

SECTION 18. PHILOLOGY AND JOURNALISM

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ΕΡΩΣ AND ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ IN TIMES OF REVOLUTION: «BLUE NOVEMBER» («SYNII LYSTOPAD») BY MYKOLA KHVYLOVYI

The expansion of death (θάνατος) into the territory of love (Ερως) throughout human history received a positivist generalization in psychoanalysis, which became both a phenomenon of humanism and a sign of overcoming the humanistic tradition. This problem was detailed in the concept of Sigmund Freud, and developed later by many philosophers of the XX century, such as Jacques Lacan [5], Erich Fromm [9] and Herbert Marcuse [6]. Ερως (creation) and θάνατος (destruction) are two basic instincts, primordial calls, rooted in the human subconscious, and their constant fusion characterizes the eternal flow of life. The Freudian perception of the phenomenon of violent death is legitimate here, as well. According to Sigmund Freud, any civilization begins with the introduction of methodical bans on primary instincts (equally restraining sexuality and destructive instincts). Over time, Ερως wins over its adversary: «social use forces the death instinct to serve the life instincts» [7]. However, the very progress of civilization increases the amount of sublimation and aggression it controls (in both cases, the weakening of Ερως, which releases destructiveness, is recorded). Therefore, according to researchers of psychoanalysis, it is logical to assume that «progress is associated with a regressive tendency in the structure of instincts, that the growth of civilization runs into a constant desire for ultimate satisfaction and the achievement of peace» [6], that is, the desire for nirvana muffles the desire for freedom.

The indisputable interaction of these two poles of human existence in the texts of the Ukrainian modernist Mykola Khvylovyi enables an attempt at his psychoanalytical analysis. After all, as Maryna Kutsenko points out, his works themselves allow to trace «the manifestation of deep structures of the unconscious» and the name of Sigmund Freud «appears in pamphlets among the authorities to whom the writer turned in his work» [4]. The novella «Blue November» (1923) from the «Blue Etudes» collection is no exception here.

The revolutionary topos of Mykola Khvylovyi's novella is presented as a territory where death reigns, but at the same time it is a path of renewal, a promise of a better life, a call to reject romantic experiences for a higher goal. In this territory, subjected to the power of θάνατος, the leitmotif of love seems to be an integral element, important in structuring the story as well as in creating the meaning behind it, the idea embedded into the text by its author, because love not only accompanies the male protagonist's (Vadym's) transition from life to death, but also becomes a means, even a mechanism of such a transition.

However, the nature of love in Mykola Khvylovyi's «Blue November» differs substantially from the traditional love-erotic quests of the revolutionary era. This is not a model of «free love», proposed as a social experiment immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, although the name of its ideologist, Soviet activist and diplomat Aleksandra Kollontai (1872-1952) appears

in the text of the novella and is supported by some side characters, e.g. Zimmel. It also opposes the concept of subordinating the political program of the average creator of the revolution to «sexual call and this call alone» [2], which Mikhail Bakhtin vehemently criticizes in «Freudism» (1927).

Such a model upon a more detailed study better fits Sigmund Freud's thesis from «The Dissatisfaction with Culture» (1930) claiming that «a man usually moves from the 'pleasure principle' to the 'reality principle'» [8], and along the way he has to abandon the former in order to fit into the context of the latter. Indeed, in their manifestations of love, Khvylovyi's characters seek neither a gradual «transformation of sexual promiscuity» (Wilhelm Reich) nor an evolutionary «liberation of Eros» (Herbert Marcuse). Vadym responds to Maria's confession with vague speculations, such as «I love your love» or «I know why you haven't been mine» [10]. After all, a lover is someone who, according to Erich Fromm, «enters into an existential, full-fledged communication with another individual as a person and selflessly gives himself to them» [9], but the object of Vadym's love is the commune, and its common metaphor – the blue colour – is represented throughout the text. In general, blue colour is very typical for Mykola Khvylovyi's prose. Yet, in this particular novella, we can spot a slightly different angle of its meaning.

In the Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Cultural Symbols of Ukraine, the blue colour symbolizes hope, truth, a certain idealism and faith in a bright future [3]. If we resort to a simple paratextual analysis and project the symbolism of colour onto Mykola Khvylovyi's text, we can see the embodiment of faith in a bright, harmonious future, the image of which appears in the form of a utopian «mountain commune». This utopia and everything related to it (both the blue colour itself and the mentioned commune as its projection) are opposed to the principle of reality, which means that they must move in the direction opposite to life, i.e. into the territory of death.

Actually, the text of the novella is constructed around this movement not only in the plot where the characters are shown on the move, but also linguistically. A large number of verbs denoting movement are used in descriptions of various personified phenomena. For example, the blue November itself in the work of Khvylovyi «passes», «walks ahead», «wanders», «silently goes to the east» [10], the salty wind «jiggles» [10], the peaks of the mountains «run into the fog» [10], and the roads «speed into the blackness» [10], clouds, songs and mountains fly, time, «coppery silence», memories go by and even «Vadym's face was moving in flickers of shadows» [10]. The last line prompts us to think about the fact that, despite the established thesis «movement is life», it is here, in Khvylovyi's novella, that eternal movement leads the characters and the reader in the opposite direction. And even the love offered by Maria is no longer the driving force that, according to Dante, «moves the sun and stars». It is more similar here to Jacques Lacan's concept of «giving what you don't have to someone who doesn't want it» [5]. This love is unrequited, rejected and incomprehensible; it is identified with an incurable disease which leads to death. At least that is what Vadym associates it with: «This is what you are sick with – romance» [10]. Thus, surprisingly, blue colour, the equivalent of Vadym, the romantic of Revolution now on the verge of death, is not opposed in the text to yellow-gold (the colour of Sun and life) or red (the colour of blood), which symbolizes the «defeat of urges for freedom by the cruel reality of the age» [1]. In fact, it is opposed to green, which becomes in the novella the equivalent of Maria. She is living warmth: «a green coal both in the hearth and in her pupils» [10], so she does not lose her desire to seek love and feel it. It is Maria's eyes that turn green in unison with thoughts about love: «She looked furtively at tubercular Vadym and thought with longing about love, again; she wanted to love» [10]. Maria's eyes reflect the pain: «It hurt so much... She still pondered that love was as green as a May flower» [10]. They experience the drama of death («Terror flashed in Maria's green irises» [10]) and finally capitulate to its inevitability and invincibility («Everything she said was suppressed by silence» [10]). Only the smell remains of the green colour: «the silence smelled of pine» [10] – and blue wins. But this victory no longer brings faith in a bright future, when the commune from Vadym's visions will walk across the republic. On the contrary, it simply absorbs,

destroys the movement that was synonymous to life: «In the blue night, you couldn't see anymore how the mountains were flying by» [10].

Summarising the story, the death becomes sister of love, Ερως unites with θάνατος, but since love was interpreted in a special way, death is equally unusual. The encounter with it often happens without consolation and hope, but is nevertheless a projection of return or even immortality in others texts, presenting intertwined erotic and thanatological landscapes as an exceptionally multifaceted phenomenon.

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