

# THE CONCEPT OF MELANCHOLY AND TYPOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF TRANSITIONAL ERA LITERARY CULTURE

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## Abstract

The article considers the issue of the worldview model of the Russian pre-Romantic elegy and its genre typology as part of the study of the general problem of the melancholic poetics in the literary culture of transitional eras. The research focuses on topical aspects of the general humanitarian theory of literary culture and typological uniqueness of literary processes of transitional eras considered in a general methodological aspect. The psychological and ideological areas of the phenomenon of Melancholy are analyzed from the standpoint of the men of letters closely related to the phenomenology of creative writing.

A systematic review of the problem of Melancholy as a special image-archetype has been done through the dynamics of the socio-cultural situation. A comprehensive analysis of the literary and religious-spiritual component of the problem is presented in the comparison of the elegies of the Russian “melancholic school” of the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries in the works of Andrey Yakubovich and Efim Smagin.

The results of analytics present a summary picture of the study proposed findings and its immediate prospects. The most important of the former is a combination of a general cultural approach (context of a social and cultural situation, philosophy, aesthetic and ethical thought) with a genre-thematic aspect containing the evolution of leading ethical themes and problems, the

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interaction of genres within a single literary system. In the context of the lyrical poetry of the 1780s and 1810s, one of the main “driving forces” is revealed, represented by the dialogue of idyll and elegy.

Keywords: literary culture, theology, melancholy as a philosophical phenomenon, receptive aesthetics, poetry of the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries, elegy genre evolution

## EL CONCEPTO DE MELANQUOLÍA Y PROBLEMA TIPOLÓGICO DE LA ERA DE TRANSICIÓN CULTURA LITERARIA

### Resumen

El artículo considera la cuestión del modelo de cosmovisión de la elegía prerromántica rusa y su tipología de género como parte del estudio del problema general de la poética melancólica en la cultura literaria de las épocas de transición.

La investigación se centra en los aspectos temáticos de la teoría humanitaria general de la cultura literaria y la singularidad tipológica de los procesos literarios de las épocas de transición consideradas en un aspecto metodológico general. Las áreas psicológicas e ideológicas del fenómeno de la melancolía se analizan desde el punto de vista de los hombres de letras estrechamente relacionados con la fenomenología de la escritura creativa.

Se ha realizado una revisión sistemática del problema de la melancolía como un arquetipo de imagen especial a través de la dinámica de la situación socio-cultural. Se presenta un análisis exhaustivo del componente literario y religioso-espiritual del problema en la comparación de las elegías de la "escuela melancólica" rusa del cambio de los siglos XVIII-XIX en las obras de Andrey Yakubovich y Efim Smagin.

Los resultados de los análisis presentan una imagen resumida de los hallazgos propuestos por el estudio y sus perspectivas inmediatas. El más importante de los primeros es una combinación de un enfoque cultural general (contexto de

una situación social y cultural, filosofía, pensamiento estético y ético) con un aspecto temático de género que contiene la evolución de los principales temas y problemas éticos, la interacción de géneros. dentro de un solo sistema literario. En el contexto de la poesía lírica de las décadas de 1780 y 1810, se revela una de las principales "fuerzas impulsoras", representada por el diálogo de idilio y elegía.

Palabras clave: cultura literaria, teología, melancolía como fenómeno filosófico, estética receptiva, poesía del cambio de los siglos XVIII y XIX, evolución del género elegía.

1. Some typological features of transition epochs in literary culture and general characteristics of research methodology

Transitional periods often stimulate new phenomena and processes in literary culture. Namely, the previously existing traditions act differently in a new context. Much is determined by the innermost essence of the phenomenon of literary culture, which makes it necessary to dwell on in detail.

The theory of literary culture has emerged in the humanities relatively recently [1; 2; 3]. Nevertheless, the phenomenon itself, which is described by the term "literary culture", is one of the most dynamic and accurately transmitting a system of processes proceeding and interacting in world culture and history. The potentials of literary culture manifest themselves especially vividly in the so-called "transitional periods", the distinguishing feature of which is the rapid change of moral and aesthetic attitudes, often certain crises in people's perception of history and the modern state of the world.

The system of phenomena and processes in literary culture suggests two interrelated facets. On the one hand, there is an obvious predisposition to various contrasts and conflicts in transitional periods. A deeper level of consideration reveals contradictions, which in such cases form peculiar binary oppositions according to the law of unity and struggle. On the other hand, the highest purpose of literary culture is to propose certain ways of reconciling, removing or harmonizing such contradictions.

In this respect the 18th century was a remarkable precursor to modern globalization processes in Russian and world culture, as numerous reforms and changes questioned the inviolability of the former nationally closed attitudes. A dilemma necessary for any culture began to form: either to completely protect itself or to try to enter into dialogue with the new laws.

Modern science highlights the following indicators among the leading, basic

ones in the transitional time literary culture: a kind of “religious eclecticism”, “search for spiritual truth in the sources of all times and peoples” [4] and a general “epistemological turn” of the worldview character, with the transition from the enlightening thought to new knowledge [5]. The transitivity of literary culture is a dialectic contrast of different bases – the conclusion to which the majority of scientists come.

At present, especially numerous are works on psychological and ideological aspects of the phenomenon of Melancholy that are closely related to the phenomenology of creative writing [6; 7; 8].

Here, we are to turn to the typological question of the general situation in the literary culture of a certain transitional period. The analysis of the general literary and cultural situation, the artistic and journalistic practice of writers in a similar situation allows, on the basis of material from different national cultures and times, to highlight a few of the most significant points.

First, the literary culture begins to clearly “split up” into certain “circles” of the readership (according to the general theory of receptive aesthetics – see authoritative studies [9; 10]). The former elitist ideologies and directions of their maturity and flourishing periods are replaced by the conscious desire of writers to find “wider” readership. On the one hand, literature often returns to easily “accessible” forms of open moralizing. On the other hand, works of a number of authors show a particular tendency to find precisely their readership, determined by the genre and thematic tastes of the public.

Secondly, the acquisition of “mass character” by literature is frequent and natural, which, in turn, leads to a vivid poetics of psychological (melodramatic, melancholic or other) effects. In this connection it is no coincidence that M.V. Ivanov claims that the television series of the end of the 20th century (the so-called “soap operas”) are similar to the poetics of “melodramatic effects” [11].

Thirdly, the desire to express certain moral truths openly may determine such a distinctive feature of the poetics of the transition period works as allegorical didacticism. Historical and literary material of this kind allowed A.S. Kurilov in his studies of 1990s – 2000s to speak about “the absence” of sentimentalism as such in the literary process in Russia at the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries, to put it more precisely, to note in this sphere a significant influence of the relics of the “model didactics” derived from classicism [12].

For example, the “maudlin drama” playwrights of the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries lead their characters to the victory of Love over Death through Virtue (e.g., the famous playwrights Fyodor Ivanov, Vasily Fyodorov and others in Russia). Eschatological motifs are greatly enhanced in literature, writers turn to the heritage of world culture and literature from different eras. In connection with the latter, the role of various kinds of doctrines seeking to reveal the irrational side

of Being, the “energy of the subconscious”, is growing, see: a noteworthy study of recent years [13].

By the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries, the interaction of genre models of idyll and elegy had become one of the leading in world literary culture in the dialogue of harmonization and reflection. In our recent study, we discussed the phenomenon of idyll and its worldview [14]. This article, continuing the analysis, turns to the other genre potency in this semantic pair – the elegy. It is important that elegy is predisposed to manifest features typical of the phenomenon of Melancholy.

The leading methods of our research are genetic, comparative-typological, historical-functional and systematic, combined with synchronous and diachronic approaches. The genetic method allows tracing the stages of the origin and development of a particular phenomenon. The comparative-typological method is a necessary basis for comparing various factors of a particular system in order to identify a typological commonality when creating a general analytical picture. The methodology of the historical-functional approach is one of the bases of the theory of reader perception and receptive aesthetics as a whole. Finally, the systematic method is necessary to summarize the results.

2. The The Concept of Melancholy and its embodiment in Russian elegy of the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries (the experience of a complex analysis of the elegies “Night” by A. Yakubovich and “New Moon” by E. Smagin)

The phenomenon of Melancholy in the first half of the 17th century England was understood primarily in the aspect of medical psychology and mainly with a negative evaluative attitude. “Black melancholy” appeared in the studies of W. Garvey, R. Burton and several others as one of the most dangerous and insidious diseases of the human soul, especially at the turning points of a person’s life and wider in historical time [15]. However, it was in England that the foundations of a new, literary cult of this phenomenon were laid by the end of the same century. The significance of the European philosophical aesthetic discoveries in Modern Times was great. The poet and philosopher Salomon Gessner in his etude “Night” was one of the first to figuratively systematize the main ideas of the dialectical duality of the phenomenon of Melancholy. On the one hand, during the emotive-philosophical mastering of this phenomenon by the inner world of a person, a “pleasant admiration” of the spirit arises. On the other hand, a crisis is gradually brewing, which can be viewed as a symbol of the storm that “flows through a boiling (...) heart” [16]. For masons in the last quarter of the 18th century, Melancholy appeared as a crisis designed to bring humanity to a new harmony of being,

it is the “double night” of nature and the soul (...), a necessary prerequisite for mystical awakening from the grim sleep of life ...” [17]. The latter is the undisputed center of the Death poetics growing power in literary culture and the very extensive “graveyard” tradition associated with it.

However, according to Gessner’s observation, Melancholy initially included light, positive potential. “Pleasant admiration” (in some variations of translations – even “delight”) goes back to another literary tradition – an elegy-idyllic “ensemble” in sentimentalism. Here, one can speak of the classic sentimentalist “pleasant sadness” as a direct precursor of the feeling of Melancholy [18], new for the Russian literary culture. The union of the genres of elegy and idyll in literature would be unthinkable without the special “poetics of solitude” constantly accompanying the aesthetics of “pleasant sadness” with the archetype of Silence, or Stillness replacing the “storm in the heart” image. For example, at the beginning of the 1790s the “Moscow Journal” publishes Nikolai Karamzin’s idea of a special “melancholic hedonism” in nature: “For a long time my soul has not enjoyed such silence, such perfect solitude, such perfect freedom ...” [19]. According to the productive hypothesis of the scientists who co-authored the newest collective monograph devoted to the literary culture of the Enlightenment, Melancholy can more than just harmonize with the so-called “ludicrous principle” in art [20].

The binary nature of Melancholy allows this symbolic image-archetype to interact with such a key category of the modern worldview as the Sublime, initially through the concept of “enthusiasm”. “Enthusiasm as a “conductor” of the Sublime is understood (...) as passion, which is “transformed by ideas into contemplation or meditation...” [21], and includes “... delight, joy, horror and surprise”, which gives reason to define it as a “sublime emotion” [21].

It is not surprising that the latter gave the basis to the well-known contemporary Slavist R. Figut to state a momentous pattern on the example of the poetics of sentimentalism: “... susceptibility to the Sublime conjugates (...) with the capacity for sadness (...) and melancholy. (...) <Similar majestic> does not violate, but strengthens the inner balance of the individual; with all (...) the unspoken enormity is manifested in the human soul (...) instantly ...” [22].

The law of significance of the so-called “literary periphery” becomes decisive in Russian pre-Romanticism even more than in sentimentalism. Numerous artistic discoveries were made by the authors who were consciously or subconsciously either literary amateurs or talents in literature. (The tradition continued in Russia up to Alexander Pushkin’s early lyceum creativity, for example, in the student magazine “Inexperienced pen”.)

The interdependence and transitions of the two understandings, “idyllic” and

“graveyard”, of the phenomenon of Melancholy by the poets of Russian pre-Romanticism are clearly expressed on the periphery of the literary process – in the elegies “Night” (1798) by Andrey Yakubovich and “New Moon”(1803) by Efim Smagin.

The methods of systematic integrated approach, the technique developed in the studies of Professor Yulduz Nigmatullina [23], a famous modern philologist and specialist in the field of literary theory and comparative study of national cultures, were applied when considering the basic laws of poetics.

Both works that are similar in the “nocturnal” poetics of pre-Romanticism have a single objective theme – the comprehension of the Night and its role in the Universe. The night appears as a kind of borderline Being between the vain earthly life and the heavenly ideal and as a sovereign world, focusing in itself all the dialectical contradictions of the Universe. The inner semantic closeness of the poets’ preludes attracts attention – the Night is consistently associated with the topos of Silence and the poetics of fragility: “Leaned on the chest of sleep / Already nature is in a gentle slumber ...” (A. Yakubovich) [24]; “... from the fleur of quiet night / On the blue sapphire of heaven” the new moon rises (E. Smagin) [25].

However, significant differences emerge at the figurative level. The elegy by Smagin is built on the “duet” of the images of the lyrical “I” and the new moon, with the leading role played by the latter. The poet’s philosophical and aesthetic idea consists in philosophical capturing of the nightly luminary in an ascending spiral. Constant references to the new moon, permeated by expressiveness typical of the ode, become self-sufficient in many respects. The purpose of the lyrical “I” is to dissolve in admiring the “bright large diamond”, to know the meaning of all Being through it. The simultaneous understanding of the impossibility of the full implementation emphasizes the elegiac poetics; therefore, the poet’s pathetic conviction that only the night luminary is capable of “... comforting the mortal race” – “... in the night, in the fiercest frost ...” [25] is manifested. It is the poetics of the Sublime that begins to play a decisive role in such a gradation. A figurative and compositional gradation is observed: “A lamp of darkness and love!” – “Your brilliance – Poetry is thundering ...” – “You are the world!” [25]. The saturation of punctuation with exclamation marks is a brilliant illustration of the philosophical melodic peaks of the poem. The genre aspect is likewise important: there is an overlap of tones of the Ode and the Idyll, with the resulting phenomenon of illustrative idyll-ode contrasts: “For the ants – like for the giants, / (...) / You burn ...”[25]; “Where your light (...)will pour, / There are sparks of wet dew / Will shine like diamonds / (...) / if you will glimpse in the Ocean depths, / Gliding in the mirror of smooth waters ...”[25].

The tragic “fragmentation” and disunity of the gaze and voice of the lyrical “I”

are obvious from the very first stanzas in the poem by A. Yakubovich. The lyrical “I” appeals to “the sad friend moon”, and “boredom fury”, and “righteous heavens” in the night universe. Nevertheless, the restless lyrical hero does not get an answer from anywhere; therefore, he loses the right to speak in the second semantic part of the elegy, retreating to the periphery in front of Nature “with its powerful hand”. The extensive monologue of this angry deity forms the semantic and cadence focus of the poem: “And shaking the earthly globe,” / (...) / “Look, look – here is my power! / (...) / Here is the penalty ...” – it said” [24].

Likewise, the chronotope in Yakubovich’s elegy breaks up and splits. In Smagin’s “New Moon” it is unusually whole in its harmony with the idyll (we already discussed the characteristic topos of Silence above): “... from the fleur of quiet night”, “Among the clouds clear, pure, / (...) / Through the light curtain of spheres” [25]. Yakubovich’s ideal of an idyll flashes only in the dreams of the lyrical hero: “I go under my calm shelter, / Where peace, and love dwell / With the pleasant streams of sleep / (...) to cool my heart ...” [24]. The Sublime as the Beautiful is rapidly toppled from the pedestal, unconditionally yielding to the kingdom of the Terrible.

In the resulting system, at least three interrelated, although independent, “zones” of chronotopes can be distinguished:

- a) the chronotope of Sleep – “Under the shelter of a bluish-black night” [24] – the cradle of Melancholy reflection;
- b) the chronotope of a natural cataclysm (the epicenter is the monologue of the angry deity of Nature);
- c) the chronotope of the “lost world”, where “... red day” and “... May blooms / In light and sapphire porphyry ...” [24].

It is noteworthy that what Smagin’s lyrical hero considers a happy reality, is an unattainable illusory dream for Yakubovich’s lyrical “I”.

The chronotope of Smagin’s poem is largely determined by the veiled symbolic image of Infinity. On the one hand, a “New Moon” vividly reveals the philosophy of the infinity of space: the lyrical “I” observes Nature from its subtlest manifestations – “sparks of wet dew” – to the terrible grandeur of “diamonds / In the Greenland (...) eternal ice” [25]. Then, in the fifth stanza, infinity “transfers” to the time: “like you / Before our days for many centuries – / Creation from above, noble, / The picture true of gods ...” [25] (here and further italics are by the authors of the article).

Moreover, if Smagin achieves a semantic vertex in his elegy primarily through the symbolism of images of light (“sapphires of heaven”, “lamp of darkness and love”, “bright big diamond”), Yakubovich uses a rich sound palette: a

waterfall noisily runs to the “dark forest”; the echo reports “as if with loud pipes”; “noisy rain” rages [24].

The movement in Smagin’s poem is directed upwards – the final where the poet ascends “From the senses – to upper Helikon” [25] is not accidental. In Yakubovich’s verse, although the lyrical “I” offers prayers to the “righteous heavens”, the fall dominates: the waterfall runs to the “dark forest”, “Noisy rain from clouds pours down”, and finally – the “suns” in the “worlds” (Universe) are “crushed” (the classical model associated with the last phenomenon, is captured in G. R. Derzhavin’s ode “To the death of Prince Meshchersky”).

Nevertheless, Yakubovich’s poem is especially remarkable as the influence of the space ode model is not univocal here. The finale of the poem’s extensive meditation, although indistinctly, hypothetically, is nevertheless related to the ideal of Harmony. “The night is pensive, cool”, the poet writes; the last image, to which the lyrical hero appeals, is endowed with the gift of healing. The almost completely catastrophically symbolized image of “overthrowing water” acquires an exalted purgative meaning: “By charitable dew / Wash you my breast, wash it!” [24] (It is noteworthy that such a “splash” of the exclamation mark is almost the only violation of the tragic punctuation monotony, sentences being connected before solely by commas, periods and dashes). Therefore, the idyllic chronotope, an ideal, acquires sacred significance. It turns out to be almost achieved, though for a few moments: “Under the calm, not rich roof, / To friends and to my mother / I will fly with my thoughts ... / (...) / And in my heart I will resurrect peace” [24]. In a Masonic variation, a similar phenomenon was depicted by the famous Russian poet-philosopher of the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries, Semyon Bobrov in his poem “The Kingdom of Universal Love”.

Considering the scheme of pre-Romantic Melancholy as a whole using the examples of the discussed poems, it is possible to conclude that in the “idyllic” version, with the dominant interaction with the Sublime, Melancholy is thought of as a kind of dialectical layer in the lyrical “atmosphere” on the way of the lyrical “I” from Earth to the Ideal (Smagin’s metaphor of the new moon is indicative: “A lamp of darkness and love!” [25]). “Graveyard” poetics, providing a significant space to the Terrible, radically transforms Melancholy itself, which is now felt as a “quencher” of the energy potential of the Sublime. Only the idyllic topos can redirect the “vector” from the fatal “fall down” back to the top though for a brief moment.

### 3.      Approbation

The results of systematic research conducted by us over a number of years have been repeatedly and comprehensively tested and introduced into the educational process at universities:

- a) at several international forums: The 10th International Scientific Conference “The 18th century as a mirror of other epochs. The 18th century in the mirror of other epochs” (Moscow, Moscow State University; March 24–26, 2016); International Philological Seminar “Nikolai Karamzin and his time” (Poland, Warsaw-Siedlce, May 19–20, 2016); The 11th International Scientific Conference “The 18th century: laughter and tears in literature and art of the Enlightenment” (Moscow, Moscow State University, March 22–24, 2018);
- b) in international publications [14; 26; 27; 28];
- c) in a duet monograph: *The Phenomenology of Russian Literature of the 18th Century* (Germany: in 2 parts, 2012) [29; 30];
- d) in the textbook for philological specialties of higher education institutions “History of Russian literature of the 18th century” (Moscow: in 2 parts, 2017–2018) [31, 32].

The problems of literary culture, developed by us on the material of the transitional era, arouse the scientific interest of modern researchers and stimulate the expansion and development of the topic [33, 34; 35].

#### 4. Theoretical and methodological results

A further study of the literary culture of the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries through the leading psychological and philosophical images-archetypes requires the following conditions that are of primary importance:

- combining a general cultural approach (context of socio-cultural situation, philosophy, aesthetic and ethical thought) with a genre-thematic (evolution of leading ethical topics and problems), interaction of genres within a single system of literature (in the context of the 1780 – 1810s, the dialogue of idyll and elegy undoubtedly appears to be one of the main “driving forces”);
- carrying out constant correlative parallels with literary evolution periods of various areas during transitional eras (for the 18th century in Europe and Russia, this is a fairly extensive panorama: from late Baroque to mature Sentimentalism and emerging pre-Romanticism);
- considering the originality of the “behavior” of the phenomena in the literary culture of the second half of the 18th – beginning of the 19th centuries. Interdisciplinary contacts can prove to be productive in this case. Thus, the “philosophy of wertherism” deserves special attention in connection with the genesis and evolution of the melancholic poetics that arose and was named

after the main character of the world-famous novel “The Sorrows of Young Werther” by Johann-Wolfgang Goethe.

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