

Literary Works of Jury Koval and Folk's Laughter Tradition

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Abstract — The theme of the paper is the investigation of the specificity of humour in the works of Russian children's book writer of the 20th century Jury Koval in the light of popular-humour tradition. The interest in this theme is determined by the fact that modern children's literature, while developing, uses folk literature forms. The result of the research we have come to is that the writer actively uses compositional elements of fables and folktales in his writing. The characters in his books travel the way which is characteristic of the folktale hero, which factors into the exposure of hidden non-realised potential in them, the same as it happens to folk characters. Jury Koval also uses the devices of the folk theater. Many scenes in his works are rolled out into "wordy-and-spectacular performances" which combine pathetics and buffoonery. One more feature of interaction with the popular-humour tradition is the parody which is also a characteristic feature of Jury Koval's works. On the one hand, folk-fabled nature of his characters contradicts the conceptualized genre forms in the Soviet children's literature, and on the other hand, the folk nature of the hero is also parodied acquiring an imaginary character.

Keywords — children's literature, humour, Jury Koval, folklore, popular-humour tradition

I. INTRODUCTION

Complex and multilevel process of the development of modern literature is determined by its constant correlation with the previous periods of its development. In the paper "Literary Reception of Jr.R.R. Tolkien Works in Russian Fantasy of the XX-XXI Centuries: Variations Stage" we write the following about it: "Beginning from 1990es, it strives in its movement on one hand to incorporate world literary development process and on the other hand to find its own status in regards to the preceding literary epochs" [1]. This feature of the development of modern literature may be defined using the notion of the "literary culture" described in the article of A.N. Pashkurov and A.I. Razzhivin "Literary culture as a dialog of contradictions and reconciler (basing on review of poetics of Russian literature of XVIII – beginning of XIX century) [2], which combines in itself the confrontation and interaction of different epochs in the development of literature.

Children's literature is a part of modern literary process. It is a complex and actively developing phenomenon. Modern

literature studies investigate it with a new zeal. Nevertheless, many aspects of the phenomenon still stay inefficiently explored. We should also take into account the fact that investigation of children's literature plays a vital role in the personal development of a student whose major is Language and Literature. As A.F. Galimullina, F.G. Galimullin, L.I. Mingazova and G.A. Arslanova write in their article "Innovative And Integrative Principles Of Teaching Russian And Tatar Literature At University": "The optional course "Russian and Tatar literature for children: the classical and contemporary literature" allows Philology students, future teachers, to study the works of Russian and Tatar writers for children and works included into the list of compulsory reading for children from classical to modern times, and reveal the cases of typological convergence" [3]. The significance of our research is connected with the fact that children's literature with its tendency to synthesisism actively uses folklore forms. We point at this in our paper «Contemporary Christian tale for children: questions of poetics and problems» as we analyse a modern Christian fairy tale: «Christian fairy tale realizes problem-thematic complex, connected with the ideas of Christianity, within the genre structure of the traditional folklore tale about animals, using the parable structures in it» [4]. However, the problem of folklore features functioning in the literature for children hasn't been investigated completely.

T.A. Ekimova reflects on this in her work "The Folklorism of Children's Literature". The researcher states that the category of "folklorism", which takes the portrayal, transformation and adaptation of folklore in literature as the basis, can be applied to children's literature in its full extent. The reason for that is the fact that pedagogics is focused on the formation of cultural awareness in a child, and at the early stages of children's moving into adulthood such formation bears the folklore character. At that, as T.A. Ekimova writes, we preserve the larger picture of folklore's functioning in literature, with the changes in particular features predetermined by the perception of a child reading a book: the choice of genres, closeness of images and themes to folklore, the motives which bring a child to participate in the plot and the accent on the didactic potential of folklore. The researcher turns to Russian literature dramaturgic folktale of the 20-s and 30-s of XX century and reveals the social and cultural motives for more active interaction of folklore and literature at that

period of time. The reasons may run as follows: the desire to address a new reader who is a man of the people, the reflection of the utopian mindset which was being formed at that time, the attempts to escape a tragic reality. She also writes that “the tragic reality with its heated conflict between humanism and anti-humanism, freedom and inequity, the truth and lies in the society proclaiming fine mottoes, they all didn’t bring to happy ends. Happy endings could only be reached in a folk tale with its fairy enchantment and the rule of the inevitable triumph of social justice. The dramatic tale of the 30-s and 40-s is a vivid example which displays the writers’ worldviews as having bright folklore features being a characteristic of the people living in that epoch” [5].

T.A. Ekimova writes that authors make an attempt to describe the surrounding reality to a child using the devices of a folk tale. When a child is perceiving a tale, the inner processes of introduction into culture take place and the child “acquires folkloristic awareness” [5] since a folktale synthesizes different art forms. T.A. Ekimova also writes that children’s authors transform folklore devices in their literary works.

The problem of the influence of folklore on the literature for children is also raised in the thesis of S.M. Loyter entitled “Russian Children’s Literature of the XX century and the Children’s Folklore: Problems of Interaction”. The researcher proposes an idea that literature for children becomes a background for the functioning of children’s folklore [6].

As we think, the folklore tradition in the literature for children reveals itself most vividly in terms of functioning of popular-humour tradition. Since we turn to this aspect of literature, we must mention that for a long period of time the Soviet aesthetics treated the nature and functions of humour in Soviet culture only in connection with tasks of aesthetic generalization of the aesthetic contradictions of social reality.

If we take as the basis the typology of Polish researcher B. Dzemidok, who singles out 6 typological models of the humour (1) the theory of negative character of the object of derision (the superiority of the subject over the object of derision); 2) the theory of degradation (depreciation); 3) the theory of contrast (unexpectedness); 4) the theory of contradiction; 5) the theory of the deviation from the norm; 6) the theory of the intercrossing motives [7]), we might tell that there prevailed the theory of the contradictions which has a lot in common with the theory of the deviation from the norm.

Even though there existed one more approach to the treatment of humour which focused on the nature of a play. It was developed in the works of M.M. Bakhtina and L.S. Pinsky, and also in the works of T.B. Lyubimova, S.S. Gusev and G.L. Tulchinsky, N.A. Dmitriyeva, G.O. Nodia and others. The nature of laughter was directly interconnected with the nature of a play as the expression of absolute freedom.

Literature of the 1920-s also served as the basis for creating such concepts, these were the years when literature satire developed intensively and was focused not only on the analysis and unmasking but also on the formation of a new mindset. The processes of deep reconstruction of the human consciousness losing the clear picture of the world in the second half of XX century touched Russian culture as well. But due to the peculiarities of their development they brought to quite complex and paradoxical results.

We should mention that starting from the 1930-s of XX century the humour as a form of aesthetic perception and portrayal of reality was primarily connected not with the mainstream but with marginal forms of literature development.

The folkloristic nature most actively reveals itself in the literature for children in the sense of functioning of popular-humour traditions. In this aspect a special interest is attributed to the period of the 70s and 80s of the XX century, with its outward steadiness and stability of the literary picture, which we might observe now. This period demonstrates a multilevel nature in the development of literature and also the presence of often hidden but at the same time quite significant tendencies.

An important part of the literary process in the 70s and 80s of the XX century is played by the works marked as literature for children. We should mention that in some cases such literary works were addressed to a large public and contained semiotic layers oriented to an adult perception.

At this, we would like to draw particular attention to the prose of Jury Koval, a children’s writer of the 60s – 90s of the XX century, whose bright humoristic talent was marked by almost all researchers.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS (MODEL)

The most significant principles of the investigation of folklore in the texts by J. Koval we turn to in our work are the methodological principles of D.N. Medrish, a folklorist and a literature scholar, who was one of the most authoritative researchers studying the issues of folklorism in literature. The genetic approach to the connection of folklore and literature is actualized through the analysis of the structure of fictional time, the correlation of the word and the action and the study of typological correspondence between a lyric plot in literature and a folklore text, and it brought the researcher to make conclusions about the national specificity of Russian literature which revealed itself in genre structures of a lyrical song and a faerie story. One of the areas, which is considered the most valuable for the further development of this research in literature studies, originates from D.N. Medrish’s idea of a bigger efficiency of folklore tradition in literature than in folklore itself [8]. We turn to the principles of cultural-and-historic and typological analysis. This allows us to reveal significant elements of the poetics of his texts in its interconnection with its high-principled content and in the aspect of complex interaction of set folklore forms and variations of its manifestation in the literary text.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jury Koval is a talented writer in children’s literature of 1960s – 1990s. However, both the writer himself and the critics were more inclined to consider his works as oriented not only to children’s but also to the adult’s perception. In one of his latest interviews Jury Koval told that he turned to the world of literature for children since he vividly sensed the ill-being in the world of adult literature. The author’s initial inclination to a high level of communication with the reader determined the absence of simplification in his literary language and complex composition of particular images as well as texts in general. The same complex character is attributed to one of the important features of Jury Koval’s prose, which is his humour. Almost all researchers of his

literary works pointed at this feature taking notice of close integration of humouristic and lyric initiatives in his works. Most works by Jury Koval are characterized by the original impulse of humour. It almost always has profoundly serious, often dramatic aspects. The first writer's works – stories about border guards – are infused with sad humour, while his last literary work – the novel "Suyer-Vyyer" – is closer to a tragic buffoonery in its complex genre nature.

Humour impulse in the literary works by Jury Koval is immediately connected with childhood as an existential state, the main feature of which is the absence of sophistication and naturalness. As a rule, the childish outlook exposes the contradictions of the reality such as a living absurdity or the absurdity of the social organization of life. Alongside with the childish belief in common sense and goodness they constitute the view of life close to the one the folk will have.

This is the reason why Jury Koval's humour originally transforms popular-humour traditions: the dual function of laughter (mockery - statement) which is characteristic of folk literature manifests itself there.

The interest to the experience of folk culture by Jury Koval is explicitly revealed at all stages of his literary activity. The writers S. Pisakhov, B. Shergin, I. Sokolov-Mikitov, who had an inclination to a folk outlook and a folk word, became his literary teachers. Like those authors Jury Koval initially turned towards a spoken language and a living word of mouth. One of the most important stages of his literary activity – "Wormwood Tales" – is a revision of Northern Russian Fairytales.

Some of his early works remind fables in their stylistics, as the basis of which there serves a remarkable case or an accident demonstrating the dialectic contradictions of life. Here are some examples of introductions in the stories: "There came to the border a young soldier, Koshkin by the surname. He was rosy-cheeked and cheerful"; "At the curve of the river Yalma, in an old bath-house there lived, by the way, Uncle Zui" [9]; "Vasya Kurolesov lived with his mom, Yevlampyevna, in the village of Sychi" [10]. We should mention it as an important fact that the author himself shared that "A Pig in a Poke" was born from the stories told by his father who had worked as the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, who was treated as a family humorist and a remarkable story-teller so skillful that he could make any person laugh.

The folklore laughter, as V. Propp writes, plays the role of a vivifier, and in sacred forms it bears the transitional character from the psycho-physiological laughter, which is jolly and arises when one is sensing the abundance of life, to the cultural laughter, in some sense or other connected with the exposure of the evil (in its wide meaning) and the reaction to it [11].

We will take a closer look at the folklore forms of laughter Jury Koval turns to in his works. Complex nature of humour reveals itself at its best at the level of creation of images in Jury Koval's literary works.

In fact, most images in the author's writings, the characters of which may be referred to as a humorous type, are distinctly rooted in folklore and fables. By their type, they come close to the image of Ivan the Fool from a folktale, who finally proves to possess the features necessary to achieve goals. We may see the same character in Koshkin from the story "The

Ruby-Coloured". Koshkin is a soldier serving the first year in the army. He comes to the frontier post and behaves quite naturally showing absolute ignorance of the Army regulation and subordination. The same typological row will include the cook Galosha ("overshoe") from the story "A Special Mission", and Vasya Kurolesov, and Krendel (Pretzel) from the story of "Five Abducted Monks" and others. Their actions are predetermined by the originally in-built semantics of a Simpleton (simple Simon) and the very logics of the plot most often leaning towards the embodiment of the genre composition of a folktale: leaving home – a chain of ordeals – a reward. That is why they often drop a clanger, and often get deceived and stripped clean like Vasya Kurolesov, Krendel (Pretzel), Pronka from the story of "The Treehouse", and are also thrown away in their best feelings and intentions like Uncle Zui in the story of "A Cap with Crusians". Finally, they are saved by the same thing that saves a folk hero – an unpredicted and unusual action from the point of view of a commonplace sense: Kurolesov and Krendel (Pretzel) make an attempt to punish the swindler by themselves, Uncle Zui preserves vigorous faith in goodness and kinship of all people. And as a rule, such actions result not as much in the achievement of a particular goal which the hero sets for himself, but in the achievement of an ontologically more significant result such as getting friends or finding a true vocation.

Like in a folktale the reason for that is the characters' hidden non-realised potential. It explains why their outward social actions don't coincide with their inner nature. This discrepancy serves as the basis for the humorous nature of the characters in Jury Koval's works: a simple and village-like thorough guy Vasya Kurolesov gets into the town of Karmanov (Pockets), i.e. into an alien space, and starts playing different roles: of an old stager, of an old dodger and of a foxy policeman bearing a fur moustache cut from the sheepskin coat.

In fact, Jury Koval often turns to the device of "wordy-and-spectacular performance" to reveal the heroes' hidden potential, directly connected with the living national tradition rooted in the culture of folk humour. The main thing in "the spectacle" is the play which combines the preconditioned and nominal behavior of a character. The story "A Special Mission" has such kind of an example: the cook Galosha's tricks with his chef's hat: "He suddenly took the hat off his head and threw it up, it was done so skillfully that the hat landed on the very crown of his head" [12]. The story "A Pig in a Poke" contains a great number of such dynamic and hilarious scenes played in front of the reader: the purchase of pigs, the arrest of the hero, an ambush, the capture of bandit Kurochkin and others. For example, a most illustrative is the episode when Captain Boldyrev and Vasya found out the criminal who was hiding in the house:

"Coming to the porch Boldyrev knocked at the door.

–Who is there? – asked somebody from behind the door.

And that was the moment when Vasya got overwhelmed by the desire to distinguish himself.

No sooner the Captain opened his mouth, Vasya blurted out unexpectedly in bass:

–Plumbers!

Boldyrev gave Vasya such a look that Vasya's heart died within him.

–What do you want? – the sound came from behind the door.

–We want to fix the water pipe, – said Vasya timidly and melted into the background.

–We don't have the water pipe, – said the voice from behind the door. – We have a well.

–So we'll fix the well, – said the Captain losing his temper.

–Why fix it? It does work.

There was nothing else to say. Boldyrev stabbed a look into Vasya, kept it a little in his soul and took it out" [13].

The mechanism to create the comic effect is quite traditional at first sight. We might observe the process of "doubling the ostensibility": the first layer, which is objective by its nature and which constitutes the inadequateness of the matter and its manifestation, is covered by the second one – which is subjective, or elusive, – the latency of such inadequateness, "the pretension to put on the image and value of the significant" (Hegel)" [14].

But, on the other hand, mockery is combined with the compassion to the character which is reflected through the author's phrases: "Vasya's heart died", "timidly", "stab a look".

In such a way, within one and the same episode there go two simultaneous actions: the inadequacy is both exposed and eradicated. This very principle gives birth to the persistent sensation that there is a chance to reconcile contradictions in life and to find a place in the world picture for each of them.

Such scenes are marked by the combination of the pathetic and buffoonery characteristic of the poetics of folk drama. So, we may see the example in the episode which describes that when Vasya was stalking to a serious offender to capture him, an inscription struck his eyes: "What is more valuable for you? Life or saved minutes?" "Saved minutes" – Vasya thought" [15]. Tense dramatic effect of the scene immediately comes into contrast with the way Vasya cuts Kurochkin's claws slamming an orderly bin onto his head.

An important moment constituting the image of Jury Koval's humorous characters is the parody. The parodic character of the author's literary works attracts attention of all critics analyzing his stories. The first who noticed the parody as the specific feature of Jury Koval's works was G.A. Moghilevskaya in her review on "A Pig in a Poke", she called it a particular type of an ironic parody of a detective.

The writer uses a quite complicated kind of parody. The folk-fabled nature of the characters contradicts with the genre forms chosen to describe it, while it participates actively in the process of parody of some steady, schematised and sphaselated genre formations of children's literature: a detective story about the Soviet militia, stories about border guards, "a school story".

These are the very types of parodies described by D.S. Lykhachev in his work "Laughing World in Ancient Rus" when he was investigating the peculiarities of functioning of this genre in Ancient Russian literature. He pointed out that

the essence of Ancient Russian parodies rested not on the mockery of the individual author's style or outlook as much, but mostly on the mockery of genres, i.e. of "a firmly set well-ordered form possessing its own features which belong only to it, which is called the sign system" [16]. The researcher sees the aim of Ancient Russian parody in the following: "to ruin the meaning and orderliness of the sign, make it senseless giving it an unexpected and random meaning, create an inordinate world, a world without a system, an absurd and foolish world" [17]. That is to say, there is created the anti-world, where everything seems turned upside down, and in the end, there shows up an impression that an ordinary world coexists with a different world – the world of the evil and unreality".

The works by Jury Koval give a steady impression of such coexistence even through the active life of objects surrounding the realistically described characters, which are involved into the real-life picture created by the author: "The bullet was just breaking through the door, was just thrusting out its sinister head..."; "The TVset shouted something after him... it crawled on the floor with a soft clangour and came to rest at the Rushpill's boot" [18]. This comic personification of objects surrounding a man creates a so-called background for the reality, behind which there hides one more layer arousing a feeling of anxiety and uneasiness.

Traditionally, the heroes who form the center of a book belonging to the discussed genres happen to be travestied and comically lowered. First of all, it is revealed in the fact that the kitchen-sink aspect of their life is emphasized. The stories about border guards reek with borsch (beetroot soup) and chops, milk cans, care packages, the narration about the work of militia is full of such details as eating sandwiches and drinking tea.

The very image of those customarily courageous heroes is parodied. It happens partially due to the fact that the narration is given by a simple sole. In the story "A Pig in a Pole" the main character is a witness of the deeds of a good militiaman, Tarakanov, who "bears a huge reddish moustache as if he was growing it since the day he was born" [19]. The moustache later becomes the tenor detail in the Tarakanov's appearance, a kind of a tuning fork that guides his mood: the moustache may stand sternly and solemnly like a rainbow above the river", it may also drop like "the sport flags under the rain". The portrait of captain Boldyrev reminds of the image of a Red Indian from popular adventure books and films: "...a curved and winged nose, brazen cheeks and screwed up eyes of grayish black colour" [20].

But the nature of Jury Koval's parody seems to go much deeper. One might notice that the very folk character of the hero is also ridiculed at the same time, acquiring the features of ostensibility. Denoting the folktale character of the hero's traced way through the composition elements of the folktale as a genre (leaving home – some trouble – getting a fabulous device - the ritual of initiation – the final battle – the award), Jury Koval uses each of the components to its best effect turning all of them upside down. For example, the theme of the prohibition which is violated by a folk hero and leads to a disaster is rendered through the express desire of Vasya's mom, Yevlampyevna, to get her son go to the town of Karmanov to purchase pigs ("A Pig in a Poke"). "A fabulous" device leading to the location of the criminal is a sack with a

honey smell in which a dog was kept, and “a fabulous” helper is the dog itself. But all these devices were granted to the hero by the antagonist himself – the villain who deceived Vasya.

The episode describing the ambush testifies for the parodic character of ordeals Vasya was struck down with. The guy’s imagination draws an image of a bogeyman attacking him in the darkness. As the plot shows, Vasya’s fear turns out to be of a dog which happily found its master. The sign of a parody in this episode is vividly seen through the ironic comparison: “Two shadows stood still, and the third, the moustached, shadow was always moving around. It was pressing something shagged and kicking. It was sergeant-major Tarakanov who was holding Matros in his hands and resembled an Ancient Warrior winning over a small dragon” [21].

IV. CONCLUSION

In fact, Jury Koval uses composition elements of a fable and folk tale in his literary works. The characters of his stories like all folk characters go through the way which promotes to the exposure of hidden and non-realised potential in them. Jury Koval also uses the devices of the folk theatre. A lot of scenes in his stories roll out into “wordy-and-spectacular performance” which combine the pathetic and buffoonery. It promotes the creation of a steady picture of the world. Parody is also one of the characteristic features of Jury Koval’s literary activity emphasizing the interaction of his works with the popular-humour tradition.

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