
Originality of Modern German Literature

Ishanova Saule Ilyasovna

Lecturer, At the Karshi State University

Abstract: The article deals with the literary tradition in the literature of modern Germany. This article will be interesting to an expert in philology.

Keywords: literary tradition, imitation, influence, borrowing, literary trend.

Denizens of Chaos. The origin of postmodern aesthetics is usually traced back to the manifesto of the American critic Leslie Fiedler “Cross the borders, fill in the ditches” (1969), defiantly published in *Playboy*. Fiedler analyzes the literary situation of the late 1960s in American literature and identifies the most promising genres. These are western (K. Kesey), fantasy (K. Vonnegut) and erotica (“*Lolita*” – a work for which Nabokov moved away from the poetics of high modernity). A postmodernist, in Fiedler's understanding, a writer must write both for connoisseurs and connoisseurs and for the undemanding masses.

In the late 1960s, calls to target the mass reader seemed promising. Representatives of “high literature” rushed to master the “low genres”. Writers of the Cologne School in Germany (D. Wellershof 1925; G. Seuren 1932; G. Herburger 1932; N. Born 1937-1979, R.D. Brinkman 1940-1975) proclaimed the ordinary as the only worthy source of literary material. Their “new realism” was intended to “open people’s eyes to the gloomy pictures of everyday life, deformations in relations between people in modern Western society” (D. Wellershof).

However, the protest character of the mass reader-oriented literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s was gradually lost in the 1980s, simultaneously with the fading of hysteria about the inevitability of nuclear war. The bipolar world is gradually stabilizing; the real “end of history” postponed for an indefinite time, leaving, however, a tangible “aftertaste” (D. Zatonsky) of the end of the world [1]. In a space, that still has certain (albeit illusory) ethical guidelines (the ideology of confrontation between the two systems), which literature now has to settle in, loomed the ghost of a “new chaos”: absolute chaos after the end of the world. The idea of “settling down in chaos” again (as in the beginning of the XX century) becomes relevant. True, already without the excessive enthusiasm inherent in the naive pioneers of the avant-garde. The interest of the researcher comes to the fore, as dispassionately and objectively as possible describes abyss after abyss, failure after failure, dead end after dead end (W. Eco, J. Fowles, P. Suskind, K. Ransmayr, A. Posse).

What is it, chaos after the end of the world? Most likely, like the initial chaos, archaic deities, super humans who despise everyone who not endowed with sufficient power (whatever that means), inhabit it. Deities who know only their own super-truths and super-goals, who despise any other truths and strive for only one thing – to penetrate as deeply as possible into their individual abyss, to see, feel, describe what is inside. That is why, since the mid-1980s, the pages of books, movies, and television screens have been flooded with endless “puddles of blood, lymph, semen, and urine” [2]. “Pathologists” from art coolly study the structure of the “new chaos”, the possibilities and abilities of its inhabitants.

However, in the early 1990s, the Super system itself collapsed (D. Zatonsky’s term for a

developed bipolar world). Pseudo-values imposed by ideology and replacing “eternal values” in the minds of the nonprofessional crumble to dust. “The West, perhaps to a greater extent than we, was traumatized by the farcical finale of the Great Confrontation, which clearly indicated not even the futility of the efforts expended, but their initial uselessness, as it were. ... The comedy of enmity grew into the comedy of cooperation and ended with the comedy of victory. But in general, it was a grandiose ideological comedy that incinerated all beliefs, all hopes, all utopias of the world order” [1] writes D. Zatonsky.

What was at first perceived by the Western nonprofessional as a great victory turned out to be one of the most severe “challenges of history”. Face to face with the primordial chaos are now not only pioneering researchers, bright creative individuals, but first, the most ordinary people.

Awareness of the everydayness of the apocalyptic worldview is becoming, in our opinion, one of the most important characteristics of the Western prose of the “X generation” [2], because it is inherent in most of the works of young Western writers in the second half of the 1990s. Return to first-person narrative; captivating sincerity, reproducing a real feeling of longing for something unattainable, which, upon closer examination, turns out to be normal human relations in an ordinary world with traditional values, and at the same time, confusion in the face of a “brave new world” full of obscure threats. Such is the notorious “new sincerity”, suddenly discovered there, “where the old one was not allowed to enter the doorway and for a long time they carefully monitored that it did not smell anywhere, as well as any manifestations of feeling in general, any attempt to express on behalf of one’s own, not at all simulated “I” [3].

The disillusioned children of the sixties subversives (the motif of the “guilty of everything” hippie mother in the works of D. Copeland, M. Welbeck, K. Kracht) continue to master chaos and adapt to it as much as they can. However, they no longer feel themselves brave pioneers who have shouldered on themselves the heavy burden of developing a new space, but simply not very happy people, forced to adapt to the conditions in which fate threw them. In addition, their goals are completely different. The main thing is to survive, i.e. preserve yourself as a whole, do not crumble into fragments, and do not get lost. So, to find meaning in your chaotic existence.

Silence in the 1980s. “Perfumer”. Throughout the 1980s, the appeal of German-language literature to readers remained extremely low. Even in Germany itself, the novels of compatriots withstood circulations of only a few thousand copies and invariably forced out of the bestseller list by books by Isabel Allende, Umberto Eco, numerous Americans and Englishmen. The only exception was Patrick Suskind’s *Perfumer* (1985), which sold almost ten million copies worldwide.

Indeed, “*Perfumer*”, the German-language standard of combining mass character and elitism (in full accordance with the wishes of L. Fiedler), is a very special case. For all its “mass culture”, the center of the novel is one of the main philosophical problems of the XX century: the problem of language, historically especially relevant in German-speaking countries.

First erupted in Vienna at the beginning of the XX century. The “crisis of language” throughout the past century has continually erupted into the literary texts of the overwhelming majority of significant German-speaking writers. From expressionist dreams of “renewal of the language”, through the “linguistic skepticism” of post-war lyrics imbued with a sense of guilt of the language for the crimes of fascism (G. Eich, I. Bachmann) to complete “lack of language”, embodied, in particular, in “*Perfumer*”. The hero of P. Suskind, offended by God, who is fluent in the language of smells alien to the “speaking person”,

readily sacrifices many innocent people to the “new truth”.

Having brought to its logical conclusion the series of “linguistic skepticism” traditional for German literature, “Perfumer”, due to its enormous popularity, gave rise to many variations and imitations all over the world, which put it at the origins of a new series – works that introduce characters into literature who do not know the human language. Speech and therefore lost human nature (however, the cause and effect here can change places).

A special place among the “successors” of “Perfumer” in the line of “non-language” (and not only) is occupied by “American Psycho” (“American Psycho”, 1991) by the American B.I. Ellis, whose character Patrick Bateman spoke for the first time in the “language of labels”, clearly preferring the latter over normal human language.

This monstrous novel, in turn, becomes an important milestone in the formation of the literature of the “Generation X” everywhere in the world – and, in particular, the German language. For the influence of American culture and literature on the representatives of the “X generation” in Germany (where, however, they prefer to call it in its own way – the “grandchildren generation” [1] or the “Golf generation” [2] is very, very tangible. Yes, and Patrick Bateman seems to be a completely natural product of the “super consumption society”, which, meanwhile, is gaining momentum on our side of the Atlantic.

New storytellers. In the West of Germany, meanwhile, a generation of writers who are tired of postmodernism is also growing up. They are young, just entering life and want to share with themselves similar experiences that accompany growing up. They just want to talk – first of all, of course, about themselves. By the second half of the 1990s, the predominance of “Eastern” authors in the literary arena of Germany becomes somewhat less noticeable. The former “Ossies” woke up, shook them up, intrigued them, asked questions, offered their answers and, without leaving the stage, moved to give way to their Western peers. On the German literary scene, “heroes like us” from the East are joined by their Western peers. In addition, their stories are in demand.

The simple story of a disabled boy experiencing the crisis of growing up, narrated by seventeen-year-old Benjamin Lebert “Crazy” [1] (1999), instantly sells 180,000 copies. Aspects magazine’s 1999 German Literary Debut Award goes to Jenny Erpenbeck (b. 1967), who speaks heartfelt about the life experiences of her peers in *The Old Child’s Tales* (*Geschichte eines alten Kindes*). Julia Frank (b. 1970) hits the bestseller list again, following two novels – *The New Chef* (*Der neue Koch*, 1997) and *The Toady* (*Liebediener* 1999) – with a collection of elegant short stories called “Forced Landing” (*Bauchlandung*, 2000). The second novel by Elke Naters (b. 1963) “Lies” (*Lügen*, 1999) survives several reprints. Its lyrical hero (suspiciously resembling the writer herself) tells about her relationship with her friend, a pathological liar. Even in the stories of Teresia Mora (b. 1971), who is more concerned with problems of literary style than the authors mentioned above (for which she was awarded the Engberg Bachmann Prize in 1999), there is a distinct desire to tell about oneself. The debut collection of short stories by Judit Herman (b. 1970), a writer who managed to become “the voice of her generation”, “Home? Wait...” (*Sommerhaus, später*, 1998) is a phenomenal success: not only the printed version, but also a CD with the recording of texts performed by the author diverges in a six-digit circulation.

Now, exactly at the turn of the millennium, in 1999-2000, German criticism beats the fanfare, loudly announcing the arrival of the “new literary generation”. They just do not call it: both the “generation of grandchildren” (by analogy with the “generation of children of war”. Whose oldest representative, Günter Grass, was just awarded the Nobel Prize, 1999), and “Generation X” (with the light hand of D. Copeland), “generation go”, “generation Berlin”

and “generation @” [3] – and since 2001 also “generation Golf” (using the term introduced, as already mentioned, by one of the representatives of this very generation, F. Illies). Publishers and critics vying with each other promise an unprecedented flourishing of German-language literature coming in the near future and the growth of its popularity throughout the world.

In addition, in this unprecedented campaign (launched in the media, no doubt on the initiative of major figures in the German book market), Judit Herman occupies a special place. Therefore deserves special consideration as the most striking example of the successful combination of the advertising business and literature in the artificial fusion of the image of the author created by the media (empirically the most an important factor for market success), and his texts (a less significant factor).

At the beginning of 1998, in almost all newspapers and magazines with a literary page, almost simultaneously, a photograph of a lovely young woman appears. Long blond curly hair, sad intelligent eyes, the smile of Mona Lisa. Such a face is impossible to miss. In a mechanistic world, where spiritual values are slowly but surely being replaced by material ones, and disharmony is felt more and more sharply, such a face awakens hope: not everything is lost yet, you can try to restore the freshness of perception, and purity of thoughts, and love.

The laconic caption says that the photograph depicts the famous writer Judith Herman. The paradox lies in the fact that by the time her photograph went around all the most popular periodicals, the “writer” had not published a single line: she had only received a grant to write the first collection of stories. As we already know, the advertising strategy chosen by the Fisher publishing house worked brilliantly: the debut collection of short stories mentioned above, *House. Wait...* [2] Went through several reprints and released in the main European languages over the next two years.

The second book by Yu. German “Nothing but a shadow” (*Nichts ALS Gespenster*, 2002), objectively weaker, nevertheless, has collected brilliant criticism and is now being translated in many countries. Instantly and painlessly, Judit Herman replaced Durs Grünbein as the “face of the generation”. Moreover, the point here is not only and not so much in the attractiveness of the external appearance – in her human and literary fate, several important circumstances combined at once.

Firstly, it became the first striking example of the successful combination of the author's image and his texts into a kind of “artistic and commercial whole”. Later, other writers (including very worthy ones – I. Schulze, K. Kracht) or their agents adopted this technique. Secondly, having moved to East Berlin “on time” and supporting the rumors about her Eastern origin (in fact, Judit German was born and raised in West Berlin) she managed to play on the interest awakened earlier by Eastern writers. In addition, living in Berlin, a city that today occupies a special place in the literary life of Germany, she voluntarily or unwittingly found herself in the thick of things. Moreover, thirdly, she (as, indeed, many other “grandchildren” – simply because of their desire to talk about themselves and their friends) managed to become the “voice” of a noticeable part of the “thirty-year-old generation”. Her heroes are modern Berlin youth, people are creative, talented, although somewhat lost in the turmoil of the big city, deepened into their inner world and as if free. They strive for self-realization and, at first glance, live a full life, in which, however, there is no place for love.

The generation of “grandchildren” yearns for love – this seems to be one of its defining features. Unloved in childhood (an obsessive motive of a hippie mother who did not pay

enough attention to children, or – as an option. For example, in Z. Yenny – a mother who preferred her own life and new love to the first family and the child born in it), they did not learn love themselves, and therefore they are not able to build full-fledged love relationships, they are not even able to distinguish love from other types of affection. In addition, since the main problem of human life has not been solved for them (and, perhaps, has no solution), they cannot write (and think) about anything other than the absence of love. Hence the excessive “fixation” on themselves and their own experiences.

In a sense, Judit Herman can be called an average representative of the literary generation of “grandchildren”, or rather, that very large part of it, which, being in a painful (albeit not always conscious) search for a permanently absent love, without further ado, is engaged in grinding bones to itself and like themselves. In addition, much of what said about her texts, to one degree or another applies to most of the texts of the “new storytellers”.

Thus, in modern literature, “The World as Chaos” has lost its appeal, it has been replaced by a picture of a wretched world, a world in which (there is no love and therefore) it is unbearably boring (T. Ubel, G. M. Oswald). The parodic mode of narration replaced by tragic seriousness (all writers are practically without exception). Irony and play recede into the background: unlike their predecessors, they see themselves as part of a reality taken seriously (B. Lebert, J. Erpenbeck, J. German, and even K. Kracht). Intersexuality loses its former meaning: the experiences of a particular person appear to be unique, not requiring analogies and allusions (G.M. Oswald, B. Lebert, Y. Frank). The “crisis of authorities” loses its sharpness; there is a partial return to tradition. There is a renewed interest in the private human destiny, a specific episode – most often from the personal experience of the author. Formal and theoretical refinements fade into the background, giving way to an individual point of view, personal intonation (not always), and the ability to present one’s story (rarely).

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