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“Story of King Leo” and the Parable Tradition to the Memory of Supervisor E.K. Romodanovskaya

Alexander V. Shunkov*

*Kemerovo State University of Culture and Arts
17 Voroshilova Str., Kemerovo, 650029, Russia*

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The transition period era (the second half of the 17th-beginning of the 18th century) demonstrated multiple examples of the tradition substitution process, of transformation of the Russian literature genre system, of forming a new artistic paradigm, determining a new understanding of the author's task. In such transformation process special attention is given to the new narrative style, which becomes a milestone of its era: the parable story. The parable story that appeared in Russian narrative tradition at the turn of the 17th-18th centuries caused the idea of a new way of perception demonstrated by the reader able to evaluate a fictional plot. The article presents an analysis of Russian fictional story, defined in genre as a parable story. In the analysis of the story, the role of parable tradition manifests itself in the construction of the plot, in the images of the protagonists. The relevance of the article is determined by existence of a separate area of research engaged with the study of the narrative tradition in Russian literature of the transition period.

Keywords: Russian literature in the transition period, fiction, parable, story, literary tradition.

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Research area: philology.

The character of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886-911) in the literature of Kievan Rus' is well-known due to the translation of the Chronicles of Dorotheos, metropolitan of Monemvasia, of the year 1665 (Adrianova-Perets, 1948, 416; Droblenkova, 1998, 226). One of the articles of the Chronicles is titled “On the Wise Deeds of Leo the Wise”. The article is comprised of scattered legends of Leo VI, who went down in history as an author of philosophic, mystic and astrologic works. With time his name became a myth; the emperor “was believed to be a magician and a wizard, mentioned in a whole

series of legends and heroic stories from the international fund of epos and tales” (Adrianova-Perets, 416). In Rus' the readers' interest to such legendary tales was enormous, which caused tsar Alexey Mikhailovich to have the Chronicles of Dorotheos of Monemvasia translated.

“The Story of King Leo the Wise” is considered to be a famous milestone in Russian fiction literature of the transition period, existing as three manuscripts dated by 17th-18th centuries (Droblenkova, 1998, 227). However, in the year 1994 E.K. Romodanovskaya introduced another manuscript edition of the story that had not

been published before; it was dated by the 19th century and at the primary comparison with the known editions of the 17th-18th centuries was considered to be an independent text. E.K. Romodanovskaya published the text as an attachment to her famous monograph "Russian Literature at the Threshold of the Modern Age. Ways of Forming Russian Fiction Literature of the Transition Period" (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 215-224), presenting the manuscript, its approximate date and place of storage (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 190).

In the same book E.K. Romodanovskaya stated that the story belonged to Russian narrative tradition and was absolutely unknown to the modern specialists: "It is obvious that the "Story of King Leo" recorded in the later manuscript and unknown before belongs to Russian literature" (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 38). However, the edition of the story published over two decades ago did not attract much attention of the literature historians either. In the light of the foregoing, it seems logical to turn to the text itself to analyse and trace the transformations happening in Russian literature of the transition period and leading it to the discovery of creative ideas, to the new understanding of the roles of authors and readers in the process of creation and perception of a literary text.

Let us remind the reader that "The Story of King Leo" was mentioned by E.K. Romodanovskaya in the context of studying one of the problems typical of the literature of the second half of the 17th – beginning of the 18th centuries, which is the active penetration of fiction, fictional protagonists with a fictional biographies and names, into the literature. At the same time, "The Story of King Leo" was remarked by the researcher as a literary milestone that drew attention to the emergence of a new protagonist in Russian literature: a protagonist with a "pseudohistorical name". "I use the term

"pseudohistorical names" to refer to the cases when a protagonist of a fictional story is named after a real historical personality, though his characteristics, deeds or consequences of his deeds do not match the facts known about such a personality" (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 38).

As we see from the story, one of its protagonists is righteous King Leo, who was a fair and wise governor of Byzantium. The image of the protagonist is created in the Medieval poetical tradition: the reader is demonstrated an absolutely perfect character, gifted with all the Christian virtues:

There was a king who was glorious and rich, and his glory was known around the neighbouring kingdoms and far away states. <...> How pious he was, his piety shone for many and many years (The Story of King Leo, 1994, 215-216).

Observing the Medieval laws of book tradition, the author constructs the conflict of the first episode of the story in the fairest way: the ideal character (King Leo) is opposed to an antagonist character (King Urusunum, "an assailant", "a foul king", "a very evil one") who decided to unleash a war against King Leo. Such introduction of King Leo in the present episode (from the point of view of the Medieval book tradition) cannot but evoke an association with the real historical character, the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI the Wise, known to Russian readers as the main character of "'Chronicles' of Dorotheos of Monemvasia, one of the most famous books on Byzantine history both in Western Europe and in Rus'" (Drobenkova, 1998, 226).

However, as E.K. Romodanovskaya remarked, the protagonist of Russian story is an example of a fictional literary character with a "pseudohistorical name" having no relation to its historical prototype. The name of the protagonist and the toponyms used in the story "bear no meaning and perform an ornamental function

only" (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 39). We cannot but agree with this observation, but, at the same time, it requires an additional explanation. The name "Leo" plays multiply in the story; first of all, it is the name of the Byzantine Emperor; later it sounds as the patronymic of Prince John, the son of Leo, and later appears in the episodes where the Prince, travelling around the world in search for his father, encounters a lion fighting with a snake in the middle of the desert. As the narration continues, the lion accompanies the Prince all the way, guarding him until he reaches the Kingdom of Assyria and becomes the heir of King Heraclius.

The name "Leo" in the analysed story has no historical underpinning and is not related to its real prototype, Leo VI the Wise. The author is very unlikely to be attempting to write another variant of the story of the Byzantine emperor, the connection to whom is found only on the most superficial level. However, under the seemingly entertaining character of the story there is a hidden parable potential that is not evident at the first sight. The author concealed it, putting the more exciting events to the fore: the death of King Leo in the sea, the prince John's search for his father, his starvation on the island and miraculous escape, his wandering around the desert and encounter with the lion, arrival in Assyria, marriage to King Heraclius's daughter, legal inheritance of Byzantine and Assyrian kingdoms, reunion with his mother and happy reigning.

We should also notice that the name Leo cannot but revoke certain associations with the widely known Evangelic stories. The ambivalent image of the lion can be interpreted in multiple ways determined in the enormous diversity of Medieval book culture. As we know, the meaning of the symbol in Christianity has both a positive and a negative connotation. One of them is provided by Apostle Peter: a lion is a symbol

of evil (passion) a man needs to mortify and, eventually, to eliminate in himself:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

At the same time, in the apocryphal texts we may find other examples of the ambivalent nature of the lion represented in one image. Among such texts there is the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas (Apocrypha, 1989, 219-262). This non-canonical gospel text presents one of the quotations of Jesus, where the images of a man and a lion are close and tightly intertwined with each other:

Blessed is the lion which the man eats, and the lion will become man; and cursed is the man whom the lion eats, and the lion will become man.

The metaphorical meaning of the utterance can be interpreted as follows: happy is the one who conquers the beast (of passion) in himself and becomes human, and unhappy is the one who is defeated by the beast and turns into a beast himself. There are two elements in a man, constantly fighting with each other: the noble and the animal. His destiny depends on the element that wins (the man or the lion). In this case a special symbolic meaning is obtained by the allegoric episode of fight between the lion and the snake, as the prince has to make a choice between the two opponents in the fight.

And he heard an animal voice in the valley, roaring horribly, and another voice that hissed. Scared, the prince approached the valley and saw a lion and a snake fighting with each other, both exhausted and fallen to the ground. And the prince thought for himself: "Whom shall I help, the lion or the snake?" – and then he decided: "My father bore the name of a lion. The lion I shall help (21).

As a result, the lion image in the story plays with multiple tones of meaning, adopted by the author not only from the famous fictional plots, but also from the holy books. The ornamentality of the name is revealed in the literary functions it performs, forcing the reader to see the hidden parable motives, organizing the plot of the parable story intended to demonstrate and to confirm the invincibility of the Christian truths.

It would be appropriate to remind some genre-forming features of the parable story outlined by E.K. Romodanovskaya. First of all, those are the sources of the plot different in their origin: folklore, historical, fictional. The basic one is forming the reader's skill "to achieve the exhaustive comprehension of any literary text; it is the parable that teaches the primary principles of the literary art to the reader" (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 111). "The Story of King Leo" is organically entwined into this narrative tradition. The author of the story managed to arrange the fictional plot in the form of a historical one, embeddinh a sentential meaning into it. Despite the difference of the twists and turns in the destinies of the protagonists (the father and the son), there is something in common that unites the episodes of their stories into a single whole.

Such binding element is the use of book techniques for creation of the characters, traditional for the Medieval age. Both King Leo and Prince John the Son of Leo are depicted as perfectly ideal persons representing the idea of a true Christian by their deeds. First of all it is manifested through the use of traditional stylistic patterns at the description of the characters. Thus, King Leo is presented as the "most righteous", the "wisest" of men, a loving husband and father, the defender of his country. The image of his son John is covered within the same tradition: despite his age ("*of young age he was*"), he was superior to his peers in many ways ("*in courage and deep intellect he was superior to all his peers*"). We

can also say that both protagonists of the story follow the well-known Christian behaviour model represented in such famous genres of Medieval literature as hagiography and testament. The influence of the Medieval book tradition also explains the prayers quoted in the story, the mentioning of various rituals performed on different occasions in the lives of the protagonists (King Leo's victory over his enemy Urusun, the King's death in the sea, the salvation of Prince John, the marriage of the Prince and the daughter of King Heraclius, the reunion of the widow Queen with Prince John etc.). In this regard we can draw a parallel between the novel tradition and the tradition of a parable serving as a source for reminiscences the reader may sometimes be unaware of.

In the present case we observe the phenomenon previously noticed by E.K. Romodanovskaya: the author of the story uses the name of a historical character naming the protagonist after him, but creates an absolutely fictional plot. This peculiarity underlies the genre of the parable story: "Thus, if some stories emphasize, first of all, the fictional character of the protagonist, in other stories it is the fictional plot that is emphasized. It is typical not only of the pseudohistorical stories, but also of the so-called parable stories based on the Biblical text" (Romodanovskaya, 1994, 69). As a consequence, an educated reader is perfectly aware of the author's introduction of fictional episodes with the fictional characters into the story.

One of such episodes of a folkloric origin is the episode with the Daffrin flesh-bird, with the help of which Prince John, following the advice of his wise teacher Jacob, manages to escape from the island. It is worth noticing that, being a typical peculiarity of the parable genre, allegory is not found here. The author focuses the reader's attention on the extraordinariness of the exciting episode with the fantastic bird, who grabbed the

Prince with its claws to carry him to a different place. Such combination of the two different narrative layers (didactic and entertaining) in the text is traced throughout the whole plot. Moreover, the entertaining character dominates over the didactic one, thereby enhancing the fictional side of the book by drawing it closer to "the folkloric tradition and narrative arrangement" (Meletinsky, 1990, 52). As a result, the major emphasis of "The Story of King Leo" is made on the eventful part, coloured with the folk poetic traditions, not on the "meaningful" part compulsory for a parable; this enhances the fictional character of the narration. The author opposes a fictional story and a fictional protagonist, though "dressed in the historical dress", to the historical plot. This peculiarity allows us to consider "The Story of King Leo" as a book, demonstrating all the features of transition from the Medieval age to the Modern time.

There is one more detail which can be taken for a certain marker of a parable: it is the subtitle of the story referring the reader to its potential source. In the manuscript published by E.K. Romodanovskaya we read: "*Written from the Palestinian historical book 'The Golden Chain' about King Leo*". This seemingly ordinary phrase has, in fact, a certain meaningful implication. On one hand, it is a reference to the famous Russian collection of apologues called "The Golden Chain" (Krutova M.S., Nevzorova N.N.) comprising of moral tales. Making a reference to the famous source, the author increases the authority of the current story as well. On the other hand, this phrase allows us to judge of the nature of the author's writing techniques. He cannot be considered to be a simple compiler,

making up his story of several independent motives, which would be typical of "The Story of Leo the Wise" (Adrianova-Perets, 1948, 416; Droblenkova, 1998, 226), though with the word "written from", used in the subtitle, underlines the fact of deriving the story from a reliable source. Together with that, in the process of writing the story the author showed his creative independence. We can suggest that even if he had turned to a well-known story collection, it would have been facultative, and the plot of the story was based on a different pattern, without copying the earlier edition traditions of the 17th-18th centuries. Ultimately, the story is not an absolute imitation of its primary source; it is an absolutely new book. This fact of literature practice reveals one of the basic tendencies of the age: the liberation of the author's consciousness, the implementation of an individual approach of writing typical of the second half of the 17th – early 18th centuries, which also characterizes the literary text as belonging to the time of transition.

Therefore, "The Story of King Leo", existing as a 19th century manuscript, fits the literary process of the transition period and demonstrates the discoveries that happened in Russian literature at the turn of the 17th-18th centuries. That was the period when the Medieval narrative tradition, developing throughout the previous seven centuries, was rethought by the scribes and obtained some new genre forms. One of such new genres was the parable story which demonstrated some new writing techniques in the interpretation and processing of the gospel text, perceived and evaluated by the author as a source of plots for his own books.

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«Повесть о царе Льве» и традиция притчи.

Памяти научного руководителя Е.К. Ромодановской

А.В. Шунков

*Кемеровский государственный университет
культуры и искусств
Россия, 650029, Кемерово, ул. Ворошилова, 17*

Эпоха переходного времени (вторая половина XVII – начало XVIII века) демонстрирует множество примеров того, как протекал процесс смены традиций, как менялась жанровая система русской литературы, формировалась новая художественная парадигма, определялось новое понимание задач автора. В рамках такой трансформации особое место отводится новому повествовательному жанру, который становится знаковым явлением для своей эпохи – повести-притче. Повесть-притча, заявившая о себе в русской повествовательной традиции рубежа XVII–XVIII веков, позволяет говорить о новом восприятии текста читателем, способным оценить художественный вымысел. В статье впервые представлен анализ русской беллетристической повести, по своим жанровым признакам определяемой как повесть-притча. В процессе анализа отмечается значение притчевой традиции, проявляющей себя в построении сюжета, в создании образов персонажей. Актуальность темы настоящей работы определяется научным направлением, существующим в отечественном литературоведении и занимающимся исследованием повествовательной традиции в русской литературе переходного времени.

Ключевые слова: русская литература переходного периода, беллетристика, притча, сюжет, литературная традиция.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
