

THE EMERGENCE OF POSTMODERN TRENDS IN THE LITERATURE OF SOCIALIST REALISM (EARLY ANDREY BITOV)

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Abstract: The purpose of the article is to examine the beginning of the emergence of postmodern trends in Russian literature in the 1960s and 1980s and, using the example of Andrei Bitov's short story "Penelope", to show how the traditional theme of love underwent a gradual transformation at the end of the twentieth century. The article shows how the theme of love, which previously served as a condition for revealing the moral and ethical potential of the male protagonist in Russian and world literature, began to lose its distinct real features in postmodern prose and turn into love-mirage, love-illusion. The analysis revealed that Andrei Bitov was one of the first Russian postmodern writers in modern prose who identified and demonstrated new components of the love theme.

Keywords: Andrei Bitov; postmodernism; the theme of love; tradition and innovation; the short story "Penelope".

1 Introduction

When starting to analyze the figurative and motional constants of the love theme in the Russian postmodern short story of the 1980s and 2000s, it would be correct to turn primarily to women's prose, since it is the gender attribute that largely affects the concentration of certain themes in the work of various writers. It is enough to look at the works of L. Petrushevskaya (Petrushevskaya 1999), L. Ulitskaya (Ulitskaya 2021), V. Tokareva (Tokareva 2023), T. Tolstaya (Tolstaya 1999), D. Rubina (Rubina 2010), etc., as it becomes clear how powerfully the theme of love, its variants and motivational components are presented in their stories. Meanwhile, in our case, it is more correct to turn to men's stories, to the early stories of Andrei Bitov, since it is this writer that critics and literary theorists refer to the three pillars on which Russian postmodernism stands at the end of the twentieth century. "*Pushkin's House* by Andrei Bitov, along with *Walks with Pushkin* by A. Terts and *Moscow — Cockerels* by Ven. Yerofeyev is considered to be a text that opens up new postmodern trends in the modern literary process" (Bogdanova 2002, 3).

Indeed, if we turn to the criticism of the 1980s, it becomes obvious that the name of Andrei Bitov invariably appears among those writers who laid the foundations for a postmodern vision of new literature (it is enough to refer to the works of N. Leiderman (Leiderman 2003), M. Lipovetsky (Lipovetsky 1997), M. Epstein (Epstein 2000), I. Skoropanova (Skoropanova 2002), O. Bogdanova (Bogdanova 2004), etc.). A. Bol'shev writes: "Bitov, if I may say so, initially has a postmodern worldview, in the coordinates of which the world is a text, a game and a transcoding of signs" (Bol'shev 2009, 39).

And although there is another judgment in literary criticism — that Bitov does not belong to postmodern writers, but such a point of view has begun to gain strength only in recent decades. In our opinion, at the present time, when the trends of postmodernism have (almost) disappeared, almost every Russian postmodernist writer can be said that the avant-garde experimental trends in his work were local, not basic. However, during the rise and heyday of

postmodern trends, Andrei Bitov's work turned out to be one that vividly demonstrated thematic, motivational, and stylistic originality, which at that time qualified as postmodern.

2 Literature Review

Bearing in mind the constitutive features of postmodern literature — the imaginary reality, the lack of integrity of the hero, the "zero" (according to R. Barth) position of the author, etc. — it is easy to detect all these signs already in Bitov's early work (Bogdanova 2002; Benevolenskaya 2008; Levental' 2009, Sukhikh 2009, Bol'shev 2013). As noted by critics, the hero of Bitov's very first stories is "not equal to himself", "not coinciding with himself" (Bogdanova 2002, 5). It is enough to recall the 1961 Bitov's story "The Loafer", where the hero himself talks about himself: "I am no longer me..." (Bitov 1996, 61) or "I make many different impressions..." (Bitov 1996, 46). And these impressions are not external, for example, professional or social, but internal, psychological, when not only strangers, but also the hero himself does not see himself as stable, even with certain facial features — he is low, then tall, or his eyes appear to him either brown or gray (Bitov 1996, 47). The hero seems to be living not his own, but someone else's, "stolen" (Bitov 1996, 60) life. As the text of the story "The Loafer" reveals, the narrative of the hero's life is permeated with motives of "invisibility of existence" (Bitov 1996, 48, 65), untruthfulness, ghostliness, pretense, shadows and reflections (Bitov 1996, 50, 55, 61, 63, 65, etc.). Recall that it is these constants that define postmodern literature and become constitutive signs of a postmodern type of worldview.

In this context, it is important to understand how the theme of love manifests itself in Bitov's early stories and how it is interpreted by the writer. Did Bitov's perception of the theme of love influence the further development of Russian postmodern literature? What is the peculiarity of the figurative-motional components of the theme of love in the works of new literature?

Critics have already written quite a lot and in detail about the theme of love, its motivational variation, and the diversity of female images in Bitov's novel "Pushkin's House" (Bogdanova 2002; Benevolenskaya 2008; Levental' 2009, Sukhikh 2009; Bol'shev 2013), however, in the prose writer's stories, the theme of love, the motives of a love interest, independently and purposefully, were practically not touched upon. That is why it is necessary to take for analysis one of the earliest stories by Bitov — "Penelope" (1962) — and trace how the young novelist began to shape the future (postmodern) perception of the theme of love, what features of its manifestation the author paid attention to.

3 The image of the narrator and the ego-hero of Bitov's story

It is quite obvious that in the center of Bitov's story "Penelope" there is a male ego-character, a young hero, about whom the narrative is being conducted. His thoughts, mood, well-being and introspection are reproduced in the smallest nuances by the narrator. Meanwhile, the *I*-narrator is contoured in the text of the story only sporadically, only a few times, mostly the narrative is conducted as if from a third person (*he*), but borders on the form of presentation in inappropriate direct speech. Thus, the hero and the author are placed in a relationship of the "second self": hero = alter ego of the author. The subjectivity and personality of the narrative seem to double, saturating the story with internal, hidden from outsider fluctuations of the "unequal" hero. The character appears as if from different angles: he looks at himself from the inside and at the same time "corrects" his impression through the eyes of others. The stereoscopy of the image increases, the "isolation" of the character in the space of the story is intentionally enhanced.

However, the isolation of the hero, carried out by the narrator, relative to the hero himself indicates something else. The need to evaluate oneself not only from within, but also from others allows us to talk about the character's uncertainty, about his orientation to the assessment of outsiders. If the hero himself thinks of himself as an adult, confident, established man, then an appeal to the assessments of others puts him in the position of a person unsure of himself, unable to make a choice and make a decision on his own. The author puts him in a position where the character's behavior is actually mediated not by himself, but by the world around him. It is the outside world that dictates to him the norms of actions and behavior. The principle of freedom, which brings Bitov's hero to the fore, turns out to be leveled, equal to zero. There is a motive for the imaginary independence, the imaginary freedom of opinion and behavior. A free hero turns out to be unfree, an independent one turns out to be independent. The principle of postmodernity is distinctly explicated in the text.

Just as it was in "The Loafer", the character of "Penelope" is not really independent, he only creates impressions. The proof of this is the versions and variants of those circumstances that could be happening to the hero at the moment (they could, but they are not happening). However, unlike "The Loafer", the sphere of manifestation of the hero's lack of independence is not the professional sphere, not the surrounding society, but love. Bitov draws out the many faces of his hero in new circumstances — through a relationship with a girl. The motive of love in the story "Penelope" becomes a litmus test for the identification and self-identification of the character.

The main character of the story is a young man named Lobyshev, he is "not seventeen", he perceives himself as an "adult" (Bitov 1996, 69, 70). A Leningrader, he works, holds a very responsible position — foreman, "head of the detachment ... on the expedition" (Bitov 1996, 75).

Finding himself in conditions of forced "downtime", when he had 2–3 hours of free time in the middle of the working day, waiting for a delayed expedition salary — "money has not yet been brought from the bank" (Bitov 1996, 68), he is looking for a way to pass the time. "In general, he felt very good when he walked along Nevsky Prospekt, along his beloved autumn Nevsky, and looked around — what kind of air! He felt free and spacious when he walked like that" (Bitov 1996, 68). The feeling of freedom and spaciousness that engulfed the hero is maintained in a simple rational way — not to think or, in his definition, to think casually (Bitov 1996, 69).

Like the slacker hero from the early story, Lobyshev sees options in everything: he can go to the Summer Garden or Mikhailovsky Garden and, sitting on a bench surrounded by autumn trees, devote hours to thinking about himself and life, or not think about anything. The hero imagines various options, but chooses the most lightweight option — he decides to go to a session of a picture in the nearest Leningrad cinema on Nevsky Prospekt. "...he will still enjoy it, no matter how much he spits later..." (Bitov 1996, 71).

4 The sourdough image is the image of the heroine Penelope

It has already been said above that the story is entirely devoted to the hero and the reproduction of the mechanism of his introspection and self-perception. However, the author specifically emphasizes the moment when the hero "passes into the dark alley of the cinema" (Bitov 1996, 71). The novelist highlights this circumstance, thereby further events — meeting and getting to know the girl — are brought to the fore by him. The love motive, according to the will of the author, occupies a central position. Next, it is the love affair that organizes the plot of the story.

In the system of the heroes of the story, a second character appears — a female, an unnamed heroine—a girl, a random stranger. Critics have already drawn attention to the fact that the heroine is not named in any way. If the hero is represented by his

last name (Lobyshev), then the heroine is not. She does not introduce herself to the hero, he does not ask her name. However, this is not entirely true. The fact is that the hero is sent by the author to a movie theater with the non-coincidental name "Colosseum" and the film is not coincidentally called "Odyssey". The precedent names of the film and the cinema evoke ancient Greek allusions and generate parallels to the events taking place in today's reality. The title of the story "Penelope" seems to be transferred to the heroine of the story — the unnamed girl-heroine gets a significant name. The ancient story of Odysseus and Penelope comes to life in the realities of the modern world.

Ready for a love adventure, finding himself in a crowd in the doorway of a cinema and hearing "a woman's voice, young" (Bitov 1996, 72), the hero instantly reacts to it. "Lobyshev turned around and, without looking too closely, saw a small sturdy figure, a short light-colored hairstyle and a young, wow face" (Bitov 1996, 72).

All the details accompanying an acquaintance are benevolent, endearing, promising. A young girl has a hero to herself, she does not hesitate to find a definition for a young stranger — "cute" (Bitov 1996, 73). She looked "at him both devotedly and admiringly, one might say lovingly, or invitingly..." (Bitov 1996, 73). The beginning of the love story took place.

Meanwhile, the author placed the hero and heroine in such a situation that, in the conditions of a *dark* archway, "he [Lobyshev] could not particularly look at her; however, he has not yet found anything unpleasant in her" (Bitov 1996, 72). There are distinct and recognizable signs of love motives in the text, the romantic metaphor "the light of conversation" flashes. It seems that Bitov consciously builds up the realities of events in such a way that the reader should freeze in anticipation of a future love and romantic story familiar from the stamps of literature or according to the laws of cinema.

But the plot of the Bitov story takes a different and decisive turn. In the perception of a love story, the effect of deceived expectation is triggered. The heroes (already almost in love) "came out of the doorway into the light", and "here something in his companion seemed unusual or indecent to Lobyshev <...> what he saw in the light and did not understand yet, already began to alarm him" (Bitov 1996, 73).

In bright light, the heroine appeared before the hero in a completely different image. "And he saw that her short hairstyle was not like a hairstyle, but recently grown hair, moreover, dyed to breakage, <...> a shabby, tight-fitting, like a man's jacket <...> there was something impossible on her feet: worn, shapeless, and there were no stockings" (Bitov 1996, 74).

The charm of a young face, a slender figure and a warm voice, which charmed the character in the semi-darkness of the arch, was destroyed by the girl's beggarly outer attire. Bitov (and after him the hero) insistently emphasizes the squalor of the heroine's appearance. A character, represented as a thinking, understanding hero, suddenly finds himself in front of the materiality of the world and the poverty of his companion. However, the familiar love story — the Cinderella plot — does not work in Bitov's story: the hero is ashamed of the poor appearance of a stranger and tries to retreat in every possible way.

Note that the appearance of the hero is also not the most ceremonial, not for visits. Earlier, thinking about himself, the hero reflected that his current attire — a work sweatshirt and boots — were not suitable for a walk along Nevsky Prospekt and for going to the cinema. "...you should have been better dressed" (Bitov 1996, 70). However, he rejects the idea of going home and changing clothes — out of pragmatic expediency and the need to return to work soon — and goes to the cinema dressed like a worker. The heroine-girl is not confused by the appearance of the hero, but the hero himself is defeated by the sight of an old jacket, skirt and shoes.

But, anyway, it can be assumed that the novelist intentionally and consciously (in the tradition of world literature) subjects his hero to a love test. Moreover, his hero passes (in the conditions of modern reality) in a fabulous way three times.

5 The psychological world of heroes: illusion and ghostliness

Once in the cinema, the heroine finally explains what caused her exclamation on the street: "A very poor woman, an old lady, in line, and her money was stolen, twenty rubles. If only they knew who they were stealing from... And then the poor old lady is in line..." (Bitov 1996, 74). The heroine shows sympathy for the poor old woman, whereas the hero is gripped by completely different feelings towards the poor girl. The beggarly appearance of the heroine causes him rejection, shame, embarrassment, a desire to get rid of his companion as soon as possible and in any way. The test has not been passed.

However, the author does not limit himself to this: the tests continue. The girl suggests going to the buffet before the session, since, according to her, she has not had breakfast yet. The hero almost happily admits that he has "no money" (Bitov 1996, 75). And in this situation, the begging heroine turns out to be on top — she admits that she has enough money for a sandwich and she generously offers the hero — "we'll eat in half" (Bitov 1996, 76).

The hero does not deceive the heroine, he really only has "a ruble" (Bitov 1996, 76), but the situation is built by Bitov in such a way that the immaturity of a "non-seventeen-year-old boy" becomes visible and tangible. False (as it is obvious to the reader) shame and embarrassment expose weakness and lack of freedom in the character of the hero, which previously he seemed to have so confidently and convincingly refused. And in this mini-scene, the central character is doomed to fail.

Finally, the author gives the heroine the opportunity to demonstrate taste and intelligence: during the demonstration of a newsreel, the girl asks the question: "How do you feel about abstract painting?" (Bitov 1996, 77), making it clear that she is familiar with this kind of art. The hero does not believe in the depth of the heroine's knowledge, so he walks away from the conversation, making it clear that the heroine does not reach the level where an intelligent and educated hero could talk about painting with her on equal terms. The heroine did not get the opportunity to speak out, she was forced to remain silent.

Meanwhile, the hero is afraid to enter into a dialogue with the girl and not only because he does not trust the knowledge of the heroine. He is scared of the people around him, the audience, who, as it seems to him, are all looking at them. And, most likely, they look at it with condemnation. The hero is afraid of public opinion. The moral principles of the hero are questioned by the writer.

6 Ways to self-identification of the hero

As mentioned earlier, the random film that the hero got to was chosen by the writer for a reason. The projection of the love line of the ancient hero Odysseus and faithful Penelope intersects with the love vicissitudes of Lobyshev and his companion. Note that while watching a movie session and most importantly — in the dark, without light — the confused and upset hero feels very comfortable, even cozy. The shame and embarrassment (almost fear) that he felt in the light disappears. The principle of postmodern perception of life comes into force — ghostliness, artful artificiality (= cinema), shadows and reflections. The light scares the modern hero, the darkness turns out to be saving. The people around do not give strength, but generate fear and doubt. Love and fidelity are perceived as true only within the framework of (cinema-)illusion and the darkness that hides the real outlines.

Lobyshev even liked the girl in the dark of the auditorium: "In general, he was pleased with the way she treated him in the dark" (Bitov 1996, 77). "The girl put Lobyshev's hand on her

lap <...> The girl stroked herself with Lobyshev's hand" (Bitov 1996, 78). For the hero, twilight is more desirable than lighting, illusion is more desirable than reality. With the lights out in the hall, "Lobyshev felt better again. It became almost good again" (Bitov 1996, 78).

It is not a random film, which the characters find themselves watching, that brings new accents to the narrative, which complement the narrative. The reality in which the hero finds himself now, his shame and embarrassment, is replaced by a lively interest in on-screen events. The film is fascinating, the hero even feels like "a little Odyssey" (Bitov 1996, 79).

Lobyshev sees the ingenious Odyssey as "a completely <...> modern guy", in which, according to the central character, "thirst for thrills and pleasure" dominates (Bitov 1996, 79). Lobyshev sees "something strangely similar between himself and the Homeric hero" (Bitov 1996, 79). The duality of the character of the hero of the story is projected onto the image of an ancient Greek character. Lobyshev seems to find an excuse for himself in the fact that strength and weakness were interchangeable in the Odyssey. Moreover, the hero generalizes, transfers this observation to all people: "... the best thing about people is their strength. Weaklings, in fact, they are extraordinary" (Bitov 1996, 79). Plus easily changes to minus, minus to plus.

In the eyes of the modern hero, Odysseus with his strength and weakness is "justified" (Bitov 1996, 80), and after him Lobyshev himself is justified. Now the film is perceived by the character as reality, and the random "pathetic" companion is a "strange shadow", a "bad dream" (Bitov 1996, 80). The hero's postmodern world turned upside down and found its own logical validity. As it turns out, in today's world, as in the world of Ancient Greece, in the atmosphere of myth and fairy tale, you can choose a point of view, find a special position that will provide justification and explanation for everything.

7 Resolution and non-resolution of the conflict in the story

In later works, Bitov and other postmodern writers will end the narrative at such a "crossroads", when the finale will invariably offer a multiplicity of options and variations for the further development of the (poly-)plot, and most importantly, it will demonstrate a variety of axiological assessments, or rather, lack of evaluation (Those who overcame socialist realism 2023). The dominants of the author's presence will be leveled, the author's position will be "zero", the clarity of the views of the central character will not be detectable. However, so far, in 1962, Bitov is still looking for a moral outcome in the story and trying to point to a moral assessment of what has been accomplished. His hero realizes that he has committed meanness, another thing is that he finds an explanation and justification for this. The value hierarchy still exists, but it has already been broken.

The polysemantism of the hero — inequality to himself — is brought to the fore by Bitov in the pre-postmodern character. He is good and bad, honest and mean, thinking and thoughtless, ashamed of his actions and finding excuses for them. But the only thing is that Bitov's hero thinks about shame, about sin, about guilt: "How ... how am I going to live with this? — he thought painfully..." (Bitov 1996, 83) — does not yet fit him into the framework of a postmodern hero. The hero is only close to the postmodern vision, but he is not yet quite a postmodernist. But he is already close to it. He is simulated.

It is no coincidence that the answer to the sacred and painful question of the Bitov's hero ("How to live?") turns out to be a simple "disappearance" of the heroine — "suddenly disappeared, gone" (Bitov 1996, 83). The hero demonstrates an almost pseudo-idealistic perception of reality: it does not exist, because I do not see it. Getting rid of the pangs of conscience happens in the hero instantly — postmodernistically, without requiring time or realistic motivation.

Love, which in classical Russian and world literature became a measure of humanity, loses its axiological evaluative function

in Bitov's story. The hero is not looking for true love and fidelity on the model of Homer's Odysseus and Penelope. It is enough for him to realize that in ancient times there was shame, betrayal, treason in the world. He is comforted by the thought that in the past a person was bad, weak, capable of meanness. Bitov's hero is comforted by the illusion of love — something invisible, hidden by darkness, hidden in the darkness of the auditorium.

8 Results and prospects

Thus, drawing conclusions from the analysis of the story "Penelope", we can conclude that Andrei Bitov is indeed one of the founders of postmodern trends in Russian literature of the 1980s — 2000s. Already in the early stories of the 1960s, Bitov portrayed in his work the type of a new — *another* — hero who went beyond the usual literary canons. The hero of Bitov's early stories was characterized by ambivalence, a willingness to easily change his point of view, radically transform not only the moral and ethical, but also the objectively existing laws of the universe. The world of such a hero was de-hierarchical, the part supplanted the whole, but in turn it could easily be replaced by something else.

Love in the world of postmodern heroes has ceased to be one of the highest values. In the text «Penelope», Bitov showed how illusion displaces reality, how deceptive appearances can become a substitute for real and genuine feelings. If Bitov's heroine — the faithful Penelope — is still objectively real, she exists, then very soon in postmodern literature the subject of love will disappear, move into the world of the unreal and mystical. In postmodern prose, the most familiar embodiment of love will be fiction, an illusion that acquires the status of reality and imaginary authenticity. The object of love of postmodern heroes will be a voice, a letter, a memory, a movie character, their own fiction, even a cat. Love, which has received a traditional reflection in Russian and world literature, will cease to exist, giving way to the illusion of love.

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