

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ANIMAL INTO A LITERARY SUBJECT AND THE PROBLEM OF RENOUNCING ANTHROPOMORPHISM

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Abstract:

The article analyses the process by which an animal becomes a literary subject and the problem of renouncing anthropomorphism within this process. Three levels of anthropomorphism are distinguished – the lexical, the narrative and the cognitive – and the manifestation of each in the text is illustrated by passages from the original. Three devices of renunciation are examined: leaving the conjecture open, conveying the inner state through an external sign, and acknowledging the limits of knowledge. The analysis substantiates that a complete rejection of anthropomorphism is impossible and that managing it by marking the limits of knowledge constitutes the practical solution.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, literary subject, inner state, limits of knowledge, form of conjecture, posthumanism, animal image

HAYVONNING BADIY SUBYEKTGA AYLANISHI VA ANTROPOMORFIZMDAN VOZ KECHISH MUAMMOSI

Annotatsiya:

Maqolada hayvonning badiiy subyektga aylanish jarayoni va bu jarayonda antropomorfizmdan voz kechish muammosi tahlil qilinadi. Antropomorfizmning uch darajasi – leksik, bayoniy va kognitiv darajalar ajratilib, har birining matndagi ko'rinishi aslyat parchalari bilan izohlanadi. Voz kechishning uch usuli, ya'ni taxminni ochiq qoldirish, ichki holatni tashqi belgi orqali berish va bilishning chegarasini e'tirof etish ko'rib chiqiladi. Tahlil natijasida antropomorfizmni butunlay rad etish imkonsizligi, uni bilishning chegarasini belgilash orqali boshqarish esa amaliy yechim ekani asoslanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: antropomorfizm, badiiy subyekt, ichki holat, bilish chegarasi, taxmin shakli, posthumanizm, hayvon obrazi

ПРЕВРАЩЕНИЕ ЖИВОТНОГО В ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ СУБЪЕКТ И ПРОБЛЕМА ОТКАЗА ОТ АНТРОПОМОРФИЗМА

Аннотация:

В статье анализируется процесс превращения животного в художественный субъект и проблема отказа от антропоморфизма в рамках этого процесса. Выделяются три уровня антропоморфизма – лексический, нарративный и когнитивный, проявление каждого из них иллюстрируется фрагментами оригинального текста. Рассматриваются три приёма отказа: сохранение предположения открытым, передача внутреннего состояния через внешний признак и признание границ познания. Анализ обосновывает невозможность полного отказа от антропоморфизма и практичность его регулирования через обозначение границ познания.

Ключевые слова: антропоморфизм, художественный субъект, внутреннее состояние, границы познания, форма предположения, постгуманизм, образ животного

Introduction:

The demand to avoid anthropomorphism has become one of the recurring requirements of contemporary animal studies. Its rationale is clear: when human feelings and motives are ascribed to a creature, the creature itself disappears and only a reflection of the observer remains. The requirement is therefore directed against a genuine analytical danger. In literary practice, however, the requirement produces a difficulty of its own. A narrative that grants no inner dimension to a creature cannot represent it as a subject at all, and the animal returns to the status of an object. The demand and the aim thus appear to contradict one another.

The relevance of the study lies in the fact that this contradiction has been formulated theoretically but rarely examined on concrete textual material. The aim of the article is to distinguish the levels at which anthropomorphism operates and to describe the devices by which a text may regulate rather than abolish it.

Review of the literature:

A theoretical study of posthumanist criticism has argued that the boundary between the human and the animal is maintained by discourse rather than by biology, and that literary texts participate in this maintenance [1]. The claim shifts the question from representation to the mechanism that produces it. A work devoted to the companion species has proposed that relations between beings should be described through mutual constitution rather than through projection [2]. This proposal offers an alternative to both anthropomorphism and its simple negation. A collective study of the history of anthropomorphism has demonstrated that the notion has changed its evaluative charge several times and that its rejection is itself historically conditioned [3]. The observation prevents the requirement from being treated as self-evident. Within literary theory it has been shown that the ascription of an inner state to a non-human being is not a single operation but a series of distinct devices, each with its own degree of

assertiveness [4]. This insight underlies the three-level distinction proposed below. A study of narrative technique has examined the forms in which a narrator marks uncertainty about the mind of another being [5]. The forms described there – conjecture, question, negation of knowledge – are directly applicable to animal representation. Finally, a specialised investigation of the writer whose text serves as material here has noted that his protagonists constantly attribute reasoning to creatures while simultaneously denying that such attribution is reliable [6]. The present article develops this observation into a systematic description.

Research methodology:

The study employs textual analysis, narrative analysis and the descriptive method. The material consists of the original text of “The Old Man and the Sea”, chosen because the attribution of inner states to a creature occurs there with unusual frequency and is repeatedly qualified by the protagonist himself. Three levels of anthropomorphism were established in advance. The lexical level covers the vocabulary used for the creature; the narrative level covers the syntactic forms through which intentions are ascribed; the cognitive level covers the assumptions about the creature’s reasoning. For each occurrence the level and the degree of assertiveness were recorded. All quotations are given from the original edition with the page indicated in square brackets, and an Uzbek rendering is supplied in parentheses as the author’s translation. The conclusions are formulated within the limits of the selected text.

Analysis and results:

The lexical level is the most visible and also the least assertive. Here the creature receives words that belong to the human sphere without any claim about its inner life. The protagonist applies to the fish the vocabulary of character: “Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother” [7 – B. 102.] (“Men hech qachon sendan buyukroq, go‘zalroq, xotirjamroq va olijanobroq narsani ko‘rmaganman, birodar” – muallif tarjimai). The evaluative terms used here belong to the ethical description of persons, yet the sentence makes no claim about the creature’s consciousness. The lexical level therefore transfers value rather than experience, and its removal would impoverish the text without altering the epistemic situation. A second lexical device is the address itself. Speaking to a being that cannot answer is a recurrent feature of the text, and the narrator supplies a motivation for it that is entirely human: solitude. The device thus reveals more about the speaker than about the addressee.

The narrative level is more assertive, since here the creature is granted intentions through syntax. The text ascribes plans and decisions to the fish, but almost always in an interrogative or conditional form: “I wonder if he has any plans or if he is just as desperate as I am?” [7 – B. 54.] (“Uning biror rejasi bormikin yoki u ham men singari umidsizmik?” – muallif tarjimai). The interrogative form is decisive. The sentence raises the possibility of a plan and simultaneously refuses to affirm it. This is the first device of renunciation: the conjecture is left open, and the reader receives the hypothesis together with its uncertainty [5]. The same device governs the estimation of the creature’s age and nature: “He is wonderful and strange and who

knows how old he is” [7 – B. 53.] (“U ajoyib va g’alati, uning necha yoshda ekanini kim biladi” – muallif tarjimasi). The rhetorical question marks the boundary of knowledge without denying the qualities that precede it.

The second device consists in conveying an inner state through an external sign. Instead of naming what the creature feels, the text describes what may be observed and leaves the inference to the reader. The protagonist reasons about the effect of pain in purely physical terms: “Maybe if I can increase the tension a little it will hurt him and he will jump” [7 – B. 59.] (“Balki tarangligini bir oz kuchaytirsam, unga og’riq beradi va u sakraydi” – muallif tarjimasi). Here pain is not ascribed as an experience but predicted as a cause of movement. The formulation belongs to the vocabulary of craft, yet it presupposes sensitivity in the creature. The device therefore does not eliminate anthropomorphism; it converts an assertion into a working hypothesis. The cognitive level is the most assertive and the most problematic. At this level the text ascribes to the creature not merely feeling but reasoning, that is, the capacity to weigh alternatives. The protagonist approaches this level several times but withdraws each time.

The withdrawal is performed by an explicit acknowledgement of the limits of knowledge, which constitutes the third device. Speaking to a bird, the protagonist notes the impossibility of communication directly: “But he said nothing of this to the bird who could not understand him anyway” [7 – B. 60.] (“Ammo u bu haqda qushga hech narsa demadi, chunki qush baribir uni tushunmasdi” – muallif tarjimasi). The sentence is instructive because it contains both operations at once. The creature is addressed, which is an anthropomorphic act, and the futility of the address is stated, which is its correction. The two movements occur within a single sentence and neither cancels the other.

A comparable structure appears at the moment of greatest confusion, when the roles of the participants become indistinct: “is he bringing me in or am I bringing him in?” [7 – B. 109.] (“U meni olib ketyaptimi yoki men uni olib ketyapmanmi?” – muallif tarjimasi). The reversal is not resolved, and the unresolved question marks the point at which the human framework ceases to apply. Taken together, the three devices produce a regulated rather than an abolished anthropomorphism. The text does not refrain from attributing inner states; it attributes them and then marks the attribution as uncertain. The result is a representation in which the creature possesses an interior that remains inaccessible.

This structure has a further consequence for the status of the animal image. Because the interior is posited but not described, the creature cannot be reduced to a symbol: a symbol requires a determinate meaning, whereas here the meaning is deliberately withheld [1]. The regulated form also explains why the removal of anthropomorphism would be self-defeating. If the conjectures were deleted, the creature would lose the very dimension that distinguishes it from an object, and the text would return to the tradition in which the animal is a mere occasion for human action [3].

A distinction should nevertheless be drawn between the creature that occupies the centre of the narrative and those that appear at its margins. The sharks receive no conjectures about their reasoning, and their behaviour is described exclusively through motion. The three devices are

therefore applied selectively, and their application itself marks the hierarchy of the animal images [4]. The birds occupy an intermediate position. They are addressed and pitied, yet no plan is ascribed to them; the protagonist reflects on their condition in general terms rather than on the intentions of an individual bird. The intermediate case confirms that the devices form a scale rather than a binary opposition.

A final observation concerns the reciprocity of the operation. As the creature acquires attributed interiority, the protagonist increasingly describes himself in terms belonging to the animal sphere: endurance, instinct, the behaviour of the hands treated as semi-independent agents. The two movements are symmetrical, and the boundary is eroded from both sides [2]. A further case shows how the lexical level may borrow from the vocabulary of kinship without asserting anything about the creature. The protagonist regrets the killing in terms that would be used of a person: “I am sorry that I killed the fish though” [7 – B. 114.] (“Baribir baliqni o‘ldirganimdan afsusdaman” – muallif tarjimasi). Regret is directed at an act, not at a mind, and the sentence therefore remains within the lexical level.

The narrative level also employs comparison as a means of ascribing capacity indirectly. The creature is placed beside the speaker in a shared condition, and the shared condition implies a shared faculty: “Keep your head clear and know how to suffer like a man” [7 – B. 102.] (“Boshingni tiniq saqla va odam kabi azob chekishni bil” – muallif tarjimasi). The instruction is addressed to the self, yet the standard it invokes has just been applied to the creature. A related device consists in transferring the vocabulary of thought to parts of the human body, which produces the symmetry described above: the hands are addressed, blamed and encouraged as though they were separate participants. The operation lowers the boundary between the human and the non-human from the human side, and it occurs at the same points in the narrative as the attributions directed at the creature [2].

Finally, the text contains one instance in which the attribution is withdrawn immediately after being made. The protagonist notes his own uncertainty about his mental state and, in the same passage, revises a conclusion he had drawn about the creature. The revision demonstrates that the conjectures are not presented as knowledge but as working hypotheses subject to correction [5]. The three levels may be arranged on a scale of assertiveness, and this arrangement has a practical value for analysis. The lexical level asserts nothing and may be used freely; the narrative level asserts a possibility and requires a marker of uncertainty; the cognitive level asserts a capacity and requires an explicit acknowledgement of the limits of knowledge. A text that observes this gradation avoids both extremes: the naive attribution of a human mind and the reduction of the creature to a mechanism. The gradation also offers a criterion for evaluating other texts. If a narrative ascribes reasoning without any marker of uncertainty, the creature becomes a disguised human being; if it refuses even the lexical level, the creature becomes an object. The presence and the distribution of the markers therefore provide a measurable indicator of the status assigned to the animal image [4].

Conclusion:

Anthropomorphism in the analysed text operates at three levels. The lexical level transfers evaluative vocabulary without making claims about consciousness; the narrative level ascribes intentions through syntax; the cognitive level ascribes reasoning and is the most assertive of the three. Three devices regulate these operations. The conjecture is left open through interrogative and conditional forms; the inner state is conveyed through an external sign rather than named; and the limits of knowledge are acknowledged explicitly within the same sentence in which the attribution is made. The result is a regulated rather than an abolished anthropomorphism. The creature is granted an interior that remains inaccessible, and this inaccessibility prevents its reduction to a symbol while preserving its status as a subject. The devices are applied selectively: the central creature receives all three, the marginal creatures receive none, and the intermediate cases receive some. The selective application itself constitutes an indicator of the hierarchy of animal images within the text, and this indicator may be tested on a broader body of material.

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