

Conference Paper

Modern Prose As a Multimedia Hypertext (Using the Example of the Table-Talk 1882 Story By Boris Akunin)

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Abstract

This article is devoted to text comprehension in the era of online literature, which implies a closer interaction with the reader than ‘a paper format’ one. As an illustration of the named trends using hypertext, the project by Artemy Lebedev “To Favorable Attention, Illustrations to the Project Table-Talk 1882. (Based on the work of the same name by B. Akunin)”, created in 2004, was chosen. The project is a visualization of text details, divided into eight chapters. The text of Akunin’s story was aimed at play with the reader. First the author and his fans publish an abridged version of the story in the network, then the detective announces the key to the crime, and asks readers to write a sequel. The project of Artemy Lebedev is a kind of attempt to write a sequel particularly by visual means. Similar experiments with a text are characteristic of postmodern literature: numerous interpretations of the text interact with each other and multiply its intertextual connections. Thanks to electronic format authors expand the boundaries of the text, creating various versions. In fact, the text generated by Internet navigation has the same quality: the reader, following the links, independently creates the text seen by each user of the network, as a result — the text is individual. Authors of publications cannot create texts with the same features: many works have a continuously developing plot that does not allow mixing fragments of texts. A detective as a genre that implies a play with a reader: in the classic detective stories of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie where the reader tries to figure out who committed the crime. The digital format allows transferring this game with the reader to the network and beating the layering of the text in a new way.


Keywords: Postmodernism, Akunin, online literature, digital text.

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1. Introduction

The most representative direction in the literature of the late twentieth century is postmodernism. The question of the belonging of Akunin’s works to this literary movement is discussed in the works of G. Makhortova [8], M. Lipovetsky [7] and other researchers, and in most cases it is solved positively: Akunin is recognized as modern postmodernist who actively uses various aesthetics of this literary direction. Among the features of postmodernism, the game with texts comes to the forefront [6]: the author

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creates his work based on numerous previously written texts, using various means of communication — from direct quotation to a veiled hint, up to the theory of the author's death proclaimed by Roland Barthes: they are so composed of quotes from what has already been said in the literature that it would be wrong to talk about the author as such [2]. At the same time, the use of intertextual connections makes it possible to talk about the “blurring of borders” announced by Leslie Fiedler [4]: literature ceases to be divided into elitist and mass, since the same work can be both elitist and mass: the mass reader will be carried away by an action-packed story, and the elite will be interested in a complex system of intertext interactions.

The success of the “Fandorin Project” is largely due to the orientation of both the mass and elite readers. If the former is interested in the detective storyline, the latter will be attracted by skillful stylization and numerous intertextual links. In his answers to journalists' questions, Akunin himself repeatedly said that his activity as a writer “grew” from the skills that he acquired as a translator. The art of stylization, the combination of the plan of a foreign writer with the style of Russian literature, became the basis for the design of the “Fandorin Project”.

Texts created in the context of postmodernism use intertextuality as one of the leading principles of creation. In a broad sense, intertextuality is a semantic dialogue of two texts, the connection between which is through a reminiscence mechanism. In a narrow sense, intertextuality is the principle of text generation inherent in postmodern discourse. The basis of this text generation is the collage mechanism and / or semantic layering of several other texts (discourses) in the space of one available text.

The digital format translates intertextuality into a network form and turns it into a game with the reader. Intertextuality is an integral part of hypertext in the Internet. Some authors of modern literature do not interact with the possibilities of text in electronic format, and the appeal to Akunin's work is due to the fact that he tries to use the online form and the features of the existence of texts associated with it.

2. Methods and Methodology

The study of modern online literature undertaken by L.R. Kim [5], taking into account the concept of secondary oral literature in connection with the advent of new technologies [9], postulates a secondary folklorization of online literature, in particular, the tendency for the reader to rethink texts. B. Akunin, as a modern author, interacts with this trend, inviting readers to continue to work on their own and thereby laying the possibility of a variety of interpretations in the text.

In the folklore tradition of text transmission, one and the same story is multiplied due to the difference in interpretations in oral transmission. The online literature allows you to do the same with the text due to the capabilities of hypertext, numerous click-throughs, and also due to the emergence and distribution of so-called fanfics — amateurish continuations of texts published in the Internet.

In the texts by Boris Akunin, the specificity of the author's strategy is due to the fact that the author intentionally declares a dialogue of his own texts with the texts indicated in the heading complex in the form of dedication. In the work Akunin plays this communication in different ways. Firstly, the appeal to the source text is the key to the plot denouement, constructed according to the laws of the detective genre as solving a riddle. Secondly, the intertextual dialogue actualizes the pretext as a kind of aesthetic value in itself: the reader voluntarily or involuntarily reproduces the semantic moves, the atmosphere of the work or corpus of the author's texts. Thirdly, interaction with the 'donor' text triggers the mechanism of polytextuality (polyintertextuality): the author tries to use all the valencies of the intertext. In some cases, the text serves as a reference to another, equally transparent pretext.

In combination with the capabilities and traditions of online literature, polytextuality becomes digital, and the text begins to interact not only with other texts, but also with photo and video formats, which can be illustrated by the example of B. Akunin's story "Table-Talk of 1882".

3. Results and Discussion

The story "Table-Talk of 1882" is included in the collection of stories "Greenstone Rosary", however, it was originally published separately [3] and was used in the Internet to play with the reader: it was proposed to solve the detective riddle and send a continuation option. The peculiarity of the plot of this story is that Erast Petrovich Fandorin investigates the crime of a dispute, not being present at the place of its commission, that is, the reader is given a priori all the same data as the detective. During a secular conversation, the mysterious disappearance of Princess Karakina is discussed; one of the eyewitnesses talks about the circumstances of the case, and Fandorin accepts the challenge and expresses a version of the development of events that led to the disappearance of the princess.

The text was published before the words "Only a clue is painfully unpleasant", and readers were invited to finish the denouement. Since Erast Petrovich's question about the plumbing in the estate was already present in the published part of the story, readers

basically came to the same version that is present in the author's text — dismemberment of the body with the draining of blood into the drain. Also, among the popular versions stands out the option of dissolving the body in a bath in acid. Moreover, none of the readers doubts that the murder occurred, but they either blame Polina or Anna (if we assume that Polina was killed), then Renard, or even Mustafin himself, the narrator who was present at all the events described.

The story “Table-talk of 1882” is extremely detailed in terms of motivating events and their possibilities in the “live journal” of the user under the nickname Flammberg [11]. In this analysis, only the Akunin, “canonical” version of the ending of the story is analyzed, and two points are called into question: is it possible to remove parts of the corpse in small boxes and nodules in the hot summer without attracting attention at all, and how the murder was made: twins were in approximately equal physical conditions, and one of them could hardly strangle the other [11]. The version of poisoning is criticized by the author of the analysis on the grounds that it is unlikely that the sophisticated princess, who is not accustomed to work, is aware of exactly where the poison is stored in the father's estate, for example, for rodents. In the study [5], it is suggested that Anna committed suicide, and then Polina got rid of the corpse and reasonably argues that such an interpretation is also possible.

The project of Artemy Lebedev's design studio “To Favorable Attention, Illustrations for the Table-Talk Project 1882. (Based on the same-name work by B. Akunin)” [10] also represents an attempt to continue the story and give an original interpretation of the crime committed. The illustrations are dated 2004-2006, before the publication of “Table-Talk of 1882” in the collection “Greenstone Rosary”, that is, the authors of the project perceive the story as an independent work and call it not a story, namely a ‘project’, thereby referring to its interactivity. In addition, the illustrations do not follow the text, but offer an alternative version of the development of events.

Lebedev's studio illustrations are divided into eight chapters, which are little correlated with the consistent development of the plot. The first chapter is devoted to the location of the house of Odintsova, the owner of the salon, and her friendship with Tchaikovsky and Turgenev (the author relies on the text of the story in the description of the location of the house, and considerations of friendship with celebrities are logically derived from the hypothesis “Of course, half of Moscow visited her salon for all these years” [10]). The second chapter shows an allegedly restored note from the “Vedomosti moskovskoy gorodskoy politsii” in 1876, dedicated to the mystical disappearance of Princess Karakina.

Further, the authors of the project switch to decorating the walls of the Odintsova salon, commenting on this fact as follows: “At this point, the reader is invited to choose one of the possible options for the development of the plot. As conceived by the author, through Bryullov’s paintings” [10], that is, it is understood that the reader is not yet familiar with the finale, and is still in doubt. The authors of the illustrations offer four paintings, symbolizing four scenarios: “with a bloodthirsty shade; pastoral; playful, nude style; mystical” [10]. These are four options for the development of the events of the story, the resolution of the love triangle of two sisters and the Frenchman. With a bloodthirsty shade — one sister kills the other (the most popular version of the continuation of the story among readers and corresponding to the ending of Akunin himself: Polina kills Anna, dismembers her body and draws blood into the water supply), idyllic pastoral — there is neither hatred nor jealousy, everyone is happy; nude painting — a hint of connection between one of the sisters (or both) and the Frenchman; the mystical is the otherworldly version of the disappearance of the princess. Moreover, the authors of the illustrations describe in detail only two of the four outlined paintings: the bloodthirsty and the nude (which, sort of, rejects the options of mysticism and pastoral). To illustrate the bloodthirsty plot, a picture with a double murder was chosen: “For the “bloodthirsty” sketch, we select a typical plot of that time — murder. The foundation was the painting “The Death of Inessa de Castro, Morganatic Wife of the Portuguese Infant Don Pedro.” In the final version, the situation of double murder is played out. She could have arisen if the attorney of the servant of the court lady had interceded for Madame during the attempt on her and was killed first. And then, as we know, Inessa also perished” [10]. This alludes to the commission of two murders in the text: not only the mysterious disappearance of the sister, but also the subsequent death of Karakin father.”

The painting “in the style of nude” is based on the plot of “Bathsheba” by Bryullov, in which the artist refers to the Old Testament parable about King David and Bathsheba. According to the biblical story, King David saw Bathsheba in the bathhouse and fell in love with her. This plot alludes to a sudden outbreak of passion between the Frenchman and Polina Karakina and the key role of the bath in the denouement of history.

The “mystical” picture is described by the authors of the illustration without details, but photo sketches are shown (that is, a mystical version of the development of events is possible, but unlikely), and the pastoral is not described at all and is only presented in the final version of the illustration — the image of the wall of Odintsova’s interior with four paintings. That is, the illustrators thus say: “there will be no idyllic, ‘pastoral’ development of history”. This is an erotic and bloodthirsty story.

In the fourth chapter, the authors of the illustrations proceed to find out the location of the Karakin's estate, showing maps, sketches of watercolors depicting a typical 19th-century estate, and stylized "photos from Prince Karakin's album": "Add another graphic element — a photograph, some kind of archive, from the album of Prince Karakin, made once in Sosnovka. From the photo library we take a photo card of that time, we find a pine forest. It turns out that at that time nature was not just photographed, it was expensive, so we find the image of people and put it in the foreground. We age the image and add garbage" [10]. As a 'photo of people', a photograph of Oscar Wilde and his young friend Alfred Douglas was used, which ultimately graced the final collage.

Oscar Wilde is a fairly recognizable person, and his photo in this context is hardly used by accident. The author's most famous and widely represented work in mass culture is "Portrait of Dorian Gray", and the photo used by his composition reminds of this work: two gentlemen are sitting next to him, one older, and one young and very smart.

Using this allusion also provides a clue to the detective story as it is seen and understood by the authors of the illustrations. In the story, the two main characters are twins, and one of them kills the other, just as Dorian Gray ultimately kills his twin — a portrait. One princess dies and remains forever young in the memory of those who knew her, the other lives a long life in marriage, while bearing the sin of killing her sister. That is, at the time of the demonstration of Wilde's photo, it is already clear that the author of the illustrations supports the most popular version — one sister killed the other. In this case, we note, until clarification by Erast Petrovich, it is assumed that Anna remained alive, and Polina was killed. If you adhere to this version, then a sad and envious sister kills her cheerful double, just as the desire to live in Dorian Gray gradually dies away because there is an exact copy in his life — a portrait.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the depiction of the telegraph point where Erast Petrovich sent a footman to confirm his version: he sent a dispatch to Brazil, where Princess Karakina departed, received a response and brought it to the guests, thus proving Fandorin's right. At this point, the text of the story ends, but the illustrations contain three more "chapters" depicting a bottle of Benedictine liquor, the bedroom of one of the visitors to the salon — Molly Sapegina (with Molly herself in front of the mirror and a view from the side of the bed) and the girl's album of the same Molly with a letter from an unknown whose content "will forever remain a mystery to readers" [10]. The presence of these "chapters", which do not correlate with either the text of Akunin's plot or detective story, suggests that the authors of the visual series wrote their 'continuation' not to the detective story, but to the story itself, and it looks like this: after successfully

solving the mystical disappearances, the heroes drank liquor, and then transferred to Molly Sapegina's bedroom and got acquainted with her girl's album.

There are no hints that one of the male heroes (Fandorin or Mustafin) appeared in Molly's bedroom; on the contrary, the reader is invited to appear in the bedroom: "In this chapter, the reader is destined to wake up on the bed in the girl's bedroom. At the end of the XIX century" [10]. In general, the game with the reader in the postmodern era also involves its direct involvement in the text, which is played out in the visual format using the angle.

4. Conclusion

Transformations of the text with the advent and development of electronic technologies lead to the emergence of text with many authors: for example, when reading an online encyclopedia, the reader himself follows the links and forms the content that he consumes, thereby becoming a co-author of the text.

In fiction, this tendency realizes itself through the possibilities of numerous interpretations and extensions of the text. Modern works interact with the reader using amateur sequels, and one of the options for communicating with the target audience involves stimulating the author of such continuations in the form of a game with the reader, as B. Akunin does.

The draft digital illustrations for the text considered in this study not only offers a solution to the crime (coinciding with the author's version), but an alternative continuation involving the reader, moreover, literally "drawing" him into the text with the help of the angle. At the same time, the authors of digital illustrations do not position them as illustrations for the book, intended for publication: this is an exclusively post-modern project, a kind of spin-off of the text that allows you to plunge into the atmosphere of the era when the story unfolds.

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