

The Moral and Ethical Choice of the Protagonist in Contemporary War Prose

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Abstract: This article examines, from a comparative perspective, the problem of the protagonist in war prose. There is a growing need to study the issue of the modern individual situated at the intersection of national cultures from new socio-historical positions. This is most clearly reflected in the discourse of "man and war" at the level of philosophical reflection. The artistic exploration of the theme of war and the post-war period is equally represented in both Russian and Uzbek prose at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The protagonists in the works of V.P. Astafyev and Nazar Eshonkul portray individuals displaced by objective social circumstances from their historical time—crushed by these forces, alienated from society and from themselves, lonely, and therefore collapsing as personalities. Such are Normat in Nazar Eshonkul's novella *People of War* and Danila, Marina, and Arkasha in Astafyev's short story *The Passing Goose*. At the core of the protagonist concept lies the question of the individual's search for their historical place and the possibilities of self-realization in contemporary reality. Under certain socio-historical conditions during wartime, the literary protagonist emerges as a figure capable of embodying the most essential or significant character traits of their era. The characters created by V. Astafyev and Nazar Eshonkul are precisely such figures. By focusing on the "eternal" problems of human existence, Astafyev and Eshonkul resolve moral and philosophical issues through artistic representation. These concerns dominate the prose of both writers and shape their unique authorial conceptions of the protagonist. These characters reflect the full range of ethical and aesthetic issues within their literary worlds and define the authors' original philosophical outlooks.

Keywords: Turn-of-the-century literature, concept of the protagonist, interpretation of reality, "eternal" problems, war, alienation, degradation, moral judgment, coercion of circumstances, moral choice.

INTRODUCTION

The prose of the turn of the 20th–21st centuries represents a unique and still not fully comprehended phenomenon in the history of literature. Most critics unanimously note the emergence of a new perspective on the portrayal of the individual in literary works, which is closely connected to an anxious awareness of impending global challenges—challenges whose resolution depends on the collective efforts of all humanity.

The problem of the protagonist has never disappeared from the agenda of literary discourse. This reaffirms the enduring truth that at the heart of any literary work lies the human being. At various stages of literary development, a specific concept of the protagonist has emerged—one that could not remain static or immune to change. "Its main aspects depended on literary movements, schools, and creative practices" [Salikhov R.G. 1999, p. 8].

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the issue of the protagonist is one of the most thoroughly explored topics in 20th-century literary studies. It has been addressed in monographs, doctoral and candidate dissertations, and thousands of academic articles. Literature, as a means of artistically and emotionally interpreting reality, possesses a rather fluid nature—something that is most clearly reflected in the treatment of the protagonist. It is no surprise, then, that like any dynamic structure, literature, in the course of its development, could not remain inwardly

conservative. Like a living organism, it is inherently inclined toward natural self-development. Literature often resists external interference in this process and, over time, tends to free itself from artificial constraints, returning to its inherent state.

This process, however, does not occur rapidly. Yet the impatient individual—often driven by ideological or other motives—seeks to impose their will on the literary process, thereby exerting forceful influence on it. Such individuals are obsessed with the idea of reshaping literature to fit their immediate worldview. As a result, different types of protagonists emerge during various stages of societal and literary development. However, the literary organism tends to reject artificial abstractions and ideological pressure, resisting such intrusions. This struggle is typically prolonged, and over the course of literary evolution, various conceptions of the protagonist replace one another, creating the illusion of an internal battle for dominance over the literary space.

"The protagonist is the cornerstone of all literature" [Salikhov R.G. 1999, p. 26], and it is therefore quite natural that numerous polemics and debates have arisen under various labels and categories. Whether the discussion concerns style, poetics, or other aspects, it ultimately returns to the protagonist.

Thus, "the concept of the literary protagonist is the concept of a real individual confronted with numerous social and everyday challenges... Some of these challenges lead to confusion and a loss of faith in ideals, while others, on the contrary, inspire determination and active engagement" (cyberleninka.ru).

METHODS

The pursuit of a deeper, more nuanced understanding of reality and the individual has defined the nature and core tendencies of the literary process at the turn of the century. In literature, the focus shifted from socio-moral issues (which were characteristic of prose before the "Thaw" period) to the spiritual, philosophical, and ethical "eternal" problems of human existence. The "new" literature began to emphasize that the problem of the protagonist lies not only in the social conflicts between the individual and society, but also in the moral-philosophical, psychological, and national-historical foundations of existence.

Spiritual and philosophical inquiries into the development of the modern individual, the study of ethical foundations of personality, and the psychological norms of a character's inner world are central to contemporary prose. These areas have drawn the focused attention of literary scholarship to a key component of literary engagement with reality: the artistic concept of the protagonist. This concept integrates a wide range of issues, including the aesthetic stance of literature toward reality and the interplay between objective and subjective dimensions in the artistic representation of the world.

The ethical stance of a character cannot be fully understood without considering the author's own moral and philosophical worldview. At the same time, it is equally inappropriate to judge an author's position without accounting for the "voices" of each of their characters—since in contemporary prose, the author's viewpoint is often not presented explicitly but is instead diffused among the voices of the protagonists. Understanding a character's moral position is impossible without taking into account the psychological concept developed by the author. As L. Ginzburg points out, "psychological analysis 'serves' ethical problems, while at the same time being shaped and pressured by them" [Ginzburg L. 2004, p. 36]. This leads to a sophisticated psychoanalytical exploration of the character's inner world—an exploration that is shaped by ethical searching and the process of moral choice.

Modern literature evolved, existed, and reflected upon itself within the space of many intersecting cultures at the end of the 20th century. There is a pressing need to study the modern individual at the crossroads of national cultures from new socio-historical perspectives—something most clearly manifested in the discourse of "man and war" at the level of philosophical reflection.

RESULTS

The artistic exploration of the theme of war and the postwar period found equal reflection in both Russian and Uzbek prose at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries. In the characters created by V.P. Astafyev and Nazar Eshonkul, the image emerges of a person who is pushed out of their historical time by objective social circumstances, crushed by them, alienated from society and from themselves, lonely, and for these reasons, disintegrating as a personality (Normat from Nazar Eshonkul's novella *People of War*, Danila, Marina, and Arkasha from Astafyev's short story *The Migratory Goose*). At the core of the hero's concept is the question of the individual's search for their historical place, the possibilities of self-realization in the present reality. The idea of a person's alienation from the world, the infinite value of life, the tragedy of "orphanhood," and the inseparable connection between generations—the living and the dead—are the central themes of these writers' works.

In the dictionary of V.I. Dahl, the word "alienation" means "to distance oneself" or "to become foreign" (slovardalja.net). S.I. Ozhegov interprets the concept as "the cessation of close relations between people, internal estrangement" (slovarozhegova.ru). Considering the semantics of the word, the concept of "alienation" can be divided into two components: "external" alienation and "internal" alienation.

"External" alienation of the characters in Astafyev's story *The Migratory Goose* stems from their deep loneliness, detachment from the surrounding world, and feelings of abandonment, which undoubtedly affects their behavior and relationships with others.

The beginning of the story creates an impression of hopelessness and doom for the main character—Danila Solodovnikov: "Torn apart by fatigue on the hunt, <...> alone, it seemed, (Danila) was the only one wandering in a <...> shifting, engulfed in darkness <...> world" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.7].

The fate of a man who defended his homeland strikes with its tragedy and depth. In the chaos of postwar years, the paths of the main characters—Danila and Marina, a young married couple whose fates were painfully similar—crossed. Both became orphans early in childhood and had to grow up in orphanages where the warmth of parental love never touched their hearts. However, despite the loss, they did not become cruel or indifferent; on the contrary, life's trials tempered their character, taught them tolerance and compassion, and allowed them to see the light even in the darkest times. Their meeting, full of despair and hope, became the beginning of a new life.

Now they had nowhere to go: "It's good for them <...>, they are going home, but he, where is he going? He has no home on earth" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.11]. They were now traveling together to the city of Chufyrino, invented by Danila, hoping to find shelter, settle down, and have children. Danila sincerely believed that fate would eventually smile on him and "somehow everything would work itself out, in such a big country there would be a corner for him too" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.11]. But the big country did not find a cozy corner or even a temporary refuge for his small family: "they were needed by no one and nowhere, everywhere they were an obstacle and an unnecessary nuisance" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.17].

The motif of the "external" alienation of the heroes is manifested on the lexical level: repeated negative constructions ("no home on earth," "needed by no one and nowhere"), words ("alone," "lost everything"), and special sentence constructions—an inversion ("The soldiers are going home <...>. The soldiers, the brothers, are going home, but Danila, in fact, has nowhere to go") [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.9]. However, the world is not without kind people. The newlyweds were taken in and cared for by Vitalia Gordeevna, an elderly woman completely lonely despite having a living son. She accepted and loved them as her own children. The tenants and the landlady found solace in each other, sharing joys and sorrows and fully trusting one another (Petrova E.I).

Vitalia Gordeevna became for the young family a teacher, a friend, and a mother. "Dearest than kin they are to you. Everyone should have such children," said a neighbor, envying their family harmony. Despite all the difficulties that befell

them, the family became close and stronger. "Internal" alienation—the spiritual estrangement of people—manifests in the novella at the level of subtext.

V.P. Astafyev shows how the spiritual bond between close people—a mother and son—is breaking. Vitalia Gordeevna has long internally distanced herself from her son, even forbidding herself to think that he would return home after being discharged from the army, as their last meeting left a depressing impression on her. It was repugnant for her to see how he and "now live a worthless, empty life with his wife but are so pleased with themselves and their lives and with the great work they perform" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.57]. The words of their neighbor Khrunchiha proved prophetic, when she said to her friend: "Well, Vitalya, hold on. These gentlemen won't give you or the workers a life; they'll drive you out of the world" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.46].

With the arrival of the Mukomolov family, the harmony and agreement previously reigning in the house were disrupted. At first glance, one would expect that people who have experienced the horrors of war would be spiritually close, showing understanding and respect, but a "quiet, unknown to anyone war" began. This is likely because each of the story's characters experienced the war differently. Danila was at the front line, where "thousands upon thousands of Russian people were laid low, no one cared for them at the beginning of the war, and no one cared for them at the end either" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.45]. Vladimir Fyodorovich "did not expose himself to danger, firmly believing that his and the political department's main task was 'not to particularly interfere with people fighting'" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.35]. Marina did a lot of terrible bloody work at the front, saving people throughout the war. Vladimir Fyodorovich's wife "was pushing the front to victory with her lively front" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.61]. Therefore, Vitalia Gordeevna reproaches her son: "Eh, a loser, a loser, he didn't even have enough sense to find something better than this useless trifling thing on the whole huge front" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.48].

Vladimir Fyodorovich and his wife could not understand all the hardships that fell on the young family because these families are entering peaceful life in different ways. The Mukomolovs "arrived with a bunch of goods, rosy, handsome, looking like nobles" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.49]. The author's irony in describing their settled well-being

("<...> the party gentleman carefully carried himself on the ground, spoke importantly and condescendingly with subordinates <...>") [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.50] reveals the spiritual emptiness of these people. The Solodovnikovs had "lost all property," "worked and wore themselves out, knowing no days off or holidays" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.51]. Despite the hardships, Danila and Marina's souls did not become hardened. They were always ready to help others, even at their own expense.

The war in peacetime is terrible because it cripples human souls, makes hearts callous, and in these hearts, pleas for sympathy and understanding no longer penetrate. The Mukomolovs have lost the ability to empathize; they do not feel pity for a family exhausted by hard work and need, nor do they pity the sick neighbor's child. Complete spiritual alienation (Petrova E.I). Misfortunes befell the Solodovnikov family: their son Arkasha died, Danila died of overwork and tuberculosis. "Already estranged from everything in the world," the widow has nothing left but "to throw into the grave, as into the face of death and the evil of the world," her husband's awards. And she will not go to church for consolation: "So what is this, again speculation, again opportunism, the desire to live with someone else's help." No, let the Mukomolovs and all the others like them live, but she, already estranged, a life worn thin like a fish, like ice in an icebreaker, will somehow manage on her own with her affairs [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.64]. And from "small deeds"—only to hang herself decently, so as not to burden anyone anymore. There is no one to blame or how to live in the world when you finish reading the story to the deathly calm ending: "And all right. Together friendly and not cramped, maybe it will be warmer in the other world, more welcoming than in this one, long cursed and blown by all winds" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.51]. In the story *The Migratory Goose*, the main object of Astafyev's study is the image of the "outcast"—a person pushed out of society by historical consequences, alienated from their roots, and breaking down as a personality.

Astafyev places at the center the question of the individual's search for social and historical independence, since the writer sees the cause of his hero's failure not only in the manifestations of socio-historical consequences but also in the manifestations of a moral crisis of universal human significance. V.P. Astafyev has his own ethical-philosophical system, including such concepts as

love, freedom, faith, death, etc. However, often his heroes are tragically ill with loneliness, unfulfilled in life, "superfluous" in it, fallen out of their time. It is no coincidence that the writer named his story *The Migratory Goose*. Migratory means fleeting, quickly passing by. The lives of the main characters passed as unnoticed as the life of the migratory goose that Danila hunted to support the fading strength of his sick son. They could not stay in peaceful life; they left unnoticed, leaving no trace. Attention is drawn to Danila's phrase: "The goose is a rare bird here, it only appears in migration" [Astafyev V.P. 2002, p.47]. The Solodovnikov family can also be considered special because, despite incredible hardships, they managed to preserve humanity, tolerance, understanding, and kindness to others. The theme of alienation is a red thread running through the works of the contemporary Uzbek prose writer Nazar Eshonkul.

The writer differs from his contemporaries in style, approach to reality, uniqueness of images, and interpretations. It is remarkable that in the author's works, the image of a person struggling with himself, his thoughts, and spiritual experiences is shown from completely new perspectives. Nazar Eshonkul's prose is a kaleidoscope of the "eternal" spiritual and moral problems of man and existence. Showing interest in the objective and subjective prerequisites for the formation of the personality of the modern person, Nazar Eshonkul, like Viktor Astafyev, focuses his attention on the "violence" of circumstances over personality. The writer shows the contradictory nature of the modern world through the image of an "ambivalent" hero, whose life positions depend on external socio-historical circumstances. The tendency to oppose circumstances and personality is reflected in the principle of artistic representation of the hero—a person placed by the author in a space of overlapping crisis life situations, whose evaluation and analysis are carried out from inside the personal "I."

This principle is also reflected in the author's position. Nazar Eshonkul does not give a straightforward interpretation or explanation of the created image but reveals its internal state through the self-analysis of the hero, in which the author's worldview—the writer's spiritual and moral stance—is contained. Nazar Eshonkul's literary hero, due to his inner instability, is always lonely and alienated. A vivid representative of this type of hero is Normat, the protagonist of the novella *People of War*. Nazar Eshonkul's literary style is

characterized by deep emotionality and realism. The writer vividly conveys the atmosphere of wartime and allows the reader to deeply feel the characters' experiences. In *People of War*, the writer tries to comprehend the terrible consequences of the impact of war on the human psyche. The events of the novella unfold in the small village of Tersota, where the writer shows how the war changed the villagers and what social and moral problems they face. The central characters of Nazar Eshonkul's novella *People of War* are Normat—a young man who was changed beyond recognition by the war, turning from a healthy and strong man into a disabled person forced to adapt to new living conditions and struggle with his own "self"—and Anzirat, Normat's wife, a woman who sacrificed her honor for the sake of her children's lives.

One of the famous Uzbek literary critics, Tukhta Boboev, author of the textbook *Fundamentals of Literary Studies*, reflecting on the character of the characters, comes to the following conclusion: "Character is, above all, a clear image of a person, manifested in his individual actions and mental experiences in specific life conditions. It can be said that character is understood as a set of essential traits determining important features, the hero's traits" [Boboyev T. 2001, p.49]. Thus, we learn about the hero's inner world through individual mental traits. In certain socio-historical conditions (for example, during wartime), the image capable of embodying the most important or significant character traits of "its" time comes to the forefront at the hero level. In this light, not only the hero's actions but also changes in his psyche play an important role in revealing the image.

Nazar Eshonkul, through his heroine Anzirat, states: "She felt that on the two banks of the same river there were two lives. One tirelessly created, the other constantly robbed. It seemed to her that the other bank was the bank that brought misfortune" (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012). In the novella, the river personifies human life and becomes a symbol of Being. It reflects the eternal struggle taking place in a person's soul—the confrontation of good and evil. Both are offspring of Being. The heroes throw themselves either to one bank or to the other, experiencing many trials and making difficult decisions. However, sooner or later, every hero faces an important choice—between what is right and what is easy.

This choice symbolizes the moral dilemma faced by the characters. The "right" decision may require sacrifices and hardships, but it aligns with the highest moral standards and principles. On the other hand, the "easy" path may promise comfort and pleasure, but often leads to negative consequences and contradicts fundamental values. This moment of choice is key in the fate of each hero. The path they choose and how they live their life depend on this decision.

Nazar Eshonkul takes readers on a journey into the world of ancestors. Through the words of Boykhun Bobo, he presents a profound philosophy: "If you do not find a land without wars, your world will be destroyed: brother will betray brother, friend will betray friend, wife will betray husband, people will lie to each other. Where blood is shed, betrayal is born. Happiness will turn away from these places, people will study not the science of life, but the science of killing. War will erase everything from the face of the earth, and no one will remain from this family. You will all become lost people of war. Support your comrades who have gone in search of a peaceful land. If you find such a land, bring others there as well..." (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012). In our view, this passage expresses the main idea of the story.

The main character of the story acts as an observer. Through Normat's eyes, the writer conveys a wide palette of human experiences and emotions that arise in the extreme conditions of war. The artistic intent of the work unfolds gradually, allowing the reader to gradually delve into the essence and details of events. This particular method of plot development, used by the author, creates tension and prepares us for the story's climax. The writer focuses on small details that play a key role in guiding the hero's thoughts about secret events that occurred in his absence.

Changes in Anzirat's psychology, her behavior during dinner, her attempt to justify her wrongdoing by Normat's (mistaken) death: "You received a death notice... a paper about your death... and I thought..." (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012) — all this becomes the object of psychologically accurate depiction. The text lacks unnecessary, unmotivated, or unconvincing details. In the end, Normat learns about his wife's betrayal. The heavy, tormenting thoughts, contradictory feelings of the hero, their sudden surge, make the reader a participant in the events. The just question "Why did this happen?" torments both the hero and the reader simultaneously (teoriya-literatury). On one

hand, there are the horrors of a four-year war, the desire to survive and return to family; on the other — the wife's betrayal, thoughts that the children will be orphaned while the father is still alive, and the conclusion he comes to: "At first, I was deceived, told to go to war, then deceived at war, sent to war to tempt my wife, deceived to carry out others' business in the war, everyone deceived him, every passerby deceived him, deceived from the first days of his return, deceived on the roads, deceived in the hospital, he was returned home to show him this deadly event, then they laughed at him, he was always deceived" (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012). This conclusion is tragic not only for Normat. If a person realizes they live in deception, life loses meaning and value for them.

At the beginning of the work, Normat appears as a noble, brave young man, ready to sacrifice his life for peace on his land. Possessing good physical attributes: "Normat was a 'bogaty' (hero), sturdy and tall, '...' one of the first riders of the village, radiating strength in every fiber" (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012), he never used this strength as a weapon. However, Normat returned from the war a completely different man: "Villagers saw a thin man with sagging skin instead of muscles, with already graying hair at the temples, looking about fifty years old, with scars here and there on his face, still carrying the sharp smell of medicines and ointments, a living witness to the terrible war they had often heard about" (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012). Normat changed not only externally but internally as well. Facing his wife's coldness, he loses the meaning of life, begins to think about death, beats his unfaithful wife nearly to death, and decides on murder. But the greatest tragedy of the war is conveyed through the fate of the young woman — Anzirat. She was a beloved daughter who had never known hardships. By fate, she became Normat's wife. She lived with him in harmony and peace, raising children. But the war turned her life upside down. Anzirat appealed to the kolkhoz chairman Mirzakul for help to save her little daughter and became a victim of his deceit. Unwittingly, she found herself on the other side of the river, where the devil built his nest, intending forever to lead people astray from the true path. The author convincingly shows Anzirat's experiences, depicting her suffering and the tragedy of people in wartime, avoiding one-sided depictions of a woman's tragedy, revealing the complexity of the human soul. Anzirat sometimes calms herself by justifying her sins with the idea that she did everything for her children's

sake. However, she herself does not believe these excuses. The writer tries to reveal the second "self" living in Anzirat's subconscious: "Anzirat missed Mirzakul's caresses, how he tickled her neck, touching her with his unshaven chin, his rough masculine manners, how he stroked her hair, how a purely masculine scent emanated from him, a scent pleasant and arousing passion, a scent she missed for three years" (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012).

By describing the heroine's mental state, the author shows how complex human psychology is, how people always try to justify their transgressions. Nazar Eshonkul managed to truthfully and convincingly portray life's material: we pity Anzirat, trapped on the shore of betrayal, in some ways sympathize with her, even believe Mirzakul, believe that he truly misses Anzirat, her eyes, her hair with the scent of kатык, believe in his suffering, and pity him as a human being. We cannot unequivocally condemn them, nor accept Normat's decision to return home after learning about the tragic fate of Mallavoy. The writer remains faithful to life's truth. All three perish. It could not have been otherwise. To remain alive for Normat was tantamount to losing the honor of a strongman-fighter. Normat could not oppose the centuries-old traditions of his ancestors. In Uzbek literature, there are many works dedicated to the theme of female infidelity during the war (the novel by U. Khoshimov "Between Two Doors," the novel by I. Shomurodov "Cannibal"). This confirms that such situations often arise in the real reality of wartime, but the reasons for infidelity vary. Some sin voluntarily, others are forced by circumstances. Nazar Eshonkul's skill is that he psychologically justifies and convincingly depicts how Anzirat was forced to decide on betrayal and how she was sucked into the quagmire. Through a family tragedy, Nazar Eshonkul showed the entire panorama of war, cruelly destroying human destinies.

The image of Baydi Momo in the story becomes a symbol of woman's fidelity and devotion. She appears as the defender of her family, the guardian of its traditions, an example of female selflessness and honor. The image of Baydi Momo is introduced as a lesson for readers sympathizing with Anzirat — a person must always remain human, cherish their honor, and keep it under all circumstances, and on which shore they find themselves depends only on themselves. Baydi Momo also became a widow and raised two children alone. She gave no one reason to gossip about her: "No one understood why, for whom, or

why she worked so selflessly and tirelessly. Hard labor bent her before her time. To all who asked for her hand and proposed, she answered the same way: ‘My husband did not divorce me, I am still married to him’” (Nazar Eshonkul. 2012). Baydi Momo overcomes life’s difficulties and the pain of being a young widow only through selfless labor. The author’s important conclusion is that a conscious and committed sin is a harbinger of a new sin. Anzirat could not withstand the hardships of life, and as a result, her life ends in tragedy. Overall, the story artistically substantiates that in the most difficult circumstances, a person must preserve the sanctity of the soul: dignity, pride, honor, and that crossing over to the other, wrong shore brings countless misfortunes. This is the moral-aesthetic and ethical significance of the story. In conclusion, it should be noted that through the fate of Normat and Anzirat, the writer managed to show how war breaks people’s lives, forces them to go against centuries-old traditions, changes their guides and value systems.

The writer believes that only the good beginning in a person contributes to their spiritual rebirth. Nazar Eshonkul does not show real ways of victory of good over evil. However, in the very fact of the presence in the world of the “eternal longing for the human,” he sees the impulse for the birth of spirituality, the acquisition of good. For the writer, good and evil are eternal concepts, based on which he substantiates the idea of the cycle of light and dark beginnings in human life, whose essence lies in that once committed good or evil does not disappear without a trace and becomes the impetus for new good or evil in the next generation. The main criteria for evaluating a person for the writer is the presence of the very aspiration for wholeness, for spirituality. The heroes of Nazar Eshonkul, through constant “digging” in their feelings — self-analysis, seek out the motives of future actions.

CONCLUSION

The works of Viktor Astafyev and Nazar Eshonkul are united by a pursuit of ethical and psychological understanding of contemporary existence: they are drawn not to pure philosophizing, but to the artistic and psychological exploration of the spiritual and moral development of the individual. Despite differences in worldview, common key issues can be identified in the authors’ works: alienation of the individual and society, loneliness, determinism and freedom of the personality, power, the relationship between man and history, and the

continuity of generations. Their prose is an attempt to comprehend the characteristic process of our era—the depersonalization of the individual and the fragmentation of personality.

Astafyev and Eshonkul are also interesting because they carry within their work a powerful tradition of world culture in general and national cultures in particular. Typological study of their work allows us to see the facets of the creative originality of writers from different national traditions and to more fully appreciate the real ideological and artistic wealth of literature at the turn of the centuries. Each writer solves the problem of the human condition in his own way, but the common criterion of the artistic concept of the hero is the fullness of moral responsibility, which flows into the inescapable vicissitudes of a free personal act.

However, despite the many shared tendencies, the writers are notable for their individuality, uniqueness, irreproducibility of artistic search, and personal approach to solving philosophical and ethical questions, which determines their interest in searching for new artistic-stylistic forms of depicting the human and new aspects in traditional forms.

Writers exploring spiritual, philosophical, and existential problems of reality increasingly speak and write about the growing antinomy of the individual and the modern world, which turns into a tragedy for the person at the end of the 20th century. Contradictions in human relationships that give rise to inner loneliness and create the intrapersonal conflict of the “I” and the “Ego” lie at the core of the theme of the hypertrophy of personality.

Astafyev and Eshonkul focus their attention on the “eternal” problems of existence that humans carry from generation to generation without knowing their resolution. The open moral-philosophical problematics dominating the prose of these writers form the basis of their authorial concepts of the hero, which integrate the entire spectrum of ethical and aesthetic issues of the artistic world, defining the distinctive worldview positions of the authors themselves.

At the core of Viktor Astafyev’s hero concept lies the problem of the “unclaimed by time” person of the “reflective” generation. Meanwhile, Nazar Eshonkul’s heroes occupy a special position relative to the world—they are always caught by the author at the moment of moral judgment. Thus,

the concept of the hero in the works of Viktor Astafyev and Nazar Eshonkul organically merges into the literature of the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, reflecting significant aspects of the conceptual comprehension of the problem of man at the turn of epochs.

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