

THE CONCEPT OF WINDOW IN *THE WHITE GUARD* BY MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

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ABSTRACT

The story takes place in Kiev at the time of the Tsar government in 1917, in short, in the Russian sphere of Asia. The novel is a semi-biographical depiction of the author's life and his suffering and calamity during the Bolshevik chaos that invaded the Kiev Empire, and revolved around to free the Ukraine and turn the tsarist system into a soviet one at the expense of innocent people who sought peace at any price. Most of all the dwellers of the city joined the white army when the omen of Petlyura (Bulgakov: 9-13-14...) and the Hetman approach the city. Against and for, was their attitude during the entire story as it is fully and skillfully chaptered, and complexly plotted wherein each chapter or scene or dream contains a plot, thereby lies the handling of characters and display in a very distinct fashion.

KEYWORDS: The White Guard, Bulgakov, Kiev Empire

INTRODUCTION

By the same token, The Turbins are firstly presented in their apartment mourning their lost mother (09) and recalling their father-the professor- Whereas Alexei, Elena and Nikolka are the brothers Turbins. Alexei is a doctor who comes back after nine years of training in the cadets as he has become a doctor, and is the eldest and the protagonist to some extent as the events unfold. Elena is the wise sister and the epitome of wisdom and feminism in the novel. Then, comes Nikolka the youngest brother, who at 17 years old rushes towards taking part in the battles as they break during the following chapters. Most of all the first chapters have as settings; the apartment and its lobby as place, and the night and dawn as the time of many happenings and an important moment to flood the Vodka all along the way.

There comes in the next chapters the apparition of the white officers bringing bad news of Petlyura's taking off the City, among which the character of Myshlayevsky (09-15...) who is the antagonist of the white Tsarist guard, the drunk, the brave and the masculine refracted by the author giving thereby, the pride of it. He is, in fact, the trigger of the battle-like side of the narrative in general. He brings the news and shifts towards the spot dragging with him Alexei as an officer doctor in the white army that is supposed to defend the City against the enraged soldiers of Petlyura (66). The latter remains as a myth during all the action fiction, and never given a physical description, though Bulgakov is very accurate in terms of physical details, and idiosyncratically, reflects the author's biological pre-requisite to write, and reflection of his own abilities and medical skills in this pointed account looking so genuine and original.

Afterwards, a description of the moments of Elena spent in the apartment, worrying about her eldest and dear brother as he is engaged in the bloody battles and drawbacks at the enemy lines and the edges of the city (170). She is all the time looking through the window seeking hope and redemption at the time when, the maiden does the same thing with the brave white officer though, drunk with a nasty back breath, but she could find the way to kiss him in the neck. Nikolka springs in another chapter as the hero of his action while guiding his platoon in the heart of gun fires and bomb shells as Petlyura approaches upon the city as the plague devastating everything and killing the Tsarist officers and cadets. In fact,

the Tsar himself and the headquarters flee and abandon the soldiers without any support or final orders; cowardice behavior is such sight of things at the time of war and chaos by a so-loved and obeyed leader **“headquarters betrayed us”** (Bulgakov: 148).

As the end of the fiction comes to sights, Vasilisa or Vasily Lisovich (08), the engineer, and neighbour of the Turbins struggles with his bonny wife, refuses to denounce the soldiers who are upstairs under Elena's care, where lies her dear brother Alexei injured and under Typhus domination; he is in fact, delivering soul. After many glasses of Vodka, the characters of the beginning revolve again in the primary setting giving resolution to happenings. Petlyura is never seen, but Kiev is no longer Tsarist, it is The Republic of Ukraine, Elena prays for the recovery of her brother and he does after the Miracle, Nikolka is home, release and silence, but mourning is the afore-omen. Good for him, he recovers and undertakes his work as physician, trying to help junkies to recover from their addiction to cocaine, alcohol and fallen women. Stream of consciousness prevails the beginning in Alexei's dream, and at the end whereby the author describes the dreams of every one of the main characters and a soldier's hope about warmth and serenity which is the golden dream of any soviet Russian soldier.

In the annoyed sea of fiction and prose, the frost is all dominating (thirty six times in the novel) but freezing its dwellers. Bulgakov tells his readers his life and experience, he might be Alexei in a one way to see things, narrate, depict and refract his agony, his addiction to morphine, alcohol and his family that he should never see again, after he left. Thus, half of the events is fiction, wishes and imagination of a great mind, and a skillful writer, social realist and romantic nostalgic in the soviet Russia, exiled inside, he ascertains his torment and distress. being a doctor and writer just enables him to give reason to the addicted characters and actual citizens of the frozen part of Siberia, Kiev, Ukraine and mother Russia.

2.3. THEMES AND SYMBOLS

When focusing on the background of Russian authors, the biological and formalist approach to literature prevails in Mikhail Bulgakov *The White Guard*, as he was a physician prior to start writing which is obvious in his very detailed fiction and presentation of events and action. In fact, he preserves the fictional tense of narration without setting aside any detail at all. He describes the place in a very accurate fashion that makes the reader hear the footsteps of characters as they unfold so real. His sense of time is so complex that it needs a strong memory to remember when and who came at what time it happened and the mingling of night, dawn and twilight involve the reader to a considerable extent, by virtue of which, he compels him to attend the style and feel the causality of events, the interaction of characters with the major governing forces. With wit and conceit, he presents the action holistically, and then atomistic ally, events are driven by to interpretation and understanding.

The major themes that are conveyed in the novel under study are; family, social life, equality, taboo love, desire if not lust, freedom, paralysis, mental equilibrium and addiction, to cite but a few. They are, in fact, revealed through the different components of piece of literature itself, wherein most of them are symbolically presented. In the setting, it was night and the family was in their apartment mourning their mother and recalling the memory of their father; the Turbins, actually a Russian typical family whose members are symbols of the society stratification at the time of the Tsar Alexander I. Alexei, Elena and Nikolka were the children Turbins; the first presented as a physician who has just returned after eight long years in the cadets, Elena stays at home and waits for the return of her husband from war, he was a soldier as many Russians. Then Nikolka, the youngest one, somehow set aside in the beginning of the events as they rose.

By the same token, it seems like all the events are at night, not even a word about sun, perhaps because of the prevailing weather, a key concept to set a mysterious and blurred mood. The atmosphere is cold, icy feelings, the snow is everywhere, and its prevalence chills everything around. This caused the writer to use an epiphany that conveys the paralysis everywhere, even from the part of the reader who is prevented from understanding such over use of the snow all over the novel. The weather is a strong symbol purposefully used by the novelist to represent a pain so extreme of the Russian anguished society by the time, or it is the author's intention to symbolize the agony in this fashion. Someone or something is dying and delivering soul, it is but the Tsar's system collapsing after years of ambivalence. The Bolsheviks take the ground and kill the beast, but it is a beast killed by another monster-like fellow where innocence stands as an independent candidate for the death sentence that lies in the corridor mist of the afternoon, so short but efficient.

THE CONCEPT OF WINDOW

The window is among the outstanding factors that literature had torn from the human very analysis, awareness and representation of his environment, and its relation with the approach, perspective, prospective and interpretation of the fiction prose that lies in the graveyard of masterpieces standing by and waiting for the day of judgment, their criticism in fact. So, windows, doors, walls, ceilings are to be considered as the fences that prevent the brain from pouring out of the skull, if so to ascertain, the hedges that keep the state of delirium and insanity locked outside. Actually, the "window pane" in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte (Chen, 2012), draws the parallel and reveals the very diverse knowledge of Bulgakov and his tremendous ability to concretize and conceptualize this concept, perhaps without keeping attentive, in his demonic, devilish and deadly mood, tone, atmosphere and environment that was his.

In *The White Guard*, the concept of window is the psychological release and relief from depression, grief, sorrow, desolation, delirium, addiction to fallen women, vodka and religion (Bulgakov: 256-7). Every setting contains a window a specific character finds his ease through, Elena in the apartment, the colonel in the headquarters, Visalia in his apartment wherein he interacts with the most hidden desire ever dreamt of under the spouse's domination. As is the case for Heath cliff and the other characters in *Wuthering Heights*, the window is a breach for the unnatural and the poltergeist. It keeps the evil locked inside or outside. It is in fact the interaction betwixt the unconscious and the conscious area of the human soul wherein the stream of consciousness ought to be raised for discussion, and of great omnipresence usage in the novel in question. Every thought of Alexei is expressed through the voice of the narrator, his dream-like chapter, his sister's communication with her inner through the window, a whole perspective of action through the window pane.

Whenever the events rise to the climax, there is interception and the window is here to absorb all the tension and the voltage, to make an end to one sub-plot and hence raises the subsequent to the extent of making the reader addicted to it and compels him to finish and know about the next rising plot and protagonist.

The word "**window**" is highly tempted in the narrative as is for the much cited above ones. In fact, the recurrence of such word in fractions like; "**the narrow lancet windows of the church**" (04), epitomizes the repression of church to the citizens' feelings and outbursts under the shutting policy. "**The Turbins' windows shone brightly and cheerfully**" (08), the psychological estate of the Turbins in general is described as stable and shining but to an extent of collapse thereafter, and it is show in the emphasis and exaggeration of brightly and cheerfully. Indeed, soon the collapse shows itself through the ramifications in the cadets' troops in the line; "**cadets crawling from window to window, firing. Machine-guns fires at the windows**" (11); the concreteness of the bad omen or the collapse takes place wherein it is broken through a window, in the same line thrice, the war reaches the inner sides of the dwellers of the City.

Yet, **“Freud tried to show that dreams are not simply meaningless hallucinations, but a window into the unconscious that can reveal suppressed wishes” (Bowdon, 2007: 06)**, wherein these wishes of well-being of The Turbins in particular and people of the City in general, were dreams that came true and were not these meaningless hallucinations. Additionally, the third chapter is refracted as a dream where Alexei fulfilled peace and harmony in the City. Actually, the **“window”** as a concept is deeply rooted in the childhood of any human being. It is believed that a window exist in the unconsciousness of the mind, for

“It may seem a stretch to believe that a child can make such interpretations, but Klein claimed that if you spoke in their language a child really could understand. She believed that the way children play is a window into their unconscious mind and what is troubling them. Given children’s difficulty in articulating all their thoughts, play was the best way of healing any mental issues. (Ibid: 183)

In this way, Bowdon goes back to the childhood to highlight it as the basis or origin of any phobia or fear that springs out in the adulthood, and takes the language as means of communicating dreams, but to the extent of needing a window either to escape from or express repressed thoughts.

Every member of the Turbins family holds within repressed thoughts and feelings, **“Elena was nearer to the window and her eyes were shadowed with fear”**, **“Nikolka gripped the window-catch and pressed his other hand against the pane, [...], and flattened his nose against the glass” (12)**, **“a stream of fool abuse rattled around the room like hail on a window-sill” (17)**. Bulgakov hereby describes the atmosphere in the room where Nikolka and Elena struggle from the inside and not showing to each other to keep the general mood steady. The psychological likely collapse of the young brother or rather the rage to take part in the battle as the warrior hot blood rushes in his solid and still veins of a young body well trained.

However, Elena does not have this concern directly, but obliquely with compassion and tremendous patience tries to solve the dilemma inside her head. The one of the feminine creature, the mother and sister of the brave Alexei, faith is her escape, backing up her window pain and pane with consolation from despair and suicide. She tries to keep the faith and believe in the virgin and the fate that is unknown to her but revolve around and expectation of miracle and divine salvation. For Dos Passos emphasizes the importance of the room that gathers the brother and sister in this scene in particular, but does not take part in a direct analysis wherein brought as a clue. In this way,

“Dos Passos’s view of the room is a disorientating one, which gives pure perception priority over function. The eye seizes first on a perceptual high point: the open window, with its shaft of light; and from this, it follows a track which ultimately leads to the thing we ought to have noticed first” (Leech & Short: 192).

The writer stresses the afore-point in joining Alexei to his brothers in interaction with the window wherein, **“Alexei Turbin, without conscious reason, paced up and down the dark-living-room, pressed his face to the windowpane and listened” (23)**. It seems like he is described as bewildered and lost in the dark of unconsciousness and seeks refuge in grasping the windowpane, for Leech & Short describe the flashback as **“ the rope in a shop window, and can observe happenings in two directions, outside and inside” (Leech & Short: 330)**. Alexei within the novel has had many flashbacks like the one of his passed father while staring at the clock but the window is always cited in most of the scenes that refract psychological matters.

Hope coming from windows can be considered in passages; **“brilliantly lit window”**, **“light from the windows”**

(29). It is in fact, a passage through which things spring up in a bi-directional fashion, between the realism and the dimensional which is likely to be recognized as psychological and something which is not palpable to a considerable extent. In some others, Bulgakov personifies the window and describes the anatomy of giving due to do and fulfill; **“left-hand window”**, **“over the right hand window”**, **“glanced fearfully at the windows”** (33), presenting the fears from the eyes of the window, a supernatural entity that controls the gate leading of the two world; reality and fiction.

Windows have been given citizenship in **“the French windows”** (37) the fact that concretizes its personification, **“blank windows”** (47), **“black windows”** (48), **“dark windows”** (86), empty and dark windows give right to the evil that dwells and lies underneath such concept. Still the theme of Christian paganism and the devil recurs in a psychological context or interpretation. In addition to a state of delirium and non-sense within which Alexei has fallen into, but a tremendous description in the narrative should be cited and quoted so that to serve as an evidence of the Russian tradition within the western one, **“he fell into a deep, black, dreamless sleep and when a pale delicate light began to dawn outside the windows of his room, Alexei began to dream about the City”** (50). The dream is likely to be related to the unconsciousness through the window in the room of Alexei.

Very tremendous are the windows to let hope come in and fear out, **“the vast windows”**, **“great windows”**, **“light would start to burn in the windows of the houses”** (52), **“the left-hand window was a colored drawing of a lady’s hat with ‘chic parisien’ in golden letters”**, and deeper is love for women, and French ones, known to be sensual, since Paris is supposed to be the golden city, an obsession intertwined between beauty, art and former colonizer, so personified; **“the right-hand window was a huge yellow[...], crossed cannon badge of the artillery”** (72), the fraction reflects the very deep unconscious belonging of the author to the artillery corps characterized to be the most important one in the structure and the strength of any army in the world.

However, the afore soon seems to be seen from a very narrow angle, **“light managed to filter through the narrow, cob-webbed, barred windows”** (88), a little hope is sensed through the very complex and innate state of mind of the soldiers marching forward, others backward, the writer’s deep idiosyncrasy so reflected, palpable and recognized to be that accurate and measurable in the psychological domain. However, some hope is also seen through the windows, something that recurs again and again, **“the reflection in the windows was blue sky”**, **“blue skies in the windows”** (111). The use of colors is acknowledged to be part of the Russian literature according to some critics, but at this stage it cannot be stated as such unless it is going to be repeated along the remaining text fragments.

The window is afterwards given measures to be more like real material rather than an abstraction, however, still origin of metaphysical interpretations, **“little window”** (113), **“under the window”** (Idem), **“shattering all the windows”** (Ibid), **“half of whose windows smashed in”** (134), then the afore state description or conceptualization is broken and shattered dragging the readership backward to the very first adaptation of the concept “window”. The source of the unhappiness of some of the personages in the novel might be it, wherein another connotation to it, appears to be as **“black, joyless window”** (129), as is stated above in previous paragraphs.

The danger seems like to be disappearing or vanishing because it is foretold by the author, perhaps to tranquilize the reader and give him/her some hope that the war shall stop and everything would be at the norms, **“the artillery badges were gone from the window”** (146), nevertheless, still are some windows broken every here and then, **“a windowpane shattered somewhere in the courtyard of the same house”** (156), and still the windowpane is evoked wherein it constituted a crucial element in *Wuthering heights*, it is also considered and characterized to have one in *The White Guard*.

Up to now Nikolka, the youngest Turbin could overcome the pain caused his inner windowpane and trespass the psychological agony within which Elena is remaining until the end of the fiction, **“Nikolka jumped up and ran to the window [...], Elena folded her arms to her chest and said: ‘I beg you not to go out’ [...], ‘all right, go then’”** (166-7), she wanted at a moment to let him out, then she could not stop him. Nikolka could be interpreted as her pain that went out of her as well as his consciousness that prevented him to react in this time, time of war, when nothing goes straight.

Bulgakov highlights the part of the window that remained opened, is just a little part wherein he distinguishes the paralysis to the winter, the cold and dark, foggy and blurred weather that prevails the psyche of most of characters in the narrative, **“the little upper pane, the only part of the window left unsealed in winter”** (192). Then, **“he thrust his hand out of the little upper window-pane”** (Idem), the release or the would-be is at hand. In a fore going fragment, Nikolka suggests to open completely the window and let freedom to his and their souls and inner feelings to breathe a fresh air, may be restore the buried underneath repression while he utters, **“obviously we must open up the rest of the window”** (Ibid), and he did thereafter.

In latter lines, **“the Turbins windows shone brightly and cheerfully”** (302), everything goes astray for the family, the reader can sense the stabilized state of mind and the general mood, the atmosphere is apparently tremendous for all the members after having witnessed a miracle, their unexpected gathering, the family again united. For the fact that Bulgakov never saw his family after the taken over of Kiev, he genuinely reflects his agonies and unshed tears through the use of “window” in his narrative which he culminates it by, **“there were flowers on the window ledge”** (304), flowers that could serve for a gathering dancing party as well as for a very painful funeral. The afore-concept has been repeated on purpose or perhaps not, one hundred and thirty six times **136**. It might fulfill the readers’ expectations and understanding of what is really behind and between the lines, words and phrases that came to be alive.

CONCLUSIONS

The afore-discussed elements are but a few before the mightiness of aspects offered by Russian literature in general, and *The White Guard*, the novel by Mikhail Bulgakov more specifically. ‘Snow’, ‘window’ and ‘addiction’ are systematically linked to the concepts of space and time tackled in chapter one; wherein, snow covers this very large area which is Russia; window provides escapist behavior of words and phrases under the domination and strength of different substances and other entities. They sustain the hypnotized atmosphere that prevails and overshadows the fiction prose from threshold to conclusion.

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