

## THE WRITER'S WORK THROUGH THE PRISM OF SCIENCE AND CREATIVITY

(BASED ON MIKHAIL VELLER'S ESSAY "TECHNOLOGY OF A SHORT STORY")

This article represents the main conceits of development of a writer's individual style and mastery, as they were interpreted in prose writings by Mikhail Veller, the modern Russian prose writer and publicist. There was shown that the views of a writer's mastery in literary theory and in one's own artistic practice could differ in terms, yet be similar in the main idea of an individual style development, which is the constant hard work on every word and phrase, whether in poetic or in prosaic writing.

The keypoints of so-called 'technology of a short story,' as they were interpreted in writings by M. Veller, are thoroughly analyzed in the given article, based on the examples from Ukrainian and Lithuanian literatures. The author of the article has shown that such conceptual components of a literary process as the creative invention, genre modifications, composition, language and style, are to be connected by an artistic idea to make up the real short story which would be read non-stop. These principles were used to study one of the humoresques by Vitaute Žilinskaite, *Precise Orientations*. It was chosen as the brilliant synthesis of story, parody, literary essay, and scientific article, whose artistic objectives are not only a derision of the graphomaniac writer, but also a persuasion for the young poets from erroneous steps in assessment of individual literary style.

**Keywords:** artistic writings, individual style, M. Veller's works, short story, technology.

Every author that gives advices for young prose writer comes independently to a conceptual thought that a short story should be concentrated, first of all. In writing, an author has to eliminate any element which is not in touch with the story's plot and thus disturbs a reader to follow the movement of action. Finally, in completing the story, the writer should put it aside for several weeks and then read it with unprejudiced eye. Genre specification of a literary work is one of the initial moments for the professional judgment and estimation; it is a lock to open for better comprehension and, subsequently, for proper interpretation of a literary work [See Syvokin' 2006: 282].

It is significant that the beginning prose writers used to start from **short stories** – not just because they seem easier, though in fact harder to write, but because they are shorter than a story or a novel. So, the objective of this article is to affirm the main principles of the short story composing and to show their development within the individual style of a writer. According to Mikhail Veller, the modern Russian publicist, "the short story is to be considered the most ancient and the very first among the literary genres. The brief re-tell of any event in human life – whether it was an episode in hunting or a fight with an enemy – was a kind of a spoken story. A legend, a tale, a myth and other likely narrations that were adorned with splendid fantasy and poetic images – i.e., cultivated literature – appeared much later. Unlike any other kinds and

genres of art, the story seems to be immanent to humankind, since it had originated together with speech, and served not only to transmit information, but also to commemorate events. Consequently, the short story is affirmed an initial form of literary speech organization” [Veller 2008: 448].

It is not a wonder that Mikhail Veller has named the sequence of advices to young writers ‘Technology of a Short Story.’ Taking into consideration the term ‘technology’ itself, which is usually associated with technical activity (like food technologies, metal procession technologies etc.), we can see that it consists of two correlating Greek-language parts ‘techne,’ or ‘the art,’ and ‘logos,’ or ‘a word.’ Henceforth, the short story obtains its own art and word, which are unique for every piece of this genre.

The longitude of short story is the sign which conditions the tempo and the rhythm of prose. For Ivan Bezpechnyi, a Ukrainian literary theorist, “the short story is to be read non-stop, lest any break would weaken or even destroy its artistic influence. The small volume of a short story is not only its formal marker, but also a sign of its special esthetic content” [Bezpechnyi 2009: 274]. Consequently, the short prose work (that could be read non-stop without any fatigue) permits the larger concentration of text, sharper laconicism, formal refinement, and style density. So that the reader can slowly ‘savor’ the hard-written phrase or the separate detail, while keeping in mind the whole story [Veller 2008: 450].

Russian literary critics in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had expressed an erroneous thought that the short story is merely the first step to increase a writer’s own mastery [See Karpova 1986: 44]; in other words, as the author comes to the highest grade of novel-writing skill (like Vasilii Shukshin, for example), one will never return to short stories which one will consider unserious.

Otherwise, Halyna Tarasiuk, a Ukrainian prose writer, uses almost similar categories to depict a story’s charm, “It is hard to create the great epic picture perfectly. This is why I like the laconic form of a story, a novella, or a short story; I used to call them ‘novels,’ and do it obstinately. Just these genres allow coining the phrase rhythm, as well as writing the good melody and faceting the Word to its divine gleam” [See Bondar 2010: 164].

The short story and related genres tell about one or two man events in a character’s life (usually, there is only one character in a story). Such a literary work shows a complete character as it is almost impossible to show one’s evolution within the short story. Therefore, in composing of the artistic material, the writer accentuates those events that will wholly expose the internal world of a character.

**Invention** is an evidence of a literary work’s existence as a hypothesis which should be confirmed or disproved; or as a project which should be implemented. Usually, an invention

fixes the author's creative intentions that outline the base of a literary work – its topic, genre, volume, character system and the ways of their interactions. The rough copies activate the writer's internal imperatives that were previously given in notebooks, diaries, letters, or variants, but were not wholly embodied in character system.

“Invention always looks like crystallization, when an invisible substance, dissolved in liquid, begins to form the straight system of crystals, and this process gets witnessed by an observer. To start the process, it is sometimes needed to add just one formed little crystal into the solution. The role of this little crystal often belongs to a new amazing fact, a fresh and sharp observation, or an effective phrase pronounced by someone else” [See Soloukhin 1982: 73].

Indeed, the splendid fact fixed with several words could be extended to literary work of some certain genre. However, the notes would remain unchanged and thus perceived as a monovse, a verset or a stanza (not only for a poet, but also for a prose writer), leaving enough possibilities for mutual creation with a recipient. As Volodymyr Danylenko, a Ukrainian literary scientist, stated in his essay *Contemporary Ukrainian Short Story* (2008), “when the invention had been formed, you should immediately write it down, give its synopsis, and try to feel the rhythm of future first and last phrases. Love your work and constantly think over it” [Danylenko 2008: 260-267].

The writer's invention, regarding the inexhaustibility of artistic fantasy and amazing emotional expressions, may be realized gradually – in planning of the future work and then in selection of the material, including ‘work on studies’ (as for talented writer) and the momentary illumination (as for genial writer).

Indeed, the genre of a short story requires much mastery, clarity of a thought, and precision of a word. The necessity to polish the text carefully, to make its composition well-organized, to strengthen the narration, to appreciate the polysemantic nature of a symbol – these are factors that have conditioned the definition given to the short story by the majority of prose writers, ‘the hardest one amongst the prose genres.’ [See Veller 2008: 451].

As it was evident, one of the greatest mistakes in beginners' short stories is the overextended descriptions of landscape and interior space. “As the author comes into the forest – he starts to describe the forest incessantly; as he gets home – there comes the description of the house; as he sits by the window at night time – he needs to depict the heaven's canopy and recall every star by its name” [See Shengheli 1928: 53].

Of course, a writer cannot do without place description, yet one must introduce them reasonably, only if it is motivated by action in the story.

Subsequently, the other conceptual question is **how to start the prose narration.**

The importance of the first phrase for a short story is well-known. The first phrase is like a 'tuning fork' which makes the entire story resound to its tone. Therefore, coming along with M. Veller, we can formulate the following types of initial sentences.

1. **Expositional phrase** that serves an acquaintance of a reader with the main character and/or the action place and time. This is the simplest mean to start a story, as for the young writers. For example, *The poetry lovers have obtained a good present recently: the new poetic collection, Withered Buds by Jūrgis Bubėnėikas, was published* (Vitaute Źilinskaite, *Precise Orientations*).

2. **Landscape phrase**, or a description of an action place (it may be often marked with a mood expression). Such a landscape can be either dark or bright, either rural or urban. The subsequent periods are connected with the initial one through consonances, yet there may be a contrast as well.

3. **(Auto)biographic phrase** that starts the story told from the first person and hereinafter introduces a reader into the remembrance about the recent or remote event from a narrator's life.

4. **Maxim or advice** as an expression of thought and mood, or persuasion of the necessity to read a story more attentively. It could be actual or perpetual, happy or sad. For example, *The main character for the contemporary novel (short story, story, or novella) should be a writer (or at least an artist, or a sculptor, or an architect, or a journalist, or a philosopher) who's in deep tormenting crisis and thus can neither write nor do anything else* (Vitaute Źilinskaite, *How to Write a Contemporary Novel*).

5. **Detail**. In this case, the first phrase gets the reader's mind focused on a certain subject or phenomenon. Such a detail obtains the symbolic meaning which gets transformed into subsequent narration associatively.

6. **Action**. Starting from the certain action moment, the author might make his story more capacious and laconic, or make an event visible and profoundly sensual. For example, *I've just received a letter. A letter from an archive* (Vitaute Źilinskaite, *The Manuscript*).

7. **Emotional phrase** – an interjection, interrogative or exclamatory sentence, or someone's claim repeated. For example, *Who does not want to describe one's travel impression and then to see them published?* (Vitaute Źilinskaite, *How to Write Travel Notes*).

However, in the majority of cases, the strongest initial phrase gets written not at the beginning, but in the middle of creative process.

After some theoretical studies, it is interesting to make a projection of M. Veller's technology of a short story onto Vitaute Źilinskaite's writings.

As it is apparent in *Precise Orientations*, the short story mentioned above, its artistic invention is a parody on critical reviews in which the esthetic quality of some newly published literary works was exaggerated too much. The name of an invented criticized poet a decadent, *Jūrgis Bubenčikas*, is a brilliant artistic detail that concentrates the action in the story – as the last name is supposed to be derived from Russian *bubenchik*, or ‘a sleigh-bell.’ With a help of such a linguistic game, the writer accentuated the lack of individual poetic voice in the flood of ‘candy-box’ words uttered by a graphomaniac poet.

Vitaute Žilinskaite set up the conflict in putting together two reviews different in style. Jonas Čivas, the first ‘critic,’ tells about *Withered Buds* in quite simplified form resembling an essay or a prose poem, entitling his review *Simply and Freshly*:

“The speaker [of Bubenčikas’s poems] heartily accepts the new-coming day. He is glad to see *the flower’s just opened its petals*, and otherwise he is sad of *the wind tearing away the last leaf*. This is traditional, well-trodden path of our poetry – to look at the world with naïve childlike eye, and to sing it – resoundingly, with no sophisticated word clauses and with no thought reeled in a clew tangled tightly” [See Žilinskaite 1990: 55]. Afterwards, the ‘critic’ is citing a quotation from the poem, leaving the place for a reader to analyze it:

A little bird is suffering – why  
The buds had withered suddenly,  
The moans a-sounding instantly –  
I am still asking why? (translated by the author of this article)

Traditional leading motifs for the majority of lyrical poems (like buds, birds, blooming and withering time, and hereinafter the soul torments) become the objects for Žilinskaite’s negligence and derision, as well as the iambic tetrameter verse profaned by graphomaniac. Moreover, the ‘critic’ tends to laud the mentioned ‘verse,’ using the words that do emphasize the parody intonation – *naivety – so well-expressed, so real and non-invented naivety and simplicity, those emotions that we are all missing*. What Žilinskaite wished to deride was the contradiction between some homonymy categories like *simplicity versus banality*, or *naivety versus primitiveness*.

Žilinskaite’s *Precise Orientations* represents the so-called ‘revolver composition’ of a story [Veller 2008” 469] where one object is shown from different viewpoints. The parody intonation gets stronger in the second review, *Association Language* by Petras Divas, whose onomastic component is also much powerful (here the last name Divas is hypothetically composed from Russian root *divo*, or ‘a miracle,’ and Lithuanian masculine suffix *-as*, and it is exactly rhymed with previous author’s last name, Čivas). This review looks like a ‘pseudo-scientific’ article due to great deal of philosophical and philological terms used incorrectly and

out of place. The same graphomaniac ‘collection,’ *Withered Buds* by Jūrgis Bubenčikas, became an object of critic’s praise as ‘an assertion of profound sense of any notion’:

“Upon saying *The flower’s just opened its petals*, [the poet] is presumed to tell about resurrection of entire humankind. Upon showing *the wind tearing away the last leaf*, he reminds us the sorrowful idea that everyone will sooner or later encounter the inevitable farewell with life” [See Žilinskaite 1990: 56].

As for M. Veller, any author of a short story may turn to any lexical massive and then re-interpret it in any concentration, because the small volume would surely allow a recipient comprehending even the most complicated text [Veller 2008: 482]. In our case, Žilinskaite’s ‘critic’ is extending the range of scientific terms in an irrelevant context, making up the ‘horizon of waiting’ for a conceptual poetic phenomenon in readers. Consequently, the incompatibility of scientific style to the stanza ‘A little bird is suffering...’ is creating the strong and lapidary novelistic Wendepunkt of the story:

“A reader who got used to direct expressions of a poetic thought would not get oriented at underground artesian streams boiling up within verse lines. Yet, let one read *Withered Buds* the second, the third, the fourth etc. time – to discover finally the many-laired philosophical collisions, the internal confrontations between thought, the powerful association language:

A little bird is suffering – why  
The buds had withered suddenly,  
The moans a-sounding instantly –  
I am still asking why?”

A reader should keep in mind that a decadent poet named Jūrgis Bubenčikas never existed in Lithuanian literature, but he is not merely a simulacrum, just because this figure turns to be a collective image for graphomania.

It is time to review the common thought about a short story as the simplest literary genre due to its small volume. The main conceits of literary mastery in short story writing, which are the ability to choose a worthy topic, to start the narration efficiently, to create the holistic characters, and to show the event in well-organized language, have to be regarded by not only writers, but also literary critics and scientists.

That is why Mikhail Veller has applied the word ‘technology’ to short story composition correctly, since a writer should follow the principles of ‘art’ and ‘knowledge’ thoroughly. The combination of these principles is evident in any masterpiece of short story genre, whether serious or humorous. What remains a fruitful material for contemporary literary studies is the heritage of Vitaute Žilinskaite who was always able to set up a paradigm of a parody, a critical essay, or a review that got closely in touch with real and (mostly) fictitious cultural phenomena.

The further researches in the field of 'short story technology' would allow a literary scientist revealing the profound content of an everyday life event, or a character's personality, embodied in a written work. According to M. Veller, 'any literature had originated from the short story.' This kind of research turns to be more efficient in studying the so-called 'synthetic stories,' or 'stories about stories,' which show a development of individual literary talent and individual writing manner (or a critical reception of one's literary or other artistic endeavors), as their authors usually combine the elements of a scientific article, poetic language, and everyday live speech.

## ТРУД ПИСАТЕЛЯ СКВОЗЬ ПРИЗМУ НАУКИ И ТВОРЧЕСТВА (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ М. ВЕЛЛЕРА)

### *АННОТАЦИЯ*

В статье представлены ведущие концепты развития индивидуального стиля и мастерства писателя, интерпретированные в эссеистике Михаила Веллера – современного российского прозаика и публициста. Показано, что взгляды на литературное мастерство в теоретических исследованиях и самостоятельном творчестве различаются в терминах, но сходны в утверждении главной идеи – непрерывного упорного труда над каждым словом и предложением, как в художественной прозе, так и в эссеистике. В данной работе также проанализированы ключевые моменты так называемой «технологии рассказа» на материале юмористической прозы Витауте Жилинскaitе. Особое внимание уделено произведению «Четкие ориентиры» как блестящему образцу синтеза рассказа, пародии, литературного эссе и научной статьи.

**Ключевые слова:** художественное произведение, индивидуальный стиль, труды М. Веллера, рассказ, технология.

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