

Genre-based tradition of happy ending in Ye. Zamyatin's Tales

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Abstract. The article deals with Ye.I. Zamyatin tales from the perspective of their compliance with the genre canons of a fairytale. The authors explore the Tales of Fita cycle as well as the tales “The Devourer” and “The Church of God” included in the collection “Big Kids’ Fairytales”. Special attention is paid to the endings of tales; the authors analyze their correspondence to the canons of folklore and literary fairytales formulated by the researchers of this genre: V.Ya. Propp, V.P. Anikin, and I.P. Lupanova. There is a mixture of the fairytale genre with the genre of socio-political satire in Ye.I. Zamyatin’s analyzed works. The authors analyze the plot and stylistic means used by the writer, their compliance with the standard canon. Within the study, the authors rely on the results of existing research in this area and attempt to explore the writer’s work in a new context. Traditionally works in the field of literary research into Ye.I. Zamyatin’s work focus on the dystopian motives and the analysis of political overtones in the writer’s satirical works. At the same time, the genre-related features of Ye.I. Zamyatin’s early works remain poorly understood and require particular academic attention. The novelty of this study consists in the fact that the study is focused on the analysis of the genre structure of Zamyatin’s “tales”. The authors use the method of comparative analysis, problem-logical, functional and systemic methods. The study allows one to determine the degree to which Ye.I. Zamyatin’s tales correspond to traditional plot-related and “formulaic” devices used in the endings of folk and literary fairy tales as well as study the specific features of mixing the genres of fairytale and satire in the famous Russian writer’s works.

Keywords: fairytale, literary tale, satire, Zamyatin

1 Introduction

The tale has been a genre in folklore and literature of different peoples since ancient times. The main feature of a tale as a genre is an emphasized, conscious orientation towards fiction [1: 5]. Other genre features of the tale include an instructive nature, an image of the struggle between good and evil (with the obligatory victory of good at the end), the division of characters into protagonists and antagonists, the presence of various plot versions and, of course, a happy ending [2].

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According to V.Ya. Propp, any development from sabotage or shortage through intermediate functions to a wedding or other functions used as a climax can be called a fairytale. The end functions are sometimes rewards, extraction, or even the elimination of trouble, salvation from the pursuit – this is the happy ending [3].

A literary tale uses the plot and stylistic features of a folk tale. Researchers understand a literary tale as:

- stories that have an element of the magical, miraculous (as in the fairytales by A.S. Pushkin [4], V.F. Odoyevsky [5])
- stories about talking animals;
- works that reproduce the formal elements of a folk tale: folklore plot motives (the same beginning or ending, traditional image-characters performing a certain function), folk means of poetic speech (three-fold repetitions, set expressions – “brave hero”, “beautiful girl”, etc.)

However, a literary tale does not develop on a folklore basis. For example, V.F. Odoyevsky in his fairy tale “The Town in the Snuff-Box” uses fairytale elements to create satire: a little boy in a dream explores the magical world inside a snuffbox, talks to bell boys who are unreasonably beaten by hammer-men on the orders of the overseer Valik, who is pushed by the Spring Princess that starts this whole circuit. The allusion to the hierarchy of society is obvious and understandable even to such a little boy as the protagonist who admits having learned a lot in this wonderful place. The protagonist’s father admits this upon hearing his son’s story but adds that there is still a lot to learn, thus completing the story on a moralizing note.

Such an ending can be called happy: the character wakes up and returns to his native and familiar world, having learned a lesson.

2 Methods

We used the following general methods of humanities in the study:

- the method of comparative analysis, in which the selected texts were compared with the well-known definitions of the fairy tale genre and the characteristics of a happy ending;
- the problem-logical method, which made it possible to determine the problem area of research and formulate basic concepts;
- the systemic method that allowed to consider Ye.I. Zamyatin’s works as complete functioning systems, each element of which has its own function;
- the functional method, which made it possible to consider the role and significance of plot-based and stylistic means used by Zamyatin in his works.

3 Results and discussion

Ye.I. Zamyatin turns to the literary fairytale genre in the 1910s, demonstrating an interest in Russian folklore and the fairytale narrative form [6]. The presence of characters-functions corresponds to Zamyatin’s ideas about the character as the embodiment of a certain idea [7]. Through the tales, Ye.I. Zamyatin expressed his understanding of the relationship between the people and the authorities [8, 9] and his attitude to contemporary Russia [10] by using satire as the main tool [11]. According to Solzhenitsyn, Ye.I. Zamyatin “surpassed Saltykov-Shchedrin by a lot” in the wittiness of satirical portrayal [12: 188].

For example, the key theme of Zamyatin’s *Tales of Fita* is the relationship between power and the people. In the first fairytale, Fita appears, or rather, “*spontaneously infests the underground of the police administration*” [13] and “*grows*” in the same place, feeding on ink. Researchers interpreted [14: 206] these lines as an allusion to the groundlessness of the

power of the Bolsheviks, to the illegal past of this pariah (Fita's exit from the underground), and, finally, to Lenin, with whom Fita's appearance and the name of his adoptive father, Ulyan, was associated.

Fita is both similar and dissimilar to a person: the character is "predominantly male, tiny like a baby, but respectable, bald and with a belly, just like a court councilor, and his face is not a face, but still – Fita, in a word".

Fita hangs up old reports in the corner and prays to them like icons and uses the absorbed ink to create new ones. Fita is the personification of bureaucracy that can only create endless decrees and ignore real problems. The name itself hints at the uselessness of the hero (Fita is an extra letter of the alphabet). Fita becomes governor and begins to "solve" the problems of the residents of the province: first, by his decrees, Fita forbids them to die of hunger and cholera, threatening corporal punishment, then "destroys the city's cathedral of unknown origin" to "establish a direct road for passenger cabs". At five o'clock, Fita announces his will and permanently abolishes the guards, instead of whom there are now free people, prescribes "*unswerving freedom of chants and processions in national costumes*" and, finally, decides to make everyone the same, aligning everyone to either the bald or the blessed. It was then that the people "*started living happily. There is no one happier in the world than the blessed*". This ending only formally corresponds to the canonical happy formulas for a fairy tale ending. The formula conceals the author's irony, a hint of which Zamyatin gave in the last sentence of the text: "There is no one happier in the world than the blessed".

Tales of Fita are combined into a cycle, forming a single story with an open ending. The temporal structure of the tale is open-ended: the first tale ends with Fita's death but does not become the end of the story: in other tales Fita is alive, and the people praise his deeds. This is a satire on state philosophy, on the people's blind faith in the "father-sovereign", on the idea of a "general party line" replacing spirituality.

Zamyatin also makes fun of the "liberation" which turns into tyranny: Fita abolished the security guards, and the freemen immediately took their place, and "*they knew their business in the long overcoats – they were born purely as security guards. They would drag one to the station, in the station – and would [punch one] in the face, and under the ribs – well, everything is as it should be*". The residents of the province, ready to endure any harassment from "their" power, are only glad: "*they were eager to be in the prison, they were on duty at the entrance all night long and bought tickets to the prison from the dealers*", so the thieves and murderers had to be driven out of the prison. The allusion to the historical events contemporary to the writer is rather transparent [15]. Finally, in "The Last Tale of Fita", the protagonist is for the first time overtaken by his own decrees: Fita himself must be equalized, become as bald and blessed as the inhabitants became by his order. A certain triumph of justice is certainly a good ending to the story but Fita managed to cause too much trouble to the people and did not meet any conscious resistance.

Fita's regime in these tales plays the role of the forces of chaos which must be defeated by the forces of good. There must be a hero (perhaps represented not by an individual but by the people as a community) who conquers chaos, restores order, and lives happily ever after. There is no such hero in these tales.

Fita met his end just as "unreal as it began": while the rebelling people finally beat him, "he did not shout or do anything but only became less and less, and melted away. And there was only an ink stain and this very wax seal and number". However, is order restored with the death of Fita, is general equilibrium restored? This is highly doubtful.

The only one who could give this answer is the unnamed storyteller. For Zamyatin, an epic work is akin to a theater [16] where the narrator is an actor: "*In the work of the epic nature, the author should be invisible... Readers should see and hear the author in the role, in the makeup which is needed to reproduce the spirit of the depicted environment*" [17: 85].

The narrator willingly uses vernacular (“suprotiv”, “posusolit”, “prokhlebnutsya” [“opposite”, “slaver”, “sip”], etc.), trying on the role of a “joker” [18] – a trickster over whom no forces of chaos have power. The position of the “fairytale fool” is invincible since it assumes the most complete form of debunking evil – ridicule, and the character’s clowning around provides this ridicule throughout the text [19].

The taunts become the force that opposes the orders of Fita who, in an effort to restore order, creates only chaos. According to the laws of a fairytale, chaos must be conquered, good must overcome evil, and truth must overcome lies. The narrator has power only over the last condition – while relaying the story to the readers-listeners, the narrator can only convey the story as intended by the author – as a warning against “social experiments”, the victim of which becomes a person, as a satire on the injustice of power and the blindness of the people.

A similar and at the same time completely different story appears in the fairytale “The Devourer” included in the same collection. There is again the charactonym of the antagonist (from the colloquial verb “khryapat” – to devour) and his inexplicable appearance in the fairy-tale world: “There was a shock – *the stars fell from above like ripe pears. The firmament emptied, became like an autumn yellow field [...] Then the Devourer started making his way across the land*”.

The Devourer is similar to the chthonic monsters of ancient mythology – the world of chaos and fantastic demons, in whose images man’s fear of incomprehensible and dangerous forces of nature was expressed.

The Devourer walks and swallows whole whoever he meets on the way and goes on, without stopping, devouring eternal values: work, song, beauty, personified by the swallowed people. The Devourer has no purpose, no malice and does not care about anything but his belly. There is no weapon against the Devourer, no hero to defeat him. There is only a sharp-witted young man from Yaroslavl called Ofenya with some ordinary surname – either Petrov or Sidorov. Ofenya realized that the Devourer can only go forward, does not know how to turn around and look around, and then Ofenya began to quietly follow the Devourer, treading exactly in his footsteps, and other people followed him. Then the Devourer ran out of food and died. This enemy was defeated by cunning, ingenuity but also by the common efforts of the united people. The villagers even received a reward for the victory: the Devourer fertilized the land wonderfully. The triumph of life over death, ingenuity over indifference, people over the monster – this is the happy ending of this tale.

Finally, the tale “The Church of God” is constructed in a completely different way. The main character of this tale, Ivan, decided to build a church but the methods by which Ivan obtains money for this enterprise are far from pious: like a robber, Ivan sits in ambush, looking for merchants and torturing them to rob them: “*Then Ivan whistles like Zmei Gorynich – horses rear up, the coachman falls on the ground, the merchant in the carriage shakes like an aspen leaf out of fear*”.

Comparison with Zmei Gorynich tells the reader that Ivan is more of an antagonist than a protagonist.

Ivan builds the church but dedicates it to his own pride rather than to God: “*so that the sky got hot, the devils felt sick, so that the word went around the whole world about Ivan’s church*”. This church is built on blood, a dead spirit permeates it, becoming unbearable for the people that gathered in this church at Ivan’s invitation. Ivan remains alone in his church and alone with his sins.

This tale is a didactic work: in the tale, Zamyatin expresses his disagreement with the principle “the end justifies the means” and the idea of a paradise built on blood [20]. Popular morality in his mind does not accept this [21].

4 Conclusion

As one can see, within the tales, Ye.I. Zamyatin typically deviates from the genre canon of a folk fairy tale both at the plot level, the level of the fairy chronotope, and the level of the narrative structure. The writer uses folklore images, giving them satirical or allegorical meanings, mixes folklore formulas with bureaucratic clichés and neutral contemporary vocabulary.

The writer also violates the genre traditions of fairytale endings: not all of Zamyatin's fairytales have a happy ending. In some of them, the ending remains open, in others the ending is instructive and sad. A happy ending in Ye.I. Zamyatin's fairytales is an exception rather than the rule.

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