

HISTORY AS TEXT IN EUGENE VODOLAZKIN'S NOVEL «SOLOVYEV AND LARIONOV»

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Abstract: At the end of the 20th, especially at the beginning of the 21st century, there was a keen interest of Russian and foreign writers in the historical subject. At the same time, in the literature of postmodernism, history is conceived as a text, as a narrative, as a discourse. The article considers the peculiarities of the narrative of the historical past in contemporary Russian prose by way of the example of the novel by contemporary Russian writer Eugene Vodolazkin. To attain this goal, within the context of the work we use the system-structural method of research which assumes the perception of all components of the work as an integral literary system, and the hermeneutic method that allows to give a creative interpretation of the work on the basis of a deep understanding of its content and the features of its literary structure. The authors come to the conclusion that unlike many postmodern texts in which history is apprehended only as an object of the game, in the novel "Soloviev and Larionov", as well as in the works by E. Vodolazkin on the whole, postmodern methods have been put into the service of the author's humanistic conception that makes it possible to write the prose of this writer not only in the context of modern literature, but also in the context of the Russian literary tradition.

Key Words: history as a text, postmodern methods, literary discourse, scientific discourse, genre masks, humanistic tradition.

1 Introduction

The French philosopher, historian, writer Guy Debord, in 1968, used the metaphor "performance" to characterize modern society. For half a century, the definition of "performance society" has not only lost its relevance but also acquired new arguments in its favor. It is in keeping with the famous metaphorical definition by J. Derrida "the world as a text", that expresses simulativeness of the reality in the postmodern era. In his time Guy Debord wrote: "Performance as a modern social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, the rejection of history, (...) is a false consciousness of time". The concept of "the world as a text" also implies "paralysis of history and memory". At the same time, the boundary between the truly former and the fictitious is blurred. History is taken as a text, as a narrative, as a discourse. A new understanding of the subject, purpose and methods of modern historical science gave rise to a discussion which, in the 1980s and 1990s, was reflected in the pages of journals «History and Theory», «American Historical Review», «Speculum», «Past and Present», «The Monist» (Ankersmit, 1989).

According to F. Jameson's concept, "history is inaccessible to us but in the form of text and our attitude to it and to the Reality itself necessarily passes through its preliminary textualization, its narrativization" (Ankersmit, 1995; Jameson, 1977; Pihlainen, 2002).

This attitude is reflected in the literature. At the end of the 20th, at the beginning of the 21st centuries, there was a great interest of both Russian and foreign writers in historical themes, which has been more than once the subject of study in modern literary studies. Researcher E.V. Kolodinskaya formulated the main reasons for contemporary writers' turning to the historical past: "this is due, first, to the crisis state of the modern ("postmodern") world outlook and the attempts of the writers to assess the place of man in the world and history, who is in the power of chaos and absurdity; second, with the desire of the authors to write the literature of the late 20th century into the reinterpreted historical and literary context; third, with the desire to determine their position in the humanitarian debate about the forms and methods of historical knowledge and the boundaries of scientific and fictitious narratives about the past, and finally, with the need to express their attitude to the so-called "popular history" (historical and pseudo-historical research, being as a mass product, the criterion of quality of which is the fascination

and sensationalism of the material presented in it)" (Khabibullina & Zinnatullina, 2016).

However, new texts enable to highlight new nuances in understanding the well-known thesis "history as a text", clarifying the causes and functions of the textualization of the reality.

The object of studying in this paper is the novel by popular Russian writer Eugene Vodolazkin "Soloviev and Larionov" (2009; Connor, 1996; Cooper, 1996; Farkhoutdinov & Isavnin, 2017).

The purpose of the work is to define the specifics of the narrative strategy and, in particular, the causes and peculiarities of the narrativization of history in this novel.

2 Methodology

In accordance with the stated goal and specifics of the object of the analysis, we use the system-structural method of research in the work, assuming the appreciation of all components of the work to be an integral literary system, and the hermeneutic method, which allows us to give a creative interpretation of the novel, to consider literary images as a part of the cultural context, which is needed when the subject under study is a text based on intertextual links, literary and linguistic play (Hutcheon, 1989; Shevchenko et al, 2017; Breeva, 2014).

3 Results and Discussion

Doctor of Philology, an employee of the Pushkin House, an expert on ancient Russian literature, Eugene Germanovich Vodolazkin, has recently acquired distinction as an active participant in the literary process. And although his books are awarded a number of literary prizes and are not deprived of criticism, on the whole the writer's works have been insufficiently studied so far. In particular, only one literary article concerns the novel "Soloviev and Larionov" – this is the paper by O.A. Grimova "Narrative Intrigue in a Modern Novel, which shows how "the enigmatic intrigue, intrigue of mystery" is realized in this work. The aspect of analysis that is of interest to us in this article has not been practically affected. (Mrathuzina & Nasrutdinova, 2015).

E. Vodolazkin used the names of the two main characters in the title of his novel "Soloviev and Larionov". The first of them is a young historian, a graduate of the St. Petersburg University, a graduate student of the Institute of Russian History, and the second – a General of the White Army – the object of Solovyov's dissertation work. The composition of the novel based on the constant drawing the fate of the young scientist and man together, whose life and destiny is the object of his scientific research, is built according to this. It is noteworthy that not only Solovyov, whose surname is represented as allusive, referring to the great Russian historian Sergei Mikhaylovich Solovyov, but also General Larionov is also attached to the "work of the historian": this is how his work on memoirs is defined in the novel. In this regard, it is natural that the originality of the narrative strategy of the novel determines the fiction interaction of scientific and literary discourses (Grimova, 2015; Villalobos Antúnez, 2015).

In one of his interviews E. Vodolazkin admitted that he likes "to work with genre literature. At least, to start in one of its genres, and then – to leave its boundaries". In the novel "Soloviev and Larionov" he uses not only genre models of fiction but also of a scientific article, a report, memoirs. The work presents the history of the formation of a scientist-historian and the story of his scientific research. The text is represented according to the laws of scientific research. It is full paginal footnotes and references scrupulously made up. And this scrupulousness is frankly a play technique designed to expose the simulativeness of the created textual reality. With rare exceptions, these are either fictitious or redundant footnotes, that is, completely

unnecessary footnotes, generating mainly a comic effect. For example, when mentioning that Yalta is “a sign place”, a reference to “Proceedings on Sign Systems”, when mentioning that Ursulyak’s collection “Stone Foot” is collected poems, - the reference to the famous work by Zhirmunsky “The Theory of the Verse”, etc. Often, bibliographic references in the novel are based on literary and linguistic play.

These footnotes as if intentionally demonstrate the principles of the organization of the postmodernist text: “the collision in one intertextual space of two or more fragments of meaningful and stylistically different textual worlds, which implies the emergence of a quasi-parodic effect”. So, in the first example this effect is generated from the relationship of the name of the fictional French historian A. Dupont (one of the most common French surnames, taken as an ordinary philosopher) whose works, according to the novel’s plot, served as a stimulus for Soloviev to choose the topic of scientific research, and the title article “The Headless Horseman”, referring to the famous novel by Mayne Reid. The title of the journal «Трезвость и культура» (“Sobriety and Culture”), where this article was allegedly published according to the law of the association, it makes one recall the pretext of Russian postmodernism - the poem of Venedikt Erofeev “Moscow-Petushki”, because it was in this edition that it was first published. In general, this footnote is conceived as a pastiche or a reduced form of parody. Almost all quasi-scientific apparatus, accompanying the novel “Soloviev and Larionov”, is made in this spirit. The language game is more obvious in the second example: it is characteristic that the reference to the author of the article about scientific and charitable funds with the speaking initials of U.E. (the conventional units, that is, currency designation) and the surname Otkatov (from «откат», which actually means ‘bribe’ in Russian slang) arises after an ironic remark about “the scrupulousness of Russian funds”.

The narrative strategy of the novel by Vodolazkin is subordinated to the principle of the pastiche. It is built as a successive shift and interaction of different genre and style masks: a novel of education, memoirs, love and adventure novels. In the play of various discourse strategies, the discourse of the historical novel occupies a special place. «Время противопоставлено вечности. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in spite of the fact that the work by E. Vodolazkin recreates the episodes of the civil war in the Crimea and even represents real historical figures (Zhloba, Zemlyachka, Bela Kun), nevertheless, this is not a novel about the past. In his interviews E. Vodolazkin has turned to the problem of time many times. Concerning his novel “Laurel”, he said: “There is no time (...) literature – it’s not about the era, even not about history. This is about man”. Or: “Time is opposed to eternity. For simplicity of perception, the events in it are arranged in a certain order. We call it chronological. Events, I think, do not disappear anywhere with the transition of man to eternity – they simply lose their chronological attachment: they hang in eternity like the toys on a Christmas tree, and they no longer need time. Without fear of tautology, I will say that time is temporary” (Vodolazkin et al, 2015). In the novel “Soloviev and Larionov”, history is represented not as a consistent development of the events in time, but as a revealing of the timeless, that which is typical of repeating. It is no coincidence that the principle of *deja vu* is so significant in the composition of the work. It is noteworthy that both Solovyov and Larionov will experience “a painful sense of *deja vu*”, connected with the repetition of some details, personal and historical events. General Larionov often could not determine when exactly those or other events occurred, “merging in his memory with others (...) That led him to the idea that most of the events of his long life had time to happen again – and not once”.

The principle of *deja vu* lies at the heart of one of the culminating events of the novel that happened at the conference with the symbolic and simultaneously ironic title “Larionov as a Text”. One of the speakers presented the materials comprehending a scientific puzzle. He found a strange coincidence of the facts contained in two completely different

documents – in the memoirs of General Larionov about his childhood and, in particular, about his trip with his parents to Yalta in 1888 and in the report of Red Commander D.P. Zhaloba about the entry of his troops into Yalta in November 1920. “From the point of view of the researcher, there was not even a hint of acquaintance of one author of the text with the text of the other one. (...) Both texts cannot be raised to a common source, because, despite their proximity, they tell (...) about different events”. And, nevertheless, they coincided even to the small points. The secret of this coincidence was solved by Solovyov, thanks to the advice of his teacher Professor Nikol'sky, who refused to assess the events of world history “according to the degree of their progressiveness. To assess them, he allowed a single criterion – a moral one”. Having learnt that the General’s notes concern most of all childhood, the professor suggested that for him “his childhood was then a measure of everything”. This allowed for Solovyov to put forward a hypothesis, of the veracity of which he was convinced, when General Larionov’s notes fell into his hands. It turned out that in 1920 he left the remnants of his army in Yalta a little earlier than the Reds entered the city, and ordered his subordinates, by having disguised in the costume he had won in the city theater, to stage his children’s Yalta memories, because “that had already once held had the seal of veracity”. This “textualization of the reality” saved the lives for hundreds of people. The Reds believed in the spectacle played for them, representing the natural course of a peaceful life. So “peace” had won “war”.

In the final of the novel we get an answer to another question that determined the main scientific intrigue that guided Soloviev’s search: why was General Larionov, who, unlike the others, did not hide from the Reds, not shot by them? E. Vodolazkin again uses the “text in text” technique, intensified with the “*déjà vu*” effect. The final episode with the unsuccessful execution of Larionov is a kind of illustration to Soloviev’s reflections on “the which extent the story itself is a fiction”. He asks himself this question after having read the text included in “The Complete Collection of Russian Folklore”. Notes of 1982”. The members of the folklore expedition received it from a resident of the village of Berezovaya Gat Timofey Zhzhenki and took in as a new interpretation of the biblical story from the Book of Judges. Meanwhile, Soloviev knew that Timofey Zhzhenka in 1920 was a batman of General Larionov, and therefore guessed that the story told to him was a reality. Timofey told how two armored trains stopped at one of the stations, which was “left by two generals. Each of them believed that the station was in the hands of his troops”. One of them had orientated himself in what was happening earlier than the other one and could kill him, nevertheless, despite the fact that nothing prevented him from doing so, he did not fire. In response to the question why, he replied: “Because death cannot teach anything”. Soloviev immediately realized that these words were uttered by General Larionov. It was this humanistic gesture towards the enemy that served him as a kind of “amulet”: the good turned into the good in return and saved the life of the White General not only in 1920 in Yalta, but also during all subsequent years of Soviet power.

Thus, the thought expressed by Mark Lipovetsky as long ago as 1997: what is happening today in our and world cultures is seen as an attempt to rebuild the building of humanism in the chaos space [...] because any alternative to humanism is fraught with blood” (Vizel, 2018; Lipovetskiy, 1997).

4 Summary

In the novel by Vodolazkin life is stronger than death, peace (more precisely, the power of childhood) is stronger than war, the eternal is stronger than the temporary. These values are the main criterion in the writer’s work, which prevents the transformation of history into text, play, pure narrative. The play in the prose by E. Vodolazkin is possible only “in the light of conscience”.

5 Conclusions

In the novel “Soloviev and Larionov”, as in the works by E. Vodolazkin on the whole, postmodern methods have been put to serve the author’s humanistic concept, which allows writing the prose of this writer not only in the context of modern literature, but also in the context of the Russian humanistic tradition.

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