

THE AESTHETICS AND IDEOLOGY OF THE IMAGE OF THE MOON IN SAMANTHA HARVEY'S ORBITAL: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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The article examines the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of the image of the Moon in the novel *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey. As the literary merits of the novel were acknowledged, its political aspects did not pass unnoticed, with the book's reception being significantly different in the Anglophone and Ukrainian reading circles. This study employs the methodology of critical stylistics, developed by Lesley Jeffries, to examine the poetics and politics of the Moon in the *Orbital*. In particular, the analysis is directed towards disclosing how such textual-conceptual functions as naming and describing, representing actions/events/states, equating and contrasting, negating, and presenting others' speech and thoughts are used in the novel to both create an aesthetically appealing image of the Moon and represent particular ideologies connected with the Moon, whether placing them into a critical perspective or not. The analysis revealed that the aesthetic dimension of the image of the Moon in *Orbital* includes several perspectives from which the Moon is described as looked at from the space and from the Earth, the latter consisting of the "earthed" and the "sky-bound" points of view. The aesthetic representation of the Moon is harmonised with the description of the people's attitudes to it, as a more contemplative approach correlates with the image of the Moon as unthreatening and a more proactive approach is reciprocated with a more active role of the Moon. The ideological dimension of the image of the Moon in the novel comprises two different ideologies: Russian expansionism and space ambitions and aspirations for exploration with the aim of gaining new knowledge and achieving accomplishments. The article concludes by applying Uilleam Blacker's appeal to approach literature in full awareness and acceptance of the responsibility of reading to interpreting *Orbital* and thus calls for not shying away from questioning the problematic ideology represented in the novel.

ЕСТЕТИЧНІ Й ІДЕОЛОГІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ОБРАЗУ МІСЯЦЯ В РОМАНІ САМАНТИ ГАРВІ «ОРБІТА»: СТИЛІСТИЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ

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Ключові слова: критична стилістика, текстуально-концептуальні функції, роман, ідеологія, поетика, політика, художній образ, персонаж.

Статтю присвячено аналізу естетичних та ідеологічних аспектів образу Місяця в романі Саманти Гарві «Орбіта». Роман здобув визнання своїх літературних достоїнств, і водночас став об'єктом обговорення стосовно своїх політичних аспектів. При цьому сприйняття книги в англomовних та українських читацьких колах мало суттєві відмінності. У розвідці застосовано методологію критичної стилістики, розроблену Леслі Джефферіс, для аналізу поетичних та політичних вимірів образу Місяця в романі «Орбіта». Аналіз спрямовано на виявлення того, як такі текстуально-концептуальні функції, як найменування та опис, репрезентація дій/подій/станів, прирівнювання та протиставлення, заперечення, а також репрезентація висловлювань та думок інших, використовуються в романі для створення естетично привабливого образу Місяця та втілення певних ідеологій, пов'язаних із Місяцем, котрі можуть бути подані в художньому тексті як без критичної перспективи, так і в певній критичній перспективі.

Результати аналізу засвідчують, що естетичний вимір образу Місяця в романі «Орбіта» включає кілька планів, згідно з якими Місяць описується як з космосу, так і з Землі, причому погляд на Місяць із Землі може бути «заземленим» і «зверненням до небес». Естетична репрезентація Місяця гармоніє з описом ставлення людей до нього, оскільки більш споглядальний підхід корелює з образом Місяця як незагрозливого об'єкта, а більш проактивний підхід відповідає активнішій ролі Місяця. Ідеологічний вимір образу Місяця в романі охоплює дві різні ідеології: російський експансіонізм і амбіції підкорення космосу та прагнення до досліджень, набуття нових знань і здійснення здобутків.

Стаття завершується тим, що привертає увагу до актуальності тези Уїллема Блекера щодо необхідності підходити до літератури з повним усвідомленням відповідальності читання і в цьому контексті закликає не відвертатися від проблематичності ідеології, представленої в романі «Орбіта».

Introduction. Samantha Harvey's novel *Orbital* won the Booker prize in 2024 and was shortlisted for the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction the same year. These facts do not only signify that the novel received literary critics' acceptance but also imply that poetic and political aspects of the book could acquire different weight in the eyes of diverse readers. Indeed, the aesthetics of the novel comes stronger in the evaluations of the literary judges. The Chair of the Booker prize judges Edmund de Waal in his statement on the book lauded it for its aesthetic qualities, singling out *"the beauty of sixteen sunrises and sixteen sunsets"* as the key source of inspiration for the novel (Information, 2024), remarking on the *"language of lyricism and acuity"* (Information, 2024), and highlighting the judges' unanimity in recognising the novel's *"beauty and*

ambition" (Information, 2024). De Waal acknowledged that the novel touches on the political topics only in passing while summarising the main activity undertaken by the characters in the novel: *"six astronauts in the International Space Station circle the Earth observing the passages of weather across the fragility of borders and time zones"* (Information, 2024). The judge of the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction Ross Raisin found the narrative in the novel not only *"obliquely political"* but also *"beautifully strange"* (Raisin, 2024). Such greater attention to the aesthetics of the text than to its implicit and explicit political messages is quite characteristic of the book reviews in the Anglophone world, whether sympathetic (e.g., Books on the 7:47, 2025), neutral (e.g., Reynolds, n.d.) or critical (e.g., Writing at Large, n.d.). However, in Ukraine, it is primarily

the novel's political dimension that caught attention of the readers. The Ukrainian literary critic Ganna Uliura offered a harsh criticism of the novel's political messages (2024), and her opinion was quoted at length by Ukrainian media reporting the news about the novel's Booker prize success (BBC News Україна, 2024; Читомо, 2024). In her overview of the readers' negative responses to *Orbital* receiving the Booker prize, Anastasiia Andrushko (Андрушко, 2024) presented a selection of outraged comments of Ukrainian readers who condemned the novel's portrayal of the Russians and an appeal to cooperation with them.

Such a discrepancy between Anglophone critics' focus on the aesthetic evaluation of the novel and Ukrainian readers' concentration on its political interpretation calls for an exploration of the peculiarities of the intertwining of poetics and politics in Harvey's *Orbital*. This study is set to explore this question through the analysis of one of the key images in the novel *Orbital* – the image of the Moon.

Material and methods. Methodologically this study is grounded in critical stylistics (Jeffries, 2014; Jeffries, 2019) as a research approach that brings the stylistic toolkit to the analysis of the ideologies represented in the texts and by the texts. Having developed from critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical stylistics has diverged from CDA's adherence to socialist political standpoint (Jeffries, 2014: 408).

In this study, I follow Paul Simpson's understanding of ideology, developed from a critical linguistic perspective, as "the ways in which what we say and think interacts with the society" (Simpson, 1993 / 2005: 5). For the purposes of this research, I will use the following definition of the term *ideology*: it is "a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it" (Cranston, 2025).

The material of the study is comprised of those extracts from Harvey's *Orbital* that: i) have explicit mentioning of the Moon and ii) provide information necessary for the interpretation of the extracts of the first type.

Since the tools that the critical stylistics employs "can be used for non-critical (i.e. literary or aesthetic) stylistics too" (Jeffries, 2014: 408), this study consistently utilises one set of research instruments. These instruments are Jeffries' "textual-conceptual functions", i.e. linguistic means of "presenting the text world", which can be a fictional world in the case of literature (Jeffries, 2014: 409). From Jeffries' list of the textual-conceptual functions the following proved to be the most useful in the analysis of the aesthetic and ideological aspects of the image of the Moon in *Orbital*: naming and describing (Jeffries, 2014: 413), representing actions/events/states (Jeffries, 2014: 413–414), equating

and contrasting (Jeffries, 2014: 414), negating (Jeffries, 2014: 416), and presenting others' speech and thoughts (Jeffries, 2014: 416–417). To further explore the presentation of the characters' thoughts in the novel, the concept of the free indirect thought as the textual representation of the character's consciousness, an insight into the character's mind (Bray, 2014: 224) was used.

To contextualise the results of the analysis of the *Orbital*'s image of the Moon in the existing critical discourse about this novel, a reader response research in stylistics (Harding, 2014; Whiteley & Canning, 2017) was employed. The published reviews of *Orbital* as texts expressing the critics' responses were analysed with the help of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Results and discussion. In Harvey's novel *Orbital*, the Moon is often mentioned in connection with a particular person who participates in the events that constitute the plot of the story. Thus, it is reasonable to start the analysis with a brief account of the characters of the novel.

Orbital describes 24 hours in the life of the six astronauts orbiting the Earth in the space station. All these astronauts are invented characters and none of them is a description of a real person. These astronauts are as follows: *Chie* – female Japanese, *Shaun* – male American, *Nell* – female English, *Pietro* – male Italian and two male Russians *Roman* and *Anton*. When the characters are introduced in the novel for the first time, they are divided into two categories: international and Russian, e.g.: "[...] *four astronauts (American, Japanese, British, Italian) and two cosmonauts (Russian, Russian) [...]*" (Harvey, 2024: 2). Even though at the first glance such a division might look as being motivated by pure logic and technical accuracy, a consistent text analysis reveals that this classificatory split aligns with the differences in the personal attributes ascribed to astronauts and cosmonauts. The most striking difference between the two groups of characters in the novel comes in their relationships with their family members. On the one hand, the astronauts are portrayed as people involved in loving and caring relationships: *Chie* profoundly grieves the death of her mother who deceased while *Chie* was on her mission (Harvey, 2024: 8, 58), *Shaun* misses his wife a lot (Harvey, 2024: 102, 104), *Nell*, acknowledging that she and her husband are different, respects their difference and makes genuine reciprocated effort to keep connection (Harvey, 2024: 85) as well willingly makes a choice to keep good relationship with her brother (Harvey, 2024: 17), *Pietro* lovingly longs for his wife (Harvey, 2024: 81) and also expresses deep interest in his daughter's intellectual and spiritual development (Harvey, 2024, p. 53). On the other

hand, the cosmonauts in the novel are depicted as deprived of love: Roman's only memory about his wife is her dried flowers (Harvey, 2024: 5), he never shows any affection to her or concern about her, he spend his free time indulging in his hobby of talking to random strangers using the radio transmission (Harvey, 2024: 86, 99–100), and Anton realises and accepts that his marriage is loveless (Harvey, 2024: 92–93).

This lovelessness of Anton's life is given considerable attention in the novel. There is quite a detailed account of Anton's years-long suffering because of his incapability to provide true support to his children, to be "[...] *the vehicle that carries them all through darkness [...]*" (Harvey, 2024: 92) and inability to find a way to tell his wife "*We don't love one another any more [...]*" (Harvey, 2024: 92). It is only when Anton discovers a lump on his neck, that he feels relieved to be able to admit that there is no love in his marriage anymore (Harvey, 2024: 92). Such a situation in Anton's family life is given a one-word nomination – *lovelessness*, e.g.: "*The lovelessness of his marriage is a fact that has come upon him gradually, one gentle dawning after the other*" (Harvey, 2024: 92). Being named, *lovelessness* becomes a definite fact, a precise characteristic of Anton's relationships. The deadly lump on the neck, the discovery of which triggers Anton's acknowledgement of *lovelessness*, is perceived by Anton himself as a physical embodiment of his emotional predicament, e.g.: "[...] *when he first caught sight of the lump on his neck it seemed [...]* the logical culmination of all those dawns, those realisations that he and his wife didn't love each other [...]" (Harvey, 2024: 92), and it can be interpreted as a symbol of the devastating consequences of a loveless marriage.

Presented in this way, *lovelessness* in *Orbital* brings to mind the portrayal of a dysfunctional Russian family in Andrey Zvyagintsev's film *Loveless*. It is beyond the scope of this article to address the question of whether Harvey watched the film or at least read about it. Rather, the choice of the naming *lovelessness* and *loveless* makes the comparison of the portrayals of the life of a Russian family in the novel and the film justified. Zvyagintsev's film tells a harrowing story of the ugly separation of a couple that never really loved each other and did not want to care for their young son who, upon an accidental discovery that he was not loved by his parents, tragically disappeared. As I agree with the critics' evaluation that the film *Loveless* is a "pitiless parable" (Kermode, 2018), "not just as a drama of marital dysfunction but as a fierce metaphorical indictment of the society that produced its characters" (Cheshire, 2017), I would like to argue that *Orbital's* description of Anton's family is much more than a

representation of a particular unhappy marriage failure. It can be considered as at least an invitation to ask the question of what moral principles lie at the core of the Russian family.

Let me move now to the analysis of the aesthetic and ideological aspects of the representation of the Moon in the novel *Orbital*.

Aesthetic aspects of the image of the Moon

The Moon is represented in *Orbital* as a shining cosmic body, e.g.: "[...] *the earth reels away in a mass of moonglow [...]*" (Harvey, 2024: 1). It is quite remarkable that the beauty of this very sentence was acknowledged by the novel's reviewers (Information, 2024).

The Moon's attribute in the novel is the *silver* colour (Harvey, 2024: 4). The novel very briefly mentions the natural phenomena of "*phases*" and "*cycles*" of the Moon (Harvey, 2024: 4) as well as the fact that when observed, the Moon looks dim during some periods, e.g.: "[...] *the moon started to fade [...]*" (Harvey, 2024: 31)

The Moon is metaphorically described in the novel as the astronauts' and cosmonauts' calm companion, e.g.: "[...] *their silver companion moving placidly through its phases*" (Harvey, 2024: 4). The Moon is given quite a passive role in the main storyline as it is observed by the crew on the space station rather than included into any sort of interaction with them, e.g.: "*But all the same moon seen several times a day and sometimes in strange distortion*" (Harvey, 2024: 4). This image of the Moon, which evokes peacefulness and tranquillity, contrasts in the novel with the image of the space that is metaphorically characterised as a predator animal, e.g.: "*Raw space is a panther, feral and primal [...]*" (Harvey, 2024: 1).

In the novels' subordinate storyline about another crew of astronauts going on a new mission to the Moon, the Moon is endowed with a more active role, e.g.: "*It had been well and good, their last supper, some normality to take their minds off it all. But the moon had gatecrashed. There it was, so small and far. Its cold hard light bore down and drove an axe through their appetites*" (Harvey, 2024: 31). The metaphor *the moon had gatecrashed* in the quoted above extract represents the Moon as an uninvited intruder into the astronauts' minds, and the metaphor of the Moon's light as an axeman adds dramatism to the representation of the astronauts' psychological state on the eve of the launch to the Moon. As it transpires, the Moon's active or passive role in the story mirrors the astronauts' intentions towards the Moon as they are either observing it from afar or aiming to reach it and land on it.

Through the simile the image of the Moon is juxtaposed with the image of the pumpkin in the

context where pumpkins grown by Chie's parents in their garden are compared with the full Moon, e.g.: *"Pumpkins growing, lots of them, as big as the moon looks in its summer fullness [...]"* (Harvey, 2024: 21). This simile brings the earthly perspective of looking at the Moon in addition to the space-based perspective described above. In this scene Chie's mother is depicted together with her husband in their garden near their wooden house *"[...] bent over their vegetable patch [...]"* (Harvey, 2024: 21).

This "earthed" representation of the Moon – the image of the Moon as evoked by looking at the pumpkin – is semantically contrasted in the novel with the "sky-bound" image of the Moon as the hypothetical point at which Chie's mother was looking when a photo of her was taken, e.g.: *"Her mother was scowling up at the sky [...] [...] it must have been what her mother was looking at from the beach, something happening up on the moon, and that her mother could see it with her naked eye"* (Harvey, 2024: 58). This photo, dated on the back with the inscription *"Moon Landing Day, 1969"* (Harvey, 2024: 58), profoundly captivated Chie throughout all her childhood as she was always pulled to it by *"The lure of the absent moon [...]"* (Harvey, 2024: 58). Chie cherished the photo very much and took it among *"[...] the few earthly possessions [...]"* to the orbit (Harvey, 2024: 58). Having reflected on her childhood thoughts about the photo, Chie realised that it was the photo that *"[...] had generated her first thought of the space"* (Harvey, 2024: 58).

In the novel, the Moon also features as represented by a small decoration – *"[...] a small felt moon on a piece of string [...]"* (Harvey, 2024: 1). At the first glance, it seems to be just a detail of the description of the interior of the orbital station, but as later in the novel it is made clear that this felt moon belongs to Roman, the image acquires an ideological tint. Hence, I move on to the discussion of the ideological dimensions of the image of the Moon in Harvey's *Orbital*.

Ideological aspects of the image of the Moon

The image of the little felt moon on the string appears in the novel for the second time in the description of the celebration which the six astronauts on the orbital station held to mark the launch of a new mission to the Moon. This time, it is specified who put up the toy moon, e.g.: *"[...] Roman hung up the little felt moon his son had given him and which had been one of the few things he'd brought with him to space"* (Harvey, 2024: 32). This detail could sound sentimental if placed in another context, but in the novel, Roman is portrayed as having very proprietary aspirations towards the Moon. While on the orbital station, Roman has a clear memory of himself

back in his Moscow flat looking at the Moon and *"[...] seeing it, the same moon, like a souvenir he's brought back from a holiday somewhere exotic"* (Harvey, 2024: 6). The Moon in Roman's perception is an object he can easily possess and take whenever he wants, be it the felt moon carried from the Earth to the orbit or the celestial Moon brought from the space mission to Moscow.

The other cosmonaut, Anton has very similar ideas. He grew up firmly believing in his father's fables about Russians having landed on the Moon, e.g.: *"[...] on the moon's surface, by the Russian flag, was a little box of Korovka, the milky sweet he liked, left by the last visiting cosmonaut. That the box has his name on, that he would one day eat those Korovka"* (Harvey, 2024: 43). Anton reminisces of those childhood stories as he grudgingly thinks about the Russians losing to the Americans in the race to get to the Moon, e.g.: *"[...] the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth Americans to soon land on the moon's hallowed dusted crust, and yet still not a single Russian boot. Not one. Not a single Russian flag"* (Harvey, 2024: 42). In this extract, the negation, which evokes both the negated and the positive proposition (Jeffries, 2014: 416), gives away Anton's strong adherence to Russia's ambitions in the space. It is very emblematic that Anton is thinking about the Russian boot and the flag as they indeed are the marks that the Russians try to imprint and impose on the land they capture.

In their totality, the novel's episodes discussed so far in this subsection succinctly represent the Russian ideology of dominance and expansion. It is quite remarkable that none of the astronauts in the novel think about the Moon as a souvenir or as the predestined place with the food pre-prepared for them to consume (Jeffries, 2014: 32).

In contrast with the Russian cosmonauts, the crew of the four astronauts who are actually going to the Moon are driven by exploratory rather than conquering motives. Their launch is placed in the novel in the context of musings about the hypothetical expectations of the objects of exploration, e.g.: *"Does it [the Moon], and all of the other moons and planets and solar systems and galaxies, yearn to be known?"* (Harvey, 2024: 31).

Roman's and Anton's views on the Moon landing are also contrasted in the novel with Chie's views. For Chie, the Moon landing means a connection with her mother as she treats the inscription *"For the next and all moon landing days ever to come"* (Harvey, 2024: 58), which her mother wrote on the photograph that had been taken on the Moon Landing Day, as the bequest. As the novel renders Chie's contemplations on the meaning of this inscription and her relationships with the mother (Harvey, 2024: 58–61), it becomes clear that the

Moon landing means for Chie the affirmation of their (her mother's and her own) resilience and the will and power to survive and believe in the possibility of great achievements.

This difference between Roman's and Anton's ideas and Chie's views is in consistent with the difference examined above between cosmonauts' and astronauts' family relationships and values.

Because Roman's and Anton's ideas and ambitions are presented in the novel in the form of free indirect speech, the novel leaves a chance for the readers to critically engage with these ideas. There is a further detail in the novel that might prompt a critical review of the Russian ideology as expressed through the images of Roman and Anton. In the episode where Pietro dreams of getting a "*pointless ornament on a shelf. A rug*" after returning to the Earth (Harvey, 2024: 15), Roman laughs at him because it is "*Not alcohol or sex – just s rug*" (Harvey, 2024: 16). As Anton joins the dialogue, he asks Pietro not to describe what he would do on the rug implying some dirty things, to which Pietro responds that he will "[...] *dream of space*" (Harvey, 2024: 16). This episode definitely does not portray Russian cosmonauts in a flattering or even sympathetic way.

The presented above findings that the ideological aspect the image of the Moon in Harvey's *Orbital* puts Russian ideology in the critical context seem to come at odds with the analysis of the novel done by Tetyana Mykytenko (Микищенко, 2024) who asserts that the novel propagates Russian ideology. I will look at this paradox in the following part of the article.

Mykytenko (Микищенко, 2024) argues that the key message of *Orbital*, which she formulates as "*we all are flying together into the bright future*", reproduces the main slogan of the Soviet Union. She explains that the whole range of episodes perfectly accords with Russia's ideology and policy, including the idea of the invisibility of the borders, the representation of the Kuril Islands from the Russian rather than Japanese standpoint, complete non-representation of Ukraine but a zoom in into the Russian cities, and the glorification of the Russian cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev – the only character who has a direct prototype in real life. This criticism is well-grounded. Not only are these episodes conspicuous, but also the character's and the narrator's perspectives blend in them seamlessly. For example, Krikalev is introduced as "*Roman's hero*" (Harvey, 2024: 133) but the perspective immediately shifts to the third-person narrator's as Krikalev is given a highly praising description (Harvey, 2024: 133). This blurring of the distinction between the character's and the narrator's perspectives makes it impossible to contextualise the represented ideology

in the characters' minds and thus it comes across as the message of the novel.

Indeed, the Anglophone reviewers of *Orbital* also interpret the novel as promoting the idea of global cooperation and disregard of borders, however, they do not find it problematic, e.g.: "*In offering us a vision of our planet as borderless and interlinked, Harvey makes the case for the futility of territorial conflicts, and the need for co-operation and respect for our shared humanity. This is a theme that couldn't be more sobering, timely, or urgent*" (Information, 2024).

As it follows from the analysis, Harvey's *Orbital* represents Russian ideology in two ways: one is the reproduction of Russia's expansionist ideas in the narrator's descriptions and ruminations, and the other is the contextualisation of the Russian aspirations in the minds of the Russian characters. While the former makes it more difficult for the readers to engage with the critique of the Russian ideology, the latter opens a window of opportunity for an attentive and non-indifferent reader.

I would like to join those academics and critics who argue that the critical approach to the various forms of representation of Russian ideology in literature and art is much needed. Thus, I believe that those elements of Harvey's *Orbital* which present a clear split between the narrator's and the Russian characters' perspectives are worth close examining and detailed discussion. Such an analysis might be a helpful tool in breaking the spell of Russia's "greatness".

Conclusions. The aesthetic dimension of the image of the Moon in Harvey's *Orbital* is quite nuanced and comprises several perspectives: the look from the space and the look from the Earth, the former further including the "earthed" and the "sky-bound" points of view. Overall, aesthetic representation of the Moon reflects people's attitudes towards it: it is either unthreatening, glowing and sometimes getting dimmer or an active intruder into people's minds.

The ideological dimension of the image of the Moon in the novel consists of the representation of the two different ideologies: on the one hand, Russian expansionist hopes contextualised within the aspirations of the two Russian characters and on the other hand, the ideas of exploration, gaining new knowledge and aspiring for achievements.

The readers, both professional critics and lay audience, can be inclined to pay more attention to either of these dimensions. One of the key factors that influences this choice is the direct empirical experience of the readers. Accordingly, the Anglophone critics who are not in the imminent danger of being subject to Russia's violence chose to contemplate the novel's poetics while the Ukrainian

critics who have had the direct first-hand experience of Russia's aggression proved to be exceptionally sensitive to the novel's involvement with politics.

If one accepts Uilleam Blacker's view that "*Literature [...] is where language goes to reach the heights of its power and it is thus a space of great potential and of great responsibility*" (2024), they should be prepared to bear this responsibility, even if the responsibility "*is not comfortable*" and is seen as "*a burden*" (Blacker, 2024). Accepting the responsibility of dealing with literature can mean being prepared to carry out not only an aesthetic evaluation of a text but also to make a deliberate choice while examining the ideological stances in the text and openly take sides. In the case of Harvey's *Orbital* in the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine such a responsibility means not to shy away from the problematic ideological ideas represented in the novel but to question and expose them.

Further critical stylistic research will be necessary to provide a timely and well-grounded examination of how Russian ideology keeps infiltrating contemporary fiction. For example, in Natasha Brown's novel *Universality*, which was longlisted for the Booker Prize 2025 (Universality, n.d.), one of the characters sees a Russian novel as an epitome of superiority when she lists it among the suitable options for "*a lofty comparison*", e.g.: "*[...] pick something from the week's news and make a lofty comparison. 'Obscure elements of European history are best, but a Russian novel or philosophical theory can be just as effective'*" (Brown, 2025: 32). A critical stylistic analysis will help to disclose the aesthetic and ideological aspects of the image of "*a Russian novel*" in *Universality*.

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