

PECULIARITIES OF EPITHETS FUNCTIONING IN THE SHORT STORIES BY H. P. LOVECRAFT

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The article presents the analysis of the role of epithets in the creation of mysterious atmosphere and awaking the reader's feeling of fear and disgust in short stories written by H. P. Lovecraft. The peculiar feature of "cosmic horror" in the short stories under analysis is the use of epithets in order to appeal to sensory feelings, which are the powerful tool for the creation of disgusting and terrible images and feelings. By means of interdisciplinary approach, the epithets have been grouped according to the location of sensory receptors into visual, auditory and olfactory. It has been found that visual epithets constitute the dominant group.

Key words: horror literature, cosmic horror, epithets (visual, auditory, olfactory), fear, repulsion.

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Особливості функціонування епітетів у коротких оповіданнях Г.Ф. Лавкрафта

У роботі розглянуто роль епітетів у створенні містичної атмосфери та виклику у читача відчуття страху і огиди в оповіданнях Г.Ф. Лавкрафта. Особливістю «cosmic horror» у досліджуваних роботах є використання епітетів з метою апеляції до сенсорних почуттів, які є потужним інструментом створення огидних і моторошних образів та відчуттів. За допомогою міждисциплінарного підходу епітети було проаналізовано відповідно до каналу сприйняття інформації та розподілено на три групи: зорові, слухові та нюхові. Було з'ясовано, що зорові епітети становлять домінуючу групу.

Ключові слова: література жахів, "cosmic horror", стилістичні прийоми, епітети (зорові, слухові, нюхові), побоювання, відраза.

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Особенности функционирования эпитетов в коротких рассказах Г.Ф. Лавкрафта

В работе рассмотрена роль эпитетов в создании мистической атмосферы и вызове у читателя ощущения страха и отвращения в рассказах Г.Ф. Лавкрафта. Особенностью «cosmic horror» в исследуемых работах является использование эпитетов как средства апелляции к сенсорным чувствам, которые выступают мощным инструментом создания отвратительных и жутких образов и ощущений. С помощью междисциплинарного подхода эпитеты были проанализированы согласно каналу восприятия информации, после чего было выделено три группы: зрительные, слуховые и обонятельные. Было установлено, что зрительные эпитеты составляют доминирующую группу.

Ключевые слова: литература ужасов, "cosmic horror", стилистические приемы, эпитеты (зрительные, слуховые, обонятельные), опасение, отвращение.

Introduction

In the last few decades there has been a growing interest in horror literature. This genre is particularly attractive to modern readers and scientists, who live in the period of globalization, which presupposes interaction and integration among

people, reconsideration of core values and principles. At the same time free access to varied information makes it difficult to amaze and interest the reader. In this context horror literature becomes very appealing, as it provides the addressees with spectrum of thrilling emotions (usually negative) and helps

them experience something that they hardly come across in their everyday life.

The vast majority of works aimed at analysis of horror literature is sporadic, because Ukrainian and foreign linguists did their researches mainly within the Gothic prose studies. Thus horror was the main object of literary studies, where its genre's core elements were determined (Noël Carroll, S. T. Joshi, A. Lloyd-Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, Ye. Zharinov, I. Kachurovskiy, O. Matvienko and D. Varma) and peculiarities of horror stories by S. King were distinguished (U. N. Shafieva, O. H. Nenilin); translation studies (A. O. Rati) within which the set of the dominant ways for translation of each genre forming lexics, linguistic and stylistic means was pointed out; and cinematic art (O. E. Artemieva) that focused much attention on the evolution of American horror films in the 20th century.

The great contribution to the development of the genre was made by Howard Philips Lovecraft. He created his own subgenre of horror — “cosmic horror” with its peculiarities, specific characters and mood. The main function of the horror literature is to induce the feeling of anxiety, fear, disgust and warning. Talking about the unique style of H. P. Lovecraft's horror stories, they are not scary in a traditional understanding of the concept. The writer tried to create the specific and terrifying atmosphere both to scare and involve the recipient in the further reading. The setting is a key means in his writings.

H. P. Lovecraft is obviously the pioneer of “cosmic horror” and scientists studied his novels and short stories in different aspects: diachronic (A. O. Rati, Xavier Aldana Reyes), linguocultural (A. Nenilin) linguistic and stylistic (E. Petrova, O. Khomenko, N. Pozdniakova), but there are no scientific researches which present complex approach and analysis of epithets that serve to create the atmosphere of darkness and repulsion, and it causes the **actuality of our research**.

The aim of the article is to determine the role of epithets in the creation of atmosphere of repulsion and fear in horror stories by H. P. Lovecraft.

Theoretical Background

Galperin I. R. defines the epithet as a stylistic device based on the interplay of emotive and logical meaning in an attributive word, phrase or even sentence, used to characterize an object and pointing out to the reader, and frequently imposing on him, some of the properties or features of the object with aim of giving an individual perception and evaluation of these features or properties [3, 144]. According to V. A. Kukharensky, epithet expresses characteristics of an object, both existing and imaginary [4, 30]. Moreover, the epithet is markedly subjective and evaluative, which means that it presents unique writer's point of view on the object and expresses his evaluation usually positive or negative.

In our research we've analyzed epithets with the help of interdisciplinary approach, using the basic notions of psychology as physiological aspect is of great importance to our work. Horror texts are usually characterized by elements that aim to scare the readers, giving them the essence of dread and fear, using fear to evoke a response. So, horror always appeals to the emotion of fear, fear of unknown, disease and death, as well as to disgust and repulsion. At the same time the nature of different emotions and feelings is the object of psychological studies.

In our research we have used the classification of sensation, elaborated by British psychologist Charles Scott Sherrington (1926) where he suggested dividing the sensory receptors in three broad classes: *exteroceptors*, *proprioceptors* and *interoceptors*. The relevance of this classification is that generally, humans perceive the information and emotions through external factors, such as different views, smells, touches, etc. A lot of different scientists worked on this topic, for example, I. P. Pavlov, I. M. Sechenov. They made a conclusion that the eyesight plays the main role in human's life. More than 90 % of information we receive with the help of eyesight, about 9 % of information from the hearing and less than 1 % from the smelling [8].

Results and Discussion

A closer look at the epithets under analysis made it possible to establish the dominant group of sensory receptors, which appeared to be *exteroceptors*, which in turn are divided into subclasses: visual (sight), auditory (sound) and olfactory (smell).

The largest group includes epithets of visual perception. Having analyzed some short stories we noticed that in majority of cases the protagonist is alone; he investigates the surrounding and gives a precise description of what is around him and what is going on. It helps the reader to relive what the main character relives, to see what he sees and thus to be an active participant of the story.

Epithets of visual perception

Let's consider some examples of **epithets of visual perception**:

- (1) “*But as I stood in the tower's topmost chamber, I beheld **the horned waning moon, red and sinister**, quivering through the vapours that hovered over the distant valley of Banof.*” [1, 17]

In this case all the unassociated epithets (I. R. Galperin) created with the help of adjectives are used to show us all the ugliness, fear and evilness of the scene. The author expresses the feeling of anxiety through setting. The adjective *horned* means *something having horns*, *horn*, in its turn, is the main attribute of demons and evil spirits. So, it's not only

about the shape of the moon which is crescent, the adjective adds to the vivid image of the night, that shows us the connection with the dark side, with devil particularly. *Red* is just a colour, but in Cambridge Dictionary we can see the following definition of the word *being the same colour as blood* [2]. So, generally in horror stories this colour is associated with blood and brutal or violent emotion. An adjective *sinister* usually means “making you *feel that something bad or evil might happen*” [2]. All together the adjectives in the phrase make us imagine and experience the doomy atmosphere of the story. With the help of epithet the image of the moon is expanded to demonic, bloody, and full of danger and maybe even death. The epithet appeals to the sense of sight and creates the feeling of discomfort, evilness and keeps the reader in suspense.

Let's analyze the following examples.

- (2) “As I stared at **the uncannily lighted door and windows**, I became subject to the most extravagant visions — visions so extravagant that I cannot even relate them.” [1, 63]

The adverb *uncannily* — of supernatural character, eerie, mysterious; *lighted* — such radiation that is visible to the human eye [5]. The image of door is mysterious, maybe something or someone is hiding behind it. This epithet is used to show the mystery, light fear and to provoke a kind of suspense, to make the reader ask the question “What is next?”, “What is behind the door?”

- (3) “My head, heavy and reeling, drooped to my breast, and when next I looked up it was in a dream; with the Pole Star grinning at me through a window from over the **horrible swaying trees** of a dream-swamp.” [1, 17]

The adjective *horrible* describes the feeling of great fear, dismay or aversion; *swaying* — sweeping motion, caused by wind [3]. From the context we can see that the function of this epithet is to show all the sinisterness and darkness of this scene. Walking the yard, the protagonist is very scared with the night atmosphere and at the same time he feels the presence of something else nearby that is why even movement of the trees is perceived by him as something monstrous. The swaying of trees itself reminds us of the motion of pendulum — periodic, constant and strained, we can imagine the play of light and shadow, and it represents the fight between good and evil.

Let's analyse the following examples.

- (4) “He stretched out his arms toward the sun and prayed in a tongue no villager could understand; though indeed the villagers did not try very hard to understand,

*since their attention was mostly taken up by the sky and the odd shapes the clouds were assuming. It was very peculiar, but as the little boy uttered his petition there seemed to form overhead **the shadowy, nebulous figures of exotic things**; of hybrid creatures crowned with horn-flanked discs. Nature is full of such illusions to impress the imaginative.” [1, 55]*

The adjective *shadowy* signifies something of uncertain identity or nature; the adjective *nebulous* is something cloudy or hazy not *clear* and having no *form* [2]; the adjective *exotic* means originating in or characteristic of a distant foreign country or world, in some cases something attractive or striking, mysteriously different or unusual [2; 5]. From these epithets we may make a conclusion that this narration is about aliens from outer world. In Lovecraft's works aliens are very big, smart and powerful, but we don't know them, their existence is a mystery, that's why they are shadowy and nebulous, and everything that is unknown evokes fear and negative thrilling feeling.

- (5) “Well do I remember the night of the great Aurora, when over the swamp played the **shocking coruscations of the daemon light**.” [1, 16]

The adjective *shocking* in this context means extremely bad or unpleasant and upsetting; *coruscation* is something that is flashing brightly; *daemon* — is an archaic spelling of demon, an evil spirit [2]. So, we can see that the great effect of fear and anxiety is contributed with the help of epithets that describe the light; the main role belongs to the epithet *daemon*, as due to it the light is perceived as not only unpleasantly flickering, but also mysterious, supernatural, evil and sinister, thus acquiring negative evaluation. Being a visual epithet, it brings the feeling of panic and suspense and makes the recipient continue reading in order to find out what the further development of the plot will be.

- (6) *Out of the unimaginable blackness beyond **the gangrenous glare of that cold flame**...* [1, 185]

The unassociated epithet *the gangrenous glare of that cold flame* presents the vivid image of the fire. Taking into account the meaning of the word *gangrenous* — decaying because the blood has stopped flowing there [2] we can think of two possible characteristics of the light: its color — it's not bright-red or yellow as the glare should be, but muted, dark; or its intensity — it's barely glowing and the cave is not lit up. The idea of the fire being not bright is highlighted with the help of the second part

of the epithet (*cold flame*). Thus the emerging image is repulsive, because, apart from being visual epithet, it evokes some olfactory associations, as it's widely known that gangrenous, decaying body smells awful.

Olfactory epithets

Thorough analysis of horror stories by H. P. Lovecraft enabled us to identify some **olfactory epithets**. In general, smells can take back to certain emotions, good, pleasant, disappointing, sad or scary. In majority of analyzed texts these epithets create the atmosphere of disgust, antipathy and nauseousness; show the dreadfulness and monstrosity of surrounding, describing either the scenes of nature or the house interior. Let's consider few examples of these epithets:

- (1) *"The stones in the crumbling corridors seemed always hideously damp, and there was an accursed smell everywhere, as of the piled-up corpses of dead generations."* [1, 109]

The adjective *accursed* symbolizes something what is under the curse or is cursed. It is a very interesting epithet for the analysis as the main protagonist of the novel *"Outsider"* sends a huge message and specific emotion to the reader. The reader sees and feels all the frightfulness and horridness of the scene. The protagonist walks in the old castle and inhales bad, accursed smell, so awful and so destructive. Each inhale brings harm and makes both the body and the soul cursed. The atmosphere becomes so bad that it is impossible to stay there for a long time. This epithet was used to show the evil mood and state of that place. The negative image of the place is strengthened with the help of simile (*as of the piled-up corpses of dead generations*) that intensifies the olfactory perception, as the smell in the corridors reminds the writer of the smell of decaying body, which is connected with death, repulsion and fear.

- (2) *"Outside, across the putrid moat and under the dark mute trees, I would often lie and dream for hours about what I read in the books..."* [1, 109]

Putrid — something, that is rotten. Having faced something putrid we realize that it has a specific awful smell, that is why, intrinsically, we feel this disgust and it gives us a right to attribute this epithet to olfactory subgroup. At the same time the smell of something decaying is usually associated with cemetery and corpse, and they evoke some negative feelings. The second case of epithet in the example given above (*mute trees*) belongs to *auditory subgroup*. Obviously, we can see the trees, and the adjective *mute* shows us, that they

are motionless. But we should add, that silence also can be sinister, because the reader waits for some kind of action, silence, in this particular example, keeps the audience in suspense.

Auditory epithets

The last subgroup of epithets that we've distinguished is the Let's have a look at the example:

"In another week the burgomaster decided to overcome his fears and call at the strangely silent dwelling as a matter of duty, though in so doing he was careful to take with him Shang the blacksmith and Thul the cutter of stone as witnesses." [1, 55]

The adverb *strangely* signalizes that the state is unusual or surprising. The adjective *silent* denotes the absence of any sound. No one is speaking, the nature is still. This factor forces the recipient to feel displeasure and the same feeling of anxiety and vulnerability. The noun *dwelling* indicates a place for living, but, by means of epithet *strangely silent*, it acquires additional characteristics, silent dwelling means abandoned, no one lives there, and it's empty, but usually something terrible hides in such houses. Altogether, the epithet evokes the feeling of fear and suspense.

Conclusions

Having analyzed the stylistic functions of epithets presented in the American horror stories by H. P. Lovecraft we proved that the writer used them in order to transfer the dark, mysterious and sinister atmosphere of his unique literary world by appealing to the reader's feeling of disgust, repulsion and fear. These elements constitute the core features of the genre. While reading the horror text, the recipient experiences strong negative feelings and emotions which he doesn't come across in his everyday life and, as the result, he goes through catharsis, which relieves him of his repressed emotions. The emotional catharsis, the negative, repulsive and frightening feeling, attracts the reader and makes him continue reading the story. Thus, we can claim that repulsion and disgust appear to be an effective tool for reader's attention manipulation. H. P. Lovecraft perfectly chooses epithets to evoke these feelings, as he mostly uses adjectives or adverbs with negative evaluative and emotive denotative meanings (*sinister, uncannily, gangrenous, accursed, putrid, harrowing, soul-chilling*). The author of the horror stories under analysis appeals to sensory feelings, as they are basic mechanism for explicit depiction of repulsive images and accumulation of disgusting feelings. The peculiarity of H. P. Lovecraft's horror stories is that there are no visible cruel scenes, no dismemberments and anything close to it. He tries to make people feel anxiety and fear showing them the dark side of nature.

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