



THE ARTISTIC FUNCTION OF CONTRAST IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH, FRENCH, AND GERMAN NOVEL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: In this article the use of artistic contrast in the nineteenth-century English, French and German novel is considered in comparison of Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo and Gustav Freytag. It is emphasized that despite the typological convergence of the function of contrast as an artistic and compositional means for the revelation of social, moral and philosophical conflicts in the works of all three authors, it is interpreted according to the national literary tradition of each author. In Dickens it is used for the purposes of humanitarian social criticism; in Hugo – as expression of philosophical and romantic conflicts between the law, conscience and moral value; and in Freytag – as practical didactic function with emphasis on ethical value. Consequently, the example of works of Dickens, Hugo and Freytag proves the existence of simultaneous interaction of typological convergence and national literary specificity.

Keywords: comparative literature, typological convergence, realism, literary trends, moral attitude, social criticism, moral conflict.

Introduction

Contrast is the most vivid artistic method in the nineteenth-century realist novel that helps to reveal the injustice of the society, to show the fate of characters more clearly and to raise moral and emotional reaction in the reader. Contrast plays an important role in the works of various writers representing



national literatures — Ch. Dickens, V. Hugo, and G. Freytag. Nevertheless, in the works of each of these authors this artistic method is realized in its unique way.

The main goal of this thesis is to perform the comparative analysis of the function of the artistic method of contrast in the works of the mentioned above authors, revealing not only typical for all of them characteristics but also peculiarities of their usage of this artistic method conditioned by the national literature tradition. The significance of the topic consists in the fact that the social-philosophical meaning of this method and its connection to the national literary tradition are often ignored.

Main part

In the novels of Dickens, the contrast can be created via two different characters or social settings. One of the major themes used in these contrasts can be the conflict between a cold business attitude and human compassion and imagination. By this means, the writer reveals those features of industrial society which are opposite to human nature, making the reader take the side of social injustice. Contrast in the work of Dickens serves mostly as a tool of social criticism. This type of contrast is usually based on two families, social settings, or value systems.

In Hugo's writings, the principle of contrast is closely related to romantic pathos: the opposition between law and conscience, and between public censure and true moral sublimity, endow justice with a philosophical, universal meaning. Consequently, contrast acquires not only a social but an existential meaning, illustrating man's attitude towards society and destiny. Moreover, contrast operates within one personality due to the opposition between the outward criminal behavior of a person and his internal holiness. Socially, Hugo

opposes those who firmly defend the law to those who follow human conscience.

In the case of Freytag, the principle of contrast gains a more pragmatic and moral meaning. The conflict between the honest, hard-working, and responsible merchant and his fraudulent competitor who only thinks about his own interests promotes an idea of an ideal society of German bourgeoisie. Here the principle of contrast works not as a tragedy, but as a didactic element that helps readers understand how to behave and work in their lives. Contrast is also established between nations: the conflict between an industrious and organized society of German bourgeoisie and its frivolous or fraudulent members makes it possible for the author to create a model of his society.

Comparison of the three authors leads to the conclusion that contrast is always an effective means of reflecting conflict in social and moral spheres. At the same time, artistic interpretation of contrast is unique for each country's culture: in Dickens – humanitarian and critical one, in Hugo – philosophical and romantic one, and in Freytag – practical and ethical (didactic). This is caused by different literary trends of each of these countries.

It is also important to examine the origin of contrast. It would not be right to regard contrast merely as a feature of nineteenth-century realism because the method has origins in ancient times. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century, the use of contrast acquired a new purpose as a tool for social criticism. Contrasts have been transformed from mere comparisons of people or events to tools for revealing social contradictions.

Another aspect of contrast that needs to be mentioned is its role within the structure of the work. For all three writers, contrast exists not just within separate events but also within the structure of the whole work, when the oppositional logic extends into the characters' fates, the development of the

plot, and, sometimes, the very title of the work. This implies that contrast was a compositional principle used by the nineteenth century realist novelists.

The other essential element of comparative analysis of the contrast is the mechanism of influence that contrast exerts on the reader. With the help of contrast, the author manipulates the emotional and moral attitude of the reader through establishing a clear distinction between the positive and the negative aspects: the reader understands intuitively what attitude he or she should have. The mentioned mechanism exists in all three works, but the degree of influence and the way of influencing vary in Dickens – emotionally and sentimentally, in Hugo – philosophically, and in Freytag – practically.

Moreover, the comparative typology of contrast is relevant to the field of literary translation. The transfer of the tone of contrast—the passionate intensity of Dickens, the elevated thought of Hugo, and the practical didacticism of Freytag—cannot be accomplished through mere lexical transfer; the construction of the emotional connection between the contrasting components is also needed. Consequently, the comparative-typological approach may be applied both in literary research and in translation theory.

Conclusion

To conclude, in all three authors, contrast is the key instrument used in the representation of social and moral conflicts, but the emotional and aesthetic treatment of the contrast varies according to the literary traditions of a particular nation: humanitarian-critical attitude is prevalent in Dickens, philosophical-romantic – in Hugo, and practical-ethical – in Freytag. It is evident from the results obtained that at the same time, the typological similarity and national distinctiveness exist, and therefore, more research is required in this field in relation to other literatures in Europe, such as Russian or Italian.



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