

Conference Paper

The Fable Arrangement of John Ruskin's 'The King of the Golden River'

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Abstract

The article presents a fable study of J. Ruskin's novel 'The King of the Golden River' in accordance with the four-phase model of the literary text plot development. There sequentially come the separation phase, which corresponds to the description of the characters in the category of their values-based orientations; the partnership phase – meeting supernatural creatures, who become enemies for the older brothers and helpers for the youngest; challenges with moral duty; the deadly challenge phase – risky adventure and meeting with dying creatures; this phase is left uncompleted for the older brothers, but for the youngest one it introduces the incorporation phase, which transforms the main character in their new internality. The study of John Ruskin's novel 'The King of the Golden River' based on the classic fable system lets consider the evolution of the genre of a literary fairytale and expound its ideological and literary value.

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Received: 12 March 2019
Accepted: 17 April 2019
Published: 25 April 2019

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Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under
the responsibility of the
Individual and Society in the
Global Era Conference
Committee.

Keywords: fable; plot; novel; separation phase; partnership phase; liminal phase; incorporation phase; main character.

1. Introduction

John Ruskin (1819-1900) is an English writer and draughtsman, an art theorist and the Pre-Raphaelite ideologist, a prolific poet. His works, dedicated to both art theory and general cultural problems, made a great influence on the development of artistic ideas of that time. In his works dedicated to questions of architectural theory and history, we can see the romantic outcry against bourgeois reality, and it comes in combination with the plea for renaissance of medieval art.

Among fictional works of Ruskin, there were several poems, which were published only for tiny number of friends: the novel in verse *Dame Wiggins of Lee and her seven*

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wonderful cats and the novel *The King of the Golden River*. Ruskin's poems were characterized with an original, "secondary" romanticism, some "picturesqueness" and "architecture". They reflect the understanding of beauty, which found great expressions in his works. The novel *The King of the Golden River* which is one of the first works in the genre of author's tale in English literature, can be seen as the fictional imprinting of social issues in Ruskin's works, establishment of kindness and justice ideas [3].

As the genre, literary fairytale keeps inner connections with folklore and lets author create their own individual work, and every time the fairytale makes a special, inimitable fictional world [1]. The analytic research of the unusual text with universal matrix lets us go deeper into constructive and semantic originality of the plot [5].

2. Theoretical Background

The fable of literary work is determined as the factual narration point, i.e. all events, cases, actions and states are in their casual and chronological sequence. In such a manner, the fable is different from the plot, which is author's combination of well-formed elements [2]. As defined by Tomashevsky, fable is 'the set of events tied together which are communicated to us in the course of the work... Plot consists of the same events, but in the order and the connection they were given in the work' [4: 119].

Tyupa comes up with the general four-phase model of the literary text fable organization: "...in accordance with historical poetics it's much more effective to use the system of historically formed phases of the text development while analyzing plot and fable". These phases come sequentially: the separation phase, the partnership phase, the death challenge phase and the incorporation phase [5: 39].

The study purpose is to analyze the fable organization of John Ruskin's novel 'The King of the Golden River', written in 1841.

It tells the story about three brothers: Hans, Schwartz and Gluck from the Treasure Valley. Two cruel older brothers denied putting an old strangely-looking man up for the night, who knocked on their door. The old man turned to be a ghost - Southwest Wind, Esquire, who in turn floods their valley, turning their valley into a dead valley of red sand, and all of this caused the busting of brothers. Meanwhile the younger brother, twelve-year-old Gluck, disenchant the other powerful ghost – the King of the Golden River. In return for his services, the King showed Gluck the way to wealth, but only good-hearted people can go this way. The older brothers go on a treasure hunt, but their greed and inhumanity don't let them to lay hands on it, and both of them turned into black stones. The young Gluck was the last who goes on a treasure hunt. He stems difficulties and

helps those in need and suffering, and finally received the award and the Treasure Valley becomes rich and prosperous again.

3. Results

The fable organization of John Ruskin's novel *The King of the Golden River* is a liminal model, which consists of determining the main character from the general picture; finding a magic helper or an enemy; the death challenge which confirms the main character as a hero; and a final transformation. As a rule, the main character of a fairytale goes through the "wisening" phase, the phase of trial temptations and challenges before he/she goes to the crucial phase of the death challenge [5: 38]. We can see correspondence of novel's fable levels to the traditional fairytale plot building, and it shows author's address to the folklore tradition, as the leading genre feature of author's novel. It makes the novel more mythologically deeper.

The first **separation phase** has a complex structure and consists of the expanded characters' characteristic in the category of their values-based orientations.

In such a manner, the portrait description of the older brothers includes citation of their "outstanding ugliness" ("were very ugly men"), and of their "small, dull eyes", which «*were always half shut, so that you couldn't see into them, and always fancied they saw very far into you*» [7]. Such detailed portrait of a character not only determines them of the general picture, but also ironically states their life stance and imaginary oneness.

Cruelty of the older brothers in Ruskin's novel is entire, and their inhumanity is extended not only on people, but also on nature. The description of their cruelty has a clear social feature, which demonstrates author's address to social problems and aim to change didactic trend of the fairytale to social characterization. The final characterization of the older brothers is their nickname "Black Brothers", which was given to them for their "cruel and severe temper". This presages coming disaster, brings the category of death in the problematic level of the novel.

The younger brother Gluck's separation phase is contrast-based on characters of Hans and Schwartz, and includes establishment of his contrast to the older brothers, both portrait and personal: «*He was not above twelve years old, fair, blue-eyed, and kind in temper to every living thing*» [7]. The description of Gluck's appearance and temper can be seen as the characteristic of the different character. It separates him from the general picture, because his functioning in novel's textual reality - living in the Treasure Valley under the dominion of his brothers – is a completed living space.

It is worthy of note, that in terms of Gluck's characteristics, there is also an establishment of his oneness, which in particular is discernible in this phrase: «*He did not, of course, agree particularly well with his brothers, or, rather, they did not agree with him*» [7]. It circumstantially establishes his position of the novel's main character and central actant of the narration.

In general, the separation phase in Ruskin's novel leverages traditional fairytale about three brothers, where the older ones are evil and ugly, but the younger one is kind and beautiful. All of this lets us consider further expansion of fable levels not only in this particular novel, but also in the genre specificity of fairytales.

The description of the area, the place, where brothers live, is also can be an additional level, which implements the first separation phase. Landscape plays a significant role in Ruskin's novel, it is viable to consider it as one of the plot development factors. First of all, the mention of «a valley of the most surprising and luxuriant fertility» obviously separates it from the general picture.

Further, there comes an expanded description of the valley and its name (*The Treasure Valley*), and this strengthens its first establishment of exclusiveness. At last, all actions and events are conditional upon unusual nature of this area: «*At last came a very wet summer, and everything went wrong in the country around. The hay had hardly been got in, when the haystacks were floated bodily down to the sea by an inundation; the vines were cut to pieces with the hail; the corn was all killed by a black blight; only in the Treasure Valley, as usual, all was safe*» [7].

In such a way, in Ruskin's novel the separation phase includes contrast-based characteristics of all brothers, which is related to the description of the area where they live. Traditional fairytale situation comes into focus from author's position and includes, in particular, individualization of the younger brother's personality. It is significant factor for separation and concentration on the character, demonstrating the individual wholeness of personal existence "I-am-in-the-world".

The second stage of the fable text expansion is **the partnership phase** – establishment of new intersubjective connections, in particular, when the main character finds "helpers" and/or "enemies" [5: 39]. For three brothers the first point of this phase is the meeting with Southwest Wind, Esquire, who transformed into the old man and knocked on their door. It is remarkable, that there is an original individualization of the supernatural character. In Ruskin's novel, Southwest Wind, Esquire has not only his full name, but also a high social standing, not to speak of contributory attributes – e.g. his own name card. All of this significantly distinguishes him from typical fairy characters in folklore tales, where the image of characters is made by generalization and even abstracting.

Hans and Schwartz's behavior in the situation of establishment of intersubjective connections is determined completely by their affiliation with particular type of characters in the context of fairytale, and also their personal by values-based orientations. Older brothers denied putting an old man up for the night three times. In such a manner, within the plot and storyline Southwest Wind, Esquire turned out to be an enemy for brothers, and that expectedly makes sense. His reaction on brothers' cruelty has the form of triple complex of counter-move, organized in ascending order.

It is worthy to note the functioning of number 3 in the novel (3 brothers, 3 violations of bans, 3 levels of magic retribution), which is traditional for literary world of folktale. Number 3 has a sacred meaning, and within novel's fantastic reality number 3 arises time and again, making a deep mythological level of narration.

In point of the younger brother's storyline, the beginning of the partnership phase is also connected with the meeting with Southwest Wind, Esquire, but in the other category. First of all, the main character's prepossession to establishment of intersubjective connections is taking place even before the beginning of all events:

"What a pity," thought Gluck, "my brothers never ask anybody to dinner [7].

The situation of establishment of intersubjective connections for Gluck is realized in the form of violation of ban, but on the literary level it means gaining experience, exceeding the character's living experience level. It is worthy to note, that Gluck often hesitates about his actions, he is afraid of dire consequences, taking into account his relationships with brothers and his position in the family. Consequently, the situation of moral choice appears in Ruskin's novel, and its result marks the deepening of psychologism, which is characteristic for a literary fairytale unlike a folk tale, where characters are stable in terms of types, qualities and functions.

Final episode, where Black Brothers are punished, says for a successful establishment of partnership relations between Gluck and Southwest Wind, Esquire. The remark "...perhaps you had better go to your brother's room: I've left the ceiling on, there" [7] distinguishes Gluck of the whole situation again, indirectly establishing him as a chosen one, and this leads to further movement of the novel in many ways.

More semantically significant case of establishment of partnership relations is taking place in the second part of the fairytale: between the younger brother and the King of the Golden River. We can see a repetitive situation of an initial prepossession to establishment of partnership relations between characters even before narrative action: «...and were at last reduced to one large drinking-mug, which an uncle of his had given to little Gluck, and which he was very fond of» [8]. Traditional 'finding a new helper'

situation becomes more complicated by the motive of a magical predetermination, which strengthens the character's position of 'being-chosen-one'.

The episode, where Gluck meets the King for the first time, is a violation of traditional fairytale triality principle: a mysterious voice from the pot calls Gluck three times, but then there is the fourth time, and this time it sounds "passionately". On the one hand, the remark intonation is kind of a psychological characteristic factor of the character, which plays a significant role for understanding the whole image of the character in literary fairytales. On the other hand, there is a number 4, which meaning is connected with the concept of stability and completeness of the world order, and this makes a special level of perception of the King, as the pagan daemon. The motive of gold has a significant meaning here, taking into account that the first character's appearance in the novel was in the form of a subject: «*a very fierce little face, of the reddest gold imaginable*» [8], and with his further textual appearance from the pot with melt lets us consider the King as an original chthonian daemon. All of this makes the novel's semantics more deeper and mythological.

The episode when the younger brother and the King meet is depicted as a meeting of two old friends. Then goes the King's monologue, he represents himself but also paradoxically confirms, that Gluck is the chosen one: "*I am the King of what you mortals call the Golden River. The shape you saw me in was owing to the malice of a stronger king, from whose enchantments you have this instant freed me*" [8]. At first he counts the third brother as mortal, which is a little depreciative, but further the King appreciates Gluck's merits and equates him with mythological creatures. The boy's ability to disenchant the spirit of the river is supposed to have a unique heroic character in the novel's reality, the key factor of kindness, which guarantees harmony of the fairytale world order.

In such a manner, having met supernatural creatures, the older brothers only found enemies, but the younger one got magical helpers. When the main character demonstrates "wrong" behavior, he meets challenges complicated with moral choice situations. Anyway, Gluck successfully passes all tests, and in a literary plan it can be considered as an original "soul training".

The King's final remark is also personal: "*What I have seen of you, and your conduct to your wicked brothers, renders me willing to serve you*" (8), and it leads to the next stage of the fable expansion – **the liminal phase**, the death challenge.

For the older brothers the liminal phase is a mortality risk of the King's treasure hunt. In particular, it is the way to the Golden River's fountain through ice-tongue. Difficulties or this journey become more complicated by some mystical obstacles: «*Myriads*

of deceitful shadows, and lurid lights, played and floated about and through the pale-blue pinnacles» [9], creating special infernal fairytale's space, that symbolically can be considered as a way to the netherworld.

Later the brothers' liminal phase includes meeting with death in the forms of a dying dog, child and old man. Apart from triple death challenge, this episode can be qualified as a kindness challenge (a creature), innocence challenge (a child) and wise challenge (an old man). The brothers can't pass this test, and this is another factor of literary fairytale's problematic complication.

In accordance with passing all stages of the death challenge, we can see growing value-based infernal world concentration around the brothers. The landscape descriptions of 'serpent shadows', 'bloody smoke', 'unfathomable darkness' have a distinct netherworld color. In particular, the mention of 'the low dark clouds in the west' can be considered as death aesthetics in its archaic understanding. In accordance with mythology, "the land of the dead" is located in the West (as the sun sets in the west, it is always associated with death in mythology), consequently the west leads the way to destruction and death.

For the second brother's storyline, stated order of triple death meeting is violated by a personal challenge: «...he thought he saw his brother Hans lying exhausted on the path before him» [10]. It seems that this challenge has not only storyline function, but psychological characteristic function of the character. It is important for a literary fairytale, in which all characters' actions are explained by their personality and temper. This episode has a substantial significance also because of the laugh motive in its demonic version, which again refers to infernal chronotopos of the novel: «...he thought he saw a strange expression of mockery about its lips» [10]. The scene of the Black brothers' death has apocalyptic features and the final event is a clear allusion to downfall to hell.

As much as the older brothers can't pass the death challenge, their storyline ends there, and their level of the fable narrative expansion is left uncompleted, and that usually means literary discredit of characters' living position [5: 40], and this is stated by their turning into Black Stones, i.e. moving to a category of non-living things.

The liminal phase of the death challenge for Gluck is built similarly to his brothers', and at first the character has even bigger mortality risk and mystic things. However, at this death stage, while successfully passing all challenges, Gluck extends mercy to suffering and dying creatures, and his way becomes much easier. Then, the landscape starts to change and gains clear positive connotations, heavenly garden features. The heaven motive is expanded with sound and visual aspects, with angel music and heaven's light.

It's worthy to note the plot inversion of meetings dying creatures in terms of the younger brother's storyline: an old man – a child – a dog. Insensitivity to value-based change of characters' level expands the main character's psychological characteristic, and the idea of mercy and kindness expressed in his character. Also, the final episode, where Gluck meets a dog, has a significant meaning both for the stage of fable expansion and for the novel itself. Gluck's remark: "*Confound the King and his gold too,*" said Gluck; and he opened the flask, and poured all the water into the dog's mouth» [11] is the highest point of the novel, and signifies the change of character's personality. Gluck doesn't consider the final destination and the award – the King's treasure – as a key factor of his journey anymore. The process of character's achievement personhood takes place not only within this plot, but in the genre of fairytale in general. In accordance with the plot, this episode opens a final stage of fable expansion – the incorporation phase, where there goes change of outer (social) and inner (psychological) position of the main character [5].

In the novel "*The King of the Golden River*" the changes of outer and inner position of the main character are connected, and let us watch the miraculous transformation of a lonely scared child into the great lord of the Treasure Valley. This transformation is showed again in the perspective of social problematics. The symbolic "reincarnation" is often accompanied with character's homecoming, they return to their old, broken and loosen connections. In the last scene of the novel we can see the character's transformation with the Valley's reincarnation: «*And thus the Treasure Valley became a garden again, and the inheritance which had been lost by cruelty was regained by love*» [11], and on this background, the character's new quality is emphasized again. Mentioning "a flourishing garden" and "the power of love" in the final scene, the author refers to motives of Christian tribute and resurrection.

As **the result**, a fable study of John Ruskin's novel 'The King of the Golden River' goes in accordance with the four-phase model of the literary text plot development [5: 38]. There sequentially come the separation phase, which corresponds to the description of the characters in the category of their values-based orientations; the partnership phase – meeting supernatural creatures, who become enemies for the older brothers and helpers for the youngest; challenges with moral duty; the deadly challenge phase – risky adventure and meeting with dying creatures; this phase is left uncompleted for the older brothers, but for the youngest one it introduces the incorporation phase, which transforms the main character in their new internality.

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