

SCTMG 2020**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»****NEOREALISM AND HETEROTOPIAS: CREATIVE METHOD OF MODERN CIRCASSIAN RUSSIAN-SPEAKING WRITERS**

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Abstract

The growing trend in the development of Russian-language fiction in the North Caucasus is distinguished by specific features that manifest themselves at all levels of the literary text: plot, poetry, composition, style. Therefore, one of the important tasks is to determine the main markers, which are the most symptomatic for samples of modern Russian-language literature. The article reflects the features of the artistic style of the Russian-speaking Circassian writer A. Balkarov on the example of the stories “Requiem for a Drawn Life”, “Astronomer”, which allows revealing the specifics and peculiarities of his individual style, which directly or indirectly may indicate some new trends in the artistic discourse. Contemporary Russian-language literature as one of the forms of Adyghe literature is subject to the mythological influence, which manifests itself at the level of meta-narrative, intertextuality. In his work, central existential motifs are embossed: the feeling of loneliness, absurdity, meaninglessness of existence, characteristic of Russian-speaking authors. The chronotope of A. Balkarov’s works is generally recognizable; the main characters are immersed in the space and time in which the author really resides. The principle of reliability is maintained even in the geographical location of objects, while toponymy is preserved. Accordingly, a feature of A. Balkarov’s individual style is heterotopy, which indicates the inclusion of real, genuine places in the art narrative. Given the insignificant elements of postmodern poetics, A. Balkarov’s artistic method is defined as neorealism, since the dominant feature of his work is the intense search for lost or disappearing universal values.

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Keywords: Russian literature, A. Balkarov, individual style, heterotopia, neorealism.



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1. Introduction

Prosaic genres have stayed flexible, movable forms, tending to transform throughout the history of their development. The period between the end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI century is the time of new synthetic forms of art and ways for mutual enrichment of artistic expression. This results in “the trend for the intermediation of arts. Specialists start to study the visual imagery of fictional prose holistically due to the change in a literary paradigm, which involves the rejection of the centralization on literature” (Murnaeva, 2016, para. 7).

2. Problem Statement

Nowadays, this trend has grown stronger in both the Russian Federation and its regions. However, the growing trend towards the development of the Russian-language fiction, which involves the whole North Caucasus region, has its special features at all levels of the literary text: plot, poetry, composition, style. That’s why this research aims to determine the most symptomatic markers for the samples of modern Russian-language literature.

3. Research Questions

The article concentrates on the literary analysis of two stories by Russian-speaking Circassian writer Balkarov (2007): “Requiem for a Drawn Life” and “Astronomer”.

4. Purpose of the Study

The work aims to determine specific features in the individual style of Balkarov (2007). These features can directly or indirectly indicate some new trends within the artistic discourse of modern Russian-language Circassian literature.

5. Research Methods

The article relies on historical-genetic, comparative historical, and comparative typological methods as well as the method of descriptive poetics.

6. Findings

We can see the mysterious relation trend in the national literature, e.g. in the works by Russian-language Circassian writer Alim Balkarov (2007). “Requiem for a Drawn Life” is the modern remake of a common “nomadic plot”.

The plot of Balkarov’s novel is quite simple: a young drug-addicted artist Asker Zhanhotov draws a portrait but dies of an overdose. The day before, he bought a dose in a local shop after selling the picture, which was the last valuable thing he possessed. Thus, the portrait stays unfinished. Mariana Ogurlieva, a young girl, now owns the picture of the deceased artist. She starts to understand the value of the picture and changes herself. Instead of a cheerful, talkative, girl without excessive reflection, she

becomes an interesting, paradoxical, complex personality with an enquiring analytical mind and the need to acquire knowledge. Thoughtfulness, criticality, rapid acquisition and the demand for new knowledge give her identity new traits and bring her to a serious crisis. The heroine withdraws into herself while critically evaluating changes that happened in her: “Asker killed himself with poppy tears, and she is killing herself with knowledge tears, she thought. No, I can’t show this picture to anybody else. I’ve read it, and my future life became empty” (Balkarov, 2007, p. 46). However, the picture has a strange magical impact on other people too, e.g. the sister, who wants “to see the picture every day and every hour” after she looked at it once (Balkarov, 2007).

The authors of the story himself gives parallels when the works of art predict destiny and the final of life.

Murnaeva (2016) highlights the power of the subconscious impact that works of art have. From the point of the “author—reader” (“artist—viewer”) opposition, this power is a leitmotif of the story: “All philosophical and aesthetic considerations of the heroine indicate that the writer attaches great importance to the unconscious (according to C. Jung) that resides in the instincts and constitutes a necessary basis for a human’s soul. “Our picture has a bad soul” – this is what our heroes think. The text contains the “thresholds” to decipher the drawn picture. This is manifested in a variant of double coding. In this case, Asker and Mariana are two contrasting images that embody the Author and the Interpreter who have a long-lasting argument about the purpose of the art, the power of talent, and the adverse effects of glory on the identity of an artist... The picture influences on people implicitly, revealing their covert, unrealized capabilities” (Balkarov, 2007, p. 57).

The picture in the “Requiem for a Drawn Life” story is an immediate indicator, which awakens the existential, spiritual identity in the heroine. The author eliminates the border between real and virtual worlds. In the conflict between these two worlds, the author takes the side of the art. It dominates life, and it’s no coincidence that Mariana keeps the picture.

In the end, the literary text is perceived as an entire metaphor which again brings us to the metaphysical argument about what was the first – life or art. In his monograph “Oscar Wilde and his Drama”, Anikst (1960) notes that: He (O. Wilde) thought that art entirely forms a human, and it’s not the art that imitates life, but life imitates art” (para. 5).

Murnaeva (2016) believes that the plot of the story makes us remember the works by N. Gogol and O. Wilde. The day-to-day life of the city depicted in the narrative, small scale of thoughts, ideas, and activities of its inhabitants make the author’s topos a monotonous, secular decoration that is suitable to show the development of main heroes’ identity. The illusiveness, the surrogacy of the “real” life defines it as a secondary phenomenon in comparison to the interesting work of art. Such a trend is noted in the Soviet literature, e.g. the works by Bitov.

Bitov, especially after “Pushkin House”, treats the empirical reality of life as deceptive, illusory, easily transformable, and not having the authenticity – in the absence of the highest transcendent instance (No, the world without a prayer is absolutely hopeless in the mind or will of the creator artist). (as cited in Amusin, 2016, p. 104)

The “Astronomer” story contributed to the fullest crystallization of Alim Balkarov’s individual style. “Masculine” prose, relying on verbs and lacking frills, becomes even more reserved, laconic, but

acquires something new – the build-up of internal intensity and tension. The main hero, Anzor, has difficult life's circumstances and scarce initial opportunities: his family has neither money nor other resources that can provide him a bright future. However, this is a happy-end story.

Because of its simplicity, calmness, and even indifference, the narration resembles a newspaper report. And this makes catharsis at the final even sharper, because the hero gained his happiness not by circumstances but against them.

Every time the hero has a difficult choice, he does it according to his conscience.

The author builds the same unstable opposition of the external environment and the hero. The representatives of the environment constantly change. However, all of them are united by the position of conformity, the ideology of opportunism and consumption that kills everything pure, fresh, and alive. The contemporaries of Anzor are generally empty, evil snobs, ignorant and immoral people. There are no exceptions besides the main hero and his wife Madina. The society receives a severe, disappointing sentence implicitly, without fanfare and emotions. However, it is this emotionless author's verdict that makes it convincing.

The plot of the story is realized implicitly to a large extent. Neither the all-knowing author nor the narrator gives evaluative comments. However, a reader understands that protagonists stay alone in a foreign environment, and the growing internal conflict is natural for them.

The author resorts to escapism, which is a typical plot device in these situations. The main hero and his wife settle far away from civilization and near a forest. Anzor goes hunting and starts to pursue his old dream, i.e. to calculate an astrological formula. The narrative situation is objectified with some elements of modern idyll.

Biblical allusions mentioned in this fragment are for a reason. Anzor and Madina who live among peaceful wild animals is a literary reference to Adam and Eve before God banished them from the Eden. Simultaneously, it seems like the author uses his heroes to deliver the Rousseau's point about the necessity to return to nature. In the end, Anzor is an accomplished, known, and internationally acclaimed person who sums up the results of his life in which he carried out his existential mission.

Thus, the author realizes the concept of non-conformism, and the personal success at the end becomes possible not because of "blind" positive circumstances or somebody's help – the only reason is the absolute intransigence of the hero who only listens to the inner voice of his acute moral imperative, bright existential mission.

Only through the words of a minor character, a reader learns that Anzor saved his fellow soldiers from death in Afghanistan. Characteristically, the first-person narrative depicts maximum neutral scenes in which actions are described but not evaluated. In this case, the author could represent the narrative enunciated by a typical bearer of the Adyghe etiquette who won't mention himself in any context related to compliments.

Although some works by Balkarov have negative attitude towards the assessment of art ("Requiem for a Drawn Life") and science ("Astronomer"), this attitude is notional as it is represented by moral and aesthetic norms of the majority which confronts such marginals as Asker ("Requiem for a Drawn Life"), Anzor ("Astronomer"), Azamat ("In Search for Spanish Love").

The situation when a person who follows his or her mission in science, literature or art doesn't have a clear aim gives a plot and the whole narrative a dramatic charge. According to the author's logic, only a handful of people can transform their imperfect identity by means of creative work. Their intentions and faith meet neither sympathy nor understanding. The results of their work can be acclaimed by those around if official reputable organizations or people give their approval ("Astronomer").

The author makes snobbery, doublethink, and ignorance the main social markers of modern society in the national republic.

Thus, the artistic concept of the story is the active manifestation of non-conformism, full independence from social mimicry and opportunism of any kind. However, the author uses the narrator to question the existing order of things, revealing the inconsistency and absurdity of what's common. The flaming optimism of the Balkarov's story resides in the opportunity to succeed in any aspect regardless of absolute ideological, social, and political isolation, rejection, existential solitude, incomprehension with constant and uncompromising following to his or her supreme I. The semantics of the story is revealed via an artistic and compositional sequence of actions that lack evaluative comments, expressive means, i.e. purely implicitly.

The main heroes immerse into time and space in which the author exists in reality. The toponymy, in this case, stays unchanged. The principle of authenticity remains even in the geographical position of objects: in "Requiem for a Drawn Life" and "Astronomer" we can see that the bus station is near the market and art workshops are located in the "Gorny" neighborhood, which corresponds with reality. In some cases, real people become the characters of the story: "Our friend from Djambulat Koshubaev publishing house wrote verses that contain the following line: Baksan highway goes deep into the Polovetsian steppes..." (Russian-language Adyghe poet and writer Djambulat Koshubaev currently works as an editor in Elbrus publishing house in Nalchik).

The author describes the real topos of the modern town of Nalchik. For example, the main hero writes an SMS where he uses jocular intonations and offers to "sent him to Dubki" to prove his craziness. Dubki is a psycho-neurological hospital which is really located in the Dubki neighborhood of Nalchik; "now even the lecturers of Academy ask him for help" (here, the author mentions the V. Kokov Agricultural Academy located in the center of Nalchik); "Dima Pak from Prokhladny": Prokhladny is a town in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic; "complete three-month sewing classes in Baksan": Baksan (the birthplace of A. Balkarov) is also a town in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic. The author mentions the real streets of Nalchik with real buildings: an apartment on Pushkin street, an apartment on Kuliev street, the lyceum on Pushkin street, shop on Kabardinskaya street, etc. The main hero goes from Krupskaya library via "the Green market" to take a bus to Baksan. This is a real route to get to the bus station. Balkarov precisely depicts the topos of Nalchik and uses it to create a new virtual, artistic reality.

7. Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that the specificity of Balkarov (2006) individual style resides in heterotopia –

Real places...which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which...all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented,

contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (p. 64)

With the available insignificant elements of postmodern poetics, we define Balkarov's artistic style as neorealism because the laborious search for the lost or disappearing universal values is a dominant feature of his literary works.

Neorealism is not an independent movement but a bridge between other movements, a link between the Soviet literature of the XX century and the newly emerging literature. "This is a thread that unites the realistic tradition of art in different eras," – said I. Kalita (2015) in his article "The case of the New realism" (p. 125).

According to the researcher, neorealism is characterized by "the new period of distortion and deformation of language by two powerful waves: borrowings and the activation of obscene words, which are the processes that started before the USSR collapsed..." (Kalita, 2015, p. 125).

Nasrutdinova (1999) points out the following ideologic characteristics of neorealism: the refusal to accept modern Russian reality, the desire for change at all costs, the search for power that can bring changes; the conviction in the absence of a strong basis for the modern generation makes neorealism writers yearn a priori truths and search for real values; new heroes lack acceptable directions in life and left by parents to fend for themselves; the connection with previous generations is lost, and people need to acquire necessary values by themselves while taking particular steps that need a determined effort and morality: the interest toward modernity, social and political topics, vital points of Russian society; the concern for the destiny of villages; the shame for contemporaries, the conviction in the meaninglessness of their existence become the source of eschatological motifs; the increased attention toward human existence, repeated plots, and motifs (voluntary marginality of a hero, the conscious refusal of the successful career and big money due to personal qualities or the reluctance to blend in; the death of the ancestors or the alienation of young people from their roots; love story never has a happy end; young heroes are doomed to solitude; the reasons for the actions of heroes have no reasonable explanation, as a rule).

One of the formal traits of the neorealist prose is its fragmentation, the concentration on the duration of a current moment. These common markers allow us to say that neorealism in the Russian literature of the 2000s is a movement within a realistic direction (Nasrutdinova, 1999).

The works by Balkarov represent neorealism, though showing some traits of postmodernism. Taking into account the genetic relationship of Adyghe literature with myth and folkloric heritage (Hakuasheva & Borova, 2016), we can define its modern genres as fantastic realism, which is a subtype of neorealism. Modern Russian-language literature as one of the forms of the Adyghe literature is also influenced by these myths and folklore, which is represented at the level of meta-narrative and intertextuality.

When comparing the traditional Adyghe culture with European traditions, we can see that *djeghu* (festive gathering) corresponds to a carnival. This gathering has live till nowadays, although in a reduced form (e.g. the celebration of the New Year's Eve on the day of solstice – *Mafashkhadzhed* when people sacrificed a black chicken or the custom for brining rain when children in the village carry a doll on a pole – *Chantsiguashu*, etc.). Thus, traditional culture still has a polymorphous influence on the artistic

mind through written folkloric sources and experience. This means, syncretic forms of literary discourse must be treated and defined based on the most developed literary and folkloric determiner if we don't consider a typical percent of exceptions.

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