

**RLMSEE-2020**  
**The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment**  
**PRECEDENT NAMES IN THE COMPARATIVE TROPES OF**  
**MODERN RUSSIAN PROSE**

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### Abstract

The article examines the functioning of precedent names in modern Russian prose. They are analyzed as part of various comparative constructions – metaphors and similes. Precedent names are classified, and a number of thematic groups are distinguished, in which they are included: ancient mythonyms, names of biblical characters and saints, names of literary characters and folklore characters, names of historical figures and cultural figures. It is noted that the most voluminous group in quantitative terms is the group of names of literary characters. The second place is taken by the group of names of historical figures. The article shows that comparative tropes with precedent names characterize a character or narrator in different aspects (appearance, behavior, intellectual and moral qualities, speech features, social status, professional qualities, situations in which the character finds himself). Special attention is paid to the functions of precedent names. In modern prosaic texts they perform an intertextual function, an evaluation function, and in some cases a plot-forming function. The above-mentioned functions can be combined in a literary work. Modern prose is characterized by a tendency towards stylistic lowering of precedent names, which is reflected in the choice of their definitives and their inclusion in colloquial phraseological constructions.

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## 1. Introduction

A precedent name is understood as «an individual name associated either with a well-known text <...> or with a precedent situation <...>, a complex sign; when it is used in communication, an appeal is made not to the denotation itself <...>, but to a set of differential features of this precedent name» (Brileva et al., 2004, p. 17).

Precedent names are now in the focus of researchers. A special branch of philology is even proposed – precedent linguistics (Golubeva, 2020; Zueva, 2016). Precedent names are mainly investigated in the linguocultural and psycholinguistic aspects. They are studied, for example, in the works of Alefirenko (2010), Fleisher (2014), Gudkov (2003), Popadinets (2010), Tereshchenko (2016) and others.

In these works, the source domains of precedent names are described, their typology is presented, taking into account the semantics and formal structure. Particular attention is paid to proper names. In the dissertation of Fleisher (2014), the foundations of the precedence of a proper name were developed and the types of names were distinguished according to their formal structure (one-part, compound, double). The evaluative function of proper names in the text is analyzed (Kosichenko, 2006). The development of the cognitive potential of the precedent anthroponym (Zolotarev & Privalova, 2020) and its cultural conditioning (Kremneva, 2019) are investigated. The precedent names have been compared in different cultures, for example, in Russian and English, Russian and German (Stepanov 2017; Tereshchenko, 2016). The precedent names were studied on the basis of mass media texts (Volova 2016, Zakharova 2004), scientific texts (Golubkova, 2017), Internet discourse (Radbil' & Pomazov, 2020), and fiction texts. The researchers study, for example, precedent names in the works of Lomonosov (Patroeva & Lebedev, 2020), Chekhov (Bystrova, 2016), Tsvetaeva (Steshenko, 2016), Ilf and Petrov (Larina & Milevskaya, 2015).

At the same time, the functioning of precedent names in modern Russian prose has not been sufficiently studied. Some observations are contained in a few articles (for example, works on the prose of Rubina (Kikhnei & Sil'cheva, 2018) and Pelevin (Urzha & Skvortsova 2016).

## 2. Problem Statement

It seems interesting to identify the main trends in the use of precedent names in the texts of modern Russian prose, to consider the semantic transformations of these names, to classify them and to determine their role in a literary work of fiction.

## 3. Research Questions

During the research, the following questions are considered:

- Determination of groups of precedent names in modern prose, taking into account different parameters.]
- Identification of the structures in which they are used.
- Investigation of the semantics of precedent names.

- Description of the historical and cultural background on which precedent names are used.
- Determination of the functions of precedent names in the texts of modern prose.
- Identification of new trends in the use of precedent names.

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our work is to identify comparative constructions including precedent names, and to determine their functions in the works of modern Russian prose. The research material is represented by contexts extracted from the Russian National Corpus and contemporary literary texts (works by Evgeny Vodolazkin, Alexei Ivanov, Olga Slavnikova, Yuri Buida, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Dina Rubina, Mikhail Shishkin, Victoria Lederman, Elena Kolina, Elena Chizhova, Marina Stepnova and other authors).

#### 5. Research Methods

The main research methods are the descriptive method, the structural-semantic method, the method of corpus analysis of linguistic material.

#### 6. Findings

In modern Russian prose, precedent names are widely used, which are often included in metaphors and similes and act as markers of intertextual relations. The precedent names used in contemporary prose are diverse. The following main groups are distinguished:

a. Ancient mythonyms: «Here Anton Kurbatov is already landing <...>, beautiful as *Achilles*, and ugly as *Midas*<sup>1</sup>» (A. Matveeva. Eat!), «The People's Leader is a poet in the original and at the same time the ultimate meaning of this word. He is like *Orpheus*, whose verses were listened to by all nature, they moved trees and rocks. Likewise, Gulimov's poems directly invade life, form the basis of national projects and state programs. He is a poet of a special, prophetic sort» (Chizhova. Interlinear translation).

b. The names of biblical characters and saints: «You know, once I felt like *Noah*, to whom it was revealed that sooner or later the flood would come and the life of everyone on earth would end» (Shishkin. Letter Book); «Day after day, from month to month, I seemed to be filled with weight, as if a baby was growing in me – a cruel, wayward baby, ready to subjugate my future ... a kind of incoherent, confused, tongue-tied knowledge was ripening in me, which was larger, stronger and smarter than me, and before this weight, before this power it was impossible to resist, but it was only possible and necessary to obey it, like *Jacob* obeyed the Angel ... (Buida. Stalen).

c. The names of literary characters: «Your vocabulary still leaves much to be desired, Baev, you are the same *Mitrofanushka* as you always were» (Zavershneva. Skyscraper); «there was a mustache on his face, in general black, but with light blond whiskers. “Like *Pechorin*”, thought Sasha, she remembered the portrait of Pechorin well. Adam Sigismundovich was of slightly above average height,

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of contexts from literary works were made by us. – N. Fateeva, N. Nikolina, Z. Petrova

but due to the exceptional proportionality of the physique he seemed tall» (Mikhalskiy. Lonely Man Feels Like in the Desert Everywhere).

d. The names of folklore characters and heroes of literary tales: «Not a student of the twenty-first century, but just *Rapunzel!*» (Victoria Lederman. The Freshman-girl), «Everything in his life was okay, smooth, and bad turned into good by itself. Like *Ivanushka the Fool*» (Shcherbakova. Ah, Manya ...).

e. The names of historical and cultural figures: «and some saw the Student himself, menacingly, like *Peter the Great*, standing with hands folded on his chest» (Remizov. Free Will [Volya Vol'naya]), «We held our breath, and Ramil triumphantly looked at us from above with such a look that gave me goosebumps. *Genghis Khan* during the Battle of Poltava» (Gelasimov. The Year of Deception).

In quantitative terms, as the material shows, the most voluminous is the group of names of literary characters. The second place is taken by a group of names of historical and cultural figures.

As one can see, the composition of precedent names included in comparative constructions is diverse. In modern prose, precedent names are used that are characteristic not only of the Russian culture, but also of other national cultures belonging to different periods of history.

In the texts of modern prose, contexts are regularly encountered in which two or more images are used simultaneously, they can characterize different cultures. For example: «In general, a chubby *Chichikov* with the manners and habits of *Casanova*» (Bakonina. The School of Doubles),

«It's a pity, Zukhra is not there. In women's society, it's somehow ... more cheerful».

<...>

“Anyhow, she is a good woman,” Batyr refilled glasses for the third time.

Grandfather Aslanbek, looking around, drank quickly.

“Very good,” he readily agreed and shyly put an empty glass on the table. “So... um... understanding.”

“And smart.”

<...>

“Genius, of course. *Leonardo* in a skirt! .. *Dostoevsky* in heels! .. In short, Tambov *Einstein* is her friend!”» (Kosykh. Illegals).

At the same time, paired tropes are used in modern prose texts, including interrelated precedent names: *Adam* and *Eve*, *Rachel* and *Leah*, *Eliza Doolittle* and *Professor Higgins*, *Mozart* and *Salieri*. For example: «I cultivated art laboriously, slowly, but they trampled on it and did not even notice. I was *Salieri*, and they were some absurd *Mozarts*» (Belozerov. People on Demand).

Comparative tropes, including precedent names, characterize a character or narrator in different ways. These are:

a. appearance:

«And Nikolai Ivanovich was extraordinarily handsome, just incredibly – bright-eyed, golden-haired, smiling, he seemed to Galochka some kind of festive *Lel*, the embodiment of all the Russian folk tales under which she fell asleep in childhood» (Stepnova. The Women of Lazar), «And about twenty-five years ago, Margot was a boisterous and nimble blue-eyed girl, with a bulb instead of a nose and a dishevelled head: *the good soldier Svejk* at the beginning of his military career» (Rubina. The White Dove of Cordoba), «A large, slightly asymmetrical *mouth*, and the smile is always a little crooked. The dark,

rounded eyebrows gave her face a constantly amazed expression, gray-green eyes of an unusual shape, as if she used an eyeliner, always looked a little offended. It turned out such a sad *Pierrot*» (Colina. Princess of St. Petersburg), «she [Zhenya's bride] seemed to Shurik very pretty. <...> *Nefertiti's* head extended upward with a bun of red tow-like hair, a long neck and a long waist <...>» (Ulitskaya. Sincerely Yours Shurik);

b. behaviour, actions of the character:

«But at thirty-three, when he got off the stove, like *Ilya Muromets*, why, for example, describe the bad, albeit for the sake of the best arrangement» (Popov. Aunt Musya and Uncle Leva), «Take off your cloak, don't stand like *Galatea*, now it will be hot here, you are going to sweat, catch a cold...» (Volkov. Liquidators), «I understand that Muza Pegasovna gives me a fur coat without a fight, like *Kutuzov* surrendered Moscow burnt by fire» (Sinitsyna. Muse and General);

c. intellectual and moral qualities, emotional properties:

«Vishnevetsky said that this bitch had a boyfriend jealous like *Othello*» (Makeev, Leonov. Cop's Protection Racket), «She's a touch-me-not, like *Tatiana Larina*» (Zhitkov. Supermarket), «I know who you are you are, perhaps, really better than everyone, at least better than everyone I know, you, like *Chatsky*, are angry and proud» (Naiman. Love Interest);

d. the character's speech:

«Hearing Hanna's speech, I want to move away from her even further. It's just some kind of *Eliza Doolittle*. But I am not Professor Higgins» (Vodolazkin. Brisbane)

e. social status: «Oh, I would be rich like Rockefeller, because mountains of golden sand are at my feet!» (Rubina. On the Sunny Side of the Street);

f. professional qualities:

«It was written on her face: Who would have thought that such *Pinkertons* are working in the police?» (Sukhov. The Case Is Over – the Term Is Beginning).

Precedent names belong to quasi-standards. In modern Russian prose, a number of regularly occurring standards can be observed, for example, the standard of avarice – *Plyushkin*, *Gobsek*, *Koshchei*, the standard of jealousy – *Othello*, the standard of strength – *Ilya Muromets*, *Hercules*, the standard of sacrifice – *Prometheus*, the standard of laziness – *Oblomov*, the standard of beauty – *Apollo*, *Aphrodite*, the standard of ugliness – *Quasimodo*, etc.

In modern prose, precedent names are more often used in similes than in metaphors. Metaphors and similes that include them differ semantically: a metaphor, as a rule, actualizes the entire set of differential features of a precedent name, while a simile distinguishes a certain feature from this set, different features and situations can be related to the same name.

Let us compare, for example, comparative constructions with the name *Ostap Bender*:

«Konstantin felt like *Ostap Bender*, who had just gutted the last 12<sup>th</sup> chair» (Seliverstov. 12 and a Half, or My Life in Pure Art),

«Just like *Ostap Bender* at the establishment of "Horns and Hooves", Zhukovich could not resist» (Danilyuk. Ruble Zone),

«I treated mommy exactly like the *comrade Bender* treated millionaire Koreiko» (Proshkin. Mechanics of Eternity),

«And, like *Ostap Bender* from his favorite book “The Golden Calf”, he demanded a good round sum for a folder with compromising evidence» (Grachev. Yary Against Videopirates).

In the prose of recent years, precedent names are consistently adapted to the depicted modern situations, which is reflected in the nature of their definitives: «A couple of *local Heracles* swung the tablet with the scrap picked up near the station warehouses» (Romanova, Romanov. Trump Queens), «Julia made him an offer, like the *modern Tatyana Larina*, and he simply did not repeat Onegin’s mistake» (Chulaki. Primus), «And, sitting on a stool, announced: “I’ve come for a minute, Alexandrych. You know, here a *new Chichikov* showed up ... But if that one bought up dead souls, then this one buys living ones» (Solntsev. Half-decay. From the Life of Levushkin-Alexandrov, As Well As Anecdotes About Him), «“Vaksa, why are you sitting there like *Onegin in jeans*? I suppose you think who’s there, crimson beret wears, with Spanish envoy tru-la-la?» (Aksenov. Mysterious Passion), «Maybe she is married to some *Caucasian Othello*, who has now gone on a business trip and finally let the poor girl have a good time?» (Grigorovich. Dust Storm), «“We arrived by car.” “In the car of this *Romeo from the NKVD*? And who were you with them?” “He is already forty-eight”» (Gelasimov. Rachel).

In modern prose, tropes with precedent names are often characterized by ironic expression, combine with definitions that lower the image: *hoarse Orpheus*: «He was generally enlisted here long ago, and therefore they did not spread compliments, but simply showed the bard their thumbs. The girls of the tribe, of course, turned out to be more generous and therefore grouped around the *hoarse Orpheus*, as if offering him to make a choice» (Aksenov. Mysterious Passion), *skinny Orpheus, drunken Eurydice*: «And I called him, *skinny Orpheus*, who had to go down to the sewer kingdom of Hades after his *drunken Eurydice*» (Simonova. Polovtsian Dances), *drunk Icarus*: «Flapping my wings, I fell under the table like *drunk Icarus* and gave a choking wail from there» (Skripkin. Tinga), *crazy Chichikov*: «It occurred to Marina before more than once that Klumba behaves like a *crazy Chichikov*, buying up dead souls not for the sake of mortgage, but for the eternal possession of the host of the dead» (Slavnikova. Immortal. The Story of a Real Man), *moth-beaten Romeo*: «Don’t you really understand that this is absurd? *Moth-beaten Romeo* is ridiculous...» (Romanov. Parliament).

In addition, they are regularly included in the composition of evaluative constructions with words *some, such one* [*tozhe mne, vyiskalsya, nashelsya*], etc.: «Trying to cool my ardor so as not to run into adventures, I giggled at myself: “*Such one Danko you think you are!*” [*Tozhe mne Danko vyiskalsya!*]» (Mamedov, Mil’kin. To Myself), «I won't describe my feelings in connection with my love affair – *some Tatiana Larina at thirty-eight!* [*Tozhe mne Tatiana Larina tridsati vos'mi let ot rodu!*]» (Caterli. A Due Voci).

On the basis of the metaphorical use of precedent names, derivative words are formed that are figurative in nature and are often associated with language game: «The appearance of a funny guy dressed like Malchish-Plokhish, but completely *Kibalchish* [*Kibalchishnyi*] in everything else, as if released painfully accumulated tension from people: purulence, fear, sticky lymph serum – everything burst out along with hysterical gaiety» (Stepnova. The Women of Lazar), «Something awaits him at home, that is, in the “coffin with music”, where the *Koschey the Immortal* [*koshchei-bessmertnaya*] old woman withers over the “parrots”» (Izmailov. Stuntman).

Comparative constructions with precedent names perform various functions in modern prose texts. They serve as a sign of intertextual connections, act in an evaluative function, can develop motives and themes that are significant for a text and play a plot-forming role in a literary work. This function, for example, is performed by the precedent name *Robinson Crusoe* in Vodolazkin's novel «The Aviator». In Kolina's novel «I'm Not an Angel», the tropes with the precedent names *Becky Sharp* and *Emilia* from Thackeray's novel «Vanity Fair» are actively involved in the development of the plot. The author herself notes: «I was asked to write a modern version of the classic novel, and I obediently wrote a chamber story based on Thackeray's novel "Vanity Fair", whose heroine, the ambitious adventurer Becky Sharp, became a symbol of shameless profit-seeking and cynicism. But what are her "personal qualities" in modern language: sharp mind, ambitiousness, persistence in achieving goals, positive outlook on life, mastery of communication techniques. It sounds like a resume of a graduate of a prestigious management school. Add to this feminine charm and the firm decision "I will never starve" – she is really the heroine of our time! And her friend, gentle Emilia (meek disposition, kindness, complete inability to navigate in life), who is she, according to modern concepts, a helpless fool?»

The above-named functions interact in the text. For example, in the novel by Slavnikova «2017» the precedent name *Mistress of the Copper Mountain* is continually repeated and combines an intertextual function and a plot-forming function.

## 7. Conclusion

Comparative constructions with precedent names in modern prose develop the traditions of the Russian literature of the previous period and consistently act as signs of different types of culture. They serve as a means of establishing intertextual relations, describe a character or narrator in different aspects: they indicate appearance, features of temper and behavior, the character's actions, speech, social status, professional qualities. The names of literary characters are most often used, and modern Russian prose is characterized by expansion of the range of precedent names dating back to foreign literature (*Ivanhoe*, *Becky Sharp*, *Hercule Poirot*, *Eliza Doolittle*, *Quasimodo*, *Svejk*, etc.). In modern texts, both nationally specific and universal names are used, for example, *Baba Yaga*, *Koschey the Immortal*, *Ivanushka the Fool*, *Ilya Muromets*, *Dobrynya Nikitich*, *Alesha Popovich – Judas*, *Odysseus*, *Orpheus*. Cf.: «Looking for her mistake in relations with her mother-in-law, immortal like *Koschey*, Margarita now assumed that death, this main predator in the zoo of birdlike angels and hoofed devils, would sooner grab the victim <...>» (O. Slavnikova. Dragonfly enlarged to the size of a dog), «All Russian men are mighty, like *Ilya Muromets*, thoughtful, like *Dobrynya Nikitich*, and gentle, like *Alesha Popovich*» (Solomatina. Obstetrician-HA! Tales), «I was possessed by grief; I thought that I would never be able to look people in the eyes again, that I would become lonely, like *Cain*, like *Judas* – in general, I felt bad, and I did not hope that I would ever get better» (Buksha. ana), «Standing at a bus stop with a backpack over her shoulders, Medea felt like no less than *Odysseus*. Probably even more, since Odysseus near the coast of Troy, not guessing about the many years it would take him to return, quite accurately imagined the distance separating him from home» (Ulitskaya. Medea and Her Children).

Precedent names occupy different positions in the text and can be placed in the strongest position of the text – the title (for example, «Agamemnon» by Sharov, «Leonardo's Handwriting» by Rubina,

«Little Zaches» by Chizhova). In modern prose, there is a tendency to stylistically lower many precedent names and use them in colloquial, often ironic, constructions.

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