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## ■ O I JUST WANT TO LEAVE THIS PLACE: AUDEN'S DISCOURSE OF THEMATIZED SELF-ALIENATION

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Ovaj članak ispituje tematsko-rematsku organizaciju na nivou diskursa u pesmi „O Where Are You Going?“ V. H. Odena. Budući da se književni tekst realizuje između autora i čitaoca, nije teško pretpostaviti da organizacija glagola u fiktivnom tekstu otkriva autorovu glavnu nameru. Primenom koncepta tema-rema na tekst odabrane Odenove pesme na nivou zavisne rečenice, pokušaću da dokažem da se tema diskursa junakovog odlaska komentariše kao puko napuštanje mesta na kome se trenutno nalazi i na taj način otkriva se autorova impulsivna želja da ode na neko drugo, prethodno neodređeno mesto.

Ključne reči: književni diskurs, tema diskursa, rema diskursa, medijacija, funkcionalni pristup.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines, from the standpoint of literary functions, how W. H. Auden's 'O Where Are You Going?' reflects the author's early eagerness to leave his country. The organizing verbal items such as rhymes, grammatical constructions, and unique semantics configurations all contribute to an organized harmony of items; just as each instrument in a symphony plays part of the score, each verbal item plays its own unique role. Together their 'sounds' show Auden's young eagerness to leave his own country. By looking at the poem 'O Where Are You Going?' functionally, that is, by viewing it from the author's view of how the theme presented in the early organization of the poem (discourse theme) is commented upon in the later stage (discourse rheme), it is possible to access what Auden intended to convey at this stage of his life.

Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, England, in 1907, and, after moving to Birmingham, he was educated at Christ Church, Oxford. When young, Auden was

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influenced by Robert Frost, William Blake and Old English verse, and at Oxford his talent as a poet was already apparent. In 1939, Auden moved to the United States and took American citizenship. His attitude to life changed between his young days in England, when he was an advocate of socialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, and his later life in America. This 4-stanza poem was written in 1931, when he was eager to leave his country, and this is well reflected in the organization of the poem.

Before analyzing the work in detail, it is necessary to look briefly at the two functional approaches on which the analysis is based: Mukařovský–Jakobson aesthetics and Mathesius–Halliday’s functionalism. The Mukařovský–Jakobson view of literary language, which centers round the idea of ‘parallelism’, should be re-interpreted in a dynamic dimension of communication like M.A.K. Halliday’s functionalism. This dynamism in communication also characterizes literary language placed in society as a communication setting. This approach, functional as well as textual, gives us a far better tool for the understanding of literary language than just thinking of this variety of language as a mere collection of specific linguistic features, like a social or a regional dialect. When placed in the Mathesius–Halliday framework, this poem by Auden emerges not as a collection of parallel items, but as a communicative event.

## 2. MUKAŘOVSKÝ–JAKOBSON’S MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Jan Mukařovský and Roman Jakobson assumed language used in communication to be composed of the seven elements shown in Figure 1, each equipped with a macro-function. The communication model below is a revised version based on Hymes (1968: 117), and Cook (1989: 24–26, 1994: 153–154):

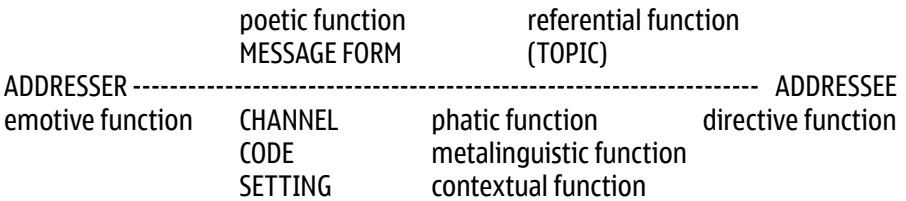


Figure 1: Seven Macro-components and Seven Macro-functions of Language

The addresser is one who sends a message, that is, the writer or the speaker; while the addressee is the receiver of the message, the reader or the listener. The channel is the medium through which the message is sent. A speaker’s voice, a writer’s letters or characters, a telephone line, a computer screen, etc. are media in communication. The message form refers to the specific grammatical and lexical selection of the message. What Jakobson calls ‘poetic function’ is realized here. The topic refers to the content of the message. The code is a specific language like English or German, or a dialect of a language. The setting indicates the social or physical context in which the communication takes place. Each element is associated with one macro-function.

According to Mukařovský (1964: 64) and Jakobson (1960: 356) a message focused upon the message form is 'esthetic' (Mukařovský) and 'poetic' (Jakobson) in its function. According to their poetics, a poetic work is a collection of self-focused equivalent units that correspond with each other. In other words, poetry is a text involving parallelism of linguistic units, from those of lower levels (phonological, morphological, lexical, etc.) to higher levels (text, episode, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

The Mukařovský–Jakobson approach to literariness confines its focus to the text, or the message form, despite the context-oriented features of their communication model shown in Figure 1. A literary text, however, is better viewed when placed in the communicative framework as Mathesius (1975), Halliday (1994), and others in Prague and London (e.g. Firbas 1964, Firth 1957) claimed for natural discourse.

At the sentence level, Mathesius as early as the 1930s gave "new sense to the traditional distinction of grammatical and psychological subject (and to the analogous distinction of the two kinds of predicate)" (Vachek 1972: 19) by introducing new functional terms indicative of the information that they convey: 'theme' and 'rheme'. The "element about which something is stated may be said to be the basis of the utterance or the theme, and what is stated about the basis is the nucleus of the utterance or the rheme" (Mathesius 1975: 81).

Michael A. Halliday has developed these ideas into the three distinct layers in the clause. As the diagram below shows, what was discussed as a single event by Prague linguists under the heading of 'theme' and 'rheme' is given two definite roles. One stratum is for the speaker's point of view; the other for the listener's viewpoint:

		<i>The Grays</i>	<i>retired</i>	<i>to their beds</i>
Experiential	TRANSITIVITY	Medium	Process	Location: locative
Interpersonal	MOOD	Modal	Propositional	
Textual	<b>THEME</b> (addresser's point of view)	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>	
	INFORMATION (addressee's point of view)	Given information	New information	

Table 1: Three Layers of Semantic Component in Clause (Halliday 2002: 25)

In a literary text at discourse level, a level where the author communicates something to the reader, the elements work together in a communicatively dynamic manner, along the line of theme-rheme development at a text level below the superordinate author-reader structure, in the same way that words and phrases do in a clause.<sup>3</sup>

2 "Repetition, however, does not just involve recurrence of sounds. It may also rest on an equivalence of syntactic structure or of the semantic content of individual words" (Boase-Beier 1994: 405). See also Toyota (2003, 2012).

3 The Prague School of Linguistics called the original text-functional unfolding of utterance 'Communicative Dynamism' (CD).

Prague linguists' and Halliday's functionalisms examined above, especially their text-forming function, complement the Mukařovský–Jakobson aesthetics. This is because the scope of parallelism, one of the text-level cohesive devices, should be determined according to the discourse-level functional super-structure. The principle of parallelism is effective only when related with some functional superordinate structures that determine its scope.

### 3. THE OVERALL PARALLEL ORGANIZATION OF THE POEM: THE AAAB PATTERN

Auden's 'O Where Are You Going?' can be divided into two parts: the first part consists of the first three stanzas; the second, the last stanza. This organization is realized by the distribution of the masculine rhyme which falls on the second and the fourth lines from Stanza 1 through 3:

1-2	"That valley is fatal when furnaces <i>burn</i> , — 4 That gap is the grave where the tall <i>return</i> ."	} masculine rhyme
2-2	"That dusk will delay on your path to the <i>pass</i> , — 4 Your footsteps feel from granite to <i>grass</i> ?"	} masculine rhyme
3-2	"Did you see that shape in the twisted <i>trees</i> ? — 4 The spot on your skin is a shocking <i>disease</i> ?"	} masculine rhyme

On the other hand, the fourth stanza lacks this rhyme, but the central two lines are combined with what Jakobson calls pararhyme:

4-2	"Yours never will" —said <i>farer</i> to <i>fearer</i> , — 3 "They're looking for you" —said <i>hearer</i> to <i>horror</i>	} pararhyme
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The grammatical structure of each stanza also shows a pattern which parallels this rhyming organization (AAAB). Each of the first three stanzas has a first reported part consisting of Predicate Verb (*said*) + Grammatical Subject (*reader, fearer, horror*) in the first line, followed by the second reported part in the other three lines as a whole. However, the last stanza shows a different pattern; namely, it has three Predicate Verb (*said*) + Grammatical Subject (*rider, farer, hearer*) patterns in the first three lines, followed by a narrative part (As he left them there, as he left them there).

From the rhyming and the grammatical patterns, it is possible to identify a basic pattern of AAAB underlying this work, which is again reflected in the final stanza.

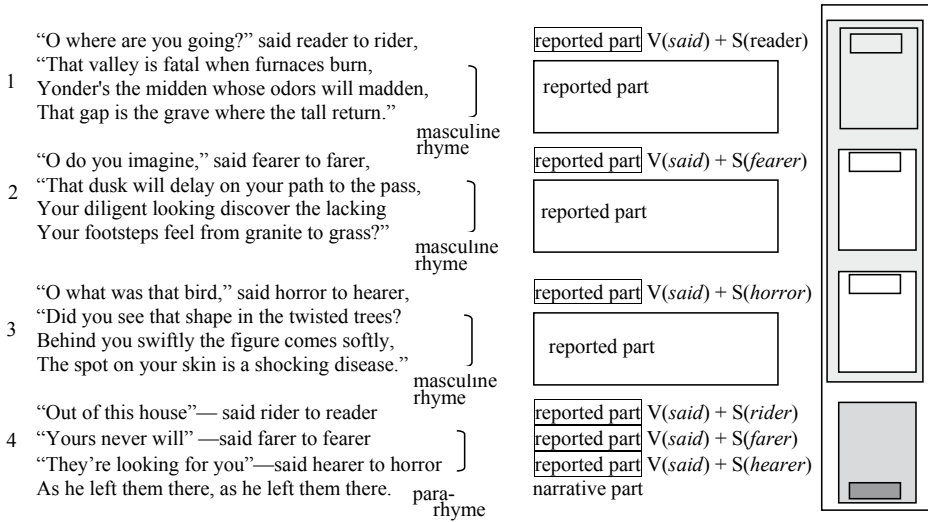


Figure 2: The Basic Verbal Pattern of AAAB

The distribution of questions parallels and supports the above over-all organization of the work: Stanza 1 begins with reader’s question “O where are you going?” which is followed by one non-*wh*-question in, again, the first line in Stanza 2 “O do you imagine” and one *wh*-question in Stanza 3. Only Stanza 4 lacks questions, foregrounding this part as in the above over-all organization.

Stanza 1	1 question ( <i>wh</i> )
Stanza 2	2 questions (non- <i>wh</i> )
Stanza 3	1 question ( <i>wh</i> )
Stanza 4	∅ question

Figure 3: Distribution Pattern of Wh-Questions

This organization of the work is also supported by the distribution of two *that*-phrases (Stanza 1), one *that*-phrase (Stanza 2), two *that*-phrases (Stanza 3), against one *this*-phrase (Stanza 4), making *that* – *this* contrast:

Stanza 1	2 <i>that</i> -phrases	main clause subjects	} subject-related
Stanza 2	1 <i>that</i> -phrase	subordinate clause subject	
Stanza 3	2 <i>that</i> -phrases	subject complement, object complement	
Stanza 4	1 <i>this</i> -phrase	prepositional complement	} subject-nonrelated

Figure 4: Distribution Pattern of that-this Phrase

The word following the determiners (*that*, *this*) can be categorized into two parts depending on its relation to the status of a grammatical subject. <sup>1-2</sup>*That valley* and <sup>1-4</sup>*that gap* hold the strongest grammatical subjectness in the main clause; <sup>2-2</sup>*That dusk* is downgraded into the subordinate grammatical subject, still keeping its grammatical subjectness; and <sup>3-1</sup>*that bird* and <sup>3-2</sup>*that shape* barely hold their relation with their grammatical subjects (<sup>3-1</sup>*what* and <sup>3-2</sup>*you*) as a subject complement and an object complement respectively. This distribution of subject-related words follows the overall pattern. On the other hand, <sup>4-1</sup>*this house*, a prepositional complement, in the last stanza loses its grammatical relatedness with the subject of the clause in which it appears, highlighting again the last stanza.

Use of the definite article also shows a unique distribution throughout the work, supporting the above overall pattern of AAAB. Stanza 1 contains three definite noun phrases (<sup>1-3</sup>*the midden*, <sup>1-4</sup>*the grave*, <sup>1-4</sup>*the tall*), Stanza 2 two definite nouns (<sup>2-2</sup>*the pass*, <sup>2-3</sup>*the lacking*) and Stanza 3 three nouns (<sup>3-2</sup>*the twisted trees*, <sup>3-3</sup>*the figure*, <sup>3-4</sup>*The spot*), while Stanza 4 shows no definiteness in nouns.

A plural morpheme in the nouns realized in the form of -s also shows the same distribution: <sup>1-2</sup>*furnaces*, <sup>1-3</sup>*odors*; <sup>2-4</sup>*footsteps*; <sup>3-2</sup>*trees*; <sup>4</sup>*∅*-s.

The overall AAAB pattern is also realized within Stanza 4. In the first three stanzas, the person who is going to leave (*rider*, *farer*, *hearer*) is spoken to by three persons (*reader*, *fearer*, *horror*); and in Stanza 4, these three addresser-addressee relations are all inverted. In Stanza 4, the first three lines consist of the three relations of address, while the fourth line is devoted to the description of the rider's actions, giving the last constitutional element a highlighted position:

Stanza 1	reader→ <b>rider</b>
Stanza 2	fearer→ <b>farer</b>
Stanza 3	horror→ <b>hearer</b>
Stanza 4	<b>rider</b> →reader <b>farer</b> →fearer <b>hearer</b> →horror <b>he, them; he, them</b>

Figure 5: Speaker-listener Alterations

A close look at the first three stanzas also reveals this bottom-heavy structure within the trio, in that both parties in the addresser-addressee relation in the first two stanzas (*reader* → *rider*; *fearer* → *farer*) are humans, while in Stanza 3, one of the participants, the addresser, is a personified abstract noun (*horror*).

#### 4. THE SECOND ORGANIZATION OF THE POEM: THE THEME- RHEME FRAMEWORK

As has been examined above, this poem consists of two major parts: the first three stanzas and the fourth stanza. Of the arrangements of items so far discussed, the exchange between the two participants in the first line of Stanza 1 and the first line of Stanza 4 is most highlighted, creating the theme-rheme structure of this poem over the four stanzas, or what I call discourse theme–discourse rheme. The other verbal items in each of the two parts hinge on this exchange. A closer look at the two parts reveals that the addresser–addressee relation in the first line in each part is the major topic of this poem:

Stanza 1	"O where are you going?" said reader to rider,	DISCOURSE THEME	As to leaving
Stanza 2		↓	
Stanza 3			
Stanza 4	"Out of this house"— said rider to reader		DISCOURSE RHEME

Figure 6: Discourse Theme-Discourse Rheme over Stanzas

This poem begins with the reader's question about the rider's departure ("*O where are you going?*"), to which rider replies that the person is just leaving the place ("*Out of this house*"). Other exchanges that follow are just elaborations of this basic exchange. In other words the discourse-thematic question of where the rider is going is commented upon with the discourse-rhematic reply about the person's leaving the place. Considering the fact that the reply does not specify the rider's concrete destination, but the act of leaving, it is possible to say that the author's greater concern is over the rider's leaving.

To support this discourse theme–discourse rheme framework, the last word of the first line in Stanza 1 and the line-end word of Stanza 4 constitute a masculine rhyme: <sup>1-1</sup>*rider*-<sub>4-1</sub> *reader*. In addition, the first lines of the middle two stanzas end with <sup>2-1</sup>*farer*-<sub>3-1</sub> *hearer* respectively, constituting another masculine rhyme pair.

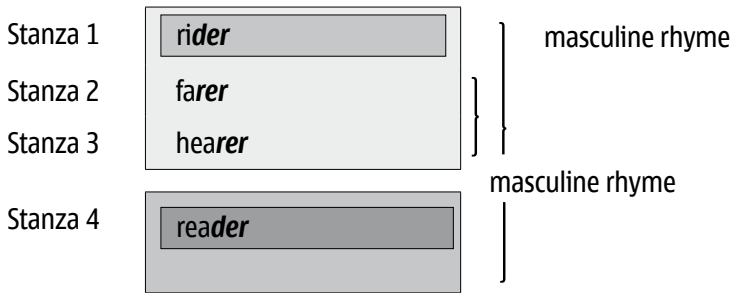


Figure 7: Masculine Rhyme Distribution Supporting Thematization

The two participants in the <sup>1-1</sup>*rider*-<sub>4-1</sub> *reader* pair contrast sharply in that the first line of Stanza 1 has the second-person subject of action 'you' ("*O where are you going?*"), while the first line of Stanza 4 lacks this: <sub>1-1</sub>*you* (subject of action) – Ø. (See Figure 7) The presence of the second-person subject of action *you* (actor) is supported by the presence of two *you*'s as subjects of human faculties of perception in Stanzas 2 and 3. These other instances of *you* are the second-person subject of perception <sup>2-1</sup>*you* (subject of perception) ("*O do you imagine,*" said *fearer* to *farer*), and <sup>3-2</sup>*you* (subject of perception) ("*Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?*"). The three instances of *you* in the first stanza group show some involvement of *you* in the world around, while the second part, Stanza 4, lacks this involvement. There appears no subject *you* of action or perception there. The only instance of <sub>4-3</sub>*you* in the third line ("*They're looking for you*"—said *hearer* to *horror*), is not the subject of action or perception, but the goal of third-person action. Thus <sup>1-1</sup>*rider* followed by other instances of *you* of perception shows a sharp contrast with <sub>4-1</sub> *reader*, which appears in an environment with no such action or perception:



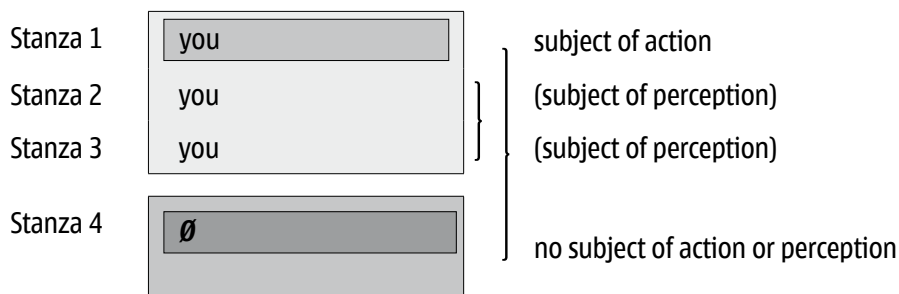


Figure 8: Non-realization of Subject you

In Stanza 1, reader attempts to persuade rider that the distant place is a horrible one by relaying rumors beyond his or her direct experience. Stanzas 2 and 3, however, refer to is something closer to the addresser, something within his or her experience, through which to persuade rider not to leave. In Stanza 2, the addresser's experience is not within the direct reach of the addressee's senses ("O do you imagine,"); but in Stanza 3, as the verb of perception <sub>3-2</sub>see shows the experience is more direct ("Did you see..."):

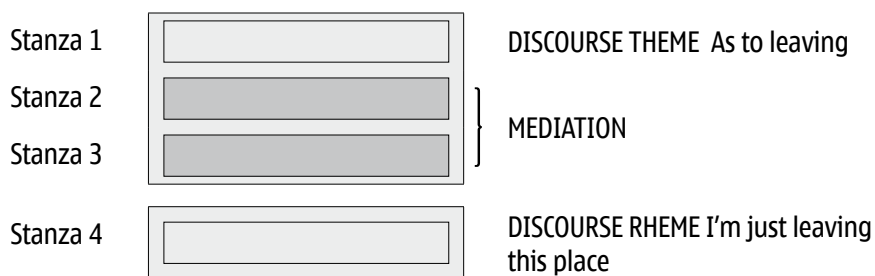


Figure 9: MEDIATION transforming DISCOURSE THEME into DISCOURSE RHEME

These two central stanzas have the function of connecting the first stanza with the last one, which is for the closest environment. We may call this the mediating function of literary discourse. This poem begins with the topic of a distant place in Stanza 1, followed by explanation of closer things in Stanza 2 and 3, leading to the comment in the last stanza that <sub>4-1</sub>this place is the horrible place and rider wishes to leave it.

Supporting the rider's leaving of the place, the highlighted sound /əʊ/ in *O*, which is at the first word of the title and of each stanza, and echoes in the last word of the title *Going*, is equally distributed throughout the work, appearing once at the head of each stanza, though slightly modified in the last stanza (<sub>4-1</sub>*Out* /əʊt /). This modified /əʊt/ echoes back at <sub>1-3</sub>*odors* /əʊd-/ in Stanza 1, giving a prominent position to Stanzas 1 and 4 which encloses the MEDIATION part: <sub>1-1</sub>*O*/əʊ/ (, <sub>1-3</sub>*odors* /əʊd-/); <sub>2-1</sub>*O*/əʊ/; <sub>3-1</sub>*O*/əʊ/; <sub>4-1</sub>*Out* /əʊt /.

Fukase (1971) rightly points out that the main theme underlying this work is loneliness of a man who is leaving, or has to leave, his place in life:

Just as 'waste' is a key word in T. S. Eliot, so in Auden the word 'lonely' is the clue to the undertone of his poems.

Fukase (1971: 193)

In order to illustrate this mood in his works, Fukase quotes a few lines from 'April 1929':

But thinking so I came at once  
Where solitary man sat weeping on a bench,  
Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted  
Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken.

('April 1929', ll.9-12)

No chattering valves of laughter emphasised  
Nor the swept gown ends of a gesture stirred  
The sessile hush

(ll.29-31)

Around 1929, Berlin was a place of conflicting political factions, and there Auden spent some time of the year, alienating himself from London. Then appears this poem. In 1939 Auden moved to the United States. His moves round this time of life, at least, seem to be driven by a sort of impulse to alienate himself from wherever he was.

This word 'self-alienation' best describes Auden's underlying theme in this work, too. Alienation, or positive distancing of himself from home seems to be the key word in understanding the poet of this period. Positive, because, unlike William Wordsworth wondering lonely as a cloud in the sky, Auden's distancing himself from home seems to have been a compulsive and obsessive act. Compulsive, as the line below shows

Although I love you, you will have to leap;  
Our dream of safety has to disappear.

Auden 'Leap Before You Look'

Auden's wandering from his home country did not seem to be based upon a firm belief, psychological or sociological. Poets, keenly sensitive to the things round them, tend to keep themselves away from the world they abhor. The cause of Auden's wandering does not lie in the poet's interest in Marxism and Freudianism at the time; rather, it was his inherent trait of self-alienation that caused him to find a similar theme in the theories of these two philosophers.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As Fukase (1971: 196) claims that poetical works, those of Auden being no exception, cannot be dissolved into the poet's historical environment in which he or she lived, a poetical work should, first and foremost, be appreciated through the network of verbal

items. These verbal items in poetry are not only there to create a beautiful universe of language. They are there verbally to reveal the poet's major concern manifested in the complex configuration of the work. In the case of 'O Where Are You Going?', through the theme-rhematically arranged "<sup>1-1</sup>*O where are you going?*"–"<sup>4-1</sup>*Out of this house*" pair, it is possible to find there the major organization of this poem: '(theme) As for the departure'–'(rheme) I'm just leaving'.

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## SUMMARY

### O I JUST WANT TO LEAVE THIS PLACE: AUDEN'S DISCOURSE OF THEMATIZED SELF-ALIENATION

This article examines theme-rheme organization at discourse level of W.H. Auden's 'O Where Are You Going?'. Because a literary text is realized between author and reader, it is not difficult to assume that the verbal organization in the fictional text reveals the author's main concern. By applying the concept of theme-rheme at clause level to Auden's text, I argue that the discourse theme of the hero's departure is commented upon as a mere leaving of the place where he is now, revealing the author's impulsive desire to leave the place with no prior idea of destination.

**KEYWORDS:** literary discourse, discourse theme, discourse rheme, mediation, functional approach.

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