Zahar Prilepin's blogs as the new modern literary creativity measurement

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Sodobni tehnološki razvoj vpliva na literaturo, ne le na dojemanje in branje knjig, ampak tudi na način, kako pisatelji ustvarjajo in objavljajo svoje literarne umetnine. Prilepin kot znan in priljubljen sodobni pisatelj, ki ima v ruskem literarnem okolju uveljavljen položaj, svoje knjige in rusko literaturo promovira s pomočjo blogov. Avtorica članka Prilepinove bloge in druge internetne vire analizira z namenom prikazati njegovo sodelovanje pri ustvarjanju e-literature. Sodobni blogi so razloženi v kontekstu javne literarne sfere, ki v socialni komunikaciji ustvarja edinstvene družbene priložnosti. Dejavnosti pisateljev in literarnih kritikov, ki imajo v literarnem okolju uveljavljen položaj, nedvomno pomembno vplivajo na revolucijo v ruski spletni literaturi, ki jo predstavlja novi literarni žanr. Ta se izraža v široki spletni distribuciji literarnih del in interaktivni komunikaciji avtorja z bralci ter njihovega neposrednega vpliva na avtorjevo nadaljnjo ustvarjalnost.

Modern technological development affects literature not only in the form of perception and reading books but also in the way writers create and publish their literary pieces of art. Prilepin, as a famous and popular contemporary writer with a confirmed position in the Russian literary environment, promotes his books and Russian literature using internet blogs. The author attempts to analyse his blogs and other internet resources in order to show Prilepin's involvement in creating e-literature. Contemporary blogs are explained in the context of the public literary sphere, which creates unique social opportunities in social communication. The activities of writers and literary critics who have a well-established position in the literary environment appear to have an undeniably significant impact on the revolution in Russian web literature that is represented by a new genre of literature, which is expressed in the wide distribution of literary works over the internet and the interactive communication of the author with readers and their direct influence on the author's further creativity.

Ključne besede: Prilepinovi blogi, sodobna ruska literatura, literarna kritika, e-literatura, javna literarna sfera, vojne izkušnje

Key words: Prilepin's blogs, modern Russian literature, literary criticism, e-literature, public literary sphere, war experience

Introduction

Zahar Prilepin is one of the exciting and famous personalities of modern Russian literature. His professional and personal life is characterised by the variety of interests and activities he does. First of all, Zahar Prilepin is a writer who represents new tendencies and creates projects that show the transformation in Russian literature. The reader can familiarise themself with his numerous works of poetry, prose, traditional reports and also innovative concepts that are realised in the virtual web space. Nowadays, Prilepin is considered to be one of brightest writers in modern Russia and furthermore, he is known as an activist-writer, patriot, even nationalist because in each sphere of his activities he goes beyond the reinforced standards (Steblyanko 2018). His nationalism goes far beyond the traditional frames of this word. In terms of nation, Prilepin perceives the whole multi-national country and its interests, as well as the interests of each and every person who lives in Russia. His experience of the Chechen warhas been represented in his literature very vividly and originally in a way that often provokes heated discussions among literary critics as well as writers. The personal life context that he demonstrates in many of his statements gives an intimate background inherent in the literature on the web.

In accordance with a research article (Sishchuk, Gerasimova, Goncharova 2019: 3) the interaction between language and culture depends on people's social background and mentality. Prilepin's books have been published in their thousands and critics consider that he is a talented and reliable writer whose works are moving in time with human mentality and social growth. His popularity among readers is constantly growing as his philosophical thought attracts more and more attention not only of young people but of many other people who admire him despite his age, origin, and literary experience.

Prilepin's creativity is not limited to literary novels. He is active in the Russian discourse, taking part in poetry processes and journalism development. His literature experience strengthens in various forms. Prilepin worked as a reporter and then as an editor in different magazines. He presents his life experience in television programmes, for example, in *Russian language lectures* where he talks not only about literature but also about culture, history and politics. Zahar Prilepin discusses the current literary process and historical events providing some literary criticism that, according to Marina Zagidullina (2017) works "as the self-awareness of the literature along with meta functionality (including the themes of creative writing in literature works)". Prilepin uses the opportunity to talk about literature on the web, participating in different projects. In his web posts, it is possible to read his conversations with representatives during which he does not only ask the questions but also expresses his points of view on the literary process. Prilepin is an active speaker in the media space aiming to complete the tasks of the social phenomenon of the literary critics whose mission is realised as a service to society and art according to the writer's personal beliefs. Marina Zagidullina (2019) talks about his "eidos of literature, its immanent nature to be the verbal chronicle of human evolution in humanity". Zahar Prilepin expresses his interest in politics and the military activity of the country in his works and recently also on the internet.

Literature review

Due to technological limitlessness, the readers, who orient towards the work of a particular writer, create a strong society. The blogosphere is an entertaining area of the internet where groups with different interests form and various traits characterise them. Blogs have become a new genre of literature (Gumkowska, Meryl 2009: 298–309).

The interactive communication is connected with the new trend of the WEB 2.0 generation that is dedicated to spreading an enormous amount of information and giving an opportunity for users to interact and integrate. In his work, the researcher Keen (2007: 26) excludes the presence of professionals in this sphere. Characterising a new blogger's environment, he admits that they are concentrated on themselves. Confirming the existence of this phenomenon, Byron Reeves notices that the endless activities of non-professionals lead to the destruction of essential cultural values, and that is why the professionals should control the ongoing process (Reeves, Nass 2000: 295). Most likely, Prilepin acts as a professional writer and critic who makes a natural selection of the latest works.

In modern studies, the topic of blogs has started to be considered. The works of Russian scientific writers, who are focused on blogs in the context of the literary process, appear quite rarely. The blog, as a genre of a blogosphere discourse, is analysed taking into account the peculiar sociolinguistic aspect in the works of Kochetkova and Tubalova (2014: 39) who pay special attention to the blog speech genre as a type of utterance that has formed, on the one hand, through "the intention of individual personality sublimation" and, on the other hand, "by the technical capabilities of the internet as a special sphere of the communication". Zaliznyak (2010), using the expression of Krongauz and researching the diary genre, defines the dominant property of its network option as "public intimacy". Zaliznyak (2010) states that "the classic diary has the auto address property and the blog-diary has the multicast text principally oriented towards many readers". The researcher considers that the changes are significant if they have led to the inner transformation of the hyper genre of blog. Similarities between a conventional diary and a blog are in the presence of the potential public orientation according to Zaliznyak (2010) because the conventional diary "is written as if it is exclusively for oneself and without showing off, but at the same time it makes the diary interesting to the other people who may read it" and "the appearance of the phenomenon of 'public intimacy' is connected not only to the fact that new technologies enable people to share their reflections with a vast audience, but at the same time the bloggers may represent their texts as a unique creative act and as "evidence of one's being" in the virtual space. Considering features of the English-speaking blogosphere, Khudyakova (2015: 47) supposes that "the orienting impact has a complex nature and can be implemented explicitly and implicitly in several areas depending on the communication conditions, aims and author's motives".

Considering the existence and role of blogs, the important question is the place of their functioning. The role of media in the creation of the public sphere attracts the association with the literary public sphere that, at first, has been the laboratory and the training area for public investigations. Habermas has called it the literary

public sphere, and there it is possible to exchange the mind and values (Ochman 2015: 28) that contribute to the creation of discursive forms for the trust culture (Sztompka 1999; Giddens 2003). The blogosphere thoroughly performs the aforementioned communication functions and creates a new area where society forms a unique background of modern literature. The importance of the blogosphere in a communication network environment is confirmed by Michurin (2014) who considers as follows:

> Internet-communication plays a prominent role in the life of modern society, increasingly crowding out traditional forms of contact by all the diversity of its species (messaging in email, blogs, forums, instant messaging and social networks).

Methodology

The current article is dedicated to the new and actively developing philosophy – the texts in social networks based on the materials of Zahar Prilepin's expressions. Presented the role of unique literature formations on the internet and their influence on modern society, it's culture, literary preferences and mentality.

Philosophers, cultural scientists and sociologists evaluate the current situation as the "value vacuum", "normative value uncertainty" and "value relativism and nihilism", because of the "general decline of the morality value status and blurring of the reference points in understanding good and evil", "the decline of the social authority of traditional values" and "the profanation of the idea of personal responsibility and personal choice" (Tilinina 2012).

One of the thesis consequences of the sociological nature of fiction and popular literature is the perception of literary creativity in terms of the social communication model, in which the sender (author) uses institutionalised mass media with the intension of spreading definite cognitive and aesthetic values (Sell 2000). However, the nature of the social communication literary process is a reflection of common and modernisation tendencies. It can be assumed that along with the implementation of basic modern institutions (i.e. the social and technological systems, market rationality and national state) the social communication model through literary creativity takes on the characteristics of mass communication processes. This particular scientific bias characterises not only literary sociology but also studies in cultural and media studies fields.

Regardless of the chosen research plane, the thinking about the literature in the context of modern sociology processes is focused on showing that literary creativity is not only the collection of cultural texts that subordinate the laws and patterns and form an area of symbolic culture, but also a set of the structural social practices including the process of information exchange, constructing and even the development of general knowledge (Berger, Luckmann 2010; Luhmann 2009). Such thinking goes far beyond the framework of the basic paradigms of classical and modern literary criticism, demonstrates theoretical and conceptual consistency with the studies included in cultural science. The cultural studies can be considered as a part of literary theory, but one should remember that cultural works have a broader thematic research coverage and a different pedigree coming

from the so-called *Frankfurt school* than the traditional one and dogmatically understand literary criticism (Burzyńska, Markowski 2007).

The current text is present on the research plane, and it aims to seek standard fields in sociological theory and modern theory of literature. The main goal is to show the place and role of literature blogs (Akram 2017: 62) using the materials of the online dairy blogs of Zahar Prilepin in the literary sphere as a particular type of a social network system. In this particular interpretational context, the function of the literary blogs has two aspects: first, it is related to the process of literature system reproduction through the accumulation of the cultural capital, and, second, considers changing a system in the process of active social capital resources development (the blogosphere).

Results

Like the other famous contemporary writers, Prilepin has mastered the ability to use internet resources as a new space where he actively develops his literary skills and also spreads literary knowledge among a wide audience. Zahar Prilepin has discovered a new territory of influence and successfully attracts the attention of different social groups. The internet provides excellent opportunities that are nowadays used by many Russian writers to increase their popularity. The network undoubtedly creates a new unique area that Suvorov (2016: 211) calls "the literary space" where readers get unlimited access to works, literary events and projects where Russian writers play an active part.

With online literature, the readers can directly connect with an author, ask a question, and get an answer immediately. It often happens that the questions can be provocative, and the writers use this possibility to express their points of view in an informal situation and spread these views among a larger audience.

The blogs present writers whose private lives are inaccessible to a wider audience. However, the readers are not interested in the real person but the virtual idea of them. They are interested in reading not about their literary ideas but the intimate facts of their private lives. Now, all blog readers can establish a dialogue with the help of comments. A blog provides the possibility for readers to not only to communicate with an author but also to influence upon their further work by showing their preferences that then often reflect in the later works of an author. As the experience of some authors shows, subscribers retreat from the literary issues and provoke the expression of scandalous accidents, providing political views or showing a writer in an informal environment. The writers are often subjected to reader manipulation and also provoke the significant quantity of the comments that turn into vivid discussion. A characteristic feature of blogs is the frankness of the authors who open the door to their literary laboratory. Bloggers often communicate with subscribers or translators of their books under web posts. They share their reflections and rely on answers, comments and evaluations to provide the stages of their creative work, writing about the difficulties and challenges they faced, discussing their plans for upcoming works by describing the concepts and ideas. The readers' reaction is the real proof of their high evaluation. The writers consciously submit their opinion and show unofficial facts connected with publishing

books, attracting a larger quantity of readers that increase their popularity. Often the blogs become a place where literary texts are born in the form of short stories, novels and poetry. Online recordings turn into actual journalism or even prose. For writers, it is hard to give up their literary skills, stylistics and language. However, getting used to virtual reality, they develop their literary laboratory precisely on the internet, creating peculiar types of electronic literature.

Despite the various blog accusations about the lowering of quality in literature and literary criticism, the enormous role that they play in developing a literary process in the twenty-first century should be recognised because they are its real participant and constituent phenomenon. Many blog writers' records are highly valuable literary utterances that become high-quality works as it has been said before. The virtual or so-called digital audience significantly influences the author's new texts that, despite their individuality, consciously or unconsciously take into account a subscriber's opinion and use the suggestions, evaluations, even ideas as part of the creative process.

A significant opinion about the literature being created on the internet is provided by modern literary critic Valeria Pustovaya (2011). She considers the occurrence of this phenomena in the literary blogosphere as a significant revolution that has created a new literary form and, on the contrary to the opinions of many literary critics, theorists and historians, thinks that the blog is a new force in literature: "the mass adoption of utterance is a revolution in language, literature and social network communication that is equal to the invention of typography". Like the opinion of Pustovaya, literary form researchers have determined the characteristic features that allow for the exploring of the blog as a new genre (Cherkasova 2012).

Blogs give the invaluable opportunity to spread positive ideas, to promote literacy projects and to encourage reading new books. They attract attention to the new literary phenomena, offer the opportunity to read high-quality literature, exchange opinions and enliven the discussion of new books, young writers and critics. Blogs are often a means of advertising. It is one of the best methods to attract young people who are immersed in modern technology. Bloggers' posts are often converged on various forms of media practices. They use several new media manuals, which quickly find a wide audience. Bloggers refer explicitly to ratings and comments of their creativity by the digital audience actively taking part in the literary process online and which greatly influence their popularity.

According to Suvorov (2016: 211), Evgenij Grishkovets' blog is "a kind of landfill where the literature creator conducts 'tests' of the new texts and regularly checks the residual reader memory (first of all with like-minded people)". The particular place where the particular conditions are created for any literary experiments is *Livejournal,* due to which a blogger has a confident view of the regular readers and the preparation for the perception of their creative projects. Such an audience "core" consists of regular blog followers and lovers of already published books, and a writer first of all shares their plans and excerpts of new works with these readers.

Prilepin actively acts in such popular blogosphere portals such as *Facebook*, *Livejournal* (LJ), *Vkontakte* and *Snob.ru*. His high level of activity is admitted on the LJ website, which is popular among Russian writers'. Many of his blog posts can be read on the social network Vkontakte, where one can find various statements

from the author's *Pathology* about the politics and situation in Ukraine where he has had his battalion, about modern and classic literature, music, Russian cinema, concerts and everything that has got his attention.

Prilepin's popularity leads to many novice writers sending him their works for evaluation, which in turn emphasising his experience and position in the literary environment. However, he does not put himself into a position of responsible and experienced critic. Besides, he considers that there are some professional and qualified contests for this aim, where literary works according to genre are genuinely evaluated. Zahar Prilepin tries to push forward the idea of the literary rivalry that positively influences the state of modern literature. In the following excerpt, there is an example of psychological manipulation principles where a prestigious personality with high authority makes an impact on the wider audience demanding to act on his instructions:

> All kinds of texts, novels, essays, poems and short stories are still often sent to me to read. All this is accompanied by my favorite phrase: "I am very interested in your opinion". People are kind. Send the texts (and also the films and songs) to the contests. My opinion is rubbish. Here is a contest, for example. Take part, and bless you. (Prilepin 2018a)

In his notes, Prilepin describes his creative process. The excerpt below shows the writer's plans, his actual positions and, furthermore, it gives the guarantee that Esenin's biography has been processed by him to the degree of guaranteeing the text being of full value and a book being the mature reflection of a personality and writer's work (*I* is for the interviewer, *P* is for Zahar Prilepin):

> *I:* Let's talk about literature. In February 2017, your last book *Platoon* was published. What will be next?
>
> *P:* Nothing as for now. I am busy with nothing. When I will have the time, I will write a biography of Sergei Aleksandrovich Esenin. I have been dealing with it for my whole life. It is in my head and I just need to write it down. For two years, I have not been writing and I am not going to yet… (Rudalev 2018b)

The writer is very self-critical, and he possesses extraordinary manipulation abilities and abilities to promote his creativity. On the one hand, he objectively evaluates his novel and then uses the principle of contrast to present the value of the next book, admitting why one should read *Black Monkey* that, by the way, has created heated discussions among critics and literary specialists. The author's objectivity increases his popularity and author's position as someone who can evaluate and admit his weaknessess:

> *I:* When you finished writing, you said about *Black Monkey* that you felt disgusted with the text. Did this happen again with other books?
>
> *P:* No, this text was very specific and it has been disgusting to me and even till now I have not re-read it. But it was written for some reason, this book, and I have to deal with it. Then I wrote *Cloister*... (Prilepin 2018b)

In his blogs, Prilepin publishes information about the new literary phenomena using his authority and presents critical reviews or describes books without evaluating them, as can be seen in the fragment above. He is aware of the fact that such a

message will attract the attention of readers, so many people will want to read the novel, and he will achieve the aim to promote his literature.

Prilepin's frankness, absence of fear of criticism or public neglect is confirmed in his informal statements in the blogosphere. Reading his online notes, one can get to know Prilepin as a writer: his language and the idea of fighting indecent literature is a taboo. He directly talks about his plans at the same time, defines all the literature and shows orientation on the definite audience and his place in the literary environment.

Almost every true writer has a particular vision of true literature. Zahar Prilepin also has formed his idea that "the bones should crackle". The comments left under his writings gives him the possibility to realise the value of his work. In his self-esteem, he successfully fulfilled his tasks because readers saw things that made their "the bones crackle" in his novels. It should be noted that in all his statements, he considers the issue of Russian literature, showing his care and the direction in which it should be developed:

> Literature is a wall against the wall. Bones should crackle. This is what people should see. Russian writers are responsible for what is happening. /.../ It seems to me that some people in Russia see this in my case. If I have any experience, then it is just this one. (Rudalev 2018b)

His stance as a patriot who loves his country is seen not only in active military events. Prilepin constantly refers to Russian classics as the basis of the literary process and the enormous role that it plays in the formation of the modern Russian mentality and on the uniqueness of the Russian classics' works who have not yet found their inheritors. On the VKontakte blog, one can get to know his interpretation of Russian classics' masterpieces that are as interesting as the writer's statements.

In the context of aggressive virtual audience, the confession of *Sanka*'s author is very interesting, where he is indifferent and affirms his independence and authenticity on the web, and gives guarantees that everything that has been written by Prilepin is his genuine texts:

> As you understand being in Donetsk, I am not very attracted to reading what has been said about me: for example, for the past three years, I have no habit to enter the blogs where my personality is discussed. And when I am sent the links, I still do not visit them. No kidding, I am a very busy person, and it does not bother me. Suddenly I have noticed that if you do not pay attention to it nothing changes at all. There was a gathering of 300 people, discussing me for three days. I could read about it and thought about it for the whole day being in a slight fury. But I did not read, and in a year, there was no trace of this conversation. And I am at the same place I have been before. That is all the strategy. (Rudalev 2018a)

Result discussion

All the given examples show how the famous writer creates his next works in the web splace. The comments, provocative reviews or opinions are the basis for his next novels. There are more and more samples of the works he thinks about on the internet. Prilepin entered into a new trend of modern literature on the web, experimenting in new and classic literature, reading and discussing books

in society with the help of his literary and critical skills, trying to influence the ongoing mental transformation. The excerpt provided above presents Prilepin's self-evaluation, someone who perceives himself as a successful and popular writer due to which he should not fight for his position in modern literature, and he can freely act in society in favor of the development and promotion of his literature in a technology-oriented society. No doubt, the twenty-first century is a time of a new culture of reading formation that is oriented on the presentation. According to Andrei and Elena Selutin (2016: 106):

> /.../ new network media has started to play the expert role defining borders and approaches of reading, emphasising the novelty and the widest thematic volume of literary texts, whose reviews will become the basis for the modern person's world image in the end.

The new culture of reading is "texts about texts". Prilepin, no doubt, fits into the process of the new phenomenon formation. He takes on the responsibility of a position in the modern reading process and creates the new format of literary works with his texts. The digital activity of Prilepin confirms the existence not only of a new type of literature, but it turns utterances into genres that have served only internet users and become the manual for modern writers. Prilepin is not the exception. More often famous writers, who realise the possibilities that the global web gives, publish not only their literary works but also take an active part in society, leaving their literary projects that become a new form of the literature of the twenty-first century. Researchers such as Selutins, characterising modern literature, pay attention to the "fashion theory and fashion tendencies formation in the modern popular culture" (Selutin, Selutina 2016: 106). Prilepin appears to be the designer of new literary tendencies. Nowadays, it can be assumed based on the theses in the works of Dyxel and Brandmeyer on the problems of the humanisation of socially-oriented marketing:

> The designer following his taste creates an image as the result of the interaction of the typical taste preferences and obeys him and find new attitudes of activity that allow him to "model the judgment of the taste, and imperceptibly shape the mass representation of beautiful and ugly". (Barkova 2013: 123)

Conclusion

The main goal of the literary author can be described as the following: to create masterpieces, to express his thoughts, ideas and points of view, to develop the younger generations, etc. Nowadays, writers should also develop their skills of conveying their thoughts to readers using all the possible means provided by modern technologies. It allows them to use slang words and new spaces and platforms for communication, turning the authors into literature designers, who create their special vivid language and a tool of connection with their audience.

Zahar Prilepin's thoughts, which subscribers can read on the web, are perceived as the forecasts of the literary designer. The author of *Sin* consciously simulates the taste of the readers, manipulates their consciousness, and at the same time, forms their image of the new literature on the background of the Russian writers'

achievements. In the role of literary designer, Prilepin creates an innovative literary format on the web. His heroic achievements in military service, his activities as a cultural trigger, and his literary works that are awarded many prizes established his strong position in the literary environment that he continually strengthens with nationalism as a symbol of belonging to national literature and caring about new Russian masterpieces. With his strong attachment to the Russian literature and also with his non-standard activity, Prilepin creates a trusted platform that expands his sphere of influence upon the readers in the virtual environment.

The interaction of Prilepin's creativity on the web provides new possibilities to form representations of Russian society about innovations in the online literary forms. Zahar Prilepin steps out of the traditional frames of genres. Sociolinguistic abilities and a deep awareness of the Russian literatary political situation lead him to take part in the new space where he finds a space to experiment, which results are set in the Russian blogosphere, and provokes a new generation of young people who are interested in the continuation of the Russian literary tradition.

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BLOGI ZAHARJA PRILEPINA KOT NOVO MERILO SODOBNE LITERARNE USTVARJALNOSTI

Članek se posveča novemu in pomembnemu pojavu v okviru upada ali razvoja ruske literature. E-literatura, ki izvira iz blogov, objavljenih na literarnih straneh, širi svoje meje in sfero vpliva. Blog kot priljubljen in zelo cenjen literarni žanr je v virtualnem okolju privlačen za številne ruske pisatelje, ki z bogatimi internetnimi viri vstopajo v nov literarni prostor. Zahar Prilepin, eden najpomembnejših pisateljev, novinarjev in pesnikov, svoj literarni diskurz vnaša v kibernetski prostor, v katerem zapolnjuje kulturni vacuum; pri tem odpira

nove vsebine, ki so bistvene za delovanje ruske družbe. Literarno delo Zaharja Prilepina je obravnavano znotraj taksonomije široko razumljenega modela družbene komunikacije. Prilepin, ki ima izkušnje na področju književnosti in tudi na področju družbenih vprašanj, v posebnem primeru nacionalističnih poskusov oživitve ruskega imperija blog uporablja kot sredstvo družbenega vpliva in postane tudi oblikovalec nove elektronske literature. Sociolingvistične zmožnosti pisatelja, njegovo globoko razumevanje ruske književnosti, vključno z mojstrovinami velikih ruskih pisateljev, in strast do nje, pa tudi politični dogodki so pritegnili njegovo pozornost pri sodelovanju v literarnem življenju v virtualnem okolju. V njem izvaja svoje literarne eksperimente in novo generacijo spodbuja, naj rusko tradicijo literature nadaljuje v kibernetskem prostoru. Zahar Prilepin v blogosferi ustvarja posebno platformo zaupanja, v kateri se novo literarno življenje začne pod nadzorom avtorja *Greha*.