

ON “LITERARY MASTERY” AS AN ESTHETIC CATEGORY

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Abstract

Literary skill, or literary mastery, is taken to consideration as the way to develop one's ability to 'feel' the word and to get into its secrets, to turn one's own worldview into a literary work and to transform the entire world with its help. Those writers who tried to define 'literary mastery' as an esthetic category outlined some certain aspects of this notion (like poetic ear, workability, knowledge in the field of verse or prose writing); however, each attempt of determination was incomplete due to the versatility of terms and phenomena that could be described as literary mastery. In this paper, upon studying the individual ways to creation, we confirmed the mentioned category as a core point in contemporary Ukrainian literary studies.

Introduction

The diversity in topics to discover by literary means and in the scientific ways to interpret the creative heritage could be defined as the indication of today's 'creativogenous' society (term applied by Silvano Arieti). Theoretically, this kind of society is characterized by *access to cultural means; diversity in cultures and subcultures; aspiration not to simple existence, but to achievement of certain objectives; free access to education; lack of privileges to definite cultural groups and preconceived attitude to any others; intellectual tolerance, interaction and collaboration between creative persons; system of awards and encouragements* (Arieti 1997, p. 121). Thus, some philologists wished to come into the internal world of a writer for cognizing the main secrets of one's style and the main artistic means of one's creative laboratory. Moreover, they could use all the obtained knowledge to start their own creation.

Researchers who paid attention to different aspects of writers' style (including genre and style diversity, plot-structuring, versification, imagery, artistic language) come to generalize about the main criterion of mastery: *it is a harmony of figurative and expressive means in creating the individual picture of the world. Finally, literary mastery is defined as the harmonic correlation between shape and sense of a written work, and henceforth the ability to create such a harmony, to discover the new vision of a subject.* In other words, *literary mastery is an individuality of a writer's disposition, conditioned by one's ability to express it in words.*

'The ability to analyze is the ability to explore the energy of word,' as Yevhen Malaniuk wrote. Every method of analysis (historical and typological, discursive, comparative, intertextual, psycholinguistic, archetypal, close reading etc.) would surely concern such an important aspect as literary mastery. Upon outlining the 'literary mastery' as an esthetic category, we find it logical to move forth to a versatile process of its development.

Creative laboratory as a metaphor of a writer's work

As for the authors of *Literary encyclopedia*, creative laboratory is determined as the complicated many-stage process of a literary work creation, starting from an invention up to publication confirmed by an author's will. The author's laboratory studies contains the following points: *history of invention and creation of a literary work and its perception that would be conditioned by a writer's disposition, one's vital and creative experience, and also the level of one's individual culture, abilities, talent or geniality, esthetic tastes, and belonging to an epoch's literary context* (See *Literaturoznachcha* 2007, p. 462).

Creative laboratory could be explored on all the levels on an author's individual style evolution – starting from the motifs and inventions fixed in diaries, notebooks, letters, conversations and so on, and also expressed in manuscripts, typewritten texts, sketches, corrections, and versions printed in a writer's lifetime. That is why it is necessary to reveal the uniqueness and evolution of an individual creative laboratory by its juxtaposition to the experimental work of a natural scientist.

The naturalists of any branch use the various substances and equipment to study the nature. Particularly, these are different chemical reagents; measuring devices like balances, thermometers, voltmeters, spectrophotometers; microscopes to examine the small objects; laboratory glassware for

various purposes and so on. Usually, the naturalist sets up the objectives for research, and formulates several interconnected tasks to achieve them. The expected result of an experiment can be determined as confirmation (or refutation) for a hypothesis that was a fundamental for a scientific work.

This is why the term ‘laboratory,’ with an application ‘creative,’ got implemented into the scientific communication of philologists completely organically. We tend to think that exactingness, purity, punctuality, and objectivity in carrying out an experiment, and also devotion to one’s occupation are the similar features for both naturalists and writers.

So, a writer uses the words and word construction for reagents; studies the future literary work’s microcosmos of the characters and their material world through the ‘microscope’ of one’s experience; weighs carefully every word and image on the analytic balance. Finally, the ‘spectrophotometer,’ which can be identified to Alexander Pushkin’s ‘magical crystal,’ is the author’s observant thinking and feeling that allows him or her looking into either past or future, ‘bringing up’ the characters of the work, and studying the mysteries of the natural environment.

Just like the reagents connect to each other during the reactions of composition, decomposition, substitution, or interchange, the author’s correction of the final text, addition or elimination of some elements, conditioned by the purpose to give more perfection to the literary work, are going on.

Finally, the wholesome and complete literary work, a result of the sequence of different reactions, is the new-obtained (or even a new-discovered) substance.

Secrets of creativity

‘Secrets of creativity’ is the other idiomatic image to apprehend the writer’s work. From long time ago, creativity had been considered a mysterious and deeply intimate process. In the great scientific work entitled *From the Secrets of Poetic Creativity* (1898), Ivan Franko had formulated the principles of a poet’s mastery analysis, the process that should be started with analyzing the sensual base of poetic imagery. Such a method for an analysis would become, as to Sergey Parkhomenko,

a scientific foundation for further discussions over the question whether the individual manner of artistic thinking was enrooted in the sensual base of esthetic perception.

Ivan Franko assured that one of the main characteristics of an artistically thinking human was so-called *eruptivity* of one’s unconsciousness, i. e. the ability to raise the whole complexes of bygone sensual impressions and memories to the level of deliberation. This could occur only in certain benign conditions, or by ‘an impulse.’ In other words, Franko had contextually defined this ‘eruptive power’ as *inspiration*, greatly appreciated by Romantic thinkers and writers.

Henceforth, Franko had confirmed that a human has two levels of consciousness, called ‘higher’ and ‘lower.’ As it was known long ago, ‘higher consciousness’ belongs to the sphere of ratio. However,

the larger part of what a man had experienced in one’s lifetime, the larger part of all those suggestions that were named ‘education’ and therefore helped a man to concentrate the heritage of many-millennial cultural work of entire humankind, – that part overcomes the clear lair of higher consciousness and gets slowly darkened, disappears from the surface, drowns in the deep well of human soul and hence lies buried over there, like gold in underground deposits... This is our lower consciousness, which nest for ‘superstitions’ and ‘prejudices,’ vague aspirations, sympathies and antipathies. They are unclear for us just because their roots are hidden from our consciousness (Franko 1981, p. 61; translated by the author of the paper).

Yet, upon creating, our poetic fantasy reveals its ability to raise these lairs of bygone impressions to ‘the daylight of higher consciousness.’ In connecting Alexander Potebnia’s conception of correlation between language and thinking with means of psychological analysis, Franko accomplished the unique physiological and linguistic research of human senses’ functions, projecting them on certain artistic images that were fixed in a concrete language long ago.

As to his thought, the tactile, visual, and auditory images are the most conceptual in human’s perception of the world. The researcher set up some parallels between poetry, music, and painting to confirm that if painting appeals only to eyesight, and music does it only to hearing, – poetry can appeal both to eyesight and to hearing (as the poem gets read by eye or recited), and hereinafter, with

a help of words, to the other senses (taste, odor, touch). So, the versatile sensual appellations are the means to create such images that could not be created only by painting or only by music themselves. The tripartite poetic cycle *Vol'ni virshi (Freed Verses, 1906)* is an example of Franko's theoretical theses embodied in the literary work. In the first part, *Moderne*, the sensual images, which are put in gradation, make up the extended metaphor of verses 'as free as the wasps in summer heat,'

*As arrows shot off the drawn bow,
As words framed in wrath,
So angry,
As nice as a smile of a maiden,
As bitter as sting of a viper, –
Fly forth!*

(Franko 1976, p. 269; all the poetic quotations are hereinafter translated by the author of a paper).

The taste details do suggest the imagery connected with certain taste and thus express the speaker's mood at the moment of speaking:

*A minute's like goblet,
Hey, fill to the brim!
Vermouth!
So bitter, but sparks go a-jump in my eyes...*

Symbolic conceit 'vermouth,' or a wine enriched by herbal potions (mostly wrung from absinth), is considered a latent metaphor of bitterness and sadness. However, these words also express the Dionysian 'drunkenness by life' (as Friedrich Nietzsche wrote). Particularly, Franko's speaker compared drunkenness to the 'faint state in which a poet creates one's chants' (Franko 1981, 55). That is why we confirm *Moderne* as an endeavor of the new poetic manifesto with a slight parody intonation.

Dmytro Pavlychko, a contemporary Ukrainian poet, uncovered the 'secrets of creativity' with almost similar means. As he wrote in his literary critic essay,

the process of creation gets divided by at least two periods. During the first, or the 'sacral' one, when the bygone impressions, embodied in vitally-experienced images, are 'erupting' from the depth of unconsciousness, – the poet forms the avalanche of thoughts and feelings that come easy, just because they are organically connected to one's emotional experience. But the creative process, unless it is psychologically complicated, mysterious and individual, and therefore resistant to any kind of mechanization, – anyway will come into 'technical period' that would be either intermediate or final stage of creation. The emotional strength is getting weak, the raging fantasy is getting calm, and the consciousness is analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of a rough-written poem.

Just the technical period of creativity is the best time for using the rhyme glossary to give more harmony to shape and sense of a work and more perfection to the shape itself. Along with that, it would help a poet to keep the uniqueness of one's new opus thanks to the uniqueness of rhymes (Pavlychko 2007, p. 35).

Jan Parandowski, the author of 'Alchemy of Word,' gets a Ukrainian reader acquainted with the secrets of creative laboratory of the writers from different countries, taking metaphor as a conceptual sample. As for him, metaphor

contains various dangers... It is needed so much tact, mind, and taste to stay within the limits of exquisiteness, using these intricate word ornamentations. You can do without similes, especially in prose; moreover, you can avoid them consciously and successfully – yet there is no escape from metaphor (See Parandowski 1982, p. 79).

Free-verse meditation *Nie! ne napiszę sonetu* (*No, I would not write a sonnet*) by Bronisława Ostrowska, a representative of 'Young Poland,' is a variation of 'L'Art Poétique' theme, where the secrets of a lyric poet's mastery got embodied in floristic motifs,

*Nie! ne napiszę sonetu.
Ale narwę w ogrodzie astrów białych,
Promienystych, lekkich komet o złotym oku,
I gałęzi białodrzewy o białym aksamicie skóry na smutnych liściach,
I welonów gipsówki drżących jak srebrna mgła –
I włożę to w wysoki rznięty krystal na wnetrzu ciemnych drzwi...*

*(No, I would not write a sonnet.
But I'd pick some white asters from my garden,
Asters, the comets splendid and light and gold-eyed,
And white-tree twigs with white-velvet leaves,
And sculptured veils trembling like silver mist –
And then put it all into high crystal vase amongst the dark trees...*

– See Dłuska 1962, p. 248; translated by the author of this paper).

The speaker's imagination puts an identification of floristic and poetic arts, which allows us talking about the Japanese culturological conceit 'ikebana' interpreted in Ostrowska's poem. It has turned out to be that poetry consists of a bunch of asters looking like Milky Way; of sunflowers and mauves on the background of 'loud laughter'; of grapes of rowan tree; of spikes of wheat and rye; and even of 'nibbling hazelnuts.' As for the speaker of the poem, poetry is 'weaving words inside the soul as on the looms'; it is present in everything and needs no words and moreover the strict poetic forms to be created (as the refrain sounds, *No, I would not write a sonnet*. See Naumenko 2010, p. 32).

Secrets of creativity are being discovered in writers' memories, diaries, literary-critical essays, and scientific publications. The writers themselves (or their biographers) used to tell about the work over a writ in different manner. For example, **Anna Akhmatova** loved winter and summer 'for their stability' (See Nikolenko 2007, p. 202-203). **Hryhory Skovoroda** liked to write in solitude – in the forest, on the riverside, or on the apiary; 'he loved the apple odor around,' as Pavlo Tychyna witnessed (See Tychyna 1981, p. 275). **Oles' Honchar** liked to write stopping the car by the steppe. **Hryhory Kosynka** used to create at night time, previously having thought over each period and episode (See Nikolenko 2007, p. 200-207). **Ivan Franko** first 'chanted' the stanza pattern for the future poem, then chose the rhyme sequences, sketched a rough variant of a work – and only after that, in a few days, he sat down to correct it. **Vasyl Stefanyk** started and finished a short story throughout a night; besides, he spent enormously much paper for one story. **Marko Cheremshyna** liked so-called 'poetic mess.' **Ivan Karpenko-Karyi** and **Marko Kropyvnyts'kyi** used to work over several plays at once (See Shevchuk 2007, p. 418-419).

The secret movements of literary working – or a 'golden chain of emotions – inventions – images – words,' by Lev Ozerov – are invisible for a strange eye, sometimes because of the years passed. However, their energy and power of creative flight are so strong that would turn a meticulous reader into a witness or even a participant of the described events. One can read *Lisova pisnya* (*The Forest Song*) at home, at the library or on the plain air; one can watch this play performed at opera, ballet or drama scene, watch a movie or a cartoon based on this play – finally, one can get the great impression of the work, yet only imagine, not to see at real, 'the ancient, forefather woods on Volyn' as it was shown by Lesya Ukrayinka one hundred years ago.

The magic of art would maybe remain just a secret of talent, an individual discovery for a writer. Otherwise, the accumulated knowledge about the specific features of a writer's style would reveal the way to its cognition. Everyone who stands to writing should know that to reveal the secret of creativity means to outline one's **own** place in it, to comprehend **what** one could do in prose (poetry, drama etc.) and **how** one would achieve one's objectives; and therefore to do one's best in using the artistic means to show one's own world. Upon writing each of subsequent works, one must not use the same secret (onomastics, puns, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme chains, tropes, motifs and realia).

Turning back to Jan Parandowski,

even if none would disturb the future writer to go one's chosen way, none would otherwise initiate one into the subtle features of a writer's work. One should reveal them oneself, obtain them by one's comprehension and instinct, search one's way blindly, find the unknown paths (usually trodden by previous generations), stray amongst the shrubbery, and finally go back to the large road which leads to creation and glory (Parandowski 1982, p. 75).

Creative invention as the component of a creative laboratory

Invention is an evidence of a literary work's existence as a hypothesis which should be confirmed or disproved; or as a project which should be implemented. Usually, an invention fixes the author's creative intentions that outline the base of a literary work – its topic, genre, volume, character system and the ways of their interactions. The rough copies activate the writer's internal imperatives that were previously given in notebooks, diaries, letters, or variants, but were not wholly embodied in character system.

Invention always looks like crystallization, when an invisible substance, dissolved in liquid, begins to form the straight system of crystals, and this process gets witnessed by an observer. To start the process, it is sometimes needed to add just one formed little crystal into the solution. The role of this little crystal often belongs to a new amazing fact, a fresh and sharp observation, or an effective phrase pronounced by someone else (See Soloukhin 1982, p. 73).

Indeed, the splendid fact fixed with several words could be extended to literary work of some certain genre. However, the notes would remain unchanged and thus perceived as monoverse (verset) or a stanza, leaving enough possibilities for mutual creation. Mikhail Veller, the modern Russian publicist and writer, outlined the following types of creative invention (it is necessary to comment some of them in connection with Ukrainian literature; our comments were italicized):

1. **Imitation.** Just as a young person has read the work, one gets inspired to write something similar. Finally, one writes something almost 'the same,' yet a little worse in quality. The psychological direction is like this, 'Well, I'll also write the same way, and whatever I write will also be interesting.' This is the common way for every beginner until one's individual style is elaborated.

2. **Adaptation.** Being unable to find one's 'own' topic, the beginner tends to write 'something that will anyway be read' – like 'ironic' detectives, love stories, cookery bestsellers, many-volume 'fantasies' and so on. The direction is like this, "That's how I should write, – it's the reliable way to earn money." Yet it concerns only to commercial writings.

3. **Gifted plot.** The invention gets taken completely, just if it corresponds to the worldview and the manner of a writer. *The archetypal example is the 'Inspector' collision which got interpreted creatively and originally by Mykola Gogol' and Hryhory Kvitka-Osnovyanenko, according to the individual manner.*

4. **Information of an event.** Any newspaper article, TV show or archival document could be interpreted this way. The author could take the information as a base, and then model one's own variant of a situation. *The item about a Kharkiv citizen who changed his disharmonious surname became a source of Mykola Kulish's Myna Mazaylo. Also, the prohibition to light fires in Kyiv dated by ages of Lithuanian colonization was occasionally found by Ivan Kocherga and then made up a base for his drama Svicchyne vesillya (Svichka's Wedding; Svichka was the last name of the main character, coming from the word that means 'candle').*

5. **Sublimation.** A narrator or a speaker is shown as a person completely opposite to an author (by physical or psychic constitution). *An example in Ukrainian literature is Bohdan-Ihor Antonych who, being an unhealthy man, gave a skilful description of sporting games in Bronzovi myazy (Bronze Muscles) poetic cycle.*

6. **Game.** Children's games that are theatrical by their essence will lead to literary creativity. *Look at the gallery of characters in children's literature – animals, birds, plants, things and so on are acting together with human beings. The writers' biographies are evidence that all these characters were the participants of their childhood and school life.*

7. **Unexpected supposition.** The creative direction is like this, 'What might have been is to be shown.' Fantastic and anti-utopist prose appears that way. *Besides, Ukrainian literature represents many novels written in a manner of so-called 'alternative history,' like Pseudo-Nostradamus and other works by Vasyl Kozhelyanko.*

8. **Dream of an Ideal.** The entire humankind's dreams about justice and invincibility, about love and wisdom, embodied in images that are now called 'eternal,' 'wandering,' or 'archetypal' (See Veller 2008, p. 455-458).

Conclusions

S. Weinberg, a Nobel prizewinner, assured that any attempt to cognize the Universe in one of a few things that raise the human life over the farce and give it some features of the high tragedy. Only the selfless search for the right words and the joy of the word harmony obtained in work will allow approaching to the truth, to comprehend the world of literature and one's place in it.

The writer's invention, regarding the inexhaustibility of artistic fantasy and amazing emotional expressions, may be realized gradually – in planning of the future work and then in collection of the material, including 'work on studies' (as for talented writer) and the momentary illumination (as for genial writer, especially for a lyric poet).

This is why literary mastery will remain a live substance directed into the future, devoted to the best traditions of the past and affirmed the spiritual source for the present. The new generations of literates come to interpret their predecessor's heritage critically; sometimes they complete the uncompleted plots, use the unused conceits, and solve the unsolved problems. Literary mastery is a joint of different knowledge streams, a synthesis of cognizable and non-cognizable, and a unity of spiritual, esthetic and social connections which create the system 'Human – World – Literature.'

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