

THE WORLD OF THINGS IN THE ARTISTIC SPACE OF HENRI de REGNIER'S SHORT STORIES ('THE JASPER CANE' COLLECTION)

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Abstract

The article focuses on the world of things in the artistic space of short stories from the collection "The Jasper Cane" (1897) by Henri Regnier (1864- 1936), a French poet and prose-writer, whose creative work complements the overall picture of French culture at the turn of the 20th century, a controversial period known in the West as "Belle époque"("La belle époque").

Material specificity is an essential facet of the poetic world of Regnier's stories. The article highlights the various functions of the world of things in the writer's short stories: material objects do not only form a decorative background to the narrative, the material world becomes a symbol of man's inner world, of human soul.

The article analyses the impact of various aesthetic movements on the writer's work at the turn of the 20th century, an epoch that gave rise to many artistic ideas which were further developed in the 20th century. The article deals with the writer's peculiar view of the world of objects, which combines a symbolist-mystical conception of things with parnassian beauty. The abundance of material things in Regnier's stories does not bring his work any closer to the realist tradition. In the writer's stories things are not the material signs of the epoch, they do not create an objective space of the social trend of his works; just the opposite, the world of things separates the characters from reality, things indicate a mysterious connection between man and the surreal world. The article formulates the idea of emotional and mystical conception of things, reflecting the author's symbolist view of the world.

To Regnier as a symbolist things and people are elements of a single whole, of the world spirit, of outer space. The influence of symbolism is also evident in the motif of destruction, which significantly affects the organization of the artistic space. It is saturated with signs indicating the movement to an end, to decline. The world of objects in "The Jasper Cane" is vivid and tangible. Regnier's predilection for visual and graphic images can be explained by the influence of T. Gautier and Parnassians.

The article discusses the place of man in the world of things. In "The Jasper Cane", there is a shift of emphasis from people to things, the image of man is obscured and simplified, which reflects the tendency to destroy the anthropocentric view of the world that was widespread at the turn of the century.

The analysis of the world of things in the short stories by the French writer leads to the conclusion that the conception of things in Regnier's works reflects such problems of a transition period as discord between the objective world and human consciousness, the inability of man to live in harmony with himself, the themes that will be continued in the French literature of the 20th century.

Keywords: Henri de Regnier, the turn of the 20th century, the thing, symbolism, Parnassian charm.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the work is connected with the interest of researchers in the literary process of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, one of the outstanding figures of which is Henri de Regnier. His works appeared in times of crisis, when there was a clash of different trends, the emergence of new phenomena that determined the main directions in the development of literature in the 20th century. Research into Rainier's work allows us to sum up the cultural development at the turn of the 20th century, to understand the trends emerging in the literature of the new century.

The collection of short stories "The Jasper Cane" (La Canne de jaspe), was the first prose work written by Regnier, a representative of the second generation of French symbolist poets. The stories from this collection clearly show the influence of Regnier's poetry which in fact was the source of the main features of his prose: its style and emotionality, some of the themes, the picturesque images and the artistic space filled with material objects.

The abundance of descriptions of the interior decoration of halls and premises, of the external architectural form in Regnier's stories is the basis for singling out in the study such an element of artistic reality as the world of things. Things form an integral and very significant facet of Rainier's verbal and artistic imagery.

The world of things is an important part of human reality, both real and embodied in works of art. The degree of attachment to the world of things is different in prose and in poetry, in the literature of different periods, in works by writers of different literary schools. In literary works things that are internally substantial have to be recreated externally in the form of objects in order to be perceived.

Normally, while using a thing to fill a decorative background, poets more than once tried to give it a separate place, to make it one of the protagonists of their works, alongside a man. In the literature of the late 19th - early 20th centuries this tendency became noticeable, and we can point out three types of man's attitude to things. Two unknown quantities - man and matter - can either be identical or absorbed by one another, or they can be completely incompatible with each other. For a symbolist a personified thing is the same as a person or part of a person; a thing and a man, though to varying degrees, are elements of a single, overwhelming whole, of the world spirit, of the cosmos. A thing is not a decorative background, but an independent character in a work of fiction (Beleckij, 1989, pp. 95-104).

A thing that has come alive or a reified man, the images that are not uncommon in mythical and poetic traditions, both archaic and modern, both folklore and literary, do not only emphasize the otherness/difference of the nature of man and things, but also indicate the two boundaries, where they can meet/come together – a thing that is becoming a person and a man that is becoming a thing (Toporov, 1995, p. 27).

The basic works in terms of historical and literary reference are written by D. D. Oblomievskij, G. K. Kosikov, S. N. Zenkin. They allow us to see Regnier's work in the context of the French literature of the late 19th – the early 20th centuries, to combine the analysis of the artistic world of his short stories with the understanding of the historical and literary parallels between Regnier and his predecessors and contemporaries.

2. OPINION AND DISCUSSION

Let us analyze the object-oriented titles of the stories from "The Jasper Cane" collection. The key word of the title expressing the deep message of the story helps us to determine the most adequate aspect of perceiving the content of the stories included in the collection.

For instance, let us point out the name of an object – a walking stick (canne) - in the title "Jasper cane" as

one synthesized image. A cane may indicate a distancing from the object that is touched with it. So, perhaps the author's idea was not so much to force the reader to immerse in the depicted world entirely as to help him get aesthetic pleasure and experience a feeling of empathy, while remaining a detached observer, a guest, a lone passerby (*promeneur solitaire*). And finally, the object – a cane made of natural stone and used as a walking-stick - is the anticipation of the unique connection of the world of things, of man and nature in the artistic space of the short stories, which is so vividly displayed in Reignier's descriptions.

In the introduction to the "Jasper cane" collection, preparing the readers to easy reading, Regnier writes not so much about action, as about "a semisecret" (*demi-secret*), "charm" (*charme*). Then, assuming that the reader is not too captivated by the proposed plot moves, he points out, "There will remain, at least, landscapes, visited by these sacred and important shadows, the houses where they live, the objects that they touch with their dark hands." (Régnier, 1908, p. 6). The author mentions such obviously important details that are used as symbols, such romantic attributes as "swords and mirrors, jewellery and costumes, crystal bowls and lamps". Inviting the reader to pass through the maze, to visit the lawns and read the book quietly, "page after page, as if you, a lone passerby, were turning with your jade cane a beetle on the dry sand of the alley, a small stone or a fallen leaf" the author gives us the key to his creative work, offering the easiest way to the text - a slow aesthetic reading of his works. The comparison of reading with flipping objects with a jasper cane focuses the reader's attention on the aesthetic aspect of the short stories, on the visual perception of his descriptions.

We can also list the titles of short stories within his collections with the symbolic names of the objects pointing to the central images and emphasizing the importance of objects in the artistic world of Rainier's short stories: "The Live hammer" (*Le Heurtoir vivant*), "The Unexpected Bowl" (*La Coupe'inattendue*), "The Sign of the Key and the Cross" (*Le Signe de la Clef et de la Croix*).

The space of the short stories is filled with objects; things, ceasing to be just a background, become a way of characterizing a person, an expression of his individuality. Reignier hardly ever characterizes his personages outside the space they are in. Separate objects around the character contribute to the formation of his image.

In the short story "Marquis d' Amercer" a meeting with the Marquis is preceded by a description of the hotel where he resides. Such details as the locked shutters, the windows protected by iron bars point to the reserve of the inhabitant of this dwelling. The descriptions of the landscape and the interior characterize him as an aesthete, who is used to surrounding himself with beautiful things. The details of his clothing and precious jewellery create the impression of the aged Marquise's dynamism and mobility, which contrasts with the detached luxury of the environment. In "The Letter to Mr. de Simandre" objects help to compare different groups of people. The author of the letter is depicted as a simple and undemanding man who is proud of being detached from the world of courtiers' excesses. He is contrasted to the image of the aristocrat Polydore d' Amercer, who is languid, refined and sophisticated. In the story "A Journey to the Isle of Cordic" the psychological description of the character is given through the interior images. The hero-narrator walks along the long gallery of the royal palace and it seems to him that "soul of the Emperor is as slippery and dangerous as the plates, and is also dotted with strange shapes and twisted arabesques" (Régnier, 1908, p. 83). The Emperor's study is filled with a collection of dolls, his passion for dolls characterizes him as a man enjoying his power over people, who are just obedient puppets for him. The hero of the story sees this for himself when he is forced to submit to the will of the capricious monarch.

So, the traditional method of indirect characterization, contributing to the disclosure of characters in multi-faceted reflections, is transformed by Henri de Regnier, and the hero is presented not only through the perception of the narrator or other characters, but also through the perception of things, when the author-narrator acts as an interpreter from the "language of objects".

Quite often the objects, ordinary or mysterious, fulfil a plot-building function. They determine the development of the narrative, its main points, the fate of the characters depends on them. In "The Sign of the Key and the Cross" the plot is built around a symbolic object – a key. De Gerteler used this key to lock his rival d'Agliole in the dungeon, thus reminding his wife and her lover about his terrible vengeance. The last wiggle of the key is associated with time that has stopped, a clock that has stopped. The image of the key is a symbol of liberation. Madame de Gerteler, seeing the key in the hands of a monk, decides to tell him the secret that had tormented her all her life. At the end of the narrative the key falls, thus removing the curse that it symbolized. The description of the key removes any mystical interpretation associated with its image: "It was heavy. Its rust it seemed reddish" (Régnier, 1908, p. 113). Completing the chain of tragic events, this brief description of the key turns a sinister symbol into an ordinary object. In the novel "The Live Hammer" the main plot-forming detail, a symbolic object, is an ordinary door knocker, which becomes a symbol of an

unknown force, calling into the unknown.

The principle of thingness, that is, filling stories with material objects, was used by realists, for example, Balzac, and so it would seem that it should bring Regnier's stories closer to the realist tradition. But this does not happen. Balzac's things are the material signs of the epoch, they create an objective space of social orientation, whereas in Regnier's stories the world of things surrounding the characters isolates them from reality. In Regnier's short stories an emotional-mystical conception of things is formed, reflecting the author's symbolist attitude. The world of things is involved in creating an imaginary reality, which is more valuable than objective reality. Objects in his stories indicate a mysterious connection between man and the unreal world. The outer form of things conceals content. The hero's imagination animates a door knocker, which seems to him "a resounding call to a certain destiny" ("The Door knocker").

In the short story "Hertulia, or the News" the love story of Gertulia and Hermotime is conveyed through the world of objects and symbols - an arrow, a dagger, a flask, a key, and a spike. In the "Unusual lunches" the Duchess de Termiane acquired a desired influence on her guests. in the mysterious world of things. The magic of the "witch" (sorcière), as well as her charm, consisted in the objects that surrounded her. Getting out from under the spell of Duchess de Termiane is only possible by destroying the connection with these objects. That is what d'Orscam does, breaking a small lamp, which is both a pass to the Dutchess and a love amulet, an object that binds a man to her house.

Regnier's characters, alone in their silent homes, like to surround themselves with objects that are signs, emblems embodying the illusion of life. Detached from real life, immersed in the world of dreams, they see the universe in dead objects ("Eustasy and Humbelina", "The Knight Who Slept in the Snow"). In the short story "Eustasy and Humbelina" there is an explanation of the secret meaning of objects in the philosopher's room: a mirror is a frozen image of the sky, a crystal vase creates an illusion of water. The hero escapes from real life into the world of dreams, dead objects replace the natural world, the whole universe is embodied by the image of his sweetheart.

The idea of "correspondences" that exist between things, the phenomena of life and nature, which goes back to Baudelaire, is close to Regnier. The portrayal of the concrete world of things is used as a means of describing an emotional mood evoking in the soul of the heroes a number of vague emotions, memories and feelings. The external material world becomes a symbol of the inner world, of the human soul.

The inner feelings of the characters correlate with external ones, complex phenomena of mental life are expressed through metaphorical imagery. In the short story "The Manuscript Found in the Cabinet", the melancholic hero contemplates his lonely surroundings. The leaves falling into the pond remind him of the monotonous flow of time, make him compare life to a tree – people's fates are similar to the fate of its leaves: "I know how they bloom and turn green, how they die in the autumn, despite their fake decoration of multi-colored gold and hypocritical purple" (Régnier, 1908, p. 248).

The writer creates a multidimensional artistic image, combining the real and the ideal. In another episode the hero's imagination transforms the black peacocks walking in the garden into the guards of the graves, and the stone slabs remind him of tombstones. All this awakens in his memory the image of his beloved, for whom he is still grieving. Such symbolic images establish a surprising connection between the character's feelings and the environment.

The structure of an image that allows of "seeing something else standing behind the phenomenon" and turns the objects of the outside world into a symbol of man's inner world is defined by D. Oblomievskij as one of the kinds of symbolic aesthetics, in relation to the work of Verlaine, Rimbaud and, partly, Mallarmé (Oblomievskij, 1973, p. 201).

However, it should be noted that Regnier's symbols quickly lose their mysterious, abstract meaning, turning into an allegory. The associative links arising between things and phenomena, are amenable to rationalization, not without the participation of the writer, who explains the meaning of the symbols, thus facilitating the task of the reader. In the short story "The Unexpected Bowl" the glass bowl that an old woman gives travellers by the forest spring is a symbol of purity, a reminder of a life spent "day after day in filth" (jour par jour dans l'horreur). The heroine refused to give her love a man whom she loved with all her heart, she only kissed his dead lips. To punish herself for the fatal mistake she gave her body to the rude hands of passers-by. Now that she has grown old, the woman gives travellers a drink of water. This final phrase of the story makes the image complete, which is characteristic of an allegory, whereas a symbolic meaning is characterized by a "movable inexhaustibility" (Kosikov, 1993, p.11)

Of all the magic items in Regnier's world of things portraits are the most common. Portraying a character

from a bygone era, the portrait focuses on the past, which often guides the characters of his stories, makes them dream, causes obsessive thoughts. In the writer's imaginary universe they also fulfil the function of doubling.

Another object that is no less frequent among Regnier's things-emblems is the statue. Statues, the beautiful legacy of the past, fill the alleys of parks and gardens in the writer's stories. In the garden and park ensembles of the 17th–18th centuries, sculptures and fountains served as a means of decorating the space and visually enlarging it. In the works of the German romantics (Jean-Paul, Tieck, Eichendorf), and later in those of the late French romantics (Gautier, Verlaine, Heredia) the motif of a statue reflected in the water is quite common. However in Regnier's stories this motif becomes obsessive in nature.

Regnier's statue is a symbol of beauty perpetuating its gesture. But the durability of stone is alleged. Time wears it away, smashes, destroys, crushes, turns it to dust. Sculptures adorn the space, ennobling it, but at the same time Regnier's parks and gardens, populated with frozen sculptures, immersed in dreams about themselves are silent and motionless, devoid of life. You don't see people behind works of culture (Zenkin, 1999, p. 191). The tendency of discord between man and culture began to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century and is reflected in the works of T. Gautier, E. and J. Goncourt, G. Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, and S. Mallarmé. For Gautier the main thing in the cultural heritage is art, "seeking not to transcendent truth, but to earthly worldly beauty". In Mallarmé's lyrics (especially in the later period, in the 1880s and 1890s) the wealth of symbolic meanings derived by the poet from the objects of artistic culture is marked by a seal of death lying on them (Cellier, 1959).

The statues in Regnier's parks and gardens are also the legacy of the Greco-Roman classics, the only worthy object of artistic representation, according to the Parnassian postulate, followed by Regnier. Works of decorative applied art caress the look of an aesthete, spiritualize daily life, returning to art its vitality. This is how Regnier, an artist of the transition period, solves the problem of correlation between art and life, which was fundamental to his contemporaries and still remains topical (Rusinova, 2011, p. 68).

One of the important elements in Regnier's creative work is picturesqueness as a specific way of organizing the artistic space, in which the material world surrounding the characters appears to the eyes of the reader in its physical visibility. One cannot but agree with H. Berton, a French researcher, one of Regnier's contemporaries, who said, "what young idealist artists portrayed so beautifully for our eyes, Regnier created for our imagination, more perfectly than any other writer" (Berton, 1910, p. 18) Noting that "Regnier's style rather resembles the texture of painting", A. A. Smirnov explains Regnier's addiction to visual and graphic images by T. Gautier's influence (Smirnov, 1926, p. 26).

A sensation of the picturesque in Regnier's works appears due to the abundance of visual details, a precise description of the contours, shapes and colours of the objects mentioned in the text, thanks to an extensive and accurate palette of colours and tones, as well as frequent similes, referring the reader to works of painting, sculpture and graphics.

Continuing the European traditions of the aesthetic school, which developed in France from the concept of "pure art" and the Parnassians' works Regnier argues that artistic consciousness is autonomous in relation to objective reality. The writer emphasizes the aesthetic aspects of the objects of the outside world, he strives for the expressiveness of the verbal image.

In the artistic world of Henri de Regnier's stories things become remarkably vivid and picturesque, they become the subject of the story – they "begin to live, to act in the spiritual space" (Toporov, 1995, p. 21), whereas the image of man is simplified and depersonified.

A striking example of the shift in the boundaries between the world of things and the human world is the short story "The Bluebeard's Sixth marriage". The author replaces the description of the portraits of the legendary villain's wives by descriptions of the outfits, their colour and the peculiarities of the fabric. The women's dresses are the cause of their death, because they absorb all the charm of their mistresses. Only the Bluebeard's sixth wife, Geliada, who was naked during the church wedding, overcomes the dependence on things, thus becoming identical to herself. This liberation from things makes her the centre, allowing her to wear clothes without merging with them.

In Balzac's works things belonged to the world, whose master was a man, a man was the meaning of it all, the key to the whole world. At the turn of the 20th century there emerged a different trend, which can be observed in Regnier's works and which fully manifested itself in the 20th century - a man lost his own value, the circle of the relationship between the character and the thing was closed, thus making them identical.

In the 20th century things and machines escaped from under human control, ousted man from the space

allotted to him by nature, filling this space. The aim of A. Robbe-Grillet's experiments was to release things, the objects around man, the paintings of nature from "human values, to neutralize the metaphor, to abandon anthropomorphism" (Robbe-Grillet, 1981, p. 468). His descriptions overflow with numbers and geometric forms, thus creating a new space, which is not anthropocentric. A person loses his independence. Being the products of stereotyped thinking, Robbe-Grillet's characters barely differ from one another.

3. CONCLUSION

So, the thing – one of the most significant facets in the artistic world of Henri de Regnier's stories - performs a number of different functions: the function of characterization, the plot-building function and perhaps the most important of all – the aesthetic function, expressing the peculiar artistic consciousness of the writer, who inherited the tradition of "pure art" of T. Gautier and the Parnassians.

In Regnier's short stories an emotional and mystical conception of things is formed, which reflects the author's symbolist view of the world. Following Baudelaire's theory of correspondences, Regnier depicts the imaginary through the material, claiming the mystical unity of the universe. His narrative is built on associations, analogies, memories and the characters' subjective impressions. The world of things is involved in creating an imaginary reality, which is more valuable than objective reality.

Regnier's work is characterized by a kind of "transparent" symbolism, his symbols never reach the degree of solidity that is characteristic of Mallarmé's poetry. The endings of his short stories, containing the original conclusions of the author or the narrator, help the reader to explain and rationalize the associative links between objects and phenomena.

Regnier vividly recreates the world surrounding the characters, paying attention to every detail. It is as if the author were painting verbal portraits, landscapes and still lifes; his pictures of the outside world are compared to picturesque canvasses. This reflects the influence of T. Gautier and the Parnassians. In a picturesque setting the image of a man is obscured and simplified.

The shift in focus from the human world to the world of objects in Regnier's short stories indicates the destruction of the anthropocentric point of view at the turn of the century. The tendency to identify man and things manifested itself most clearly in the works of the writers of the 20th century (A. Robbe-Grillet, J. Perek, M. Butor, etc.).

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