A COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER IN 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN AND UZBEK LITERATURE: A FRAMEWORK FOR LITERARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this article is to substantiate a comparative-typological approach to the female character in twenty-first-century American and Uzbek literature and to turn it into a model for teaching literature in higher education. **Methods:** The study is conceptual and design-oriented. Directed qualitative content analysis of foundational works in literary theory, feminist criticism and narratology produced eight analytic criteria. The criteria were then tried out in an illustrative close reading of three American novels and built into a four-stage instructional model with a four-level assessment rubric. **Results:** The criteria cover personal freedom and choice, family and marriage, motherhood and intergenerational relations, social pressure and gender roles, psychological conflict, national-cultural values, symbol and detail, and narration and authorial position. The illustrative reading showed that the criteria separate characters who share a theme, such as motherhood under pressure, but differ in agency, voice and narrative position. The instructional model moves students from close reading through criterion-based analysis and comparative synthesis to contextual reflection. **Conclusion:** The framework helps students avoid equating superficially similar characters from different cultures and read each woman in her own historical and cultural context. The model has not yet been tested with students, and the Uzbek corpus remains to be analysed; a classroom experiment and a systematic Uzbek corpus study are proposed as the next steps.

Keywords: female character; comparative-typological analysis; American literature; Uzbek literature; literary education; gender approach; narrative perspective

1. Introduction

The female character is one of the oldest and most persistent subjects of world literature, yet the way she is read changes with the historical period, the national tradition and the reader. In literature classrooms this variability is rarely made explicit. Students tend to describe a heroine by her family role (mother, wife, daughter-in-law) or to label her as “strong” or “oppressed”, and they transfer these labels from one national literature to another without testing them. Such reading reduces a complex artistic image to a stereotype and leaves the intercultural potential of literary education unused.

2. Literature review

2.1. Image, character and type

The artistic image is the central category through which literature re-creates reality. It is not limited to a human figure: space, time, objects, details and states of mind can all become images, and a single image fuses individuality with generalisation. A woman’s position in her family, her relation to society or her struggle for personal freedom may exceed one individual fate and express the problems of an entire period. Character is the narrower category: it shows what kind of person the figure is, what values she relies on, how she decides and how she reacts to events. Character is revealed through the author’s description, speech and dialogue, action and decision, inner monologue, memory, dream and psychological detail, and it develops through conflict. Characters may be dynamic or static, and non-change can itself be an artistic choice.

The artistic type condenses features of an era, a social environment or a pattern of human relations in an individual image. A type is not a stereotype: the stereotype repeats a simplified, pre-formed idea of a person or group, whereas the type keeps complexity, individuality and inner contradiction.

2.2. Text-centred and contextual reading

Wellek and Warren (1956) distinguish the intrinsic study of literature, which concentrates on the work’s own structure, images, style and symbols, from the extrinsic study, which relates it

to biography, society and ideas. For the analysis of an image this implies that reading must begin with the text and its compositional relations before any social explanation is offered. Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory adds the reader's part: the meaning of a literary work is realised in the transaction between reader and text, so students' own positions are legitimate objects of reflection rather than obstacles.

3. Methods

3.1. Design

The study is a conceptual, design-oriented investigation in the theory and methodology of literary education. It has three components: (a) derivation of analytic criteria from theory; (b) an illustrative application of the criteria to a small corpus of American novels; (c) design of an instructional model and rubric from the criteria. No human participants took part, and no claims about learning gains are made.

3.2. Derivation of the criteria

The theoretical sources listed in the previous section were analysed by directed qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). The deductive categories were artistic image, character, type, gender perspective and national-cultural context. For each category the author extracted the questions that the source implies a reader should ask of a text and grouped similar questions into candidate criteria. Candidates were merged when they overlapped and were kept separate when they led to different textual evidence. The result was a set of eight criteria, each phrased as a guiding question.

4. Results

4.1. Eight criteria for the comparative-typological analysis

Analysis of the theoretical sources produced eight criteria, presented in Table 1. The table has three columns: the criterion, the guiding question that students ask of the text, and the textual evidence to look for. The first four criteria concern the heroine's position in relation to choice, family, generations and society. The fifth concerns her inner life. The sixth places her in a

national-cultural context. The last two concern the means by which the text shapes the image: symbol and detail on the one hand, narration and authorial position on the other.

The gender approach is used to understand gender relations in each work in its own historical and national-cultural context, not to evaluate American and Uzbek heroines by identical social standards.

4.2. Implications for the Uzbek part of the corpus

The protocol was designed for use with Uzbek texts as well, and its application there follows the same steps. Three precautions arise from the theory. First, a woman under family pressure in an Uzbek text should not automatically be matched to a heroine under family pressure in an American text. In one the pressure may be expressed as a conflict between individual freedom and obligation, in the other through custom, kinship and collective values; criteria 4 and 6 are meant to expose such differences. Second, traditional female images must not be classified as negative or stereotypical in advance: the test is how fully the inner world is opened and what capacity to influence her own fate is shown.

5. Discussion

The results answer the four research questions. The theoretical categories required for comparative interpretation are artistic image, character, type, gender perspective and national-cultural context (RQ1). They can be operationalised as eight criteria with guiding questions and expected textual evidence (RQ2). The illustrative reading of three American novels suggests that the criteria discriminate between heroines who share a theme, particularly through criteria 3, 6 and 8 (RQ3). The criteria can be built into a four-stage model whose outcomes, activities and assessment are aligned (RQ4).

The study’s main implication concerns the logic of comparison. The criteria put into practice Zhirmunsky’s (1979) distinction between typological parallel and mere thematic resemblance: comparison is permitted only after each heroine has been analysed in her own text. This matters in teaching because students tend to compare early and read late. The sequence of

stages reverses that habit by requiring close reading and individual analysis before comparison.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The criteria were derived and applied by a single researcher, the corpus is small, and only the American sample was read with the protocol. The teaching model has not been tested with students, so its effect on learning is unknown. Readers should also note that the model presupposes access to the texts in a language the students can read; for American novels this usually means English, and for Uzbek texts Uzbek or translation, a difference that may itself affect interpretation. In practice, instructors may need to adjust the number of criteria for time-limited courses, for example by selecting four or five that fit the text.

6. Conclusion

The article has argued that the female character in twenty-first-century American and Uzbek literature can be compared in the classroom with rigour if image, character and type are distinguished, a gender perspective is applied without presumption, and national-cultural context is taken seriously. Eight criteria were derived from theory and shown, on three American novels, to separate characters that share a theme but differ in agency, family relations, voice and narrative position. A four-stage teaching model and a four-level rubric make the criteria usable in higher education.

Practically, instructors of literature and teacher-education programmes can adopt the criteria as a common analytic matrix across national literatures and use the stages to sequence a unit from close reading to contextual reflection. The next step is to apply the protocol to a defined Uzbek corpus and to test the model with students.

Statements and Declarations

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