

# opción

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Linguística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, 2019, Especial N°

# 23

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNe: 2477-9385  
Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

# Act of a literary hero in literature theory and history

**Nikolay I. Nikolaev<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M. V. Lomonosov

**Tatiana V. Shvetsova<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M. V. Lomonosov

[tavash@yandex.ru](mailto:tavash@yandex.ru)

## Abstract

This article presents a theoretical re-evaluation of the act of a literary hero concept and its historical and literary content via the review and critical assessment of contemporary works dedicated to the theory of the hero's act. As a result, the act of a literary hero can be used as a formal characteristic helping to distinguish the participants in the plot of the literary work. In conclusion, we believe that the described approach to studying literary heroes through the prism of their acts brings in some fundamentally new elements to understanding the logic of the historical literary process.

**Keywords:** Act, Artistic, World, Crisis, Historical.

## Acto de héroe literario en literatura, teoría e historia

### Resumen

Este artículo presenta una reevaluación teórica del acto de un concepto de héroe literario y su contenido histórico y literario a través de la revisión y evaluación crítica de obras contemporáneas dedicadas a la teoría del acto del héroe. Como resultado, el acto de un héroe literario puede usarse como una característica formal que ayuda a distinguir a los participantes en la trama de la obra literaria. En conclusión, creemos que el enfoque descrito para estudiar héroes literarios a través del prisma de sus actos aporta algunos elementos

fundamentalmente nuevos para comprender la lógica del proceso literario histórico.

**Palabras clave:** acto, artístico, mundo, crisis, histórico.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The act of a literary hero can be considered one of the most relevant topics of philological studies due to its close relation to the current scholarly trends: the cognitive turn and the anthropocentric paradigm development. The effectiveness of the anthropocentric approach in literary studies is demonstrated in the works by (BELYANIN, 2007). At the same time, we cannot state that this literary research field has been already fully developed from the methodological point of view. The term anthropological literary studies apply to a complex of very different theories and concepts, having in common the same interest in the issue of man in literature.

The issues related to the act of a literary hero are undoubtedly within the scope of anthropological literary studies. In our opinion, identification of the types of acts, their motives, forms and means of expression will contribute to a better understanding of the advanced models complying with the values and meanings of the new cognitive society, which are intuitively searched for by literature.

The foundations of the theory and philosophy of act were laid in the works of such ancient thinkers like Socrates and Aristotle. In modern times, this theory has been actively developed in the

philosophical and linguistic scholarly discourse, starting from the studies by (BAKHTIN, 1995), a significant contribution to developing the theory of the act, following the approach outlined by (BAKHTIN, 1995).

It is considered that a human act is present in all social practices. The act focuses, concentrates the energy of searching for the meaning of human life. On the one hand, it is a way of active manifestation of a human who is present in and built into the world. On the other hand, it carries the energy targeted to change the world. Thus, the act is one of the most important factors in the development of human civilization.

Today nobody would object to the assertion that literature for us, apart from everything else, is a means of comprehending the world and oneself. Being anthropocentric in principle, literary and artistic consciousness aspires to understand and depict a human being. A human image in literature is a product of the general concept of personality and the world developed in the specific cultural and historical epoch. The literary hero is constructed, modelled according to the prevailing literary ideas of the time. According to Andreev, different epochs differently understood the relationship between art and reality and had different principles of aesthetic modelling of personality. Historical modelling of the images of literary heroes also involves modelling of their acts.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

There is no consensus among literary scholars regarding the notion of literary hero. Contemporary literary studies provide different terms and definitions for it. The most widespread term is a hero, but scholars also use the terms a human image in literature, a model of a man in literature, a persona, a character, or an octant.

The notion of a literary hero can be interpreted in different ways. First, it emphasizes the leading position of a particular character in the literary work as the carrier of the main problematic and thematic load. The main hero, unlike secondary characters usually depicted in a traditional way, also often reflects innovative artistic preferences of the writer. However, the term literary hero is often applied to any literary character (SCHREGLMANN & ÖZTÜRK, 2018).

Second, the notion of literary hero can be treated as an integral image of a person, including appearance, way of thinking, behavior and sacred content. In this sense, it is similar to the term personal character. When used within certain semantic boundaries, this word will denote the inner psychological portrait of the personality, including innate personal characteristics (BAKHTIN, 1995).

The literary hero is one of the basic elements of the artistic world of a literary work. Therefore, the study of the text poetics usually does not do without an analysis of its composition. Our review of contemporary literary studies, dedicated to the issues related to

constructing the image of a literary hero in a literary text, allowed identifying the following main areas of research:

1. Description of the character image components:

1.1. The semantics of character names, studies in the field of literary onomastics concerning the analysis of names as used in literary works. Hero's name as a social sign; search for links between the meaning of the proper name and the behavior or physical characteristics of the character; the name of a literary hero as a cultural sign; discussion of methods for translating the names of literary heroes (CAORUONAN, 2017);

1.2. Representation of the inner world of a literary hero with expressive and symbolic means; non-verbal characteristics of the character's image (BULAEVA & BUROVA, 2017; BOZHKOVA & SHABALINA, 2015; BOBOKHONOV, 2016); speech strategies of characters aimed at harmonization of interpersonal relations;

1.3. Characterization of the types of literary heroes' behaviour: literary behaviour (BREWER, 2015); female behaviour; male behaviour; and literary hero's emotional behaviour;

2. Description of functions of particular literary heroes;

3. Studies of the image of a literary hero in a particular literary work or all works of a particular author as a whole;

4. Research into the poetics of literary heroes in relation to their times;

5. Identification of specific features of literary hero types in the literary process of a certain epoch (BURTSEVA, 2013);

6. Image of a literary hero and the problem of identity (BARABANOVA, 2004);

7. Strategies and methods for interpreting the character image.

Only a few scholars analyse images of literary heroes through the components of their behaviour, in particular through their acts. Today the analysis of the act of a literary hero is not systemic and is carried out on a selective basis. At the very best, those scholars who address the problem field of the act focus either on the names of the act in different languages or on the interpretation of one or more types of acts without reference to others (BUSHUEVA, 2017; 2018).

### **3. RESULTS**

In our study, we performed a review and critical assessment of the terms and definitions used in the theory of the act in the artistic and aesthetic sphere with the content analysis tool. We also performed a two-level triadic formal concept analysis to formulate a scholarly definition of the studied phenomenon that would fully and accurately

reflect its nature (ZHALEH ET AL, 2018: UKAJ, F., & BIBULJICA, 2019).

Based on our review and critical assessment of the terms and definitions used in the theory of the act in philosophy, education, linguistics and aesthetics, we set a terminological framework for describing the research object — the act of a literary hero. We analysed scholarly approaches to the research into the developmental patterns of the literary process in Russia, coming to some interesting conclusions and offering a new methodological approach to studies in this field.

Based on the systemic categorial methodology, we developed a concept of the development of Russian literature, including pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis periods. We also carried out a review and critical assessment of approaches to the systematization of the Russian historical and literary process with the method of comparative analysis, which resulted in the developments of new research methods. We also explained the reasons for appearing a failing-to-act hero in the Russian literature of the 1840s.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

Representatives of different fields of knowledge define a different set of characteristics for the phenomenon of act as a research object. Philosophers treat the act as a fragment of social being; a way



of human presence in the world; “a universal category of being” (BAKHTIN, 1995: 10).

Territory as a factor in the act formation presupposes the impact of the area, geographical location, climate, natural characteristics and anthropogenic properties and other factors on the subject and on the subject’s acts. The territory properties collectively determine a specific type of developmental location, which, in turn, affects the people inhabiting it, forming their personal qualities, traits of character, patterns of behaviour and their actions. The act of a literary hero correlates with a certain narrative. The act is an element of the artistic picture of the world. It has its inner structure, i.e. unity of subjective, personal elements and socially significant consequences of the act.

The process comprises comprehension and choice of the motive, as well as its justification for oneself or for others. The motivation analysis can lead to awareness of the main, dominant motivation — initial or primary one. All human motives are based on conscious needs and interests. The act provides a platform for interaction of subjects, forming connections and relations for the cooperation of literary heroes. The diagram below shows the process of emergence of an act and its impact on the world.

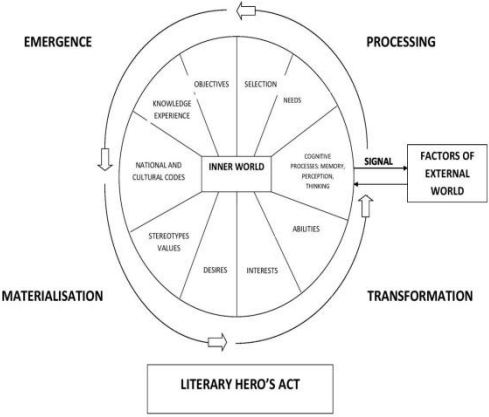


Fig. 1: Model of Literary Hero’s Act

The act is a sign by which inner cognitive processes reveal themselves and are exported to the outside world; it is an element of the cognitive process and a way to establish interaction between the external and the inner worlds.

The act is “a connecting link between the objective world of culture and a unique personality” (BAKHTIN, 1995: 14); in other words, it is a link between the external world, which is full of signs and codes of culture, and the inner world, expressed in values, interests and needs.

The act of a literary hero has a certain structure in which the inner and external aspects can be discerned. Its representation in a literary work is composed of a number of components revealing the personal inner world, including intentions, thoughts, conscious

feelings, and the sphere of the unconscious. In the early stages of literary art development, event aspects of the hero's act predominate, and the internal processes and psychological motives of the act are much less represented.

In today's literary studies, there are many different definitions of the notion of the act, depending on the specifics of the analyzed literary works and the scholars' cognitive and research objectives.

The most significant scholarly definitions of the act of a literary hero are summarized in the table below. As a rule, they reflect the research efforts to generalize and systematize the data obtained during studies of specific literary works.

Table 1: Definitions of the act of a literary hero and similar notions

<b>Notion</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Author</b>
Act	Character's function in the text	Propp (2001:22)
Act	Verbal gesture	Bely (Hansen-Løve, 2001: 56-57)
Act	A special part of the literary composition	Tomashevsky (1999)
Hero's act	The basic element of the plot, both in fairy tales and other narratives	Lutovinova (2009)
Act	Reveals characters' systems of values. Plays an important role in organizing the artistic space of a literary work	Martyanova (2014)
Act	Acts in their interrelation are an important aspect of the plot	Khalizev (2000, 2004)
Moral act	Laid down on the tectonic level of a literary work.	Tyupa (2009)
Act	Determines the hero's status in the literary text.	Nikolaev (2012)

Act	A spatial movement, thought, word or their combination, which has a certain value orientation. Thus, the hero's status in the literary work can essentially determine the hero's act	BOSNAK (2005)
Act	Constitutes the second figurative structure of the literary work — a storyline, imbued with a targeted action combining all substantive details	BORISOVA (2009)
Act	Means of depicting a character and expressing his essential characteristics.	Zotov (n.d.)
Cultural act	The discourse transforms biological behaviour into a cultural act	Obatnin (n.d.)
Speech act	An act of speech, a verbal action in a specific verbal genre	Karasik (2016)
Act	A category that is directly related to the organization of different event series of the play.	Monkhbat (n.d.)

So, in the literary studies, the act of a literary hero can be used as a formal characteristic helping to distinguish the participants in the plot of the literary work: the main heroes and secondary characters.

A detailed definition of the act of a literary hero can be formulated based on exploring the nature of such an act and structuring the attributes that are important for its understanding. The act of a literary hero is a meaningful, value-loaded category, indicating the character's unique position in the artistic picture of the world, character's predisposition to a free volitional choice and responsibility for its impact on the state of the world. It is correlated with the

established behavioural stereotype inherent to the national culture and with material or non-material results.

In Russian literature, this usually happens in the atmosphere of waiting for a hero, which accompanies the literary-critical polemics of the respective epoch. For example, waiting for a hero theme is actively discussed in contemporary literary studies. A similar situation occurred in the Russian literature of the 1840s, which has been already discussed in other papers.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

One of the main conclusions from the discussions on the act of a literary hero is that it has a deep principle dependence on the state of the artistic picture of the world. The hero's experience of the unique and inimitable nature of the own place in the world is a necessary precondition for the emergence of an inner impulse for the hero's act directed to this world.

Such concepts as specific features of the world architectonics and justification of the uniqueness of the hero's place predetermine the conceptual characteristics of literary heroes in different national kinds of literature. Changes in this area determine the epoch-specific properties of the hero and the structure of national literature. For example, the appeal of the Russian literature to the inner world of man during the reign of Peter the Great became a fundamental event in the

history of the Russian artistic thought and a new argument in justification of the uniqueness of the hero's place. The literary characters, deeply experiencing the uniqueness of the own inner being, at the same time testified to serious changes in the artistic picture of the world of the Russian literature as a whole. Such justification of uniqueness of the hero's place in the world through revealing the hero's inner being continued to be the dominant artistic strategy until the middle of the 19th century.

In our opinion, that was a specific response of the Russian literature to the deep crisis of the act occurring in Russia in that historical period. That crisis created "an abyss between the motive of the act and its product" (BAKHTIN, 1995: 18). The literary hero, experiencing the loss of the own ontological materiality, stands at the edge of this abyss, unable to reconnect, within oneself and through oneself, the parts of the traditional architectonics of the world of act divided by the abyss. In other words, the crisis in the Russian literature of the 1830s-40s, which we discuss here, was caused by another profound transformation of the artistic picture of the world in Russia. Therefore, we believe that the described approach to studying literary heroes through the prism of their acts brings in some fundamentally new elements to understanding the logic of the historical literary process.

In our opinion, perception of the Russian classic novel as a result and product of the profound crisis in the literature of the preceding period rather than a product of evolutionary development

conceptually changes the traditional approach to the Russian historical and literary process. These changes are based on the described approach to the notion of the act of a literary hero and its historical and literary content.

## REFERENCES

- BAKHTIN, M. 1995. **Toward a philosophy of the act.** Man in the world of the word. pp. 22–67. Moscow (Russia).
- BARABANOVA, N. 2004. **Identity of the image of a literary hero as a narrative problem.** PhD (Philology) thesis. Samara (Russia).
- BELYANIN, M. 2007. **Literary anthropology of late Tolstoy's works.** PhD (Philology) thesis. Moscow (Russia).
- BOBOKHONOV, M. 2016. **Artistic detail as means of the external manifestation of the hero's inner life.** Contemporary issues of Turkology: Language – Literature – Culture. Proceedings of the International Research and Application Conference. pp. 603–608. Moscow (Russia).
- BORISOVA, E. 2009. “On the content of artistic image and imagery concepts in literary studies and linguistics. **Bulletin of Chelyabinsk State University.** Vol. 37. № 35: 20–27.
- BOSNAK, D. 2005. **The hero's act as a way of realizing the evil in the artistic system of F. Sologub's novel The Petty Devil.** Grekhnyov Readings. Collection of Academic Papers. Pp. 109–111. Nizhny Novgorod (Russia).
- BOZHKOVA, G., & SHABALINA, I. 2015. “Gesture as a means of creating a poetic portrait in the lyrical heritage of Kapranov”.

**Filologicheskiye nauki: Voprosy teorii i praktiki.** Vol. 11. N° 1: 33–36. Russia.

BREWER, B. 2015. “The pen is mightier than the sword: Action as madness in Don Quixote”. **Forum for Modern Language Studies.** Vol. 51. N° 4: 364–378. Russia.

BULAEVA, N., & BUROVA, E. 2017. “On non-verbal characteristics of the character's image: by the examples from the Gothic science fiction”. **Rossiyskiy gumanitarnyy zhurnal.** Vol. 6. N° 2. Available at <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/o-neverbalnyh-sposobah-harakteristiki-obrazov-personazhey-na-materiale-goticheskoy-nauchnoy-fantastiki>. Russia.

BURTSEVA, E. 2013. **A literary hero as the main sign of a literary epoch.** **Philological Sciences in Russia and Abroad – II.** Proceedings of the 2nd International Research Conference. Pp. 1–6. Saint Petersburg (Russia).

BUSHUEVA, A. 2017. “Conceptualization of the act of meanness: by the example of the Russian language”. **Bulletin of Volgograd State Pedagogical University.** Vol. 5. N° 1180: 96–100. Russia.

BUSHUEVA, L. 2018. “Classification of acts: by the example of the acts in a trick category”. **Bulletin of the Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod.** Vol. 1: 155–159. Russia.

CAORUONAN, A. 2017. “On-and-off-the-stage attitude in characters: Research of Shakespearean studies in the contemporary western world — All's Well That Ends Well as an example”. 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Creative Education. **Advances in Education Sciences.** Vol. 13: 317–321. Russia.

SCHREGLMANN, S., & ÖZTÜRK, F. K. 2018. “An Evaluation of Gifted Students' Perceptions on Critical Thinking



Skills”. **Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists**, 6(4), 1-16.

UKAJ, F., & BIBULJICA, H. 2019. “Market Regulation and Marketing of Enterprises as a Factor for the Development of SMEs in Kosovo”. **Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies**, 8(1), 45.

ZHALEH, K., GHONSOOLY, B., & PISHGHADAM, R. 2018. “Effects of Conceptions of Intelligence and Ambiguity Tolerance on Teacher Burnout: A Case of Iranian EFL Teachers”. **Research in Applied Linguistics**, 9(2), 118-140.





**UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL ZULIA**

---

# **opción**

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
Año 35, Especial No. 23 (2019)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la  
Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de  
Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

**[www.luz.edu.ve](http://www.luz.edu.ve)**

**[www.serbi.luz.edu.ve](http://www.serbi.luz.edu.ve)**

**[produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve](http://produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve)**