

**Відображення дискурсу життя в художньому тексті**

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**Depiction of the discourse of life in a literary text**

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*The topic of life is one that is brought up frequently in literature. That leads us to believe that such a concept as discourse of life exists and can be studied. In order to confirm this belief we will analyze a literary piece that is centered on this topic and that piece is Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain*. What separates this novel from others is its narrator, who is a dog. As he tells the reader his story, in fact he tells the stories of multiple people that he interacts with on the daily basis, thus giving us many different perspectives to explore. The problem revolves around the fact that very few studies have been done on the novel we will be covering or the author's writing in general. Therefore, in addition to the main goal of creating a collection of quotes describing the views and attitude to life of various characters in the book, this article can serve as an impetus for other scholars to pay attention to Garth Stein's work. Before moving on to the matter at hand, we will outline basic terminology (discourse and discourse analysis), give a summary of Garth Stein's biography and dwell on briefly on other authors' research into his work.*

*Following our goal, we sum up the perspectives of the three most prominent characters – Denny, Eve and Enzo. Considering their various differences, such as age, gender, professional background, and even species, we were surprised to discover that they share quite a few similarities. As we analyze the text we recount their defining characteristics: Denny is self-sufficient and prone to self-sacrifice; Eve loves her family, is supportive of her husband's interests, though tends to sacrifice her own; Enzo desperately wants to become human, carefully analyses people around him and, once again, often makes sacrifices for the sake of his family. Thus, we conclude that life in Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is characterized first and foremost by the main characters' tendency for self-sacrifice, all in different measures. This quality that makes even the canine narrator akin to a real human being, despite his doubts in regards to his ability to ever become one.*

**Key words:** *literary discourse, discourse of life, discourse analysis, discourse, animal narrator.*

*Тематика життя дуже часто згадується в літературі, через що ми припускаємо, що існує її дискурс життя і його цілком можна вивчати. Але щоб підтвердити це припущення, нам необхідно проаналізувати художній твір, в якому ця тематика є центральною. Для цього ми обрали роман Гарта Стайна «Мистецтво перегонів під дощем». Ця книга особлива тим, що її оповідач – собака. Розповідаючи читачеві історію свого життя, він також розкриває для*

*нас життя декількох близьких йому людей, що дає нам можливість розглянути дискурс життя з декількох різних ракурсів. Головна проблема полягає в тому, що дуже мало хто намагався дослідити цей роман і творчість його автора в цілому. Тому окрім основної мети створити збірку цитат, що описують погляди різних персонажів книги та їх ставлення до життя, ця стаття може послугувати поштовхом для інших науковців звернути увагу на творчість Гарта Стайна. Перш ніж приступити до роботи, ми окреслимо терміни, якими ми оперуємо (дискурс та дискурс аналіз), поговоримо про біографію Гарта Стайна, а також коротко обговоримо дослідження інших авторів його творчості. Після реалізації нашої мети ми підсумовуємо погляди трьох головних персонажів роману – Денні, Ів та Енцо. З погляду на їх чисельні відмінності, такі як вік, стать, професійний досвід і навіть біологічний вид, ми були вражені тим, що між ними, як виявилось, існує багато подібностей. Аналізуючи текст, ми визначили головні якості цих героїв. Для Денні це самостійність і схильність до самопожертви. Для Ів – любов до своєї родини та підтримка інтересів чоловіка (зادля чого вона іноді поступається власними інтересами). Для Енцо – бажання стати людиною, звичка аналізувати поведінку людей і відданість своїй родині, задля якої він часто йде на жертви. Таким чином ми дійшли висновку, що життя у романі Гарта Стайна «Мистецтво перегонів під дощем» перш за все характеризується схильністю головних героїв до самопожертви. Навіть головний герой, не дивлячись на те, що він собака, саме завдяки цій якості стає більше схожим на людей, хоч його і турбують сумніви, щодо його готовності після смерті перевтілитися в людину.*

**Ключові слова:** художній дискурс, дискурс життя, дискурс аналіз, дискурс, оповідачтварина.

**Introduction.** As one might expect, the topic of life is quite a prominent one in literature and has been for a long time now. So many questions surround the miracle of existence, many of them still unanswered, that it is really no wonder humanity has been so eager to explore the answers in literature, probably ever since language first emerged. Seeing as the concept of life is so important and so widely discussed in literature, we began to question whether the discourse of life is a meaningful type of discourse to recognize and study. In order to answer that question we must explore a literary piece that not only delves into this topic, but is focalized around it. One such book is Garth Stein's *The Art of Racing in the Rain* and here we will explore how it depicts the discourse of life.

This novel stands out due to how it depicts many different perspectives of life, different philosophies, the central one being the most uncommon. It belongs to the main character and narrator who is a dog named Enzo. He believes his breed to be a mixture of Labrador and terrier because "terriers are problem solvers" (Stein, 2008). Perhaps this flattering description of the breed

is what the narrator, as well as the author, uses as an excuse for his unnaturally human-like intelligence. It is that intelligence that allows him to tell his story in the first place – the story of his life and his death. Moreover, the animalistic narrator manages to explore the lives of his cohabitants and the changes they undergo in the span of several years. We see his owner, Denny, convert from a loner to a real family man, make futile attempts to balance his career and his family life, cope with grief and fight for the right of custody of his daughter, Zoë. We see his wife, Eve, learn to love Enzo, wrestle with the anger issues arising from her illness, drown in denial, and, ultimately, accept that nothing lasts forever. And although the story doesn't focus too much on their daughter, Zoë, we still get to see glimpses of her own life's story as well. Despite Enzo telling the reader his own story specifically, that fact appears to get lost in narration as the plot focuses heavily on his family and their human issues with which he is nonetheless actively involved. The readers' attention is brought to him again only when he has finished helping Denny reunite with his daughter. Only then does the reader realize that their story is Enzo's story as well. They are not simply connected – they cannot exist without each other. Just like Denny would most likely not have succeeded in his endeavors without Enzo's support and understanding, Enzo would not have realized his desire to become human had he ended up with a different family. Thus, focusing on the other characters' stories did not take away from his story, but rather enriched it.

Given all this, the novel appears to be a perfect test subject for our task – the issues of life and death are central to the plot and moreover are presented from the point of view of multiple characters, thus giving us several perspectives and philosophies to work with and compare. This way we will be able to explore the discourse of life from multiple angles and get a better grasp of what it really is.

**Problem Statement.** The main problem that prompted this study was the profound lack of research done into Garth Stein's writing. It is not as if there is nothing at all to aid us with this study, but it was surprising to find out that the captivating literary style of a best-selling author did not attract more attention. It is our hope that this article will not only expand the volume of works studying this author's writing, but will also encourage others to take scientific interest in it, as well as other under-appreciated writers' literary pieces.

**Analysis of the latest research and publications.** Before we delve into the matter at hand, we must first outline the terminology with which we will operate, as well as consult existing studies both on the matter of discourse analysis and those exploring Garth Stein's writing to see what can be learned from them.

Definitions of discourse tend to be quite broad. Outside linguistics, it is most commonly used as another way of saying "language in use"; in other contexts, it can mean specifically the use of spoken language as opposed to written language (Baker & Ellece, 2013). In scientific terms,

however, discourse can be both written and spoken – all that matters is that it is used in a social context and somewhere between one and hundreds of thousands words in volume (Nordquist, 2020a).

In the 1970's scholars developed a new analysis method centered around discourse – it was what we now call discourse analysis. Just like discourse itself, this method is defined quite broadly. In short, it studies how people use language when communicating in speech or in writing. As we have mentioned before, discourse can exist in and be defined by various contexts, which are always taken into account when applying discourse analysis. Thus, it does not only analyze the language itself, in isolation, but extra-linguistic factors, such as gestures, body language, images, punctuation, even location and time, as well (Nordquist, 2020b).

Garth Stein is a bestselling author who is recognized internationally. Among other notable achievements, he is the co-founder of a non-profit organization “Seattle7Writers” that helps readers and writers in various ways. It might be useful for us to keep in mind as we proceed with this study, that Stein himself possesses a racing license and has even won a championship in 2004. Interestingly enough, he abandoned that career path after crashing while driving in the rain (Bio, Garth Stein, 2023).

Lastly, we will dwell on what little analysis has been done into Garth Stein's work. Fortunately, we have discovered a work analyzing “The Art of Racing in the Rain” and its findings offer much to consider.

F. Jinnah briefly analyzes aspects of magical realism in the novel in question. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, magical realism is a strategy used in storytelling that integrates elements of myth or fantasy into a narrative that might as well happen in the real world. The key aspect of the strategy is that these elements are seldom questioned, as if they were as mundane as eating breakfast or taking out the trash. This strategy is used so subtly in the novel that it manages to escape the reader's attention – as we read it we “forget” that dogs cannot talk, write, tell stories or even understand human language to the full capacity of the novel's canine narrator. Similarly, Enzo's undeniable reincarnation is also part of magical realism, as there is no scientific consensus on the existence of afterlife.

The author of the article remarks on Enzo's analytical abilities, most especially on his habit to psychoanalyze the people around him, aided by his superb senses. This can be seen in how he judges Eve, comparing his own claws that “grew too long and scratched the wood floor” (Stein, 2008) with her delicate fingernails that she takes great care of with various tools, for the sole purpose of pleasing the right people. It is this habit that lets him assert that humans are much more concerned with their property than their beloved animals, seeing as how Enzo had very limited

freedom during the wedding. He concludes that humanity has become far too materialistic and forgot what is really important in life.

Another curious idea that the author of the article extracts from the novel is that Enzo believes everyone has a chance to achieve greatness. His faith in Denny's motto – “that which you manifest is before you” (Stein, 2008) – is unshakeable, as if he is telling the reader: if a simple dog can reach his goal, so can you.

**Goal.** The main goal of this research is to make a selection of quotations detailing the perspectives of different characters and analyze the differences and similarities of their approaches to life. If we wanted an easy way out, we could have instead referred to the title, setting the goal of discovering how life is depicted and understood in the context of fiction. However, while it is the simpler approach to formulating our goal, in reality it would only complicate the process because it is far too broad and does not allow us to properly focus our attention on one thing at a time. Therefore, it would be reasonable to narrow down our goal to something more specific – something that would give us a concrete thread to follow.

**Results.** Here we will summarize how the different characters of the novel view life and cope with its challenges, and then compare their perspectives to see what they have in common or otherwise. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, we will start with Denny, then move on to Eve, and discuss Enzo last. This way we will be able to summarize our findings more easily.

The prominent themes in Denny's life seem to be self-sacrifice and self-sufficiency. It has been mentioned countless times in the novel that he has made various sacrifices, big and small, for the sake of his family. For instance, “after Eve became pregnant, Denny took his job behind the counter at the fancy auto shop that serviced only expensive German cars” (Stein, 2008), even though his previous job left him with a lot more time to spare. When Eve was rendered powerless by her illness, he took over every chore he could possibly handle, having to “cut back his hours at work” (Stein, 2008) to make it possible, and tried to care for his wife in any way he could, even if he couldn't give her everything she needed. And when Denny desperately wanted to stay with his wife during her final days, he had to give up on that aspiration to honor Eve's wishes – “as he fell asleep that night, she wanted him to dream of her as she used to be, not as she currently was” (Stein, 2008). In addition to his self-sacrificing tendencies, Denny displays a habit of relying on himself as much as possible. This quality is best illustrated by a conversation he had with Eve about one of his races. Denny doesn't blame the other driver for causing a crash – he blames himself for being in a position that allowed the other driver to cause it. He believes that “any problems that may occur have ultimately been caused by you, because you are responsible for where you are and what you are doing there” (Stein, 2008). Also worth mentioning is his intense interest in racing – he is not just a driver, he knows his sport from the inside out and constantly refers to it in daily life, recalling

his past achievements and applying his wisdom to everyday problems. Furthermore, he treats Enzo not like a pet, but rather like a friend, or even a family member. Denny talks to him like he would to a fellow human – “[He] asked it as if I were Eve or Zoë, as if it couldn’t have been more natural to see me there or address me like that” (Stein, 2008). And most of all, Denny loves his family and struggles to be apart from them.

As we began to analyze Eve’s behavior, we were surprised to find many similarities with Denny’s personal qualities. Just like him, Eve is prone to self-sacrifice. She desperately wanted to stay at home with her daughter beyond maternity leave, but denied herself that happiness (and refused Denny’s offer to quit his own job to look after Zoë) because “that wasn’t practical” (Stein, 2008) – she wants to be with her family but she needs to provide for them. In the same vein, she encourages Denny to take part in more competitions even when she’s terrified of being left alone with her illness. And let’s not forget the fact that when she was dying she sent Denny, the only person who could really understand her and support her, away, because he is the only who would be seriously and painfully affected by being by her side until the end – “Zoë won’t remember, (...) I don’t care what my parents think. And Enzo—well, Enzo understands. But I don’t want you to see me like this” (Stein, 2008). Also similarly to Denny, Eve loves Enzo immensely and talks to him as if he was human. She speaks to him when she is trying to figure out what happened to her, she confides in him about her agony and how she copes with it, she asks him to protect her at night and make sure she wakes up. Another outstanding quality of Eve is her unconditional support for Denny’s career and interests – “I love you (...) I love all of you, even your racing. And I know on some level that you are completely right about all this. I just don’t think I could ever do it myself” (Stein, 2008). In the novel, she can often be found watching racing tapes with Denny and Enzo and asking questions, perhaps well aware it brings him joy to merely explain it to her. At the same time, Eve is characterized by fear. She is afraid of Denny being away, she is afraid of her own head, “she was so afraid of doctors and hospitals. She was afraid that she might go in and they would never let her out” (Stein, 2008). And of course, her family is everything to her – she is even happy to clean up after Zoë makes a mess during her birthday party, simply because that’s her daughter, safe and full of joy.

We cannot move on without discussing Enzo’s point of view. While, as expected, he shares a little with Denny and Eve, there is one glaring difference between them – he is a dog, as opposed to the other two being human. Interestingly enough, most of his behaviors are infused with desire to become human. That fact is not news to anyone, for it is his ultimate goal, which he voices in the very first chapter. But he does not simply want the power or the opportunities that being human would give him – he is genuinely fascinated by the human world, like, for instance, the weather channel, which “is not about weather; it is about the world” (Stein, 2008). Our canine narrator

practices hard for his reincarnation, trying to teach himself to chew and walk like a human, picking up words and letters from Zoë's educational cartoons, studying "the television for clues on behavior and to learn how to react in certain situations" (Stein, 2008). But most of all, he desperately wants to have thumbs and laments their lack any opportunity he gets. However, Enzo does not just practice to be human. He puts a lot of effort into analyzing the humans around him to understand why they do what they do. "I cannot speak, so I listen very well" (Stein, 2008) – this, he believes, will make him a good person once he is finally human. Perhaps that is the reason why Enzo is so often found deducing, or "knowing" people's unspoken fears and motives. He also often remarks on the materialistic nature of humanity – "they cling to things so hard sometimes" (Stein, 2008).

Enzo is also shown to be somewhat prone to self-sacrifice. He frequently remarks on how different he is from other dogs, attributing it to his willpower "that was strong enough to overcome [his] more primal instincts" (Stein, 2008). Where "most dogs cannot help themselves" (Stein, 2008, p. 23), Enzo is able to restrain him, fully conscious of his actions. At times, he does let himself loose, he allows himself simple canine joys in moments of unspeakable happiness, but those are the exceptions of the rule. In his daily life, he actively suppresses his nature to keep his family safe and not be too much of a bother. We see this when he patiently rations what little food he had and carefully chooses a convenient spot to do his business, locked in the house all alone, when he avoids intruding on their family time, when he keeps his temper seeing his favorite toy washed and devoid of its homely scent.

Finally, it is only prudent to consider his attitude towards Denny and Eve. The first thing we are made aware of is that Enzo believes he has become a burden for Denny – "He needs to not have me around to worry about anymore. He needs me to free him to be brilliant" (Stein, 2008). His determination to die is in part caused by his desire to reincarnate as soon as possible, but in part also by the belief, that Denny would be better off without him and needs help understanding that. It is also clear that Denny has profoundly influenced the narrator. Enzo does not just love racing – he applies the wisdom that has been passed on to him to every challenge he encounters. "That which you manifest is before you," (Stein, 2008) Enzo tells himself, making the crucial decision to face his biggest fear and let Eve grow to trust and love him. She enters Enzo's life abruptly and is at first unwelcome, although he puts a lot of effort into not showing it, despite feeling as if they have to compete for Denny's attention. It is Denny's philosophy that pushes him to make the first step to accepting her as part of his family and allow her to do the same.

**Conclusions and perspective for further research.** We would like to open this final chapter with this quote from the novel: "I marveled at them both; how difficult it must be to be a person. To constantly subvert your desires. To worry about doing the right thing, rather than doing what is

most expedient. At that moment, honestly, I had grave doubts as to my ability to interact on such a level. I wondered if I could ever become the human I hoped to be." (Stein, 2008)

It is interesting that here Enzo describes the exact qualities he has displayed throughout the novel, incapable of seeing his own humanity. And it seems that this subversion of desires, this choice to do good despite circumstances, to sacrifice one's own comfort, is the common theme for Enzo, Eve and Denny. This action that permeates the entire story seems to us to be key element of its discourse of life. It seems to us that what the story is trying to tell us is that life itself is not possible without an occasional compromise. We see it in Denny when he gives up on the convenient job he used to have in order to give his family a more stable income; when he sabotages his career to help Eve, take charge of Zoë's upbringing, and care for Enzo. We see it in Eve when she gives up on spending more time with Zoë in favor of earning more for the family, when she encourages Denny to pursue his career despite it being a risk to her, and when she sends her husband away despite being in dire need of his company. We see it in Enzo as well, for instance, when he puts effort into loving Eve, when he gives up the joy of a dog's life for the humanity that is to come and gives up his own life to grant Denny freedom. Perhaps the fact that Enzo learned this inherently human quality was ultimately what allowed him to fulfill his dream and be reborn as a human being.

This conclusion was reached as a result of narrative discourse analysis (Politz, 2023). More precisely, after a careful reading of the text we selected passages that describe behavior, opinions, and viewpoints of the novel's characters. Those passages were then categorized according to the character trait they depict. For instance, the following excerpt was placed in the "self-sacrifice" category, meaning it showcases this trait in Enzo and can, among other passages, serve as evidence that this kind of behavior occurs frequently in him: "I rarely let myself go, practicing to be restrained like men are" (Stein, 2008). The next and final step was to compare the volume of the resulting categories, single out the most prominent ones in individual characters and those that they have in common with each other. These most prominent traits have been described in detail in the previous chapter.

The analysis of the given novel has shown that the discourse of life can indeed be singled out as a type of discourse. We can claim this, because the text depicts the lives of multiple characters, most over the span of many years, and an entire lifetime in case of the main character, as well as show their personal growth and character traits. More literary texts must be analyzed before we can define the discourse of life with certainty. However, on the basis of this particular novel, we can say that the discourse of life is the use of language with the purpose of describing everyday living as well as unique occurrences that shape one's life, dwelling on the purpose of life, fear and/or acceptance of death and what may happen afterwards.



Although we have made an important discovery, more remains to be found. In the future, we plan to conduct further research into this matter, for instance, by expanding the textual analysis to include the rest of the characters, conducting a corpus analysis to see prominent lexical units, running a stylistic analysis to the exact devices the author uses to create various emotional effects, and so on.

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