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Contemporary Traditionalist Prose in the Mirror of the Latest Literary Studies (monograph review)

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The review presents the recently published monograph “Russian Traditionalism: History, Ideology, Poetics, Literary Reflection” (M., Flinta-Nauka, 2016), dedicated to one of the timeliest and controversial issues of modern literature and culture in general – the issue of genesis and functioning of Russian traditionalism, which origins date back to the so-called “village prose”. The continuity of axiology and ideology, metaphysics and natural philosophy, self-reflection and communicative orientations, utopian projectivity and behavioral patterns are analyzed in the book. The traditionalist type of artistic thinking is revealed in its typological characteristics and individual uniqueness.

Keywords: tradition, “village prose”, Russian literary traditionalism.

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Research area: philology.

The monograph “Russian Traditionalism: **History, Ideology, Poetics, Literary Reflection**” (M.: Flinta-Nauka, 2016) continues the well-known series of scientific publications “**The Universals of Culture**” (Vol. 7), represented by the Siberian literary scholars and focused on understanding the contemporary literary process. The book became the result of work of the similarly named International Scientific Seminar¹, organized in the city of Krasnoyarsk in

autumn 2016. The forum allowed inviting to the conversation the authors of iconic monographs, textbooks and articles devoted to traditionalism as a key direction of the Russian language and literature of the 20th century as well as the results and prospects of its development (Kovtun, 2015, 2982-2988).

For a reason the book was published under the auspices of two influential public organizations – the newly established The Russian Language and

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Literature Society, headed by His Holiness Kirill the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and the *Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature of Higher School* – the edition reflects the most important challenges facing the national literature and culture at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries.

The book is represented by the eminent reviewers and the international editorial board, which includes Doctor of Philology, Professor of Friedrich-Schiller-University **Andrea Meyer-Frantz** (Germany), Doctor of Philology, Professor of Saitama State University **Nonaka Susumu** (Japan); Doctor of Philology, Professor **Irina Plekhanova** (Russia), Doctor of Philology, Professor **Natalia Kovtun** (Editor-in-Chief, Russia). Doctor of Philology, Professor, Head of the Slavic Department of the University of Fribourg **Jens Herlth** (Switzerland) and Doctor of Philology, Senior Researcher of Lomonosov Moscow State University **Alexander Markov** (Russia) became the official reviewers of the edition.

The **topicality** of the range of problems reflected in the title of the book is obvious, it is confirmed by the interest of the writers and literary associations, and the official rhetoric of authorities. At the same time the issues of traditionalism status in the culture of the recent years, the evolutionary possibilities of tradition and the prospects for the continuity of the respective ideology and aesthetics are resolved extremely debatable. The traditionalist type of artistic thinking is revealed in the monograph through its typological characteristics and individual uniqueness. Imagery system dominants are seen as the basic constructs the author's worldview. Various research methods of general tendencies and phenomena are proposed and implemented, the reception of traditionalism remains a subject of scientific debate.

A few years ago we talked about traditionalism more as of the peripheral movement of our literature and the writers of this movement were less read and published, but the end of the era of postmodernism actualized the principles of realistic writing again. At that, we cannot say that today's generation massively started reading the books by V. Belov, V. Astafyev, V. Rasputin, V. Lichutin, B. Ekimov or M. Tarkovsky. This does not happen, but the themes, motifs and images that were signified by these writers have become quite popular, although sometimes their meaning is levelled, degenerating to the level of sign. The authors of the directly opposed views (A. Prokhanov and V. Rasputin, M. Tarkovsky and E. Limonov) are beginning to appeal to the traditional values. The representatives of the "new realism", who heavily criticized the ideology and aesthetics of postmodernism that rose on "the soil deprived of reality": Z. Prilepin, R. Senchin, S. Shargunov, D. Gutsko, A. Babchenko and D. Cherny build their ecumenes from the semiotic arsenal of traditionalism, playing with the idea of continuity.

"Village prose", which gave basis to the Russian literary traditionalism, causes rigid ideological disputes since its formation. It is either seen through the representatives of the obsolete stagnant morality, or the defenders of the lost "way" of peoples' life, advocating for the return to the sources of national culture, natural world, and the precepts of ancestors. The 20th century as a whole is signified by the clash of two diametrically opposed directions: natural, native, cyclical culture and rational and intellectual civilization that differ in ontological models, understanding of time (cyclical time and time of acceleration), attitude towards personality and the prospect of self-identity. Depending on a particular model actualization, attitude towards the "villagers" in the official ideology changes.

In the late 1950s they are the representatives of the fronding direction, whose popularity was growing in the proportion to disillusionment with the utopian project of socialist realism. “The Long 70s” became the time of recognition. V. Rasputin is convinced that the “village prose” as it is now, “Could not but appear and have its mournful say in the 1970s. Perhaps these were not the writers who created this prose, but literature, as a live and sensitive process, created the writers for this prose with its will”, “able to precisely find the nerve endings on the huge body, which we call “people”” (Rasputin, 2007 481 – 482).

The Russian people themselves had to rediscover the values of the “peasant” Russia, preserving the archetypes of peasant culture in novels and stories and in aesthetic principles that, in fact, determined the retrospective nature of their work. In western Russian studies there is an opinion that the “village literature” defended the cultural prestige of the country. The monographic works of the late 1990 – 2000s, dedicated to the ideological-thematic and aesthetic originality of the prose about village, raised the question of its relations with the traditions of Russian classics, studied the creation of the positive national character and archetypes (Bolshakova, 2000), the specific features of narration, utopian, eschatological (Tsvetova, 2008) and ideological contexts (Razuvalova, 2015).

Properly philological interpretations of traditionalism are quite stable. The authors of the outlined circle have their admirers and critics, who gave the interpretation to the axiology and the style of prose of national self-consciousness as a worthy successor to the Russian classics. Its opponents accuse traditionalists of the olden time idealization, exploitation of popular aesthetic and simplification of the inner world of the individual. Generalizing varied analytical material, the several research strategies are outlined: the direction that was established in

the reflection of “The Long 70s” is associated with the works by V. Bondarenko, V. Kozhinov, A. Lanshchikov and Y. Seleznyov, who perceived traditionalism as a triumph of “common people”, that occurred at the intersection of high noble and national poetic traditions. The analysts of liberal circles, by contrast, are negative on the deliberately vernacular traditionalism, ideological dependence on authorities, conservatism and prophetic ambitions of the authors (M. Berg, D. Bykov, D. Dragunsky).

Professional literary studies as early as in the 1970s contrasted the “villagers” to the other directions of “confessional prose” on the basis of attention to the eternal themes of Russian literature (the destiny of man on earth, “the love of paternal graves”, collegiality, etc.), which made it possible to talk about the continuity in culture, emphasizing the aesthetic rather than ideological context. Interest to the “villagers” allowed focusing on the fictionally significant texts and to get away from the cliché of the orthodox Soviet literature. European authors, namely Y. Brudny in his book “Reinventing Russia, Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991” (Brudny, 1998) and K. Parthe in the monograph “Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past” (Parthe, 2006) make attempts to separate ideology and poetics itself in the course of traditionalism analysis. Without denying the traditionalist authors’ sharp statements concerning the “Jewish question” and Eurocentrism in general, the researchers also pay tribute to the aesthetic advantages of the aforementioned literature.

The crisis situation of the 1990s and disappointment in the project of globalism and artistic prospects of postmodernism generated nostalgia for the values of national, the desire for stability and a strong character, able to indicate a way out of the historical dead end and prevent environmental disaster. Appeal to *neo-pochvennichestvo* with its attention to the

categories of “national peace”, “the soul of Russia” and the “Russian character” was inevitable in this situation, but the direction conceptosphere obtains different focuses. The authors’ frustration with history and the present, as well as their shift towards metaphysics actualizes the research interest in to the “fictional mythologism”, mythemes and archetypes, deployed in this prose. In the 1990s, the method of mythopoetic analysis of traditionalism became one of the most popular, allowing to demonstrate the reproducibility of tradition and the wealth of fictional nuances of its implementation (Kovtun, 2013).

By the 2000s, “ontologically oriented” literary studies, basically distancing themselves from the ideological and sociological range of problems, emphasizing the interest to the “naked man”, the man as a particle of natural existence, designed to become not the master, but the “voice” of the surrounding world, are brought to the forefront. Gradually, the “ontological” approach is contaminated with the analysis of religious orientations in the authors’ texts; the important observations were made in terms of impact on the historical philosophy, aesthetics of traditionalism ideology and mythology of the Old Believers (Kovtun, 2009).

The latest research strategies presented in the monograph include “confessional autobiographism”, within which the studies by A. Bolshev (Bolshev, 2005), A. Martazanov (Martazanov, 2006) and partly R. Tempest are carried out. They seek to explain a number of artistic features of traditionalist literature (rhetorical devices, the specific features of gender relations, the particular qualities of the character), resorting to the principle of transfer, tested in the works by A. Zholkovsky. Literary scholars use psychological tools to shed light on “the underwater part of the iceberg of the author’ personality”, considering the texts with the “inner man”, and the orientation to confession

becomes dominant. The topicality of the chosen approach is proved by the tragic element of historical situation, in which the formation of “village prose” took place; when the personality experienced the unprecedented pressure of inhuman circumstances, an attempt to escape into the world of beautiful “harmony” was a variant for self-rescue.

The monograph under review occupies its own niche in the contemporary range of diverse approaches, methods and judgments made about the literature of traditionalism. The book does not claim to create a final picture, but the very fact of its appearance is the evidence of actualizing interest to mythology, poetics and sociology of the literary movement. The appeal to the study of literary traditionalism in the context of the 21st century prose gives an opportunity to conceptualize the history of this literary movement formation and development; to describe the models of various literary epochs’ attitude to tradition, their relevance for the characteristics of the literary period, to demonstrate the attitude to the traditional values in the literature at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries (re[de]construction of the concept of “tradition” in the era of globalization).

The monograph presents the genesis of the traditionalist prose formation: from the literature about the village of the 19th century – through *pochvennichestvo* and “peasant” poetry of the turn of the centuries – to the “village prose” of the second half of the 20th century and its evolution into neo-traditionalism. The book includes 4 sections, they relate to each other chronologically and ideologically. In the first one “**Axiology of Traditionalism in the Context of the Literature of the 19th – Mid-20th Centuries**” the traditionalist prose is viewed in the retrospect of Russian and Soviet classics, special attention is paid to the origins of contemporary traditionalism. The second section, “**Typology**

and Phenomenology of Traditionalist Authors' Works" emphasizes mythopoetic approach, the works that allow studying the works of iconic authors (V. Shukshin, V. Rasputin, E. Nosov and V. Astafyev) through the prism of transnational and transcultural universals are of particular significance.

Section **"Ideology and Poetics of Contemporary Traditionalism"** is devoted to comprehension of the latest trends of traditionalism, as well as to the study of theoretical propositions of this literary movement. It is of interest due to its focus on the "new realists" as the successors of classical traditionalism, and its appeal to the experience of work with the tradition on the stage of contemporary theater. The monograph is finalized with the fourth section **"Traditionalist Writers in the Mirror of Literary Criticism and Comparative Studies"**, which demonstrates the process of changes in the reader's expectations, when the strategy of dialogue is preferred to the authoritative word of the author-prophet. The specific features of traditionalism perception in

the East and West are studied as well, allowing to analyze the issue of the Russian traditionalism reception in the European cultural community: postulation of the right perception orientations and evaluation of the traditionalist Russian text, its translation and forms of dissemination.

The controversial points of the monograph include dependence of the individual authors on the material under study and certain didacticism in representing their own research position. The book also lacks of study, allowing to compare Russian and European traditionalist literature, to demonstrate that we leave the era of globalism largely on similar grounds.

On the whole, the monograph **"Russian Traditionalism: History, Ideology, Poetics, Literary Reflection"** can be considered as an accomplished scientific work, particularly relevant in the light of the current situation of breaking cultural paradigm, end of the era of globalism and advancement of new manifestos and values, in one way or another oriented at the traditional values: inheriting them or engaging in controversy with the previous ideals.

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Проза современного традиционализма в зеркале актуального литературоведения (рецензия на монографию)

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В рецензии представлена только что вышедшая монография «Русский традиционализм: история, идеология, поэтика, литературная рефлексия» (М.: Флинта-Наука, 2016), посвященная одной из наиболее актуальных и дискуссионных проблем современной литературы и культуры в целом – проблеме генезиса, функционирования отечественного традиционализма, истоки которого восходят к так называемой «деревенской прозе». В книге анализируется преемственность аксиологии и идеологии, метафизики и натурфилософии, авторефлексии и коммуникативных установок, утопической проективности и поведенческих моделей. Традиционалистский тип художественного мышления раскрывается в его типологических характеристиках и индивидуальном своеобразии.

Ключевые слова: традиция, «деревенская проза», русский литературный традиционализм.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
