DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v7i3.1725

Studying the Texts of the Yakut Epic Olonkho: A Phenomenological Approach

Vera Sofronovna Danilova[1], Nikolay Nikolaevich Kozhevnikov[2]

Abstract

The theoretical and methodological bases of the present research are based on the theory of Wolfgang Iser, which distinguishes between the concepts "text" and "literary work." "Text" is produced by the author and exists in a single variant, representing a symbolic code that is waiting for its implementation, before which it has only virtual meaning. "Literary work" is what arises in the act of reception - as a result of the reader's activity in the realization of the semantic potential of the text - and exists in a multitude of receptive variants. In the process of the reader's communication with the text, "the horizon of expectations" of the text, which contains the requirements for the reader coded in the text, interacts with "the horizon of expectations" of the reader, which is based on the requirements imposed on the text by the reader. The merging of the "horizons" is the key to an adequate understanding. In the present paper, the interaction of "the horizons of expectations" of the text and the reader is represented in the form of "windows", "created" by the text and the reader in the experience of the perceiving consciousness. "The expectations of the text" are considered in the form of "windows" formed by phenomena and horizons. They are attached to three levels of the structural features of the olonkho texts: the active (eventive) level, the level of accenting rhythms and the semiotic level, which are the most illustrative for the conducted research. "The expectations of the reader" are provided by three fundamental limits of dynamic equilibria (identification limit, communication limit and the limit of the rhythms of world harmony), which are attached to the levels of text singled out above.

Keywords: Philosophy of literature, Turn to the reader, Receptive aesthetics, Text, Literary work, Horizon of expectations, Window of expectations, Fundamental limit of equilibria, Level of text structure, Actional, Accenting rhythms, Semiotics.

[1] North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Russia. E-mail: nnkozhev@mail.ru
[2] North-Eastern Federal University, Yakutsk, Russia. E-mail: nikkozh@gmail.com

Introduction

At the present time, a direction of literary studies has developed where the methods of hermeneutics go hand in hand with the methods of phenomenology. This direction is closely connected with the activity of the receptive-aesthetic school established in Konstanz (Germany). The most prominent representatives of this school were Hans Robert Jauß and Wolfgang Iser. Here the turn of modern literary criticism to the figure of the reader was completed, started by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and continued by Roman Ingarden. This approach fits well with the philosophical study of the texts of the Yakut heroic epos olonkho. The goal of the authors of this article is to establish that it is the reader (listener) who becomes the key figure here. It should be emphasized that since there is no clearly specified author in olonkho, the text becomes the fundamental object of research, while the characteristics of the interaction between the reader and the text become the subject of research. When "the horizons of expectations" of the text and the reader coincide, the perception of the Yakut heroic epos olonkho is fully realized.

Research Methodology

According to the approach developed by Roman Ingarden, the structural basis of a literary work consists of several levels. At a minimum, he distinguishes four levels: phonetic (sound), semantic (meaning), schematized aspects (content), and the represented entities (objects) (Ingarden, 1962). This approach is well complemented by the receptive aesthetics of H.R. Jauß and W. Iser, where five historical types of artistic reception are singled out. The second of these types ("admirative") is suitable for the heroic epos. In this case, the recipient feels detached from the hero who seems like an unattainable ideal. In other types, the reader identifies with the hero, treats him ironically, and so on.

A text according to Wolfgang Iser is a "semantic potential", a symbolic code that, prior to the act of its realization, has only a virtual meaning. A "literary work" is what arises in the act of reception - as a result of the reader's activity in realizing the semantic potential of the text - and exists in a multitude of receptive variants (Iser, 2004).

 All of this is perfectly suited for the study of the Yakut heroic epos olonkho, where the core of the text implies the plurality of its interpretations. The narrator of olonkho - olonkhosut enhances the internal structure outlined in the text, creating additional factors of influence on the reader. "Text strategy" means a set of "instructions" for the reader in accordance with the communicative settings of the text. H.R. Jauß believes that the text in its internal structure itself contains a set of factors of influence on the reader, that is, it assumes the existence of a more or less adequate method of reading it (the reader's thought processes that the text stimulates and the aesthetic results that the text "counts on") (Jauß, 2004). Then the reading, despite its subjectivity, occurs in accordance with the intention of the text itself, which regulates perception and prevents arbitrary interpretations.

 "The horizon of expectations of the text" is the requirements for the reader coded in the text, i.e. those thought processes that the text stimulates in the reader and the aesthetic results that the text "counts on". This horizon is formed simultaneously on several levels of olonkho. In addition, we can distinguish *external structures of the text* of olonkho, such as plots, rhythms, images of heroes, architectonics, which can contribute to a *strictly objective study* of the interaction of horizons. All these structures of the text of olonkho (internal and external) actively influence the reader.

According to Iser, with the help of instructions and authors' comments on the text, a *"communicative definiteness"* is created, forming a self-organizing vector of understanding the text. The "horizon of expectations" assumes its openness (Gadamer, 1988), which allows us to treat the text not as a closed self-

valuable object but as a phenomenon open to readership that can be rethought, i.e. as a "score" (Jauß, 2004).

"The horizon of expectations of the reader" is the requirements imposed on the text by the reader. It contains the aesthetic results coded in the reader's mind, on which the text can "count". This horizon, unlike the stable "horizon of expectations of the text," can change in the process of perception. It is closely related to the strategy implemented by the text - "communicative uncertainty". It is formed on the basis of so-called empty spaces, gaps (Iser, 2004). The reader fills these gaps in accordance with the level of their aesthetic competence, through creative reading, proceeding from the conditions set by the text.

When the above-mentioned horizons converge, the text is transformed into a literary work. For that, the reader accepts the unknown aesthetic experience offered to them by the text and performs work to overcome the distance between the horizon of expectations of the text and their original horizon of expectations. As a result, a "merging of horizons" can occur, which, according to Jauß, will lead to an adequate understanding. The problem of the historical variability of reception is of particular importance in this case, since the latter always has a historical character. This is due to the fact that the horizon of expectations of the reader is always determined by the temporal and historical context to which the reader belongs. The modern reader's view of the heroic epos olonkho, from which they are separated by centuries, is certainly different from how it was perceived in those distant times. In addition, the olonkho texts themselves are consecutive layers (mythological, folklore, epic), which can be considered separately.

Discussion

For the purposes of this paper, we will now refine the basic concepts of the above methodology. In particular, having expanded the concept of "horizon", we will use the concept of "window" for the expectations of both the text and the reader. The concept of "window" is multidimensional in contrast to the concept of "horizon", which has a tendency to one-dimensionality. "The window of expectations of the text" corresponds to the phenomena and horizons of the text, it is informed by features of plots, rhythms, images of heroes, architectonics, formulas of several categories (Lord, 1994), repetitions in description of the surrounding world and in elements of the plot, direct appeals to the reader.

 Let us consider the "window of expectations of the text," that is, its structure and the set of factors that can influence the reader. Let us single out three fairly simple levels of the text of olonkho: "actional (eventive) level", the level of "accentuating parts of the text (systematic reminders)", "semiotic" level. These levels correlate with the above-mentioned levels of Roman Ingarden; however, in our opinion, they are more consistent with the goals of the study of heroic epos. The "window of expectations of the text" is formed through the interaction of the phenomenon and the horizon of each of these levels and they can exist only through joint interaction. We call a "phenomenon" a memorable characteristic feature of the selected level or their totality, the "horizon" is the world where these "phenomena" are present, the boundaries within which they exist.

The actional (eventive) level is the most accessible and the simplest of the levels listed. It corresponds to the "admirative" type of artistic reception, where the recipient feels detached from the hero of the epos. The distance between him and the modern reader is too great. This level includes plots, storylines, motifs and formations based on them. The plots in the texts of olonkho are schematic, rather well-studied and classified. "Phenomena" of this level are vivid and memorable episodes: kidnapping of a bride, wife or sister, battle with the kidnapper, preparation for battle. Several such episodes can easily be combined into a plot. A common plot can be formed with separate modules, which either complement or exclude each other. "Horizon" is a world where the plot unfolds. It can encompass the Middle World, all three worlds together or parts of them sufficient for developing a particular plot. The mechanism combining phenomena and

horizons in the window is the rhythms. Both "phenomena" (particular plots, storylines) and horizons have their own rhythms. However, they all belong to olonkho and are tuned to the general system of its rhythms.

For the level of "accenting rhythms", the "phenomena" are epic formulas of several kinds and tropes. These epic formulas and tropes are repeated many times with variations in all olonkho texts. They are also striking characteristic features of olonkho that are easy to remember, when several such formulas stick in the reader's memory, they begin to sound in their mind with a steady rhythm. The "horizon" of this level embraces the rhythms of the text associated with the distinguished "phenomena." Constant repetition of these rhythms ensures interaction between them and creates an appropriate "window".

The semiotic level includes an exceptionally wide variety of elements. The phenomenon here can be chosen either accidentally or as a result of special procedures. In case of an accidental choice, several striking signs are revealed, for example, the description of the main figures of the Lower World Arsan Duolai ("clad in a shabby fur-coat") and his wife "old Ala Buurai with wooden stocks on her legs". The "horizon" corresponding to these "phenomena" can, in the first approximation, characterize, for example, the Lower World. On this basis, an approximate comparison of all three worlds is possible; for example, the contrast of the Lower World with the flourishing Middle World and the Upper world, from which one can expect both good and evil. The choice of "phenomena" on the basis of special procedures is associated with distinguishing particular semiotic ranges. This can be, for example, the ranges of elements of women's clothing, household items, the hero's weapons. These ranges are contained in the systems surrounding them that form horizons on the semiotic level. The widest "horizon" corresponds to the semiosphere of the specific olonkho text or all existing olonkho texts. Rhythms also play a determining role for this level. We can distinguish rhythms within the semiotic series, systems, the entire semiosphere of olonkho. These rhythms interact with the rhythms of other distinguished levels of text: plots, epic formulas, tropes, etc.

"The window of expectations of the text" of olonkho is oriented toward objective variants of its interpretation. In "the window of expectations of the reader" there is inevitably a subjective element. In order to avoid complete subjectivity that depends only on the reader's preferences, let us single out a set of objective factors that can be common to all readers. To do this, we will consider the "the window of expectations of the reader" of three fundamental limits, based on the dynamic equilibria of deterministic chaos: the identification limit, communication limit and the rhythm of the reader themselves. The concept based on these limits was developed by the authors (Kozhevnikov & Danilova, 2016; 2018), including as applied to literature (Kozhevnikov & Danilova, 2018).

The reader seeks to identify olonkho by some of their own attributes, highlighting what affects them in the olonkho texts. Then they form a system out of the identification parameters that they have singled out, with methods that are relevant just to them, creating their own holistic image of olonkho. Their rhythm is also tuned to the rhythm of olonkho and they aim for it. All these limits are unattainable. The identification of olonkho by the reader is poorer than a specific olonkho text, let alone all the presently available texts. The holistic image of olonkho is much larger than a specific studied image of olonkho, as well as the rhythms of the reader and the text do not coincide in the vast majority of cases, but they can strive for each other. Primarily, the rhythm of the reader - to the rhythm of the text.

Let us consider possible variants of forming the "window of expectations of the reader" on the three levels singled out above.

The actional (eventive) level creates the prerequisites for exploring different approaches to the formation of storylines. Traditional classification of the olonkho plots suggests their division according to the stages of the settlement of the Middle World, to the ancestors and defenders of aiy and the tribe of uranghai sakha. There exist early types of Yakut olonkho, tales of heroines (Emelyanov, 1980; 1983). However, such approaches set aside the parameters of colourfulness, eideticness, olonkho life. The approach developed

by us, on the contrary, emphasizes these "phenomena." The plot lines based on them will not be so detailed and systematic but they will be more vivid and memorable.

Such, for example, is the arrival of Nyurgun Bootur to a mythical blacksmith (Kytyi Bakhsylaany, Baaltaany, Kyuettani), to his huge iron thundering house in the middle of black trees on the ground that is black from soot. The fluster of Kuogaljim daughter Kuo, whose aspiration was pleasant to the newly-arrived handsome hero, was shut down by her father. All the best weapons (chainmail, sword, spear) here were taken by Nyurgun Bootur. Or the last test on the Khalbas-Khar rope stretched over the fiery abyss that Nyurgun Bootur overcame, and Uot Usumu did not. Another one or two of these "phenomena" and there is a unique story, one's own reading of olonkho, which for a particular reader will be deeper than many other variants of it.

Accenting rhythms can be found in all olonkho texts:

In ancient times

In warring, bloodthirsty times

Before the world changed,

Beyond the evil horizon

Of the awful earlier years…

(Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 2014, p. 4)

Beyond ancient times,

In the past, departed years,

In the old days,

In the far distant past

That their songs could never be heard,

That their successes could never be predicted…

(Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 2014, p. 44)

The rhythm of these tropes runs through all the texts of the Yakut heroic epos of olonkho providing communication both between parts of a single text and between all texts of olonkho. This rhythm outlines the corresponding horizons that correspond to the parts of olonkho, or the harmonic cascade of the text in question, or the cascade of rhythms of all available olonkho texts.

The semiotic level is characterized by an abundance of signs and interactions between them. For example, the sign of the three rings as a symbol of the unity of the world.

The first among them,

The most eminent one

The size of a small hill,

Breathing a dense fog

Buksat Khara the warrior oburgu thinking

In three laughing girth-like bolts

Of the three-layered high, vast sky

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Stirred noisily,

Then nine white, swirling skies

Would thrill,

In very open bolts

Of the long-suffering Middle World

Turned over,

The abundance and happiness

Of the evil-seated

Middle World

With obscure edges,

Trembling from its midst

Overflowing in its sides

Like water in a flat bowl,

Would burst out,

If a tricky, sorcerous bolt

Of the disastrous Under World

Turned upside down

The bottom of the evil deep,

The Motherland

Would stir

Like water in a birch-bark bucket,

And thus holding

Its blazing, shaking handles…

(Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 2014, p. 60)

This sign alone demonstrates the strength and fragility of all three worlds and the efforts that aiy's heroes must exert in order to keep it in balance.

The semantic range describing the grace of a woman is very illustrative. So pure and white is the beauty in olonkho, as if she glows from within:

You can see the body through the dress,

White bones glisten through the body,

Through the bone, the bone marrow trembles

(Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 1947, p. 18-19, translated by the authors)

Just as illustrative is the semantic range of household items:

> Inside the house of the heroic bootur
>
> «tursuks» lamented like women,
>
> glasses themselves sang,
>
> chairs told tales,
>
> benches asked riddles,
>
> brooms were dancing,
>
> poker danced clanking,
>
> ladders composed songs,
>
> chests told fables…
>
> (Nyurgun Bootur the Swift, 1947, p. 20, translated by the authors)

The horizons here are the corresponding systems of signs. It can be a system of either all household items, or some of them, a description of a woman, etc.

Conclusion

For the philosophical study of the texts of olonkho, the authors used well-known methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics, but refined the original concepts by examining two "windows": "the window of expectations of the text" and "the window of expectations of the reader" in the experience of the perceiving consciousness. As it was demonstrated above, these "windows" are more convenient for research than the corresponding horizons. They are much more illustrative and have more opportunities for interaction. The principles of building windows differ. "The window of expectations of the text" relies on "phenomena" and "horizons", and "the window of expectations of the reader" relies on the three limits of fundamental equilibria (identification, communication and the rhythm of harmony). Understanding equals the transparency of "windows", which is more illustrative than the interaction of horizons. Here the rhythms of "windows" can converge, be homomorphic or similar. The approximation to the convergence of windows will be ensured if the "phenomena" are oriented at the identification limit, and "horizons" - at the communication limit. The most complete convergence is ensured by the convergence of the rhythms of the "window of expectations of the text" with the "window of expectations of the reader".

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