

Images of Siberia in the Poems of Amateur Poets

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Abstract — This article is devoted to the study of various images of Siberia in the amateur poetry by authors who were born in Siberia or lived in Siberia. For the purposes of this essay, the term “amateur poetry” is taken to mean poetry without poetic harmony and artistic value. Unlike high-quality fiction, amateur poetry contains a different set of interpretations of images of Siberia. As a result of the study, we made five main conclusions. First, the theme of Siberia helps understand the genesis of self and describe the phenomenon of own existence in the system of knowledge about the world. Second, there is a tendency to comprehend the fact of their own existence using the assertion of involvement in a small motherland or a global project. *Third*, there is a trend towards an idealized description of Siberia. *Fourth*, the description of Siberia in amateur poetry can become a way of social manifestation. *Fifth*, we give comments on the peculiarities of the use of geographical names in amateur poetry by Siberian authors. *Sixth*, we have identified the most frequent words mentioned about Siberia in amateur poetry and came to the conclusion that poets often described Siberia more in summer than in winter.

Keywords — *amateur poetry, dilettantish poetri, Siberia, image, written folk art*

I. INTRODUCTION

Purposefully, the term “amateur poetry” will be taken to mean poetry without poetic harmony and artistic value.

In scientific articles amateur literature is also called “naïve”, “dilettantish”, “primitive” poetry, “grafomania”, “pseudo-fiction”, “subliterature” etc. This suggests that there is no common paradigm for describing amateur poetry. In one of our articles we suggested to call it a phenomenon of “written folk art” [1].

The amateurish versification is very common. It is generally agreed today that this phenomenon is not an interesting subject of philological studies. In our opinion, the amateur poetry is the separated area of literature. It differs from the professional literature by the original text structure and the role in culture.

Some researchers consider primitivism as a reception in avant-garde poetry and reception of modern performative practices: J.F.B. Amaral [2], K.M.D.A. Maciel [3], D.M. Davydov [4]. A.L. Andrade examines artistic images and poetic descriptions of landscapes, compares the postmodern poet with a traditional artist who worships the idol. According to the researcher, primitivism and archaic structures in art become a source of modernization [5].

The authors of more recent studies have described individual facts and segments of amateur poetry. T. Rivera studied the amateur youth poetry slam and came to the next conclusion: amateur poetry practice had potential to develop, reshape, and redefined new economies of cultural value [6]. V.V. Maroshi describes the peculiarities of the functioning of naïve poetry in the metropolis (by the example of the verses of Vera Vasilyeva) [7].

B.E. Wise wrote articles about naïve and sentimental poetry by William Alexander Percy, a lawyer, planter, “sexual freethinker” and amateur poet [8, 9]. Amateur poetry often translates an unofficial assessment of social phenomena and stereotypes. Amateurish poetry is studied as a manifestation of the speech and picture of the world of social and cultural groups the authors belong to. This approach is supported by J.B. Kostyakova, V.S. Titova [10], M.V. Ahmetova [11], A.L. Mahnyrev [12], Y.A. Rykunina [13].

Literature researchers often treat the amateur poetry as non-original and secondary. A.A. Bonch-Osmolovskaya and B.V. Orekhov propose to study this phenomenon statistical method [14, 15]. We consider this approach important, but it is unacceptable for our work. The thesis of A.B. Lord about the uniqueness of any author's poetic expression is more important to us [16]. This is about the epic. But let us think that the amateur poetry got into the field of interest is a kind of an epic tradition.

In modern Russian amateur poetry there are common poems about the author's birthplace and about the territories with which the author's work is connected.

Against this background, the central question that motivates this paper is the interest in the diverse interpretations of the image of Siberia in the mass consciousness. Our purpose is to describe the diversity of Siberian images in the poems of modern amateur poets.

Before us the image of Siberia in mass consciousness was studied with attraction of various literary material.

When studying quality literary Russian works, scientists usually draw conclusions that the image of Siberia is interpreted by poets and writers within the following motives.

- “Image of Siberia in the Russian classical literature represents its country of cold-winter-night (moon), that is, death in its mythological understanding”, “Siberia is a country of deserted and limitless space” [17, p. 28].

- Siberia is a huge and untapped, ideal space for modernization (“monumentality”, “heroic weekdays and strong characters”); contrast of the “cursed past” and the socialist present [18, p. 96, 124].
- “Periphery, Siberia... oppose to the Capitals as “own”, the native land” [19, pp. 154–154].
- “Siberian Supermen” by Vasily Shukshin, brutal siberian man, “bestial Siberian man” [20].
- “Siberia... in the imagination of the people is the primordial Rus” [21].

In the study of the image of Siberia in European literature there are similar motives, but they may have opposite connotations. So D.A. Olitskaya writes, “Siberia epitomises Western ideas about Russia as a mysterious and wild “alien””; “Konsalik (H.G. Konsalik (1921–1999), German author of popular adventure novels) employs the image of the Siberian taiga to show that the Russians have a beastly nature, which reinforces his idea of the Russians as a dangerous and wild nation”; “Siberia was represented as a territory that especially needed a civilizing influence” [22, p. 44].

Besides interesting images of Siberia in journalism and memoirs. S.V. Melnikova writes, “Siberian intellectuals of the 18th and 19th centuries... perceive their stays in Siberia as exile and punishment and express desire to leave it forever... Motives of emptiness (material and spiritual), dangers, unrealized mission prevail All this allows to define Siberia as a space of “spiritual hunger”” [23, p. 157]. N.N. Rodigina and K.N. Mitrofanova studied the image of Siberia in the Russian and soviet children magazines of the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Persistent themes in this magazines was “geographical description of the Siberian region, its climate, the architecture and urban everyday life, and the cultural traditions of the Siberian people”. Authors of one of the journals “acknowledged some specific of Siberia as a place of hard labor and exile” [24, pp. 5].

Amateur poetry represents a different slice of interpretation of the image of Siberia in the mass consciousness.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The main method of our research is the motive analysis within the framework of the intertextual approach. This method combines structural and semantic analysis of the poetic text. This method reveals the approaches to interpreting the image of Siberia in amateur poetry.

We should use descriptive method, because the phenomenon has not yet been described. Elements of statistical analysis were also useful in the description.

The material of our research is a published collection of amateur poems. The authors of these verses were born in Siberia and lived there or their profession was connected with the Siberian territory.

In addition, we use a biographical method in the study. We conduct large biographical interviews with poets, if possible. During the interview we did not stop the respondent's story. At

the beginning of the interview we asked him, “Tell about yourself, please”. During the interview we asked several times: “Do you want to tell something else?” We also involve as a source other biographical materials, located in collections of verses (autobiography, brief biography, photo, author's comments, preface, after-story, etc.).

We also managed, thanks to fate, to make participant observation. From 2000 till now The Festival of amateur poetry takes place in Novosibirsk. It's called the Poetic marathon “The Breath of the third millennium” (“Dyhanie tret'ego tysyacheletiya”). All these years we have participated in it as the author, communicating with other authors, collecting editions of amateur poetry.

We consider amateur poetry outside of poetic harmony and the history of world literature. We ignore the lack of originality and aesthetic inferiority in the works by amateur poetry. The obvious illiteracy of the authors is also not important to us. The nonappraised fixation of the interpretation of the image of Siberia in amateur poetry allows one to understand the perception of Siberia in terms of the big social layer.

III. RESULTS

In the considered poetic books one can notice two tendencies:

- confessional narrative;
- claim for truthfulness.

It shows titles of books, for example, “State of mind”, “The incurable pain of the soul”, “Bells of the soul”, “Sails of the soul”, “Ludmilin day”, “Dreams”, “Feast of Revelation”, etc. Each author pretends to talk about the innermost. In the design of books we most often meet landscapes of the motherland or the most important territory (for authors). In our collection such territory is Siberia.

Often amateur poets indicate in the book title their territorial affiliation: “Bratsk’s Comrade Komsomol member”, “My small homeland”, “Beloved land. Collection of poems and songs by the authors of the land Toguchinskoj” (Toguchin, 2011), “Angara said the string” (Irkutsk, 1993), “I was born in Siberia...”, “Daughter of the Siberian Land” etc. The covers of these books are decorated with documentary or stylized realistic image of the respective territories.

Amateur poet Vera Vasilyeva in the annotation to her book “The Daughter of the Siberian Land” writes, “The author of the publication is a direct participant of all the events described in the book”.

The Nina Migunova’s book is “The incurable pain of the soul” (Novosibirsk, 2016) 78 pages. 20 of them contain photos from the author’s family archive. These photos illustrate poems.

Often in their speeches amateur poets emphasize the truthfulness described in their verses. They can tell the story of creating a poem for a long time. Often the following poem does not add anything new to the story and only repeats it. But this duplication is important for amateur poetry. A vivid example of such duplication is the book “Gremyachinsk. Historical Handbook and poetic Collection” (Kropotkin, 2007) of G.

Lelikov. Part of the book is the history of the village Gremyachinsk, which is located on the shores of Baikal. The other part of the book consists of poems by Mr. Lelikov about 1) each of the 15 streets of the village, 2) the enterprises and institutions that work in the village (fishery, repair shops, fishery inspection, etc.), 3) the characters constituting the population of the village (district Policeman, nurse, postman, Hunter), 4) the village school, 5) Baikal.

It is our belief that the Siberian theme is important for the self-identification of many amateur poets. For them the way of describing Siberia becomes one of ways of life-strategy description or substantiation.

Let us now analyze interpretation of the Siberian theme in amateur poetry and contexts in which this theme manifests itself.

Let us call motives, which the Siberian theme in amateur poetry is built.

First, the theme of Siberia helps to understand the genesis of self and to write the phenomenon of own existence in the system of knowledge about the world.

For example, Yuri Karasev in the book “I was born in Siberia...” (Novosibirsk, 2000) has been counting his own history since the time of Yermak. He realizes himself as a descendant of the Cossacks who came to Siberia with Yermak Timofeyevich. The image of Yermak Timofeyevich is also often found in high-quality poetry and in popular texts about Siberia. But Karasev integrates this motive into a poem with a grammatical error: “Я в Сибири рожден, / И с Сибирью знаком / С тех казачьих времен, / Что пришли с Ермаком” (“I was born in Siberia. / And I am familiar with Siberia / From those cossack’s times / That came with Yermak”). As we can see, the lyrical hero is familiar with Siberia from the XVI century. This statement has a special value if we consider that a) the first line of the poem is the title of the Karasev’s book and b) lyrical hero of amateur poetry is usually very close to the author. In the same Karasev’s poem there are lines: “Я уйду в глубину / Заастральных долин / И Владыке шепну: / – Пусть все станет твоим” (“I’ll go deep / Into the astral valleys / And the Lord whispers: / Let everything be yours”). The lyrical hero, descendant of the Cossack of the era of Yermak, will bequeath to the Lord all the lyrical hero had. It turns out that in the Karasev’s artistic world the lyrical hero is more long-lived and more powerful than God is.

Another author, Tatiana Ostapenko, writes, ““Siberia”, “Taiga”, “Oka”, “Winter” – / They are in lines and between lines. / Someone may not understand / What I am of those words”. In the poems Ostapenko there are two popular motives – taiga and winter.

The Lelikov’s poem “Parents” starts like this: “My mother is Siberia. / Father is Gremyachinsk” (in the book “Gremyachinsk. Historical Handbook and poetic Collection”).

Second, the tendency to comprehend the fact of their own existence using the assertion of involvement in a small motherland or a global project.

In the Lelikov’s book “Gremyachinsk. Historical Handbook and poetic Collection” among the historical photos is the photo

of the book’s author. Under it there is a signature: “On the threshold of the Gremyachinsk’s school. I’m going to first class! 1991 year”. In the beginning of the book, Lelikov writes: “My son was born here. My childhood and youth have passed here. Here I studied in school and then worked as a teacher <...> I have the right to call my own Homeland – this is my Gremyachinsk. Residents love their village. They work for him, eager to make him better <...> They proudly pronounce – this is my Gremyachinsk!”

The Ostapenko’s book titles “My Small Homeland. A Poetic collection dedicated to the 250 anniversary of “Winter” (Sayansk, 1993). Here “Winter” is not the time of year, but the town in Irkutsk Oblast, located at the point where the Trans-Siberian Railway crosses the Oka River.

Boris Salnikov in the amateur poetry book “Bratsk’s Comrade Komsomol member” (Bratsk, 2013) writes only about construction The Bratsk hydroelectric power station, Bratsk city and the infrastructure around it. Salnikov was not born in Siberia. He spent his childhood in Kursk, graduated from the University in Moscow. Most of his life he worked in Siberia. During the construction of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station, he was one of their Komsomol leaders. In 2013, he headed the Council of Komsomol’s veterans in the the Bratsk. In Salnikov’s poem “Lila Danilova” there are lines: “Подорвав здоровье наше, / Оживляли мы Сибирь. / И в тайге, познав лишения, / Мы увидели свершенья, / Нашей жизни утешенье: / ГЭС и голубую ширь” (“Having undermined our health, / We revived Siberia. / And in the taiga, having known deprivation, / We saw accomplishments, / Our consolation of life: / Hydroelectric station and blue vastness”). As in the Karasev’s poem, in the Salnikov’s line lyrical hero is more long-lived and more powerful than something powerful. In Karasev’s book it is the Lord, and in Salnikov’s book it is Siberia. In the artistic world of Salnikov, people are reviving Siberia with industrial development. This motive of longevity and the power of man is specific to Siberian amateur poems about Siberia. The world view of the lyrical hero of amateur poetry is unambiguous and unchanged. He has no doubts. In 2011 Salnikov wrote in one of the poems: “Комсомольцы славного Братска, / Не окончился ваш поход” (“Komsomol members of the glorious Bratsk, / Your campaign did not end”).

It is important to note that quoted books are not thematic collections. These are peculiar “books of life”. They collected poems written in different years. The compilers, proofreaders and editors of these books are authors themselves.

Third, the trend towards an idealized description of Siberia. The unique Siberian nature is described in amateur poetry with the typical and generalized images. For example, will, wide, forest, snow, “birch territory”, “Garden of Eden”, “gentle space”, “sincere conversation”, “high azure sky”, rivers, lakes, steppe, meadows (Victor Lipchansky “Sails of the soul”, Novosibirsk, 2005 and “Light of love”? Novosibirsk, 2003); “clean eyes of lakes”, “coniferous eyelashes”, “From the Sea of Okhotsk to the Ural Spurs, From the icy shores to Kazakh borders”, ancient taiga, arctic fox, snow (Tatiana Karelina “State of Soul”, Novosibirsk, 2002), “Siberia is beautiful on all sides”, “Siberian charm is great” (Tatiana Ostapenko). Often the authors place in their text about Siberia as many images of

different spaces and contrasting qualities as possible. Of particular interest in this regard is the poem “My Siberia” by Viktor Lipchansky. The poem has no plot and meaningful composition. It is a huge poem (at least 214 lines, we did not find the full publication). In this poem each new fragment of text introduces a new unsystematic set of various qualities of Siberia.

If the author in one poem several dozen times says, “Siberia! My Siberia”, he certainly understands the purpose of these words.

In our opinion, in such versions something archaic is the same mechanism for creating a plot as in the ironic definition of the Akyn creative method: “I see the steppe, I sing the steppe”. The amateur poet’s creative impulse is the Ivan Shmelev character’s despair. In the story “The Inexhaustible Cup” one of the Shmelev’s characters said, “I will write you, which was never! And you will!”

As a result of the included observation and with the help of an interview I was able to understand that amateur poetry’s authors interpret their own poetic statements as a means of combating spiritual entropy.

These comparisons leads us the conclusion that the amateur poet’s creative act such an author should be considered as an act of constructing some “heaven on earth”. Events described in the poems are placed simultaneously in the past and in the future. Often these poems are about the past for the future. Amateur poet Boris Salnikov enthusiastically describes the work successes that he performed in his youth. And then he writes that he wants the modern Russian youth to do great things, which are similar to those of Salnikov’s youth.

Fourth, the description of Siberia in amateur poetry can become a way of social manifestation. The poets write about the “righteous” from the “unrighteous” in the life of society and individual.

For example, Vera Vasilyeva in the poem “The Favorite Land of Siberia” writes: “Я родилась в Сибири / И ею я горжусь. / Я родилась в Сибири / И для нее тружусь <...> Как все прекрасно. / На земле все у нас есть. / Только бы у народа / Была совесть и честь” (“I was born in Siberia and I am proud of it. I was born in Siberia and I am working for her... So our land is beautiful! Only the people would have a conscience and honor. If only the people have a conscience and honor”) etc.

One more amateur poet Ludmila Faybusevich (in the book “Ludmila’s day”, Novosibirsk, 2004) asks the local authorities not to introduce a new tax. She motivates its offer to the harsh climatic peculiarities of Siberia.

Fifth, a few comments on the peculiarities of the use of geographical names in amateur poetry by Siberian authors. The description of Siberian space in general is characteristic for amateur poets who live in or near the big cities (Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk). In smaller cities, which according to the poets have any specialization, the poets write about Siberia as a whole seldom. In poems of amateur poets living in villages, the generalized image of Siberia and images of specific geographical places meet equally often.

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In addition, there are many amateur poems about a separate natural or cultural site in Siberia. These objects are grouped in the books around the Altai, Baikal, Sayan and other topics. In specific poems they are always described in isolation as a self-sufficient image.

Sixth, we have compiled a selection of 15 random poems about Siberia. They belong to nine authors. We conducted a statistical calculation of words using the program Textus.Pro 1.0. We conducted a statistical calculation of words using the program Textus.Pro 1.0. Among 1474 words (or 2176, given articles, conjunctions and particles) in the collection the following was the most frequent (taking into account the word forms).

TABLE I. WORDS USING FREQUENCY.

The most frequent words	Number of Uses
Siberia, Siberian	79
Love, love, beloved	21
here	17
people	16
Land, region	15
field	12
life, Live	11
garden	11
Beauty, beautiful	9
Joy	9
My	8
Homeland, born	8
Summer	7
Birch	7
City	5
Green	5
White	5
Winter	5
Village	4
Forest	4
Apple trees	4
Lake	4
River	4
Magic	3
Great	2

IV. DISCUSSION

Unlike high-quality fiction, amateur poetry contains a different set of interpretations of images of Siberia. For amateur poets-Siberians (even if they were not born in Siberia) Siberia does not contain exotic meanings. Siberia for them is not a space of winter and cold. If the motives of winter and cold are met in their poems, winter and cold do not become a hindrance for people. As a rule, a person cheerfully and happily overcomes the challenges of weather and nature. Amateur poets are not interested in industrial modernization of Siberia, “strong characters”, “ideological-moral collisions”. Hard labor, banishment, Ssylnoe, “the cursed past” of Siberia, which is marked philologists in the works of fiction, the amateur poets do not seem so. On the contrary, “the cursed past” is interpreted by amateur poets as a pretext for pride or a source of modern power of the Siberians.

Instead of “Siberian Supermen” and “bestial Siberian man” in the amateur poetry there is a variety of images: atlants, and residents of the Garden of Eden (verses by Victor Lipchansky), unremarkable citizen (poems by Lyudmila Faybusevich), peasant (poems by Yuri Karasev).

Siberia in the amateur poetry is single, exists as if outside the spatial context. The world outside Siberia does not exist. If Siberia in certain poems is represented as a fragment, peculiar “shard” (a separate natural object – a mountain, a threshold, a river and so on), it also acquires absolute character.

V. CONCLUSION

Our research proves the importance of continuing the work with amateur poetry. I hope that in the future we will be able to describe the world view of amateur poets, as well as to make a theoretical description of amateur poetry as a full-fledged phenomenon of literature.

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