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Research Article

Motives of Honor and Dishonor in the Works of Art by A.S. Pushkin

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The author of the article analyzes the motives of honor and dishonor in the late prose work of A.S. Pushkin “Captain’s Daughter”. Using the method of motivational analysis proposed by I. Silantsev, we examined the implementation of these motives from the point of view of 1) the subjective organization of the text; 2) the functions of the actor; 3) chronotope. In the process of research, we came to the conclusion that the paired motive of honor and dishonor is realized in the system of actors of the work through a complex predicative structure that reveals the actions of characters, their internal motivation and external embodiment.

Key words: motive, theme, Pushkin, “Captain’s Daughter”

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Мотивы чести и бесчестья в творчестве А.С. Пушкина

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Автор статьи анализирует мотивы чести и бесчестья в позднем прозаическом произведении А.С. Пушкина «Капитанская дочка». Используя метод мотивного анализа, предложенный И. Силантьевым, мы рассмотрели реализацию указанных мотивов с точки зрения субъектной организации текста; функции действующего лица; хронотопа. В процессе исследования мы пришли к выводу, что парный мотив чести/бесчестья реализован в системе актантов произведения посредством сложной предикативной структуры, раскрывающей поступки того или иного персонажа, их внутреннюю мотивировку и внешнее воплощение.

Ключевые слова: мотив, тема, Пушкин, «Капитанская дочка»

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1. Introduction

A theme is a complex narratological category defined as a semantic plot indecomposable in the semantic plan, in which there is a potential for further explication — the development in a narrative series of meanings accumulated in a theme. The theme has the property of discreteness: it is actualized not in a specific episode of the text, but in the semantic “condensation” of elements that are significant for its reading. The theme has a dichotomous nature: on the one hand, it is an invariant model of a paradigmatic order (as a result of which some researchers have attempted to create an index of themes in world culture), on the other hand, it is a specific variant representation in the text, filled with the corresponding narrative and plot content.

In the works of A.N. Veselovsky, a theme is presented as a semantically integral unit, a basic formula, indecomposable into smaller components [1]. The scientist noted that the motive could be morphologically segmented: it has components that do not violate the integrity of its semantics (“The serpent abducts the king’s daughter”). The semantic integrity of the theme structure makes it possible to “dissect” it into semantic components,

as A.L. Bem convincingly proved. Exploring the theme of such art works as the “Prisoner of the Caucasus” by Pushkin and Lermontov, as well as the “Atala” by Chateaubriand, the scientist showed the presence of a certain “psychological framework” consolidating the plot facts of the above art works. This “skeleton” is the basic formula “love of a foreigner to a prisoner”, which is considered as the main theme of the texts; further analysis reveals attributive themes called “incoming” by the researcher. The theme contains the potential for further development, complication with minor themes. The complicated theme, according to Bem, is a plot [2]. According to A.P. Skaftymov, the theme is linked to the nodal points of the story, around which thematic complexes are united. The theme is a representation of the integral psychological quality of the protagonist, dominant in his personality [3].

When analyzing themes, I. Silant'ev suggests paying attention to the following elements that are part of their structure:

- predicate (committed act);
- actants (characters in the story);
- spatio-temporal characteristics (circumstances of the action, giving the theme semantic completeness) [4].

This model is especially representative in the analysis of such themes as “honor” and “dishonor”, which are highly psychological, and cannot be implemented otherwise than through the function of the hero in the context of a specific plot narrative.

The themes of “honor” and “dishonor” are among the most recurrent ones for art works by A.S. Pushkin. Heroes of Pushkin’s art works, as a rule, find themselves in a situation of moral choice, as a result of which they either follow a certain ethical imperative or move away from it.

Honor is the moral core of a person, his commitment to the internal system of positive values and principles establishing the framework of what he is bold enough to do without feeling guilty, and remorseful. It is accompanied by an increased sense of responsibility for the protagonist’s actions, features decency, a spotless reputation, an honest name, and a positive assessment of a person; it is a combination of qualities, through which a person gains self-esteem, self-respect, and respect from others.

The concept of honor is a kind of criterion for assessing human dignity, and includes such qualities as high morality, strict moral principles, nobility, justice, valor, courage, honesty, chastity, conscience, dignity, selflessness, and truthfulness. When analyzing vocabulary definitions of the word “honor”, one can differentiate such signs of this concept as:

- dignity underlying self-esteem, and approval from others;
- reverence;
- temperamental attribute to be proud of (Dictionary by T.F. Efremova).
- internal moral dignity of a person, valor, nobility of the soul, clear conscience (Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language by V.I. Dahl).
- moral qualities of personality worthy of respect (Explanatory dictionary by S.I. Ozhegov).

Dishonor is a concept oppositional to honor absorbing such themes as shame, disgrace, reproach, and vilification. Paroemiological units including the word “dishonor” (“Head off for the dishonor”, “Death before dishonor”, “Dishonor is worse than death”), allow

us to derive its additional semantic features: destructiveness for the moral and social life of a person, social death.

Dishonor is associated with the humiliation of one person by another. Disgrace, in turn, implies a lack of honor; dishonorable behavior.

In Pushkin's art works, dishonor is presented both as a social insult, a humiliation (for example, in "Dubrovsky"), and as a lack of honor, immorality of the acts committed by the hero. Honor is one of the central points in the individual picture of the writer's world. The "Dictionary of the language by A.S. Pushkin" gives the following interpretation of the word "honor": 1) worship, respect; 2) that which is pride, adornment of someone or something; 3) high moral dignity; 4) esteem, honorary title, high honorary position; 5) *by honor* — "good", "as friends", "amicably".

2. Discussion

Honor and dishonor in the novelette "The Captain's Daughter"

"The Captain's Daughter" is one of the most famous prose art works by A.S. Pushkin. The writer himself attributed his work by genre affiliation to a novelette; nevertheless, "The Captain's Daughter" has the features of a novel: a complex narrative structure, an extensive system of images, and historical message. In literary criticism, "The Captain's Daughter" was qualified as a family chronicle, memoirs, novelette, historical novel with deep socio-philosophical content. Petr Grinyov, wise in experience, plays the role of the narrator recalling the events of his youth. The novel presents the initial and final stages of the protagonist personality formation. One of the main topics disclosed in the work is the theme of honor and dishonor. The theme, as you know, is directly related to the theme of the work implementing it at different levels: in the system of actants, spatio-temporal context, functions of the characters.

A.S. Pushkin worked three years on the novel "The Captain's Daughter" (from 1833 to 1836). In 1834, the preceding work on the topic of the Pugachev's Rebellion saw the light of day — the historical chronicle "The History of the Pugachev's Rebellion" [5].

Gathering materials for the future work, the author visited many places related to the historical event. Journeying across the Volga region and the Urals he collected information from eyewitnesses of the historical events of 1770. Pushkin obtained access to unpublished archival records of the rebellion from Nicholas I. It was during the collection of information about the Pugachev's Rebellion that the writer conceived the idea of writing a novel.

The historical model for creating the work was the character of Emelyan Pugachev. The choice of topic complicated writing the novel mostly because of censorship tightened during the reign of Nicholas I. The novel was rewritten many times, the plan of events changed, as well as the storyteller, on whose behalf the story could be told.

All three years of work on the material, Pushkin modified the structure of the work; about six text variations have been preserved. The theme of honor is central to the story. As an epigraph, the author takes the proverb "Take care of honor from a young age" and develops this idea throughout the work. The novelette presents the moral and ethical "confrontation" of two heroes — Grinyov and Shvabrin, one of whom chose the path of honor, and the other turned from this path [6].

To understand the character of Grinyov, the preposition of the theme (Silant'yev) of honor is important, that is, the narration of episodes preceding the main events that can reveal the character of the protagonist. The childhood and early days of Pyotr Andreyevich Grinyov were “the very pleasure” for him. He did not study, raced pigeons on the roofs and even made a kite of a geographical map. In a word, he spent these years as a young oaf, having fun and playing [7].

As a young man, Grinyov dreamed of military service, of an independent life. He hoped that he would be sent to the regiment, where his family had a relative, would be made an officer, and his life would be carefree again. “The idea of military service merged in me with thoughts of freedom, of the pleasures of St. Petersburg life. I imagined myself to be an officer of the guard, which, in my opinion, was the height of human well-being”. Father taught the hero to act in good conscience: “Father said to me: “Farewell, Pyotr. Serve faithfully to whom you swear; obey your superiors; do not chase after their affection; do not ask for service; do not excuse from service; and remember the proverb: honor without maintenance is like a blue coat without a badge”. For the first time, we see the actualization of the theme of honor in an episode when Pyotr Andreyevich loses a large sum of money in a tavern on his way to Orenburg and does everything possible to return it contrary to the advice of the overseer Savelich. Realizing that he had offended the old man, Pyotr finds the strength to ask for forgiveness: “Finally I told him: “Well, well, Savelich! enough of this, let’s make it up, sorry about that; I see myself I am to blame. I was up to mischief yesterday, but I wronged you unjustly. I promise to behave smarter and obey you. Well, don’t be angry; let’s make peace”.

In the next episode, Grinyov generously thanks the counselor who helped him get to the village through a blizzard. “I was annoyed, however, that I could not thank the man who helped me if not out of trouble, then at least out of a very unpleasant situation. “Well”, I said coolly, “if you don’t want to give him fifty kopecks, take something out of my garment for him. He is dressed too lightly. Give him my rabbit coat”. The gratitude to the person who provided the help can also be interpreted as a *variant of an honest deed*. In the subsequent plot, the motive of honor is objectified in a chain of episodes and their general predicativity.

In the Belogorsk fortress, where Grinyov was sent to serve, he defended the honor of young Masha Mironova, who was indirectly offended by Shvabrin. Refusing to join the Pugachev’s Rebellion, Grinyov again acts in honor: he cannot break the oath of the imperial army even under pain of death. Pugachev’s reprisal against the commandant, his wife and Ivan Ignatievich is indicative: Grinyov does not ask for mercy from the “impostor” even with a noose around his neck.

For the heroes of “The Captain’s Daughter” the concept of honor is associated with the performance of official duty. Ivan Ignatievich, *by honor of duty*, informs the commandant Mironov about the atrocities being prepared in the fortress; *the sworn duty* encourages Grinyov to return to the empress’s operating troops.

Awareness of his duty to his homeland gives Grinyov fearlessness to Pugachev: “I am a natural nobleman; I swore the Empress: I can’t serve you”. He asks Pugachev to let him go to Orenburg, without experiencing the pangs of conscience before the upcoming trial. “My conscience was clear; I was not afraid of the trial”.

Grinyov manifests himself at the trial to the highest degree of honor. The hero does not name his beloved one for fear of casting a shadow over her name. “I wanted to continue as I started and explain my relation with Marya Ivanovna as sincerely as everything else. But suddenly I felt insurmountable disgust. It occurred to me that if I called her, the commission would demand her to answer; and the thought of confusing her name between the foul gossips of the villains and bringing her to confront with them herself — this terrible thought amazed me so much that I was embarrassed and confused”.

We meet another hero — Shvabrin — in the Belogorsk fortress, where he was transferred to the service for the “homicide”. “Alexey Ivanovich Shvabrin was transferred to us for the homicide already five years ago. God knows what sin beguiled him; he, you will see, went out of town with one lieutenant, but they took steel with them, and began jabbing each other; and Alexey Ivanitch murdered the lieutenant, and even with two witnesses! What can one do? There is no master for sin”.

Shvabrin is characterized by dishonest behavior; one of his basic strategies is slander. So, he slanders on Ivan Ignatievich and Vasilisa Egorovna; denigrates Masha; splits on Pyotr to his parents.

“The words of Marya Ivanovna opened my eyes and explained a lot to me. I understood the stubborn slander with which Shvabrin was pursuing her. He probably noticed our mutual attraction and tried to distract us from each other. The words that gave rise to our quarrel seemed even more vile when, instead of rude and obscene ridicule, I saw in them deliberate slander. The desire to punish the impudent slanderer made me even stronger, and I eagerly began expecting an opportunity for that. And all that because she refused to marry Alexey”.

The duel, which was supposed to resolve the dispute between Grinyov and Shvabrin, reveals the dishonest nature of the latter: taking advantage of the fact that Savelich distracted Pyotr, Alexey wounded him.

The characteristics of Shvabrin as an antihero are manifested during the course of the story. “And what is Shvabrin, Alexey Ivanych? After all, he cut his hair in a circle and feasts now with them right here! Agile, nothing to say”. Choosing the enemy’s side, Shvabrin violates his military oath, betrays his homeland and begins to serve the false king. In this case dishonor is actualized through the theme of betrayal connected with it. The general says of him: “Oh, this Swabrin is the great Schelm, and if he ever falls into my hands, I’ll command him to be judged in twenty-four hours, and we will execute him by shooting on the parapet of the fortress!”. His attitude towards Masha is ignoble: he starves the girl, seeking her hand. When Masha becomes a captive of Shvabrin, Grinyov acts in honor and hurries to rescue her risking his own life. He goes to Belogorsk fortress with Savelich failing to obtain the support of the general, but Masha’s honor for him is above the fear of death. “I’ll rather to die” I said in a fury, “rather than cede her to Shvabrin!”.

Shvabrin’s antibehavior culminates at the trial when he defames Grinyov before the commission. “According to him, I was sent by Pugachev to Orenburg as a spy; daily went to skirmishes in order to convey messages about everything that was done in the city; that finally I clearly went over to the impostor, traveled with him from fortress to fortress trying in every possible way to ruin my fellow traitors in order to take their places and use the rewards handed out by the impostor”.

Savelich is a secondary character in the story. Despite the fact that he is not the main character, his image is very important for understanding the meaning of the theme of honor.

The image of Savelich in the novelette “The Captain’s Daughter” is very many-sided. He is not a sketchy character, but a full-blooded person with his own ideas about honor, order and law.

We list the main features characterizing this actant:

1) a faithful, loyal, responsible and caring servant. “If you have already decided to go, then I’ll even walk but follow you, I won’t leave you. Catch me sitting behind a stone wall without you! Am I crazy? Your will, sir, but I will not leave you alone”;

2) kind — the author himself gives this characteristic: “kind tutor”;

3) house-proud — he purchases everything necessary for his master, monitors his clothes and keeps the room clean;

4) he loves to teach the young master — he could not be appeased if he “took up the sermon”;

5) very stubborn — “none could argue stubborn old man”, “knowing the stubbornness of the tutor”;

6) grumbling — “grumbled again”;

7) unbelieving — “looked suspiciously”.

Nevertheless, he lives in his honor — the honor of a faithful servant. He even objects to the master in a letter: “But I am not an old dog, I’m your faithful serf”. Under no circumstances will he defect “Petrusha” and he will give his life for him, that is, he will act according to his conscience (in honor).

The theme of honor is also represented through the image of Emelyan Pugachev. Honor is objectified in the moral aspect through such differential themes as mercy, generosity, sympathy for Grinyov and Masha. Being a “runaway Cossack”, leader of the anti-noble rebellion, Pugachev has his own code of honor. He claims that “fair’s fair”, and gives Grinyov a horse, a coat, money in memory of a glass of wine and a rabbit coat. In addition, Pugachev helps Grinyov save Masha from Shvabrin and does not allow “offend the orphan”. Pugachev sets out his ideas about honor, morality and dignity in the Kalmyk fairy tale about the eagle and the raven: the first eats living blood, the second one — carrion. Grinyov, however, equates robbery to the life of a raven — eating carrion. Imbued with sympathy for the impostor, Pyotr is ready to pay him with all but honor and conscience: “Listen”, I continued, seeing his good disposition — “I don’t know what to call you, and I don’t want to know... But God sees that in my life I would be glad to pay you for what you have done for me. Just do not demand that it is contrary to the honor of my and Christian conscience. You are my benefactor. Finish it as you began: let me go with a poor orphan, where God will point us the way. And we, wherever you are and whatever happens to you, will pray to God every day for the salvation of your sinful soul...”.

Themes of honor and dishonor pervade the entire fabric of the story. They are explicated in the system of actants — central and secondary characters, each of which performs certain actions on a predicative level that correspond to his nature. As O. Freudenberg writes, the hero does only what he himself means.

3. Conclusion

Themes of honor and dishonor are among the key ones in Pushkin's art works. Realizing in the system of characters, through the function of heroes, as well as spatio-temporal characteristics, themes are filled with specific plot content. In the novelette (the novel according to some research definitions) "The Captain's Daughter" the theme of honor is objectified in the images of Pyotr Grinyov, his father, old Savelich, as well as Masha Mironova. The main representative of the dishonor theme at the level of the actant structure is Shvabrin. The image of Pugachev occupies an intermediate position between honor and dishonor: on the one hand, he is able to act according to conscience; on the other, he is an impostor, a "false king" torturing and executing anyone who has not sworn allegiance to him.

The honor for the heroes of "The Captain's Daughter" correlates with the concepts of duty, devotion, fidelity to a given word (including military oath), respect for a woman (beloved). Dishonor is associated with the themes of betrayal, apostasy, slander, and reproach. Such antibehavior, according to Pushkin, should be punishable: the author demonstrates this on the example of the storyline of Shvabrin, whose life ended sadly (see "Missing chapter"). Following the internal principles of honor, on the contrary, ennoble the heroes and leads them to well-deserved happiness.

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