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## **Maxims and Generalisations in Modern Literary Prose**

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### **Abstract**

While naming research units this paper aims to single them out in two modern novels, to define their significance and to identify the author's intellectual attitude and stance in the process. Generalisations and maxims have been singled out by the functional contextual method whereby these units were identified in similar or identical contexts, their meaning and implications defined in the co-text and their significance in extralinguistic context. Drawing the implied senses in context, the meaning and the implied sense of maxims and generalisations build up to their significance which determines the author's intellectual stance and her/his intellectual-emotive imprint in the language of the works. To the degree in which generalisations and maxims exceed their co-textual sense, they are assumed to imply the author's rationality, judgment and omniscient and/or philosophical stance. This functional contextual study of maxims and generalisations furthers research into the author's identity and its imprint in literary text.

**Keywords:** generalisations, maxims, co-text, context, extralinguistic context, meaning, sense, significance.

## Introduction

Except for the focus on sententiae in learning the classical languages (cf.: Kuzavinis, 2003, 6-7) and formulaic language in modern methodology (Wray, 2002; Wood, 2010), interest in maxims (short, pithy statements expressing a general truth or rule of conduct) among linguists does not seem to be at its peak at present. The current classical sententiae are well described in dictionaries and the present-day questions concern the accuracy of their original meaning in their modern use (cf.: *mens sana in corpore sano*; *Quem di diligunt, adolescens moritur*; *quos vult perdere Jupiter, dementat prius*). Maxims from modern languages, which are often quotations from poetry, may be challenged with the same question of accuracy and with the supreme test on the accurate completion of a quotation by the listener/reader (cf.: *Can spring be far behind, is just the question for this February day. She thought that this would suit me well in my divorced and outcast state*). Maxims in modern prose are less analysed and they are far less winged.

## Literature Review

The problem of this paper is the question what the topical and functional content of maxims and generalisations is and how it reflects the author's vision and stance in modern literary prose. The author's views have been assessed on the basis of classical works featuring wit and wisdom by such authors as Baltasar Gracian and François de La Rochefoucauld (Pinsky, 1981; Velickiene, 2017). As literary prose evolved from philosophically and psychologically motivated plots to journalistic writing and to the new novel, the author's imprint in the text kept changing. Since the question of the author's verbal identity was posed in phenomenology (Ingarden, 1973; Wales, 1991) and singled out as central in stylistics (Milic, 1969), the author's imprint in the text has remained an open research question. The present paper aims to take on an aspect of this question.

No works of fiction based on maxims and wit like *The Art of Wisdom (Aulicus sive de prudentiacivili et maxime aulica)* by Baltasar Gracian (2017) or *Reflexions (Reflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales)* by François de La Rochefoucauld (2002) can be traced in modern literary prose. The wit of Oscar Wilde in his works such as an essay, *Only Dull People Are Brilliant at Breakfast*, the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or a play, *A Woman of No Importance*, would probably be the richest specimens of modern literature of the kind.

In its idea and material, the present research has not been orientated toward a discovery of anything in the like of the works of these authors. As researchers of Romance languages indicate (Pinsky, 1981, 517), *The Art of Wisdom* by Gracian is a collection of aphorisms from three earlier works of this author and variations on them. The witty and sometimes satirical attitude in this work is "not a device of the author", the subtleties of which may be too difficult to grasp to the readers of the twenty-first century. This work is rather a ready guidebook to a wise person who may be desiring to win status and become a personality (Pinsky, 1981, 517-533). Gracian is a pragmatic advisor with his deep insights and wisdom

implied in his striking thoughts, some of which may be contradictory (Velickiene, 2017). Moreover, readers educated in the cultural tradition of Western Europe recognise time-tested precepts of Western culture in the work of Gracian, as it testifies cross-cultural legacy of Europe.

*Reflexions ou sentences et maxims morales* by La Rochefoucauld, with which Gracian's work is often compared, is different. *Reflections* by Rochefoucauld are also witty observations, but the work of this author is based on a few general postulates from which all others and the author's wit with satire evolve. It is not a guidebook nor advice that La Rochefoucauld is giving. He tends to disclose "the pretense of civilized culture" (Velickiene, 2017, 10). Gracian assumed and contemplated a contrasting opposition of nature (*genium, natura*) and culture/reason (*ingenium*) in the foundation of his conception. La Rochefoucauld had also these concepts in his reasoning but the cultural background of these authors and their *ingenium* was different. Yet, in the secularised thought of the century, they both were similarly determined to seek the accomplishment of human culture in their endeavours (Velickiene, 2017, 9-11).

## Methodology

The present research was not intended to seek witty sayings and their implications in the study of modern literary prose. The idea was rather to generalise on the contextual sense and significance of maxims and generalisations, and perhaps to draw some conclusions on the consistency of the author's views, as cumulatively reflected in his works. This aim has been conceivable because generalisations and maxims often exceed the fictitious line of representation in imaginative literature and represent the author instead as an omniscient creator. This aim in view, generalisations and maxims were singled out by the functional-contextual method, their meaning studied and significance defined. The functional contextual method encompasses the analysis of feasible stretches of the text from identical or similar contexts (the beginning, middle and end of the narrative; description, conversation, comment, etc) with the view to single out the unit in focus and to define its meaning, implications and sense in the immediate and broader context. The immediate context is co-text. The broader context is the context of the literary work and the extralinguistic context which includes the author and cultural context. Key terms in this analysis are, context, co-text and extralinguistic context, meaning, sense and significance (cf.: Halliday, Hasan, 1990).

The present paper is based on the analysis of two novels, *The Seven Sisters*, by Margaret Drabble and *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes. *The Seven Sisters* was a richer source in total but *Flaubert's Parrot* included more maxims proper as its author resorted to quotations from Flaubert in a number of contexts. Yet, as genuine maxims are not very frequent in modern literary prose and they are less winged than the classical maxims, generalisations (concluding or leading general statements in descriptions and comments) have also been included in the research material. Generalisations which serve as conclusions, motives or reasons in the narrative and which sum up on experience were the plainest. General summaries in the narrative,

summaries in good humour and wit, heightened and evaluating generalisations approximated genuine maxims, but these were less numerous than summary statements. Genuine maxims were not many.

The novel *The Seven Sisters* by Margaret Drabble represents a story of seven English elderly women who, dedicated to their study of Latin and to the reading of Virgil's *Aeneid*, set out on a trip to North Africa and Italy in the footsteps Aeneas. A quiet account of the trip, on which they happen even to glimpse into their notes of Latin on one occasion, includes brief stories of the women in the group, a longer characterisation of Valeria, their guide on the Africa's leg of the trip and Italy, with brief allusions and digressions to the classical figures and places related to the classical sights. The narrative does not skip the age of the travelling women with such remarks as "we are no longer young", she didn't buy anything as "she has too many things already" along with allusive comments on the centuries that mark the views and sights they visit adding a personal human touch to the story. *The Seven Sisters* is a classical story of fragmented composition partly in the form of a diary.

Singling out and collecting maxims and generalisations took the reading of the novels twice. These units of research were usually traced at the end of narrative sections in the novel *The Seven Sisters*. A few were found to begin narrative sections and very few were picked from the middle of the narrative sections. This was a contextual analysis when the meaning of the units in focus was assessed in relation to the co-text and to the text of the whole novel. As meaning had been known to be "function in context", the analysis was also functional. To count as a maxim, the meaning of the singled out unit had to have a generalised sense over and above its literal and contextual senses. This generalised sense and brevity identified maxims proper and generalisations approximating maxims. It is not all generalisations that were included into the research material. Context-bound generalisations which summed up on a line of the narrative were not included. Consider, for example, the end of the pondering of Sally Hepburn, a fault-finding and prying member of the group of the Virgilians, who wonders at the possible resources of Candida, the narrator and the principal actor, who had actually received a cheque of 120,000 GBP from a firm at which, on her late father's advice, she started a little pension fund later supplemented with a bonus for her "as a long-term pension-holder" (p.141):

*How much money has Candida got? She had described her bonus to Sally as a 'small windfall', but that could mean anything, couldn't it? Had she come into a fortune or won the lottery? The sight of her friend looking so undertrodden is very irritating to Sally Hepburn. It goes against the rules of age and entropy. It is not right.* (MD, p.172)

As a conclusion in this narrative, the two underlined sentences were included in the research material because their generalised significance exceeds their narrative co-text and makes them independent units. Although not very pithysemantically, significant for their common sense rather than wit or wisdom, these generalisations can be taken out of the context and used elsewhere. That is why such generalisations have been considered to approximate maxims proper. Only co-textually bound generalisations have not been included into the research material. For example,

contemplating the luck in buying lottery tickets, Candida assesses one shop where she thinks she might or might not buy a ticket, and the shop repels her:

*It's the sort of shop that sells deadly wares. Nothing there could do you any good. Would I have to go back there to collect my winnings? Surely not. I must find out how the system works before it's too late.* (MD, p.99)

The closing statement in this paragraph is also a generalization, but this generalization is a concrete statement co-textually bound and significant only in this context. It is not pithy nor does it extend to the general significance of the whole novel and has no generalised significance here or elsewhere, which could make it applicable as an isolated unit to any relevant situation outside literature. This generalisation could be a useful formulaic unit in learning English as a foreign language, but it has no generalised significance which would turn it into a succinct or witty saying applicable elsewhere as a piece of wisdom. Generalisations like this and those of even more concrete co-textually-bound content were not included into the research material. Consider another example of the generalisations left out:

*In her room, which is next to Candida's, Julia Jordan is not wasting time gazing at the view. She is still unpacking her suitcases. This activity reassures her. /.../ Her shadow party-going self glimmers back at her, festively. She continues to arrange her underwear neatly in her drawers. She is a tidy person. She likes her things to be neatly arranged about her.* (MD, p. 191)

## Findings

To be included in the research material, generalisations had to have generalised significance and be succinct and witty or somewhat elevated. To review the material, the collected generalisations will be considered according to the groups into which they have fallen. Like generalisations which are conclusions in the narrative (20 items), **summary statements in the narrative** are among the most numerous (20 items). Summary statements are also succinct and witty. For example:

1. *Andrew was very good at marrying philanthropy and money.* (MD, p. 16)
2. *And this pointless but necessary yearning was part of the becoming.* (MD, p. 97)
3. *It seems a pity to get so far, and not to arrive.* (MD, p. 178)
4. *One can never have too many holds on happiness.* (MD, p. 186)
5. *My home is my treasure and it is beyond price.* (MD, p.193)
6. *It is an invitation to crime.* (MD, p.196)
7. (Of the Mediterranean:) *'But it's as pure as the day of creation.'* (MD, p.199)
8. *In bed, lying awake, Candida realizes that the solution to the problem is death. It always has been, and it always will be. There is nothing to be*

*done about this. Even Hegel must have known that. One can accept it, or fail to accept it. Acceptance is the better choice. The readiness is all. And she is certainly not ready to accept it yet.* (MD, pp. 209-210)

9. *They get bored when life is too calm.* (MD, p.242)
10. *She didn't do too badly, for aloner.* (MD, p. 264)

Apart from being co-text bound, these summary statements have generalised significance owing to their generalised sense which arises from their brevity and wit or from insightful sharpness (5, 6, and 8), evaluating praise (7, 10) or irony (9). Their generalised sense implies an omniscient author, although this author is quite concrete in this group of summary statements. A sudden turn to brief generalisations creates the impression of omniscience, but the co-text happens to tone it down.

Quote (8), for example, is a summary of thoughts following an episode with the local African boys who demonstrated, to the travelling ladies, that the innards of sea urchins are digestible and how the vivisected creatures move after their death. In the evening of the day, Candida enjoyed Julia's company in a bar in North Africa. Their talk touched upon their former biology teacher remembered after the episode with sea urchins. Candida noticed how worn out her hands were, while Julia put in a sharp critical remark about Candida's ex-husband. Candida's broken life led her to the generalisations in quote (8). The six brief philosophical sentences which follow her resignation, "that the solution to the problem is death", give the impression of omniscience. Their general sense and a reference to Hegel are not related to the day's events. Only the seventh sentence focuses on the presence of Candida's mind and returns the narrative to virtual representation. Omniscience is very distinct here. It is credible to believe that, in generalisations, the author gives his actual point of view. Irrespective of the situation or character, it is the author who generalizes. Given this function in the narrative, it is very likely that the author draws on his own intellectual resources. There is also some consecutiveness in generalisations and maxims throughout the book.

**Summary statements in good humour and wit** (20 in total) have made a separate group as numerous as that of the previous summary statements (20 in total). For example:

11. *I must congratulate myself on my courage, for no one else will.*(MD, p.126)
12. *At my age, you don't have aims. You run in order to stand still.*)(MD, p. 130)
13. *I'll go for a short walk by the canal, and join the other no-hoppers, killing time before time kills them. Killing time on their bicycles, with their fishing umbrellas, with their sad dogs, with their trailing grandchildren. Jogging, loitering, plodding.* (MD, p. 140)

In these contexts, the summary statements (11-13) are clearly witty or humorous and relevant co-textually and extra contextually. Their humour depends on the apt choice of the words and arises from the contrasts, which gives them their generalised significance and pinpoints the humour. These witty summary statements can function



individually because of their generalised significance. They approximate maxims proper the closest and indicate an omniscient author, who is implied by a sudden turn to a general thought even ignoring coherence. In quote (13), for example, the phrase, “killing time, before time kills them”, is so general following a concrete description that the author reiterates its first part further and puts it in the context of concrete actions. This turn of the phrase highlights its general sense and the impression of omniscience. This method of stepping up and down in generalisations is inevitable in changing the point of view and recurs in Margaret Drabble’s language.

This group of summary statements in good humour and wit includes **summary statements based on proverbial idioms or their periphrasis**. For example:

14. ...Mrs Jerrold seemed happy to go along with us. The more the merrier, said Anaïs, lying back...(MD, p. 149)
15. In for a penny, in for a pound. I have offered to pay for the driver and the minibus. (MD, p.156)
16. She is at their disposal, she assures them, and their wish is her command. (MD, p. 181)

Although the speakers of these proverbial sayings is different in every case, they all indicate the common sense or courtesy of the speaker. As these proverbial idioms are very well known, these summary statements are not more impressive than the initial group of generalisations in good humour and wit illustrated above. Their effectiveness is in their brevity in the quoted contexts in the novel. From the point of view of their meaning and sense, it is the initial group of summary statements in good humour and wit (see Nos. 11-13) that approximates maxims proper rather than these proverbial idioms.

**Conclusions in the narrative** (20) are generalisations rather than maxims. They are less focused, some are a little longer and not so witty. For example:

17. Age has its delicacy. (MD, p. 34)
18. People tell her their secrets in order to shut her up. (MD, p. 40)
19. In her eyes, her father can do no wrong and I can do no right. (MD, p. 48)
20. As a nun enters a convent in search of her god, so I entered my solitude. I felt no fear, and I felt no hope. (MD, p. 54)

These conclusions in the narrative are co-textually bound, yet (17) is significant for its general sense and brevity, (18 and 19) are witty owing to a contrast in their structure, and (20) has generalised significance owing to a comparison in it and to its additional contrast. Conclusions in the narrative (17-20) are significant as individual units and all approximate maxims. Despite their concrete co-textual sense, they imply an omniscient author by their detached generalised significance.

Some conclusions in the narrative are similar to asides and so quite sharp. For example:

21. Activity attracts activity. (MD, p. 63)

22. It wasn't a performance, as I was telling the truth, but she made me feel as though it was a performance. (MD, p.64)
23. I am not the kind of person to have close friends who pop in, but I think I wish I were that kind of person, and the illusion of being it is better than nothing. (MD, p. 66)
24. I could tell that Sally thought this was a very kind proposal, and one that would suit me well in my divorced and outcast state. I am supposed to be humbled, and grateful now for any overture. MD, p. 69)
25. Once Sally gets hold of a word, she does it to death. That day it was all gigolos and nibbles. (MD, p. 70)

Conclusions in the narrative which are similar to asides (21-25) are no less co-textual than the previous group (17-20), but their general significance is vaguer. Only (21 or partly perhaps 23) are independent because of their general sense. Conclusions (22, 24, and 25) are only co-textually significant. This group of conclusions in the narrative (21-25) are generalisations rather than maxims, yet, owing to the insightful observations, they imply an omniscient observer.

Although not compositionally marked, **evaluating generalisations** were more prosaic yet incisive in the contexts of *The Seven Sisters*. For example:

26. Indoors, in the Club, it's another world. It's all lightness and brightness and politeness. (MD, p. 22)
27. We had some coloured people at the School, because all schools with very high fees take coloured people now, particularly schools like Andrew's that can dress exploitation up as multicultural philanthropy. (MD, p. 23)
28. 'Juicy Julia' we called her, with admiration. How ugly and inappropriate schoolgirl slang is. (MD, p.25)
29. We were sick and green with curiosity. (MD, p. 27)
30. ... she seems to go ahead, like a spectre with a corpse lantern, lighting the way to the tomb. Things can only get worse, says Sally. (MD, p. 39)
31. She didn't describe it very well, as vivid narration is not her forte, but I got the picture. (MD, p. 65)
32. ...I am no longer fond of Andrew, nor do I feel as much affection as I should for my three daughters, so I am as bad as she is. If bad it be. I do think I think it is bad, but she doesn't seem to have a sense of good and bad. And maybe there is no good or bad. It was all indoctrination. (MD, pp. 92-93)
33. I lost touch with my only daughter for nearly twenty years. Through a stupid misunderstanding. It's just not worth it, says Mrs Jerrold. Life's too short. (MD, p. 238)
34. They do not speak of this, for they are nice ladies. Some of them do not even think of it. (MD, p. 234)
35. And then gain, may be I won't bother. As the fabulous Mrs Jerrold said, life's too short. (MD, p. 253)

As, except for (32, 33, 35), evaluating generalisations express plain subjective opinions, they imply a female author and have no other co-textual or extratextual significance. Their expressiveness is limited to the insightful pinpointing of the details like in (26, 27, 31, 32, and 34). Except for the simplest ancient drop of wisdom in (33) and (35) and a deliberation in (32), evaluating generalisations are nowhere near maxims.

**Heightened or elevated generalisations** were few (8), but they were based on elevated concepts and superior creatures. For example:

36. *These strange plants are plants, and no plants, and they live between the species. They are life, and they are death. I never live nor die.* (MD, p. 125)
37. *Outdoors, the rain dripped down the brickwork with its crusted city tears of salt and nitrate and lime and droppings: inside, I warmed myself in the glow of the bright horizons of the future.* (MD, p. 143)
38. *The gods play games with us, but at least this game is an amusing one. At least it begins well. Maybe I am after all a favoured daughter.* (MD, p. 146)
39. *... ,in these survival days, after biology has done its best and worst. /.../ He has done me such wrong... .He is like a great blank in my memory. He is like a hole cut in my side.* (MD, p. 160)
40. *They seem to be travelling ... beneath a huge forgotten giant, ..., reaching its pitiful empty arms up into the sky, ...It is a monster, but it is a tame monster. It lets them pass.* (MD, p.224)
41. *... his description of arriving in Naples from Africa was as good as Goethe's. 'I am myself the moonrise of the South,' he wrote.* (MD, p. 299)

Heightened or elevated generalisations (36-41) are based on metaphors and metonymies (36, 37, 38, 39, and 41), a simile (39) and contrasts (36, 40). Therefore these generalisations are not neutral; they express emotional attitudes to the objects and subjects mentioned. Their poetic implications relate them to maxims, but their emotive sense excludes the implication of omniscience.

**Observations of the superior** (5) were similarly heightened, if only tending to humour. For example:

42. *All our sex was in the head and in the pages of our diaries, and even there it was heavily monitored and edited.* (MD, p. 26)
43. *Our school, though prim, was not wholly unenlightened.* (MD, p. 28)
44. *If I'd risked another hundred yards or two in the downpour I could have reached my Health Club and civilization.* (MD, p. 78)
45. *Naples, Amalfi, Sorrento. In and out of fashion they drift, over the centuries, ...The wheel of fortune has turned oncemore and the time of Naples has returned again, ...* (MD, p. 91)
46. *Grandma Pratt is still alive, though she hasn't got much to show for it. /.../ I think she is past taking things in. /.../ I think her God never even noticed that she existed.* (MD, p. 253)

Observations of the superior (42-46) are lively generalisations with a distinct sense of humour. But most of them (42, 43, 44) are too long or too mundane (42, 43, 46) to identify as maxims. (45), though, includes a classical maxim but does not carry it off. It ends on a simple, practical note.

**Generalisations on experience** (11 in total) have been succinct and pithy in Margaret Drabble's novel, and some of them were accompanied by comments. For example:

47. *We didn't have so many things in those days. There weren't so many things to have. There was more to look forward to, but less to possess. It's the other way round now.* (MD, pp. 85-86)
48. *Rows can hurt, but they don't kill you. We are surrounded by these miseries. London is suffused with grief. There can be luxury in grief.* (MD, p. 132)
49. *Life has made me redundant. I am retired from it, though I have never had a job from which to retire.* (MD, p. 133)
50. *Sudden money makes one reckless. I had nothing to lose.* (MD, p.145)
51. *Or did I want to be kind? That seems unlikely. The human heart is black, so kindness cannot have been the explanation of my deeds.* (MD, p. 151)
52. *All writers love flattery, I believe, and Julia loves it more than most, because she doesn't get enough of it.* (MD, p. 152)
53. *People of our age ought to be able to look after ourselves.* (MD, p. 160)

Generalisations on experience (47-53) are witty, yet too long to approximate maxims. Except for (50), which can be identified as a maxim, the other generalisations on experience are lively descriptions of the author whose keen eye implies an observer but not an omniscient person.

What have been called **maxims proper** in the novel *The Seven Sisters* were very succinct sayings reminiscent of quotations or translated quotations, quotations in the original languages and allusions. For example:

54. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.* (MD, p. 34)
55. *... perhaps her heaviness and shapelessness make them feel at home with her. Is to be fat to be trustworthy? Somebody in classical antiquity thought so – ...* (MD, p. 39)
56. *Exsomnia noctesque diesque. It is true that I slept badly.* (MD, p.74)
57. *Julia is a wicked woman. I am a wicked woman. Her sins are of commission, mine of omission. Both are grave.* (MD, p. 77)
58. *Health, wealth and the pursuit of happiness. The new declaration of our human rights.* (MD, p. 161)
59. *Queen Dido gazes from her battlements across the centuries for their approach, ... ./.../ ..., they do remember her. They keep their trust.* (MD, pp. 167-168)
60. *Onwards and upwards, nachCuma, nachCuma. /.../. It lies before her like a cloth of dreams.* (MD, pp. 178-179)
61. *Aeneas must not idle around here in the luxurious oriental land of Libya. He is chosen for a higher state.* (MD, p. 183)

62. *Unlike Mark Antony, he will obey his destiny and sacrifice love for glory. He will become one of the greatest betrayers of history, and Dido one of the greatly betrayed.* (MD, p. 183)
63. *Heu regni rerumque oblite tuarum! 'Alas, you, of your kingdoms and fortunes forgetful!' Yes, the words fall into place, connect, and glow into transitory meaning.* (MD, p. 184)
64. *... pursues Julia. 'So what are we, after all?' 'Youth is not everything,' says Candida, sententiously.* (MD, p. 206)
65. *Goethe had said, somewhere that the only proper (or was it possible?) response to greater genius is love.* (MD, p. 213)
66. *..., she remembers Julia's contempt for those who make of marriage a Procrustean bed, and chop off their limbs to fit into it more neatly. They make marriage, ... , into a bed of blood. /.../ Infelix thalamus. Unhappy bed.* (MD, p. 221)
67. *Nevertheless, they sleep soundly, as they make their slow way /.../ across the sea to Italy. They sleep as soundly as Palinurus, charmed by a vengeful god.* (MD, p. 221)

In accord with the definition, maxims proper (54-67) from the novel *The Seven Sisters* by Margaret Drabble are short pithy statements which express a general truth (54, 56, 57, 58, 64, 65, and 66) or a rule of conduct (55, 59, 61, 62, and 63). The allusion to a Procrustean bed (66) is paraphrased and extended into a statement of a practical problem of marriage. Only an allusion to Yeats's poem, *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* (60), and another to Aeneas's helmsman Palinurus (67) are exact. They extend the meaning of the indicated lines. Allusions are not simple maxims. Their significance depends on the reader's familiarity with the meaning of the original source. Their appeal derives from the affinity that the reader perceives between the original meaning and that of the modern context. Allusions are not about the rules of conduct and even their truth value is only implied and depends on the reader's broader knowledge. Yet maxims proper listed in this section are enriched by the statements based on allusions.

## Discussion

As the reviewed material indicates, maxims proper are few in the novel, *The Seven Sisters*, by Margaret Drabble. Witty and poetic generalisations are more numerous. But the compositional, statistical and functional account of maxims and generalisations the way it has been done above does not reflect their significance in the novel under analysis nor their human significance to the readers. Apart from their co-textual and contextual significance, which is perceivable in the extensive quotations above, maxims and generalisations in modern literary prose are indicative of the author's philosophy and moral stance. This can be deduced when discovering that maxims and generalisations appear like statements of an omniscient author, which is true of summary statements, summary statements in good humour and wit, conclusions in the narrative and maxims proper. These units extend the context and

sense of concrete quotations because they are not mere replicas of the actants or fragmented comments. They are integrated into the scenes quoted but they exceed the contextual line of an argument or a description. The author's voice pinpoints the wisdom of every situation or its issue. This is the conducting author who speaks in generalisations and maxims even when the words literally are ascribed to one of the actants.

The author assumes a superior's voice almost in every of the enumerated quotations. The generalisations and maxims continuously issue from the judging or the omniscient mind, and there is consecutiveness and consistency in this authorial vision in the novel under analysis. Except for evaluating generalisations and most generalisations on experience, a wise and sensitive speaker is indicated in most of the generalisations, especially in those summarising and concluding the narrative.

The content of maxims and generalisations in the novel *The Seven Sisters* by Margaret Drabble sums up as observations on life situations, on human habits and character. Some of these observations have a philosophical shade in summary statements (2, 3, 4, 7, 8) as do some summary statements in good humour and wit (12, 13), conclusions in the narrative (19, 20, 21, 23, 24), evaluating generalisations (30, 32, 33), heightened and elevated generalisations (36, 38, 39), observations of the superior (45, 46) and even some generalisations on experience (51). Strangely, only some maxims proper have a shade of philosophical thought (54, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, and 65). Philosophical thoughts in these generalisations and maxims concern living, becoming and behaving, making choices and contemplating happiness, dreams, fortune, perceiving fleeting time, life and death and limitations of age, awareness and forgetfulness, love and possession and other minor points. These philosophical thoughts are limited to the indicated generalisations and are not amplified. But they are supported by Margaret Drabble's views on human age, woman's consciousness of it and its limitations. They are also supported by thoughts on woman's awareness of the environment, her sensitivity to other person's emotions and feelings, woman's self-consciousness and self-criticism and the broadness of her mind. Interestingly, a few of the generalisations are based on allusions to the poets – Shakespeare (24) and Yeats (60), to Virgil (63) and, questionably, to Julius Cesar (55). These allusions are subtly executed through single words and one longer quotation; they are apt and extend the meaning of respective maxims.

Although the novel *The Seven Sisters* includes no continuous philosophical contemplation, it is a very satisfying work which has a sensitive author nobly deliberating man's life and behaviour aside from modern chaos and cruelty. These observations on Margaret Drabble's thoughts have been deduced from generalisations and maxims extracted from the novel. This shows that maxims and generalisations are a rich resource indicating the author's mind, especially when generalisations appear in a classically composed literary narrative. The present deduction on the author's mind is a grounded conclusion because a certain consecutiveness has been traced in the content and language of Margaret Drabble's generalisations and maxims. It permits to generalise on the author's mind as her generalisations exceed the literal sense of the words, the frame of character creation and represent an omniscient author.

**Findings.** Even more omniscience and philosophical thought have been found in maxims and generalizations in the novel *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes. It is a fictitious biography based on the assumption that man's life cannot be presented as a complete consecutive tale. The life that is gone is credible only in more or less authenticated fragments. *Flaubert's Parrot*, therefore, gives glimpses of Flaubert's personal life and, especially, of his writing while the narrator carries out his search of the parrot which supposedly sat on Flaubert's desk when his best works were written and which is the property of one museum. In the museum, it appears that there were more than one parrot and that finally it is impossible to identify the one which graced Flaubert's desk. This intriguing story with a planned frustration at the end gives insights into the writer's mind and behaviour through quotations, as well as the author's own views on writing, literature, man and woman and their relations. There are paragraphs which are intensely philosophical, ironic or confusing. The narrative is composed so that maxims and generalisations appear in groups. Some functional groups of maxims and generalisations have been the same as in Margaret Drabble's novel. For example, **summary statements in the narrative** have been several (12 items) in Julian Barnes work. For example:

68. *But I really am trying to make things easier for you. Mystification is simple; clarity is the hardest thing of all. Not writing a tune is easier than writing one.* (JB, p.116)
69. *What do we need to know? Not everything. Everything confuses. Directness also confuses.* (JB, p. 116)
70. *Besides, an idea isn't always abandoned because it fails some quality control test. The imagination doesn't crop annually like a reliable fruit tree. The writer has together whatever's there: sometimes too much, sometimes too little, sometimes nothing at all.* (JB, p. 133)
71. *The greatest patriotism is to tell your country when it is behaving dishonourably, foolishly, viciously. The writer must be universal in sympathy and an outcast by nature: only then can he see clearly.* (JB, pp. 153-154)
72. *'You can depict wine, love, women and glory on the condition that you're not a drunkard, a lover, a husband or a private in the ranks. If you participate in life, you don't see it clearly: you suffer from it too much or enjoy it too much.* (JB, p. 154)
73. *He put it best, perhaps, when he said that the writer must wade into life as into the sea, but only up to the navel.*

*Secondly, when readers complain about the lives of writers –... But if a writer were more like a reader, he'd be a reader, not a writer: it's as uncomplicated as that.* (JB, p. 155)

The themes of summary statements in the narrative differ in every case in *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes. The themes concern writing and related phenomena (ideas and writing, participation in life and writing, the writer's commitment, writer and reader, etc), patriotism and others. All summary statements imply the mind behind them with a very firm and powerful grasp of the phenomena.

The summary statements are brief and compelling, their logic is clear and leaves no room for a challenge but acceptance. Summary statements in Julian Barnes' novel are close to genuine maxims and the weight of experience in them excludes the sense of playfulness in them.

**Generalisations in the form of a definition** have been most numerous (20) in the novel *Flaubert's Parrot*. For example:

74. Irony is, after all, the modern mode, a drinking companion for resonance and wit. Who could be against it? (JB, p. 71)
75. Style is a function of theme. Style is not imposed on subject-matter, but arises from it. Style is truth of thought. (JB, p. 97)
76. We can study files for decades, but every so often we are tempted to throw up our hands and declare that history is merely another literary genre: the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be a parliamentary report. (JB, p. 101)
77. ..., they each seem to do one thing well enough, but fail to realise that literature depends on doing several things well at the same time. I could go on at great length on all these topics; ... (JB, p.110)
78. ... Nature is always a mixture of genres; ... literature is not a pharmacopoeia; ... (JB, p. 157)
79. The work of art is pyramid which stands in the desert, uselessly: jackals piss at the base of it, and bourgeois clamber to the top of it; ... Do you want art to be a healer? Send for the AMBULANCE GEORGE SAND. Do you want art to tell the truth? Send for the AMBULANCE FLAUBERT: though don't be surprised, when it arrives, if it runs over your leg. Listen to Auden: 'Poetry makes nothing happen'. (JB, pp. 160-161)
80. He told me to write with the head, and not with the heart. He told me that hair only shone after much combing, and that the same could be said of style. /.../ He told me I had the love of Art, but not the religion of Art. (JB, p.178)
81. He claimed he was defending my work, and that every hour spent in society was an hour subtracted from my desk. But that is not how I worked. You cannot yoke the dragonfly and make it drive the cornmill. (JB, pp. 179-180)
82. '... Pride is one thing: a wild beast which lives in caves and roams in the desert; Vanity, on the other hand, is a parrot which hops from branch to branch and chatters away in full view.' (JB, p. 180)
83. Sometimes you talk, sometimes you don't; it makes little difference. ..., the right words don't exist. 'Language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.' (JB, p. 191)
84. 'Sadness is vice'. (JB, p. 191)
85. 'People believe a little too easily that the function of the sun is to help the cabbages along'.  
/.../ The function of the sun is not to help the cabbages along, and I am telling you a pure story. (JB, p. 192)

Generalisations in the form of a definition also concern phenomena related to writing (irony, style and its achievement, literature, history and literature, the work of



art, emotions and writing, language, engagements of a writer, pride and vanity, etc. All these definitions are brief and leave no room for misinterpretation. Julian Barnes's logic in his definitions is hard and committing. Although harder, generalisations in the form of a definition by Julian Barnes are much like the maxims of Baltasar Gracian. Quote (79), for instance, is indicative of exceptional intelligence. Every question and statement in it makes a point, and all points relate without the employment of functional words. To extract the intelligent thought from this quote, it is necessary to pinpoint the sense of the sentences with the same clarity and relate their implications logically. Only deep thought clarifies the sense of this quote. There is more than omniscience in it. It represents a compelling mind and implies an irrevocable conclusion.

Unlike in *The Seven Sisters* by Margaret Drabble, periphrasis of idioms has not been traced in *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes. **Generalisations in good humour and wit** were very few. For example:

86. *'You provide desolation', wrote George Sand, 'and I provide consolation'. To which Flaubert replied, "I cannot change my eyes'. (JB, p. 160)*
87. *Do you imagine that Art is something which is designed to give gentle uplift and self-confidence? Art is not a brassière. At least not in the English sense. But do not forget that brassière is the French for life-jacket. (JB, p. 161)*
88. *He said that these were three preconditions for happiness – stupidity, selfishness and good health – and that he was only sure of possessing the second of these. ...he wanted to believe that happiness was impossible; it gave him some strange consolation. (JB, p. 175)*

Generalisations in good humour and wit crumple in the context of the hard definitions of Julian Barnes and so are not many. They are very apt, though, and provoke emotional reaction in how they alliteratively contrast desolation and consolation (86), how they facetiously expose the lameness of the idea that art may be imagined as uplifting (87), or how three preconditions of happiness are reviewed for Flaubert (88). Quote (87), for instance, is based on as intelligent deduction as quote (79). The meaning of the word in it is used to serve a logical conclusion. The word adds wit to Julian Barnes's firm logic. The few generalisations in good humour and wit are relaxing amid the statements of unarguable logic by Julian Barnes.

**Evaluating generalisations** were fewer (4 in total) in *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes than they were (10 in total) in *The Seven Sisters* by Margaret Drabble. For example:

89. *And what do people think of him now? ..., as the hermit of Croisset, the man who said 'Madame Bovary', c'est moi; ... Confident scraps of wisdom, hand-me-down summaries for those in a hurry. Flaubert would hardly have been surprised at the lazy rush to understand. (JB, pp. 95-96)*
90. *She was a mutilated machine, and besides she has already forgotten him: ... ./.../ It may sound strange, but I became interested in her. No doubt the coin is always fascinated by its obverse. (JB, pp. 172-173)*

Evaluating generalisations are plainer and harder than those of Margaret Drabble. These generalisations are very few in Julian Barnes's novel, as befits a male author.

Heightened or elevated generalisations like observations of the superior have not been singled out in *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes, but **witty conclusions in the narrative** were quite numerous (16 items). For example:

91. *What a moment of perfectly targeted irony. A modernist moment, too: this is the sort of exchange, in which the everyday tampers with the sublime, that we like to think of proprietorially as typical of our own wry and unfoolable age.* (JB, p. 74)
92. *The balance of our response shifts with this knowledge: Flaubert becomes plodding and predictable: ...* (JB, p. 74)
93. *... Flaubert, when he left home, was already preparing the special effects... Ironies breed, realities recede.* (JB, p. 75)
94. *When you're young you prefer the vulgar months, the fullness of the seasons. As you grow older you learn to like the in-between times, the months that can't make up their minds. Perhaps it's a way of admitting that things can't ever bear the same certainty again.* (JB, p. 91)
95. *'The whole dream of democracy', he wrote, 'is to raise the proletariat to the level of stupidity attained by the bourgeoisie.'* (JB, pp. 93-94)
96. *Books are not life, however much we might prefer it if they were. Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead.* (JB, p. 95)
97. *'The artist must manage to make posterity believe that he never existed.'* (JB, p. 95)
98. *We look at the sun through smoked glass; we must look at the past through coloured glass.* (JB, p. 106)
99. *Commerce, Voltaire declared, was the base on which the greatness of our nation was built; now it's all that keeps us from going bankrupt.* (JB, p. 115)
100. *Its conclusion, of course: that happiness exists only in the imagination.* (JB, p. 138)
101. *The writer who imagines that the novel is the most effective way of taking part in politics is usually a bad novelist, a bad journalist, and a bad politician.* (JB, p. 152)
102. *Flaubert said: 'You don't make art out of good intentions'. He also said: 'The public wants works which flatter its illusions'. (JB, p. 156)*
103. *Well, that may be the proper way to nurse genius; but it is also the way to suffocate talent. Gustave didn't understand this, ...* (JB, p. 179)

Thematically varying, some Julian Barnes's conclusions in the narrative are as brief as definitions: *Ironies breed, realities recede* (93); *Books are not life,...* (96) ... *happiness exists only in the imagination* (100). These imply no compulsion, only a convinced and powerful mind, and they are borrowed from Flaubert. Some conclusions in the narrative are plain observations (92, 99). Except for its irony, a

statement of the dream of democracy (95) and of the irrelevance of the novel in politics when failing the novelist (101) are also quite plain. Two conclusions in the narrative on the extremes of irony (91) and on the growing uncertainty of the ageing (94) are original. The latter (... *things can't ever bear the same certainty again*) compares interestingly with Margaret Drabble's observations on age (*Age has its delicacy* (17) or *We can't pretend that we are young any more* (64)). Margaret Drabble's observations imply mild self-criticism of the ageing, while Julian Barnes's a generalising mind. He is more philosophical than Margaret Drabble in this one concept.

A compelling conclusion resides in the statement, *The artist must manage to make posterity believe that he never existed* (97). Obliging modality features in Julian Barnes's other conclusions in the narrative, such as: *We look at the sun through smoked glass, we must look at the past through coloured glass* (98). Several other conclusions in the narrative are based on contrast. The one of art not made out of good intentions, while the public wanting *works which flatter its illusions* (102) is indicative. Another conclusion based on contrast is the one of what nurses genius may suffocate the talent (103). Although all conclusions in the narrative by Julian Barnes are insightful, only some of them approximate maxims. Some conclusions in the narrative belong to the maxims of Flaubert (95, 97, 100, 101, and 102) and only some to Julian Barnes (96, 103). Strangely, conclusions in the narrative do not imply the rational strength of Julian Barnes the way definitions did.

Several **statements of general wisdom** (8 in total) were traced in *Flaubert's Parrot*, and these were not found in the novel *The Seven Sisters*. For example:

104. *When he wrote of himself, 'I attract mad people and animals', perhaps he should have added 'and ironies'.* (JB, p. 72)
105. *With Homais's Légion d'honneur, it's the other way round: life imitates and ironises art.* (JB, p. 72)
106. *The sky is a theatre of possibilities. I'm not romanticising. Go into the art galleries along the Normandy coast and you'll see what the local painters liked to paint, over and over again: the view north.* (JB, p. 92)
107. *Man is nothing, the work of art everything...* (JB, p. 97)
108. *The past in a distant, receding coastline, and we are all in the same boat.* (JB, p. 114)

All statements of general wisdom in *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes approximate maxims. Their brevity weakens the rational power of the author in them. Only one statement of wisdom, which contains Flaubert's own opinion (*Man is nothing, the work of art is everything...* (107)) implies a convinced powerful mind. One such statement, which includes a part of an old maxim, (... *we are all in the same boat* (108)), loses the strength of its expression. However brief, these maxims imply the author's potential and stance. Julian Barnes equals Flaubert in his rationality and irony.

**Generalisations on experience** in *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes were as numerous (10) as they were in *The Seven Sisters* by Margaret Drabble (11). But Julian

Barnes's briefs on experience have been more theoretical, literary and philosophical than those of Margaret Drabble. For example:

109. The Normans are a famously stingy race, and doubtless their gravediggers are no exception; (JB pp. 78)
110. In life, we make a decision – or a decision makes us – and we go one way; had we made a different decision (...), we would have been elsewhere. The novel with two endings doesn't reproduce this reality: it merely takes us down two diverging paths. It's a form of cubism, I suppose. And that's all right, but let's not deceive ourselves about the artifice involved. (JB, p.99)
111. ...Flaubert was, as always, right. Style does not arise from subject-matter. (JB, p. 107)
112. Flaubert teaches you to gaze upon the truth and not blink from its consequences; ..., to sleep on the pillow of doubt; ... Nature is always a mixture of genres; ... – literature is not a pharmacopoeia; he teaches the pre-eminence of Truth, Beauty, Feeling and Style. (JB, p. 157)
113. Form isn't an overcoat flung over the flesh of thought (that old comparison, old in Flaubert's day); it's the flesh of thought itself. You can no more imagine an Idea without a Form than a Form without an Idea. Everything in art depends on execution: the story of a louse can be as beautiful as the story of Alexander. All these maxims are by Flaubert, except for the one by Bouilhet. (JB, p.160)
114. I have no interest in slander. /.../ I have schemed. But women scheme when they are weak, they lie out of fear. Men scheme when they are strong, they lie out of arrogance. (JB, p. 162)
115. In his second letter he wrote, 'I have never seen a cradle without thinking of a grave; the sight of a naked woman makes me imagine her skeleton'. These were not the sentiments of a conventional lover. (JB, p. 174)
116. True love can survive absence, death and infidelity, he once told me; true lovers can go ten years without meeting. /.../ 'Life is like riding', he wrote to me once. 'I used to like the gallop; now I like the walk'. (JB, pp. 175-176)

Except for two generalisations on experience which concern Normans as a stingy race (109) and decision making in life (110), other generalisations on experience concern the writer's art in composition (novels with two endings (110)), style (111, 113), literature (112), and form and execution in literature (113). These generalisations are longer as they consist of several independent statements, but they approximate classical maxims. The generalisations on experience which concern writing matters retain the implication of the powerful mind of the author, who also incorporates the attitude and conviction of Flaubert himself. Generalisations on experience which concern men and women in lies (114), Flaubert's irony on seeing a naked woman (115) and his view of true love (116) are sharp and insightful. They approximate classical maxims and imply the author's intelligence.

Julian Barnes has a few **complex and elaborate generalisations** in the form of a definition and commented conclusion. These elaborate generalisations concern imagination, politics, literature, and human life in general. For example:

117. *All these unwritten books tantalise. /.../ A pier is a disappointed bridge; yet stare at it for long enough and you can dream it to the other side of the Channel. The same is true with these stacks of books.* (JB, p. 141)
118. *He did not, at least, entertain the childish fantasy of some literati: that writers are better fitted to run the world than anybody else.* (JB, p. 151)
119. *The best form of government, he maintained, is one that is dying, because this means it's giving way to something else.* (JB, p. 151)
120. *Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't. I'm not surprised some people prefer books. Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never your own.* (JB, p. 201)

Except for the maxims the authorship of which Julian Barnes indicated himself (see No. 113, above), there is a section in the novel *Flaubert's Parrot* which is titled as Flaubert's maxims. In this section, maxims come in clusters and only partly translated. For example:

121. *Maxims for life. Les unions complètes sont rares. You cannot change humanity, you can only know it. Happiness is a scarlet cloak whose lining is in tatters. Lovers are like Siamese twins, two bodies with a single soul; but if one dies before the other, the survivor has a corpse to lug around. Pride makes us long for a solution to things – a solution, a purpose, a final cause; but the better telescopes become, the more stars appear. You cannot change humanity, you can only know it. Les unions complètes sont rares.*  
*A maxim upon maxims. Truths about writing can be framed before you've published a word; truths about life can be framed only when it's too late to make any difference.* (JB, p. 202)

## Discussion

This last group of the quoted maxims from the novel *Flaubert's Parrot* confirms one extra time that Julian Barnes's generalisations are maxims proper and that he was conscious of their significance. Julian Barnes's maxims and generalisations are basically concerned with life's philosophy and literature. This is both in line with the idea of this book and the author's intelligence in it. The idea is that a human life cannot be restored and told to a dot. It is gone and its story can be only fragmented and incomplete. Therefore generalisations and maxims are indispensable in summing up on separate episodes of a human life simultaneously focusing the thoughts of the person in question. Most of Julian Barnes's generalisations are maxims. They imply the author's intelligence and the power of his mind.

This inventory of maxims and generalisations is numerically about equal in the two novels. Maxims and generalisations in the two novels have appeared to be significantly different. Some of Margaret Drabble's generalisations in summary statements, both general and in good humour and wit, in conclusions in the narrative, in heightened and elevated generalisations, and in observations of the superior approximate maxims, in addition to several maxims proper. Margaret Drabble's generalisations and maxims implied an observant and insightful author, especially sensitive in experience, who speaks at points as an omniscient figure. This is what defines and motivates the function of maxims and generalisations in literary prose of classical heritage. Some of this author's maxims and generalisations have a philosophical bent but they do not evolve into a more consecutive philosophical reasoning in Margaret Drabble's novel *The Seven Sisters*.

Most of Julian Barnes's generalisations have been found to be maxims, in addition to maxims proper, which dominated in the material from the novel *Flaubert's Parrot*. Julian Barnes's maxims and generalisations implied a very rational author whose powerful mind is distinct in every statement. Most of this author's maxims and generalisations are philosophical and very rational, especially when the topic concerns literature, style, art, writing and the author's attitude. The powerful rationality and philosophical bent are especially evident in summary statements, generalisations in the form of a definition, (absent in Margaret Drabble's novel), in conclusions in the narrative, statements of general wisdom and in generalisations on experience. This is what defines the function of maxims and generalisations in literary prose of professional and biographical character. It is indicative that evaluative generalisations were very few in Julian Barnes's novel, while heightened and elevated generalisations and observations of the superior were absent altogether. Maxims proper in Julian Barnes's novel *Flaubert's Parrot* combine both Flaubert's and Barnes's concepts, are especially strong and identify with the maxims of Baltasar Gracian.

## Conclusions

Apart from the topical interest, judgmental power and verbal incisiveness, maxims and generalisations in two realistic novels implied the author's power of intellect, insights and stance. It is possible to assume that, in maxims and generalisations, the author forsakes his involvement with the creation of character and situation and speaks his own mind. This study has shown that relevantly chosen material can be productive in discovering the author's individuality and stance while analysing its meaning and significance. Human language is a rich resource of sociocultural evidence, while literary language is richer than its other forms. The definitive analysis of the author's (and speaker's) imprint in his words still missing, the present study can be treated as a successful step in an attempt to identify the writer/speaker in his language. The logic of reasoning, the types of sentences and the ways of emphasis reveal the author's intellectual and emotive stance. Whatever the scholarly uses of the topical and functional description of

maxims and generalisations in literary prose, this material can be enlightening to a scholar and useful to a teacher of English as foreign language.

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