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ARTISTIC PECULIARITIES OF THE NOVEL «THE MEETING AT TELGTE» BY GÜNTER GRASS

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The article analyzes the artistic peculiarities of the novel «The meeting at Telgte». The narrative in the novel revolves around a fictional meeting for writers and poets during the Thirty Years' War. The story is an analogy for the post-World War II society in Germany. The author of the article studies the methods by means of which Günter Grass depicts the dramatic events, comprehends two historical tragedies – the Thirty Years' War and the Nazi past.

Günter Grass (1927-2015) is well-known West German writer, novelist and poet. He is the author of grotesque-satirical and anti-fascist novels, winner of the Group 47 prize (1958), the Büchner prize (1965), as well as the Nobel prize (1999). The writer received international acclaim during his lifetime, his works being translated into many languages of the world, and many books and articles being devoted to the analysis of Grass' creative heritage.

The famous story of Grass «The meeting at Telgte» (1979) tells about a fictional meeting, the author brings together German poets of the baroque epoch, as well as composers and theologians. This meeting, as is shown, devoted «to rescue their cruelly maltreated language and to be near the peace negotiations» [1]. In the story the writer dwells on the event of The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) in Germany, conveys the atmosphere of the time, mentioning the eternal companions of military events: «Far away the war is sowing hunger plague desolation» [1].

The choice of the meeting place was not accidental: the town of Telgte – «a snug little town which, though impoverished, had remained unscarred» [1], it is not far from Osnabrück and Münster, where the peace of Westphalia was signed, which put the end to the war. The meeting is presented as a real event during The Thirty Years' War: «Telgte had long been a place of pilgrimage, there he would find quarters for their lordships, those pilgrims of the Muses» [1]. However, it should be noted that such meeting could never happen during the war, because Germany was divided into large and tiny sovereign States.

It is necessary to point to the saturation of the story with the game element. A. V. Dobryashkina notes that «in addition to the apocalyptic content, inspired by the problems of The Thirty Years' War, which could be compared with the tragedies of the twentieth century, the Baroque finds for Grass some more attractive features. The 17th century is, first of all, one of the most distinctive game periods of European culture, the period of understanding life through the game, which has a rich stockpile of specific genres and images» [2]. In the novel Günter Grass uses the method of literary masks, melts together art space and reality. The writer introduces actually existing poets, such as A. Gryphius (1616-1664), F. von Logau (1605-1655), K. G. von Hoffmannswaldau (1616-1679), G. R. Weckerlin (1584-1653), D. Czepko von Lagerfeld (1605-1660), into the narrative.

In all Grass' writings the autobiographical element is very diversified and significant. Some biographical overtones could also be traced in his story «The meeting at Telgte». The writer correlates history and modernity: «I am writing about the meeting at Telgte now, because one of my friends, who brought together his colleagues in the forty-seventh year of our century, intends to celebrate the seventieth anniversary» [1]. Günter Grass keeps in mind the writer Hans Werner Richter (1908-1993), the founder of the «Group 47», who is hidden in the story behind the mask of Simon Dach. In the story Simon Dach is the initiator of the meeting of writers and poets at Telgte, in the same way as Hans Werner Richter organized association of writers in 1947. S. N. Satovskaya noted that «therefore, come in contact allusively here 1647 as the year of an imaginary meeting at Telgte and 1947 as the year of foundation of the «Group 47» [5].

The author in the narrative is hidden behind the mask of H. J. K. Grimmelshausen. A. V. Dobryashkina notes that «Grass, like Grimmelshausen, paraphrases his grotesquely baroque chronotope, freely imitates the genre patterns of historical poetics, as if reviving the historical genre of grotesque, making the genre a symbolic and specific game formation» [2].

Getting into an intellectual game with the reader, G. Grass does not recall the names of his own contemporaries and events of his own life. However, we understand that the fictional meeting of writers at Telgte reminds the meetings of «Group 47», the association of writers, including G. Grass, who did not want the revival of militarism and nationalism. At the meeting at Telgte various writings are read out and discussed, debates are

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held about the situation in the country, in art, and the German language: «when it came to improving the language and Germanizing foreign words, we found ourselves in agreement» [1]. It is known that at the meetings of «Group 47», which were held twice a year, there was a lively discussion of the works of his own work too.

The main feature of the game space by Grass is the lack of any clear boundaries between reality and fantasy. An important role in the narrative is given to characters of famous writings. The plot and thematic unity of the novel is ensured thanks to the image of Gelnhausen, which, as A. V. Dobryashkina noted, «is pretentiously created of the details which are sequentially selected from the biography and creativity of real Grimmelshausen» [2], and short temper, efficiency and his skill to be an inexhaustible story-teller, becomes a twin of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, who after the death of the hermit sails towards the big life and entered a new world which is «near Gelnhausen» [3]. Another storyline in the novel is Courage, who is the character - which was created long before Grass - by Grimmelshausen in the novel «*Simplicio against*» (1670), and centuries later, was embodied in the play written by B. Brecht «*Mother Courage and her children*» (1939). T. Hardziayok rightly notes: «Courage is transformed by Grass into a settled innkeeper. Courage is of a grotesque nature and combines many traits of her literary predecessors. It is prudence and manipulation of Grimmelshausen's Libusky, indifference to material possessions and desire for freedom. Very similar to what we have in Brecht's writings, Courage is a symbolic character, and is associated with the image of an unattractive and ruined homeland» [4, p. 36].

Günter Grass strives to show that The Thirty Years' War and World War II are equally great tragedies in German history. After the end of these wars Germany was in poverty and hunger, the political significance of the country fell to absolute zero. Both wars made a painful impact on the historical memory of the Germans and inspired a lot of anti-war writings. All the writers of the 17th century turn to experience of The Thirty Years' War. After World War II «zero hour» was declared in Germany which was followed by literary interpretation of the development and consequences of fascism. The anti-fascist theme can be found, for example, in the following works: «*The Seventh Cross*» (1942) by A. Zeghers, «*The Man Outside*» (1947) by W. Borchert, «*Pigeons on the Grass*» (1951) by W. Koeppen, «*Billiards at Half-past Nine*» (1959) by H. Böll, «*The Tin Drum*» (1959) by G. Grass, and in many other literary texts.

In the novel «*The meeting at Telgte*» Günter Grass describes the historical reality of the 17th century, he speaks through Simon Dach: «In the forty seventh year of this woeful century our hitherto drowned-out voice be heard above all the longwinded talk of peace and despite the continuing clamor of battle» [1]. He ends his speech to the poets with the question: «Where, o Germany, shall I leave you? For well nigh thirty years, by murder and rapine, Thou hast destroyed thyself, the guilt is thine» [1]. This appeal is also actual for the 20th century. Other Grass's reasoning point to contemporary meaning: «For the German rulers had opened up the fatherland to foreign borders, while the foreigners had chosen Germany as their battlefield, so that it now lay dismembered and unrecognizable, all loyalty lose with the old order and all beauty destroyed» [1].

The art of Grass's narrative lies in the interplay of different motifs and symbols. The writer refers to the symbol of thistle, which grows in a flowerpot. It is an essential attribute of the meetings at Telgte, «the thistle, that latter day flower and symbol of adverse times» [1]. Nothing can defeat this plant: no war, no plague, no fires. In the image of the thistle Grass described the long-suffering fatherland: «Gryphius dropped the thistle that was Germany, dashed it to the floor in our midst» [1]. This vivid scene describes the position of the plundered and devastated fatherland, which lies in ruins. This scene, depicted by Grass, refers not only to the era of the Thirty Years' War, but also to the modern time, when Germany was again divided into many parts.

In the novel Günter Grass uses also humor and irony, which is coloured with somber tones: the house of Courage was destroyed by a sudden fire, together with the house the manifesto was burned down. The manifesto was worked out by all the meeting participants: «Logau wanted to run back into the taproom: save the screed! Czepko had to hold him. And so, what would in any case not have been heard, remained unsaid» [1]. In this situation, only Courage stayed calm, rushing out to the free gypsy life: she packed her belongings and, «without a word or gesture backward glance, Libuschka rode off with her maids in the direction of the Outer Ems», they kept heading «to the gypsies» [1].

The novel «*The meeting at Telgte*» is one of the best Grass' works. To depict the dramatic events, to comprehend two historical tragedies – the Thirty Years' War and the Nazi past – the writer uses a number of artistic techniques: autobiography elements, literary masks, grotesque, symbols, irony. These techniques create a special character of the artistic world of the work.

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