

Teaching the Course “History of Russian Literature” to Journalism Students: Theory and Poetics

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Abstract

The article deals with theoretical and poetological aspects of teaching the discipline "History of Russian Literature" to students enrolled in a bachelor degree in "Journalism". The author draws on his own experience of teaching the discipline at the Faculty of Journalism at St. Petersburg State University (Russia). In the area of methods of teaching the general subjects, an approach to teaching literature is sufficiently developed for students studying philology at the university. Meanwhile, today communication science serves as one of the fastest growing areas of scientific knowledge and the sphere of popular practice. However the question of the methods of teaching the history of literature to numerous students studying the communicative science is still not seriously raised. From theoretical point of view, it is not equally important to introduce vast and diverse picture of the literary process in different periods to journalism students, as to philology students. The main task is to teach students how to read and understand literary texts in their correlation with the extra-literary line. In this case the specific character of the literary context and creative manner is more fully revealed through demonstration of the impact of different factors: political, social, common cultural - on the literary process as a whole and individual poetics in particular. In addition, in the teaching process it is necessary to solve such problems as teaching students to use the results of literary analysis of a literary text for learning algorithms of text creation and creating individual media products. The purpose of this article is to actualize literary material in the way of analysis of some examples of general and individual poetics of the literature of 1920 - 1930-s.

Keywords: history of literature, teaching literature, poetics

1. Introduction

The course "History of Russian Literature" to future journalists is extremely difficult. The first reason is the absolute discrepancy of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of classroom hours, provided by the relevant educational standards, volume and didactic possibilities of historical and literary material. The second reason is connected with the specifics of the student audience, which is influenced by a number of circumstances that consider this subject peripheral having only indirect relation to the studied field. Meanwhile, in spite of the ongoing reduction of literature centralism in such logocentric country as Russia, traditionally it is fiction that underlies the formation of the national picture of the world.

The model of a graduate of journalism faculty should include a broad liberal arts education that determines his ability to quickly understand the variety of issues and fields. The danger of such extensiveness is associated with superficialism, lack of depth. The study of literature is intended to deepen the understanding of the world. For journalism students, unlike philology students, it is more important not to describe bulk and diverse picture of the literary process in different periods, but to teach them the rules of reading and understanding literary texts, to give the appropriate code, and it is a task of hermeneutical character. If "Literary Theory" and a number of other professional disciplines are taught separately to philologists, in connection with the reduction of academic hours, the cycle of literary disciplines for journalists is presented today only by "History of Russian Literature" and "History of Foreign Literature." This implies the need for theorizing and updating the history of literature.

Literature and Journalism, existing as a single informational and publishing complex during XVIII - XIX centuries, began to diverge at the turn of XIX - XX centuries. However, in the Soviet era literature again moved closer to journalism functionally. This article will present some key positions, summarizing part of the lecture course on "History of Russian Literature," read by the author at the "Higher School of Journalism and Mass Communication" Institute of St. Petersburg State University (Russia). The chronological framework is related to the specific historical and literary period of the 20-30s of the XX century, that is the era of the formation of a new state of experimental type - the USSR.

2. Literature Review

In recent studies, a new cultural paradigm, actively formed at the turn of the 1920-1930s, is persistently interpreted as quite traditional: it has classic / archaic mythological character (Gunther, 2010; McCannon, 2003). At the same time, according to Boris Groys, "turn to the Socialist Realism was a part of an integrated development of the European avant-garde in those years. It has parallels not only in the art of Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany, but also in the French neoclassicism, painting of American regionalism, in the traditionalist and politically engaged British, American and French prose of that time, historicizing architecture, political and advertising poster <...> etc." (Groys, 1993). Western Slavists regularly turn to the study of various practices of Soviet totalitarianism. They are mainly interested in the experience of manipulating the mass consciousness at the way of using deeply traditionalist patterns (Rolf, 2006). Naturally, this traditionalism, brought to life by the need to control the consciousness of an unprecedented mass audience, resulted in reduction of the complexity and contradictions of the world picture (Bynum, 2013).

Mass literature, which was so successfully developing in the context of the Soviet era, formed a completely new type of a writer and the communicative field itself. "The concept of mass literature is a sociological concept", claimed Yu.M Lotman. (Lotman, 1993).

3. Methodology

As early as in 1915 the classic of formal school of literary criticism B.M. Eichenbaum fairly spoke about the lack of distinct methodological criteria of pre-university study of literature: "Discussion is centered <...> on the issue of *teaching* or *teaching methods*, as if the question of the *studying* literature, i.e. about the *basis of its studying*, has been solved <...> with certainty. <...> The principles of studying literature in high school have not been clarified at all" (Eichenbaum, 2003). This thesis is fully applicable to the university teaching of literature, especially at non-philological faculties. Methods of teaching should be based on the approximation of the literary text to the student: through an appeal to his experience, the empirical realities, social realm. Naturally, in the course of development of the discipline the emphasis is put on humanitarian knowledge gained in the high school - knowledge of literature, Russian language, history, social science, cultural studies, stylistics and so on. The approach formed on the basis of teaching experience is reflected in the presented article.

Mass literature as such is fundamentally based on the use of standard genre and style forms on the background of the reduction of individual style. But it should not be thought that it is totally primitive and not individualized. Individual style is able to find expression in the context of mass culture. The Soviet period tried to raise the level of people to cultural and scientific levels purposefully and effectively in many respects.

4. Results

Dramatic collapse of sociopolitical formation caused by the revolution of 1917 fully reflected on the transformation of the literature. Gradually, the government takes full control of the literature. Never - neither before the Soviet period, nor after it - the literature had played so significant role in educating society. In the year of the USSR formation (1922), the major critic and inspirer of the "Pereval" literary group A.K. Voronsky was one of the first to introduce the term "Soviet literature". The main purpose of the new literature was to be of social benefit. Conceptual foundations of bringing forward the pragmatic aspect of "literary production" as an absolutely dominant approach were laid by Lenin, assigned the utilitarian propaganda purposes to the culture. In fact, during the Soviet era the problem of creating a state literature, aimed at implementation of the state order, was set and solved. Such purposes are periodically explicated in different periods of history (from the ideas of Plato's dialogue "The State" to the new ideological trends).

The impact of divergent trends (cultural heritage of the preceding era, a new generation of writers who came to literature, unifying cultural policy of the state) explains the multi-layered nature and semantic volume of the literature of the 1920s, appearing as one of the most striking and original periods in the history of Russian literature. However, at the same time (especially noticeable after 1925), the trend towards the creation of the state literature gained momentum.

The most obvious landmark in the period under consideration including the 1920 - 1930s is determined by the First Congress of Soviet Writers organized in 1934, which finally abolished numerous literary groupings of the early 1920s (Sheshukov, 2013). At this congress final consolidation of the requirements and principles of the basic method of Soviet literature and criticism takes place, i.e. socialist realism. 1932 is marked with the approval by the Congress Organizing Committee and the introduction of the term "socialist realism", inspired under the participation of Stalin. In the Charter of the Union, socialist realism was determined in the way of requiring the artist to give a truthful, historically concrete

depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. It was emphasized that this requirement should be combined with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism (Mezhdunarodnoye molotom i nakovalney, 2011). However, the term "socialist realism" has still remained "encrypted term" because of its extreme vagueness (such uncertainty simplified the actions of the repressive apparatus against abjurors from dogma).

The 1930s is a unique period in the history of Russian literature, as this was the time of unprecedented uplift of mass literature. The exclusivity of the situation was also in the fact that such uplift was artificially modeled and was a direct consequence of the implementation of the social order.

In 1930 an unprecedented social and cultural campaign was conducted. At this time, the most massive literary organizations "Russian Association of Proletarian Writers" and "All-Russian Society of Peasant Writers" decided to appeal shockworkers in literature. Literary activity of the workers and farmers (reminded of Rabselkor movement, i.e. working-class and rural correspondents' movement) actively sanctioned by the state, became almost mandatory, because it was interpreted as an integral part of the production process.

4.1 Common features of the poetics of Soviet literature in the 1920- 930ss

In the history of literature, poetry, periods of prose domination alternates with periods of prose domination. In contrast to the poetic era of the century beginning, the 1920s is the era of strongly marked prosaic. Let us try to classify the prose of the 1920s.

- 1) Attempts to create Russian narrative prose were made, which was caused by the appearance of an entirely new mass reader interested primarily in thrilling subjects. An order for "Red Pinkerton" (version of "James Bond" of the early XX century) and orientation to R. Stevenson should be considered in this context. In the 1924 – 1925s Marietta Shaginyan under a pen-name Jim Dollar published agitation and adventurous trilogy "Mess-Mend" about the workers' struggle for their rights in the world. Ilya Ehrenburg, who lived at the beginning of the 1920s abroad, wrote an adventurous picaresque novel, which brought him European fame - "The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito and his Disciples" (published in Berlin in 1922, later the novel was banned in the Soviet Union), and KGB serviceman's novel "Life and Death of Nicholai Kurbov" (1923, also drew criticism in the ideology-driven journal "Na postu"). Meanwhile, the samples of narrative prose are, of course, related primarily to the Western European tradition.
- 2) Sophisticated forms of narrative were developed. Firstly, it is ornamental prose, which is the introduction of techniques of poetry in prose. This kind of sophisticated lyrical narrative was developed by Andrei Bely, E. Zamyatin, A. Remizov, B. Pilyak and others. Secondly, genre-stylistic form of the tale was actively used, referring to the classical tradition, to be exact – to the prose of N. Leskov. Tale is a special form of narrative, assuming the narrator's support to someone else's speech and reproducing the "live speech presentation and speech emotions" (Eichenbaum, 1986). The master of tale was Mikhail Zoshchenko (Murphy, 1981).
- 3) The topicality of artistic journalism, documentary and fiction prose was caused by the turmoil that took place in the country ("Untimely Thoughts" by M. Gorky, banned in the USSR "Cursed Days" by I. Bunin). In the early 1920s there was a massive departure of cultural and scientific intellectuals of the country, known as the first of three large waves of Russian emigration of the XX century. The first wave of emigration that settled mainly in Paris, Berlin and Prague set the task to preserve cultural continuity, including the reconstruction of the Russian Silver Age.
- 4) Construction of the new state required the creation of its own mythology, legitimizing its sacred and secular status. Hence, there was the order for "red Leo Tolstoy", for the epic canvas. The most famous novels included epic trilogy "The Road to Calvary" (1922 - 1941) by A. Tolstoy, the novels "Quiet Flows the Don" (1928 – 1940) and "Virgin Soil Upturned" (1932 – 1959) by M. Sholokhov, A. Gorky's final novel "Life of Klim Samgin (Forty Years)" (1925 – 1936), for the first two parts of which Gorky was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1928. In the cultural memory Sholokhov's "Quiet Flows the Don" was imprinted as the main epic of that era, which reflects best its scale and contradictions.
- 5) It was a heyday of satire and antiutopia. The heyday of antiutopia in the world literature of the XX century is explained by the reaction to the totalitarian regimes that suppressed individuality. In the transition stages of society life, the meaning of "back", laughter culture increases manifold. It helps to move away from old forms of cultural practices, perceived as old-fashioned, and to approve new social and cultural forms. The public space of the 1920s, and even the beginning of the 1930s, was full of different carnival campaigns. It included public trials of literary heroes, "OBERIUT" theatrical performances (the most well-known of their performance in 1927 was "Three left hours"), the carnival of books. Accordingly, the the 1920s were marked by the heyday

of the Soviet satire. Such classics as: V. Mayakovsky, M. Bulgakov, I. Ilf and Ye. Petrov, M. Zoshchenko, wrote in various satirical genres

4.2 Genre-stylistic dominants of literature of 1920 – 1930-s

In the terms of genres the 1920s were marked by genre regrouping, where the boundaries between them were vague (Schaeffer, 2010). By the turn of 1920 - 1930s the relation of poetry and prose begins to level off, and the 1930s are marked by the dominance of poetry, as non-professional writers tend primarily to the poetic creativity. Poetic material was strongly influenced by prose, which lead to the phenomenon of Soviet journalistic poetry. Since the 1930s the leading position among large prose genre forms completely belonged to the novel (Clark, 1981); among small prose genre forms - to different "production" essays. Essay was realized as a syncretic, artistic and journalistic kind of fiction. In the context of the socialist-realist poetics of the 1930-s genre designation - "story", "essay", "narrative" - acted as fully interchangeable as they had in common the shared documentary basis. In other words, the essay genre reflected the special status of the literature of socialist realism as one of the leading social institutions.

In the 1930s, literary journalism brought a new type of the hero; these were "heroes of Bolshevik tempo", "noble people of the Soviet Union", and finally, "the women at the fronts of the five-year plan". Genre and thematic specialization and common-documented journalistic character of the literary process of the 1930s were quite obvious, that came into conflict with a fundamental property of the literature, which was a special kind of art like convention and defamiliarization (Shklovskiy, 1990).

At the stage of socialist realism the individual was substituted by the social, known in the culture as the Soviet classicism. At the turn of the 1990s the critic E. Sergeev wrote: "Socialist realism is characterized by strict hierarchy of genres <...>; strict thematic hierarchy <...>; the conflict between the duty and feeling, where the duty always prevails; one-dimensionality of the characters, which is the mouthpiece of ideas; <...> unity of action <...>; often unity of place <...>. But all these are distinctive features of classicism" (Sergeev, 1990).

The process of organization of the literary process by the state was accompanied by the orientation on the common availability of ideologically "correct" literary works. They were published in a huge mass circulation, staged, broadcasted on the radio. The downside was the taboo for "harmful" texts and the action of repression mechanism against their authors. Thus, in the 1930s contradictory situation was formed: on the one hand, it was extremely providing an inducement to the literary work, on the other hand, it subjected the creative individuality to the most powerful annihilation

5. Discussion

Along with the desire to "raise Pushkins" implementing mythologem that "Pushkin is our everything", the mass poetry of 1920 - 1930-s actively rehashed, first of all, B. Pasternak and V. Mayakovsky (Gasparov, 2000).

Significant number of poetic texts varies rhythmic and phrasal patterns of Pasternak. Thus, a collection of pocket and brochure volume, published by ten thousandth circulation - "Stihi o metro. Collection of litkruzhkovtsev of Metrostroj" (M., 1935) - consisted of poems by the poets who built metro, which is not surprising if we take into account further cultivated aesthetics of the Moscow metro. The exposition of the collection verses by G. Kostrov, including - "Masters". This text is written in alternating two and three-foot line of five-foot line anapest and refers to the general rhythmic pattern of Pasternak's poem "The Year 1905" (Dev'yatsot pyaty god):

*Ni potoki vody,
Ni porody sploshnye pregrady
Ne sderzhali napora
Borboi vdokhnovenykh lyudei.
I stoyuat pod zemleyu
Dela i postupki brigady
Izvyaniem mechty,
Voploshchenem vysokikh idei.*

*I stoyuat pod zemleyu
Prostornye svetlye zaly,
Potolki v perelivakh
Sovsem nezemnoi sinevy!*

*Eto – gordost strany,
Eto – luchshie v mire volzaly
Dlya trudyashchikhsya mira,
Dlya trudyashchikhsya nashei Moskvyy!*

*I vtoruyu postroim!
I v tonnelyakh ne budet izyanov!
Svody vyderzhat smelo
Lyuboe davlenie plastov.
Ved na stroiku pridut
Molodoi brigadier Emelyanov.
I Marusya Ageeva,
I zabotlivyi Zhenya Sinkov. [In Russian] (Stihi o metro, 1935).*

Lyrical epic of the poem is achieved through the clear and simple composition typical of songs (three cited stanzas constitute the second part of this architectonic verse), as well as the iconic formulas of high (civil / philosophical) lyrics, forming a universal model of the world. The poetic modeling of poems in the 1930s is clearly presented in a simplified form as it neglects figurative assimilation. Moreover, if the word is used in a figurative sense, for example, as a metaphor, it easily loses connection with its values and approaches to catachresis (in this case, this construction is "stoyat dela i postupki" ("the things and deeds are standing")). Quite original final of the poem is connected with the fact that opening metaphysical picture of metro is replaced by the construction details of strictly private, personal nature, emphasized by the intonation as a kind of chorus, covering the last couplet.

This unique collection organically combines high poetry and mass, that is not only of the auditorium, but also of the authors, was not unnoticed by the critic O. Mandelstam. In the review of this collection of poems Mandelstam wrote: "Stihi o metro are chosen with love, internally knitted and are at the same level of execution. Separate lines and verses stand out especially above this level, but the reader still has the impression that the collection was written by one author, but in different manners. (Most clear poetic personality belongs to comrade Kostrov). Theme of the book is organizing enthusiasm, the scope of work <...>. A lyrical hero of the poem is, in fact, the team, rather than the individual" (Mandelstam, 1994). One of the largest poem experts, a native of Russia, who spent almost all his life in emigration K. Taranovskiy, having reprinted another piece of this review in his book "Essays on the poetry of O. Mandelstam", acutely noted: "There is typical Mandelstam in these words" (Taranovskiy, 2000).

6. Conclusion

In the context of deep connection of the officious Soviet literature with specific traditionalism and declarative break with the evolutionary development of cultural tradition, a certain mechanism of succession continued (often – in the marginalized manner, sometimes by a backbone method) to implement itself. As can be seen, the representative of the cultural elite O. Mandelstam evaluated and gave a start to the representative of an entirely different cultural and social stratum, i.e. to the non-professional poet, a metro-builder. In other words, during the Soviet time there was a merging of high and mass literature.

Not only literature of "first-line", but even Soviet mass literature - with all its officiousness, commitment and primitiveness - was not deprived of individual traits. It is valuable, of course, not so much from the aesthetic point of view, but as successful experience of mass familiarization to the culture. Such inculturation occurred in the 1920s on the basis of interest and storyline, and in the 1930s - on the way of pragmatization: widespread use of production and technical themes and the glorification of labor. The result was the formation of a new type of cultural and historical personality – a "Soviet person", "homo soveticus", by definition of Russian social and philosophical novelist A.A. Zinovev (Zinovev, 2011).

The prospect of further research in this field, as well as its practical implementation is in the convergence of sciences (literature and communication studies), a greater degree of interdisciplinary.

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