

The Concept of Personality of the Writer in the Books by A. Bely “Arabesques” and “Green Meadow”

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Abstract

The heritage of the Silver Age, in particular the works by Andrey Bely, the theorist of symbolism, the poet and writer, critic, attract the interest in modern study of literature. Many new studies of both foreign scholars [Gerald Janecek, 1978; Helle L. J., 1996.; Langen, 2005], and of our country are devoted to his works. In literary studies a number of scholars engaged in the problems of prose and poetic texts, memoirs by A. Bely, however, the works covering his critical prose are almost non-existent. T. L. Kapinus started to repair this gap in examining the symbolist's critical early prose of 1902 - 1905 in terms of aesthetics and poetics [Kapinus T. L. 2013]. It defines the aim of our work - to have a detailed look at the genre originality of the articles, books by A. Bely through the prism of his symbolist concept of personality. The material for this study is based on the books of the articles by A. Bely “Arabesques” (1910) and “Green Meadow” (1911). To study the genre peculiarity of the symbolist's books “Arabesques” and “Green Meadow”, the concepts of personality in literary portraits, we used the methods of cultural, structural and system analysis. The analysis carried out has shown that the critic depicts contemporary writers and their predecessors from the point of view of their ability to know the mysteries of existence. In order to show how the portrayed is close to the answer, A. Bely uses the following models: the personality of the creator becomes like theurgist, who can transform the world and bring humanity to All-unity; the ability of the personality to hear the true music of life (music category); appeal to the archaic model face image - face - mask. The order of literary portraits and articles in books reveals the degree of personality's importance for the era and ability to deliver the world from chaos.

Keywords: criticism, the Silver Age, A. Bely, the concept of personality, literary genre of the portrait.

Introduction

In the era of the Silver Age the attitude toward the mysteries of the author's personality, his individual characteristics had fundamentally changed. If in XIX century more attention was paid to the very author's works on the whole (there were changes in 1870-1880s), at the turn of XIX - XX centuries the personality of the author, his character and outlook come to the fore. The question of the concept of the personality of the turn of the century has been appealed to by many scholars (L. A. Kolobaeva [Kolobaeva L. A., 1990], V. M. Papernyi [Papernyi V. M. 2002] A. S. Afanasyev [Afanasyev A. S. , 2012]). However, their academic papers dealt with the study of the concept of personality in the works by other writers, or in literary prose by A. Bely. The influence of symbolist views on the nature of personality in A. Bely's critic, in particular in the literary portraits collected in the book "Arabesques" and "Green Meadow" has not been thoroughly studied so far. This determines the objective of our research – to find out the influence of symbolist concept of personality on specifics of genre peculiarity of literary critical books "Arabesques" and "Green Meadow".

Methods

In this study, the leading methods have become the methods of cultural, structural and system analysis, allowing us to trace how the philosophical conceptions of that time influenced A. Bely's aesthetic and critical views, determining the structure of the books "Arabesque" and "Green Meadow" and the specific character of genre forms of literary portraits by A. Bely. We also rely on a series of studies on the philosophical and aesthetic analysis of Russian symbolism [Sayapova A. M., 2014; Vafina A. H., 2015; Bekmetov R. F., 2015].

Results

It is generally known that the views of the symbolists of 1900s exerted strong influence on V. I. Solovyov's teaching. According to the philosopher's opinion, the world is in the state of chaos and general separation, as it was away from God and is held by the evil in captivity. The roots go deep into cosmic history when the Soul of the World, the Eternal Feminine, Sophiya the Wisdom had decided to create the world without God, thus creating it imperfect, and she herself became its hostage. So all people have to "to go from the general division and chaos to union with God" again [Magomedov, 2009]. This philosophical conception has laid the foundations for the aesthetics of Russian symbolism, such as pantheism, myth-making life creation, we will dwell upon them in greater detail in order to reveal how this vision of the world is reflected in the criticism by A. Bely.

Following the teachings by V. Solovyov, the symbolists were imbued with the idea of "path", which, according to G. A. Tolstykh, was reflected in the works by the poets of the Silver Age who wrote collections of verses, which, preserving their integrity, were considered in the context of the art representative of this era [Tolstykh, 1994]. Accepting Z. G. Mintz's opinion, the researcher notes: "This perception of the poet's works as a single text is an essential feature of the symbolic world-view" [Tolstykh, 1994].

A. Bely was literally infected with V. Solovyov's ideas and actively developed them in his works. The idea of "path" and creativity as theurgic act determines the order of the literary portraits and the content. A. Bely created "Arabesques" to depict modern literary era, "not to prove but to show" [Bely, 2012]. The symbolists believe that creativity is the way to achieve a universal harmony that specifies the subtitle "On the Pass" of the cycle "Literary Diary". The article "The Sacred Victim" gives a clue to understanding of this cycle: "We are on the pass and still do not know where to go" [Bely, 2012]. So in this cycle the critic passes his

opinion about the modern literary processes (symbolism, mystical anarchism), and then arranges the microcycle "About the Writers", in which the era of the turn of the century appears "in persons".

In another book by Bely "Green Meadow", the issues of Russian literature are important, as the very title suggests the theme of Russia through the symbol. The critic of course, worried about the state of contemporary literature and its development, and it is this collection in which the symbolist considers the works by certain personalities as a theurgic act. In the article "Apocalypse in Russian Poetry", that closes the book, A. Bely, reflecting on art, writes that it is "the shortest path to religion; here mankind, knowing the essence, combines the unity of the Eternal Wife: work carried out to the end, turns directly into the religious creativity – theurgy" [Bely, 2012]. So in this collection the critic considers Merezhkovsky, Bryusov and Balmont to be the theurgists showing their significance for literature and revealing how they were able to approximate to All-unity. He believes that Merezhkovsky could see something that people omit, but he could not manage to convey it in his work. At the same time, Bely notes that the portrayed, combining history, criticism, mysticism and poetry, brings closer humanity to a new life, but Merezhkovsky, according to the symbolist, remained "realized to the end nowhere" [Bely, 2012].

Two literary artists of today, according to the critic, realized in their works the basic theurgic principle at most, which includes the continuity of form and content [Bely, 2012]. Actually, these two figures close the gallery of literary portraits - Bryusov and Balmont. Bryusov was able to subordinate the content to the form that pounces on the symbol, without achieving this integrity, the images reflect something demonic [Bely, 2012]. However, the poet "stands between work and life, cleansed by creativity", as he could not fully realize the principle of life creation [Bely, 2012].

Life creation is one of the main features of the aesthetics of symbolism, but they could not achieve it in reality. The last literary portrait of the book is "Balmont", in whose personality Bely sees great talent. Poetry and music united in the works of the portrayed, but the critic emphasizes Balmont's "strange integrity" in his silhouette as if he has taken off the ground and finds no peace. At the same time the bright red light radiates his works (we will dwell upon the symbols of color in Chapter Three), that warms humanity: "Balmont is a shining mirror of aestheticism, burning with the hundreds of rubies. When the source of the light goes off, how long we will be admiring these lines, filled with light" [Bely, 2012].

It is essential to say about the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy on A. Bely's views. Personality, philosophical ideas and style of Nietzsche's writings influenced many writers and poets of this era. The critic attempts to compare the portrayed with superman, which becomes apparent in reference to this theory, in comparison with Nietzsche. For example, in silhouette, "V. Solovyov" (the book of articles "Arabesques") A. Bely calls the portrayed to be "camel" and "child with lion's mane", which reflects the stages of rebirth of the spirit. However, it should be noted that, in depicting Nietzsche's personality in literary portrait, the critic uses V. I. Solovyov's theurgy. The symbolist believes Nietzsche to be really "alive", at the same time it is necessary to take into account that Bely writes about himself and his generation in his book "Arabesques" in the following way: "We are the deadmen, decomposing the old life, but we have not been born to a new life yet" [Bely, 1994]. The critic sees in this philosopher a man who has cognized the secrets of existence. According to A. Bely, Nietzsche was able to connect the gap between the East and the West and become "a preacher of a new life" [Bely, 2012]. This position of the symbolist determines the place of this portrait in the book "Arabesques": it comes after the article "The Songs of Life", in which

the critic reflects on lifelessness of the era and on creative work in life, and life can be found in its rhythm, the rhythm of the music. It was Nietzsche to be able to hear it amid the chaos, and therefore, cognize the mysteries of existence.

As is generally known, the Symbolists put the category of music to a high position as “in music there is the closest approximation of the depths of the spirit to the surface of consciousness” [Bely, 2012]. To know the depth of the human soul is possible only through music, but at the same time to arouse a real life. So, the ability to hear the music for A. Bely becomes a criterion of personality assessment, which is revealed in the analysis of literary portraits: “Who does not have an ear for music, does not understand anything” [Bely, 2012]. A striking example can be the portrait “Ibsen and Dostoyevsky”, where we find references to Nietzsche, who, to use A. Bely’s figurative expression, has eagle flags for flight, and Dostoevsky has none. An important thing to assess the personality of the writer of XIX century is that he is not able to feel the harmony of music: “he had stricken incongruous notes all his life” [Bely, 2012]. The symbolist thought that Dostoyevsky headed Russian literature off, and now to restore it, one needs to refer either to Pushkin or to Gogol. According to Bely, Dostoyevsky moved in breadth, and Ibsen chose the path to the sun, moving in height, and in modern literature it is necessary to move up, finding harmony of body and spirit. One of the arguments cited by the critic indicating the right way of the creator of “new drama” becomes music: “how much music is there in simple cold words” [Bely, 2012].

Another way of cognizing the mysteries of existence becomes a myth, which, according to E. I. Adamyan, “allows Bely to notice and show all the elements of the human spirit, to get into the very its core, to reveal its depth” [Adamyan, 2011]. With this end in view, the critic uses the archaic mythologem image - face - mask, which many poets of the Silver Age resorted to (M. Voloshin, A. Block, V. Ivanov, etc. This reference is associated with the conception of personality, as the veritable essence is covered with the mask that one needs to expose. From our point of view, there is also V. I. Solovyov’s influence, who believed criticism to expose the “background” of creativity of an author. According to the noted scholar of the Silver Age and works by A. Bely V. M. Paperny, reference to this archaic model is associated with impersonal conception of creativity when an individual “self” is replaced by soullessness [Paperny 2002]. Confirmation of this view comes from the formal order of the symbolist’s articles: “we” is often used instead of the pronoun “I”, for example, “and we are dead” (“Gogol”), “we have already betrayed his way” (“Nietzsche”), “we know that there is light” (“Ibsen and Dostoyevsky”). It is not a manifestation of scientific ethics, namely the desire for such unity and sense of mass. However, the reflection of this conception is present at the level of content as well: it should be remembered that the myth, according to “Solovyov’s adherents”, was to have become “a way to overcome subjectivism and individualism” and embodied the idea of the collective [Mintz, 2000]. The aspiration to take off the mask and find the Face is associated with this idea, which reflects the truth of the world. So, throwing off the mask, man is conscious of his divine spark but also feels a common connection with all of humanity [Mokina, 2004]. In Bely’s portraits Face has two meanings:

- 1) The critic understands the face as inwardness of the image object, hidden behind a mask-face. By creating the silhouette “Merezhkovsky” Bely portrays a wax, deathly face (like a mask) that conceals his true character.
- 2) The Face as a way of merging with the world, but such knowledge is opened to few people, and one needs to be prepared to this vision. In literary portraits, it is reflected in the fact that the vision of the Face is terrifying and has become a tragedy, overtaken personality. In the portrait of “Gogol” A. Bely explored why the Russian classic had not been able to overcome the abyss opened before him.

On the other hand, this triad - a reflection of the human soul (divine - human - feral) shows that on the faces of the people there is a distorting mask that has grown and that hides their true nature. In literary portraits of the critic there is present such understanding of the mask, which coexists with other meanings, which will be discussed below. An example is the portrait of Z. Gippius: "Oh, Mr. Krainy: the mask has flown off your face: before us there is a respected poet" [Bely, 2012]. However, N. V. Mokina believes that sometimes mask becomes a synonym of face as face hides the inner nature of man from the others [Bely, 2012].

It should be noted that mask does not always distort the essence, A. Bely believes "mask" to hide the secrets of knowledge and at the same time to be a sign that distinguishes a person who has known the truth. The use of this model shows similarities in the perception of the world by the ancient Greeks and the modern man [Mokina, 2004]. From our point of view, this is due to Nietzsche's philosophical conception of "eternal return", which is based on the idea that in every particular phenomenon there is something Whole and past and future is reflected in this single [Mintz, 2000]. In the portrait of "Friedrich Nietzsche" critic pictures the image of the philosopher as "a great mystic of life", but other people do not notice it under the mask, and, according to Bely, the modernity cannot evaluate Nietzsche's merits, approximate to the truth which the philosopher could know: "the way to which we are called by Nietzsche is the "eternal" road that we have forgotten: the road that Christ took, the road that has been taken by "raja yogis" of India" [Bely, 2012].

As we have already noted, the image of abyss is a criterion for assessing the personality of the writer and co-exists with the mythologeme face image – face – mask. A. Bely in the article "The Symbolism as a World-View" writes: "Gulf yawns at our feet when we tear away the mask from the phenomena. We are horrified by gulf that separates us from the sleeping. We are horrified by the difference between the views and being" [Bely, 2012]. After the mask has been torn off the world gulf of terror and fear opens wide, the image of which is associated with Greek mythology. It relates to the chaos, which in the Greek tradition was called wide chasm from which the world had been formed [Adamyanyan, 2011]. According to ancient notions, all the dark hollows are correlated with the feelings of rejection, decay and death [Adamyanyan, 2011]. At the same time, according to A. Bely, gulf opens only to the select few: "Artists, poets, musicians - those few for whom contemplation of the depths is open [Bely, 2012]. As the scholar E. I. Adamyanyan notes, the use of this image autobiographic portraits of the symbolist means the presence of the prophetic gift in an object of representation, the ability to see more than ordinary people can. It seems to us that this meaning has already been in the critical portraits of A. Bely. Confirmation of this idea can be the portraits "Ibsen and Dostoyevsky" (the book "Arabesques") and "Gogol" (the book "Green Meadow") to be already mentioned earlier.

We can trace the author's attitude through this image in a number of other portraits of the two books "Arabesques" and "Green Meadow". In the article "The Second Volume", which is part of L. Andreev's literary portrait, the image of "the real abyss" arises and "sour notes" do not sound in his works [Bely, 2012]. There becomes apparent the parallel with the portrait "Ibsen and Dostoyevsky", in which the same assessment criteria are used, as both Dostoevsky and Andreyev depicted the horrors of their time. However, as one can note, in his contemporary A. Bely sees true talent reflecting the chaos of the era: "L. Andreyev - the only true portrayer of shapeless chaos of life" [Bely, 2012]. Also, the gift of prophecy is marked in A. P. Chekhov, in whose characters "the spirit of gulf" is felt, Bryusov and Balmont, in whose works the depth of gulf is revealed.

Summary

A. Bely, creating the images of the writers, identifies the criteria through which he assesses the personality. The critic resorts to the myth in order to see the true essence of the portrayed. Those personalities acquire the real value who, like theurgists, can lead humanity towards All-Unity. A. Bely considers F. Nietzsche, V. Solovyov, V. Bryusov, D. Merezhkovsky and K. Balmont to be among them. The assessment criterion becomes the category of music that allows to show whether the personality under studied by the critic to choose the right way or not; the image of abyss that is associated with the archetypal mythologeme face image – face – mask, by overcoming which one can know the mysteries of existence.

Conclusion

Thus, the use of these models allows A. Bely to express his attitude to the writers of XIX century and to modern times, as well as to the dynamics of the literary process and the world order.

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