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Я в роли Другого: доктрина метемпсихоза в повести Ш.-Л. Монтескье «Правдивая история»

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Аннотация. Цель исследования состоит в определении специфической роли, которую доктрина метемпсихоза играет в повести «Правдивая история» Ш.-Л. Монтескье. Это малоизвестное сочинение французского просветителя рассматривается в соотношении с другими, наиболее значимыми произведениями эпохи на аналогичную тему, что позволяет выявить его оригинальность. Книгу принято относить к маргинальным сочинениям, нетипичным для Монтескье, однако научная новизна исследования состоит в том, что оно позволило обнаружить не только глубокий философский потенциал книги, но и теснейшую связь с мыслью Монтескье, нашедшей выражение в его магистральных работах. Результаты анализа показали, что книга имеет ярко выраженный обличительный характер, будучи нацеленной на разоблачение нравов общества, в частности женских нравов, однако не сводится к этому намерению. Использование доктрины метемпсихоза подчинено глубокой философской задаче, состоящей в том, чтобы проверить те или иные просветительские идеи. Так, Монтескье подвергает осмыслению идеи о принципах деспотического правления, о природе счастья, об идентичности человека и о Другом и пр. Автор умышленно прибегает к доктрине метемпсихоза с тем, чтобы иметь возможность, помещая героя в бесчисленное количество состояний, свободно и без видимой мотивировки обращаться к самому широкому спектру разноплановых проблем и при этом не быть скованным в способах их интерпретации. Полученные данные позволяют по-новому взглянуть на жанровую природу «Правдивой истории» и усмотреть в ней признаки такого жанра, как меннипея.

EN

I in the role of the Other: The doctrine of metempsychosis in Ch.-L. Montesquieu's novel "True Story"

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Abstract. The aim of the research is to determine the specific role that the doctrine of metempsychosis plays in Ch.-L. Montesquieu's novel "True Story". This little-known writing of the French enlightener is considered in relation to the most representative works of the era on the same topic, which allows us to highlight its originality. The novel is usually classified as a marginal work, which is not typical for Montesquieu, but the scientific novelty of the research consists in revealing not only a deep philosophical potential of the novel, but also its closest connection to Montesquieu's thought expressed in his major works. The results of the analysis showed that the book has got a pronounced accusatory character, being aimed at exposing the morals of society, in particular the morals of women, but is not limited to such intention. Using the doctrine of metempsychosis is subject to a deep philosophical task, which consists in testing certain ideas of Enlightenment. Thus, Montesquieu examines ideas about the principles of despotic rule, the nature of happiness, the personal identity and the Other, etc. The author deliberately resorts to the doctrine of metempsychosis in order to be able, by placing the character in a countless number of states, to deal with the widest range of problems freely and without apparent motivation and at the same time not to be constrained in the ways of their interpretation. The data obtained allow us to take a fresh look at the genre nature of "True Story" and see in it the signs of such a genre as menippea.

Introduction

When Ch.-L. Montesquieu's "Persian Letters" were first published in 1721, it immediately became an immense pan-European literary success. 27 years later, in 1748, after Montesquieu publicly released his philosophical and political treatise "The Spirit of Laws", he became an incontestable authority in the field of political, sociological

and juridical thought for several generations of intellectuals in different parts of the world. As a result, these two major works almost completely supplanted all other productions of this prolific writer. Over a three-hundred-year period, both readers' and researchers' interest towards the works of Montesquieu strengthened, continuing to be focused on his "Persian Letters" and "The Spirit of Laws" and giving rare attention to his fictional works, such as "The Temple of Gnide" or "Arsace and Ismenie". It especially concerns "True Story", which was discovered too late, only at the end of the 19th century, so that this text was not introduced into scientific use in due time. It is particularly true for the Russian-speaking cultural and literary space, where the work is almost non-existent. Neither has "True Story" been translated into Russian nor has it attracted the attention of the researchers. Meanwhile it turns out that in all these little-known fictional works Montesquieu touches on the Oriental theme (Gaillard, 2005), continuing the tradition of his first novel, thus, studying them allows us to significantly complement the image of Montesquieu as a novelist.

The relevance of the present work is determined by several factors. Studies on Montesquieu, which have a solid tradition, are especially scrupulous and regular in France, but even there "True Story" lies on the periphery of research interest. The existing studies highlight a number of particular aspects, such as satirical dimension of the novel or its genre features. Each of them has to some extent revealed the richest potential of the book and for this reason these studies, which remain extremely fragmentary, need to be developed. Besides this, such an in-depth study is all the more important since the idea of metempsychosis, underlying the novel, is firmly tied to the Oriental problematic, specifically to the problem of perception and representation of the Oriental civilization in the Occident, the problem of relationship between the Orient and the Occident and, to a certain extent, the problem of confrontation between the Orient and the Occident. Having been of great significance in the Age of Enlightenment, this problem is becoming a sensitive topic on the modern geopolitical agenda. Finally, as we will see, "True Story" has got not only its literary merits, but also bears the stamp of Montesquieu's philosophical thought. The fact is that, despite the three-hundred-years gap, Montesquieu's ideas are high in demand in our days. His ideas on human nature, on notions of natural right, freedom, equality, on principles of government and many others are relevant in the context of the 21st century more than ever.

To achieve this aim it is necessary to solve the following tasks:

- to juxtapose "True Story" with the most relevant contemporary works on the topic of metempsychosis in order to reveal the specificity of Montesquieu's novel;
- to identify the main problematic categories in the novel and to analyze them in relation to Montesquieu's thought in general;
- to specify the function that the idea of metempsychosis has got in the novel;
- to give the novel a genre definition.

As research material we used "True Story" by Montesquieu and some other examples of ancient and modern literature that served to the author as sources or have got typological similarities with his work:

- Лукиан Самосатский. Сновидение, или Петух // Лукиан Самосатский. Сочинения: в 2-х т. / под общ. ред. А. И. Зайцева. СПб.: Алетейя, 2001. Т. 1.
- Crébillon Cl.-P. Le sophia: conte moral // Les conteurs du XVIIIe siècle: coll. P.: E. Flammarion, 1894.
- Gueullette Th.-S. Contes chinois, ou Les aventures merveilleuses du mandarin Fum-Hoam // Le cabinet des fées, ou Collection choisie des contes des fées et autres contes merveilleux. Amsterdam, 1795. Т. 19.
- Montesquieu Ch.-L. Histoire véritable // Mélanges inédits de Montesquieu / publié par le baron de Montesquieu. Bordeaux – P.: G. Gounouilhou, imprimeur-éditeur; J. Rouam et Cie, libraires-éditeurs, 1892.
- Montesquieu Ch.-L. Histoire véritable / publiée d'après un nouveau manuscrit avec une introduction et des notes par L. de Bordes de Fortage. Bordeaux: G. Gounouilhou, imprimeur-éditeur, 1902.

The theoretical background of the research consists of the publications on the Age of Enlightenment philosophers, literary creation and thought (Лукьянец, 1999; Момджян, 1983; Favre, 1978; Mauzi, 1960) and also of the foreign researchers' publications devoted to Montesquieu's "True Story", its genesis, genre, problematic and narrative characteristics (Crisafulli, 1953; Dornier, 2013; Gaillard, 2005; Matyaszewski, 2023; Perrin, 2009; Rustin, 1966; Stewart, 2022).

As for the research methods, a comparative historical method was used to analyze the novel in relation to some of the most representative works of the era on the same topic. This approach allows outlining the original way of using the idea of metempsychosis, while the idea in itself is not original if considered in the context of the literary process of the era.

The practical value of the present work lies in the possibility of using the research data in theoretical courses on the history of foreign literature of the 18th century or in special courses on the French literature of the Enlightenment. They will allow forming a comprehensive image of Montesquieu as a writer and thinker, which should not be limited to his two major works. The developments carried out in the article could be useful while working on the translation and preparation of a commentary edition of "True Story", which is inexistent now in Russia.

Discussion and results

The doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls, becomes curiously popular in Western Europe in the Age of Enlightenment, which is known by its rationalism. While in the Occident the doctrine has got its own tradition (Обидина, 2010, p. 7), which runs back to Pythagoras, its proliferation is largely due to the vogue for the Oriental culture established at the turn of the 17th-18th centuries. The philosophers, such as Holbach, Diderot, Mirabaud or Voltaire, demonstrate a certain interest in the problem, expressing both sharply critical, indulgent, or even approving

judgments (Favre, 1978). But the most important success encountered by this doctrine was in fiction. Over a half-century period (from the end of the 17th century to the middle of the 18th century) French authors alone created about fifteen novels, fairy tales, comedies and works of other genres (Perrin, 2009, p. 170), inspired by the “fashionable” concept of metempsychosis and talking about the reincarnations of a character into the bodies of other people, animals and inanimate objects. This being said, the authors use the potential of the concept in a different manner.

In 1723, a Parisian editor published “Chinese tales, or The Wonderful Adventures of the Mandarin Fum-Hoam” by Thomas-Simon Gueullette (1683-1766), who is known, besides his “Chinese” tales, by “Tartar”, “Mongol” and other tales in the Oriental style. Following the tradition of the tales of 1001 nights, the narrator, who names himself Fum-Hoam, addresses a Chinese monarch and his young wife, a Georgian princess, and tells them over 46 nights about his transmigrations into the bodies of a sanguinary tyrant, a flea, a dog, a noble young woman, a priest and many other creatures. The narration is filled with a typical assortment of components of the Arabian tales or the tales imitating them, such as fabulous adventures, passionate love, acute jealousy, vengeance, tragical death, etc. In general, although these stories have certain morality, we can say that they are told for the sake of the unusualness of the stories themselves. They are neither an attempt to denunciate the morals, nor the criticism of the existing world order, nor the realization of another Enlightenment project. In fact, the metempsychosis is used only as a narrative device, which provides quite inexhaustible possibilities for storytelling, the content of the stories and their number being not motivated by anything. Moreover, the doctrine of metempsychosis is discredited at the end of the book. It turns out that all these stories about the peregrinations of the soul are nothing more than a mystification. The narrator asserts that he has always been nothing but himself and that the stories were invented by him in order to demonstrate the “absurdity” of the belief in the transmigration of souls and to force the Chinese monarch to accept the “only correct” faith of his Muslim wife.

The doctrine of metempsychosis underlies another famous book, the “moral tale” “The Sofa” by Claude Crébillon (1707-1777), which was published for the first time in 1742 and provided the author with lasting fame as an “immoral” writer (Crébillon, 1894, p. VII). However, literary critics avoid stigmatizing Crébillon, pointing out that his main preoccupation was to describe the morals of his contemporaries (Лукьянец, 1999, p. 163), which was done in an extremely satirical way. This is the main striking difference between Crébillon’s “moral tale” and Gueullette’s “Chinese tales”. In contrast to his predecessor, Crébillon uses the potential of the doctrine of metempsychosis precisely for the purpose of exposing the morals of his era. The author hides behind an obviously implausible fiction by placing the character’s soul in a sofa as a punishment for the sins in his past lives, which allows him to make a number of curious sketches about women of different ages and conditions. Among them there is, for example, a stern married lady of a supposedly impeccable reputation that she skilfully uses in order to freely receive a young Brahmin, or a young girl whose mother teaches her to choose lovers according to their fortune or at least to have several of them at once, and many other representatives of the pseudo-respectable society. Thanks to the idea of metempsychosis, Crébillon methodically highlights the vices of his contemporaries, especially focusing on voluptuousness, adultery, inconstancy and other similar sins. Unlike Gueullette, the author of “The Sofa” acts primarily as a moralist.

These and other fictional works on the topic of metempsychosis are joined by the “Oriental” novel “True Story” by Charles-Louis de Montesquieu. The book was written in the late 1730s, approximately at the same period that Gueullette and Crébillon’s works, then it was revised, but never received the author’s final approval for printing. It was published for the first time only in 1892, but, as it turned out later, this publication was made not from the original manuscript, the existence of which was not yet known, but from its later remodeled version (Dornier, 2013). The original version of the text, based on the earlier manuscript, was published ten years later, in 1902. There are quite a lot of discrepancies between the two versions. Apart from more or less important transformations in the vocabulary and the syntax, the later version of the text has a frame composition that has been absent in the earlier one. There are also two narrators instead of one, but several episodes are being reworked, significantly reduced and even withdrawn. These transformations seem to be due, at least partly, to the critics given by Jean-Jacques Bel (1693-1738) (Dornier, 2013). Bel was a councillor at the Parliament of Bordeaux (where Montesquieu was a president at the same time), an editor and a severe literary critic, but also Montesquieu’s close friend and in some way his “intellectual partner” (Volpilhac-Auger, 2023). Montesquieu’s manuscript attracted rather severe criticism from Bel, who attacked both the fact of borrowing the idea of metempsychosis, its “trivial” title, “ignoble” character, numerous commonplaces and repetitions and, on the whole, judged it only as “materials for a future book” (Montesquieu, 1892, p. 85-96). Although Montesquieu’s novel has really got an unfinished character (both in its first and second versions), it represents an original, innovative work and, most importantly, a work that is very rich in ideas. The present research deliberately relies on the earlier version of the text, which is more complete, has a more harmonious organization and seems to reflect better the author’s original intention.

Montesquieu’s “True Story” partly correlates with contemporary literature on the topic of metempsychosis. In particular, like Gueullette and Crébillon, Montesquieu proceeds from the idea that the memory of the person who has experienced a series of reincarnations is able to store the souvenir of each of them, even if they have had thousands of states, which took centuries. The memory itself represents in this case, using the term of J.-F. Perrin, the “narrative matrix” (2009, p. 170). The whole text is a continuous narration about the presence of the soul in the bodies of various creatures, starting from the very moment of death of the character, killed by a husband of a young woman whom he intended to seduce. This accident, as the character asserts, took place four thousand years ago and was the reason for his soul to be sentenced to occupy the bodies of “the most despicable animals” (“les animaux les plus vils”) (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 6).

It is quite remarkable to see how Montesquieu implements the mechanism of reincarnation itself. According to the traditional views, the soul is transferred from one body to another depending on its way of proceeding

in the previous state, which can deserve either punishment or reward. Inappropriate actions are punished by transferring the soul into a lower state, while the behavior that was nothing to blame deserves the soul to be transferred into a higher one. This principle correlates with the main idea of metempsychosis according to which the soul should, by the means of reincarnations, rise, ennoble and reach its highest point of existence (Stewart, 2022, p. 164). During a certain time, Montesquieu follows precisely this logic. While the soul of his character remains in the bodies of animals, it really moves from a lower state to a higher one. It does not exclude that the process goes extremely slowly, because only the initial stage of being animal, i.e. being in the bodies of insects, corresponds to “seven or eight hundred reincarnations” (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 6), which became inexplicably “four or five hundred reincarnations” in the later version (Montesquieu, 1892, p. 35). But as soon as the character’s soul deserves to be transferred into a human body, such positive progression stops altogether. He says that having become a man, he was not even able to retain those few virtues that he had acquired in his previous animal state: “I no longer found in myself the former mental peace, nor this freedom of judgment, this wisdom, and this prudence that I had. On the contrary, I was full of passions, caprices, and misunderstandings” (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 13). He acknowledges that in his numerous reincarnations he often was a rascal and much less often an honest person (“honnête homme”). In one of the final episodes, the narrator even claims that not only he did not achieve perfection, but, on the contrary, fell very low: “...instead of reaching a new level of perfection, I fell insensibly; I always became inferior to myself” (Montesquieu, 1892, p. 70). However, it is interesting to note that the character is not really inclined to consider himself guilty, the main responsibility, from his point of view, lies with the humanity. A. S. Crisafulli (1953, p. 65-66) sees here signs of irony. Indeed, in his ironic manner, typical for all Montesquieu’s fictional works, the author seems to demonstrate that humans are weak by nature, incapable of self-improvement and the very structure of society does not contribute to this.

The narration about transmigrations of soul, in general, presupposes a certain fragmentation. But Montesquieu takes this principle to the extreme. When Gueullette and Crébillon offer quite a comprehensive picture of one or another state of a character, so that each of them appears as a relatively complete story, Montesquieu limits himself to very brief, quickly succeeding episodes, which aim to highlight one specific phenomenon and expose it to a critical understanding, most often ironical one. In the spirit of Crébillon, but several years before him, Montesquieu makes an important emphasis on depicting the morals of society and especially the morals of love. To do this, he repeatedly transfers the soul of his character into the body of a woman. In general, in the literature on the topic of metempsychosis the idea of reincarnation into a woman is not uncommon. The earliest specimens can be found already in the ancient literature, for example, in Lucian’s “The Dream, or The Cock”. Montesquieu’s contemporaries (especially Gueullette) also transform their characters into women. However, only Montesquieu clearly shows a specific tendency that consists in using a woman’s mask to expose exactly woman’s vices, such as hypocrisy, ostentatious virtue, moral laxity, infidelity and debauchery. For example, in one of such episodes the character reincarnated into woman talks with abandon about her love affairs in higher society. She boasts that not only her marriage did not hamper her gallant adventures, but, on the contrary, they only increased her attractiveness and significance in the eyes of the entire society as the status of her lovers became higher and their wallets became fatter. She says: “Having the good fortune to please one nobleman, and then one rich gentleman, I suddenly became fashionable, everyone wanted to get me, and I was arrogant, putting on an important air, which grew more and more every day, and I became more expensive the less value I had” (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 37). Certainly, in this episode Montesquieu turns to ridicule both the morals of the high society where debauchery appears as the norm of behavior and the arrogance and narcissism of men who do not accept a single idea of a woman’s possible infidelity, but the phenomenon that is primarily targeted is the unparalleled immorality of women. In general, in all episodes where the character describes himself in a woman’s body, he invariably reports on facts of dissipation, betrayal and adultery. In this “female” part of the book, we can find a very noticeable orientation towards the libertine literature of the era with its typical erotic problematic, the description of free morals of love, the introduction of the notion of gallant love, which is based not on marriage bonds, but on passion and pleasure. By the way, hiding under a woman’s mask, Montesquieu tends, as it seems, to create an illusion of objectivity: the criticism of female morals comes not from an outside and biased male observer, but from a woman herself and looks like an act of self-exposure.

This being said, in the case of Montesquieu the idea of metempsychosis is much more than a simple effect of fashion, an original narrative strategy or an instrument of satire in order to expose the morals of the era. It is also subordinated to a more serious philosophical task and is connected with the search of the answers to the fundamental questions of existence (Perrin, 2009, p. 170; Matyaszewski, 2023, p. 91), which are included in the problem field of the Enlightenment. Without attempting to give an exhaustive list of these problems, we will focus only on some of them that seem especially significant for Montesquieu.

One of such essential problems for the French philosopher is the problem of despotism and specifically Oriental despotism, which the author repeatedly raised both before and after writing “True Story”. It is characteristic that in this “Oriental” novel the problem is demonstrated by using the example of the fate of a eunuch, which is one of the character’s temporary states. This episode, which may seem insignificant, is of great importance in the context of the work, as indicated by a number of facts. The episode takes the central place in the composition of the work: it is included in the third chapter of the originally planned six chapters. At the same time, the length of the episode exceeds by far all the others. It is the only case when Montesquieu gives a truly detailed description not only of the character’s state, but also of how it is perceived by the character. Thus, it seems regrettable that in the later version of the text the episode was reduced in such a way that it became equal to all the other episodes, but the eunuch’s story

lost its philosophical interest completely. It is also significant that this (and only this) episode in the manuscript belongs to the hand of Montesquieu himself, as indicated by the editors, in contrast to the rest of the text written by his secretary.

Let us consider the figure of the eunuch as it is seen through the eyes of Montesquieu. It is a creature enslaved by his condition. During his life, he is forced on repressing his nature, excited by the constant presence of female beauty, which is an inexhaustible source of suffering for him. He is also forced to fulfill the duty imposed on him and hates it, being submissive only by threats and fear of punishment. However, the paradox consists in the fact that, being slave and living in fear, the eunuch acts at the same time as a tyrant. His function of supervisor of the harem's women allows him to consider that he has got some power on them and the right to bend them to his will. Thus, the greater the eunuch's suffering from the awareness of his physical handicap and lack of right to sensual pleasure is, the greater the fury that he puts in the demonstration of his power over these women is, increasing punishments, oppressing and humiliating them, forcing them to remain in eternal fear as he does. In essence, this mechanism is nothing more than the illustration of the mechanism of despotic state itself (Васильева, 2022, p. 58). As it is known, Montesquieu considered the principle of fear as the fundamental principle of despotic states (Момджян, 1983, p. 103), to which he included precisely the Orient countries. In his thought, a despot is also the slave of his condition. He is a tyrant towards his subjects. Like a eunuch in a harem, he has an absolute power over the lives of his subjects, who are kept in obedience only by a sense of fear. But this same feeling subjugates the despot himself, because as the despot toughens his power, his fear increases both for his own life and for the safety of the regime itself, which risks falling at any moment as a result of an internal rebellion... It is possible to say that in this case we are dealing with a kind of self-citation, because Montesquieu reproduces, in general terms, his own ideas, developed before in his "Persian Letters".

More general problem categories conceptualized in this novel include the category of happiness, which also refers to the fundamental notions of the Enlightenment (Mauzi, 1960). It is symptomatic that Montesquieu considers it not in itself, but in relation with the category of wealth. In particular, in chapter 6 it is asserted that happiness has no material basis, because happiness "cannot consist in something that cannot be given to everyone" (i.e. the wealth) (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 62) and above that should not be the cause of poverty and humiliation of another person. This idea is revealed in a conversation with Plutus, the god of wealth among the Greeks, who explains to the character that the true happiness is "the real values that are in a person himself... virtue, health, peace, good spirit, home tranquility, fear of gods" (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 62). As for the wealth, it is always associated with worries, illnesses, passions, aversions, fears that make the rich people unhappy. But, as Plutus says, "there is another kind of people, who are even more unhappy than the rich people, these are the poor who dream about becoming rich" (Montesquieu, 1902, p. 62).

These reflections correlate in a curious way to the idea developed in Lucian's satirical story "The Dream, or The Cock". Lucian's character, who passed through a series of reincarnations and preferred to stay in the body of a cock, edifies his interlocutor, the poor tailor Mycillus, that if he knew how many troubles accompany the life of a rich man, "he would laugh at himself, at the fact that he could previously think that the highest happiness is wealth" (Лукиан Самосатский, 2001, p. 431). Among different troubles that a rich man encounters in his life Lucian's character mentions, like Montesquieu's character, illnesses, provoked by intemperance in food and general debauchery, fear of possible ruin, etc. And, like Montesquieu, he comes to the conclusion that people have the wrong idea about the rich only because of their ignorance and look unhappy in their desire to possess gold, believing that "it makes those who possess it beautiful and intelligent and strong, brings them honor and glory" (Лукиан Самосатский, 2001, p. 427). In fact, Lucian is considered as one of the main sources of Montesquieu's "True Story", but it is generally accepted that Lucian influenced Montesquieu in two ways. In particular, the critics mention the fact of using the idea of metempsychosis, which unifies Montesquieu's novel with Lucian's "The Dream, or The Cock", and the fact of borrowing the title from another Lucian's satirical story called "True Story" (Crisafulli, 1953, p. 59; Rustin, 1966, p. 90; Matyaszewski, 2023, p. 85-86). In reality, the influence of the ancient author seems to exceed the superficial, "external" borrowings, and also concerns the ideas.

Another problem, which is considered in the novel, is the problem of the Other and the self-identification of a person in relation to the Other. It is to note that all of Montesquieu's work demonstrates an extreme concern with the problem of the Other. In his fictional works, he gives the right to speak both to the Persians, the woman, and the eunuch who are all different incarnations of the figure of the Other. The Persians are the Others, because they represent another, i.e. Oriental, civilization, which in the Western European consciousness appears as barbaric. The woman is also the Other, because she still occupies a different position in the system of social relations of the Age of Enlightenment, which is secondary, dependent position in relation to men. Finally, the eunuch is the Other because of his perverted physical nature. Thus, "True Story" is an example of a radical experiment with the image of the Other. The character is given the opportunity to try on not one specific role, but an incalculable number of masks, he lives a series of the opposite states, being either a despised insect or a sacred animal, either a powerless eunuch or a sovereign master of a harem, either a fraudster or a Greek philosopher... It is particularly remarkable that, according to the character, he was not happy in any of these states. Demonstrating his dissatisfaction with all of them, he even enters into argument with his Genius about his future reincarnation and finally is given the right to choose it himself. What is presented here is essentially an impossible situation, because Montesquieu breaks the mechanism of metempsychosis as a process that does not depend on the will of a person, but only on his way of action. Anyway, it turns out that even the freedom of choice does not provide a solution to the problem at all. The character explains that the tragedy of a human creature is that he is torn apart by an internal struggle between dissatisfaction with his own condition and unwillingness to be someone else, desire and aversion to be someone who he is, love for himself and envy for someone else's condition (Montesquieu, 1892, p. 48). But most importantly, he is forced to acknowledge the fatal impossibility of overcoming his own "I" (Gaillard, 2005).

Only at first glance Montesquieu's "True Story" may seem a sort of a literary trinket, and for a long time this work has been perceived exactly in this way. But an abundant presence of philosophical inferences on a wide range of matters takes it explicitly beyond the scope of "easy" or entertaining literature. In fact, "True Story" reveals signs of some specific genre that combines such disjoint elements as satire, adventures, fantasy, philosophy and many others. M. Bakhtin gave this genre the name of *mennipea*, not referring strictly to the genre of ancient literature, but using this term in an extended sense as genre that existed in different forms and under different names at each era after Antiquity (Бахтин, 2002, p. 128). Regardless of the era, the main characteristics of *mennipea* remain an extraordinary freedom in plot constructing and using fantasy, which is justified by a philosophical aim: the author deliberately creates such exceptional situations for his character to test any philosophical idea (Бахтин, 2002, p. 129). As we could see, these characteristics are absolutely applicable to Montesquieu's "True Story" even though this novel was created without any awareness of its belonging to the genre of *mennipea*.

Conclusion

Thus, we came to the following research findings.

"True Story" by Montesquieu appears as a quite natural product of the Age of Enlightenment with its obvious interest to this philosophical doctrine, but at the same time it is an unusual example of the literary production on this topic compared with other most significant 18th-century French writings on metempsychosis. Unlike his contemporaries, Gueullette or Crébillon, Montesquieu demonstrates that the idea of metempsychosis can be used not only as the original device that allows the character to overpass time and space and observe human vices, but also aims to solve philosophical issues.

The philosophical investigation is not focused on any specific issue. The transmigrations of the character create numerous situations that allow Montesquieu to consider a wide range of issues, which are particularly acute for the French philosopher. One of them is the problem of Oriental despotism. Using the example of a eunuch, the author illustrates the mechanism of its functioning as cooperation of absolute power and slavery based on fear. Another one is the category of happiness, which Montesquieu interprets in the same way as Lucian does in his satirical story "The Dream, or The Cock", i.e. as a phenomenon that does not depend on the external, material factors, but has its source in the immanent properties of a person. He also examines the notion of the Other and the problem of identity. The novel appears as a radical experiment with the figure of the Other because of the innumerable reincarnations of the character into the bodies of different creatures and comes to the conclusion about the fatal impossibility to overcome one's own identity.

The analysis showed that the idea of metempsychosis is nothing but an experimental technique and performs, in fact, the same function that could be associated to the technique of defamiliarization in "Persian Letters". While hiding his character under different masks, Montesquieu had an opportunity not only to express such delicate thoughts on behalf of his character that cannot be expressed directly, but also to express such heterogeneous thoughts that can hardly be expressed all together in a traditional novel. Fantastic and innumerable transformations, coupled with an exotic Oriental context of the novel, create the illusion of a distance from the real France of the 18th century (and, more generally, from any reality) and by this way give the author almost unlimited freedom in interpreting the most pressing and controversial issues, which have nothing in common with each other.

Such stylistic and content diversity allows us to take a fresh look at the genre nature of "True Story" and to place it within the tradition of *mennipea*, as it was defined by M. Bakhtin. In accordance with the genre, Montesquieu's novel paradoxically combines elements of different genres, like the adventure novel, satire, fantasy. But using these elements is not so much aimed at entertaining the reader, but at giving the author wide opportunities for experimentation and testing any philosophical idea.

Considering the philosophical potential of the novel, it is possible to outline the further research perspectives as follows. One possible way consists in developing the study of the philosophical issues raised in "True Story". Another research way is to introduce the data we already have got in a more complete study of the "experimental" writings of Montesquieu, which cover all his fictional works where the topic of the Orient is the main theme.

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