

MODELLING FUNCTION OF METAPLOT ABOUT PRODIGAL SON

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ABSTRACT

The article is concerned with the problem of determining the variations of the metaplot about the wandering son, well known to readers, from the biblical text, in the space of literary relations. The authors claim that this metaplot can be considered as a kind of archetypal matrix, which is reproduced in various historical and cultural eras in a wide variety of styling. The metaplot about the prodigal son is a universal mythological model of those relations that develop in the process of intergenerational dialogue (dialogue between “fathers” and “children”). In the Russian literary tradition, this model is marked by clearly expressed spiritual and moral features, because if a Western person in his behavior is rational (such a behavioral pattern goes back to Aristotelian understanding of European civilization), then a Russian one is ideally ethical (a similar norm originates in the Platonic philosophy, more precisely – in Platonism, which is an integral element in the Orthodox-Christian system of values). The parable of the prodigal son affirms the importance of independent choice of path of life. It tells not only about the going away from father’s house and the losses that inevitably accompany this process. It also symbolically narrates about gaining new reason to live, which occurs as a result of the transformation of a Child into an Adult, ready to take moral responsibility for the right to choose a path, and not rely on granted conditions of being that are supposed to exist originally. Consequently, the metaplot about the prodigal son includes a certain number of works of Russian literature of various genres, united by a single cultural matrix. This is not just gospel writings, not just a figurative interpretation of an ancient parable. The metaplot about the prodigal son also embraces those texts that develop the problem of the dialogue between “fathers” and “children” at a typological level. The content and main meanings of the symbolic-mythological metaplot cannot always be presented explicitly, in a clearly visible form. They often underlie the structures of a literary work. Special research procedures are required to reveal, highlight these hidden communicative units and understand them in comprehensive way.

Key words: Archetypal plot, structure, motif, universal mythological model, canon, metatext.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is aimed at forming a worldview of man, shaping his mentality. If a European is rational and logical, then a Russian is, on the contrary, intuitive and ethical, so is Orthodoxy, ethically and contemplatively intuitive. The way of thinking of the Russian people, broadly and generally speaking, is ethical. Of great importance for Russia is the cultural matrix, formed in antiquity and being inseparable from Christian roots. It embraces spiritual values. The Christian cultural matrix was defined two thousand years ago, and it was adopted in Russia a thousand years ago (in the era of Kievan Rus). Matrix as a system of values, ideals, commandments and prohibitions, the “recoding” of which from ethics to logic is impossible, forms the basis of the world understanding and behavior of the Russian person, and therefore the Russian writer.

Matrix in literature / culture is a complex phenomenon. It is archetypal and produces similar works. As V.K. Vasiliev notes, “the matrix generates identical texts... in such a way as if it has one... author in the entire thousand-year historical and literary process. It is regardless of time; eternity emanates from it.” (Vasiliev, 2010). In this timeless, and from the point of view of the typology of the historical and literary process – general and similar, every time the earthly, being current, expressing the unique features of the era and the specifics of the writer’s work is pictured.

To denote such a system in literary criticism, different terms are used: “basic archetypes”, “cultural code”, “cultural matrix”. The culturological “periodic table” consists of various patterns of behavior depending on specific situations. The first element in this table is the archetypal plot of the prodigal son.

The gospel story about the prodigal son is a behavioral canon, the norm as a component of the Russian cultural matrix: the end of this biblical story has a pronounced moral character. The proverbial prodigal son evolved from a deep crisis of morality to God and to himself. This explains the special attention of the Russian literary discourse to the plot of the wandering son. The story of the prodigal son teaches people to successfully master the rules governing life according to sacral concepts. This is a universal mythological model of interrelations of generations with its procedural completeness, including all conceivable moments of movement-action – a model 1) with the will of the Son, his wandering and suffering in a strange world, and 2) humility and forgiveness of the wise Father.

Studying the depths of national self-consciousness, its origins, a true artist rises to the level of the universal and the national. And this is certainly a feature of Russian culture, the spiritual searches of which affirm responsiveness to the universal and eternal, as many Russian philosophers and literary scholars wrote about (A.P. Skaftymov, D.S. Likhachev, and others).

The archetypal plot (invariant) in relation to other variants-models becomes a metatext, because it conveys time father-son relations. The peculiarity of the metatextual system is a literary genetic predetermination. Preserving the main “gene” of this plot (the “fathers-children” motif), the archetypal gospel story as a text gives a powerful cultural impulse to literary variability.

The “fathers – children” motif being a genetic code that carries specific information (in our case, about the conflict or conflict-free relations of generations, and this is a universal human problem) gives a development program with time. The narration about the prodigal son appears “in the role of a condensed program of the creative process”, a genetic program. “Gene” has the qualities of modeling, and the

author's individual consciousness (relying on memory) models a new literary and aesthetic variant of the situation, taking account of a specific life event, and the features of the historical era, and, finally, the uniqueness of the cultural moment in the development of society.

Based on the foregoing, the task is to understand which underlying laws are the cornerstone of the creation of a varied plot, how literary consciousness reacts to a basic textual model, in which the dialectics of the general and the particular, the universal and the national is manifested here.

2.METHODS

The fundamental method of this study was a system-integrated approach. It combines several methods. In our case the two of them were the most valuable: 1) historical and literary, 2) structural and semantic. The content of the first method consists in the fact that the study of a literary work involves, as far as possible, an understanding of a specific historical era, which does not exclude the comprehension of some universal laws of thought, manifested in "text" form ("text" is here at the same time a verbal and non-verbal language that conveys message). Concerning the second method, its essence is reduced to the regard of the whole palette of intratext relations. The text within its borders is conceived as a special (first, philosophical and aesthetic) model of the reality, a picture of the world, a way of worldview. We point out to the fact that the article considers the results of modern research using close methodological developments (Spirchagova et al., 2018; Yuzmukhametova et al., 2018; Amineva, 2018; Shchepacheva et al., 2017; Zueva et al., 2017). In addition, we considered the works of Western literary scholars who studied the plot about the prodigal son in various aspects (Jack, 2018; Carroll, 2009; Marling, 1992; Lai, 1981).

3.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As discussed, genetic information is encoded information intended to be decoded by individual imaginative and non-imaginative consciousnesses and addressed to the present and future. In the history of the development of the archetypical / mythological plot about the prodigal son, the following properties, characterological and functional features are manifested: 1) universality; 2) its merging with literary work; 3) the conscious and unconscious appeal of the artist of the word to myth; 4) the preservation in the works of literature of the "gene" of the archetypical plot; 5) the severity in the myth of a certain eternal type of consciousness; 6) the myth does not disappear, it is transformed; 7) the mythological code performs a sociocultural function: it stores social experience and regulates intra-social relations; 8) the myth in communicative relation acts as a special modeling system (Lotman, & Uspenskij, 1977); 9) the properties of myth in the archetypical plot are expressed in the fact that the latter offers humanity an eternal model of personal and social behavior.

The parable about the prodigal son affirms the value of a person who independently chooses his own path, fate, and not dogmatically accepts the prepared variant of life. V.I. Tyupa wrote about the same thing (Tyupa, 2001). The very plot line of the youngest (prodigal) son, who has shown his will in a situation of choice, reflects the life of the majority, a reflection of the typical. Wandering as a life journey concludes a rite of initiation, transformed into involuntary self-initiation through temporary and

forced self-isolation from the usual environment, led to a new, higher way of being. The symbolic death of a son as a Child and the birth of a son as an Adult is an evidence of the beginning of a new cycle. As a result of a new experience, the ontological status of a person changes. The structure of the typological system (the gospel parable of the prodigal son – a work of Russian literature) reveals the presence of a temporal distance between the initial and final states of the character. Leaving home is not only a manifestation of the sinfulness of the prodigal son, but also a testament to freedom, associated with human nature. Going away is not only the path leading away from the father, but also the path to himself, the search for his place in the universe.

The archetypal plot of the prodigal son is an invariant with plot motifs and different levels of understanding of the text of the biblical parable. The paradigm of variations of the biblical parable in Russian literature in works with a similar plot line is the typology of a specific plot in the “big time” (according to M.M. Bakhtin) and meets the traditions of Russian academic literature. Variations imply numerous transformations and modifications of the invariant plot.

This universal mythological model of intergenerational relations – an element of the cultural matrix – “forms” typologically similar works of Russian literature of different genres. The paradigm of plot modifications envelopes in similarity and difference with the explicit and implicit “presence” of the archetypal plot in their structure. This structure, in turn, “provokes” the semantic inexhaustibility of narrative-anecdotal models of different eras with the story of the prodigal son and the process of decanonization in solving the problem of “fathers” and “children”.

The paradigm of plot modifications is organized by unified structural units. The long-time span of the literary process allows to find out within this paradigm the degree to which the plot canon is followed in resolving the generational conflict. Its repetition / reproduction in a variative “performance” as an act of creativity introduces the writer / reader / characters to the divine principle and contrasts chaos. According to S.N. Broytman, “the role of the creative person is the role of a mediator among other mediators, and the goal of works is to approach the primary principle localized in the valuable past” (Broytman, 2001). These words, in our opinion, can be applied to literary work in the historical-typological and historical-genetic coverage of the “life” of one plot line.

The reasons for the transformation are common to all periods of the literary process: the issue of intergenerational relations was filled with a new meaning in different historical times. The behavioral pattern is modified, the prototype absorbs various mythologemes and ideas. Each epoch offers its own narrative and plot constructions. The appearance in the writer’s work of the motif “fathers – children”, which correlates with the motif “prodigal son”, is determined by the needs of the creative method, historical and autobiographical contexts. This motif also programs plot development. The author being a subject of creativity brings the personal-creative to the paradigmatic-canonical via the mechanism of personal and superpersonal memory.

The form and the content undergo transformations. The coordinates of the semantic space of the invariant (“prodigal”, “son”, “father / God”, “fathers – children”, “two brothers”, etc.) with a situation of contradictions of consciousnesses receive literary realization in the representation of semantic variants. Different semantic levels are recognized in different variants: 1) the sacred meaning of finding God within oneself; 2) everyday sense of unity of generations, understanding of the unity of life principles. The acquisition of spiritual affinity proves to be higher than shared bloodline.

The semantic inexhaustibility of the invariant - the plot of the prodigal son - allows writers to “unfold” the ambiguity of images of father and son. This confirms the position that the archetypal plot of the prodigal son has a universal character. Another important point is the explicit or implicit presence of the parable in the works of Russian literature. Implicit reproduction of the plot and the motif of the prodigal son is more frequent.

The explicit and implicit presence of the archetypal plot, the direct or indirect reference of the authors to this plot is evidence of matrix literature, evidence of the manifestation of not only personal but also super-personal consciousness of culture. Decoding of the plots containing the main informational “gene” in their structure (the “fathers - children” motif) allows the reader and researcher to see and understand intertextual exchange, and to speak on total intertextuality in general.

Long-term studies of the multi-genre texts of Russian literature made it possible: 1) to establish ourselves in the idea that the plot of the prodigal son is a recurring plot that has been preserved in literature over the different periods of its development, 2) to formulate the theory of plot modifications (Rad, 2011) that explains how literary works vary the ancient invariant with the consideration of the peculiarities of time.

The theory of plot modifications is inextricably connected with the author’s problem, which can be perceived through one of its aspects - as the problem of expressing literary consciousness. The work of the author’s consciousness results in literary conceptuality. The concept of the author with his understanding and appreciation of the human world is represented by the consciousness of characters. Different understandings of life by authors and characters, positions, viewpoints, “languages” as integral worldviews enter a dialogue with each other.

The dialogical structure of thinking that determines the poetics of a work implies the existence of dialogues related to the comprehension of the meaning of the work. Within story modifications, multi-level dialogues can be represented as follows: 1) a dialogue of the worldviews of heroes; 2) a dialogue of author’s consciousness with the characters’ consciousness; 3) a dialogue of a creative personality (the author) with life; 4) a dialogue of the author with myth; 5) a dialogue of eras; 6) a dialogue of time and eternity; 7) a dialogue of the text with culture.

It can be confidently stated that the parable is implicitly transformed from the subject of analysis into its methodological basis. Literature provides the examples of moving away from the ideal settlement of the conflict of generations. Invariant as a metalanguage plays the role of the organizer of the system. The impossibility of distinguishing modifications without resorting to the general is obvious. Varieties of narrative texts partially implement this model and partially deviate from it. In relation to the aspect of coincidences and deviations, “narratology will be able to embrace the whole multitude of texts, their historical and cultural diversity” (Bart, 1987).

4.SUMMARY

Thus, we have analyzed a theoretical model of the correlation of the invariant plot of the prodigal son with its historical and literary variants. The summarizing conclusion of the article is that the general canon can be differently interpreted. The story of the prodigal son is, by and large, the history of mankind in all its variation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In connection with the foregoing, we suggest in an approximate corpus of works the structure of which is close to the archetype of the lost son. See, for example, from ancient Russian literature: "The Life of Theodosius of the Kiev Caves", "The Song of Prince Igor"; from the literature of the 18th century: D.I. Vonwizin "The Foreman" A.N. Radishchev "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow", N.M. Karamzin "Nataly, the Boyar's Daughter"; from the literature of the 19th century: A.S. Griboyedov "The Mischief of Being Clever", A.S. Pushkin "Station Master", "Captain's Daughter", M.Y. Lermontov "Mtsyri", N.V. Gogol "Taras Bulba", I.S. Turgenev "Fathers and Sons", N.G. Chernyshevsky "What Is To Be Done?", F.M. Dostoevsky "The Brothers Karamazov", A.P. Chekhov "Black Monk", from the literature of the 20th century: N.S. Gumilev "The Prodigal Son", I.A. Bunin "The Life of Arseniev", K.G. Paustovsky "Telegram", Y.O. Dombrowsky "Dark-Complexioned Lady", etc.

Each of them contains the motif of fathers and children and the motif of prodigal son associated with it. The works vary in genres, and this once again confirms the omnitemporal life of the all-time plot.

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