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Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, 2019, Especial N° 20

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
ISSN 1012-1537/ ISSNe: 2477-9385  
Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

# **Common motifs, Characters, Metaphors and Plots between Dovlatov's and Petrov's Novels**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to investigate common motifs, characters, metaphors and plots between Dovlatov's and Petrov's novels via structural and comparative-historical methods. As a result, it is worth paying attention to the importance of the Russian intelligentsia metaphor. Refer to Dovlatov's *A Foreign Woman*, where he, through the image of Maria Tatarovich, defines the significance of the Soviet intelligentsia: In the Soviet Union she was a multi-skilled intellectual. In conclusion, all of the novels have common motifs, metaphors, characters united with external similarity, actions, characteristics and plots.

**Keywords:** Correlation, Implied Sense, Characters, Plot.

## *Motivos, personajes, metáforas y tramas comunes entre las novelas de Dovlatov y Petrov*

### **Resumen**

El objetivo del estudio es investigar motivos comunes, personajes, metáforas y diagramas entre las novelas de Dovlatov y Petrov a través de métodos estructurales e histórico-comparativos. Como resultado, vale la pena prestar atención a la importancia de la metáfora de la intelectualidad rusa. Refiérase a Dovlatov *A Foreign Woman*, donde él, a través de la imagen de Maria Tatarovich, define el significado de la inteligencia soviética: en la Unión Soviética era una intelectual con múltiples habilidades. En conclusión, todas las novelas tienen motivos comunes, metáforas, personajes unidos con similitud externa, acciones, características y tramas.

**Palabras clave:** correlación, sentido implícito, caracteres, trama.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the issue of Sergei Dovlatov's creative work has become a subject of interest for native and foreign researchers of Russian literature. Monographs and memoirs about his life are being published and republished; dissertations and scientific articles are written about his work and its place in the canon. For example: monograph of Italian Slavist Salmon (2008) *Mechanisms of Humor. About the Works of Sergey Dovlatov*, philology romance by Genis

Dovlatov and Vicinities; theses by Plotnikova Traditions of Russian Classical Literature in the Work of Polivanov Pseudo documentaries in Russian Uncensored Prose of the 1970-1980-ies; documentaries of Aza Babayan and Sergey Bubnov Dovlatov, Lev Lurie Sergei Dovlatov: The Compromise (A Cultural Layer), Sergei Dovlatov: The Suitcase (A Cultural Layer). Documentaries about his life, which include analyses of some elements of his work, are broadcast.

In 2005, a historian Lev Lurie shot documentary films Sergei Dovlatov: The Compromise and Sergei Dovlatov: The Suitcase (A Cultural Layer). Articles and notes about the writer's work are published in such specialized journals, as *Zvezda* № 03 1994, *Russkiy Pioner* № 6 (57) 2015 - the issues are entirely devoted to Sergey Dovlatov.

A comparative analysis of S. Dovlatov's and I. Ilf and E. Petrov's works allowed us to identify common motifs, characters, metaphors and plots. The originality and importance of this study are in that it fills the existing lacuna in scientific research, confirms more than once the assumptions made by colleagues that Dovlatov continues to develop Ilf and Petrov's traditions in his work, and he is their successor. This article includes an abstract, introduction, literature review, definition of the method, results, discussion and conclusions. During the study by applying structural and comparative-historical methods, we identified common parallels between Dovlatov's short novels *The Affiliate* and *A Foreign Woman* and Ilf and Petrov's novels *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*. This allows stating that the works by Ilf and Petrov are the context of Dovlatov's works.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the digital database of the Russian State Library, there are more than 25 dissertations related to Dovlatov's work. It is noteworthy that the dissertations deal with either Dovlatov's works in the context of Russian literature, included in the literary canon, or those compared with the works of his contemporaries – Venedikt Yerofeyev, Vasily Shukshin, Eduard Limonov, etc. There are also dissertations on comic principles and irony in Dovlatov's works, in particular in comparison with Zoshchenko. In the English-language literature, there are few studies dealing with Dovlatov's writings. So, in the library at the University of Tartu, we can see only 37 sources relating to his work. At the same time, there are no studies regarding the stated topic. Literary traditions associated with Dovlatov were dealt with by such researchers as (Dobrozrakova, 2012; Suleri & Cavagnaro, 2016).

Referring to the Scopus database – pasting Dovlatov for the search, we see 25 links, only five relate to Dovlatov's work. One of them is related to the research by Semenenko (2018) the Power of Myth: Mikhail Zhvanetskii's Satire in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, which also includes the study of boorishness as a cultural phenomenon. Dovlatov's quotation is mentioned who defined it as rudeness, arrogance and insolence multiplied by impunity. The meaning of the words stinginess and boorishness is analyzed: the word stinginess is colloquial, it is a Yiddish slang word, first recorded in the

early 20th century, and combines rudeness with greed, which in Soviet times became synonymous with boorishness. Another link leads to Young's (2009) study *Sergei Dovlatov and his Narrative Masks*.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology includes the works of authors who combine structural and comparative historical approaches. The essence of the structural approach is in defining the system, identifying universals, in the initial assumption that the structural dimension prevails in any phenomena of the surrounding world. The structure can be interpreted as recognizing itself, the manifestation of the hidden. The recognition of a particular locus is the identification of its beginning, which is in opposition to history as a process or, in other words, by assigning history by the beginning, when history is represented as a chain of events of its end. Thus, Raymond Williams stated categorically that the representation of people's relationship in any artwork is always the relationship between experience and persuasion. The structural approach allows identifying the frequency of use of the image, plot, metaphor, motif, and thus – to identify the degree of its conventionalism (Vashukova, 2005; Dobrozrakova, 2007; García-Santillán, 2019; Sebaa et al., 2017).

### **4. RESULTS**

The research findings are the identification of parallels between Dovlatov's short novels *The Affiliate* and *A Foreign Woman* and Ilf and Petrov's novels *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*. The novelty and relevance of the study is that in Russia and abroad there is no research concerning the identification of parallels between Dovlatov's and Ilf and Petrov's works. Dovlatov evaluated Ilf and Petrov's work in *Solo on Underwood*: There is a concept of a sense of humor. However, there is something opposite to the sense of humor. Well, let us say – the feeling of drama. Lack of a sense of humor is a tragedy for a writer. Rather, a disaster. But the lack of a sense of drama is just as bad. Only Ilf and Petrov managed to write good novels without a shadow of drama. In the course of the undertaken analysis, common motifs, metaphors, characters united by external similarity, actions, speech characteristics, and common plots were revealed (Table 1).

<b>I. Ilf and E. Petrov. The Twelve Chairs</b>	<b>S. Dovlatov. The Compromise</b>
<b>I. Ilf and E. Petrov. The Twelve Chairs</b>	<b>S. Dovlatov. The Compromise</b>
Common characters	
<p>The twentieth century flourished. Two young men – the twenty-year-old Baron Geismar and the son of a prominent official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dalmatov – met in the illusion with the wife of reserve warrant officer Marianne Time and killed her in order to rob.</p>	<p>Comrade Dolmatov gives final farewell. &lt;...&gt; Whoever only I was – Dokladov, Zaplatov....</p> <p><b>S. Dovlatov. The Affiliate</b></p> <p>You, Dalmatov, was a Soviet journalist. Then you became an anti-Soviet journalist. Now you will again be a Soviet journalist. You do not mind?</p>

**I. Ilf and E. Petrov. The Twelve Chairs**

Common plots

The owner of Bystroupak Dyadyev proposed: let us select candidates of the new municipal government, including the governor, the mayor, and the chief of police, officials and trustees.

Common metaphors

Charushnikov accused the Cadets of selling Finland, of receiving money from the Japanese, of fraud against the Armenians. He, already as a representative of authorities, blamed the governor Dyadyev of the absence of general rank. To this, Dyadyev stated: I will be an actual state councillor, and you envy? When I want, I will put you in a prison locked. I will tackle you... The argument never ended: The star shone. It was an enchanting night. On the Second Soviet the dispute of the governor with the mayor continued.

Common characters and plots

He himself and Elena Stanislavovna (out of pity) voted for Charushnikov. There was one abstaining: It was clear from Kislarsky's face that it was him. He did not want to spoil relations with the future

**S. Dovlatov. The Affiliate**

Candidates of... major statesmen of the future Russia. First the President. Then the Prime Minister. And finally, the leader of the opposition party

Gentlemen! It is possible that someone will suspect me of anti-Semitism. However, I want to ask a question. Namely – can a Jew be the chairman of the All-Russian State Duma? Can a Jew run the All-Russian Council of the National Economy? And finally, can a Jew be the leader of the all-Russian political opposition? In short, can a Jew be in control of Russian statehood?

It was said about Chudnovsky – he was drinking. About Vorobiev – he was prone to lurches of policy. About Mikhailovich – he was rude and non-collegial.

Three people voted for Kharitonenko. The same Belyakova, her disciplined husband and, surprisingly, Kharitonenko himself. Upon hearing all those in favor, he raised his hand gloomily. His heavy



governor, whoever he was.

hand of a boxer, forever disqualified as far back as in the sixty-fourth year.

#### Common characters and plots

It is time to drink, Your Excellency, – he said to Dyadyevu. – Dash, Polesov, to the

Panayev was walking by with the architect Yudovich. He noticed me and said with a sly smile:

Octyabr. Got money?

- It is time to sober up!

And I? – Suddenly a thin, worried voice

Then I suddenly understood everything:

rang out. They all turned back. In the

- So It is you, I say, who ordered cognac for me? And brandy?

corner, near the parrot, there stood

In response, the old man slightly raises his hat.

completely upset Polesov. Viktor

- So, good wizards, I shout, do not exist?

Mikhailovich had tears brought to his black eyes. Everybody became very

ashamed. The guests suddenly

Panayev smiled again, as if he wanted to ask:

remembered that they were drinking

- And I?

Polesov's vodka and that he was even

one of the principal organizers of the

Stargorod Affiliate of The Sword and The Ploughshare.

#### **I. Ilf and E. Petrov. The Golden Calf**

#### **S. Dovlatov. A Foreign Woman**

#### Common plots

Apartment number three was even called

Our area stretches from the railway to the

Voronya Slobodka (Crow Suburb). A

synagogue. A little to the north – the

long life together hardened these people,

Meadow Lake, to the south – Queens

and they did not know fear. The

Boulevard. And we are in the middle.

equilibrium between apartments was

108th Street is our main thoroughfare.

maintained by blocks between individual

We have Russian shops, kindergartens, a

tenants. Sometimes the inhabitants of

photo studio and hairdressers. <...> Our

Voronya Slobodka united all together

whole street was concerned about how

against any one of tenants, and it was bad

events would develop. After all, we treat

for such a tenant.

such cases seriously.

#### Common characters, motifs and metaphors

In the long chain of adventures that

Marusia Tatarovich replying the question:

preceded the fire in apartment number three, the first link was nobody's grandmother. Nobody's grandmother lived on the attic storey, nobody knew her name and surname. Although the whole apartment was lit with electricity, the grandmother turned on a kerosene lamp with a reflector upstairs. She lacked trust in electricity.

Common characters, motifs and metaphors

The tenants of the apartment are people from the past pre-revolutionary life. Among them are nobody's grandmother without a name and a surname, a former mountain prince, and currently an Eastern worker Gigienishvili, Alexander Dmitrievich Sukhoveyko raised in the page corps nicknamed Mitrich, Dunya renting a bed in aunt Pasha's room,... and aunt Pasha herself – a stallkeeper and a hard drinker. Lucius Frantsevna Pferd was the principal tenant. A retired janitor Nikita Pryakhin lived in the suburb too.

Common characters, common plots

During the time when the pilot Sevryugov was away, a citizen Gigienishvili broke the lock of his room, and threw out all the property of the hero into the corridor, including the red propeller hanging on the wall.

Why did you leave, and in addition with a young child? gives the following answer: I do not know ... It just happened. <...> I had a dream. <...> As if I had wings. And then – as if I flew over the city and turned out all electric bulbs.

Before immigration, Leva Baranov was an artist. He painted Molotov's portraits.

Subsequently, when Molotov was removed, he turned into an abstractionist, he began to drink and go on the rampage. Yeliseyev taught Marxism-Leninism in Kiev. He defended his thesis. And he was preparing to become a doctor of science. When he was not given a visa to Bulgaria to a familiar scientist, he was offended and went to America. Pertsovich <...> was a driver in Moscow too. Thus, little has changed in his life. He began to earn much more, indeed. And he had a taxi of his own here...

In the Union, he was a famous human rights activist.

He showed exceptional courage in the fight against the regime. Had three camp terms. Seven times went on hunger strike. Being let off, he fell back into his old

Gigienishvili spent four months in prison for arbitrariness and returned from there hopping mad.

ways. <...> After the third term, Karavayev was allowed to go to the West. <...> Karavayev was disappointed by America. Here he lacked Soviet power, Marxism, and punitive authorities. Karavayev had nothing to resist.

#### Common characters and metaphors

Icebergs! – said Mitrich mockingly. – This is what we can understand. There has been no life for ten years. <...> Pryakhin truly says. To take away – and that is that. Especially since Lucie Frantsevna proves the fact about the law. Varvara, crabbed by neighbors, ran to complain to her husband, who noted: Or maybe It is necessary, <...> maybe, from the mouth of a simple peasant Mitrich, the great homespun truth speaks. Just think about the role of the Russian intelligentsia, its significance

He was a good family man, did not smoke and drank moderately. So Lemkus became a religious figure. Ran mysterious trans world radio. Hosted a regular program –How to behold God? He became pious and sad. Now and then he whispered, looking down. <...> A religious figure Lemkus also became interested in Marusia. First, he presented her the Bible in English. Then he said that God prefers the unsettled and lonely. Finally, he promised favorable conditions in a different, future life.

#### Common characters and motifs

During the fire: Nobody's grandmother howled terribly. Nothing is known about the further fate of nobody's grandmother.

Nothing is known about Marusya's fate after the wedding: In August, Musya became depressed. The reasons, as is usually the case, looked insignificant. It is known that people really suffer only from annoying little things. <...> Then I am becoming silent. I do not fit to speak about the good. Because we would only find funny, humiliating, stupid and miserable things everywhere. Gossip and

	swear. It is a sin. In short – I am becoming silent.
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Table 1: Parallels between Dovlatov's short novels *The Affiliate* and *A Foreign Woman* and Ilf and Petrov's novels *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*

We see the similarity of the plots associated with the description of the characters' experiences during the elections. And now let us compare the plot with the conclusion of Dovlatov's *The Affiliate*. The day after the election, the lyrical hero, who got drunk the day before, survived a difficult farewell to his former lover, elected to the opposition, guesses that he was given a drink by a classic of Soviet literature, Panayev:

Panayev was walking by with the architect Yudovich. He noticed me and said with a sly smile:

- It is time to sober up!

Then I suddenly understood everything:

- So it is you, I say, who ordered cognac for me? And brandy?

In response, the old man slightly raises his hat.

- So, good wizards, – I shout, –do not exist?

Panayev smiled again, as if he wanted to ask:

-And I?

We see that Dovlatov's and Ilf and Petrov's works are united by a common motif associated with the characters – this is a superfluous man, the character traditional in Russian literature. The characters from the chapter of *Voronya Slobodka* are from the past pre-revolutionary life, the characters from Dovlatov's *A Foreign Woman*

are those who abandoned the Soviet life in the past. It is important that the motif of a superfluous man for S. Dovlatov was one of the main ones in his work.

It is worth paying attention to the importance of the Russian intelligentsia metaphor. Refer to the Dovlatov's *A Foreign Woman*, where he, through the image of Maria Tatarovich, defines the significance of the Soviet intelligentsia: In the Soviet Union she was a multi-skilled intellectual. She could work anywhere. During the time when the pilot Sevryugov was away, a citizen Gigienishvili broke the lock of his room, and threw out all the property of the hero into the corridor, including the red propeller hanging on the wall.

Regard Dovlatov's short novel *A Foreign Woman*. This is how Maria Tatarovich's explanation of reasons for leaving the USSR is presented: I do not know ... It just happened. <...> I had a dream. <...> as if I have wings. And then – as if I am flying over the city and turning out all electric bulbs. No one needs both Maria and nobody's grandmother, but at the same time, they become the sole focus, not wishing it. The plots are combined with the metaphor of light – electricity, which was trusted by nobody's grandmother, electric light bulbs that Marusia Tatarovich turns off in her dream. Real denial (nobody's grandmother), symbolic denial (Marusya Tatarovich) of electricity leads the heroines to the final of a certain stage in their lives. The epic with nobody's grandmother ended with fire. During the fire: Nobody's grandmother howled terribly. Nothing is known about her further fate. The characters of Maria and nobody's grandmother are united by a common motif – the superfluous people.

In the character of Maria, the author describes her whole life with her failures, with her admirers, her work, and the fruitless desire to return to Russia, with the onset of depression: In August, Musya became depressed. The reasons, as is usually the case, looked insignificant. It is known that people really suffer only from annoying little things. Desperate, Tatarovich decided to marry Rafael, being aware of the instability of marriage and the futility of this act. During the wedding celebration, a large family of Rafa presented the couple with a luxurious limousine: As it turned out, the limousine was their gift to the groom. The serenade was meant for the bride. Maria's further fate, as well as the fate of nobody's grandmother, is also unknown. The result of Marusya's life formulated by the author is as such: Then I am becoming silent. I do not fit to speak about the good. Gossip and swear. It is a sin. In short – I am becoming silent.

Thus, *A Foreign Woman* and the chapter *Voronya Slobodka* from *The Golden Calf* are united by common plots and motifs. What meaning Ilf and Petrov put in the character of nobody's grandmother is unknown. It is known what sense Dovlatov put into the character of Marusya. In a letter to Naum Sagolovsky, he writes: I may have written to you that in time of need I was down and sold a non-existent short novel *A Foreign Woman* to Polovets for \$ 1,000. Now I am dashing this story off in sweat. It turns out unimaginable garbage. But: the heroine is called – Maria, Marusya, Tatarovich, she symbolizes Russia, Emigration with a capital letter and hell of a thing. Thus *A Foreign Woman* and the chapter *Voronya Slobodka* from *The Golden Calf* are united by the metaphors of the past life, the image of Russia,

and emigration. Comparing Dovlatov's *The Affiliate*, *A Foreign Woman* with Ilf and E. Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf* we singled out common motifs, characters, metaphors and plots.

Thus, having paid attention to the connection between Dovlatov's collection of short stories *The Compromise* and I.Ilf and E.Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*, we continued the research and achieved the outcome: the links between S. Dovlatov's *The Affiliate* and *A Foreign Woman* and I.Ilf and E.Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*. Note that the objects of analysis are innovative since they have not come in researchers' view.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

We cannot compare the obtained research data with the data received by other researchers, since there are no studies on the stated topic. We will summarize the findings. The goal – identifying common motives, characters, metaphors and plots between Dovlatov's *The Affiliate* and *A Foreign Woman* and Ilf and Petrov's *The Golden Calf* and *The Twelve Chairs* has been achieved. The assumption that one of the subtexts of Dovlatov's works is presented by Ilf and Petrov's novels has been confirmed. It is important that the assumption is confirmed again. The first study was presented in April 2018, as described above. It is important it is the second confirmation. Research perspectives are: the obtained data will be summarized and

supplemented by parallels between Dovlatov's works Solo on Underwood, Solo on IBM, Zone, Reserve, Craft. The purpose of the comparative analysis will be to prove that one of the main contexts of Dovlatov's works is the novels by Ilf and Petrov.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

Having compared Dovlatov's The Affiliate and A Foreign Woman with Ilf and Petrov's The Twelve Chairs and The Golden Calf we note that they have:

- Common motifs;
- Common metaphors;
- Common characters united with external similarity, actions, characteristics,
- Common plots.

Thus, the assumption that one of the subtexts of Dovlatov's The Affiliate works and A Foreign Woman is presented by Ilf and Petrov's The Twelve Chairs and The Golden Calf.

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 35, N° 20, (2019)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.

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