

The model of the Moscow world in
M. Elizarov's story "Masha"

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El modelo del mundo de Moscú en la historia de M. Elizarov "Masha"

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Abstract

The Russian literature of the early XXI century demonstrates authors' aspiration to assess various social and cultural processes taking place in Moscow – the historical and spiritual centre of Russia. The study of a text as a phenomenon of culture, in which a nation's mentality is reflected and symbolic spatial realia are formed, contributes to revealing the cultural originality of the nation, its moral priorities.

The importance of studying the semantics of the Moscow space in M. Y. Elizarov's post-modernist prose is specified by a number social and cultural factors, among which are the change of the life value paradigm, moral imperatives and ethical traditions forming Moscow's new mythology. In connection with the latest events in Ukraine, the new status of the Crimea, Russia's self-determination in the global political and cultural space, this paper gains special relevance.

Keywords: Postmodernism; Russian literature; Moscow text; Moscow world model; Mikhail Elizarov

Resumen

La literatura rusa de principios del siglo XXI demuestra la aspiración de los autores de evaluar diversos procesos sociales y culturales que tienen lugar en Moscú, el centro histórico y espiritual de Rusia. El estudio de un texto como fenómeno de cultura, en el que se refleja la mentalidad de una nación y se forman símbolos espaciales reales, contribuye a revelar la originalidad cultural de la nación, sus prioridades morales.

La importancia de estudiar la semántica del espacio de Moscú en la prosa post-modernista de M. Y. Elizarov está especificada por un número de factores sociales y culturales, entre los cuales se encuentran el cambio del paradigma del valor de la vida, los imperativos morales y las tradiciones éticas que forman la nueva

mitología de Moscú. En relación con los últimos acontecimientos en Ucrania, el nuevo estatuto de Crimea, la autodeterminación de Rusia en el espacio político y cultural mundial, este documento adquiere especial relevancia.

Palabras clave: Postmodernismo; Literatura rusa; Textos sobre Moscú; Modelo mundial de Moscú; Mikhail Elizarov

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SUMARIO: 1. Aim and methods. 2. Results. 3. Discussion. 4. Conclusion. 5. References.

1. AIM AND METHODS

The object of the research is the polysemous space of Moscow as a fragment of the Russian spiritual culture reflecting the human mind. The study focuses on the structural semantic elements of the Moscow space in the post-modernist prose.

The material for this research is M. Iu. Elizarov's story "Masha" from the author's collection "My vyshli pokurit na 17 let..." ["We stepped out for a smoke for 17 years..."] representing a creative case of the Moscow space interpretation.

The aim of this article is to interpret the model of the Moscow world in M. Elizarov's prose.

The leading method used in this research is the structural and semantic analysis, enabling us to ascertain the structure of the semantic field of the image of Moscow, and the realia that verbalize and visualize it. The comparative method helps us to reveal the distinctive features of the post-modernist space of Moscow in the story by M. Elizarov (2012).

2. RESULTS

The research determines the structural elements of the Moscow world model; the motives and images, representing the picture of Moscow in the beginning of the XXI century are revealed.

Our analysis appeals to one of the crucial problems of the modern humanitarian knowledge – the comprehension of life in Moscow by changing generations.

M. Elizarov's prose is little studied, and there are no research works dedicated to the picture of Moscow in his writings. In this article the model of Moscow metropolitan world is revealed and investigated for the first time.

The article's theoretical value consists in the further development of the problem

of the “Moscow text”, connected with the investigation of the capital’s cultural and historical phenomena through people’s private life.

The practical significance of the paper is determined by the possibility of using the received results in giving a course of lectures on the actual problems of the history of the Russian literature and culture, and also in country-specific studies, cross-cultural communication through teaching Russian as a foreign language, in undergraduate and postgraduate research connected with the study of the specific mentality and culture of the Russian people.

3. DISCUSSION

A number of foreign papers are dedicated to the study of cultural phenomena, including the religious ones, directly connected with the modern fiction; among them are the researches of Z. Mohamed and U. M. M. Tahir (2013), U. M. M. Tahir (2010, 2012), D. L. Gugin (2008), R. Manqoush, N. M. Yusof and R. S. Hashim (2013), F. Ferdinal (2013), D. Zhang- Cziráková (2012). Foreign scholars, e.g. P. Mazzarello (2001), conduct interdisciplinary researches with the focus on the Russian classics’ works.

The perception of the capital in the XVIII-XXI centuries takes a lot of place in the works of V. N. Toporov (1995), Iu. M. Lotman (n. d.), N. E. Mednis (2011), N. M. Malygina (2005), A. P. Liusyi (2013), S. Monas (1983), R. Wortman (1985) and other researchers.

This paper considers M. Elizarov’s postmodernist outlook on Moscow’s toponyms and other realia of the capital connected with his view of Moscow as a woman-city. The evaluation of the city given by the writer radically reviews the traditional aesthetic postulates about Moscow.

In the context of this paper, under world model we understand an author’s system of ideas about reality, and also a person’s interrelation with this reality.

The model of the Moscow world identifies a person’s “ego” in the context of many metropolitan realia, determining an individual’s life and explaining reality.

In his story “Masha”, M. Elizarov masters the archetypal dichotomy of the virgin-city and the whore-city, communicating a confession, which is not only a narrative, but also becomes a device of creating the images of the protagonist – the poet – and of Moscow. The romantic character of the poet’s confession, who came to Moscow, on the one hand, is perceived as a self-confession, on the other hand, it brings to the reader the facts of his private biography, showing how much the standards of life are deformed today.

The comprehension of the Moscow world by the hero-narrator is based on sense perception, “Kogda ty ushla ot menia, tochnee, ne ushla, a prosto oborvala telefonnyi razgovor, slovno ostupilas i nechaianno vyronila ego iz ruk <...>”

["When you left me or, more exactly, not left, but simply interrupted a phone call, as if you stumbled and by chance dropped it from your hands <...>"] (Elizarov 2012, 8). The story's character, the poet, is distinguished by his noble attitude to three women: his darling, Masha – a random acquaintance from "Google", and his spouse, left behind in another city. After parting with the "belokuraia" ["blond"] and "merelinopodobnaia" ["*Marilyn*-like"] (Elizarov 2012, 13) darling, he critically assesses Masha, involuntarily comparing her with the darling's image. In his new state of parting with the fair beloved, "trogatelnoe uglovatoe pugalo iz gugla" ["the pathetic awkward fright from Google"] (Elizarov 2012, 14) turns into "malchika-kaleku" ["a crippled boy"] (Elizarov 2012, 19). The accent shifts from naivety, kindness and sincerity of the virtual heroine, unskillfully writing verses, sending original compliments to her revered poet, to her physical defects, "Esli dopustit, chto Mashiny zuby byli napechatany v taims niu roman kegl dvenadtsat, to dva zaglavnykh ee reztsa byli vosemnadtsatoi verdanoi" ["Assuming that Masha's teeth were typed in Times New Roman 12, her two capital incisors would be Verdana 18"] (Elizarov 2012, 19). The physical parameters speak about aesthetic alienation both of Masha and of the poet from each other and from the world.

On parting with his beloved, the hero-narrator tries to find another sweetheart. Masha becomes her – an unbalanced person, who wins over the lonely writer, left without a muse, with her naive verses full of "natuzhnyimi metaforami" ["strained metaphors"] (Elizarov 2012, 15). In her description, the discrepancy between her appearance and the poet's expectations is highlighted. As early as in the story title, M. Elizarov indicates the heroine. The name belongs to a lonely person, protesting hard against her disconnection with the world. Having met the narrator, Masha gets into a critical state of alienation. The problem of the paradoxical interrelations of the girl with the outside world is considered by the author as a typical one in the modern conditions of the contradictory Moscow reality.

The same can be said about the hero – the poet. Masha's presence in his life is destined to relieve his loneliness. His first date with Masha takes place in the Pushkin's area – near one of the most well-known spiritual symbols of the capital. The lines engraved on the pedestal "I dolgo budu tem liubezen ia narodu / Chto chuvstva dobrye ia liroi probuzhdal" ["And long the people yet will honor me / Because my lyre was tuned to loving-kindness" – translated by Avril Pyman] argue with the events of the story. Masha manages to wake up a good feeling in the hero, but not for long. Her trick in the Coffee House (she splashes out coffee on the guests) hastens the end of the unbegun relationship between her and the narrator. The characters try in vain to overcome the senselessness of their existence. The author provides the place of their date with a hidden meaning. The monument of Pushkin reminds of the sense of self-preservation of life and stability of its moral bases.

The hero's feelings are realized in unexpected comparisons and complex metaphors: "<...> kak boevoi radist, vyklikal tvoi nomer tri chasa kriadu" ["<...> as

a combat radioman, I called out your number three hours in a row”] (Elizarov 2012, 8). The special view of the capital life, chosen by M. Elizarov, objectively exposes the picture of the everyday Moscow, the semantics of its inner space connected with the traumatized souls of the people living in the capital.

On the basis of the myth of the virgin-city and the whore-city, M. Elizarov realizes a “love element” in a private situation. The motive of the Moscow myth, described by M. P. Odesskii as “Moscow is the place of death / parting with one’s beloved” (Odesskii 1998), is transformed by M. Elizarov into a complex of motives – duality, home and loneliness.

The motive of duality is revealed, above all, in the destroyed harmony of relations of the man and the world, disruption of the hero’s mind. The poet came to Moscow to work and seemed to meet a real love. The ideal Moscow world attracts the character. He thinks that it is in the capital that he will improve his life. But his darling leaves him. After that the character exists in two worlds simultaneously – in a deep love dimension, which is now only in his dreams and memories, and in a really ugly place. The hero considers love to be a guaranty of harmonization of his inner “ego”, which is “bifurcated” in female images – the blond beauty and the poetess Maria, “Ia <...> byl pochti uveren, chto Masha vygliadit slovno tvoia dobraia raznovidnost” [“I <...> was almost sure, that Masha looked like your kinder variety”] (Elizarov 2012, 18). The dichotomy of the virgin-city and the whore-city helps to reveal the ambivalence of the hero’s dual relationship with Masha and the beauty, respectively. The glaring contrast of the two female images, detects the poet’s strive to get rid of the false double of his beloved woman and join her: “Ia byl blizok k dikarskoi reaktzii – otmakhivaias rukavami krichat: – Chto za duratskie shutki? Gde nastoiashchaia Masha?!” [“I was near to a savage reaction – to shout, flailing my arms, ‘Is this a foolish joke? Where is the real Masha?!’ ”] (Elizarov 2012, 20). The hero has not met a double of his darling. The motive of duality offers the hero an illusory way of overcoming his inner crisis.

M. Elizarov travesties the actions and behavior of Masha. The girl passes a deceit off as truth. The hero, not willing to meet the poetess, realizes it, when he gets her messages – invitations for a date. The situation of SMS-communication of the characters finishes with the message about the girl’s death (the author’s address to the archaic formula “Moscow is the sweetheart’s death place”). The poet suspects the girl’s game, “Proshchanie s Mariei sostoitsia zavtra v 11 utra. Priezhaite po adresu metro Pervomaiskaia <...> Vprochem znal, chto ne poedu: pervomaiskii adres za verstu razil pervoaprelskim pokhoronnym farsom” [“Maria will lie in state tomorrow at 11. Come to this address near the Pervomayskaya subway station <...> However, I knew that I wouldn’t go – the Pervomayskaya address reeked of an April Fools’ funeral farce”] (Elizarov 2012, 30). The opposition “farce – reality” is regarded as the heroine’s spiritual death. Metro Pervomayskaya and Tyoply Stan, where the poet lives, are situated at the opposite ends of Moscow, emphasizing the

opposition "far – near". The playing dimension of Moscow gives Masha the right to a specific form of life in the city. Mystifying her life, Masha becomes a creator of the inner metropolitan world. Masha's awkward poetic attempts present a version of her another being and a cultural code of a complex metropolitan life. Masha lacks rootedness in the world because of a mental illness, while the poet does so because of his denying moral norms.

The disharmony in the relation "I – Moscow" leads to an existential conflict of the man in the relation "I – the world". The idea of two worlds is assumed as a basis of M. Elizarov's views of the Moscow world – the ideal and the real, and determines the structure of the model of the capital's world.

M. Elizarov actualizes the problems of the meaning of life and personality, being in the state of the deepest spiritual crisis, which explains the hero's search for life guidelines in love.

M. Elizarov's ideas about a person's existence in the Moscow world include the description of the narrator's life near the Tyoply Stan subway station. The poet himself defines his rented lodgings as "nishchii ugol" ["a beggar's dwelling"] (Elizarov 2012, 9). The dual name of the station, enters the real context of the heroes' life, overcomes the cliché interpretations of the Moscow space as a single territory. The words "Tyoply Stan" ["Nomads' Warm Camp"] are perceived by the hero as "zasakharenniy frukt" ["candied fruit"] stuck together (Elizarov 2012, 10). Such view of the Moscow territory is determined by the process of the population's migration – colonization by people from other towns.

M. Elizarov's Moscow displays a symbolism of the world centre. The land of Tyoply Stan becomes sacral. Geographically, here is the highest place in the city.

The poet rents a room, "v kotoroi otsutstvovala dver, vmesto nee nispadala otstavnaia shtora, a okno zanaveshivala pylnaia gardina, pokhozhaia na ispolinskii bint" ["in which there was no door; instead of it, a drapery hung down, and a dusty curtain covered the window like a gigantic bandage"] (Elizarov 2012, 10). The capital's space is recreated through the image of a badly furnished room.

The motive of the house reminds of an idea of a human's happy life and the necessity of overcoming homelessness. Moscow, where every person used to find a shelter, enables the hero to value a home space, protected from outside inference. The metaphorical conversion of home into "ugol" ["a corner, dwelling"] symbolizes the opposition of "home – anti-home".

The idyllic Moscow space is represented by the image of the narrator's beloved woman's unapproachable apartment, "Ia namerevalsia tebia karaulit u tvoego podieзда – vnutr doma bylo ne popast <...>" ["I intended to watch you near your entrance – it was unreal to get into the house <...>"] (Elizarov 2012, 9). The image of the house-shelter giving rest and security is combined with the image of the beloved woman's house and forms a hidden inner space of Moscow.

To his sweetheart's house the hero opposes the bookstore, which temporarily gave shelter to him, "Kak mladentsy tashchat v rot vsiakuiu maniashchuiu drian, tak ty zatashchila menia v svoi dom na probu – uvela iz knizhnogo magazina, gde ia samovliublenno i ispuganno prezentoval moe ocherednoe bumazhnoe chado" ["Like babies who drag any alluring trash into their mouths, you'd dragged me into your house on approbation – you'd taken me away from the bookstore, where I had been narcissistically and frightenedly presenting my latest paper child"] (Elizarov 2012, 9). Such vision of the urban space forms an individual planning of the city, in which "one's own" and "alien" space arises. The experience of losing house loss is an anthropological constant of the modern culture (Matlakhova 2011). Although it sounds paradoxical, Moscow gives a person a chance to stay alone.

In the Moscow space various personalities coexist – the writer from another city, the cynical beauty, the spouse, left by the writer and therefore angry with life, the unattractive Masha. In his story, M. Elizarov actualizes the problem of the meaning of life. Each character has his/her metaphor of being; the life of the writer is like a horror, of his darling – like a love adventure, of his former wife – like a betrayal, for Masha life is an amateur play.

The character's comprehension of being detects individuality in it. The moral estimation of the surrounding reality by the story's characters is diverse. The writer perceives the situation around him as obsession, naming the attitude of the surrounding people to him "pasternakovskaia travlia" ["the harassment of Pasternak"] (Elizarov 2012, 12). His darling does not appreciate art. The indifference to art denies the very essence of beauty. The inability to understand poetry defines the girl's lack of spirituality. For the writer's wife Moscow is associated with an idle life. The world view of Masha, who wants to find a kindred spirit, is aimed at clarification of her place in the writer's world.

The metaphor of "the harassment of Pasternak" refers to the lines from the poem by B. L. Pasternak (n. d.) "Obieiasnenie" ["The accounting, explanation"]:

Proidut goda, ty vstupish v brak,
Zabudesh neustroistva.
Byt zhenshchinoi velikii shag,
Svodit s uma geroistvo.

<...>

No kak ne skovyvaet noch
Menia koltsom tosklivym,
Silnei na svete tiaga proch
I manit strast k razryvam.

[Years pass, you'll marry, then forget
Your present disarrangement,
For womanhood's a great exploit,
A feat to set men raving.

<...>

And yet, however firm the bond
Of nighttime's anguished fetter,
Repulsion's power is no less strong,
The urge to flee still beckons.]

(Translated by Christopher Barnes)

This metaphor explains the plot of the modern story as a non-banal love story, on the one hand, and on the other hand – as a reaction of the city, aggressively relating to a stranger. The metaphor illustrates the images of a city-fortress, not

admitting "strangers", and a city breaking hearts and destroying the dreams of its "visitors", branding their senseless existence.

The motive of loneliness according to M. Elizarov is a vital code of a modern man. The hero-poet's wish to possess a woman introduces an erotic motive into the text, but it is read as a longing for spirituality. The absence of descriptions of body parts denies corporality and the possibility of filling the flesh with a spirit. The existential opposition "loneliness – love" demands from the poet to force his way to the sense of being. The spirit of creation present in M. Elizarov's text is endowed with a transforming force and should spiritualize the characters' lives. So, the opposition "existence (life) – non-existence (impermanent state)" appears.

The temporal characteristics of the depicted Moscow world are reflected in the hero's perception of a natural continuum only in interrelation with personal life, "Ty prekratila nas nakanune vosmogo marta" ["You stopped us on the eve of the 8 March"] (Elizarov 2012, 11).

The return to the image of the beloved woman in the context of the story becomes for the writer a sign of loss of sense in the world, "Ty ushla po telefonnym provodam <...> I semero minuvshikh sutok, tochno raskoldovannye trupy, vzdulis, lopnuli I razlozhilis na tysiachi rykhlykh muchitelnykh minut" ["You went away through telephone wires <...> And the past seven days, as if corpses removed from a spell, swelled, burst and disintegrated into thousands of loose agonizing minutes"] (Elizarov 2012, 8). Motion as the law of existence of the capital's world manifests itself in the details of narration, "Na piatnadsatoi minute reshil zvonit" ["on the fifteenth minute I decided to call"] (Elizarov 2012, 19), "piatnichnyi iunyi vecher" ["young Friday evening"] (Elizarov 2012, 21) etc.

The author distinguishes such features of the metropolitan life as contrast, sharp division into social groups, domination of passions. The influence of Moscow on a person is strong. A disease state and physical sickness of the story's heroes, who insistently try to establish existentially significant relations with the capital through love, is shown, "Ty menia podkosila, obeznozhila. No prishla pora stanovitsia na protezy <...> Dlia nachala vzdumal pribratsia v komnate <...>" ["You demoralized me, immobilized. But time came to rise on prostheses <...> For a start I decided to pick up my room"] (Elizarov 2012, 14). The hero overcomes his emotional turmoil; that is why confession is chosen by the author as the form of narration.

4. CONCLUSION

The model of the Moscow world consists of several structural elements including spatio-temporal fundamentals; images of the heroes; motives (duality, home, loneliness) and problems (meaning of life, personality), ensuring the connection between the components of the model, while their oppositions fix the inconsistency of life. The centre of the system is the hero-poet. The spirituality of the capital's world

is symbolized by the memorial to Pushkin-demiurge. The fundamental geometrical figure of the Moscow world model is an isosceles triangle, containing an the idea of unity of body, soul and spirit. On the apices of the triangle there are “love”, “chance” and “fault”, reflecting the hero-narrator’s knowledge about the world.

The model of the Moscow world is based on the system of oppositions: “one’s own – alien”, “existence – non-existence”, “far – near”, “farce – reality”, “loneliness – love”, reflecting the signs of the metropolitan world.

The oppositions are connected with the structure of the Moscow space (“house – room, corner”) and time (“November – December – March – April”, “moment – hour – day – weeks – month”, “morning – afternoon – evening”), reflecting the contrasted signs of the world.

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