

## “THE STAR OF OLMES” BY TAUPIK RYMZHANOV: THE CONCEPT OF GREY AND CONTROVERSY OF THE CHARACTER

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the fantasy novel by T. Rymzhanov "Olmes' Star" in order to identify the reasons why the author used the concept "gray" as the central one. The work traces an interdisciplinary connection between the concept of a concept and literary studies, which practically opens up new possibilities for analyzing the creative heritage of T. Rymzhanov using the cognitive-linguistic approach. As a result, it was concluded that the gray color is related to the internal contradiction of the character.

**Keywords:** colour, connotation, grey, linguistic picture of the world, character study

The concepts of colour are central in the linguistic picture of the world. As Peacock notes, there is no specific distinction between red and green as colours, but the difference emerges when those colours are applied to certain objects [1]. What he means is that people do not tend to prefer abstract red over abstract green: when thinking of colours, they usually imagine a specific object, either tangible or intangible. Furthermore, as Armin Saysani et al suggest, colours have conceptual meaning for blind people [2]. In their research, these authors identified several colour concepts which had similar semantic meaning for people with normal and destroyed eyesight. As this study proposes, human perception of colour tends to rely on how this certain colour is described in language.

Precisely, colours have acquired additional meanings throughout the millennia of their usage. A simple example is how people associate red with anger, green with calmness, and grey with indifference and boredom. These associations have penetrated various spheres of art, including abstract painting, music, and literature. Our research is mostly based on the associations concerning the concept of “grey”.

Mishenkina [3, p. 289] handled a study where she explored the associations and connotations of the main colours of the spectrum. For this research, she interviewed over 80 citizens of Great Britain and Russia. As her findings show, most of Russians and the English believe that grey is a negative concept. Their associations include mice, cats, hair of the old people, and mist (mostly for the British). When it comes to emotional associations, Mishenkina seems to lack this aspect, which we consider crucial.

Other studies dedicated to the problem of colours in culture include the researches of Grigoryeva, Muzhikova, Ivanova, etc. [4, 5, 6]. Most of these studies involve national associations of the main colours. These researchers tend to

explore what certain colours mean for certain nations, what place these shades occupy in the linguistic picture of the world. The perception and categorization of colours, as these studies suggest, rely on the national character and the features of culture. However, as further analysis will show, chromatic conceptualization is not limited to cultural behavior patterns.

Turning to the role of colour in literature, the book which has been chosen for the analysis is “The Star of Olmes” by TaupikRymzhanov [7]. It is a fantasy story inspired by Kazakh folk tale, “Olmes”. In Kazakh, “Olmes” is a word that describes an immortal person, which also contributes to the ideal image of the main character. However, the focus of this research is on another hero, the one who does not have a happy ending. This character first appears as a terribly looking giant who is mistaken for an antagonist. As the story shows later, this giant is only a servant, and the main villain comes to the stage. The giant, tortured and almost killed by the main characters, turns into a man wearing a long grey cloth. Nonetheless, as the plot progresses, this cloth-wearing man starts to dissolve. Finally, there is only one thing which he leaves behind: the eye. This eye, which the author calls “shagyr”, travels with the main characters and saves them from the main villain. When the antagonist is captured, the eye transforms into a good-looking young man who then reunites with his lover. The story, however, does not end here. The young man decides to kill the antagonist by himself, which leads to catastrophic consequences. As a result, the man undergoes the last metamorphosis, finally becoming the eye forever.

Here it is necessary to clarify what “shagyr” means. For Kazakhs, this word describes a colour close to grey and is utilized exclusively in the context of eye colour. Hence The Eye was grey. If to be more exact, it was a grey eye with the capability of reflecting the light which made it possible for the man to see in the dark. Here appears the question: why exactly this colour?

First and foremost, it must be noted that this character does not appear in the original folk tale. Definitely, TaupikRymzhanov attempted to make the story complex and profound. If to analyze this work in terms of Vladimir Propp’s scheme, the only character which is left behind is The Eye.

- 1) Hero – Olmes
- 2) Trophy – his love, a princess
- 3) Sender – the father of Olmes, the king
- 4) Gifter – Gulbarsha, Baltaly
- 5) Helper – Hakzar
- 6) False hero – Baltaly
- 7) Villain – Zorman.

The story is definitely more complex than a simple folk tale. Nevertheless, the patterns of a fantasy story and the patterns of a magic tale tend to coincide, as these two have the same origin. In this case, it is pretty surprising that only one significant character is left behind the scheme. There are, indeed, other characters which are not mentioned here. It is possible to classify them across the same axis. However, The Eye does not fit here for one simple reason: he does not have a clear ending in the story. The villain is defeated, the hero is awarded, the princess

marries the one she loves, and all other characters face what they deserve. When it comes to The Eye, his final is controversial: he remains in this strange state for the rest of his life and is sentenced to travel across the steppe. On the other hand, his beloved one shares this fate, also turning into an eye. From now on, their destiny is limited to a never ending journey which has no destination.

When analyzing this character, two main concepts need to be considered. The first is, obviously, an eye. For most of Eastern cultures, an eye is the symbol of watching, both in positive and negative aspects. For instance, Turkish people tend to present each other with the so-called “eye marbles” which are dedicated to protect from “bad eye”. This implies that Eastern societies tend to associate eyes with some power. A negative glance may even destroy someone’s life. In this case, The Eye is not portrayed as an indifferent watcher: he can influence the events thanks to the force that eyes possess. This hypothesis is approved several times: The Eye saves his beloved one from the antagonist’s servant; he shows the main characters the right way, etc. On the other hand, The Eye is incapable of changing anything, his power has certain limits. He even stops being tangible after the last transformation. As a result, he stares but cannot intervene. Anyway, the image of a strange grey eye which gazes at the characters throughout the story is quite powerful. Perhaps, this image makes the story more colorful despite being grey.

The other concept is the grey colour. As it has been mentioned before, Russians and the British claimed that this colour was closer to negative side than to positive one. When it comes to Kazakh people, they do not tend to be so judgmental about this colour. For instance, some representatives of contemporary generation believe that grey is actually the colour of calmness, relaxation, and melancholy. Such emotional associations are very important for identifying the real place of this colour in Kazakh conceptosphere.

The author did not use this colour to describe something calm and relaxing: this seems to be a fact. Neither did he use grey to portray an average character who does not deserve any attention. His real purpose was to show the controversial nature of The Eye: his eternal strike against himself. To approve this, it is useful to study the pre-story of The Eye.

As the author claims, The Eye was a prince once. He was born to a family of the sultan who was going to lose his power. The repeated changes in his father’s political state made The Eye highly sensitive to any opportunities which would ensure some power. Even the love of Akgul, an innocent young lady, did not stop him, and The Eye became the servant of Zorman, the main antagonist. Zorman offered him the throne, and The Eye was convinced. However, Zorman betrayed The Eye, turned him into a forceless giant and kidnapped Akgul, thus becoming an owner of this controversial man. Liberated by the main characters, The Eye turned into a cloth-wearing manlike creature – not exactly a man, but a parody of himself. Such an appearance was the result of his inner war: the war between his real self – the lover of Akgul– and the other side of him which desired power. As this war progressed, The Eye lost everything which belonged to both his selves, and his only eye remained because of its innocence and the absence of power. He became a watcher because he could not decide which side to choose, which self to support.

In contemporary literature, the concept of “grey morality” describes a literary work with controversial characters. Antagonists and protagonists may switch places, and some characters may face inner strikes – unbearable and undefeatable. As a result, literature, no matter what genre it uses, steps away from the idealistic portrayals of good and evil and turns to realism. Even fantasy works tend to become more realistic from year to year. Such a tendency is motivated by the needs of society: people demand realistic characters and switch from ideal portrayals of heroes to tricksters who might be even more attractive for them. Controversies attract people [8].

For instance, the fate of The Eye is close to the destiny of Theon Greyjoy, a character from famous “Game of Thrones” TV-series. Here are the vectors of their resemblance.

1) Both come from a noble family, suppressed by some higher authority. The father of The Eye was a sultan, not a khan, which may have resulted in The Eye’s eternal desire for power. Theon was given to Stark family as a prisoner. He was raised in comfort, yet he always dreamed of invading the Starks and revenging them.

2) Both committed something inappropriate and were punished for misbehavior. Theon attacked Winterfell, the homeland of the Starks, his host family; he was punished for this by becoming physically disabled. His disablement also resulted in the loss of the conscious: for a significant period of time Theon had amnesia and believed he was the servant of a local nobleman. The crime of The Eye has been described above: he joined the villain, which then turned him into a “half-man” – quite close to the disablement of Theon. A closer look can find deeper resemblance. When Theon witnesses his former friend, Sansa Stark, being abused by his owner, he cannot change anything. He silently watches, almost becoming an intangible eye.

3) Both faced retribution and forgiveness. Theon died saving one of the Starks. He was “liberated” from his inner controversies by finally becoming a “good man”, as one of the Starks called him. When it comes to The Eye, his continuous sequence of transformations helped him realize who he really was. The Eye aided the main characters and earned the forgiveness.

However, there is a great difference as well. Theon Greyjoy was forgiven, The Eye was not. Moreover, he could not beat his controversies and became a victim of them: he liberated the villain and caused catastrophe.

Another difference lies in the nature of the story itself. As “TV tropes” suggest, grey morality (an informal title) refers to the situation where antagonists and protagonists are equal in terms of evil. The heroes are not heroes, and the villains are not villains. The story is cynical and quite depressive in manner: a good example, “Game of Thrones”, has been already mentioned. When it comes to “The star of Olmes”, it is a fairy-tale turned into a fantasy novel. Its main motives are light and optimistic: saving, love, friendship, forgiveness, the domination of good. The villain is finally defeated, and the villain is quite classic: he praises no one but himself, he uses demons as servants and sometimes changes his appearance to confuse the main characters. The Eye would not be noticeable in a cynical story; in

“The star of Olmes” he is unique and outstanding. The general canvas of the story suggest that The Eye must be forgiven, but the author surprises the readers by finally turning him into an eye.

The Eye is the character who did not want to choose any of his controversial personalities. Such unwillingness to affect his own life turned him into an intangible phenomenon which is incapable of changing anything. And the fact that this phenomenon is grey makes the story deep and symbolic.

As it is evident here, the author utilized the concept of grey in a unique manner. His associations concerning this concept were not motivated by the national character of Kazakhs. He did not portray an average character: on the contrary, The Eye is someone who remains in readers’ memory for a long time. The fact that Таупик Рымжанов used the concept of grey morality long before its mainstream popularity makes this work, indeed, innovative. Moreover, this shows the eternal power of colour concepts over the perception of art consumers.

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#### ТАУПЫК РЫМЖАНОВТЫҢ «ӨЛМЕСТІҢ ЖҰЛДЫЗЫ»: СҰР ТҮСІ КОНЦЕПТІ ЖӘНЕ КЕЙШКЕРДІҢ ІШКІ ҚАРАМА- ҚАЙШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ

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**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Т.Рымжановтың «Өлместің жұлдызы» атты ертегі-повесінде «сұр» ұғымының орталық ұғым ретінде қолданған себептері зерттеледі. Еңбекте концепт тұжырымдамасы мен әдебиеттану зерттеулірінің арасындағы пәнаралық байланысы анықталып, іс жүзінде Т.Рымжанов шығармашылық мұрасын когнитивті-лингвистикалық

тұрғыда талдауға жаңа мүмкіндіктер ашылады. Нәтижесінде сұр түс кейіпкердің ішкі қайшылығымен байланысты деген тұжырым жасалды.

**Тірек сөздер:** түс, коннотация, сұр, әлемнің тілдік бейнесі, кейіпкерді талдау

## **«ЗВЕЗДА ОЛЬМЕСА» ТАУПЫКА РЫМЖАНОВА: КОНЦЕПТ СЕРОГО ЦВЕТА И ПРОТИВОРЕЧИВОСТЬ ПЕРСОНАЖА**

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**Аннотация.** В статье анализируется фэнтези-повесть Т. Рымжанова «Звезда Ольмеса» с целью выявить причины, по которым автор использовал концепт «серый» как центральный. В работе прослеживается междисциплинарная связь между понятием концепта и литературоведческими исследованиями, что практически открывает новые возможности для анализа творческого наследия Т. Рымжанова с использованием когнитивно-лингвистического подхода. В результате сделан вывод о соотнесенности серого цвета с внутренней противоречивостью персонажа.

**Ключевые слова:** цвет, коннотация, серый, языковая картина мира, изучение персонажа.

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