

«TO EXPOSE OUR TERRIBLE AGE»: THE POETIC EPOS OF ELLA BOBROWA

Galina L. Nefagina, Pomeranian University in Slupsk (Poland)

E-mail: nefgl@mail.ru

DOI: 10.32342/2523-4463-2019-0-16-17

Key words: *emigration, war, the novel, the poetic form, tradition, the poetic epos.*

The poet, critic, translator Ella Bobrowa (1911–2012) belongs to the generation of those Soviet people who went through the horrors of the German occupation of Ukraine, through the refugee and Di-Pi camps and were forced to become second wave immigrants. She described her life in an autobiographical narrative in verse “*Irina Istomina*”. “*Irina Istomina*” was written in the beginning of 1960s, when in Russian-language literature abroad there were almost no works about the fate of the second emigration and di-pi, and in Soviet literature it was simply impossible to write about «traitors» and «collaborators» even during the Khrushchev “thaw”. The typical experience of «involuntary emigrants» Bobrowa embodied in a peculiar artistic form of poetic epos.

The article analyzes the peculiarities of the genre and poetics of the work. In the poem, the classical tradition primarily connected with Pushkin’s influence is obvious. Apparently, the model for the creation of “*Irina Istomina*” was Pushkin’s novel “*Eugene Onegin*”. Pushkin’s tradition is manifested on many levels of the work. The title of the novel is given by the name of the main character, which determines not only the importance of the character, but also its being typical for that time. Bobrowa inherits the form of the novel in verse, uses the “*Onegin*” stanza and rhythmic. The address to the reader, so typical of Pushkin’s novel, activates the reader in “*Irina Istomina*” and emphasizes the real basis of the work. The author’s comments reflect the direct relation to what is happening, moreover, the author’s close acquaintance with the hero, as it was in Pushkin’s poem. Many of Bobrowa’s poetic metaphors have deep roots and go back to folklore and “*Lay of Igor’s Warfare*”.

“*Irina Istomina*” is an epic, covering the period from 1937 to 1950, but with retrospectives in an earlier historical period. Through the narrator’s perception of the storyteller – the heroine’s friends – all the important events in the history of the country are given. The narrator and the heroine represent a generation of people born and raised by the Soviet (Stalinist) reality. Bobrowa’s own biography, the basis of the novel, made it possible to show the fate of an entire generation. The boundaries of the novel’s artistic world are expanding due to the lyrical love story of Irina and Vadim.

As in any epic work, in Bobrowa’s novel there are many characters, both essential for the fate of the main character, and episodic ones, met on the way to her wanderings. Bobrowa’s novel is accurate in the smallest details, which creates a three-dimensional picture of the time of the “birth of new biographies” and a kind of encyclopedia of the life of di-pis. Bobrowa does not ignore any real episodes, typical for the di-pi destinies. Antithesis plays a significant role in the novel, being the basis for the second part of the work. It is no coincidence that it is titled “*And what do we have?*” The contrast between «here» and «we have» is the leitmotif of the narrative.

If everyday life is perceived through the antithesis, the existential life is much more complicated. The heroine faces moral issues that require reflection. In spiritual life, a special role of the Orthodox Church is emphasized. Faith was the invisible bridge that united all Russian people in emigration into one nation. Having appeared as a prompt response to the just ended war, “*Irina Istomina*” in the 21st century is perceived as a historical novel, the realities of which allow us to imagine the life and existence of those people who have become “unreturned”, to understand the complex intertwining of private lives with the fate of the world.

References

1. Bobrova, Je. *Irina Istomina: Povest’ v stihah* [Irina Istomina: the Story in Verses]. Moscow, Nasledie Publ., 1997, 111 p.
2. Moseshvili, G. *Dragocennyj dar (pojezija Jelly Bobrovoj na grani dvuh vekov)* [Precious gift (Ella Bobrova’s poetry on the edge of two centuries)]. *Izbrannoe: v 2 t.* [Selected works: in 2 vol.]. Moscow, PROBEL 2000 Publ., 2018, vol. 1, 876 p.
3. Bobrova, Je. *Irina Istomina* [Irina Istomina]. Toronto, Sovremennik Publ., 1967, 88 p.
4. Dimer, E. *Prozrenie Iriny Istominoj* [Irina Istominoj’s enlightenment]. *Vestnik* [The Bulletin], 1999, no. 8 (215), Aprile 13. Available at: <http://www.vestnik.com/issues/1999/0413/win/dimer.htm> (Accessed 10 May 2019).
5. Sedyh, A. *Otkliki russkikh pisatelej na povest’ Jelly Bobrovoj «Irina Istomina»* [Comments of Russian writers to Ella Bobrova’s story “Irina Istomina”]. Available at: <http://newcanada.com> (Accessed 10 May 2019).

Одержано 21.02.2019.