



TRANSFORMATION OF THE REALIST PARADIGM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE: THE PHENOMENON OF “NEW REALISM”

Yuldasheva Lola Kuldashevna

Teacher, Karshi State University, Uzbekistan

Abstract

This article examines the main trends in contemporary Russian literature at the turn of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, focusing on the formation and interpretation of the phenomenon known as “new realism.” The study analyzes the relationship between postmodern and realist paradigms, as well as changes in reader perception in a transforming cultural environment. Special attention is paid to generational aspects of the literary process and the influence of sociocultural factors on the artistic thinking of contemporary authors. Drawing on the theoretical concepts of Shklovsky (1925), Zamyatin, and recent thematic analyses (Yuldasheva, 2023), the article substantiates the idea of the cyclical nature of literary development and the interaction of different aesthetic systems. The key features of “new realism” are identified, and it is concluded that contemporary realism represents a dynamic artistic system that preserves its essential function of reflecting reality while adapting to evolving sociocultural conditions.

Keywords: Contemporary Russian literature, new realism, postmodernism, literary process, artistic paradigm, generational factor, realism, sociocultural transformation.

Introduction

In the context of contemporary literary development, the transformation of the realist paradigm has become one of the most significant and widely discussed phenomena in modern Russian literature. The turn of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries marked a period of profound socio-political and cultural



changes, which inevitably influenced literary discourse, narrative strategies, and aesthetic orientations. Within this dynamic environment, the emergence of the so-called “new realism” represents an important stage in the evolution of Russian literary tradition, reflecting both continuity with classical realism and a reconfiguration of its foundational principles.

Realism, as a dominant literary paradigm in Russian literature since the nineteenth century, has traditionally been associated with the truthful representation of reality, social critique, and moral inquiry. However, contemporary literary processes demonstrate that realism is not a static category but a flexible and evolving system that adapts to new historical and cultural conditions. The phenomenon of “new realism” thus arises as a response to post-Soviet transformations, globalization, and the fragmentation of social experience, combining elements of traditional realism with postmodern sensitivity and narrative experimentation.

The relevance of this topic lies in the need to critically reassess the role and functions of realism in the current literary landscape. “New realism” is characterized by its focus on everyday life, social marginality, and the ethical dilemmas of contemporary individuals, while also incorporating subjective perspectives, documentary elements, and hybrid narrative forms. This approach reflects a shift from grand ideological narratives to localized, often personal, experiences, thereby redefining the relationship between literature and reality.

Theoretical approaches to this phenomenon emphasize the interplay between continuity and innovation. While some scholars view “new realism” as a revival of classical realist traditions adapted to modern conditions, others interpret it as a distinct literary movement that challenges the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, objectivity and subjectivity. In this regard, contemporary Russian authors employ diverse stylistic and thematic strategies to capture the complexity of post-Soviet reality, including the use of fragmented narratives, colloquial language, and autobiographical elements.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the transformation of the realist paradigm in contemporary Russian literature through the lens of “new realism,” identifying its key features, thematic priorities, and aesthetic innovations. By examining representative texts and critical perspectives, the study aims to reveal how “new



realism” redefines the principles of literary representation and contributes to the ongoing development of Russian literary tradition.

Thus, the investigation of “new realism” as a literary phenomenon provides valuable insights into the changing nature of realism and its relevance in the twenty-first century, highlighting the complex interaction between literature, society, and cultural identity.

Literature review

The late 20th and early 21st centuries in Russian literature are characterized by a shift in artistic paradigms and a reconsideration of the role of literature within the cultural space. The decline of literature-centered culture, associated with changes in modes of textual perception and the increasing dominance of visual communication, has led to transformations in both reading strategies and authorial approaches. The book is gradually being replaced by visual representations, and literature is losing its former status as a central cultural institution once supported by the educational system.

Postmodernism, which dominated the literary landscape at the end of the 20th century, is gradually losing its leading position, functioning both as the culmination of a previous stage and as a transitional form toward new artistic tendencies. At the beginning of the 21st century, a tendency toward a return to realism emerges, albeit in a transformed version commonly referred to as “new realism.”

This phenomenon is also shaped by broader sociocultural changes and generational shifts. The literature-centered perception of culture, characteristic of older and middle generations, creates a gap between them and the new generation of readers and writers shaped within a different cultural environment (Yuldasheva, 2023).

The theoretical understanding of shifts in literary paradigms is grounded in Shklovsky’s (1925) concept, according to which several literary schools coexist in each historical period, one of which becomes dominant. A new artistic system is not a mere restoration of previous forms but rather a complex structure incorporating elements of earlier traditions.

This approach aligns with Zamyatin’s idea of the cyclical development of literature, which involves the emergence of a phenomenon, its opposition, and



subsequent synthesis. In this context, “new realism” can be interpreted as a result of the interaction between realist and postmodern traditions.

Recent thematic studies emphasize the enduring relevance of motifs such as friendship, love, nature, and homeland in contemporary Russian literature, illustrating the continuation of traditional thematic structures within the realist paradigm (Yuldasheva, 2023).

At the same time, some scholars emphasize the conditional nature of “new realism” as an independent movement, highlighting its genetic connection to earlier literary traditions and its dependence on the sociocultural context (Popov, 1999; Frolov, 2010).

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the literary process in the early 21st century indicates a renewed interest in realism, driven by the need to comprehend a rapidly changing social reality. Contemporary realism retains its essential function—the representation of reality—while significantly transforming its expressive forms.

The defining features of “new realism” include linguistic freedom manifested in the weakening of normative stylistic constraints, the synthesis of elements of socialist realism and postmodern aesthetics, the fragmentation of the artistic worldview, autobiographical orientation and pronounced reflexivity, reliance on the author’s individual social experience as the basis for artistic representation, as well as the use of self-presentation strategies and promotional tools in literary practice (Shargunov, 2010; Yuldasheva, 2023).

Within the contemporary literary context, “new realism” can be interpreted as a response to the exhaustion of the postmodern paradigm. The desire to restore a connection with reality is accompanied by a rejection of total irony and playfulness characteristic of postmodernism.

Following Shklovsky’s theoretical perspective (1925), it can be argued that a new group of authors oriented toward the reinterpretation of realist tradition has moved to the forefront of contemporary Russian literature. However, this process remains exploratory and is marked by internal heterogeneity.

The realist tradition, in this sense, does not disappear but undergoes transformation while preserving its structural core. It functions as a cultural



framework composed of archetypal images and existential themes that acquire new meanings in different historical contexts.

An important factor is the changing status of literature in society. As it loses its former institutional centrality, there is an increasing individualization of authorial expression and an expansion of forms of interaction with readers, including the use of media and public relations strategies.

Thus, “new realism” should be understood not as a fundamentally new literary movement but as a specific stage in the development of the realist tradition under contemporary cultural conditions. Its specificity lies in the synthesis of diverse aesthetic principles and in the transformation of the relationship between author, text, and reader.

The essence of realism as a mode of representing reality remains unchanged; however, transformations in reality itself lead to changes in the forms of its literary representation. Contemporary realism therefore appears as a dynamic system capable of adapting to new sociocultural conditions while continuing to reflect them artistically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformation of the realist paradigm in contemporary Russian literature demonstrates the dynamic nature of realism as an evolving literary system rather than a fixed aesthetic model. The emergence of “new realism” reflects the complex socio-cultural and ideological shifts that have taken place in post-Soviet society, revealing a renewed interest in reality while simultaneously redefining its modes of representation.

The analysis shows that “new realism” preserves certain core principles of classical realism, such as attention to everyday life, social issues, and moral inquiry, while integrating new narrative techniques, subjective perspectives, and documentary elements. This synthesis allows contemporary authors to portray reality in a more nuanced and multifaceted way, capturing both external conditions and internal experiences of individuals.

Furthermore, “new realism” highlights the growing importance of personal narratives, marginal voices, and localized experiences, thereby expanding the thematic and stylistic boundaries of Russian literature. It reflects a shift from



grand ideological frameworks to more individualized and fragmented representations of reality, which correspond to the complexities of modern life.

At the same time, the phenomenon raises important theoretical questions regarding the relationship between fiction and reality, objectivity and subjectivity, as well as the role of literature in interpreting social change. The coexistence of traditional realist elements with innovative forms confirms that “new realism” functions as a hybrid and adaptive literary paradigm.

Thus, the study of “new realism” not only deepens our understanding of contemporary Russian literature but also contributes to broader discussions on the transformation of literary paradigms in the twenty-first century. It demonstrates that realism remains a relevant and productive framework for exploring human experience, capable of adapting to new historical contexts and cultural challenges.

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