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THE ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE MOTIF OF UNIVERSAL CATASTROPHE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK SCIENCE FICTION

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Abstract:
The article compares the interpretation of the motif of universal catastrophe in English and Uzbek science fiction. The English tradition is traced from Byron, Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells and M.P. Shiel to A.C. Doyle's "The Poison Belt" and the Atlantis episode of "The Maracot Deep", while Uzbek material is represented by H. Shayxov's "Sirli nur", "Mutamax", "Olovdan chiqqan odam" and the novel "Tutash olamlar". Five parameters are used: the source of catastrophe, its scale, the response of the characters, the outcome and the moral meaning. It is shown that the English catastrophe is predominantly cosmic and is answered by stoic contemplation and renewal, whereas the Uzbek catastrophe is predominantly anthropogenic and is presented as a testament and a warning.

Keywords: Universal catastrophe, disaster, apocalypse, motif, cosmic threat, ecological warning, renewal, testament, Doyle, Shayxov.

INGLIZ VA O‘ZBEK ILMIY FANTASTIKASIDA UMUMBASHARIY HALOKAT MOTIVINING BADIIY TALQINI

Annotatsiya:
Maqolada ingliz va o‘zbek ilmiy fantastikasida umumbashariy halokat motivining talqini qiyoslanadi. Ingliz an’anasi Bayron, M.Shelli, G.Uells va M.P.Shildan A.K.Doylning "Zaharlangan mintaqa" qissasi va "Marakot jarligi"dagi Atlantida epizodigacha kuzatiladi, o‘zbek materialini esa H.Shayxovning "Sirli nur", "Mutamax", "Olovdan chiqqan odam" hikoyalari va "Tutash olamlar" romani tashkil etadi. Halokat manbai, ko‘lami, qahramonlar munosabati, yakun va axloqiy ma’no parametrlari qo‘llanadi. Ingliz fantastikasida halokat asosan kosmik bo‘lib, unga stoik mushohada va yangilanish bilan javob berilishi, o‘zbek fantastikasida esa u asosan inson faoliyati natijasi bo‘lib, vasiyat va ogohlantirish sifatida taqdim etilishi ko‘rsatiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: umumbashariy halokat, falokat, apokalipsis, motiv, kosmik xavf, ekologik ogohlantirish, yangilanish, vasiyat, Doyl, Shayxov

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ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ МОТИВА ВСЕОБЩЕЙ КАТАСТРОФЫ В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ И УЗБЕКСКОЙ НАУЧНОЙ ФАНТАСТИКЕ

Аннотация

В статье сопоставляется интерпретация мотива всеобщей катастрофы в английской и узбекской научной фантастике. Английская традиция прослеживается от Байрона, М. Шелли, Г. Уэллса и М.Ф. Шила до повести А.К. Дойла «Отравленный пояс» и атлантидского эпизода «Маракотовой бездны», узбекский материал представлен рассказами Х. Шайхова «Таинственный свет», «Мутамах», «Человек, вышедший из огня» и романом «Сопредельные миры». Используются пять параметров: источник катастрофы, её масштаб, реакция героев, исход и нравственный смысл. Показано, что в английской фантастике катастрофа преимущественно космическая и встречает стоическое созерцание и обновление, тогда как в узбекской она преимущественно антропогенная и подаётся как завещание и предостережение.

Ключевые слова: всеобщая катастрофа, бедствие, апокалипсис, мотив, космическая угроза, экологическое предостережение, обновление, завещание, Дойл, Шайхов

Introduction:

The idea of the end of the world is as old as mythology. The flood, the fire that consumes the universe and the last judgement are present in the sacred and folk traditions of many peoples, including the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. Science fiction inherited this motif but changed its foundation. In myth the catastrophe is sent by the gods as punishment or as a phase of the cosmic cycle. In science fiction it is explained by natural causes or by the consequences of human activity, and the writer asks not why the world is punished but how human beings behave when their world is threatened. The universal catastrophe thus becomes a test of the moral and social foundations of a civilisation.

English literature developed this motif earlier and more consistently than any other. It was in Britain that the “disaster story” became a recognised form, and the reasons for this, as scholars have noted, lie partly in the national mentality and partly in the historical experience of the country [1]. In Uzbek literature science fiction emerged only in the late 1960s, but the motif of catastrophe appeared in it quickly and acquired distinctive features connected with the ecological and historical experience of the region. The aim of the article is to compare the interpretation of the motif in the two literatures and to determine its common and specific features.

Literature review:

“The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction” notes that disaster stories were written mainly in Britain and were less popular in American magazine fiction, whose optimistic and expansionist ideology was at odds with the idea of global destruction. Among the early examples it names H.G. Wells’s “The Star” (1897), M.P. Shiel’s “The Purple Cloud” (1901) and Doyle’s “The Poison Belt” (1913), noting that in Doyle’s story it is not the atmosphere but the luminiferous

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ether that is poisoned, and that the poisoning ultimately proves non-fatal [1]. In the same source Byron's poem "Darkness" (1816) and Mary Shelley's "The Last Man" (1826) are regarded as forerunners of the scientific romance [2]. B. Stableford and J. Clute compared the ending of "The Poison Belt" with Wells's novel "In the Days of the Comet" (1906), in which humanity is morally transformed by a cosmic event [3]. M.I. Timoshkina wrote about the feeling of crisis and global catastrophe that marked European culture between the late nineteenth century and the Second World War [4].

In Uzbek literary studies O. Sharafiddinov emphasised that Shayxov's fiction is directed not at entertainment but at the eternal problems of humanity and at the reader's conscience [5]. F. Salayev examined the problems of man and nature in contemporary Uzbek science fiction [6], and M.Q. Obidjonova pointed out the collectivist orientation of Shayxov's stories in comparison with the individualism of Bradbury [7]. A comparison of the catastrophe motif in English and Uzbek science fiction has not yet been undertaken.

Research Methodology:

The study uses historical-literary, comparative-typological and motif analysis. The English material is represented by Doyle's "The Poison Belt" [8] and the Atlantis episode of "The Maracot Deep" [9], set against the background of the tradition described in the literature review. The Uzbek material includes H. Shayxov's stories "Sirli nur" ("The Mysterious Light") [10], "Mutamax" [11] and "Olovdan chiqqan odam" ("The Man Who Came Out of the Fire") [12], as well as the novel "Tutash olamlar" ("Adjacent Worlds") [13]. The motif was described according to five parameters: the source of the catastrophe, its scale, the response of the characters, the outcome and the moral meaning. Uzbek quotations are given in the original with the author's translation.

Analysis and results:

The English tradition of the universal catastrophe developed in several stages. In Byron's "Darkness" the extinction of the sun leads to the moral collapse of humanity, and the poem shows people burning their homes for light and killing each other for food. Mary Shelley's "The Last Man" describes the slow death of mankind from plague and the loneliness of the sole survivor. In these Romantic works the catastrophe is cosmic or natural, and the emphasis falls on the despair of the individual in the face of nothingness. At the end of the nineteenth century, with Wells and Shiel, the catastrophe receives a scientific explanation, a comet or a poisonous volcanic cloud, while retaining the Romantic interest in the moral state of the survivors. Doyle's "The Poison Belt" belongs to this second, scientific stage, but its ending introduces an optimistic correction.

In "The Poison Belt" the source of the catastrophe is cosmic. The Earth enters a zone of the ether that has become poisonous, and all living beings fall into a death-like state. Challenger and his friends survive by shutting themselves in a room with cylinders of oxygen [8]. The scale of the catastrophe is universal, and Doyle conveys it through a series of carefully chosen scenes rather than through statistics. The most moving of them occurs when the heroes drive

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to London through the countryside. Near a convent they see schoolchildren kneeling on a green slope, nuns in front of them and the mother superior standing alone above. Malone writes that they seem to have been warned of the danger and to have "died beautifully", gathered together for a last common lesson [8]. The narrator admits that he cannot find words for the feelings that the scene arouses and that the best he can do is simply to state the facts [8]. The restraint of the description is itself an artistic device. The documentary principle of Doyle's narrative becomes a form of reverence.

The response of the characters to the catastrophe is the philosophical centre of the novella. Lord John, who has seen death many times, says that a universal death is terrible. Challenger answers with an analogy. If a man were sent alone in an open boat to an unknown destination, his loneliness and uncertainty would crush him. But if the voyage were made in a good ship that carried all his relatives and friends, the situation would be quite different [8]. The common fate of humanity makes death less terrible than individual death. This stoic attitude is accompanied by the observation of the dying world. From the window the heroes watch darkness descend, and Challenger points to a long red line on the southern horizon, explaining that Brighton is burning [8]. The catastrophe is watched rather than resisted. The heroes are spectators and commentators of the end of the world.

The outcome reverses the expectations of the reader. The poison proves to cause only a deep catalepsy, and humanity awakens, recognises the scale of what has happened and begins to rebuild. Stableford and Clute connect this ending with the moral renewal of humanity in Wells [3]. For Doyle the universal catastrophe is a trial that leads to purification. The world is not destroyed but reminded of its fragility and of the unity of the human race.

The Atlantis episode of "The Maracot Deep" shows another interpretation of the motif, the catastrophe as moral punishment. The heroes, who have found the descendants of the Atlanteans at the bottom of the ocean, are shown pictures of the ancient history of the sunken continent. Reformers warned the people who had sunk into corruption and finally abandoned them to their fate, and the whole land perished because of the depravity introduced by the Lord of the Dark Face [9]. One of the interlocutors compares this destruction with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah [9]. Here the catastrophe is caused not by the cosmos but by the moral decay of a highly developed civilisation. Doyle's late fiction thus turns from the cosmic disaster to the ethical one, a shift that brings it closer to the Uzbek tradition.

Shayxov's story "Sirli nur" is the most direct Uzbek parallel to the Atlantis episode. The astronaut Davron lands on the planet Ziyo and finds a civilisation on the verge of extinction. He witnesses the last minutes of its final representative, a being about a thousand years old, whose eyes express unprecedented fatigue and boredom and who puts an end to his own life [10]. The story ends with the testament of the "elders of the planet", who hand over to the newcomers all their reserves of knowledge and energy so that they may restore the planet. The testament contains the words: "Bizni xudbinlik barbod qildi. Inson abadiy emas, lekin insoniyat abadiy!" ("Selfishness destroyed us. Man is not eternal, but humanity is eternal!") [10]. The source of the catastrophe is the moral failure of a civilisation, as in Doyle's Atlantis. But the outcome differs. In Doyle the corrupt land perishes and its lesson is told by survivors. In

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Shayxov the dying civilisation itself addresses those who come after, and the catastrophe becomes a testament. The ethical emphasis shifts from punishment to responsibility before future generations.

In “Mutamax” the motif acquires an ecological content rooted in a real regional disaster. A spherical mutant that has arrived from space absorbs trees and grows, and the tissue cut by laser beams grows together again [11]. The military are powerless. The decisive role belongs to the scientist, who advises leading the creature to the dried-up shores of the Aral Sea. There a salt storm, saturated with poisonous chemicals, destroys it [11]. The fantastic threat is defeated by a real catastrophe, and this paradoxical solution reverses the usual logic of the motif. The cosmic monster is less deadly than the environment created by human beings. In Doyle the poisoned ether comes from outside; in Shayxov the poisoned land is made at home.

The motif of human-made catastrophe also appears in Shayxov’s historical-fantastic story “Olovdan chiqqan odam”. The action takes place in the ancient Kipchak steppe during the Mongol invasion. The hero Nurbek, who can walk on fire, comes out of the flames unharmed, and the tribe burns its weapons. The author calls this event “odamzodning qirg‘inbarot urush va bosqinchiliklarga qarshi ilk isyoni” (“humanity’s first revolt against devastating war and conquest”) [12]. Here the catastrophe is war, and the response is not stoic contemplation but a collective moral act. The tribe renounces violence as a whole community, and the fantastic element serves to express a pacifist ideal through the forms of folk legend.

In the novel “Tutash olamlar” the motif of catastrophe enters the inner world of the characters. In the chapter set in a psychiatric hospital, one of the patients, Qumri, speaks in her monologue of cotton fields and poisoned zones that exist even at the bottom of the ocean [13]. The words of a woman considered insane carry a bitter ecological truth. The motif of catastrophe here is not a plot event but a diagnosis of the state of the modern world, and the asylum becomes a place where the truth can be spoken.

The two writers also differ in the narrative form through which the catastrophe is transmitted. In “The Poison Belt” the account is written by the journalist Malone, who survived inside the sealed room and records what he saw as a witness. His text is a chronicle of the end of the world written after the world has been restored, and its authority rests on personal observation. In “Sirli nur” the decisive text is not a chronicle but a testament composed by the dying civilisation for those who will come after it [10]. The witness speaks to his contemporaries about what happened, while the testator speaks to the future about what must not happen again. This difference in the speech act corresponds to the difference in the function of the motif. Doyle’s catastrophe is a story told after the danger has passed, and the reader is invited to share the relief and the lesson of the survivors. Shayxov’s catastrophe is a message whose addressee is the reader himself, and the lesson is formulated as an obligation. In “Olovdan chiqqan odam” the same orientation towards posterity is expressed through the form of legend, in which the act of the ancestors is presented as a precept for their descendants [12].

The comparison according to the five parameters yields the following results. The source of the catastrophe in Doyle is predominantly external and cosmic (the poisoned ether), although in his late work it becomes moral (Atlantis). In Shayxov it is predominantly internal and

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anthropogenic: selfishness, war, the poisoning of the land. The scale in Doyle is global and concerns the Earth as a whole, while Shayxov either transfers it to another planet or localises it in a recognisable region, the Aral Sea or the Kipchak steppe, which nevertheless stands for humanity. The response of the characters in Doyle is stoic contemplation and commentary, while in Shayxov it is collective action or a moral act of the community. The outcome in Doyle is renewal after a trial; in Shayxov it is a testament or a warning addressed to the future. The moral meaning in Doyle is the unity and fragility of the human race; in Shayxov it is responsibility for the consequences of human actions.

Conclusion

The motif of universal catastrophe in English and Uzbek science fiction shows both common and specific features. In both traditions the catastrophe is a test of civilisation, and both writers analysed here connect it with moral questions. The English tradition, from Byron and Mary Shelley to Wells, Shiel and Doyle, developed the motif mainly as a cosmic or natural event, and in “The Poison Belt” Doyle gave it an optimistic ending of trial and renewal. His late Atlantis episode introduces the idea of catastrophe as moral punishment. In Shayxov the catastrophe is predominantly anthropogenic and is associated with selfishness, war and ecological destruction, the last of which reflects the real experience of the Aral Sea disaster. The Uzbek writer presents catastrophe as a testament and a warning to future generations and emphasises collective rather than individual response. These differences are explained by the historical context of each literature and by the collectivist orientation of Uzbek science fiction. The conclusions are limited to the works analysed.

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