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The Reinterpretation of Biblical Images in Katrya Grynevycheva's *"On the Way to Sykhem" and Other Stories*

ABSTRACT

Paper deals with the peculiarities of the small prose by Katrya Grynevycheva. It clarifies the symbolic dominants, means of character creation, and the author's world outlook. The article identifies biblical images in her book *"Po dorozhi v Sychem" ta inshi opovidannya* [*"On the way to Sykhem" and Other Stories*]. The writer uses paraphrases for citation of the Biblical text. She adds new meanings and extends the semantics of religious images. The images include: Heroes, Characters, Flora and Fauna, and the Elements. Katrya Grynevycheva correlates such concepts as ground, terra, earth and Homeland. Thus, Ukraine is spiritual substance. The investigation reveals the main features of the author's individual style. The book represents a variety of genres (legend, fairytale, parable, storytelling). The Christian intertext pervades all stories. Katrya Grynevycheva builds the artistic God's world and insists on basic truths (love, faith and peace). The paper proves the uniqueness and significance of the writer's heritage in the development of Ukrainian literature.

KEYWORDS: Bible, story, parable, contrast, symbol, open finale

STRESZCZENIE

Reinterpretacja obrazów biblijnych w zbiorze opowiadań Katri Grynewyczewej „*Na drodze do Sychem*” i inne opowiadania

W artykule przedstawiono cechy opowiadań Katri Grynewyczewej, odkrywając ich dominanty symboliczne, specyfikę budowania postaci przez autorkę oraz ich orientację filozoficzne, a także określając zarysy biblijnych obrazów zawartych w książce „*Po dorozhi v Sychem*” ta *inshi opovidannya* [„*Na drodze do Sychem*” i inne opowiadania]. Pisarka reinterpretuje w niej tekst Pisma Świętego. Nadaje mu nowe znaczenia i zawartość semantyczną, rozwijając obrazy religijne, np. postaci główne (Pan Bóg, Jezus Chrystus, Maryja), inne postaci (apostołowie, król Salomon, królowa Saby), flora i fauna (baranek, pszczoła, wilk, mak, tarnina), żywioły (woda, ogień, wiatr) itd. Katria Grynewyczewa

zestawia ze sobą zjawiska takie jak gleba, ziemia, ziemia ojczysta i ojczyzna. W rezultacie Ukraina nabiera charakteru substancji duchowej. Artykuł bada główne cechy indywidualnego stylu autorki (metaforyzacja życia, symbolika kolorów, asocjatywizacja). Zbiór opowiadań reprezentuje rozmaite gatunki literackie (legenda, baśń, przypowieść, podanie). Całość narracji przenika intertekst chrześcijański. Katria Grynewyczewa przedstawia artystyczną ekspresję Bożego świata, akcentując stałość jego prawd duchowych – wiary, miłości i pokoju.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Biblia, historia, przypowieść, kontrast, symbol, otwarte zakończenie

Kateryna Vasylyvna Grynevych (1875–1947) was a Ukrainian writer and editor of the *Dzvinok* children's magazine, and an active public figure. She gained recognition in Ukraine only at the end of the last century. However, literature experts focus primarily on her historical novels (*Sholomy v sonci* [*Helmets in the sun*], *Shestykrýlec* [*Six-winged*]) and an interesting collection *Nepoborni*, devoted to the conflicts in the Ukrainian life during the Austro-Hungarian times. Meanwhile, the works that make up "*On the way to Sykhem*" and *Other Stories*, categorized as children's literature, are perceived as mere writing exercises, rejecting what is outlined in their outlook and the writer's dominant individual style.

First of all, we are talking about a distinct Christian core. Katrya Grynevych does not violate the sanctity of biblical images and motifs, but she reinterprets them on a personal and national level. She originally "ethno-marks" events, modifying and expanding the semantics of their sacred symbolism.

The first story in the collection, *Hospod' i orachi* (*The Lord and the harrowers*), is a reminiscence of Christ's Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13: 3–23; Mk. 4: 3–20; Lk. 8: 5–15). The wisdom of the Son of God is embodied in an instructive story, which the narrator interprets. At the same time, the writer modifies the parable. God acts as a central character, the core around which the events occur, and who reveals the nature of two other participants in the plot. It is worth noting that the author builds a conditional polylog: the characters receive similar questions, but provide different answers. At the same time, the defined chronotope is maintained, the semantics of which, however, can be expanded in view of the problems raised on top of the timelessness and universality of human types.

Katrya Grynevycheva compares two laborers. The characters are described not only according to their behavior, but also by the names the author gave them: "little man" and "man," in which we see axiological

accents. The poor little man could not properly till his fields due to illness, however, he believed in God's providence. The second one, on the contrary, made efforts to prepare the soil, but his arrogance and pride made him reject any higher power. So, the Lord rewards the one who asks for help, recognizing his dependence on the Almighty and does not complain of his fate. The egocentric man is left to his own devices and he loses his harvest. Katrya Grynevycheva emphasizes that God does not punish him because the rye was yielded where His feet touched the ground. He respects the choice of the man who should understand his error and, if desired, fix it.

Following the parable genre structure, the author provides a defined locus of attention. The Lord travels accompanied by the clacking of storks among willows and forget-me-nots, in Ukrainian folk costume (*svitka, cheres*), sincerely happy about the spring and human labor, because He, too, is a worker. He sows the seeds of goodness, love and joy that can help a person overcome any obstacles, alleviate suffering, and find the meaning of life. Therefore, in this context, there is an ambivalent sign, symbolizing God's work with souls and the continuous presence of God in all living things. However, the writer does not jump into conclusions, encouraging the recipient to contemplate on the parable and the responsibility for one's thoughts, words and actions.

The story *Na mohyli ravvi Azamata* (*At the grave of Rabbi Azamat*) combines the religious, mythological, historical and iconic aspects forming a dilogy with *Hospod' i orachi*. Majnun helps Alexander the Great in interpreting the mystery of the living eye, donated to him by an elder guardian of the throne of Yahweh. It is no coincidence that the Old Testament name of God was chosen to explain human nature here because of its semantics of "I am what I am" (Exodus 3, 14) that is consistent with the interpretation of eyes as the mirror the soul (L. Tolstoy). Also, it assumes the opposition of the Eye of God (Psalms 32, 18) and human eyes. If the first protects and loves, the latter require and disable. Both are directed by the sensitive universal, only with a different dominant.

The artistic frame of the work is a dialog between a young lady and the caretaker of a cemetery, who represents the wisdom of old age. Katrya Grynevycheva uses paraphrases for quoting the biblical text, focusing on the central character of the story:

For the living know that they shall die: and the dead know nothing, and there is not reward for them anymore, because the memory of them is gone, and their loves, and their hates, and their envies, are now perished; neither have they any portion in anything that is done under the sun! (Eccl. 9, 5–6)

“Those eyes, that rest under the earth, do not see any more. Time and the ground give them comfort” (Grynevycheva, 2004). She emphasizes the futility of earthly attributes (status and wealth) that hinder seeing one’s true nature. At the same time, she emphasizes the integral part of the worldly life, which include pain and regret, joy and despair, confusion and desire for more.

It should be noted the story is permeated by a distinct onomastic contrast. The semantics of the name and nickname of the hero contain antonyms: Azamat means “mighty, big” while Majnun—“crazy.” Yet, both interpretations make up one integral whole, showing a man of extraordinary wisdom, inaccessible even to the king.

The unique construction of the work—as a text inside a the text—reveals a significant range of the issues raised. Katrya Grynevycheva compares the philosophical categories of life and death, eternity and transience, stupidity and wisdom, wealth and poverty in the material and spiritual dimensions, combining various phenomena in the parable of life, which are permanent components of macro- and microcosms of the universe—God, nature, and people. She also updates Skovorodinska’s principles of “philosophy of the heart” where a person is not defined by wealth or status, but by the internal state of harmony.

Besides parables, the collection includes works which can be classified as fairy tales. Thus, in the story *Molochij* (*Spurge*), the writer uses folk motives to deal with the metaphors of life. A dying mother entrusts her little girl to the moon and stars. Following her guidelines, the girl obediently and humbly accepts various ordeals, and gets rewarded by being finally married to a young prince.

The author combines the personalization nature inherent in Ukrainian culture with biblical overtones. The herbal talisman of spurge (*div-snih*), out of which the orphan girl makes her garment, and whose seedpods resemble wings, is reminiscent of a little earth angel, that then forms a flower on the heroine’s head in the form of a bridal wreath. In addition, prickly thorns used as buttons represent the suffering of her pure soul. Carnations not only decorate the house of old woman Mort, but also “greet her with their fragrance like a family member.” The last feature transforms flowers into good predictors of future events that will be decisive in the destiny of their ward.

The angelic protection of the girl character appears on an external and internal level. The narrator emphasizes her unusual ability to revive the earth, and at the same time plants respond to her with full flower and fruit. Humility, kindness and the hard-working nature of the girl help her keep her fortitude against violence and greed from her landlady. The harmony of the natural and human worlds sanctify the Lord’s protection, which is found in fairy light that guards the child in her sleep:

The moon was not shining and the night was still, but light burned bright over the orphan's bed like silk vestments in the church. (Grynevycheva, 2004, p. 40)

Here we should recognize the semantics of the “day-night” antinomy. In the light of day the girl experiences insults, harm, and neglect, while darkness feels comfortable, warm, and light. The first sphere describes the society, while the second defines God and nature. What a community cannot understand, is familiar to the person, who is guided by the primary child-like imperatives with an expressive sensitivity dominant. Not coincidentally, the prince takes the strange (for the pragmatic and selfish public) girl to his “court on the tallest hill, pitched high above the banks of the human sea.” The sincere soul is separated from the crowd of the philistines who do not fear God and lack conscience. Therefore, gratitude, faith and obedience to the Lord's will become the key to her happiness.

It is advisable to specify the image frame of the work. The benevolent moon and the rich stars are recipients of the mother's plea, and then they become the symbols of the orphan's words who can raise the human heart in her hands up to the sky. The comparison stresses the depth of the girl's suffering, revealing the purity and greatness of her soul.

In another work, Kattrya Grynevycheva retells the famous story of King Solomon and the bee. But unlike many interpretations, she presents a small bee as the main character of the work, giving it unique features. The reader learns the name of the insect (*Cvitanka*), her portrait (silver legs, shapely head, fiery wings, tear like pearls) and her fate (most fun). The author equates this representative of nature with a human being, focusing on the uniqueness of every person. In addition, she compares the monarchs of two different worlds. Queen Bee is forced to sacrifice her subordinate to save the nest from destruction. Meanwhile, the reaction of Solomon expresses human nature, prone to emotional outbursts and condemning others due to his personal interests.

However, the wisdom of the biblical king is found in curbing his rampant and wicked desire for revenge. A right decision affects his fate. The bee helps solve the problem with Queen of Sheba's flowers (1 Kings 10; Luke 11, 31; Matt. 12, 42) and becomes the best advisor to the famous monarch: “The little bee became his matchmaker, and even more! This was an unforgettable day, when she shared the glory of Solomon” (Grynevycheva, 2004, p. 65).

Including the fairy tale *Car Solomon i pchilka* [King Solomon and the bee] in the collection, the writer wanted to show the interdependence of all things on earth. Even insects, small at first glance, can change the life of a person, and even an entire country. The human world and the world

of nature are dependent on each other and partially overlap. All thoughtless intrusions into one will lead to the destruction of both. However, the text presents the matter of choice, which we make every second and requires our informed decisions.

The problem of choice is fully explored in the story *Darovanyj cherevychoķ* [The given slipper] which uses certain biblical allusions. A talented tailor named Svyryd is robbed by his brother. The man finds himself at a crossroads: either tell on his blood relative, who is a drunk, or accuse himself. Looking for solace, the tailor goes to church, where he plays the violin before a crucifix. Christ, moved, gives him a slipper embroidered with pearls, but soon Svyryd is accused of theft and deceit. Jesus, however, saves the man from death by repeating the miracle and giving the condemned man the other shoe. An amazed customer invites the tailor to work in a big city where the man finally finds solace.

Analyzing this piece of fiction, one needs to pay attention to the reinterpretation of the shoe custom (Ruth 4, 7). The Crucified is suffering for Svyryd's brother's sin, removing the man's pain and saving him from despair. Kattrya Grynevycheva emphasizes the figure of the chosen one. Jesus bestows a gift on the tailor, who puts his own soul into items, as the needle burns from the heat of his hands, and the violin embodies the essence of an artist: "in the twilight of the church, a lamentation song sounded, vibrating with urgent regret for a young life, a complaint about undeserved injustice, and all injustice in the world" (Grynevycheva, 2004, p. 60).

The parable- and fairy tale-like story shows the importance of faith in the life of the individual. The villagers, without any doubt and remorse, attack, throws stones and abusive insults on someone whom they previously respected. This image can be interpreted as the personification of Doubting Thomas. If Jesus did not show mercy for the second time, the crowd would have lynched the innocent man. So, the lack of trust in one's neighbor and disbelief in the power of God (the crowd was not convinced even by bloody tears running down the face of the Crucified), hence the rejection of miracles will cause self-destruction of mankind—a spiritual suicide inevitably resulting in its physical disappearance.

The problem of faith and trust also dominates another story, *Chervona ĳoriuķa* [The red cow] in which the ethnic marking is shown by the presence of angels in the "sacred corner" of the cottage together with a jug of magical herbs. A poor widow trusts passersby and invites them in, which she is rewarded for with her fondest wish coming true, which she was hesitant to implement. Jesus relieves her of her fear of the future. He gives the red cow who fed the whole family to a wolf as food. (Incidentally, this predator symbolizes human nature, as discussed below). Surprised disciples seek to change Christ's will and only an explanation from their

Teacher helps them understand the meaning of His action. The Son of God heard the thoughts of the mother who was concerned about her children-laborers in the city. Living in the woods, she could not give, help, hug and protect them. The loss of the cow helped the woman get rid of her fear and to set off to meet her children, thus reuniting the family. So, in fact, Jesus made the friendly hostess' dream come true.

It should be noted that the writer uses biblical motifs and images. Miracles of Christ are revealed by the location of guests in the small cottage, in marking all gathered there with the plant's white juice (Matt. 14: 13–21, Matt. 15: 32–39; Mk. 6: 31–44; Mark 8: 1–9; Luke 9: 10–17; John 6: 5–15). Compassion of the Son of God's disciples is manifested in their trying to save widow's animal by changing its color.

The cow symbolizes sacrifice (1 Sam. 6: 7–14), which encourages the widow to change her life and children. Interestingly, Katrya Grynevychева also uses the word “cow” as the unit of measure. This assumption is confirmed by the explanations given to the Apostles by Jesus on the relationship between the loss of the animal and the family reunification. Two types of water (Gen. 26, 19) embody the definition of springing water and bitter water (quagmire, stagnant) that resemble the souls of men. The comparison of the widow's children to bees updated the image of Our Lady as the most beloved image of mother with Child in the world.

Maternal love is the leitmotif of the legend titled *Ма́к (Poppies)*. The writer creates contrast by describing Nazareth as “black,” which is emphasized by bright red spots of blood on the road. National symbols are permeating not only through color symbolism, but also in the choice of the flowers, because poppy in Ukrainian culture signifies the purity of a girl, which correlates with the chastity of Our Lady—the Virgin Mary.

The baby's sickness makes His mother run barefoot to look for medicine in the city. The carpenter's wife, singing a lullaby, does not notice anyone and anything, being focused on the Child only, “her heart coming up to her throat.” The award for her commitment is the Child's smile and the wreath of poppies made by the little boy on His mother's head.

Interestingly, two images of Jesus Christ are presented. The father, carpenter Joseph and Mary truly love the boy who plays with other children and showers his family with flowers and hugs. The boy's illness highlights the human component of the Son of God, actualizing the depth of His suffering on the cross. This indicates the subtext presence of the adult Christ, who appears at the end of the work. The author notes that drops of the blood of Our Lady turned into poppies, flowers that always accompany our “daily bread ... as a long cord of coral beads.” That seems to be an allusion to the New Testament, the approach of Pesach, when Jesus made His flesh bread (John 6, 48–56). Also it is worth mentioning that poppy

has yet another meaning—innocent blood shed—that points to Christ’s sacrifice for mankind. The author presents a certain semantic gradation: the unbreakable nature of the mother-child bond, the interdependence of redemption and sacrifice, and the sanctity of God.

It is advisable to note that the theme of sacrifice is a dominant in the work of Katriya Grynevycheva. She explores this concept at different levels. In *Poppies*, maternal devotion is presented, and in the *On the way to Syh-kem*, the universal dimension of sacrifice is accented.

Talking about Jesus wandering with his disciples, the writer describes an artistic portrait of Christ, which uses Old Testament images. She distinguishes His copper-colored wavy hair, comparing His dark and warm face with topaz and the slenderness of His stature with the lily of Sharon. The spiritual superiority of the Son of God is emphasized by His disdain for material goods, gifts and His caution around any living beings:

all the attention of His glowing eyes was set on not stepping foot on any of the violet grasshoppers bouncing among the blades of weeds. (Grynevycheva, 2004, p. 43)

The power of Jesus is manifested in the unconscious change of the insolent shepherd, who suddenly feels mental turmoil due to his internal terror resulting from his own emptiness under the gaze of Christ.

During the trip, travelers meet two shepherds. The first appears as a cynical and sinful man who despises both nature and people. The second shepherd is willing to help the newcomers. She looks like a little angel, a polite and friendly child who loves everyone and fills all around her with the love as well. Her sincerity and purity is shown in her behavior towards animals. She sees them as her friends or even children who need protection and care.

Jesus blesses the girl. However, when Peter asks Him about her future, He says that He would give this earthly angel the rude shepherd for a husband:

Not only for her I must worry ... Then he will have wheat and Chelbon wine until the end of his life, and thousands of skeins of white wool at home. (Grynevycheva, 2004, p. 46)

The dialog between Peter and the Son of God exposes the ambivalence of the world, consisting of heaven and earth, and the Lord’s human, physical and spiritual nature. The fisherman feels for the shepherd girl, mourning her future family “bliss.” He reacts emotionally to the news, because he lives in the present, focused on the human life matters, looking at an

individual. Meanwhile, Christ talks about the fate of each person and humanity in general. Children who are fully loved by their mothers who are driven by kindness, grow up to be righteous people. The brutal shepherd receives a chance to repent for his sins and change, revealing the source of terror within himself and opening up for Jesus.

Thus, the image of the sheep becomes meaningful. The animals which appear in the text belong to the shepherd. The girl becomes an *Agnus Dei* for a man in order to save his soul and being and to educate the future generation about purity and kindness. Jesus Himself becomes a shepherd, a wise and fair teacher who cares about His human flock.

God's sacrifice for the salvation of mankind is presented in *Mysalexova stricha* (*Mysaleh's meeting*). A pilgrim, lost in the forest, meets a traveler who tells him he lost his sheep and weeps. The man is struck by the presence of this unusual knight: "Dear and noble" figure, "glowing good visitor from heaven," eyes like stars, "grand purity of features" and "divine radiance" in his face. The mystery is revealed a few years later in the "worst of nights" during Mysaleh's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The man sees his acquaintance crucified on the cross. Asked what did He do wrong, the Nazarene (as in Eusebius of Caesarea) says that this was committed by a lost sheep. The Syrian protests saying that such wounds could be inflicted only by predators (wolves, bears, or rabid dogs). A moment later the night covers everything around, and only howling and cries of animals can be heard.

It is worth looking for specific content items. The image of Mysaleh is gradually revealed by his emotional reception of events. First, the writer emphasizes the courage, strength and joy of the pilgrim. Subsequently, he is filled with curiosity and compassion towards the stranger in the woods. Finally the pilgrim sinks into despair when witnessed with the bloody execution of the Innocent. Mysaleh rightly points to the inhuman nature of the executioners, whom he equates with predators. There emerges the famous idiom, the source of which is the Bible: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7, 15).

A "lost sheep" who would become a "prodigal son" by accepting the faith of Christ and finding himself through it, is transformed into a pseudo-judge who entices, encourages and ultimately directs the crowd to perform the bloody execution of Jesus. Besides, this actual literary allusion it also becomes a "winged word." The Roman writer Plautus defines egocentrism in his comedy *Asinaria*, using the well-known saying: "A man is a wolf rather than a man to another man." Spiritual or physical homicide is always like a boomerang and leads to self-destruction.

Despair and anguish of the Righteous One determine the relation of God to everyone, even when one "lost sheep" inflicts an incredible pain

on the Almighty. The burden of sins of irrational creatures causes not only emotional but also physical suffering to the Savior who accepts the Lord's will and makes a willing offering of Himself for His ungrateful children. The ambivalence of humanity and the continued fight between impurity and purity, between good and evil, death and life concentrated in the image of Mysaleh who runs away from the city of crime and cruelty, shocked by the terror of the execution and in remembrance of the red light in the house of Pontius, who performed the unfair trial of the Innocent. The world is suddenly dominated by solid darkness, contrasting with the red color. Both colors become symbolic revealing the spiritual nothingness of the executioners and the greatness of the Crucified, manifested in His bloody agony.

The final piece of the collection, which includes issues raised in the texts of interest to us here is *Dyvna nich* (*A strange night*). A boy named George receives a bowl of flour from his teacher, but he loses this treasure through his antics of the wind who blows it away. He goes for help to a witch named Khyma. The image of this woman is embodied in ancient Ukrainian beliefs (animism, totemism, fetishism) inherited by Molfars, village medicine women, and seers who serve as mediums between the natural world and the human one. Katrya Grynevychyeva emphasizes the old woman's respect for all living things which she owes her gift to: "Before who begin anything, do anyone you meet any good. Even very small, at least make them laugh" (Grynevychyeva, 2004, p. 67).

The writer presents pantheism as a dominant mentality of the Ukrainians.

The boy goes in search of the offender and witnesses an unusual conversation. He hears the voices of dead soldiers killed while defending their homeland and its independence. Cossacks were ready to fight, but inert future generations are unlikely to appreciate the enthusiasm of their ancestors. Thus, the wind retells what he saw and heard. The wind has to admit the lack of enthusiasm, courage, and willingness to defend the homeland by the contemporaries who "quashed their conscience."

By the way, the choice of the wind as an interlocutor for the dead is not accidental, because an Ukrainian belief was that the wind can carry souls who follow it like a signpost.

Despite the sadness of reality, the "north" and "gusty" wind welcomes the boy politely, returns the flour and gives him some nuts from a squirrel and some grains from a hamster. For the child, material wealth becomes unimportant. Georgie is now aware of his responsibility to his ancestors and descendants for the future of his country, nation and people.

In the image of the hero biblical accents are also embedded. The boy is a shepherd. So, his job is to guide and lead the flock of the new generation,

capable of fighting. In addition, the child, giving this promise identifies the treason of the Homeland with the betrayal of the corrupt disciple of Christ:

I am not betraying your faith, my homeland, no! And I shall not put forth my hand for Judas' coins, though am I poor! And if I ever encounter an abandoned grave, where no path leads anymore, I will clear it from the weeds, I will bring flowers and remember the precious blood that fell on you, dear earth ... Here God himself, engulfed in light, glanced at the shepherd George. (Grynevycheva, 2004, p. 71)

Speaking of abandoned graves, the writer once again emphasizes forgetfulness and ignorance of history as the main cause of Ukrainians' troubles. The story shows the personification of nature as a mediator between the worlds that permeates the entire collection. A bizarre mix of Christianity and Paganism identify and outline the view on the Ukrainian homeland as a spiritual substance.

Having analyzed the collection of Katrya Grynevycheva's "*On the way to Sykhem*" and other stories we can conclude that the book offers an impressive variety of genres (parable, fairy story, legend, tale). All the texts have an open ending, as the future of the central or minor fictional characters remains unknown. The novelist stresses the independence and responsibility of the decisions that people make every minute of their lives.

Religious, namely Christian intertext is the dominant of the literary texts. The writer explores and reinterprets biblical images and motifs enriching them with the semantics of subjective meaning, which involves national reinterpretation of phenomena and events. She gives a sacred value to the Fatherland as the basis of human existence. At the same time, the author creates an artistic model of God's world, where every being depends on the harmony and peace, which are warranted by acts of love and faith.

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