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LITERARY BIOGRAPHY OF A WRITER FROM THE PROVINCE: CHALLENGES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The paper proves the need of historical and theoretical analysis of the genre of scientific biography of the writer on the material of the regional literary process in the Republic of Buryatia. The problems encountered in the creation of scientific biography in provincial literary discourse are considered. The main stages of reflection of the genre in domestic science and foreign criticism are highlighted. The analysis of theoretical works showed the difficulty in determining the peculiarities of this genre as a synthesis of scientific biography of the creator with elements of a literary portrait. The creators of the genre of literary biography of a provincial writer also face an explanation of such a problem as his underestimation of the facts of their life manifested in the absence of documents, memories, diaries, which distinguishes him from the adherents of the romantic idea of life. At the same time, for the regional literary scholar, the understanding of the worldview, mental bases of national culture in the views of Buryatia writers on the relationship between life and literature should not close the evidence of their belonging to the Russian aesthetic tradition. As a result, an important methodological conclusion is made, dictated by the challenges of time: it is important not just to study some cultural code of the writer's personality, but to find the internal biography of the writer as an act of gradual self-determination, self-knowledge, which makes it a historical personality.

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1. Introduction

At the modern stage the creation of the biography of a writer has become an important and relevant task of historical and literary science. Although there is still no theoretical justification and methodology for compiling scientific biographies and they have not yet taken their place at the all-Russian level (Demchenko, 2014), the main methodological requirement has been historically objective: the content of the writer's biography, its structure should be determined by the unity of an artist and a man, personality and history.

2. Problem Statement

The creation of a literary biography of a writer from the province, in this case the Republic of Buryatia, is primarily a theoretical problem. Hence, it is important to trace the formation of the main stages of the development of the biographical method and the understanding of the genre of biography both in foreign criticism and in the domestic literary tradition. Another aspect of the task is historical-theoretical analysis, reflection of problems of national and at the same time regional (provincial) historical-literary and biographical material.

3. Research Questions

What do we mean by literary biography as a scientific genre? What research genres were used in regional literary discourse? What features of the Buryat national and regional literary process become problematic factors in the process of creating a literary biography?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to define the genre features of the writer's scientific biography in the wealth of its structural moments, as well as to clarify the peculiarities of the existence of Buryatia writers in the real literary process, which allows determining the type of writing personality from the point of view of biography.

5. Research Methods

The study is based on the biographical and receptive methods of literary scholars. It also deals with the problematization of rich diverse biographical and historical-literary regional material.

6. Findings

Theoretical battles, challenges of the 21st century require the excursus to the history of literary biography. The biographical method, presented by Sainte-Beuve Ch.-A. in his *Literary Portraits* in the first third of the 19th century, is still the initial stage of the formation of a literary portrait, when the author calls upon "to see a person in a poet" (Sainte-Beuve, 1970). Penetratingly and at the same time not without subjectivity the French critic describes the peculiarities of a talent and a style of the creator, thus

showing great interest in the real facts of the biography of the writer, especially in the biographical history of the first work, which becomes the Rubicon in the fate of the creative personality. While Sainte-Beuve's (1970) "psychological biographism" will find support from a range of followers, today it is thought of as supporting, because the writer's biography is regarded within this method only as one of the sources of literary image whose value and meaning is wider than the "material" used in the work. The attraction of the writer's biography acts as a research strategy for understanding his creativity, but not as a separate independent genre.

In the Soviet (Russian) literature, theoretical issues related to the reflection of the genre of biography intensified in the 1920s–1930s of the 20th century. There is an obvious connection to the era of new romanticism – the art of modernism, which placed a bet on a particular individual that aroused interest in a particular human personality *sui generis*. The extremes of ideas belonging to M.O. Gershenzon and the Society of Poetic Language Study sought to remove V.M. Zhirmunsky in his *Tasks of Poetry* (1919), B.V. Tomashevsky in *Literature and Biography* (1923) (as cited in Cherkasov, 2008), G.O. Vinokur in *Biography and Culture* (1927).

The problem that Vinokur (1927) discusses is the understanding of personal life as a subject of study in a person's biography. Strictly speaking, the biography does not examine personal life or personality, but the "history of personal life" (Vinokur, 1927), which includes physiological, cultural, social factors such as inheritance, genealogy, history of education, a range of cultural influences and impacts, a generational factor, etc. It is important to pay attention to how a historical fact becomes a biographical fact – it happens through experience and forms of behavior, including actions. A "poem" is also a form of personality behavior, its acts – Vinokur's (1927) definition of literary creation, literary work. Vinokur (1927) thus argues the midline when a biography cannot be reduced to or subtracted from creativity alone, when numerous factors of real life-personality history become material for science.

The next round of thinking about the problems of literary biography came in the 1970s–1980s of the 20th century. This may be caused by a certain underestimation or, on the contrary, a re-evaluation of biographical nature in the process of interpreting the writer's creativity. Khrapchenko (1987) talks about the extremes of the biographical method, when everything in creativity is derived from the facts of biography: "The world depicted by an artist is not separate from his personality, but at the same time, it does not come down, except for extremely subjective writers, to the combination of his personal experiences" (p. 64).

A more comprehensive definition of scientific writing biography belongs to Lakshin (1982): it is "based on facts subjected to critical study and documentary verification, a chronological study of the life of the author in the light of the main pathos of his creativity and ideological-literary evolution" (p. 93). It is necessary to add to this definition the need to study the specificity of the creative personality of the artist of a word, which is also revealed in its specific-historical ties with the era, literary and social environment, family environment.

The last stage of intensification of discussion related biography, including problems of literary biography, came at the beginning of the 21st century. Neo-Romanticism reappears on this turn, adhering this time to postmodern literary strategies related to individual apotheosis. On the one hand, new biographies appeared in the series *Life of Wonderful People*, on the other – a large number of theses on

the problems of writing biographies. There has also been a link with other humanitarian subjects, where research has reached a new level in understanding the problem of personality biography (Bertaux, 2002; Possing, 2002).

Thus, the analysis of works on the theory of literary biography showed complexity and ambiguity in the understanding of this genre. For us the literary biography is the synthesis of scientific biography of the creator with inclusion of the elements of a portrait, with manifestation of not essayistic, but analytical style.

The regional literary process in Buryatia also highlights various stages and genres in creating a biographical description of the life and creativity of writers. Regional literary scholars rarely turn to scientific biographies because of their particular labor intensity, but there are still precedents. Palikova (2008) considered the creativity of Russian writers of the republic in an inextricable connection with the stages of life fate in the genre of literary portrait with the elements of scientific biography. It is this type of writing biographies (A. Schitov, V. Lipatov, M. Shikhanov, etc.), created by her (Palikova, 2008, 2012), presented in the 2008 pilot tutorial *Writers of Buryatia of the 20th-21st Centuries*. Earlier this genre was tested by the scientists of Buryatia in a collection edited by V.C. Naidakov (*Portraits of the writers of Buryatia*, 1997), the task of which was to give a portrait-essay of the creativity of an individual writer, more often chronologically built, in connection with his contribution to the development of regional literature. The genre of the creative portrait was rather publicistic and approached the scientific biography quite conditionally.

Against the background of memorial articles of not quite accurate reference and biographical materials it is possible to identify a three-volume the *Anthology of Literature of Buryatia of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century* (2011), which carefully worked out brief references to writers and works published by them.

The problem of scientific biography in modern literature is closely related to the range of questions on the sociology of the literary process: it is the interaction of the text of the work and the readership, the problem of literary behavior of the writer, the so-called literary life, the problem of literary rows, statuses and hierarchies. In this regard, it is possible to highlight another model of scientific biography – a study on a documentary basis, which determines the identity of the artist in his unity with the era, social environment and creative expression. It is worth noting the work of Khandarova (2019), which reflected the development and approval of literary reputation of the classic of Buryat literature A. Balbuurov.

Thus, the question of creating a modern literary biography in Buryatia is quite relevant, but it is built within a problematic field of regional literature. Here it is important to back off from ideological, generational tenderness both in the perception of the writers of the 1950s-1970s formed under the conditions of the Soviet time, and the writers of the crisis period of re-formation.

Another problem, or feature, is the specificity of national mentality and language in the work of bilingual or Russian-speaking writers. The biography of the Buryat author writing in Russian involves the study of the phenomenon of transculture, a phenomenon that is created, among other things, by biographical factors that caused the writer to “push” and “combine” various national traditions in himself and the reader’s mind. It is a special cultural phenomenon created in the process of spreading ethnic and linguistic boundaries. This was the case with Vladimir Mitypov, whose family spoke Buryat, and he –

whether due to the influence of the school or for another reason – began to write in Russian, and more importantly – in beautiful, expressive Russian.

How did the transition from Buryat as a language of life to Russian as a language of creativity take place? Is it worth seeing here the influence of some social circumstances, when the prestige of Russian language, Russian culture was undeniable and to some extent suppressed the native language? Or should we add here the teaching of subjects in Russian at schools, supplemented literally by a spoiled reading of popular literature and fiction? Or it is necessary to take into account some other factors ... Perhaps it is worth raising the question of bilingualism, when the sphere of domestic use of a language does not overlap with the sphere of social creativity. In any case, it is necessary to admit that V. Mitypov is one of those writers of Buryatia, who recorded, like Chingiz Aitmatov after 1965, the process of landmark transition from the national language to Russian. (Bashkeeva & Dorzhieva, 2013, p. 28)

Quite different was the biography of a poet-lyricist Dugarov (2016), writing in Russian. For him the position of bilingualism was important. The poet himself has repeatedly admitted in his bilingualism as a synthesis of Eastern and European worldview: "... two languages, however, in different but necessary degrees feed my Eurasian muse: "Russian sounds in my verses, / And another, native, is feeling sad" (Dugarov, 2016, p. 74). That is, in order to create a full biography of a poet, it is necessary to explain "bilingualism" as an existence at the intersection of two languages, but its unique appearance is created by the awareness of the native national identity (Imikhelova, 2019). Here we see the worldview origins of the poet's Eurasianism as a cultural synthesis and spiritual unity of peoples around Russian national openness, sobriety and national tolerance. But for the writer of the younger generation A. Gatapov, the author of the novel Tamujin about the childhood and youth of Genghis Khan, the question of the choice of a language was not relevant, for him, who came to writing in the atmosphere of Russian culture, the doubts about the ability to create texts of high literary value were more important.

Another factor that poses difficulty in creating a genre of biography is related to the writer's attitude to his personality and creativity, in a sense positive, is the deprecation of himself, the "position of modesty", the reluctance of "PR". Among the nations and nationalities of Russia, this position is traditionally welcomed, the importance of the common beginning, the collective, the people is very significant, the personality relates itself to the common beginning, thus presenting value and triumph. "The position of modesty differs one of the most famous writers of Buryatia – V. Mitypov, the author of The Valley of Immortal and The Inspector of the Golden Taiga. Resting in Peredkino art center he did not only enjoy the honors and attention to himself as to a famous writer, but was grateful and thankful to the Union of Soviet Writers for the opportunity to create at the state expense. Meanwhile, the Moscow-based Bulat Okujava, in his opinion, showed himself as a bumptious personality unfavoring the creative youth and everything around him.

Hence the inevitable consequence – underestimation by the writer of the facts of his life, failure to protect documents, sometimes their negligence. In this regard, the task of the literary scientist becomes more complicated. The famous Buryat prosaic and a playwright Ardan Angarkhaev does not collect critical

publications about his work, but also he does not even have the texts of his plays set in the 1970s–1980s on the stage of the national drama theatre. They had to be sought in the personal archives of the heads of the literary department of the theatre of different years. Or another playwright – Stepan Lobozerov, when asked about the manuscripts of his plays, expresses doubt whether they are preserved et al.

Minimization of the written non-natural word is typical of Buryat writers, maybe because oral discourse is quite active. Meetings, talks, collegial and friendly communication were sufficiently developed during the Soviet period. Such meetings were multi-functional and multi-genre: critical reviews and personal presentations, excursions to the history of literature, culture and appeal to life experience. It is extremely difficult to restore such biographical material, many are no longer present, much were forgotten, invaluable facts were lost.

Behind this lack of protection of manuscripts and documents there is more than just a “position of modesty”. Behind this is a special understanding of the personality in culture, including the personality of the writer. There are two types of writers in relation to the fact what is an individual and what is its relationship with the world, with society. This typology is undoubtedly related to the eternal division of the literary process into romantic and realistic periods. Romantic writers, whether it is Romanticism, Modernism or Postmodernism, are quite obviously centered on their personality.

If you take the writers of Buryatia of both the Soviet time and the present, they represent a different type, a different attitude to life. For most of them, the substances of life and literature are different, the boundaries between them are clear, the superiority of life and the virtuality of literature are renovated. Literature is one way to perceive life, which helps a living person, a contemporary first of all, in building his own life. Such an understanding of life, biography differs in integrity and is fundamentally opposite to the philosophy of life.

Thus, for the playwright Lobozerov (1987) literature is not equal to life, these are separate substances with their laws and rules. According to Lobozerov (1987), it is impossible to bring everything to literature from life, even if these are comic or simply interesting episodes: If we include everything in the play, there will be either a horror film or a comedy. The worldview concept correlates with such aesthetic position, according to which Lobozerov and his close Buryatia writers act as supporters of their country, their values, rather than defenders of cosmopolitan, liberal ideas, often fraught with internal betrayal. His attitude to restructuring, post-reconstruction, to the restoration of capitalism in Russia, which involves submission to the West, is, of course, critical. In certain moments there is proximity to post-perestroika views of V. Rasputin. Even in the 1980s and 1990s Lobozerov (1987) paid close attention to national axiological values. It is difficult for him to understand the part of the intelligentsia that suggests adopting everything from the West, perceives its basic traditions as the deep Middle Ages, and individualist foreign attitudes as their future: “Earlier there was a plague, they set stalls. Now it is necessary to protect rather than invite a plague”, – said the playwright in an interview in May 29, 2019.

Political inclusion on the basis of the Russian historical tradition, worldview stability in understanding the mental bases of national culture show that the playwrights and other writers of Buryatia belong to the Russian aesthetic tradition in the question of understanding the relationship between life and literature.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of genre component of literary biography and peculiarities of literary process in Buryatia helps choosing the methodological settings. It is methodologically important to study not just the presence of certain features that indicate a certain cultural code of personality – it is necessary to search for internal history, internal biography of the writer as an act of gradual self-perception, which is aimed at evolution and internal transformation. Here, the literary biography is impossible without personal attitude of its creator to the “hero”, without the interface of “personal history” of the writer with the analysis of his creativity in a large historical context. Thus, the need to create and publish biographies of Buryatia writers, both those that passed away and are now working in various genres of prose, poetry and drama, is dictated by the challenges of time and the urgent need of modern literature.

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