

Classicism In French Literature of the 17th Century

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Annotation: This article examines the life and work of the famous French poet-fabulist of the 17th century Jean de la Fontaine. The diversity, rhythmic perfection of his works, skillful use of archaisms in them, a sober view of the world and their vivid imagery are analyzed.

Key words: Jean de la Fontaine, fable, rhythm, 17th century French literature

Introduction

J. La Fontaine went down in history as a famous French poet-fabulist of the 17th century. His works were distinguished by an amazing variety, rhythmic perfection, skillful use of archaisms, a sober view of the world and vivid imagery. The poet often used personifications, while relying on national traditions. La Fontaine's significance for the history and theory of literature lies in the fact that he created a new genre, borrowing an external plot from ancient authors.

In antiquity, the fable served as a model of worldly wisdom, a means of teaching and a form of satire. In the early stages of human civilization, animal tales were taken literally; fable as a literary genre arose only when animals began to be seen as symbols of human virtues and vices.

La Fontaine began to write late, thirty-three years of age (1654). He published the comedy "Eunuch" - the first work as the fruit of his readings of Terence. Introduced to the then influential Minister Fouquet, he was treated kindly by the latter, received a pension and, having sold his position and real estate at Château Thierry, moved to Paris for permanent residence. Here La Fontaine became close to Boileau, Moliere and Racine (the latter was 18 years younger than him).

The beginning of creativity

In 1668, the first six books of fables appeared under the modest title: "Fables of Aesop, transcribed into verses by M. de La Fontaine." It was the first collection that included the famous, later transcribed by I.A. Krylov "The Crow and the Fox" and "The Dragonfly and the Ant". The second edition was published in 1678, and the third, with the inclusion of the twelfth and last book, at the end of 1693. The first two books are of a didactic nature; in the rest, La Fontaine is becoming more and more free. La Fontaine teaches a sober outlook on life, the ability to use circumstances and people, and constantly draws the triumph of the clever and cunning over the simple and kind. The artistic significance of La Fontaine's fables is also facilitated by the beauty of poetic introductions and digressions, his figurative language, a special art to convey the rhythm of movement and feeling, an amazing richness and variety of poetic form. La Fontaine's fables are written in most cases in free verse.

Features of the works of La Fontaine

Particularly noteworthy is the attitude of La Fontaine to "morality", which is such a natural conclusion from the depicted situation that it is often put into the mouth of one of the characters. The poet himself argued that a fable should educate only by introducing the reader to the world. The rejection of edification is in clear contradiction with the instructive nature of the fable, which has been considered an integral feature of the genre since the time of Aesop.

La Fontaine's fables are popular in their light, graceful humor, so characteristic of the French for the common sense invested in them, but they are to a certain extent refined, gallant and therefore sometimes somewhat salon. This is how, for example, the fox thinks in the fable "The Wolf and the Fox" (the fox sits in a bucket at the bottom of the well, where she unreasonably sank, looking for some kind of gain, and now persuades the wolf to take her place, for she cannot finish eating the cheese that was there): "Comrade, I want

to treat you, do you see this object? This is a special cheese. God Faun prepared it. Io's cow gave her milk, even to Jupiter, and even if he were sick, his appetite for this dish would have been whetted"[1]. As you can see, the fox is very learned, obviously, no less knowledgeable of her in ancient mythology and the wolf, since the fox turned to him with similar literary reminiscences.

In La Fontaine's fables we find literary names. The names of Moliere's Tartuffe and the medieval lawyer Patelen are already used here as well-known common names. "The Cat and the Fox, like two little saints, went on a pilgrimage. Those were two tartufs, two archipelains, two sneaks ... " - this is how the fable "Cat and Fox" begins (I, 149). La Fontaine's fables are philosophical. In one of them, he reflects on genius and the crowd. Epicurus was considered insane in his homeland. Compatriots turned to Hippocrates, the famous physician, asking him to cure the madness and the philosopher Democritus. "He lost his mind, reading ruined him ... What does he say? - The world is endless ... This is not enough for him. He also talks about some kind of atoms "(I, 175-177), - the simple-minded Abderites lament, calling on Hippocrates.

The subject of the fable is often not only the vices of people, but psychological observations, quite in the spirit of La Rochefoucauld or La Bruyere. In the fable "Husband, Wife and Thief," he tells how a certain husband, who was deeply in love with his wife, did not, however, enjoy her favor. The unfortunate spouse did not find any flattering response, not a gentle look, not a word of friendship, not a sweet smile in his wife. But then one day she herself threw herself into his arms. It turns out that the thief frightened her, and, fleeing from him, she resorted to the protection of her husband. For the first time, a loving husband knew true happiness and, grateful, allowed the thief to take whatever he wanted. "Fear is sometimes the strongest feeling and even conquers disgust," La Fontaine concludes his fable. "However, love is stronger. An example is this lover who would burn down his house just to kiss his lady and carry her out of the flames. I like this hobby" he adds further (I, 193-194).

In the fable about the "aged lion" we are talking about humiliation, or rather, the boundaries of humiliation that a person can withstand. There is a limit to everything, and the most terrible humiliation is an insult inflicted by a being despised. The lion, the thunderstorm and horror of the forests, has grown old under the weight of years, he grieves, mourning his former might, and is persecuted by his former subjects, "who have become strong in his weakness." The horse kicked him with his hoof, the wolf jerked his teeth, the bull stabbed his horn. A lion, unable even to roar, silently endures beatings and insults, meekly awaiting death. But then the donkey went to him. "Oh, this is too much! - exclaimed the lion. - I am ready to die, but to be subjected to your beatings - doesn't mean to die twice "(I, 68).

In the fable "The Rooster and the Fox" there is a subtle irony typical of the French. An old and experienced rooster on a branch, at the post. He is a sentry. A running fox in a sweet voice addresses him: "Brother, we are no longer in a quarrel, a common world this time. I came running to tell you about him. Come down quickly, I will hug you, do not hesitate, I still need to run around twenty outposts.

- What are you saying, my dear! Here's the news! And how nice it is for me to hear it from you! Wait, I will call two greyhounds, they will come running at once and they will be happy to kiss you for good news.

- No, it's better another time, goodbye!, - The fox hurried, and throwing off her fashionable shoes, she ran away. And the old cock loosened up. Still would! To deceive a deceiver is a double pleasure "(I, 51).

La Fontaine, in the preface to his fables, pointed to the originality of his art. He said that he did not achieve the laconicism of Phaedrus (an ancient Roman fabulist who lived in the 30s-40s BC), but he made up for this lack with gaiety. "I call gaiety not something that causes laughter, but a certain special charm, a general joyful flavor that can be given to any subject, even the most serious."

Often, the poet's life experience, translated into images, turns out to be more meaningful than the edification formulated by him. So, the fable "The Woodcutter and Death" cannot be perceived only as an illustration to the final lines, which says that a person prefers any suffering to death. The picture of the life of a peasant, exhausted under the burden of unbearable taxes and soldiers' quarters, exhausted by corvee and greedy usurers, speaks more to the mind and heart of the reader than the abstract truth of edification. This is an example of a fable, which, according to VG Belinsky, tends to develop into a "little story", into a "drama with faces and characters."

The son of a forester, La Fontaine knows the life of nature, the habits of birds, fish, animals. Therefore, he writes about them so naturally, intimately, poetically. Close to "Fables" is another element of the comic, which goes back to the popular square performance: cane strikes falling on a donkey ("Donkey dressed in a

lion's skin"), ridiculous jumping of a donkey imitating a house dog ("Donkey and a little Dog"), ridiculous attempts rats to climb into narrow burrows ("Fight of rats and weasels") - they resemble farcical scenes, probably very similar to those that La Fontaine could see somewhere at a fair in his native Champagne. The requirements of clarity, brevity, grace, presented by the classicist aesthetics to the poetic language, did not prevent the fabulist from turning to a juicy folk proverb, vernacular, dialecticism, to the dictionary of hunters, fishermen, farmers and other working people with whom he had to meet on a hunt and during long rural walks. In the treasury of folk speech there are words that are not suitable for gallant poetry, but they accurately denote the circumstances, the behavior of the characters, the motives of their actions and even their appearance. The winged word or turnover in "Fables" is often barely perceptible as such, so naturally they are merged with the text.

La Fontaine, like any fabulist, uses traditional personifications. The cruel wolf has always been habitually associated in the French fable with the feudal predator, the lion with the head of state, the cunning fox with a face close to the monarch, and peaceful animals, birds or insects with simple powerless members of society. Turning to fable personifications, La Fontaine, already in the collection of the 60s, covered many aspects of French life in the 17th century, captured its essential vices. The picture turned out to be rather unsightly. The lion mercilessly robbed the weaker animals who trusted him (the fables "Heifer, Goat and Sheep in Commonwealth with the Leo", "Tribute from Animals to Alexander", etc.), the wolves devour their victims, seizing them either simply by force, or hiding behind the letter of legality ("The Wolf and the Lamb"), the treachery of the insidious fox knows no limits. Predators hate each other, but their main prey is primarily peaceful animals. There is no law to protect them, no patron to help them. On the contrary, at times even a recent brother of the powerless refuses to support him ("The Horse and the Donkey"). La Fontaine persistently pursues the idea of the superior strength of the "evil", of the weakness of the "good", and therefore constantly speaks of the need to be careful, cunning, and resourceful. However, these conclusions are colored with bitterness and are often drowned out by the call to be honest, not to pursue profit, to rely on the strength of our own hands, to help our own kind and to unite in a moment of danger, because only mutual support can help peace-loving and kind beings. The unattractive picture of cruel morals drawn in the collection "Fables" of the 60s helps to better understand the political views of La Fontaine. The fabulist stands for autocracy, but he is well aware that autocracy is not an easy burden for his subjects.

Conclusion

La Fontaine, as a classicist poet, professes an imitation of nature, and therefore of the ancients, who achieved perfection in this imitation. However, according to him, "my imitation is not slavery." Already in the first collection of fables, written, as is clear from the study of manuscripts, in a more mature period, differ from the earlier ones. La Fontaine is moving away from graceful imitation, seeking to find his own voice. The most skeptical fables are imbued with subtle humor, the specificity of which is fundamentally different from the burlesque parody of fifteen years ago. If Scarron forced epic heroes to express themselves in a clownish language, then La Fontaine endows humorous heroes with a sublime language. In "Fables" a certain "immorality" of morality is usually striking. La Fontaine does not teach the observance of the code of life of that "educated person" who, on the whole, was the central figure in the culture of classicism; the poet's sound skepticism is summed up in one simple word: beware. Beware of people and animals, above and below, friends and enemies, those around you and yourself. For all the high and peculiar poetry of fables, they are based on the rather prosaic art of living, drawn from the universal understanding of life.

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