

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES, 2019

1. Introduction

In the globalization era with its tendency to unification of cultures, the interest in in-depth study of peculiarities of national literatures [1] is growing, and it permeates greatly the value of comparative literary studies [2]. In this context, analyzing from this perspective of traditional plots and characters becomes important too, it is one of the top-priority problems of modern comparative studies [3, 4], which has long been investigating “historical patterns of functioning of so-called universal characters ... in particular their structural changes, semantic transformations and evolution of cultural functions, experienced by them when “crossing the borders” of diverse national literatures, genres, style epochs” [5]. In this context, it is important to take into account achievements of archetypal critics [6–8].

Modern researchers emphasize the importance of understanding “dialectic of national and universal in national variants of traditional structures, preventing mechanical subordination of the first to the second,” noting that “just national peculiarity of certain version of traditional material reveals more deeply its universal subtext, allows us to see universal features in specific ones and vice versa” [9].

These ideas are also supported by Y. Boyko-Blokhin (Ukrainian emigre literary scholar, specialist in Slavic studies, professor at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich), multidimensional nature of whose literary activity was often pointed out by scholars. German philologists highly appreciate the contribution of the researcher, inter alia, to the international Slavic studies.

In this context, Y. Boyko-Blokhin’s views on the problem of creative reinterpretation of traditional plots and characters in Ukrainian literature (from the perspective of the European canon), consideration of which is the purpose of the proposed paper, are of particular relevance.

Following problems were set up in the furtherance of this purpose:

1. Consideration of the views of Y. Boyko-Blokhin on creative reinterpretation of traditional characters of Prometheus, Cain and Don Juan in Ukrainian literature from the perspective of the problem of style.

2. Clarification of significance of the scholar’s conclusions regarding functioning of the traditional material (with an emphasis on specific features of national interpretations) in further development of comparative literary criticism, taking into account “reformatting” of the world Slavic studies in the

UKRAINIAN VERSIONS OF CLASSIC PLOTS AND CHARACTERS: ANENT THE QUESTION OF THE EUROPEAN CANON

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Abstract: The article focuses on the interpretation by Y. Boyko-Blokhin, Ukrainian emigre literary critic, of Ukrainian versions of traditional plots and characters, his thoughts are actualized with reflections of other researchers about the problem of European identity, and in particular with a variety of views on the European cultural heritage. An approach of the Ukrainian scholar to investigation of the outlined problem (with special attention to peculiarities of the national literature, and an emphasis on clarifying “mechanisms” of creative transformation of traditional material) is conceptualized from the perspective of the literary studies of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. Arguments of the scholar concerning authenticity of Ukrainian versions of traditional characters, namely Prometheus (T. Shevchenko “The Caucasus”), Cain (I. Franko “The Death of Cain”) and Don Juan (Lesia Ukrainka “The Stone Host”), are analyzed and comprehended in the European context, with due consideration for previous tradition, from the standpoint of the problem of style. Conclusions of the scholar are construed as representational for Ukrainian literature as an integral part of the European cultural space. An important role of conceptual ideas of the scholar, which remain relevant even for contemporary comparative literature studies, not only by contributing to continuous development of national comparative literature (given the impossibility of their full-fledged progress throughout several decades under the ideological pressure), but also regarding the forthcoming of “reformatting” of the global Slavic studies, is substantiated in view of the question of searching for the European canon.

Keywords: traditional plots and characters, archetype, Slavic literatures, European context, Romanticism, national identity.

context of “the search” for the European canon.

2. Methods

Achievements of historical and comparative analysis, techniques of culture-historical and receptive-aesthetic schools are used in the paper.

3. Results

Analyzing Ukrainian interpretations (T. Shevchenko, “The Caucasus”; I. Franko, “The Death of Cain”; Lesya Ukrainka, “The Stone Host”) of traditional for the world literature plots and characters (Prometheus, Cain, Don Juan) in the context of the precedent literary tradition, from the perspective of literary style development, the scholar substantiates their originality, which, accordingly, reveals also national specifics of Ukrainian literature as an integral component of the European cultural space.

The emigre scholar, who advocated peculiarity of Ukrainian Romanticism within Slavic and West European contexts, and emphasized a specific role of T. Shevchenko, considers that the artist’s deepening into the well-known romantic character of Prometheus is very meaningful.

J. Hall, author of “Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art” (2004), notes that “every epoch introduced its symbolic interpretation of the figure of Prometheus, adapting the myth to its own purpose” [10]. Other researchers, whose attention was

drawn to functioning of this traditional character in literature [3, 11], are of the same opinion. Very remarkable is consideration of C. G. Jung: “Every age has its own unilateralism, its prejudice and its spiritual pain ... a poet or a prophet gives a verbal expression to something that was not outspoken by that moment of time, and whether through characters or by bringing to the stage shows the awaited by incomprehensible desire of all men ... for the sake of salvation of the epoch or its destruction” [12]. Just “the romantic impulse of the 19th century made Prometheus a symbol of freedom, defeater of tyranny” [10]. This is in line with the opinion of Y. Boyko-Blokhin on Shevchenko’s version of the character of Prometheus (“The Caucasus”).

Y. Boyko-Blokhin, substantiating peculiarity of the Ukrainian poet’s interpretation, conceptualizes it in a broad literary context (given the previous tradition and its actualization). Y. Boyko-Blokhin emphasizes distinctive features of Shevchenko’s Prometheus in comparison with versions that belong to another nations, he observes disassociation of the Ukrainian poet from the ancient myth (“Shevchenko does not reconcile Prometheus with Zeus”), absence in Shevchenko’s poem of both

“Voltaire-specific detronization of Promethean heroism, lowering of his figure”, and “pessimistic notes, typical for Goethe”. At the same time, the researcher argues that Shevchenko’s character “becomes a concise *symbol* (italics – O. T.) alongside optimistic through figures of Prometheus”, described by Byron (for whom “Prometheus personifies sublime resilience of an individual human spirit raised to the heights with the strength of mind”) and Shelley (“majestic personification of the human identity defeats eternal evil forces and heads to the kingdom of beauty and harmony”). According to the scholar, Shevchenko’s Prometheus “is not an individual but an invincible nation”. Y. Boyko-Blokhin points out that precisely in this idea “peculiarity of the Ukrainian artist is seen at once” [13], since he makes singular interpretation of the character that is a mainstream for Romantic literature.

Creative transformation of the character of Prometheus in the poem “The Caucasus” explicitly testifies, according to the scholar, “deep penetration of Shevchenko into the world of Romanticism and peculiarity of his status in it” [13].

The scholar expanded an opinion of the French critic P. de Saint-Victor, who believed that Mickiewicz’s role in the world literature (due primarily to the revolutionary nature of the Polish poet’s art work) was “to launch a new era in literatures of the entire Slavic world” with an emphasis on specifics of Slavic Romanticism. “If so,” Y. Boyko-Blokhin points out, thinking in this context also about the role of the author of “The Caucasus,” then T. Shevchenko “developed Mickiewicz’s revolutionary motives in Romanticism, added them sharpness and political orientation, and became a central figure of Slavic Romanticism” [13].

Franko’s version of the character of Cain (“The Death of Cain”), which Y. Boyko-Blokhin interprets as a “continuation” of Byron’s poem (“Cain”) while clarifying its role in the evolution of the style of the word man (from Romanticism to Neo-Romanticism) is also very noticeable in the context under consideration.

Y. Boyko-Blokhin attaches an exceptionally significant common literary value to the fact that I. Franko felt the need/demand to “complete the image of Byron’s Cain” [14]. The scholar argues that this poem with its reflections and philosophical content continues Byron, tries to solve the problems raised by the British poet within the *style framework*, inherent to the revolutionary Lord.

“The most worthy of astonishment”, according to Volkov, is the fact that “TC (traditional characters. – O. T.), which initially embodied all the evil and negative (Satan, Lucifer, Cain, Judas Iscariot) occasionally also undergo similar total reevaluation” [15]. It should be mentioned, that the character of Cain in Franko’s poem is a very illustrative example in this context, and it is not surprising that Y. Boyko-Blokhin places a greater focus on it: character of Cain, created by Franko, “turns” into its opposite.

I. Franko’s poem begins with the very same point which was the end of the poem of George G. Byron (the murder of Abel). In this context Y. Boyko-Blokhin points to significant difference in interpretation of the character of fratricide by both writers. He emphasizes that in the Ukrainian interpretation the individualist Cain “becomes infinitely active in the pursuit of good ... can find expression of the power of his “self” in devotion to altruistic goals” [14].

It is noteworthy that the scholar, who accentuates in this context the understanding of the deep symbolism of biblical images by the poet, perceives at the same time the symbolic meaning of the title of the poem: “the death of Cainism as a spiritual and mental condition” [14].

The researcher states: “Franko responded with his poem to the problems that tormented Byron ... high ideologic level of Franko’s work provided a profound response and its universal character.” “The Death of Cain” is an outstanding masterpiece in the world literature” [14], which convincingly confirms the phenomenon of “dialogics of cultures”, according to M. Bakhtin, i. e. when these cultures “neither merge nor mix, each preserves its consistency and open integrity, but they are noticeably enriched” [16].

With the poem “The Death of Cain” Y. Boyko-Blokhin associates “great stylistic leap” to the “realistic” period of creative activity of I. Franko, who “covered thorny way in his search for a style” (from Romanticism to Modernism). Emphasizing the transformation of artistic and aesthetic achievements of the British romanticist in our own land, Y. Boyko-Blokhin comes to the conceptual conclusion: I. Franko “launched Neo-Romanticism in our literature. Lesya Ukrainka followed in his tracks ...” [17].

Researchers associate with creative legacy of the woman writer, due to her deeply original versions of classic plots and characters, totally new period in the evolution of our national literature. This is explicitly demonstrated by Lesya Ukrainka’s drama “The Stone Host”, which Y. Boyko-Blokhin analyses in his thesis of the same name, taking into consideration both previous and more recent understanding of traditional story of Don Juan [17].

Y. Boyko-Blokhin contemplates this drama in the context of West European literature (O. Anthes, G. Byron, G. Gendarme de Bevoitte, P. Goize, E. T. A. Hoffmann, K. D. Grabbe, P. Merimee, Moliere, N. Lenau, di Ponto, O. Pushkin, H. Roujon, Tirso de Molina, A. Tolstoy) and notes that a singularity of the woman writer arose from thorough knowledge of the literary tradition and analytical approach to it.

The scholar argues that the hero of Lesya Ukrainka “absorbs just a little bit of several figures of Don Juan that existed earlier on, he is the bearer of the further existence of tradition and at the same time remains perhaps the character, the most psychologically complex figure of Don Juan in the world literature” [17].

Denoting the special attention to the theme of Don Juan in the literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Y. Boyko-Blokhin states that “the hero sometimes becomes his opposite”. Views of contemporary researchers are fully consistent with it [18, 19]. This is observed by the scholar in Lesya Ukrainka’s play (“defeated don Juan is a modern presentation of the theme” [17]).

Despite the fact that in the center of Lesya Ukrainka’s interpretation is the character of Anna (as indicated by the author), Y. Boyko-Blokhin believes that the poetess underestimates the value of her figure of Don Juan (“her hero is interesting both by his scenic attraction and psychological complexity: such an exceptional situation that he faces while standing between the women, Dolores and Anna, and the fact that he is experiencing a spiritual crisis are of great importance”) [17]. Highlighting a peculiarity of the conception of this character in Lesya Ukrainka’s drama, the scholar observes: Don Juan, *losing himself* (italics – Oh T) – “is slowly approaching petrification” [17].

In the underlying message of this poem the scholar sees (remarkably, in view of modernization of traditional material) a reflection of fundamental problems of national existence, deeply peculiar “historiosophical prediction of the journey of the Ukrainian nation in the near future” (“Ukrainian intellectuals between the idea of dictatorial internationalism and exalted national aspirations, pure in their impulse, as Don Juan between Anna and Dolores!” [17]). The woman writer, who envisions,

according to the researcher, in general terms, the October Revolution of 1917, “tries to take a look ... into the future and avert the danger” [17]. Y. Boyko-Blokhin believes that this is “the Ukrainian ideological essence” of “The Stone Host”.

According to the scholar, Lesya Ukrainka found a solution of the contradiction between universality, and national and spiritual relevance of the work precisely in the multiplicity, provided by Neo-Romantics, in particular, by modalities of symbolic poetry.

Thinking of Lesya Ukrainka’s interpretation through the prism of the style problem, the researcher arrives at an important conclusion regarding the “stylistic synthesis” of “The Stone Host”. The emigre scholar stated: “the classical compression, architectonic harmony taken from Neoclassicism enhance her Neo-Romanticism with exceptional stylistic originality” [17], which testifies convincingly distinct tendencies of Modernism in Ukrainian literature at the beginning of the 20th century, with due regard to the European context too. It is significant that “The Stone Host” by Lesya Ukrainka was recognized as one of the most original versions of the traditional story of Don Juan (Bompiani Encyclopedia, 2006).

4. Discussion

Nowadays the problem of classic plots and characters is extremely challenging, even more due to the rather controversial issue of “searching” for the European canon. For example, M. Böhmig, a contemporary researcher of Slavic literatures, reasonably emphasizes an urgent need for understanding of the contribution, in particular, of East Europe “in formation of what is considered a pan-European heritage” [20]. In this context, “optics of Eastern Europe, which is common for such convinced “Europeanists” as Rousseau, Herder, Mazzini,” is highly visible, observes O. Pachlovska, a culture expert, professor of Sapienza University of Rome, “since 1920’s, Italy and Germany, as well as other Western countries, begin to contemplate Eastern Europe as a civilization, capable of completing and culminating the Western world”[21].

Paradoxically, in the 21st century it is necessary to prove that “relative insignificance ... of the contribution of Eastern Europe seems symptomatic not so much because of insufficiency of its cultural heritage ... as due to the wrong idea of so-called “old Europe” about limited cultural weight of Eastern European countries, and frequently also due to unidirectional perception of European cultural achievements, which are spread in most cases from the West to the East, and much less often in the contrary direction” [20]. An imperative need for it even now is evidenced, for example, by the fact that Shevchenko’s interpretation of the figure of Prometheus as a symbol of unconquerable nation, as Y. Boyko-Blokhin claims, unfortunately, remained out of sight of Caroline Corbeau-Parsons in her book “Prometheus in the nineteenth century: from myth to symbol” (2013) [11]. In her “vibrantly interdisciplinary comparative proj-

ect”, the researcher endeavors to present the Prometheus myth “in all its kaleidoscopic variety” [22]. The full-scale implementation of this ambitious plan would apparently benefit from the consideration of the innovative Ukrainian version of the character of Prometheus (T. Shevchenko, “The Caucasus”), which is undoubtedly one of the brightest segments in the “kaleidoscope” of world culture. The conceptual thesis of D. Ďurišin (which remains relevant for contemporary comparative studies) is very remarkable in this context as he insists on importance of finding out “to what extent modification of the idea of national consciousness in “dependent literatures” enriches the European literary process in the age of Romanticism, to what extent these two “opposite” or rather heterogeneous groups of national literatures are mutually interconnected and mutually intercrossed in their development” [5, p. 229].

It is worthy of note that Ukrainian emigre scholars have repeatedly emphasized this. In particular, D. Chyzhevsky, the author of “Comparative History of Slavic Literatures” (1968), argued that the Slavic influence on Western European literature should be investigated as well, he thought that it is an important task. But it is more important, according to the researcher, that “Slavic literatures often were “potential” for West European phenomena ... External impulses conditioned the nascence of peculiar works which, because of acuity of their content or form, brought something completely new to literary development” [23]. These thoughts are also supported by Y. Boyko-Blokhin [24], that is evidenced by his correspondence with D. Chyzhevsky as well [25].

This research is a first-ever analysis of Y. Boyko-Blokhin’s views on the problem of traditional plots and characters in the context of national (mainland and emigre) and foreign comparative literary studies [3, 15, 19].

The efficiency and further potential of the comparative scholar’s approach to investigation of the traditional material (given its usability in the national literary style development), which is consistent with contemporary researches, is substantiated [3, 11, 19]. The consideration of Y. Boyko-Blokhin’s opinion will undoubtedly deepen future comparative history of Slavic literatures, as well as studies, dedicated to analysis of Ukrainian literature in the European context, training courses in the history of Ukrainian and Slavic literatures.

Conceptual thoughts and ideas of the emigre scholar are of great importance not only for the continuous development of Ukrainian comparative studies [26, 27]. Y. Boyko-Blokhin’s views, in particular, on the problem of traditional plots and characters (that represent Ukrainian writing as an integral part of European literature, highlighting its contribution to the pan-European cultural heritage) furnish a convincing proof of the urgent need for “reformatting” of world Slavic studies, that is of crucial importance taking into account the question of the European canon as well.

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