

SYMBOLISM IN WALT WHITMAN'S POEMS AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS INTO KYRGYZ LANGUAGE

СИМВОЛИЗМ В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ УОЛТА УИТМЕНА И ИХ ПЕРЕВОД НА КЫРГЫЗСКИЙ ЯЗЫК

Аннотациясы: Бул макала белгилүү Америкалык XIX кылымдын Уолт Уитмендин чыгармаларга арналган. Ал биринчилерден болуп XIX кылымдын “*vers libre*” инновациясын колдонду; Оксфорддук адабий терминдердин сөздүгү төмөнкүдөй аныктама верлибриге берет: “формасы метрдик композицияга ээ эмес, рифмы”. Уитмендин Верлибри абдан символкалык жана метафораларга толук.

Негизги сөздөр: Символдар, метафоралар, верлибр, концептуалдык, денотативтик.

Аннотация: Эта статья посвящена произведениям известного Американского поэта XIX века Уолта Уитмена. Он был одним из первых, кто использовал поэтическую инновацию XIX века “*vers libre*”; или другими словами «верлибр», белый стих который сейчас широко известен по всему миру. Оксфордский словарь литературных терминов дает следующее определение верлибру «форма метрической композиции не имеющий рифмы». Верлибр Уитмена чрезвычайно символична и наполнена метафорами. В статье мы рассматриваем символы как основной идеей поэзии Уитмена.

Ключевые слова: символы, метафора, верлибр, концептуальный, денотативный, переносный.

Abstract: Our research is devoted to the literary works of the greatest American poet of XIX century Walt Whitman. He was one of the first poets who used the 19th-century poetic innovation “*vers libre*” or another word “*free verse*” which is now widely spread all over the world. Oxford literary terms dictionary defines it as “*unrhymed verse without a consistent metrical pattern*”. Whitman’s free verse is full of symbolisms as well as metaphors. In this article symbols are studied as the main idea of Walt Whitman’s poetry.

Keywords: symbols, metaphors, free verse, conceptual, denotative, figurative

1. Introduction

Symbols, signs, signification are all the objects of the study of semiotics. Along with these it includes metaphor, analogy. In order to determine the role of symbols in Walt Whitman's poetry we compare it with the other semiotic concept metaphor. By its imagery, allegory the metaphor is similar to a symbol. Therefore, the notions of metaphoric image and symbolic image are used with some literary critics as synonymous concepts.

2. Symbol and metaphor

Nowadays the researches devoted to the study of metaphors have become more intensive, and quickly spread worldwide occupying different spheres of life. Metaphor has become the source of understanding the human consciousness, his perception of the world based on specific cultural peculiarities. Metaphor is omnipresent in different kinds of discourse, and this lead to the diffusion of the concept metaphor itself. We'd like to identify the two concepts by their similarities and differences. However, both of them are based on the image, they can be more the object of interpretation than understanding. According to Avdeenko I.A "the main similarities of symbol and metaphor are their figurativeness, allegory, interpretation, meaning transference. As a result they allow to name something by one word, whereas it is impossible to describe by many words thus leading to the enlargement of the meaning." [1] But there are also some principal differences which were mentioned in the works of such researchers Arutyunova N.D, Losev A.F, Shelestyuk E.V. According to Shelestyuk E.V "Symbol is a complex sign, which has minimum two equal kernels of the meaning- direct denotative and figurative, more often abstract meaning. Direct meaning presents image of the symbol and characterized by mandatory generalization of concrete notion. Symbol's figurative meaning may have archetypical, cultural-stereotypic, subjective- individual, conceptual character." [2]

Metaphor is – a trope, figure of speech, symbol is – a language sign. A metaphor is characterized by its predicative position, so its nature is focused on the meaning, and possibly implementing it into the lexical stock of a language. A symbol is not used in the predication; it is more a form than meaning. A metaphor is "not asking to be on the paper", while symbol "strives" to be a graphic image.[3] In metaphor two subjects are compared; in the lines "Ir degen akyndardyn **ak boposu**, ardaktap kara janin

urop bakkan" words *ir* and *ak bopo* are used as a comparison. It's English translation goes as follows: "Verse is the **darling baby** of the bard, who does his best to raise him in regard". Accordingly verse and darling baby are compared.[4]

In the lines "Ere **half my glass of life** is run", the half of interesting and happy life had passed" is shown with the metaphorical phrase, in translation it was expressed as follows: "**Jashoomdun suusun** ichtim ten jarymyn" "Jashoonun suusu" is metaphoric phrase which means the life itself with all happy and sad moments. [5]

There are cases when the figurative meaning turns into significant one and it is included into the dictionary as a separate word. The examples are given in the article "Metaphors in a Cognitive Aspect" written by Bibaisha Nurdauletova, Galiya Abdilova, Sholpan Saparbaikyzy" [6]: the word "**ash kazan**" which means in Kyrgyz and Kazakh Languages a human organ (stomach), its literal translation is "food digesting pot". This word is a metaphor which became a significant word. Here two subjects are compared: a kitchen utensil in which the food is prepared and human organ in which the food is digested.

Symbols do not have dual subjectivity; there is no comparison, but there is conceptual allegory.

The followings are the examples of symbols in poetry:

"A flower was offer'd to me,
Such a flower as May never bore;
But I said "I've a Pretty **Rose-tree**,
And I passed the sweet flower o'er." ("My pretty rose tree" W. Blake)

Here "rose" symbolizes love.

" In the **spring** I asked the **daisies**
If his words were true,
And the clever, clear-eyed daisies
Always knew.

Now the **fields are brown** and barren,
Bitter **autumn** blows,
And of all the stupid asters
Not one knows." ("Wild asters" Sara Teasdale)

Spring and daisies symbolize youth. Brown fields and autumn symbolize advancing age and the approach of winter (death).

If the semantic need necessitates the conversion of the image into a metaphor, then its transformation into a symbol is mainly affected by extra-linguistic factors, it means that the decisive factor in

transforming the image into a symbol are the functions performed by a single person in religious and cultural unity and ideological harmony of the society, state and humanity in general.

3. Walt Whitman's free verse and symbols

Walt Whitman was one of the first poets who used the 19th-century poetic innovation “vers libre” or another word free verse which is now widely spread all over the world. Oxford literary terms dictionary defines it as “unrhymed verse without a consistent metrical pattern”. Whitman published his first book of poems in 1855, and they were completely different from those of American poets of his time. Whitman touched such themes which were not depicted before, and the most important of them was post civil war America with young democracy and everyday problems. Walt Whitman wanted to open his heart to people and the classical form of poetry was not free enough to express his thoughts. So to the reader's great surprise he opened “vers libre”. However he discovered the new way of development for the American literature, and that's why many people consider him as a founder of American free verse. For Whitman free verse is a special way of self-expression, his perception of the world. His most popular works are –long poems consisting of numbered fragments, which have separate context, but closely connected with each other on same general idea. Examples are: “Song of Myself”, “Song of the Open Road” and “Children of Adam”.

There are several characteristics of Walt Whitman's poems:

1. Whitman's free verse contains a lot of enumerations:

“... all falls aside but myself and it,

Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth, and what was expected of heaven or fear'd of hell, are now consumed,

Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise ungovernable,

Hair, bossom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused, mine to diffused... (Children of Adam)

Here we see not only enumerated objects, but also accompanying enumerative intonation which creates emotional and logical unity of the poem.

In another poem “A Clear Midnight”

“ This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,

Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,

Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best,

Night, sleep, death and the stars.” (“A Clear Midnight”)

In this poem we can see enumerations containing not only nouns (*away from books, away from art...*) but other parts of speech: Participle I, (*erased, done*) and Participle II (*emerging, silent, gasing...*).

2. Another favorite characteristic is –repetition.

Repetitions can be lexical and syntactical. Syntactical repetitions are similar constructions, which make the sentences longer. Example: poem “Song of the Open Road”, creating the image of the road he simulated the continuity of the movement by long syntactical constructions:

“ Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!

Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!

Earth of departed sunset – earth of the mountains misty-topt!

Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!

Earth of shine and dark motting the tide of the river!

Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!

Far-swooping elbow'd earth – rich apple-blossom'd earth!

Smile, for your lover comes.” (Song of Myself)

This extract shows two kinds of repetitions. First the lexical repetition; the word “**earth**” comes at the beginning of the lines 5 times, in whole repeated 8 times. Second syntactical repetition; sentence structure beginning with the word earth is the same, (object and its characteristics), and the first and the last sentences form such a composition that creates the effect of expectation. Besides, repetition of the word “**smile**” intensifies this effect. The following extracts from the same poem demonstrates close contextual unity:

“ I am a poet of the woman the same as the man,

And I say it is a great to be a woman as to be a man,

And I say there is nothing greater then the mother of men.” (Song of Myself)

Here Whitman used so many different forms

of repetitions. The most important in this extract is the words “**woman**” and “**man**”. He equally appreciates the role of woman and man, male and female, that’s why they are inseparable, as in line “*there is nothing greater than the mother of men*” he concludes his thought. Every repetition completes and intensifies the previous ones and deepens the general idea of the poem. In this extract we see a lot of similes with conjunction “**as**” which is also one of the characteristics of his poetry. Whitman used similes in his poems to give the equal importance to everything that exists. But the conjunction “**as**” also expresses the idea of omnipresence and continuity. The poem “Song of Myself” starts as follows:

“ I celebrate myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” (Song of Myself)

“Everything which belongs to me equally belongs to you” is the main idea of his poetry.

Thus, considering several examples we can assure that free verse best reflects the poet’s world outlook; free verse best fits to express free, independent ideas.

3.1 Main symbols

“Leaves of grass” is the name of his first collection of poems, and it was published in 1855. It has nine editions and is full of love to people, places. Some of the famous poems from that collection are: “Song of the open road”, “Song of Myself”, “I hear America singing”, “All is truth”, “When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed” and others. Walt Whitman’s poems are full of symbolisms as well as the name of his book. **Grass** symbolizes the whole, the unity, and **leaf** is “a single, separate”. Whitman sees not only the unity of all people, but every individual, each person. Each person is unique as a leaf of grass, but at the same time a person can’t exist without a society, hence the grass stands for unity of all people.

1. The symbol of **equality, brotherhood** is depicted in the above mentioned poem “Song of Myself”

“ I celebrate myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” (Song of Myself)

Most of his poems were translated into Kyrgyz language by our prominent poet Suyunbay Eraliev.

The form and style of Walt Whitman was preserved in his translations and we see the same symbols:

“Men ozumdu danktaim dagy, yrdaimin,

Men emneni kabyl alsam ozumcho, any kabyl alasynar siler da,

Al antkeni, menin ar bir atomum, silerdin da atom bolup sanalat” (S. Eraliev)

Here we see that he appeals to all ordinary people to the mass, declaring himself people’s poet. Throughout the poem he transforms into different characters, experiencing all their sorrows and joys. His empathy to other people’s feelings best symbolizes the theme of brotherhood, unity, equality.

2. The poem “Song of the open road” consists of fifteen sections, in almost every section there is the meaning of road as a symbol. It starts as follows:

“Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,

Healthy, free, the world before me,

The long **brown path** before me, leading wherever I choose.” (“Song of the open road”)

“**Brown path**” that takes him wherever he chooses, symbolizes the **life** full of new possibilities. The song is a merry chant of a wanderer who embraces all that he meets while traveling on the open road with optimism and cheer. He has chosen the road because it is the place where people come together regardless of status and social rank. The road is used by both the poor and rich and it is a chance for different people to associate with each other. He uses it as a trope to evoke in our minds the idea of a new way of living and enjoying existence against a background in which the above mentioned ideals of universal brotherhood and equality are fulfilled. The open road charges people with happiness, sweetness and freshness as they experience comradeship and contact with each other. Humanity is pervaded by a sense of happiness felt through the rambling experience upon the road.

“Joo-jalang, kubanyp chong jolgo chygam,

Erkinmin, denim da sak, bet aldymda but duino,

Ma bul uzun **kuron jol**, alyp barat men kaalagan tarapka.”(S. Eraliev)

In Kyrgyz language the word “jol” also symbolizes “life”, like the name of the book by our famous poet and writer Mukai Elebaev “Uzak jol”. Mukai Elebaev meant by ‘uzak jol’ his hard and poor

life full of obstacles.

3. Next is the poem “To think of time”

“Have you fear’d the future would be nothing to you?”

Is to-day nothing? is the beginningless past nothing?

If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing.

To think that the **sun** rose in the east – that men and

women were flexible, real, alive – that everything was alive,

To think that you and I did not **see, feel, think,** nor **bear** our part,

To think that we are now here and bear our part.”
(“*To think of time*”)

This poem is very emotional; his question has already an answer. The question “**Is today nothing**” is not a question at all, it is a statement that implies the huge, priceless and unexplained importance of the day. Rhetorical questions are often used in his poetry, because they are more emphatic than any strong statements. His rhetorical question “is today nothing” has an answer, it is in his next lines: “**If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing**”. Moreover he made the logical chains, there is no future, if only there is no present (today) and the past (beginning less past). But we know that there is a present and the past, so the future exists with them. The next part is in the past tense. (Past simple). The sun rising in the east is the symbol of life, of real life. The reality of life is depicted in the following line: “**that men and women were flexible, real, alive**”, not only people were alive, but everything was alive. And the verbs “**see, feel, think, bear the part**” metaphorically mean the life. The word “life” itself he didn’t mention at all, but gave symbolic characteristics.

So, considering this short poem, we learn the

poet’s position: the time is endless, it doesn’t have the beginning, it consists of present, past, future; these three components are not separable. Moreover “yesterday”, “today” and “tomorrow” are valuable, and every moment is valuable.

4. Conclusions

Whitman’s poetry is highly symbolic for he exploits recurrent images in most of his poems such as the image of the grass, the sea, the bird, the road... etc until they end up as symbols in his poems. Therefore, his symbols preach about his ideals and that his symbols are flexible. They are flexible in the sense that they acquire new dimensions through the poem.

So, as a conclusion we summarize that Whitman’s poetry is innovative for the usage of free verse which retracted the rhythm of English Bible, syntactic parallelism and numerous symbols. The vivid symbols make the poetry more expressive, that sometimes it is so difficult to identify their philosophical intensesness. Walt Whitman’s poetry is popular all over the world. People read it in the original and in translations in many countries of the world. He has his own place among the modern poets-revolutionaries of XIX century thanks to the special expressiveness of lively poems.

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