

The Interaction of Theme and Form in Literary Works

Ismailova Khurliman Najimatdinovna

PhD, associate professor, Department of Russian Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Karakalpak state university, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This research examines the interaction between theme and form in literary works, focusing on how artistic structure, narrative techniques, and stylistic devices contribute to the development and expression of central ideas. The study analyzes how form functions not merely as a vessel for meaning but as an active element that shapes thematic interpretation. Through close reading and comparative analysis of selected literary texts, the research demonstrates that theme and form exist in a dynamic, interdependent relationship. Changes in narrative perspective, genre conventions, symbolism, and language influence the reader's perception of meaning and emotional impact.

Keywords: Theme, form, literary analysis, narrative structure, artistic techniques, literary devices, symbolism, genre.

Introduction: In literary studies, an idea is understood as the conceptual meaning embedded within a literary work. Literature conveys a wide range of ideas, which may be broadly divided into logical and abstract types. Logical ideas are those that can be communicated directly without reliance on figurative language and are primarily apprehended through rational cognition. Such ideas are characteristic of non-fictional texts. In contrast, works of fiction – such as novels and short stories – are more frequently concerned with philosophical and social generalizations, causal analysis, and abstract reflection. Alongside these categories, literature also embodies a distinct and subtle form of meaning referred to as the artistic idea. An artistic idea is a thought realized through imagery and aesthetic form. It exists exclusively within figurative representation and cannot be fully articulated through propositional statements or conceptual definitions. Its specificity derives from the manner in which the theme is revealed, the author's worldview as expressed through characters' speech and actions, and the depiction of lived experience. The artistic idea emerges from the interrelation of logical reflection, imagery, and compositional structure. It cannot be reduced to a purely rational concept capable of direct explanation or illustration, as it is inseparable from artistic form and narrative organization.

The formation of an artistic idea constitutes a complex and often prolonged creative process. It is shaped by the author's personal experience, worldview, and interpretation of reality. The development of such an idea may extend over many years, during which the writer revises the text repeatedly in search of appropriate expressive means. All thematic elements, characters, and events selected by the author serve the purpose of articulating the central artistic idea and its nuances. However, it is essential to distinguish the artistic idea from a preliminary ideological plan, which may exist in notes, drafts, or conceptual outlines. While literary scholars may reconstruct the genesis of a work through archival research, the artistic idea itself often resists direct identification. In some cases, authors even diverge from their original intentions in favor of artistic truth, guided by an internal creative imperative. The concept of theme in literary theory has been interpreted in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. The most widely accepted assertion is that the theme constitutes the objective foundation of any literary work. While the theme is closely connected to reality, it cannot be equated simply with the life material depicted. The object of representation in fiction may include human experience, nature, flora and fauna, material culture, or even fantastical beings.

However, these elements do not necessarily define the theme. Natural imagery, animals, and fantastic figures often serve allegorical or symbolic functions, representing human qualities or emotional states, or providing a contextual environment for social life.

Defining theme solely as life material reduces analysis to a description of depicted objects rather than an examination of the social essence of human existence. Following A.B. Esin, the theme of a literary work may be defined as the object of artistic reflection – that is, life situations and character relations, including interactions between individuals and society, nature, and everyday life, which are transformed from reality into the aesthetic structure of the text and constitute its objective content. [3, 46]

Because the theme encompasses everything represented in a work, it can be fully understood only through comprehensive analysis of its ideological and artistic dimensions. For example, identifying the theme of K.G. Abramov's novel "Purgaz" («Пургаз») requires attention to the multifaceted development of the idea of national unity among the Mordovian people during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. [1, 38] This theme is elaborated through the formation of the protagonist's character, shaped by cultural traditions, historical circumstances, and political struggle.

In thematic analysis, it is essential to distinguish between the object of reflection (the theme) and the object of depiction (specific events or situations). Additionally, themes may be categorized as specific-historical or universal. Specific-historical themes arise from particular socio-historical contexts and are limited in time and place, such as the theme of the "superfluous person" in nineteenth-century Russian literature. Universal or eternal themes – such as love, death, friendship, and generational conflict – recur across cultures and historical periods.

Given the multidimensional nature of theme, literary analysis also employs the concept of subthemes, which represent individual lines of thematic development contributing to the overall unity of the work. This approach is especially important in the analysis of large-scale texts, where multiple themes coexist. In such cases, one or two dominant themes are typically identified, while others are considered secondary.

An essential component of content analysis is the identification of a work's problematics. In literary criticism, problematics refers to the author's ideological interpretation of reality, emphasizing those aspects of social life and character that are considered most significant from the writer's worldview. In extensive literary works, authors often address a range of interconnected problems – social, moral, political,

and philosophical. A comprehensive interpretation therefore requires examination not only of the central problem but of the entire system of problematics and the contradictions of reality reflected in the text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One may concur with A.B. Esin's assertion that problematics embodies an author's distinctive worldview. [3, 52] In contrast to the subject matter, problematic content represents the subjective dimension of artistic meaning; it is within this sphere that the author's individuality – defined as the writer's original moral and axiological stance toward the depicted reality – is most fully revealed. Although different authors may address identical themes, no two major writers produce works that coincide in their problematic orientation. The originality of problematics thus functions as a defining hallmark of an author's creative identity.

From an analytical perspective, identifying the uniqueness of a literary work requires comparative examination with related texts in order to determine its distinctive features and artistic specificity. This task presupposes the identification of the dominant type of problematic content present in the work under consideration.

The principal typology of problematics in Russian literary criticism was formulated by G.N. Pospelov. Building upon G.N. Pospelov's classification and taking into account subsequent developments in literary theory, A.B. Esin proposed a revised typology, distinguishing mythological, national, novelistic, sociocultural, and philosophical forms of problematics. [4, 69] In our view, it is also methodologically justified to single out moral problematics as an independent category.

Literary authors do not merely pose problems; they actively seek their resolution and evaluate the depicted phenomena in relation to prevailing social ideals. Consequently, the theme of a literary work is inseparably linked to its idea.

In his treatise "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality" («Эстетические отношения искусства к действительности»), N.G. Chernyshevsky defines the function of art as the reproduction, interpretation, and evaluation of life. This position remains convincing, as works of fiction invariably convey the ideological and emotional attitude of the author toward the social characters they portray. Such ideological and emotional evaluation constitutes the most dynamic and active component of a literary work's content.

According to the "Dictionary of Literary Terms", the idea of a literary work is understood as the author's

attitude toward the depicted reality and its correlation with the writer's ideals of human existence and social life. A more nuanced definition is offered by G.N. Pospelov, who conceives the idea as the integrative unity of all elements of content – a figurative, emotionally charged, and generalized thought that manifests itself in the selection, interpretation, and evaluation of characters. [4, 75]

The identification of a work's idea is a crucial stage of literary analysis, since a progressive idea – one that corresponds to historical development and social progress – is an essential attribute of genuinely artistic literature. The comprehension of a work's central idea must emerge from an analysis of its entire ideological content, including the author's evaluations, ideals, and pathos. Only under these conditions is it possible to assess the artistic strengths and limitations of a work, as well as the nature and origins of its internal contradictions. With regard to K. Abramov's novel "Purgaz" («Пургаз»), the central idea articulated by the author may be formulated as follows: the strength of a people lies in unity. Through the unification of all Mordovian clans, "Purgaz" («Пургаз»), as a gifted leader, succeeds in resisting the Mongol invaders and liberating Mordovian land from foreign domination. [1, 55]

As previously noted, the themes and problematics of a literary work must satisfy criteria of depth, relevance, and significance. The idea, in turn, must meet standards of historical authenticity and objectivity. Readers expect the author's ideological and emotional evaluation of characters to correspond to their objective social significance and historical role within the broader context of national life and its future development. Works that provide historically truthful assessments of social phenomena and characters are progressive in their ideological content. According to I.F. Volkov, the primary source of artistic ideas lies in those convictions that have become an integral part of the writer's personal and emotional experience. V.G. Belinsky referred to such ideas as pathos, emphasizing that a poetic idea is not a logical proposition or abstract principle but a living, emotionally charged passion. Borrowing this concept from Hegel, V.G. Belinsky associated pathos with the artist's inspired comprehension of the essential truth of life. E. Aksenova defines pathos as an emotional intensity that permeates a work and imparts to it an inner unity and vitality. In pathos, the author's thought and feeling merge into an indivisible whole, providing the key to the work's idea. Pathos is not necessarily expressed through overt emotionality; rather, it is the sphere in which the creative individuality of the writer manifests itself most clearly. Through the authenticity of

emotional and intellectual engagement, pathos ensures the artistic persuasiveness and emotional impact of a literary text. It is realized through artistic means such as characterization, plot development, imagery, and the overall figurative structure of the work.

When external conflicts give rise to profound internal contradictions, drama intensifies into tragic pathos. Tragedy reflects conflicts that are fundamentally irresolvable, revealing the painful experiences of characters and exposing the socio-historical or universal contradictions of human existence.

Satirical pathos is marked by the negation of negative social phenomena and character traits. Satire exposes the discrepancy between pretensions and reality, performing a critical and corrective social function. In Mordovian literature, satirical pathos is most prominently represented in the fable genre.

Humorous pathos, which emerged as a distinct category during Romanticism, is directed toward relatively harmless contradictions of life. It evokes laughter tempered by sympathy rather than condemnation and highlights incongruities between self-perception and reality.

Sentimental pathos, characteristic of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, emphasizes emotional sensitivity and moral virtue, particularly among socially marginalized individuals.

Romantic pathos expresses spiritual exaltation and the pursuit of a sublime ideal. Its relative absence in Mordovian literature is largely attributable to the historical conditions under which written literature in this tradition developed.

DISCUSSION

The evolution of patriotic motifs in twentieth-century literature is inseparable from major historical events and the society's broader cultural transformations. A systematic analysis of literary texts makes it possible to distinguish several key stages in the development of patriotic discourse.

The first stage (early twentieth century) is marked by a re-evaluation of traditional patriotic values within the context of modernist aesthetics. Works by A.A. Blok, V.Ya. Bryusov, and N.S. Gumilev register a complex interplay between patriotic feeling and emerging philosophical and artistic paradigms. In this period, Russia is increasingly conceptualized as a cultural-historical phenomenon requiring renewed interpretation. In A.A. Blok's poem "The Scythians" («Скифы»), patriotic pathos attains a quasi-cosmic resonance and is fused with the idea of Russia's distinct historical mission. The poet's expressive strategies

construct a multi-layered representation of national self-consciousness that integrates both inherited and modernist elements. N.S. Gumilev's war poetry, meanwhile, reframes patriotism by combining heroic ethos with philosophical reflection on Russia's destiny; poems such as "War and Peace" exemplify a synthesis of conventional patriotic topoi with modernist poetics.

The second stage (1920s-1930s) is characterized by the formation of a new model of patriotic consciousness under revolutionary change. Texts by M.A. Sholokhov, A.A. Fadeyev, and N.A. Ostrovsky foreground the dialectics of the personal and the collective within the ideological framework of revolutionary patriotism. M.A. Sholokhov's "And Quiet Flows the Don" («Тихий Дон») portrays the tragic fate of the individual in a watershed era where patriotic commitment is tested by civil conflict; the narrative offers a multidimensional account of history and multiple modalities of patriotism. A.A. Fadeyev's "The Young Guard" («Молодая гвардия») develops a distinctive mode of patriotic narration in which heroism is combined with psychological verisimilitude: the young protagonists act not only from doctrinal imperatives but also from deeply internalized convictions.

The third stage (the wartime years) involves the highest concentration and intensity of patriotic motifs. Works by K.M. Simonov, A.T. Tvardovsky, and M.A. Sholokhov construct a polyphonic image of popular patriotism under conditions of extreme trial. A.T. Tvardovsky's "Vasily Tyorkin" («Василий Тёркин») functions as an "encyclopedia" of everyday patriotism, where heroism is inseparable from the routines of wartime life; the protagonist embodies a fusion of civic pathos and folk wisdom. M.A. Sholokhov's "The Fate of a Man" («Судьба человека») refracts patriotism through the prism of personal biography, emphasizing the individual's inextricable linkage to national history and grounding patriotic feeling in a deeply ethical register. [7, 36]

The fourth stage (the postwar decades) is marked by the increasing complexity of patriotic problematics and by new modes of reflecting on historical experience. Texts by V.P. Astafyev, V.G. Rasputin, and Yu.V. Bondarev present a multi-planar account of patriotic consciousness in peacetime. [9, 65] V.G. Rasputin's "Farewell to Matyora" («Прощание с Матёрой») explores the relationship between patriotism and traditional value systems, highlighting the fragility of historical memory amid technological modernization and articulating the "small homeland" as a foundation of patriotic identity. V.P. Astafyev's writing introduces an ecological dimension to patriotism by linking love of country to responsibility for its natural resources; in "The Tsar Fish" («Царь-рыба»), nature becomes an

active participant in the historical process rather than a passive backdrop.

The fifth stage (late twentieth century) involves a reconfiguration of patriotic themes under conditions of social transformation. Literature of this period documents a difficult search for renewed forms of patriotic consciousness appropriate to altered historical realities. Across the century, the artistic articulation of patriotism shifts from direct declarative statements toward increasingly mediated and complex representational strategies. Symbolic imagery and extended metaphorical structures gain prominence, enabling authors to convey the multidimensionality and internal contradictions of patriotic feeling.

The analysis indicates that the effectiveness of patriotic education through literature depends on several interrelated factors:

- 1) the aesthetic persuasiveness of the text, achieved through an organic synthesis of historical truth and formal excellence;
- 2) psychological credibility of characterization, which enables readerly identification;
- 3) the multi-aspect representation of patriotism, incorporating diverse manifestations of attachment to the homeland;
- 4) the correlation of patriotic motifs with universal human values, which gives texts broader resonance; and
- 5) the integration of historical context into the work's artistic fabric.

Particular attention within this framework should be given to the transformation of the literary hero across the twentieth century, as shifts in heroic typology are directly correlated with changing conceptions of patriotism and its culturally sanctioned forms. In the first half of the century, literature develops a new type of patriot-hero whose actions are shaped not only by personal belief but also by an awareness of historical necessity. A.A. Fadeyev's "Rout" («Разгром»), for instance, dramatizes the formation of patriotic consciousness in the context of civil war, with Levinson exemplifying a leadership model in which patriotism is expressed through the capacity for ethically difficult decisions in the name of the collective good.

Narratives of collectivization and industrialization also significantly shaped patriotic consciousness. L.L. Leonov's "Sot" («Соть») interprets national transformation through personal destinies, showing how patriotic affect is converted into concrete practices of building a "new life" and portraying the interaction between the individual and historical process as structurally complex and ideologically

charged.

Mid-century war prose further expanded the conceptual repertoire of patriotism. Works by V.P. Nekrasov, K.D. Vorobyov, and V.V. Bykov advance the paradigm of “trench truth,” where patriotism manifests in quotidian endurance [9, 68] and the ordinary heroism of defense. V.V. Bykov’s “Sotnikov” («Сотников»), in particular, foregrounds the moral-philosophical dimension of patriotic duty by staging the drama of ethical choice under extreme conditions. A special place in the evolution of patriotic discourse belongs to A.I. Solzhenitsyn. “Matryona’s Home” («Матрёнин двор») proposes an alternative understanding of patriotism through the figure of a righteous woman who preserves the moral foundations of national life, contrasting lived ethical integrity with official rhetorical formulations and reaffirming the “small homeland” as the locus of authentic patriotic feeling. The literature of the Khrushchev “Thaw” contributed substantially to patriotic pedagogy by reinterpreting wartime experience and emphasizing moral choice and psychological interiority. Texts by Yu.V. Bondarev, G.Ya. Baklanov, and V.O. Bogomolov offer ethically nuanced portrayals of war; Yu.V. Bondarev’s “Hot Snow” («Горячий снег»), for example, frames patriotic obligation through the protagonists’ personal переживания, producing a psychologically credible depiction of the formation of patriotic consciousness.

“Village prose” likewise played a crucial role, representing patriotism as an organic bond with traditional culture and communal life. Works by V.I. Belov, V.G. Rasputin, and F.A. Abramov conceptualize historical memory as the basis of patriotic identity; F.A. Abramov’s “House” («Дом») demonstrates how family continuity and local tradition cultivate a sense of participation in the nation’s fate. In parallel, the ecological theme deepened patriotic reflection in works by S.P. Zalygin, V.P. Astafyev, and Ch.T. Aitmatov. [9, 70] Ch.T. Aitmatov’s “The Scaffold” («Плaha») offers a philosophical model of patriotism grounded in human responsibility toward nature and develops a dense system of symbolic figures to articulate moral accountability for the country’s future.

CONCLUSION

Urban prose of the late twentieth century introduced additional dimensions, depicting patriotic consciousness in the context of urban culture and everyday social life. Works by Yu.V. Trifonov, A.G. Bitov, and V.S. Makanin explore historical memory through the prism of the city; Yu.V. Trifonov’s “The House on the Embankment” («Дом на набережной») connects private biographies with collective history, revealing

the tensions between personal moral choices and historical legacies. Finally, late twentieth-century literature also reflects the growing complexity of narrative structures: authors increasingly employ psychological analysis, non-linear temporal organization, and multi-level symbolic systems. The rise of documentary prose – such as works by A.M. Adamovich, D.A. Granin, and S.A. Alexievich – signals a further shift in the representation of patriotic experience, combining testimonial foundations with interpretive literary analysis (e.g., *The Blockade Book* as a multi-voiced account of collective endurance). At the same time, postmodern aesthetics in works by V.S. Makanin, L.S. Petrushevskaya, and T.N. Tolstaya often refract patriotism through the lens of cultural crisis and moral disorientation, underscoring the difficulty of sustaining ethical reference points in a rapidly changing world. Overall, twentieth-century literature demonstrates a clear evolution of patriotism from overt ideological affirmation toward philosophically complex and ethically mediated reflection. This trajectory is driven by the expansion of thematic domains (ecological and cultural-historical problematics), the intensification of psychological depth, the diversification of forms of patriotic expression, and the centrality of historical and cultural memory as a foundational category for patriotic education.

Thus, pathos may be defined as the writer’s emotionally evaluative attitude toward the depicted reality, distinguished by its intensity and expressive force. Literary criticism traditionally identifies several principal types of pathos: heroic, dramatic, tragic, sentimental, romantic, humorous, and satirical. Heroic pathos affirms the significance of individual and collective feats and their importance for the historical development of a people or humanity as a whole. By idealizing heroic characters and emphasizing their moral qualities, authors create works imbued with admiration and exaltation (e.g., Homer’s “Iliad”, Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”, A.S. Pushkin’s “Poltava”). Dramatic pathos characterizes works depicting conflicts generated by external circumstances that threaten the aspirations or lives of characters. Such drama may be ideologically affirmative, when the author sympathizes with the protagonists, or ideologically critical, when the characters’ moral positions are condemned. Dramatic pathos is frequently associated with war literature and with narratives addressing social inequality.

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