

Humorous Mysticism as a Base of Bulgakov's Grotesque Model in the Story "Diaboliad"

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Abstract: This article deals with the interpretation of the grotesque world of the short story "Diaboliad" by the Russian satirist of the XX century Mikhail Bulgakov. Using the social and aesthetical types of analysis, the authors explore the satirical orientation of the story and the peculiarities of grotesque creation at plot, character and style layers of Bulgakov's work. Special attention is paid to interaction of humorous devices with the mystic base of the story "Diaboliad". Interpretation of the "humble man" in post-revolutionary period topic is also accentuated. Regarding absurd as a leading literary principle of the writer the authors of the article point out the role of constant motives in Bulgakov's story. These include the motive of "doubling characters", the motive of "automatism", as well as the motive of buffoonery elements in Bulgakov's work.

Key words: Grotesque • Mysticism • Satire • Humour • Absurd • Fantastic • Farce • M. Bulgakov

INTRODUCTION

Of all the Russian writers of the 20-30-s of the XX century nowadays Mikhail Bulgakov probably at most retains in the Russian and worldwide social conscience. Being a successor of the classical Russian tradition, primarily of Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Mikhail Bulgakov worked out his own approach to the questions of philosophy and aesthetics with the effect of his work presented as a principally new art phenomenon.

As a writer, Bulgakov developed by leaps and bounds. His work is various in genre (satirical articles and short stories, narratives and novels, plays and film scripts), in ideological orientation and emotional colouring (tragedies and comedies, lyrics and humour, fantasy and philosophical reasoning). But it is necessary to acknowledge that the process of objective estimation of his literary heritage was hard and slow, which can be explained by existence of political obstacles in Bulgakov's mother country, by cultural, historical and language barriers in the sphere of world philology. Nevertheless, a great number of researchers, e.g. Edwards T.R.N. [1], Leblank R.D. [2], Natov N. [3], Proffer E. [4; 5], Wright A.C. [6], Curtis J.A.E. [7], Haber E.C. [8] and other scholars managed to get interesting results following their study of Bulgakov's work which lead to stirring up Russian literary critics' interest to this writer since the end of 1980-s. In the whole, painstaking work of

Bulgakov-interested authors in Russia and all over the world provided a formidable foundation to raise a number of problems aimed at recognition of the originality of Bulgakov's literary system. There is a noticeable logical tendency in studying the writer's work – from opening up a row of outward biographical and real historical stratum to motivated profound reading of his separate works and, as a result, to tendency of perceiving Bulgakov's originality in recreating reality through literature overall. One of the clue stories of his first period of work playing a profound role in Bulgakov's writing manner establishment was a satirical phantasmagoria, short story "Diaboliad" written in 1923.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In literature study there formed two approaches to Bulgakov's heritage: one is sociopolitical and the other is of the philosophical aesthetics character. Those who approach Bulgakov's work from sociopolitical idea pay their major attention to searching for prototypes and sometimes draw parallels between the events described in the stories and real episodes of the political life of the country. Such political interpretation often leads to oversimplified, straightforward judgment of the literary work. Another approach, leaning on philosophical and aesthetic knowledge, gives a more profound, multidimensional presentation of the literary work.

We can be guided by M. Bakhtin's viewpoint that reification, that is elucidation of the text not by other texts but by out-of-text outward reality, inevitably leads to extinction of the infinity and fathomlessness of meaning. It is only possible to understand, comment and extend the meaning referring to other senses that is by philosophical and aesthetic interpretation, when symbolic structure elucidation goes into eternity of symbolic meanings [9].

At the same time, it is necessary to discriminate between actually possible interpretations of Bulgakov's texts and historically possible author's intentions. You can't ignore the specific character of satire, its functions and abilities. The obligatory, indispensable feature of satire in general is its topicality, everyday life submergence, intervention in contemporary events and processes. Thus, the fullest idea of the literary work can be received only through deep analysis, including both, sociopolitical and philosophical aesthetic aspects. In this article the we are going to stick to these principles while giving the interpretation of the story "Diaboliad".

Mysticism and Grotesque in the Story "Diaboliad":

In spite of different assessments of the art standard of Bulgakov's "Diaboliad" (e.g. see [10]), the scholars rightly note that his probe-tested genre of grotesque story proved to be efficient. In creating the artistic world of "Diaboliad" Bulgakov uses a great number of methods: everyday life depicting, anecdote, piling on the agony to the condition when it is possible to transfer the events into the sphere of unreal, fantastic. Beginning as a traditional story about a low-level official written in a matter-of-fact style, the narrative gradually grows into a fantastic short story. The title of the story gives a hint about the mystic character of the depicted events. It is necessary to mention though that the scholars rightly note the source of Bulgakov's interest to mystic powers. The mysticism of the writer was not only connected with his interest to devilment as it is (though the sphere of sacramental, magic and queer proved to be a strong magnet for imagination), but with his interest to the mysticism of social life [11]. And humorous constituent here is the most important and essential side of the unreal.

Bulgakov emphasizes the absurdness of the described events. On the one hand, absurd as an art principle, leads to destroying of reality, to mysticism, to fantastic denotation, on the other hand, it adds a humorous pattern. Intertwinement of fantastic and comical gives birth to Bulgakov's grotesque, basing on alogism of miniature life situations. Occurrences in life, which seem to be not only unfair, depraved, vicious and wanton, but

also odd, queer and absurd, contradicting reality by their initial originality, get chosen by the writer as objects for his literary analysis.

Created by the writer new imaginary world differs from the real one. There are no conventional connections and notions. The normal natural sequence of institutionalization is shown as some magic dimension, ruinous for the main character of the narrative. Korotkov can't catch up with the constantly eluding from him Longjohn. This scene is typologically similar to the episode of Ivan Bezdomny following Woland in Bulgakov's "Master and Margarita". Insistent search of the Complaints Bureau goes on in the grotesque labyrinth of exclusive and comedy twisted world of the public institution (here we come across the motive of "the enchanted place").

Mysticism with the comical colouring is displayed from the first pages of the short story "Diaboliad": there is a scent of sulphur (a sign of deviltry) in Korotkov's room, Longjohn turns out to be capable of magic, taking no time relocations in space and striking transformations. Although all those events have a real, quite logical motivation (there turn out to be two Longjohn twin brothers) and the further fantastic pictures are explained by the mental disease of the main character, the reader remains with the feeling of unnaturalness and frangibility of existence, illusiveness of the surrounding world, its blatant disharmony, iteratively enforced by Bulgakov's grotesque.

G. Nedoshivin in his "Art theory sketches" underlines that reality itself possesses such sides which inevitably demand grotesque handling, grotesque wording. In his opinion, grotesque is a way of outward-layer explication of social vices and sores, which in real life have no material, directly observable perceptual guise [12]. In connection with this opinion we can refer to V. Gudkova's viewpoint. The scholar mentions that though "Diaboliad" has a local theme and the main character suffers a complete ruin occasionally, not able to restore the lost wholeness of the world to his mind, it asserted the motive which will develop throughout Bulgakov's further literary work: the motive of the delirious reality [13].

In Bulgakov's short story under analysis the features of keenly satirical realistic grotesque and modernistic grotesque following the tradition of romanticism are randomized. First of all, this intersection finds its expression in the motive of insanity. It's common knowledge that this motive is conventional for any type of grotesque. In "Diaboliad" insanity acquires a bleak

tragic shade of individual disconnection, which tends primarily to romantic and modernistic grotesque. In Korotkov's character the author emphasizes the feeling of dereliction, neglect and tragic loneliness of the personality in the world of chaos. As Lesly Milne, an English philologist, interested in Bulgakov's work claims, the writer, continuing Gogol and Dostoyevsky's tradition in disclosing the subject-matter of the humble man, depicts a double character of the shy individuality with subdued sexuality. In the structure of "Diaboliad" L. Milne finds the traces of imitation to "Viy" with the tree nights of horror [14].

Nevertheless, Bulgakov never abandoned aspiration for investigating the "chaos" and contradictions. This aspiration nourished realistic grotesque. In this tendency the satirist followed in his teacher's M. Saltykov-Scedrin's steps. We can point out lots of irony in mystery link at describing metamorphoses of "Dyrkin the Dread", who starts to cringe before the wrathful boss: " 'Me?' muttered Dyrkin, magically changing from Dyrkin the Dread into Dyrkin the Good Chap" [15]. Or another example: Korotkov's clock strike forty times (a magic number), but this ominous mystic sign is placed in the humorous contextual area (the main character is in the state of alcohol intoxication).

The topic of insanity in "Diaboliad" is closely connected with the motive of "doubling characters", lookalikeness and reflectivity. D. Likhachev in his book "Laughter in Early Rus" writes that laughter creates countless pairs, doubles scenes and objects, which provides for "automatism" and stultification of the world [16]. The forms of doubling the world are numerous. Appearance of comical clones or doubles is one of them. In Bulgakov's work there is a whole system of such doubles, various antitheses and confrontations. Doubling generating ambiguity is a characteristic feature of the poetic world of the satirist.

Bulgakov's conception of many-versification of existence and its relativity falls short of "reflectivity", which seems to be a constructive and brilliantly effective principle. The most essential part of the comedy poetics is that Bulgakov uses primarily not reflecting, but distorting characteristics of the mirror. "Distorting mirror" reflects all the oddness of everyday life where it is next to impossible to distinguish between truth and forgery, real and fantastic elements.

It was existence of two Longjohns that initiated the main character's delusion. Meeting bearded Longjohn several minutes after meeting clean-shaven one, Korotkov is pondering over two versions. The first version is

mystical: the beard has grown while Longjohn was driving the motorcycle and raising upstairs. The second version is espionage adventurous one: the beard is artificial. Both versions make Longjohn strange, queer and hostile to the existing world. They show that he is foreign and alien to surroundings and to normal human relationship. In addition, it develops that the second Longjohn's voice also differs from that of the first Longjohn's one. "The voice is false, too", says Korotkov to himself and this decision is, in fact, a comical rebuttal of the espionage version and indirect confirmation of the mystical version.

The same idea is used in "Master and Margarita" in the analogous episode with Ivan Bezdomny who suspects Woland to be a spy. Homorous dethronement of imaginary fears in both Bulgakov's works underlines actual and unabridged danger coming not from outside, but from inside of the state system.

Many scientists note analogies in composition between Bulgakov's "Diaboliad" and Gogol's "Nevsky Prospect". For instance, Piskarev's pursuit of his beauty is similar to Korotkov's pursuit of Kaslonyer. But, in our opinion, Korotkov's search finds more similarities with the plot collision of the other Gogol's short story "The Nose". The difference lies in the doubling of Korotkov's object of pursuit: he chases, on the one hand, the necessary for social life papers and, on the other hand, elusive Longjohn. In Gogol's story the nose unites both – "an identity card" without which the social status of the main character is deficient and a high-ranking gentleman – a literary precursor of Longjohn. Once again it is necessary to remind not only of Longjohn's, but also of the nose's propensity for grotesque metamorphoses.

Longjohn brothers are in fact one character in two images. Longjohn is a high-ranking official, a boss, ready to rule any department in his charge. For example, we get to know that before appearing as the head of the Main Central Base for Matchstick Materials (MACBAMM) he was the chief of journalists for two days. The reader can only guess about all the fields of his former executive posts. At the same time we guess that Longjohn is an ill-educated and illiterate worker. Misspelling of his last name with the small letter leads to comical confusion in chief filing clerk Korotkov's papers. Working for MACBAMM Longjohn (alike to Scedrin's governor) murmurs one and the same phrase: "You'll get the sack!" His behavior and way of running his department creates a grotesque picture of an automatic, mechanical person's poverty of intellect. To accentuate the topic of false significance of the official, Bulgakov uses a device of

parody glorification, offering a humorous reconsideration of biblical commandments in his story with regard to officials-bureaucrats: "The thirteenth commandment says: thou shalt not go in to thy neighbour without notification".

Bulgakov emphasizes not only Longjohn's incompetence, but his manageability to take up any kind of leading positions and top-level jobs. This personage is able to occasionally settle into office as a high flyer and this ability, being repeated numerous times, grows into regularity. The scholar I. Urupin regards Bulgakov's characters of this group from the point of view of the national and cultural "archetype of impostor" [17]. Suchlike tragicomic situation develops in some other Bulgakov's works as well. In the story "The Fatal Eggs" a flute player edits a newspaper, irrigates Turkestan Region, heads the state farm and so on. In "Master and Margarita" Stepa Likhodeyev after the Variety theatre runs the grocery store; Sempleyarov, the chairman of the Moscow Theatres' Acoustics Commission, gets in charge of the mushroom-canning plant. The same idea is touched upon in a number of satirical articles by the writer. In connection with this idea, we can say that creation of the character of werewolf Longjohn who can momentarily move around in space, turn into a cat and do many other mystic things, has a satirically philosophical meaning, because it deciphers the mystics of the social life.

The protagonist of the story "Diaboliad" Korotkov also has his double – Vassily Pavlovich Kolobkov. In this case the topic of doubling is quite traditional for the Russian literature and is connected with the topic of fate, fatal predetermination of life, losing of the character's "I". The leading role passes from a person to his documents. In a formalized world the personality of a person abandons value and importance. This tragedy is more clearly seen through its tragicomic framing: the character tries to elicit putative profit from his catastrophic social situation with the threat of arrest: "You can't do that," Korotkov replied with a *satanic* laugh, "because nobody knows who I am. Of course not. You can't arrest me or marry me..."

It can easily be noticed that ironical characteristic features of the protagonist of the story are multifaceted, multiple-aspect and discrepant. As we have already mentioned, there are close links between the image of Korotkov and the traditional for the Russian literary topic of the humble folk, a cog in the machine. With respect to this fact, it is also necessary to add that Bulgakov not only followed this tradition, he deviated from it as well.

This deviation lies in two layers – firstly, in the appearance and habitus of the main character and secondly, in his behavior. Korotkov is a tall pleasant-looking fair-haired man with his own characteristic individuality which is, though slightly, expressed. While pushing his fortune, the character is deprived of altruism and unselfishness. He manifests uncharacteristic for a humble man decisiveness and diligence. Undoubtedly, there is an autobiographical moment: all those years Bulgakov himself developed appalling energy and activity to survive in tough post-revolutionary times.

In "Diaboliad" the motive of "automatism" and "puppetness" characteristic of grotesque and Bulgakov's satirical poetics in general is implemented in full swing. In A. Bergson's scientific study of the humorous theory it is mentioned that stagnant, stereotyped and mechanical sides of life should be opposed to recollection and thoughtfulness, automatism should be opposed to independent activity of a man and all those human mistakes should be accentuated and corrected by laughter and satire [18]. In "Diaboliad" all the surrounding life of the main character is mechanical and insipid. Automatism in its function is always connected here with social and political events' material.

In the chapter under the characteristic title "Machine horror" an official from the Complaints Bureau like a machine, pronounces automatic disjointed primitive phrases and slogans: "Kindly inform me concretely and abstractly, in writing and by word of mouth, urgently and confidentially - Poltava or Irkutsk? Don't waste a busy person's time! No walking along the corridors! No spitting! No smoking! No asking for small change!" The peak of this mechanical phantasmagoria is a foxtrot that thirty typewriters played at the same time. The world around Korotkov is dull and lifeless, dead and mechanical, callous and soulless. This idea finds its confirmation in other quotations from the story as well: "At the tables looking not at all like crows on a telegraph wire, but like the three falcons of Tsar Alexis, sat *three completely identical fair-headed, clean-shaven men* in light-grey checked suits"; "A chubby little Dyrkin *bounced out on a spring* from behind the desk..." Longjohn himself, mumbling the word "to fire" all day long, reminds some mechanism, alien to "alive life" and incarnating the principle of primitivism.

The most important part of the poetics of humour in this Bulgakov's work includes buffoonery scenes which perform a certain compensatory role to the tragic events and circumstances. The scenes of Korotkov's pursuit

after Longjohn pertaining here have a clearly defined farcical colouring, e.g.: "At that moment their eyes met and they both howled shrilly with fear and pain. Korotkov backed away upstairs, while Long-John retreated, horror-stricken, in the opposite direction... He stumbled and fell down, striking the back of his head..." Official Dyrkin is also "presented" buffoonery strikes: "You blackguard", the youth said clearly. Shaking his head and brandishing his briefcase, he slapped the latter onto Dyrkin's pate, like a pancake on a plate". Further we read: "In a daze, Korotkov gave a shy crooked smile, took the chandelier by the base and crunched the candles down on Dyrkin's head. Blood spurted onto the baize from the latter's nose and he rushed through an inner door shouting for help". Inseparable combination of tragic-terrible with comic-implausible come out with obvious unattractiveness.

Buffoonery scenes of the short story under discussion are typologically compared with the buffoonery scenes of beating Varenukha and restaurant rowdy scene with Bezdomny in "Master and Margarita" where we come across farcical ear strikes from the arsenal of rough comics. Such episodes bring in theatrical and clownery elements, facilitate creation of the utopian freedom atmosphere, temporary abolition of exclusive hierarchy relationships, relative triumph of justice.

An episode with "a sobbing old man" in "Diaboliad" is also presented exceptionally in a spirit of clownery: "The old man pulled out a *large handkerchief with orange flowers*, started to cry and blew his nose.

'So you want to deprive an old man of his tiny travelling allowance, eh, Mr. Kolobkov? Alright then.' The old man started shaking and sobbing and dropped his briefcase.

'Take it. Let a non-Party, fellow-travelling old man starve to death. Go on. That's all he's good for, the old cur. Only remember this, Mr. Kolobkov.' The old man's voice grew prophetically ominous and rang out like a bell. 'They will do you no good, those satanic shekels. They'll stick in your throat.' And the old man burst into heavy sobs".

In this scene everything is presented comically hyperbolized: the handkerchief, the stream of tears (as in case with a clown) and pathos prophetic note.

As R. Juliani mentions, the writer of "Master and Margarita" 's tendency to satirical representation of contemporary reality draws him together with the traditional devices of show booth farce and folk grotesque [19]. In this context, by the way, the

observations of another scholar, O. Berdyayeva [20], over the folk traditions of "Diaboliad" are also very interesting.

Thus, we can see that even in his early work "Diaboliad" Bulgakov develops ardour for such forms of show booth play as unexpected appearances and disappearances, humorous pursuits, falling down and so on. At the same time we can't help agreeing with those scientists who consider carnivalization nowadays to be primarily a literary tradition of the satire genre and its out-of literature sources are taken for granted by writers [21].

Summary

We can't fail to notice that comics and mysticism influence the readers mind in different directions: laughter places us to the solid soil of reality and mysticism gets away to the unreal space. Thus, in Bulgakov's work these two vectors – mysticism and comicality – are combined. The writer creates a unique model of genre and style – "tragic grotesque", where farcical scenes have a tragic implication and tragic events go on in a comedy way, not losing at the same time their tragic essence. Humorous elements in this genre play an essential role of alleviating tragic sensation of existence, abandoning fear and hopelessness.

CONCLUSION

"Diaboliad" states one of the most regular Bulgakov's key-notes: mystical power of the documents over a person, over reality. It is a bright expression of the general idea about priority of *manner over matter*.

Surrounding Bulgakov reality is apprehended by him as absurd, nonsense, chaos. Thus, the writer's realism's tendency to grotesque type is quite natural. He just finds the way to transform the "odd" material of real life to insane and deformed grotesque literary world.

It is grotesque with its intention to bring together contrary opinions and opposite views that suited Bulgakov most of all for combination and disclosure of such incompatible heterogeneous phenomena as chaos of the first post-revolutionary years and inviolability of sluggish bureaucratic state system which produced a queer alloy in the Russian state in 1920-s.

With the help of the humour and comicalness Bulgakov demotes mysticism, transferring it from the fantastic layer to the real one. With the help of the mystical the writer extends satire, makes it more capacious and meaningful which enables him to make philosophical

conclusions. Bulgakov as a satirist tends to explore social conflicts in both social historical and moral ethical aspect, in the aspect of human existence.

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