THE REFLECTION OF EVERYDAY KYRGYZ CULTURE IN CHYNGYZ AITMATOV’S WORKS

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of belles-lettres role for studies in humanities and social sciences. Cultural studies certainly should use the literature as one of the most important materials for research. Analysis of works of Chyngyz Aitmatov is proof of the effectiveness of this thesis. Literary works are also to attempt to understand the reality around us as well as they are its product. Aitmatov’s sublimed romantic point of view covers only the domains of conflict, the spheres of contact of the where various dimensions of everyday life, and various attitudes towards them. These differences evolved from different historical epochs and reflected in human lives. However, there is hope that the concept of “everyday life” will not share the fate of other culturological terms in the belles-lettres interpretations. The main point is to expose how much belles-lettres show the everyday life and its socio-economic and political context.

Key words:
cultural studies, belles-lettres, socio-economic and political context, everyday life, Chyngyz Aitmatov
1. Introduction

The use of culturological terms in the belles-lettres analysis may bring to the underestimation of the artistic value of a work, which role is reduced – it is being treated as another cultural fact, at best. At worst, what occurs most often, the literary work is used only as an illustration of intellectual constructs of the given culturologist\(^1\). It is a typical situation in semantic, semiotic, and other communicative analyses of literary works among other kinds of texts.

However, there is hope that the concept of “everyday life” will not share the fate of other culturological terms in the belles-lettres interpretations. The notion in question appeared in the humanities before the culturologists defined the field of interests for their discipline. Among other culturological streams, the socio-logical culturology is one that enables the researcher to describe cultural phenomena meticulously. Thus, our methodological approach and the definitions of everyday life will be borrowed from this stream. Z. Dorofeeva’s *The Sociology of Culture and the Contemporariness* was written from the point of view of socio-logical culturology\(^2\).

2. Under “everyday” she understands

Visible, but not remarkable

In this understanding, “everyday life” refers to everything within the realm of “food, clothing, procreation, habitation, time-sharing, etc. – everything what belongs to the close and well known world, the world, which is easy to orientate in”\(^3\). First of all, this world is directly connected with the axiological nature of art. And, secondly, there is also a direct relationship with the narrative structure of the literary works.

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\(^3\) V. Khudenko, *Povsednevnost’ v labirinte racyonalnosti*, “Socyologicheskiye issledovaniya” 1993, No. 4, p. 69.
Everyday life is a space-time dimension of historical development; in this understanding “everyday life” is treated as a corporeality of an individual and as objectiveness of the reality surrounding him or her.

The given characteristics approximate the ordinariness and the concept of an artistic vision. The understanding of everyday life as a space-time dimension of historical development is especially close to one concept in the theory of literature – the details of subjective picturesqueness in their narrative form of literary motifs.

Two famous short stories in the history of the Soviet literature had parallel narrative structures. These were Mikhail Sholokhov’s *Destiny of a Man* (Original Russian title: *Sudba cheloveka*) and Chyngyz Aitmatov’s *Jamila* (Original Russian title: *Jamiliya*). The main plot in both texts was based on the main character’s memories. In Sholokhov’s narration, Andrei Sokolov recalls his story while waiting for the transport at the riverbank. And, Aitmatov described the memories of a painter, who did not want to show his painting to his fellow countrymen. Such an order of the narrative motif seems to be extremely important for both authors, who place the reminiscent voices in the beginning as well as in the end of their stories, i.e. in the most recognizable moments of the narration – visible, but not remarkable. One has to admit that the problem of self-identification of a prosaic writer, painter, or an intellectual is connected with the acquired competence. There is something much more important than the story – the reader’s attitude towards this, what happened with Andrei Sokolov in Sholokhov’s work and what happened with Jamila in Aitmatov’s text.

Georgiy Gachev made a very good cultorological analysis of *Jamila*. His methodology was based on the comparison of the main features of Aitmatov’s text with the various forms existing in world literature. One has to point, that the author considered world literature as a part of universal culture. Gachev’s work was written in the early 1960s, but his subtle observations are still a perfect example of an analysis of the literary text from the culturological point of view. However, there are some details intentionally or unintentionally omitted by Gachev, i.e. facts and cultural phenomena connected with the everyday Soviet reality of his contemporaneity.

The narrator in *Jamila* confesses, “I have never exposed this painting at any exhibitions. Furthermore, when the relatives from my village come to pay me a visit, I try to hide it somewhere deeper”. Although Gachev paid much attention

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to the details showing the development of the new ordinariness against the every-
day patriarchal reality, he did not take advantage of the possibility to show that
Aitmatov presents the story of Jamila and Daniyar as the painter’s inner psycho-
logical conflict, which was a part of the narration. The final sublimed lyrical mon-
ologue contradicts the details of everyday life. The passage “I try to hide it some-
where deeper” says that the artist has some feelings and emotions when he is alone,
but it does not mean that he is able to show them to his relatives from the village.
Moreover, he knows their potential reaction very well – they had already expressed
themselves through Sadyk’s (Jamila’s husband) words: “Traitor! – shouted Sadyk
in my face”. In the same story, Aitmatov gives an inner answer for this accusation:
“Let them consider me as a traitor. Whom did I betray? The family? Our clan? But
I did not betray the truth, the truth of life, the truth of these two people”.

This inner feeling of “the clandestine truth” was part and parcel of the intel-
lectuals’ everyday life in the 1960s. Although this truth is hard to perceive in inter-
human relationships, it is possible to find its expression in the literature and art.

The other important moment is the crucial point of the narrative motif in
question. This episode crosses the fates of three characters: Jamila, Daniyar, and
the painter. Gachev could have made a detailed analysis of the given part of the
story, compared Aitmatov’s narration with the logic of other famous works, and
used the concepts of the “voice of fate” and “destiny”. However, he ignores this
motif. The passage refers to brigadier Orozmat’s decision to order Jamila to an-
other work – cereal transport. He needs her mother’s permission: “You do not let
your daughter – said Orozmat – and the administration attacks us... The army
needs bread and we are not accomplishing the plan. Is it right? We have to do it!”.
Although Gachev preferred the universal, human perspective, from the everyday
Soviet life point of view the crucial words of destiny are here: “the administration”
and “the plan”. These words represent the power of the Soviet Empire with its
ubiquitous ordinariness and Jamila’s mother, a woman living according to tradi-
tional rights, is not able to find anything against the state’s authority. However,
she desperately tries to keep her humiliated pride alive and at least pretend to
abide by the customs. Since it is not allowed to leave the girl alone, she sends her
son to “look after her”.

Aitmatov depicts this aspect of Soviet state even more suggestively in The First
Teacher (Original Russian title: Pervyi uchitel’). In the story, he writes, “So you are
against this paper, the paper about the education of youth, the paper with the of-
official stamp of the Soviet authorities? And who gave you the land, water, freedom?
Then who is against the laws of Soviet authorities, who? Answer!”. And, these were
the words of the first teacher; “Like a bullet broke the silence of warm autumn and,
like a sudden shot, sounded in the rocks. Everyone was listening carefully, not losing a word from his speech. People were holding tongues with their heads bent down”. The ordinariness of a communist state with the eternal argument of “a bullet” seems to be the most important argument in any discussion. It is a very interesting experience to observe how Gachev quotes the passage above and makes no comment on the everyday Soviet reality, which surrounded both him and Aitmatov, and tries to escape into associations of the New Testament. One has to admit that his way of reasoning is unreliable: that a bullet had the same importance in 1924 as in other times or that the argument of power followed the words and sometimes preceded them. However, both Gachev and Aitmatov tried to find religious values – using the motif of Christ’s image – to go beyond the borders of the Soviet ordinariness.

The Scaffold – a novel (Original Russian title: Plakha)

They, the wolves of the steppes, could not know that their game – saiga antelopes – would be sequestered in order to fulfill the plan of meat supplies, and that the economic situation in the last three months was quite nervous, while the five-year plan was going to fail and someone from the oblast administration out of the blue sky suggested to “use” the reserves of the Moyun-Kum people. The party activist’s decision came down to the argument that meat supplies for the state are more important than the meat production, and that the confiscation is the only solution if the oblast administration wants to avoid the shame in the face of the whole country as well as suffer the consequences of the higher authorities’ dissatisfaction.

Cranes Fly Early – a tale (Original Russian title: Ranniye zhuravli)

So we have not only to fulfill the plan, but also plough and sew two hundred hectares of spring varieties extra. Two hundred! Do you understand? Where do we get the workers from, who will help us? Thus, because of our present situation, and because of all that what is going around in the spring campaign, we decided to organize another one brigade of ploughmen with two-furrow ploughs. We were trying to solve this problem. We cannot send women. It is a far place, in Aksay. We have not enough people. And that is why we decided to ask you, the school-boys …

Farewell, Gulsary! – a tale (Original Russian title: Proshchay Gulsary)

This work deserves special attention, because while Aitmatov describes the Soviet ordinariness especially meticulously in this story, he does not in any other
of his texts. The amalgamation of tradition, patriarchal rules, and the new, communist reality seems to be extremely interesting: “How could she talk this way to her husband’s father? No matter what, I am the father. Why the hell did I join the communist party? It did not help me at all – regardless of that I worked the whole life as a herdsman, and now I am expelled… It was not you who took me, and it was not you who relegated me”. The reflection of the everyday Soviet reality in the forms of linguistic behavior is so clear that they can be easily and by purpose treated as a joke: “And I am a member of the audit committee. I have just met you, and I am going to reveal some facts – Tanabay was trying to joke”. The Soviet ordinariness, the patriarchal traditions, and rules are merged into one system, where each of the elements had its own domain. It was a kind of socially differentiated “bilingualism” – one had just to know when and where should he choose each of the codes. And suddenly the quiet situation is interrupted. The character of Farewell, Gulsary! receives a document with an official stamp (as in The First Teacher) with a demand to give his horse to the state, and Tanabay can do nothing but to obey the order. This episode is interesting not only because of the mentioned incident, but also because the state authorities chose the language of local tradition instead of their official style: “The new chairman came to our village. He is our guest. How can we, the whole village, leave him without a good horse... It would be violation of our Kyrgyz customs”. However, this peaceful coexistence of the Soviet reality and local tradition was possible until these two dimensions of everyday life cross in a moot point. The conflict in any problematic point must cause a loss of balance in someone’s private life: “So you, comrade – he was looking in the direction where Tanabay took the dead lambkins – you are a shepherd-communist and your lambs are dying? – They probably do not even know that I am a communist – virulently replied Tanabay”.

The reality in which Tanabay lives is the Soviet reality, Soviet ordinariness, which is defined right up to the party meeting and small machinations connected with posts at the local kolkhoz. It is difficult to demarcate a line dividing the traditional Kyrgyz existence (however, it does not exist anymore) and the rules from outside. These two worlds have amalgamated. Only in the fragments about a holiday, death, and funeral, we may observe an escape from the borders of everyday life. The narrative structure of the novel (as in Jamila and Destiny of a Man) is looped around one episode – the farewell of Tanabay and Gulsary – that transcends memories about his own life and the existence of his homeland. The inserted motif, i.e. the song-legend about an old hunter appears as a form of a traditional catharsis.
When The Mountains Fall – a novel (Original Russian title: *Kogda padayut gory. Vechnaya nevesta*6)

This was Aitmatov’s last novel. It is a reflection upon the post-Soviet reality. Again, we can analyze the motif of an order: “A concert… It is not as much important. I will not complain, but they have just called, there was an order, Arsen Samanchin should not be present at the audience today”. Life has changed. There are new “hosts of life”, who command new orders, but the essence of life remained unchanged – one has to accept decisions. However, the new hosts are not as powerful as the apparatus of the communist party; they act in a narrower range and are not as pathetic as Balzac’s and Dreiser’s characters were.

Fyodor Dostoevsky’s poetics and his “underground man” as well as Nikolai Gogol’s “little man” and his mutinies would suit the mentioned situation. Samanchin is not Tanabay, whose life was exploited and then discarded by the communist party machine, and Aydana is not Jamila. One should pay attention that, in this work, Aitmatov was analyzing the same situation, which he had already rejected in *Jamila*, i.e. the situation described in Kasym Bayalinov’s tale *Happiness* (Original Russian title: *Schastye*). The main character in *Happiness* comes home from the war as an invalid. His wife does not want him anymore, though she did not find another man. There is another reason of her behavior – she does not need a burden and she became cold-hearted as a merchant7. Arsen Samanchin, with all his positive character traits and the legend about the Eternal Bride, was thrown away by Aydana for one main reason – he was not able to provide his beloved woman with the goods she needs, and is convinced that she deserves them.

Life in the village is centered on one goal – profits. People dream only about money. Carrying and worrying about snow leopards, Arsen Samanchin realizes his personal need, which was not connected with the needs of his clan. His death was a result of his individual impulse, which was understood neither by the people whose lives he had saved nor by his fellow countrymen from his village, whom he had prevented from committing the crime.

The main narrative motif of *Happiness*, centered around an old snow leopard, who is trying to pass a defile for the last time in his life, is a kind of a specific psychological parallelism and does not entail this global burden as the characters of Gulsary and Akbara did. The characters in question had to struggle with universal changes while Samanchin has only the quandaries of a little man who cannot find a place for himself and his dreams in a country with triumphant market economics.

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A brief analysis of Chyngyz Aitmatov’s works with the use of the culturological concept of “everyday life” gives a possibility to ensure that the belles-lettres constitute one of the most important materials in the researches of the Soviet ordinariness. One has to admit, that the literary works are an attempt to comprehend the surrounding reality and simultaneously they are products of this reality. Aitmatov’s sublimed romantic point of view covers only the domains of conflict, the spheres of contact of where various dimensions of everyday life, and various attitudes towards them. These differences evolved from different historical epochs and reflected in human lives.

Chyngyz Aitmatov, in principle, does not worship the material existence in Robinson’s style – all these oddments which make the house cozy and pleasant, where all the rules are clear and the problems are easy to solve. Thus, Aitmatov is a real Soviet writer, who displays contempt for material goods and ordinariness (middle class values). His attitude resembles the first artists after the Revolution. He belongs to this romantic outburst of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the everyday existence was considered as an obstacle on the way to the “romantics of long wandering”.

The development of Soviet reality in the late 1960s, 1970s, and in the beginning of the 1980s did not prove the aforementioned romantic aspirations. However, these attitudes gave the writer a chance to transform the romantic pathos into philosophical mythological constructs, such as the image of Avdiy and the cosmic theme in The Scaffold, The Ascent of Mt. Fuji (Original Russian title: Voskhozhdenie na Fujiyamu), Spotted Dog Running On Seashore (Original Russian title: Pegiy pes, begushchiy krayem morya), and another cosmic motif in A station in the mist (Original Russian title: Buranniy polustanok).

There is an important point in this philosophy (which has vanished and was not present in the novel When The Mountains Fall): the end of the Soviet epoch with its escape from everyday ordinariness into the new world without any place for the surrounding reality.

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