

Phenomena “Beauty” and “Intellect” as an Ideal in the History of World Literature for Children and Youth

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Abstract

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The article explains the urgent necessity in usage of children literature, foreign and Russian classic literature to determine spiritual and moral, aesthetic and common cultural priorities in socialization. The problem posed in the title concerns not only the child or teenager's circle of reading, but also the dynamics of psychological and social personal adaptation. This circle of reading may become a perfect psychological exercise and crucial point of consecutive and systematic development of questions that allow child or teenager to be self-aware in a number of real-life situations and culture, its synchronic and diachronic aspects.

Firstly, the result of studying this problem might be the development of recommendations for parents, primary school teachers, literature and foreign language teachers, who address literary works of different genres and encourage the elaboration of reflecting child's necessity in shaping moral standards and freely determining the priorities, the nature of these seemingly antithetical phenomena. The methodology of this study is determined by the material that is an object of the analysis - literary works, therefore comparative and historical, historical and functional and systematical approaches are used due to their ability to direct the thought of a teacher and student in the direction, developing the visual thinking, speech and creativity.

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1. Introduction

In modern social and cultural conditions, the definition of the concept of an ideal is moved at the periphery in educational resource because of different circumstances. However, the cultural workers and pedagogical community insist on bringing back into the school the two-component education principle, i.e. the growing necessity in education and mentoring as interconditional processes which is becoming more evident. The need in constant reflecting upon images of beauty and intellect while reading the world literature works for children and youth is obvious now by itself and especially

important when the value-orientation principles lose their clarity. The reflection upon the notions might seem important only for aesthetics and/or psychology and sociology, but, on closer examination, they become defining in shaping of motivation in personality. They define the priorities of real-life behavior, choice of the occupation preferences and evaluation of personal interaction preferences, which, in turn, shapes the future behavioral principles of a person. Any discourse on this subject in the area of Information and Communication technologies, mass media and the Internet much more likely would confuse more than help to understand what is valuable and life-building and what is unnatural, false even if it is tempting and fascinating. However, tutors and parents may not be aware of the fact that the readings of these literary works with a child, which discover these questions directly or indirectly, allow them to solve many problems of pedagogical nature without insisting on their only allowed point of view.

Alongside many other without doubt important features distinguishing the nature of an ideal, the essential ones are those, which meet the moral and aesthetic requirements of society and personality and indicate the similarities and differences of national worlds. The perception of beauty and intellect differentiate in different national worlds, even social groups, leads to the understanding of named phenomena directed to needs under the circumstances meditation of a tutor or parents. Y.I Mineralov analyses the problem of “national” as a factor of not only mentality, but also creative worldview in a wide range of studies. Y.I. Mineralov, S.A. Vasiliev, 2010, his scientific and philological position, theoretical approach to the literature and history and literature research methodology form the basis of this study (Y.I. Mineralov, 1999). The philologist’s studies are based on scientific works of F.I. Buslaev who examined literature in the context of culture, different national cultures and art forms.

Needless to say, that Federal State Educational Standards never concern a matter of reflection upon the questions like “what the true intellect is” and “what the true beauty is” giving up the most important question of self-identity.

The child, that just started to be self-aware, speak, is commonly convinced by parents that he or she is “a handsome young man” or “beautiful girl” and “child prodigy”. This kind of “encouragement” of a child at any stage of preschool age can result in completely inadequate deformation of child’s self-esteem that forms his or her tone of relationship with other children. Moreover, it is literature that often can compensate unwarranted admiration of parents just by the fact of reading proper literature.

In primary school, children read with pleasure “Beauty and the Beast” supported by the sense of familiarity of content from the Walt Disney animated movie. Very important communicative rhetorical work can be held by comparison of the animated movie with the literary fictional work translated from French into Russian. Therewith, it is evident that the American animated movie and French fairy tale bring important ideas and are understandable by a Russian-speaking child senses that are perceived in Russian language and in Russian creative reality with different emphases. From this perspective, these works are fair to compare with the fairy tale by S.T. Aksakov and try to understand why the author, reinventing the ancient story in Russian cultural space, puts the magical object, story-building detail in the title.

The understanding of the priorities of native and foreign, comprehending the common area of an ideal’s nature may be formed through learning, simple reading and talking, not necessary in school

environment, but – what would be more effective – in the context of family reading, library talks and other forms.

It is possible to trace the sequence of references to the fiction works where the intellect and beauty of the character and world reveal themselves, but the sequence of fiction works presented in this study is not the transcendent and is possible. The circle of works with this kind of problems, dominant or satellite consists of a big number of fiction works. Thus, if the notions of beauty and intellect will be uncovered during the process of reading, then it is possible to proceed from the reflection upon the outer beauty, the portrait to the understanding the spiritual beauty, which has its own ways to reveal itself, through the kindness, generosity, compassion, diligence, faith etc.

2. Research Questions

There is no doubt that these problems figure at different angles in the literature, but during the personality development, it will be right to suggest to a child to reflect upon the questions that are going to become definitive for him or her in direct or implicit way. In an apologue fairy tale for children and youth “Beautiful Princess and the Happy Dwarf” N.M. Karamzin gives as it may seem an unexpected answer to the dilemma “what is more important: the intellect of the beauty?” (Karamzin, 1989) He answers the question with a funny tone saying that the happiness for a human is in harmony, in balance and not in controversy. A quite small fairy tale discovers the answer to the deep and simultaneously surface question “What are we loved for?”, but also focuses the child on the reflection on the idea worded by A.P. Chekhov “Everything must be beautiful in a person: the face... and the thoughts” (Chekhov, 2007). In this case, the fact of the matter is not that the person in his or her childhood will answer the question and will have conclusive answer for the rest of his life. He or she will face this question again and again, but the answer, giving the freedom of choice, will allow “building up” more arguments in the form of personal and aesthetic experience, feelings and thoughts. Thus, in the childhood person receives not an answer to the question, but a direction of social and psychological, spiritual and moral training.

The fairy tale “The Little Scarlet Flower” by S.T. Aksakov, which children get to know in preschool in form of the literary work with illustrations as well as the animated movie, introduces the story-building and at the same time symbolical detail (Aksakov, 1999). It on the one hand explains what people are loved for and on the other hand stimulates even boys and girls to think about what the inner and outer beauty is and how a person can grow psychically. What happens when a person sympathize, feel sorry for somebody else? Thus, in “The Little Scarlet Flower” the daughter sympathizes with her father, the cursed scaring young man sympathizes with the young girl. The compassion allows the beauty of the soul to blossom, and this beauty frees everyone from the bonds of the evil and reveals the beauty of the intellect, its compassion, and on the other hand the genuineness of the beauty of the soul, its virtue, unselfishness. There is no doubt that the fairy tale of S.T. Aksakov is more complicated than the apologue of Karamzin, therefore is necessary to re-read these literary works, draw new senses from the fairy tale and food for reflection and your own creativity.

Thereafter, when the young man or woman will read the modern works or the story of Apuleius or the short novel of Jean de La Fontaine, the completely new sides of already discovered image that differentiates in the folklore and minds with the development of culture and arts will be open to them. Moreover, every time these young people will be in circumstances where they have to compare their personal experience with the experience and clues depicted in these masterpieces. It is difficult to negate this “parental” experience and it is edifying to return in the thoughts to the idea of “the Golden Ratio”. Thus, “Beauty and the Beast” by Jeanne Marie Leprince de Beaumont (2007), “Beautiful Princess and the Happy Dwarf” by N.M. Karamzin, “The Little Scarlet Flower” by S.T. Aksakov are the literary works that adapted a story about Cupid and Psyche from the novel “Metamorphosis” by Apuleius (2001) for children and youth. Later the story was embodied in a romance “The Loves of Cupid and Psyche” by Jean de La Fontaine that gave an impulse to development of Russian poetic fairy story with elements of Russian folklore (“Dushenka” by I.F. Bogdanovich (1809)). Thereafter A.S. Pushkin (1999) will master and develop further the genre in his poem with the ballad aspect “Ruslan and Ludmila”.

Thus, preserving the main story points, “Cupid and Psyche” manifest in different historical periods and cultures in a new way. Jean de la Fontaine brings into his work a wide discussion on the subject of advantages and disadvantages of different genres – tragedy and comedy – very vital polemic at that moment. He uses the story and characters themselves to defend both viewpoints, naturally inscribing it into the ancient story. He also raises the valid issue of young women education, adding an episode where Psyche explains the nature of love and lovers to two shepherd daughters. He also touches the question of the outer, “petrified” beauty and the inner beauty of life, giving an example of apologue about a king who chose a wife between two women.

None of these elements was written intentionally for children, but they touched the problems of the phenomena “intellect” and “beauty”. I.F. Bogdanovich re-invents the ancient story on the Russian folklore basis, discovering new sides of initial ideas. He tries to reflect the innocence of the female protagonist. Thus, in Apuleius’ version of the story, Psyche punishes her evil sisters by herself, in La Fontaine’s version she does it by the command of Cupid, and in Bogdanovich’s version Cupid, the Love itself brings justice upon the sisters letting their sins lead them to their death. During the Venice’s trials, Dushenka (Russian for Psyche) recovers her beauty, so on her last trial for the box of Proserpine’s Beauty, she opens it out of sense of curiosity and not to return her own beauty, so this episode gives a completely new traits to the character of Psyche.

Another important thing is the discovering in literary works of different genres and animated movies an image of beauty as it was introduced in the ancient world, French, Russian, American cultures in different periods, considering all the different national emphases. There is a common cognitive core allowing through the reading with children develop their personality, able to independently and freely evaluate the moral and aesthetic priorities.

3. Conclusions

It is necessary to base on the classics presented in ancient tradition, national folklore, exemplary literary works to learn the moral and aesthetic aspects of the beauty and the intellect, reason and virtue. This allows among other matters to outline the concepts of literary style, genres, mimetic principle in the art. In this respect, the works written for children (S.T. Aksakov, N.M. Karamzin) will be of highest priority, then the works written for youth (A.S. Pushkin) and at last, there will be the works that are closer to the source material.

Recommendations: If teacher reads and comparatively analyses the works that introduce the ideal of concepts of beauty and intellect, he has no opportunity to shape spontaneously moral and aesthetic priorities of the youth, diachronically showing the perceptions of the ideal in different cultures, analyze the perceptions of true and pseudo values through reading of the exemplary literature in Russian and foreign languages.

In this case it is important to combine the reading, perception, reflection (comparison, collation, analysis of the art) and the effective creative speech (writing essays on similar subjects by using various titles of classic books, developing in these essays the ideas of predecessors from Russian and foreign cultures). It is possible to build up an image of an ideal in the conscious of the child and later the teenager by using different means and methods of creative activity in education (literary writing, relying on graphic arts, music and song performance and the performance in general). This course of actions encourages the child to communicate during in-class as well as extra-curricular independent activities of all sort and builds up the motivation for similar activity since it aims for a successful result.

4. Results

Methods to develop reader's skills, broaden perspective, acknowledge personal and national ideals are diverse, but focusing on phenomena of beauty and intellect helps to break a mental block in the process of reading, invites to form self-sufficient moral and aesthetic ideal, which turns out to be not just anticipated and familiar, but also well-worded.

Through the reflection upon the beauty and intellect, the love and compassion in the works of different arts, where owing to raising and solving a complex of questions is tied to named principles, the synthesis of arts (music, graphic arts, drama and literature, art of the film, which is synthetic by definition) can come to life. It helps children and youth to develop aesthetic sense, free and independent behavior of a young person in a modern society.

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