

Expressionist Motives in the Work of Yuri Mamleev

Ella Radaeva

Department of Russian, foreign literature and methods of teaching literature, Samara State Social and Pedagogical University, Samara, Russia
Corresponding author. Email:radella@rambler.ru

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the elements of expressionist poetics in the works of Yuri Mamleev, a Russian writer of the 20th century. The author mainly considers the novel “Rogue bears” as well as several short stories from the 1960s and 1980s. The author of the article holds the idea that expressionism, which disappeared in the 20s of the last century, really had an impact on subsequent literature, in particular, on Russian literature; although a direct mention of this by literary scholars in the context of an analysis of the work of the authors of the second half of the 20th century is extremely rare. Expressionist poetics is studied in the works of the above author at the level of plot and artistic techniques. This research work, in general, is devoted to the question of the relationship between Man and Culture, touches on the problem of language and tradition as cultural universals of society.

Keywords: *Yuri Mamleev, expressionism, “Rogue bears”, “Pit”, “Carol”*

1. INTRODUCTION

Yuri Vitalievich Mamleev (1931-2015), writer, poet and philosopher, is the founder of the genre of “metaphysical realism” [1]; some researchers claim that this is “one example of a radical postmodern philosophy” [2]. However, this study sets the task of detecting expressionist poetics in Russian literature of the second half of the 20th century, in this case, in a number of Mamleev’s works. It should be noted that the expressionist worldview a priori does not contradict the poetics of modern, postmodern, “metaphysical” prose, because primordial expressionism “did not begin with manifestos and declarations, from one center; it began spontaneously and in different places, with bright and bold artistic practice” [3]. All the works of Yu. Mamleev and especially his novel “Rogue bears” is one of the brightest examples of this “impudent artistic practice”, because, according to the author, “the novel was created deep underground... Publication of the novel in the USSR was impossible” [4], and even the American publishing house sentenced the writer's creation: “The world is not ready for this book” [4]. The research direction we have chosen seems relevant for two reasons: it is undeniable that expressionism has left a deep mark in contemporary art and continues to affect it; interest in the work of Yuri Mamleev has been growing in literary criticism since the beginning of the 21st century, but it has never been viewed through the prism of expressionism, while the presence of its style features in the prose of this writer is obvious to the author of the article.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. *Selecting a template (heading 2)*

In this work, a systemic-cultural approach is used, which attracts various fields of science to research, one way or another, illuminating the concept of the world and man: philosophy, art history, philology. In addition, we resort to the philological analysis of the text and to the method of quantitative analysis, revealing in the works under consideration the most frequency elements of style (here - expressionism). There is also a contextual analysis in the study of a linguistic unit in the context of the spiritual atmosphere of society, a world of ideas that characterizes it, and is implicitly present in the novel “Rogue bears”. We rely on the immanent approach to the “standards” of expressionism; “This approach sees expressionism as a phenomenon of concentrated release of the expressive (expressive) properties that were originally inherent in artistic creation, and from time to time spontaneously takes on an explosive character. From this point of view, expressionism can be found both in Leonardo da Vinci and in antiquity...” [3]. This view goes “along with the traditional ... understanding of expressionism as a historically determined complex system of certain ideological and creative principles” [3]. However, this view fits the author’s most creative act, which claimed in relation to the “Rogue bears” novel: “There are such depths of subtexts that are not even clear to me ... because it was written by the power of some kind of meditative-

irrational breakthrough - something went beyond me. I was horrified, I denied what I wrote" [5].

3. RESULTS

According to P.M. Toper, the expressionism system proceeds "from the idea of a direct, "shock" effect on the reader" [3], counts on "shocking the bourgeois." Such an effect undoubtedly has a novel by Yu.V. Mamleev's "Rogue bears" to this day, where the colors of the "dehydrated" world are thickened to the limit. At the very beginning, we get acquainted with the main character, Fyodor Sonnov, who is outlined schematically, which is also characteristic of the poetics of expressionism - pointedness, highlighting one or two features: we see only a huge belly and empty eyes. His face was "bluntly focused" and "directed toward the world", but there was no peace for him. Arriving on a train to a provincial town, Fedor kills a stranger with a knife in the stomach on the way from the station, asking him to smoke before. Then he, having laid the food stolen from the victim on the grass, begins to eat and, gently stroking the corpse on the cheek, tells him the story of his life, right up to the meeting of his parents. The country boy was not Sonnov's first victim, meanwhile, in the artistic world of the novel, the protagonist cannot be called a pathological serial killer: Fedor is trying to follow his dream; his dream is to see the soul leaving the body. Since he does not succeed, there are more and more victims. Sonnov, despite his isolation and severity, is warmly greeted wherever he appears. Sister Claudia is pleased with him; Claudia has an exorbitant libido and satisfies itself with everything and even living geese. The old woman, who feeds only on the blood of cats, warmly takes care of Fedor. Fedor is considered their man in the club of the "metaphysical" intelligentsia of Anna Barskaya, where they organize sessions of spiritualism and livelihoods; that is, any attempts to penetrate the other world, to experience the metaphysics of death. Fedor calmly, but with curiosity, meets his own death, when at the end of the novel he is sentenced to death for "murders from hooligan motives". Fedor Sonnov is a typical expressionist hero - a wanderer, a stranger. He feels like a stranger in this world, killing people who seem to him long dead. He only once abandons his plan when he sees Izvitsky hugging himself and kissing his reflection in the mirror; Fedor feels sorry to interrupt this greatest act of "self-love".

Each of the heroes of the novel is a bearer of a certain idea, a wanderer in search of his path to God in this "dehydrated" world. There are other heroes in the "Rogue bears" besides the above; for example, the teenager Petenka, whose degree of alienation reached the point that he could not eat anything from the outside world, he ate only his own acne, lichen and scabs, he cooked soup from them. This is the only moment in the "Rogue bears" that can be called fantastic. However, the brightest representative of expressionism F. Kafka in the novel

"The Metamorphosis" uses a fantastic moment only at the very beginning, when the hero turns into an insect, and then events develop according to the laws of realism; The Austrian writer portrayed life as a nightmare that could be dreamed in a dream. There is the same thing in "Rogue bears": Petenka soon dies, because it is impossible to live such food until old age, but he dies, eating himself, wanting to be sealed in himself to the absolute. The same desire - to be sealed - not to allow any particle to realize itself in the outside world - explains the hatred of the children of the demented Paul, who kills babies ready to be born in the bosom of his wife. It should be said that the theme of death, funeral processions, beloved by expressionist poets of the first decades of the 20th century, goes through the novel "Rogue bears": the corpse of a rural guy almost at the very beginning of the story, then the stillborn children of the spouses Pavel and Lidinka, who are buried by grandfather Kolya, then death Lidinka and her funeral, imaginary death and false funeral of the blessed old man "kurotrup", the funeral of Petenka, finally the shooting of the protagonist. Meanwhile, the novel remains crowded. Anna Barskaya's club is replenished with new members. It is known that "expressionism perceives the world as a "repository" of different ideas: it does not seek ambiguous symbols for establishing fragile connections between the phenomena of the world, but seeks simplification, a schematically-reduced expression of these ideas" [6]. We observe the same thing in the novel: "Izvitsky was obscure, drawing some figures with his hand. Remin was busy with his intricate relationship with the religion of the self; Anna cherished the intellectual witch in herself; and Padova again began to annoy the hints of the existence of Higher Beings"; Klavusha "spoke of the world as a whole, as a good hut flying upside down, firmly covered by her strong comprehensive mind" [7]. Here we observe another feature of expressionism, highlighted by L.G. Andreev: "Expressionism wanted to break all sorts of (including social) partitions between people, to find common ground for everyone in the sphere of spiritual and social life. "Not individual, but characteristic of all people, not separating, but uniting, not reality, but spirit", Kurt Pintus wrote in the preface to the anthology of "Twilight of Humanity" [8]. Despite the fact that each of the heroes is immersed in themselves, they are together, they want to share their "worlds" with each other and absorb the "world" of each other. Even if this does not happen, they constantly gather in a group, are next to each other. You should pay attention to this episode: "Tolya was angry at Klavenka's fence: "it would be nice to make a breach in her world ... And Tolya suddenly spat in his beer mug.

- You have to be Satan and the mouse! <...> With a mouse, in order to get used to inferiority and to defend ourselves in this way from the Higher, and to Pride, which obscures the light, so as not to die from longing, from the infringement of the "I" [7].

There are quite adequate, from the generally accepted point of view, people among the heroes of the novel

“Rogue bears”; however, their adequacy does not withstand clashes with the absurd world. Universal, Christian values are stilted, unviable. What was the worldview of the elderly Andrei Nikitich shortly before he decided that he had died and turned into a chicken?... “He sought to wash away, drown out his underlying fear of death and otherworldly love for God and life. With this love, he subconsciously wanted to transform the world in his mind, to make it less scary [7]. <...> He again became so weak by dinner that he wept. <...> “one must love, love people”, he repeated” [7]. Then he begins to behave like a chicken, and settles in the Klava's chicken coop. Only his son Alex remains adequate until the end of the novel; he continues to take care of him, to look for him when he suddenly disappears, and who, in the end, “went into ancient Christianity”. But before this, we clearly see the emblem of expressionism literally materialized at the end of the book - the picture of E. Munch “The Scream”: Alyosha Khristoforov screamingly leaves the “metaphysical” club, full of horror of what is happening in it. Nevertheless, Aleksey is only a minor character in the novel and his “normality” is lost among the rest. The author claims: “... these are not monsters, but ordinary people who simply went too far in their spiritual pursuits. <...> They, having not yet entered the ocean of the Spirit and not having begun spiritual research, lost their mind; they were swallowed by the darkness of the 20th century” [5]. Indeed, there are no socio-political issues in the “Rogue bears” novel, there are no concrete realities of Soviet Russia - according to the author, “the impetus was the world situation of the 20th century. <...> Many, at least in Moscow, have the impression that man as a spiritual being in this world is finished, that religion capitulated to the stench of the modern world, in which we saw only war, only violence ...” [5].

The expressionist worldview of the author is also reflected in the spatio-temporal paradigm of the work: the characteristics of prose researcher A. Platonov and I.V. Yugovoy are applicable in relation to the chronotope of the Mameleev's novel: “Everything here resembles a dream or terrible oblivion in which the shadow schemes move. Space is deprived of a clear vector orientation; it is expanding in all directions and is filled with emptiness in connection with a complete loss of orientation in the historical space of the era. Time “acquires” eternity due to the violation of relations between the past - present - future” [6]. Y. Mamleev writes: “The courtyard, fenced with a high fence and a house, was like an abandoned, decay-cozy little world” [7].

The poetics of expressionism at the level of artistic means is present in the novel “Rogue bears” in the form of neologisms, bizarre associations: “it is obscure to perceive the world”; “Klava intervened chubby”; “Pondered her flesh”; “Cringed with fear”, etc.

No less expressionist categories of time and space are manifested in Yu. Mamleev in works of a small genre. So, the story “Pit” (1966), reminiscent of Joyce's “stream of consciousness”, begins with the words: “Morning fell into

the quiet emptiness of the streets” [9]. The pit symbolizes the emptiness in the soul of the hero, where there is no place for anything but the “consciousness of death.” This emptiness is transferred to the category of the surrounding hero of the world - space, and time “falls” into this emptiness, like into a hole.

The world in the next story, “Parish” (1969), loses its contour in a completely expressionist spirit from the very beginning: “There were no dreams, no nightmares emanating from the flesh, no dull sense of death that does not exist, no fear turning inside out. Gregory simply knew that horror was coming” [10]. Here we can observe how the concepts of “nightmare” and “horror” are simultaneously assimilated and interpenetrated. However, we do not see these faces, despite the following explanation: “Everything supposedly remained in place: house-boxes, indifferent to their existence; the sun in the empty sky; trams. However, something has appeared in the world that relates only to Gregory. Therefore, the rest did not notice anything.” [10]. The style of expressionism affects the reception of the “frame” and editing; and all this is intended to reflect the confusion, shock of the hero, a small man, in a hostile world.

The title character of the story “Carol” (1985) lives in a hole. In fact, this is the same “pit” that gives its “tenant” some semblance of protection from the outside world. The reader is not given an explanation of which hole the protagonist lives in - this hole is “sketchy”. However, the hole is in New York. By the way, Carol “did not understand ... what century is now: the twentieth century or twenty-third” [11]. It is also unclear to the narrator himself why his hero's name is Carol. The etymology of this name is also vague: it is translated from the Old German as “queen” but can be interpreted as “man” (Karl). In our opinion, this circumstance indicates only that the hero is impersonal, he is deprived of certainty even from a nominative point of view. But this little man, deprived of the right to individuality, makes attempts to find some kind of contact with the world around him: “Carol sometimes crawled out of this hole. But what he saw strangled him. Dark, scary New York night. When he went outside, he realized that he was dead, cursed, immersed in fiery hell, like this all-knowing City of Dreams” [11].

Thus, the hero of Yu. Mamleev is typically expressionistic, and everywhere he experiences inescapable horror at the absurdity of the surrounding reality, wherever he is in Soviet Russia or in the USA. This circumstance should remove the accusation of Russophobia from Y. Mamleev, which he is mistakenly attributed to by some critics. His hero is a citizen of the world, but a world of the absurd and unknowable.

4. DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, Yu.V. Mamleev positions himself as the founder of “metaphysical realism.” He speaks of

“Rogue bears” that the reputation of a “black novel” has entrenched in the novel, and he often uses the term “surrealism” described [4]. There is no unanimous point of view on whether the writer’s heritage belongs to one direction or another in scientific works devoted to the works of Yu. Mamleev. So, N.N. Gasheva examines the existential orientations of Mamleev’s characters [12], E.I. Kulakovskaya and N.R. Udovenko see “new realism” in the novels of Yu. Mamleev [13], [14], N.A. Nagornaya explores the work of this bright representative of the third wave of Russian literary emigration in the mainstream of postmodernism [15]. Even with such a variety of views on the genre-stylistic specifics of Y. Mamleev’s prose, we see expressionism - the spirit of which does not in any way contradict any of the above concepts. According to P.M. Toper, because “there was no unity either in public views or in the aesthetic program” inside expressionism [3]. The author calls the novel “Rogue bears” also “very esoteric” [5] and this also meets the characteristic of expressionism as “a high degree of religiosity of expressionism in its ideal, disinterested expression, the spread of the formulas of cosmism, transcendence, mysticism” [3]. However, in our opinion, the main thing that should determine whether a literary work belongs to one or another artistic paradigm is the concept of a hero, the relationship between the world and a person, the author’s worldview, manifested in his choice, albeit unaccountable, of certain artistic means.

5. CONCLUSION

Each hero of Mamleev is the bearer of a certain idea. For example, “rogue bears”, which never goes into hibernation, but seeks God in a “dehydrated” world, in other words, their own spiritual path. These searches are devoted to the novel “Rogue bears”. A similar hero is present in the vast majority of stories. An expressionist ethic needs an apocalypse in order to bring the world to the brink, which will either reveal its new path to a person or fill the soul with darkness and despair. Expressionism lives for the sake of the final idea, and not for the sake of impression, therefore its heroes are doomed to solving superhuman problems incommensurable with their human capabilities [6]. In addition, as can be seen from the above, the poetics of expressionism is manifested in the prose of Yu. Mamleev not only from the point of view of the concept of the world and man, but also at the level of structural elements of the artistic form: organization of time and space, system of characters, plot, motifs and lexical means.

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