



Peculiarities of the Epigram Genre in Satirical Poetry of the Second Half of the XIX Century

Guo Tianyu

Doctoral candidate Uzbek State University of World Languages

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Abstract: *The article deals with the role of epigrams in revealing the meaning of a literary text, on the example of the analysis of lyrics in Russian literature. The epigram is a genre relevant to Russian literature from the eighteenth century to the present, and the second half of the nineteenth century called a period of epigram flourishing, its “golden age”. Examples of poems with the analysis and allocation of epigrams given, as well as analyses by prominent literary scholars and theorists.*

Keywords: Russian literature, poem, literary scholars, epigram, analyses

INTRODUCTION

The epigram is a “short satirical poem, usually with a witticism (pointe) at the end”; in Russian literature it is a poem “partly responding to topical, often political events” [1: 511]. The epigrams trace its history back to antique literature, where they were written in elegiac distich and had arbitrary content: at first, they were “dedicatory inscriptions, then epitaphs, teachings, descriptions, love poems, table poems, satirical poems” [2: 1233]. For the modern epigram, which largely based on the samples of poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century, the satirical component, a scathing joke about the addressee of the message are indispensable.

The epigram as a genre attracts the attention of many researchers. I.S. Leonov in his PhD thesis analyzes the poetics of the Russian epigram of the XVIII -

early XIX centuries and notes the process of continuous development of the genre during this period, the enrichment of comic artistic means of the epigram, as a result of which the epigram “passes from an informative, statement, didactic to comic genre” [3: 5].

METHODS

Epigrams analyzed by literary scholars in the works of various authors from different periods of Russian literature: V.A. Zhukovsky [Litinskaya 2016], M.N. Muravyov [Filimonova 2014], A.P. Sumarokov [Rybakova 2007], A.S. Pushkin [Dobritsyn 2005; Zagranichnov 2014], P.P. Ershov [Silchenko 2013], I.S. Turgenev [Aldonina 2016], Sasha Cherniy [Afanasyeva 2011], V.I. Gaft [Pischugin 2014] and others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The epigram is a genre relevant to Russian literature from the eighteenth century to the present, and the second half of the nineteenth century called a period of epigram flourishing, its “golden age”. In this connection, it is necessary to take a closer look at the epigrammatic works of the “Iskrova” poets, who understood perfectly the power of the epigram and realized that it was their weapon. V.S. Kurochkin addresses his opponent in the poem “We mow everything funny, mow everything”:

You, with your book and your whip,

In addition, we with our stock of epigrams.

A strong weapon" in the literary and social struggle makes the epigram its brevity, capacity of meaning, sharpness of the humor it expresses. In addition, "the distinctive feature of the epigram is a specific occasion for its creation" [5: 45], which always makes the epigram topical and socially important.

V.S. Kurochkin was a master of epigrams. More often than not, he did not put the name of the recipient of the epigram in the title of the poem, and the reading community had to guess whom he was talking about himself. For example, the poem "Humorous flair" (1862) is an epigram on B.N. Chicherin. The subject not explicitly named, but a number of details help contemporaries to understand who is in question:

With humorous flair

Beneath your doctor's toga,

Beneath your wise wig,

In the curves of your stern speech

The nagajka of a Cossack,

However, we see it in your buttonholes, in your cuffs.

And your polemical habits,

That you are not of our regiment.

B.N. Chicherin at this time – professor of Moscow University ("doctor's toga", "wise wig"), he speaks out for autocracy ("nagayka chuy Cossack"), against parliamentary, to which, as he believes, Russia is not yet ready. It is interesting that in this epigram, as in many other works by Kurochkin, there are features of his favorite genre – parody. Thus, the line "in conveys, buttonholes" refers to the words of Skalozub from the comedy "Woe from Wit" by A. S. Griboyedov: "The uniforms have conveys, epaulets, buttonholes". However, this element interpreted as a postmodernist allusion, except that it made a century before the appearance of postmodernism...

The poet is concerned with various social phenomena and specific incidents. For example, he

was outraged by the trial of Hieromonk Gabriel, who had caught to death a ten-year-old pupil in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra, but was acquitted by the court, which agitated A.M. Zhemchuzhnikov most of all:

...Even if it is the whole school.

The meek shepherd in his drunken form.

("How not to shriek here with the poet" 1875).

The subjects of Kurochkin's epigrams show the breadth of his views, his deep humanism, and his indifferent attitude to those negative processes, which were taking place in the post-reform period in Russia.

V. S. Kurochkin created also epigrams-epitaphs, for example, "Epitaph to Bavius" (1861) is a "parody" of A. S. Pushkin's poem "To portrait of Vyazemsky" (again postmodernism?) and epigram on P. A. Vyazemsky:

Fate wished to show all its humor in him,

And amusingly combined nothingness with ranks,

The wrinkles of an old man with the wit of an infant.

In addition, the old man's wrinkles and infantile stiffness.

The combination of the epigram with the epitaph (a genre of tombstone inscription) is a genetic feature of the genre and dates back to antiquity, when the epitaph was a variant of the epigram. However, as the epigram genre acquired a satirical orientation, which became acutely satirical in the second half of the nineteenth century, this combination became ethically dangerous. Naturally, the epigram-epitaph was admissible only for a person alive at the time of its writing. However, joking about the coming, inevitable death corresponds to the peculiarities of the Russian picture of the world [4:64], let us remember the Russian phraseology where there are many humorous synonyms for the lexeme die: to play in a box, to kick off skates, to stretch legs, to give up oak. The form of the epitaph required from

the poet a strictly serious tone and a deliberately positive description of the “deceased”, which contributes to the contrast between the serious and the humorous and, consequently, increases the comic effect.

D.D. Minaev has many epigrams written on a variety of occasions. First, he dedicates his epigrams to Iskra’s literary opponents – conservative and reactionary periodicals. In this case, a favorite artistic device of the poet is a pun play on the name of the publication in the epigram. For example, the epigram “To the Gazette “Day”” (1861 or 1862):

There is no better madrigal for the day:

Neither day nor night, neither darkness nor light.

D.D. Minaev alludes to such a feature of the newspaper’s policy (the weekly newspaper Den published in Moscow in 1861-1865) as a combination of apparent opposition to the government with pro-government sentiments, that is, the hypocrisy and duplicity of the newspaper publishers.

In the epigram “To the Niva magazine” (1870) the satirist expresses his opinion about the quality of the materials published there:

Let your zeal not acknowledge you,

We believe in your success, brilliant and swift:

Only the “field” that bears good fruit,

The manure not spared for it.

The magazine “Niva” began to publish in 1869 in St. Petersburg, that is, this edition was new at the time of writing the epigram. We can outline the situation of the creation of the epigram: D.D. Minaev studied the issues of the new magazine for several months, understood its doctrine and in a succinct quatrain presented his view to the reader. Indeed, Niva was alien to social problems, which, in the opinion of the Iskrovites, was unacceptable. The magazine intended for the “well-meaning” strata of the population and published mainly serious literary, historical and

popular-scientific materials, accompanied by numerous illustrations.

The periodicals are also devoted to epigrams “To the Journal, which changed its editor” (1877), “Herald of Europe” (1883) and others (1883).

Secondly, D. D. Minaev uses epigrams to make a vivid and frequently acerbic evaluation of the art phenomena of his time. He evaluates works of painting (“Beggars (Mr. Gauger)”, 1862), newly printed novels (“Inscription to the novel of Mr. Boborykin “On the Road!” 1862 or 1863). Plays (“To the play “Alien Wine” by Mr. Ustryalov”, 1863 or 1864; “On the reading of the drama “Mamaevo Battleship”, 1864 or 1865) and poetry collections (“To N. Shcherbina, who published the collection “Bee”, 1865), new plays, new roles of actors (“To Boborykin as Chatsky”, 1864). The significance of such a lively reaction to the events of cultural life – in its speed, almost instantly. We should think that authors and heroes of cultural events as well as their spectators or readers were waiting for caustic epigrams of this type. In many ways, such epigrams served to create public opinion.

For example, after visiting an art exhibition, the poet creates epigrams on several paintings. In the epigram “To a Picture of a Whipped Game by Mr. Gravert” (1863), he uses a pun, playing around with the word game in the title of the painting:

Here you do not have to look at the signpost,

You can see here all at once,

What is in the pictures before us?

Game, men, only game...!

It is easy to understand that the motives that prompted D.D. Minaev to make fun of this or that work are, once again, the desire to see the topical in art and the aversion to works unrelated to contemporary social problems. At the same time, Minaev’s epigrams sound very intelligent, there is no direct insult in them, the mockery consists in the use of a language game, which the reader himself must

unravel and approve. The reader, who has made an intellectual effort to perceive the joke, gets the impression that it is so natural, as if he himself came up with the pun. We think that D.D. Minaev's caustic and topical epigrams quickly spread in society, passed from mouth to mouth, and even became winged.

Thirdly, D. D. Minaev addresses his epigrams to specific people, while necessarily indicating, fully or briefly, their names: "To M.O. Mikeshe" (1871) "To Kn. Meshchersky" (1877), "M. N. Kiatko" (1880 or 1881) "V. Kokorev" (1884), etc. In this case, the reason for writing the epigram may be some event in the life of a person, for example, a passion for sculpture artist M.O. Mikeshe:

Our brave artist, Orpheus in caricature!

Your talent is impossible not to appreciate:

You make the stones speak...

On your own powerlessness in sculpture (1871).

Epigrams D.D. Minaev addressed not only to specific events and people, but also to collective images: "To a nameless journalist" (1868), "To an amateur actor" (1871), "In the office of the censor" (1873), "To one of many" (1879). In these works, the poet ridiculed the most outrageous social phenomena or types, such as a lecturer who does not have the ability to captivate the audience:

It is not marvelous that all his hearers were asleep

At his lectures, but that he himself

Did not himself fall asleep from his own reading,

Is much more worthy of amazement.

(To One of the Lecturers, 1888).

D.D. Minaev resented any situation in which a person did not show considerable talent in the activity he was performing, whatever it might be. This indicates that the poet had a fine artistic taste, a flair for any violation of beauty, any deviation from harmony.

By the way, not all of D.D. Minaev's epigrams filled with barbed mockery. There are also good-natured jokes. For example, the epigram on the paintings of I. I. Shishkin on the theme of the forest ("The Forest" I. Shishkin, 1881), in general, looks like a praise for the skill of the artist, who accurately and authentically reproduce the phenomenon of nature:

The forest so truthfully written,

That all involuntarily marvel.

In such a forest, the mockery of the devil

In addition, epigrams get lost.

Only a careful reading reveals a barely hinted mockery of the artist's excessive truthfulness, of his desire fully comply with the requirements of accuracy and authenticity in art. However, such an epigram shows the satirist's lack of pointless acrimony about any work of art, any author. D.D. Minaev actively rejected the absence of talent and just as actively glorified talent in its presence.

L.F. Ershov, having examined Russian epigrams of the second half of the XVII – early XX centuries, called A.M. Zhemchuzhnikov "the last major epigrammatist of the XIX century" [7; 37], which both assesses his significant role in the development of Russian epigrams and points to the decline of the genre in the late XIX century.

The satirist combined epigrams in cycles devoted to a theme (problem). For example, the cycle "In an Album of Modern Portraits" (1870) includes 13 epigrams. These are sketches, portraits of typical representatives of the era, and the titles do not indicate who exactly is in question, and the readers, therefore, invited to guess themselves, and perhaps recognize themselves. It is not difficult to recognize, as A.M. Zhemchuzhnikov depicts the details of the portrait very accurately. For example, the portrait of a citizen dissatisfied with the emancipation of the peasants:

Since then, filled with anxiety,

How on their feet the peasants have become.

He is amazed that so many feet

The earth not yet been shaken.

The satirist tries to capture as much as possible the types present in contemporary society: these include the landowner, who for the tenth year has been deciding “to beat or not to beat” (the echo with the beginning of Hamlet’s monologue enhances the satirical effect through stylistic contrast), and the journalists, “the cook of the printed cook”. Moreover, the aristocracy, who from the “cream of society” in newspaper publications have turned into, the “salt of the earth,” and the liberated peasant, who is “thrown into a chill” by the “scarecrow of freedom”, and the secular vacuous man who is “forever talking...” No one can escape the sharp pen of A. M. Zhemchuzhnikov.

The form of the epigram-epitaph allows the satirist to raise the most burning, important issues, such as the problem of political censorship of literary works and periodicals, very strict in the post-reform period. The epigram “Our censorship” (1871) is devoted to the imaginary easing of censorship requirements (in 1865, “Provisional Rules” appeared, which freed periodicals from prior censorship before printing an issue):

You are gone... Your hand

Thy hand not lifted up to shit,

However, your spirit is with us

In its immortality, you cannot help but believe...

A.M. Zhemchuzhnikov shows that real easing of censorship is impossible, and with the political structure of society that existed in the second half of the 19th century, censorship is a constant, “immortal” phenomenon. He was right, of course, and in 1872, the requirement of prior political censorship of periodicals restored.

The very fact of writing an epigram in the form of an epitaph allows the author to begin ironizing even before the epitaph written, for example, if the tragically deceased announced as progressing:

He grew up so honest, so clever,

He cared so much for his little brothers,

That he strangled by Russia

In her grateful, embrace.

(“To Our Progress”, 1871).

The construction of the epigram in accordance with the classical requirements of the epitaph is one of the ways to create a comic effect. Indeed, as we can see, A.M. Zhemchuzhnikov in the first lines lists the fine qualities of the “deceased”, and in the last lines, he mentions the reason for his “death”.

A cycle of epigrams “Notes on Some Publicism” (1895) dedicated to A.M. Zhemchuzhnikov’s comrades-in-arms – journalists dealing with political issues. In these epigrams, the poet mocks such qualities of publicists as malice, bad-mouthing (“Touching everything, riddled everything”), lack of a clear own position (“He can recognize neither darkness from light, / neither evil from good”), repetition of others’ thoughts (“parrot speech”). Overall, one feels that the satirist has a low opinion of “the other in the press of the power bars”.

Conclusion

In the use of the genre of the epigram, a single trend of satirical poetry of the second half of the XIX century was the sharp political and social orientation of the works. Epigram of antique type ceased to exist on the pages of the press and completely replaced by the satirical epigram (including such varieties as epitaph). Satirists successfully used in their work such genre features of the epigram as brevity, two-part nature (presence of exposition, representing a person or phenomenon, and conclusion), topicality (dedication to an actual problem, event, a popular person for one reason or another). It is in this form, which has since become a classic; the epigram lives on in all further Russian literature.

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