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The Problem of Historical Choice in East German Literature: Johannes Bobrowski in Context of the Postwar Literature of the 1950s-1970s

Dilyara A. Salimzanova¹, Gulnara T. Gilfanova²

Abstract

The article tells about works of the famous German writer Johannes Bobrowski (1917-1965) born 100 years ago; the world literary community celebrates his 100 anniversary as in 2017. The poetic speech of Bobrowski, difficult for perception, reflected the main perspective of his poetry: history of the people and communication of the person with the nature. Art development of history, author's cycle of stories and two novels of the original narrative technique in the conditions of totalitarian regime and continuous censorship, in many respects predetermined development of a genre of the historical novel in literature of the East German space of the "middle" of the last century. The creativity J. Bobrowski opens the new truth about the German life and history, thereby expanding a framework of art judgment of the past country.

Keywords: Poetic speech, Narrative technique, The historical novel genre, East German literature.

¹ Kazan Federal University, Naberezhnochelninsky Institute. E-mail: gilfanova_di@list.ru

² Kazan Federal University, Naberezhnochelninsky Institute.

Introduction

The ideological situation of post-war Germany was characterized by the essential moment: Writers anti-fascists proceeded from the idea of uniform democratic Germany which had to revive after condemnation of Nazi criminals and eradication of Nazi ideology on an anti-fascist and anti-Hitlerite basis.

From anti-fascist emigration the German writers who are spiritually enriched with life experience endured and learned, played a significant role in formation of the German culture, in particular - national literature returned to the homeland exempted from the fascist power. Writers I. O. Bekher, V. Bredel, F. Wolf, E. Wainert, A. Sharer, G. Cinner, F. Erpenbek, as well as many writers from the Western emigration returned to East Germany in the first post-war years from the USSR: A. Zweig, A. Zegers, B. Brecht, L. Renn, L. Fiurnberg, B. Uza, E. Arendt, G. Markhvitsa, R. Leongard, J. Petersen, A. Abush.

And in the years preceding the formation of the new republic (GDR) and when on the world map the new German state appeared, in literature development of the new direction giving to the German writers a historical opportunity to awaken in the fellow countrymen, and first of all, in youth, belief in the future and aspiration to transformation of the country.

The period of the German life at a stage of forming the socialist Germany is displayed by the German writers as the period of class fight where the working class becomes the driving historical force of an era. How it happens on the German ground from 1947 to 1951, shows the famous novel of A. Zegers "Decision". Today we already know that the German history in circumstances of GDR was also distorted, in it we saw only fight of classes, various parties.

Estimating public and literary life at GDR from the middle of the 50th, it is necessary to notice its discrepancy, an antagonism of various tendencies. On one hand, the obvious progress in an economic recovery, increase in living standards inspiring hope and confidence in the future. On the other hand, in ideological and spiritual spheres of public life attempts, fruitless and humiliating for the intellectuals, to unify public consciousness continued.

Arrests of writers (E. Lest, V. Harih) and scientists, departure of many from them in Germany were a consequence of crisis in cultural policy of GDR (G. Mayurer, S. Game). The created situation is caused first of all by incompatibility of self-development of literature and culture with utilitarian and authoritative policy of V. Ulbriht. "The Bitterfeld conference" of 1959 testifies to it, one of slogans of which was "rapprochement of writers with the people". Modification of utilitarian slogans, quenching the main problems as political, so, in a special measure, cultural policy in the country, paved the way of events on August 13, 1961 when "for protection of frontiers of GDR" for one night the wall between the Western and East Berlin was put up. Toughening a frontier regime changed destiny of millions of Germans - in the moral, world outlook, everyday plan. The famous writer Christa Wolfe told in the novel "The Split Sky" (1961) about the spiritual tragedy of the German people as to the national problem demanding deep judgment.

Administrative management of culture affects moral and moral atmosphere of all society very painfully. "Until the cultural policy is defined by bureaucrats from art, the general situation will practically not change also talented, but non-standard artists will make the way to us with huge work. As for literature of GDR, here we are waited also by discovery, already partly known: We in many respects should recognize F. Fiuman and K. Mikel, E. Arendt and Johannes Bobrowski, Brecht and Bekher anew. Their searches and delusions in peripheries of the 20th century can be seen by different eyes now", - A. Gugin on the eve of reunion of Germany, in the 1990th year writes (1990: 6).

In this atmosphere (denial of fascism, retaliation with the past and at the same time tendencies of totalitarian political system, the ideological bans and barriers) the first works of Bobrowski appear.

The literary public of the East and West Germany knew of Bobrowski's creativity only in 1960, after his performance at a meeting of "group 47", in Ashafenburg where he "read, hard and wide, two poems, and the 22nd meeting of "group 47" realized: the poet is open... Man of small growth... Externally he resembled rather the working person, even on the peasant - large, a little rough face, wide cheekbones. Old-fashioned clothes, strong boots. It was presented by Bobrowski..." (1974: 14).

His first works informed descendants of historical images (loner rebels, thinkers, composers, artists), Bobrowski's reflections on the reasons which led Germany 1945 to terrible accident, held in remembrance the past, that fault that continues to weary and call to atonement. "Wine of my people before the people of Eastern Europe from emergence of the Chapter of the German knights and prior to events of the recent past" (Bobrowski, 1974: 32), - he formulated the subject in the first poetic collection "Time of Sarmatians", and then developed in the historical prose.

J. Bobrowski's appearance on post-war literary "arena" with its original, honest internationalism during artificial division of the German nation was urgent. He feels insufficient humanistic balance of political system of the new German state, its ideology. National literature more than ever needed such writer as J. Bobrowski who stretched invisible thread of reunion of spiritual heritage of the 18th century with cultural wealth. Bobrowski did much for formation of humanistic consciousness of the post-war generation of Germans, he spoke: "The culture is imaginable as process of a progressive humanization, process of a hominifying the relationship" (1974: 66).

The writer acted (for that both literary views and a personal ideological position of everyone who devoted himself to literary activity were clear to the reader: "Humanistic German literature - East German and West German is ideologically various, has different prerequisites. The problem of both literatures in respect of a humanization coincides: general democratic and anti-fascist aspirations. Humanist writers of West Germany are opposition forces in literature - irrespective of ideology of the West German state, firmly stand on the positions" (Bobrowski, 1974: 67).

Literary works of the German writer originate in Russia, Bobrowski speaks about it: "... I wanted - and it was the beginning of my creativity, in 1943-1944 - to tell beauty of the Russian nature. Winter landscapes, were close to the description which both Paustovsky, and Tolstoy addressed more than once to me, inspired trust, struck with the quiet beauty... here I grew up... This area appeared before me in a new way, and I wanted to write about it, at first tried to write with paints, and then prose" (Bobrowski, 1974: 54).

At the first meeting with ancient Russia - walls of Novgorod - the German soldier Bobrowski had a need to transfer what was seen - the destroyed houses, a picture of the profaned Novgorod - in a verse ("Cathedral" 1941, "On the steepness keeps silence Novgorod" 1943, "Message" of 1943) (Bobrowski, 1971: 5).

The main perspective of Bobrowski's poetry – is history of the people and communication of the person with the nature. On his plan, the earth of Sarmatians since the Teutonic chapter suffering from the German invasions had to give an evident reason for reflections, strengthen confidence in correctness of a new historical way in new generation of Germans, wake up feeling of love and respect for the next people. In its verses there is a complete image of Eastern Europe. Destinies of the Slavic, Baltic and Finnish people, the millennia of their drama history, their fight against overseas enslavers, their ancient myths, songs and customs - all this became a subject of the closest creative attention of the poet. The nature and history of Eastern Europe are connected in verses indissolubly. In poems "Steppe", "Sarmatian Plain" the mighty South Russian plains and steppes in the primordiality keeping memory of the millennia of history appear at us. The cycle of poems "Time of Sarmatians" which told of the most severe historical and class antagonisms which pass through all history of Eastern Europe countries - from times of the

Christianization of Kievan Rus' and fights with the Teutonic chapter before invasion of fascist Wehrmacht - opens the solemn "Elegy of memory of Pruss". Contrary to the author's name, it, most likely reflects the mourning ode reviving destiny of the Lithuanian nationality. Confidence grows in the poet that descendants will not repeat those tragic mistakes any more in relation to other people which were made by their "fathers" (Leistner, 1990: 101-108).

As the lyrical element in Bobrowski's poetry is considerable, its main perspective - destinies of the whole people and the states, people and the nature, laws of life and history, - a perspective, public in character, integrally demanded "big style". "In prose I will be given an opportunity to reflect most fully personally endured" (the Russian captivity, his thoughts and search in literature of post-war Germany, his historical outlook means here) – mentions J. Bobrowski in the memoirs (1974: 68).

Two of his novels belong to creative heritage of J. Bobrowski prose-writer: *Levin's mill*, *The Lithuanian clavers* and two books of stories, short stories. A perspective of stories and novels - judgment of the past, fault of the German people in relation to the next generations, edge of the childhood where his memoirs steadily come back. In historical prose J. Bobrowski "poetically develops the same favorite region - distressful east lands between Neman and Vistula. Once they were occupied by ancient Sarmatians, and then Lithuanians and Poles, Roma, Jews and Germans mixed up here. To this ground where the writer was born, he gave all the artist's love" (Pronin, 2007: 344).

Materials and Methods

Research material is considered, mainly, from positions of specific historical and historical-and-functional methods. When reading the art text of novels the system analysis technique is used.

Results and Discussion

The first novel (*Levin's Mill*, 1964) which action is takes place in 1870, "incubatory time of anti-Semitism" (according to Friedrich Heer), J. Bobrowski, formulates the theory of 'prefashizm' (emergence of fascism)" (Albert, 1990: 164). The writer warns about the danger menacing to his native land about which John Milfull unambiguously speaks: "'clouds' (unfaßbares Gewitter) over the Sarmatian world" were condensed (Albert, 1990: 165). The author of *Levin's Mill* opens sources of fascism origin in the German society, shows how from the daily conflicts there is an alienation ideology, partially based on the structurally functional theory of historical and social sciences in which the fascism is described as "a special form of domination in the societies which are in a critical phase of their transformation in process of industrialization" (Albert, 1990: 165) arises. In this regard, moods of average estate are of real interest (small bourgeoisies, residents of towns and rural areas), its aspiration "to worry", having literary processed, once again events of the childhood and behavioral strategy.

In inherent only to him style of the special narration, Bobrowski artly comprehends the childhood and youth (the 30th years of the 20th century) on the boundary earth (Sarmatian space), in the conditions of the German fascism origin. The poet and the writer, the patriot of the homeland, he looks for the answer to a question which was asked by literature of both Germanies - responsibility of each German for the incident and deeds, awareness of own fault by separately taken person. Also he formulates the main subject of the literary creativity: "atonement of fault of the German people before the people of the Eastern Europe, - first of all, at the time of crisis" (Haufe, 1998: 14).

In this plan, *The Lithuanian Clavers* can be considered as synthesis of lyrical and prosaic works of Bobrowski. About it J. Bobrowski writes 22.10.1964 to Manfred Peter Hein who emigrated to Finland: "It

seems to me, all previous was "introduction", actually, what I have to tell, I write just now" (Haufe, 1998: 15).

The events described in the novel *Lithuanian Claviers* take place within 2 days - on June 23 and 24, 1936 against the background of an east Prussian landscape of Memel, childhood and youth memories of the poet, the writer J. Bobrowski - political and historical events of 1936: beginning of the Spanish civil war; invasion into the demilitarized Rhine region (the German history).

The Memel region (village Vilkishky) – is the region with special history. Action of the novel *Lithuanian Claviers* takes place in parallel in the autonomous Memel region of independent Lithuania and in the boundary city of a Nazi Reich Tilsit in 1936. These lands are a part of Sarmatian space, the writer's homeland that is especially interesting to J. Bobrowski as the literary historian.

If Bobrowski's novels give quite wide range of public events, conflicts and their driving forces, then the stories written in an interval between novels or in parallel with them only rather small fragment of reality, specific, accurately limited episode which features of characters, characteristic features of an event tries to catch most important. Stories cover quite considerable period of time: the childhood (*Silent summer, and something about quails*), a pre-wartime (*Prophet, Pizhma*), war (*A mouse holiday, Dancer Malige*) and at last, our days (*Owl, Forced into stranger capital*).

Close to these stories - amusing stories from original life of East Prussian edge (*The Lithuanian legend, Lobellersky of Liski*), the third group of stories are short stories in which historical characters appear: Dietrich Buxtehude (Buxtehude), Kant and Gaman (*Pinnau's Memories*), Schopenhauer (*The young man at a window*), the unknown poet from the Bobrowski family (Belendorf, *From poetic heritage*) (Bobrowski, 1971: 7).

Addressing material of the past, history of the German people, Bobrowski tries "to wake" consciousness of the German youth, more senior generation of the Germans who were influenced by burdens and deprivations of the German Reich power, "to open" eyes on the German tragedy of 1933-45. Through the creativity, through the appeal to historical examples he speaks about responsible participation in life (K. Donelaytis, the teacher Poshka).

The German researcher Mr. Wolf caught in creative shape of Bobrowski nearly the most essential line: constancy, rare sequence of its artist's addictions. "Frequent return peculiar to Bobrowski to the same related topics is explained by the aspiration of the author to bring the ideas home of everyone. The whole layers of history remained undiscovered yet (here that was the main incentive in literary work of Bobrowski), and the whole generations of Germans just did not know the writers and philosophers. J. Bobrowski deeply understands it" (Wolf, 1984: 340).

Undoubtedly, as personal experience of Bobrowski, everything endured in days of Nazism and war also with a big force is expressed in his stories (*A mouse holiday, Prophet*).

Heavily, events of the first weeks of war in his stories *Dancer Malige, Mouse Holiday* look painfully. The politician of oppression and destruction of the whole people in "the third empire" of Hitler, the historical past of the German people induced to address his historical prose, art judgment of the past where history acts as model for the present. "History is not generalized, does not repeat and cannot be only reminiscence," - Bobrowski says (1974: 33). He believes, the author puts into the image of the past something personal. The strict border between the past and the present changed. Almost all stories of Bobrowski narrate about the present. "Events, cases from our life - they come to the rescue. I begin to write stories without plan, without long reflections, simply with a game light and shadows!" (1974: 68-69).

Persistence with which Bobrowski - in novels, short stories written after war - again and again raises a question is significant: "How could this happen?" tells the memoirs etude of the writer *The continuing reflections* about it. Here he comprehends lessons of German history (campaigns of the German knights, the German fascism, World War II, division of Germany), has feeling of powerlessness from a crime which was created on behalf of the German people, asks questions: "How it is possible to learn from history? And why we have to describe ancient history?" Literature, Bobrowski considers, is of great importance and can make positive impact if transfer truthfully and for certain the facts of the historical past taking into account the present (Wolf, 1984: 77).

In an interview to Ad. Zac, Bobrowski emphasized that in the prosaic works he uses reliable material: "on my shelves - literature on the country and on people Weihselgegend which participate in my stories, and, first of all, documents: messages on processes, the description of the chronicle from last century" (1974: 49).

His stories are portrait verses where K. I. Belendorf, young Schopenhauer, D. Buxtehude, the Konigsberg environment of Gaman participate. In the short story *Belendorf*, using an outline portrait of the German rebel and freethinker of the 18th century Kasimir Anton Ulrich Belendorf long ago forgotten by official science the writer mentions poems and the facts from his life, without forgetting also about friends of the famous thinker (Shtendlina, Gelderlin) dreaming together with him of a brotherhood of the people and considers that social injustice can be eliminated only with effective measures that conformably to problems of post-war Germany. Reviving the German past in the stories Bobrowski does not doubt that these people are close to our time; memory of them is dear to new Germany.

Conclusions

Tragic experience of war, and reflection about history lessons, formation of GDR, need of strengthening by means of literature in consciousness of the people updating of social and political life promoted creation of original substantial texts. J. Bobrowski, working on the historical story, means the present, represents the past from the point of view of the present, working on historical poetics of the story, novel, uses the reliable material which really happened. The writer's task, in his opinion, is creating space between the facts. Bobrowski claimed, "ascertaining the facts kills the live narration. ...where the author writes and uses the facts, his ideology" joins (1974: 68).

Without accurate civic stand it is impossible to express the true outlooks on life. The crucial role is played by historical outlook of the writer. Complexity of historical outlook of the writer defines its specifics of "small prose" where the important place is allocated to a historical subject (Putzger, 1978). He seeks to look at the German past with people's eyes – from the national point of view (history - life of true representatives of the people, its activity, and creativity) and does it non-conventionally.

Unique images of historical prose (especially its novels *Levin's Mill* and *Lithuanian Claviers*) in many respects outstripped the time. The historical prose of the Prussian writer (by origin), - art development and judgment of the German history by him in literature of the divided Germany and the European space - has a certain value in creation of the international relations model (Slavic, German, Lithuanian) the people and in postulation of the multipolar world.

Historical development features of the "middle" of the last century (crisis development of an era of scientific and technological revolution, dramatic nature of opposition of social and political systems) turned public consciousness to history problems. In the first post-war years and until the end of the 60th the German prose is in process of searching for original language and forms of expression, comprehends

the recent past and the present what many-sided works of the poet, short-story writer and novelist Johannes Bobrowski.

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