

National Research University Higher School of Economics

As a manuscript

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**THE KEY IMAGES IN THE CHRISTMAS BOOKS OF THE 1840s BY
CHARLES DICKENS**

Dissertation Summary
for the purpose of obtaining academic degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Philology and Linguistics

Academic Supervisor:
Doctor of Sciences,
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Moscow 2024

General information

The dissertation research is devoted to the study of the key images of *Christmas books* by Charles Dickens, written from 1843 to 1848. These books have many common features and recurring themes, manifested at different levels (imagery, linguistic, ideological), and reveal the system of aesthetic and philosophical views of the writer. According to A. Bely, for a better understanding of the author, it is necessary to put together a picture from mosaic pieces scattered by him, in which each part is connected to the other, as a system of ogival arches draws the whole of a Gothic cathedral [Bely 1994: 481]. In the dissertation, special attention is paid to such a function of the cycle as “expansion of the semantic potential of each text” due to the effect of repeated reflection of one work in other works of the same cycle — the principle of “mirror of mirrors”, a situation in which a significant increase in meanings is obtained, eventually going far beyond the boundaries of linguistic expression [Figut 2003: 12], that is, the contact, the juxtaposition of the stories with each other gives new meanings or, in the words of W. Eco, new “interpretation potentials” [Eco 2004: 20]. Moreover, not only the stories themselves, but also all the components of the cycle structure (for example, sound and visual images) will complement each other, demonstrating internal connections, thereby expanding and enriching the possibilities of scholarly scrutiny, which will facilitate the understanding of the text and the specific author’s language, the medium through which Dickens conversed with his readers.

According to V. Tyupa “The cycle as a literary form becomes more active in unstable, transitional periods since one of its main properties is to hold certain values in epochs of their rapid revaluation” [Tyupa 2003: 52]. *The Christmas books* were written by Dickens at a time when traditional belief systems were being dismantled while new ones emerged: “Romanticism marked a monumental shift in the history of culture and laid down an intellectual and creative framework that was further explored by writers and artists until the early 1900s” [Zenkin 2001: 5]. Tectonic shifts affected — both literally and figuratively — the most profound levels of experiencing the world: in the 1830s, a few years before the release of the first *Christmas book* by

Charles Dickens, the English scientist Charles Lyell published a collection of three scientific volumes focused on his geological studies [Lyell 1835]. In it, the idea runs through the red thread that the Earth's prehistoric era encompassed many more thousands of years than those 5,500 years which are obtained by adding up the years of life of all the biblical forefathers. At the scientific and empirical standpoint, this called into question the supernatural origin of the Earth and the reliability of the Bible, and ultimately the validity of Christianity in general. Dickens decides to enter into a polemic with the growing anti-religious skepticism of the nineteenth century, but his *Christmas books* cannot be classified as religious literature, they do not show signs of preaching or retelling the miraculous deeds of Jesus: the triumph of the main Christian commandment of love and forgiveness is shown through the actions of ordinary people. The presence of a supernatural miracle in the *Christmas books* is only the surface layer of the poetics of the *Christmas books*. The Christian miracle, according to Dickens, does not consist in victories over the laws of nature, ghosts or monsters, not in miracles-signs that the Pharisees were waiting for ("An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but no signs will be given to it"). The Savior's Christmas made possible the main miracle — people learned the commandment of love, and the opportunity to overcome the serpent in their own hearts manifested: forgiveness and repentance, two cornerstones of Christianity, would become the key motifs of the artistic world of Dickens's *Christmas books* of the 1840s.

According to Yu. Lotman, the system of relationships the author forms between the key images is highly significant [Lotman 1996: 134]. The images in a literary work become those "constant organising, cementing elements which are the vehicle of unity in the multiplicity of the poet's works and which stamp these works with the poet's individuality" [Jakobson 1975: 1]. The "alphabet" of author's images and the arrangement of these images in the text is the basis of the author's style, through which the writer conveys the main idea to the reader, therefore, the analysis of style is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of any literary work.

The relevance of the conducted research is due to the continuous interest in Dickens's Christmas books of the 1840s, and the lack of study of this group of stories

as a cohesive collection, but — most importantly — the lack of understanding of important stylistic and imagery features of Dickens’s Christmas prose of the 1840s as well as the philosophical and aesthetic goals of the author, which he achieved in these works.

Previous Studies on the Issue:

Despite the wide popularity and a huge number of reviews published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in scholarly papers the analysis of *the Christmas books* of the 1840s takes no more than a chapter or reveals only the socio-didactic orientation of the poetic features of these works. N. Eremkina writes that the minor works by the writer were not thoroughly studied by scholars, who instead gave priority to their novels [Eremkina 2009: 3].

Dickens is the center of any discussion of the social life of nineteenth-century Britain [Stead 2015: 30], and “the world depicted by Dickens is always the arena of the struggle between good and evil” [History of Western European Literature 2004: 251]. Many literary scholars, keeping in line with the practices of XIX century literary critics, looked at the *Christmas books* of the 1840s by Charles Dickens based on their own beliefs and interpreted the main author’s idea, that is, in fact, what exactly was good or evil for the writer, in different ways. One of the first literary studies that mentions the *Christmas books* of the 1840s belongs to the pen of Th. Jackson, an activist of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Ultra-leftist views on literature were reflected in the researcher’s conclusions: he puts forward the idea that the best qualities of humanism, according to Dickens, flourish in the homes of the poor, and believes that Dickens’s role in the invention of Christmas is exaggerated. The main merit of *the Christmas books* is that, firstly, they mark the final transition from the early to the late Dickens, and secondly, they declare the idea that “the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself” [Jackson 1937: 295].

Following Jackson’s lead, researchers of Marxist literary studies in the mid-1900s delve into the social issues portrayed in the *Christmas books*, using a traditional methodology for their time. Among the notable researchers of Dickens in

Russian literary studies was T. A. Silman, she examines the ideology within the *Christmas books* and the lore of the hearth, as depicted by Dickens. In particular, she believes that the main thing in *the Christmas books* of the 1840s is the social issues raised by the author [Silman 1958: 204]. Another Russian scholar, I. Katarsky, in one of the small chapters of his book *Dickens*, emphasizes that these works hold value in their defense of the oppressed class's interests. [Katarsky 1960: 145].

The English literary scholar Th. Beachcroft writes that the minor prose of Dickens explores the harsh realities of a commoner's existence: in short stories, the overarching goal is to foster unity among people, rather than to follow a linear sequence of events as seen in novels [Beachcroft 1968: 98]. M. Shelden, in the article "The Chimes' and the Anti-Corn Law League", notes that the story *The Chimes*, written in 1844, deserves attention not because of the plot, which the researcher called "mechanical", and not because of the characters described by him as "one-dimensional", but "because it marks an important step in Dickens's development as a writer. In the story we see him attempting for the first time to give an entire fiction a single, coherent political purpose, based on free trade radicalism" [Shelden 1982: 330]. According to the scholar, in *The Chimes*, Dickens presents a thorough analysis of the societal issues of poverty and crime in the UK, which lead to the formation of his social views.

The social orientation of Dickens's *Christmas books* of the 1840s is emphasized even by those researchers who a priori classify these works as Gothic literature, traditionally far from focusing on solving social problems. The article on Dickens in the encyclopedic three-volume "Gothic Literature" emphasizes that through the use of techniques found in the literature of "fear and horror", Dickens aimed to bring awareness to the harsh realities faced by many, while also examining the concepts of selfishness, corruption, oppression and mortality [Gothic Literature 2006: 229].

However, some researchers believe that Dickens was not a politicized figure. This is confirmed by the fact from the writer's biography that despite being invited several times to become the author of the *Edinburgh Review*, an influential liberal magazine in the political and cultural sphere, Dickens's name never appeared on the

pages of this magazine associated with the Whig Party and regularly read by representatives of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. And this brings some scholars to the conclusion that Dickens intentionally chose not to engage with this group of citizens. As Collins writes, although Dickens was aware of his responsibility to society and flattered by the invitations of a renowned magazine editor, he was adamant about not aligning himself with any particular party or movement [Collins 1963: 172]. Collins gives an example of Dickens's own magazines. The periodicals, which were widely read by the lower classes, never strayed from their role as a family-oriented periodicals and did not espouse any political ideologies. [Collins 1963: 171].

There has been a surge of interest in Russian literary criticism regarding the examination of Ch. Dickens's *Christmas books* of the 1840s from the point of view of the genre paradigm. For example, in their papers T. Boborykina [Boborykina 1996], M. Bondarenko [Bondarenko 2006], O. V. Chaplygina [Chaplygina 2009], highlight the motives, images and ideological intent of the author, and define the concept of a Christmas story as a piece of writing that revolves around the Yuletide season and showcases a non-religious miracle as its main plot point. However, this understanding of the "Christmas story" has little bearing on the numerous equally crucial aspects related to style, narrative, symbolism, and philosophical aesthetics.

Among contemporary Western researchers of Dickens's work, the study of the *Christmas books* often reaches deep levels of their poetic and stylistic features, but even in foreign literary scholarship there is not a single comprehensive study devoted to all five books of Dickens. In most cases, articles and monographs emphasize a specific element of Dickens's Christmas writing style during the 1840s. R. F. Glancy's research reveals a strong commitment to the framework structures inherent in Oriental literature. The researcher correctly notes that the process of telling a story in the Christmas books turned into a journey "back" into memories [Glancy 1980: 82]. Philipp Allingham's article provides a detailed lexical and etymological analysis of the names of the main characters of *A Christmas Carol in Prose*, which showed that playing with the names of characters is the most important characteristic of

Dickens's style [Allingham 1987]. The American literary critic T. Sergay writes about the enormous influence of Dickens on the poetry and prose of Boris Pasternak. After analyzing the Christmas chronotopes common to both writers, he suggests that, perhaps, it was *the Christmas books* of the 1840s that inspired Pasternak to create the most significant images and motifs in the novel *Doctor Zhivago* [Sergay 2008: 120].

The collection of articles *Dickens's Style* [Dickens's style 2012] addresses the language and writing style utilized by Dickens in his prose. It assembles 13 different articles that bring to Dickensian studies a fresh and systematic look at the stylistic aspect of the writer's works, which was previously overlooked by literary critics. According to the authors of the collection, the genius and uniqueness of Dickens lies precisely in his style and a language play. In addition to describing specific rhetorical figures, the articles address more general issues: understanding time, the topic of death, as well as the philosophical and scientific discourse of that time. However, Dickens's *Christmas books* serve there as nothing more than illustrative material, along with the rest of the author's works.

Gaps in the study of the *Christmas books* of the 1840s and the lack of a full-fledged and convincing description of the writer's worldview, which "is conveyed not through direct statements, but rather through linguistically impactful effects" [Zenkin 2018: 202] caused **the need for a new study**.

This study examines 5 works: *A Christmas Carol in Prose* (1841), *The Chimes* (1843), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), *The Haunted Man* (1848). These stories will be studied as a single whole — a cycle, because only basing on the collection of the author's works as a whole "that common whole that can be called an individual style is crystallized in the perceiving consciousness <...> and from this common whole the each work's distinctive "grain" is readily displayed" [Bely 1994: 481].

The object of the study is Charles Dickens's writing style of the Christmas stories of the 1840s that articulates the writer's philosophical and aesthetic beliefs, both explicitly and implicitly.

The focus of the research is the key images of *the Christmas Books* of the 1840s, which shape the essence of the author's style.

The aim of the dissertation research is to identify the key images that create the basis for the style of *the Christmas Books* of the 1840s by Charles Dickens. The aim entails solving the following tasks:

1) To explore the stylistic originality of *the Christmas books* of the 1840s through the classification of the key images of each book and to ascertain if these images encompass the entirety of the cycle's works .

2) By means of the revealed key images, to identify the intermediate traditions that Dickens relies on in his *Christmas books* (in particular, to analyze the connection of the *Christmas books* with the Gothic tradition, as well as to study the musical component of the writer's idiosyncrasy, including at the level of composition, images and sound games).

3) Through the patterns that reveal themselves in the structure of the key images of the cycle of the Christmas books, to explore Dickens's tactics for engaging the reader and understand the precise message the author sought to convey, specifically in terms of his philosophical and aesthetic stance.

The relevance of the undertaken research is due to the undying interest in the *Christmas books* of the 1840s. Dickens, the lack of study of this group of works, and — most importantly — the lack of understanding in literary studies of important stylistic and features of his Christmas prose of the 1840s and the author's intended philosophical and aesthetic objectives in these works.

The novelty and theoretical significance of the study: This dissertation offers a fresh outlook on the study of Dickens's Christmas books that made it possible to discover in them a complex system of symbols, allegories, images and motifs, which create a system of key concepts most often found in his texts and form the writer's unique style.

The research methodology is based on the structural-semiotic, comparative (intermediate), narratological, comparative-historical, cultural-historical method, and the method of close reading.

The methodological basis of the research was the papers on the theory of the fantastic, supernatural and sacred by Ts. Todorov, R. Lakhmann, D. R. Khapaeva, R. Kayua; works on the aesthetics of music by G. V. F. Hegel, works on musicality in prose by V. Wolf, B. M. Gasparov, I.A. Delazari, cultural monograph by J. Starobinsky, a monograph on Christmas prose by E.V. Dushechkina, a study on the sound analysis of the text by A. P. Zhuravlev, books on the theory and analysis of the text by M. M. Bakhtin, M. L. Gasparov, U. Eco, Yu. M. Lotman, S. N. Zenkin.

The main arguments of the dissertation to be presented for defense:

1)The unity of the style of *the Christmas books* of the 1840s is formed by certain visual, spatial and sound images that reveal the possibility of various readings of the text and give an idea of the writer's ideological and aesthetic attitudes.

2)Contrary to the currently prevailing tendency to classify Charles Dickens's Christmas stories as Gothic literature, these works are actually pseudo-Gothic: Dickens's Gothic is present only as an entourage, the ideological message conveyed in these stories are in direct contradiction to the ideas typically found in Gothic literature: Dickens creates a special language of fear, different from language of fear in Gothic.

3)The emphasis on the musicality of a literary text is manifested at different levels, including the narratological and phonetic-semantic ones.

4) An important element of Dickens's style is the use of frame structures and images that mark the boundaries between reality and fiction. These images contribute to the actualization of new meanings that can be extracted from the text.

The practical significance of this study is due to the fact that the results of the study can be integrated into university courses in English literature of the 19th centu-

ry, as well as used in writing textbooks and compiling commentaries on *the Christmas books* of the 1840s by Dickens.

Approbation of the Research Results: the research materials were subjected to examination at academic conferences and seminars of various levels: at the 39th International Philological Scholarly Conference in St. Petersburg (March, 2010); at the 22nd Purishev Readings held at the Department of World Literature of Moscow Pedagogical State University (April 2010); at the conference on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens, organized by the National Library of Russia (February, 2012); at the 43rd International Philological Scholarly Conference in St. Petersburg (March, 2014); at the 14th International Gothic Association's conference at Manchester Metropolitan University in Manchester, UK (July-August, 2018); at the 60th Annual Convention of the Midwest Modern Language Association in Kansas City, USA (November, 2018); at the 24th Annual Dickens Society Symposium in Salt Lake City, USA (July, 2019); at the 25th Annual Dickens Society Symposium (online, July, 2020); at the 26th Annual Dickens Society Symposium in Rochester, USA (July, 2023); at postgraduate seminars at the Department of the History of Foreign Literatures of St. Petersburg State University; during the development and implementation of the English Literature course for students of the Department of Philology of the Higher School of Economics of St. Petersburg (2023-2024 academic year).

There have been 11 academic articles written on the dissertation topic, with 5 of them being published in reputable journals.

Articles published in journals from the list approved by HSE, or indexed in the international databases:

1. Goroshkova R. A Tale of Two Magazines: Dickens on the Pages of Contemporary and Fatherland Notes // *Dickensian*. 2022. Vol. 118. No. 518. P. 269-280.
2. Goroshkova R. 'Someone who was very close, and very dearly loved': Russian Obituaries of Dickens // *Dickensian*. 2020. Vol. 116. No. 511. P. 112-120.

3. Goroshkova R. R. Memory and Feelings in Christmas Stories of the 1840s by Ch. Dickens // *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta*. Series 9. Philology. Oriental studies. Journalism. 2015. № 2. P. 11-17.
4. Goroshkova R.R. About “non-gothic gothicism” in the poetic of Christmas Stories of 1840s by Ch. Dickens // *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta*. Series 9. Philology. Oriental studies. Journalism. 2013. № 4. P. 3-10.
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Other publications:

6. Goroshkova R.R. Frame images in Charles Dickens *Christmas Stories* of the 1840s // *Filologicheskie nauki. Voprosy teorii i praktiki*. 2019. V. 12. № 4. P. 390-394.
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11. Goroshkova R.R. The Concept of Blindness in *The Cricket on the Hearth* by Charles Dickens // *XXII Purishevskie chteniia: Istoriia idei v zhanrovoi istorii*.

Pod red. E. Chernozemovoi. M.: Moskovskii Pedagogicheskii gosudarstvennyi universitet 2010. P. 114-115.

The structure of the dissertation is determined by the tasks set: the dissertation consists of an Introduction, two chapters and a Conclusion.

In the introduction, in addition to the bibliographic reference, a multidimensional review is proposed, introducing the historical and social context of the epoch. This observation gives an idea of the spirit of the times and the political atmosphere that prevailed in England in the 1840s, as well as events directly related to the background and goals of the creation of the first story of the cycle - *A Christmas Carol*. **The first chapter** is devoted to elements of the Gothic style in Dickens's Christmas prose of the 1840s. It consists of three parts. In the first part, entitled "Gothic Literature: from Barbarism to Nationalism", the issue of the Gothic is explored through a historical lens, highlighting key characteristics and providing an explanation for its significance as well as the contextual relevance of Charles Dickens's *Christmas books* of the 1840s to Gothic literature is explored and dissected. In the second part, "Fear and its languages", the connection between fear and the perception of a Gothic work is elucidated, and the roots of this fear were investigated in accordance with specific canons and scenarios. It is shown that the feeling of fear in the *Christmas books* of the 1840s by Charles Dickens has a completely different nature than the fear that the masters of the Gothic genre presented. The third part of the chapter is devoted to the semiotic and culturological analysis of visual images of *Christmas books* of the 1840s, associated with Gothic literature, but revealing a completely different nature in Dickens's text. In this chapter, Dickens's Christmas stories are scrutinized for their use of Gothic elements, in particular images denoting isolation, boundary, frame (house, threshold, shell, Gothic cathedral, etc.), as well as "the images of fascination" (fire, mirror, shadows, spirits, magical creatures). The use of these images – due to the blurred boundaries between the meanings of words, their ambiguity – allows the writer to highlight the array of interpretations, encompassing eternal and transient.

The second chapter deals with the problem of sound images in the Christmas stories of the 1840s by Charles Dickens. The focus of this chapter is to discover the

complete range of sound diversity present in Dickens's literary works, as well as the "ingredients" of the musicality of the text, listed by researcher W. Wolf [Wolf 75]. Firstly, ideological and philosophical: why did Dickens need musical sound in the text, what is the philosophy of his verbal music and how it helps to understand the writer's worldview, which manifested itself in that multi-layered musical "pie" of each of his Christmas stories of the 1840s. Secondly, technical ones: musical and sound language, onomatopoeia, narratological techniques (such as rhythmic alternation of modes of perception); compositional construction of the text and playing with musical genres. An attempt has been made to figure out for what purposes Dickens interwoven music into the narrative: in order to appeal to the reader's inner world, to his soul and feelings (in Dickens's Christmas Books, the ability to hear music is equated with the ability to feel and sympathize). The verbal melody created by Dickens in the Christmas Stories of the 1840s does not just sound, but also requires the reader's participation: understanding the meanings that Christmas brings.

In the conclusion, the dissertation research presents the main findings and stresses the value and distinctiveness of this cycle, which laid the foundation for the genre "Christmas story", one of the most important phenomenon in the history of literature of the 19th century. The analysis allowed us to conclude that the cycle of the Christmas stories is a space where the stories are linked with each other by the internal semantic connections. The stylistic effects and literary techniques utilized and developed by Dickens become a way to influence the reader, repeatedly reinforcing the importance of the ethical message.

The last section of the dissertation constitutes of bibliography, including 450 titles.

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