

Russian Fiction in the First Decade of the XXI Century: Confession of the Professional

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Abstract:

Modern Russian literature is characterized, inter alia, by an increase of interest to an individual, not because of its outstanding features and talents, but, on the contrary, due to the fullness of its common life. Large number of representatives of various professions came into literature. In this article, an attempt is made to characterize the key works of A. Malatov, T. Solomatina, A. Astvatsaturov and A. Dezhurov in order to identify the typological features of "professionals" prose.

Key words: prose of "professionals"; realism; naturalism; diary; network literature; confession; individualization; typical image.

3rd International Conference on
SOCIAL SCIENCE, HUMANITIES & EDUCATION
 6 - 8 MARCH 2020 BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

In the first decade of the new century, the tendency to unite authors not in accordance with the principle of ideological or stylistic community, but on the principle of so-called corporatism, continues to persist in Russian literature. In modern literary space, "health professionals" are widely represented (Altam Malatov, "Immoralist: The Midday Crisis"; Tatyana Solomatina, "Obstetrician"), "lawyers" (Pavel Astakhov, "Raider"), "philologists" (Arseniy Dezhurov, "Mr. Doctor's Servant", Andrey Astvatsaturov, "People in the Naked") and so on. The distinctive feature of such literature is the lobbying of profession interests through a frank, sometimes naturalistic (mostly it concerns the works of A. Malatov and T. Solomatina), reflection of daily professional life. Probably, partially this is presupposed by the ever growing interest in the so-called "non-game" literature and represents a new round of realism development. Now the authors from book to book write not just about the typical character who represents modern society in this or that social section, but about him or herself and those who in some way was involved into the circulation sphere of the planetary "I".

For example, Almat Malatov, being a representative of the generation of thirty-year-olds who actively expressed themselves in modern literature, is a writer, journalist, author of one of the most visited online diaries. He is extremely frank, however, quite often crossing the line of frankness and intentionally coarsening the text due to obscene vocabulary and a large number of physiological details. The latter, however, can be justified by the notorious medical cynicism. Nevertheless, Malatov can not be deprived of masterful possession of the word, he knows how to hook on the vital and awaken emotions. Almat Malatov says about himself: *"Once I graduated from a medical institute, and I know how to find your brain. I managed to work as a nurse, a paramedic, a model, a chef, a doctor, a human resources manager and establish a small but proud firm"*. In 2004 he was awarded with the popular network prize of Parker (as the author of the best magazine), in 2005 the book "Binary code" was published; two short stories are included in the anthology of the best stories of 2005 and 2006 ("Secrets and Treasures", "Vinegar and Crocodiles").

"Immoralist: The Midday Crisis" is a novel-journey in the best traditions of Henry Miller and Charles Bukowski. The character flies by plane from Moscow to the city of his childhood, thereat moving not only in space, but also in time. Carefree childhood, reckless adolescence, crazy youth... Bohemian clubs, a dormitory of the medical institute, communal apartments, an endless chain of flashing faces that seemed to be of little significance to the character, but for the author being a necessary element of his creative method – a kind of literary pointillism. All these pop-up faces, pictures, silhouettes – a way to look at one's life, to see it not casually split, not momentary, but whole, evolved in some way: *"The past must remain in the past, the youth, not released in time, corrodes the soul like ever young cancer cells"* [Malatov, 238]. And in order to let the past be released, make it lose its power over the soul and thoughts, it is necessary, according to the the author, once again, fully aware of what is being done, to experience the thoughts and life along the streets of the past. The external storyline is trivial:

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the character travels to the city of his childhood to see his relatives. But a few hours in an airplane from Moscow to Chisinau turn into a long journey into life. *"Saying goodbye to the city, setting the last points, so as not to return to this place, I must go around all the places, the corners and shadows of which cause déjà vu in Moscow and London, visit all people whose names are sore in my memory"* [Malatov, 239].

If A. Malatov, even in frivolous-physiological episodes remains a sad lyricist, a little philosophic and expert not only of bodies, but also of souls, then T. Solomatina, even speaking of the romance of feelings and relationships, remains unpromisingly naturalistic.

Tatyana Solomatina, writer, journalist, Ph.D. of Medicine and full Ph.D. of Philosophy, at the same time is the author of several books on medical and near-medical topics ("Midwife", "Reception ward") and a notable blogger. And in both guises she acts as a decisive person, firmly defending her life position, or more precisely – the right to have this life position. The texts of her published works are built according to the same pattern and represent a set of curious, sometimes tragic, but always medical tales, combined in the image of the main character, in which autobiographical features stand out clearly. The reader faces a gallery of images, designed to reflect the slice of our reality in the most unattractive light, but mitigated by the relentlessly declared author's medical sense of humor. However, we have to admit that the author does not always manage to realize the conceived.

Tatyana Solomatina herself repeatedly named V. Veresaev and M. Bulgakov as her literary reference points and predecessors, but such a comparison plays far from the benefit of our contemporary writer. On the background of the classics, many flaws in style, inaccuracy and, ultimately, the paucity of the language become sadly noticeable: *"In the doorway there appeared the mighty carcass of the observatory head of this maternity hospital, part of the multidisciplinary clinical hospital, and today the responsible duty doctor Igor Boytsov, with the party nickname "Bonya"* [Solomatina, 34]. Tendency for compound sentences can be traced through all T. Solomatina's texts and is probably of a fundamental nature. However, it is not always justified from the viewpoint of style and common sense. In the above-mentioned fragment, the failure of this method is clearly observed: what was appropriate and became a sign of L. Tolstoy's idiostyle, in the performance of Solomatina turns into a heavy, unintelligible text burdened with redundant chancery, though among the admirers it is treated as a model of the writer's identity.

At the moment, the total circulation of books by T. Solomatina exceeded 130,000 copies, she is an author in demand, having her own numerous readership and performing an enlightening mission, which is very noble and very necessary today.

The works of A. Malatov and T. Solomatina have much in common with the network literature in that part, which is represented by regular diary entries in the blogs of popular Internet users (Dmitry Gorchev, "Life without Carlo"). The network diaries gave the authors the maximum degree of frankness, external illogicality, the nonlinearity of the plotline, external absence of the plot, which is often replaced by confession and extreme, painful frankness.

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Such an approach to the construction of the literary text carries a significant danger: memories, impressions of childhood, adolescence, youth have the property of the end. And then the author either rolls to self-citation, an endless repetition of what was once said, or returns to literary sources: traditional genres of the narration and the novel.

One of the features of the so-called literary novel (a work created by a professional philologist) is its planned philology nature. In other words, the author (A. Astvatsurov, A. Dezhurov) does not leave his/her text even after publication. Of course, any modern book that provoked even minimal reader's interest generates a flow of statements, comments, attempts at varying degrees of successful analysis. And the author is involved in this postnatal life of his/her offspring, forced to give repeatedly different explanations to the readers, share creative plans, encourage promises to continue or, on the contrary, disappoint, confirming the definitive and irrevocable death of the character for author's interest. This situation is an integral part of any creative process and is equally useful and necessary for the author, for the reader, and for the critic. Along with this for a full-fledged creative process, all three elements are necessary, since only in a permanent discussion with each other, the author, the critic and the reader are able to accumulate the energy necessary for creativity. When it comes to the creative work of professional philologists who turned to literary prose after they had been formed scientifically, then it seems to us possible to talk about a certain and not always positive self-sufficiency. So, Andrey Astvatsurov, a graduate and lecturer of the philological faculty of St. Petersburg State University, the author of a number of scientific researches, among them "Phenomenology of the text: game and repression," a research where special attention is paid to the problems of the struggle with the literary form as the type of repression, critical text strategy, recreation in the text the movement of disembodied energy and the relationship of a person with the things around him, in his debut novel "People in the Naked" (2009) moved from theoretical research to the phase of a scientific experiment.

"People in the Naked" is a book mainly autobiographical, similar to nothing, alive and witty, densely populated by real characters from the circle of St. Petersburg humanitarian intelligentsia. Among Astvatsurov's genre and "intonational" predecessors according to the critics there are Sergey Dovlatov, Pavel Sanayev, Alexander Zholkovsky (with his "Vignettes"), Venedikt Erofeev... However, here, as in the case with the texts of other "professionals" – A. Malatov and T. Solomatina, the author sins with excessive self-absorption. Undoubtedly, exquisite bohemian stories, alternating with deliberately coarsened everyday sketches, are curious, deliberate refusal from any moral on the background of excellent possession of a word that the author cannot be deprived, is capable of attracting the reader to the sophisticated, but at the same time trying to avoid traditional for classical literature didacticism and rich problems. Each story told by the author is another heart-warming for the dedicated joke, for example, about Yury Lotman, who lived in Tartu in the same building with a dermatovenerologic dispensary or about Zakhar Plavskin, extorting Othello's nationality from the regular careless student: *"Plavskin has almost lost his speech. Or pretended that he has almost lost it. This is most likely. Professors, especially in Russian universities, convince*

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everyone and themselves first of all that if someone does not comply with university ideals and standards, then this is an outrageous illegitimate misunderstanding. But in vain. A person is interesting because he is unpredictable, that he evades all standards and regulations. That he is on his own. That he is lonely, naked homeless on the bare ground, equal to himself" [Astvatsaturov, 60]. It is difficult to imagine how similar stories can be captured by a non-philologist, because they have a pronounced corporate spirit, are built on the principle of sapiente sat and are not provided with explanations. This approach nevertheless sharply narrows the circle of readers, even in comparison with the gynecological stories of T. Solomatina, since the latter can quite naturally appeal to at least the entire female reading audience, and the number of philologists does not go with it in any comparison. However, the author himself does not agree with such an approach to his text, arguing that outside the frivolous tales and jokes it is concealed "a number of very important existential ideas, which I simply try to present in everyday language. This can be perceived as stories, jokes. But in them I try to "dissolve" some important ideas for me. For example, related to a very close to me left discourse. Everyday life helps me look at these ideas from the other side, make them ironic. As a writer, I want to play these ideas, I want to show their different perspectives. Demonstrate how life itself refutes them. For this, I need this household layer" [Miroshkin].

However A. Astvatsaturov is certainly an author very curious, showing filigree possession of the word, saturating the text with allusions, reminiscences, able to write and loving every word in Russian. If we talk about the formal side of his work, the novel consists of two parts, strikingly different from each other and written in different years. The first part appeared out of the records that were made by the author in his blog since 2002, the second part was written later in 2006. It is, among other things, about painful forms of culture (such as postmodernism), exploiting other, healthy forms. The demarcation line between the first and second parts of the novel is very obvious. The first part, due to the specifics of writing, seems more direct and complete. It is organized with the help of a special system of leitmotifs (for example: a naked lone human body, bare earth, bones, skull –as if it was a reduced person, its different entities). The second part is more a novel about literature, about life, about oneself, a peculiar means of self-growth, internal change. This is a journey through literature. And the epicenter of it – the "set-in" novel-clip "The Way of Gava", completely quoted. This is an allusion to Sorokin's novel "The Way of Bro". According to the author's original intention, it was supposed to publish a two-part book, consisting of two narratives. However, they were subsequently combined into a single novel. In one of the interviews A. Astvatsaturov noted that, in his opinion, this should have been a successful contrast: "the asceticism of the first part and literary ornateness, the citation nature of the second" [Miroshkin].

One of the principles postulated by the author is the principle of destroying the old novel form, which should contribute to the emergence of a new literary language. Reflecting his own novel from literary viewpoint, A. Astvatsaturov explains the looseness of the composition of his work by a conscious desire to deconstruct the traditional novel form, which, in his opinion, binds creativity, driving it into the framework of the pattern.

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If the first part of the "People in the Naked" is transparent and represents a set of jokes united by the personality of the author who does not seek answers, does not raise questions, but fixes the very flow of life around himself with an ironic impartiality characteristic of the intelligentsia, the second part is essentially an expanded answer to the question why the author still decided on the feat of writing. In the first lines of the second part of A. Astvatsaturov, with some excess frankness, informs the reader that he began writing mostly for the sake of envy for his more successful colleagues who managed to find their niche in the changed life realities. All further experiments and flirting with the form somehow stem from this initial message: to designate his place in the number of commercially evolved philologists. Such a position, doubtful from the viewpoint of classical writing, is, nevertheless, very common in modern realities. And more over – justified. Rozanov's principle of writing "exactly because of money" is now becoming not something elusively embarrassing, but quite worthy of respect and recognition. Indeed, is it not insulting to philologists who are capable of producing an endless stylistically literate text, but who do not do this because of internal restrictions and fear to be accused of graphomania, when the wide readership again confesses the love to the next mediocre dilettante?

Having included in the second part allusive "novel-clip" "Way of Gava", examples of epistolary and dramatic genres, balancing in the space of one text a typical philologist and a typical bro from the nineties, A. Astvatsaturov made a serious claim for the future.

If A. Astvatsaturov makes only first steps in fiction, then it is difficult to name Arseny Dezhurov a debutant.

A. Dezhurov was born in 1968 in Moscow, in the family of the philologist-Germanist S. Dezhurov and continued the family tradition, in 1990 graduated from the Philological Faculty of Moscow State Pedagogical University of V.I. Lenin. Ph.D. of Philology, Associate Professor. The scope of literary interests: grotesque in literature and painting, category of the comic in literature and aesthetics of German romanticism. Space and time in literature and painting.

Member of the Writers' Union of Russia (1998). Member of the Society of E.T.A. Hoffmann (Germany) and the Heidelberg Music Archive ETAH, Corresponding Member of the International Academy of Pedagogical Education, Member of the Russian Union of Germanists, Laureate of the Losev Award "For the best scientific work in the field of humanitarian research "(1999, 2000).

In addition to a number of professional publications, A. Dezhurov is the author of the books "The Frog Princess. Loving eyes. Plays for children's theater" (Moscow, 1999); "I'm 20, and I'm writing letters" (Moscow, 2004); "Comedies" (Moscow, 2004); "Mr. Doctor's Servant" (Moscow, 2008).

The novel "Mr. Doctor's Servant", like the work of A. Astvatsaturov, is deeply autobiographical. However, is much more traditionally literary. The novel has a linear plot, compositionally divided into two unequal parts, which tell in some way about the ordeals of the spirit of the modern intellectual and intelligentsia representative, whose image fits into the

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paradigm of the characters of Artsybashev, Gorky, W. Burroughs and so on. To detect allusions, reminiscences, hidden explicit quotes in the text of a professional literary critic is a mission that is deliberately sentenced to failure. The researcher faces a completely different question, with no final solution: which part of the literary game is of a conscious nature, and which is the cultural discourse intrinsically inherent to the author.

In contrast to A. Astvatsurov, who focused in his novel on the deep individualization of his character and his solvency with the author's personality, A. Dezhurov creates a typical image of the modern intelligentsia representative, who is restless, unrequited, sometimes unnecessary to himself and at the same time self-reliant, in the exclusivity of his earthly vocation. To enhance this effect, the author also implies linguistic means, oversaturating the language of the work with complex speech constructions filigreed from the viewpoint of the norms of Russian speech, but at the same time far from everyday utterances and philologists, even: *"I am an angel! This idea made happy with its new simplicity. It seemed to me that it was only necessary to remember it – and then to live like this, joyfully, genderlessly, angelically, in each subject for the finality of form to see the infinite movement of matter, to feel the breath of the deity. The world looked at me with kindred eyes, and I am beautiful not by human beauty, but the way a tomato, a dandelion, a pebble are beautiful – I pulled to it my kind, slightly orange hands"* [Dezhurov, 59].

The so-called "literature of professionals" sins with one common, but very palpable drawback: it very often ceases to be literature itself. Some, such as T. Solomatina and P. Astakhov, manifest their life position in the literary form, others (for example, A. Astvatsurov) use professional skills to solve other problems, not only creative ones. Each of these approaches to creativity has the right to exist and finds a response in the readership, but in addition to the immediate interest of the public, expressed in print circulations and fees, there is also a diachronic, time-prolonged demand, which is unlikely for many of our contemporaries. And it is connected with the narrowness of their creative approach. So, the doctors M. Bulgakov and A. Chekhov, even appealing to their own professional experience, wrote first of all not about a doctor, a peasant, an official, but about a man. Medical accuracy, frankness, did not make them cynical professionals, but helped in the creation of characters, quite viable behind the doors of the reception ward. Perhaps such level of typification can probably be attributed to A. Malatov's works.

The same drawback is inherent to other professionals, too absorbed in the desire to tell the uninitiated about the sacraments of their fascinating and hard work: legal, philological, military, media and other. Probably, over time these works will be of interest. And it is even more likely that historians, sociologists, culturologists, and philologists will be interested in them. All those who build a scientific picture of the world, relying on documentary evidence of the era. In this regard, the "literature of professionals" stands in line with the production novel and in fact differs little from it, perhaps, only because the latter does not have a negative character, his functions are performed by temporarily erring, but necessarily corrected in the

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final antagonist of the main character. And of course, the action of the modern production novel unfolds not in factory decorations, but in much more dangerous offices. Despite the apparent simplification of the way of the modern book to its reader, in fact, things are much more complicated. Volumes of printed products are growing, bookshops in large cities are akin to the intellectual jungle, and in small settlements they lack or merge with post offices, where in the window the volume of Dostoevsky lies between the creations of D. Dontsova and B. Cartland. However, in both cases, there is no necessity to talk about simplifying the way of the book to acquire a reader.

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