CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TERM "TRAGEDY" IN ENGLAND IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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Abstract: The word "tragedy" comes to England from Greece and begins to be used in various contexts. According to tradition, Chaucer was the first to use the concept in English, but its use was recorded long before Chaucer's time. However, it is not always used correctly. This article reveals different interpretations of the term "Tragedy".

Key word: Tragedy, phrase, a catastrophic event, a literary form, interpretation.

The strengthening of the tragic worldview in England in the 14th century was the result of many factors that determined the mentality of people and the spiritual climate of that time. The concept of the tragic as pathetic, hyper-emotional, placing the figure of the martyr at the center, describing high suffering, was built on the personal experience of people and was a natural product of the era. However, we call such a worldview "tragic" solely in retrospect: this term was familiar to few in England in the 14th century and was used in a wide variety of contexts, often far from reality.

The word "tragedy" comes to England from Greece and begins to be used in various contexts. It is traditionally believed that Chaucer established this concept in the English language, but there are recorded cases of its use long before Chaucer's era. However, it is not always used correctly: a whole palette of different interpretations of this term unfolds before us, since medieval translators, not being familiar with it, did not always correctly understand what was meant, and this led to a blurring of its meaning.

Thus, one of the first to use the word "tragedy" was William of Malmesbury (c. 1090–1143) in "The History of the English Kings" (Gesta regum Anglorum, 1125): for him, tragedy is, first of all, a kind of collapse, a catastrophe. It is this meaning that turns out to be the main one for a long time and persists until the beginning of the 14th century: in his "Polychronicon" (Polychronicon, end of the 14th century), Ranulf Higden (c. 1280–1364) uses the word "tragedy" in the same vein , telling the story of the death of Prince William Adelin in a shipwreck off the coast of Normandy on November 25, 1120. He clearly draws on William of Malmesbury - both use the phrase "totam tragediam enarravit"[1] - "[a surviving eyewitness of the events] told the whole tragedy." However, already at the end of the 14th century, in the translation of the Polychronicon from Latin into English by John Trevisa (ca. 1342 - ca. 1402), this phrase is translated as "tolde alle the geest it was byfalle"[2] - "told about all deeds that occurred." Here the word "geest" refers us to the early medieval genre of gestures (chanson de geste), poems about heroic deeds. Thus, we see that Trevisa chooses not to preserve the word "tragedy" when translating, and also reads into he has a slightly different meaning: for him, tragedy is not primarily a catastrophic event, but a poem telling about it.However, the extent to which Trevisa understood the nature of tragedy remains in question, since in his translation he refers to gesture not only as tragedy, but also as comedy , calling it "a song of gestes."[3] In addition, from time to time he still retains the word "tragedy" in the translation, but renders it in a distorted form ("tregideas"[4]), which suggests that Trevisa is not familiar with this concept .

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[1] *Kelly, H.A.* Chaucerian Tragedy. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997.,p. 41.

[2] *Higden, R.* Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century /Ed. by Joseph Rawson Lumby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 461.

[3] *Higden, R.* Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century /Ed. by Joseph Rawson Lumby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. P.315.

[4] *Higden, R.* Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century /Ed. by Joseph Rawson Lumby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.p. 403.

In an even more general sense, the word "tragedy" in the 14th century simply means "book". Thus, the surgeon John Arderne (1307–1392) recommended The Bible and Other Tragedies[5] as a source of funny stories that could make the patient laugh and thereby help his recovery. What was referred to as "tragedy" was the set of rules for Whittington College, which (obviously, not without the influence of Chaucer) ended with a royal stanza beginning with the words "Go, litel boke, go, litel tragedie"[6], although what was meant was a pamphlet defining the rules student behavior.

Even later, in the 15th century, the word "tragedy" did not have a single meaning. Many of those who use it follow the line of Trevisa, for whom tragedy is a story that has a literary form. Within this meaning, further shifts occur: these stories are no longer necessarily high genre. For example, the Scottish chronicler Walter Bower (ca. 1385–1449), who continues the chronicle of John of Fordun (ca. 1360 – ca. 1384), points out that tragedies are nothing more than a source rude jokes and close-minded humor. The material on the basis of which Bower makes this conclusion is curious: he refers to the images of Robin Hood and Little John, who were loved by the people and were often sung by bards, and also appeared in "comedies and tragedies"[7]. Obviously, Bower brings together comedy and tragedy in terms of genre: by these names he probably means the ballads about Robin Hood, which he disapproves of as the fruits of low culture.

Sometimes the understanding of what "tragedy" is takes on the most unexpected forms: tragedy turns out to be not even a book or a work, but the person who created this book. Chronicler and theologian John Capgrave (1393–1464) writes: "A tragedy, generally speaking, is one who writes old stories that sound heavy and sad."[8] However, then he changes his interpretation and returns to the meanings of "poem", "work", however, these fluctuations within the framework of one text mark the writer's uncertainty. Tragedy as a person also appears in one of the astrological treatises stored in the Huntington Library, but now it is no longer the author of the tragedy, as it was with Capgrave, but its direct participant, the one whose fate is subject to the transition from happiness to misfortune[9].

However, along with these "false", or rather, unfixed interpretations of the word "tragedy", there were others that were closer to ancient examples and significantly influenced the perception of tragedy in the 14th-15th centuries. An example of a scribe who gave one of these interpretations is Thomas Walsingham (c. 1340–1422), who clearly distinguishes between comedy and tragedy, relying on ancient sources: following Seneca and Lucan, he notes that tragedy tells the story of the great deeds and crimes of high-ranking persons, ends in mourning and causes sadness, and comedy is the opposite of it in everything. Often tragedy tells of tyrants who rise high and fall to the dust. It is curious that a comedy is an incident presented in the form of a dialogue between characters, but tragedy, according to Walsingham, is first and foremost a narrative, a story told by someone: it does not necessarily have to be dramatized: its most important property is a constructed narrative[10].

These considerations appear in Prohemia poetarum[11], where Walsingham expounds his thoughts on the differences between comedy and tragedy. In addition, Walsingham wrote another work where he mentions the tragedy. As an allegorical character, the muse Melpomene, she appears in "De Archana deorum"[12]255, differing from other muses in her sad appearance and characteristic "howling" intonation[13]. Walsingham speaks about tragedy not only in the context of literature: in his "English

[5] *Kelly, H. A.* The Non-Tragedy of Arthur // Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature /Ed.by G. Kratzmann and J. Simpson. Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986. P. 93.

[6] *Entick, J.* A New and Accurate History and Survey of London, Westminster, Southwark, and Places Adjacent.Vol.4. L.,1766. P. 355.

[7] «...in comediis et tragediis». *Bower, W*. Scotichronicon. Vol.2. Edinburgh: Robert Fleming, 1759. P. 104.

[8] «Trajedi is as mech to sey as he that writith eld stories, with ditees hevy and sorrowful». *Capgrave, J.* The Chronicle of England /Ed. by Francis Charles Hingeston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 49.

[9] *Kelly, H.A.* Chaucerian Tragedy. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997.,p. 44.

[10] *Federico, S.* The Classicist Writings of Thomas Walsingham: 'worldly Cares' at St Albans Abbey in the Fourteenth Century. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016. P. 41–42.

[11] Lat. "Prologues of Poets".

[12] Lat. "Secrets of the Gods."

[13] *Walsingham, T*. Archana deorum /Ed.by Robert A. van Klyve. Durham: Duke University Press, 1968. P. 16–17.

Chronicle" (Chronicon Angliæ, 1388) he uses this word when describing the murder in Westminster Abbey[14], i.e. recognizes the right of real stories to be called tragedies.

So, we see that the word "tragedy" for the scribes of the English late Middle Ages is a concept that often does not exist outside of literature. In their judgments about it, they rely on ancient sources or comments on them (for example, Trevisa's statement about tragedy as a gesture indicates his familiarity with the works of Trivet). However, such an understanding of tragedy, despite its "literary nature," in fact rather distances the researcher from comprehending the tragic in its medieval version; "everyday" interpretations of the word "tragedy", highlighting the "tragic situation" and noting the connection between the catastrophe that occurred in reality and the disaster described in the work, on the contrary, help to find a connection between the old ancient term and the atmosphere of the era. The category of the tragic turns out to be extremely important for the spiritual climate of the late Middle Ages.

Let's summarize. We see that the tragic attitude, characteristic of the picture of the world of a person of the 14th century, stems not only from the experience of experiencing numerous disasters suffered by Europe, but also from its philosophical understanding. Despite the fact that the term "tragedy" is increasingly isolated, shifting to ancient roots, and is not used to characterize the modern literary process, in the culture of the 14th century, turning to the direct experience of contemporaries, the category of the tragic flourishes, the influence of which is felt even by those scribes who continue to gravitate toward interpreting tragedy through ancient examples and sources. The tragic is gradually transforming, expanding its boundaries from the subject of scientific research to a narrative about the fate of everyone.

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[14] *Walsingham, T.* Chronicon Angliæ /Ed. by Edward Maunde Thompson. L.: Longman, 1874. P. 206.