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Complex Words In The Works Of Symbolists And Acmeists: Features And Functions

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Abstract: The article examines the role of complex words (composites) in the poetic language of Symbolists and Acmeists. Drawing on works by Z.N. Gippius, D.S. Merezhkovsky, N.S. Gumilev, and A.A. Akhmatova, it analyzes types of complex words, their morphological structure, semantics, and stylistic functions within the Symbolist pursuit of polysemous imagery and metaphorical density, as well as the Acmeist emphasis on image precision and word structure.

Keywords: Silver Age, Symbolism, Acmeism, complex words, composites, word formation, poetics, Gippius, Merezhkovsky, Gumilev, Akhmatova.

Introduction: The Silver Age of Russian literature marks a period of intense spiritual and artistic exploration, when poetry gained unprecedented expressiveness and inner freedom. Within this cultural surge, two influential movements emerged. Symbolism, the elder, sought to grasp the world's hidden meanings, relying on the musicality of words and favoring sign-images through which ideal reality manifested. Acmeism arose as a response to Symbolism's excessive vagueness, proclaiming clarity, tangibility, and density of artistic image, returning poetry to earthly existence, human experience, and precise verbal form. Together, these movements set a high standard of artistic mastery for the era and became pillars of its aesthetic diversity.

Word formation in composites ranks among the most productive yet intriguing methods of creating new words. Many writers employed them in their works, and Acmeists were no exception. By using established composites and crafting occasional ones, authors achieved stylistic conciseness, imagistic precision, and semantic density [6, 270].

Complex words, or composites, are lexical units formed by combining two or more stems. In poetic contexts, such words serve not only nominative but also heightened expressive roles, enabling deeper insight into the artistic methods of these movements.

Within poetic texts, complex words fulfill these functions: expressive (intensifying emotional tone); semantic (crafting multilayered images via merged meanings); metric and rhythmic (influencing verse rhythm through length and stress); stylistic (highlighting authorial individuality via neologisms and unconventional forms).

Symbolists employed composites as tools for images of enhanced semantic capacity, merging intersecting traits of an object or state in one form. For them, such words were not mere ornament but a means to approach the «second reality» – profound meaning beyond ordinary expression.

Acmeists used composites for tangible, concrete expression, grounding the abstract in the material and creating palpable metaphorics – a key distinction from Symbolists, whose images aspired to the mystical and elusive.

The analysis now turns to composites in the works of prominent Symbolists and Acmeists: Z.N. Gippius, D.S. Merezhkovsky, N.S. Gumilev, and A.A. Akhmatova.

Z.N. Gippius, a poetess with a pronounced intellectual and psychological orientation, features poetry marked by intense reflection, inner drama, and spiritual renewal. She masterfully blended refined Symbolist imagery with analytical precision, weaving emotional depth with rigorous thought. Traditionally, she is viewed as imparting a sharp spiritual quest and personal intensity to early 20th-century Russian lyric.

In Gippius's poetry, complex words primarily organize meaning and convey emotional expressiveness.

Through composites, she forms concentrated, tense images merging semantic strands: режуще-острый (cutting-sharp) evokes painful exposure, sharpness «scratching» consciousness; мертенно-холодный (deathly-cold) amplifies spiritual numbness and inner void; молитвенно-чистый (prayerfully-pure) sets tones of inner cleansing and quiet focus, evoking ritual elevation; весело-покорный (cheerfully-submissive) captures emotional duality – outer lightness, inner yielding; правдиво-лживый (truthfully-deceitful) depicts consciousness torn between sincerity and self-deception. These enhance psychological contrast, rhythmic pulse, and introspective tone. Ultimately, composites are a tool not only for imagery but also for precise depiction of inner experience.

D.S. Merezhkovsky, a key Russian modernist figure, poet, prose writer, and Symbolist ideologue, fused historico-philosophical themes, human spiritual quests, and culture's hidden higher patterns. Active in Silver Age literary life, he shaped new art's aesthetics, influencing generations. His poetry and prose feature tense reflection, complex imagery, and synthesis of earthly and transcendent elements.

In Merezhkovsky's poetic language, complex words concentrate meaning and nuance emotion. They merge material traits with spiritual interpretation: лазурно-серебристый (azure-silvery) forms a light image both celestial and earthly; братски-нежный (brotherly-tender) blends ethics and emotion for trusting fraternity; мелочно-тревожный (pettily-anxious) conveys soul fragmentation from minor worries; глубоко-мирный (deeply-peaceful) expresses rooted harmony from inner certainty; детски-ясный (childishly-clear) denotes perceptual purity for renewal via simplicity. Collectively, they yield dense, symbolically rich images uniting sense and thought.

N.S. Gumilev, a central Acmeist, treated words with sacred force, pursuing precise expression, heroic image, and structural clarity. Composites play key roles in his poetic reality.

Certain composites fulfill emotional-psychological functions: сребристо-горестным рыданьем (silvery-sorrowful sobbing) – beautiful yet bitter, aestheticizing suffering; безнадежно-счастливой (hopelessly-happy) –conflicting doomed bliss; бледно-мерцающем взоре (pale-flickering gaze) –weariness, doubt, fleeting hope. They craft multilayered emotions vital to Acmeist poetics.

Others serve visual-imagistic functions: светло-чарующих речей (light-enchanting speeches) – elevated magic; многозвездный шатёр (many-starred tent) – cosmic-earthly; смертоносных равнинах (death-bearing plains) –war/death void; сонно-вздыхающим морем (sleepily-sighing sea) – animated calm/grief. They build atmosphere, feeling landscapes, spatial metaphor, and symbolism.

Gumilev's composites organically reflect his heroic, tangible, and weighty worldview.

A.A. Akhmatova's use of complex words differs from Gumilev's: rarer and restrained per Acmeist clarity, yet pointedly expressive.

1. Emotional-psychological (nuanced contradictions): любовно-кротко (lovingly-meek) – quiet love; полуласково, полулениво (half-tenderly, half-lazily) – split repose; просветленно-злого (enlightened-evil) – inner conflict. They deepen tones and reveal complexities.

2. Visual-imagistic (synesthetic vividness): червонно-дымною зарею (crimson-smoky dawn) – intense haze; звезды матово-бледны (stars matte-pale) – lifeless dimness; луг так сладостно-покат (meadow sweetly-sloping) – sensual curve. They enrich reality tied to the heroine's state.

Complex words in A.A. Akhmatova’s poetry are not merely descriptive; they are multifunctional elements that convey deep emotions, create rich imagery, and contribute to the poetic rhythm and sound.

Thus, Symbolists and Acmeists share active composite use, but their functions differ. Symbolists convey fluidity, polysemy, and tension, densifying visible-hidden intersections. Acmeists craft multilayered and mythically dense imagery, emphasizing clear, tangible reflection on human experience, nature, and the universe. Symbolists amplify associative space, while Acmeists stress structural precision.

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