

Modern Traditionalism: Wake for Utopia vs. Revival of Realism (Instead of the foreword)

The present issue of the Journal of Siberian Federal University, which you hold in your hands, is the result of the work of a group of authors with different ideological and aesthetic preferences, but converging on the interest in the topic of modern Russian literature, Russian traditionalism in its literary manifestation. The chance to collect the works of the experts in the same issue is not accidental. In November 2015 Siberian Federal University hosted the International scientific seminar “*Russian traditionalism: history, ideology, poetics, literary reflection*” (the project uses state support funds allocated as a grant in accordance with the Presidential Order No. 79-рп of 04.01.2015 and on the basis of the tender held by the Society “Znanie” of Russia), which allowed inviting the authors of monographs, textbooks, iconic articles devoted to the mentioned direction of Russian literature to take part in the conversation. The topicality of the given problems is obvious; it is confirmed both by the interest of the writing and literary unions, and the official rhetoric of the authorities. At the same time the issue of the status of traditionalism in the culture of the past few years, of the evolutionary possibilities of tradition, of the prospects for the continuity of the respective ideology and aesthetics is solved in an extremely debatable way.

A few years ago we first talked about traditionalism as a peripheral direction of our literature, the writers of this kind were read and published less, but the end of the era of post-modernism again actualized the realistic principles of writing. This is not to say that today’s generation massively turned to books by V. Belov, V. Astafiev, V. Rasputin, V. Lichutin or B. Ekimov. This does not happen, but the themes, motifs, images that these writers denoted, have become quite popular, although sometimes their meaning is leveled, formalizing up to the sign. The artists with directly opposing views (A. Prokhanov and V. Rasputin, M. Tarkovsky and E. Limonov) begin to appeal to traditional values. The representatives of the “*new realism*”, namely Z. Prilepin, R. Senchin, S. Shargunov, D. Gutsko, A. Babchenko, build their ecumenes of the semiotic arsenal of traditionalism, playing with the idea of continuity...

Village Prose, which gave the basis of literary traditionalism, has provoked rigid ideological disputes since it appeared. People see the representatives of the moribund stagnant morality, the defenders of the lost “harmony” of the national life, calling for a return to the sources of the national culture, the natural world and the precepts of ancestors, in it. The XX century in general is signified by the clash of two diametrically opposed directions: natural, authentic, cyclical culture and rational, intellectual, civilization that are different in the models of ontology, understanding of time (cyclic time and acceleration time), the attitude to the individual and the perspective of independence. Depending on the actualization of a particular model in the official ideology, the attitude to the Village Prose writers changes. In the late 1950s they were the representatives of the nonconformist direction, whose popularity was growing with the disillusionment with the utopian project of socialist realism. “The Long 70s” was a time of recognition. V. Rasputin is convinced that Village Prose as it is now

“could not either appear or have its mournful say in the 1970s. Perhaps, not the writers created this fiction, but literature, as a living and sensitive process, by its will, created writers for this prose”,

“which is able to locate nerve endings accurately on the huge body, which we call ‘nation’” (Rasputin, 2007, 481-482).

The values of “peasant” Russia had to be rediscovered by its own people, keeping the archetypes of the peasant culture in novels and stories, in aesthetic principles that, in fact, led to the *retrospective nature* of their work. The western Russian philology had an opinion that Village Literature defended the cultural prestige of the country. The monographic works of the late 1990-2000-s devoted to the ideological-thematic and aesthetic originality of the prose of the village, raised the question of its relations with the traditions of Russian classics, studied the creation of positive national character, archetypes, the specificity of narration, utopian and ideological contexts. These are the works by K. Parthe (Russkaia derevenskaia proza: Svetloe proshloe. Monografiia [Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past. Monograph]. Tomsk, 2004), N. Tsvetova (Eskhatologicheskaia topika russkoi traditsionnoi prozy vtoroi poloviny XX veka [Eschatological Topography of Russian Traditional Prose of the Second Half of the XX Century]. Saint-Petersburg, 2008), N. Kovtun (“Derevenskaia proza” v zerkale Utopii. Monografiia [Village Prose in the Mirror of Utopia. Monograph]. Novosibirsk, 2009), A. Razuvalova (Pisateli-“derevenshchiki”: literatura i konservativnaia ideologiia 1970-kh godov [The Village Prose Writers: Literature and Conservative Ideology of the 1970s]. Moscow, 2015).

The basis of the program of “neopochvennichestvo” was moral and religious quest, discordant with the idea of speculative, technical and aesthetic future, cultivated by a part of the Russian avant-garde. We emphasize that the marked enthusiasm fits into the rhetoric of the official authority, abandoning the strategy of modernization, building communism, motivating the transition to conservative positions in “the long 70s”. The nature of this convergence is formal, limited to a situational interest in a range of values (nation, tradition, national classics, cultural background, etc.) along with noticeable differences in its interpretation and functional use. It turned out in the period of perestroika, when the authorities once again changed the rhetoric and tactics, the representatives of traditionalism demonstrated a stiff opposition to the liberal-cosmopolitan forces which have been bailout for the country since the 1990s.

The art project of traditionalists is aimed at restoring the unity of the nation, the integrity of the national self-awareness, cultural memory; its most important task is to turn the peripheral to the central, to legalize the peasant culture as a determining factor in the fate of Russia. Creativity, personal behavior of a prophet writer simulates the transition into the world of tradition; the texts of the Village Prose writers are a hermeneutic experiment to mainstream the ancient senses in the culture of the momentary. It is obvious in this context, that the literature of “neopochvennichestvo” defends the prophetic functions of life arrangement; it is driven by “a passionate desire to “stretch out” life to the ideal through its restructuring” (Tsvetov, 1985, 6). The works of classics of traditionalism are called the prose of “*social modeling*” (T. Rybal’chenko), the literature of national identity, whose intonation is always recognizable. Literature is functionally compared to the church: “Such revelations, which rational thinking does not work out, are sometimes delivered to us dimly, briefly through art”, A. Solzhenitsyn says (Solzhenitsyn, 1991, 43). V. Astafiev defends the idea of sacralization of work: “So, if replacing the ruined church and becoming the spiritual pillar of the people fell on the native literature, it had to rise up to this holy mission” (Astafievs, 1997, 308). V. Rasputin recognizes literature as “a suffering teacher of conscience”, as a department.

The word of prophet writers is monologue and didactic that poorly correlates with the modernity, learned the lessons of postmodernism, aimed at a dialogue and the co-creation of the author and the reader with the absolute priority of the latter. The success of “*new realists*” is built on the ability to take into account the tastes of the general reader, construct the author’s myths, calculate the commercial success of works, orient in the ideological conjuncture. This controversial generation often appeals to ideas, texts and names of preceding traditionalists, playing with them in their own work. That is how we can draw a parallel between Rasputin’s “Farewell to Matyora” and “Flood Zone” by R. Senchin, camp texts of Solzhenitsyn and “Abode” by Z. Prilepin, the prose of V. Astafiev and M. Tarkovsky.

Philological interpretations of traditionalism by themselves are quite stable. The writers of the defined circle have its admirers and critics, who gave the interpretation of the axiology and stylistics of the prose of national identity as a worthy successor to the Russian classics. Its opponents accuse traditionalists of the idealization of antiquity, the exploitation of popular aesthetics, the primitivization of the inner world of the individual. Extremely generalizing varied analytical material, we will outline several successful research strategies: the line that was established in the reflection of “the long 70s” is associated with the works of V. Bondarenko, V. Kozhinov, A. Lanshchikova, Yu. Seleznev, who saw the triumph of “common people” in traditionalism that occurred at the intersection of the high noble tradition and the national poetic one. The analysts of the liberal circle, by contrast, sharply express their opinion about deliberate vernaculars of traditionalism, ideological dependence on the authority, conservatism, prophetic ambitions of the authors (M. Berg, D. Bykov, D. Dragunsky).

Professional literature studies as far back as the 1970s contrasted the Village Prose writers to other directions of “confessional prose” on the basis of attention to the eternal themes of Russian literature (the destiny of man on earth, “*love for paternal graves*”, collegiality, etc.), which made it possible to talk about the continuity of culture, emphasizing the aesthetic rather than ideological context. The interest in the Village Prose writers allowed focusing on artistically significant texts, getting away from the cliché of the orthodox Soviet literature. The attempts to separate the ideology and poetics in the analysis of traditionalism were also taken by European authors; first of all, by Y. Brudny in the book “Reinventing Russia, Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991” and K. Parthe in the monograph “*Ruskaia derevenskaia proza: Svetloe proshloe* [Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past]”. Without denying the sharp statements of traditionalist authors about the “Jewish question” and Eurocentrism in general, researchers pay tribute to the aesthetic advantages of the mentioned literature.

The crisis of the 1990s, the disappointment with the project of globalization and artistic perspectives of postmodernism generated nostalgia for the national values, the desire for stability, a strong character, able to indicate a way out of the historical impasse and prevent the environmental disaster. Addressing to neopochvennichestvo with its attention to the categories of “the national world”, “Russian soul” and “Russian character” in this situation was inevitable, but the conceptsphere of the direction got different accents. The disappointment of the writers with the history, the present, looking into metaphysics actualize a research interest in “art mythologism”, mythemas and archetypes deployed in this prose. In the 1990s, the method of a mythopoeic analysis of traditionalism became one of the most popular that allowed demonstrating the reproducibility of the tradition, the wealth of artistic nuances of its implementation. By 2000, “ontologically oriented” literature studies had come to the fore. It principally distanced itself from the ideological and sociological problematics, emphasizing the interest in “naked man”, man as a particle

of natural being designed to be not the master, but the “voice” of the surrounding world. Gradually, the “ontological” approach was contaminated to the analysis of religious attitudes in the texts of the writers; some important observations were made in terms of impact on the historical philosophy, traditionalism aesthetics of ideology and mythology of the Old Believers (Kovtun, 2009; Kovtun, 2013).

The latest research strategies include “confessional autobiographism”, in which the studies of A. Bolshev (Ispovedal’no-avtobiograficheskoe nachalo v russkoi proze vtoroi poloviny XX veka [Confessional-Autobiographical Beginning in the Russian Prose of the Second Half of the XX century]. Saint-Petersburg, 2002), A. Martazanov (Ideologiya i khudozhestvennyi mir “derevenskoi prozy” (V. Rasputin, V. Belov, V. Astaf’ev, B. Mozhaev) [Ideology and Artistic World of Village Prose (V. Rasputin, V. Belov, V. Astafiev, B. Mozhaev)]. Saint-Petersburg, 2006), partly R. Tempest, developed. They seek to explain a number of artistic features of traditionalist literature (rhetorical devices, the specificity of gender relations, the features of the hero), resorting to the transfer principle, tested in the works of A. Zholkovsky. Literary scholars use psychological tools to shed light on “the underwater part of an iceberg of the author’s personality”, considering the texts, which presented “the inner man”, while the focus on confession becomes dominant. The relevance of the chosen approach is proved by a tragic element of the historical situation, in which the formation of Village Prose happened; when a person experienced an unprecedented pressure of inhuman circumstances, an attempt to get away into the world of wonderful “harmony” was a way of self-escape.

Finally, among the most recent works the monograph of A. Razuvalova “Pisateli-“derevenshchiki” : literatura i konservativnaia ideologiya 1970-kh godov [The Village Prose Writers: Literature and Conservative Ideology of the 1970s]”, is worth noting. It deals with the social and cultural circumstances that influenced the characteristics of self-presentation and rhetoric of the late Soviet “neopochvennichestvo” followers. “Neopochvennichestvo” itself appears here as a case of “permitted Fronde”, which allowed the Village Prose writers, on the one hand, to integrate into the Soviet cultural order, and on the other hand, to argue with some of its basic principles, as well as, indeed, with the mindset of the liberal-progressive wing of intellectuals.

Particularly, we will mention the large-scale research projects devoted to the study of the work of individual traditionalism authors implemented within the analysis of local texts, namely *Siberian* (in National Research Tomsk State University and Siberian Federal University) and *Northern* (in Northern (Arctic) Federal University), including the researches of the artists transformed “into the territorial literary ‘brands’” (A. Razuvalova) (conferences in Irkutsk devoted to the work of V. Rasputin; in Krasnoyarsk, devoted to the work of V. Astafiev, in Biisk and Srostki, devoted to the work of V. Shukshin, etc.).

In the light of the current palette of different approaches, methods, judgments made about the literature of traditionalism, we do not pretend to create the final picture at all, but the fact of the appearance of the present issue of the Journal of Siberian Federal University is the evidence of the actualization of the interest in the mythology, poetics and sociology of the direction.

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