



## **WORLDVIEW OF GENERATIONS AS A FACTOR IN SHAPING THE MORAL CHOICE OF HEROES IN FICTION**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the problem of moral choice as a reflection of generational differences in views and beliefs, using Nikolai Gogol's novella "Taras Bulba" and Pierre Mérimée's short story "Matteo Falconet" as examples. The author explores how traditional moral values shape the characters' actions, determining their attitudes toward honor, duty, and family. A comparative analysis is provided of the worldviews of representatives of different cultures and eras: the Corsican peasant Matteo and the Zaporozhian Cossack Taras, for whom honor becomes the highest moral norm. The article emphasizes that generational conflict, based on differing notions of good and evil, inevitably leads to tragedy. It concludes that works of art reflect the historically changing moral world of society and serve as a means of understanding eternal moral values.

**Keywords:** Moral choice, generational conflict, honor, convictions, Prosper Merimee, Nikolai Gogol, Matteo Falcone, Taras Bulba, moral values, traditions.

### **Introduction**

The expression "the moral world of a work of art" arose precisely as an attempt to incorporate moral issues into a writer's artistic system. This concept is not a new category. The moral world is a system of ethical values existing within a work and realized in the artist's and his characters' ethical assessments of the world; in his ideas about moral norms and their connection to time; in his views on the ethical and psychological structure of man; in his model of what is and should be in human behavior; and in the social and class arrangement of moral emphases.

Looking at the experience of literature, we see that what is important is not the mere presence of moral issues in a work, but what pulsates most acutely within it,



what is brought to the forefront, and how it reflects time. The moral world of a work of art is a historically and socially specific, fluid formation; in each era it is imbued with new meaning, and each social and class environment has its own range of ethical interests. The connection between the moral world of a work of art and a historically specific stage in the development of literature and society has been a frequent subject of research in relation to the literature of past centuries. Literature's direct relationship to questions of good and evil—its ethical interpretation of the world—has been considered a defining characteristic not only of individual works but of entire literary eras and movements.

Generation gap is a concept that reflects the socio-political and ideological meaning of the confrontation between young people and the foundations of society. Generation gap manifests itself in global age conflict and mutual misunderstanding. This conflict typically extends beyond the boundaries of a single family and becomes the content of relationships between different generations.

Generation gap is a highly complex and ambiguous social phenomenon, rooted in a vast array of causes (problems) related to a range of contemporary social phenomena [1, p. 72].

The problem of relationships between the younger and older generations is one of the most common in both Russian and foreign literature. Generations change. What was relevant to the older generation may be alien to the younger generation. Since any literary work is first and foremost a conflict and only then a description, we must understand that the history of literature is the history of the depiction of conflict. One of the most common problems is the conflict between fathers and children, that is, the conflict between the younger and older generations.

In the second half of the 18th century, European literature saw a particular interest in the genre of the educational novel. In the 19th century, both in Europe and in Russia, this interest did not wane. On the contrary, the problem of family, the relationship between adults and children, became a favorite theme for many writers, seemingly breaking free from the confines of everyday life and becoming central to the works of Goethe, Dickens, Hugo, Pushkin, and Balzac. I would like to examine this issue using the examples of N. V. Gogol's novella "Taras Bulba" and Prosper Mérimée's novella "Matteo Falconet."

Nikolai Gogol is one of the key figures in Russian literature. His unique style, influenced by Ukrainian folklore, elevated him to the ranks of the greatest Russian



writers, including Tolstoy and Pushkin. The story "Taras Bulba" is Gogol's signature work, embodying all the hallmarks of his work: memorable characters, expressive language, and a gripping narrative that combines romanticism with realism.

In N.V. Gogol's "Taras Bulba," the tragic conflict between father and son emerges in all its powerful and indomitable dimensions, unfolding against the backdrop of historical events and personal dramas. Gogol masterfully conveys the tension and pain that overwhelm his characters, transforming their internal contradictions into a string that inexorably stretches to its breaking point. Taras Bulba, personifying ancient Cossack traditions, saw in his sons not only the successors of the line but also the hope for preserving their fighting spirit and honor. His sons, Ostap and Andriy, endure many trials, becoming accustomed to the harsh life of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, but ultimately their paths in life diverge [1, p. 53].

Andriy has a rich inner world. Even in the seminary, he distinguished himself among his comrades for his resourcefulness, dexterity, and strength, and for this, he was repeatedly chosen by them to lead dangerous undertakings. Seeing his youngest son in battle, Taras exclaims: "And this kind man—the enemy would not take him—is a warrior!" But the harsh heroism of the Sich did not captivate Andriy. His soul was drawn to the quiet joys of love. His feelings for the beautiful Polish woman are full of lofty lyrical movement. Love has always been valued above all else. Much has been forgiven in the name of love. Admiration for feminine beauty has long been a measure of spiritual nobility. Upon first meeting the Polish woman, Andriy's outward state—stunned, almost petrified—matches a feeling akin to a knight's admiration for his beloved: "...he raised his eyes and saw standing by the window a beauty such as he had never seen in his life... He was stunned. He looked at her, completely lost..."

Taras Bulba lives by his principles, where the most important thing for him is to fight. Even when he is told they have made peace, he resists it, seeing no point in simply living. As for his son, well, firstly, he is of a different generation and, therefore, of a different time. And after meeting the Polish girl, a new feeling appears in his heart: love. He lives not only by reason and duty, but also by feelings. But this was unacceptable for that society, for his father. And it was precisely this rejection of social norms, the pressure and demand, that pushed him to such a decision: to choose himself and his love, and to abandon his family.



The conflict between the individual and social norms in this case is irresolvable. "The Fatherland is what our soul seeks, what is dearest to it. My Fatherland is you," Andriy exclaims. The author laments: "...and the Cossack perished." Indeed, "the Cossack perished," but Andriy survived. Does a person have the right to choose between personal happiness and the interests of the state? This is a philosophical question. Andriy, who, in the opinion of his father, "sold his faith and soul," loves sincerely, intensely, and therefore is not an ordinary traitor. In courage and sincerity of feeling, he is almost equal to Ostap and Taras. This is confirmed by the fact that Andriy does not resist his father or make excuses to him at the moment of their last meeting; he dies steadfastly, without humiliation. I would like to add that the relationship between parents and children is very important for preserving family and moral values. Therefore, the ability to hear and listen to each other, to accept, understand and appreciate, and to instill correct values in the younger generation, without pressure and taking into account individual characteristics, is of great importance for the formation of a healthy, well-mannered society.

Another work that also addresses the theme of honor and the unforgivability of betrayal, even by a son, is Prosper Mérimée's "Matteo Falcone." Matteo Falcone strictly observed the unwritten codes of honor of his time, and for him, betrayal was one of the most terrible sins. He was a man of his word and honor, a man of integrity and uncompromising nature. To restore justice, he did not spare even his own son, who readily sold the man's life for a silver trinket. Following his moral principles to the end, the hero killed his beloved son: washing away the shame with blood was the only possible solution in this situation.

The story takes place on Corsica—an island where honor, fidelity to one's word, and devotion to the family code were valued above all else. For the Corsican people, the moral laws of the family and community were more important than the laws of the state. It is within this framework of beliefs that the personality of Matteo Falcone is formed—a proud, independent, and stern man for whom family honor is the highest value [6, p. 36].

And what about Fortunato? His very name means "lucky." The boy is said to show "great promise," and is predicted to have "a long career." Indeed, Fortunato is remarkably dexterous, resourceful, and calculating. Above all, calculating. Here is young Falcone basking in the sun, waiting for his father—what does he dream of? A Sunday trip to the city to see his uncle, a corporal: there, gifts await him—the



blessings of civilization. Clearly, Fortunato is becoming constrained by the narrow confines of the maquis custom. The aspirations of father and son—even if only in small ways—diverge.

Matteo's son faces a moral choice: to surrender or shelter the fugitive. At first, the boy displays cunning and caution, but, succumbing to temptation—the promised watch—he violates the sacred law of hospitality and betrays the man to the soldiers. For a modern reader, the child's actions might be justified—after all, he is still young, and the temptation is strong. But for Matteo and his generation, betrayal, even unconscious, is tantamount to a loss of honor.

Fortunato will commit betrayal—not out of fear (the boy is brave and fears only his father in all the world), not out of stupidity (under interrogation by the *voltigeur* sergeant, the boy brilliantly counters all his wiles and threats). Young Falcone was destroyed by his passion for commerce and the desire to be the first. At the sight of the silver watch with which the sergeant bribes him, Fortunato instantly loses all reason and common sense. The sergeant's mockery is the final blow: "...Your uncle's son already has a watch... though not as beautiful as this one... and he's younger than you." The thought of someone beating him to it is unbearable for the boy, and he succumbs to criminal temptation.

Matteo's decision to execute his son seems barbaric and cruel, but it is subject to the immutable laws of Corsican morality. The hero acts in accordance with his convictions, believing that family honor and loyalty to tradition are above personal feelings. This reveals a generational divide: young Fortunato no longer fully shares his father's strict views, and Matteo is unable to accept the new understanding of morality, which values human life over a code of honor.

Mérimée shows how the clash of generations—bearers of different moral systems—becomes tragic. The older generation lives by the laws of the past, where the concept of honor is inextricably linked with blood and vengeance; the younger generation gradually loses these ideals, guided by personal interests and weaknesses. As a result, a gulf opens between them that cannot be bridged.

So, having become familiar with two different texts, one from the 19th century and the other from the 20th, we can conclude that both works reveal the same foundation for the characters' moral choices: adherence to a traditional code of honor. However, the difference lies in the scope of these convictions. In Mérimée, it is personal, familial honor, limited to the family; in Gogol, it is a national-



religious ideal linked to the fate of the entire nation. Matteo defends the honor of his name, Taras the honor and faith of his people.

Both writers emphasize the tragedy of such choices. Both Matteo and Taras act in accordance with their convictions, but their actions destroy what is most precious to them—their sons. This illustrates the price of absolute fidelity to tradition: it makes a person strong, but deprives them of human warmth and compassion.

The views and beliefs of different generations can serve as the basis for moral choices in art, reflecting and critiquing the values that bind society together, using artistic traditions to explore universal moral questions, or creating a dialogue between the values of the past, present, and future. Works of art can reflect a specific generation's views on morality, demonstrate the evolution of moral concepts over time, or use historical context to create a dialogue between generations. This can happen directly, through a didactic approach, or indirectly, through aesthetic and narrative choices that provoke reflection.

While allowing individuals the right to live their own lives, writers encourage readers to live according to moral principles, norms, and rules. According to writers, beliefs and ideas about what is right are embodied in real actions and behavior—this is one of the important aspects of the multifaceted process of personality development.

By studying literature, a person is able to gain a deeper understanding of history and the contemporary world in which they live, as a nation's historical past is always connected to its present. These works capture the history and soul of a nation. This is why they are an inexhaustible source of spiritual and emotional enrichment.

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