

## Characteristics of Studying Classical Texts in Literature Classes

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**Abstract:** The article is devoted to contemporary methodological issues concerning foundation and development of principles and characteristics of classical texts study in literature classes. Classical Russian literature serves as a medium for analysis and theoretical conclusions. The author proves the concept of teaching pastoral, ethical, aesthetic, and moral tasks of education to students through the medium of analysis and exploration of classical texts.

**Keywords:** classical text, short novel, epos, epic literature, narration, narrator.

The classical text is a holistic framework. All its elements are related to each other and express the unique style of the author's world view, the author's evaluation of the reality phenomena. In this way, an artist recreates the world model in their creative mind. The reader, when looking at it, can find the world recreated in the figurative form. They can see and read the artist's attitude to the events be it facts, or anguish of mind... Though to be inside this imaginative world means to be a part of it. Here, the phenomenon of co-empathy, involvement and co-authorship starts playing out.

The concept of essence of artistic communication has become possible due to the blending of conceptual thesis by Y. M. Lotman and M.M. Bakhtin. According to them, the classical text is a semiotic space, i.e. "text inside the text". This text works as a "generator of thoughts" which, similar to a human consciousness, needs a converser in order to generate opinions and ideas (2, pp.5). As well, they underline that to pursue the classical text means to associate with the text, that is without rejecting yourself and without changing your views one should "find themselves in the other" or rather "find otherness in oneself" (1, p.312).

The classical methodology of teaching literature has always stemmed from the specifics of the literal genre and its' style. M.A. Rybnikova simply and clearly formulated the approach point for the analysis of the classical text: "Methodological devices applied in the text analysis arise from the genre of the classical text.... It is possible to parse the ballade based on the plan, although, one can hardly plan lyric. While a short story can be read and entirely analysed, a big novel requires more focus and attention. We choose leading chapters from the novel, we read one of them during the lesson, and another one we read at home. We thoroughly discuss and analyse the third chapter and retell it. We then analyse the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth briefly, and narrate, while the passages from the seventh and the rest the students would narrate as a literary story. Finally, the teacher narrates the end of the novel. A riddle can be solved, and learnt by heart. One explains the meaning of the proverb, accompanied by life experience, and with fable, we usually analyse it in order to perceive its' morality" (3, p.58).

Here, we have approached another specific feature of epic when the narrator is the principal storyteller of the novel, a mediator between the narration and readers. The narrator can turn into the certain character-the storyteller of the novel. V.E. Khalizev states: "In other words, the epic form reproduces not only the narration itself but the character that narrates the story. It artistically captures the peculiar manner of speaking and perceiving the world, and ultimately the mindset and feeling of the narrator"(5, p.338). The specific nature of the epic occurs in the ability to reflect the

socio-historical precision of the human existence, to show the events, characters, and relations between people of a particular epoch.

It is, therefore, important to immerse students into a historical and biographical background while studying epic compositions. It supports their understanding of peculiarities of the author's world view. Thus, Z.S. Smelkova suggests her students introduce themselves with L. N. Tolstoy's journalistic essays such as "Project on Army reforms", "Soldier's memo", "Do not kill anyone!", "Memories about the Soldier trial" and "Nikolay Palkin" before exploration of his short story "After the Ball". With these essays, students learn that L.N. Tolstoy was a participant in the Crimean War of 1854-1855. He knew about the disempowered position of soldiers in the army, and he dreamed of issuing Soldiers' magazine in Russia.

One can recall the circumstances under which the short story "After the Ball" was written. The diary entry made by L.N. Tolstoy in June 1903 states: "A merry ball in Kazan city, I am in love with (Koreisha), the daughter of a Polish military commander, I am dancing with her; her handsome old father tenderly takes her and they dance mazurka. And the morning after passionate sleepless night, the sounds of the drum drive can be heard and the Tatar is persecuted through the ranks, and the military commander orders to beat him more and more painfully" (4, pp.30-31).

These documentary evidence show to the reader the mystery in which the plot is born. It allows them to see the birth of the storyline. Other biographical notes complement the context: it was well known that L.N. Tolstoy studied in Kazan city with his brother Sergey Nikolayevich. They both knew Varvara Andreyevna, the daughter of the military commander A. P. Koreisha. The event described in the diary, however, had happened with Sergey Tolstoy. Why was the entry made in the first person then?

Z.S. Smelkova suggests the author "chose this form of narrating the story in the first person at the stage of conception, predetermining the personal nature of recreating the occurred event and its emotionality" (4, p. 31). Therefore, it is worth noting that biographical facts are not taught on their own during the lesson, rather they are interwoven into the further interpretation and analysis of the classical text. S.A. Zinin (p.61) highlights that the formation of the "contextual approach" towards exploration of the classical texts facilitates the students' culture of literary associations. It nurtures their ability to correlate various literary phenomena.

Lastly, discussing the specifics of the epic of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century, one cannot but note the emotional and semantic relations between the narrator's and character's quotes whose synergy confers internal dialogue to the literary narration where "the classical text captures the complex of heterogeneous and conflicting consciousness" "due to internal dialogue and polyphony of speech" "people's vocal thinking and spiritual communication between them are artistically mastered" (3, pp. 1241-1242). How should we analyse the classical text considering its' generic specifics? The issue of school analysis used to find quite appropriate solutions in the methodology of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is well-known that in the rather distant past, the discussion of the classical text in schools considered its' genre and generic specificity. Students of those days were able to identify "epic and dramatic forms" of the classical text and could determine the genre. Both V.P. Ostrogorsky and V.Ya. Stoyunin develop various techniques devices for the author's fundamental idea:

- analogy of vital sources and the plot of the classical text;
- identification of the direct and hidden author's evaluation of characters and events;
- importance of the headings and epigraph's role;
- analysis of speech characteristics.

A story, drama, or a poetry are “structured” in some way, and it is vital to understand this structure of the work. It's not just what we call plan. It is an internal plan, a complex correlation of images and scenes” (3, p. 39). It has become a methodological concept in the modern methodology of teaching literature. The idea for the choice of analysis based on the text specificities and goals of interpretation has emerged from the difficulty of a monographic, holistic study of a classical text in schools.

Thus, the subsequent types of analysis can be named following V.G.Marantsman’s ideas: analysis of the system of images, or “figurative” (relating to images-characters, images-symbols, images-descriptions); careful re-reading of the entire work and its’ consistent and detailed analysis at different levels of analysis: that is “following the author”; or consideration of the work in the chosen problematic or thematic aspect - "problematic-thematic". The art of methodology is to competently combine different ways and methods of analysis, based on the generic and genre specifics of the text.

To some extent, this approach to the analysis of the epic text is the solution to the problem of "navigation" in the "maze of chains", characterised by L.N. Tolstoy. To perceive the author's position, students can refer to the plot of the work and trace the chain of key episodes, exploring different elements of the plot, that is the exposition, plot, climax, conclusion ...

Any of the key episodes carries a reflection of the whole work and is associated with the embodiment and disclosure of the author's idea. One of vivid examples of these are the climax scenes from I.S. Turgenev’s novel. If we choose the "figurative" type of analysis, we must remember that we are discussing the system of characters by placing a character in the center of analysis. Applying the same approach, we can consider the system of contrasting characters in "Eugene Onegin", Pushkin's novel in verse. The system that could be figuratively called "water and stone, poetry and prose, ice and fire" includes the contrasting characters as "Tatiana - Olga", "Onegin - Lensky", "Onegin - Tatiana", "Tatiana - Olga, Lensky, Onegin".

Each of the characters "flashes" in some key episode, thoughtlessly wasting their spiritual strength. Someone burns out in this impulse of theirs, someone continues to live in a new quality. But the contrasting also goes in a different direction, where each of these pairs is opposed based on "a person looking for the meaning of life" and "a person built into the standards of everyday life and in the framework of the rules." In this sense, both Onegin, and Tatyana, and Lensky oppose to Mr. N.N.

The visual means of the classical text can become the starting point for the reader's immersion into the author's mindset: a portrait (for example, Natasha Rostova, given by the author in development), an interior (in "Dead Souls" interior details characterize the space around and inside the hero), landscapes (we perceive nature as the author's aesthetic ideal through Turgenev's landscape) ... Internal monologues (in War and Peace, "Crime and Punishment"), key images, cross-cutting details - everything can become the key to perception of the whole work as a whole. Speech structure, phrase breathing, intonation, style support perception of the author's inception in the text. Since "the author is free in the arrangement of time and space" in an epic work, everything that becomes a part of the composition carries the author's idea and is integrated into the author's model of the world.

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