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*Fairy tale discourse in the dramaturgy of Anna Bogachova,
Irina Vashkovskaya and Anna Yablonskaya*

Abstract

The playwrights of 20th century have often used fairy tale genre to find answers to the vital questions of modern times and to comprehend primeval dilemmas of human existence. As in contemporary culture the genre is usually targeted at children and teenagers, it may be a powerful educational tool. Therefore, the term “fairy tale discourse” remains an especially valid notion.

This paper focuses on research on fairy tale discourse in the dramaturgy of Anna Bogachova, Irina Vashkovskaya and Anna Yablonskaya. Their works, particularly, the variety of genres and themes present in the plays, are actually a reflection of developments in Russian dramaturgy of the 21st century. Being the part of new Russian dramaturgy, the plays by Bogachova, Vashkovskaya and Yablonskaya are the source of knowledge about contemporary times, cultural and social background, as well as the post-modernist literary trends of the generation.

The authors use tools offered by the fairy tale genre in order to realise their objectives, fulfil aesthetical taste, but also to experiment with the generic form. The poetics of the plays is based on the fairy tale rules. They include references to folk tradition and literary heritage. The hierarchy of values is clearly drawn, which contributes to visualisation of the story line. The complexity of the abovementioned motifs is influenced both by circumstances of the era and importance of national tradition that stands the test of time.

Several positive play reviews prove the importance of the authors on theatre stages in Russia and abroad. Despite the popularity, the works of Bogachova, Vashkovskaya and Yablonskaya are yet to be systematically studied. As there are some publications focusing on their plays, none of them discusses the issue of fairy tale discourse. In fact, the contemporary literary scholars have yet to sufficiently discuss the features of fairy tale drama as a particular emanation of the wider phenomena – the fairy tale discourse.

The study of fairy tale discourse in Russia is currently present in linguistic studies and publications dedicated to fairy tale motifs in prose. Therefore, the analysis of works that are the subject of this paper may contribute to further studies on fairy tale elements in literature. The insight in post-modernist modifications of the fairy tale drama genre may help to identify its constructive attributes. This paper also examines generic features and syncretism of fairy tale plays dedicated to theatre performance, which is also a new attempt in scientific analysis.

The characteristics of fairy tale drama and modern approach to analysis of the discourse require the use of various research methods. The main method used in this study was structural-semiotic approach. It primarily allows the analysis of the text, but also tracks the relation between artistic environment and generic characteristics of the play.

The applied cultural-historical analysis is based on relation of written fairy tale drama with its cultural and historiographic context. The inter-text and discourse-contextual analyses were conducted with the use of hermeneutic method. It allows more than one parallel interpretations of the same text and may lead to studying fairy tale dramas at various angles. Additionally, the method permits the possibility of revealing the rules of receptive aesthetics during the interpretation of a piece of writing.

The main effort in inquiry was put in the analysis of written text of the plays, while the stage versions were also considered due to generic syncretism of fairy tale drama. The study of fairy tale elements in modern discourse needs a clear definition of this term. The first part of the paper includes the description of the term “discourse” and the review of scientific literature covering the subject.

The analysis of the literature of the subject shows that the modern research paradigm allows to interpret discourse as the notion relating to a coherent and integral text that is influenced by a historical-cultural context, but also socio-psychological one. Due to both contextual influences the discourse remains relevant and socially valid (N.D. Arutiunova’s remark following the concept of P.M. Foucault). In such an approach to analysing fairy tale discourse the text itself becomes the matter of research. The text analysis reveals patterns, regularities, structures and general features of the discourse. Therefore, the notion of “fairy tale discourse” in this paper was defined as a certain collection of fairy tale concepts in dramatical texts and various options of their updated versions that had been created not only by cultural or socio-historical factors, but also by authors’ attitudes. Considering the overall conditions of studies of the subject, this PhD dissertation proposes the hypothesis that the fairy tale discourse should be regarded as the

most representative emanation of fairy tale in modern Russian dramaturgy in the aspect of modification of generic features.

The first chapter of the dissertation contributes to study of generic features of the fairy tale drama. It consists of the characteristics of the genre in the light of discourse theory and the description of certain aspects of research on folk tales and literary tales (also dramas), present in existing literature of the subject. Then, the reflection on the appearance of fairy tale genre in Russian dramaturgy and theatre has been presented. Moreover, the analysis of generic variety in the works of Bogachova, Vashkovskaya and Yablonskaya, with the consideration to the phenomena of fairy tale drama syncretism in theatralisation, has been conducted.

The second chapter examines the influence of post-modernist trends on main semantic features of the genre. In fact, they modify the contemporary fairy tale discourse, which was determined through the analysis of play appearing in the dramas by discussed authors. The play is present in two basic forms: one extracted from the text works on poetic level and the other being an inter-text play is based on the interaction between texts. The artistic world of fairy tale drama is explored within the interaction of fairy tale or incredible reality with modern reality, which is ironically transformed into the poetics of the fairy tale.

The analysis of artistic chronotope presents originality of fairy tale and dramatic combination of the space-time. The psychologisation of roles, typical for post-modernist narration, in fairy tale drama resulted in the extended structure of chronotope covering both the macro-world of art and the spiritual micro-world of the characters.

The third chapter regards fairy tale characters. What is generic in this case, the category of the character is one of crucial determiners of the fairy tale discourse, as the presence of actors is a condition of development of fairy tale story line. The ways of character's presentation in the works of Bogachova, Vashkovskaya and Yablonskaya have been also studied, revealing a typical factor determining post-modernist fairy tale drama, that is the author's transformation of images and characters through ironic-grotesque techniques of visualisation. The reinterpretation of gender roles of fairy tale characters in modern dramaturgy leads to a shift in categorisation of characters in plays, thus such a measure may be regarded as one of the forms of modification in fairy tale discourse.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation focuses on the issue of artistic communication in the aspect of receptive aesthetics, as the reception of fairy tale drama takes the new shape in modern society. The studies from this chapter confirm that

communication strategies of the authors aim at an active dialogue with the recipient. To solve communication problems, Bogachova and Yablonskaya turn to strategic techniques, favouring “reading” of various meanings by the recipient. They include narrativisation, play, and performative potential of fairy tale drama. The playwrights use indirect forms of suggestion in the text. These indications are apparent in the poetics of plays, the logic of story lines, and included in descriptions of characters, comments or stage directions. Such actions lead to the narrativisation of action in fairy tale drama. Additionally, the play strategies used by the playwrights in the text and its performative potential have substantial influence on recipient’s consciousness. Such an influence grossly improves the overall efficiency of author’s communicative strategies.

The studies on plays with fairy tale elements written by Bogachova, Vashkovskaya and Yablonskaya lead to the conclusion that the fairy tale discourse consists of different works (in formal and generic manner), which can be all classified as fairy tales. Its main element is uncommon reality with fairy tale characters, artistic space-time – fantastic order of the world, events, and semantic structures that exists on the level of fairy tale characters, artistic space-time, image of the world, events, and sayings. On one hand, the discourse both stems from and enhances folk and literary traditions dear to society in the poetics of dramatical text, but on the other hand, in the post-modernist trends the discourse reveals the features connected with the modification of generic elements of the classical fairy tale.

The outcome of the studies conducted in this paper also bears the conclusion, that the features of fairy tale discourse in fairy tale dramas are visible within the interaction of the discourse with other dramatic discourses. As a result, to the view comes a formal syncretism, which triggers the occurrence of a new theatrical experience. Namely, modern and traditional canons of storytelling are being synthesized with various types of performance genres, remaining the means of communication, a kind of communicational channel connecting the author with the recipient.

The communicational function of the fairy tale discourse in fairy tale drama reveals itself in its dynamic nature, which is determined by a stage interpretation combining subjective approach of the interpreters with generic diversity of the play proposed by the author. At the same time, hidden or obvious indications anchored in the text by the author in the form of commentaries and stage directions, become interpretative suggestions. Usually, the director’s performance relies on directing techniques i.e. the choice of artistic conception, actors and the division of roles. The vision of fairy tale world, created by the

interpreter through stage design and assisting stage projects, becomes an important aspect of performing the play in the theatre. During that process, the abovementioned approaches to interpretation of the fairy tale discourse often get transformed. The crucial goal here is to establish a contact with the recipient, which is possible through the synthesis of fairy tale genres with the elements of dramatical genres in staged text.

This study of fairy tale plays written by Bogachova, Vashkovskaya and Yablonskaya affirm that the fairy tale discourse determines the trend of fairy tale drama. The utility of the genre has always developed from its aesthetical and educational functions. The former one, in modern fairy tale dramas in question, is not merely connected with story line "enchantment", as the main generic feature, but is also a feature of the fairy tale discourse.

The incredible or magical fiction becomes an original way of presenting the contemporary reality that is often ironically or parodistically reflected in artistically imaged world. The educational function is always present in fairy tale pedagogy, which has a clear reflection in interactive plays and performative dialogues with the audience. The educational message is particularly visible in the presentation of behaviour of fairy tale characters.

In summary, this dissertation is the first attempt to study the fairy tale discourse on the example of modern Russian fairy tale drama with consideration to recent scientific trends defining the discourse as the phenomena influencing certain formal and semantic commonality of texts. Additionally, this is the first analysis of the body of works (by three playwrights) that has not been examined in the aspect of fairy tale discourse before. Finally, it was the first time to view post-modernist influence on semantic features of the genre in the texts of fairy tale dramas, with the consideration to recent changes in fairy tale discourse.

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