

**The Immigration of Suffering from Homeland to the New one**

**Stylistic Analysis of the Short Story**

**'My Dead Brother Comes to America'**

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**Abstract**

The short story, My Dead Brother Comes to America, is analyzed by adopting linguistic method to explore the narrator's inward world. Thus, showing the frustration between two worlds: the destroyed home land due to war that led to the family's shattered hopes and the new, strange home land (America) which the father immigrated as other family members are going to join. The stylistic analysis focuses on linguistic method such as transitivity, the revelations of narration and comment on the characters reactions.

The use of parallel structures and transitivity of material process and mental process increases the misery and disappointment of the narrator who has stated that his family is "hovering" between two worlds: native land and alien land. Moreover, the ghost of the passing away brother dominates the whole family's life in the new home.

**Key words: immigration, suffering, real world, mental world.**

**About the Author**

Not much was known about Alexander Godin (1909-197), who used the pseudonym of Joseph Katz, belonged to a Jew Russian family that immigrated to the U.S.A. He worked as a bottler in a chemical plant in New York. He gained fame for his short stories and novel 'On The Threshold (1934). His short story "My Dead Brother Comes to America" which was published in 1934 was one of the most famous literary works. The story showed the suffering of Ukrainian

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family who immigrated to the United States through Ellis Island .The story presented the terrible war they faced at home land and their endurance of hard ship to arrive to the new land. In his late age, the writer became disabled due to chronic schizophrenic and died in poverty in 1970.

### **Introduction**

The story portrays the idea of immigration and how an Ukrainian family suffered in escaping from terrible war in their home land and in the harsh journey. In a vivid and skilful style, the narrator succeeded in describing the episodes of suffering which an Ukrainian family endured .Due the civil war in the homeland, the family's life is completely broken and its hope is shattered .So, the family went into a tragic journey to join the father who left years ago. The family endured the harsh climate in the long sea journey to the new homeland, America. Then the sad death of the young brother during that journey accumulates the family's suffering and deeply saddened the narrator. Upon the family arrival at Ellis Island, feeling of strangeness is felt between the father and family when they meet since he has been absent for eight years. The parents were interrogated by the immigration officials who discovered that their answers were contradicted about the number of their children. Because the mother did not tell the father about the young boy's death which was a difficult situation. But the soul of the dead brother still shadows the family's life in the new homeland.

### **About the Story**

The plot of ,”My Brother Comes to America,” begins as moments of suffering in which the narrator describes the uncomfortable journey of his family on a ship from home land, Ukraine ,due to war, to America to join the father who has already immigrated there. The tragic death of his young brother and how his corpse was thrown into the deep sea as grave, the shattering of the family lives and hopes shed a gloomy mode on the narrator's feelings. After the ship arrived to the new homeland, the father received the family. All the characters in the story are associated with the narrator through the idea of immigration.

However, during the whole narration of the story events, the narrator shows a sort of unusual coolness toward his father which accelerated in a state of being strange person to him. Moreover, the narrator expressed deep sadness for the died brother. “Immigration” was the

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central motif in the story. In order not to spoil the joy of arriving at new homeland, the mother kept secretly the news of the young boy death from the father who discovered it when the immigration officer compared his responses with that of the mother about the number of the family children. Although, the family settled in the new homeland, the died young brother's soul persistently haunted their lives.

#### The Function of Description and point of View

The selection of words is an important approach to appreciate a literary text. Therefore, word's choice and its usage in a literary work is a vital tool to achieve the intended effects. The significance of word depends on the effects it produces implications and associations with the untold. This is confirmed by (Hope & Wright, 1996), "The vocabulary is evidence for the history not only of the language, but also of the culture and the people" ( p.160). Then Lazar(1993) stated that the stylistic analysis is an impersonal attempt to analyze a text and deviation of language from its ordinary use by specific : "illustrating how linguistic forms function to convey particular messages" . The mode which is presented in a story includes all the basic parts of a narrative in a work of fiction" ( pp,31-32) . Abrams (1999) explains that" in the stylistic analysis, the dramatic situation is identified by some essential questions:" who is telling the story? Who is the narrator talking to? Where and when do the events take place? and from whose perspective is the story told ?" ( p.231) . Verdonk (2002) shows that" the narrator can be first, second or third person and if he is third one the point of view can be either limited or omniscient which is considered a s intrusive or impersonal. Therefore, it is assumed that emotions and experiences of each one's perspective differs from the other's to a large extent. As this contextual difference can lead to varied interpretation of the same text" (35).

Shen Dan (1998:208) stated that story elements such as the character's words, activities, appearance, background are conveyed to the reader through the character's mind. This point of view directly presents the character's thoughts and feelings. The story is told through the eyes of thirteen –year –old narrator who expresses his eyes and mind the sad feelings towards the dead brother and disappointment of the father. And the reactions of the mother, his big sister and the young ones were presented through his comment and description. The narrator seems to assume the same status as the character in observation. The inner focalization point of view can help to

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direct access to the character's mental world. According to Cui Xiliang(2001), if the narrative perspective of observation is inside the scene container , it is inner –perspective ,if it is outside the scene ,it is called exo-perspective scene . So the narrator is inside the scene container with the character, assuming an inner –perspective .Actually, it is the narrator in the guise of the characters to convey to us something of his true feelings.

The narrator does not designate his name or that of the other characters since they are distanced from the readers in the physical world. By showing the physical identity of the narrator, the author brings to the prominence of his feelings, identity and true thinking identity. Nearly, the whole relationship between the characters are revealed through the narrator's feelings, comment and description. .

We know about his brothers and sisters by mentioning their ages who seemed younger than their real ages because of hard suffering at homeland,: “but our hard life left us too short and thin for our ages” . He distanced himself from the father during the whole story events as he mentioned his name in more than nine times without using the possessive pronoun ”my” e.g “It was *father*”, side of *father*”, “since *father*”, “ kept *father*”...etc

Then he completely absented his father by using second person and object pronouns e.g. “ to recognize *him*, “ to grieve for my brother than *he*”, “because *he* had been kinder to her than to all the rest”, “ was father ;*he* ,too, was being questioned. ” The narrator s' cool affection toward his father is clearly shown when he met him after eight years : “when he drew me to him ,my head and legs bent back like runner's and my muscles grew taut as sting, he must have felt my resistance”. Then his passive feeling towards the father is obviously reached its peak when he said that ;”...*he* meant *less* than *stranger* to me”. Sarcastic tone is used by the narrator in describing the war which led to shatter the family's life and hopes as they were innocent victims ,” we lived through a heroic period of history without having any thing of the heroic in our nature ,and many things happened to us... during that time our lives had been broken into shards.”

The narrator is deeply frustrated between two worlds: the destructive native home of shattered dreams and hopes,” Ukraine” and the cold, rigid and indifferent new home land, “America.” The word “worlds” provide cohesive tie that represents the story theme which was the terrible war at home and the harsh examination by the immigration officers in the new home

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land. symbolically, since the narrator was disappointed of the two worlds, the family hang between them: “that we were , *hovering*, between two worlds : one which had castigated us with rods of steel and afterwards cast us out ,and the other ,rigid, indifferent, before which we had to cringe and weep and which would admit us only after it had drained our hearts of all hope.” The harshness of the ship journey and the tragic experience of the young brother’s death affected deeply on the narrator that made him feels with unusual jealousy for anyone ,even for his father , to share him his deep grieve for his dead brother: “... did not question about boy ; this raised him greatly in my esteem”... I envied him his suffering, if he should learn, and fiercely jealousy of his pain... I felt entitled to grieve for my brother.” Moreover, he attempted to suppress any kind of emotion toward the father.” I was the first of the children to recognize *him* and with unhappy instinct, tried to gauge my feelings toward *him*.”

On other hand, no one mentioned a word about the dead brother when the family reunited in the new homeland.

The narrator said that ,”... either through negligence or fear , mother all the time kept father in dark about my brother’s death”, and when she saw the spare cap she grew hysterical and the father gazed at her helplessly ... his lips would not obey and the words vibrated in his throat , making a curious sound,”. The shadow of deep grieve of the memory of the tragic death of the narrator’s brother dominates the whole family’s life.

eig “, “ I remember nothing but a child’s bitterness and frustration and pain , our lives had been broken into many shards, I felt ,could ever break my heart again as the death of my brother left it broken, the first and most terrible death I had ever witnessed.”

According to naturalism theory, (Oxford English Dictionary “character’s fate has been decided, even predetermined, by impersonal forces of nature beyond human control, and sense that the universe itself is in different to human life”. Since the family was exposed to harshness of nature during the journey, the narrator pictured it in vivid style eig”,the ship ,symbol of all suffering we endured in crossing. That night we slept aboard we could still feel the vomit and ammonia smell of the sea in our nostrils ,and see the emptiness of water unrelieved by anything but cheerless birds of the sea, and masses of weeds .But from the new way some of the sleepers snored it could be seen that assurance had partly , if no altogether, returned to them ; others , however , tossed and moaned upon their bunks”. He described the new homeland as”...rigid

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,indifferent, before which we had to cringe and weep, and which admit us only after it had drained our hearts of all hope.” The family was reluctantly received by immigration officers ,”...all of them even smiled the same sour way into the sheets as they in turn wrote mother’s answers’ to the questions,”

**Transitivity of mental process and material process**

A writer’s selection of language is essential to show its artistic aspects. Leech & Short (1981) introduce a method of linguistic analysis such as checking lexical and grammatical categories.

On the other hand, Halliday (1994) talked of transitivity system which contains the world of experience in a set of process types. The outer experience related to external world, and the inner experience deals with consciousness. The grammatical classifications tackle material process and mental process. Therefore, these two processes can be used to analyze the narrator’s feelings. The verbs *wept*, *torn* and *beat* show the dynamic interaction with the outer world. They are actions connected with eyes, hands which reflect the inner and deep sadness for the dead brother. The verbs *collapsed* and *broken* represent material processes. But they show the deep grief for the dead brother and the shattered hopes of the family due to war. The father ,”...*carefully* put I it away the (suit) into the drawer”. This action shows how the father kept the suit for the dead brother. *Carefully*, here takes the initial place of the clause which serves as the theme and it has the salient status in a sense. It carries psychological weight than the action itself. It obviously reveals the inner state of the narrator. Since the outward action is usually highlighted to conceal the father’s inward excitement. Another one,” I awoke clutching desperately at the dream” . The inner, intensive turmoil is clearly echoed outside and it is justified by the narrator’s physical action; *clutching*. In the scene of the dying brother, we can read the grammatical metaphor of transitivity. He died so suddenly, and his *very old* and *wise eyes* had *looked up* to us at the moment of death and had seemed to say:” I know I am going to die ; you need not trouble”. The dying brother, actually, was the one who looked as he was the agent “actor “ of the action. The narrator raises the goal phrase to the subject position., thus reducing the agentivity of the dead brother . That was the personification of the goal phrase in the second phrase signals transference from passiveness to activeness because:” his very old and wise eyes looked”,”...had seemed to say” know” to show the escape of the helpless brother from the real world.

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Verbs representing mental processes are: *believed* and *silent*. These verbs demonstrate the static inner activities. And they show the true inner feelings of the narrator's world. The inward actions are more vivid than the outward actions, though they cannot be seen. The adjectives, *usualness*, *unusualness*, *bitterness*, *useless* and *helpless* all have the symmetrical "ness" and "ess" which confirm the Narrator's disappointment and suffering at both the homeland, during the terrible journey to America. The adverbs *helplessly* and *hopelessly* show the silent, deeper sorrow of the parents in losing their son. Since the father gazed at the mother helplessly and with twitching lips: "... and as soon as we passed the threshold, father began to sob helplessly"

**In what sense did the dead brother come to America?**

The common theme of magic realism could be of great help in providing response to the question: why did the dead brother come to America?. Originally, magic realism movement was based in Latin America. Gabriel Garcia, Miguel Astrurias and Isabel Allende were regarded as pioneers in "magical realist". Matthew Strecher (1999) defines magic realism as: "what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe". Then Faris et al. (2005) provide wide sense of the term by stating that: "magic realism has taken on an internationalization: dozens of non-Hispanic writers are categorized as such and believe that it truly is an international commodity " It can be defined as literature that portrays magical or unreal elements as a natural part in an otherwise realistic or mundane environment." (pp4-8). The family members' awareness of the arrival of the dead brother to America may symbolically represent a sort of nostalgia. Moreover, it can be interpreted through the magic realism which forced his appearance.

Magical realism writers usually keep silence of explaining abnormal events within the literary text. This was confirmed by Chanady (1985) said that "... is the deliberate withholding of information and explanation about the disconcerting factious world" (p.16) The narrator stated that the family members have been haunted dream of the coming dead brother's soul. The suspended question of, *how my dead brother comes to America*?, has a sense of magical realism that is answered by Flores (1985) by stating that: "the narrator is indifferent, characteristic enhanced by his absence of explanation of fantastic events, the story proceeds with "logical precision" as if nothing extraordinary took place" However, Mc Gingley (2012)

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states that the unused hat of the dead brother symbolizes the painful feelings that the family feel about the him. The mother saw it, she grew hysterical, the father gazed at her helplessly and with twitching lips. The meaning that this object holds, lying lifelessly before them is explained by the narrator: “At that moment, he sates we become aware of the return of the dead boy into our lives. He, too, had come to America”.

**Conclusion**

The stylistic analysis depicts the narrator’s difficulties experienced, his grief and frustration. The mass immigration is the central motif which is persistently continues in similar tragic episodes. Rey states that the author used figures of writing to symbolize the hardship endured by immigrants to reach their destination as they ...’paid hefty price through their hardship, pain and loss. Godin uses the boy to represent this somber fact”(1)

Updike& Kenison (2011) express their admiration of how Godin skillfully wrote such a story due to the longevity of its theme that address a wide universal audience. And the author succeeded in “turning one’s boy family turmoil into a social commentary about larger issue of mass emigration to America”.

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