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**The Narrators and Their Roles in the Works
of John Irving**

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of John Irving**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
1. Author versus narrator	3
2. Point of view	3
3. Narrator.....	4
4. Types of narrators	4
4.1. First-person narrator	4
4.1.1. Reliable and unreliable narrator.....	5
4.1.2. The main character and the minor character.....	5
4.2. Third-person narrator.....	6
4.2.1. Third-person narrator omniscient	6
4.2.2. Third-person objective.....	7
4.2.3. Third-person limited	7
4.3. Second-person narrator.....	8
5. Heterodiegesis and homodiegesis	8
6. John Irving and his authorship.....	9
6.1. John Irving's life.....	9
6.2. John Irving's publications.....	10
6.3. Appreciation of John Irving	12
6.4. John Irving's style and inspiration.....	13
7. The Hotel New Hampshire	15
7.1. Brief summary of the story	15
7.2. The narrator of the story	16
7.3. Extracts from the book <i>The Hotel New Hampshire</i> with a commentary.....	16
8. A Prayer for Owen Meany.....	19
8.1. Brief summary of the story	19
8.2. The narrator in the book <i>A Prayer for Owen Meany</i>	20
8.3. Extracts from the book <i>A Prayer for Owen Meany</i> with a commentary	21
9. A widow for one year	25
9.1. Brief summary of the story	25
9.2. The narrator in the book <i>A Widow for One Year</i>	27
9.3. Extracts from the book <i>A Widow for One Year</i> with a commentary	28
Conclusion	31

Endnotes.....	33
Bibliography	35
Abstract.....	38
Resumé.....	39
Appendices.....	40

Introduction

The Bachelor's thesis deals with the topic of the narrators in John Irving's books. Its objective is to delineate various types of the narrators and to find the key attributes and to demonstrate them on the selected works of John Irving. Readers usually know what the book is about, but they are not interested in the narrator himself or herself and in his or her contribution into the story. Therefore, we would like to change the status quo at least for the purpose of the thesis.

The thesis is divided into theoretical and practical part. In the theoretical part, it is necessary to specify what exactly the term narrator means. Then, this part will give a division of the narrators and their key characteristics. While choosing the type of the narrator, every writer has to realise the advantages and disadvantages of his choice. To find the information about the types of the narrators and their use, it is necessary to work with linguistic books that usually deal with the fundamental division into the first-person narrator and the third-person narrator. The principal publications for drawing up the thesis were *Stylistics* written by Peter Verdonk, *Stylistics for students* by Paul Simons and *Literary stylistics* published by University of Nigeria. However, we can find a lot of pages about literature and narration modes on the Internet which provide more detailed descriptions of various narration modes.

An integral chapter of the theoretical part will constitute an introduction of John Irving. We can find there his brief biography and the enumeration of his books and other works as well as information about his writing techniques. John Irving, a famous American writer has been chosen for this thesis for the amount and length and complexity of his novels and for the reason that he is favourite American writer of the author of the thesis. We can find many interviews with his own explanations about his works as well as about the narrators in his novels. Evidently, he is a type of writer who always contemplates every single detail in his books.

The practical part of the thesis deals with the selected books written by John Irving and their analysis. The analysis will be based on the depiction of the chosen book and the description of the narrator used in the book. The books analysed in this part will be *The Hotel New Hampshire*, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and *A Widow for One Year*. The type of the narrator will be then demonstrated on selected extracts from the chosen

book accompanied by a commentary summarising the key attributes contained in the given extract. The aim is to expose the variances between different narration modes and to prove that John Irving is a writer capable of using them as needed.

1. Author versus narrator

When analysing a narrative technique in a chosen book, we need to distinguish between an author and the narrator. These two are often represented by two different people and it is a common mistake among readers to relate them to each other. [1] Both of them, the author and the narrator, can figure in the masculine or in the feminine gender. For simplicity's sake of the text we will refer only to the masculine gender.

The author is a person who creates the story, who produces the text, who creates all the characters in the story, including the narrator; he is separated from the narrator as well as from all other persons appearing in the story. However, the voice that is supposed to be heard belongs to the narrator of the story, who let readers to see the story or events by his eyes, from his perspective. The only example where one should assume that the narrator and the author are the same person is an autobiography. [2]

2. Point of view

An author can individualize his story and liven up his prose by considering the person, role and individuality of the narrator and his point-of-view and how it can affect the narration of the plot. The point of view is reader-oriented but author-controlled. The term point of view "signifies the perspective from which the reader experiences the action of story. Perspective means perception, thought, and emotion, and point of view determines whose perceptions (sight, hearing, and the rest of the sense), whose thoughts, whose emotions you get as you read a passage." [3]

"The point of view is also the distinction in a story between who tells and who sees." [4] There exist various types of point of view and the author of a story can use just one point of view for the whole story or it is possible to play with them and use more than one. Switching between more points of view brings better overview to the readers and they can understand the story better, as well as the characters and single events. "Nowadays, many stories, alternate between the first and third person modes of narration. In typical cases, the author moves back and forth between a more omniscient narrator to a more personal first person narrator." [5]

3. Narrator

“Plato and Aristotle distinguished three basic kinds of narrator: (a) the speaker or poet (or any kind of writer) who uses his own voice; (b) one who assumes the voice of another person or persons, and speaks in a voice not his own; (c) one who uses a mixture of his own voice and that of others.” [6] However, to determine the narrator it is necessary to distinguish his perspective and his point of view. These two factors are important for the whole story because “any change in the perspective or point of view from which a fictional world is presented will result in a different story and give rise to a different interpretation.” [7]

The problematic of the narrator and his division and recognition concerns only narration itself, which means that it is focused only on the speech of narrator. In other words we do not apply this theory on dialogues between other characters that are separated by quotation marks and are therefore considered to be a direct speech of these characters. [8]

4. Types of narrators

4.1. First-person narrator

The first-person narrator, also called as *I-narrator*, makes readers assume that the person who tells the story is also one of the characters within the story, usually the central one. The narrator tells the story with the use of pronouns like *I, me, my, mine, myself* or *we, us, our, ourselves* when he refers to himself, so it does not pose a problem to identify this type of narration. The narrator holds a subjective perspective on events; readers can see the whole story through the narrator’s eyes, because they are directly engaged in the events of the story. His subjectivity is the reason why this type of narrator is said to be limited, because he does not know all the facts, he knows only things he saw or heard. [9] Readers usually learn about the emotions and opinions of the narrator, therefore readers often sympathise with him; his intrinsic as well as extrinsic conflicts mediate intimacy, urgency and immediacy. The first-person narration is also known as the autobiographical narration, “the narrator of the story is the person who has experienced or witnessed the events he narrates, or in some literary pieces, the author

may assume this position.” [10] One reason why this type of narration is read well is because it most resembles people’s everyday stories and how they talk about it.

“A rare form of first person narration is the first person omniscient in which the narrator is a character in the story, but also knows the thoughts and feelings of all the other characters.” [11]

4.1.1. Reliable and unreliable narrator

The literary discussion concerning narrators also further distinguishes between reliable and unreliable first-person narrator. The reliable narrator narrates the story in a way that readers can trust him that the events are not distorted. Naturally, the majority of narrators are reliable. By all means, this issue is connected with a psyche and maturity of the narrator as a character. Therefore, an author can use an unreliable narrator which could be immature or intellectually undeveloped so the reader cannot rely on the truth of his words. This is quite rare mode of a narration and it deserves to mention an example which might be the book *Flowers for Algernon* written by Daniel Keyes. [12] On the other hand, some authors believe in the contrary which means that they are convinced that these immature characters can tell only the truth in the raw and they have not the ability to lie. An example of this case might be the character of Forrest Gump from Winston Groom’s book of the same name.

4.1.2. The main character and the minor character

Another possible division of the first-person narrator is from the point of view of the importance of the character for the overall story – it is to the main character (of great importance) and to the minor character (of lesser importance). A majority of authors chooses the main character as a narrator because it is natural that the story is about *me*, about the character that narrates the story as is generally mentioned in the opening of the chapter about the first-person narrator. The other possibility is to choose the secondary or minor character as the narrator. The example of such a technique is possible to find in Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s book *The Great Gatsby*. The minor character only observes the life and destiny of the main character. The reasons for choosing a minor character as the narrator of the story vary. It is usually used when the author wants to keep distance to see what is happening in reality or when he needs

a more sympathetic character than is the main protagonist or when he needs to hide some information which is known to the main protagonist but not to other characters. [13]

4.2. Third-person narrator

In addition to first-person narrator, readers can also encounter so called third-person narrator. This type of narrator is not a character within the story. He stays beyond the events as an observer; not involved, he can adopt mostly an objective point of view as opposed to the first-person narrator. He is an unspecified individual that recounts the story and the readers gain the knowledge of the characters only through this outside voice. By this mode, the author is well separated from the other characters in the story. Such story is narrated with the use of pronouns *he, his, him, himself, she, her, herself, they, their, them, themselves*. This type of narrator is a dominant type used by authors due to his great flexibility and due to the fact that he is mostly seen as reliable. [14]

4.2.1. Third-person narrator omniscient

As with the case of first-person narrator, the third-person narrator has also a few subcategories. The first to be mentioned here is the category of omniscient one. Initially, it is necessary to define the word *omniscient*. It is a compound of Latin origin where *omni* means *all* and *scient* means *knowing*, which basically implies that the narrator knows everything, and the readers know everything, too. “The author moves from character to character, place to place, and episode to episode with complete freedom, giving himself access to his characters’ thoughts and feeling whenever he chooses and providing information whenever he wishes. This is probably the commonest point of view and one which has been established for a very long time.” [15] The readers are able to know exactly how the characters feel, what they do and think; this is the most direct way how to present the story to the readers. Such narrator can take a subjective approach. Still, one of the advantages is that he brings the sense of objective reliability of the plot because “the omniscient mode of narration is the least capable of being unreliable – although the omniscient narrator can have his own personal judgements and opinions on the behaviour of the characters. In addition to reinforcing the sense of the narrator as reliable, the main advantage of this mode is that

it is eminently suited to narrating huge, sweeping, epic stories or complicated stories involving numerous characters.” [16] Another advantage is that as the readers know everything, they know the actions, they also know feelings of all the characters in the story and so they are free to understand the story according to their own knowledge and perception.

The third-person narrator can be not only omniscient, but he can be also omnipresent. The term *omnipresent* means that the narrator can “be in different contexts at the same time and, as he is also omniscient, he knows what is going on there and has exact information about the contemporaneous situations of the different characters.” [17] Basically, it is possible to state that the position of this type of narrator is similar to the generally accepted position of God because he describes things which are quite impossible to observe for a living human.

4.2.2. Third-person objective

Further, we can also distinguish a third-person objective narrator. The objective point of view enables the narrator to tell a third-person’s story, but he cannot tell more than can be inferred from the story’s action and characters’ behaviour and dialogue. The narrator never exposes anything about what the characters think or feel, so he could not understand his motivations. In this narration mode, the narrator is an isolated observer as well as the usual first-person narrator. [18] This might beg the question whether the first-person narrator equals to the third-person objective narrator or does not. The main difference between these two narration modes is the objectivity of the storytelling. While the third-person objective narrator is or should be an objective and unbiased narrator, as it is apparent from the designation, the first-person narrator carries his own subjectivity.

4.2.3. Third-person limited

The third and the last subcategory of the third-person narrator is the third-person limited. This mode of narration is situated between the third-person omniscient and the third-person objective. When the narrator uses third-person limited perspective, his perspective is limited to the internal working of one character, usually the main protagonist. The narrator can speak explicitly about the thoughts and feelings of the

character, but regarding the others characters, the readers and the narrator can only estimate their thoughts and feelings based on their behaviours and dialogues. [19]

4.3. Second-person narrator

Further, we can distinguish a second-person narrator. This type of narration is not that common in literature, it is the rarest one but it is usually used for instructions. It is grammatically represented by pronouns *you*, *your*, *yourself*, ergo the reader feels as if he were a character within the story. The focal character is *you*, which means the readers themselves. This mode of narration is rather difficult to manage, but in case when it is used well, the readers can easily imagine themselves within the action of the story. This mode could be very emotional and intimate for the readers, because they could not do anything with his destiny written in the book, they could feel powerless against a plot that leads them to their possible destruction. [20] As already mentioned, not many fiction books are written in second-person narrative. Exceptions to the rule are usually books about psychosis or “choose-your-own-adventure” types of books. However this kind of narration is popular for a lot of non-fiction self-help or do-it-yourself books and tourism advertisements or cookery books. [21]

5. Heterodiegesis and homodiegesis

There is another possible differentiation of the narrator, which might be sort of an additional one, concerning the exegesis or the plan of the story. As it is established in the text above, the third-person narrator is external, he is not involved in the story and this fact permits to say that the narrative is heterodiegetic, because the narrator is different from the exegesis. He does not stay on the same plan. On the other hand, the narration could be homodiegetic in case that the story is narrated directly in the first-person narrator. That means that the homodiegetic narrator stays on the same level as the whole story does, because he is internal to the narrative. [22]

6. John Irving and his authorship

6.1. John Irving's life

John Irving is an American writer born on March 2, 1942 in Exeter, New Hampshire, as John Wallace Blunt, Jr. but his name was changed to John Winslow Irving six years later when his mother Frances Winslow Irving remarried Colin F.N. Irving and John Irving was adopted by him. He never met his biological father. [23]

Going through his biography, it is easy to find an inspiration for his novels because in every point and in every decade of his life, there is something that he used in his stories. John Irving studied at the same boy's preparatory school where his step-father worked as a teacher. In this period, he was already interested in wrestling and in writing and he excelled in those two fields in spite of the fact that he suffered from dyslexia, though not being diagnosed during his early school age; so as a student, he was considered as mediocre. [24]

After his graduation from Exeter in 1961 he studied at the University of Pittsburgh though only for one year owing to the school wrestling program which was insufficient for him. He also studied at the University of Vienna but lately he settled at the University of New Hampshire where he obtained his bachelor's degree. He continued in his studies at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop where he met a number of future great novelists. In 1967 he obtained his Masters in Fine Art and during the next few years he was employed as an assistant professor of English at Windham College in Putney, Vermont. Up to the year 1978, he travelled to write and teach at various colleges and universities. [25]

In 1964, he got married to his first wife, Shyla Leary, who was an artist and gave birth to their two sons, Colin and Brendan. In 1982 he got divorced with his wife and five years later, in 1987, he remarried his literary agent, Janet Turnball. In 1998, they fathered his third son named Everett. Presently, he is not only a father, but also a grandfather. [26]

He is interested in wrestling for his whole life. He worked as a wrestling coach until 1989 and three years later he was put into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame is

Stillwater, Oklahoma, for his 20 years of competitive wrestling and long activity of coaching. [27]

6.2. John Irving's publications

In 1968 John Irving published his first novel *Setting Free the Bears*. People bought fewer than 6000 copies of this story however the reviews were indifferent and slightly optimistic. It was evident that John Irving is a beginner as a writer and he needs to develop his style. Briefly, this story is about two Viennese university students who became friends, who want to travel on their motorcycles and they want to set free animals from the Vienna ZOO. [28]

In 1972 he published his second novel *Water-Method Man*. This novel proved Irving's growth as a writer, so he received better reviews but still people bought even fewer copies than in case of *Setting Free the Bears*. In this novel "Irving developed a penchant for complex plots and characters and a keen sense of the importance of detail; all of which comes from a combination of his travels in Vienna and the United States and his love for Charles Dickens' work. Irving wrote with a style that clearly indicated what he felt: the one cannot tell a story truthfully without giving the reader as descriptive a picture as possible." [29] It is a comic novel about the man undergoing the treatment by the *water-method* which means, that he has to drink a lot of water before and after sexual intercourse. Initially, he is irresponsible and indecisive but during the story he discovers the true values. [30]

His third book *The 158-Pound Marriage*, published in 1974, is considered by critics as the poorest one. The story is not pleasant for everyone since this is a topic of sharing partners between two married couples. After this failure John Irving went back to teaching and between 1975 and 1978 he worked as an assistant professor of English at the Mount Holyoke College and the year after at Brandeis University. [31]

John Irving's career took a twist in the year 1978 by publishing a new book called *The World According to Garp*, which is, as opposed to *158-Pound Marriage*, his most popular and critically acclaimed book. It was his first international bestseller. He improved his style and "brought in a whole new level of complexity and realism to his imaginative narratives. [...] He constructed immensely complicated and richly detailed

characters by describing physical movements, professional habits, dress, and incidents in their lives that make them who they are, not just physical features and a name.” [32]

His other book *The Hotel New Hampshire* was published in 1981. It is a story about the Berry family, their moving and their hotel business. [33]

The sixth novel was published in 1985. *The Cider House Rules* is the most Dickensian novel that John Irving wrote. This book deals with a controversial theme of orphanage and abortions. Readers observe life of one unadopted boy that grew up in the orphanage among the apple orchards and in his adulthood he searches for happiness. [34]

In 1989 he published *A Prayer for Owen Meany* which is a popular novel among American citizens about the unusual boy Owen Meany. [35]

Son of the Circus, a novel published in 1994, was Irving’s most extensive novel at that time. It is a detective story that takes place in India. John Irving used a space of the story for writing about wide range of sexual deviations since the main theme of this novel is an investigation of brutal sexual murders. [36]

The novel *A Widow for One Year* was published in 1998. It is a complex story about the life of a woman called Ruth Cole. [37]

In 1996 a story collection called *Trying to Save Piggy Sneed* came out. It is a collection of eight short stories including one narration that the readers can know from *The Hotel New Hampshire*. [38]

In 1996 he published his first memoir *The Imaginary Girlfriend*, which is a short book dealing with his own life. His second memoir *My Movie Business*, published in 1999, is about the making *The Cider House Rules* into the movie. All his books are fictional except for these two books classified as a non-fiction. [39]

The tenth novel *The Fourth Hand* was published in 2001. It is a shorter novel about one handsome reporter whose arm was bitten off by a lion. Reviews received for this novel were mixed. [40]

John Irving is also an author of a book for children. In 2004 he published *A Sound like Someone Trying Not to Make a Sound*. The interesting fact about this book is that readers can know this story from Irving’s book *A Widow for One Year* because

one of the main characters, Ted Cole, is an author of stories for children and in the book, this story was written by him.

Irving published his longest novel *Until I Find You* in 2005 and some reviews talk about it as about his most intimate story, for the similarity with Irving's life because it is a story of a man who is searching for his father that he never met. [41]

In 2010 he published his novel *Last Night in Twisted River*, a sort of mysterious story because it is not evident who is the main character of the story. Irving uses there his favourite setting, concretely New Hampshire. [42]

His last novel up to now, *In One Person* deals with a controversial theme of sexual identity. The narrator and the main character Billy is a bisexual man talking about his life. In this novel John Irving points out that it is difficult to be tolerant of everyone's sexual identity. [43]

Nowadays Irving's novels are translated into thirty-five foreign languages and nine of his books are rated among international bestsellers. [44] Four of his books were made into the movies: *The World According to Garp* in 1982, *The Hotel New Hampshire* in 1984, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* titled as *Simon Birch* in 1998, *The Cider House Rules* in 1999 and *A Widow For One Year* titled as *The Door In The Floor* in 2004.

From the list of the abovementioned books, the following ones will be further analysed in the thesis:

The Hotel New Hampshire

A Prayer for Owen Meany

A Widow for One Year

6.3. Appreciation of John Irving

John Irving is an owner of several awards. For example, in 1974 he received an award from the National Endowment for the Arts that granted him more money and time to write. In 1976 – 1977 he received the Guggenheim Foundation Grant. In 1980 he won the National Book Award for *The World According to Garp*. In 1981, he got an O. Henry Award for his short story "Interior Space". He won his probably most

valuable award in 2000 since he became a winner of the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay for *The Cider House Rules*. [45]

6.4. John Irving's style and inspiration

“John Irving is considered among the most imaginative and entertaining contemporary American writers since Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Heller. An exceptional storyteller, whose intelligent novels appeal to both academic and mainstream readers alike, Irving dismisses any demarcation between high literature and popular fiction and asserts the primacy of plot and content over style.” [46] Many critics refer to his use of sophisticated metafictional techniques of postmodern writers in a conventional novel.

He is respected for his deep and detailed characterisation and setting descriptions and multileveled plots as well as for his settlement with the dyslexia. When he writes his stories, he still uses ordinary notebook and a pen. He is perceived as a “realistic fiction writer that has an intriguing tendency to write stories revolving around unusual concoctions of sex, macabre violence, love, family, and comedy, and how all such elements exist in humanity.” [47]

Among his favourite themes belong such controversial topics as parental loss, infidelity, feminism, childhood abuse and various types of the sexuality because as he says in one interview, he has always sympathized with a wide range of sexual desires. [48]

As it was mentioned, Irving is inspired by many elements from his life, so readers can find in his stories wrestling, Vienna, an academic setting, missing parent element, schools in New England, the loss of childhood innocence, sexual deviants and others. John Irving himself denies in interviews that some of his books should be autobiographical, excluding *The Imaginary Girlfriend*, as this is the question which is often repeated. It is always question of inspiration from his life, but not an autobiography. He explains these repetitious themes in a way that he does not choose these topics, they choose him and they obsess him. However he writes about those themes because he knows them very well, he knows every detail about them. [49] For example many of his characters are writers for the same reason. He knows a lot about writers and about the whole process of writing.

To his favourite writers that influenced him belong Gustave Flaubert, Paul Thomas Mann, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Hardy and especially Charles Dickens. At the age of fifteen he read *Great Expectations* from Charles Dickens, which inspired him in his future writing of plotted, character-driven novels. [50]

At the beginning of writing his story, there are one or more final sentences of the story. He begins with the final sentence, usually more than a single sentence, he sees the ending and according to this vision, he writes a whole story. His approach to writing is so special that, in his career of the novelist, he has never changed these last sentences, not a word, not a comma; they are fixed for the whole process of writing, as he said in an interview for the New York Times. [51] John Irving learned this method, writing from the last sentence, from Graham Green who is for him the most accomplished living novelist in the English language. [52]

Regarding the topic of the narrator, as John Irving says he prefers third-person omniscient one and the majority of his novels is written in this way, however in some cases, he used a first-person narrator like in the case of the novel *In One Person*. The main character and the narrator of this story, Billy, is a first-person narrator because only this narrator can explain how difficult it is for him during his growing up and during his life as an adult man. [53]

7. The Hotel New Hampshire

7.1. Brief summary of the story

The book *The Hotel New Hampshire* is Irving's fifth novel, published in 1981. It is a story about the Berry family. In 1939, Win Berry and Mary Bates met at the Maine resort, Arbutnot-by-the-Sea; they had summer jobs here and fell in love. There was one animal-act performer, Freud, who amused guests of the resort together with his bear whose name was State o'Maine. After the season, Freud gave the bear to Win Berry and the bear got a new name, Earl. After that, Win did some performances with bear that became a part of the family.

Win and Mary fathered five kids, Frank, Franny, John, Lilly and Egg. They lived in Dairy, New Hampshire in the house altogether with Iowa Bob, Win's father. Win was a dreamer influenced by his summer job in the resort. He decided to buy a former school for girls in Dairy and change it into the hotel. Family sold their house and moved into the first Hotel New Hampshire. By this time, children have certain issues. Frank had a problem with his sexuality because he felt he might be a gay; Franny was raped by three older boys from the school; Lilly was too small and Egg was hard of hearing. Since Franny was raped, John became to do weightlifting because he loved her and he wanted to protect her.

One day, father got a letter from Freud, who lived in Vienna and ran his own hotel. He wanted Win to go to Vienna and help him with the hotel. He wrote that he found a smart bear. Win decided to go with the whole family, but without Iowa Bob, who was dead by this time, and they sold their hotel to the midget circus. As the family was cautious, parents decided to fly by two flights. Win, Frank, Franny, John and Lilly sat in the first flight. They arrived to Vienna and the second day they were informed, that the aeroplane with Mary and Egg crashed and they are dead.

The rest of the family started to live in Freud's hotel together with Freud and female bear Susie which was actually a young woman in the bearskin. In the hotel lived also some prostitutes and radicals.

They renamed the hotel to Hotel New Hampshire; it was their second Hotel New Hampshire. One day, radicals took the family with Susie and Freud as hostages.

Radicals needed someone who could drive a car, which functioned as a bomb, to the Opera. They decided to take Freud as the driver, but he caused that the bomb exploded more early and saved many people in the Opera. Win killed one radical by a baseball bat and all from the Berry family became the heroes.

They moved back to the United States and Lilly became a famous writer and Frank was her agent. Between John and Franny came about incest, but they were able to solve their problem lately. Since Lilly was for all her life unhappy with her tallness, she committed suicide. Franny became the famous Hollywood actress and married her friend from school and John was in relationship with Susie. The family bought the resort in Arbutnot-by-the-Sea, so they owned their third Hotel New Hampshire although it did not function as a hotel but as a sanatorium for raped women.

7.2. The narrator of the story

In the case of the book *The Hotel New Hampshire* we are talking about the first-person narrator. John Irving chose John Berry as the reliable narrator. To be the first-person narrator, John Berry meets many conditions. He talks about himself and his family so we can consider it as the autobiographical narration; he holds a subjective perspective. He is able to describe his own feelings but he is not able to describe feelings of other characters which makes him the limited narrator. He is one of main characters since the members of the Berry family are all equal in the story.

7.3. Extracts from the book *The Hotel New Hampshire* with a commentary

“And so it’s up to me – the middle child, and the least opinionated – to set the record straight, or nearly straight. We were a family whose favorite story was the story of my mother and father’s romance: how Father bought the bear, how Mother and Father fell in love and had, in rapid succession, Frank, Franny, and me (‘Bang, Bang, Bang!’ as Franny would say); and, after a brief rest, how they then had Lilly and Egg (‘Pop and Fizzle,’ Franny says).” [54]

At the beginning of the story, John states that he is the narrator of their story. As the first-person narrator, he brings his subjectivity into the story, but the readers can believe that he is objective as much as he can. While reading the story, one has to

realise that from the choice of his siblings, he is the most normal kid, because it seems that he has not any psychological problem leaving aside his love to his sister Franny.

As we can see, he knows everything about the history of his parents; he knows exactly how they have met and what they did. However, he is not omniscient. He knows these facts from his parents themselves, from their telling and remembering.

“But Frank blubbered on: how Franny was terrible to him, how she never let him alone, how she was always turning the other kids against him, how he tried to avoid her but she was always there. ‘She’s in the middle of everything bad that happens to me!’ he cried. ‘You don’t know!’ he croaked. ‘You don’t know how she teases me.’” [55]

As the first-person narrator, John can use some expressive words to realistically evaluate the situation. Using the colloquial verb “blubber” he points to Frank’s annoying behaviour. In terms of limitation of the narrator, we can find there only the description of the action (“he cried”, “he croaked”) since the narrator does not know the thoughts of other characters.

“It would be a while before those extra twenty pounds came off, but they would come off, and they have stayed off ever since. I weigh 150 pounds, all the time.
And I would be seventeen before I finally grew another two inches, and stopped for life. That’s me: five feet eight inches tall and 150 pounds. And hard all over.
In a little while I will be forty, but even now, when I work out, I remember the Christmas season of 1956.” [56]

The narrator provides information about his current age; he is an adult man that remembers his youth. The story is narrated with the benefit of hindsight; it is possible to state, that his perspective on events from his boyhood is more sober. Therefore it is possible to determine him as the reliable narrator.

“Sometimes, when I’m really pumping, I can see the Black Arm of the Law moving through the trees, humming their tune, and sometimes I can recall the smell of the fifth floor of the dorm where Junior Jones lived – that hot, jungle nightclub in the sky – and when I run, about the third mile, or the fourth, or sometimes not until the sixth, my own lungs remember, vividly, the feeling of keeping up with Harold Swallow.” [57]

The advantage of the first-person narrator is the possibility of entering into his mind. The narrator has visions, feelings and memories and the readers can know them through his individual voice. The readers can know John’s state of mind which is something difficultly observable for a common observer.

“We all stood still, facing this prospect as we might face a death sentence, but Mother said, ‘That’s a wonderful idea! I’m going to call the Matsons!’

‘The Matsons?’ Father said.

‘And the Foxes, and maybe the Calders,’ Mother said.

‘Not the Matsons!’ Father said. ‘And the Calders already asked us to a party – they have a New Year’s party every year.’

‘Well, we’ll just have a few friends,’ Mother said.

‘Well, there will be the usual customers, too,’ Father said, but he didn’t look too sure, and we looked away from him.” [58]

As opposed to John’s feelings and thoughts, the readers are not able to know how other characters feels since the narrator does not know it, too. He is observer of others characters and he can deduce that his father looks unsure but he cannot be sure about it. He can quote the conversation between his parents due to the fact that he was present when they were talking.

“Now I was really confused; it seemed amazing to me that she would have thought she’d ever hear from him. I couldn’t think of anything to say, except a stupid joke, so I said. ‘Well, Franny, I don’t suppose you’ve written to him, either.’” [59]

In this extract we can see John’s subjective evaluation because he assesses his joke as “stupid”. We can see the usage of the personal pronoun “I” which signals his subjectivity, and in addition, we can know his feelings when he talks about his confusion.

“It is impossible to say what Ronda Ray might have done, or said, if she had seen them; but Ronda was still in bed.” [60]

The fact that the narrator cannot know Ronda’s reaction is the evidence for his limitation. If he was an omniscient narrator, he knew it although he was not present.

Using the extracts from the book, we demonstrated the nature of the narrator. The readers can know narrator’s name and they are able to put his into context, thus we can talk about the homodiegesis of the narrator. The narrator provides information about his feelings and thoughts but he is not able to move inside the minds of other characters; he is limited by his personal experiences. John Irving chose this type of narrator to mediate a subjective view on the story, but he was prudent when choosing which character should be the narrator; it is evident that he needs the character providing predominantly objective information.

8. A Prayer for Owen Meany

8.1. Brief summary of the story

A Prayer for Owen Meany is a story about a friendship of two boys, John Wheelwright and Owen Meany. They grow up in Gravesend, New Hampshire. John does not know his father, her mother never wanted to confess it. In their boyhood, the boys were members of local baseball team. One day in 1953, eleven-year-old Owen batted the ball with a great force and hit John's mother Tabby to her temple. Tabby was dead on the spot and the ball, the murder weapon, has disappeared. This happened by accident and all people were shocked since Owen was a diminutive boy who was so light that his classmates always lifted him up over their heads. Owen was a strange boy in general; due to his diminutiveness he looked unusually and his voice frightened people. However, he was wise, well-read, friendly and devout.

In spite of these facts, Owen and John were the best friends for all life. Owen never believed that the tragedy related to John's mother would be an accidental incident. He was convinced that he is God's instrument. He used to have a dream and he did not want to tell about it to anyone but lately, he acknowledged that the dream is about his death and that it is a repeating dream. Due to that, he knew precisely when he will die and that he will die heroically during saving some kids. Owen's father was owner of a granite quarry and he was a producer of gravestones as well. Owen was skilful in the work with granite and lately, he secretly carved his own gravestone with the precise date of his death.

When the boys were older, they started their studies at Gravesend Academy and lately at the University of New Hampshire. Owen helped John with his homeworks because John was not apt and he was slower than his classmates. By this time, John and Owen started to train the shoot at the basket which had a special technique containing a lifting of diminutive Owen. John started to work for Owen's father in the granite quarry and Owen decided to go to the American army. The kids in his dreams looked like Asians and since they were in period of Vietnam War, he felt that joining the army is his duty.

In 1967, John got a notice to physical exams for joining the army. When Owen has learnt it, he arrived back home for a while and decided to help John and save him

from being enlisted by cutting off John's index finger on his right hand. By a diamond saw, Owen executed a clear cut and John has the memory of Owen Meany for the rest of his life.

The death of Owen Meany was heroic as he had predicted. Owen and John saved Vietnamese children that were transported to the United States of America thanks to their trainings of shoots at the basket. Using this technique, they throw out a grenade. Owen did not survive this heroic deed because he overlaid the grenade. After his death, John felt Owen presence for several times and it was Owen who helped John to find his biological father. It was evident, that Owen could not be an ordinary human; he was someone like a prophet or martyr or someone like Jesus.

8.2. The narrator in the book *A Prayer for Owen Meany*

Although the whole story is about Owen Meany, the narrator is John Wheelwright, his best friend. Due to their deep friendship, John is able to tell the readers almost all details from Owen's life. The choice of John as the first-person narrator makes sense; as Owen is an unusual boy, he can be considered as the unreliable narrator. John is a normal boy and lately a normal man and the whole story is narrated with the benefit of hindsight. John Irving stated that the reason *A Prayer for Owen Meany* has a first-person narrator is that one cannot have a religious experience or witness a miracle except through the eyes of a believer and John Wheelwright is such a believer. [61] When John narrates the story, he is an adult man living in Toronto, Canada. He is a forty-five-year-old teacher remembering his growing up with Owen Meany and his narration is interposed with the records from John's diary. We can consider him as the reliable narrator; there is no evidence about his unreliability. It is obvious that he is the limited narrator; he can narrate merely about things that he personally experienced. He does not know everything about Owen, he does not know his thoughts but as his close friend, he can surmise them. The book *A Prayer for Owen Meany* functions as John's memoir; he talks about himself, his family, his feelings and his friendship with Owen and how this boy influenced him in his life; it is an autobiographical narration. However, as this is a story about Owen Meany, John who is the narrator, is the minor character of the book. He takes the same role as Nick Carraway in Fitzgerald's book called *The Great Gatsby*.

To see this this type of the first-person narration mode more clearly, we can demonstrate the facts on several extracts and point at the key elements.

8.3. Extracts from the book *A Prayer for Owen Meany* with a commentary

“I grew up in Gravesend, New Hampshire; we didn’t have any unions there – a few cigar smokers, but no union men. The town where I was born was purchased from an Indian sagamore in 1638 by the Rev. John Wheelwright, after whom I was named. [...] Poor Mr Fish: he didn’t know that the lake was named after Indian chiefs and higher-ups – and that naming a stupid Labrador retriever ‘Sagamore’ was certain to cause some unholy offense. As you shall see, it did.” [62]

The paragraph opens with the first-person pronoun “I” which signals subjectivity. The narrator states there his name, John Wheelwright; it is a concrete narrator, we can name him. John talks about his family, he puts the story into context by narrating about the place where they lived and about its history as well as about their neighbour Mr Fish. Obviously, the narrator is a character within the story and as we can see, he knows already the whole history which means, that the story is narrated with the benefit of hindsight.

“My Aunt Martha was a senior in college, and already engaged to be married, when my mother announced that she wasn’t even going to apply for college entrance. My grandfather was dying, and perhaps this focusing of my grandmother’s attention distracted her from demanding of my mother what the family had demanded of Aunt Martha: a college education.” [63]

In this extract, the narrator continues with a description of his family. We can see an ample amount of usage of possessive pronoun “my” which signals the first-person narrator and the fact that he is important for the story.

“But Owen Meany was a legitimate Gravesend Academy candidate; he was a brilliant student; he was the kind of student who was supposed to go to Gravesend. He could have applied and got in – and got a full scholarship, too, since the Meany Granite Company was never flourishing and his parents could not have afforded the tuition. But one day when my mother was driving Owen and me to the beach – Owen and I were ten – my mother said, ‘I hope you never stop helping Johnny with his homework, Owen, because when you’re both at the academy, the homework’s going to be much harder – especially for Johnny.’
‘BUT I’M NOT GOING TO THE ACADEMY,’ Owen said.

‘Of course you are!’ my mother said. ‘You’re the best student in New Hampshire – maybe, in the whole country!’
‘THE ACADEMY’S NOT FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME,’ Owen said.
‘THE PUBLIC SCHOOL IS FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME.’” [64]

Since the novel is about Owen Meany, Johnny talks about him frequently in details. The readers can find detailed descriptions of Owen’s character and actions through the whole book. Johnny knows his family and its financial situation. However, as the narrator is not an omniscient narrator, he can describe only the things, which he can observe or which result from his personal experience. In this extract, the narrator can observe and hear a conversation between his mother and Owen, but he is not able to know their actual thoughts.

“But I suspect that Hester must have impressed Owen Meany most of all. In her T-shirt, there was little doubt that she would one day have an impressive bosom; its early blossoming was as apparent as her manly biceps. [65]

Although the narrator cannot know the thoughts of other characters, he can surmise. With Owen, they are close friends and Johnny knows his attitudes. He does not know if Owen was impressed indeed but he can be almost sure about it. As his best friend, he can afford such suppositions.

Thus Owen and I were left to discover what Gravesend prep-school boys kept in their rooms when they went home for Christmas. We took Dan Needham’s master key from the hook by the kitchen can opener; we began with the fourth-floor rooms. Owen’s excitement with our detective work was intense; he entered every room as if the occupant had not gone home for Christmas, but in all likelihood was hiding under the bed, or in the closet – with an ax. And there was no hurrying Owen, not even in the dullest room. He looked in every drawer; examined every article of clothing, sat in every desk chair, lay down on every bed – this was always his last act in each of the rooms; he would lie down on the bed and close his eyes; he would hold his breath. [66]

The narrator uses a personal pronoun “we” related to himself and Owen since they spend a long time together and it is the evidence that the narrator is a character within the story. John describes what Owen usually did in the rooms and he does not describe things that he did by himself because he might think that it is not important for the readers. Owen’s behaviour is special; some people might call it as a strange behaviour. John, as a reliable narrator, provides veracious account of Owen’s actions.

“But it was Owen whom Germaine was especially afraid of. She was a girl who believed in the supernatural, in what was she always calling

‘sign – for example, the rather commonplace mutilation and murder of a robin by one of the Front Street Cats; to witness this torture was ‘a sure sign’ you would be involved with an even greater violence yet to come. Owen himself was taken as a ‘sign’ by poor Germaine; his diminutive size suggested to her that Owen was small enough to actually enter the body and soul of another person – and cause that person to perform unnatural acts.’ [67]

Owen is perceived as a strange boy, many people were scared of him owing to his appearance and his voice. Due to Owen’s unusualness the readers could consider him as the unreliable narrator; if he was the narrator, it could be hard for them to trust what he narrated and it could sound arrogantly from his side. John adopts a critical view; he talks about Owen as about an extraordinary boy who influenced all people around him and the readers can trust him although he brings his own subjectivity into the story.

“‘WHAT THE PART REQUIRES IS A CERTAIN PRESENCE,’ Owen told Dan. “THE GHOST MUST TRULY APPEAR TO KNOW THE FUTURE. IRONICALLY, THE OTHER PART I’M PLAYING THIS CHRISTMAS – YES, YES, I MEAN THE STUPID PAGEANT – IRONICALLY, THIS PREPARES ME FOR THE ROLE. I MEAN, THEY’RE BOTH PARTS THAT FORCE YOU TO TAKE COMMAND OF THINGS, WITHOUT WORDS... YES, YES, OF COURSE I MEAN ME!’ There was a rare pause, while Owen listened to Dan. ‘WHO SAYS THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME HAS TO BE TALL?’ Owen asked angrily. ‘YES, OF COURSE I KNOW HOW TALL MISTER FISH IS. DAN, YOU’RE NOT USING YOUR IMAGINATION.’ There was another brief pause, and Owen said: ‘THERE’S A SIMPLE TEST. LET ME REHEARSE IT. IF EVERYBODY LAGHS, I’M OUT. IF EVERYONE IS SCARED, I’M THE ONE. YES, OF COURSE – “INCLUDING MISTER FISH.” LAUGH, I’M OUT. SCARED, I’M IN.’ [68]

The narrator describes Owen’s long speeches. He wants to point out that every word said by Owen is important and makes sense albeit some speeches and long monologues could look redundantly. The quotations of Owen’s speeches clarify his character and attitudes; the readers can find out that he is sure about himself and that he does not give up of his opinions. Again, the narrator describes solely things that are observable; the actions without thoughts of the characters involved.

“There was a major who’d taken a liking to him; Owen said that his writing and editorial work for The Grave had provided him with a better background for what the Army seemed to want of him than anything he’d learned in ROTC, or in Basic Training. Hester and I agreed that Owen

sounded despondent. He said simply: ‘A GREAT DEAL HAS TO BE WRITTEN EVERY DAY.’” [69]

The proof that John is not an omniscient narrator is the fact that during Owen’s activity in the Army, John knows information about him and his life solely thanks to Owen’s letters or telephone calls. He is limited by his personal experiences and by information that Owen provides him.

“I have ordered a big breakfast for us – we had never had room service before! While I took a shower, he wrote a little more in his diary. ‘HE DOESN’T KNOW WHY HE’S HERE, AND I DON’T DARE TELL HIM,’ Owen wrote. ‘I DON’T KNOW WHY HE’S HERE – I JUST KNOW HE HAS TO BE HERE! BUT I DON’T EVEN “KNOW” THAT – NOT ANYMORE. IT DOESN’T MAKE ANY SENSE! WHERE IS VIETNAM – IN ALL OF THIS? WHERE ARE THOSE POOR CHILDREN? WAS IT JUST A TERRIBLE DREAM? AM I SIMPLY CRAZY? IS TOMORROW JUST ANOTHER DAY?’” [70]

After Owen’s death, John got his diary and we can see some extracts from it. The narrator provides them for exposition of Owen’s thoughts. This is one of aspects that points out the fact that the main character of the story is Owen; the narrator wants us to know Owen’s mind.

As mentioned above, John as the first-person narrator adopts a subjective perspective, but the story is more objective due to his narration than if the narrator was Owen Meany himself. John only observes Owen’s life and destiny and although he is a secondary character in the novel, he is important for Owen’s life because he is his closest friend staying with him until his death; this makes John the homodiegetic narrator. With the use of John as the narrator, John Irving keeps distance from Owen who could be considered as the controversial character. Owen’s importance is highlighted also by capital letters of his speeches; the main intent is to stress on Owen’s specific and irritating voice.

9. A widow for one year

9.1. Brief summary of the story

The novel *A widow for one year* was published in 1998 as Irving's ninth novel. It is a complex story with elaborated characters as the readers of John Irving appreciate it. It is a story about the life of Ruth Cole although it could not be initially evident.

The story is divided into three parts and the first part takes place on Long Island in the summer of 1958, where a married couple Ted and Marion Coles lives. Few years ago, they were affected by a family disaster. Their two sons, Thomas and Timothy, died after a car accident in their eighteen and sixteen years. Ted Cole is a writer of the children's books; he also paints, so he illustrates his books by himself. He is a womanizer. Besides the illustrations for his books, he paints mothers with their children, and later he paints mothers only and usually naked. He had many affairs with mothers that he had painted. Marion is a wonderful woman, she has always been, but she is not able to deal with the death of her sons and she is still saddened, although she and Ted fathered a new child, a daughter named Ruth. Their house is full of photographs of their dead sons, and little Ruth, that has never met her brothers, knows every photograph and every history concerning these photos.

In the summer of 1958, Ted Cole hired Eddie O'Hare, a sixteen-year-old student of the same school that Ted's sons had attended, as his assistant. Primarily, he needed Eddie to drive him since Ted has forfeited his driving licence. Furthermore, he was sure that Eddie could attract his wife Marion. Marion and Ted did not live together in one house, their marriage was not working anymore. They owned two houses nearby in the same town and they were taking turns in care of their four-year-old daughter Ruth. Eddie was beguiled by Marion's beauty and she was attracted to Eddie because he bore a striking resemblance to her dead sons. They have felt in love with each other and started an affair.

This first part ends by Marion's leaving Ted and Ruth. She left Ruth because she knows that she could not be a great mother for her, she does not want to love her because she is afraid of losing her other child. She took away all the photos of the boys from the walls of their house including the negatives. Ted was shocked by this action and he was sad because of the loss of the photos. On the other hand, he was grateful that

he can be with his daughter Ruth. Eddie went away from Long Island to his home in Exeter.

The second part of the novel starts in the autumn of 1990. Eddie and Ruth are adult people, Eddie is forty-eight-year-old and Ruth is thirty-six. Both of them are writers, Eddie is not too popular, whereas Ruth achieves success. They have not seen each other from the summer of 1958, but Eddie should introduce Ruth before her author reading. Since this occasion, they have become friends and started to meet each other more often. Ruth always had a number of complainers because she had been writing about troubled waters, for example about abortions or about widows. Some of her readers criticised the fact that she is writing about such situations without knowing them personally. One day, one widow wished her to experience it personally.

Ruth flew to Europe within the presenting her new book. She spent some time in Amsterdam, where she was developing idea for her new novel. She was discovering the streets with show windows with prostitutes and learning the details for her forthcoming book. She made an arrangement with one prostitute to hide Ruth in her room while being with a client. Ruth always wanted to know all the details for her stories. While she was hidden and watched the act, the client killed the prostitute, took a photo of the dead body and disappeared. Ruth was shocked and did not make any move and later she ran away, too. She took a case of negatives that the killer dropped by accident and later she sent it anonymously to the police station near the street where it happened.

When she flying back home, she read a book Eddie had given her with a recommendation that it is a good reading for aeroplane travels. The story was written by a woman living in Canada called Alice Somerset. While reading, Ruth found out that this woman is her mother and that was the reason why Eddie gave the book to her. After the return to the United States, she found out that her father committed suicide and she felt sorry that their last words had been words of fight. Later, she married her publisher Allan and fathered a son Graham with him.

The third and the last part of the story takes place in the autumn of 1995. Graham is three and Ruth's husband Allan has died. Meanwhile in Amsterdam, sergeant Harry Hoekstra solved the murder thanks to the case Ruth had sent to him and he is still searching for the witness of the murder because he is curious who it is. He knows that the witness is a woman considering the fingerprints that were on the case. He is retired,

however he is still searching for her. He is a passionate reader and his favourite author is Ruth Cole. She has just published her new book and a part of the story takes place in Amsterdam, describing a room of a prostitute in the story and Harry realizes that it is the same room where the prostitute had been murdered. When Ruth came to Amsterdam again and presented her new book, they met. They felt in love and they decided to live together in the United States. They married and wanted to sell Ruth's house. Eddie wanted to buy it but the house was too expensive.

At the end of the novel, seventy-six-year-old Marion appeared in the town and spent a night at Eddie's house. She told Eddie that she wants to be with him and that they can buy the house together. They visited Ruth and Harry and the last and short paragraph of the whole story is "Don't cry honey,' Marion told her only daughter. It's just Eddie and me." [71]

9.2. The narrator in the book *A Widow for One Year*

In the first part of the story, the narrator focuses equally on Ted Cole, Marion Cole and Eddie O'Hare. The character of Ruth Cole is not too important in this part, although this novel is a story about her. The narrator describes even the things that had happened before her birth. On the grounds of this complex information the readers can understand the destiny and life of Ruth Cole more easily, because these three parts operate with a wide time extent, more specifically with more than forty years. The second and the third part focus on Ruth herself.

The readers of the book know all the information from the narrator, the third-person omniscient. As the third-person narrator he fulfils all important points. He stays within the story and objectively provides information. He is an unspecified individual; it is not possible to name him. The readers can gain the knowledge about the characters only through his voice since the characters do not describe themselves on their own. In the text, it is possible to find the third-person pronouns that are often repeated. The proof for his omniscience is that he knows thoughts of all character within the story and he knows all their activities and their past as well as he knows how to describe various places where these characters are, which makes him also omnipresent. His omnipresence and omniscience are evident also particularly in the chapters that bear the names of the characters, for example *Eddie at Forty-Eight*, *Ruth at Thirty-Six*, *Allan*

at *Fifty-Four*, *Hannah at Thirty-Five*, *The Civil Servant* and others. These particular chapters put a stress on certain characters regardless of if they are on Long Island or in Amsterdam.

To see the above explained more clearly, we can demonstrate the facts on several extracts and point at the key elements.

9.3. Extracts from the book *A Widow for One Year* with a commentary

“When Ruth woke to the foreign sound, she at first wasn’t sure if it was her mother or her father who was throwing up; then, despite the unfamiliarity of the disturbance, Ruth recognized that measure of melancholy and contained hysteria which was often detectable in her mother’s voice. Ruth also remembered that it was her mother’s turn to stay with her.” [72]

In this extract it is possible to find several proofs that the narrator is the third-person omniscient. The first attribute that the readers can recognize is the fact that they see the thoughts of little Ruth, they learn about her uncertainty and about her feeling although she is not saying a word. The readers can move inside her mind. The second attribute is that it is not possible that four-year-old girl could use such description of feeling as we can see it in the extract. It is evident that the narrator is a mature person who wants readers to have an exact view about the event and who is able to provide it.

“So is that the deal? Marion wondered. He takes all that’s left: the house, which she loved but didn’t want – and Ruth, whom she either couldn’t or wouldn’t allow herself to love. Marion would take her boys. Of Thomas and Timothy, Ted could keep what he could remember. (I get to keep all the photographs, Marion decided.)” [73]

We are able to know Marion’s train of thoughts and intentions even though she has never told these intentions to anyone until then. We can consider it as a third-person expression of a first-person experience since the narrator describes her most intimate experiences.

“‘Hello, Eddie,’ she said.
If he died a little whenever his father spoke to strangers, Eddie now knew what it means to really die: his breath was gone, he couldn’t speak.
‘I thought you’d never see me,’ the beautiful woman said.
From that moment on, he would never stop seeing her, not in his mind’s eye – not whenever he closed his eyes and tried to sleep. She would always be there.

‘Mrs Cole?’ he managed to whisper.
‘Marion,’ she said.” [74]

In this extract, we can observe a conversation between two characters. This action is evident for any common observer, but this observer cannot perceive the thoughts of the characters. This ability belongs to the third-person omniscient narrator and as we can see, this omniscient narrator also knows the future; he knows that Eddie will never stop thinking of her, which is inaccessible to observe for a common observer.

“Mrs Pierce gathered a dozen or more sheets of stationery from her desk before she approached Eddie. ‘I understand that you’re angry. I’m very sorry about that,’ she said pleasantly to the handsome sixteen-year-old, who looked to her incapable of frightening anyone. (I have got to get better help, Penny Pierce was thinking to herself as she went on, visually underestimating Eddie. The closer she looked at him, the more she thought he was too pretty to qualify as handsome.) ‘When my customers are angry, I ask them to voice their complaints in writing – if you don’t mind,’ Mrs Pierce added, again pleasantly. The sixteen-year-old saw that the manager had presented him with paper and pen.” [75]

The narrator describes facts which are observable by any onlooker, owing to describing the actions that are visible or audible, because one of the described actions is a conversation or more precisely Mrs Pierce’s speech. On the other hand, there is also description of Mrs Pierce’s thoughts which only she herself can be aware of. The narrator objectively describes her subjectivity.

“Jane distracted herself with pleasant observations of her son: how he had grown! And his former schoolmates...well, they had grown up, too. Even Eleanor’s troubled daughter was quite a pretty girl, relaxed and outgoing – now that she was in a boarding school and wasn’t living in the same house with the lurid movie of her own birth and her mother’s nuclear missile of pleasure.” [76]

This extract is sort of exceptional due to the fact that it is taken out from the chapter about Ruth Cole’s novel. Actually, this chapter functions as an extract from her novel. We can see that Ruth Cole uses in her novel the same narration mode as John Irving in the book. Even there we can find some typical features for the third-person omniscient narrator, as for example internal thoughts of the character or usage of pronouns in the third person like *herself* or *her*. Again, the narrator expresses the subjectivity of the character involved (“pleasant observations”).

“What I like: Allan’s aggressiveness, most of the time. (I like the limits of his aggressiveness, too.) And his criticism, at least of my writing. I can be myself with him. He tolerates me, he forgives me. (Maybe too much.)

I feel safe with him; I would do more, read more, go out more with him. He wouldn't force himself on me. (He hasn't forced himself on me.) He would be a good father." (p.381)

"From my hotel room in Kiel, I can see the ferries in the bay. They are en route to and from Sweden and Denmark. Maybe one day I could go there with Allan. Maybe one day I could travel with a husband and a child, and with a nanny for the child." [77]

The chapter from which the previous two extracts are taken is different from the whole book because it is an excerpt from Ruth's diary. In this case, we can observe a shift in narrative perspective to the first-person narrator because we can observe Ruth's point of view. From her first-person perspective, we can see her state of mind and the way how she is looking on her boyfriend Allan; the content of her speech is highly subjective. She describes what she can see from her window so it is the first hand information for the readers. She openly writes about her dreams. We can find there the personal pronoun of the first person "I", which relates to the narrator and which is often repeated in the extract as well as pronouns "my" and "me". We can consider that John Irving put this part into his book on account of the complexness of the whole story. By the usage of this type of narrator we can understand the character of Ruth Cole better due to the immediate transmission of her ideas.

"She [Ruth Cole] couldn't have known that the Flying Food Circus had been a popular restaurant in Toronto in the late seventies, or that her mother had worked as a waitress there; in fact, it had been something of a triumph for Marion, who was then a woman in her late fifties, to be the only waitress in the restaurant who wasn't a young woman. (Marion's figure had still been that good.)" [78]

The narrator knows about the restaurant where Marion worked and we can consider this as the attribute of his omnipresence, because the restaurant takes place in Toronto. However, this extract represents predominantly his omniscience since he is able to describe what Marion thought about the possibility of working in this restaurant as well as he knows about Ruth's unknowingness about this fact.

Through chosen extracts we demonstrated the use of the third-person narrator and his omniscience. He provides complex information about the story and about the characters. The narrator is not situated in the same plan therefore we can talk about the heterodiegesis; he is not involved in the story and we cannot name him or put into any context. Due to his distance from the story, we can consider this narrator as the reliable one.

Conclusion

The narrator is an important element of every fiction book because he forms the whole story and sets its tone. He influences the readers as well as the inflow of information. The elemental classification divides the narrator into two main categories which are the first-person narrator and the third-person narrator. Both modes are popular between writers because both of them offer special advantages and a deeper classification.

The first-person narrator brings his subjectivity into the story because he is usually one of the characters within the story. He is usually the central character but it is not the rule; the majority of the first-person narrators is the reliable and limited one, too. This narration mode can be established as an autobiographical narration since the narrator tells the story he experienced personally.

The third-person narrator holds an objective view on the story. He is not a part of the story and then, he can be unbiased. As for the third-person narrator, the most used option is the omniscient one because through this narrator, the writer of the book can describe every detail. He is able to describe each character's thoughts and feelings; he knows every place, the history and habits of the characters. Using this narration mode, the writer obtains a space for his imagination.

The role of narrator and its various types were subject of the thesis mainly in connection to the works of John Irving, whose life and work have been introduced in chapter 6. Each of the novels chosen for this thesis and being subjects of the analysis in the practical part, represent different narration mode, which proves that, as a writer, Irving is able to deal with various narration modes. As mentioned above, he prefers the third-person omniscient. All his masterpieces are written in the third-person, however, the ration of usage of the first-person narration and the third-person narration is approximately equal (see Appendix I).

The Hotel New Hampshire is narrated by the first-person narrator who is one of the main characters. The role of this narrator is to describe the story of his family from within. We can consider this novel as the memoir of John Berry, the narrator of the book, since he talks only about his family going through their history into the present time of his narration. He provides a subjective point of view on their situation.

A Prayer for Owen Meany is narrated by the first-person narrator as well as *The Hotel New Hampshire*. On the other hand, there is one fundamental difference in the character that functions as the narrator. On the contrary to *The Hotel New Hampshire*, the narrator is the minor character of the story. John Wheelwright tells the story about his friend Owen Meany. Due to his distance from the main character, John could be considered as the catalyst of the story since the character of Owen Meany and his story are sort of controversial.

The last book chosen for the analysis which is *A Widow for One Year* is narrated by the third-person omniscient narrator. We can say that this story is the most complex one due to the limitless narrator who observes every part of Ruth's life, even the certain period that had preceded to her birth. The narrator does not appraise; he provides details from her life and about her parents because it is necessary to understand Ruth's mind.

The principal publication was the book *Stylistics* written by Peter Verdonk which was the most useful in the process of the analysis. In the book, we can find besides the theory also examples how to describe concrete narration mode when working with some extract.

The books written by John Irving are not complicated for comprehension. His stories are readable and his books are available in the Czech Republic even in English versions. The process of the analysis did not bring any serious difficulties however getting the books for the theoretical part was slightly time-consuming.

What the author of the thesis found interesting that is the way, how John Irving writes his books and the fact that every novel is predestined because he always knows the ending. After this move, he always meditates about the form of the novel, including the type of the narrator.

This topic could be further elaborated using other Irving's novels for the analysis of the narration mode or using more aspects of the narrator, for example his means of expression. All in all, Irving proved to be an interesting author for literary analysis.

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Abstract

The topic of this Bachelor's Thesis deals with a division of narration modes and their definition, pointing out the key attributes for their classification and advantages they could bring. The work focuses on the narration modes in novels of American writer John Irving; thus, one part of the thesis describes his life and his work. The narration modes are demonstrated on three chosen books; more specifically on *The Hotel New Hampshire*, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and *A widow for One Year*. Each individual book is chosen to demonstrate a different narration mode.

Resumé

Tématem této bakalářské práce je rozdělení vypravěčských stylů a jejich vymezení s poukázáním na klíčové body pro jejich rozpoznání a na rozdílné výhody, které může daný vypravěčský styl přinášet. Práce je zaměřena na vypravěčské postupy ve vybraných dílech amerického spisovatele Johna Irvinga, část práce se tedy zaměřuje i na jeho život a dílo. Vypravěčské postupy jsou demonstrovány na třech vybraných knihách, konkrétně se jedná o díla *Hotel New Hampshire*, *Modlitba za Owena Meanyho* a *Rok vdovou*. Jednotlivé knihy jsou vybrány tak, aby se ve vypravěčských postupech neshodovaly.

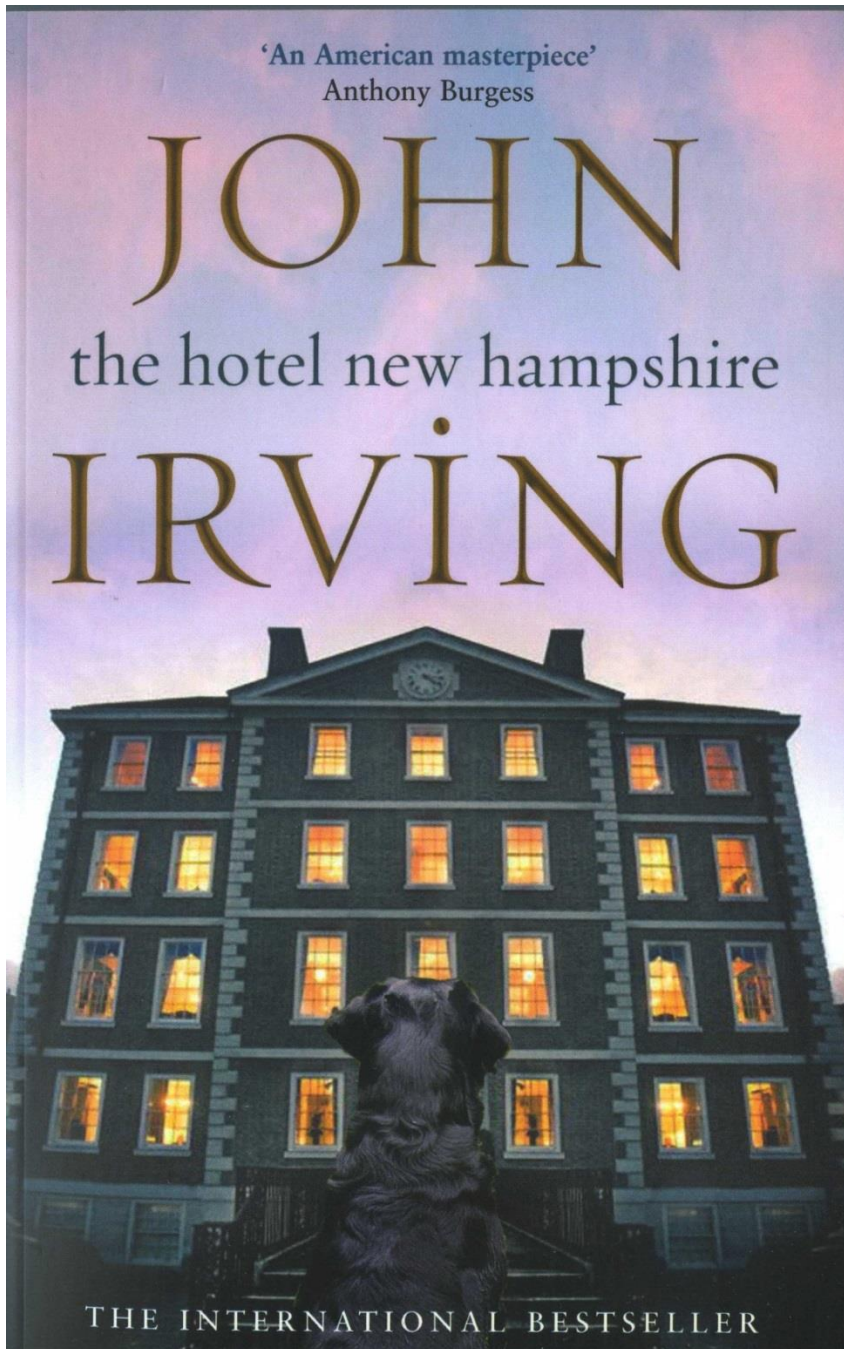
Appendices

Appendix I: A chart of the narrators used by John Irving

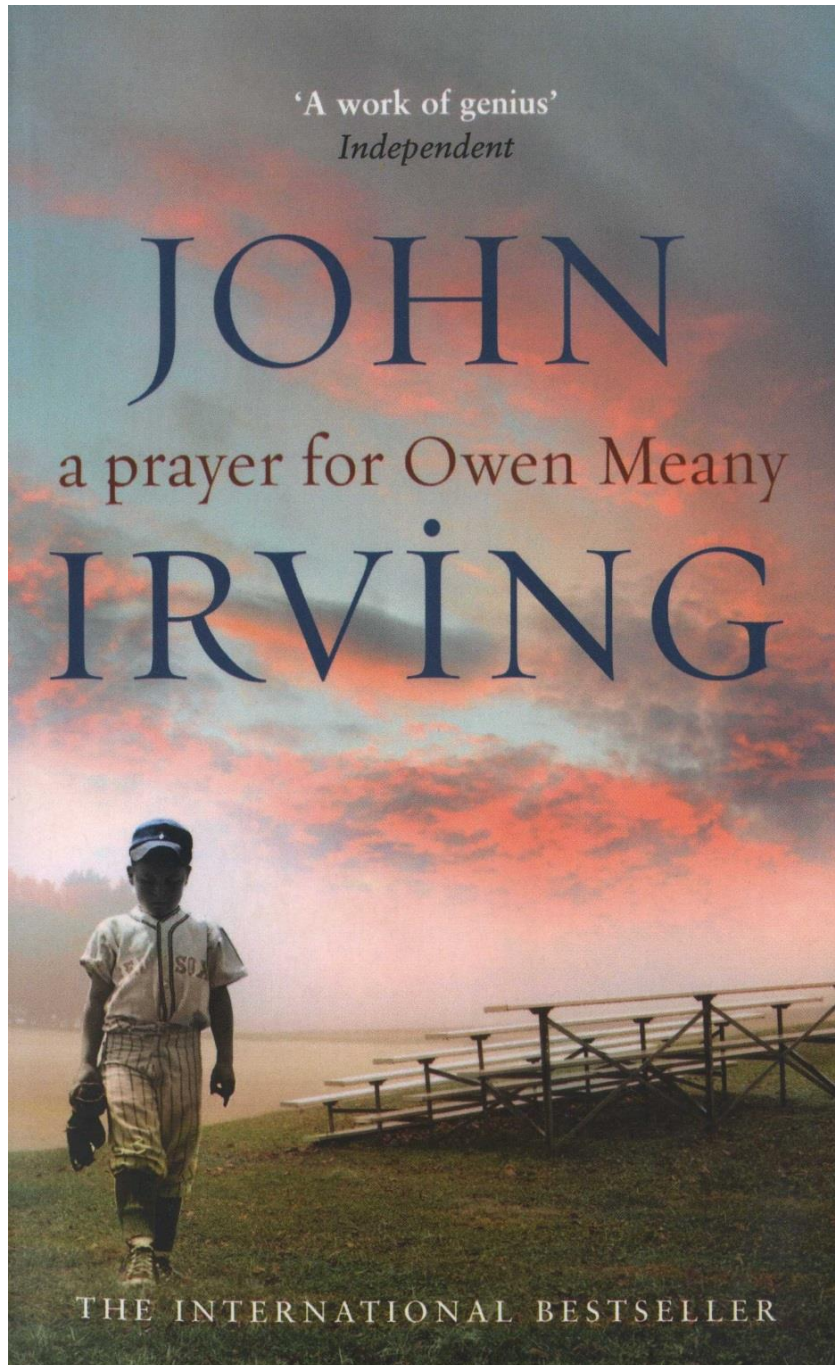
Title of the novel	Type of the narrator
Setting Free the Bears	First-person narrator, main character
The Water-Method Man	First-person narrator, the main character, but the narrator switches into third-person narrator
The 158-Pound Marriage	First-person narrator, one of main characters
The World According to Garp	Third-person narrator, omniscient
The Hotel New Hampshire	First-person narrator, main character
The Cider House Rules	Third-person narrator, omniscient
A Prayer for Owen Meany	First-person narrator, the minor character
A Son of the Circus	Third-person narrator, omniscient
A Widow for One Year	Third-person narrator, omniscient
The Fourth Hand	Third-person narrator, omniscient
Until I Find You	Third-person narrator, omniscient
Last Night in Twisted River	Third-person narrator, omniscient
In One Person	First-person narrator, main character

Appendix II: Covers of the books used for the analysis

The Hotel New Hampshire



A Prayer for Owen Meany



A Widow for One Year

