

---

© TATIANA N. SMERDOVA

t-smerdowa@mail.ru

УДК 811.161.1:82-34

### **FAIRY TALE IN THE CONCEPTUAL SPHERE OF CHILDHOOD**

*SUMMARY. A tale, being a special genre of epic character, serves as one of the basic sources of the conceptual opposition of "good" and "evil", where it is clearly established. The article attempts to define the connection of the concept "childhood" with the conceptual sphere of "good" and "evil", and the concept of "God" through the analysis of the frame "tale".*

*KEY WORDS. Concept, fairy tale, morphological basis, functions, artistic space, conceptual opposition.*

Within the framework of the analyzed concept "childhood" in the work "My Childhood" by Maxim Gorky, the frame "tale" is clearly established, although it is not dominant. In the text under analysis the author narrates three fairy tales, while the lexeme "tale" itself is used 17 times.

The notion of "tale" poses itself as one of the most important lingvocultural and mythopoetic phenomena, reflecting the national identity of a nation with the help of a specially structured system of linguistic means, symbols, characters and semantic fields. On the one hand, a folk tale features a complex of knowledge and peculiarities of the world perception and outlook of a people, as well as the result of their collective art. On the other hand, a folk tale expresses the individual virtuosity of a storyteller. The virtuosity of a tale, together with the peculiar manner, style, mood, depends on the narrator. For Gorky such a talented narrator was his grandmother. *"But the best of all her stories was the ones which told (...) of Vassilisa the Wise; of the Priest Kozlya, and the beloved child of God; and the terrible stories of Martha Posadnitz, of Baba Ustye the robber chief, of Mary the sinner of Egypt, and of sorrowing mothers of robber sons. The fairy-tales, and stories of old times, and the poems which she knew were without number"* [1; 50].

A tale, being an integral part of a child's life, performs not only an informative and education function, but it also teaches how to empathize with the characters and believe in the power of good. With its help, a child starts distinguishing what is good and what is bad, because it is the tale that draws a distinctive borderline between good and evil, which is one of the fundamental ethical oppositions.

The object of studies in the article is a Russian tale, presented in the work "My Childhood" by Maxim Gorky as a separate text. The purpose of the analysis is to examine the macrostructure of the tale and the forms of its realization, and to identify the connection of the concept "childhood" with other concepts through the frame "tale". To achieve this goal, we will first refer to the etymology and definitions of this notion.

According to the "Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language" of M. Fasmer [2; 630], the word "tale" appeared no earlier than the 17<sup>th</sup> century (\*съказъка from казать), before that the word "fable" was used. In the "Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian language", edited by S.I. Ozhegov [3; 709], a tale is defined as a narrative, usually a folk-poetic story about fictional personages and actions, mostly involving magic or fantastic forces.

The tale, as a genre, is a narrative macrostructure, the basis of which is a narrative canvas, where numerous actional verbs are connected by coordinative conjunctions. Pieces of description may also be found in tales. They are rather concise and relay the emotional attitude of the author (modality) with the help of special linguistic means: epithets, inversion, exclamatory sentences [4; 55].

The issue of genre adherence preoccupied many linguists, e.g. A.N. Afanasiev, A.N. Veselovsky, D.S. Likhachev, A.L. Nikiforov, V.Y. Propp and many others.

In the famous work "Morphology of the Folk Tale", V. Propp presents all the possible forms, in which a tale may appear. He also supplies a description of a tale, based on its narrative units, their relations to each other and to the whole. The author argues that any tale begins with some initial situation, followed by a sequence of functions. The functions, identified by V. Propp, constitute the morphological bass of the fairy tales. By "functions" certain deeds of a character are meant, which are categorized in terms of their significance for the course of action [5; 31]. All in all, 31 functions have been identified; however, some of them may be omitted. They make up the major elements, determining the course of action.

Surveying the functions of the characters in Gorky's "My Childhood", we will resort to the following statements, suggested by V. Propp:

I. The functions of the characters serve as permanent and stable elements of the tale, regardless of by whom and how they are accomplished. They are treated as the main components of the tale.

II. The number of functions, characteristic of the fairy tale, is limited.

III. The sequence of functions is always the same.

IV. All fairy tales are similar in their structure.

Let us apply the above mentioned statements to our case and consider one of the tales, telling the story of the wise hermit Iona, and how when he was but a lad he was judged, with his stepmother, by an act of God.

The structure of this tale includes the following elements. As a rule, some *initial situation* introducing the characters marks the beginning of a tale. In our case, the characters are a step-mother, a father and a stepson.

*The second function* is absention: the step-mother lays her husband in a bark on the lake. The death of her husband may be treated as an aggravated form of absention. The villain is the step-mother, committing murder.

*The third function* is trickery. The villain tries to deceive the hero (Iona): "And fell to the earth with wailings sore and womanly laments". According to the definition given by V. Propp, "the hero of a fairy tale is that character who either directly suffers from the action in the initial plot of the villain (resp. senses the misfortune or shortage of another person), or the person who is supplied with a magical agent (a magical helper), and who makes use of it" [5; 60]. The character that sets off to find the stolen item is called the seeker. In our case

---

the hero-seeker is Ion. He wants to know the truth about his father's death: "*Those tears of yours I do not believe! It is joy you feel not pain*".

**The forth function** is struggle. A new character is introduced into the tale, which may be called the helper. The hero defeats his step-mother due to his helper, at whose disposal happens to be a steel knife (a magic tool), and "*like a swallow the knife did dart to earth, and fixed itself in her (the step-mother's) heart*". The victory is received in a positive manner:

*"Down on their knees the people did fall*

*Praising God Who is Ruler of All:*

*'Thou are just, O God!'"*

Now we shall consider the nominative chain and the range of the characters' actions. The villain is objectified with the following lexical means: a young wife, a witch, a young widow, a stepmother, a night-bird, artful. The hero is characterized with such words as a stepson, Ionushko, creature without sense, abortion, fit for rubbish heap.

The range of actions of the villain (the stepmother) includes causing harm and is represented by the following linguistic units: *a potent liquor made of herbs which bring sleep; she laid him, slumbering, in a bark of oak, like a grave, so close and dark; the frail craft o'erturned*. Most of the actions of the personages are motivated by the course of action. Driving the father out of the house and overturning of the bark are the result of the stepmother's hatred.

The next range of actions of the hero (Iona) covers the attempts at finding the truth: *her tears not believing*.

The range of the helper's (an old fisherman) actions comprises the solution of a difficult problem: *a steel knife; high above his gray head the sharp blade he did fling*.

In this tale we find proof of Propp's idea that a tale first brings about some shortage, which is later eliminated by the helper. Having enumerated the functions, we can highlight the fact that one function leads to another, not a function is excluded by the other one, because they belong to one and the same syntagmatic structure.

We believe it is of importance to mention the viewpoint of D.S. Likhachev concerning the artistic space of a tale, given in his work "The inner world of a literary work". Describing the inner world of a tale, the researcher introduces the notion of a "minor resistance of the material environment". In this connection, he underlines that the tale possess exclusively favorable conditions for the development of actions, which are done easier than in any other folklore genre. Let us enumerate some of those conditions:

- the presence of only complications determined by the plot itself, but not natural complications;
- the psychological inertia (the decision are taken quickly, the characters do not hesitate; they go on with whatever they put their mind on);
- dynamic ease of the tale (the hero does not only moves easily, but he also transform into animals, plants and objects with the same ease);
- the boundless space (it is closely connected with the action, but at the same time it has no relation to the real space);
- no correlation between the time in reality and the time in the tale;

- the use of various forms of the magic and magical items (a flying carpet, a magic tablecloth, a magic mirror, etc.);
- unexpected turns of the events.

The analysis of the above mentioned tale has revealed only plot-dependant complications. The decision of the hero also springs up without a moment's thought. Disbelieving his stepmother's words, he exclaims:

*"Let some one take a knife,  
And throw it up to the cloudless sky;  
Blameless you, to me the knife will fly.  
If I am right, you die!"*

The steel knife, being a magical agent, helps to resolve the problem on the spot and discredit the stepmother. However, as far as the artistic space is concerned, in this case it correlates with the reality space: *"his father was [an uglichenin], a fisherman of the White Lake, by his young wife his ruin was wrought"*. Uglichenin is a city resident of Uglich, one of the oldest towns in Russia, situated in the Yaroslavskaya Oblast. The toponym of the White Lake is found in the encyclopedic dictionary of F.A. Brokgaus and I.A. Efron: the White Lake is a lake in the Npvgorodskaya Guberniya, on the border of Kirillovsky and Belozerski Uezds, in the old times called "Ves". Therefore, the correlation between the place where the storyteller (the grandmother) lived and the artistic space is evident, as Gorky spent many years of his childhood in his granny's family, who lived in Nizhny Novgorod.

In the genre aspect, the tale under consideration is likely to be referred to the folk tales, as it contains the features of realism, matters of life, and the two essential elements (element of love and socio-economic element). Unfortunately, in this particular example we do not have enough of contextual background to name which of these two components may be found. However, in most of the tales, the image of a cruel and malicious stepmother, who marries the main hero's father in order to get rid of him, is said to be rather typical.

On the grounds of D.S. Likhachev's viewpoint that "there is some connection between the concepts" and that "one conceptual sphere may overlap with another one", we suggest studying the conceptual opposition "good-evil" ("the hero — the villain").

The field of "evil" is expressed by the image of the stepmother and the function of the villain, and is, therefore, revealed in a great number of lexical units with the negative connotation. In the first place, these are:

- actional verbs: [*узвела*], *brought, o'veturned, fell with wailings, [за-спорила], smiled scornfully*;
- attributive phrases, containing an evaluative component: *that dark pool, an artful night-bird, [горе лжубое], baleful gaze, dark business*;
- emotionally colored addresses: *creature without sense, abortion, fit for rubbish heap*.

The means of objectifying the field of good relay the emotional attitude of the author to the protagonist, i.e. the modality. In most of the cases the attitude of the author is expressed with the help of the diminutive suffixes. The author calls the main character as Ionushko, employing the diminutive suffix that carries the positive evaluation and adds the connotative meaning of diminution and endearment

---

at the same time. Such an example is spotted in the sentence: “*With his little hand upon his heart [Положил он ее ручку на сердце]*”. Making use of the lexeme with the diminutive suffix, the author places the boy in the opposition of ages with his stepmother, showing his youthfulness, naivety and gullibility. The word “[кроткий]”: “*He swiftly at her words did dart [Говорил он ее кротким голосом]*”. The explanatory dictionary defines this word as gentle, humble, quiet, which means it is positively charged.

In this tale another connection may be traced, i.e. the connection of the concept “childhood” with the concept “God”. The explanatory dictionary of the Russian language, edited by V.I. Dahl, gives the following definition of the word “God”: God — the creator, the Almighty, The Omnipotent, the Eternal, the Lord, The Creator of the Universe [8; 65].

In the example under scrutiny, his image is the one of the supreme, omnipotent being, ruling the world and human destinies: “*But life is God’s affair. Death too He sends when it doth please Him.*” All happens at God’s will. God has the power over animate and inanimate. At the end of the tale God is empowered with the function of a judge: “*Thou are just, O God!*” Despite the youthfulness and inexperience of the main character, the tale ends with a traditional victory of good over evil.

Summing up, we should point out that the morphological analysis of this tale helped to trace the link of the concept “childhood” with the conceptual sphere of “good” and “evil”, together with the concept of “God” via the frame “tale”. The result we have got proves that concepts and conceptual spheres are interrelated.

#### REFERENCES

1. Gorky, M. *Childhood. Among humans. My universities*. M.: Hudozhestvennaya literatura, 1984. 698 p.
2. Vasmer, M. *The Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language* (in 4 volumes). M.: Progress, 1987.
3. Ozhegov, S.I. and Shvedova N.U. *The Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian language*. M.: Az, 1996. 907 p.
4. Andreeva, K.A. *Functional and semantic types of text*. Tyumen State University, 1989. 99 p.
5. Propp, V.Ya. *The Morphology of the tale*. Leningrad. 1928.
6. Likhachev, D.S. *The inner world of a literary piece // The problems of Literature*, № 8, 1968. P. 74-87.
7. *The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron*. URL: [http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz\\_\\_efron/11298/Белоезеро](http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz__efron/11298/Белоезеро)
8. Dal, V.I. *The explanatory dictionary of the Russian language: The modern version*. Exmo-Press. 2001. 735 p.