Doctor Zhivago by B. Pasternak in Chinese Literature Studies: The Role and Place of Metaphor in the Artistic Whole of the Novel

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Abstract. The relevance of the topic of the article is attributable primarily to the following circumstances: 1. the necessity of the comparative study of the artistic space, time, structure and composition of Pasternak’s novel Doctor Zhivago by Russian and Chinese literary scholars; 2. the importance of the study of philosophical and religious views of the author and their influence on the peculiarities of the literary work contouring; 3. comparative study of views on the problematics, space and time system of the work. The article deals with the peculiarities of the interpretation of the artistic features of the novel Doctor Zhivago by B. Pasternak in the studies of Chinese literary scholars. It is stated based on the analysis conducted by the author that the narrative structure, artistic space, time and composition are the most important characteristics of the work. They ensure a perceptual unity of the artistic world. At the same time, these categories are inextricably linked, they define and reveal each other, create a complex system of relationships between characters, images, events, places, and artistic reality as a whole. The conclusion is that the complex narrative structure of B. Pasternak’s novel allows several levels of its reading. The connection of narratology phenomena is revealed: the event and the motive, and the internal intrigue of the whole narrative.

Introduction

The study of the specifics of the artistic peculiarities of the Doctor Zhivago literary work in the context of its meaning-forming elements is a very topical issue today in the field of literary studies. The study of the novel Doctor Zhivago in Chinese critical literary practice began relatively late, developed slowly and did not have significant results. Zhang Jianhua, Professor of Beijing University of Foreign Languages, made a significant breakthrough in the scientific study of the novel. He was the first to give a periodization of the process of studying the novel in China. Thus, the novel was considered mainly from a socio-political point of view during the first stage (from the 1950s to the mid-1980s). The point of view of socio-historical criticism prevailed during the second stage (from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s). Finally, the third stage (from the late 1990s to the 21st century) associated with cultural transformation, gave freedom of aesthetic criticism [1].

The problem of poetics of the literary work in the context of the so-called narratology reading is of particular scientific interest. The “event of storytelling” and the speakers’ and the perceiver’s attitude to it occupy the central place in the novel narrative. Their roles in the implementation of narrative discourse are equally weighted in the novel Doctor Zhivago [2].

According to the point of view of the famous researcher V. Tyupa, the narrative structure of the novel includes the mythopoetic paradigm of the “series” of worlds—the upper, middle and lower [2]. The symbolic triad of worlds of B. Pasternak, like the novel as a whole, is focused on the affirmation of spiritual revival and moral salvation of humanity. The worlds are arranged in a hierarchical system: the lower world relates to the earth and the “dead eternity”, the middle world—to nature and history, the upper world reveals the meaning of life in the context of eternity and relates to heaven and the concept of eternity. Relationship with death (earth and “dead eternity”), life (nature and history) and eternity (heaven and “eternal life”).

Chinese literary scholars made a significant contribution to the study of the artistic peculiarities of the novel Doctor Zhivago by B. Pasternak. Works by such scientists as Wang Lei, Sun Lei,
Wang Jiezhi, Zhang Xiaodong, Feng Yuzhi, Liu Yubao should be noted among the most interesting scientific works. At the same time, Chinese scientists have not studied deep enough or reflected on the issue of specificity of artistic peculiarities of *Doctor Zhivago* by B. Pasternak (in the framework of the study of the narrative structure, peculiarities of artistic space, time, composition and poetics). Accordingly, all this leads to certain difficulties at the level of understanding and interpretation of the deep motives of this work. We will consider and show examples of thoughts by Chinese scholars that coincide with, are close to or differ from those by Russian researchers.

**Examples of Chinese Scholars’ Interpretation of Metaphor in *Doctor Zhivago***

Metaphor occupies a certain place in the narratology system of the novel, in its three-world metaphysical dimension, among other methods of text creation. Moreover, it is the metaphor that creates the artistic whole of the novel.

*Doctor Zhivago* by B. Pasternak is perceived and evaluated by Chinese literary scholars and critics as a divisive novel, which is explained by the presence of many points of view on Russian history, on peculiarities of depicting heroes and events, on the specifics and functionality of the narrative.

Special attention should be paid to the work of Chinese scholar Wang Jiezhi, where the novel is considered as a work reflecting the Russian history of the early XX century through the prism of poetic expression of historical notions [3]. The form of the lyric epopee was Pasternak’s unique phenomenon [3] from the point of view of the researcher. First of all, comparison and metaphor became concrete tools for creating this form. The expressiveness of the metaphor is intended to change the notion of the usual image, to strengthen the impact of the image on the reader, to make it more memorable. Metaphoric values and symbols are not only a component of the narrative structure of the *Doctor Zhivago* and they are also a method and a means of expression of the emotional, psychological and mental state, the character and the destiny of the heroes by the author through their dreams, sleep, delusions and hallucinations [3]. It is the notion of dreaming as a special way of indirect and figurative expression of the “invisible world”.

For example, in the scene when the protagonist fell ill with typhus: “He was delirious off and on for two weeks. He dreamed that Tonia had put two streets on his desk, Sadovaia Karetnaia on his left and Sadovaia Triumphalnaia on his right, and had lit the table lamp; its warm orange glow lit up the streets and now he could write. So he was writing. <...> Only now and then a boy got in his way, a boy with narrow Kirghiz eyes, in an unbuttoned reindeer coat worn fur side out, as in the Urals or Siberia. He knew for certain that this boy was the spirit of his death or, to put it quite plainly, that he was his death...” [4].

Therefore, the image of the boy with narrow Kirghiz eyes has a symbolic character—it is a harbinger of death, the circumstances of which will be associated with his brother, albeit not directly. The meeting with brother Evgraf, which takes place on the stairs, is of particular relevance (Evgraf does not only perform the function of the “savior” for Zhivago family in the novel, but also the function of “streaming” of literary texts of the protagonist to the “eternity” space). In this sense, Evgraf is the immediate “narrator” of *Doctor Zhivago*. It is also unusual that the room on Kamergerskiy lane, where the hero lay in delirium, will be his last dwelling as well. The coffin with his body will stand precisely there.

Thus, the image that arose in the dream with a prediction of the fate of the protagonist carries the meaning of the metaphor in the above fragment.

Chinese literary scholar Lu Youzhou was the first to notice the widespread use of metaphor in the novel through a series of dreams, hallucinations, and death.

For example, in the 8th section of the 13th part, Yurii Andreievich sees in his dream that “from the other side, his little boy, Sashenka, was knocking, crying and begging to be let in. Heartbroken, Yurii Andreievich longed with all his being to take the boy in his arms, press him to his chest, and run away with him as fast as his feet would carry him. Yet, with tears pouring down his face he kept hold of the handle of the locked door, shutting out the child, sacrificing him to a false notion of
honor, in the name of his alleged duty to another woman, who was not the child’s mother and who might at any moment come into the room from another door” [4].

According to scholar Lu Youzhou, the narration in the form of the dream allows too deeply reveal the subconscious of the character and fully express his internal conflict of feelings and mind, obligations and desires, the dream contains the metaphorical value of artistic images [5]. Thus, the image of the protagonist is harmoniously inscribed in a certain historical era: he actively participates in historical events, not being a real historical figure, he has some metaphorical meaning. In particular, the date of the protagonist’s death—the year of 1929—is not accidental, because there were serious changes in many spheres of life of the Soviet people (political, economic and cultural spheres) this year. Accordingly, the death of the hero of the novel marks the end of one era and the arrival of another one.

Examples of Russian researchers’ Interpretation of Metaphor in Doctor Zhivago

The generalized metaphorical meaning of the central image of the novel is also manifested in the fact that Pasternak made it the bearer of the best qualities of Russian poets of different epochs and different generations—from Pushkin to Mayakovsky, and Blok. Yuri Zhivago has the utmost degree of artistic generalization. The Russian poet bears the seal of doom, as he always opposes to the authorities, the Russian poet breathes the air of “secret freedom” (A. Blok). The protagonist carries exactly this idea of free creativity. Zhivago is a metaphor of life and creativity.

Some Russian researchers of Pasternak’s works think that Doctor Zhivago to be considered as the “lyrical self-expression prose”. Finally, there is the opinion of literary critic Dmitry Bykov that Pasternak’s novel is a “paroemia full of metaphors and exaggerations. It is inconsistent, as life is inconsistent at a mystical historical turning point” [6]. D. Bykov asserts that “Zhivago” is a vivid example of symbolist prose [6].

A. Blok, repeatedly mentioned in the work, exists as an object of conversation and thinking of the characters. A quote from A. Blok’s poem We are the children of Russia’s terrible years has the meaning of the metaphor of the atmosphere of the epoch and hints at the fate of the generation[7]. Images of nature (landscapes) complement the narrative structure of the novel, they are closely related to the emotional experiences of heroes of Doctor Zhivago. This is especially evident in the metaphorical description of natural landscapes in the work (metonymic description). On the one hand, the writer accurately depicts natural landscapes, on the other hand, he talks about the mental and emotional state of the hero through the depicting the world of nature, and even allows the characters to animate nature, emphasizes the indivisibility of man and nature. In our opinion, a human being in Doctor Zhivago is a part of nature and is opposed to it at the same time. While the nature may be disclosed as a special animated environment that comes into contact with a human being, sensitive children feel that animacy particularly: for example, Nika and Yura (Nika Dudorov takes on the role of God and orders the aspen tree to freeze): “How wonderful to be alive,”—he thought.—“But why does it always hurt? God exists, of course. But if He exists, then it’s me”,—He looked up at an aspen shaking from top to bottom, <...>,—“I’ll order it to stop”—With an insane intensity of effort, he willed silently with his whole being, with every ounce of his flesh and blood: “Be still”, and the tree at once obediently froze into immobility.” [4] The human being also belongs to the natural world in the minds of the characters of the novel. Nature creates the illusion of human presence, everything is in motion, nature is animated, human-like.

It should be added that Pasternak thought a lot about the title of the novel. The accuracy of the title dictated the way of narrative form to him as well. When B. Pasternak began his work on the novel, its tentative names were “Novel in prose”, “Big prose”, “Big narrative in prose”, “A lengthy big letter in two books”, “My epopee”. In the end, the search for the name led him to the only possible exact name, which incorporated the rich intertextual meaning and metaphorical depth.

Chinese researchers often argued in determining the genre of the novel. Wang Jiezhi considered it a poetical novel and a lyrical epopee [3]. Zhang Xiaodong treated it as a kind of synthesis of symbolism and realism [8]. It should be noted that a common opinion was reached in Chinese
Pasternak studies that this novel is a magnificent work, and it differs from the traditional realistic works of Russian classics.

“Prose of the poet” by B. Pasternak is a peculiar form of artistic speech, combining the characteristic features traditional for prose and poetry. Russian linguist R. Yakobson was the first to speak about the prose of the writer as a “the prose of the poet” in the article “Notes on the prose by poet Pasternak”: “Pasternak’s prose is the prose of the poet belonging to the great poetic era: all of its properties are from it” [9]. R. Yakobson called the coexistence of two forms of verbal expression, poetry, and prose, in one creative system a literary “bilingualism” [9].

Literary critic Y. Orlitskiy, known for his works on the synthesis of verse and prose, noted the following peculiarities of the “poet’s prose” in Doctor Zhivago: “an obvious weakening of the plot”, “sonic repeats similar to those of verse”, “the strophic orderliness of the number of fragments”, “miniaturization of chapters” [10].

Peculiarities of the interpretation of the artistic features of Doctor Zhivago in Chinese literary studies

All of the above was confirmed and further developed in the monograph by Wang Jiezhi “The prose of the poet: a study of novels by Pasternak”. The scholar and leader of scientific research in Chinese study of Pasternak analyzed all prose texts of the poet and came to the conclusion that the prose of the poet is characterized by a strong lyrical atmosphere, and cannot hide the lyrical elements, because the poetic expression of feelings and emotions penetrates the story itself” [3]. Of course, Chinese researchers had made accents long before the work by Wang Jiezhi when observing the poetry of the prose text; beginning with the first work—“First experiments” short fiction—and to the last novel—Doctor Zhivago—all prose texts by B. Pasternak are classified as “Poet’s prose”. All observations of researchers concerned only the minor aspects of the issue of the poetry of prose texts. And Wang Jiezhi received wide recognition in the Chinese Pasternak study because he deeply investigated the the relationship between poetry and prose and made a significant generalization in his work.

Literary critic Liu Yubao believed that lyricism, imagery, and philosophicity were the most outstanding peculiarities of the poetics of Pasternak’s novel, and they constituted a unique aesthetic system. That is why the author of the novel expressed the assertion of the “Unity of nature and human being” idea. It is also expressed in the creation of a lyrical atmosphere in the novel when the image of nature in the novel acquires a poetic sound [11].

Take the Chinese translated text, for example, section 4 of chapter VI, which occupies the largest volume of the narrative, 11 pages. Sections 14, 15, 16 in chapter II occupy only half a page, respectively. Liu Yubao said that the unit of narrative structure, occupying 1-5 pages, was the most common in fiction. Thus, the scientist concluded that the poetry alike composition in the novel had a pronounced uneven character and fragmentation [11].

Conclusion

Observations on the text of the novel allow us to conclude that the artistic whole of the novel grows out of metaphor and metaphorical thinking. The metaphor runs through all levels of the text - from the name of the hero in the title to separate images and fragments and poems of the poet at the end of the novel. Some names of geographical places and names of the different characters are after a metaphor. The meaning of the set of metaphors focuses on the main idea of the novel—the Life. Also one can see the correlation of metaphor and plot events in Doctor Zhivago. The subject, the object and the addressee of the discourse interact in the narrative strategy of the novel, as well as the internal and external chronotope. Means of artistic expression, as visual metaphors in the narrative structure of the novel, make the picture bright and multifaceted for the reader. Metaphor is also a tool for gaining insight into the inner world of Pasternak, his aesthetic position and mindset.
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