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### **Readings of Russian novels in the context of intercultural exchange**

*Abstract:* The article deals with the concept of Modernism and Postmodernism developed in the novels by an Argentinean author F. Andahazi «Conquistador» and «City of Heretics» in relation to the concept of Russian modernism and in relation to the European cultural tradition.

*Key words:* Andahazi, Leopoldo Zea, Fry Bernardino de Sahagun, VI. Soloviev, Brusov, Rozanov, Minsky, Merezhkovsky, European civilization, the Old World and the New World, Mexican myths, Christianity, Latin American Renaissance, modernism, the Silver Age

*Аннотация:* В статье рассматриваются понятия модернизма и постмодернизма, представленные в романах аргентинского автора Ф. Андахази «Конкистадор» и «Город еретиков», в соотношении с концепцией русского модернизма и европейской культурной традицией.

*Ключевые слова:* Андахази, Леопольдо Сеа, Фрай Бернардино де Саагун, Вл. Соловьев, Брюсов, Розанов, Минский, Мережковский, европейская цивилизация, Старый свет и Новый свет, мексиканские мифы, христианство, Латино-Американский ренессанс, модернизм, Серебряный век

«Modernism in art and aesthetic theory which is closely associated with the general movement of bourgeois social thoughts in the era of decline reveals itself first of all through a devastating break with classical tradition»<sup>1</sup>, – said M. Lifshitz. It is well-known that withdrawal from the tradition revealed itself both in the aesthetics and ethics. Nowadays there is a significant number of studies of specific features of European modern culture. It is very interesting to see how modern aesthetics penetrate into a little-studied area – the philosophy and literature of Latin America.

<sup>1</sup> *Lifshitz M. Ancient and modern mythology / Лифшиц М. Мифология древняя и современная. Moscow: Art, 1979. P. 474.*

«The Latin American continent attracts <...> attention of the social sciences and philosophy; the things that happen there now can be called the Latin American Renaissance»<sup>1</sup>, – Michael Kolesov said it in the early 90's and these words are still relevant. Anyway this process should be called the Renaissance with some reservation because the concept of Latin American culture is not homogeneous in essence. According to Leopoldo Zea, a Mexican philosopher, one of the founders of the «philosophy of Latin American essence» there are two streams in the structure of Latin American philosophy and culture: the European, e. g. «external», and Latin American, e. g. «internal». The modern Latin American philosopher must not be influenced by outside ideas and concepts, but should study his own history and gain his own philosophical experience. Since the philosophy of history traditionally formulated and conceptualized the European perspective for the future so those nations that are far from Europe were declared either marginal and peripheral or inheriting a set of concepts and philosophical discourses from Europe. In other words, Latin American culture is determined as the secondary one forced to follow in the steps of European civilization. It seems that Federico Andahazi tries to find the identity, to break the tradition in determining the position of Latin American culture in relation to European culture in the novel «El Conquistador».

The author took the words of the Franciscan Friar Bernardino de Sahagun as the epigraph to the novel: «It is not easy to appreciate the Mexican people because they were beaten and their houses were destroyed many times, so nowadays nothing is left. They are called barbarians now, people who are not worthy; but they were superior to many other nations in terms of their state system»<sup>2</sup>.

The novel is about a character named Quetza who made the trip from America to Europe before Columbus did it. Quetza discovered the way to the New World, as he called Europe, because the Old World is the land of the Aztecs. The novel does not pretend to be historical; in any case the Argentine writer did not see it as such. «It was not my target to do more than just talk about the adventures. I believe that this is an adventure novel, not a historical one <...>, and I was not too interested in which side of the Atlantic will read it»<sup>3</sup>, – Andahazi confessed in one of his interviews while presenting the book to Spanish readers. Another time he said even more frankly: «I'm not a writer interested in history as a way to reach the truth. My novels are not historical ones. I try to set my Literature in fiction, and if I have to change history to write my literature, I do it. <...> It's a lie well told. <...> I do not try to rebuild reality. My goal is to write to blur. <...> that historical fact gave me

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<sup>1</sup> *Kolesov M.S.* Philosophy and Culture of Latin America. Simferopol, 1991. P. 3 / *Колесов М.С.* Философия и культура Латинской Америки / Симферопольский гос. университет. Симферополь, 1991. С. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Andahazi F.* El Conquistador. St. Petersburg; Moscow, 2008. P. 12 / *Андахази Ф.* Конкистадор. СПб.; М., 2008. С. 12.

<sup>3</sup> «No me propongo otra cosa más que contar una aventura. Creo que es un libro de aventuras, no una novela histórica (...) y no interesa demasiado desde qué lado del océano Atlántico está narrado» (Federico Andahazi presenta en España a Quetza, el azteca que descubrió Europa. Efe, Madrid.18/09/2007).

the opportunity of going deeper in fiction. <...> as Baudelaire said: a manuscript is that which is written again»<sup>1</sup>. However it is well-known that Andahazi spent a lot of time studying the history of the Aztecs and the culture of this extinct civilization while working on the novel.

Quetza has some affinity with the mythological hero Quetzalcoatl, «Feathered Serpent», whose life story is told in ancient Mexican legends. This highly respected American-Indian deity could be a European person (he was pale-skinned, bearded) who managed to get to America long before the Spaniard.

However the Soviet archaeologist and historian Valery Gulyaev contended that «it was not evident that the god had blonde hair, white skin and was extraordinarily high. Such description of his appearance could be found only in Spanish monks' manuscripts of XVI–XVII centuries»<sup>2</sup>. Probably the Spanish priests and monks took into account some Indians stories and interpreted the myth about Quetzalcoatl in a way that suited them. They ranked him as the monk-martyr, who ran from Europe and carried enlightenment and humanistic laws to the Indians. Some of them even advanced a most extraordinary version and claimed that Quetzalcoatl was Jesus Christ himself who came to America with His Disciples after the Resurrection.

The plot which unites all the legends about the hero is the story of his setting sail with a promise to come back from the East. This legend helped the invaders to defeat Montezuma, who saw features of the resurrected god in the white bearded conquistadors.

When asked what the name of Quetza means Andahazi said: «Resurrected»<sup>3</sup>. Maybe the author tried to constitute a link between Quetzalcoatl and Quetza. When he was a two-years-old sick little orphan people were going to sacrifice him to the God of War – Uitsilipochtli. «Sons of Tenochtitlan (the city where the child was growing up. – *I. A.*) treated human sacrifices in different ways. They were warlike people, so most of them still approved of it, but quite a few people felt killing to be a disgusting thing and refused to drink the blood of their brothers». Among them was a wise old man Tepek who interceded for the child with the cruel priest. Tepek worshiped Quetzalcoatl as the «supreme creature who was opposed to death and destruction» and was an opponent of violence. The portrait of the old man is very interesting: his gray hair could be taken for towhead (blond); moreover he had a long hooked nose with impressive nostrils which were a sign of his ancient Toltec ancestry. Quetzalcoatl has the same nose in some Mexican myths. Tepek was like a father for Quetza, brought him up, and saved his life more than once.

The mind and education of the young man earned the respect of the Council of Elders. He certainly was a talented boy: he created an accurate calendar, improved the layout of dams and bridges, and designed ships. The city of Tenochtitlan, as it

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<sup>1</sup> *Rodrigo Arias*. Federico Andahazi. [http://www.andahazi.com/en\\_prensa\\_uolsinectis.html](http://www.andahazi.com/en_prensa_uolsinectis.html)

<sup>2</sup> *Gulyaev V.I.* How many times was America discovered? Moscow, 1978. P. 26 / *Гуляев В.И.* Сколько раз открывали Америку? М.: Знание, 1978. С. 26.

<sup>3</sup> ¿Qué significa Quetza? – Significa «El Resusitado». <http://autorneto.com/literatura/resenas/el-conquistador/>

becomes clear to the reader, was not inferior to any of the major European cities of that time.

Quetza was to find out the new world for himself and his fellows. His goal was not to conquer it but to discover. «Quetza is a synthesis of the various European characters-explorers, such as Columbus and Copernicus, – says Andahazi. – This is a Renaissance man who thinks clearly and critically, fights against the established political regime, who makes maps before Copernicus, who travels around the world before Magellan»<sup>1</sup>.

The character feared to think what may happen if the European seafarers would conquer and subjugate his homeland. Andahazi had no doubt about the fact that the Aztecs could make such a difficult and dangerous journey themselves. Frescos of Diego Rivera with the Indians ship flying through the air towards the East influenced Andahazi to write the novel when he saw them in Mexico.

The author's idea is clear and straightforward: the reader should see the European countries through the eyes of the character, as if moving away from the traditional European history. Quetza was in at the orgy of Inquisition, the cruelest in Spain. Reflected in the historical mirror, this country should have understood and recognized that the Spanish Conquista was the most severe in the history of human conquests. Quetza was astounded by the sight of crucified Christ – the scene depicted in numerous crosses. They turned out not to stop practicing sacrifice in Europe; the fact that the faithful drink the blood of Christ during the Eucharist transforms them into cannibals. And he wondered how Christianity could be a monotheistic religion if there are many images of the saints in addition to the image of God.

«The City of Heretics», another writer's novel, published in 2005, earned him notoriety; however, Andahazi called this piece his first historical novel. The Madrid newspaper «El País» made no bones about the plot: «The brutality, eroticism and criticism of the Church woven into a love story have determined the historical novel “City of Heretics” by Federico Andahazi. A love affair of two French righteous persons of the 14<sup>th</sup> century allows the author to “speculate on the themes of pleasure and sin, and the power of fanaticism, misogyny of the Church during a long time”. The novel mixes fictional love story and the original story of the Shroud of Christ»<sup>2</sup>. Andahazi's characters shocked many Argentine readers with their love. The periods of crisis usually pave the way for different interpretations

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<sup>1</sup> Quetza es una síntesis de varios personajes europeos, de descubridores con nombre y apellidos como Colón o Copérnico. Es un hombre renacentista, con un espíritu luminoso y crítico, que lucha contra el poder político establecido. Un hombre que configura los mapas del cielo antes que Copérnico, el primero que deja constancia cartográfica de la geografía terrestre, antes que Toscanelli, y el primero en dar la vuelta al mundo, antes que Magallanes (Federico Andahazi presenta en España a Quetza, el azteca que descubrió Europa. Efe, Madrid. 18/09/2007).

<sup>2</sup> Brutalidad, erotismo y críticas a la Iglesia envueltas en una historia de amor son parte de lo que se encuentra en la novela histórica *La ciudad de los herejes* (Planeta), de Federico Andahazi. La relación amorosa entre dos religiosos en el siglo XIV en Francia permite al autor «reflexionar sobre el placer y la culpa, sobre el poder y el fanatismo, y sobre la misoginia de la Iglesia a lo largo de los tiempos» (El País. Madrid. 19/01/2006).

of cultural values; contradictions and failures arise within the culture. The XX<sup>th</sup> century, according to some philosophers, is the «last century of Culture and the first century of the transition period, which we call the post-cultural»<sup>1</sup>. The birth of a new type of consciousness was typical for the Renaissance, its emblematic features being temporal culture, anthropocentrism and the secular way of thinking. The same features will eventually cause the post culture phenomena.

The XXI<sup>st</sup> century inherited forms of consciousness typical of the European culture at the turn of the XIX–XX<sup>th</sup> centuries and gave the birth to some artistic and apocryphal works where the evangelical events were estimated alternatively and therefore they caused controversial public reaction. At that period there have been published «Gospel of Judas», and José de Sousa Saramago's book «The Gospel of Jesus» (1991) containing the undisguised criticism of Christian dogmatics. A little earlier N. Kazantzakis' novel «The Last Temptation» (1951) was included by the Catholic Church into the Index of prohibited books; «The City of Heretics» and «The Anatomist» by F. Andahazi provoked a scandal due to his erotic and provocation. So, the process of the emancipation of intellectual consciousness has approved of the human values not based on the religious ethics, more over – as a rejection of the religious precepts. If the religious philosophers of the XIX–XX<sup>th</sup> centuries sought for the human hypostasis of Jesus Christ not conflicting with the fundamental dogmas of the Church, the writers of the XX–XXI<sup>st</sup> centuries often revised the canon disclaiming its axioms. However, Andahazi admitted he was trying to convey to the readers the idea of the necessity to look inside them and to understand that everyday behaviour is imposed by society, but not by the real people's intentions. «I am convinced that the history is the best way to show the present time because the past always creates present, it always means a metaphysical reality»<sup>2</sup>, – he stressed.

One of the characters of the novel, the monk Aurelio, is endowed with a portrait likeness to Jesus Christ. D. Merezhkovsky in his book «The Unknown Jesus» asks the questions about Christ's appearance, which strongly agitated humanity since the first centuries of Christianity. There is nothing told about His appearance in the Gospels, His image is deprived of material characteristics. Merezhkovsky tried to lift the veil over Jesus life before baptism and sermon. Neither the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), nor the Gospel of John describe the height, face, hair color of Jesus. Researchers tend to explain this circumstance with the fact that the New Testament was not created by the Apostles themselves, but their disciples who have not witnessed these events and have never seen the Master. «Apparently, none of the authors was a contemporary of Christ. Creating Gospels was spread at about the same time as the development of Christian religious organizations»<sup>3</sup>, – says A. Zerkalov.

<sup>1</sup> *Bychkov B., Bychkova L.* The 20<sup>th</sup> century: ultimate culture metamorphosis. Moscow, 2000, No 2. P. 63–76; No 3. P. 67–85 / *Бычков В., Бычкова Л.* XX век: предельные метаморфозы культуры // Полигнозис. М., 2000. № 2. С. 63–76; № 3. С. 67–85; или см.: [http://www.philosophy.ru/library/bychkov/xx.html#\\_ftnref4](http://www.philosophy.ru/library/bychkov/xx.html#_ftnref4) (05.05.2011).

<sup>2</sup> Estoy convencido de que la historia es la mejor herramienta para hablar del presente, porque siempre significa y metaforiza el presente. Quehacer, <http://www.desco.org.pe/node/5565>

<sup>3</sup> *Zerkhalov A.* The Gospel of Mikhail Bulgakov. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984. P. 7–8 / *Зеркалов А.* Евангелие Михаила Булгакова. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984. С. 7–8.

As Merezhkovsky says, the roots of the tradition of beauty and ugliness of the Face of the Lord go into a very dark but historically authentic memory. Indeed, there are antithetical legends of the appearance of Jesus from ugly to hyper beautiful. «Something most special, not like other people's faces, something private in the face of Jesus is something beyond all human measures of beauty and ugliness, incommensurable with our three dimensional aesthetics. If so, then it is clear that seeing Him one does not remember which of the two prophecies was fulfilled in Him»<sup>1</sup>, – says Yuri Terapiano.

What was the image of the Nazarethan? One of the characters of F. Andahazi's novel «City of Heretics», the worst by his spiritual qualities – Geoffroy de Charny, – keeps looking for the answer to this question. «The burly, beardless, short-haired man with a sheep on his shoulders», as he is depicted on the frescoes of the cemetery of St. Calixtus? The Byzantine Christ – Pantokrator of the frescos of Santa Catalina in Sinai? Or even a black Saviour? Features of the face of Christ are necessary for the earl to enrich himself, depicting his portrait on the shroud, which he is going to make and show as a genuine Turin Shroud. Andahazi's appeal to the New Testament is caused by his conscious and sharp rejection of the canonical tradition. Yet this is not the trial given to the true Christians, he accuses the Pharisees of lie as they consider themselves to be people of high moral standards, and also – the Church indulges them.

The earl's daughter, beautiful Christina, formed her own image of Christ in her mind – «a harmonious and enlightened». In her thoughts he is gracious and understanding, her feelings for him akin to passion. Like V. Brusov's Renata<sup>2</sup>, who fell in love with Fire Angel Madiel, who became a man in the image of Count Heinrich von Otterheim, who, wearing white coats, with blue eyes and golden curls, looked like an angel, Christina found her groom in a young monk Aurelio. Theological constructions of Andahazi look quite elucidated: he is not looking for the ghostly image of Christ, but for His human subsistence. In fact the author takes part in the debate initiated by neochristian representatives – it was around the issue of mystical perception of reality, ideas of the Third Testament, the Kingdom of «super organic substance», available to empirical knowledge, practically rehabilitating the human flesh. But if religious thinkers talked about the tragedy of separation of sexes, prophesying the androgynous future, «male-female» existence, Andahazi, following Vasily Rozanov, rehabilitates marriage, family union.

VI. Solovyov's theory of Eros, outlined in his work «The Meaning of Love» (1892–1894), denies the ideal family as «procreative» in favor of an androgynous person. Rozanov's «two in one», «one flesh» was the worship of the fertility, which led to sharp disputes at sections of Religious-philosophical meetings in Russia at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century. One of their members, N. Minsky said: «The family is

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<sup>1</sup> *Terapiano Y. Unknown Christ // Tchisla. Paris, 1933. No 9. P. 215–216 / Терапиано Ю. Иисус Неизвестный // Числа. Париж, 1933. № 9. С. 215–216.*

<sup>2</sup> See: Brusov V., «Fiery Angel».

filth and violence, childbirth – a pledge of our imperfections, the only beautiful and consonant with the covenant life of Christ – is chastity and virginity»<sup>1</sup>.

Later in the book «Self-knowledge: an Attempt at Philosophical Autobiography» N. Berdyaev while thinking about the rescue and salvation of humanity for eternal life, repeats the words of Merezhkovsky about the necessity of two flows of love, not only from God to human but from a man to man as well: «There are two ways of movement throughout our life, the ascent line and the descent line. An individual rises to a certain height, moves closer to God. The way of ascent brings him spiritual power; the individual creates the supreme value. Nevertheless, he remembers about those left down there, those who are weak spiritually, those who can't achieve the supreme values. And here begins the way of descent, in order to help our brothers, share spiritual values with them and help their ascent»<sup>2</sup>. If Merezhkovsky engages in polemics on the subject of love with V. Rozanov, who claimed that «the Gospel is the zero of the sex», Andahazi supports the thesis of Rozanov. At the beginning of the novel Aurelio fights with the passion and unbearable sensuality awakened in him by Christina. He reflects: «Marriage is a lesser evil, but still an evil», although gradually he admits that the world blessed with love should be based on love. According to him, if the Apostles denied the reproduction ideal and to a certain point condemned humanity to extinction, it was only because they strongly believed in the imminent apocalypse. Since the end of the world «doesn't have a concrete term» nobody has the right to forbid humans to do something which has a direct connection to the propagation of the species.

Andahazi believed that the history of a nation is closely related to their sexual history: «I remember one of my journeys to Turkey for the presentation of my books and there I bought a French book about the sexual life in the Osman. Frankly speaking, this book opened my eyes. I understood various aspects of the Moslem life style, beginning with the sexual one, although this edition wasn't unusual. Thanks to the history of sexuality I managed to find answers to important questions related with Moslem culture. After that trip I started to search such books in all Argentinean book stores, but there were no editions dedicated to the topic of the history of Argentinean sexuality, although we are full of pride of our sexuality in our everyday life. In Argentina you may easily find the history of homosexuality, but you'll never stumble on the history of national sexuality»<sup>3</sup>. The writer didn't want to offend anybody as it happened with the controversial novel

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<sup>1</sup> *Minsky N.M.* Debates // *Novy put'*. St. Petersburg, 1903. September. P. 319 / *Минский Н.М.* Прения на заседании РФС // *Новый путь*. СПб., 1903. Сентябрь. С. 319.

<sup>2</sup> *Berdyaev N.* Self-knowledge: an Attempt at Philosophical Autobiography. Moscow, 1990. P. 64. / *Бердяев Н.А.* Самопознание. Опыт философской автобиографии. М., 1990. С. 64.

<sup>3</sup> La historia de la sexualidad de los otomanos me reveló cuestiones esenciales de la cultura musulmana. Entonces busqué en todas las librerías y bibliotecas argentinas, y descubrí con asombro que no existía ninguna historia sexual de los argentinos, a pesar de que tenemos casi un orgullo futbolístico por nuestra sexualidad. Hay una historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina, pero no hay una historia de la sexualidad. Entonces me pareció que era un libro que faltaba, que si no lo escribía yo, lo iba a escribir otra persona. – Una entrevista a Federico Andahazi por Rafael Ojeda. // *Quehacer*. № 171 / Jul. – Set. 2008. <http://www.desco.org.pe/node/5565>

«Anatomist» for which Andahazi was given the Amalia Lacroche de Fortbat then was deprived of the status of laureate under the pressure of the audience. The book «City of Heretics» wasn't intended to insult or offend its readers, it wasn't épatage either, it was just an aspiration to raise the values of the human's spirit and to demonstrate that the soul is inseparable from the flesh.

«What is truth?» – this is the question which Andahazi's characters tried to solve with fervour: «Aurelio made stupendous efforts in order to rid himself of certainty in anything, because in his opinion the way to truth is via doubts. Eventually Aurelio refused to accept “truth” as the highest blessing when he thought of all injustices, all the murders and evil deeds committed in the name of ‘truth’. The absence of one dogma gave a right for existence to many other points of view». The main character is crucified. Searches for truth led him to the highest of feelings: to the love of woman. This love was the reason why the main characters were called apostates, who let a demon into their souls. This love may symbolize true service to the Christian dogmas and the choice of the beloved woman's name is not a random one. Her name is Christina.

There is no doubt that various examples of modernist ideology have been borrowed by Andahazi from the Russian writers of the turn of the XIX–XX<sup>th</sup> centuries. In one of the interviews Andahazi confessed: «I am very well acquainted with Russian literature, moreover, my grandparents were Russian and I grew up listening to your wonderful language. My favourite writers are Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gogol and Pushkin. I constantly read and reread Dostoyevsky with great excitement. I think that he managed to illustrate the darkest side of the human being but in spite of this fact the reader finds Dostoevsky as the most pure and warm-hearted author»<sup>1</sup>. All Andahazi's novels are considered to be one huge text united by the discovery of something new, pierced by anxiety, which accompanies every new revelation. Every new novel is written in a very creative way and the reader must not feel that he has met that idea in the previous book. Each book has to set new issues and questions with no definite answers and that is not because the answers are vague, it is because the world we live in cannot be defined in one specific way.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.litblog.ru/konkistador/>

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