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## Circle as a Reflection:

### “Almaty” Text as a Way to Express Traditionalism

#### (D. Nakipov’s Novel “The Circle of Ash”)

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*The article deals with the poetics of a circle and a text as a way to express traditionalism in contemporary literature. The object of the analysis is the novel “The Circle of Ash” by the Kazakh writer D. Nakipov. The purpose of this article is to prove that this work of literature is written in the spirit of traditional mythological poetics, which excludes the validity of characterizing it as a postmodern novel. This approach is built on the following assumptions. The first is to develop a philosophical-aesthetic basis of the notion of “Almaty” text that is introduced for the first time (by analogy with “Moscow” and “St. Petersburg” Russian literature texts) as a sign of traditionalism in Kazakh literature. The second is to identify a reflection as a manifestation of mythological poetics. The third is to study the semantics of the circle as a central phenomenon in reflection.*

*The results of the study can be used for holding special courses and seminars on the poetics of a literary text and the contemporary literary process, etc. The analysis of the poetics of the circle in D. Nakipov’s novel “The Circle of Ash” allows organizing and compiling literary interpretations of the circle, define it as the basic principle, forming the essence of the composition of the author’s whole work.*

*Keywords: reflection, text, traditionalism, poetics of the circle, postmodernism, topos.*

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*Research area: philology.*

“The Circle of Ash” is the first novel of the Kazakh poet and writer Dyusenbek Nakipov, published in 2005 in Almaty.

Dyusenbek Nakipov is a poet, librettist choreographer, writer. In the past he graduated from the Bolshoi Theatre Ballet School and the Faculty of Journalism of Kazakh State University named after Al-Farabi. In the 90s he worked as a chief editor of the creative association “Alem”

of the film studio “Kazakh film” named after Sh. Aymanov. At present he is the organizer of a series of international cultural and humanitarian programs, the chairman of the Union of Choreographers of Kazakhstan, President of the International Festival “Prize of Traditions”. D. Nakipov is the author of such works as “The Evening of the Century” (1996), “The Song of the Shellfish” (2000), “A Woman and Purple” (2004),

the poem "Gemini", "One Against All, or the Fall of Baghdad", "Tales of the Eternal Groundhog", "Time of Re"(2001-2004), the novel "The Circle of Ash"(2005).

D. Nakipov became famous as a writer due to the novel "The Circle of Ash". Critics enthusiastically welcomed the author's work. "The Circle of Ash" marked a peak, or flourishing, of postmodern novel in Kazakh literature. ... It is woven out of air" of our crisis transition epoch, out of the search for our increasingly liberating literature. But the most interesting and perhaps the most important thing is that it is the first full-fledged Kazakh postmodern novel, which is artistically independent on Western traditions"(Badikov, 2008, 237)

The present work is devoted to the idea of substantiating the novel as a work written in traditional mythological poetics, which excludes the validity of characterizing it as a postmodern novel. This approach is built on the following assumptions. The first is to develop a philosophical-aesthetic basis for the notion of "Almaty" text introduced for the first time (by analogy with "Moscow" and "St. Petersburg" Russian literature texts) as a sign of traditionalism in Kazakh literature. The second is to identify a reflection as a manifestation of mythological poetics. The third is to study the semantics of the circle as a central phenomenon in reflection.

The notion of the circle, determined the title of D. Nakipov's novel, contains a wide gradation of various spatial and semantic meanings. As a geometric figure, a circle is a shape which is indivisible and identical in all its points. Being closed space, a circle is the most important and versatile of all the geometric shapes and refers to such concepts as a sphere, periphery, ball, disc. In terms of content, a circle is characterized by fullness and completeness, and encompasses the idea of continuity and dynamism.

A cyclic motion and the change of seasons happen in circles. Circular movements are present in ritual folk dances. The expression "round table" existing in the modern language dates back to the Western European cultural tradition (the round table of King Arthur).

The circle is a defining concept in the cultural traditions of the Eastern peoples: the composition of the circle in a yurt, that is a nomadic dwelling, organizes a round hole in the top of the yurt, named shanyrak, and contains the idea of space. In the ritual dances of shamans it has a magical value. Such hats as turban and skullcap have a circle shape. Ancient and medieval architectural structures have a dome shape.

The comparison with Slavic pagan mythology, where the circle of the sun is the personification of the deity and displayed in a round shape of pancakes; sledding around is also nonrandom, a circle dance reflects the way of perceiving the world that is universal for the peoples: the circle symbolizes the power of the sun or cosmic creative powers.

The biblical texts describe the underworld as a space consisting of circles of hell and heaven. In the parable about the prodigal son, the youth's walks happen in a circle of leaving, wandering and return. The way of man is related to the cyclic, spiral motion in a circle, in which some phases and steps are repeated. The ontological understanding and comprehension of life is reflected in the saying: "What goes around, comes around".

In the world literature the image of the circle is re-presented in the "Divine Comedy" by Dante: the main character, traveling in the underworld, goes through hell, purgatory and paradise. The circle principle is included in the composition of the novel in verse "Eugene Onegin" and the story "The Station Master" by A.S. Pushkin. The heroes of the works of Russian classics experience a number of life and spiritual-moral tests in a

circle. L.N. Tolstoy published a collection with the featured title "The Reading Circle". The literature of the XX century represents the archetype of the circle in the title of the works "In the First Circle" by A. Solzhenitsyn, "The Return of the Terms of its Own" by I. Druta, "Among Friends" by L. Petrushevskaya.

The linguistic interpretations of the circle are represented in a number of phrases and expressions, "a straight A student", "a straight D-student", "full orphan", "round the clock"; "round table", "mutual responsibility", "going around in circle", "... on its circuits", etc.

Literary interpretations of the circle are continued in the novel "The Circle of Ash" by D. Nakipov. The author explains the choice of the work's title in the following way: "When I was 9 years old, I spent my holidays in jailow. The aul decided to migrate to another place. My family left something and asked me to return and bring a thing. I came in the wonderful mood to the place where yurts had stood, and saw circles of ash. I wept alone for the first time. I do not know why. I could feel the smell of yesterday's bawysaks, of just seething life ... Perhaps, that was when a poet awakened inside me" (Nakipov, 2007, [online] Available at: <http://www.litkarta.ru/dossier/nakipov-info/dossie...>).

The meaning of the novel's title "The Circle of Ash" is beyond the scope of linguistic interpretation. In the context of the autobiographical narrative the circle of ash denotes the space of spiritual, moral and aesthetic life. In the author's understanding of the circle of ash it is the source, the starting point, absorbing such constants as Motherland, History and Memory.

The lexical meaning of the word "ash" is explained as "dust-like gray mass that remains of something burnt down" (Ozhegov, 1986, 428). In a figurative sense it is used in combination "to rise from the ashes", which means "to be reborn after the destruction, fire". The phrase "to

sprinkle ashes on one's head" means "extreme grief" (Ozhegov, 1986, 428).

From a philosophical point of view "ash represents both impermanence of all things, and the birth of a new life, acting as a substance that stimulates the fertility of cornfields and well-being of humans and animals. It is also associated with purification, asceticism, sorrow and repentance" (Adamchik, 2006, 145). In this context, it embodied the history of the characters and heroes of the novel: the Ballerina, the dance teacher Doc, the theatre workers Gevra and Esenia.

According to modern researchers V. Savel'eva (3), A. Ishchanova (4), A. Tolysbaeva (5), A. Sarsekeeva (6), the novel "The Circle of Ash" by D. Nakipov refers to postmodern prose. The basis for this assessment is a genre defined by the author as a novel of intentions (translated from the Latin word "intention" that is "aim, desire"). In fact, the novel's complex composition, plot, narrative forms, content-conceptual richness, multi-layered structure, associativeness and polyphonic features are all the characteristics of the postmodern novel. Analyzing the novel of the writer from the point of view of the problems, A. Ishchanova highlights several lines in it, including existential, eschatological, ontological and social ones (Ishchanova, 2007, 11-12). Interacting and complementing, they create a single vicious cycle of being. At the center of this being is the circle of ash. "The four sublimed sat in a circle of ash, inhaling old and new fumes, each of them was responsible for their season – green, blue, yellow and white, and for all that happens there in their time..." (Nakipov, 2005, 223). A similar interpretation is suggested by N. Sarsekeeva. In her opinion, "the sublimed figures can embody the prophets or spiritual power of the world religions (Islam, Buddhism, Christianity), and the image of the fourth embodies the idea of Tengrianism. They can also embody the four

seasons" (Sarsekeeva, (2011), Available at: <http://iskernews.kz> (accessed 15 may 2015).

The composition of the novel "The Circle of Ash" is based on the principle of the circle. The real events (the stories of the Ballet Dancer, Doc, Gevra, Esenia, Kalmyk, and others), the fantastic world of samions, the story of a clone boy line up in a chain of linear time, rotating and repeating cyclically. A circular movement of the plot creates the illusion of a continuous movement of life – terrestrial and extraterrestrial.

The fantastic story of unearthly creatures, samions, is given in italics as the imaginary reality, appearing periodically in the consciousness of Gevra, one of the heroes of the novel. The reader learns about the existence of a degenerate civilization of onosams in the constellation of Gemini, where the gene of the boy Ral, died on the Earth, is delivered. A relatively fantastic reality complements the picture of the contemporary reality. The author's intention, manifested in an effort to understand himself, his own inner state, is the beginning which is common and unifying all the storylines of the novel. From this perspective, the genre strategy of "The Circle of Ash" by D. Nakipov can be characterized in the concepts of the author's reflection. In the context of postmodern estimates, the novel would seem to be associated with other works of postmodern literature. This is messaged by the author's language, style, writing, a play on words, and concealed citationality.

Traditionalism is found, for example, in the image of artistic space in the novel by D. Nakipov. So, the book reproduces a lot of toposes: city (Alma-Ata, St. Petersburg) and aul (the birthplace of the Ballet dancer), theater (stage, scene, class) and the daily routine (apartment, shop, café), the earthly life and extraterrestrial (cosmic) civilization. Conventionally, the two types of space can be distinguished: the external one that is the city as a reflection of the external world

with its fluidity and regularity, and the internal one that is the theater as the center of the spiritual world of the characters.

Our interpretation of Almaty in the novel as a kind of "urban" text, namely as a chronotope and "text" at the same time, is based on a famous scientific tradition. It is known that the problem of "urban" text was substantiated in the writings of Yu.M. Lotman (1), V.N. Toporov (2), and others. Such notions as "St. Petersburg" text "Moscow" text, "Crimean" text, and others were established. According to Yu.M. Lotman, "any reality, involved in the sphere of culture, begins to function as a sign reality ... The very relation to a sign and significance is one of the main characteristics of culture" (Lotman, 1998, 91). On this basis, the researcher concludes that the city space in fiction appears as a text and at the same time creates new texts.

What was the substantiation for us to separate the "Almaty" text? On the one hand, Almaty is a quite realistic space in which the novel's characters inhabit. A more detailed interpretation and analysis of the work can reveal its sacred meaning. Almaty is a closed space. Its centre is Opera and Ballet Theatre. The episode describing the theater resembles paintings of Impressionist artists, such as C. Monet, K. Korovin, I. Grabar. "Two squares around the theater, as if little groves. There are poplars, chestnuts, ash trees, oaks and ... fir trees here.... However, now, in these very days of warm and mature autumn the squares are more like impressionist landscapes or Gothic coloured stained-glass artworks. Scarlet, gold, green, silver sepia fir trees in contrast with the indigo sky. ... The mountain peaks resemble a lightweight crown on the head of a princess-ballerina" (Nakipov, 2005, 7-8).

The Almaty text in the novel appears in different variations of the plot: in the paintings of the artist Kalmykov found in the basement of the theater; in realistic descriptions of the December

days, experienced by the hero of the novel; in the lyrical recollections and reflections of the heroes. "And here is the famous Central Grocery store – exposure pattern, the grocery store of the Soviet trade, Empire granite for gastritis in the womb, but apparently this is solid windows, an abundance of food, swept away before dinner. ... There was the favourite legendary "Brod" there situated near opposite to "Komuna". No one remembers where the term came from: perhaps, it was simply derived either from the verb "brodit'" (to wander in English – editor's note) or from the forbidden "New York Broadway ..." (Nakipov 2005, 45-46).

The theatrical theme in the novel by Nakipov refers to Bulgakov's works "Theatrical Novel", "Moliere" and S. Maugham's "Theatre". The sacral meaning of the theater space is revealed in the following episode: "He seemed to exude the thoughts, moods and feelings. This is a kind of unprecedented healing resin, concentrated emanation of the creative energy of artists, pure intention of their souls. Over the years, the theater engorged fantasies, emotions and fates of all the people working here, or even living here with all the force of human desires and passions, and this incredible mixture of the high and the low penetrated the theater through, and it became a living organism or a particular state of mind"(Nakipov, 2005, 8).

The sacred meaning is also present in the cellar / utility room, where stagehands Gevra and Esenia shelter; and the class where the Teacher holds dancing lessons; and the bar, where the Ballerina creates her dancing masterpieces. "Gevra served as a stagehand for many years, and such people are not noticed here. He is here just because this is his place or function in a large body of the theater"(Nakipov, 2005, 19). For the hero the theater is an escape from household dullness and chaos. "In the city and generally in that life where he was forced to go out occasionally, he felt anxious. The balance has been disturbed there for

long; the rule of prospect did not usually work" (Nakipov, 2005, 28). Urban, everyday life is opposed to the Theater, where everything is clear, transparent and peaceful, "there the fore is seen as the first, the second is in its place, and the distant shot is a backdrop, prospect, which is vague and painted ... at random as expected ... "(Nakipov, 2005, 28). There is a shift of perceptions of real life and imaginary, scenic life in the mind of the hero.

The theatrical space incorporates a plurality of small spaces: the stage, the hall, the class (Doc), the bar (Ballerina), the basement / utility room (Esenia, Gevra): it is here where they find true freedom and peace of mind. "That corner was two meters in length, a little more than a meter in width and height, rested on the main wall of the theater (just behind the lift) and was below the "ground level". No one ever was bored or lonely there" (Nakipov, 2005, 9).

The space of D. Nakipov's characters has visible outlines and also expresses their internal unconsciously projecting desires and passions. "The class is sacred, and it has become a ritual for her in recent years, as incensing herbs for ancient priestesses, and almost replaced sex. Successful classes delivered a special "orgasm", understandable only for the initiated" (Nakipov, 2005, 21). For the dance teacher the bar is an attribute of a ballet class, for the Ballerina it is an allegory of the High Court for her. "Standing face-to-face to the bar-inquisitor, the Ballerina felt "the eye" of the Teacher and was now entirely in his power .... (Nakipov, 2005, 22).

Gevra, Ballerina, Doc go through the way of hardship. Having lost the connection with his family and former life, Gevra cloisters in the Theater's basement. Once and for all, leaving the parental home, the Ballerina lives in her city apartment.

Doc's entire family died in a plane crash, and his only consolation and meaning of life is

his work in the classroom and at the bar, where he indulges in memories and reflections on the meaning of life. The semiotic nature of the circle is revealed throughout the whole story. The heroes of the novel by D. Nakipov, going through mental sufferings and losses, return again to the same circle of life. Fate connects lonely Gevra and the Ballerina. The dance teacher finds peace of mind in the everyday work. The character Esenia, a former worker of the theater, also find his way.

The circle in its archetypal essence symbolizes spiritual cleansing and enlightenment for the heroes of the novel – Gevra, the Ballerina and Doc. The sacred meaning of their experiences and return to themselves, their true, free from the bustle life (that is the role of the Ballerina's memories of the distant aul and her father, Gevra's fantastic dreams, Doc's thinking about the past life) marks a distinctive final of the novel: the fate of each character is resolved. The Ballerina, saying goodbye to the theater, finds love, Doc takes his last silent flight over the city, getting off the ground, the Old Man jumps from the upper walkway down to the stage. The withdrawal from reality into the world of art and return to reality again is a circular way of life of Ballerina, Doc and Gevra.

The motive of grief is all-pervasive in the novel narration. And above all, it is associated with the social motives of Goloshchekin's extermination by hunger in Kazakh auls, of the December uprising in 1986. Against the background of these events, the story of characters is even more tragic. After a serious illness the Ballerina's mother and later her father pass away. The dance teacher after a farewell benefit performance of the Ballerina returns home. But he is hailed by young voices from the darkness. He is picked up by the wind, and flies "in the sky's high camps to other dances, which are pure and eternal". This plot circle creates different levels of narration, reflecting the breadth of the author's narrative solution.

Thus, the novel "The Circle of Ash", contrary to the popular belief of modern Kazakhstan researchers, is not a product of postmodernism. Let us define the main points of our analysis.

The philosophical-aesthetic basis of the notion of "Almaty" introduced for the first time is that in the novel "The Circle of Ash" the author recreates the artistic image of the garden castle with his own special rhythm, aura and history for the first time. Almaty is not only artistic space, but also the embodiment of the cultural and spiritual generation's life, survived the tragic periods of social history: the earthquake, the stagnation era and the events of 1986.

One of the main manifestations of mythological poetics is the presence of the author's reflection. Almost all the characters (Gevra, the Ballerina, Doc, Esenia, Kalmyk) are prone to self-analysis: throughout the narrative they talk to themselves. The dance teacher lives by the memories of the past, the Ballerina yearns for her own home. The fantastic dreams of Gevra return him to the recent past. The heroes do not lose the connection with the history of their blood and family. In the end, each of them unconsciously seeks to restore the old world order. (Gevra and the Ballerina). The purification experienced by the characters cleansing, spiritual asceticism implement the catharsis in its psycho-physiological meaning in the novel. The dramatic events, experienced by the characters, are comprehended by them as their own destiny. And the sense of connection with time, its impact on their fate are emphatically expressed in the episodes of the disaster, namely the earthquake, and the December events.

The novel by D. Nakipov is dominated by the motives of human alienation, loneliness. The loneliness of the Ballerina is brightened up with an aquarium with goldfish. Gevra abandons himself with fantastic dreams in his imagination.

The Old Man in charge of theatrical props spends his leisure time with a turtle. The storytelling, composition and images are all the subject to the author's reflection, everything is designed in the spirit of traditional mythopoetic prose. Besides, the themes of memory, history, alienation, loneliness, which are central in the novel and traditional for all literature by their definition, in the work of D. Nakipov express the author's identity and reflection.

The manifestations of the circle in the novel can be found in the novel's plot structure and composition. The storylines and narrative about the heroes and events are arranged in a chain, made up of individual wheels. Cyclically repeating, they create the illusion of the movement of earthly life and extraterrestrial civilization. After leaving the reality for the world of theater, the characters again return to real life. Thus, the Ballerina, after

leaving the parental home for the sake of art, returns to the real world. Gevra, who once lost the link with the past (with the family), regains it thanks to the meeting with the Ballerina. A common stagehand Esenia, grown rich by selling paintings of the artist Kalmyk, suddenly begins to understand the hidden meaning of the great master's pieces.

The image-motif of the circle in the novel appears in various forms, creating new meanings: the circle of ash, the circle of the ordinary, the circle of dance, the ash circle of the heart, the circle of the former family, the circle of people, etc.

Thus, the circle of ash in the eponymous novel by D. Nakipov is a kind of bridge between different time layers of civilizations. At the same time it is a symbol of the universe, associated with the original, circular time.

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## **Круг как рефлексия: «алматинский» текст как выражение традиционализма (роман Д. Накипова «Круг пепла»)**

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*Статья посвящена проблеме поэтики круга и текста как выражения традиционализма в современной литературе. Объектом анализа является роман казахстанского прозаика Д. Накипова «Круг пепла». Цель данной статьи – доказать, что данное произведение написано в духе традиционной мифологической поэтики, что исключает правомерность характеристики его как постмодернистского. Такой подход построен на следующих исходных посылах. Первое – разработать философско-эстетическую основу впервые вводимого в научный оборот понятия «алматинский» текст (по аналогии с «московским» и «петербургским» текстом русской литературы) как признака традиционализма в казахской литературе. Второе – выявление рефлексии как проявления мифологической поэтики. Третье – изучение семантики круга как центрального в рефлексии явления.*

*Результаты исследования могут быть использованы при чтении спецкурсов, семинаров по проблемам поэтики художественного текста, современного литературного процесса. Анализ поэтики круга в романе Д. Накипова «Круг пепла» позволяет систематизировать и обобщить литературные интерпретации круга, определить его как основной принцип, составляющий суть композиции всего произведения автора.*

*Ключевые слова: рефлексия, текст, традиционализм, поэтика круга, постмодернизм, топос.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

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