Maieutic Means of Criticism

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The work is dedicated to the consideration of Maieutic tools of creation of the text of art criticism. There is a sample of applying Maieutic methods to the critical text about Mark Chagall’s creativity in the article. The research is intended for experts in the field of art and art criticism, and also for those who is interested in questions and problems of studying of the art.

Keywords. The Art criticism, Maieutic, the text of criticism, a work of art, an artistic image.

Introduction

The main task of the research has been consideration of a problem of tools for creation of the art criticism text. In art criticism there is a special area – Maieutics. This area is connected with actualization of the relationship between a spectator and an art-work. One of the major problems of art-criticism Maieutics is the creation of the interesting, attractive and substantial text of art criticism. It is absolutely necessary to create a special technique for making the text of art. The technique obviously depends on the person of the text’s addressee, but the scientific problem is to come closest to understanding of the universal Maieutic principles that involve the person into the world of art. The purpose of the art critic’s work should be creating an opportunity for the dialogue space between an art-work and the spectator. The leading role in this dialogue should belong not to the subject of perception, but to a work of art. Though the academic analysis of an art-work is an obligatory condition for creating of the art criticism text based on the same art-work, nevertheless it is not the sufficient basis for evoking interest to the given text in different audiences of readers. An opportunity of construction of a harmonious relationship between the text appeal and its idea is a very important professional problem for a critic. The solution of this problem determines further destiny not only of art-criticism speciality, but also the development of human culture.

Methods and Instruments

According to the theory of V. Zhukovsky, maieutics is considered to be one of three aspects of professional model of an art-historian (Zhukovsky, 2004). This aspect correlates to the main target of the critical text – to help during the process of artistic image generation, as a result of relation between the spectator and the work of art. The maieutics of criticism appeals, to some extend, to the methods of the Socrates’ maieutics, being used in the rhetoric practice. In
this context, maieutics is a skill to help to give a birth to something new, something more flexible, it is knowledge about oneself and the world, having been got by means of gradual making a person to refuse from his initial convictions and to pass over to this knowledge stereo rupture, to the famous revelation of Socrates «At least, I know – I know nothing». The ironic provocation of the marking-down of human arrogance and self-assurance is the knowledge refinement from the seeming and illusory by means of raising of paradoxical and contradictory questions. Indication to these contradictions and, thus, organization of a cognitive problem, of a conflict is a methodical target of criticism. In the result of such probation – the bringing to zero knowledge, to a clear foundation – there must be born an artistic image, which is, in any case, more flexible and more thought-over, during the interaction of the spectator and the work of art.

Sophistical negative relativism and its only possible conclusion – «I know – I know nothing» – is an intermediate product of the cognitive procedure. Finally, it must be objectified into a statement of a more general definition, making the man closer to the essence of things. In this connection there appear inviting, challenging, initiative, provoking motives and intonations in the text, thus, forming logical lacunes of understatement, of under-unveilingment. Maieutic critical text excites the feelings and the intellect of the reader through disclosure of the very possibility to experience or through the promise to give an answer to the question, having been raised by the critical article. The basis of such a criticism is a game, inter-reversing the «ego» of the author of the article and the «ego» of its reader, temporally merging them into one whole, and then advisable separating them. Such a criticism never directly answers the question, what the idea of the artistic work is; it does not give any clear schemes of its perception, though playfully suggests the reader to try some aspects of relationship between the abstract spectator and the work of art. The critic becomes a secret intermediate, now acting as the piece itself, imitating its «voice» (fragments of a literature work are quoted in literature criticism, in pictorial criticism there are used «lively» descriptions of the work’s fragments), then acting on behalf of the potential spectator, giving him unrestrictedness and free rein to independent communication alone with the work of art.

Results

WALKS WITH MARC CHAGALL’S PARACHUTE

In March, 2005 it was 20th anniversary from the date of death of great Marc Chagall – a Russian painter, who died in France.

Beginning from XVIII century there was a special attitude towards France in Russia. It was the time, when the French language played as big role, as today the English language pretends to have in XXI century. The mythologeme “Paris is the cultural centre of the entire world” blended for a long time in the Russian conscious with the mythologeme “the Russian and the French people are mentally alike”. The myths about similarity of the Russian and the French people, saturated with a high-society speech of the heroes of «War and Peace», with adventure novels of Dumas, with Voltairian and Cartesian tractates and sensual rocaille plots, haunted our conscious in waves, interchanging with outbreaks of national self-conscious.

Nowadays, both in France, where the museum of Marc Chagall functions in Nice, and in Russia, where the same role is played by the Vitebsk museum, Chagall’s oeuvre is actively discussed, which exactly national culture’s property it is more likely to be. But the picturesque works of Chagall can themselves answer the question about such an aspect of this painter’s creation.
— Have a look, here it is, Russia! — I told to my companion, having come on to the platform of the Vilnensk railway station. And I hardly managed to stop the porter, who had almost edged away with my baggage.

M.Z. Chagall. 2000. P. 243

The artist’s (who has given us the walks and the flights over cities and towns in such a talented way) surname Chagall, being imposing in European and «speaking» in Russian, has not been always so.

Marc Chagall appeared somewhat later, than Moyshe Segal had come into the world.

Moyshe (equal to Moses) was born in the Vitebsk town, not far from the Lithuanian State Border. It was in 1887.

The name Marc – Moses in the mode of France – appeared in 1910, when Chagall visited Paris for the first time.

Oh, what if to saddle up the stone chimera of Notre-Dame, to brace it with hands and legs and to start flying! Paris is under me! My second Vitebsk! (Chagall, 2000: 240)

The trip to Paris on a small grant from an art patron was not a careless walk, the painter lived in misery, «reading the menu as a poem» in cafes, but in all other respects, Paris was his lucky ticket for the provincial from a poor Jewry of the Russian town, Paris for him was Louver, first of all, and his radiant light of French culture.

Such a huge distance, separating my native town from Paris, kept me from running away home immediately in a week or in a month. I would have cooked with pleasure some extraordinary event in order to have an excuse to return. Louver put an end to these hesitations (Chagall, 2000. P. 214).

One more representative of the Russian upcountry was different from others probably by that fact, that he remembered about it and, more over, that he understood it quite well, that the only way to prove it was to study the world tradition, having overcome the peak of modern European art.

Thus, the meeting of the world of Paris and the world of Jewry happened. Thus, happened the first genius «remake» of the eternal into the mode of France.

One wonderful day (there are no other kinds of days in the world), when mother was putting the bread on a long-handled peel into the oven, I came up to her, touched her floured elbow and said:

— Mummy... I want to be a painter.

I will be neither a salesclerk, nor an accountant. I have had enough! It has been not for a waste that I have felt all the time: something special is going to happen.

Consider yourself: am I the same as others?

What am I good for? I want to become a painter. Save me, dear mama. Let’s go with me, please, let’s go! There is such an institution in our town, if I enter it, finish the course, then I will become a real painter. And I will be so happy!

— What? A painter? You’ve gone mad. Leggo, don’t hinder me to put the bread into the oven (Chagall, 2000:139).

Chagall experienced the situation of loosing of his native land, of his previous name Moyshe, feeling himself, in some sense, even a traitor in regard to his own roots. There, in Vitebsk, his father, having never approved his studying painting, did not even extend his hand for a farewell handshake. His beloved mother and father, brother and sisters, town fences, his girl-friend Bella — all these was left far away. But Chagall had to move further, he reconsidered his trip to France, giving this fact the meaning of his own high significance. Yes, one day he had been born in a small country room in Vitebsk, and people and cows had been curiously peeping into the windows.

Chagall created a lot of paintings on the topic of birth, wherein the same motives were present:
a cow, a lamp, a dark room, a figure of a father, a birthing mother and a baby. Narrating about all these, Chagall described with great tender the domestic details, growing up to the level of symbols: for example, a washtub was the first thing, which he saw, when he was born. His birth was wonderful, and there was no exaggeration in it.

A washtub was the first thing, which was captured by my eyes. A common washtub: deep, with well-rounded sides. Such ones are sold in the market. I was fully in it.

I don’t remember who, most likely, my mother told that, when I was born – the fire broke out in a small house at the road, behind the prison in the suburb of Vitebsk. The fire captured the entire town, including the poor Jewry. My mother and the baby by her feet, together with the bed, were taken to a safety place, to other end of the town. But what was above all, I was born dead. I wouldn’t live. Imagine, such a small pale lump, who did not want to live. As if he had seen an eyeful of Chagall’s paintings (Chagall, 2000: 49).

In 1911 Chagall created the last «Birth» (Fig. 1), wherein he directly announced the idea of advent of a prophet-painter with the help of the painting’s solemn vertical format and its strictly symbolical composition, where the main role belongs to a ray of light, descending into the mother’s womb: the coupling of the divine ray of light and the mother principle – this is the explanation of the special foreordination of the baby. Reconsideration of his birth in his Paris work was connected with the motif of christening (the washtub is a symbol of christening laver), i.e. here, the idea of secondary birth, of birth in France under a new name is refracted. That is why he called Vinaver (his friend-art-patron) his art father, and Paris – his second Vitebsk. In Paris «Birth» there appears strictness of compositions, and even structure, which is not typical to his previous life-describing paintings, made on this topic. And that again reminds us about the fact that Chagall, being in Paris, the centre of modern art, was in search of his own, unique technique of pictorial works’ creation, in search of a new, god-inspired method of expression. In this respect, Chagall remains to be a Moses in pictorial art.

Once, the wife of one of my familiar doctors, whom I visited sometimes in order to get encouraged, retorted to my complaints, that I was picked at even here, in Saloon: – and what? You are to blame yourself; do not produce such pictures (Chagall, 2000: 218).

In 1911 Chagall created the painting «Russia, Donkeys and Others» (Fig. 2). Cultural elite of Paris met it with enthusiasm. Everything, what was depicted in the painting: on the roof of a house – a red cow, green calves, a woman with a vedro and with a torn head, hovering about in black cosmic space – seemed to be a surrealistic portrait of Russia. Under the woman there was an image of church. «Sur-nature! » – pronounced Guillaume Apollinaire for the first time.

So, it comes out to be Russia, does not it? On the whole, I have hardly known it. And almost have not seen it. Novgorod, Rostov, and Kiev – where are they and what do they look like? But, really, where?

I have seen only Petrograd, Moscow, the Liozno place and Vitebsk. But Vitebsk is a special place – poor, godforsaken little town. There are dozens, hundreds of synagogues, butcher shops, passers-by (Chagall, 2000: 245).

In 1913 «Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers» appeared (Fig. 3). Marc Chagall wrote a lot of self-portraits, but this one is unique. «Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers» is full of riddles. Firstly, seven fingers. Secondly, Chagall presented himself with his works – real and unreal. For example, the highly-appreciated painting «Russia, donkeys and others» is depicted on the easel.
Fig.1. M.Chagall. Child's Birth.1911
Fig.2. M. Chagall. Russia, Donkeys and Others. 1911

Fig.3. M. Chagall. Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers. 1911-1912
before the artist. The view from the workroom window is overlooking the Eiffel Tower – it is as if a quotation of his own painting of 1913 «The view of Paris from the window» (Fig. 4). In the right corner there is a sight of the Vitebsk town in the aureola of floating clouds, a constant motif of Chagall’s oeuvre.

*My motherland is in my soul.*

*Have you got?*

*I enter it without visa.*

*When I am lonely, – it ever knows,*

*Get me to bed; wrap me like mother* (Chagall, 2000: 5).

Thirdly, the artist presents his pseudo-cubic self-portrait, because, here all the depicted space is broken by surfaces, squares and angles. It is known about the attitude of the master towards cubism: Chagall paid tribute to it, but he wondered why it was necessary to make so much effort, in order to depict an object in its physical essence.

*Sandrar assured me, that I could get on even with the most arrogant cubists, for whom I was a waste of space.*

*Their ideas did not in the least disturb me. I thought – «let them eat to their health their square pears on their triangle tables».*

*Probably, my manner of that time seemed to the French to be slightly wildish, while I was looking at them in awe. It was tormentingly.*

*On the other hand, I was thinking that, my art did not contemplate, it was a melted plumbum, an azure of my soul, pouring out on to the canvas. Down with naturalism, impressionism and cubo-realism! They were dull and abominable for me* (Chagall, 2000: 220).

Fourthly, in most of his self-portraits Chagall draws himself in some relative clothing (something is blue, something is of gray colour), with some attributive elements (a white collar, a glove, a hat). His suit of clothes in «Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers» is a significant part of the
composition. It would be fare to notice, that the three-piece is presented in the manner of cubists, and the suit itself is elegantly-official and serves a symbol of festivity. Precisely that time, bow-tie came firstly into fashion (after the first setting of the opera «Chio-Chio-San, or madam Butterfly»). Thus, we see the artist depicted in the process of creation, having put on himself a fashionable suit. Chagall presents himself in the aspect of «a fashionable» painter, who has shot extremely actual tendencies of his time. Without doubts, it is a self-irony. The spectator’s eye is capable to build some formal parallels and with their help the author slightly hints to the ambiguity of the fashionable author’s position: the curves of the painter’s hair are similar to the form of the clouds on the right, wherein the image of his native town is enclosed. Triangular forms of the Eiffel towel and diagonal rays of light behind the workroom window repeat the coat lapels, signaling that, there is a connection between the coat – a symbol of external prosperity, and France. The triangles of the Eiffel towel and of the collar, motley Paris life, presented on the garden background, and the colourful and psychedelic design of the artist’s shirt are uniting.

Consequently, having put on the clothing (the form, the language) of Paris art, Chagall has remained in his thoughts in his motherland, and hence the content, but not the form of his creative work, is associated.

Fifthly, we see a parachutist behind the window near the Eiffel towel. Just the same as in the painting «The View of Paris from the Window» the parachutist has dotted eyes that make him gazing in surprise. In this regard, Chagall appears to be a descent both for European art and for Russian as well. Having returned back home in some period of time, he started enthusiastically providing an artistic education in Vitebsk already as a representative of world art, air-dropping the European art heritage on to the Russian land.

Sixthly, the method of artistic space organization resembles the principles of the Russian icon. Still being in Petersburg, Chagall stood for a long time in the museum of Alexander III (now – the Russian museum), silently talking to icons. For Chagall, the Russian icon is a pattern of mystic pictorial art; it is an absolutely special world, it is built in reverse perspective, its background is nominal, the figure is right before the spectator, the central presentment is often surrounded by stamps in the corners, depicting sacred symbolic spaces: mountains, trees, temples. Such stamps are signed. «The stamps» – with the presentment of Paris on one side, and with the presentment of Vitebsk on the other, – are signed by Chagall with yellow colour on the red background of the wall near the upper boarder of the painting: «Paris» and «Vitebsk», but it is done with the help of Jewish letters, in the Yiddish language. In this case, the icon’s artificiality is squared: it is not an icon; it is a «quasi» icon, more over, it is a social work, a self-portrait. It is surprising that, this «quasi» Jewish icon is aimed for reading by that very people, who has never had any icons at all because of the prohibition on anthropomorphic presentments in Hebrew art. The discovered Yiddish inscriptions at the work’s upper boarder are also a sign, which unexpectedly transforms the portrait genre of the piece and makes us look at it from a different point of view.

The seventh point is also a riddle, but not the last. The riddle of seven fingers is a provocative
outrageous element, awakening the spectator’s interest, and on the other hand, it is an indication to creation of a miracle. If we pay attention to the artist’s hand, then we see one and the same right hand on the left and on the right side. (Chagall wrote with his right hand, what is testified by the photos). We may suppose that, there are depicted two phases of creation. The hand with five fingers, holding the easel and the brushes is a thingish phase, material side of his creative working. The hand with seven fingers, touching the painting, is a mysterious moment of creation. «Seven fingers» idiomatically in Yiddish means «very quickly», i.e. creation for Chagall is a process without making any mental efforts, creation in the stream of consciousness. Formal, material side of the artist’s creative work is fragile for his will of transfiguration. Why five fingers is not enough for the author? Pentadactylism may serve as a sign of humane capabilities, which are not enough for the «prophet’s» super-task.

Messiah’s responsibility is expressed with an actual wish to embrace the native land, being physically so far, to include it into one’s own paintings as more as possible, to place it into the world order, and thus to save it from perishing, from being forgot by god, from cultural isolation, to prove its existential worthiness before the whole world. A humane hand is not at all enough for such an aim; here at least the hand of the Creator, of the Maker is needed. Otherwise, it seems that, one could have depicted simply more than five (six, eight or eternal number) of fingers, but exactly the number «seven» possesses the root of miracle-creation, the continuity from the apocalyptical tradition. Real, mathematically correct «five fingers» transform into miraculous «seven», which create a symbolic space and resurrect seven days of the Creation (in this case, the author is God), seven rainbow colours (here, he is an artist) and seven-branched candlestick – a sacral ritual of Judaism (he is Jew).

A walk with parachute is difficult to describe adequately, as far as it should be experienced by oneself. The same concerns all the eternal creational riddles of our compatriot – Marc Zakharovich Chagall.

Discussion

The system of maieutic moves is encoded in an every text of criticism. The essence of the critical text is much predefined by the fact, that the visual-imaginary and the research (analytical) primacies are merged together. More over, the outspread of the visual-imaginary beginning is considered as the artistic method's prevailing, while the author’s underlining of the object-matter’s analysis and its interrelations’ revealing appear as a domination of the research, theoretical method.

In this article we give, for example, a pattern of an artistic critical text, dedicated to the pictorial art of Marc Chagall. The artistic critical text, mentioned below, is full of factual material. The text problematic is set by the question about the national identity of the artist’s oeuvre. There is a classical «literature» conflict in it: the relationship between the man and his motherland, the problem of willing or unwilling emigration, of Jewish cosmopolitanism, a contagious eternal problem of self-comprehension of a modern provincial, being abroad, an outbreak of one myth-world and a painful formation of the other myth, the process of changing of the world’s notion. This is a crucial moment of growing older, which every person overcomes a lot of times during his entire life.

The structure of the text is not monotonous, there is created an effect of a «springings» text with a help of a chequerwork of the critical author’s words and Marc Chagall’s citations from his poems and memoirs, which are phenomenally contagious by themselves. It gives a possibility to the works of art to acquire «a voice» of their own.
The presented author’s critical text purposefully begins from an offbeat fact (about that, that Marc Chagall took this name for himself in France); this maieutic-teller’s move is counted for gradual outspreading of the question, why it was so important for the painter.

The means of maieutics are presented in expression: the text strives to be unfinished; it is open for discussion, it does not purposefully draw the line in the interpretation of the idea of the piece. At the same time, there are elements of communication of an abstract spectator and the work of art, wherein the author of the article tries not to impose his point of view, but suggests the reader a game returning into the spectator’s guise, wherein the spectator is offered «a pig in a poke»: at the moment of the article reading he is supplied all the necessary expert information and investigational ideas.

In a certain moment, the reader extrapolates the history of Chagall to his own life experience, according to the design of the artistic maieutic critic: the history of a provincial, the history of conquest and overcoming, and the history of celebration of personal myth over social stereotype. The main maieutic target of the article is an adaptation, preparing of the reader to the interaction with Chagall’s pieces. Thus, the addressee is a man, who is striving to be elected. As it was said by Vas. Rosanov, every man has his own Passion Week in his life.

**Conclusion**

Maieutic means of art criticism promote a birth of an integral artistic image by means of gradual destruction of the person-reader’s primary beliefs and stereotypes of knowledge. As a result the reader gets a new, more flexible, knowledge of the world and of oneself.

In each text of art criticism there should be a system of maieutic operations. In many respects the essence of the art criticism text is predetermined by the certain form of relationship between eye-minded and investigative (analytical) principles. While the development of the eye-minded principle is considered to be predominated by an art method, the author’s stress put on the analysis of a picture subject which reveals its interrelations should be understood as dominated of the investigative theoretical method.

According to a plane of the art critic as a maieutic, the reader of the article «Walks with Mark Chagall’s parachute» at the certain moment extrapolates Chagall’s story upon his own life experience: the story of the provincial, the story of conquest and overcoming, the story of celebration of a personal myth above public stereotypes. The main maieutic idea of the article is to open up the artistic image but still to keep a part of a secret about Chagall’s creativity. The text of art-criticism shouldn’t act as a substitute for a real relationship between the viewer and the art-work; it should only motivate the reader.

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