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ABSTRACT

The research is an attempt at a comparative literary analysis of the works of Russian and Korean prose that represent the contemporary global novel. The purpose of this study is to identify the gender issues and the role of the mythological poetic context in the poetics of Ludmila Ulitskaya’s and Lee Hyeon-Su’s works. The article investigates the artistic regularity of the development of Russian and Korean novel prose of the 21st century, the creative individuality of L.E. Ulitskaya and Lee Hyeon-Su. The research aspect of the gender perspective and the categories of mythopoetics is focused on revealing, the cultural identity of the characters of works; Russian and Korean authors’ creative individuality; the peculiarities of constructing a gender imagery system, the transformation of mythological motifs and the role of a regional geographic material. A comparative analysis of the poetics of the novel by L.E. Ulitskaya “Medea and her children” and Lee Hyeon-Su “New Tales of Gisaeng” allows revealing spiritual values in women’s aspiration for the knowledge of the world’s eternal beauty. The personal and social motives of Medea Sinopli’s and gisaeng’s feelings and actions are defined psychologically. The principles of understanding the myths and legends that have entered the national world of Russian
women and Koreans, the features of the characters’ perception of Russian and Asian nature in the context of regional knowledge have been distinguished.

Keywords: contemporary literature, Russian novel, Korean prose, Ulitskaya, Lee Hyeon-Su, mythopoetics, gender issues, literary tradition, regional studies.


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1. INTRODUCTION

A topical issue of literary criticism at the beginning of the 21st century is the consideration of the world literary process on the basis of a comparative analysis of the novel text. The study of the works of contemporary Russian prose writer Ludmila Ulitskaya and Korean writer Lee Hyeon-Su has the goal to identify gender issues and the mythopoetic context in the poetics of their novels on the basis of a comparative analysis, on the one hand, and the aesthetic regularity of the development of world prose, on the other hand.

Modern literary criticism has a number of scientific works on writing of the above-mentioned authors within the scope of variative subjects on the history of Russian literature and literature of the Asia-Pacific region countries. This article is written in relation to interdisciplinary links, extending students’ understanding about Russian and South Korean prose of the 21st century. Analysis of the poetics of the literary text makes the literary thesaurus more profound, replenishes the regional knowledge about the way of life, culture, religion in Russia and South Korea.

The purpose of this study is to identify gender issues and mythopoetic traditions, their role in the poetics of the Russian and Korean novel.

The objectives are: 1) to reveal the gender nature of the psychology of the heroines belonging to different nationalities, social strata of society based on traditional human concepts of the world; 2) to trace the transformation of mythological traditions in the plot scheme of the novel; 3) to identify the traditional and new, real and spiritual in the heroines’ life and fate.

The theoretical significance of the article consists in an attempt of a comparative analysis of Russian and Korean prose leading to the discovery of artistic regularities of the aesthetic development of the literatures relating to different peoples of the world.

The practical importance of the article lies in the knowledge of multinational literary texts in connection with their gender issues and the functioning of myth in the genre of the modern novel. Observations and findings of the study can be used while compiling a world literature anthology.

The result of the comparison of the poetics of texts in connection with gender issues and the mythopoetic traditions of contemporary works, poorly evaluated by criticism, reveals the artistic regularity of the development of Russian and Korean prose in the 21st century and the authors’ creative individuality.

The research aspect of the gender perspective and the categories of mythopoetics is focused on revealing, first, the cultural uniqueness and psychological identification of the characters of works; secondly, the Russian and Korean authors’ creative individuality; thirdly,
the peculiarities of constructing a gender imagery system, a plot, the transformation of mythological motifs and the role of a regional geographic material.

A brief review of scientific and critical works on the research topic indicates that it is not sufficiently developed in terms of comparative analysis experience, which greatly expands the communicative strategy of modern literary criticism. An analytical reading of the Russian and Korean novel in the context of advances in modern world literature, the comprehension of those aspects of the writer’s creativity that demonstrate continuity within the national literary process, allows us to approach the solution of the problems of poetics of world prose that have not been studied sufficiently.

1.1. Literature review

A review of the literature on the subject demonstrates the existence of scientific monographic studies, dissertations (Osmukhina 2013; Abasheva 2017; Zhelobtsova & Sizykh 2014; Sizykh 2015) on the creative work by L.E. Ulitskaya within the framework of Russian prose of the 20th and 21st centuries. The range of literary criticism studies on the work of Lee Hyeon-Su is limited by a small number of domestic studies on the Korean literature (Kontsevich 1975; Lee 1985; Barashkova 2013). The works of the co-authors of this article (Barashkova 2013; Zhelobtsov 2013) dedicated to the literature and culture of the APR countries are of particular interest in Russian literary criticism.

As the key aspects of the given article are related but at the same time polyphonic, they were traced in modern scholars’ scientific papers published in international journals and specifics of these aspects is paid attention to. Among them are issues connected with the family novel, peculiarities of modern women’s writing; special considerations are given to gender problems in fiction and poetry, the role of a mythopoetic context and the development of these issues in a comparative aspect.

As far as the problem related to the study of family novel is concerned, the main feature of modern studies is its research not only taking into consideration some traditional views but including a certain modern context in it. Thus, the genre of the family novel offers new modes of presenting the nation founded not on family structures, as in previous models of family romances, but more likely “on eccentric neighborhoods where binaries and categories of normal/abnormal, heterosexual/homosexual, statehood/independence… are no longer hold” (Taylor 2012). Some plots of the so-called “feminine family romance” are first and foremost dependent on the heroine’s refusal of conventional marriage patterns and, moreover, on their “disidentification” from traditional understanding of femininity (D’hoker 2013).

An interesting point of view as for keeping family traditions is presented by Belinda Burns (2016), who analyzes these tendencies characterized in the twentieth-century Australian fiction, when suburbia is generally described as a “feminine domain”, which is opposed to the “masculine city”. When traditionally the female characters were depicted as spending dull lives of “domesticated conformity” in the suburbs, feminism of the 1970s and 1980s led to the female character liberated from her suburban “cage” by women writers. The next step was creating a female protagonist who refuses the public (“assumed masculine”) domain and returns to a more domestic (“assumed feminine”) sphere. Here we can trace “reimaginings of the suburban setting”, which admits feminine transformation.

The investigation of contemporary women’s writing includes such aspects as women’s life in different regions of the world (Sojka 2001, Moura-Kocoglu 2017, Björklund, 2018), in various settings (Thomson 2011; Kon-Yu & Van Loon 2018; Peters, Rendell & Vine 2018), representation of racist and sexist gazing as far as women are concerned (Canpolat 2016), etc.
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The theme of motherhood seems to be one of the urgent topics dealt with in modern fiction (Björklund 2018; Akhtar 2018; Karaman 2015). The authors not only dwell on complexities of relations between mothers and their children, but describe their “understanding of gender, sexuality, power, community, identity, and media”; and some more things can be added, such as “trauma, breastfeeding, disability, the beauty industry, incest, and shame” (Akhtar 2018).

Another aspect which is interwoven with those mentioned above is that of gender (Romero 2013; Lee 2016). It is demonstrated how the “rigid gender-role divisions” dissolve in the modern world, and at the same time gender fusion is traced (Kitsi-Mitakou 2017).

Many papers analyze the gender aspect in its close connection with such issues as sexuality, identity and writing (Dascăl 2013), nature (Cheang 2013a; 2013b), power (Moosavinia & Yousefi 2018) and mythological motifs (Massoura 2018), i.e. investigate their “intricate intertwining” (Dascăl 2013). In some papers the attention is given to the translator’s gender identity and its influence on the adequacy of translation (Diachuk 2017).

The analysis of literature dedicated to the above-mentioned problems reveals that comparative studies are not very numerous. They take into account different national literatures and the ways how these issues are represented in them (Raddeker 2014).

Taking into consideration this fact, the present study is necessary to demonstrate intercultural differences in understanding these issues, the ways they are presented and depicted in literatures of different countries, the specifics of female protagonists’ behavior, their way of life, relations in the family, keeping national traditions and simultaneously demonstrating new tendencies in the female characters’ lives which are shown regarding their reference to different nationalities.

2. METHODOLOGY
The methodological and theoretical basis of this study is presented by: the main provisions of the methodology of literary text analysis (Pospelov 2000, Tomashevsky 2005; Khalizev 2008).

The solution of the set tasks was carried out by a comparative analysis of the literary text, which reveals gender issues and mythopoetic traditions in the poetics of L.E. Ulitskaya’s and Lee Hyeon-Su’s novels. The comparative method helps reveal the artistic work on the authors’ transformation of classical literary content.

3. RESULTS
The findings of comparing the poetics of the modern novel texts from the perspective of gender issues and mythopoetic traditions revealed the artistic regularity of the development of the Russian and Korean literature in the 21st century and their presentation to the reader.

The chronotope in the novels by L. Ulitskaya and Lee Hyeon-Su is based on mythological allusions referring to the authentic material of the Greek and Korean archetype of the person’s eternal search for home as the center providing future generations, family traditions and the woman’s idea of happiness. The authors of the works draw a clear time line between the historical past and the realities of actuality in which their heroines exist. Retrospection of the life scenes of the dramatic fate of Medea and gisaeng, overlapping certain facts, actions, thoughts, feelings of modern heroines, complicates the movement of the plot layers, correspondingly deepens the psychological nature of the images and reconstructs the compositional form of the novels. Heroines, trying to return the past and to relive the feelings of mythological characters, are in a situation of tragic conflict. In the well-known plot about not quite successful female fate, the well-known biblical motif about the natural destiny of
Eve, whose name stands for “life”, vigorously revives. Reconstruction of the plot of the ancient text deepens the philosophical subtext of novels, unfolds a spectrum of heroines’ emotions before the reader.

Ludmila Ulitskaya and Lee Hyeon-Su create the mythology of the new century based on good deed and charity, home and family, love and childbearing.

Analysis of the poetics of the novels by L.E. Ulitskaya and Lee Hyeon-Su reveals the genre polyphonism of literary texts dominated by family-related, historical, psychological, and parable basic principles. The works of Russian and Korean writers once again confirming the women’s gender ability to work meticulously on the historical context, facts, details, biographically accurately describe the stages of the protagonists’ life and their spiritual climaxes. Therefore, the mythological constant as the semantic core of the comparative analysis of the novels “Medea and Her Children” and “New Tales of Gisaeng” is artistically significant.

Observations on ethno-cultural values, their canonical role in Russian and Korean art clarify the characters’ qualities and explain their mentality. The experience of correlating the works of L. Ulitskaya and Lee Hyeon-Su in terms of the literary study of mythopoetics can be taken into consideration by literary critics studying the new prose of Russia and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

The research aspect is focused on revealing, first, cultural self-identification and psychological reflection of the heroines of the novels; second, the writers’ artistic identity; third, the specifics of the composition of images, plot construction and ethno-cultural values interpretation.

Modern literary criticism assesses the place and role of creative work by L.E. Ulitskaya, her works in the development of the family novel genre, filled with the atmosphere, conflicts, and characters of current reality.

Ludmila Ulitskaya began to develop the theme of women in contemporary Russian prose, in which there were works by Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Tatyana Tolstaya, Viktoria Tokareva, Dina Rubina and others. Literary critics and the readership appreciated her novel “The Kukotsky Enigma” which won the Booker Prize. She talentedly creates an original female world within the scope of the existing gender literature, has approved the idea of the existence of gender literature, within which the female world exists independently and is self-sufficient. The title of the new novel “Medea and Her Children” [13] is noteworthy; the novel recreates an archetypal plot with a mythological content about Medea and her tragedy. The prose writer depicts the ancient space of the Crimea, in which her modern heroine Medea Sinopli lives. The center of the world of a woman having an ancient Greek name becomes a house on the beach. The talented writer manages to evoke the family home, place and warmth in details, traits and particularities. The plot lines of the novel are straightly tied to the key image of the house, in which her relatives come and which her relatives leave in order to return again at different stages of their destinies. The portrait characterization of the heroine is stored in memory through the color chosen by the author herself, who traces the widow’s fate of the childless woman. Her figure in black attire goes back to the mythological image and merges with the endless sea space deprived of joy and light. It should be noted that the expressive quality of the writer’s style is chronicles, when the material world of the novel is filled with the smell of dry grass, a noble shimmer of copper utensils warmed by the soul of old craftsmen. At the same time L.E. Ulitskaya overcomes the fatalism of the ancient Greek myth, transforming it into the consciousness of a modern man, often alienated in the megalopolis of environment. The social loneliness of Medea, who lost her husband, does not
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become her real credo. The heroine’s morning begins with the preparation of her home for the reception of guests, the expectation of joyful childish laughter and her loved ones.

It is known that the novel “Medea and Her Children” enriches the traditional genre of the family novel, preserving the family history inscribed in the social parameters of the new society. Let us clarify that the connection of numerous relatives around Medea and her home is based on the principle of the aspiration of people “from Lithuania, Georgia, Siberia” to harmony. Following her artistic principles, L.E. Ulitskaya recreates the historical path of the Greek Sinoply family to the Crimea. The biography of the descendants of the family naturally coincides with the chronicles of Russian life, with its wars, revolution, repression and collectivization. The semantic space of the novel is based on the reproduction of nature filled with biblical eternity. Culminating in the plot development are episodes in which the meetings of the young Medea with Samuel occur against the background of the majestic mountains, grazing sheep among the blossoming trees reflected in the mirror of the sky. The characters do not abandon the idea that it is their house which is the unique place of attraction of life from a person’s birth to his/her death: “… they both felt that they were in the center of the Earth that the smooth movement of the mountains, the rhythmic sighs of the sea, the flow of clouds, fast, translucent and denser, slowed, and a vast distinct flow of warm air from the mountains, directed together into a circular, everything gives rise to complete rest” (Ulitskaya 2016).

The novel by L.E. Ulitskaya becomes a bestseller in Russian prose as well as the novel “New Tales of Gisaeng” by Lee Hyeon-Su (2013), translated into different languages of the world, including Russian.

The readers’ growing interest in the literature and the national culture of the APR countries, among which South Korea has taken the lead, is understandable. The famous writer Lee Hyeon-Su as well as the Russian writer works creatively in the genre of women’s prose. In 1996 she received a Kim Yujung Literature Prize for the story “The Spider’s Nest”, and in 2003 she won the Mu-young Literary Prize for the novel “Toran” (Taro). The novel “The Rosewood Cabinet” was highly appreciated in 2010 with the Hahn Moo-Sook Literary Prize.

Comparison of the novel of the Russian writer with the work of Lee Hyeon-Su reveals the mythopoetic context when the ancient Korean legends seemed to suggest the “speaking” title of the novel “New Tales of Gisaeng” and deepened the plot related to women’s life. It should be noted that the work published in 2005 received a second life on the well-known Korean TV channel in the TV serial that the audience took the fancy in. If L.E. Ulitskaya takes her stories in her own professional biologist-geneticist’s experience, then Lee Hyeon-Su collected material while meeting gisaeng. They told her their tragic stories that made the prose writer interpret the dramatic material artistically, imagining herself as an eagle with three claws: “In April I visited the grave of gisaeng from Buyonggak. The grass on the mound was so green that my eyes ached. I quietly touched the top of the mound with my hand and promised them in my mind: “I will find your lost shoes and bring them to you. I promise you to write about you, not missing a single word that you wanted to say ...”. I dedicate this novel to all gisaeng who lived in this world and left it anonymously, in the name of their empty hands and bare feet” (Lee Hyeon-Su 2013). It is noteworthy that a meaningful comparison of the metaphorical nature of the titles of both novels revealed the authors’ intentional approval of authentic content when the Greek name and traditional Korean notation of the asocial profession of poor girls are preserved. One cannot help noticing the reader’s association in the perception of girls who from their early age were forced to attend to the service of wealthy men with the humiliated Sonechka Marmeladova from the novel by F.M. Dostoevsky “Crime and Punishment”. Following the great Russian humanist, a modern Korean writer defends the spiritual innocence of the unhappy heroine: “She sold her body for money, but not her soul”
(Lee Hyeon-Su 2013). The author reinterprets the ancient legend about gisaeng as educated, skilled in music and intelligent girls who not only know how to dress beautifully and skillfully seduce men, but who have made a unique contribution to preserving national traditions and have become a model for the modern Korean woman in terms of patience, kindness and responsiveness. The eternal phrase of the Russian classic that beauty will save the world can also be attributed to Lee Hyeon-Su’s heroines.

The problem of the author and the hero is realized in the poetics of the novel “Medea and Her Children” through some blending of the writer in her heroine’s feelings and actions. She stands in solidarity with Medea Sinopli in moments of joy or trouble, shares her dreams and hopes, showing an ambiguous inner world. Reading a Korean writer’s novel overcomes the perception of gisaeng only as the girls of the corporal feast, but shows their human world, sincere and individual. Lee Hyeon-Su sees the life of ordinary people in the fate of every female worker at gyobang. The novel imagery unites together the cook Tabakne, the gisaeng-mother Madame Oh and others at Buyonggak gyobang. However, she does not hide that the profession of heroines, devoid of morality, makes them forget about the ancient traditions. Reproduction of legends about gisaeng is a stylistic means of revealing the manifestation of high feelings built on trust, friendship and faith.

The ancient myths of Greece and Korean legends continue to be an eternal source of spirituality, aesthetics, folk wisdom for world literature. Thus, the mythology about gisaeng has undergone several stages of interpretation from the lofty comprehension of heroines to reducing female images to the typical essence of prostitutes. What is interesting is how narrow-minded people perceive Lee Hyeon-Su’s female character, when pity, contempt and indifference are mixed: “usually if she said “I’m gisaeng”, then everyone shuddered, as if with a bee sting. Often the faces of the people who looked at her became like a pickled cucumber trampled with bare feet, and there were those with whom they became as if they had been doused with cold water, while the others looked at her with an indefinite and obscure gaze ...” (Lee Hyeon-Su 2013).

It is necessary to distinguish the readers’ assessment of the literary text from the critical view of the literary critic who understands the nature of the genre of the legend, accentuating the epic origin. That is, there is a work before us, created according to the canons of folk art, which is part of the world folklore treasury. It is no coincidence that the authors of various literary dictionaries and cross-cultural encyclopedias comprehend legends as a text linking the past and the present of the peoples of the world.

If the Russian writer presents the old house on the seashore as a symbol of kindness, hospitality and propagation, then the Korean prose writer claims Buyonggak gyobang as the center of the traditions of Koreans who can talk, intellectually entertain the visitor during the tea ceremony and maintain an aesthetic conversation about the beauty of the picture, music and seasons. But the author of the novel “New Tales of Gisaeng” in its plot movement does not go away from modern realities, when many of these have turned into brothels. Medea Sinopli’s house also stands apart in the contradictory events of Russian life, guarding its inhabitants against lies, hatred and betrayal. The heroines’ psychological characterization is dominated not by their momentary actions, but by their ability to sing, play the gajeum, observe the Korean customs of meeting any guest. The culmination is not an episode of humiliation of a girl’s human dignity, but an almost theatrical mise-en-scene of an imitation of a honrye reproducing a wedding ceremony. The cross-cultural knowledge of the ancient ritual of creating the bride’s hairdress is important, when the hair is lifted upward as a roll what is a sign of marriage. The portrait of the widowed Medea Sinopli, who symbolically wears a black kerchief and a dress, is impressive. The mastery of chronicles unites the Russian and Korean writers. In Medea’s house, jugs, pots and dishes belonging to the Sinopli
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family are preserved; she continues to cook traditional Greek food, brews medicinal herbs of the Crimea for diseased children in them and heals with folk remedies. The cross-cultural history of the novel reveals the present Crimea as Cimmeria. An ancient castle with Gothic spiers, sea shells and stars look metaphorically in the landscapes of the novel.

The girls from Buyonggak have not forgotten the ancient recipes of the gyobang’s culinary art and the original etiquette of the behavior at the Korean table.

The imagery of novels is quite numerous and defined by toponymic realities, which allows the authors to show not only the heroes’ inner psychological world, but also to give a social snapshot. The central image of the cook Tabakne, distinguished from others by strong energy, is singled out. For many people she becomes a senior friend, mother and girlfriend, to whom they trust their dreams of happiness, luck and prosperity. The conflict between her and the gisaeng singer Madame Oh is an interesting story. It is Tabakne that saves an elegant young woman from alcoholism and illness. Quite often their dialogues resemble conversations of the characters of the play “The Lower Depths” by M. Gorky with an elderly person Luka. The theme of “former people” in this case reinterprets the world classic story.

The genre aesthetics of the family novel allows the women writers to delve into their heroines’ autobiography. Readers of “Medea and Her Children” learn the retrospection of her fate from youth to maturity, and listeners of the Korean legend get acquainted with the biographical details of Ms. Mihn’s life. Her childhood in a poor farming family, the suffering of her three sisters who “hopelessly dreamed and sincerely believed that if they go to distant lands, after twelve mountains and rivers, then they will have a happy future” are chronologically reproduced. The main thing in Miss Mihn’s nature is her stamina and vitality. That is why she opposes an atmosphere of envy, rudeness and violence.

The women writers’ works are seamless and valuable in the cultural discovery of the national world, both Russian and Korean. The novels are permeated with the aesthetics of the Crimean landscape, the sea element, the poetry of Russian lyrics and the sounds of the Korean national traditional instrument of danso, which reproduces the whiff of the wind, the singing of birds and the rhythm of the rain.

The end of the novels is mythological, when the theme of eternal life dominates over the Medea’s disappointments and sorrows and the drama of girls from the gyobang. Observations on the functioning of the mythological element in the poetics of the novels at the level of the authors’ transformation are concluding.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, the authors have made a comparative analysis of the poetics of the novels by L.E. Ulitskaya “Medea and Her Children” and Lee Hyeon-Su “New Tales of Gisaeng” which reveals the traditions of national literatures and genre searches of prose writers. Archetypes House-Family, Love-Duty, Good-Evil are comprehended by the writers as the basis for the development of a harmonious personality. The plot lines of the texts are permeated with the heroines’ reflections about the world order, the harmony of man and nature and text monologues and extra-textual dialogues about the sense of being. Observations of the psychology of characters from different social strata of Russian and Asian society show their national self-identification, on the one hand, unity based on the ideas of faith and good, on the other hand. Thus, the experience of comparative analysis of women’s writings in Korean and Russian literature exemplified by Ludmila Ulitskaya’s and Lee Hyeon-Su’s novels reveals the importance of the archetype in the system of open and hidden folklorism. The women writers include mythological content in the modern semantic space, when the plots of the novel are realized in the real characters’ fate.
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