



«Hero» As A Literary Concept

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Abstract. The article explores the evolution and diversity of approaches to defining the concept of «literary hero». Particular attention is paid to the functions of the hero: plot-forming, ideological, psychological and symbolic. The article emphasizes that the study of the hero is not only an analysis of the literary image, but also a dialogue with the historical context, philosophical concepts and the evolution of human self-awareness.

Key words: literary criticism, fiction, literary hero, character, protagonist

Literary criticism at the end of the 20th century and on the eve of the 21st century needs to expand its concepts and categories, including the traditional literary concept of «hero».

In the traditional sense, a hero is the most important link in a work of art, one of the constants of the epic. A literary hero differs from a character in that he does not perform a secondary function.

The concepts of «actor» and «character» are often used unambiguously with a literary hero. Sometimes they are distinguished: literary heroes are called actors (characters) who are drawn more multifacetedly and are more significant for the idea of the work. Sometimes the concept of «literary hero» is applied only to characters close to the author's ideal of a person («positive hero») or embodying the heroic principle. It should be noted, however, that in literary criticism these concepts, along with the concepts of character, type and image, are interchangeable.

Within the framework of the formal school (V. Shklovsky, B. Eichenbaum), the hero was perceived as an element of the composition, subject to the laws of the plot. The emphasis was not on the psychology of the character, but on his role in the development of the plot. For example, in Russian fairy tales, the hero performs a number of functions (according to V. Propp): sets out on a journey, overcomes trials, defeats the antagonist.

Structuralists (R. Barthes, K. Levi-Strauss) deepened the analysis, considering the hero as part of binary oppositions (good/evil, friend/foe). His character and actions were interpreted through a system of signs, where each gesture or remark carries a symbolic load. For example, in Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, Emma becomes a sign of the romantic ideal, which collides with bourgeois reality.

Mikhail Bakhtin in his work «Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics» [1] introduced the concept of polyphony, where the hero is not the author's puppet, but an equal participant in the dialogue. He has his own «ideology» and inner freedom. For example, Raskolnikov from «Crime and Punishment» is not just a bearer of an idea, but an independent thinker whose monologues raise questions about morality and free will. Bakhtin emphasized that the author «does not judge the hero, but lets him speak out» [1, p. 36].

Representatives of the cultural-historical school (G. Lukacs, L. Goldman) analyze the hero in the context of social processes. For example, the «superfluous people» of Russian literature (Onegin, Pechorin) reflect the crisis of the nobility of the 19th century.

R. Barthes and J. Derrida challenged the idea of a stable hero identity. In poststructuralism, he is a textual construct whose features depend on interpretation. For



example, the characters of Borges or Pelevin exist in a space of simulacra, where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary are blurred.

The reader becomes a co-author, filling the hero with his own meanings, which is especially evident in postmodernist texts (for example, «The Khazar Dictionary» by M. Pavic).

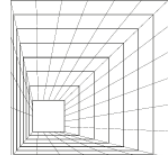
In the 21st century, hero theory is shifting to the study of antiheroes (Walter White from *Breaking Bad*) and marginal figures. Their ambivalence reflects the disintegration of traditional values and the complexity of identity. The theory of the «weak character» (A. Compagnon) emphasizes that the modern hero is often deprived of charisma and certainty, becoming a mouthpiece for existential anxieties.

The characteristic features of a literary hero include the fact that he plays an important role in the development of the plot, in the construction of the composition, and also with the help of his image the idea and theme of the work are revealed.

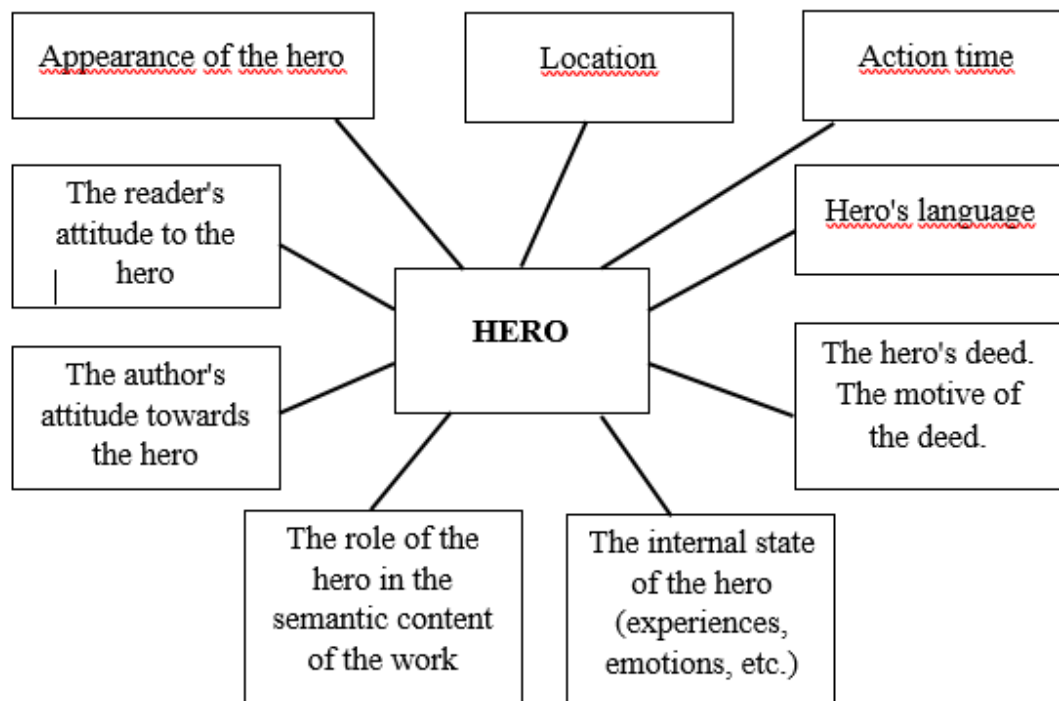
Literary heroes can be found in many different genres of literature. They play different roles in the plot, represent a variety of characters, and reflect different aspects of the human experience.

From the point of view of the figurative structure, a literary hero combines character as the internal content of the character, and his behavior and actions as something external. Character allows us to consider the actions of the person being portrayed as natural, arising from some vital cause; it is the content and law (motivation) of behavior.

The hero's appearance is made up of the following elements: the character's value orientations determine his worldview and ethical beliefs, which give the hero meaning in his life; thoughts and attachments, which determine the diverse life of the hero's soul; faith, which determines the presence of the hero in the spiritual field, his relationship with God; statements and actions that indicate the results of the interaction of the soul with the spirit of the hero. The hero can not only think, but also feel, analyze his own activity, that is, do reflection. Artistic reflection helps the author to reveal the hero's personal self-esteem and evaluate his attitude to himself.



Characteristics of the hero of the work



Important characteristics of a literary hero include:

Character and personality. A literary hero can be a positive, negative or neutral character. His characteristics are determined through actions, thoughts, dialogues and relationships with other characters.

Character development. Some characters go through an evolution over the course of a story, changing as a result of events and the environment. This is called character development.

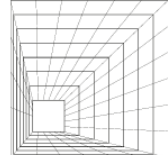
Motivations and goals. Literary characters often have specific motivations and goals that can drive the plot. Their aspirations can range from achieving personal happiness to overcoming external obstacles.

Role in the plot. Characters play various roles in the plot, whether they are the main characters (protagonists), opposing characters (antagonists), supporting characters (secondary characters), or serving other purposes (episodic characters).

The protagonist is the central figure in a work, around whom the plot develops. His actions, aspirations, and internal conflicts determine the direction and development of the plot. The protagonist often faces major conflicts, overcomes difficulties, and goes through character evolution.

A secondary character is an important but not central character. His or her fate is intertwined with the main character's, and he or she can influence the course of events. A secondary character can support or hinder the main character, introduce additional elements to the plot, and also serve as a mirror for the analysis and development of the main character's character.

A minor character appears in a work for a short time and plays a small role in the plot. Their character and actions may be fleeting and may not have much impact on the



overall course of events. Minor characters can be used to create atmosphere, provide additional information, or even add humor to a work.

Off-stage character - exists in the world of the work, but its actions and fate usually do not affect the main plot. These characters can create a sense of reality of the world, but do not have a significant impact on the course of the plot. They can be passers-by, a crowd, or even staff, enriching the environment.

The hero remains a key element of literary analysis, serving as a bridge between the text and the cultural context. From ancient epics to postmodern experiments, it is transformed, reflecting changes in public consciousness. Contemporary literature increasingly turns to antiheroes and marginal figures, which emphasizes the complexity of human identity in a globalized world. That is, the following can be distinguished from the stage of evolution of the image of the hero in literature: *antiquity*: a demigod hero (Achilles, Hector), whose fate is predetermined by the gods; *middle ages*: a knight (Perceval) who embodies Christian virtues; *romanticism*: a lone rebel (Faust, Mtsyri), in conflict with society; *realism*: «superfluous man» (Eugene Onegin), reflective but inactive; *modernism*: antihero (Joseph K. from Kafka's The Trial), lost in an absurd world; *postmodernism*: a deconstructed hero (for example, the characters of V. Pelevin), deprived of integrity. Thus, studying a hero is not only an analysis of the character, but also a dialogue with the era, the author and oneself [2, p. 56-75].

As for the functions of the hero in a literary work, they are as follows: *plot-forming*: the hero's actions create conflict and movement of the plot (for example, Rodion Raskolnikov's decision to kill the old woman in Crime and Punishment); *ideological*: the hero becomes the spokesman for philosophical or social concepts (for example, Prince Myshkin in «The Idiot» as the embodiment of the Christian ideal); *psychological*: through the inner world of the hero, universal human contradictions are revealed (Hamlet's monologues); *symbolic*: the hero turns into an allegory (for example, Orpheus as a symbol of art).

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