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The Truth of the Literary Past: (on the Issue of the Narrative Peculiarity in A. Solzhenitsyn's Epic 'The Red Wheel')

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The present article tackles the artistic method used by Solzhenitsyn in his work "The Red Wheel". The starting point for consideration is the writer's statement that this work of art is not an ordinary historical novel and it realizes totally exceptional artistic goals. The author of the article proposes to analyze some of Solzhenitsyn's theoretical explanations, which might have affected the specific character of the world presented in "The Red Wheel". The research of those explanations makes it possible to figure out certain parallels between the concept of artistic perception of Solzhenitsyn's world and classical reflections on the subject of tasks of literature and the role of an artist. An exceptional role in this system of literary values is played by the truth of literature understood as authentic historical evidence, and a writer who takes on the role of a historian and is aimed at finding the meaning of historical events.

Keywords: artistic method, vision of an artist, history in literature, truth.

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Research area: philology.

Introduction to the research problem

A. Solzhenitsyn's epic cycle of novels "The Red Wheel" received quite unenthusiastic critical acclaim among readers. Despite this, the author considered this work as the main task of his life, and the final parts of the epic as his most important achievement. It is known that the plot of the work originated in his youth, when, as a student of physics and mathematics, Solzhenitsyn decided to write a work about the Russian revolution.

In "Diary R-17" the author noted that the first literary drafts written at once in 1937 were included almost unchanged in the later composition of "The Red Wheel" (Solzhenitsyn, 2005, 11). This article will try to describe some of the specific features of the method of the historian Solzhenitsyn that are directly related to the peculiarities of his understanding of the perceptual capabilities of the writer. The article proposes a combined research approach that does not involve the analysis of only literary facts in the perspective of determining a type

of the represented world or a search for features peculiar to literary trends (Urmanov, 2014, 499-502). We will focus mainly on identifying the ethical, psychological and didactic prerequisites of the individual method of Solzhenitsyn.

“The Red Wheel” quite distinctly reveals the extraordinary understanding of the literary truth. Solzhenitsyn planned to show the distant past, revive the historical faces and describe in detail the situations of the past, as if they were played in front of the reader. This task went far beyond the usual historical novel, the plot of which is usually centred on a particular person or event. In Solzhenitsyn’s work it captured hundreds of characters and a variety of different events lining into many parallel storylines and sometimes forming a sum of separate events.

Methodological settings

Analyzing a method of reflecting the historical past in “The Red Wheel” it is necessary to get as close as possible to the time of resumption of work after a long break caused by the war, imprisonment and exile of the author. According to the observations of L. Saraskina the return to the interrupted work on the epic falls on March 9, 1969 (Saraskina, 2009, 621). So Solzhenitsyn began working on “The Red Wheel” immediately after editing “The Gulag Archipelago”. By the way, the author’s most important work on the theme of the Soviet camps was not considered completed at that time, since the writer and his aides had to archive the work and transfer it to the West. Thus, Solzhenitsyn getting to the work on “August 1914” was still in the heat of the archival work, and the experience with the unusual material, which became the basis of “The Gulag Archipelago”, remained fresh. Let us remember that it is contact with the authentic, direct evidence concerning specific historical events that allowed Solzhenitsyn to develop a special literary strategy, which was later reflected

in the genre determination of the “Archipelago”. “The Literary study” was possible thanks to the alternation of different approaches to the investigated material, a composition of different points of view. The narrator used both his own and others’ experiences, conducted archival research. However, the writer himself compared the technique used in “The Red Wheel” to the one that he had learned during the writings of “the encyclopaedia of camp life”. In 1976, responding to a question about the genre of the fragments of “The Red Wheel” published under the title “Lenin in Zurich”, Solzhenitsyn said that the most appropriate term determining the work would be “literary study” (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 346). This means that the history of the Russian Revolution was reconstructed by the same principle as “The Gulag Archipelago”. The author also commented on the goals that were pursued in his opus: “to restore history in its fullness, in its complexity” (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 346). Thus, both works were aimed at establishing the historical truth that was understood as the truth of the genuine evidence.

The issue of the literary method

It seems that over time the concept of the historical truth in the works of Solzhenitsyn has undergone modifications, and at the same time the technique of presenting the world has changed as well. We must remember that the work on “The Red Wheel” (after the new addressing to the abandoned plot) differed by a certain, almost feverish haste. In the atmosphere of expanding persecution of Solzhenitsyn and simultaneous strengthening of his fame abroad, the writer tried to put in order the collected material and to outline the core of the big cycle. The work was accompanied by dramatic changes in his personal life and the events opposite in spirit happening in his creative life. From our point of view, awarding the “Matryona’s Place” author with the

Nobel Prize is especially important. It caused a serious reflection of Solzhenitsyn on the role of a writer in the modern world. During the Nobel Prize award ceremony the winner was supposed to deliver a speech, and the Russian writer, even while remaining unsure of how he would be able to accept this award, thought this through and wrote the appropriate speech. It seems that the ideas from that speech of the writer could explain the technique of "The Red Wheel".

The author honoured with the international award recalling his experience thought about the power of literature and his own destiny. Quite naturally, he thought about his mission and boundaries of literary possibilities. From the written works there is a sharp sense of the limitations of the writer's talent, awareness of great responsibility for others. Thoughts of the writer are sometimes of a purely religious character and resemble the messianic concept of art. On the other hand, they show that exaggeration of an artistic potential is alien to Solzhenitsyn. A problem of the right of the artist to creativity is particularly important in this thinking: "One artist imagines himself as the creator of an independent spiritual world and takes on his shoulders the act of creation of this world, its population, the overarching responsibility for it – but then he breaks, for a mortal genius cannot bear such a load" (Solzhenitsyn, 1999, 530-531).

It is about creating a parallel world, and, therefore, the right of the artist to fiction. According to Solzhenitsyn, the art only reflects the creative possibilities only inherent in God. The most striking manifestation of them is nature – the world a human lives in. And a human can admire the perfection of nature around him. Admiration is the beginning of creation. In this connection, a real artist only imitates God, being, according to Solzhenitsyn, an apprentice in the workshop of the Creator (Solzhenitsyn, 1999, 531).

It is worth to emphasize the religious origins of this approach to creative work. The writer's words coincide with the religious understanding of art that is not confined to the limits of a particular confession. In our opinion, it is appropriate to compare the words of Solzhenitsyn, for instance, to the official position of the Catholic Church represented in the appeals of John Paul II. In the famous letter to the workers of culture in 1999 the Leader of the Roman church touched upon the same issue emphasizing that real creativity is inherent exclusively in God (John Paul II, Electronic resource).

Religious understanding of the origins of creativity does not mean, however, that a human should be limited only to imitation of nature. It seems that the task of the writer, as understood by Solzhenitsyn, is not to realistically convey traits of the presented world, but not to destroy the order of God's creation, not to tell deliberate lies. The Nobel Prize winner does not imply that the writer is always objective, but he knows how to acutely express the most important and the most difficult things for people, even something that causes heated debates. Brilliance of artistic activity consists in the directness of transmission of the truth. Literature is not a sum of theses that are confirmed or refuted by logical reasoning. This is rather a miracle of delivering vivid images of the human experience to the consciousness of the reader. Thus, the artistic activity requires not only talent, by which thoughts take an appropriate literary form, but also a unique impressionability. This evaluation of creative work resembles the view of L.N. Tolstoy captured in "What is art?", where the author emphasizes that the true artist does not imitate reality, but conveys the vivid human experience of being (Tolstoy, Electronic resource). Tolstoy calls the effect of such activity a "true art", which is pretty close to the concept of the truth by Solzhenitsyn. The analysis of the arguments on the subject of understanding the

truth will allow us to explain the uniqueness of the literary technique of the writer.

Writer's workshop

In a famous interview conducted by B. Pivot for the French television, Solzhenitsyn spoke in detail how he handled a historical material and organized editing of the written text (Solzhenitsyn, 1997, 174-175). He presented to a well-known journalist the technical side of his work. For example, he stressed how important it was for him to work with true documentary materials, historical press and personal recollections of the revolution witnesses. The writer clearly showed that technical and editorial work – handling and segregation of archival materials, rewriting and sorting of information – was only a part of the effort. The most exacting task, according to Solzhenitsyn, was to transform the past into the present, and this task required the need incredible sensitivity and a God-given ability to delve into the past and see the most important. But this super difficult problem was not confined to it, because the writer had to convey what he saw in the past and to make it so that everything was clear to the reader. The writer called the ability to convey to the reader the information corresponding to his cognitive abilities and relating to old events a “tunnel effect” (Solzhenitsyn 1996, 347). This definition is used by Solzhenitsyn repeatedly and is explained as a kind of intuition that is available to the artist, who using his experience is able not only to present the past, but also to project the past events that could have occurred, although there is no evidence that they actually took place. According to Solzhenitsyn, literary extrapolation has the unshakable strength and stands up by accuracy capable of replacing the original evidence.

In a conversation with Swiss students the writer stated that the artistic imagination can complement the guidelines of the historian-

scientist and added that he always was aware of his limitations that could lead to different inaccuracies in his versions of historical events (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 219). The writer also recognized that his main literary method was to compare his own experience with the famous documentary material, and to represent a complete scenario of events. At the same time, Solzhenitsyn made a reservation that the filling of gaps in the evidence with the help of the imagination did not mean permissiveness. The writer renounces all games with the past, the abuse of power of fiction. For him the work on the shortcomings of historical evidence should be based on responsibility, so he introduces the concept of “responsible conjecture” (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 212).

This does not mean that the version of history given by the writer is perfect, since there is always some possibility of a mistake. Nevertheless, it remains the most correct image of the past. In the next year in London and Madrid Solzhenitsyn convincingly pointed out that tunnel method remains the most effective way to understand the past: “the study of art is not only a substitute for the scientific research, but it also surpasses it in its capabilities” (Solzhenitsyn 1996, 461). Solzhenitsyn calls the ability to intuitively delve into the past “the eye of the artist” and “the vision of the artist” (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 346). It should be noted that the features of a mystical act are visible in the characteristics of the described method of the world modelling. Not every writer is willing to accept a unique gift of the artistic vision, because not everyone knows how to use it. Of course, a real talent, rich experience and pure impressionability are the traits that contribute to a peculiar feat of the writer: “There is the impression as if it is dark, and you peer into the darkness, over and over again... suddenly an arm becomes visible, then a shoulder and a head – and then something is slowly emerging out of the mist” (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 221).

Mystical understanding of the artistic vision is later softened and acquires a more real characteristic thanks to Solzhenitsyn's attention to historical details. The writer speaking of the supernatural abilities of the artist does not neglect the historical evidence. The author of "narration in measured terms" particularly stresses the importance of verification of his version of history from the side of the participants of the presented events. Therefore, Solzhenitsyn is proud that many assessments of the First World War veterans confirmed the rightness of the image presented in "The Red Wheel". Of course, it refers to the overall climate of the era, which the writer sought to restore in his cycle: in the Russian emigrant press my "August" was massively discussed mostly by military people who can rightly judge it, most of them say "so truly grasped, it was really so" (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 221).

Solzhenitsyn does not insist that his own version of the history accurately reflects all the facts, but stresses that for him the most important value in the work remains the truth. The writer does not provide a detailed interpretation of the literary understanding of the truth and the related question of mimesis that fascinated generations of the experts of art (Kieries, 2001, 162-164). The author of "The Red Wheel" did not recognize too modernized and hermetic understanding of creative activity, inclining, most likely, to the classical solutions to this issue. Solzhenitsyn filling the literary historic paintings with authentic characters and events is not limited by reflection of reality, but tries to enrich the history and bring it to the reader. So it seems that the position of Solzhenitsyn is closer to the classical understanding of Aristotle who believed that the world presented in a work of art should be seen not as a true reflection of extraliterary activity, but as a representation of it. Stagirite drew attention to the difference in the approach of a historian and a poet to the same material. This definition

is considered to be fundamental in subsequent centuries-old arguments over the relationship of fiction and history. In a classical quote Aristotle points out cardinal difference between a writer and a historian: "There a difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen" (Aristotle, Electronic resource).

It is significant that Solzhenitsyn in his metaliterary statements touches upon similar questions. He distinguishes two types of the narrative: the creation of fiction and focusing on the history, and tries to determine the relationship between them. For him, the work of a writer in relation to the work of a historian is more efficient and economical. Besides, the writer offers a great freedom in the choice of material as an advantage of the literary approach: a historian uses only documentary materials, a significant part of which is destroyed, so he is limited in possibilities of the insight into the events.

Thus, the artist can not only use his extraordinary abilities to present the events, to which it is impossible to get through the analysis of historical documents, but also – and this is the uniqueness of the theory of the author – has the right to consider his imagination as a source of historical knowledge. Therefore, Solzhenitsyn almost equates the truth of a literary work with genuine historical evidence. The peculiarity of this approach is in its plasticity, since the image of the past presented in literature can be shown from many points of view and, consequently, the threat of subjectivity paradoxically decreases. The writer notes, "many questions <...> cannot be answered except by the artwork" (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 349-350).

The vision of the artist in "The Red Wheel" understood as a literary study primarily aims to recreate the unverifiable past. Solzhenitsyn says, "I write as an artist, but I have in mind the purpose of restoration of the historical truth" (Solzhenitsyn, 1996, 346). The writer stresses

that in the course of such efforts the historical truth is not created, but is recreated. In fact, the task of the writer is not just to follow the facts, but to know the motivation of historical figures, to understand the significance of the events that are often distorted or limited by the official historiography.

Conclusions

Artistic vision in Solzhenitsyn's "The Red Wheel" should be considered as a concept bearing a lot of ideas and entailing different consequences in the field of narrative,

representation of the worldview. This principle makes it possible to enrich the plot with the new events, but at the same time, to arrange the composition of a literary work, to determine the relationship between the historical reality, the narrative about the past and the literary fiction. The highest authority is always the artist himself – a gifted apprentice of God with a special talent. Such a writer knows all the circumstances of the literary work process, takes into account the cognitive abilities of readers and remembers the special role of literature in the lives of the people.

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Правда литературного прошлого (к вопросу о специфике наррации в эпосе А. Солженицына «Красное колесо»)

Моника Сидор

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Статья направлена на выявление художественного метода, использованного Солженицыным в произведении «Красное колесо». Исходя из того, что Солженицын не считал свой цикл обычным историческим романом и ставил перед ним особенные цели, автор статьи предлагает проанализировать некоторые теоретические высказывания писателя, которые могли повлиять на специфику мира, представленного в «Красном колесе». Исследование некоторых установок Солженицына позволяет увидеть в его художественной рецепции мира черты сходные с классическими рассуждениями на тему задач литературы и роли художника. Особенное значение в этой своеобразной системе литературных ценностей занимают: правда литературы, понимаемая как подлинное историческое свидетельство и писатель, принимающий на себя роль историка, нацелен на установление смысла исторических событий.

Ключевые слова: художественный метод, видение художника, история в литературе, правда.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
