

THE LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLS AND ITS FUNCTIONS IN THE LITERARY TEXT

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Abstract

This article analyzes the nature of symbolic language and its functions in literary texts. The study examines the theoretical approaches of Erich Fromm, Northrop Frye, Goblet d'Alviella, S. A. Ustyantseva, Yuri Lotman, Mircea Eliade, and Annemarie Schimmel to the concept of the symbol as a means of expressing abstract meanings through concrete forms. Particular attention is paid to the semantic, aesthetic, philosophical, compositional, and communicative functions of literary symbols. The main focus of the study is the symbolic meaning of the number “seven” in mythology, religion, folklore, and literature. A comparative and typological analysis is conducted based on the epic “Alpomish”, Alisher Navoi’s “Lison ut-Tayr”, Dino Buzzati’s “The Seventh Ward”, and Khurshid Dustmuhammad’s “The Road to the Silent Place”. The analysis demonstrates that the number “seven” functions as a universal mythopoetic code in different cultural and literary contexts. It expresses such meanings as sacredness, completeness, perfection, trial, purification, spiritual transformation, destiny, and death. The study also shows that symbolic elements may serve not merely as auxiliary details but as important structural components of a literary text, contributing to its semantic depth and polysemy.

Keywords: Symbol, symbolic language, literary text, mythopoetics, semiotics, number symbolism, number seven, archetype, cultural memory, existentialism, composition.

Introduction

The dove as a symbol of peace, the horse as a symbol of friendship, blood as a symbol of struggle, the sword as a symbol of protection, the eagle as a symbol of agility, one as a symbol of beginning, three as a symbol of completion, and seven as a symbol of wholeness have existed in the thinking of peoples around the world. Therefore, oral folk literature—including proverbs, riddles, fairy tales, and epics—is distinctive in

that these symbols have conveyed relatively stable meanings and have preserved this characteristic throughout their historical development.

Psychologist Erich Fromm was the first to introduce the concept of a universal symbolic language into scientific discourse and to study its nature comprehensively. According to the scholar, “symbolic language is a form through which a person perceives and expresses inner experiences, feelings, and thoughts through external events and phenomena by means of sensory perception. This language does not logically correspond to the laws of time and space of the world in which we live; rather, it differs through its intensity and its capacity for combination. It is a universal language belonging to all cultures and peoples throughout the history of humanity” [1].

Universal language is precisely symbolic language, and it may appear in the form of numbers, colors, signs, depictions or phenomena of nature, fruits, customs characteristic of a particular people, living creatures, and animals. Therefore, symbolic language is not restricted to a particular nation or culture but expresses a universal system of meanings formed throughout human history. At the same time, it performs a function of commonality and comprehensibility for everyone, regardless of nationality or language. Research shows that universal language is reflected in the structure of symbols in any literary work. When a symbol rises to the level of an image, the field of understanding between the author and the reader expands. However, it should be emphasized that not every symbol expresses a universal language, and it is logically incorrect to call every image a symbol. Thus, universal language can also be understood as the language of symbols.

The American scholar Northrop Frye identifies the following conditions that determine the “symbolic” nature of an image, that is, conditions through which an image rises to the level of a symbol:

The abstract meaning of the symbol is explicitly revealed through the context;

The image is presented in such a way that it cannot be interpreted only literally, or a literal interpretation does not fully reveal its meaning;

The image implies associations connected with myths, legends, and folklore [2].

These criteria proposed by the scholar serve as an important theoretical basis for distinguishing the concepts of symbol and symbolic image from other details.

It should be emphasized that an artistic symbol also performs a compositional and structural function within a literary text. In some cases, a symbol may be repeated

from the beginning to the end of a work; nevertheless, such repetition gives a distinctive tone to the artistic language and serves as a connecting link that unifies the plot and composition. A symbol used as a title, epigraph, or central detail can concentrate the meaning of the entire text around a single semantic point.

An artistic symbol is not merely an auxiliary element in a literary work but one of the leading elements that constitutes its ideological, aesthetic, and compositional system. It deepens the meaning of the work, ensures a spiritual dialogue between the reader and the author, and transforms the literary text into a multilayered semantic structure. According to the Belgian scholar Goblet d'Alviella, "a symbol expresses the process through which form is transformed into meaning and material appearance into abstract content" [3]. Thus, a symbol is not simply a particular object itself but an expression of an idea, emotion, or spiritual content hidden behind it.

This view makes it possible to understand more deeply the function of the symbol in fiction. In a literary work, a symbol serves not to reveal concrete reality itself but its inner essence and philosophical and psychological content. At the same time, it possesses informative, emotionally elevating or depressing, unifying and separating, and concealing functions. As a result, an ordinary object, natural phenomenon, or image becomes a carrier of a particular idea and generates multilayered meaning within the text. In this sense, the symbol is an important aesthetic means of connecting external form with internal content.

S. A. Ustyantseva, who studied the functions and characteristics of symbols in literary works, identifies a number of their functions. The symbol manifests itself through imagery, motivation, complexity of content, equality of meanings, internal polysemy and ambiguity of semantic boundaries, archetypal nature, universality within a particular culture, and interconnections between symbols in the cultures of different peoples and historical periods [4]. These characteristics are also inherent in the symbolic nature of numbers.

Throughout human history, numbers have been interpreted not only as instruments of calculation but also as symbolic models for understanding existence. As people observed natural phenomena, celestial bodies, and recurring patterns of time, they sought to express them through particular numbers. Among these numbers, seven occupies a special sacred position and has become a universal symbol in almost all civilizations, expressing similar meanings.

Ancient civilizations influenced one another, and as a result, the seven-day structure of the week and the seven-layer model of the universe were formed. In Egyptian mythology, the number seven was also regarded as a symbol of transition between life and eternity. In certain religious rituals, actions repeated seven times signified spiritual purification and connection with the sacred world. This demonstrates that the number performed not merely a practical but also a sacred function.

In the ancient Greek tradition, the number seven was associated with cosmic order and the concept of destiny. The myth of the “Seven Against Thebes,” the legends of the “Seven Sages,” and rituals associated with the cult of Apollo used this number to express harmony between humanity and the cosmos.

In Islamic culture, the number seven is also regarded as one of the central sacred symbols. In the Qur’an [5], concepts such as the seven heavens, the seven earths, and circumambulation of the Kaaba seven times signify spiritual purification and harmony with divine order. In this respect, the number seven appears not as a quantitative measurement of time or space but as a model of sacredness and purification.

The number seven also occupies a special sacred position in the mythological thinking of Turkic peoples. Ideas about the world consisting of seven layers, the concept of seven generations, and the notion of the seven climates are closely connected with the people’s cosmogonic worldview.

In the epic Alpomish, the hero’s seven-year captivity is not merely a temporal indicator but functions as a mythopoetic code signifying his initiation, spiritual and physical trials, and rebirth. This motif corresponds to the archetype of the hero attaining maturity through trials found in world epic traditions.

In Alpomish, the number seven acquires a mythological and symbolic meaning, expressing the stages of trial, maturation, and renewal experienced by the hero. The seven-year captivity, seven-day temporal units, and repeated use of the number are connected with the poetics of sacred numbers in the mythological thinking of Turkic peoples and serve to deepen the philosophical content of the epic.

Seven years my head remained disgraced in prison,

Neither kinsman nor relative received any news of me [6].

According to Annemarie Schimmel, the author of *The Mystery of Numbers*, the number seven is one of the most widespread sacred numbers in the religious, mythological, and folkloric traditions of peoples throughout the world, and it is

interpreted as being associated with the ideas of perfection, completion, and sacredness [7].

In Sufism, the number seven is also regarded as one of the most important symbols expressing the stages of the inner spiritual perfection of the human soul. In Alisher Navoi's epic "Lison ut-tayr", the birds pass through seven valleys in search of Simurgh: Talab, Ishq, Ma'rifat, Istighno, Tawhid, Hayrat, and Faqr-u Fano. In reality, these valleys do not represent geographical distances but stages of inner spiritual transformation.

In this sense, the number seven is interpreted in Sufism as a complete model of the spiritual journey. This model was later reinterpreted in various artistic forms both in European modernist prose and in contemporary Uzbek literature.

Previously, the number seven was found primarily in religious literature, Sufism, or sacred scriptures; over time, however, it entered literary works.

In particular, twentieth-century European modernist literature paid special attention to expressing philosophical reflections on human existence, time, loneliness, and death through symbolic forms. In this process, the work of the Italian writer Dino Buzzati occupies an important place. In his works, realistic reality is consistently combined with symbolic and mythopoetic layers, creating a universal model of human destiny. His story "The Seventh Floor" is one such work, in which the number seven is not merely a compositional element but functions as the central semantic code of the entire artistic structure.

From this perspective, in accordance with Yuri Lotman's view, a symbol is not simply a sign belonging to a particular text but a semiotic code preserved for centuries in cultural memory.

The number "seven" chosen by the writer is not a detail invented by the author but a contemporary artistic interpretation of a symbolic language that has preserved meanings of sacredness, perfection, trial, and completion in the cultural memory of humanity.

The hospital depicted in the story initially appears to be an ordinary medical institution, but its internal structure possesses not a realistic but a mythopoetic character. According to the concept of sacred space described by the religious scholar Mircea Eliade [8], sacred space is a boundary that transfers a person from ordinary life into a completely different spiritual state. In "The Seventh Floor", the hospital performs precisely this function: the protagonist comes there to receive treatment, but

in reality he confronts the most important truth of his existence—the inevitability of death.

The symbolism of the hospital is also manifested in its vertical structure. In the story, the protagonist does not move simply from one floor to another but moves from the upper levels downward. This movement recalls the mythological archetype of katabasis, the descent into the underworld.

In ancient Greek mythology, Orpheus's descent into Hades, as well as the layers of Hell in Dante's Divine Comedy, signify the crossing of the boundaries of human existence. Buzzati recreates this archetype in a modernist manner: although the protagonist physically moves through the floors of the hospital, spiritually he moves increasingly closer to the end of life.

The seven floors in the story can be interpreted not merely as part of the hospital's architecture but as a philosophical model of the successive stages of human life. Each new floor changes not the protagonist's external circumstances but his inner state. His perception of time, his hopes, and his acceptance of reality gradually change. In this process, time ceases to be an objective measure and becomes a symbol of the process through which a person understands his own existence.

The symbolist Annemarie Schimmel interprets the number seven as a symbol of completion and perfection. In Buzzati's work, however, this meaning acquires a new existential dimension: completion is associated not with the perfection of life but with its end. This further strengthens the polysemantic nature of the symbol.

The number "seven" simultaneously embodies several layers of meaning:

- a central code unifying the compositional structure;
- a sacred sign marking the boundary between life and death;
- a model of existential time;
- an archetype signifying the inevitability of human destiny;
- a mythopoetic symbol connected with the cultural memory of humanity.

As S. Averintsev emphasizes, a genuine symbol is a sign possessing inexhaustible polysemy.

In Buzzati's story, the number seven appears precisely as such a multifunctional symbol. It not only organizes the composition but also unifies the entire philosophical concept of the work.

From this perspective, in Dino Buzzati's "The Seventh Floor," the number seven is not a real unit of counting but a universal mythopoetic code that unites philosophical

reflections on human existence, time, destiny, and death. The writer enriches an ancient mythological model with modern existential meaning and transforms the number seven into the principal semantic center of the work.

Written as a kind of literary counterpart to Dino Buzzati's "The Seventh Floor," Khurshid Dustmuhammad's story "The Road to the Silent Place" likewise demonstrates the author's symbolic poetics.

"The Road to the Silent Place" is also one of the works that fully reveals the author's symbolic poetics. At first glance, the number seven does not appear explicitly in the story. However, analysis shows that the internal composition, plot dynamics, and system of images are constructed according to an archetypal model characteristic of the number seven. This can be explained through Yuri Lotman's theory of the "cultural memory of the symbol." According to the scholar, a genuine symbol is not always explicitly named in a text. It exists as cultural memory within the internal structure of the text [9]. Thus, in Khurshid Dustmuhammad's story, the number seven participates not at the lexical level but at the compositional and semantic levels.

The central image of the story is the road. In world mythology and literature, the road is one of the most ancient archetypes, signifying human destiny, spiritual quest, self-understanding, and the process of transition between life and death. According to Mircea Eliade's concept of the sacred journey, every sacred path signifies the transition of a person from one state to another. This process is more a spiritual transformation than physical movement.

In "The Road to the Silent Place," the distance traveled by the protagonist reflects changes taking place in his inner world rather than merely physical movement. During the journey, the protagonist's views of life, time, and human existence change. Thus, in the story, the archetype of the road functions as a symbolic space serving the inner maturation of the human being.

At the end of the story, during a conversation on the sixth floor, Zohid Yaqin says: "I am very close to my father and mother—very close... Very close" [10]. This creates an impression in the reader that the statement may also foreshadow the inevitability of death on the seventh floor.

Literary scholar G. Sattarova comes to the conclusion that "Dino Buzzati demonstrates, through the example of Dino Corte, how a Western person, deceived by the illusions of life and thirsting for its pleasures, gradually descends toward death" [11]. In our view, however, if we proceed from the meaning and content of the

mythological code of “seven,” the descent may also be understood as a process of purification. Certainly, each floor, character, or process can be interpreted separately as a symbol, but the principal symbolic language is the number seven.

As noted above, in Alisher Navoi’s *Lison ut-Tayr*, the birds pass through seven valleys in search of Simurgh: Talab, Ishq, Ma’rifat, Istighno, Tawhid, Hayrat, and Faqr-u Fano. These valleys do not represent physical distance but the gradual purification of the soul. The movement of the protagonist in Khurshid Dustmuhammad’s story is typologically close to this model. At every step, he is forced to abandon his previous perceptions and accept a new truth. If in Navoi the seven valleys constitute an explicit model of Sufi perfection, in “The Road to the Silent Place” the same model appears as a hidden compositional mechanism within the poetics of modernist prose.

An important aspect here is that the author does not directly mention the number seven. Nevertheless, the protagonist’s spiritual movement, the development of events, and the logic of his spiritual transformation are constructed according to a seven-stage initiation model. Therefore, the number seven functions as a hidden mythopoetic code in the work.

Viewed externally, these two works belong to different cultural environments. The first is an example of Italian modernism, while the second belongs to contemporary Uzbek philosophical prose. However, their internal poetic structures are based on a common archetype.

Dino Buzzati

Vertical movement (floors)

Sacred space — hospital

Seven as an explicit compositional code

Moving closer from life toward death

Khurshid Dustmuhammad

Horizontal movement (road)

Sacred space — road

Seven as a hidden compositional code

Moving closer toward true life

Although the forms of these two movements are different, their purpose is the same: confronting the truth of human destiny.

This pattern can be observed in both Buzzati’s story and Khurshid Dustmuhammad’s story. The difference is that in Buzzati, the journey occurs through existential destruction, whereas in Khurshid Dustmuhammad it is expressed as a process of

spiritual awareness. Although the two writers belong to different literary traditions, in their poetics the number seven appears as a universal mythopoetic code expressing the spiritual transformation of the human being.

An important point is that in Dante's Divine Comedy, there are seven terraces on Mount Purgatory. The protagonist passes through these seven terraces one after another, achieves spiritual purification, and then ascends to Paradise. In Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy, the number seven, through the seven terraces of Mount Purgatory, expresses the stages of spiritual purification of the human soul. This model has a typological affinity with the concept of the seven valleys in Alisher Navoi's Lison ut-tayr. In both works, the number seven functions as a mythopoetic code signifying the gradual ascent of the human being toward perfection. In this respect, the number appears in world literature as a universal model of symbolic language.

The symbol performs important functions in a literary text, including providing information, deepening philosophical meaning, indirectly expressing the author's position, ensuring compositional unity, activating the reader's thinking, and strengthening the polysemantic character of the text. Therefore, the symbol is not an auxiliary element of a literary work but one of the leading artistic means that constitutes its internal poetic system.

The symbol in a literary text manifests itself not only as a means of aesthetic influence but also as a universal semiotic system that unites cultural memory, mythological thinking, and national and universal meanings. In contemporary Uzbek prose, symbolic poetics has developed as an important poetic principle that harmonizes national traditions with the experience of world literature and ensures the depth, philosophical character, and polysemy of artistic thought.

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