

SEMIOTICS OF UKRAINIAN AND ENGLISH INTELLECTUAL NOVELS IN “MAN IS A COMMODITY” CONTEXT

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Abstract. *The article under consideration is devoted to the actual topic in modern society, which is investigated through the scope of Ukrainian and English intellectual novels “Misto” by V. Pidmohylnyi and “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde. This topic reveals the principle that life is a fair”, i.e. everything could be bought and sold, and a man is a commodity in this cruel world.*

The novelty of the research is that it is the first time an attempt to identify and explore the artistic-semiotic model of “life is a fair” in the works by O. Wilde and V. Pidmohylnyi in the perspective of modern comparative literature; the artistic-semiotic model of “life-fair” in a number of works of Ukrainian and English literature is systematically considered; the functioning of the model at the poetic and semiotic levels is comprehensively analyzed; the main structural elements of the literary model (constant and transient) are highlighted; a comparative-typological comparison of the creative work of writers was made, as well as the role and significance of a complex artistic-semiotic analysis of a literary work were specified.

Further development of certain provisions of the research in future literary studies is likely on the basis of not only comparative but also theoretical vectors, which will be based on a more detailed study of the artistic and semiotic space of each of the studied artists. This will create an opportunity to identify complex artistic and semiotic paradigms of modeling the brightest representatives of domestic and world literature.

Keywords: *semiotic model, poetics, semiotics, genre, plot and thematic features, internal transformation.*

Introduction

The period of the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries is a time of crucial events in the life of mankind, a day of reassessment of existing values and principles, the formation of a “new” morality, the desire to get happiness at any cost. The artistic model of “life is a fair” is clearly manifested in the works of Ukrainian and English literature, based on the social orientation of those times.

The mainline in the mechanism of functioning of the “life is a fair” model is the semiotic constant “man is a commodity”.

In the concept of “man is a commodity”, the authors see characters in works, who

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independently sacrificed certain human benefits (beauty, health, reputation, dignity, family) in order to achieve the most secret goal: to be young and beautiful forever, to get rich, to achieve success despite the circumstances, etc.

It is essential to note, that the phenomenon of this specific model is not investigated enough. Moreover, the motto “everything could be bought and sold in this life” is rather actual nowadays in all spheres of our everyday activities. The need to clarify the mechanism of the artistic model “life is a fair” in Ukrainian and English novels makes up the **relevance** of the study.

Thus, the **objective** of the article is to study the peculiarities of the artistic model “life is a fair” in Ukrainian and English intellectual novels, and analyze all the possible stages of characters’ degradation in the context “man is a commodity”.

The goal implies the following **tasks**: to identify the context “man is a commodity” as a world-modeling beginning in the works of Ukrainian and English literature; to find out the author’s strategies for the creative implementation of the main components of the claimed model; to analyze typological approaches and individual-author features of creation of “life is a fair” model .

The **theoretical basis** of the study is provided with the works, devoted to the structural and semiotic literary analyzes (Y. Lotman (4), Y. Kristieva (2) and the artistic features of the works of O. Wilde and V. Pidmohylnyi (J. McMaster (13), N. Bernadska (1), M. Levchenko (3), G. Shton (10), M. Tkachuk (9)). The following **research methods** are used in the study: comparative typology (lies in definition of common and distinctive features of the representation of the “life is a fair” model in Ukrainian and English literature), historical (the study of socio-historical conditions of the literary process of the second half of the nineteenth– early twentieth centuries in Ukraine and Great Britain), artistic-semiotic (contains active involvement of strategies of poetic and structural analyzes in the process of realization of the set tasks).

Results of the research

The nodal “nerve” of the “life is a fair” model is the process of transforming a person into a living commodity; the characters are sold to the cruel world, and then deeply disappointed because of it.

The constituent “man is a commodity” in each work is manifested in its own way. Thus, the concept of “man is a commodity” is vividly embodied in the novel “Misto” (“The City”, 1928), the author of which enjoyed the high authority of an intellectual writer, brought up in the spirit of European and national classics, with a philosophical deepening into the knowledge of the world and man. In “Stories about anxiety” Yu. Smolych recalls V. Pidmohylnyi: “If one of the readers of these literary memoirs asked me, who of the Ukrainian writers I considered the most intellectually profound, mentally subtle or to put it simply, the most intelligent, I would not think for a minute and say: he is Valerian Pidmohylnyi ”(Smolych, 1986: 600-601).

The work by V. Pidmohylnyi proves that the writer continued the traditions of Russian classical literature, the poetics of which was based on attention to man, the manifestation of good and evil in it. V. Shevchuk justly remarks: “As a writer, V. Pidmohylnyi leads, of course, from V. Vynnychenko, who is especially noticeable in the stories of his first book” (Levchenko, 1963: 74). Close attention to the citizens, in particular the poor social stratum, to the gender problem, interest in frank psychological analysis– all these thematic aspects bring together the works of V. Pidmohylnyi and V. Vynnychenko. However, it was only V. Pidmohylnyi, who plunges deeper into the complex, contradictory, and imperfect world of human existence and human relations, the world of the intellect, psyche, and soul.

So, the writer’s short prose introduced new themes and problems into Ukrainian literature of the 1920s. With a fresh plot rhythm, the fate of the 25-year-old young man Stepan Radchenko arises, in which complexes of good and evil are constantly fighting, who, for the sake of personal approval, is even capable of making human sacrifices (the tragic fate of his girlfriend Zoska). But in fact, Stepan Radchenko turns himself into a commodity,

“sold” himself to the city for the sake of social status, material achievement, and urban comfort.

The individual’s search for his own place in the post-revolutionary space is an urgent problem in the work by V. Pidmohylnyi. Researcher S. Luschiy notes that “the writer portrayed a person who is in difficult relations with the world and the environment”, trying to “learn the secrets of the world, solve the eternal riddle of man, and also comprehend its ideals and aspirations” (6, 2000: 149). The task of understanding reality in his prose arises in the context of the existentialist idea of “discovering, explaining being through the prism of personal existence”. Such attention to the perception of the world was already characteristic of early Ukrainian modernism of the late nineteenth - early twentieth centuries, which sought to “see not the manifestation of general objective laws, but a unique “soul”, a special “vision of the world” (6, 2000: 106). V. Pidmohylnyi, in the traditions of neo-romanticism, preceding the modernist tendencies of Russian literature at the turn of the century, focuses on the psyche of his characters.

The writer, as a practicing psychologist, creates a complex psychotype of a person who seeks personal happiness not in the environment, but in himself. “The hero is constantly looking for another world in his imagination – a better world that complements and dominates the real world” (1, 2004: 17).

It should be noted that the novel by V. Pidmohylnyi “Misto” does not have the task of glorifying the beauty of the capital. The writer presents the lives of his heroes in a big city not in order to show the geographical location or economic life, but in order to show the evolution of the heroes' personality, their rise, and fall.

Stepan Radchenko is a vivid example of such a gradation, a rather pragmatic person who has clear goals in life and is ready to sacrifice his own principles for the sake of victory.

Pragmatic heroes are practical people, sober-minded, firmly aware of what they want from life, and rarely doubt that they will be lucky. They aim at success, direct their views to the future, and consider their own activities to be determinative in it. As a rule, such heroes are firmly convinced that a person creates his own life, material wealth for himself only.

So, Stepan Radchenko, trying to achieve success, constantly moves forward in education, in the tireless work of a lecturer and a writer, tries to improve his living conditions by looking for another room, buying furniture and accessories. But later, the young man begins to disdain the city. “Stepan disdainfully pushes his way through the crowd of townspeople. Here they are – the Fence! Shopkeepers, mindless teachers, foolishly carefree dolls in lush headdresses! They must be taken out, these depraved worms must be crushed, and others will take their place” (7, 1991: 331).

From the first pages of the novel, the protagonist intuitively feels his future destiny. Looking at the bright shop windows, Stepan Radchenko makes a very important conclusion: “Here, to sell ... There are thousands of people like him who come to the city, huddle somewhere in cellars, barns, and beams, starve, but work and study ...” (7, 1991: 333).

Many times the young man posed the question to himself: “Is the eternal fate of the village - is it to be sold for food?” (7, 1991: 338). But Stepan Radchenko was not sold at all for food to a huge city, he was sold for the realization of his ambitions, intentions to get rich, to become forever a part of what he dislikes. This is a manifestation of the dualism and complexity of the hero V. Pidmohylnyi.

The problem of duality between soul and body is discussed in the frank dialogue between the heroes of the novel “Misto” by Stepan Radchenko and the poet Vyhotskyi, in which the latter expressed his opinion: “In our country, nature destroys itself. One of the branches of earthly evolution will end here, and no one will come after us, no supermen. We are the last link in a chain that will unfold, perhaps more than once on earth, but in other ways and in other directions. The brain is the main enemy of man” (7, 1991: 367).

The other turns out to be the attitude towards the mental and the sensual in Stepan Radchenko. In the first days of his stay in the city, he believes that everything can be changed with the help of reason. Actions are directed by the mind, but sometimes an animal (sexual energy) wakes up in it. The front man of the novel realizes his own sexuality (thirst,

instinct) through relationships with women. For a man, this relationship is an expression of his inner conflict between body and soul, disappointment in the power of the mind. Regarding the internal conflict as a means of revealing the psychological state of the hero, which is used by V. Pidmohylnyi, Melnick notes: "All characters in "Misto" are shaped to a certain extent by an internal conflict between matter and spirit, to put it more simply, between mind and body? The conflict between spirit and body, which is part of the conflict between expectations and reality, must ultimately remain unresolved. The absurd is inevitably a sign of human existence" (6, 2000: 12). The experience of urban life convinces Stepan that reason does not play a decisive role, and he chooses, in contrast to the poet Vyhotskyi, sensual pleasure, happiness, although it is limited. However, the main character can be happy only next to a woman, for whom he perceives the world around him.

In the subtext of the work, every new relationship with a woman for Stepan is not just a stage of changes in everyday life and sensations, but also another step towards conquering the city.

Judging by the spiritual adaptation of a guy in a big city (Kiev), you can see how, with a change in the local spatial point (his own place in the city at a certain stage) - housing, the woman with whom he was in love changed, and the very course of relations, their quality and duration. It is because of his attitude to a woman that V. Pidmohylnyi expresses changes in the inner world of his hero.

For the first time "having sold himself" to Tamara Vasylivna Hnidykh (having entered into an intimate relationship with her), Stepan feels victory over himself. For a young man, these relations are regarded as a kind of trophy "the possession of this magnificent, higher than him, a daring woman could strengthen his spirit, convince the will, as happens after victory, that the hero himself shows his value" (7, 1991: 331). But it should be noted that in the relationship Stepan - Tamara Vasylivna one can observe a clear realization of the "life is a fair" model on the part of both heroes. So, for Tamara Vasylivna it was important to "buy" pleasure and affection from a young man, for Stepan it was an acquisition of personal experience and self-confidence: "Slowly devoting the guy to the secrets of love, she taught him to appreciate the kiss, which until now seemed to him an insignificant toy, and all the intimate weaving of thirst that humanity has developed during the Stone Age until now, and Stepan, quickly freed himself from the book swaddles that enveloped his mind" (7, 1991: 376).

The relationship according to the principle of "life is a fair" awaits Stepan in the love story with Zoska. He regards it as a commodity that he buys for a movie ticket, a glass of red wine, and unforgettable emotions. For Zoska, Stepan is also a commodity, thanks to the acquisition of which the girl has that pleasure in life, which she so lacked before meeting him.

But not only in the personal life of the townspeople everything was bought and sold, in the cultural sphere of the capital everything worked according to the same scheme: "The seats in the small hall of the national library, where parties were usually held, were divided according to the class principle into two categories - chairs for the elite in front, benches for plebs, mainly for students" (7, 1991: 348).

Self-aware that he sold his soul to the city, deliberately turned himself into a "commodity", Stepan is disappointed in his desire to become successful in Kyiv. At a certain moment, the city becomes disgusting to him; all those achievements that the soul rejoiced in are forever removed from it: "The evenings embraced him with terrible anxiety; a feeling of terrible loneliness oppressed him. And he endured the crazy pain of a person who had lost his personal - maybe everything is small, those human joys and sorrows that give life taste and charm" (7, 1991: 521).

In O. Wilde's novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray", the man as a commodity is the central character of the work. In the beginning, the reader is presented with a handsome young man "with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair; all the candor of youth was there as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world" (14, 1979: 38).

O. Wilde, using the example of Dorian Gray, showed how a person with an “angelic” appearance can be filled with a devilish essence. Sated with pleasures and carnal pleasures, he took on the poison of permissiveness, which became salvation and destruction. It was this pleasure that turned Dorian Gray into a commodity, an immoral living organism that brought only suffering to everyone. The hero, striving to have eternal beauty and youth, made a bet not so much with the devil as with time. Stopping, time gave a chance to live without losing its visual appeal, and the mistakes of life, pain, and all the horrors committed by Dorian's syndrome affected not in him, but in his portrait.

In addition to the theme of the venality of the soul, we observe the theme of art in O. Wilde's novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, which turned out to be at the epicenter of the author's artistic searches in accordance with the ideas of the theorists of English aestheticism. It is not by chance that the problem of the relationship between life and art, aesthetic and real reality turned out to be relevant for European decadence in general and aestheticism as its national version - the presentiment of total existential changes on the eve of a new century was reflected and was reflected primarily in the space of art or taking into account its experience. The modernist perception of the world and the vectors of its aesthetic and poetic expression matured at the heart of the artistic practice of the era of decadence, restoring the romantic tradition, assigned art a special role – at least in terms of the salvation and further development of the individual in fundamentally hostile bourgeois society.

O. Wilde creates a philosophical introduction to his novel “The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim ...” (14, 1979: 4). The paradox of the artist's life model is revealed not only in the epigraph, in the novel Lord Henry is repeatedly surprised by the extraordinary way of thinking of the artist Basil “What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain your reputation. As soon as you have one, you seem to want to throw it away. It is silly of you” (14, 1979: 10).

Lord Henry Wotton, Dorian Gray, and Basil Hallward are perceived as characters very close to O. Wilde. Lord, like the author of the novel, has a passion for paradoxes, a tendency to discuss and play an intellectual game, the rules of which have entered the history of English dandyism. Dorian inherited from O. Wilde his spectacular appearance, the ability to arouse interest in himself, capture, actively act, interacting with other people. And the artist is a kind of reflection of the author's artistic “I”, who reveals himself in serving beauty, beauty, tireless search for the ideal and conscientious and responsible creative work aimed at translating it into works of art.

The first two sections of the novel are devoted to the dialogue between the three designated characters, which determines the range of issues that will be artistically resolved in the work. O. Wilde, as he expresses his own thoughts, projects onto the characters his own points of view concerning beauty in life and art, the ratio of life and artistic modes of human existence.

For Lord Henry, a portrait is a beautiful thing, the contemplation of which gives aesthetic pleasure. His attitude to a work of art is quite consumerist. It is Lord Henry who speaks about fame, the envy of other masters to the artist, for him a portrait is an occasion for vanity and complacency, which he perceives as a well-deserved reward for the creator of beauty. Henry Wotton seeks to take possession of the portrait, introducing the topic of money, buying, and selling into the conversation. When he fails to buy a portrait by Basil for money, he tries to subdue the original, to subdue his curiosity to the life of Dorian.

For Dorian Gray, the portrait is at first a secondary thing. Youthful harmony of internal and external, natural striving for goodness and spiritual purity and spring flowering of vitality, so capture Basil, and are not realized by him. The commentary of Lord Henry in the process of contemplating the portrait makes the young man for the first time see his own attractiveness, which attracts the attention of others, subdues them, and at the same time ponders the fluidity of life, understands that youth and beauty will eventually be lost, as in the end life itself. Despite his portrait, Dorian for the first time experiences the fear of old age and death, for the first time realizes himself alive, and therefore mortal: “The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth.

As he thought of it, a sharp pain struck through him like a knife and made each delicate fiber of his nature quiver” (14, 1979: 58) At this moment, the hero utters the fatal words about his readiness to give his soul for the opportunity to stay young forever, to change the speed of movement through time with the portrait.

Dorian Gray, being more influenced by Lord Henry, never thought about what the soul’s own harmony is. In pursuit of eternal beauty, he, without hesitation, “sells” himself for pleasure: “If it were I who was to be always young and the picture that was to grow old! For that, for that, I would give everything! I would give my soul for that”

It was the commitment of the artist Basil to the young Dorian that became the basis for the creation of the portrait, which later played a decisive role in the lives of both. For Basil Hallward, this portrait was part of his soul. Without hesitation, he spoke about this to Lord Henry: “... every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion ... I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul” (14, 1979: 15). These words confirm that Basil Hallward really appreciated the harmony of life, the artist was clearly aware of what he could sacrifice for the sake of success in art. He did not turn himself into a commodity.

Becoming a hostage to his fate, Dorian Gray is not even aware of the mental suffering that awaits him. The experienced Lord Henry tells the young guy that the principle of the “life is a fair” model rules the world: Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing” (14, 1979: 42).

At the same time, the artist Basil tries to prevent Dorian’s immoral lifestyle, tirelessly repeating to the young man: “If one lives merely for one's self, one pays a terrible price for doing so. I should face in remorse, in suffering, in ... well, in the consciousness of degradation” (14, 1979: 167). The text indicates the presence of the “life is a fair” model in the work, emphasizing that in life one must always pay for material goods.

But, plunging into a life of pleasure and debauchery, Dorian began to notice changes in the portrait and in himself. The degradation of the inner world haunted Dorian, the fear of the portrait turned him into a man, did not sleep: “And everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a reason, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne” (14, 1979: 295).

The consequences of Dorian’s behavior were dire: the drive to commit suicide of the actress Sibyl Vane, the brutal murder of Basil Hallward, tarnished the reputation of everyone who tried to be friends with him. Under a purple veil, the young man hid a terrible portrait, which displayed all his immoral actions: “Now it was to hide something that had a corruption of its own, worse than the corruption of death itself - something that would breed horrors and yet would never die. What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas. They would mar its beauty and eat away its grace” (14, 1979: 254).

The inner transformation of the central character of Dorian Gray’s novel by O. Wilde also goes through several stages, taking into account the semiotics of the interior, clothing, and the environment in general.

At the end of the novel, Dorian no longer has the power to live in fear. The young man, despite the fact that he is already over forty, decides to get rid of the portrait by cutting it with a knife. But he does suicide, regretting all his actions. Dorian Gray paid the price of his own life for the opportunity to achieve his goal.

Conclusions

So, the leading dominant of the functioning of the “life is a fair” model is the process of transformation of a person into a living commodity, the characters sell themselves to the cruel world, and then suffer severely because of this.

The works under consideration are united by a key storyline, which openly demonstrates the moral degradation of the main characters, their gradual “transformation” into a commodity when they are ready to do anything for the sake of material well-being. These demo vectors are represented by the names of Stepan Radchenko and Dorian Gray.

It should be emphasized the skill of Ukrainian and English writers in the implementation of semiotics not only of the philosophy of life, but also of the so-called secondary elements, such as the semiotics of clothing, color accompaniment, aroma, and interior design.

The involvement of artistic and semiotic analysis proves the existence of the “life is a fair” model in the prose works considered.

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Received: 03 June, 2021