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VARIATIONS OF VIVIFIED EKPHRASIS IN FOREIGN PROSE OF XIX CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper discusses variations of vivified ekphrasis in foreign prose of the 19 century. The plot-forming motifs for vivifying the canvas are remarkable. The causality, locality and vitality of pictorial ekphrasis are investigated. The means of overcoming the boundaries of frozen and dynamic worlds are distinguished, frame semiotics, dream motifs and delusional visions are analyzed.

Vivified ekphrasis is one of the frequently used techniques to expand the plot of the text. It involves a combination of temporal, dramatic and spatial-temporal aspects. In pictorial ekphrasis, the most traditional plot-forming motif is the motif of vivifying the canvas.

Stable signs of vivified ekphrasis are causality, locality, vitality, temporality, and continuity.

Causality implies familiarity with the prototype depicted on the canvas, an explanation of the motif for vivification of a pictorial object and its impact on others.

The locality of pictorial ekphrasis sets physical boundaries between the subject matter and the hero. The conventional boundary of the intersection of two worlds can be a frame, a baguette or any other framing of the artistic canvas. The functional purpose of this detachment is to establish the boundaries between the dynamics of life and the statics of the stopped moment.

The vitality of pictorial ekphrasis illustrates the ways to overcome the boundaries of frozen and dynamic worlds. They can be implemented in three variations.

The temporality and continuity of vivified ekphrasis are associated with temporary endowment of the art object with vital energy.

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Keywords: Ekphrasis, image, motif, portrait, foreign prose



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1. Introduction

Nowadays, literary critics, art historians and philosophers take a great interest in ekphrasis – the description of a fictional or real work of art included in the narrative structure of the text. The works (Mann, 1998) can be used as samples to study sculptural ekphrasis, but in most cases, the object of the study is pictorial ekphrasis and methods of transmitting the visual in literature. The study of pictorial ekphrasis through artistic texts (Lotman, 2002; Mann, 1998) allows analysis of its content, composition, language features and identification of key motifs and their role in the plot development.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of vivified ekphrasis attracts specialists in terms of the analysis of a work of art Lotman, 2002). Vivified ekphrasis is one of the frequently used techniques to expand the plot of the text. It involves a combination of temporal, dramatic and spatial-temporal aspects. This results in text encoding, destruction of linear unfolding of events, artistic duplication of space and additional motifs associated with overcoming the boundaries of frozen and dynamic worlds (Sidelnikova, 2013; Lotman, 2000; Morozova, 2006). Synchronicity, temporal duration and spatial depth generated by the picture as part of the textual situation allow us to consider further functioning of the subject matter as an equally acting character. This motivates our appeal to this issue from the standpoint of the analysis of the artistic text

3. Research Questions

In most cases, the poetics of ekphrasis is featured based on the material of prose artistic texts in Russian literature (Lotman, 2000; Morozova, 2006). This study aims to investigate variations of vivified ekphrasis in foreign prose of the 19 century in the works by I.A. Apel (2013), N. Hawthorne (1982), E.A. Poe (2011), M.R. James (2013). The paper analyzes not only paintings represented in the context of the XIX century foreign prose, but also tapestry, hand engraving and portrait painting. This attributes for the relevance and novelty of this study.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the signs of vivified ekphrasis and the techniques of artistic doubling of reality, and to analyse the plot-forming motifs for vivifying the canvas, tapestry and engraving

5. Research Methods

The main methodological basis of the research in pictorial ekphrasis is the principle of consistency that implies a holistic review of the totality of characteristics of canvas vivification. Analytical-descriptive and comparison and collation methods were used to perform the analysis and interpretation of the literary text. An integrated approach based on a comparison of scientific data on this problem was used to evaluate the material in terms of the specifics of pictorial ekphrasis (Lotman, 2000; Morozova, 2006). Literary works of foreign authors of the 19 century that featured pictorial ekphrasis were used as text material.

6. Findings

In pictorial ekphrasis, the most traditional plot-forming motif is the motif of canvas vivification. This type of doubling of reality and the play of space characteristics contribute to the narrative dynamics and variability of the plot. According to Morozova, one of the most common techniques to introduce pictorial ekphrasis into the text is acquaintance with the picture as an interior detail, description of the picture as an interior item and further functioning of the subject matter as an equal character (Morozova, 2006). Synchronicity, temporal duration and spatial depth generated by the picture as part of a textual situation ensure the timeless existence of the plastic image (Morozova, 2006). These characteristics allow us to single out the following signs of vivified ekphrasis : causality, locality, vitality, temporality and continuity.

Causality includes the history of the creation of a piece of art (portrait, tapestry, engraving), a description of the prototype depicted on the canvas, introduction of a fantastic element, which manifests itself through the impact on others and mystical violation of the boundaries of the real and surreal worlds, and through the causes of canvas vivification that can be provoked by forces from the outside: art, fate, love or magic.

In Johann Auguste Apel's story *Family Portraits*, the appearance of a knight came down from a family portrait in the ancestral castle foreshadowed the death of those whom he touched with a light kiss, and the image vivified because of the family curse (Apel, 2013).

The issue of interest is the version of prophetic meaning behind the artistic canvas. According to Lotman (2000) a portrait is located at the intersection of artistic and mystical reality and occupies the middle position between the image and the subject matter. In this sense, a person who peers into his own portrait comes into contact with his depicted duplicate. The contour duplicate is assumed to replicate the original prototype or object in a distorted form: a mirror, shadow, portrait and any other duplicate is only temporarily passive and weak; it gains strength during its independent life and performs the function of an ominous duplicate that destroys or subdues the second, a better half. Contour duplicates differ in the degree of dynamics: a photograph or a copy is static; they duplicate a fragment of the present. The portrait is dynamic, as observed by Lotman (2002) "portrait time is dynamic; its "present" is always full of memories of the past and the prediction of the future".

In *Prophetic Portraits* by N. Hawthorne, two portraits of a young man and girl, which were made to order, anticipate the tragedy of the family that will occur in the future before the wedding. The heroes peer into the contour counterpart depicted in the portrait and change beyond recognition: "soon Elinor's friends came to say that day after day her face became thoughtful and threatened to become too similar to her sad portrait. No noticeable vivification with which the artist endowed him on the canvas was seen in Walter, on the contrary, he became more restrained and depressed, and if passions raged inside, he did not show outwardly anything of it" (Hawthorne, 2013). The painter artistically anticipated Walter's attempt on Eleanor depicting a flash of anger of her husband and the fear of his wife; the prophecy captured in the picture came true: "here his eyes lit up, and the face of Eleonor, who watched rage seize him, was distorted with horror, and when he took his gaze from the picture and turned to his wife, their similarity with the portraits became perfect" (Hawthorne, 2013).

The locality of pictorial ekphrasis implies framing of a canvas, engraving or tapestry, i.e. establishment of physical boundaries between the object of art and the hero.

In *The Ebony Frame* by E. Nesbit, the reunion of the hero with the beloved is possible only if her portrait remains in a black frame decorated with magical patterns.

In *Oval Portrait* by E.A. Poe, the unusual arcuate shape of the object framing the picture indicates the indissoluble unity of life and death (part of the arc symbolizes the fullness of life, and the second part implies the futility of dying). Signs of physical approaching the border of the portrait are characterized by fear, confusion and embarrassment of the character, and establish psychological distance between the dynamics of life and the static of a stopped moment.

The vitality of pictorial ekphrasis suggests techniques to overcome the boundaries of frozen and dynamic worlds. Sidelnikova (2013) explores the motif of the "vivified" object of art through the material boundaries between real and surreal worlds and considers two options for their breaking: a) when the static is vivified, breaks the boundaries and goes into real life; b) when the vital energy is enclosed within the object of art

In *Oval Portrait*, E. Poe realizes the process of this metamorphosis, when vital energy is absorbed, and a man vivifies the canvas or other object of art and becomes the part of its space. The violation of the boundaries of the physical space (in our case, an oval portrait) is carried out through the magic of art. The talent of the author vivifies the canvas and closes the door to the reverse process. It is not by chance that the form of the depicted object dominates in the title of the novel. We are witnessing the reverse process of breaking physical boundaries: from the real world to the world of the surreal. At the expense of the life of his beloved, the artist embodies his plan and creates a masterpiece: a living, inspired face of a beautiful girl looks from the portrait, and the artist, enchanted by his creation, exclaims, "It's life itself!" (Poe, 2011), whereas his wife is already dead. The portrait captures the beauty of the girl.

In *Edward Randolph's Portrait* by N. Hawthorne, the secret of the portrait is that it is impossible to clearly see the image because the portrait is time-stained. From year to year the picture holds a special place in the hall of the Governor's house. There are legends about the person depicted in the portrait: some people say that it is the portrait of the devil himself, others believe that the picture depicts the spirit of the family demon of the Governor's house, which was the governor before significant events, the servants see a sinister face looking sometimes from the portrait. Emptiness can be visually observed in the portrait but one physically feels someone's presence. People saturate the object of art with their own imagination and fantasy that creates uncertainty.

The story describes the events of 1770. At the beginning of the narrative, Governor Hutchinson examines the black emptiness of the picture. He reveals the secret of the portrait and calls the name of the person depicted in the picture. It was a portrait of Edward Randolph, the enemy of New England who deprived the people of legal freedom. Edward Randolph was the victim of a national curse that threatened him until the end of his life.

The main character of the novel, Governor Hutchinson, intends to bring British troops in Boston to quell uproar in the city. Hutchinson hesitates to confirm the order with his signature, since this means he will go against the will of the people and become the victim of a curse. At the moment of making an

important decision, after the words "Come forth, dark and evil Shape! It is thine hour!" (Hawthorne, 1982) the face of Edward Randolph appears in the portrait and makes the governor shudder.

Thus, the transformation of a portrait from a dark spot into the image is realized with the help of word magic. The hero materialized on the canvas is a former traitor. His materialization in the picture is a reminder of the destructive action and a warning to the current governor against making the wrong decision. In *Edward Randolph's Portrait*, there are no obvious violations of physical boundaries, the person depicted in the portrait does not leave the frame that is he does not break the boundaries between two worlds, stays in the periphery and affects those around him psychologically.

A number of examples of pictorial ekphrasis illustrate the borderline state of the vivified object, when the boundaries between the worlds are not violated, and the psychological impact becomes apparent through a gaze, gesture and posture: *Mysterious Portrait* by V. Irving and *Portrait* by A.G. Elenschleger.

In *Family Portraits* by I.A. Apel, the image has such a strong emotional effect on Juliana that the girl languishes physically and shows the signs of exhaustion, but escape from the canvas that frightens her leads to premature death of the heroine: "Juliana looked up, recognized the terrible image and rushed to the exit with a heart-rending cry, but at that very moment when the poor girl pushed the door trying to escape her fate, the portrait fell off the hook either under choke or as fate would have it. A heavy frame and fear pinned the girl to the ground, she fell unconsciousness and never woke up!" (Apel, 2013).

We see that revenge is carried out not by an animate, but by a material object. Thus, the destructive energy of the image is redirected to the frame symbolizing the boundaries between the static and dynamic worlds.

A similar redistribution of vital energy can be observed in Margaret Oliphant's *Portrait*: the hero "feels" the psychological impact of the portrait depicting the deceased and fulfills her will.

The temporality and continuity of vivified ekphrasis are associated with the temporary endowment of the object of art with vital energy. As soon as the causes of vivification are destroyed, the image returns to the starting point.

In *Mezzotint* by M.R. James, tragic events of kidnapping a child by an unknown person develop against an unusual vivification of the landscape. Four observers examine mezzotint (hand engraving) at different times of the day, and each time the image changes. At first, it is a deserted house, then a dark spot appears on the canvas, moonlight, the movement of the figure towards the house, and the moment the child is stolen. During the investigation of the mystery depicted in the engraving, it turns out that its creator, "Mr. Arthur Francis, was known in the district as a talented amateur engraver and an expert in mezzotint. After his son disappeared, he lived in solitude in his own house. On the day of the third death anniversary of his son, he was found dead in his office, but before his death he had just finished an engraving depicting a house that was a great rarity" (James, 2013). Using the power of his genius, Arthur Francis conveyed the tragedy of his family through this engraving: as the boy disappeared, the Francis family ceased to exist. The continuity of vivified ekphrasis is manifested through the fact that as soon as the mystery of the image was unraveled, the engraving became static and froze in its original form.

In the novel *Metzengerstein* by E. Poe, all the signs of vivified ekphrasis are concentrated: causality, locality, vitality, temporality, and continuity.

The novel tells about the enmity between the two old families of Berlifitzings and Metzengersteins, and about an ancient prophecy that is behind the enmity – "A lofty name shall have a fearful fall when, as the rider over his horse, the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing" (Poe, 2011).

Ekphrasis is introduced into the text through the description of the interior of the Metzengersteins' family palace. Baron Metzengerstein is examining rich though faded tapestries, which tell about the greatness of his family, at the moment when the stables of Count Berlifitzing are set on fire by his order. The young nobleman's gaze stops on one unusual tapestry depicting an enormous horse that belongs to the Saracen ancestor of the family of his rival: "the horse itself, in the foreground of the design, stood motionless and statue-like – while farther back, its discomfited rider perished by the dagger of a Metzengerstein" (Poe, 2011).

Vivification of the horse on the tapestry takes place at the moment of the death of Count Berlifitzing: "The head of the gigantic steed had, in the meantime, altered its position. The neck of the animal, before arched, as if in compassion, over the prostrate body of its lord, was now extended, at full length, in the direction of the Baron. The eyes, before invisible, now wore an energetic and human expression, while they gleamed with a fiery and unusual red; and the distended lips of the apparently enraged horse left in full view his gigantic and disgusting teeth" (Poe, 2011). The vitality of pictorial ekphrasis is implemented through the intersection of two worlds: the tapestry framing, which is a portal between the frozen world of art and real life, and the door of the family palace to the tapestried chamber (the door symbolizes the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead). The tapestry absorbs the vital energy of the living (Baron Metzengerstein becomes obsessed) and the energetic substance of the deceased (the soul of Berlifitzing vivifies the animal on the canvas). Note the moment of crossing the boundaries of the frozen and dynamic worlds associated with the symbolism of the shadow: "Stupified with terror, the young nobleman tottered to the door. As he threw it open, a flash of red light, streaming far into the chamber, flung his shadow with a clear outline against the quivering tapestry, and he shuddered to perceive that shadow – as he staggered awhile upon the threshold – assuming the exact position, and precisely filling up the contour, of the relentless and triumphant murderer of the Saracen Berlifitzing" (Poe, 2011). The hero does not break physical boundaries with the object of art, the boundaries are overcome by its shadow envelope. The dynamics of the shadow is due to its ability to expand, to contract and to take the original form of the duplicated object.

The fear of overlapping of Metzengerstein's shadow with the figure contour on the tapestry is explained by the associative feature of the shadow as the abode of the human soul. Shadow is an archetypal image of all cultures. It is based on mythological views of primitive people, who considered their shadow a vital part of themselves (alter ego), which can be manipulated: one can catch it, "steal" it, let it leave the body and do not let it return, and "move" it into another body (Frezer, 1986). The loss of a shadow was equal to the loss of life, and to step on a shadow meant to harm a person (Levy-Bruhl, 1991). Although the motif for losing a shadow is minimized in the plot, overlapping of the shadow with the object contour on the canvas makes Metzengerstein mad; henceforth, he subordinates his life to one goal – to curb a red horse that came out of the burning stables of Berlifitzing (the apocalyptic symbolism of the red horse is a sign of bloodshed).

The temporality and continuity of vivified ekphrasis deviate from the standard plot scheme: as soon as the causes of vivification are destroyed, the image returns to its original point. The vivification of the tapestry leads to disappearance of a part of the canvas from the palace and the mysterious appearance of a red horse (no one is aware of the appearance of this horse endowed with supernatural properties: indomitability, fantastic power of run and rare mind). Continuity is manifested in the fact that the rivalry between the rider and the horse lasts until Metzengerstein is defeated – the horse brings a confused rider to the burning palace and is reborn as a cloud in which its contours can be discerned.

The casual sign of vivified ekphrasis is manifested in the causes of vivification: the materialized object becomes a symbol of revenge and prophecy.

7. Conclusion

The persistent signs of vivified ekphrasis are causality, locality, vitality, temporality and continuity.

Causality implies familiarity with the prototype depicted on the canvas, and explanation of the motifs for vivification of the pictorial object and its impact on others. Pictorial ekphrasis can bring death to those around, have a prophetic meaning, and forecast the future.

The locality of pictorial ekphrasis sets physical boundaries between the object of art and the character. The conditional boundary of the intersection of two worlds can be a frame, baguette or any other framing of the canvas. The functional purpose of this detachment is to set the boundaries between the dynamics of life and the statics of the stopped moment.

The vitality of pictorial ekphrasis illustrates the techniques to overcome the boundaries of frozen and dynamic worlds. They can be implemented in three variations: the static comes to life and turns into real life; vital energy is enclosed in art; the boundaries between the static and dynamic worlds are not violated, the borderline state of the vivified canvas is manifested in the psychological impact of pictorial ekphrasis through a gaze, gesture and posture.

The temporality and continuity of vivified ekphrasis are associated with the temporary endowment of the object of art with vital energy.

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