

# Hermeneutic Approach to the Research on Maxim Gorky's Literary Works

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**Abstract**—The article is devoted to the current problem of the hermeneutic method in the study and teaching of literature. The article uses hermeneutic and cultural-historical methods. Describes the characteristic features of the interpretation of works of M. Gorky, which for students begins with perception, and also reveal the "hidden concepts" in works of various genres: from early stories, plays to the multivolume novel-epic "The Life of Klim Samgin". It justifies the idea that the explicit perception of the text of the works of M. Gorky already gives more freedom to interpret both the plot and the images of the characters. With specific examples, the author gives a generalized description of the understanding of texts by students. It justifies the idea that the process of perception, understanding and interpretation of texts is associated with a comparison of social practice, students' experience with those potencies, structures that were already incorporated in the work. Attention is drawn to the fact that it is important not only the study of biographical information by students, but also the textual consideration of the main works of the writer. In conclusion, it is stated that the hermeneutic approach implies a historical-literary and aesthetic interpretation, which is a very complex set of "understandings" of various aspects and levels of the artistic structure of works.

**Keyword**—*hermeneutic method, perception, interpretation, hidden concept of the work, M. Gorky's work*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In literary criticism, hermeneutics is given great importance, since the study of literary texts requires objective interpretation. The first step in interpreting any literary work is perception, mainly in the educational process aimed at studying works written by various writers. While reading the text, students perceive the text explicitly. Such a psychological process implies temporary perception, which is limited to an explicit framework. The next important stage is text understanding by students or researchers. It is a difficult stage as it stands for the correlation with those potencies, structures of social practice, experience that were revealed in the process of perception of the text. So there is a kind of imposition of these markers on the perceived text. An important step is interpretation of the text. Interpretation always has an evaluative and cognitive character, in which several factors play an important role. They are:

- correlation of the text with past knowledge, human

experience;

- correlation with allusions from the text;
- linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

Interpreting the text, one can see that "a work of art is the material objectification of the traditional cultural experience, therefore its interpretation makes sense only when there is a way out in the continuity of the cultural tradition (Gadamer)." [7]

The recognition of new meanings begins with the perception, understanding, and then the interpretation of the text. It is a necessary chain in transcoding the external verbal structure of the text into a meaningful structure.

While teaching literary analysis it is important to convey to students that the literary text unfolds in psychological, semantic and logical categories. Also it is important to emphasize the fact that the text always contains a "condensed" sometimes hidden concept that reflects the "main idea" of the text. V. Krasnykh wrote, "Thus, the concept of the text, being the embodiment of intention, serves as a 'starting point' for generating text, is the goal for the perception of the latter, is stored in memory (in long-term memory) as a maximally collapsed structure, some kind of semantic bunches, and can be re-unfolded in a completely new text." [6]

## II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY OF MAXIM GORKY'S LITERARY WORKS

When studying the works by M. Gorky, it is possible to objectively show how "hidden concepts" are revealed. In our opinion, the writer deliberately concealed a large semantic potential. M. Gorky intentionally or unintentionally "encrypted" in the text some ideas that are difficult to see if a person reads inattentively.

Explicit perception of M. Gorky's stories already gives more freedom to interpret both the plot and the images of the characters. Renate Hansen-Kokorush noted that in the text various aspects "are represented not only by semantic instances, such as characters of the text, but by activating readers in disclosing the semantic structures of the text" [5]. This thesis is applicable to the works written by M. Gorky, which activates the full potential of the cultural tradition in the disclosure of implicit meanings.

In the university course of the history of Russian

literature of the twentieth century, the personality and work of M. Gorky occupies a significant place. The study of the writer's work usually takes place in a chronological order, so naturally, students begin their study with the writer's early stories and end with dramaturgy and a great epic work *The Life of Klim Samgin*.

In understanding the characteristics of Gorky's creativity, it is important not only to give some biographical information to students, but also to appeal to the textual examination of the main works written by the writer. Such a structure of study is the key to successful mastering of the writer's artistic world.

In the early stories of M. Gorky, the entire complexity of real human relationships is revealed against the background of the Russian reality of the late 19th - early 20th centuries. Such works of M. Gorky as "Chelkash", "Makar Chudra", "Emelyan Pilyay", "Grandfather Arkhip and Lenka", "Konovalov", "Spouses Orlov", "Twenty-six and One", "Malva", etc. are traditionally perceived as realistic (or as a combination of realism with romanticism), which reveal the influence of the social environment on the individual.

If you look at the problems that the writer raises, then these works in their own way "kill realism" (the words of A. Chekhov about M. Gorky), i.e. they are not limited to the opposition of good and evil, their social conditioning, but conclude a deeper semantic potential, which the author intentionally or unintentionally "encrypted" in this or that work.

The early works by M. Gorky were based on the traditions that he perceived in his environment, which found a certain reflection in this or that text. On the one hand, this is a merchant's, and partly a craft-bourgeois atmosphere with fierce competition, the everyday life of the Kashirins' house, communication with people of different social classes, professions who were forced to survive in difficult conditions. On the other hand, it is communication with the grandmother, recognition of urban folklore, acquaintance with book culture in its various manifestations (cheap popular books, as well as Russian and foreign mass "tabloid" literature, historical novels, etc.). It had a great influence on the formation of the first life impressions, and later on M. Gorky's artistic thinking, created a kind of "foundation" for further creative searches for subjects and heroes.

Explicit perception of the text of M. Gorky's stories already gives more freedom to interpret both the plot and the images of the characters. Depicting the hero of the lower classes, or simply the lower classes that came into contact with the world of the lower classes, Gorky sought to show ways of transforming the human personality. Creativity of this period is largely due to the influence of the "third culture", expressed in the desire of an ordinary person from the philistine masses to achieve the ideal of "a beautiful, strong, free person" who was thought of as "superman." In the search for ways of such a

transformation, M. Gorky could not help but turn to the most diverse ideological currents that somehow affected Russian society at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### III. HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH ON MAXIM GORKY'S LITERARY WORKS

A very important stage in the study is the very perception of the artistic text written by M. Gorky. It is already the first step in its interpretation, often at the level of the plot and storyline, but it is still far from a deep insight into the artistic structure of the meaning. Students should be ready for this stage from school. After that, they should be ready to interpret the text - this is the necessary chain in transcoding the external verbal structure of the text into a meaningful structure. The text is developed in psychological, semantic and logical categories. It is important that the text always contains a "compressed", sometimes hidden concept, which reflects the "main idea" of the text.

For example, M. Gorky raised the problem of the relationship between fathers and children. M. Gorky depicted this problem as understanding of sin, the sinfulness of parents' behavior for the sake of their children, thus, it acquired an archetypal meaning. We can reveal it in the stories *Grandfather Arkhip and Lyonka*, *Idyll*, *On Rafts*, in the story *The Case of Artamonovs*, and in plays, especially in the play *Vassa Zheleznova* (2nd edition).

Understanding of text by students is the process of alignment of social practice, the experience of students with those potencies, structures that have already been identified in the work. So in the story *Idyll*, students, in our opinion, should see behind realistic details (old people, trading and lending money, live only for their children) that "text concept", in which the "sinfulness of parents' behavior" is reflected. The reader is exposed to the psychology of parents who, for the sake of the future of their children, are ready to take a sin.

The old woman says, "We are not for ourselves, for relatives, blood children. Let us grow them up, learn them - they will deserve our guilt before the Lord. There will be educated, princes and gods faithful people. Well, for the sake of them we will sin, so tea, not a sin will be credited. After all, the little bird of God, nestling its nestlings, bugs and ladybirds pecks, - so-so ..." [3].

In the play *Vassa Zheleznova* Sergei Petrovich Zheleznov - Vassa's husband, a drunken captain, was involved in seducing a younger girl. Vassa committed a crime to protect her family's reputation and poisoned her husband. Sergei Petrovich was threatened with hard labor, which would lay on Vassa's owner of the shipping company with an indelible stain. Vassa addressed her husband, "Do not lie, Sergey, this will not help you. And - who are you lying? To myself. Do not lie, disgusting to listen. (She went to her husband, put her hand on his

forehead, raised her head, looked into her face.) I beg you, do not bring the case to court, do not disgrace your family. Little of what I asked you for all my life with you, for a hard, shameful life with a drunkard, with a libertine. And now I ask not for myself – for the children.” [4]

We can say that M. Gorky shows how the family and life of Vassa begin to crumble. Mother, despite the strength of her character, suffers deeply. She loves her children, but realizes that her children are losers. M. Gorky gave important details in remarks.

“Zheleznov – in a dressing gown, disheveled curly hair, cheeks, chin are not shaved for a long time, thick gray mustache”. In this portrait M. Gorky combined several elements that emphasized the character's rakish life. The psychological state of Vassa, who conceived to poison her husband, the author conveyed with such a remark, “Sits with closed eyes. She opened the drawer of the table, looking for something. She found a box, examines the contents, stirring it by inserting a pen. The noise behind the doors. She quickly hid the box in her pocket.” [4]

Understanding and interpretation of the text of the play is a complement to the comparison of the first and second editions. The dramatic work put on the stage has its own life, so the students are given the task to compare several classical productions of the play *Vassa Zheleznova*.

In another story *On Rafts*, Silan Petrov married his son Mitriy to Marya, and then he was not happy with the further developments. Mitriy, frail, painful, God-fearing did not accept marriage, and did not fulfill matrimonial duties, therefore Mary and Silan became lovers. A very difficult moral and ethical situation arises that is difficult to resolve for father and son.

“The other day he mentioned”, Batyushka said, “whether it is not a shame, shame on you and me? Throw it away from you, that is you”, Silan Petrov grinned, “leave, he says, go into moderation.” – “Son, they say, my dear, stand back, if you want to be alive! I will tear apart into pieces like a rotten rag. Nothing will remain of your virtue. I have given birth to you, they say”. Trembles “Batyushka! Ali, he says, am I to blame?” “I’m guilty, they say, the mosquito is squeaky, because you’re on my way. I’m guilty, they say, because you don’t know how to stand up for yourself. Dead, they say, you are a rotten bitch. It was possible, and even this is not. Sorry for you, unhappy Kikimora.” “Howls! – Eh, Marya! Bad people have become! Another would be uh-ehma! Beaten out of the loop, then soon. And we – in it! Yes, maybe we will tighten each other” [3].

In Sergei’s portrait, the author implicitly emphasized features that could be interpreted as belonging to an infernal character. M. Gorky quite often tends to describe instigator characters with red hair, mustache or beard and other special features. We can notice such characters in some stories, for example, a soldier-baker *Twenty-six and one*, Sergey in *Malva* and others.

Understanding the artistic text is initially a poly variant, since it is meant by the author. “The texts of fiction,” wrote by A.A. Brudnyi, “give some freedom in defining differences in their understanding. It can even be said that poly variety of understanding is a specific feature of fiction texts. It depends not only on the content of the texts, but also on the peculiarities of their structure”. [2] Hermeneutics, as a section of humanitarian knowledge, refers to the various senses inherent in the text, and reveals unique meanings that the “ordinary” consciousness cannot always perceive.

Analyzing the system of characters in M. Gorky’s stories, we can see that he depicts them with mental disabilities, thus, it is possible to give a psychoanalytic interpretation of the many author’s works. His formulaic plots, archetypes can serve to clarify the “subconscious and repressed needs” of both the characters and M. Gorky himself in some way. In the story *Karamor*, the transformation of Peter Karazin (Karamora) is caused by the desire to “transcend” everyone around him. In our opinion, the elements of Nietzscheanism in M. Gorky’s works are largely due to the influence of the “third culture”. The desire of an ordinary person from the bourgeois, working class to become a “beautiful, strong, free man” who is thought of as “superman” – such an understanding of a person is also inherent in the poetics of “cruel romance”, tabloid, mass literature, and mass culture.

Before being brought to the “court” (the red purgatory), Peter Karazin (Karamora) “delves” in the far corners of his soul. M. Gorky used a well-known artistic device: revealing the personality, the inner “I” through a peculiar confession. “Personality” has its own special “inner space”, which cannot be mastered by “others” without the help of a person. The antithesis “inner-outer” reveals the “personality” only in its confession. Peter “analyzes” his life, his actions, his observations and step by step comes to the moment that turns his fate of a revolutionary into the fate of a traitor.

As M.M. Bakhtin wrote: “I cannot do without the other, I cannot become myself without the other; I have to find myself in the other, finding another in myself (in mutual relations and mutual understanding).” [1]

In Peter Karazin’s portrait, M. Gorky introduced the elements of a “split” of personality: “two people live in me, I say, and have not gotten used to one another, but there is also a third one. He watches these two, for their strife, and – not something that inflates, kindles enmity, not that – honestly wants to understand: where does enmity come from, why? This is what makes me write. Maybe he is the true self, who needs to understand everything or at least something. Or maybe the third one is my most evil enemy? This is similar to the guess of the fourth. Two people live in each person: one wants to know only himself, and the other pulls towards people.” [3]

“Personality,” wrote by V. Tupa, “is pure meaning and, like any meaning, is actualized only when it encounters a

different meaning (for which, strictly speaking, it needs an interpersonal environment of things-signs)". [8]

Peter lived with thieves in prison, but he did not tell his life to them, but wrote that "it is very interesting to tell your life to yourself. You look at yourself as a stranger, and it's funny to catch your thoughts while trying to lie, hide something from the fourth, escape from his pursuit of you." [3]

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Aesthetic interpretation is a very complex set of "understandings" of various aspects and levels of the artistic structure. A necessary condition for the interpretation of a literary text is a holistic perception, that is, a synthesis of the most varied shades of one or another emotional plane.

In this synthesis, a holistic and most adequate understanding of the literary work is carried out. The early N. Gorky's works combine a whole range of everyday urban, mythological and symbolic motifs, their interchangeability and transformations reveals the complexity of the young writer's worldview, his desire to create his own individual genre-poetic topos.

This is the source of the future complex philosophical understanding of the world, a type of artistic thinking that will bring M. Gorky among the most prominent Russian

writers of the first decade of the twentieth century. The complexity of the artistic consciousness makes it possible to understand the close connections with the mythical and symbolic plan of everyday life that is vividly depicted by the writer. This ultimately leads both the writer and the reader to a deeper understanding of the nature of a man and his relationship with the world.

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