

World through the Eyes of Juan Marsé

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Abstract. disposes the reader for reminiscences of the images, corresponding to this indication, pushes towards intertextual searches and forces to get involved in interaction. The publication notes that by simulating a mixture of the real and the illusory, the writer manages to make the reader his soulmate, to show how a new reality is born in the consciousness of the character, which has nothing in common with the reality a priori defined by him and which may be the closest to the truth.

Key words: Juan Marsé, magic realism, Spanish literature, simulation

In the second half of the XX c., one trend was substantially outlined – it seemed that the word re-discovered new world in the form of Spanish-language literature. This refers to Latin-American writing in particular, though this interest has brought Spanish literature, in general, back into focus. Indeed, just remembering the names of the people this literature has given to the world will well explain this interest. If we look through modern Georgian publications it will become clear that this trend is shared by Georgian readers as well. Excellent translations, done in recent years, allow the reader to familiarize with diverse artistic world and literary heritage. And still, probably, just the richness of Spanish literature should be “blamed” for the fact that some important authors are represented in Georgian-language library only by one or two texts yet. On the other hand, we may consider this situation as the opportunity, which promises many pleasant surprises in the future.

Juan Marse (1933-2020), one of the distinguished figures in modern Spanish, European writing is among such authors. In order to introduce Juan Marse as an author it would be sufficient to mention that he is the winner of several awards in literature, including Planeta (Premio Planeta de Novela) and Cervantes (Premio Miguel de Cervantes) awards. His name is given to the library of Cervantes’ Institute (Madrid), major part of his novels is turned into films (“The Shanghai Spell”, “Last evening with Teresa”, “The Girl with the Golden Panties”...) or included in the repertoire of drama theatres. The admirers compared Marsé’s artistic world with the “discovery of literary brilliance in annihilated environment”, although, the bibliography of Georgian translations of his novels is quite scarce.

It may possibly be due to this tendency that an interesting collection of Spanish authors’ translations came into my hands recently: “Spanish Stories, Essays, Interviews” (translated by K. Jishiashvili, ed. M. Kvachantiradze). It should be noted that the texts included in the selection are the first Georgian translation for some of the authors. The translator seems to be fully aware of the sensitivity of the matter and includes interviews of each author in the selection, which are selected with great care and enable the readers to get to know the writers better. Among those authors is Juan Marsé – the author, without whom it is difficult to imagine contemporary Spanish literature and his beautiful story “Stainless Steel Car”. And the writer’s interview under metaphoric title “It seems that my world

in the decoration of the stopped time” – performs the role of certain roadmap for Georgian reader, who, through these texts, is given the opportunity to discover very interesting unique author and communicate with him.

Born in 1933, in Barcelona, the writer spent most of his life in a poor district of the city and the characters of his stories belong to this world: people who have to struggle for existence, for survival every day. The characters of the story included in the selection are from this world too – the world that the author knows best, as he himself notes. It will probably be difficult to specify the genre in the context of which the story can be realized. The translator qualifies it as magical realism and among postmodern literature quests this form is probably the most appropriate for Marse’s story. All the more so when reading the story it will be difficult to escape the feeling that we are dealing with the principle of double coding. With the author who thoughtfully processes every detail, we cannot deem it a happenstance that one of his characters is a 12 years old boy and the other – 1945 Lincoln Continental, especially if we consider that in 1945 Marse would be of this age. All the more so that in his interview, he frankly speaks about his – 12-years old adolescent of 1945-ies – inter-relation with the world, cause-effect relations of his own reflection.

The rhythm of the text and limited number of characters requires greater efforts for their reification from the author, of which he is well aware. His sense of style is astonishing: using minimalist technique, plain accents, without rich palette he creates characters, who appear in front of the readers with extraordinary realism and never fade away. “For me it is essential to involve the reader and any technique is good enough for trapping them. After all, literature is a well told lie. But if you succeed in persuading the reader in what you are telling, the goal is achieved”¹ - says the author and chooses a typical paradigm for the plot: the story develops in the crossing point of two diametrically opposite worlds. Evidently, conditionality, indefiniteness of place and space is important for Marsé. Prestigious suburb of the city: stone fence, fat spots on the asphalt, the smell of burnt petrol... nothing indicates to particularities. Such conditionality is a kind of indication for the reader, that this space, this story may exist beyond him as well as by his side – in his city, his neighborhood, near the fence of his house... moreover, it may exist and may not exist...

Within several pages he manages to create radically different features of characters and lead the reader to a totally unexpected development of this contrast: it is the cascade of unexpected events, which takes us to even more unexpected final. It is probably the minimization of artistic techniques that enables the author to give particular persuasive power to the story and make the drama of each character so intimate for the reader.

Senor Alcon is the first character appearing in the text and is presented by the author with a sort of irony, emphasized pomposity, but devoid of mannerism: “*This gentleman dressed in white suit, holding a black case in his hand and entirely beaming with complacency, was distinguished with not only his constitution and style, but was also known as a financial shark among his colleagues*”. For Marsé it is important, that the reader “sees” the character, believe in his existence, so that his relation with the character becomes easier: “I work with the characters until the reader sees his/her

¹ Marce J., 2009:189, “It seems that my world in the decoration of the stopped time”, Spanish Stories, Essays, Interviews), Tbilisi.

movement, walking, gesturing, this or that physical action with his eyes, as, in my opinion, what you see with your own eyes is better than any psychological description”².

Sparse, measured phrases, dialogues, portraits; it seems that even one word would be excessive in these pictures. Visualization of characters through several characteristic strokes, indication, and financial shark in white suit and black case, “squeaking when walking” revives before the reader and quite naturally arouses the feelings that such complacent people usually provoke – of some kind of estrangement, distancing. Alcon is a typical businessman. His attitude towards the world is totally defined in single unit - numbers. He belongs to the category of men who have quite tangible criteria for perceiving and assessing the environment and do not plan any corrections in this regard. This is revealed by seemingly harmless remark in the final part of the text, when the character alters his schedule for the first time for the past 50 years. The author manages to make the reader his soulmate and it is even more interesting to observe the transformation of the character within just a few pages.

“It all must be because I spent my life next to losers. Yes, subconsciously they might be more attractive to me from human and literary point of view. I somehow think victory and success are false and superficial” - the author says in his interview (2009: 190). This character created by him is also a part of the world which the author considers less realistic and natural. Particularly because he had to live during Franco Era which was not devoid of this sense of relativity of success and failure. For the development of the story, it is essential that another character, - a more “genuine” one for Marce – appears and indeed, he appears “out of nowhere” like the little prince of Saint-Exupéry and offers true performance. The author emphasizes that the character is natural, without any decorations and as if intentionally, he is a total antipode of the powerful financier: *“a poorly dressed boy was sitting and looking at Senor Alcon with a smile on his face and dirty hands. On his feet, he wore rubber sandals and the shirt frayed to the extent that it reminded you of a spider’s web. He would not even be twelve years old; he had neither white skin, nor silk hair or small nose, nothing that is characteristic of smart children in smart stories”*.

The author indicates to another artistic way, characteristic for post-modernist literature – parodying- interpreting of plots and characters, well known to the reader, which disposes the reader for reminiscences of the images, corresponding to this indication, pushes towards intertextual searches and forces to get involved in interaction; nevertheless, the narration has its dynamics, and the writer has his own artistic task. However, in order not to be distracted by allusions, with the phrase following, the author returns to the story: the kid has something that distinguishes him from ordinary children, like the ones that the financier had probably met in his life many times, as well as from the smart children in smart stories: *“Instead, vibrant light glittered in his eyes and awkward calm complacency could be felt through his smile”*. However, nothing in his appearance provides grounds for this complacency. His proposal also seems strange and provocative: *“Lincoln Continental is for sale”*.

² Marce J., 2009: 191, “It seems that my world in the decoration of the stopped time”, Spanish Stories, Essays, Interviews, Tbilisi.

This is how the aesthetics of sky blue appears in white-grey space of the story, which creates the contrast against the environment in which the characters meet each other, similar to the contrast the characters themselves create between each other. The boy persistently tries to interest the financier with the vehicle having the “color of a dream” which no one but the boy can see, causing the totally natural reaction of the confident tycoon. However, the strange guest insistently trying to withdraw Alcon from the “comfort zone” has a cogent argument in response: “That’s because you don’t want to see”.

There is a kind of mystic game among the characters, where the main weapon is self-confidence and trust – in one’s own world, in one’s own dreams and whoever has more trust in his/her own world, is in advantageous position. By simulative interfusion of real and illusionary the writer manages to confuse the reader for a bit and while he/she (the reader) decides to follow the logic in order to predict the finale of duel, the author sees the main axis of the story in this very inconsequence of the battle.

Is it possible for the drastically different two characters- conventionally the one “having all” and the one “having nothing”- to have something in common? It is startling to discover that they do have something in common – despite different status, age, passions they both have one thing – complacency. If in the first case this can easily be explained and it is based on objective circumstances, in Ahmed’s case we only get to realize what exactly gives ground to complacency of the boy with ragged clothes awaited by seven siblings and grandmother in Saharais refugee camp after familiarizing with the content of the text.

Boy’s persistence and belief is so seductive that along with the reader senior Alcon also abandons the role of a calm observer and is tempted for a second. *“Immediately he heard the sound of the car starting, as if soft, velvety, silk cloth tore apart”*. However, this is only a weak moment and senior returns to the regular reality where Ahmed is not there, neither is his 1945 sky blue Lincoln Continental.

Nevertheless, the boy keeps trying. It is strange, but the boy has already discovered what remained unnoticed by senior Alkony, who is standing on the peak of success: how equivocal can be the boundary between real and unreal, truth and fiction. Because he knows, that visible does not always mean real, similarly invisible is not always synonymous with unreal: *“You won’t believe it, senior, but a friend of mine recently died in southern woods with the bullet that no one had shot, and from the gun which had not even been assembled”*.

With naturalness, or, if you like guilelessness, the author crosses the line between reality and illusion so that the story neither acquires the shade of mysticism, nor loses its persuasive power. What was unbelievable, becomes reality, what was invisible, becomes visible and a new reality is born in consciousness of the character, which has nothing in common with the reality a priori defined by him and which may be the closest to the truth.

When discussing the peculiarities of the composition of a literary piece J. Lotman noted that “in contemporary texts the beginning has the function of coding while the ending has the narrative and mythological function”³. Marsé often applies to this paradigm in his texts. The ending of Marsé’s

³ Лотман Ю.М., 1998:211, Об искусстве, СПб, Санкт-Петербург.

story was created based on this aesthetics: it can be said without any exaggeration that it will take the reader a while to return to this world after the final effect and this time is most valuable in the process of the relationship between the text and reader.

J. Marsé is one of the writers, who are interested in the secret of understanding of existence of a human, his quests, reflection, “his ethical base; who try to discover the novelty for the reader where he thinks that everything is already clear and discerned”⁴. Powerful financier loses this competition, however, for Marse, this failure equals to victory – this failure makes his character the winner. Despite the writer’s assessment that the financier Alcon belongs to the category, which is “diligently wrapped and squeaks when walking”, the character manages to break through the membrane in which he is naturally constructed and enters the new reality. Due to this encounter senior Alcon involuntarily becomes a part of the world which Ahmed inhabits, he now sees the things and events which had been invisible for him for over half a century. This is a new, mysterious window of opportunities for Marsé. What could be the price for this discovery, this sensation? Marse’s character out of nowhere calmly answers the question before disappearing once again: *“I know what you are going to tell me, senior..., that no matter how much you paid it would still not be enough for this car”*.

J. Marsé, with his texts, is the part of amazing artistic world, referred to as magic realism. Since we have mentioned the amazing world, it would be appropriate to refer tone of its outstanding representative: in his biographical novel Gabriel Garcia Marquez described an episode when he showed his novel “Leaf Storm” to his friend and a critic Alfonso Fuenmayor. He recalls: “his observations were so clever, that I took all of them into consideration - except one that seemed way too exaggerated to him, even though I convinced him it was a real adventure of my childhood.

-Reality can also be mistaken when literature is not good enough’ – he said laughing”⁵.

It is impossible to convey the content of magic realism – or, if you like, literature in general, as the means of artistic interpretation, more clearly and figuratively. We can only add that this proposition includes a contraposition in itself and Marse’s story too is a proof of this, where not only for its characters, but for the readers as well, unreal stories become real when literature is good enough!

Finally, we would like to express gratitude towards the translator K. Jishiashvili whose efforts have enriched our library with wonderful translations and who, fortunately, turned out to have a fine literary taste.

⁴ Khachidze M., 2016, Life as a Miracle in Jostein Gaarder’s Works, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Electronic Bilingual Scholarly Peer-reviewed Journal Spekali, Tbilisi, #10.

⁵ García Márquez, G., 2016:471-472, Living to Tell the Tale, Intelekti, Tbilisi.

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სამყარო ხუან მარსეს თვალთ

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რეზიუმე. პუბლიკაციის თემა თანამედროვე ესპანური მწერლობის გამორჩეული ავტორის ხუან მარსეს (1933-2020) შემოქმედება და მისი ქართულენოვანი თარგმანები (თარგ. ქ. ჯიშიაშვილი, რედ. მ. კვაჭანტირაძე). ამ ტექსტების საშუალებით ქართველ მკითხველს იმ ავტორის აღმოჩენის შესაძლებლობა ეძლევა, რომლის გარეშეც ძნელად წარმოსადგენია თანამედროვე ევროპული ლიტერატურა, ხოლო პუბლიკაცია მისი შემოქმედების კვლევის პირველი მცდელობაა ქართულ სალიტერატურო კრიტიკაში. პოსტმოდერნისტული ლიტერატურული მიმდინარეებიდან მარსეს შემოქმედება, ალბათ, ყველაზე ახლოს მაგიურ რეალიზმთანაა. ბარსელონაში დაბადებულმა მწერალმა ცხოვრების მნიშვნელოვანი ნაწილი ქალაქის ღარიბულ უბანში გაატარა და მისი ნაწარმოებების პერსონაჟებიც ძირითადად ამ სამყაროს მკვიდრნი არიან: ადამიანები, რომლებსაც ყოველდღიური დამაბული ბრძოლა უწევთ არსებობისათვის, გადარჩენისათვის. პუბლიკაცია იკვლევს პოსტმოდერნისტული ლიტერატურისათვის დამახასიათებელი მხატვრული ხერხების: ორმაგი კოდირების მხატვრული პრინციპი, მითოსური ელემენტები, ცნობილი სიუჟეტებისა და პერსონაჟების პაროდირება-ინტერპრეტაცია და ა.შ. გავლენას ტექსტზე, რომელთა საშუალებითაც ავტორი მკითხველს მინიშნების შესაბამისი სახე-ხატების რემინისცენციებისათვის განაწყობს და ინტერაქციაში ჩართვას აიძულებს. პუბლიკაციაში აღნიშნულია, რომ რეალურისა და ილუზორულის სიმულაციური აღრევით მწერალი ახერხებს თანამოაზრედ აქციოს მკითხველი, დაანახოს როგორ იბადება პერსონაჟის ცნობიერებაში ახალი სინამდვილე, რომელსაც არაფერი აქვს საერთო მის მიერ აპრიორად განსაზღვრულ რეალობასთან და რომელიც შესაძლებელია ყველაზე ახლოს დგას ჭეშმარიტებასთან.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ხუან მარსე, მაგიური რეალიზმი, ესპანური ლიტერატურა, სიმულაცია