

"New Autobiography" Phenomenon in S. Dovlatov's Novel "The Zone"

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Abstract

The present paper analyzed problems of joint of biographical personality and the image of the author and studied concepts namely the "the image of the author", "autobiographical pact", "pseudo-documentalism", "autobiographism", and the "autopsychologism". Creating an entire composition from dozen of episodes (which were created as separate short stories), S. Dovlatov integrated them by fictional correspondence between the author and publisher where he interfered biographical facts as bases for his work, his attitude towards them, and thought about the literature and his situation in it. It was found that according to the pseudo-documentalism principle, the author created a document imitating the epistolary genre and achieved, thereby affected readers' confidence. The present paper proved that in the novel "The Zone" the author distanced himself from the main character allowing us to talk about a prevailing autopsychological principle regarding the autobiographical principle. Not authenticity of facts, but the assonance of main character's experience with author's own experience in the foreground. In the style of Dovlatov, there is the assonance of main character's experience with author's own experience in the foreground.

Keywords: Image of the author; Pseudo-documentalism; Autobiographism; Autopsychologism; S. Dovlatov.



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1. Introduction

In the postmodern literature, the play is significant both at form and content levels. In the former, the result is mixing and joint of genre structure, experiments at the level of vocabulary and syntax. In the latter, it means changing of correlation between the truth and fiction in the work. A century ago, the main asset of realism as a literary trend was the writer's use of reality in all its authenticity as the basis for constructing of a fictional world. Therefore, the fact has obtained a self-sacrificing value. Postmodern authors went further in their use of documentary introduction, namely on the way of intensifying the autobiographical component in their works, and creative rethinking about the fact of empirical existence of an artistic subject (the author). It raised for Russian and Western literary studies a question about the correlation between documentary and fiction in works with a pronounced author's character with the problem of searching the author in the work (precisely the differentiation of the biographical personality and the fictional figure) for many scientists.

2. Methodology

According to the purpose of the research, we used the qualitative research methods such as comparative and componential analysis as tools to investigate common characteristics and distinctive features of fictional literature and realistic one. Before conducting a review of theoretical works, it is worth noting that according to classical Russian literary studies, the author's theory was mainly based on the XIX century's literature, "fictional literature", according to [Afanasev \(2015\)](#). Nevertheless, postulated principles can be successfully applied in studies on the postmodern era.

According to [Akkuzova et al. \(2018\)](#), the author's attitude towards the topic (the author's position and modality) is the main index of the image of the author in a fictional work. At the content level, it is expressed through semantic dominants and features of a motivational structure. According to [Vinogradov](#), discovering characteristics of author's modality can be based on the title analysis, keywords, names and remarks in the composition.

[Ayupova et al. \(2017\)](#) considered the author of a work as a "subject (bearer) of mentality, whose expression is the whole work or total combination of them". As a criterion for determining the author's mentality in the text, [Ayupova et al. \(2017\)](#) distinguished the existence of different narrative points of view. The researcher presented clear examples of subject-speech organization of a literary work and distinguished the following forms of author's mentality: The immediate author; the author-narrator; the lyric character; and the role-playing character ([Bakhtin, 1961](#)).

M.M. Bakhtin distinguished the author speech and his speech in a composition and created such a way for the author's dialogue theory: «The speech of a representative (real) author is a speech of a principally special type and

cannot be in the same place with the speech of characters» (Battershill, 2012). The author defines the character as an independent person with self position and another person with self voice and speech. Therefore, the scientist concludes about the polyphony of work. M.M. Bakhtin singles out three author's hypostases: biographical; primary; and secondary. The apex of this hierarchy is the author's position which is embodied in the story-composition, spatio-temporal and genre structure of text. The selected form of narration is the basis (Chudakov, 1971).

Despite the fact that M.M. Bakhtin used V.V. Vinogradov's term, «the image of the author», with great reservations, the researcher, A.P. Tchudakov, distinguished points of two theories: acknowledgement of author's activity at the level of fictional world and self leading role in designing this world as a whole (Dovlatov *et al.*, 2001).

In the present research, the work of L.Y. Ginsburg, «About a literary character», was important and gave the theoretical justification for distinction of autobiographical and autopsychological components in compositions (Glad, 1992). According to Ginsburg, in autopsychological plan works, main characters solved the same life problems that the author solved by his own, and solved them in the same psychological forms. They did it about the same everyday conditions as conditions for the author» (Kemalov *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, the autopsychologism is treated as a direct (or mediated) introduction of the author's experience into the composition: both at problem and form levels included (if we use the terminology of M.M. Bakhtin) in both «hero's zone» and «author's zone» (Korman, 1972).

In a work by M.Y. Lotman titled «The structure of a fictional text», «author – narrator – work» relations were transformed into «point of view- text». According to the researcher, «each compositional method becomes semantic if it is included for the contradiction to a contrast system» (Korman, 1972), in other words, if a possibility to change the view within narratives arises. The literary critic draws analogies with the concept of angle in painting and cinema. The point of view is according to Lotman, the manifestation of the author's position. Considering the work by LaCapra (2001) "The Zone", (Llyod, 1986) observation is visually realized, and needs further discussion (Lotman, 1998), (Mashakova, 2010).

In the paper of the modern researcher (Mestgazi, 2008), the study considered the image of the author interconnected with the identification of form(s) of the author's presence in texts and also of the forms of author mentality. The scientist also argues that the image of the author “absorbs all meaning components that form the reader's understanding about the author's image of world and self position, attitude towards problems of work, and pragmatic setting” (Polivanov, 2010). Shirokova (2014) distinguishes two levels where the image of the author can be identified: surface and deep levels. The firmer assumes components of text where the author “directly” speaks to readers, not requiring any knowledge connected with extra-linguistic factors. Even explicit language facilities acquire a certain meaning only in the context at the deep level and require an interpretation. The researchers also note that even within a single work, the author can combine two, three and more types of narration in order to achieve self special artistic targets. In addition to the view angle of story, the stylistics of text can be changed along with the type of narration.

In the latest research by L.S. Yankovskaya, two boundary concepts are successfully differentiated and they are important for understanding art methods of prose authors in XX–XXI centuries, and in particular, S. Dovlatov: autobiographism and autopsychologism Shirokova (2014). Based on predecessors' academic works, the researcher indicates that the autobiografism as an artistic method is a factual basis (in one way or another, at the discretion of writer) of work in order to recreate the reality, impart a credibility to the fictional world which is not literally, but rather free interpreted by the artist. In this case, the artistic generalization is achieved from particular to general. Autopsychologism is, on the one hand, a similar phenomenon because the author uses his own experience, but, it is, on the other hand, an opposite phenomenon because the experience is not empirical rather than existential: character's experiences are author's ones.

It is important to consider the term “autobiographical pact” that was introduced to the literary discourse by the sociologist, F. Lejeune. According to work translators, the theoretician B. Dubinin, this term means “a pact that the author of narration concludes in the first lines of self-discription with an imaginary or a historical addressee during the self-introduction and explaining semantic task and literary optics of future book”. Applying for the autobiography, the concept is successfully used for the analysis of works of others genres. As mentioned earlier, a number of postmodern writers Shirokova (2014), (Vinogradov, 1936) built their works on the fiction and started playing with their readers an intellectual game, deliberately misleading them, and manipulating with «the horizon of reader's expectations».

Considering the issue about the correlation of a fact and fiction in a literary work, E.G. Mestergasi said: “The reality of XX century is to tell the truth about the most important task for a writer, and it is not always allowed to solve it by familiar artistic methods, but a document can often help” (Villalobos *et al.*, 2013). The researcher introduces the term “literature with the main documentary basis” as the fictional prose narrating about real events with the involvement of documentary evidence. E.G. Mestergasi specifies that as the documentary evidence, not only official documents can be understood in some cases, but literary processed records of oral stories, and non-fictional narrations of writers can be also understood; however, names of heroes of these stories can (at the discretion of author) be real or replaced for fictitious ones: “Every work in which a fact performs not only a service, but an independent esthetic function, is a work of a fictional reality”.

Along with the concept “documentalism”, the “pseudo-documentalism” concept is introduced into the scientific discourse. Therefore, A.S. Polivanov concluded that the pseudo-documentalism as an artistic principle was that “the authors, usually acting in the work under their own names, insist on the documentary reliability of narration and make it clear that their work is to be taken as a fiction”.

Various aspects of the interaction of documentary and artistic in the literary text structure have repeatedly become objects of study in writings of Kazan literary criticism.

3. Results and Discussion

The comparison of two aforementioned concepts makes their synonymy obvious. If a fact is presented as a fiction, the problem of its reliability/ unreliability arises (compare: documentalism/ pseudo-documentalism). We believe that, with the exception of those texts, in which the literal reliability of empiricism (not only love of truth) makes it fundamental, e.g. biography, chronicle etc., the direct correspondence of work to occurred events is not fundamentally important for understanding a fictional text. S. Dovlatov's statement in an interview about his comprehension of this artistic principle can be confirmed: "The fact is that the genre in which I, along with others, speak is such a pseudo-documentalism. When all formal features of documentary prose are observed, you make a documentary by artistic means" (Villalobos *et al.*, 2013). In this case, the pseudo-documentalism in Goodwin (1993) texts becomes a literary method for realization of autobiographism principles.

In the novel "The Zone", the narrative is based on an event of writer's biography (In 1961, S. Dovlatov was expelled from the philological department of Leningrad State University and drafted into the army and a prison camp guard in Komi Republic). Realities of army have become an occasion for writing stories. The author was faced with the task of creating an entire work from scattered fragments. Solving problems of composition, the author uses the method of pseudo-documentalism for imitating the epistolary genre: "we can encircle "The Zone" with a simple trick (inventing a soldier's letter of about 12 pages) and give it parts and stretch it for the whole book. In style of Hemingway's italics in the book "In Our Time", we can see something like "Compromise", namely the unity of place and character, passing from episode to episode. Plus fragments of a soldier's letter cement the whole dubious building; As Dovlatov said: I'm ready to do all this in two weeks" (Renov, 1989).

4. Summary

In the research process, it was decided to replace the letter with "correspondence" with the publisher. This made it possible to expand the fictional world of work with a retrospective point of view: in short stories, the lyric character is immersed in surrounding him the reality, but in the plug-in structure another voice exists, the voice of a mature author who can give an evaluation both on the past and presence. On the contrary to his autobiographical character, the author exists in the real world in which markers are names of historical personalities, and everyday details (mentioning of the wife, daughter). In opposition to the main "body" of work, a publicistic basis is strongly pronounced in plug-in structures. Despite this game with "the horizon of readers' expectations", we cannot use the same sign for S. Dovlatov and the author applying for the publisher. However, "letters" are results of purposeful intellectual activity of artist. The reader's knowledge about the biographical author complements to the image of the author and is indefensible from the total artistic nature of work, and is its most important component. S. Dovlatov deliberately splices the figure of the author-creator and the image of the author with the aim to create not the illusion, but the direct authenticity of picture in an attempt to minimize the distance between the literature and reality. In this regard, the image of the author is identified by the author's position.

Paying attention to stories, we can note another characteristic of S. Dovlatov's prose— lyricism. Constant reflection of the main character, which was interrupted by the narration and dialogues (he was not so much active) as contemplative position to current events, and intimate confessional tone of narration, allowed us to talk about the lyric hero of work. The distinguished feature of "The Zone" is the name of the main character. Opposed to other texts, where the main character has either the name of the author (Dovlatov) or an assonant one (Dolmatov), Alikhanov is the name of main hero in this text.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the author (in the novel "The Zone") distanced himself from the main character allowing us to talk about prevailing auto psychological principle regarding the autobiographical principle. Not authenticity of facts, but the assonance of main character's experience with author's experience was in the foreground. The work was based not only and not so much on the empirical experience.

Acknowledgements

The present research was conducted according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth at Kazan Federal University.

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