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Components of the neoromantic plot scheme in the works by A. Grin and L. Perutz

Irina V. Klimenko 

*Lomonosov Moscow State University,
1 Leninskiye Gory, Moscow, 119991, Russian Federation*

 klim.irishka4797@rambler.ru

Abstract. The functioning of the components of the neoromantic plot scheme “an ordinary person in unusual circumstances” in the works by A. Grin, who is traditionally recognized as a neoromantic, and in the works by a representative of another artistic movement L. Perutz, is compared. This kind of comparison seems to be productive as it allows defining the differential features of a neoromantic plot. The thesis is expressed about the rethinking of the plot scheme in the novel by the Austrian writer. In the works by A. Grin the main character reveals his best qualities by dealing with unusual circumstances and coping with himself, however in the novel by L. Perutz, circumstances make the character to overcome himself to no avail, because he is deprived of the necessary spiritual qualities. Changing of points of view functions both in stories by A. Grin and in the Perutz’s novel as a plot-forming and compositional device and it is also used in creating images of characters. A. Grin focuses on the opposition between the character’s inner point of view and the point of view which is external to him. In the novel by L. Perutz the main character tries to find himself coping with external points of view. The interaction between the neoromantic and modernistic features of the novel is analyzed. L. Perutz solves the issue of the human existence reality/unreality, the fragility of the human self-boundaries by modifying neoromantic plot scheme. Integrity of A. Grin’s characters helps them to cope with circumstances and with themselves in circumstances whereas the L. Perutz’s character acquires integrity only on the verge of death.

Keywords: neoromanticism, modernism, character, point of view, romantic duality

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Компоненты неоромантической сюжетной схемы в произведениях А. Грина и Л. Перуца

И.В. Клименко 

Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова,
Российская Федерация, 119991, Москва, Ленинские горы, д. 1

✉ klim.irishka4797@rambler.ru

Аннотация. Сравняется функционирование компонентов неоромантической сюжетной схемы «обыкновенный человек в необычных обстоятельствах» в произведениях А. Грина, традиционно причисляемого к неоромантикам, и представителя иного художественного направления – Л. Перуца. Сравнение подобного рода продуктивно, так как позволяет вычлнить дифференциальные признаки неоромантического сюжета. Высказывается тезис о переосмыслении сюжетной схемы в романе австрийского писателя. Если в произведениях А. Грина благодаря необычным обстоятельствам как катализатору борьбы героя с самим собой раскрываются его лучшие качества, в романе Л. Перуца события подталкивают героя к преодолению себя, однако этого не происходит, так как он оказывается лишен необходимого внутреннего потенциала. Определяется роль смены точек зрения как неоромантического сюжетоформирующего и композиционного приема и в рассказах А. Грина, и в «Прыжке в неизвестное» Л. Перуца, а также использование ее при создании образов героев. А. Грин делает акцент на противопоставлении точки зрения героя и точки зрения, внешней по отношению к нему. В романе Л. Перуца герой, борясь с внешними точками зрения, проходит путь к обретению себя. Анализируется взаимодействие неоромантического плана романа с модернистским. Л. Перуц, прибегая к неоромантической сюжетной схеме, решает на ее основе вопрос реальности/ирреальности бытия человека, показывает зыбкость границ человеческого Я. Если герои А. Грина – натуры изначально целостные, поэтому способные справиться с обстоятельствами и с собой в обстоятельствах, герой Л. Перуца приобретает целостность только на пороге смерти.

Ключевые слова: неоромантизм, модернизм, образ героя, точка зрения, двоемирие

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Introduction

Neo-Romanticism is one of the most influential artistic phenomena of the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, and one of the most difficult for interpretation. The problem of its interaction with other literary movements and tendencies has been repeatedly addressed by such researchers as V.M. Tolmachev, V.A. Lukov, D.E. Yakovlev, D.K. Tsarik; nevertheless, it supposes further consideration of a number of general and specific issues.

The analysis of A. Grin’s plot scheme “ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances”, neo-romantic in nature, reveals a correlation at the level of typologi-

cal similarity with the plots of two works by L. Perutz, an Austrian writer scarcely studied in Russian literary criticism – the novel “From Nine to Nine” and the story “Turlupin”. Considering that L. Perutz is traditionally ranked with expressionism, the comparison of his works with those of A. Grin is productive, since the identification of the mentioned plot scheme pursued in them as a result of neo-romantic influence, makes it possible to clearly differentiate its main components which can be perceived as major ones in neo-romantic poetics by a representative of different type of fiction. This article attempts to consider the way it is transformed in L. Perutz’s novel “From Nine to Nine” on the basis of the techniques specific of the indicated plot scheme used in A. Grin’s stories “Pillory” and “Hundred Miles Along the River”.

Discussion

Point of view as a plot forming device

One of the key plot lines of a neo-romantic work is how an ordinary person finds himself in unusual circumstances which help him to discover and develop his inner potential. In depicting the Grin’s characters’ inner world, playing with points of view is of central importance as well as contrasting the observer’s position and the character’s self-awareness. The observer’s point of view can make a character seem ordinary, but in the course of storyline development he discovers own outstanding qualities, and our attitude to him changes. In this context, the image of Goan, a character from the story ‘Pillory’, is illustrative.

At the beginning of the narrative the reader tends to take the perspective of outsider in relation to the main character. It is the “philistine’s” consciousness that focuses the reader’s attention on Goan’s “ordinariness”. Once a switch towards the protagonist’s point of view takes place, his actions appear to the reader in a different light – not only the actions but also the world in general. The contraposition of the protagonists’ (Goan and Daisy) viewpoints against those of the commoners in “Pillory” turns out to be a way of realising the romantic principle of two-worldness. Ordinarity as such does not belong to the outside world; it exists in the protagonists’ minds, in their world perception.

Owing to the constant shift of viewpoints over the course of the narrative the interpretation of the character’s actions and their evaluation changes, however the integrated image is not split, being confirmed by the commoners’ viewpoint presented by A. Grin as an “objective” opinion of a third-person narrator.

L. Perutz also uses the method of playing with points of view, making it a major plot-building device. On the one hand, the narrative initially sets out to transform the main character from an ordinary man into an outstanding personality through realisation of his spiritual strength in a difficult situation, as is assumed in neo-romantic plots. On the other hand, this does not happen in reality since Stanislaus Demba is imparted with “extraordinary qualities” factitiously from the outside. He tries on masks of different personalities, adapting himself to other people’s opinions. The neo-romantic principle of character’s dependence on circumstances is realised in a deliberately literal way.

The compositional structure of L. Perutz's novel is a kaleidoscope of different viewpoints in respect of the protagonist. In every chapter the actors from whose perspective he is portrayed attempt to interpret his behaviour, with the author presenting Demba's own point of view as well. On the one hand, it reveals the true reason of the main character's strange behaviour, while on the other hand, it leaves us in the dark till the very end, not knowing that everything that happened to him was a figment of his imagination. Moreover, the very fact of the narrative – Demba's reflection about himself – opens a window for a certain social experience of the protagonist, enabling him to rediscover own life (Schmidt, 2010, p. 7).

Under the influence of other people's points of view, Demba's image gradually acquires high-pitched romantic traits with further debunking of this image.

For instance, Demba's ladylove Sonja's imagination transforms him into a jealous prom trotter, a character of romantic stories:

“Sie begriff sofort. In der ersten Sekunde schon war es ihr klar: Stanislaus Demba hielt eine Waffe unter dem Mantel verborgen. Sie hatte nicht Zeit genug gehabt, um unterscheiden zu können, ob es ein Revolver war, oder ein Messer, oder ein Todschläger, sie wußte nur, daß sich ihr Leben in höchster Gefahr befand”.

Sonja, in the first place, imagined herself, not Demba, as a romantic heroine. His character filled the place of a jealous beau in her imagination. In this case she herself was to become a heroine of extraordinary events. In a neo-romantic work, “the commonness or exoticism of the world around depends not on the immanent qualities inherent in it, but on the nature of the individual's world outlook” (Lukov, 2012, p. 311). Analysing E. Rostand's works, V.A. Lukov shows how the character's point of view in a neo-romantic work transforms the world: “Whereas in ‘The Princess of Dream’ or ‘The Woman of Samaria’ the world of reality was originally exotic, legendary, and its merger with the dream world came about naturally – in contrast to it, fantasy brought by Liunel's image imparted significance and romanticism to a commonplace provincial town” (Lukov, 2009, p. 21). The same applies to the image of L. Perutz's protagonist whose “significance and romanticism” is engendered by Sonja.

V.A. Lukov notes that the neo-romantic character is dependent on the circumstances which do not suppress him, “but enable him to reveal himself more expressively”. In “From Nine to Nine” L. Perutz turns this device inside out. The circumstances and the protagonist exist apart from each other until Demba becomes aware that people around interpret his behaviour in their own way and that he can benefit from it if he manages to make the right use of the situation. Initially, he is not prompted to treat himself in this way. Demba has no mental attraction for outstanding deeds, nor does he have a romantic view of the reality. However, gradually he begins to notice the unusual treatment of himself and comes to terms with his outrageous situation; both of these circumstances encourage him to think of himself as exceptional. L. Perutz shows that his protagonist, while not being extraordinary at all, finds a way to take on the position of an “extraordinary person”.

“...mit diesen Handschellen bin ich abseits der Welt. Ganz allein steh' ich gegen die Millionen anderer Menschen. Wer nur einen Blick auf meine gefesselten Hände erhascht, der ist von dieser Sekunde an mein Feind und ich der seine, und wenn er vorher der friedlichste Mensch war. <...>Aber das lockt, Steffi”.

In the scene of intimate talk with Steffi, Demba's image is endowed with the features of a classical romantic hero: estrangement from the society, being elect, possession of some knowledge inaccessible to others, irony over the “grey mass humanity”. A similar scene is created by A. Grin in “Hundred Miles Along the River”:

“Above all, one must be lonely. Thinking that he had studied people perfectly <...>, Nock decided <...>, having ordered his heart to be silent for ever, to meet the end of his days with sublime sadness of a sage who has knowledge of all earthly vanities – just the way a doctor, crowned with glory and grey-hair signs of great age, walks around a ward of hopelessly ill people <...>. “Yes, of course,” says the doctor with a cheerful look, “you are here by misunderstanding and in fact everything is fine...” However, the doctor is not a fool: he sees all the sores, all contrition brought by ailment, and thinks little of the sick. <...> They are not his company”.

However, there is a significant difference between Nock and Demba. Although the cited quotation reveals Nock's view of himself, although it distorts the reality to a great extent (the author deliberately creates stylistic and imaginative references to works of Romanticism, which evokes the reader's sense of sublime and at the same time of something comic), Nock in a sense is entitled to think of himself in this way. His biography is inspired by the spirit of romance and includes events of romantic-adventuristic nature: the storyline of a woman who betrayed the hero, for instance, is often found in romantic works, but now the hero, moreover, turns into a gloomy fugitive (a favourite romantic image). Nock is developing, finds the inner strength to respond to the events in his life, and depending on what the circumstances require of him he reveals himself in different aspects. In the end he appears to the reader as a noble person and his image ceases to be shaped by romantic clichés.

Demba is an ordinary man. He is not endowed with any romantic qualities. If we examine each episode separately it becomes clear that the situations in which the hero finds himself are not beyond the ordinary life pattern, and it is only the characters' worldview that endows them with special qualities.

In the scene with Dr. Becker's daughter, Ellie, two heroic-romantic interpretations of the character's unusual hands spring up at once. Firstly, Demba himself, having already mastered the due role and trying to control the situation, comes up with a story about how he had to put out the fire. It should be noted that the character's image, despite some quite appropriate situations, is never endowed with romantic pathos, although his development might seem to proceed in that very direction. Demba falls short of such type of hero even in his imagination.

However, the imagination of Ellie and her friends, on the other part, is able to turn him into a hero of a clichéd romantic story:

“– *Sie haben ein Duell gehabt, erklärte Anny mit Bestimmtheit.*
– *Ach so, – sagte Demba mit merklicher Erleichterung.*
– *Hab' ich recht oder nicht? – fragte Anny. – Mir müssen Sie keine Märchen erzählen. Mein Bruder ist nämlich grüner Alemane.*
– *Aber Sie irren sich. Es sind wirklich nur Brandwunden, – versicherte Demba*”.

On his own, the hero is not able to hold on to the position of a romantic hero. Demba is enticed by this status, but he is not willing to stand out from the bulk of ordinary people in order not to attract attention; moreover, he can not do it as he does not have due inner potential for this.

The realistic and romantic views of the hero finally diverge in the scene in the café. On the one hand, this is Demba's first conscious attempt to fully get transformed into a person he is seen from outside. He attempts to take a risk and take the place of the romantic hero offered to him, to test “*die Gewalt, die ihm über die anderen gegeben war*”.

On the other hand, the attempt to ultimately reincarnate fails miserably. Firstly, the protagonist's behaviour prior to the climax of the novel discredits him on the whole; secondly, even after managing to take on the position of a romantic personality for a while, Demba again fails to sustain it – he escapes “back to himself”, breaks away from the others' points of view.

After dwelling on a few examples of play with people's positions in the novel, it is feasible to turn to the composition of the work and make analysis of the method using the point of view as a structure-forming device.

The plot and the composition

Demba's physical (Larkin, 2006, p. 130), social and personal integrity in the novel proves to be compromised, “broken down” in the context of the composition “torn apart” into separate points of view: “L. Perutz has not only created a picture of disintegration of a human personality, he depicted a disorderly man “overstrained” by some life situation, striving to preserve himself, often at the cost of losing not only the comprehension of reality, but also his physical state” (Gurevich, 2009, p. 532).

Whereas in “Pillory” the characters got split into “philistines” and those who see the world through the prism of romanticism, L. Perutz's novel presents a broader system of worldviews. The author's conceptualisation, despite the third-person narrative – the form contrasting with the “fantasy of death” (Martinez, 2007, p. 32) – truly reveals itself only in the finale:

“*Und Dembas Hände, die Hände, die sich in Angst versteckt, in Groll empört, im Zorn zu Fäusten geballt <...> – Stanislaus Dembas Hände waren endlich frei*”.

The author's point of view in the finale elevates the work to a level of global philosophical reflection that took shape of a detective novel.

The idea that “nothing has happened” is realised in several story layers. In the first place, this is evident in each of the mini-stories in which Demba is pursuing some sort of goal. If his efforts had not been successful each story would

not be complete, which would create a motivation to move forward. However, L. Perutz completes all these stories in a non-trivial way. The main character in each of these micro-plots takes efforts to get money without arousing suspicion, eventually gets it but doesn't take it because he literally can't get his hands on it. All of his efforts are nullified, and with them – each story line, since he returns to the starting point. This type of construction comes close to the poetics of absurdity, as it reveals absolute pointlessness of Demba's actions, his attempts to achieve something, knowing that all of them are doomed to failure. Finally, human life as such gets perceived as a series of meaningless actions, futile in nature (which is shown by the author at least at the level of the form: all of these actions are nothing but falsehood, a figment of the hero's imagination), unable to bring one's life to anything but death – no attempt of Demba to get money can be successful. The motif of imaginary acquisition of money and simultaneous loss of life time (Carter, 2006, p. 102) leads to a tragic finale: the idea that death is a deliverance from meaningless actions the hero is encircled in, a complete liberation both from handcuffs and from dependence on circumstances, on others' point of view – but the character pays a high price for the liberation.

“One can not <...> ignore a notable feature of Neo-Romanticism – destruction of illusions by the brutal truth of life” (Kudryavtseva, 2017, p. 57). Liberating the hero from illusions, the author confronts him with the reality, which ends tragically for him, though disengaging him from the world of absurdity. Real life, not a game of imagination, begins for Demba when he realises that he is dying. A parallel to the finale of “The Process” by F. Kafka is appropriate here. Josef K. tries, throughout the novel, to penetrate into the viewpoints of people around him and to see himself from their perspective. L. Perutz's character does the same. The awareness of death by both Josef K. and Demba brings liberation from the prevailing viewpoints of others and ends in return to own self – a motif found in neo-romantic works, in particular, in H. Ibsen's “Peer Gynt”.

The specificity of the composition – chains of equally constructed events – may suggest another explanation: “The problem of self-identity is realised in a literary work in the form of the hero's ‘biographic story’ and has a ‘path – target’ structure <...>. The meanings of ‘life’ in the emphatic sense and in terms of ‘self-identification’ become central categories in the early modernism's ‘path-target’ structures” (Chekhlova, 2015, pp. 53–54). The search for money in a vicious circle of illusory events is perceived by the hero as a way to make up for the lack of the real life purpose; Demba tries to establish himself in the reality, but does not succeed. Even his own imagination prevents him from asserting his identity. The conflict that led to Demba's death is “a conflict <...> between oneself and one's desired image of oneself” (Moskvina, 2017, p. 202). “The complex narrative construction illustrates the idea of the novel – impending doom and impossibility to break out of the circle: if a person were given a second life, a chance to live his life anew, he would live it the same way” (Chekhlova, 2015, p. 132).

The unexpected finale, for all its numerous parallels with the modernist vision of the personality, was probably dictated to the author precisely by neo-

romantic poetics. “Neo-romanticists cultivate the notion of heroism as an intrinsic quality which may fail to manifest itself in concrete heroic deeds. This understanding of heroism is vividly expressed in a short story by J. Richepin “Don Jose the Brave”. Don Jose performs all his heroic deeds in his dreams, while in ordinary life he is totally unremarkable” (Lukov, 2012, p. 311). Both characters perform their deeds in the world of illusions. The romantic image of Demba, as well as of Don Jose, is nothing more than an illusion, and both characters fall short of the status of romantic personality.

Conclusion

The specific traits of L. Perutz’s novel that were revealed by comparing it with A. Grin’s works are formed from a combination of Romantic and Modernist features. The idea of two-worldness stands out: L. Perutz’s hero exists on the boundary delineating the reality and what is dictated by his own (or someone else’s) point of view. Meanwhile modernism influenced the form of depiction of the dual world: it is embodied in the play of mind.

As for the neo-romantic features, the authors of the present paper rely on the research by V.A. Lukov who was able to distinguish the regional features of European and American neo-romanticism.

The neo-romantic tradition had a strong influence on the choice of storyline scheme and the protagonist’s image, although the author reconceptualises the neo-romantic belief in a common man. L. Perutz, like A. Grin, portrays him in an extraordinary situation – this way the basis for traditional neo-romantic collision is formed. However, whereas A. Grin’s characters (in terms of his neo-romantic nature) are able to find strength to withstand troubled circumstances, which gradually leads them to the status of heroic personality, L. Perutz’s character has no such resources. The peradventures that happen to Demba could have helped him to realise himself as a romantic hero, but this does not happen since he does not fit this status for his qualities. L. Perutz resorts to the neo-romantic form, but fills it with a different, non-neo-romantic content.

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Bio note:

Irina V. Klimenko, postgraduate student, Department of Theory of Literature, Faculty of Philology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, 1 Leninskiye Gory, Moscow, 119991, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0003-4393-4527. E-mail: klim.irishka4797@rambler.ru