

THE GERMAN INTERCULTURAL NOVEL OF THE 21ST CENTURY. «THE GREAT HOMECOMING» BY ANNA KIM

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INTRODUCTION

From a periphery to the centre: ascension of immigrants' fiction to the intercultural German literature

In the last thirty years of the 20th century there occurred a gradual change in the face of German national literature due to the migrant-writers' literary contributions. Their literature emerged on the crest of great migratory processes – the tides of guest-workers from Mediterranean areas in 1950s –1960s as well as political asylum seekers from Eastern Europe (since 1968), Latin America (since 1973), Libia, Iran and Syria (1970s), South and Eastern Europe (late 1980s)¹. The works of the writers having a migratory past were initially treated as a peripheral phenomenon and in 1980s they were collectively given the names – *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (“guest workers’ literature”) and *Migrantenliteratur* (“migrants’ literature”) which rather pointed at the authors’ social and legal status, while often disregarded the literary formal aesthetic criteria and merits. According to M. Durzak, these writings embraced the texts expressing the new settlers’ moods, speaking about hardships of work and assimilation in Germany, and mostly addressed readers who found themselves in a similar situation².

Since late 1990s the migrant writers’ literature which had occupied a peripheral position in 1970s – 1980s was receiving recognition of a wider readers’ audience and finally became a weighty segment of the literary process. M. Durzak points out that it obtained its “independent voice having its own aesthetic coloring which essentially enriched the chorus of modern writers with a new expressive shade”³. Several factors helped effect this, among which were growing volume of literary products,

¹ Chiellino C. Einleitung. Die Literatur des Konsens und der Autonomie – Für eine Topographie der Stimmen. *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch*. Weimar, 2007. S. 51.

² Durzak M. Die Erzählprosa der neunziger Jahre. *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*. München, 2006. S. 998.

³ Ebd. S. 998.

broadening writers' circle as the migrants' second and third generations were coming into play, as well as attention and support of cultural foundations and institutes (in particular, the Goethe Institute) and literary prizes. The Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, which since 1985 has been an annual award for those who write in German as a foreign language, has attained a position of especial prominence. Among its laureates were Natascha Wodin, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Feridun Zaimoğlu, Saša Stanišić, Terézia Mora, Marjana Gaponenko. Moreover, the recent trends have shown that the most prestigious literary prizes (including the German ones) are more often awarded writers with a foreign cultural background. Thus, the 2009 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded Herta Miller, a German-Romanian woman-writer. *The Leipzig Book Fair Prize winners were Terézia Mora (2005), Saša Stanišić (2014), Natascha Wodin (2017), the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize was awarded Ukrainian women-writers Tanja Maljartschuk (2018) and Katja Petrowskaja (2013), a Russian Olga Martynova (2011).*

The social and demographic situation has proved that the literature created by authors with a foreign cultural background is both timely and to the point. The present-day Germany is “an emigrant community with a growing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity”⁴. The early 21st century saw more powerful globalizing processes, growing numbers of migrants and refugees from Middle East and North Africa. According to the data provided by the Federal Agency for Political Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*), every fourth resident of contemporary Germany relates to a group of people having a migrant past. Their number in 2017 was as high as 24% of all German population (19 million out of total 82 million). Consider one more fact – 39% of children up to 5 years of age have a migrant past. This means that a portion of former migrants living in Germany and, generally, in Europe is expected to grow⁵.

The scholars of literature doing research in multicultural texts (I. Amodeo, A. Blioumi, C. Chiellino, M. Durzak, K. Esselborn, H. Schmitz), note both expansion of the body of texts and the number of notions used to identify the literature in question. The following terms can

⁴ Schmitz H. Einleitung. Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration. Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik.* Amsterdam; NY, 2009. S. 7.

⁵ Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund I. In absoluten Zahlen, Anteile an der Gesamtbevölkerung in Prozent, 2017. *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.* 26.09.2018. URL: <https://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61646/migrationshintergrund-i>

be encountered among numerous definitions that have replaced the names *Gastarbeiterliteratur* and *Migrantenliteratur*. They are: the other German literature (*die andere deutsche Literatur*), literature with a migration background (*Literatur mit Migrationshintergrund*) or post-migrant literature (*postmigrantische Literatur*), intercultural literature (*interkulturelle Literatur*), transcultural literature (*transkulturelle Literatur*). In contrast to the former definitions, it is the works' aspects having to do with content and aesthetics that come to the foreground rather than sociocultural or biographical ones. "The literature of migration" had as a determining factor a direct experience of migrating to a different country, whereas "the intercultural literature" is no more concerned with the phenomenon of emigration and more closely conforms to the spirit of the age of globalizing.

C. Chiellino, researcher of literature and poet from among former migrants, is author of a programmed work *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland* (2007) in which he treats this literature as "a product that has become part of the official cultural production" rather than as an artistic product of cultural minority⁶. In his review of contemporary intercultural literature he classifies texts following the principle of the writers' national origin (literatures of Italian, Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish minorities, the literature of Russian Germans and emigrants, of Romanian German-speaking minority, of writers from former Yugoslavia, Brazil, Latin America, Africa, Asia and Arab countries). C. Chiellino's theoretical generalizations regarding intercultural literature appear to be of particular importance.

1. The texts belonging to intercultural literature have common thematic orientation. The scholar defines the main topical scope characteristic of the former migrants' literature in this way: "Confrontation with personal history which has led to emigration, exile, repatriation or travelling to alien countries, acquaintance with foreign culture, society and language; a project of new identity based on parity and shared by both citizens and foreigners; integration in the labor world and daily life of a receiving country/former or new motherland; confrontation with political developments in the country of origin; gender-oriented perception of one's

⁶ Chiellino C. Einleitung. Die Literatur des Konsens und der Autonomie – Für eine Topographie der Stimmen. *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch*. Weimar, 2007. S. 57.

own presence in the system of ethical values with different aims and priorities”⁷.

2. Intercultural literature’s distinctive feature is the invariable availability of the reader it addresses (the texts are written for German-speaking majority) as well as its inherent dialogue form. C. Chiellino points out that in their attraction to the dialogue the writers manifest their desire to constructively participate in building Germany’s future⁸. The authors’ deliberate choice of German in the bilingual/multilingual situation is also noteworthy as their preference of their new motherland’s language is a signal of their readiness for a dialogue.

3. One more distinctive feature of the books written by intercultural authors is their choice of characters with intercultural biographies, who, like the authors themselves, have *plural/hybrid identity*. All identity components coexist simultaneously and in parallel in the intercultural novel in which every *ego* is autonomous, has full value and manifests completion of a definite stage in the character’s intercultural biography. In C. Chiellino’s opinion this handling of the identity problem helps the authors’ to overcome “the so-called alienation of living in a foreign country” and focus the problem “that equivalent cultures are not synchronous”⁹.

4. The next property of intercultural texts, according to Chiellino, is balancing between “consensus and autonomy”. On the one hand, the authors are striving to infiltrate the common literary stream, join time-relevant currents and trends of contemporary literature (*konkrete Poesie, Frauenliteratur*, literature of the 1968 generation), while on the other hand, specific intercultural themes remain prevalent. This makes the given type of literature with its unique attitude to the new language an autonomous part of the literary process.

An important role in developing a new approach to handling intercultural literature was played by the works of I. Amodeo, a researcher of Italian origin (*Die Heimat heißt Babylon*, 1996). Asserting that conventional techniques of literary research which focused aspects of content while ignoring poetics of this literature had been exhausted, she suggested applying G. Deleuze and F. Guattari’s post-structural theory, in particular, the concept of rhizome, to German multicultural literature. She

⁷ Chiellino C. Einleitung. Die Literatur des Konsens und der Autonomie – Für eine Topographie der Stimmen. *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch*. Weimar, 2007. S. 58.

⁸ Ebd. S. 59.

⁹ Ebd. S. 61

mainly concentrated on aesthetic features common for “heterogeneous marginal literature abroad” (*heterogene Randliteratur in der Fremde*)¹⁰. Referring to the writings of French scholars, I. Amodeo introduced the concept of root-rhizome as “a non-centred, non-hierarchical system“ with its characteristic “diverse and variable cohesions and ties“¹¹. She thinks that transferring this model to literature will enable adequately describing the dynamic and non-uniform phenomenon – the literature created by foreign writers¹². From I. Amodeo’s point of view, “rhizomatic aesthetics“ realizes itself in intercultural texts as:

1) *Redeviefalt*: an immanent *diversity of languages* which can reveal itself in a text both explicitly (if, for example, several languages or dialects are present there) and implicitly, that is, the text starts a dialogue with another language (see Bakhtin’s dialogue form principle).

2) *Befremdung* – “a specific rhizomatic semantic blending“ revealed on the level of a text’s content-relevant and motivating structure as overlaying and crossing of “the native“ and “the alien“.

3) Stylistic syncretism (Renate Lachmann)¹³.

In general, rhizomatic aesthetics of the intercultural literature is a result of the encounter of cultures, interweaving and mixing of different cultural traditions and abandoning “the native versus the alien” opposition. The following features may be attributed as its major artistic peculiarities: heterogeneity, dynamism, diversity of languages, style syncretism (in accordance with G. Deleuze and F. Guattari’s *rhizomatic model*)¹⁴.

1. Anna Kim as a representative of German-Korean literature

Writers from Asian countries represent the most heterogeneous literary group among various affiliations of intercultural literature. U. Reeg, author of the review chapter “Writers of Asian Cultural Region” in the above-mentioned book *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland* puts together writers from India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, China, Japan, Korea and

¹⁰ Amodeo I. *Die Heimat heißt Babylon. Zur Literatur ausländischer Autoren in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Opladen, 1996. S. 201.

¹¹ Ebd. S. 108.

¹² Amodeo I. *Betroffenheit und Rhizom, Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft. Migrationsliteratur. Eine neue deutsche Literatur?* Berlin : Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2009. S. 7–8.

¹³ Amodeo I. *Die Heimat heißt Babylon. Zur Literatur ausländischer Autoren in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Opladen, 1996. S. 204.

¹⁴ Esselborn K. *Deutschsprachige Minderheitenliteraturen als Gegenstand einer kulturwissenschaftlich orientierten „interkulturellen Literaturwissenschaft“*. *Die andere deutsche Literatur. Istanbul Vorträge*. Würzburg, 2004. S. 21–22.

Mongolia. Admitting that the essential characteristic of this group of writers is very heterogeneous and the ensuing text genre and theme diversity is all-embracing, she finds, nevertheless, some contiguous points in the common stream of German-Asian literature. U. Reeg notes that, first, in contrast to, for instance, people from Iran and Iraq, most writers from this group emigrated to Europe not because of political repressions but for reasons of personal interest as, for example, passion for the German language, literature, getting a job and desire to be more closely acquainted with the European country. Second, a number of general “acute problems” may come to the foreground which characterizes the German language literature created by the authors of Asian origin. Here belong: a) confrontation with the new social environment and the German language; b) cultural transformations conditioned by the historical changes in the country of origin; c) women’s identity and role¹⁵.

These observations and conclusions are very timely and appropriate today and they are also relevant in respect of Anna Kim, German-Korean writer. She was born in Daejeon, South Korea in 1977. Her family moved to Germany in 1979 and then to Vienna where she has been living since 1984. Kim’s parents emigrated to Europe not for political reasons but due to their professional interests – her father had been studying “Western art” and her mother – German philology. The writer admits, however, that Park Chung-hee’s regime strengthened their intention to leave South Korea. Like many emigrants’ children, Kim seldom visited her motherland where she came first when she was 11. The second “coming back” took place when she was working on her novel *The Great Homecoming*. Anna studied philosophy and theatre art in Vienna, had practical training in London and Oxford. Since 1999 her short stories and poems have been published in *manuskripte*, *zwischenzeit* and *VOLLTEXT* magazines. Kim is well known as the author of short story *Die Bilderspur* (2004), novels *Die Gefrorene Zeit* (*The Frozen Time*, 2008), *Anatomie einer Nacht* (*The Anatomy of a Night*, 2012), *Die Grosse Heimkehr* (*The Great Homecoming*, 2018). Her art has been distinguished with prestigious awards in literature; she was awarded the Literary Prize of the European Union in 2012.

The Object of our research in the present article is poetics of Kim’s intercultural novel *The Great Homecoming*. **The aim of the paper** is to analyze the novel’s cross-cultural “rhizomatic” aesthetics on the novel’s plot-content, genre, composition and stylistic levels. We assume that the

¹⁵ Reeg U. Autor/innen aus dem asiatischen Kulturraum. *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch*. Weimar, 2007. S. 263.

novel can be attributed as a new type of the multicultural novel, the pattern of a multi-level artistic synthesis. It can combine several genres of mass literature (that makes the text fascinating and highly readable), while the major feature of such a novel is that it must necessarily have context exotic for the European reader. The migrants' traditional themes (search of identity, family and motherland, integration in a new cultural environment, return to the land of ancestors) recede here to the background, acting as an external rather than internal motivating force of the hero's behavior. Attaining actual and full identity as the basic motivation of a hero who lost his *ego* gives way to an identity game, a bold identity search staging. In full correspondence with the post-modernist author's intention to destroy ideologies and imperatives, there occurs deconstruction of all modern concepts exploited in politics (motherland, history, identity).

It should be also noted that with the exception of a few reviews the novel *The Great Homecoming* has not yet been the object of scholarly literary study and, furthermore, considering that Kim's literary work has been insufficiently examined on the whole, whereas the vector of intercultural research in contemporary literature in the German language is felt to be more and more time-relevant, we hope that the given research may be found timely and necessary.

The art of every intercultural author is the point of cross-breeding and synthesis of diverse national and ethnic cultural trends. Anna Kim, representing a new multicultural writers' generation, identifies herself as an Austrian woman-writer firmly rooted in the German language cultural background. Nevertheless, the Asian name and appearance shape in her readers a complex of quite specific notions. I. Mangold has so described this "horizon of expectations": "She has a Korean surname and looks Korean, and her new novel's title is *The Great Homecoming*. These three facts are enough to form an idea about Anna Kim's book before you have read the first page: "Why, this is a novel with a migration setting! The German writer seems to be returning to her ancestors' country!" These German readers' "receptive reflexes", here somewhat simplified, "not that they are basically wrong, they are simply very approximate as they shield the main thing"¹⁶. Her observation confirms the following: the readers of today have steady stereotypes about intercultural literature. Their biased attitude to literature "of the authors, who are not only German", predetermines their perception of the texts and affects the work of writers

¹⁶ Mangold I. Alles Spione. Die österreichische Autorin Anna Kim hat einen raffinierten historischen Roman über den Kalten Krieg in Korea geschrieben: "Die große Heimkehr". *ZEIT online*. 30.03.2017. URL: <https://www.zeit.de/2017/12/anna-kim-die-grosse-heimkehr-roman>

who comply with the readers' response and strive to meet their expectations.

Looking at Anna Kim's novel from the viewpoint of readers' expectations, one can assume that *The Great Homecoming* has succeeded as a specimen of post-modernist "double coding". When the novel was published, the reviewers unanimously appreciated the book's main merits – its synthesis of historical, political, love and spy novel traits. Its plot was based on a very confusing story of relations between Yunho, his friend Johnny and Eve Moon with whom they were in love, which were advancing in a very exotic historical setting. The events were taking place in the period of Korea's division after the WWII, Cold War and the beginnings of Kim Il Sung's dictatorship. The writer preserved the elements essential for a multicultural novel (a cross-cultural heroine, motives of searching for a motherland and restoring family ties), however, she put them outside the basic narration. The major theme of the novel is the choice a man has to make between opportunism, political mimicry and preserving one's genuine personality in the situation of permanent instability and chaos. The author puts forth in the foreground an implicit existential and philosophical sense.

The novel's title is poly-semantic and can be interpreted on the "double coding" principle. On the one hand, the story revolves around Hanna, a story-teller, who came to Korea to find her parents, and her return to her motherland. On the other hand, the matter is Anna Kim's addressing the Korean subject. The third point is that the title refers the reader to the historical fact, known in Korea as "the great homecoming"¹⁷. A big campaign started in 1959 demanding that Koreans living on the territory of Japan should be returned to North Korea. A historian E.V. Kim writes that the repatriation project was a well-planned propaganda campaign conducted under the conditions of ideological opposition between North Korea and South Korea¹⁸. Though most Koreans living in Japan had come

¹⁷ Korea was annexed by Japan from 1910 to 1945 as a result of which Korean population was mobilized for labor service in Japan. After 1945 only some portion of Koreans returned to their motherland. The post-war hardships, division of Korea along the 38th parallel and Korean war (1950-1953) were the reasons why Koreans were reluctant to return. By 1945 there stayed more than 2 mln of Koreans in Japan. Most of them returned, however, about 600 thousand decided to stay because political and social situation had become worse. Most of them were from the South but they sympathized with North Korea where since 1955 there had operated "League of Korean citizens living in Japan" which demanded repatriation.

¹⁸ Ким Е. В. К вопросу о возвращении граждан на корейский полуостров: два пути репатриации. *Корё сарам*. 23.03.2016. URL: http://koryosaram.blogspot.com/2013/03/blog-post_23.html

from the South, they sympathized with North Korea which promised them jobs, shelter and free education. The repatriation project started in 1959 aided by the Red Cross organization and with participation of Soviet ships. For the novel's heroes "the great homecoming" became fateful – Yunho, Johnny and Eve met at this culmination point, and after that they would lose each other forever.

2. *The Great Homecoming*: novel's plot and composition

The novel's events are evolving in two temporal planes – at present (modern Seoul in 2000s) and in the past (Korea and Japan in 1950s – 1960s). The first temporal plane correlates with the story of Hanna, a young girl adopted by a German couple, who came to Seoul to find her parents. This line of the plot serves as a unique framing for the main part of narration – a retrospective monologue of the aged Yunho recalling his youth's events. The heroes' acquaintance in Seoul serves as the intrigue uniting both lines of the plot. Yunho turned to an interpreter with a request to translate a letter he had received from America. It contained information that a certain Mrs. Eve Lewes had died in a nursing home for the aged. As the woman had no relatives, the notice had been sent to the only address found in her belongings. By Yunho's emotions Hanna guessed that there had been some ties between 78-year-old Yunho and Eve. Her question "Who is Eve Moon?" activates his memory and involves the old man in a long process of recollections. His narrative about the friendship with Eve and Johnny stretches for several days and acquires the form of a panoramic life story, beginning with childhood spent in Nonsan, and ending with his expatriation from Japan to Korea. Hanna is an ideal listener to the story of Yunho, an archivist in Seoul, whose story is, on the one hand, balancing between deeply personal narrative confessions with the elements of self-analysis and, on the other hand, an attempt to objectively reflect and understand the reality, the laws of its historical development. The chapters developing the main plot lines are interrupted with essayistic ones making rather extensive digressions into Korean history.

Besides the frame-type composition of the novel, a fortunate technique for uniting different narrative perspectives (the present – the past, Europe – Asia, youth – the experience of aging), and the original architectonics of the novel is worth mentioning. The novel is divided into two parts having equal volumes. In the first part ("Seoul, 1959") all events take place in South Korea. The second part ("Osaka, 1960") transfers the place of action to Japan, the city of Osaka where existed a large community of Korean communist emigrants. In our opinion, this symmetry in dividing the text

into two equal parts reflects symbolically the "unnatural" Korea's division along the 38th parallel.

All characters of the novel, their lives and destinies are involved in the storms of historical and political events – the post-war break-up of the country, ideological opposition between North Korea headed by Kim Il Sung and South Korea headed by President Syngman Rhee and fights of underground criminal groups. Yunho and Johnny, friends from childhood, were born and grew in Nonsan. Yunho's brother, Yunsu, was involved in activities of North Korean guerilla detachments responsible for disorders in South Korea. When he was arrested, Yunho was suspected of collusion with the communists and declared a traitor. As a result, he had to escape to Seoul to save himself from accusations. In Seoul he met Johnny and his girl Eve Moon and they became friends again. Johnny was mixed up in activities of an ultra-rightist organization "The North-Western Youth" supporting the president Syngman Rhee.

Once when they participated in a demonstration and it was being dispersed, Johnny committed murder and the friends had to flee. By ship they arrived in Osaka. Here in a Korean "ghetto", sheltering Zainichi Koreans, every home paraded Kim Il Sung's portraits and North Korean flags. They made themselves pass for political refugees, "two brothers and a sister", evading Syngman Rhee's repressions. As such, they rented a room in Tetsuya Yamamoto's house. At that time the start of "the great homecoming" campaign was announced. It so happened that the house-owner's daughter, who had been determined to return to Korea, mysteriously disappeared, and fearing that the blame for her disappearance might be put on Johnny, the friends took advantage of the announced "homecoming" campaign and planned one more escape. Johnny sailed to North Korea, Eve abandoned her friends and secretly went to America, and Yunho returned to South Korea. Fifteen years had passed before Yunho by chance met Eve and her American husband in Seoul. Eve asked for his address which she had kept until she died.

The novel's system of characters reflects the period of complicated political struggle in which the decisive factors were loyalty and the skill of compromise. Yunho, a weak and apolitical man, is attached a label of being "left". On the whole his sympathies were really more on the side of communists, so that he entered their underground organization. Johnny was rather on the side of the extreme right. He participates in a radical criminal band which did "dirty work" for President Syngman Rhee.

Eve Moon, a Korean dancer, looking like an American girl, turned out to be working as an intelligence agent for South Korean national security service. She was appointed to be close to Johnny as a source of information

about “North-Western Youth” activities. Johnny was aware of her “assignment” but as he badly needed money he agreed for a “double play”. Eve manoeuvres between the two camps, making use of her “lovers”. Exploiting her power over Johnny, she talked him into killing Jinman who had learnt about her spying and wanted to blackmail her. When she and Yunho had become more intimate, she decided to make him her informer as well (Yunho evoked interest as “one of the working class”). Unsuspecting Yunho, gave out to her a certain Sangok, his brother’s friend, who was of no threat to South Korea but was nevertheless arrested as being potentially dangerous “red”.

In fact, the novel’s temporal frames are quite wide and embrace the whole Korean history throughout the 20th century beginning with Korea’s liberation from Japanese rule (1905–1945), Korea’s separation in 1945, Korean war in 1950–1955 and ending with the postwar consequences of South Korea-to-North Korea opposition. Numerous pseudo-documentary digressions and historical references are available in the text.

Nonetheless, the novel *The Great Homecoming* cannot be taken for a historical novel. Commenting on this, the author points at shortage of archival materials and absence of access to documents: “Many sources were inaccessible, the archives were closed for a long time. Taking into account the lack of objective sources and incredible amount of propaganda, only an imaginative work could be written¹⁹. The basic reliable sources for Ann Kim were: 1) photo archives; 2) talks with relatives; 3) Korean movies of the 50s in which behind the pretty westernized scenes one could see the streets devastated by the war. One researcher’s opinion is that Kim’s novel is not a historical narration but a combination of “historical facts, recollections and different interpretations of what was seen and heard”. He thinks that the main task of the author was to show “how incomplete was a detailed study of the Korean war and how it reverberates in the present”. In appraising the past history “there are too many *ifs*, unanswered questions and representations of the events which could have happened so or somewhat differently”²⁰.

It is interesting that the Austrian (according to Wikipedia) writer A. Kim turned to the Korean theme in the novel *The Great Homecoming*

¹⁹ Leitner J. Anna Kim im Interview: “Ich schreibe im Jetzt“. *Tiroler Tageszeitung*. 24.04.2017. URL: <https://www.tt.com/kultur/literatur/12902919/anna-kim-im-interview-ich-schreibe-im-jetzt>

²⁰ Kountouroyanis K. Als die Vergangenheit in die Gegenwart eintrat... Rezension zu Anna Kims Roman: “Die große Heimkehr“. *Theater und DaF-Unterricht*. 2017. Nr. 44. DaF-Szene Korea. Berlin & Seoul. S. 44.

for the first time. Before that, other “alien” territories had been the places of action in her books – Kosovo and the former Yugoslavia (*Die gefrorene Zeit*) and Greenland (*Anatomie einer Nacht*). Her interest in Korea and in the past experiences of her family on the whole emerged when she became interested in politics: “Korea interested me still more than the family circumstances for political reasons. Cold war had always been fascinating for me. It is not surprising that I was greatly impressed by Hungarian refugees on the other side of the Iron Curtain”.

This or similar approach, it seems, distinguishes multicultural writers of the new generation from their predecessors. Addressing the past of their own country is dictated by the desire to understand the contemporary problems rather than by the sorrow of the irreplaceable loss of their motherland. A. Kim named the idea of urgency (*Dringlichkeit*) the motive force of her creative process. In her opinion, there is a multitude of problems one should write about now, urgently and without delay. She considers that the main problem is that of relationship between an individual and the world of politics, the effect of global geopolitical decisions upon the life of every human being. She is convinced that “What is happening on the other side of the world is always inseparable from what is happening directly before us²¹”.

3. The narrative structure

There are two narrative instances in the novel (Hanna and Yunho) conducting a dialogue with each other. Hanna, representing the author, speaking with the author’s voice in the novel’s compositional frame, is a heroine evidently possessing autobiographical traits, that is also proved by similar names (Hanna – Ann). Both literary personages (Yunho and Hanna) represent the type of personal narrator-story-teller, i.e. they act at the same time as participants of the events described. Between these narrators’ positions there is a great distance (in gender, age, mentality and nationality). Hanna is a young European, fluent in three languages. A 78-year old Yunho is a Korean, who lives as a recluse, and yet, despite the obvious differences, there is something that brings them together: inner loneliness, the feeling of being deprived of any ties and home as well as having a psychic wound: Hanna had been deserted by her parents, and Yunho betrayed by a dear person. Each of them needs the other in his or her own way so as to fill in their soul’s emptiness and find spiritual balance. Yunho, revealing his secret to Hanna, restores his bonds with the

²¹ Leitner J. Anna Kim im Interview: “Ich schreibe im Jetzt“. *Tiroler Tageszeitung*. 24.04.2017. URL: <https://www.tt.com/kultur/literatur/12902919/anna-kim-im-interview-ich-schreibe-im-jetzt>

present, and Hanna, in her turn, listening to Yunho's confessions, recovers the lost part of her identity.

Hanna's image in more respects than one corresponds to the concept of a typical character of hybrid identity found in multicultural novels. The profession she works in emphasizes the cross-cultural nature of her image. She is a translator, interpreter, an intermediary between languages and cultures. Hanna's appearance confuses Yunho who expected to see a German girl. "You look like a Korean...You are not like a German at all", – declares he seeing her for the first time. "I am both", – explains Hanna. In reality, she was brought up far from her native culture and language. Thanks to her nanny she learnt Korean, but though Junho identifies her as "one of his people", he notices at once that her speaking Korean is "artificial" and "has a Japanese accent".

The main function of Hanna as a participant in the dialogue is to listen to Yunho, to make him speak. She is a neutral, unengaged figure free from any biased ideas about her own country's history. Thanks to her hybrid identity (a German with Korean looks), the aged story-teller perceives her both as one of his people and a foreigner. After several prolonged talks they had for a few days, Hanna finally understands, why he confided his secret to her and nobody else. "Nun verstand ich, warum er mir die Wahrheit über Eve erzählt hatte: gerade weil wir einander nicht wiedersehen würden. Bei einer Fremden wie mir die Beichte abzulegen, war ungefährlich, denn mir war die Grammatik dieser Gesellschaft unbekannt. Ich kannte sie zu wenig, wusste nicht genug, um den Sünder zu bestrafen, ich war nicht einmal fähig, das wahre Ausmaß der Verbrechen abzuschätzen, in die Johny, Eve und Yunho verwickelt gewesen waren"²².

Hanna's personal motives, Yunho's voluntary listener, are not made distinct enough in the novel. It is obvious that her desire to understand why her mother left her child is what internally motivates her, and though Yunho's story does not have anything to do with her family's goings-on, Hanna feels to have indirectly become part of her ancestors' country history through Yunho's narrative, and she undergoes what I. Mangold calls "existential initiation". This is how A. Kim managed to show that her heroes' destinies are parallel and common. Finally, it occurs to Hanna that history is ambivalent and relative. She will never learn the reason why her mother dropped her, however she will never accuse her.

Both heroes are at one in their feeling of being homeless and deprived of motherland (*Heimatlosigkeit*). Yunho, for one, had never felt at home in South Korea: he was always reminded that he was a communist and was

²² Kim A. Die grosse Heimkehr [Roman]. Berlin, 2018. S. 538–539.

“on the wrong side”. Hanna feels she is a person occupying an intermediate position between the two identities. In Germany she has never been accepted as a German but South Korea has not become a home for her. Having come to Seoul, she concluded that she was not disappointed with South Korea, but rather with her not being able to feel it was her motherland: “Nein, antwortete ich, nicht enttäuscht vom Land Südkorea, jedoch enttäuscht davon, dass es sich nicht wie Heimat anfühlte”²³. A. Kim intended to demythologize the notion of Motherland exploited in politics. Her heroes perceive motherland not as a geographical space but as a place of an individual significance. Hanna says: “Ich glaube nicht an Heimat. Das heisst, ich glaube nicht an den *Ort* Heimat. [...] Ich glaube, dass es Orte gibt, die man liebt. Ich glaube sogar, dass es Orte gibt, in denen sich die Seele zu Hause fühlt, Seelenlandschaften”²⁴.

Two strategies overlay, and run in parallel to each other. Epical, detailed description of the events is accompanied with lyric rendering of the hero’s feelings and sufferings. The space in which converse the main characters resembles a cave “filled with noises and sounds” and piled up with books and vinyl disks²⁵. This is a space for memories, a place where past and present cross, where real-time laws are not in effect. People and objects lose their shape, Yunho’s figure becomes dematerialized and to Hanna he does not look a living human being, but a photo, a picture woven of light and shade inside which there sounds a voice: “Mit der Zeit meinte ich keinen Menschen vor mir zu haben, sondern eine Fotografie, ein Bild aus Licht und Schatten, in dem eine Stimme lebte, und etwas Rauch [...]”²⁶.

In the memory space, chronology loses its regularity. All clocks in Yunho’s flat indicate different time: “die Kuckucksuhr an der Wand schneller war als der Wecker auf der Anrichte und dieser flinker als die Standuhr mit dem tiefen Gong”²⁷. Music creates a special lyric setting in the novel, it carries the hero to the past and evokes nostalgia. The song “Blue Moon” performed by a woman jazz singer Billy Holliday becomes the main tune, leit-motif accompanying their meetings: “Blue Moon, sang Billy Holliday; tatsächlich befanden wir uns auf einem blauen Mond, zwischen uns eine Stehlampe, deren Schein die niedrigen Tische und Kissen, die über dem Holzboden verstreut waren, sowie den gläsernen

²³ Kim A. Die grosse Heimkehr [Roman]. Berlin, 2018. S. 280.

²⁴ Ebd. S. 281.

²⁵ Ebd. S. 14.

²⁶ Ebd. S.21.

²⁷ Ebd. S.24.

Aschenbecher mit einem bläulichen Schimmer überzog, sogar den Qualm blau einfärbte, der der Zigarette entwich [...]”²⁸.

Combining two lines of the plot enables the heroes to move from the past to the present, from the real time dimension to the subjectively experienced time span of their memories. When this happens, the past does always dominate the present. In Yunho’s story it revives and becomes “more present than reality”. Becoming immersed in his stories, Hanna gets more and more alienated from reality, feels outside the real life, not part of it (“Ich bewegte mich durch die Stadt wie hinter Glas”)²⁹. The past, forgotten or pushed out the memory while processing the wound, masters the present: “[...] es waren die Stunden, in denen Yunho von der Vergangenheit sprach, die sich gegenwärtiger anfühlten als die Gegenwart, und es war die Gegenwart, die meinen Empfindungen nach vergangen war – vergangen, noch ehe sie angefangen hatte”³⁰.

4. Identity and the problem of its political instrumentalization

The instrumentalization of identity is one of the most significant themes of the novel, that is, the use by a person of his or her political or social identity to achieve some particular goals. Eve Moon’s image is of special interest from this point of view. If Hanna owes her hybrid identity to not being accepted by either Germans or Koreans as “one of them”, Eve changes her identity always to remain on the strong side: “Ich bin auf der Seite der Starken, der schon immer stark Gewesenen und der stark Bleibenden”³¹. She had several names – two American ones, one Korean and one Japanese: “Sie war Mrs Henry Lewis, Eve Lewis. Sie war allerdings auch Eve Moon, Yunmee Moon und Mizuki Takahashi”³². She easily adapted to any new political situation, changed her roles, appearance, the way she behaved. In one of her interviews A. Kim said that her heroine did not correspond to the Asian idea of a woman. She is strong, active, and in contrast to many she does not take a passive victim’s way but a way of a person who feels to be “master of his or her own destiny”. When Americans “marched through her country”³³, she changed her appearance to suit their beauty ideal, smoked “Lucky Strike”, curled locks in her hair dyed blond, put red lipstick on her lips and powder on her face. As a result her face began to look like “a frozen mask”, and became an

²⁸ Kim A. Die grosse Heimkehr [Roman]. Berlin, 2018. S. 21.

²⁹ Ebd. S. 292.

³⁰ Ebd. S. 293.

³¹ Ebd. 182.

³² Ebd. S. 24.

³³ Kim A. Die grosse Heimkehr [Roman]. Berlin, 2018. S. 47.

embodiment of the Koreans' stereotype of American women. It was this sexually appealing "Americanized Korean girl" that Johnny and Yunho fell in love with. They overlooked her working in brothels for American soldiers – the so-called Dancing Schools, in which Korean girls were also taught how to dance, dress and speak "in the Western way". Here they believed in "the fairy-tale" about an orphan-girl from good family who once had fallen in love with an American soldier. That Eve had in fact been a spy, Yunho learnt much later: "Später lernte ich zwischen der echten und der unechten Eve zu unterscheiden, viel später, als Johny bereits auf dem Weg nach Nordkorea war..."³⁴.

In Japan where the heroes had "to lie low" for the sake of their safety, Eve changes again – this time she posed as a Korean, sister of Johnny and Yunho. She behaves as a typical Korean – a quiet, plain Korean servant girl having no striking features: "Eve, die wie eine Königin durch Seouls Straßen geschritten war, benahm sich in Osaka wie eine Dienerin. Sie sah niemandem ins Gesicht, achtete darauf, ihre Augen gesenkt zu halten, und wenn sie Japanisch sprach, klang sie wie ein Kind"³⁵. Even Johnny who had been "a rebel and a mutineer" had to make his identity more pliable, he learnt not to stick out, to change his position, speak about Kim Il Sung with respect and behave "immaculately". The only one who did not have a chance to play strange roles was Yunho having no skills of a liar. Eve remarked about him: "Ein Hase benötigt kein Hasenkostüm" ("A rabbit does not need a rabbit's suit")³⁶.

Talking about the past was for Yunho an attempt to realize his life experiences and understand what Eve Moon had been guided by, when she deceived her friends. He is trying to find out why lies and hypocrisy became for her more important than truth, reality and sincere feelings, and generally, if she had any feelings at all – or it was one overall instinct – the instinct of survival³⁷. As a result, he acknowledges her right for making a choice – the choice "to be on the strong side, on the side of those who have always been and remained strong". Everything she was saying about patriotism had in fact nothing in common with patriotism ("Eve war so wenig Patriotin wie ich Buddhist bin. Sie hatte lediglich eine Nische gefunden, in der sie leben konnte, wie es ihren Vorstellungen am nächsten kam. Sie hatte ein sehr genaues Bild davon, wie die Welt funktionierte, mit den realen Gegebenheiten gab sie sich nicht ab, den diese waren komplex,

³⁴ Ebd. S. 28.

³⁵ Ebd. S. 348.

³⁶ Ebd. S. 349.

³⁷ Kim A. Die grosse Heimkehr [Roman]. Berlin, 2018. S. 530.

ambivalent, verwirrend”³⁸. The motto the multi-faced Eve-Yunmi has, sounds like this: we don’t choose the authorities, our survival depends on how convincing our loyalty is (“wir werden von den Regierenden übernommen, wir können sie uns nicht aussuchen. Und unser Überleben hängt davon ab, wie überzeugend unsere Loyalität ist”)³⁹. This emphasizes relativity of historical truth and that all estimates are unreliable and ambiguous. A. Kim demonstrates that in any unstable time when authorities and country frontiers change often, individual identity is hard to keep. Striving to survive, one has to hide his or her real *ego* behind numerous masks and roles.

CONCLUSIONS

Our observations may be generalized in the following conclusions:

1. The intercultural novel of the 21st century ceases to remain a peripheral genre as the idea of a nucleus and a centre in literature becomes diffused and displaced. The intercultural literature asserts itself in a similar situation as an important and competitive segment of the contemporary literary process. *The Great Homecoming* by A. Kim is a model of main stream genre forms in a post-modernist synthesis (spy, love and historical novels), retaining exotic elements characteristic of intercultural literature (place of action, historical political figures, heroes’ names and Korean idioms).

2. The author of the new intercultural novel does not position him– or herself as a writer belonging to the intercultural borderline area and working on the crossroad of the two worlds. On the contrary, he or she becomes identified as belonging to representatives of the literature in the German language, well discerning readers’ preferences and using the hybrid identity as an advantage.

3. In the emigrants’ novel of the 1980s the author perceives the “alien” German culture through a prism of his or her “own” native one, whereas in the new intercultural novel there takes place acquaintance with the country of the author’s ethnic origin through a prism of the German culture which is already perceived as a native one. Thus, Hanna arrives in Korea with a set of European values and convictions, but after she meets Yunho, she learns to be more loyal.

4. The intercultural novel is an example of crossbreeding different cultural traditions, of synthesis and dialogue between cultures. This idea is artistically realized in the novel being reflected in its genre form, its peculiar intercultural subject matter and problems touched upon, its

³⁸ Ebd. S. 529.

³⁹ Ebd. S. 182.

compositional and narrative features as well as its system of heroes and the choice of a hero with a flexible identity.

5. The heroes' interest in family history, their motherland's past emerges in the new novels not as a result of the heroes' becoming aware that they lost their identity. Addressing the past ensues solely from the necessity to solve the problems of the present.

SUMMARY

The article deals with the poetics of the modern intercultural novel *The Great Homecoming* by the Austrian writer Anna Kim. The paper examines the novel's cross-cultural "rhizomatic" aesthetics on the novel's plot and storyline, genre, composition and stylistic levels. It is shown that the novel can be viewed as a new type of the multicultural novel, as an example of a multi-level artistic synthesis. It combines several genres of popular fiction (that makes the text entertaining and "readable") and provides the exotic Asian context for the European reader. The migrants' traditional themes (search of identity, family and motherland, integration in a new cultural environment, return to the land of ancestors) recede here to the background. In full correspondence with the post-modernist author's intention to destroy ideologies and imperatives, there occurs deconstruction of all modern concepts exploited in politics (motherland, history, identity). The writer preserved the elements essential for a multicultural novel (a cross-cultural heroine, motives of searching for a motherland and restoring family ties), however, the major theme of the novel is the choice a man has to make between opportunism, political mimicry and preserving one's genuine personality in the situation of permanent instability and chaos.

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