

## Open-ended Narratives in a Diachronic Perspective

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An open ending can be considered as a kind of narrative gap, defined by its position in the text. One of the attempts at a narratological description of the open ending belongs to Wolf Schmid. According to his observations, in Anton Chekhov's "The Teacher of Literature" "the text ends earlier than the story being told." The kind of open ending described by the researcher is by no means exclusive to the practice of narration. The diachronic approach, which allows us to consider historically successive types of open endings, will help us to make sure of this. Russian literature of the 18th–21st centuries will serve as an example. In classical narrative, the open ending hints the reader at the contours of the story's conclusion (Nikolay Karamzin's *The Island of Borngolm* (1794), Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1823–1830), Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1863–1869)). Here the open ending serves the "sketch" function. The implicit presence of untold events is conditioned by the specificity of the classical narrative, in which the course of the narrated story is unconditionally expedient, as if predetermined by the finale, "drawn" to it.

An attempt to expand the functionality of the open ending is first observed in Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (1837–1839). The end of the story becomes known to us in the middle of the novel, while the text ends with the demonstrative unresolved question of predestination, a question that haunts Pechorin throughout his life. The vagueness of the narrative provokes the reader not to speculate about the permissible conclusion of the story, but to understand (revise) the meaning of what has already been told: the narrated story is no longer considered "fatal" because it is one of the realizations of the possible development of events. Thus, the interpretive function of the open ending comes to the fore.

Later this function was realized in Anton Chekhov's work. "Steppe" (1888), which describes a short fragment of Egorushka's life, ends with a rhetorical question: "What would that life be like?" Yet Chekhov in no way urges the reader to read into the narrative a plan for future events. The story is placed in a larger context so that it is perceived as a small slice of reality containing an infinite number of possibilities. "The Lady with the Dog" (1899), "The Student" (1894), and "The Bride" (1903) are similarly structured.

The literature of the 20th and 21st centuries reproduces the unintentional, life-like narrative fragmentation discovered by Chekhov. At the same time, the intrigue of the fabula (how did/will it end?) gives way to the intrigue of the word. Of real interest is the incompleteness of the narrative discourse as a whole, not just the story told (Vladimir Nabokov's *The Gift* (1938), Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1945–1955), Andrey Bitov's *Pushkin House* (1964–1971), Eugene Vodolazkin's *The Aviator* (2016)). Thus, the development of the open ending is associated with the transition from the mechanics of plot construction ("sketch" function) to interaction with the reader (interpretive function).