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CONTENTS / СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

**Natalia V. Kovtun**

The Message of the Editorial Board  
– 1312 –

**Olga N. Turysheva**

Literature Abuse, or the Motive of the Guilt and Punishment of the Reader  
– 1315 –

**Natalia V. Kovtun and V. Kovtun**

Political Discourse and Artistic Fiction in Utopian Reality Representation  
– 1325 –

**Yulia A. Govorukhina**

The Problem of the Russian Language Preservation in the “Scenarios” of the Patriot Critics’ Texts  
– 1344 –

**Irina I. Plekhanova**

Intellectual Type of Creativity (Poetry)  
– 1351 –

**Pavel E. Spivakovsky**

The Problem of Metanarratives in the Postmodern Age  
– 1360 –

**Alexander V. Shunkov**

“Story of King Leo” and the Parable Tradition to the Memory of Supervisor E.K. Romodanovskaya  
– 1366 –

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 Environmental Studies (SFU).

**Evgeniya E. Anisimova**

The Siberian Journey of Vasily Zhukovsky and Tsesarevich  
 Alexander Nikolaevich in 1837: Two Images of the Russian  
 East

– 1373 –

**Aldona Borkowska**

Unfulfilled Fate of Chekhov's Tales' Characters: "Ionych",  
 "Literature Teacher", "Gooseberry", "About Love"

– 1382 –

**Aleksander I. Kuliapin**

Transformation of M. Zoshchenko's Plots in the Soviet Literature  
 of the Thirties

– 1390 –

**Elena Iu. Kulikova**

About a Mortal Plot in N. Gumilev's Works: "The Severed  
 Head"

– 1396 –

**Galina P. Mikhailova**

Reading Akhmatova: on the Pathway to Finding Self

– 1405 –

**Svetlana Y. Kornienko**

Poetry as Bargaining in Osip Mandelstam's and Marina  
 Tsvetayeva's Moscow Texts

– 1419 –

**Natalia A. Nepomniashchikh**

Versions of the "Man – Bear Combat" Plot in the Works of  
 Siberian Writers

– 1427 –

**Monika Sidor**

The Truth of the Literary Past: (on the Issue of the Narrative  
 Peculiarity in A. Solzhenitsyn's Epic 'The Red Wheel')

– 1436 –

**Natalia S. Tsvetova**

Valentin Rasputin: "What is in a Word, What is Behind a  
 Word"

– 1443 –

**Vasilina A. Stepanova**

Models of Christian Feasts as a Plot-Constructing Topos of  
 V. Rasputin's Prose

– 1451 –

**Oyvind Ravna** – Professor, Dr. Juris, University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway; the European expert in northern and indigenous peoples' studies; editor of scientific journals in the field of law problems of the indigenous peoples of the North (Arctic).

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**Nikita A. Valianov**

The Concept of Righteousness in the Literary Prose of M.A. Tarkovsky

– 1459 –

**Elena E. Prikazchikova**

Voltaire's Onomomyths in Russian Literary Consciousness of the Enlightenment

– 1469 –

**Natalya O. Laskina**

The Rhetoric of Proust's Early Aesthetic Manifestos

– 1479 –

**Elena N. Proskurina**

Poetics of the Eschatological Plot in the Novels by G. Gazdanov

– 1486 –

**Zhao Xue**

Methodological Aspects of Study of the Modern Russian Literature Reception in China

– 1494 –

**Tatiana Megrelishvili**

Relationship Between the Concepts of the Artistic Worlds Picture and the Discourse of the Georgian Poetry Written in the Russian Languages

– 1501 –

**Oksana Blashkiv**

Outside the University: (Re-)Constructing Self and Other in Marina Lewycka's „A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian”

– 1511 –

## The Message of the Editorial Board

This issue of the Journal of Siberian Federal University (Humanities) is devoted to the **Year of Literature in Russia**. The fact of drawing attention to the issues of Russian literature, the problems of studying, teaching and promoting literature as the highest achievement of Russian civilization, speaks for itself.

Books have always played a special role in Russia due to the focus of the culture on literature in general. Destruction of this principle in the postmodern epoch had immediately effected such quality of Russian literature as its widespread presence in religious, political, social philosophic and scientific discourses, and consequently in the disciplinary network, certain spiritual and intellectual traditions. The nature of this status was ambivalent: dissolution of the literary origin in non-literary verbal contexts prevented the isolation of literature as an independent kind of aesthetic activity. However, at the same time it also created the effect of “omnipresence” of literature leading many social practices to book samples. The transition from the Enlightenment faith in the power of the Word to undermining of the status of the Author, relativization of literary writing, significant violations of the conventions and boundaries of literary art in general – ranging from their outmost socialization within the Soviet project to de-socialization and total revision in the postmodern aesthetics, where the hierarchical vertical is substituted by the pluralist horizontal, occurred in the middle – end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along with the acquisition of an autonomous status, literature faced visual arts commercialized before itself, the symbolic value of which is determined by the popularity with the masses.

Without the support of the government, literature has not been able to compete on equal terms due to the low demand, lowering of the status of the intelligentsia, which has lost its previous social charisma, as well as due to thinning of the layer of “serious” readers heading at some point to the entertainment provided by visual kinds of art. The tradition of working with complex texts, which constitutes one of the most important features of the national culture, has been devalued. The author has become a craftsman, even a jester, and not the prophet and the teacher, with the mission of entertaining the audience. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the “popular writer” phenomenon has appeared. Their earnings are substantially higher than those of classical writers, for whom literature was the service, the mission. The demand for mass literature, a writer-onlooker, observer, who estrange themselves from their own text, becomes an indicator of the crisis of literocentrism, the strengthening of the market authority, its right to determine the status of a product, a gesture, an event.

The national version of the European Enlightenment determines books selling as negative, defending the sacred value of the written text, which hides God’s Word: “The word combines both reason and speech, and one of the names of the Son of God and the law he gave to people”, Yu.M. Lotman writes. The authority of the Word is recognized as immanent, inherent in the word as it is, “idle talk is unnatural as desecration”<sup>1</sup>. M. Mamardashvili considers all Russian classical literature to be a verbal myth, a unified “social-moral utopia”, “an attempt to give birth to the whole country by means of

<sup>1</sup> Lotman Iu.M. *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul'tury XVIII – nachala XIX veka. Iz istorii russkoi kul'tury* [Essays on the History of Russian Culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the History of Russian Culture]. V. IV. (the 18<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Moscow, 1996. P. 88.

words, senses, the truth”<sup>2</sup>. In terms of desanctification of the image of the book, the word of the writer desacralizes, becomes “the word of men” requiring discussion and review. The artist finds real freedom and their only risk is the commercial failure of their own books, but at the same time, the social value of their works is reduced.

Experts refer the end of the liberal period of Russian literature to the beginning of the 1990s, when the victory of liberal ideas made reading modern literature irrelevant, while its traditional functions associated with the creation of “bright future” utopias are not in demand<sup>3</sup>. Fine literature becomes the destiny of few, getting the museum qualities. The occupation of a writer loses prestige. Along with these processes, however, we can observe attempts to preserve “literary ideology” from the top-down as evidenced by the dismissive attitude toward mass literature, the operation of the cultural establishment field similar to powerful one, damping of the underground.

The current situation, which intricately combines the tendencies of the fading interest in “serious” literature and the hunger for preserving “literary ideology” with the efforts of the government (as evidenced by the presence of many literary awards, TV broadcasts on relevant topics, regular meetings between senior officials of the state and writers), is intensified by a distinct deficit of the “cultural reader” who can consume fine literature, which has become a mainstay in the chaos of modern times, the area of freedom and risk. The very understanding of Philology has been also changing, literature studies migrate from the strict limits of hermeneutics toward creativity and experiment.

This issue contains **three sections**.

**The first section, Theoretical Aspects of Literature With the Sign of “Post”**, is devoted to theoretical problems of contemporary literature, discussing the problem of the status of literature in today's world where literature finds its relationship with the reader; tracing the transformation of genre definitions (utopia/dystopia); exploring sets and rituals that characterize modern critics, and finally, considering the intellectual mode of art (for example, poetry) as an expression of the literary thought trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a whole.

**The second section: The Poetics of Literature: Themes, Plots, Heroes** includes works on the history of national literature beginning from the story-parable about the tsar Lion (Lev) of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and finishing with the articles devoted to the issues of narration in the works by A. Solzhenitsyn, ideology and mythological poetics of Russian traditionalist prose of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

**The third section: Literature and the Issues of Reception** includes studies on the perception of the mythology of Voltaire (onomomorphs of the author) in the national culture; rhetoric of the early aesthetic manifestos of Proust; the methods of studying the reception of contemporary Russian literature by Chinese readers and peculiarities of the functioning of today's Russian-language poetry of Georgia are discussed. The section finishes with an article about the problems of national identity and their artistic expression in the current Ukrainian prose.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of the Journal I would like to give special thanks to the authors of the issue, among them well-known Russian and European philologists and beginning researchers. The issue contains the works of specialists of different scientific schools and directions of the leading

<sup>2</sup> Mamardashvili M. *Kaki a ponimaiu filosofiiu* [How I Understand Philosophy]. Moscow, 1992. P. 187.

<sup>3</sup> See: Berg M. *Literaturokratia. Problema vprisvoeniia i pereraspredeleniia vlasti v literature* [Literocracy: The Problem of Acquiring and Redistribution of Power in Literature]. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000. P. 267.

universities and academic institutions of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tomsk, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Kemerovo, Krasnoyarsk, Lublin (Poland), Siedlce (Poland), Harbin (China), Tbilisi (Georgia) and Zagreb (Croatia). The joint work on the issue has once again witnessed the presence of a single research space of modern philology.

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*Natalia V. Kovtun*