

“Nature” ASA Construct in the Literary Text Landscape: Analytical Aspects



Lyudmila Viktorovna Gurlenova

Abstract Background: The study was conducted on the grounds of Russian literature of 20th century, however the analytical methods suggested are universal and can be applied to works representing other literatures as well. The rationale of this article lies in the need to systematize analytical procedures with regard to structures and elements of a literary text referring to natural phenomena, and to portray the wide range of their expressive and descriptive capacity.

Objective: The article studies functions and forms of representation of “nature” as a linguistic construct in a literary text, reveals its capacities in introducing ideas of an epoch, in performing functional yield within the landscape of a literary text and in text modelling.

Methods: Typological, structural, historical and literature methods were used for the research as they enable comprehensive analysis of a wide range of factual material. We are introducing the “nature” construct into the research to reveal polyfunctionality and multitude of connections between text fragments about nature and whole literary texts, and extrapolation of their functional and notional models to other texts. The construct is a system of literary text fragments associated with the notion of “nature”, which may be either extended or unextended depending on the individual imaginative vision of an author.

Findings: In the course of the study, works by Russian and international scientists on nature’s aesthetics/artistic physiophilosophy, literature poetics, ideological and artistic forms of the natural component, as well as the corpus of fictional narratives of both recognized and young writers of the stated period – the latter was mentioned in the monography “Sense of Nature in the Russian Prose of 1920-1930s” – were examined [5]. This article specifies and updates the period based on the studies dating back to the turn of 20th-21st centuries [17, 18, 19]. The additional research undertaken made it possible to create a detailed classification reflecting the functional and notional potential of the “nature” construct in the landscape of an artistic text.

Conclusions: The “nature” construct in literary works of various periods of 20th century features general completeness of philosophical, social and political ideas of writings, of authors’ artistic platforms, of modelling principles for a particular text, i.e. serves as a guide to the artistic individuality of an author.

It is shaped under the impact of common directive assumptions and components, such as method, genre, function, structure, mechanism for interaction with the whole, and others, thus providing it with the ability to be extrapolated to a vast range of other fictional texts.

Keywords: construct, function, structure, image, fragment, independent nature, sense of nature, artistic landscape, artistic time continuum.

I. INTRODUCTION

The nature theme was the subject for intense conceptual and artistic exploitation in the Russian literature of 20th century. Literature offered the society various physiophilosophical, social, environmental and aesthetic concepts of nature’s role within the system of the global civilization, of actual and idealistic relations between man and nature. Groups of writers working on the theme of nature (V. Arsenyev, L. Leonov, M. Prishvin, K. Paustovsky, I. Sokolov-Mikitov, V. Peskov, etc.) or vesting it with one of the main roles in their artistic world (A. Serafimovich, M. Sholokhov, S. Klychkov, A. Grin, V. Astafyev, V. Soloukhin, “villagers”, A. Bitov, and others) were established. Irrespective of individual visions, all these writers had “a sense of nature”, from the perspective of which their enlightenment and educational objectives were set in order to make a reader understand that nature is the basis for the human civilization and the source of people’s moral and esthetical vision.

In Russia, “a sense of nature” as a notion was shaped in the last third of 19th – beginning of 20th century, with the participation of philosophers V. Solovyov (his article “Krasota v prirode” (Beauty in Nature)) [15], P.A. Florensky (“Stolpiutverzhdeniye istiny” (The Pillar and Foundation of Truth)), who listed studies into the sense of nature in culture, science and religion [16], theorists of literature K.K. Arsenyev (“Kriticheskiye yudy porusskoy literature” (Critical studies under the Russian literature); 1888) and V.F. Savodnik (“Chuvstvoprinyudy v poezii Pushkina, Lermontovai Tiutcheva” (The sense of nature in the poetry of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tiutchev); 1911), who systematized observations of the evolution of the sense of nature in the Russian literature and of this notion being a formal content system [1, 12].

It integrates apprehension of nature, which is an ideological aspect, and sensorial perception of the environment, which defines the quality of its artistic representation.

Following the terminology of the previous century,

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* Correspondence Author

Lyudmila Viktorovna Gurlenova*, Director of the Institute of Culture and Art, Syktyvkar State University named after Pitirim Sorokin

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nature apprehension was perceived as nature interpretation or “world view” [3, p. 167, etc.]; the most widely used term was “philosophy of nature”; later other terms emerged such as “artistic physiophilosophy” and “nature aesthetics”. Sensorial, emotional and esthetical perception of nature is associated with a person’s mental life (including the level of subconsciousness). Researchers identify it as “experience of nature” or “psychology of a sense of nature” (P. Florensky, A. Biese). The worldview (“philosophy of nature”) and sensorial and emotional (“psychology of nature perception”) aspects of the sense of nature are thought of as interconnected ones: “...a very complex ... set with its separate parts internally interacting” [12, p. 1]. Their analysis makes it possible to design the vision of conceptual apprehension of nature in the artistic culture of 20th century, of understanding literature objectives and capacities in dealing with one of the most relevant issues of the Earth’s civilization. The “nature” construct with regard to the notion “sense of nature” serves as a principle for shaping elements of an artistic text involved in interpretation and representation of nature. Consequently, it enables conducting an analysis of all spectra of form and content relevant for a particular artistic text. The analysis can be comprehensive (multiple-aspect) or targeted at specific components.

II. METHODS

The research resorts to a combination of methods applicable to its subject:

analysis of fiction and publicist works of respected writers of the time, theoretical analysis of works on theory and history of 20th century literature, physiophilosophy, typological, structural, historico-literary methods. This wide spectrum of material allowed detailed systematization of the aspects of analysis of the “nature” formal content field.

III. RESULTS

The analysis of the material collected made it possible to conclude the following on representation of the “nature” construct in the Russian literature of 20th century.

Terms and concepts defining the status of nature as an object of multi-vector interpretation and representation in the literature entrenched in scientific research. First of all, these are “the first” (original) and “the second” (manmade) nature reflecting extensive split-up of writers’ apprehension of the essence of the Earth’s civilization.

The first concept was used by environmentalist writers and suggests recognition of mainly positive fundamental qualities of environment for the planet, while the second one reflected nature fighting ideas, civilizational and technocratic, quite often radically technocratic, appeals (the idea to replace original nature by manmade nature completely [6]).

The concept of “independent” nature resulting from revised status of nature in an artistic text – when environment was seen as a self-sufficient object just like man – was closely related to the notion of “the first” nature. Thenon-terminological concepts “positive” and “negative” with regard to the attitude to nature also established indicating separation of apprehension and representation of nature in

the literature into two vectors. The author of the article distinguishes several forms of the sense of nature expressed by the “positivist” in terms of their attitude to nature writers: myth, social form, and scientific thinking as the basis for the sense of nature of travel writers.

In addition to such terms as “materialistic” and “idealistic” worldview position other terms, for example, “mechanistic” and “organic” positions also became widely spread in nature interpretation referring to modern theories. Such notions as “social landscape”, “sense of the earth” and others also emerged. “Sense of the earth” as a concept addressed mainly to a character allowed, for instance, to reflect calendar and cosmogonic myths in his/her mind about work seen as a co-creation process similar to the one performed by nature, and thus to resist ultimately the idea of nature fighting, in the artistic sense – to diversify the relationship of man with nature, and add a mythopoetic perspective to an image.

Thus, the methodological base required for a more complex substantive and formal inclusion of the nature component into a literary text, as well as for the professional analysis of the forms of existence of the “nature” construct in the literature was expanded.

IV. DISCUSSION

Aspects of the analysis of the natural component in the landscape of a literary text, due to the multiplicity of elements and their levels, are presented in this article fragmentarily. The following will be given closer attention.

The analysis of basic functions of nature representation in a literary text has a research potential, they create a vector for analytical procedures in the “nature” construct.

1. The function of creating an epic background (natural context for events) is a detailed, sufficiently complete explanation of the time and place of events, including with the use of the epic parallelism, which allows you to compare the patterns in the course of natural and human life; it is typical for philosophical and historical works, for example, for the novel “And Quiet Flows the Don” by M. Sholokhov.

2. Characterization of the state and mood of a character (psychological function). It is often implemented through psychological parallel or contrast and is important for works of the psychological genre. The psychological parallel is the correspondence of the state of man and nature. For example, calm state of mind is displayed by description of a sunny day, a need in something new – by an image of a morning, while psychological crisis – by thunderstorm. A calm, even landscape points at width of interests and possibilities, a taste for contemplation; mountain landscapes, especially in memories or dreams, is indicative of impetuosity, unpredictability of behavior, disposition towards extreme decisions. These are not only portraits of nature that may serve as a psychological parallel to personality description, but also individual natural images; for example, a birch image as a component of the psychological parallel indicates softness, openness of the character. The hidden psychological meaning of a natural image is often associated with its mythological or historical significance.

The lyrical landscape, which has a pronounced sensual

and emotional principle, is capable of fulfilling a psychological function. It is a direct expression of the inner world of a character inclined to see harmony in nature, peace. A landscape, as a rule, is created by combining the contemplation of a natural view (immediately at the moment or in memories) and latent or expressed meditation (emotional reflection, thinking); the latter is connected with the themes of home, love, motherland, less often – God, permeated with a sense of world harmony, mystery and the profound meaning of life. In such descriptions figures of speech are abundant, rhythm is expressed. Lyric landscapes are mostly typical for the literature of 19-20th centuries (I. Turgenev, M. Prishvin, V. Soloukhin); they demonstrate a character's ability to experience delicate and profound feelings.

3. The function of creating a certain emotional tone (lyrical, dramatic, tragic, heroic) associated in the work with a type of events and their ending; the stated tone predominantly creates psychological expectation. Such text fragments are often pre-landscapes: in a literary text they are placed at the beginning of an event block emotionally anticipating the essence of upcoming events in private or public life – calm bright landscapes precede successful development and outcome of events, while pictures of thunderstorm, bad weather, and thickening dusk offer prospects of tragic development of future events.

4. The function of expression of philosophical, social, esthetical and ethical ideas; in a superficial structure it is often performed through reasoning, in a deep structure – through implied meanings of descriptions or narratives of natural events. Reasoning is provided on behalf of the narrator or characters, it includes contemplation and analysis of natural phenomena. They directly express personal position, the system of ideas and beliefs. Reasoning can be an independent text in the form of a mini-reflection, a fragment of the whole (the entire literary text), or a component of description of nature. Thoughts of different characters can collide in a literary text forming its own “intellectual” plot.

5. Narrative-compositional function (acceleration or deceleration of actions to achieve the necessary artistic effect, precedence or accompaniment of actions).

6. Descriptions of nature can also be non-functional, i.e. “independent” or self-sufficient, representing nature in the diversity of its life, as an independent character in a work.

The objectives of analysis for a researcher include finding out the purpose of actualizing a particular function in a work, its targets and means of artistic expression in a specific text fragment – in a set of such fragments and in the context of the whole work.

Art space plays an important role in descriptions of nature, reflection and narration about it; it is often built as a static or “moving” panorama [7]. It is useful for the researcher to pay attention to the character of description: composition details, space being filled with natural forms and items, the dominance of the vertical or the horizontal, flatness or volume of the image, isolation or expansion, openness of the space, reproducibility – re-creation – fiction – irreality of space, figurative motive system, details that are key to deep structures, their semantic content, “illumination” of figurative expression (light, shade, aerial perspective, etc.), texture, picturesqueness, symbolic color value, and

others. The strategy of the analysis is to understand the author's idea.

We would like to specify two of the above concepts. Landscape panorama. It is a large space depicted with natural objects located there; it is visible from above, from some kind of elevation, from a bird's perspective. Such descriptions are typical both for large epic works, in which they emphasize the involvement of the lives of specific characters in the flow of history, and for short works (short story, sketch), where socio-philosophical problems are of high significance. There is also a concept of “moving panorama”, denoting a wide-angle image as if of a moving camera. A planetary landscape is close to the panoramic one, it seeks to represent the planet as a whole; the point of observation is sort of from the top of a high mountain or from space. The presence of panoramic descriptions in numerous Russian literary works is explained by the features of the national landscape – smooth, open, without any mountains and high elevations – and, of course, the properties of the “national soul” loving spaciousness. Analysis of types of speech included in an artistic text – reasoning (as a rule, presentation of ideas), narration (about a natural phenomenon), description (dominating type of speech in terms of landscapes) – would be useful. The first type is specified below.

Reasoning about nature can be of the following types: 1) philosophical (reflections on the role of nature in planetary and cosmic life, laws of natural matter existence, on a person's place in the natural environment, on life and death, on good and evil, on the origin of nature, on the dialectics of a moment and eternity, random and regular, private and universal, etc.); 2) social (a set of problems related to land ownership and land use, more broadly – nature management: relations between a human and the social system, people and the state); 3) environmental (nature protection issues: discussions about the rules of sustainable nature management, people's liabilities with regard to “living” and unspiritual nature, the boundaries of human intervention in the natural environment); 4) ethical, social-ethical, and philosophical-ethical (reflections on the laws of relationships in the natural and human environment, about the humanistic parameters of organization of a common “home” for all forms of matter of life); 5) esthetical (reflections on the beauty of certain natural phenomena and environment in general, on the influence of natural harmony on people's spiritual world and art development).

Promising aspects of the study include the analysis of landscape composition, motives and images, references to literary and art works and authors (intertextual plan), reflection of pathos (heroic, dramatic, tragic, lyrical), connection with the method, style, manner, the degree to which phenomena and details are described (detailed, full image, laconic image, circumstance, touch).

The objectives of analyzing the elements that make up the natural construct can be demanded by specific research strategies focused on both classical philology and the post-modern synthesis of humanities and its technology.

V. CONCLUSION

During 20th century, the Russian literature maintained understanding of the importance of the natural theme, and in the 1920s-30s and 1960s-80s this topic became the subject of heated debate and, consequently, was more widely reflected in the literary process. The first of these periods is characterized by a greater socio-philosophical trend of the apprehension and representation of nature in literature, the second – a socio-environmental one. For almost the entire century, the aesthetics of nature was collectively developed; with the continued demand for landscape culture, forms of depicting nature in the works of classics of the 19th century, primarily I. Turgenev, L. Tolstoy, new approaches and techniques for the artistic representation of nature in literature were produced. The national tradition of recognizing special importance of the natural theme contributed to its preservation in the course of postmodernism. The extensive involvement of the natural theme into the Russian literature supported scientific interest in it [8]. The methodology of analysis of the natural component in the artist's text landscape has shaped on the basis of findings from interdisciplinary and philological research at the turn of 20th century produced by such scientists as Alfred Biese, K.K. Arsenyev, V.F. Savodnik, later – by A.I. Beletsky, B. Galanov [2, 4], soviet researchers of the creative work of I. Turgenev, M. Sholokhov, M. Prishvin, V. Arsenyev and other writers developing the theme of nature. On the basis of their work, a classical philological methodology for the study of the natural theme in literature has developed and is still applicable; however, it has transformed, firstly, due to significant changes in the art format and natural theme in literature (for example, in the works of A. Bitov), and secondly, under the influence of research strategies initiated in the last third of 20th century by structuralism and conceptualism [9, 10, 17, 18]. These strategies are synthesized through the research perspective in this article.

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