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MEANS AND METHODS OF BUILDING EMOTION IN ONLINE FLASH FICTION

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Аннотация:
Online fiction is often known as an experimental platform for searching new literary forms and unconventional ways of making an emotional impact on readers. Contests hosted by many online platforms uncover high-profile texts. The article deals with a story in the genre of nanofantasy (up to 5,000 symbols) “The Final Cup of Wine” written by D. Laputina and published on M. Moshkov’s Samizdat platform as part of the 2021 contest conducted by the Chemistry and Life journal for several years in a row. The story stood out both for its bright and sensible images and for the emotional response of the readers. The article examines the means and methods of building emotion in the story from the ethical and esthetic points of view.

Flash fiction implies the highest concentration of sensibility in the text as a mechanism for grasping the world sensually. A number of esthetic categories used in the text deserve special attention. At the same time, moral issues are closely woven into the narrative fabric, presenting a complex set of problems related to artificial intelligence, respect for human life, murder, ethics, and so on.

The ultimate inability to verify an online author’s identity acts as an additional emotional component of the overall esthetic impact on the reader.

Moreover, the competitive environment presupposes the possibility of interpersonal communication between the author and the reader when comments on the text become an integral part of the text itself. These comments can take various forms and serve as an object of a separate study. This article, however, considers comments as a means of intensifying emotional impact actively used by online authors through the example of a particular story and its anonymous author.

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Emotions in fiction are the object of research, the subject of description and at the same time the purpose of the work. The emotional response is the first and most important thing the artist achieves.

This article attempts to analyze a modern online flash fiction text published through the Samizdat platform, which is a relatively new form of literary work that uses a high emotional background as a means of

influencing the reader.

The Samizdat platform exists for diverse types of art; however, it attracts more people in the field of literature. New ways of communication and modern technologies allow people to create art objects that are of great interest for research work.

Samizdat's online prose is virtually unexplored. Many of the examples have only been available for reading for a few months, sometimes only a few days. Text length often becomes the decisive criterion for selecting reading material – the shorter, the better. Many online literary texts are miniaturized [3]. Flash fiction is more accessible under the changing conditions of existence on the Internet – since it does not take much time to read it, you still have a chance before it is gone.

From here we can talk about relatively new ways of emotion formation, besides those known since the emergence of art.

But even with this approach, it is quite difficult to select a particular text. Online writing contests, held regularly on various websites, provide invaluable help with an overabundance of texts. Contests are primarily used to select works according to a set of criteria.

One of the most famous online libraries on the Russian Internet is that of M. Moshkov (URL: http://samlib.ru/). The Samizdat platform of M. Moshkov Library organizes a series of contests, where the main requirements for the stories are their short length, up to 5,000-12,000 symbols. These three competitions, which took place in the last two years (2020-2021), can serve as an example: Inversion (125 works), Blackjack 21 (153 works), 2021 Chemistry and Life (169 works).

Contests unite enough participants to talk about the fierce competition of texts. We can conclude that the discovery of high-profile texts is primarily based on the level of the reader's immediate emotional response as a fundamental element.

The subject of this research is the short story “The Final Cup of Wine” by D. Laputina (URL: http://samlib.ru/f/filjum/hij.shtmlsee)[i], which participated in the contest 2021 Chemistry and Life (URL: http://samlib.ru/h/hizh2021/) in the category of ultra-short fantastic stories (URL: http://samlib.ru/cgi-bin/konkurs?DIR=h/hizh2021&AREA=2&ORDER=3). (No. 24 in the list).

The protagonist of the story turns to a company that builds robots, using the latest technologies. After a week of ideal coexistence, the robot wife, made at his request, kills him.

The story, which embodies modern decadence, stood out for its bright and sensible images, high literary skill, and high emotional intensity of readers' reactions.

The means and methods of building emotion in the story are considered through a series of ethical and esthetic categories used in the text.

The following statement is taken as the initial underlying premise: "The general, the particular, and the singular in ethics and morality presuppose a diversity of viewpoints" [1: 6], and morality itself is a cultural and historical phenomenon.

The story takes place in a dimension different from ours - in a fantastic world. This is a crucial element, because if "the development of bioethics and euthanasia today, as well as the preoccupation with the questions of life and death, have proved the relativity and limits of social relations" [1: 10], then the other world and the technologies used there lead to a corresponding ethics and morality. "With every achievement in science and technology, the unbiased possibility of human freedom steadily expands" [1: 13]. In the transition “to the changes in social life, it’s evident that the extent of freedom here increases much more slowly and definitely more inconsistently" [1: 13]. It is certain that inconsistency is a fundamental feature of this story and creates an emotional whirlwind.

The author builds the narrative in such a way that the main plot line – about an ideal robot wife constructed based on the latest technologies – remains hidden from the reader despite the direct reference. The description of the couple's daily life resets the reader, who begins to perceive the robot as a living being.

The first thing this story draws attention to is the act itself. The robot kills its beloved. “This description of the deed covers the entire range of questions that make up the content of ethics as a science of morality: Questions about the content and meaning of morality, about commonalities and differences in the concepts of “morality” and “integrity,” about choice and thus its basis, freedom, about moral value and countervalues" [1: 5]. The speed with which events unfold in the story – from unconditional love to murder – puts the readers in a state of affect that makes it impossible for them to rebuild so quickly and grasp the full range of issues covered in such a short text.

The author also introduces the concept of perfection, twice: we see the perfect beloved and a perfect human being. And destroys both concepts in a few paragraphs of text.

Thus, readers suddenly find themselves alone with the unparalleled scope of the text and its content, in

which morality manages to function as "a complex, often contradictory combination of something constant and changeable that permeates all areas of human activity" [1: 6]. The emotional impact of the text is like an uncontrollable avalanche.

At first sight we can say that the author succeeds in showing the psychological foundations of ethics, but she does not go into its practical task – the formation of moral qualities. The readers are set adrift, which in turn increases the emotionality of the text.

The approximate outline of the ethical problems of the text is substantially supplemented by esthetic categories.

The beauty, the ugliness, the tragedy, the comedy is depicted quite tangibly in the text.

The main female character is so beautiful that the author calls her "the perfect one," intentionally gives her a complex Cleopatra (or Cleo) and adds some accents to her simple image to enhance the emotional perception.

The ugliness is presented at the end of the story: “His scarlet guts formed a strange pattern” and the touching of the “still smiling” lips when it comes to a severed head.

The tragedy is the whole chain of the narrative, which the author at the same time refuses to acknowledge as such, ending the story with a captivating quote from a Saigyō Hōshi poem about cherry blossoms and a full moon in the sky. Note that these images are taken from a poem.

The comedy is the description of the tasks for the main character at the beginning of the story. For example, “Imagine that your neck can stretch 20 km into the air. Which cloud will you lick first, a cirrus or a cumulus?”

Each of these terms immerses readers individually and collectively in different and vivid emotional states.

The result is the maximum concentration of the emotional impact of the text with minimal length.

But there is more.

The competitive environment presupposes the possibility of interpersonal communication between author and reader when comments on the text become an integral part of the text itself [2]. Comments can take various forms and serve as an object of a separate study. In this article, however, we consider comments as a kind of multiplication of emotional impact actively used by authors online, using the example of a particular story and its anonymous author.

Emotional reactions of readers account for up to twenty comments. The number of the author’s replies is about the same. The readers show two polar attitudes towards the story: disgust and delight.

Where the author’s replies serve to further aggravate the emotional state of readers

As an example, we have used several shortened statements by the author and readers, in no particular order (URL: http://samlib.ru/comment/f/filjum/hij)[ii]. We have chosen those that do not require additional interpretation, are clear and self-explanatory.

If we summarize the comments, we can draw the following conclusions. First, we see an active use of scientific terms. Second, there are many references to works of world art. Third, the dialog with readers is intense.

All three conclusions speak to an emotional involvement with the text and its online existence.

In the context of the means and methods of building emotion, we can talk about achieving the author’s goal – the maximum emotional impact of the text in a competitive environment.

Another aspect when considering the text is related to the basic unverifiability of an online author. This adds another emotional component to the overall esthetic impact on readers.

Turning to the author’s last name, we find a reference to Gulliver’s Travels, a “fantastic prose satire by Jonathan Swift that satirizes both human nature and public follies” (definition from Wikipedia).

The note to the rubric includes this quote from Swift: "If a man were to begin to write down all his thoughts about love, politics, religion, science, etc., what a heap of inconsistent and contradictory judgments would eventually accumulate!" Moreover, the author’s rubric was for a time adorned with an illustration to the novel, and the author’s surname is formed from the name of the flying island of Laputa, which is described in the third part of the novel.

This partly explains the fact that at the time of writing this article neither the story nor the author’s rubric exists on the Samizdat platform of the M. Moshkov Library.

This can be considered an accompanying emotional effect.

If the goal is to expose the author, of course, it is possible. Usually, and in this case, the author leaves an e-mail address, responds to comments, and enters into a dialog with readers by posting the story online.

In summary, we can say that online literature significantly expands the boundaries of the emotional impact of texts on readers and requires further research, ethical and esthetic categories included.

Примечания

[i] **The Final Cup of Wine** (author's revision)

He struggled, above all, not with the loans he had to take out, but with the countless psychological tests. For the third month in a row, Gary has been going to the Nursery and spending about two and a half hours answering confusing and mostly silly questions and doing sometimes unpleasant but simple tasks. Many of them again and again.

"You're an absolute vegetarian, but do you ever feel like sinking your teeth into a leather sofa?"

"No."

"Imagine that your neck can stretch 20 km into the air. Which cloud will you lick first, a cirrus or a cumulus?"

"A thundercloud."

"Gary, you have an upscale, well-paying job that requires physical exertion. You grow perfect vegetables. You're happy about it. Also, you're a poetic person with a soft spot for the ancient arts. Is that true?"

"Absolutely."

"Perfect! Now pluck your left nostril as hard as you can with your little finger. And when you do, tell us why you chose to purchase our perfect product. Stop when you hear a whistle."

Gary kept gasping, tugging at his nose with his pinky for the hundredth time, allowing for small variations; he said that he sees women like cups filled with different kinds of wine, but it's always a premium one. Wine that inevitably ends. And now it's time for him to decide whether he's going to get that endless last cup, or whether he's going to stop drinking at all. The latter is out of the question because he's a healthy forty-year-old man; therefore, he's decided to buy his second half. The perfect one. After discussing it, thinking about it, and collecting enough suitable data, he chose this company. Since the Nursery doesn't use the usual neural technology, but the more obscure one described by the strange archaism "warm vibey action", they're the ones who get the perfect results. "A soul is breathed in" and "real magic happens". That's why you've to spend so much time on testing; you don't just stick your head in a neuroscanner...

A Mentor entered Nursery after a whistling sound.

This time, after the upbeat, tired tropes, "It's the perfect choice! We'll take care of your other half! We'll make you complete by any means necessary! Others have technologies, but we've the magic!" - the Mentor patted Gary on the shoulder and said eloquently said,

"Your order is complete."

"Finally!" Gary exhaled; his heart leapt as a girl entered the Nursery. "My goodness!"

He'd seen the products of the company: They were beautiful women; but now, with head tilted slightly to one side, this perfect woman was checking him out.

"I'm Cleo. Hi," said the girl. Her voice sounded like the whisper of leaves. Her small palm flew up like a butterfly and landed in Gary's big red hand. "This is exactly how I imagined you."

"Oh my God! "And I... I didn't imagine...", his hand began to tremble, and the tremor seized his whole body. Gary could not and did not try to hide it.

"This is it! This is your endless cup of wine, the one and only!" rattled the Mentor. "All your wishes and needs you can come up with will come true with our product. But not only those you can come up with yourself..."

Gary didn't listen, he only nodded automatically. Just as he was covered with rainbowy dew, Gary walked on the mist, on the clouds, leading his other half out of the building.

"... but also those hidden from you, the most intimate ones. The very most! With all our hearts, we..."

*

For Gary there was no more past; it all turned into dust. Cleo stood at the open door: colors and shades, waves and peace, happiness, and rapture - everything was now fully available to him.

"You are my eyes," he said, flying above the bright whiteness of Makalu.

"You are my hands," she said, helping him dig up the shiny black shiny soil.

"You are my ears."

“You are what I wish for.”

They’ve been saying this like mantras, again and again. And it looked as if there was no time, only infinity.

On the seventh day, Gary noticed sadness and restlessness in his beloved's eyes.

“It’s OK, love”, she whispered back to him. “I just remembered this old Coltrane’s song.”

“My Favorite Things? Oh, I’ve known it since my childhood.”

“No, but the one from the same album. Every Time We Say Goodbye. And a tanka poem that came back to me."

“Matsuo Bashō?’ Oh, I know everything by heart. Or someone else?..”

“Someone else. Saigyō Hōshi. I was so fascinated that I bought something.”

“A set for a tea ceremony?” Gary smiled. “Wonderful! It’s been a long time...”

He didn’t finish his phrase, and a drone flew out of the open window. A long, slender object fell from its aluminum casing. Shining gold, the object landed in Cleo's hands.

A katana, a Japanese sword.

The blade shone and struck twice. Gary crashed to the white marble floor. His scarlet guts formed a strange pattern, and his head rolled to his lover's feet. Cleo dropped to her knees and whispered to the still smiling lips:

Let me die in spring
under the blossoming trees,
let it be around
that full moon
of Kisaragi month.

[ii] **Extract from the comment section** (with minimal reduction)

46. Aleksey K. Tikhonov 2022/01/21 11:57 [reply]

It's a deed and a multi-layered story that raises many questions. How you managed to pack everything into such a short story is a mystery)

Bravo!

41. *Mikhail Boldyrev 2021/11/23 19:58 [reply]

> > 35.Darya Laputina

> Every esthetic, ethical or philosophical preference is more or less eclectic.

That’s right, Darya, since we often tend to somehow refract and combine within ourselves. In art, however, attitudes toward combining approaches or styles sometimes vary widely. Some consider it a hodgepodge and an unacceptable pollution, i.e., eclecticism is the opposite of style; others find pleasure in this postmodern mix of pieces and bits. Maybe it depends on the time. Or on individuality. As the Grinch once said: for one it’s nuclear waste, for another it’s a sweet medley :)

Could you please address the eclectic in ethical preferences?

> It’s unnatural if you find syncretism there.

Why so? Sometimes it comes across naturally at certain stages. You’re young and don’t know much, you’re old and can’t see clearly through your experience – a lot can happen. And it can happen quite naturally.

40. Darya Laputina 2021/11/23 16:16 [reply]

> > 39.Nika-Elena Saganenko

>I think the ending is the classic Et in Arcadia Ego.

Intriguing, yes. Want to quote Poussin here: “Death finds us at our happiest”.

3. *Darya Laputina 2021/11/17 23:43 [reply]

> > 1.What’s that?!

>But the ending is very disgusting, and it takes some time for this feeling of disgust to fade away. Is the author a maniac?

Thank you, I am pleased it made you so emotional. It’s quit shocking, isn’t it? However, I am quite surprised by your negativity. What are the reasons behind it? My guess it’s ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and underdevelopment.

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MEANS AND METHODS OF BUILDING EMOTION IN ONLINE FLASH FICTION

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