounded. Suchlike narrative and mimetic technique that is grounded in the oscillations of focal and non-focal elements, which result in focus dissipation, can be traced in Virginia Woolf’s “Blue & Green”. In this short piece of fiction the two colours (first green, then blue) associated with light, water, and their material anchors (*glass lustre* and *water spouting sea monster*), being initially focal, gradually split into a set of microfoci, highlighted by wave-like chains of short sentences. All this jointly creates the narrative construal of the breathing world of nature against a stable world of urban tradition, both intertwined with the world of human fancy, or, in Dean Baldwin’s (1989: 26) view, “a contrast between the cycles of nature and the artificiality of human institutions”.

2. Focusing vs. defocusing in literary text: Mimetic and diegetic facets

The idea of relying, in this research, upon the play of narrative (diegetic) and mimetic (imitational, descriptive) foci in the interpretation of Woolf’s “Blue and Green” originated from several sources: (i) neuroaesthetic (Massey 2009), (ii) psychological and cognitive (Stockwell 2002), and (iii) linguistic, linguopoetic and cognitive (Kovaljov 2009; Iriskhanova 2014), probably in a somewhat different order.

The initial impulse came from the cognitively reassessed Gestalt-psychological phenomenon of Figure/Ground interchange, revisited by Peter Stockwell (2002: 13–25) in terms of cognitive poetics through the lens of foregrounding and defamiliarization as well as that of readerly attention. What is especially important for tracing the foci interplay in literary text is that Figure/Ground (or, in other words

correlation of textual focus and background) can be viewed as “a dynamic process because elements of the text are thrown into relief in the course of reading” (Stockwell 2002: 14). Furthermore, “the cognitive capacity for making figure and ground”, as Stockwell (2002: 15) claims, is the embodiment of our capacity to “see, hear and move in stereo three dimensions”, which, presumably, allows the reader to perceive a literary text multimodally and holographically (see 3.2).

Introduction of the attentional angle shifts the emphasis from the dynamicity of text onto the dynamicity of the reading process, which presupposes “renewing attention to create and follow the relation between figure and ground” (Stockwell 2002: 18), or otherwise, the interchange of textual focus and background. In cognitive psychological terms attention is (i) *selective*, i.e. the focus of attention (‘spotlight’), or figure, is selected, while the background elements are deselected, or neglected; (ii) *distractive*, which means that the key to attention is newness: “attention is typically caught by movement [...]; elements in view that remain static are swiftly lost to attention” (Stockwell 2002: 18). This latter phenomenon is known as inhibition of return; (iii) *experientially patterned*, being part of literary competence that can help to differentiate conventions and deviations; and (iv) *deliberately controlled*, which might result in “repositioning attention” and “reconfiguring’ it [the ground – OV] as the figure and the object of interest” (Stockwell 2002: 19–20). Drawing parallels between a literary text and a visual field, Stockwell remarks that

The visual field is rendered as a conceptual space, populated by discrete objects in a constructed foreground and background. [...] the viewer can be distracted by new, odd or more interesting objects that were either already in the field of view but unregarded, or that came into attentional space by some means. (Stockwell 2009: 19–20)

The neuroaesthetic perspective of Figure/Ground (focus/background) correlation, underlying its earlier mentioned psychological and cognitive facets, proceeds, among others, from Irving Massey’s assumption that

Our vision has a built-in rhythm that alternates the awareness of figure and ground. [...] In any case, we never see a whole picture. When looking at one, we all suffer from what Dahlia Zaidel (2005) calls “simultanagnosia”. There is a constant conflict of space vs. boundary, gravity vs. uplift, focal vs. peripheral. (Massey 2009: 54)

Experimentally it was proved that looking at a picture or reading a text means that the viewer’s or reader’s “eye is engaged in constant saccades [...], and we shift focus continually” (Massey 2009: 53). These jerking movements of both eyes can be instrumentally fixed as, presumably, regulated by “an imitative impulse” (ibid.: 26) generated by mirror neurons, which, in Massey’s view, makes

[...] the act of perception [...] partly an act of imitation; at the very least, it is a negotiation, sometimes a struggle, between the endogenous and the mimetic. [...] Adam Smith’s idea of unconscious mimicry [...] Dugald Stewart also spoke of involuntary “sympathetic imitation”, [...] imitation as a pure reflex. (Massey 2009: 57)

The idea of continual focus shifting, provoked physiologically and neurologically, echoes the findings of Semir Zeki, a world famous neurobiologist specializing in the visual arts, who claims that

The brain is an active participant in constructing what we see, through which it instills meaning into the many signals that it receives and thus gains knowledge about the world. [...] The percepts the brain creates are the result of an interaction between the signals that it receives and what it does to them. (Zeki 2006: 244)

Overall, at the level of microconsciousness, there is no such thing as a unified *visual* consciousness. Visual consciousness consists of many microconsciousnesses that are distributed in time and space. (Zeki 2006: 248)

And still the strongest impetus for the analysis of Woolf's "Blue & Green" in terms of focus shifts was given by Iriskhanova's (2014) research on focus games in language and narrative texts with a special emphasis on *defocusing*, complemented by Oleg Kovaljov's (2009) findings concerning the notions of focus and *focusing* in literary text.

Generalizing upon Kovaljov's (2009: 72, 74–76, 80–81) comments concerning visual perception, photography, and narrative, *focusing* in literary text can be viewed as emerging due to a set of dynamic narrative or hermeneutic techniques that create a contrast of the clear-cut, sharp, often detailed centre of descriptive or narrative representation (focus) and the fuzzy background. Both are taken in their mutual juxtaposition, thus modelling the readers' narrative cognition and emotional response. It might be opposed to *refocusing* (Russ. "расфокусировка") as "techniques of naturalizing the narrative" (ibid.: 76). Thus, the *focus* can be regarded as "a zone of 'heightened image sharpness'" (ibid.: 77), understood literally or metaphorically, that acquires a particular significance, often due to some delay or suspense in perception (ibid.: 78, 80).

Focusing/defocusing in language and text as well as their reversal (when background elements, however diffuse, gain a special relevance and a particular prominence in discourse), in Iriskhanova's (2014: 4) view, concern cognitive mechanisms of attention distribution, designed for sense-generation in speech or discourse. Cognitive mechanisms of *defocusing*, as a prerequisite of language or textual/discursive games, presuppose putting out of the attention focus, consciously or subconsciously, certain qualities of real or imaginary objects and/or situations, which are normally made prominent in accordance with language or speech norms (ibid.: 13–14, 20, 32, 293). It might occur via shifting, weakening, widening, narrowing, shadowing, suppressing, shattering or splitting the primary focus, due to its complication or suspension, through the interchange of primary and secondary foci, or thanks to creating a new focus and background (ibid.: 285–287, 294, 296–297). *Refocusing* then concerns "distributing the attention focus among several components of a situation, several properties of an object, shaping *multiple* foci" (ibid.: 14).

Given that verbal and cognitive mechanisms as well as techniques of *focus games* in literary text, especially in experimental prose, are intricate, plurivectoral,

and multidimensional, we suggest singling out a complementary ludic technique that is based on the interaction of diegetic and/or mimetic defocusing and refocusing, which results in the phenomenon of *focus dissipation*. This technique is shaped by intentional attentional shifts that violate, shatter, or split the integrity of the focal elements into a set of microfoci, thus blurring and/or transgressing their contours and making them part of the background that might become narratively and/or descriptively accentuated.

3. Focus dissipation in Virginia Woolf's "Blue & Green"

The emphasis on focus dissipation in Woolf's short story under analysis proceeds from the fact that visual here is foregrounded over verbal substance (Skrbic 2004: xix) and writers as well as "artists play with these possibilities to intensify effects or to diffuse them" (Massey 2009: 29).

The centrality of *focusing/refocusing/defocusing* in "Blue & Green" is made salient from the very start due to its title that forms a syntactically and semantically double-focal construction (see Iriskhanova 2014: 292). It is further supported compositionally by the division of the short story into two parts, entitled "Green" (daytime turning into evening and night that equal blue) and "Blue" (the ocean water – a sea-monster – an old boat – the cathedral, or otherwise, life passing on to death), thus framing the text due to the above semantic and structural inversion of colours. This double-focus orientation (green vs. blue, reality vs. mirage, day vs. night, solid objects vs. liquid substances, home vs. outside world, ceiling (the lustre) vs. marble floor (table/mantelpiece), desert vs. the sky, the ocean vs. a beach, ocean surface vs. ocean depths, nature vs. town (cathedral), profane vs. sacred (madonnas)), with its borders initially marked, gradually acquires a new, fuzzy dimension.

In the "Green" part of the short story these borders first get blurred (the glass lustre dropping a liquid substance) and then transgressed (the borders between real and imaginary, water and desert) or inverted (pools of water above the desert sand) due to "the viewer's meandering thoughts" (Harry 2015 n.p.), cf. (1) and (2):

- (1) The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (2) But the hard glass drips on to the marble; the pools hover above the desert sand; camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble. (Woolf 1989: 142)

Such an effect emerges due to what we call *focus dissipation* when the primary focus of the mimetic representation – the glass lustre throwing green light – loses its "significant form" ("The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards" p. 142), bursting into a multitude of green varia ("The feathers of parakeets – [...] – sharp blades of palm trees – green, too; green needles" p. 142), associatively chained. Thus, the initial focus of the story's texture abruptly splits into a multitude of real and fictive microfoci against the background of sensory (spatial – *hang downwards, hover above,*

visual – *the feathers of parakeets*, tactile – *sliding down the glass*, kinesthetic – *drops green*, and auditory – *harsh cries*) modes of interaction. And these microfoci get more and more dispersed, blurring the contours of the story’s mimetic texture as if imitating “the neurological processes by which we respond to colors, luminance, surface and depth, edges and angles, and straight lines” (Massey 2009: 18). This associative description, miming the specificity of dynamic visual perception, characterized by the opposition between “focal and peripheral vision” (ibid.: 17), highlights the idea of movement in space, thus embodying the assumption of “the centrality of motion” for the human mind, as it is presumed that “consciousness is largely concerned with phenomena involving motion” (ibid.: 15), see (2) and (3):

- (3) [...] rushes edge them [pools – OV]; weeds clog them; [...] the frog flops over; [...] and the shadow sweeps the green over the mantelpiece; [...] the aimless waves sway beneath the empty sky. (Woolf 1989: 142)

Focus shifts in the “Blue” part of the short story are more structured, first marked by the oscillations between (i) the monster-fish moving up and down, (ii) ocean water coming out through its nostrils, taking various shapes, filling and covering the sea-monster as it sinks, and (iii) colour blue, bringing them all together as a medium in refocusing that results in focus dissipation, see (4), (5) and (6):

- (4) The snub-nosed monster rises to the surface [...] he sinks, heavy with water. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (5) The snub-nosed monster [...] spouts through his blunt nostrils two columns of water, which fiery-white in the centre, spray off into a fringe of blue beads. [...] Slushing the water through mouth and nostrils [...], and the blue closes over him dowsing the polished pebbles of his eyes. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (6) [...] a fringe of blue beads. Strokes of blue line the black tarpaulin of his hide. [...] the blue closes over him. (Woolf 1989: 142)

Though the motion in the “Blue” part proves to be more powerful, dynamic, and salient than in “Green”, where it seems ephemeral, the regular emphasis on colour blue that punctuates the description of the scene, verging on the narrative, somewhat diminishes the power of movement. Such suppression of the focus, leading to its dissipation, is in line with Massey’s neuroaesthetic view of perception, where “adding color to a mobile reduces our awareness of its motion (because we respond more quickly to color than to motion)” (Massey 2009: 6). The use of the word “blue” becomes almost obsessive closer to the end of the story, where it, being repeated in each sentence, beats a heavy rhythm of decay, heightened by the alliteration – *bl*, *bt*, *bl*, *scl*, *tl*, *bl*, *st*, *rst*, etc., and syntactical inversion, see (7):

- (7) Thrown upon the beach he lies, blunt, obtuse, shedding dry blue scales. Their metallic blue stains the rusty iron on the beach. Blue are the ribs of the wrecked rowing boat. (Woolf 1989: 142)

The final sentences of “Blue & Green” mark the abrupt change of focus and perspective (from horizontal to vertical), when the serenity of ocean waves turns into cold estrangement of the cathedral, thus acquiring the heightened sharpness of the initial textual focus while playing with bottom-up and top-down verticality, see (8) and (9):

- (8) A wave rolls beneath the blue bells. But the cathedral’s different, cold, incense laden, faint blue with the veils of madonnas. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (9) The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. (Woolf 1989: 142)

The play of focus and perspective in the final sentences of the short story evokes multiple interpretations, where “the subjective gives way to the ambiguous” (Martin 2009 n.p.).

3.1. Focus dissipation and literary ambiguity in “Blue & Green”

Being intrinsic to literary discourse, “generic ambiguity”, in Nena Skrbic’s parlance, is often viewed as a strong feature of most experimental short fiction, “stretching the boundaries of the form through minimalist works” (Skrbic 2004: xvi). Along with experiments with form and genre, Virginia Woolf’s short fiction exemplifies Massey’s somewhat hyperbolic claim about language that “is not a set of definite rules but a handbook of suggestions” (Massey 2009: xii).

Accordingly, Virginia Woolf’s “Blue & Green” contains, at least, four interconnected varieties of ambiguity, related to focus dissipation: (i) the ambiguity of form (compositional, spatial, rhythmic, etc.); (ii) the ambiguity of reference; (iii) the ambiguity of imagery; and (iv) the ambiguity of symbolism.

The ambiguity of the story title’s compositional inversion into the “Green” and “Blue” parts, which reverses the mimetic and narrative foci distribution in the short story, can be lifted not only logically and chronologically (“green” being associated with light and daytime, “blue” with evening and night) but also in terms of aesthetic perception, bringing together colours and rhythm. Theoreticians and practitioners of the visual arts noticed that “some colours are more energetical with regard to rhythm than others” (Bogomazov 1914/1996: 73), thus creating two contrasting “conditions of the sphere: serene [here associated with colour green. – OV] and active” (ibid.: 63), the latter referring to colour blue. So, the trajectory of the mimetic/narrative focus in the short story goes from serene (green) to active (blue) and serene again, this time symbolized by the solemn edifice of the cathedral, see (9), (4)–(6), and (8).

Interestingly, symbolism of the cathedral and its interior here appears ambiguous as well, oscillating between peacefulness and oppression:

One is inclined towards the latter, but one isn’t quite sure: Woolf pointedly says the feeling to be evoked is different from that of the beached fish. My own thought is that the cathedral is intended as an image of strength, but not one like that of the swimming fish. The fish in its life evokes joyous awe; the cathedral is a presence that perhaps inspires fear. However, one can also take the cathedral as an image of permanence; the fish’s glory, in contrast, is fleeting. (Martin: 2009 n.p.)

The image of sea-monster itself is characterized by the ambiguity of reference. Though one cannot find any other mentions of the sea-creature in the short story than “the snub-nosed monster” and he/his/him, there is no unanimity among scholars and critics as to what kind of creature it is. Some scholars do not categorize it at all, just calling it “a monster” (Almahameed 2016: 31), others refer to it as “fish” (Martin 2009 n.p.) with the only exception where the creature is referred as “a whale”, e.g. “Blue creates its own ocean in which a whale cavorts, beaches itself, and dies” (Baldwin 1989: 26). Though the latter seems illogical, taking into account “dry blue scales” shed by the beached sea-creature (Woolf 1989: 142). Such uncertainty, the emphasis on the creature’s monstrosity, its anthropomorphization, and the gap in time between the phases of activeness and passivity (see 4–5 and 7) add a note of fairy-tale mystery to the description in “Blue”, heightened by its focus dissipation.

Another manifestation of ambiguity, that of “a pool of green”, being an intermittent focus in the “Green” part of the short story, integrates its first three varieties – spatial, referential, and imagistic. Fluctuating between liquidity of light, colour, and glass (see 10), it strengthens the ambiguity through the spatial confusion of pools that are either above the desert, thus emphasizing its photonic nature, or down on the floor, or a tabletop, in Baldwin’s (1989: 26) interpretation, thus stressing its liquidity (see 11):

- (10) The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble. [...] But the hard glass drips on to the marble. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (11) [...] the pools hover above the desert sand; [...] the pools settle on the marble. (Woolf 1989: 142)

The blurred image of a pool in Virginia Woolf’s short story seems imperfect and fuzzy, but from the neuroaesthetic perspective any “metaphor is an imperfect image seen through a perfect one” (Massey 2009: 22), while

It is not ambiguity itself [...] [that – OV] is aesthetically pleasing. [...] It is rather the capacity of multiple experiences, even though we are conscious of only one at any given moment, that a stimulus can provide. (Zeki 2006: 264)

Despite their disparity, all varieties of ambiguity in “Blue & Green” can be qualified as perceptual, constructively bridging different kinds of representation (De Mey 2006: 273) through various attentional shifts that result in focus dissipation. Due to this, incompatible or contrasting angles of vision are either integrated “into a coherent whole” or the reader is made “to toggle transparently between interpretations” (ibid.: 270), including those that are evoked by instances of verbal holography (see Vorobyova 2010).

3.2. Focus dissipation and verbal holography in “Blue & Green”

Virginia Woolf’s “Blue & Green” belongs to such samples of short fiction where verbal representation is employed to display (or rather play with) an imaginary model of visual perception (Kovaljov 2009: 72). The latter tends to incorporate

instances of *verbal holography* (Vorobyova 2010, 2020) that lead to the effect of *textual multidimensionality*. By *verbal holography* we mean a synergetic interplay of in-built planes and dimensions, vectors and spaces, lines and geometrical figures, vantages and perspectives textualized in a literary work to create the effect of its multidimensionality, construed as the writer's perceptual model and, presumably, reconstructed by the reading audience.

Olexandre Bogomazov's (1914/1996)² conception, such a model for the visual arts (and, respectively, for similarly built literary texts) is composed of certain artistic elements, here colour, line, form as a part of space, plane, facet, and rhythm (ibid.: 14–16, 25, 40), each of them “being imbued with motion. [...] This movement [...] creates Rhythm, which acts as a deliberate link between all the elements” (ibid.: 25). These elements are in a constant invisible struggle with one another (ibid.: 51), thus provoking tension due to “the law of contrasts [...] as a source of our sensations” (ibid.: 30) and of immediate or delayed literary response.

What is particularly important for our analysis of Woolf's piece of fiction is that such tension is unequally distributed – “closer to clear-cut borderlines the concentration of mass is stronger, tighter [...] there, where the contours are indistinct, tension appears to be weaker” (Bogomazov's (1914/1996: 32), which roughly corresponds to focusing and defocusing in literary text. These processes, focus dissipation including, start with outlining “a general silhouette form” (ibid.: 21) (here the juxtaposition of two colours), further encompassing various instances of condensation and rarefaction of form, which heightens the dynamism of the latter (ibid.: 59).

A close reading of “Blue & Green” evidently demonstrates the analogy of its texture to the visual form, where, as Bogomazov claims, there might occur two formats of tension:

When the tension of substance is so strong that the Form cannot resist its ruptures and as if falls apart, or, to the contrary, there are Forms which are so strong that even the whole bunch of motions is not able to break it. (Bogomazov 1914/1996: 59)

These two formats seem to be consequently manifested in Virginia Woolf's short story. The “Green” part, though firmly framed by “forms suggesting closure” (Massey 2009: xi) (see 12), appears quite chaotic due to focus dissipation permeating its horizontal plane (13). This perceptual chaos³ is caused by the use of “simultaneous, fragmentary perspectives [...], [which – OV] require access to many vantage points at once, since nothing can be defined through a unitary perspective” (Ettinger 2012: 2). However, the “Blue” half of the short story sticks together despite the proportional fluctuations of bottom-up and top-down verticality (14) and the abrupt shift from

² Olexandre Bogomazov (1880–1930) is a Ukrainian cubofuturist painter, a representative of vanguard art, who analyzed “the logic of artistic perception and psychology of generating artistic imagery” (Gorbachov 1996: 3).

³ Here, “[...] the novelty of the modernist idea of reality [...], merely something constructed by perceiving subjects [...], [presenting – OV] a world of chaotic sensations as the fundamental condition of perception” (Whitworth 2001: 83, 109), is realized in full.

the vertical plane to the horizontal one (15). Its stability persists, though the final sentence of the short story, with its clear-cut focus upon the cathedral, still makes the ending diffuse, mainly due to the play of sensory modes – tactile (*cold, veils*), olfactory (*incense laden*), and visual (*faint blue*) (16), e.g.

- (12) The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. [...] It's night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green's out. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (13) The feathers of parakeets – their harsh cries – [...] the camels lurch through them; [...] the frog flops over. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (14) The snub-nosed monster rises to the surface [...] he sinks, [...] and the blue closes over him. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (15) Thrown upon the beach he lies, blunt, obtuse, shedding dry blue scales. (Woolf 1989: 142)
- (16) But the cathedral's different, cold, incense laden, faint blue with the veils of madonnas. (Woolf 1989: 142)

The fusion of Impressionist and Post-impressionist mimetic canons in Virginia Woolf's short story brings to the foreground two points of emphasis – the sensations of colour and multivantage geometrization of space (see Massey 2009: 32; Ettinger 2012: 2) as a manifestation of “a deep interest in the elementary geometrical forms” (Massey 2009: 29), both of which are emotionally charged, resonating with the readers' response.

3.3. Focus dissipation and emotional resonance in “Blue & Green”

The phenomenon of resonance in literary communication triggered by various textual means, along with manifestations of viewers' resonance in artistic communication (Bogomazov 1914/2016: 15–27), might be regarded at least from two angles – textual (Vorobyova 2006; Stockwell 2009: 17–55) and perceptual (Stockwell 2009: 17–55). From the latter perspective, *resonance* is “a textured prolonged feeling that can be revived periodically after the initial experience” (ibid.: 17). In the former understanding, resonance (or rather *emotional resonance*) is “a metaphorical extension of the mechanical-musical sense” (ibid.: 18), when it is “a feature of oscillating or vibrating objects”, which “has a measurement of intensity” (ibid.) in “the resonant space” (ibid.: 20), being caused by various means, those of focusing/defocusing included.

For the textual resonant space to emerge, the in-built iconic imagery (a circle, a spiral, an arrow, a triangle, or other geometrical figures) should be accompanied by the kumatoid (wave-like) dynamics as

[...] a joint effect of condensed forms and/or sense pulsation (chains of imagery, symbols, textual anomalies, artistic details, key words, etc.) [...], and the sinusoid fluctuations of syntactic, prosodic, and compositional rhythm. (Vorobyova 2006: 74)

The interaction of textual statics (in-built iconicity) and dynamics (kumatoidness), as “a sum total of rhythmical impacts”, in Bogomazov’s (1914/1996: 48) parlance, gives rise to potential emanations of energy freed up when the textual tension grows to be finally released. All this might provoke the readers’ emotional response due to hidden magnetism of literary texture and aesthetic excitement pertaining to its elements.⁴

The hidden magnetism of the short story’s texture is not confined to the geometrization of space, where instances of focus dissipation are accompanied by the play of vectors, planes, and vantages. As a verbal (mimetic and narrative) representation of the visual model of perception, it also evokes, strange as it may seem at first, auditory iconicity and acoustic resonance, quite in line with Bogomazov’s (1914/1996: 27) assumption that “painting requires acoustics of the pictorial plane”.

The “Green” part of Virginia Woolf’s short story is unfolded against the “richly resonant” (Stockwell 2009: 33) acoustic background of shimmering (*slides down, hover, lurch through, edge, sweeps, ruffled, sway*), interrupted by the staccato of dropping/dripping (*drops a pool of green – drop green – drips on to the marble – drip blots of blue* – Woolf 1989: 142), which jointly creates the soothing effect of diminuendo (17), e.g.

- (17) No ships come; the aimless waves sway beneath the empty sky. It’s night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green’s out. (Woolf 1989: 142)

The “Blue” part comes as a spatial, colour, and acoustic outburst – with ocean waters being cut by the sea-monster, spouted and slushed through its nostrils, spraying “off into a fringe of blue beads” (Woolf 1989: 142). All the above generates the effect of crescendo to be abruptly changed into the acoustic plateau to slowly calm down through step-by-step attenuation that involves instances of focus dissipation, see (18),

- (18) Thrown upon the beach he lies, blunt, obtuse, shedding dry blue scales. Their metallic blue stains the rusty iron on the beach. Blue are the ribs of the wrecked rowing boat. A wave rolls beneath the blue bells. (Woolf 1989: 142)

Though somewhat different in the mode of their acoustic iconicity, both parts of the short story dealing with the natural world, conventionally real and imaginary, verbally and compositionally form an in-built wave (lexically marked by the reference to waves at the end of each part). The kumatoid (wave-like) representation of living nature breaks against a mute estrangement of the urban world with its architectural and religious conventions, symbolized by the cathedral and its interior (see 16), presumably provoking the sensation of melancholy and ineffability.

4. Conclusions

The search for a metamethod of literary text interpretation makes scholars transcend the boundaries of conventional interpretive techniques and enter the realms of psychology of perception, neuroaesthetics, and geometry of senses. Modernist fiction,

⁴ See Bogomazov (1914/1996: 15, 18–20) on visual artistic perception.

and Virginia Woolf's short fiction in particular, with its "well-known attachment to the idea of continuity and uninterrupted flow" (Massey 2009: 33), gives a rich material for its analysis in terms of built-in attentional shifts as triggers of focusing/defocusing games. This ludic dimension of literary texture is manifested in Virginia Woolf's "Blue & Green" through focus dissipation in its mimetic and narrative formats, which tends to heighten literary text ambiguity, highlight instances of verbal holography, and evoke emotional resonance, strengthening the hidden magnetism of this meditative sketch.

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