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#### CAUCASIAN TEXT IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE: MYTHS AND HISTORY IN POETICS

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#### *Abstract*

The article addresses studying the historical and literary phenomenon, a Caucasian text in the Russian literature and culture. This problem is relevant for scholars working in various fields of knowledge: literary critics, historians, ethnographers, folklorists. The study shows that the Caucasus took a special place in life and work of the Russian literature artists. The purpose of the article is to highlight different aspects of the Caucasus theme in literature, to designate the Caucasian topos, a special space in the writers' works. It also reveals how to interact with the national images of the world. In this regard, the term 'topica' is introduced. The object of the paper is the "Caucasian text" in the literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The national topic finds its expression mainly in myth, folklore, which was under tight consideration by the poets of the 19th and 20th centuries. The necessity of textual analysis in literary, folkloristic, ethnographic aspects is substantiated. It is emphasized that special attention should be paid to the Caucasian axiology (in its various national versions), manifested both in mythological representations and in folklore as well: with the inclusion of mythologies in the literary text one can observe an evolving 'topic'. In this respect, the texts of Lermontov (prose) and Mayakovsky (poem) are most indicative, in whose work folklorism, principally the national one, appeared in the latent form. This allows speaking about the organic inclusion of the national elements in poetics, but not about stylization and borrowing.

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## 1. Introduction

The Russian literature used to be and currently is in the field of constant dialogue of cultures. As Kozhinov (1991) noted that the literature itself is a tense but heartfelt dialogue ‘in which extremely distant voices can interact’. This cultural dialogue is largely possible owing to a Caucasian text. The Russian-Caucasian literary relations initially had a political character due to the annexation of the Karl-Kakhetian Kingdom to Russia (1801). On the one hand, this fact became ‘an impetus to mass unrest in cities and villages’ (Chkhaidze, 2009); on the other hand, it was the time when freedom-loving folk and poetic ‘thinking’ was outing the world — ‘the Tiflis Gazette’ (newspaper) served as ground for this. The Russian writers who were exiled to ‘southern Siberia’ that is to the Caucasus, found there a source of their inspiration.

## 2. Problem Statement

The study of the ‘Caucasian text’ as part of the Russian literature takes a special place in the philological science, but this topic is not new; it has the own long research history in which a number of stages can be identified through developing ‘the Caucasus geography’. In general, this issue provokes the interest among both Russian and foreign researchers.

In the 1930s of the 20th century, the first monographs of I. Enikolopov were published where some topic were introduced and discussed in depth: Pushkin and the Caucasus (1938); Pushkin in Georgia (1950); Pushkin in Georgia and under Erzurum (1975); Lermontov in the Caucasus (1940), and etc. The works of Bogomolov (1987) deserve a special attention, since they presented the study results on the Russian-Georgian relations (J. Polonsky in Georgia) and cultural interrelations (based on the example of interaction in literature between J. Polonsky and George Eristavi. To another literary and historical period (1990s of the 19th and early 20th centuries) some other monographs (B. Piradov) are devoted within the same context. The attention of the researcher is focused on the period when M. Gorky stayed in Georgia (*‘U istokov tvorchestva Maxim Gorky’* (1957); *‘Na rubezhe’* – M. Gorky in Georgia on the eve of 1905 revolution (1975)).

Literary portraits of the Russian poets at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (S. Yesenin, N. Zabolotsky) are presented separately in the articles by V. I. Baluashvili and in her book ‘Meetings with Georgia’ (1978). In recent decades, new monographs by V.I. Shulzhenko (*‘The Russian Caucasus: essays on interdisciplinary studies’* (2007)), V.I. Shulzhenko, A.V. Ochman (*‘Kavminvsky Text in the Russian Literature’* (2009)) have been published, where north Caucasus realities are being analyzed in detail as the Russian writers perceived it. Nevertheless, the history of studying the literary ‘Russian Caucasus’ does not take one decade, it has some lacunae that require to be filled. Firstly, a special theme is the presence of the Russians in Tiflis, a city that played a significant role in the development of Russian culture and intercultural dialogue. Only recently some publications have begun to appear, where Tiflis topos is viewed in the Russian poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the works of Zaripova-Cetin (2012), Bagration-Mukhraneli (2014); the corpus of the poems from ‘golden’ and ‘silver’ periods in the Russian literature associated with Tiflis have been presented and analyzed (considered the topic level or presence of toponyms). Secondly, it is important to look more closely at the issue in the theoretical way, namely, it is

necessary to raise the question of the national theme, assimilation of which occurs largely through myths and folklore. Undoubtedly, it is precisely folklore that plays the main role in shaping the basic concepts of personality and society: the main myths and cultural codes of a given socio-cultural community are acquainted by an individual primarily through songs, poems, fairy tales and legends which, in result of ritual function loss, are becoming a part of folklore intended for children (for example, Meletinsky (1977) considers fairy tales to be 'declassified' and 'desacralized myths'. We highlight that there is a small number of publications devoted to penetration of Kazansky element into the Russian literature, not so much as openly ethnographic form but as latent one. Even be innovative for the 1940s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century monograph, by Andreev-Kryvich (1949), about the traditions of Kabardian-Circassian folklore in the poetics of M. Yu. Lermontov was written mostly within ethnographic view. Thus, there is a need in research of a new complex type (involving the efforts of literary studies, ethnography and folklore items), revealing the meaning of ethno-poetic constants, and cosmo-psycho-logos in its ionic versions which were reflected in the Russian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and in the Caucasian topography, not reduced to mere mentioning the toponyms and historical facts.

### **3. Research Questions**

The Caucasus in many ways attracted the Russian literature artists. Early information about the Caucasus is contained in A. Nikitin's 'Walking beyond the Three Seas', also some cursory references to the Caucasus can be found in the odes of M.V. Lomonosov, in the poetic story 'Bova' and the poem 'The Song of History' by A.N. Radishchev; either 'Poems to conquer Derbent' and the ode 'On the return from Persia through the Caucasus Mountains of Duke V.A. Zubov' by G.R. Derzhavin were dedicated to the Caucasus. After having been familiar with this wild land, in the Russian literature 'Caucasian captives' appeared, metaphorically describing the fascination felt by the Russian people with 'this wonderful world of anxieties and battles'. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when political events in the Caucasus began to develop rapidly, interest to this region began to move towards the core of intellectual and cognitive interests of the Russian readership. Due to the lack of other information channels, the literature has become one of the most important sources of knowledge about the Caucasus and myths about it. According to Urushadze's (2012) remark 'through literature we were being acquainted with the knowledge about the Caucasus, we studied it more and more, making it more attributed to us' (p. 4). The demand in terms of literary works about 'free', 'harsh', and 'desperate' mountain people was appeared primarily due to romantic plots popularity, where the writers were A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, A. Pushkin (of early writing) and their contemporaries. Their Caucasian plots fit organically into general European romantic context. The Caucasus in works of the Russian writers became the 'other' world, exotic and mysterious, on the one hand, and natural, organic, free, on the other. The Caucasian poems and narratives were based, as a rule, on historical or folklore material (legends, eyewitness notes and scripts), as well as writers 'own subjective impressions', whereas, some character features and life traditions of local population were exaggerated and imagined by the writers. A special role was played by the mountain landscape, whose vertical view of which compared to the Russian 'landscape flattening' provoked in the Russian minds both excitement and mystical horror. The romantic world duality that can be found in 'exotic' Caucasian material looked very convincing. In addition, in the Russian literature of this epoch, the Caucasus acted as the 'Russian East': within the analogy existing

in 'eastern-natured' narratives and poems by the Western romantics, the works about the Caucasus were often created in the context of Orientalism (movement in the world literature). According to Said (2006), the East, since the times of antiquity, was for many Europeans 'a receptacle of romance, exotic creatures, painful and enchanting memories and landscapes, amazing feelings' (p. 9). As known, the popular poem by M.Yu. Lermontov's 'Izmail Bey' has the subtitle 'Eastern Tale', in 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus' by A.S. Pushkin's the protest of the mountain people against the Russian imperial policy is defined by the words: 'East is raising the howl'. However, this was the Caucasus where the Russian poets (A.S. Griboyedov, V.K. Kuchelbeker, A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky) became closely acquainted with the works of Nizami Ganjavi and other oriental poets. That happened much before the well-known translations and articles by V. Obolensky and D. Oznobishina-Delibyradera (as cited in Gadzhiev, 1986) saw the publicity. Thus, Marlinsky, who spoke Azerbaijan and Persian, could read 'Leyli and Mejnun' by Nizami in original. As a poetic inspirer towards M.Yu. Lermontov, Ya.V. Polonsky and many other Russian poets and prose writers became Tiflis and Georgia in general (as cited in Bagration-Mukhraneli, 2014). Polonsky, while serving in Tiflis in 1846, creates 'Georgian Night', and later – a book of poems 'Sazandar'. Working over his comedy 'Lezgins' (The Case of the Caucasus) and a historical drama 'Darejana – Imeretian Queen' he revealed as a prose writer and as a playwright (as cited in Bogomolov, 1983). At the same time, the features of the North Caucasus, Dagestan and Orthodox Georgia were often collected in many works of similar topics, not to mention about the lack of distinction between numerous tribes and ethnic groups in the Caucasus region. Often, the expectations of Eastern bliss and unusual beauties, in searching for which the Russian people were travelling to this place and which were the bases in formation of mental image of the Caucasus, were deceptive. We also note the unstable cultural and topographical identification of Russia in the dichotomy of East and West, on the basis of which, according to the researchers, Orientalism has grown. If traditionally Russia acts as the West for the East and as the East for the West, then in 'Caucasian text' it is often interpreted as the North (in the works of Griboyedov, Pushkin, Polonsky, Lermontov, etc.). Such a localization of Russia is likely to connect with the national historical and philosophical thought of the second half of the 18th century. However, the theme of the Caucasus among the Russian writers was being evolving as literature moved toward realistic aesthetics. The first steps in this direction were made by the creators of the Caucasian romantic discourse: in Pushkin's 'Journey to Arzrum' and Lermontov's 'Hero of Our Time', the documentary perspective became acutely in demand (the author's notes in the first case and the hero's diary as well as memories about him – in the second), which meant coming away from a big romantic fiction. The Caucasus in these notes acquires the image of a real topos – the place of routine service of Russian officers and the search for compromises in dealing with local tribes, a secular rest near the sea and 'southern Siberia' for the disgraced. The most decisive break with the tradition of romanticism occurs in the 'Caucasian' legends of L.N. Tolstoy 'Raid', 'Forest Felling', 'Cossacks'. In these writings, Tolstoy openly criticizes the romantic cliches related to the theme of the Caucasus, mocking the officers travelling to the Caucasus under influence of romantic dreams about Ammalat bek and Mulla-nurah. Tolstoy stares intently at the mountaineers and the Cossacks (he reveals the opposition between the world of civilization and natural life), but not only the otherness of children of nature, but also he is seeking the common features justifying their close relations to a person who belongs to the refined culture, he is seeking

common human moments promoting mutual understanding (Hadji Murad). According to Sultanov (2016), in this story there is a thought of

*about a man as a son of God ... the main one. The rest is just wood/forest for building ... Hadji Murad, in his authenticity, probably was not very interesting to the writer. Tolstoy was interested in a person who could not break down ... the writer took the hardest task to show the fate of such a complex and multivalued person as Hadji Murad, with all real and often unpleasant circumstances of his life. Then, there was a 'burdock' as an image of a person who can be killed but who is impossible to break. (par. 2)*

Thus, from the very beginning of its formation, the Russian literary tradition about the Caucasus quickly acquired popularization and cognitive features, becoming an important source of information about the region and the basis of its figurative perception. The popularity of literary works about the Caucasus, created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contributed to the formation of a special cultural trend that developed in subsequent epochs, to formation of a broad 'Caucasian text' in the Russian literature, as well as stable stereotypes and myths that were fixed in society mind.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this research is to identify the meaning not only of the Caucasus topos but its topics in the poetics of the Russian literature; to designate the ways of interaction between the national images of the world.

#### **5. Research Methods**

To fulfill the aim the methods as historic-literary and comparative analysis are applied, as well as the experience of folklore comments is provided.

#### **6. Findings**

The Caucasus region attracted the artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially the Silver Age period. Much attention was paid to this topic by I.A. Bunin, V.V. Kamensky; N. Verzhbitsky devoted a whole cycle of stories to Tiflis ('Mtsiri', 'Children', 'Tiflis sings', etc.). Mayakovsky in 1924 wrote Vladikavkaz-Tiflis. O. Mandelstam's work was also pervaded by his love to this preservation land, celebrating the Russian people desire to understand Georgian eros in its highest sense, to the virgin spirit trying to determine the nature of the national culture in 'Journey to Armenia'. This poetic list of 'dedications' to the Caucasus region can be continued with Pasternak's poems and his poetic translations from Georgian; the message by S. Yesenin to 'goluborozhtsy' ('Poets of Georgia'); the poems 'To Armenia', 'In Baku', 'In Tiflis' by Bryusov (1973); the poems and translations by A. Akhmatova ... In all these works to be listed, we will directly find the realities of the Caucasian topos: the Aravga, Kuru and Daryal rivers; Kazbek, Elbrus mountains; city names; notes about Georgian Queen Tamara (Lermontov, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Akhmatova); figures of the Caucasian wars; a group of Georgian symbolists 'Blue Horns' (Yesenin,

Pasternak). But the 'Caucasian text' is created not only by these significant contributions, often a poet can turn to another culture indirectly and his poetics the non-national 'code' will be viewed implicitly. Understanding of 'alien/ non-native' space can occur not only at a level of a theme (love of a Circassian girl and a Russian guy; vendetta motive, etc.), although in recent literature the study of the 'Caucasian text' in the Russian literature often comes down to the 'Caucasian story' (Stepanova, 2004). Artwork arises, according to Kozhinov's (1980) apt remark, on the verge of real and cosmic reality: 'Poetry is an organic unity of the external and the internal, in which living life and living sense are phenomena going back with their roots into infinity of the Universe'.

For example, in the writings of Lermontov, who (according to the researcher's opinion) paid a special attention to the Caucasian topos and topic, expressed in a language, in folklore (Vatsuro, 1981), there are many examples of such 'deep-placed' non-national elements. Thus, the mythological and folklore subtext in a number of episodes of the novel 'The Hero of Our Time' – the song of Kazbich, the scene of the wedding of Bela's sister and the duel of Pechorin with Grushnitsky – is linking them to the traditions of the Kabardino-Circassian wedding ritual, mythological and cosmogonic representations of the Circassians (Dudareva, 2018). Researchers of the 'Caucasian text' in the poetics of Lermontov single out among his prose primarily the story 'Bela', and call it a Caucasian work. In the passage devoted to the wedding, Gadzhiev (1982) sees the transfer of the exact external state of life of the mountaineers and their character. However, in the Bela's song, albeit transcribed in prose, in Maxim Maksimycha's awkward and partly ironic retelling and in Kazbich's old song, ethnographicism is not only one that is important (Lermontov's striving to believability) but a reflection of the national axiology, which in the novel's artistic nature acquires a ritual meaning. The girl sings 'about a poplar, which is not fated to grow and to bloom in her garden' (Smirnov, 2004). Smirnov (2004), interpreting this song through the myth of a garden, comes to the conclusion that the plot was originally ritualized. It is also worth noting here 'Pechorin takes a special place of honor at the wedding', 'Pechorin and me were sitting in a place of honor and at this moment a host's younger daughter came to him, a girl of sixteen, and she did a singing to him ... how to say? .. like a compliment' (Lermontov, 1957). A ritual action was played out in front of a person who visited the mountaineers' house for the first time: First, the mullah will read them something from the Quran, then, a young couple and all their relatives are gifted with something, all are eating, drinking a booze, then, a tricking action begins, and always someone rag, greasy, sitting on a bad, lame horse, is fritzing out, acting as a clown, making a company laugh; then, when it is getting dark, in Kunatskaya, as we say, the ball begins <...> Here are one girl and one guy who are coming in the middle and begin to speak each other verse in a singing chant or other nonsense, and the rest pick them up in chorus (Lermontov, 1957). The walk is accompanied by 'merry chaos', acquiring a ritual meaning at turning points (weddings); this can probably be attributed to the Circassian carnival festivities, famous for jagu (Bgazhnokov, 1991). And there is a very deep archetypal meaning hidden in it, just like in Bela's song 'About a Poplar', which embodies the cultural sacral dialogue between Pechorin and the Circassian: Pechorin is 'alien', but through some details, some ritual moments he is attached to a different culture and, more importantly, he starts understanding himself through the national nature of another culture.

The obscured archetypal meaning opens in the work of Mayakovsky (1924). A special type of his poetic thinking is attributed with specifics of his talent (in the field of not only poetry, but also in painting)

and with his biography (the school of painting and sculpture). But there is no doubt that his literature, as well as painting, is surprisingly in tune with the archaic world perception and syncretism of the myth: verbal folklore (especially addressed children) rarely goes without 'illustrative material' whether it be dances or paintings. The 'visual code' of Mayakovsky's poetry was thoroughly revealed in the book by A. Flaker 'Literary painting and pictorial literature', but a 'national color' of his urban paintings (particularly Moscow) still needs to be studied. The principles of his painting technique not only 'repeat' the techniques of Fauvism, abstractionism and expressionism, but seem to anticipate the art of primitive and, especially, the manner of Pirosmanni (who, we recall, was discovered by futurists): the shift of proportions, 'ignorance' of scales, etc. it can be noted that colorfulness, brightness and elegance of paintings created by Mayakovsky (even with cruel plots and in a sarcastic manner) correspond to the ideas of the romantic beginning and are associated with 'southern flavor', they discover a person's preferences who is missing the colors of the south. His palette is more Georgian than Russian, with its muted tones.

The thirst to wording-based creativity that is endemic to all futurists and their followers in Mayakovsky's interpretation looks very natural, so natural that it can cause the associations with children creativity with words: muttering, repetition of sounds and rhythmic lines, about which he is writing in his work 'How to make poems' seems to be familiar to all people. So, it is known that the language experiments of V. Khlebnikov, his attention to a 'self-explanatory word' and to home etymology is not just consonant with the discoveries of Potebnia and primarily to his theory of an inner form of a word, but is also largely based on them. Like A. Bely, the futurists were interested in work of scientists. Potebnian theory of myth, revealing mythological semantics in metaphorical folklore images, seems to clarify a lot in Mayakovsky's complex system: open metaphors striking in their unexpectedness and courage are based on bringing together not far, but close things and concepts – they can be close only to those who by birth incorporate two cultures (two cultural or national codes). Mayakovsky's 'diffusion' of thinking is also manifested in 'non-discrimination' of a word and thing, object and sign, so characteristic to the futurists, that the list of these "signs" turns to be quite indicative. Suppose a 'tin fish' in a certain sense is an ornate sign, a sign that looks more like the art of the Impressionists and Europe, but for a person involved in the culture of Georgia, it is natural, since it is rooted not so much in the urban space as in the national culture and world perception (for example, the image of a fish in the poem '15000 0000' or other zoomorphic things in early poems (Dudareva & Nikitina 2018). Thus, a toponym becomes a symbol that lies at the point of intersection of inner and outer worlds, of noumenal and phenomenal spaces. Updating (revival from frequent use) of metaphors can proceed in a space of 'translation' from one 'secondary language' (Z.G. Mintz), or poetics of 'mythologization' to another. And if, say, in order to comprehend specifics of Lermontov's mytho-poetic thinking, it is important to use the data of imagology (not by chance Lermontov was reckoning long about a name of his character in the poem 'Mtsyri'; he saw as a first from possible names the name Beri that means 'alien'), and in Mayakovsky's case, a question of 'borrowing' that helps to comprehend other, not native, concepts and images through 'our own' should not be raised at all. The same can be said about a question of genesis or typology in relation to many motives and images of his work: artist's 'mythopoetic bilingualism', typical to both types of cultures essentially cancels the question of borrowing and 'translation'.

A very illustrative example is from the poem ‘15000000’, the work dedicated, at first glance, exclusively to the topic of building a new state. However, in this poem there are two archetypical models that genetically go back to Georgian folklore and the Nart epic: a mother-fish model and a horse-man model. The latter is especially interesting, since the image of a man-horse is connected with a plot of ritual absorption by a totem beast, which finds its place in the Russian fairy tale (for example, the fairy tale when Ivan is a cow or bear son (Bernshtam, 2011)) and in the Nart epic it is a plot of Sosruko struggle (Sazryko) with the narts and giants, assimilated by both Georgian and Ossetian and Abkhaz folklore (Dzidziguri, 1971).

## 7. Conclusion

To sum up, the stated problem in this myth-ritual view becomes theoretical by nature. The important aspect lies not only in identifying a Caucasian text in the Russian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is contained in topography, but rather highlighting the issue of the Caucasian, in particular Georgian, national axiology, manifested both in mythological cosmogonic ideas and in folklore, which in interaction with the literature introduce evolving topica, and from the theoretical side – the dialectical triad: *myth – folklore – literature*.

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