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Literarity in Texts by Historian: 19th Century Siberian Travelogues and Nationalism Discourse (the Case of P.I. Nebolsin)

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The article investigates the role of intertextual borrowings in the poetics of the mid-19th century Eastern travelogues, a sub-genre which had been vigorously cultivated by many authors involved in the basic strategy of Russian nationalistic discourse to present the multiple and diverse imperial territories as an integral and homogenous space. A number of obstacles on the way of this approach were created by the popular imaginative perception of vast Siberian peripheries as faraway lands, a distant and almost surreal world, exotic from both social and ethnographic points of view. In terms of poetics and semiotics, the primary objective of the author was to describe the "unknown" as "known" and "remote" as "close". Within the studied period, the feature of "recognition strategy" typical of travelogues as a genre (correlating them with topoi of classical Greek and Roman geographies) attained a distinct literary aspect. As an example the article analyzes "Notes on the Way from St.-Petersburg to Barnaul" by Pavel Nebolsin, published in 1849. Describing the everyday life of Siberians, Nebolsin introduced a number of intertextual allusions taken from oeuvres by Karamzin, Pushkin and Gogol. Eventually, the reader was offered to recognize Siberia more as "literature" rather than "geography". The forming Russian tradition of literary classics became a poetic tool of "imagining" the Eastern periphery as the continuation of the whole national world.

Keywords: *P.I. Nebolsin, nationalism, travelogue, literarity, motif, intertextuality*

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Research area: 10.00.00 – philology.

Introduction to the research problem

Travelling from Siberia to Sakhalin in the spring of the year 1890, A.P. Chekhov astutely associated historical conquering of the Russian East with the success of the national literature,

which could not boast of much popularity at that time. As he reached the Urals, Chekhov had already noticed that "*in those parts*" Mamin-Sibiryak "*was spoken of more, than Tolstoy*" (Chekhov, 2009, 71), which meant that the "local" was, to the writer's mind, more popular

than "generally Russian". By the Amur, the narrator reached ultimate alienation from the local environment, while it, in its turn, reached the peak of its separation from Russian culture. "...I feel something individual, non-Russian in everything. "...*how far removed life here is from Russia!... While I was sailing down the Amur I really felt I wasn't in Russia at all, but somewhere in Patagonia or Texas. Quite apart from the strange, un-Russian scenery, I constantly got the impression that our Russian way of life is completely alien to the old settlers on the Amur... and that we who come from Russia appear as foreigners*" (Chekhov, 1978, 42).

Theoretical grounds

Then again, if the development of the remote regions' cultural potential even seemed indefinite in its content and problematic as such (in his essays "From Siberia" Chekhov regretfully remarked: "*Though the demand for art is high here, God does not send artists to these places*" (Chekhov, 1978, 14)), then, basically, nothing could prevent the national lore which was located, in accordance with the Russian social process logic, almost exclusively in the capitals, from "imagining" the country's Eastern periphery with the well-established dictionary of their "native" motives and plots. Siberian "Patagonia" and "Texas" could integrate into the integrated Russian space not only in the rhetoric of a political declaration and / or within a series of military and economic deeds, but also due to the artistic language, when the transition of the forming classic tradition to the historical and cultural reality of the previously colonial world and currently developing national periphery began to play its special part. In this sense, the reader could have faced a renaming of some sort: being transferred from its regular chronotopos into a remote geographic venue, this or that well-known "Russian" story would make the circumstances, rules, conditions and

everyday life scenery look familiar. Something distant and alien turned close and homely due to the recognition, the mediating role in which was played by literary intertext. This tendency may be opposed to another strategy in the geocultural world of the 19th century Russian literature.

The authors of the most outstanding researches on the topic, Yu.M. Lotman and V.I. Tyupa, demonstrated significant semiotic intensification of the Siberian periphery concept, associatively and functionally linked with the motive of initiation, temporary capture of the protagonist in the underworld of the exile, suffering through ritual tortures, the pledge of the forthcoming "resurrection" (Lotman, 1997, 723-725; Tyupa, 2002). The nominative aspect of the plot revealed itself, for instance, in Yu.M. Lotman's example of the exile to Kostroma Governorate being referred to as "Siberian" by the Decembrist Age contemporaries (Lotman, 1988, 173). The repression fact itself was trivial due to its frequency, though the reference to the punishment locus was distinctively extraordinary and culturally significant as the title determined the function of the place and, vice versa, the purpose of the locus was recognized from the name.

Siberian travelogues: fiction vs. non-fiction

However, irrespectively to literary myth-making, the ideological mainstream of the 19th century was territorial integration of the imperial lands into the homogenizing national discourse (Remnev, 2004). An important role in the process was played by travelogues, a genre located on the borderline between fiction and science-like non-fiction. As long as the scientism of the text was closer to exotification (Siberian climate, nature, society with no manors of the nobility and simple peasants were characterized with their significant original features), fiction literature instruments

were mostly used to play the exactly opposite role, giving the reader an opportunity to find similarities with the Russia familiar to him, to *recognize* the familiar in something alien and remote. The fact of well-read Russian people's not knowing their own Motherland beyond the capitals had become a key-note of opinion journalism back in the times of Belinsky, who inspired writers to create "physiologies" of different territorial and social worlds (Odinokov, 1990, 173-174).

A special case of this true information vacuum was the absence of Russia guidebooks, analogies of popular Western printed *guides*. The lacuna was extremely significant: the small guidebooks gave the impression of "surrogated" travelogues; being the direct descendants of the ancient genres of periplus, periegeses, and itinerarium, they were also related to Russian genres of *putnik*, *dorozhnik*, and *skaska*. This problem was complained of by both foreign and Russian travellers. O. Finsch, the author of a large-scale work on the zoological expedition to Siberia in the year 1876, complained of the German scientists' being burdened by the excessive reserves of food they had packed due to the seeming absence of decent taverns along the way. The latter, however, were frequent, but the researchers had nowhere to learn about them: *"there are no guide books (like Norway guide by Bennett) which would point out or pay attention to the issues"* (Finsch, 1882, 9). Before Finsch, the same problem was mentioned by the protagonist of a small essay by P.I. Nebolsin (1817-1893), a Russian historian, traveller and a very original explorer of Siberia.

Having left Petersburg for Barnaul, meeting an experienced companion in a post carriage, he heard some annoyed complaints: even those territories located close to the capital turned out to be left out. *"For pity's sake! Who described it? And where? We have not a single "guide", and all the written information we find is also under*

doubt. No, I made up my mind not to believe a thing except for my own observations" (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 63, No.4, 220). Against the background of gaps even in the description of the nearby areas, Siberia looked like real *terra incognita*.

Anticipating the analysis of works issued from P.I. Nebolsin's pen, let us say a couple of words on the narrating strategy itself, aiming the reader at the recognition process. Of course, the 19th century writers were not pioneers in this. They modified the general concept of travelling to faraway lands, typical for European travel notes: one of them concerned the Moscow state, that since the 16th century had been a frequent object of literary and artistic reproductions by many European authors. So, in the eyes of Nicolae Milescu who, being on Russian service, was sent to China with diplomatic mission in 1675, Siberian taiga transformed into Erkinian woods (*"in Hellenic, "Erkinios ili", in Latin "Ercinios silva", which means, Erkinian woods"*), precious sable fur turned into the golden fleece, and the Ural range became Hyperborean mountains (Milescu, 1960, 40; 116; 37). A distinctive feature of such attributions is irresponsiveness of the author to the "voice" of the environment itself, which, without doubt, could provide him with names for all those realia. The author, acting in the name of some universal European mass of knowledge, presented himself as an intermediary connecting the old book terms with the "yet unnamed" object of the natural world. In keeping with M. Foucault, we are facing a phenomenon preceding the discoveries of rational thinking that replaced the search for similarities and symbolic analogues, typical of archaic forms of knowledge production, with a system of neutral classifying features (Foucault, 1994, 85-90). A perfect source for seeking the analogues is the classic of Greek and Roman land descriptions: the observed realia were nothing but the "echo" of such. It is curious that over the head of this

rational epoch that came up with new types of classifying unknown empirical units, such as tables, taxonomies, diagrams, the orientation on recognition manifested itself in the feature parts of the 19th century travelogue, where, instead of ancient geography samples, the reader was offered to "recognize" some well-known motives of national literature classics. Let us see some examples.

Siberian travelogues by P.I. Nebolsin

Nebolsin's intellectual and aesthetic "discovery" of Siberia happened within two genres and narration strategies: fiction-style sketches of his own trip (Nebolsin, 1849) and scientific studies on Yermak's conquest (Nebolsin, 1849a). This reference, both discursive and chronological (both texts refer to 1849) is no coincidental. Nebolsin was guided by both a rational purpose to eliminate the ignorance of the reading audience concerning the Eastern regions of the state¹, which was compulsory within the context of natural school, and by romantic longing for exotic. At the same time, being very remote from sentimentalism, he could not but consider the latest achievements of Russian lore: the general initiatives to be "closer" "to nature" and to "discard the foreign theories" (Nebolsin, 1849a, 71) were supported by the evident connection to Radishchev, both on the ideological and on the narrative² levels of his writings (not to mention the fact that the first part of the route is literal repetition of Radishchev's journey from Saint Petersburg to Moscow).

Not so long ago V.M. Zhivov demonstrated, how important for the historical and political purposes of social and territorial integration sentimental poetry was, though so alien to any sort of ideology (Zhivov, 2008). According to the scholar, sentimentalism could totally fulfill the requirements of national consolidation: historically determined differences of educational

and cultural backgrounds (consequences of the forced modernization of the Peter the Great) were gotten over by the integrity of cordial impulsions, capable of destructing all artificial hierarchies (Zhivov, 2008, 119; 122). Within this tendency, the problem of the huge empire's territorial non-uniformity could be solved in the same manner: "cordial" stories of Liza, Erast and their countless clones, created by the artistic lore, could be easily converted from social into geocultural aspect.

Here is the first example of intertextuality, placed into the geocultural aspect for the achievement of ideological goals. To the East from the Ob, the traveller stopped by a station owned by an elderly Siberian called Arkhip Sysoich, living with his wife and twenty year old daughter Glasha. Sysoich was nothing like Samson Vytin, old, stout and smart; while Glasha was just as courageous as Dunya from the story by Pushkin. The encounter of the protagonist with the Siberian station master and the conversation in which he told the voyager of the iniquities frequent in the life beyond the Urals are framed with two "sentimental" scenes, where Glasha plays the key role. At first, she kisses the stranger traveller, and then, after her father's stories, suggests that he stays *"for a day or two"* (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 64, No.6, 184), and later, that he runs away with her to the gold diggings where he was heading. The inverted Pushkin's plot is combined here with the Karamzin-style stylistics: Glasha, for whom the *"ugliest of the ugly"* fiancé had been chosen by her parents, says to the traveller who tolerated her flirt: *"Like stale bread, so cruel you are. But let Jesus be with you! Go... But tell me one thing... just one more thing. Will you ever remember this poor Glasha?"* (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 64, No.6, 184). The goal was reached: four years after the protagonist remembered the girl he had met in the middle of Siberia. *"Yes, there have been four years since that ordinary travelling adventure,*

but pretty Glasha is still on my mind" (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 64, No.6, 184).

The second example is a more sophisticated amalgam of motives, this time, adopted from Gogol, which is harder to identify as the evident intertextual dialogue from the previous example. Here we face more of a stylization, targeted at reviving the general atmosphere of the early Gogol's "Ukrainian" prose in the reader's mind. However, there was one factor which in Nebolsin's story was equal to that in Gogol's concept: the author of the travelogue demonstrates some "strange" events that happened on the exotic periphery. Though the things presented as true exotic by Gogol were presented by Nebolsin as "familiar", quasi-exotic, referencing the reader not as much to the unknown Siberian "Ukraine" as to the well-known poetics of "Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka". So, in the final chapters of "Notes on the Way from St.-Petersburg to Barnaul" we encounter the following episode.

At Voskresensky diggings, located deep in the Tomsk taiga, during Maslenitsa holiday the traveller met a man from Little Rus', Mikhailo Koval. Mikhailo himself is presented to the reader as, first of all, an old Ukrainian songs' performer. The folklore character of the image is a reference to Gogol's narrators from "Evenings...", from Rudy Panko to the *** church deacon Foma Grigoryevich and his grandfather. But Mikhailo himself is a character with a special story the narrator gets to know. Mikhailo married a girl called Parasko for love, and after a short while they had a daughter, Marusya, both parents doted upon. However, *"sometimes the mother, clasping the beloved daughter to her breast, was looking at her with the eyes misty of tears. "My dear child, by precious darling!" she thought, "What is awaiting you in this world? A misfortune awaits you!"* Paraska *"thought of her precious child's fate more and more, more and more*

she was confused by the dreadful premonitions that her Marusen'ka may be miserable, that Marusen'ka might forget God, fall into sin and become a witch" (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 67, No.12, 287). Once, obsessed with her fears and premonitions, Paraska made up some fire and threw her girl into the oven. *"The child was struggling, but the mother pressed her with a poker and waited for the end: the evil deed was committed..."* (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 67, No.12, 287). The wife confessed to Mikhailo as soon as he came home; the investigation began, but in court Mikhailo tried to cover for the criminal, and, as a result, he found himself in Siberian exile, and Paraska died.

Irrespectively to whether Nebolsin had based his story on any real facts or not, a thoughtful reader could not help recognizing Gogol style of the story. "The dreadful" located by the author of "Evenings..." near the Southern borders of Russia, was relocated to the North-Eastern border now, though keeping the literary "memory" of its Little Russian roots. More or less similar situations may be found in Gogol's "The Eve of Ivan Kupala" and "A Terrible Vengeance", where in both cases the victim of magic powers is a child. In the first story it is a six year old boy named Ivas, the brother of the girl in love. The boy stolen by gypsies gets killed by Petrus in exchange for the money given to him by evil spirits for him to marry his love. In the second story the evil spirits' victim is Katerina's little son, murdered by her magus father right in the cradle.

Evidently, the objective of the fragment with Glasha was to cut the psychological distance between the narrator and the realia described by him, thereby, due to the involvement effect, making him not only an analyst, but a participant of the local life's events, introducing the simple reader into the everyday life of that remote world. The intense exotic of Mikhailo Koval story, despite its evident belonging to the collection

of myth-like stories of Siberian criminals, only partially served for the exotic effect. Referring the reader both to the "terrible" world of the real taiga diggings and to the fictional, but familiar world of Gogol's motives, the story of a criminal from Little Russia is a way to see the remote province as if looking through the prism of a well-known book. In this sense, the verdict that "*Pushkin and Gogol are incomprehensible, thus unneeded here*" once issued by Chekhov was in advance argued with by the literary techniques of Nebolsin's travel notes: no matter whether a Siberian had read Karamzin, Gogol and Pushkin, his world as such was reproduced through the artistic experience of the authors. Suggesting that later, inspired by his local self-conscience, a Siberian would wish to see Nebolsin's books

referencing to his land, he would probably recognize the capital classics' motives in the description of his provincial life.

Conclusion

So, if within the archaic recognition strategy framework the newly discovered lands were "included" into comprehension schemes as referents "claiming" for their signs, if in the rational epoch they were made the object for description with the abstract and principally "universal" language of science, then in the 19th century, as the examples prove, the instrument for signification is the national literature itself, reviving the image of a peripheral region, which is, gradually and heavily, parting with its status of a "far-away land".

¹ On the 1840-1850-s travelogue poetics that have transformed the journey sketch heritage into the modern essay "physiology" see (Protsenko, 1984, 6; 8; 13).

² Let us mention a travelogue episode called "Diary of an Unknown Man", that is an intervention of an "another's" text into the writer's own, inspired by "Journey from Saint Petersburg to Moscow (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 64, No. 6, 185-193). Compare with "my friend's papers" found by Radishchev's traveller, containing the "Project in the future". Besides, let us remark the influence of Karamzin, whose story "Poor Liza" is mentioned on the pages of the travel diary (Nebolsin, 1849, volume 63, No.4, 238).

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**"Литературность" в тексте историка:
сибирские травелоги XIX века
и националистический дискурс
(случай П.И. Небольсина)**

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В статье исследуется роль интертекстуальных заимствований в поэтике восточного травелога середины XIX в., субжанра, развивавшегося в русле интеграционных стратегий русского национализма, одной из ключевых задач которого было создание образа гомогенного пространства, приходящего на смену картинам пестрого имперского мира. Существенную сложность на пути развития этого подхода представляли огромные сибирские окраины, типичные имперские владения, располагавшие немалой этнографической оригинальностью. В терминах поэтики и семиотики задача, стоящая перед автором, заключалась в том, чтобы описать "незнакомое" как "знакомое" и "далекое" как "близкое". Издавна присущая травелогам

как жанру стратегия "узнавания" (та или иная новая локальность соотносилась европейским автором с топосами классических землеописаний) обретает в исследуемый период отчетливо художественный аспект. В качестве примера в статье рассматриваются опубликованные в 1849 г. историком П.И. Небольсиным "Заметки на пути из Петербурга в Барнаул". В своих зарисовках сибирского быта автор прибегает к коллажу интертекстуальных цитат из наследия Карамзина, Пушкина и Гоголя. В результате читателю предлагается "узнать" Сибирь не столько как "географию", сколько как "литературу". Формирующаяся литературная классика становится поэтическим инструментом "воображения" восточной окраины как продолжения целостного национального мира.

Ключевые слова: П.И. Небольсин, национализм, травелог, литературность, мотив, интертекстуальность.

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