

## ВИЗУАЛИЗАЦИЯ ОБЛИКА ПЕРСОНАЖА В ПРОЗАИЧЕСКОМ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ: К ПОСТАНОВКЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ

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**Аннотация:** Проблеме портретирования в литературе посвящено множество исследований, однако до сих пор она остается открытой и актуальной. В этой связи представляется продуктивным указать на общетеоретические и методологические особенности изучения облика персонажа, существующие исследовательские представления о портрете в художественной литературе и изобразительном искусстве, а также особенности создания облика героя в прозаическом произведении в литературе Серебряного века, в частности, так как в этот период наметились тенденции отхода от конкретного изображения действительности и обязательного установления связей между внешними и внутренними характеристиками героя. Литературоведами XX в. портрет традиционно рассматривался в тесной связи с общей историей искусств — актуализировалась изобразительная, живописная функция портрета. Однако она не является первостепенной, хоть и ее рассмотрение бывает продуктивно в связи с синтезом искусств в случае с рисующими писателями или поэтами. В частности, автором статьи делается вывод о том, что портрет нецелесообразно было бы выделять в качестве замкнутой целостности, а словосочетание «визуализация облика» представляется наиболее адекватным для обозначения портретных характеристик в художественном тексте в противовес литературным портретам мемуарно-биографической литературы, где речь идет об изображении и воссоздании личности реально существовавшего человека.

**Ключевые слова:** облик персонажа, литературный портрет, портретный жанр в искусстве, Н.И. Жинкин, А. Белый, Серебряный век.

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## VISUALIZATION OF THE CHARACTER'S APPEARANCE IN FICTION

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**Abstract:** Numerous papers have been written on the topic of portrait creation in literature, viewing it both directly and indirectly, however it remains a topical issue up to this day. It is evidently necessary to systemize the data, gathered by numerous literary research on the portrait characteristics. In this regard, it appears productive to point out the theoretical and methodological particularities of researching a character's appearance in literature, the existing research notions on the portrait in fiction literature and visual arts and the notable peculiarities of creating a character's appearance, using examples from prose works of the Silver Age specifically. This period saw the rise of tendencies that consisted of moving away from an actual depiction of reality and the obligatory establishment of connections between external and internal features of the character. By examining various scholarly theories, the author points out that as a result of close attention to the artistic portrait, typical for the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many works of that period that studied the particularities of characters' appearance mirrored the notions about graphic and artistic portraits. Traditionally the portrait was researched in connection with the general history of art, and its depicting and artistic function was being actualized. However, it is not the primary function of the portrait, even if it could prove to be productive to research it in the case of painting writers or writing painters (for example M.A. Voloshin and K.A. Korovin). The author draws a specific conclusion that it would be impractical to distinguish a portrait as a closed integrity, and that the phrase "appearance visualization" seems to be the most fitting for describing the portrait features in works of fiction, as opposed to the literary portraits in biographical literature that portray and recreate the image of an existing person.

**Keywords:** character's appearance, literary portrait, portrait genre in visual arts, N.I. Zhinkin, A. Bely, the Silver Age.

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A lot of research was dedicated to the issue of portrait creation in literature, however it remains open and topical up to this day. It is evidently necessary to systemize all the data collected over the course of researching the features of portrait in literary studies. In this regard it appears productive to point out the theoretical and methodological particularities of researching the appearance of a character in literature, the existing research concepts of portrait in fiction writing and visual arts and the peculiarities of crafting a character's appearance in the literature of the Silver Age in particular.

In modern philology the term "portrait" means, according to a scholarly custom, both an "essay" about a person's life and work and a description of a character's appearance in a given literary work. The first meaning [2; 5; 18] is often attributed to the portrait genre in visual arts and, by analogy with the artistic portrait, called a "literary portrait", which holds a special place in memoirs and biographies. The particularity of such portrait lies in the fact that it is a reflection of a real person's image in a text, along with their biography and a place they hold in the author's life. The documental and biographical basis of a literary portrait guides the narrative to a realistic portrayal of the object being described and forces the author to find specific patterns of understanding the image and destiny of the portrayed persona. The second meaning of portrait [1; 4; 9; 11] is viewed within the framework of a character's image. The details of a character's appearance in a literary work constitute only one of the components of a character's image. They are generally analyzed along with their biography, feelings and experiences. Literary scholars more often than not interpret a portrait as a special case of a character's characterization, defining its functions and place in a given literary work. Numerous typologies presented in various monographs,

PhD papers and articles attest to it. As a rule, said typologies rank together various components of a literary text, and this approach is closely tied to the issue of boundaries of a portrait, which this paper aims to study in more detail.

The most common definitions of a portrait, given by various textbooks, dictionaries and reference books, are supplemented with certain details of a character's appearance. The depiction of a literary character normally includes various details: facial features (eyes, nose, lips, hair, skin etc.), stature, complexion, clothes and jewelry, facial expressions and gestures: "The portrait of a character is a description of their appearance: facial features, natural traits, age (facial and body features, hair color) as well as every part of a person's appearance, shaped by their social class, cultural traditions and individual initiative (clothing, jewelry, hairstyle and cosmetics). A portrait can also fixate a character's body language, their typical gestures and poses, facial expressions and looks. Therefore, a portrait can create a stable complex of a features of an "external person" [20, p. 218]; "a depiction of a character's appearance (facial features, stature, complexion, pose, facial expressions, gestures, clothes) as a way to characterize them; a variation of *description*" [14, p. 289]; "a portrait in literature is one of the methods of literary characterization, which consists of the writer revealing the nature of his characters and expressing his ideas through describing the characters' appearance" [13, col. 152]. Certain character traits found in the descriptions can not be attributed to the "external" person. Movements, poses and particular facial expressions that act as behavioral traits may be dispersed over the entire text as they mirror both external and internal changes. The indication of particularities of appearance can thus be seen as the core of a description, and the behavioral traits in such case should be seen as peripheral (that is, if we interpret them as behavioral forms and not as features of appearance).

However, such understanding of the structure of portrait leads us to the exceptional importance of the depicting function, and this is incorrect. It is obvious that an image in a literary work, including the portrait (as an element of an image), is valuable for how deep it penetrates a character's structure. This is why a talented writer, according to B.E. Galanov, "can make the reader picture a character's eyes, mouth and nose even without describing their physical appearance, but another one cannot create a coherent portrait, no matter how detailed he describes these features" [8, p. 12]. This statement not only underlines the impor-

tance of artistic function of a portrait<sup>1</sup>, but it also points out that it has other notable functions: individualizing, characterizing and evaluative.

In order to better understand the situation formed around portrait in modern theory and history of literature, it is necessary to point out the fact that many literary studies mirrored the notions regarding the portrait genre in visual arts.

For example, due to the close attention to the artistic function at the time, in 1964 an article by M.O. Gabel' titled "Portraying the Faces" was published in I.A. Beletskiy's collection of articles on the theory of literature, which made an attempt to create a general classification of portraits by era and artistic school. Gabel' pointed out the evident connection between literature and visual arts, specifically distinguishing the "visual" and "architectonic" portraits (she started researching the general theory of portrait as early as the 1920s). In 1967 a book by B.E. Galanov titled "The Craft of Portrait" was published, in which the author made an attempt to follow the history of the literary portrait and its close ties to the visual arts. Another scholar that worked in this direction was N.A. Dmitrieva<sup>2</sup>. She was behind the idea to juxtapose the development stages of the portrait in literature and in visual arts. N.A. Dmitrieva writes that "when there already existed a clear and crystalized portrait genre in visual arts, and every face on a painting had bright individual features, novelists still used standard, cliché descriptions such as: "there once was a nobleman, quite rich, good-looking and well-mannered" or "a lady as benevolent as she was beautiful". It was important to have an intriguing plot, unexpected and piquant situations that these ladies and noblemen found themselves into, but they interacted with each other in a conventional, rhetoric language that couldn't demonstrate their personal, individual traits" [10, col. 235–236]. Thus, Dmitrieva pointed out that visual arts took precedence in developing the portrait method.

As a result of such close attention paid to the picturesqueness of the portrait, many works of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that attempted to interpret

1 Based on the artistic function, the portrait in literature can be placed close to the artistic portrait. M.G. Urtmintseva explains how this term crossed from the artistic sphere in literature in a short but very informative manner: "The term "portrait" in its direct meaning was borrowed from visual arts, an artistic medium that is quite close to literature. There existed an expression "portrait" in Old French, that signified visualizing something "trait for trait". This word derives from the Latin root "protrahere", which means "to extract, to withdraw". Later the meaning of the word becomes broader, according to Urtmintseva, it receives additional meaning "to depict, to portray" [16, c. 4].

2 In the book "The Picture and the Word" (1962) the particularities of the visual arts were given in juxtaposition with the art of writing.

the peculiarities of characters' appearance, mirrored the notions of the graphic and visual portrait. The portrait was traditionally interpreted in conjunction with the general history of arts, its depicting, artistic function was being widely actualized. However, as stated previously, it is not the primary function of the portrait<sup>3</sup> [19], despite the fact that examining it in relation to the painting writers or writing painters (such as M.A. Voloshin or K.A. Korovin) might prove productive.

The importance of the individualizing, characterizing and evaluative functions of the portrait was thoroughly interpreted by M.G. Urtmintseva in her book "The Literary Portrait in Russian Literature in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century". This period was characterized by active formation of epic genres and complication of the narrative principles in general. Consequently the role of portrait "was noticeably broadened: apart from describing a character's appearance, the portrait also received the function of motivating the behavior of a character in question, as well as "another one" withing a given situation; it became a way for the author to express their views and opinions and to further unfold the narrative" [18, p. 210]. Thus, the portrayals inserted in the text by F.M. Dostoyevskiy and L.N. Tolstoy for example, could serve as plot points and narrative turns.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century certain tendencies appeared, that consisted of moving away from the actual portrayal of reality and the necessary connections between the internal and external traits of a character. These new notions regarding the portrayal of human face were endorsed in the visual arts at the turn of the century as well<sup>4</sup>. The interest towards the human face was shifting in the direction of the character in its totality in any given historical era. The culture of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was based on "contemplating, and therefore interest to the styles of different eras, as well as relishing various aesthetic details" [21, p. 86].

Writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century "started by leaning on the artistic experience of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and moved on to Chekhov, as in his works an accentuated, associative detail was often used instead of the entire description of a character's appearance" [22, p. 51]. In F. Sologub's novel "The Petty Demon" such tendency appears infrequently, but in A. Bely's "Petersburg" and L.N. Andreev's "Sashka

3 The author might not depict the whole character, and not even a person described in detail, but a singular detail that would point to the character. Thus, the depicting function ceases to be the primary one.

4 Here it is worth noting that literature does not follow in visual arts' footsteps, as N.A. Dmitrieva pointed out, for example.

Zhegulev” the details of appearance become repetitive by design. They become not only particularities of appearance, but a cue that creates the prevailing emotional atmosphere: “...his face wrinkled almost as if he had a seizure; his stony eyes circled with blue rolled up; his hands, wrapped in black suede, flew up to his chest as if he was trying to defend himself from something. His body bent back and his top-hat hit the wall and fell on his knees, under his uncovered head... The unwillingness of the senator’s movement could not be interpreted at all; the senatorial code did not cover such occasions... Observing the silhouettes — top hats, feathers, peaked caps after peaked caps and feathers again — Apollon Apollonovich thought them to be dots in the sky; but one of the dots, falling from its orbit, flew towards himself at a breakneck speed, turning into a huge crimson sphere, I mean what I’m trying to say is <...> observing the silhouettes (peaked caps and feathers), Apollon Apollonovich saw among the caps and the feathers a pair of crazy eyes: these eyes had an unacceptable quality; the eyes recognized the senator; and, after doing so, went dangerously insane; maybe the eyes were waiting for him around the corner; and, having seen him, widened, gleamed and sparkled” [3, p. 21]. The eyes are the leitmotif of the entire novel, being as a rule strengthened by repetitions where necessary. In the given passage the detail is framed with the repeating items of clothing: peaked hats, feathers and top hats. The eyes get “detached” from the character and cover the entire appearance of the person, which prevents the reader from forming a complete image of this character. Later a similar scheme of portrait composition can be seen in A.P. Platonov’s novel “Chevengur”.

Obviously, it would be impractical to distinguish this kind of portrait as a closed integrity, since it penetrates the entire narrative and interacts with all its elements and components to various degrees. The portrait can be disjointed and scattered across the text. By interpreting this particular feature of the portrait characterization, N.M. Tarabukin, a theorist of art studies, tied the depiction of a person’s appearance to specific stylistic tropes. As a result of this approach, he only described the peculiarities of an artist’s style [16, p. 192] and viewed the portrait as a state of mind.

E.B. Tager, a literary scholar, pointed out a similar occurrence in literature, when the features of portraits referred not to the features of characters’ nature, but to a specific artistic vision. He wrote that “different writers have different intrinsic principles of artistic worldview, and these principles influence a writer’s depiction of nature, things and furniture, i.e. the entire artistic and depicting sphere of the

art of literature equally” [15, p. 378]. In this regard, according to Tager, including the depiction of a character’s appearance “is used as a kind of expressive moment” [15, p. 378], and the difference between a landscape, interior details and portrait characteristics gradually disappears. He also makes an important statement that the term “portrait” is quite nominal, as it has no direct connection to an artistic or sculptural portrait. It may be more fitting to call it “verbal plastic”, visualizing a character’s image with its specific structure and functions within a given literary work.

For a more universal description of this creation of visual components it may prove useful to refer to theoretical research by N.I. Zhinkin, carried out on the topic of portrait in art.

In his article “The Portrait Forms” he rightfully points out the importance of gestures and poses for correct understanding of any given person: “A thing only has its position, its place among other things, it cannot make a gesture or strike a pose. A person, on the other hand, always has a pose and through it they make gestures. A gesture is a typically human form” [12, p. 28]. Besides the features of appearance that are mirrored in the “core” definition of the portrait, given at the beginning of this article, Zhinkin also points out the importance of “portrayed expressive forms”, i.e. “the pose and gestures of the person being portrayed, in the literal sense of the word” or “the result of an interaction between a person’s intentions and their surroundings” [12, p. 28].

Thus, it seems impractical to distinguish the portrait as a closed integrity and to exclude the “expressive forms” from it as well.

Because the concept of the portrait usually includes the appearance of a person and the “expressive forms”, it is evident that relying on any specific trait while creating a typological description of portraits is not enough to reveal the uniqueness of any given literary work’s poetics (for example, it is possible for the portraits to be static both in Antique literary works, and in the postmodernist ones). Thus it is important to take into account the fact that the function of inserting a depiction of a person (or an anthropomorphic creature) into the narrative depends on the aesthetic setting and the specific goals of the author. Moreover, the art of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created a new kind of artist, and in the works of this new type of artist the portrait becomes, first of all, a medium through which he expresses his worldview. Evidently, for the post-impressionist artists the most valuable part of the portrait was not the psychology, but the color splashes



and a person, transformed by the artist's mind and transcended into the world of art. On the one hand, the understanding of portrait formed in the art studies' tradition not always benefits the theory of literature, but in the case of symbolist prose the definition of portrait given by N.I. Zhinkin in the article "The Craft of Portrait" takes into account the personality of the artist as well, because a portrait is not only the face of a "picture", but a reflection of the characters of both the model and the artist, which when combined together create a completely new "visage" [12].

To indicate the particularities of appearance visualisation in the works from various eras, we can use the three reference points that Zhinkin also points out, but using a visual portrait as an example<sup>5</sup>. "Artistic expressive forms" are important for perception: these include the way a character is written into the narrative, the way their traits and features are presented throughout the text and the "artist's gesture" – the way they use meaningful details, for example, and whether they use or avoid "plastic" imagery – as well as "the gesture in a figurative sense of the word" (what Tarabukin called "style"): an artist's worldview and their affiliation with artistic schools<sup>6</sup>.

This article elaborates on several aspects of the issue of visualization of a character's appearance, points out the importance of including gestures and poses ("artistic expressive forms") in the definition of portrait and the impracticality of analyzing a portrait as a closed integrity, offers a method of describing the particularities of visualization of character's appearance in a literary work (the phrase "visualization of appearance" seems to be the most adequate option for describing the portrait characteristics in a work of fiction, to distinguish it from the literary portraits of memoirs and biographical literature that portray and describe an actual person).

5 This is referring to the direct application of art history methods to a literary work.

6 Formation of a portrait in literature meant the actualization of the concept of "individuality". Folk epic poetry did not distinguish any person from a multitude of similar characters. In "The Song of Roland" all "fifteen thousand barons from Carl's retinue were "beautiful in face and athletic in stature"" [15, c. 161].

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