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Myths About the Death of Novel and the Absence of Integrality in “The Novel” by V. Sorokin

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“The Novel” by V. Sorokin illustrates the possible application of the category of aesthetic integrality to postmodern novel. Stylistic eclectics does not impede the organization of the text in “The Novel”, development of the author’s strategy which is displayed in the name of the work (“Роман” - roman – stands for “the novel” in Russian), selection of material for stylization (classical Russian novel of the 19th century), gradual transition of prosaic rhythm to poetic rhythm. The game actualized by the author of “The Novel” on the level of formal text organization creates the symbolic level of content, based on mythological structures that demonstrate ineradicability of the literary phenomena. The specific feature of aesthetic integrality in “the Novel” by V. Sorokin is the contradictory trends present in it, providing incohesiveness and utmost consolidation at the same time. The conclusion of the article is the following: notions of aesthetic integrality and novel can be applied to a postmodern work of art not only as an element of parody, but also to reflect the real dynamic processes in literature that are typical of the contemporary novel.

Keywords: postmodern novel, stylization, aesthetic integrality, V. Sorokin.

Assessments and judgements of literary criticism are the reflections of hopes and expectations of a certain epoch, as B.M. Bernstein writes: “Judgements on the history of art cannot be either totally objective or essential, as interpretations and assessments are not so much knowledge as ideological *desiderata*, wishes and ideals desired to come true” (Farino, 2004, 54). Manifests of literary movements with their “revolutionary” pathos reflect more demand for new forms and artistic techniques, than any actual new processes or phenomena: romanticism, modernism, postmodernism that

manifest denial of all traditions, draw more from the previous epochs than they actually deny. The ultimate representations of avant-garde trends border with neo-traditionalism, as it is impossible to reject something without actualizing, therefore, confirming it. Let us turn to the postmodern manifestation of freedom in the structure of a modern fiction book, which is revealed in the mosaic character of the text integrality.

Category of integrality, conceived by Aristotle as a proportion of parts: “a whole is an entity which has a beginning, a middle and an end” (Aristotle, 1984, 653), is adopted by modern

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literary criticism and modernized by adherents of structural and semiotic approach (Yesaulov, 1991, 14), thereby reflecting in the central idea of book structure. On the basis of poststructuralist criticism of structure, postmodernism demonstrates a series of peculiarities that become a constant within its culture: eclecticism, absence of structure, vagueness of integrality: "As a matter of fact, on the composition level the postmodern "world outlook" declared itself in the aspiration to reproduce the chaos of life with artificially organized chaos of a principally fragmentary narration" (Ilyin, 2004, 329). To characterize the non-differentiated postmodernist integrality, Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari used the term "rhizome" which stands for "non-structural and non-linear character of integrality, providing an opportunity for its immanent primary mobility and actualization of its inner potential of creative self-figuration" (Shatin, 2008, 255).

The traits of a literary work that support the text integrality, binding it into one whole, are present in postmodern texts as well, but discussion of this matter seems not as topical as contemplation on the novelty of an ultimately free text. It is logical that, analysing a research by Fokkema, who concentrated on barely negative, disorganizing practice of postmodernism, dissembling all traditional bonds, I.P. Ilyin asked the following question: "What is the binding centre of such fragmented narration, what turns such scattered and heterogeneous material that fills the contents of a typical postmodernist novel into the entity which, notwithstanding all the provision, still forces the reader to understand it as an integrated whole?" (Ilyin, 1998, 164). Conclusions on the absence of wholeness, destruction of genre discourse in postmodernism prove, in point of fact, to be nothing but myths. In the year 1964, in his lectures on structuralist poetics, Yu.M. Lotman spoke of "holding phenomena" in literature: "...creativity is impossible without

regulations of structural relations. It would contradict both the character of a work of art as a model and its character as of a sign... When this or that author, or this or that trend in the struggle against 'literariness' turns to essays or reports..., inserting original, clearly non-literary documents into the text... he destructs the common system, but not the principle of consistency" (Lotman, 1994, 226). For the scholar it is clear, that rejection of a finite set of structural elements acts is, in fact, a way of expansion for the given set of elements (Lotman, 1994, 234). In his works of early seventies of the 20th century R. Barthes claims, that literature and language are ineradicable as deterrent phenomena, as overcoming leads to simultaneous confirmation; therefore, one can only speak of playing victory over literature, playing destruction and revelation of an "eccentric and unthinkable", a devious method of unravelling any positive (Barthes, 1994, 507). For example, Umberto Eco speaks of openness of modern literature which, in his opinion, instead of leading it to the extinction of the form, brings it to a clearer understanding, perception of literature as a "field of opportunities" (Eco, 2004, 206). M.M. Girshman suggests, that there are some complementary opposite tendencies, typical for a work of literature, that bring the material together and, at the same time, obstruct its integrality: "... integrality opposes both absolutisation as unification and plurality: in the light of artistic integrality, any external borders of aesthetic diversity, which may have been set in the piece before, are negotiated, at the same time establishing its inner limit" (Girshman, 2008, 196). This judgment can be equally applied to the postmodern novel.

Let us make an attempt to reveal integrality peculiarities of the postmodern work of literature "The Novel" by V. Sorokin in order to justify the acceptability of assessing the text as eclectic and illustrating the death of the novel genre in modern

literature and the phenomenon of aesthetic integrality.

Works by V. Sorokin are usually reckoned among the second and third waves of Russian postmodernism (Skoropanova, 2007, 3-4). In criticism of the writer the key words are "revelation", "death", "denial of life-likeness": "Sorokin reveals false significates, demonstrating metaphysical emptiness left in the place of the remaining sign... it looks impossible to survive in it" (Genis, 1994, 119). Such judgment is connected with the wide-spread opinion of postmodernism as of a phenomenon associated only with negative semantics: "general feeling of disappointment and nihilism that is specific for the era of postmodernism" (Kovtun, 2012, 1343).

Let us study the main critical judgments of Sorokin's writing style described in "Russian Postmodernist Literature" by I.S. Skoropanova. V. Kuritsyn remarks a special attitude to any ontology of V. Sorokin, which is beyond any kind of reality: "Texts by Sorokin are interesting... for the fact that they present the phenomenon of literariness as it is. They are dedicated to opportunities of utterance. It is an attempt of writing beyond the general idea of how writing should function in the society. Extraction of discourseness as such means extraction of the continuousness and totality that underlies any act of speaking. Postmodernist does not get over this totality, but brings the total ontology to the surface and tries to insert a new reflective layer into it... Reading Sorokin, one can feel the Body of the Text" (Skoropanova, 2007, 267). The metaphor of "the Body of the Text", once used by V. Kuritsyn, underlines the integrality of the author's orientation that reveals itself in the organized whole of the text.

I.S. Skoropanova develops the quotation from V. Kuritsyn, also making another remark on the novel "Norma" by V. Sorokin: "... Sorokin turns to the code of 'text in text'... Thereby

Sorokin prepares his readers for the perception of everything they read as a literary text, lets them understand that he is mostly interested in the aesthetic aspect" (Skoropanova, 2007, 257). I. Smirnov also emphasizes: "Sorokin's ideal is pure semiotics not contaminated with semantics" (Skoropanova, 2007, 281). Determining the sphere of V. Sorokin's interests, I.S. Skoropanova demonstrates the opportunity of integrative perception of his works and the presence of an integrating strategy the author applies towards the text structure and the readers.

D. Prigov speaks of V. Sorokin's position as of the only possible humanistic position in the modern culture, which is the position of freedom connected with the "...position of an observer", "realization and observation of membrane and chaos as co-existing phenomena" (Skoropanova, 2007, 277). In the opinion of D. Prigov, ontology of V. Sorokin is manifested in such elements of being, "as shock, boundary, breakthrough, unlike self-realization of a living truth or a living thing (Dostoyevsky), or the space of life and description (Chekhov)" (Skoropanova, 2007, 277). D. Prigov's observations of works by Sorokin demonstrate the presence of ironic artistic integrativeness, revealing itself in dialectically interconnected opposite elements of composition ("membrane" and "chaos", organization of form and its openness for the reader's interpretation).

As a 20th century writer, V. Sorokin suggests, that "... a step into the abyss of primitive psyche means the end of a human personality and, simultaneously, a return to the pre-history" (Sorokin, 1994, 24). Such saying reveals the author's attention to archetypical, mythological structures that form the base of "The Novel" for integration and "restraint" of verbal material.

Despite its ambiguity, the mentioned criticism of V. Sorokin's works demonstrate integrative perception of the author's style, the presence of constitutive traits of his individual

style which can be also explained by the presence of an integrating strategy in this works. The quotations given above reveal the general opinion of scholars and critics on the integrative approach in works by V. Sorokin, which is associated with irony, a phenomenon of game, complete plunge into sign structure and denial of life-likeness.

Let us turn to the peculiarities of "The Novel" by V. Sorokin that bring cohesion into the text. The title of the novel is semantically organizing. The title, as a "privileged and offset part of an artistic whole" (Tiupa, 2000, 10) acts as a cohesive element that determines the further development of the text and anticipates the expectations of the readers. The name Roman ("Roman" is both the name of a character and the name of the genre, as "roman" in Russian stands for "novel") makes up a circular plot structure of the text together with the image-word "death" which begins and finishes the verbal conglomerate. In this case the title bears a symbolic meaning, pointing at the tradition of setting off the name of the central character into the title and drawing the reader's attention to the genre of novel (roman) and its "fate". The novel's title "The Novel" reflects the game strategy of the author, who consciously chooses the character's name that (in Russian language) coincides with the name of the genre.

It is evident that cohesion of V. Sorokin's text is also influenced by the selected material: the author stylizes individual peculiarities of Russian classic novels of the 19th century. About "The Novel" by V. Sorokin I.S. Skoropanova writes: "In his book "The Novel" (1994) Sorokin... deconstructs the style codes of classical Russian literature that have become cliché, numerous "stamped" by imitator writers, and reveals the destructive potential of a national archetype" (Skoropanova, 2007, 260). It does not seem possible to say that the verbal material included into the text of V. Sorokin's "Novel" is not systematized: "For this reason it makes more

sense to speak of "quasi-non-selection" instead of "non-selection", as selection of material is what the artist inevitably does, instead of mechanically registering the facts that happen to appear in his field of view" (Ilyin, 2004, 297). The attention of the writer concentrates, first of all, on the genre of the novel, not on any other genre. Stylistic fragments of "The Novel" by V. Sorokin are also remarkable for their strict organization which points at highly conscious material selection, dictated by the peculiarities of the individual style of the author's work.

The beginning of the novel contains some features of the author's style and the style of this literary tendency in general. The author relies on some clichés, or, to be more precise, on some codes, connected with the author's individual manner of narration, with the genre and types of artistic integrality. The stylized fragments that open "The Novel" contain a complex of idyllic and elegiac motives typical for the texts with elegiac world outlook. It is an elegy in prose, the examples of which begin to appear in literature of the late 18th century. V. Sorokin uses vocabulary that forms the motives of eternity and immediateness, nature and human life opposed to each other. V. Sorokin creates associations with the style of I.S. Turgenev, renowned for the mentioned peculiarities of poetics.

V. Sorokin reproduces the peculiarities of I.S. Turgenev's novel character system, their manner of speaking. The modern author insistently turns to the motive of indifference of nature, develops it, repeats it, makes it as evident as possible, revoking associations with the style of I.S. Turgenev, based on the key features of his books, though, of course, "the object-focus and conventionality of the reproduced style is perceived due to its bond with the language consciousness of "a modern stylizer and his audience" (Teoriia Literatry, 2004, 462).

In "The Novel", V. Sorokin makes the peculiarities of I.S. Turgenev's individual style more acute, brings it to a grotesque, "excessively Turgenev" degree, discloses the language game process, thereby letting the reader understand, that the text is a not an original but a parody (though with no intention of mockery).

"The Novel" by V. Sorokin consists of stylistic allusions to not only Turgenev, but also to some novels by L.N. Tolstoy and F.M. Dostoyevsky. "The Novel" has some fragments that contain features of the style and idyllic world outlook of certain episodes of "Anna Karenina" by L.N. Tolstoy. With the help of simulacrum (Deleuze, 1993, 46), which is a resemblance of idyllic art, V. Sorokin shapes up a text that involves the major styles of a classical Russian novel.

V. Sorokin simulates the most typical features of "Anna Karenina" poetics for the reader to feel the similarities and differences of the texts, to understand the game process that evolves on the stylistic level. V. Sorokin turns to L.N. Tolstoy's most preferred themes of folk, joy of physical being, health, happiness of motion, spiritual union with simple people, collective labour, and episodes of mowing, idyllic union of characters with nature. "The Novel" by V. Sorokin reveals the contradictory strategy of the author aimed at organizing the verbal material in conformity with the stylized manners, and, at the same time, at destruction of naturalness in the narration. V. Sorokin uses a set of motives connected with the idyllic episode of the novel by L.N. Tolstoy, but achieves the effect that lets the reader realize the game intention of the author: "God, how good it feels! - thought Roman, obtaining more confidence and freedom with each move. - How simple: make hay while the sun shines... Make hay while the sun shines... How simple and how good it is" (Sorokin, 2002, 414). On the level of intonation, the motive of harmony in the quoted line is actualized through the poetic

rhythm contained in the saying, increasing with each repetition. Excessive rhythm in prosaic speech makes the text ironic, "distant" from the stylized source. By introducing clear formulation of a moral problem that comes from the plot development of the novel by L.N. Tolstoy, Sorokin achieves the ironic, not the idyllic meaning again, thereby enhancing the tendency of L.N. Tolstoy to moralize: "He listened to them, he smiled, replied, said some jokes, without feeling any difference between him and them, and felt glad that they, carried away with the conversation, would also forget about the difference; and the thick wall that had been built between the Russian peasant and the Russian landlord for centuries became absolutely transparent" (Sorokin, 2002, 422). The excessiveness reveals itself in the repetition of a word within one episode: "Russian peasant", "Russian landlord", "Russian song". Introduction of literary meaning into the symbolic meaning of the "wall" image with the help of qualitative adjective "thick" ("tolstiy" in Russian) (possible allusion to the last name of the writer, "Tolstoy") also destructs the stylistically reproduced idyllic worldview. The lyrics of the "Russian song", which completes the mowing episode, is a merry dancing song with a plenty of carnival images, though the main character thinks of it as of a song with "calm and soft melody", which also leads to an ironic mismatch between the formally reproduced idyll and the non-idyllic stylistic games.

The motive of the divine will develops along with the motive of natural harmony and naturalness of creative labour in the idyllic episodes of the novel "Anna Karenina", though it is not directly named. In "The Novel" the same motive is developed verbally, which makes the moral problems of literary works by L.N. Tolstoy recognizable for the reader, but on the other hand, brings it forward too much, establishing them too evidently, depriving them of the sacral secret.

The final part of V. Sorokin's text forms associations with the novel "Crime and Punishment" by F.M. Dostoyevsky in the reader's mind, creating a connection with the episode when Rodion Raskolnikov kills the pawnbroker woman and Lizaveta. In "The Novel" V. Sorokin uses the word "axe" as a signal for the reader to grasp the connection with the novel by F.M. Dostoyevsky together with other stylistic techniques usually preferred by the writer (naturalism of murder scenes and situations, grotesque). "Multiplied" to grotesque excessiveness, murder scenes of "The Novel" lose their function of affecting the reader: the grotesque brings them to absurd, to the loss of psychological intensiveness, to complete meaninglessness from the logical point of view; in this case, the role of expressive means is played by the linguistic game that takes place in the novel. In the last one hundred and twenty four pages of "The Novel" by V. Sorokin numerous murders happen and axe blows are multiply repeated: only in the last paragraph that takes up fifty nine pages, the verb "to hit" is used thirty eight times, along with such verbs as "to cut off", "to mince", "to hash". The episodes containing murder scenes are repeated over and over again, only the names of the characters, killed by Roman, are changed (over forty names of peasants), which inevitably leads to the loss of sense on the plot level and enhancement of the significance on the level of rhythmical organization of the book.

In the final part of "The Novel" the author presents a list of actions typical for a carnival scene, a tragic farce, the core of which is laceration, tearing bodies into pieces in association with the ambivalence of matter (Bakhtin, 1990, 212-213). There is no doubt that V. Sorokin is inspired by works of F. Rabelais, but in "The Novel" the carnival images are preceded by stylistic variations of classical Russian novels of the 19th century, the individual peculiarities of the styles are grotesquely brought to absurd, so death

and destruction turn into a means of renewal for literary forms and traditions, liberation of parodically reproduced stylistic features.

As a result of using single-type simple non-expanded sentences in the final pages of the novel, the text obtains the rhythm typical of metrical prose, where, due to repetition of verb endings, a rhyme occurs: "Roman crawled. Roman stopped. Roman crawled. Roman stopped" (Sorokin, 2002, 635). Gradually, "The Novel" loses the polyphony, typical for prose. At the end of the book the words become monosyllabic, expressive, the phrases become rhythmic, the actions of the character get primitive, repetitive, similar to those of a robot. The number of syllables in simple sentences gradually decreases from 10-9-8-7 to 4-3 syllables. The last phrase of the novel is rhythmically balanced: in the background of interchange of two- and three-syllable words, of iambic ("Roman stopped... Roman turned over... Roman smelled the floor...") and trochaic rhythms ("*pliuunul*", "*stuknul*", "*khlopnul*" – "spat, hit, clapped") a unity of iamb and trochee measure syllables occurs: "Roman died" (Sorokin, 2002, 635). Destruction of the genre, of the styles connected with a certain artistic world view, total destruction of a classical work of literature finds its manifestation in the two-syllable final of "The Novel". The strategy of creation and simultaneous destruction is carried out throughout the whole novel and brings cohesion to the text.

Symbolically it is a return to the archaic structures of verbal utterances, a movement backwards, to the origins of literature, from compound plot and composition forms of the novel genre to the primitive rhythmic prose with a plot and composition, imitating a ritual-like action. The amplification of eurhythmy at the end of "The Novel" leads to impossibility of polyphony, social differentiation of language: "Rhythm... cuts off those social and spoken worlds and faces, potential in a verbum, in the prime" (Bakhtin,

1990, 110-111). The last thirty eight pages of the text are not divided into paragraphs: they are a rhythmically and compositionally unified segment of text. Separate inarticulate lines of characters are not graphically marked as direct speech, and towards the end of the of the novel they disappear completely.

The plot dynamics is slowed down at the final of the novel due to multiple repetitions, duplication of the character's actions: it is a transition from the traditional prose to the prose of enhanced eurhythmy, the rhythm close to that of poetry. The whole literary work by V. Sorokin can be defined as a pastiche, a stylistic imitation, variation on a theme of individual styles. The logic of this game is formation and destruction of these individual styles with hyperbolization of stylistic differences, which brings to a logical transition from prose to "poetry": "The style is really a deviation in a sense that it deviates from neutral language due to a difference, an eccentric peculiarity; while poetry... goes into the depth of language, enriching it" (Genette, 1998, 361). In "The Novel" by V. Sorokin the parodied individual style of the author is dismissed and then established again, but **at the end of the book the prosaic language eurhythmy performs a compensating function to bring the "falling apart" text back together into a whole.** The almost poetic text makes an impact on the reader, involving them into the aesthetic game.

The main peculiarity of artistic integrality of "The Novel" by V. Sorokin is the fact, that its functionality is determined by the contradictory intention of the author that manifests itself through his special manner of writing. Destruction of the common procedure of literature perception is combined with the author's strategy to involve the reader into a game discourse, with his aspiration to perform a communicative act. The chaos created

on the level of contents is combined with the organized formal structure. The bond between the form and contents, necessary for actualizing the principle of aesthetic integrality, is on hand: "One of the most wide-spread principles of defining the art of postmodernism is approaching it as a certain artistic code, e.g. a code of rules... The difficulty of this approach is that from the formal point of view, postmodernism acts as art, which consciously denies any rules and regulations..." (Ilyin, 1996, 256-266). Here we speak of actualizing the "quasi-non-selection" principle (Ilyin, 1998, 168) (not denying the selection of linguistic or other elements of the text, but imitating the denial of the principle). In the novel by V. Sorokin the game of text bears the major part of its contents; the plot, in the traditional understanding of the term, is practically absent, but there is a connection with the reality of the reader's conscience which is evident: "The 20th century novel... is restored as a form of an open life dialogue with the incomplete reality, with the reader who acts as such reality. It does not cease to be a work of art, but the boundary of this work now is not the boundary of the event it depicts, but the boundary of the creative act, which includes, at the same time, the act of reader, without whom it cannot be brought to life" (Rymar', 2000, 100). "The Novel" by V. Sorokin is characterized by creation of a subsequently developing linguistic game situation, which is described as a motion towards syntactic simplification, disclosed in the last fragment of the novel, in the multiple repetition of simple sentences. The final of "The Novel", narrating of the death of the character, symbolically represents the death of novel as a genre, and, at the same time, forms the artistic picture of ontological chaos with the help of a stylistic game, carnival traditions, reviving the parodied phenomena over again.

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Мифы о конце романа и отсутствии целостности в "Романе" В. Сорокина

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Предметом исследования является специфическая эстетическая целостность постмодернистского романа В. Сорокина "Роман". Статья обнаруживает противоречивую авторскую стратегию, проявляющуюся как в разрушении, так и сдерживании текстового материала. Автор приходит к выводу о наличии в "Романе" продуманной композиции, движении словесного материала от ритма прозы к ритму стиха, от имитации связанного сюжета к возрастающему абсурду, от речевой многоголосицы к монологической речи. Стилистическая эклектика не исключает наличия художественной целостности в "Романе". Содержанием романа является разворачиваемая автором игра, символизирующая восхождение к истокам литературности. Русский классический роман подвергается деконструкции, обнажая пределы формы жанра романа. Мифологические архетипические структуры в романе В. Сорокина формируют игровое поле, способствующее возрождению пародируемых феноменов.

Ключевые слова: постмодернистский роман, эстетическая целостность, квазиинселекция, стилизация, В. Сорокин.
