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The category of the transcendental in the Ukrainian postmodern novel

Категорія трансцендентного в українському постмодерному романі

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Written by:

Lubov Pecherskyh¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1377-4462>

WoS Researcher ID: ABK-0308-2022

Nataliia Levchenko²<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7535-6330>

WoS Researcher ID: GRY-6609-2022

Tetiana Shestopalova³<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0687-5225>

WoS Researcher ID: IQS-5530-2023

Svitlana Boiko⁴<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0541-0215>

WoS Researcher ID: AAX-6277-2020

Karine Khachaturian⁵<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4131-1836>

WoS Researcher ID: AFG-3215-2022

Abstract

The forms of artistic embodiment of aspects of the category of the transcendent in the texts of Ukrainian postmodernists are the focus of this article which are studied through the analysis of the characters' worldview, the identification of dominants and meanings of human existence, and the correlation of the vision of the category of the transcendent in the novels with modern spiritual concepts. The most striking authorial concepts of the transcendental in Ukrainian postmodern prose refer to the relationship between the human and divine planes of existence, the mechanisms of transforming inspiration into a literary text, the irrational nature of creativity, the concept of reincarnation, ritual as a way of accessing the realm of the transcendental and the understanding of «nothing» concept.

Key words: postmodernism, genre, transcendental, irrational nature of creativity.

Анотація

Форми художнього втілення аспектів категорії трансцендентного у текстах українських постмодерністів перебувають в центрі наукової уваги у даній статті і досліджуються через аналіз світогляду героїв, визначення домінант та смислів людського буття, співвіднесення бачення категорії трансцендентного у текстах романів із сучасними духовними концепціями. Найяскравіші авторські концепції трансцендентного в українській постмодерністській прозі пов'язані із відношенням між людським та божественним планами буття, механізмами перетворення натхнення у художній текст, ірраціональною природою творчості, концепцією реінкарнації, ритуалі як способі долучення до сфери трансцендентного, розумінням поняття «ніщо».

Ключові слова: постмодернізм, жанр, трансцендентне, ірраціональна природа творчості.

¹ PhD in Philology, doctoral student of the Leonid Ushkalov Department of Ukrainian Literature and Journalism, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Ukraine.

² Habilitated Doctor of Philology, Professor in Leonid Ushkalov Department of Ukrainian Literature and Journalism, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Ukraine.

³ Habilitated Doctor of Philology, Professor, Head of Ukrainian Philology and Intercultural Communication Department, Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University, Mykolaiv, Ukraine.

⁴ PhD in Philology, Senior lecturer of O.M. Beketov Kharkiv National University of Urban economy, Ukraine.

⁵ PhD in philosophy, teacher of Ukrainian language and literature of Kharkiv Avto-Transport Applied College, Ukraine.



Introduction

The categories of the transcendental are eternal components of human consciousness and part of the subconscious, since they have been integrated as collective attitudes since primitive times and preserved as part of folklore, religion and sacred teachings (Scott, 2003, p. 448–449). The category of the transcendental lies between religion and philosophy, but it has vivid manifestations or evidence of inclusion in the author's worldview in the plane of literary texts, including Ukrainian postmodern prose of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The categories of the transcendental include «questions concerning space, time, and the possibility of reaching eternal reality», images of «God, human nature, or tribal and cultural knowledge given in divine revelation», «the image of universality», etc. (Scott, 2003, p. 449).

The social changes of the late 1990s in Ukraine and the radical change in the society's outlook led to the fact that postmodernism marks the loss of unconditional faith in scientific rationality, while the irrational becomes an integral part of life. The new state of the society was evidenced by the popularity of esoteric teachings in Ukraine in the 1980s and 1990s, such as reiki, transcendental meditation, NLP, qigong and yoga, psychedelic practices, mantra chanting. Most of these doctrines are based on the assumption of the existence of thought vibrations and take transcendental philosophy as their starting point. To varying degrees, these concepts have found their audiences and have had a significant impact on the worldview of Ukrainian society as a whole, forming at least a willingness to accept this type of philosophical concept.

At present, there is a noticeable convergence of literature and philosophy: in particular, there is a widespread view of philosophy as an art of thought expression, and philosophical texts are increasingly being presented in the form of literary genres, such as parables, essays, stories, novels, etc. (Gurbanska, 2019, p. 47). As Richard Bach, an American writer whose work is associated with flying and flying in a metaphorical context, wrote in his «Messiah's Handbook», «the only way to convey some truths is through the language of a fairy tale» (Bach, 2008, p. 12). As it was mentioned, «<...> in the twentieth century postmodernity ruined neo-mythological opposition between the text and reality, declaring that the text does not reflect reality but creates a variety of new realities, which are not sometimes interrelated or

interdependent» (Levchenko 2021, p. 99), and the categories of the transcendental are widely involved in the creation of these new realities.

The art of postmodernism in the context of general entropy and the statement of the incompetence of worldview concepts shows the search for meaning-making potential in exotic religions and philosophical doctrines that contain the idea of the possibility of centring human life around a certain idea or concept and give meaning to human life. The postmodern novel actively explores the problematics of the transcendental, the category finds artistic embodiment in the worldview of the characters, the events of their lives, and in some texts, completely independent concepts of the transcendental are formed that capture the imagination and testify to the search for worldview dominants in the sphere of meaning, purpose and ways of human existence.

«Each of your texts, – Yuriy Izdryk notes, speaking about the place of the category of the transcendental in the novel as a large genre, is a projection of your mental structure, which was in a certain state when you created this text <...> in such a huge array of prose speech, there is always an ideological aspect <...> in this projection, there is also a sector that is responsible for ideology in every person. For ideology, for worldview, for the interpretation of God. Because everyone has a place for God, and man fills this place with something» (Nesterovych, 2014). «I will be frank, – admits L. Deresh's character, I have always considered myself a hallucination catcher and treated even the smallest vision with the respect it deserves. I cherished a special openness to all kinds of clouds of consciousness...» (Deresh, 2007, p. 189). Yuriy Izdryk's protagonist reflects: «People of our time lack a philosophical approach to life – they perceive everything in a simplistic and pragmatic way, not feeling the complexity of the universe» (Izdryk, 2010, p. 71). Reaching the limits of the transcendence is also possible through engaging in destructive practices: the protagonist of the novel by S. Zhadan feels like «a river flowing against its own course» (Zhadan, 2007, p. 181).

The purpose of this article is to clarify the forms and varieties of manifestation of the category of the transcendent in postmodern novelism on the example of the works by Yu. Andrukhovych, S. Zhadan, L. Deresh, Yu. Vynnychuk, and Yu. Izdryk.

Theoretical Framework

The categories of transcendence and mysticism have been paid attention to in their studies by C. Spurgeon (Spurgeon, 1995), E. Underhill (Underhill, 1911), L. Levy-Bruhl (Levy-Bruhl, 1994), C. Duprel (Duprel, 1904), M. Eliade (Eliade, 2001) and others. In order to determine the nature of transcendence, to which the hero of the text aspires or joins, it is offered to identify textual parallels with certain contemporary spiritual concepts.

Methodology

The intertextual method was used to determine the polyphony of the analysed texts, in particular the category of the transcendental in the postmodern novels. The method of receptive aesthetics allowed us to outline such definitions of the category of the transcendental in Ukrainian postmodern novels as emotional nature of artistic perception, literary creativity, in particular, the issue of sources of reception and creative inspiration, as well as to draw some parallels between literary texts and authorial concepts of the transcendental at the level of powerful reception. The hermeneutical method of the study involved the principles of ambiguity, parallelism, paraphrase, and two-level completeness of meanings in the plane of the spiritual parabola of the transcendental.

Results and Discussion

Late twentieth-century novels reflect esoteric doctrines and concepts, artistically embodied by the authors. The concept of the «Law of Attraction» is the most widely represented, with various interpretations in the texts. One can find evidence of the concept of unpredictable chance (based on the book «The Black Swan» by N. N. Taleb (Taleb, 2010)): «I was afraid that chance was taking advantage of us all the time and every day. I would like to do something against it» (Andrukhovych, 1996a, p. 18). To define the essence of the concepts expressed in the literary texts, we will cite some parallels with one of the well-known texts of the channeling direction (channel as a way of connection to the «universal mind», an immense storehouse of information that has existed since the birth of the Universe), a book by N. D. Walsh «Conversations with God. An Unusual Dialogue» (Walsh, 2001). Yu. Izdryk writes: «<...> he only had time to feel the acute joy of the player and the physiological sense of harmony, well known to the creators» (Izdryk, 2010, p. 155). In the work by N. D. Walsh we find: «I

wish the whole process of life to be a feeling of constant joy, of ongoing creation, of infinite expansion and complete completeness in every moment of the present» (Walsh, 2001, p. 53). The hero of the novel by L. Deresh «asked himself in a chorus: «Who are we?» And we answered that we are an infinite number of parts of the whole, bliss, knowledge of bliss, and love from knowledge. And we understood that we are the fullness of wisdom and that this wisdom is eternal, one and in everyone» (Deresh, 2012, p. 192–193). N. D. Walsh writes: «And It decided <...> that each part, being less than the whole, would be able to look at the rest of It and see the same greatness <...>. My divine intention in dividing Me was to create sufficient parts of Me so that I could know Myself in sensations <...>. And thus I endowed each of the innumerable parts of Me (all My spiritual children) with the same power to create that I Myself have as a whole» (Walsh, 2001, p. 13–15). L. Deresh writes: «Whoever seeks the Tree finds the Earth. He who seeks the Earth finds Water. He who seeks Water finds Fire. He who seeks Metal finds Wood. He who seeks God finds himself. He who seeks himself finds God» (Deresh L. 2012, p. 58). And N. D. Walsh underlines: «My purpose in creating you, My spiritual offspring, was that I could cognise Myself as God. I had no other way to do this than through you. Thus, it can be said <...> that My purpose for you is that you should know yourselves as Me» (Walsh, 2001, p. 16). The outlined parallels determine the worldview vectors of the writers and clearly demonstrate compliance with the concept of N. D. Walsh.

In the postmodern prose of the 90s, there are attempts to create a concept of influence on the sphere of the transcendental. Yu. Vynnychuk in his novel «Tango of Death» builds the concept of recalling previous lives by a person through listening to the music performed in a special way (Vynnychuk, 2012, p. 101–102). In the novel «Jacob's Head» by L. Deresch, the concept of reincarnation is based on a «Tibetan source» (Deresh 2012, p. 30–31). The novels of the 1990s and 2000s show attention to ritual as a way of approaching the realm of the transcendental for a specific purpose: absolution (Izdryk, 2010, p. 269), transition to another state, transformation, sacrifice (Andrukhovych, 1996b), purification (Izdryk Yu., 2010, p. 313), and obtaining the necessary knowledge (Vynnychuk, 2012, p. 195). One of the magical components that appears in some texts is the sacralised image of voice or singing (Andrukhovych, 1997, p. 123).

Transcendence into oneself is one of the defining features of Yuriy Izdryk's work: «...the need for a philosophical look inward is my defining feature» (Izdryk, 2010, p. 180–181). In one of his interviews, the writer points out: «As soon as you realise that everything around you is actually inside you, you realise to what extent your whole life, and everything in the world, depends on you. And then you realise that God's greatest mercy is in your freedom...» (Nesterovych, 2014). The concept of «here and now» is important to the writer, it is at the centre of many teachings that involve movement towards the level of the absolute. Awareness of oneself in a certain temporal and spatial constant is the initial and final moment of meditation, the moment of «grounding» – restoring connection with reality after contact with the hypostases of the absolute.

Yuriy Izdryk's characters often use superhuman abilities, thus shifting the narrative towards mysticism (dividing into three ravens for easy pursuit of Okru, moving out of the body by the power of imagination (Izdryk, 2010, p. 45–46), invisibility to the mirrors and cameras (Izdryk, 2010, p. 55), the author invents strange properties of things: the standing of freshly poured sand as a «dune wall» (Izdryk, 2010, p. 309) contrary to the laws of physics, «transcross» as an image of a high-tech device, a set of elements with the property of actual immateriality (Izdryk, 2010, p. 110–111).

The novel transforms the philosophical concept of Nothing, which captures the absence, non-existence of a certain entity, or the absence, negation of being in general: «...by the mere effort of my constant willlessness, a hexagonal nothing was kept at coordinate zero, which did not stand out from the cramped surrounding space. I will not say that this was the first nothing I had seen, but it looked the most disgusting, unacceptable, unbearable» (Izdryk, 2010, p. 305). This category is an important part of the transcendental, since, according to the Christian religion, angels and the visible universe were created from nothing; in Hinduism, nothing is associated with the absolute, which existed beyond the opposition of the existing and non-existent.

Although S. Zhadan's character states: «I do not believe in memory, I do not believe in the future, I do not believe in providence, I do not believe in heaven, I do not believe in angels, I do not believe in love...» (Zhadan, 2007, p. 219), in his dreams, the images of his friends are transformed into images of angels (Zhadan, 2007, p. 189). V. Stibal writes about the relationship between

the planes of existence of humans and angels in her book «Thetahealing: Advanced Level»: on the Third Plane «we learn to live in a physical body and control our thoughts, and where we are given a chance to come to the realisation that we are an integral part of All That Exists» (Stibal, 2008, p. 197). According to V. Stibal, the cycle of learning on the third plane of existence is connected with overcoming dysfunctional human programmes, which is the reason for the appearance of a person in the world, after which he or she has a chance to return to the fifth plane of existence. The «angels» in the above fragment of the novel by S. Zhadan carry a metaphor for the transcendence of the spiritual essence beyond the human (the characters of the novel mirror the images of angels and «beat each other up» – the dream in the novel, like the dreams of an ordinary person, processes information or a situation lived during the day). However, the characters are not yet able to complete their destructive programmes. In this, S. Zhadan, perhaps unconsciously, unfolds the metaphor of «being stuck in the background of life», the impossibility of a different life, of reaching higher spiritual horizons.

Speaking about the stimulation of creative activity by chemical substances, Yu. Izdryk points out: «If we are talking about me not as an author, but as a human being, I do not like any states of altered consciousness» (Pyrkalo, 2005). For the writer, the moment of creating a text is completely irrational, more powerful than intellectual potential, it is not a principle of obligatory daily work: «This feeling is similar to the so-called 'revelation', when the essence of the world or some phenomenon is revealed not as a result of study and analysis, but simultaneously, as a complete picture. Here, it happens with every single word, with phrases, with the order of words in a sentence, with a combination of sentences in a paragraph or stanza, and so on. In what you feel in such moments, there is a lot – I think the vast majority – that is completely incomprehensible, unconscious <...> these incredible, mysterious, cosmic, latent connections between words and their meanings, which are actually the meaning of every worthwhile text. For me, this feeling is a universal method of text creation. This, in fact, is what is called inspiration – when you see a complete picture of verbal intertwining and undertake, to the best of your ability, to capture them and show at least some fragment of this complete picture to the others» (Nesterovych, 2014).

In his understanding of the mechanism of

transforming «revelations» into «corpora of texts» Yu. Izdryk is close to the concept of artistic creativity outlined in the famous bestseller «The Big Magic» by E. Gilbert. As the writer explains, she has devoted her entire life to the service of creativity, trying to understand how it works, and all the hypotheses she has found are completely based, in Gilbert's terminology, on magical thinking. «I mean the supernatural, the mystical, the inexplicable, the fantastic, the divine, the transcendental, the extraterrestrial», the author states (Gilbert, 2017). According to E. Gilbert, ideas, including plot ideas, heroes, styles, and the language of future books, are energy forms of life that also inhabit our planet. Ideas are driven by one's aspiration: to be embodied – of course, through interaction with a person who brings the idea to material reality. An idea, according to the writer, sends universal physical and emotional signals of inspiration, signs that remind you of it, and it will not leave you alone until it captures your attention in its desire to be embodied. E. Gilbert writes not exclusively about writer's inspiration, meaning any creative work. The topic of the irrational nature of creativity, entering the sphere of the transcendental in the process of creating (reading, receiving, accepting) a text is similarly presented in the work of L. Hyde (Hyde, 2007, p. 295).

Conclusions

The outlined tendencies and certain parallels between literary texts and author's conceptions of the transcendental testify to their powerful reception and comprehension in the texts by Yu. Andrukhovych, S. Zhadan, Yu. Izdryk, L. Deresh, and Yu. Vynnychuk, as well as to their significant genre-forming potential as a marker of the genre component of the spiritual novel, the novel of transcendence, and the novel of search within the diffuse genre definitions of postmodern novelism.

Among the concepts of the transcendental actualised in the texts or ideologically close to them are the following: transcendental meditation, thetahealing, the law of attraction, reincarnation, L. Hyde's gift theory, N. N. Taleb's theory of unpredictability, E. Gilbert's theory of creativity, etc.

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