

# Representation of The Simulacrum “Author” In the Intertextual Discourse of Evgeny Popov

Marina Bokareva

Senior Lecturer, Department of Russian Language and Literature, Bukhara State University, Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** The article examines a number of pressing issues in contemporary literary studies, among which the central problem is the reception and interpretation of classical literature within contemporary post-realist and postmodern discourse. Using selected works by E. Popov as examples, the study analyzes the possibilities of reinterpreting the intertext of I.S. Turgenev, N.V. Gogol, M. Zoshchenko, and V. Shukshin, as well as the motifs and plot structures of Russian classical authors and the text-forming factors selected by the postmodernist writer in modeling the metatext. The aim of the study is to identify the most characteristic phenomena of contemporary artistic narrative and to analyze the aesthetic and formal techniques of the author’s narrative style in relation to the continuity of the classical tradition.

**Keywords:** Contemporary literary process, intermediality, syncretism, decanonization, pretext, metatext, ideostyle.

**Introduction:** According to the already established tradition in postmodern literary studies, the works and personalities of the classics of world and Russian literature – such as A.S. Pushkin, I.S. Turgenev, N.V. Gogol, M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, F.M. Dostoevsky, A.P. Chekhov, Shakespeare, Molière, Balzac, Flaubert, and others – are at the center of close intertextual attention from both writers and scholars. This interest is обусловлен the productivity and universality of the images, characters, and ideas presented by the classics, as well as the considerable degree to which the works of almost all authors of the classical period have already been studied – from school curricula to academic literary scholarship.

It has been noted that the range of classical authors represented in postmodern discourse is nevertheless not particularly extensive. The writers most frequently referenced are those included in school textbooks. This is understandable and logical: a postmodern text presupposes a dialogue of cultural signs, which becomes possible only when a mental and cultural connection is established between the writer and the

reader, generated by a shared cultural space. Such a shared space is Russian classical literature. Therefore, references to the texts of Turgenev, Pushkin, and other classical authors ensure the recognizability of their motifs within the fabric of postmodern discourse.

## METHODOLOGY

As N.A. Fateeva rightly notes, the author of a literary work must take into account the fact that the degree of perception and interpretation of a text depends on the reader’s level of knowledge [13, pp. 25-38]. Contemporary literary scholarship actively develops the problem of intertextuality precisely in connection with the study of Pushkin’s, Gogol’s, Shchedrin’s, and Chekhov’s word within literary works. Within this context, Turgenevian intertext occupies a significant place. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the literary theorist and critic Y.I. Aikhenvald formulated the “category of the Turgenevian” in his work *Silhouettes of Russian Writers*, linking it primarily with the category of the soul in Russian literature [1, p. 521].

During the period of socialist realism, Russian critics and literary scholars continued to investigate the ideological orientation and thematic issues of I.S. Turgenev's work in relation to the general tendencies of nineteenth-century Russian literature. For example, G.A. Byaly in the study *Turgenev and Russian Realism* (1962) and E.V. Tyukhova in the book *Dostoevsky and Turgenev: Typological Unity and Generic Distinctiveness* (1981). The problem of the influence of Turgenev's work on contemporary literature also remained within the sphere of scholarly attention, as evidenced by T.P. Golovanova in the article "Turgenev and Soviet Literature" (1968) and L.N. Nazarova in the study *Turgenev and Russian Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (1979).

The transitional period of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century brought about a substantial reconsideration of the significance and interpretation of the categories of classical Russian literature within the literary process. Both criticism and literary practice actively employed the material of Pushkin's, Gogol's, and Turgenev's texts – from the ironic analysis of biography and creative method in V. Pietsukh's 1993 essay *The Russian Theme* to academic studies such as G.B. Kurlyandskaya's *I. S. Turgenev: Worldview, Method, Traditions. Poetics* also became an object of scholarly interest, for example in B. K. Zaitsev's doctoral dissertation (2005), while Turgenev's traditions in the works of mid-twentieth-century writers are examined in detail in the study by N.A. Kudelko.

This issue continues to attract scholarly attention today. For example, the problem of Turgenevian intertext in early twenty-first-century literature is addressed in several specialized publications. Thus, V.B. Kataev's book *Playing with Fragments: The Fate of Russian Classics in the Era of Postmodernism* contains a chapter devoted to the interpretation of motifs from Turgenev's works in V. Kuritsyn's story *Dry Thunderstorms: A Zone of Flickering*. The scholar notes in particular that the contemporary postmodernist concept has deprived writers of their reverence for classical authors, and Turgenev proved to be one of the most affected in this process of ridicule and demystification [3, p. 252].

This situation is explained by the fact that the legacy of the classics of the "Golden Age" lost much of its relevance during the new transitional period of value

reconsideration: for the contemporary reader it appears dull and conservative. By the end of the twentieth century, the classics of Russian literature were no longer perceived as "teachers of life" or "engineers of human souls," and the immutable truths recorded on the pages of their works began to seem questionable. A number of radically oriented postmodern critics, such as V. Kuritsyn, O. Sedakova, A. Genis, and M. Yampolsky, have even proclaimed the death of the classics as an aesthetic value. Nevertheless, classical texts retain an important place as a foundation and source for the creation of postmodern discourse due to their intertextual and allusive productivity.

## **RESULTS**

An author who claims a postmodernist – and in recent years a post-realist – interpretation of their creative work and its adequate reception often employs quotation as a means of demonstrating a personal attitude toward external reality, which is frequently categorically opposed to postmodernism itself, already perceived as having exhausted its potential. From this derives the entire set of well-known textual features: decanonization, structural complexity, sharpened thematic problematics, deliberate sarcasm, and others. Allusion to traditional or classical texts has become another widespread device of self-presentation, acceptance, and comprehension of one's authorial "self" within the complex historical, cultural, and social environment of the turn of the centuries – a time when social, ethical, aesthetic, and other value systems increasingly shift toward relativistic, nihilistic, or even anarchic positions. Through narrative relationships, the author inscribes themselves or their alter ego into a large-scale artistic discourse composed of the entire historical cultural experience.

Somewhat earlier, during the period of the dominance of postmodernism, art – including literature – was characterized by the blurring of boundaries within familiar oppositions (beautiful/ugly, good/evil, etc.). In this context, "meanings appear indefinite, often metaphorical and ambiguous; the experience of civilization becomes inert and ghostly. This leap is realized not only through 'shift' and 'break', but also through 'flows' and distortions, transformations and revivals, models and metamorphoses of representational modifications, configurations, and

constructions" [12, p. 380]. For this reason, within the contemporary literary situation of post-realism, there has emerged a need to reconsider and adapt the experience of postmodernism in order to determine new forms of textual construction in modern literary works. Writers turn to the search for new genre modifications, manifested in a variety of highly original genre and stylistic models. In such a framework, the personal and poetic visuality of traditional pretexts occupies a dominant position. This study raises the question of the visuality of the archetype of the classical author and of his poetic heritage in the consciousness of modernist and postmodernist writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In the process of literary criticism, each scholar perceives the textual materials of colleagues through the prism of their own worldview and sociocultural context. Contemporary literary scholars of the postmodern era approach the analysis of classical receptions in a fundamentally different way. The simple study of literary heritage is no longer sufficient. A key role is played by interdisciplinary approaches that take into account a wide range of quotation inclusions and interconnections. This issue lies at the center of several relevant areas of research. Scholarly communities are actively developing methodological approaches that enable a comprehensive interpretation of literary works in accordance with modern scientific paradigms. Among the most significant scholarly investigations, several key research trajectories can be distinguished that reveal new dimensions in the understanding of literary heritage. These include the works of E.Yu. Poltavets, O.V. Svakhina, S.A. Ivanova, and others. For example, in S.A. Ivanova's study devoted to I.S. Turgenev and his "mysterious" novellas, the author himself is presented as a source of inspiration for subsequent writers' interests and interpretations [2].

The interpretation of literary texts represents a complex hermeneutic process in which each new generation of scholars refracts artistic material through the prism of its own worldview or sociocultural experience. In this context, the postmodern approach to literary analysis has significantly transformed the traditional methods of studying literary works. The contemporary scholarly paradigm and the strategy of the humanities extend beyond the boundaries of

classical textual analysis, integrating interdisciplinary methodological principles. Particular attention is given to contextual aspects of interpretation, where quotation, syncretism, and intermediality become the principal instruments for decoding the deeper or latent meanings of artistic discourse. Modern scholarship seeks to construct a multi-layered system of interpretation that takes into account the cultural, social, and cognitive contexts of literary creativity.

It is noteworthy that the personality of the author himself represents no less significant an object of interest for representatives of the postmodernist approach. Over the course of the rather long existence of the literary phenomenon known as "the writer Turgenev," a certain authorial myth – similar to the myth surrounding Gogol – has taken shape in mass readership perception. The problem lies in the fact that the very image of literature reconstructed through the memoirs of contemporaries, personal notes, and eyewitness accounts is characterized by numerous contradictions and ambiguities. Turgenev is often described as a "Russian European," which gives rise to reflections on the validity of the concept of the Russian national idea and on the authenticity of the Russian characters represented in his works.

## **DISCUSSION**

Without dwelling on the polemics surrounding this particular issue, let us examine how the contemporary postmodern writer E. Popov interprets this situation. The author is noteworthy primarily for his numerous references to the material of both classical literature and well-known works of the twentieth century, realized through intertextual connections and allusive linkages. For example, the work titled Fetisov's Box contains an obvious reference to the once popular novel by M. Pavić *A Box for Writing Materials*. The principal difficulty in interpreting this text lies in the presence of a strong self-parodic component. This element appears for the first time in E. Popov's creative manner and forms an imitative image of the author.

The narrator, who presents himself as Nikolai Nikolaevich Fetisov, creates the illusion of authentic authorship (this technique also recalls the Pushkinian example – who is in fact the author of *The Tales of Belkin*). For a considerable period of time, the reader remains unaware of the fictional nature of the

narrator-storyteller or of the central character (the protagonist). Such an authorial strategy is not accidental; the self-reflexive component of the authorial mask becomes a distinctive feature – a characteristic hallmark of the writer’s ideostyle—in all of his subsequent works.

For instance, the novel *The Soul of a Patriot, or Various Letters to Ferfichkin* demonstrates the use of metanarrative techniques. The discursive structure of the work is based on a parodic reinterpretation of classical or authoritative literary texts that have long been canonized. The complexity of Popov’s metatext brings to the forefront a number of aspects requiring particular attention. For example, in the novel *The Beauty of Life*, the contemporary text is characterized by an even more intricate architectonics despite its orientation toward a classical model.

The narrative mechanism is based on the combination of multiple imitations of acting agents. The character-creator does not coincide with the narrator-creator. The readership is mentioned in the introductory section, in the conclusion, and in the dialogue between the Author and the Muse. The text is saturated with numerous newspaper excerpts as well as primary and secondary speech constructions of external narrators. These elements function as substitutes for the creator of the work itself. Even the figure of the reader represents a fiction, since the narrative is not directly addressed to it. The author distances himself from the textual material. Instead of the traditional scheme “writer ↔ work ↔ reader,” interaction occurs between the texts themselves. A notable result of the novel is that the structurally and conceptually significant components of the work turn out to be not the main narrative and plot but the secondary compositional elements.

Another novel by E. Popov – *The True Story of the “Green Musicians”* – follows a similar structural model. The writer deliberately implements a systematic distortion and disorientation of the reader. This further complicates the author’s narrative strategy. The main body of the novel remains almost inaccessible for the reader’s comprehension of the author’s interpretation. The commentary on the work transforms into the principal narrative. The position of the author is divided into two authorial roles: the commentator and the author of the main material represent distinct entities.

The genuine authorial position remains unknown to the reader, since all the mentioned authorial masks function merely as imitations or simulacra. The work therefore serves as an example of a metatext with a conditional authorial personality and an encoded subtext.

One of E. Popov’s most popular and frequently studied novels, *On the Eve of the Eve*, demonstrates obvious borrowings from Turgenev’s pretext. At the same time, it embodies nearly all of the narrative principles previously tested by the author. The novel includes an impersonal narrator who does not transmit the author’s conceptual position. In addition, there is a skaz-type narrator who preserves a subjective perspective, as well as a meta-narrator who interprets the original text within its contextual framework. Popov generates a discourse that is multifaceted both structurally and semantically. Simultaneously, he parodies the genre of the meta-novel through postmodern techniques of hypertextual and metatextual play, self-parodic doubles, and intellectual interaction with the readership.

It should be noted that in the course of his creative evolution, E. Popov consistently turned to various narrative strategies, thereby revealing the interpretative and representational potential of postmodern discourse. Whereas the short prose of the 1970s-1980s is characterized by an orientation toward skaz narration, the novels of the 1990s, such as *The Beauty of Life* and *The True Story of the “Green Musicians”*, tend toward the construction of metatextual systems. Works of the 2000s, including *Master Chaos* and *Arbait. A Broad Canvas: An Internet Novel*, are distinguished by a pronounced synthetic structure. The evolution of the author’s model of textual construction – from small forms such as short stories and novellas to the novelistic discourse – reaches a particular stage of development in the novel *On the Eve of the Eve*. This manifests itself in the rejection of traditional narrative principles, the abandonment of artistic and informational predictability, a deepened self-reflection, and the dominance of the narrator or its variations, such as the authorial mask or the simulacrum of the reader.

In Popov’s short and medium-length prose forms, the influence of N.V. Gogol’s artistic style is quite evident. For instance, the story *How the Rooster Was Eaten* is

narrated in the first person with the preservation of colloquial speech, which actualizes its skaz narrative structure [4, p. 1]. The writer also employs other Gogolian borrowings at the level of genre and narration, motifs and characters, as well as poetic and stylistic devices. The fact that the author bases the plot on an anecdote from everyday life lends his works a carnivalesque quality. In this way, Popov demonstrates the principal mechanism of plot construction – absurdity. This also determines the specific typology of his characters: “little people,” ordinary individuals placed in unusual circumstances.

For example, in the story *Someone Came, Visited, and Left*, the technique of the “stream of consciousness” is employed, when the author interrupts the narrative and shifts into a personal monologue [5]. The allusions introduced into the narrative are also noteworthy. These include historical events described through vivid and unusual episodes: “when someone was banging a shoe against the microphone at the UN” – a reference to a speech delivered by a national leader at the UN Assembly in 1960; and “*Sovremennik* was enthusiastically rehearsing a play by the Vermont recluse” – a reference to the writer A. I. Solzhenitsyn, who lived in exile in the state of Vermont in the United States [5].

More broadly, the Gogolian manner emerges in Popov’s narrative through a certain melodic quality of speech and a particular form of humor that arises from the tragic nature of the depicted events. This is especially evident in the paraphrasing of familiar expressions or political and social clichés: “VACATIONERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!”; “GLORY TO THE WORKERS OF ‘PNEVO-NA-NEREKHTE!’”; “LONG LIVE NOVEMBER 7 OF ANY YEAR!” [6].

As a postmodernist writer, E. Popov consistently employs intertextuality as a principal structural device, drawing upon relatively recent literary traditions. For example, he inherits the skaz narrative manner of M. Zoshchenko, thereby creating an authorial mask that not only corresponds to the aesthetics of postmodernism but also generates a multiplicity of meanings within the artistic discourse itself. The narrator-character does not coincide with the actual author; he possesses his own opinions and expresses his own point of view. The masked narrator remains ambiguous to the end—whether his position

corresponds to that of the author or whether the narrator should not be equated with the real person of E. Popov at all. This relatively simple device is used by many postmodern writers and, figuratively speaking, relieves them of responsibility for what is written.

A typical feature of Popov’s ideostyle is the device of carnivalization, employed in parodying the realities of contemporary life. The satirist Zoshchenko selected as the object of criticism the remnants of the petty-bourgeois past that spoiled and contaminated the idealized, heroic, and noble socialist present. Popov, however, more than fifty years later, ridicules another socialist reality – the mythology and ideology of a decaying socialist realism mired in hypocrisy and bureaucracy.

The concepts parodied in the works of both writers are also similar. Zoshchenko mocks the collision between the facts of socialism and petty-bourgeois attitudes and remnants of the past, whereas Popov demystifies the established ideological myths of developed socialism. Thus, carnivalization becomes a defining artistic feature of the ideostyle of both writers. It becomes evident to the reader that the author deliberately models the speech of the characters in order to demonstrate the absurdity of the depicted personalities and narrative situations. For example, in the story *Three Leaders*, elevated rhetoric is combined with everyday events: the pathos of the statements generates the comic and absurd character of the entire narrative [7].

Another writer whose work exerted a significant influence on Popov’s style was V. M. Shukshin. It should be noted that Shukshin himself introduced the young writer Popov into the literary process. After the publication of Popov’s first stories, Shukshin remarked on the extraordinary “density of writing” in the style of the young author [8]. Popov also borrowed from Shukshin the restraint in describing the emotions of his characters and the precision and clarity of dialogue. These features already characterized Popov as a postmodern writer: a particular type of irony and a reconsideration of aesthetic categories.

However, despite stylistic and thematic similarities, Popov’s stories differ fundamentally from those of Shukshin in terms of ideological evaluation and plot characteristics. Shukshin’s central character – the

chudik (eccentric) – is a literary type developed in Russian literature in the second half of the twentieth century during the period of socialist realism. Shukshin's eccentrics do not openly oppose ideology or socialist reality. On the contrary, they are products of that reality in the highest sense, since they preserve high moral and universal human values. By contrast, the protagonists of Popov's stories give the impression of renegades: the narrative is perceived as a critique of reality presented in an ironic and farcical manner. For example, in the story *The Thinking Reed*, the protagonist – a police officer – reflects on the serious topic of the future, yet it is difficult to take his reflections seriously: the author's concealed irony resonates through the narrator's confident assertions [9, p. 18]. Shukshin's influence can even be observed in the titles of Popov's stories: *Cosmos*, *the Nervous System*, and *a Chunk of Lard* (V. Shukshin) – *The God Dionysus*, *King Midas*, and *I* (E. Popov); *The Idiot* (V. Shukshin) – *Shchiglya* (E. Popov) [9].

The postmodern writer E. Popov also actively employs borrowings from mythological and other cultural sources. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the collection *Fetisov's Box*. Intertextuality in the numerous stories of this collection becomes the principal means of expressing the author's style. Like other works of short prose, these stories are characterized by intertextual-dialogic features and cultural-imagery transformations.

The central story of the cycle bears the extended title *Again Fetisov* (An Excerpt from the Book of Stories by N. N. Fetisov "Myths and Tales of the Former Ancient Greece"). This long, ironic title initially establishes the comic tone of the entire work. It is noteworthy that the author shifts all responsibility for the narrative onto a fictional writer, thereby avoiding direct intervention in the story. Popov refers to himself – the actual creator of the text – as a publisher, emphasizing his noninvolvement in the content. This position is reinforced through the preface.

In this preface, the author, speaking through his double – the publisher – describes N. N. Fetisov as a "brilliant master of artistic expression" [10]. He portrays him as a "remarkable and original man of golden soul" [10] who "called himself a writer, though no one believed him" [10] and who has already passed away. In the preface, the writer plays with the cultural tradition of

honoring the deceased, transforming it into a farcical "merry funeral." According to this tradition, the genius of Fetisov's creative heritage was recognized only after his death. The publisher E. Popov expresses admiration and with complete seriousness reflects on the philosophical depth of Fetisov's works.

In reality, however, judging by the diary entries, Fetisov appears to be mentally unstable and completely deranged. The real author of the preface parodies Soviet rhetorical clichés. In particular, clichés of literary criticism are ridiculed, since the narrator is associated with publishing activity. Speech formulas typical of meetings, speeches, and similar events are also parodied.

The identification of ancient Greek mythological allusions behind the parodic elements of contemporary reality requires particular attention. What is at stake here is a neo-myth of the Soviet period concerning ideas about the nature of artistic creativity. The work *Myths of the Former Ancient Greece* represents a modified parodic interpretation of two independent narrative lines.

The first line is conveyed through the image of a fictional parodic-mythological creator, indicated by the pseudo-autobiographical image of the conditional publisher Evgeny Popov. The second narrative line is associated with the conditional author-narrator N.N. Fetisov. The authenticity of this character is also doubtful, since acquaintance with him is possible only through the fictional publisher.

Fetisov recounts the mythological story of Dionysus and King Midas, endowing them with the characteristics of Soviet mythologemes. These mythologemes are based on the neo-mythology of the socialist system. Ancient Greek gods and heroes are deliberately diminished in the narrative and described from the perspective of everyday, mundane viewpoints.

The mythological intertext created by the real author performs multiple functions in the text. Among these functions are the parody of the creator himself, as well as elements of self-reflection and self-irony. At the same time, the mythological material itself is ridiculed and parodied. The mockery of the conditional author occurs through the demonstration of his naive and underdeveloped aesthetic perception.

The reinterpretation of the myth of King Midas serves to reinforce the neo-myth of socialist realist art intended for the masses. Midas's curse consisted of the ability to turn everything into gold with a single touch. The conditional author-publisher Evgeny Popov describes the "genius gift" of N.N. Fetisov as the ability to transform everything into art through touch. Such a reduced and utilitarian perception of art testifies to the destruction of traditional artistic concepts. Works of art and the creative process itself are deprived of their status of exclusivity and rarity.

In the chapter *The Nephew of the Hamburg Uncle* (From Fetisov's Diary) there appears a characteristic remark by the hero concerning a painting by the artist A. Pnin: "June 23, 196... Saw Sasha's new painting. Very beautiful. It depicts a simple peasant woman, yet how magnificent she is – her face breathes severity and simplicity, as if carved from granite. But I did not like everything..." [10].

The dual coding of the author, narrator, and storyteller refers to the well-known authorial myth of the American writer of the second half of the twentieth century, Jerome Salinger. The reclusive writer avoided interviews and did not produce autobiographical works. His only biographer, Ian Hamilton, published his biography in pursuit of fame. The biography was based on scarce information, several unpublished letters, and the author's own assumptions. This provoked anger and indignation on the part of the writer.

E. Popov creatively plays with the story of Fetisov's literary heritage through intermediaries, thereby constructing a similar writerly myth. Confirmation of this can be found in the publisher's confession: "The fact that his творчество has received such a response from wide circles of the reading public is evidenced by the circumstance that during the time since publication I have received such a heap of letters that I cannot carry them all at once in my official briefcase. Everyone is interested in everything. Was Fetisov bald, shaved, or bearded? And who was Fetisov besides a brilliant master? And how old was he before he died? And did Fetisov die at all? And where can one obtain more of his works? Answering these and a thousand other questions, I, Evgeny Popov, intend, plan, to devote my modest life." [10]

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Thus, it can be argued that the postmodern writer E. Popov, particularly in his early works and especially in short prose genres, constructs his authorial ideostyle through an active intertextual dialogue. The fundamental basis of this dialogue lies in the borrowing and reinterpretation of elements from Russian classical literature as well as from the broader cultural heritage of modernity.

The formation of the writer's distinctive style becomes evident already in his early novellas and short stories published in collections such as *The Merriment of Rus'* and others. In these works, through skaz-type narration, a parodic interpretation of the artistic legacy of classical authors (for example, N.V. Gogol), immediate predecessors (such as M. Zoshchenko), and contemporaries (in particular, V. Shukshin) is carried out. By reinterpreting the classical realist tradition within the framework of postmodern discourse, E. Popov attempts to represent the image of a carnivalesque, laughter-oriented world reflecting contemporary reality.

The collection *Fetisov's Box* is characterized by a more complex structural organization and thematic content. Due to the deepened self-irony present in the text, it becomes necessary to distinguish the actual author from the narrative voice itself. This results in the emergence of a fictional author—the narrator-publisher Evgeny Popov – who introduces into the narrative the simulacrum of the storyteller N.N. Fetisov, publishing his works accompanied by editorial commentary. Consequently, the structural core of the entire artistic narrative in Popov's stories becomes the authorial mask of "N. N. Fetisov."

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