



DEFORMATION OF STEREOTYPES OF THE NATIONAL MENTALITY IN V. M. SHUKSHIN'S STORY "CONVERSATIONS UNDER A CLEAR MOON"

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ABSTRACT

This article examines stereotypes of national mentality using the example of V. M. Shukshin's story "Conversations on a Clear Moon" and provides examples of these deformations. It is noted that reduced intelligence is a distinctive feature of all characters. The authors of the article come to the conclusion that, in essence, the heroes of Shukshin's later works live not so much in the world of symbols, but in the world of simulacra - signs without relation to the referent.

KEY WORDS: stereotype, deformation, symbols, referent, simulacrum, national character, national mentality.

INTRODUCTION

The story "Conversations under a Clear Moon" can certainly be considered one of Shukshin's programmatic works; it is no coincidence that he gave the title to the writer's last lifetime collection. The idea of the story arose at the intersection of several main themes for the late Shukshin and a number of pressing socio-political problems of the era. It should also be taken into account that the writer was interested not only in the psychology of the character of his contemporary, but he also constantly turned to "the sphere of the collective unconscious, updating the national, historical, philosophical and mythological paradigms" [Moskovkina, 2017, p. 52].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The significance for Russian history of the Brezhnev period of "developed socialism," the so-called "long seventies," lies in the fact that this era "immediately preceded perestroika and, consequently, the collapse of the socialist system." It was in this decade, according to the authoritative opinion of Alexis Berelovich, that "those features of the Soviet system (as we now know, doomed to death) that were preserved under the current government" took shape [Berelovich, 2003, p. 59]. The French sociologist especially emphasizes that "the whole situation with the concept of "developed socialism" is extremely important, as it indicates profound changes in the relationship between the government and the population" [Berelovich, 2003, p. 61].

Shukshin was far from the dissident movement of the era of stagnation, however, he was well aware of the futility of efforts to reform the Soviet system. After 1968, when hopes for building "socialism with a human face" collapsed, he, like many of his contemporaries, went through a period of crises and disappointments. Moreover, according to the fair remark of V. Korobov, "Shukshin had personal scores to settle with the Soviet authorities" [Korobov, 2009, p. 406].

In 1972, Shukshin made a working note, which can easily be considered an ideological extract of the story "Conversations under a Clear Moon," written, as L. Anninsky established, in the spring of the same year in the hospital [Anninsky, 1993, p. 595]: "No mind, no truth, no real power, not a single living idea!.. But with what help do they rule us? There is only one explanation left - with the help of our own stupidity. This is where our art needs to hit and hit" [Shukshin, 2014, vol. 8, p. 317]. Shukshin, as we see, lacks intelligence, both at the top and at the bottom.



In the story “Conversations under a Clear Moon,” low intelligence is a distinctive feature of all the characters. First of all, of course, this concerns the main character, old man Baev. The intellectual inferiority of people of this type is surprisingly accurately characterized by the phrase of I. Kant from the book “Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View”: “In general, a stupid person sees in things, and a fool sees in himself more value than he should have if he were reasonable” [Kant, 1999, p. 239].

Having lived a gray, unremarkable life, in his old age Baev “belatedly, but stubbornly brought the matter to the conclusion that he is a man of rare intelligence” (37). The real level of the hero's mental abilities can be judged by the ease with which the inhabitants of the hospital ward play him. Not only does Baev not feel there is a catch in the requirement to collect a vial of sweat and nine hundred grams of feces for analysis, he also tells this story to Marya Selezneva in order to extract an instructive conclusion from it and is very dissatisfied “that the story came out of nothing but comedy” (40).

Extreme stupidity and lack of education did not prevent Baev from “hanging around” in an office all his life - “now in the village council, now in the fur harvesting department, now in the collective farm board,” “in a warm place and in honor” (37, 43). He is overly proud of the scale of his activities: “... just think what kind of things I let through my hands! After all, they sent me as an auditor to other districts! I used to drive and think: if only they knew that I only had a class and a half of the Central Secondary School, as one of us joked: a parochial school. I only ran around for a winter and a half, and you have me as an auditor for others!” (42).

The main source of pride for Baev is the fraudulent operation with milk supplies. Mental limitations did not prevent him from acting as a consultant to the chairman of the executive committee. The government representative turned out to be even less savvy. Even after Baev clearly explained to the head of the district the dependence of the volume of milk supply on the fat content of milk, he only “blinks his eyes: I don't understand” (39). He needs a direct directive: “Remove <...> one percent of fat content for everyone - there will be additional milk” (39).

Although the story is called “Conversations in front of a jar” noah moon,” truly dialogical relationships between the characters do not develop. Marya Selezneva is a passive listener to old man Baev's monologue, and she does not always understand him: “Marya hasn't figured it out yet”; “Marya still couldn't understand how they got out of the situation with government supplies back then”; “Why, just lie down and that's all? - Marya couldn't understand it at all”; “Like this? - Marya didn't understand” (39, 44).

Mutual misunderstanding is total. Actually, the story begins with a misunderstanding. The collective farm board offers Marya to “retrain,” but she “understood this “retrain” as a joke, as “switch to the other side”” (37).

The heroes of the story, in fact, speak different languages, they need a translator, since they themselves do not understand the speech of the interlocutor well. In Marya's free “translation,” “retrain” means “switch to the other side,” “parochial school” turns into the Central Party School (i.e., the Central Party School), and Baev is at times ready to switch to a strange Russian-Chinese dialect: “His upper lip was crawling somewhere towards his nose, and his eyes narrowed into slits - it seemed that he was about to say: “Sevo?”” (38).

The emergence of a language barrier between compatriots is natural. This is a consequence of the loss of identity: national, social and even gender.

In Baev's appearance, speeches, and mentality, the writer emphasizes the features of “non-Russianness.” The hero is described as a man of the “golden mean”: “He was an inconspicuous little man, he never stuck his head out, he didn't do a single loud stupid thing, but he also didn't bend any smart knees in his whole life. So the sixty-three-year-old boy walked with an average step, and was like that” (37). In the story “Order”, written in the same 1972, Shukshin similarly defines the specific character of a European: “A German, as if from an early age he was aimed at the middle, so he lives his whole life - in the middle. He won't get you drunk, although he will drink and even start singing... But he will never reach the edge. No” [Shukshin, 2014, vol. 6, p. 75].

The characteristics of Russian and Western mentality are opposite. Shukshin outlined this antagonism in the sketch “Zavidki” from the series “Fictional Stories”, also supposedly dating from 1972: “Zavidki take a Russian person - he doesn't know the limits in anything, so he envies a German, a Frenchman, an American.



Everything would be fine, says the Russian man, if only I knew when to stop. I don't know the measure. And that envy is secret, in the thoughts. In words, out loud, he scolds everyone and swears. And he tells jokes" [Shukshin, 2014, vol. 9, p. 64].

The process of loss of national identity goes so far for Baev that he even puts forward a hypothesis about his American origin: "Who am I so smart about? I'm thinking: the Americans were rummaging around here - looking for something in the mountains... The jester knows him! They... are... nimble little people" (42).

It is fundamentally important that elements of Western mentality, such as hypertrophied rationalism (however, mixed with lies and deception), coexist in the image of old man Baev with purely eastern features. The hero's surname is formed "from the Turkic baj 'rich, rich man, bai' + Russian suffix -ev" [Baskakov, 1979, p. 244].

There is another version of the etymology, perhaps even more accurately reflecting the character of this character: "from the verb bait - to speak; from the words talker, i.e. a talker who loves, as we would now say, to hang noodles on one's ears, to tell tales - 'to invent, to fantasize'. This "storyteller" and talker was nicknamed Baev" [Vedina, 2008, p. 130. Emphasis added].

The hero's "non-Russianness," of course, does not boil down to the anecdotal "American" genealogy he proposes. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Baev's reaction to the main historical dramas of the twentieth century is striking.

For Marya, talking about milk supplies brings up the darkest thoughts: "Oh, tada and taska-ali! - Marya remembered. "It used to be that you'd milk it and take it all away." You'll pour a mug for the kids, and pour the rest into a milk bottle: but what plans there were... ugly!" (38). The pause that occurs before the epithet "ugly" is noteworthy. Marya does not immediately find any decent word to define the lawlessness of the authorities. And for Baev this is the most precious memory: "Listen! - Bayev perked up at the memory of his old inventive act" (38). In fact, Baev is proud that he found a way to take away this last mug of milk from the children.

Baev calls the Patriotic War "terrible" and believes that everyone's main concern is how to avoid going to the front, and for this the most reasonable thing is: "to keep quiet and keep quiet, like you, there's no one in the world" (40). Within the framework of such a value system, it is not surprising that Baev does not believe in the existence of Alexander Nevsky, who defended Russian soil.

Baev renounces his peasant roots even more decisively: "I feel in my heart: I am not a peasant's kneading. I never had any desire to plow or sow... - to any peasant work. And I was never drawn to wine. - Baev did not just frantically claim that he was not of peasant stock, but rather reflected and doubted. - After all, if I think so t: where did all this in me go? Should I strive to have land or there... to row during the holidays. No! I don't like digging in my own garden! Just sitting in an office, that's for me..." (42).

Baev did not work in offices, but "spent his whole life" (37). "Sitting" in them, he merely imitated vigorous activity: "... he kept throwing these round pieces on the abacus, over the course of his entire life, he probably threw them in as big as a big house" (37). And inspector Baev is not real. He himself is aware of this. "He was already silent..." he remarks regarding his lack of the necessary education (42). Baev is very similar to the pseudo-auditor Khlestakov from Gogol's comedy, who only in his fictional world "can stop being himself, get rid of himself, become different" [Lotman, 1992, p. 345. Author's discharge]. Yu. M. Lotman rightly pointed out the "morbid nature of self-affirmation" of Khlestakov. This thesis is quite applicable to Shukshin's character. In addition, he, like Khlestakov, can be called an impostor against his will. Baev "believed that he, perhaps, really was a man with a head," only after receiving sanction from the outside: "Towards the end, they looked around - yes, he is smart, this Baev!" (37).

Baev, of course, is funny, but on the whole his life situation cannot be called unique. Baev's interlocutor, the retrained Marya, generally loses not only her social, but also her gender identity, instead of purely female work in a kindergarten, she is forced to "hang around at night instead of a man" in the guardhouse (43).

Marya, in a dispute with Baev, gives the only example of a successful change in social status: "There is Ivan Kozlov... He was a simple soldier, but became a commander. There were so many orders, he sent me a photo card, we ran around the whole village to look" (43). In this case, the exception truly proves the rule. Firstly, the orders do not yet indicate the presence of an officer rank, and secondly, the transformation of soldier Ivan Kozlov into



some incomprehensible “commander” occurs only in the virtual photo world. From Marya’s remark it clearly follows that no one saw the real “commander” Ivan Kozlov in the village.

Baev does not limit himself to openly denying the fact of the existence of Prince Alexander Nevsky; the list of historical figures whose existence he implicitly denies is very wide. Reproducing stable elements of the legendary biographies of people from the people, Baev immediately questions the very possibility of the appearance of a gifted person among the peasants: “That’s what I’m talking about the head. Where did I get it from, from a peasant background? (43). Baev’s biography is, in a sense, a consistent deconstruction of the Lomonosov myth.

Baev paints in front of Marya a typical picture of the difficult childhood of a talented genius: “What he, my late parent, did with me is something that cannot be described with a pen, nor... as they say?.. It’s incomprehensible to the mind what he did to keep me from going to school. walked. But I had a passion for learning. There was a parish school there... Father went to see his parents: he was a capable boy, let him go. Well! My parent only... It’s not good to remember a sin, but also... Also... I asked as much as I could: he was lying at his feet, roaring, let him go to school! He’ll throw the pimas on the floor, and that’s it. Sit behind the stove, gnaw a sheep’s leg - that’s the whole parental tale. Eh-h!.. – Baev was still silent sadly. “Well, when everyone is asleep, I’ll light a splinter, and sometimes I’ll hide in a corner on the stove and read from the warehouses.” Yes, throughout the whole night it was like that - here they are, the eyes, and they sat down” (41).

M.V. Lomonosov told about his childhood in approximately the same way in a letter to I.I. Shuvalov: “...Having a father who was by nature a good man, but brought up in extreme ignorance <...> many times I was forced to read and study, which was possible, in secluded places and endure cold and hunger” [Lomonosov, 1957, p. 481–482].

A similar set of motifs is present in the autobiographical trilogy “Childhood”, “In People”, “My Universities” by M. Gorky: “They didn’t give me fire, <...> then I began to quietly collect lard from the candlesticks, putting it in a sardine tin , added lamp oil there and, twisting a lamp from threads, lit a smoky fire on the stove at night.

When I turned the page of a huge volume, the red tongue of the lamp wavered tremulously, threatening to go out, the lamp drowned every minute in the melted odorous liquid, the smoke ate my eyes, but all these inconveniences disappeared in the pleasure with which I looked at the illustrations and read the explanations for them” [Gorky, 1972, p. 348].

For Shukshin himself, his childhood passion for books also sometimes took extreme forms. The writer’s sister recalls: “I read day and night. I even managed to read in the moonlight or with a fat shirt. I poured fat into a bottle, pulled a string (wick) through potato plastic, covered my head with a blanket and read. And one day I fell asleep with this burning fuse and miraculously did not suffocate. But he still burned the blanket” [Zinovieva, 1999, p. 430].

The source of Baev’s extraordinary abilities, in his own opinion, lies in his rare powers of observation: “As far as I can remember, I have always been very observant. Isho was a toddler, but sometimes I would go knee-deep into water - there was a lake behind the village, remember? Ramenskoe was called - I’ll climb and stand. I stayed motionless for half a day, watching what was happening in the water. This is from God. This is not from people. From my parent I could only get a kick instead of reasonable advice” (42).

In this aspect, Shukshin’s hero also copies Lomonosov. Many historians of science paid attention to the phenomenal powers of observation of the first Russian academician. Thus, I. S. Melekhov in the article “M. V. Lomonosov and the origins of forest science and forest education in Russia” notes: “M. V. Lomonosov’s natural observation skills, childhood impressions spent in the north among rivers, meadows, forests, as well as long trips to the sea made at that time, knowledge northern people, their age-old wisdom allowed Lomonosov to subsequently give in his writings, albeit incidentally, a number of clear definitions and descriptions concerning northern vegetation” [Melekhov, 2001, p. eleven].

Unlike Lomonosov, Baev observes emptiness; accordingly, his observations do not have any scientific value. Emptiness is the true essence of the hero.



Despite this, old man Baev claims nothing less than the role of a life teacher: "...put your head up, I'll teach you life!" (40). He considers himself almost an apostle and prophet. In the rough draft for the story, it was not for nothing that Shukshin used the definition "mystical" in relation to the hero's rantings: "An old man goes to the watchman, weaves a kind of mystical net" [Anninsky, 1993, p. 595]. Religious vocabulary is actively introduced into the conversation about the hero's birth and childhood: "This is from God. This is not from people"; "But God gave me such a desire to study!"; "The Lord is with you! - Marya exclaimed, but she also exclaimed quietly and also almost looked back," etc. (42). The milk supply scam is a ridiculous falsification of the miracles of Christ. Baev simultaneously "resurrects" the chairman of the executive committee, Neverov ("even if it's for him... bury himself in the grave alive"), and magically, out of nothing, creates the missing milk. In imitation of religious preachers, Shukshin's character tries to speak in parables, although not very successfully. Baev is an anti-creator-trickster who only imitates creative activity.

In the novel "Pushkin House" (finished in 1971), A. Bitov gave a deep definition of modernity - "our unreal time" [Bitov, 1990, p. 346]. What is happening in the novel is best reflected by a line from A. Kushner's poem quoted by the author of "The Pushkin House": "Substitution is an unheard-of den!" [Bitov, 1990, p. 214].

The artistic world of the story "Conversations under a Clear Moon" is no less simulative than Bitovsky's. Milk from personal farmsteads is passed off here as government supplies without any problems: "If there was milk, you could put it in the papers any way you want" (39). The imaginary patient Baev finds himself in the hospital of his dreams, about which he "heard that the care there was some kind of special," but "he did not find any such care <...> there," or treatment, of course, either (40). The hairdresser in the story easily transforms into a guardhouse: "Marya sat in the hairdresser's at night, that is, during the day it was a hairdresser's, and at night Marya sat there" (37). But the hairdresser's is also a pseudo-house: "In the hut where the hairdresser was, there was a pungent, stagnant smell of cologne, it was warm and somehow very cozy" (38). In the hairdresser's lodge, the characters find that warmth and comfort that is not present in their real homes. And this despite the fact that fellow villagers consider the "house of the cross" to be the main achievement in Baev's life.

Shukshin's house is never considered only as a material object; it is always also an idea, which is clearly highlighted in the monologue of the main character: "What smart owner would start cutting down a house if he doesn't figure out in advance how much he has. In accounting it is called an estimate. And then how: he swung to the cross house - he was going to live widely, but his mind, you look, is barely a five-walled one. He'll squander his strength until he's thirty, make a splash, yell, and then it's nothing" (38).

Baev transparently hints at the correctness of his life strategy, because he managed to build a cross house, but it is obvious that it is the word "zilch", meaning "nothing", "emptiness", that best describes the colorless existence of himself.

Since childhood, adhering to the principle of "keep your head down" (37), Baev seemed to never live at all. His advice to the machine operators left in the rear: "...here you have to sit down and keep quiet, like you don't exist in the world" (40), is the most accurate expression of his own life credo. Fellow villagers, assessing Baev's success, use a strange, but, in essence, correct formula: "So the sixty-three-year-old man walked with an average step, and that was it" (37). It turns out that Baev, still alive, moreover, "aimed at another twenty years of disgraced life" (38), "seems to be no longer in the world." The phrase "was like this" is used when talking about "the rapid disappearance, removal of someone" [Phraseological Dictionary, 2004, p. 94].

Baev himself says about the chairman of the executive committee Neverov, who disrupted the milk supply plan: "at least he's in the grave for this...rush" (38). The phraseological unit "At least lie in the coffin" is well known - "about a hopeless, very difficult situation" [Phraseological Dictionary, 2004, p. 288]. Shukshin's hero strengthens an expression similar in meaning by adding "alive" to it. This, in general, unnecessary definition is precisely intended to emphasize that the border between (pseudo) life and death in the world of the story has practically been erased.

The world is so illusory that the characters in the story cannot distinguish day from night, the moon from the sun: "He probably confused day and night because of a hangover"; "Well... he confused the sun with the moon?" (44, 45). It is significant that Marya is not at all surprised by this confusion: "They are such bright nights. He probably jumped out of sleep - he saw it was light, and blew into the village store" (45).



The landscape in the story is frankly conventional. Moreover, if at the beginning the writer only uses a spectacular theatrical comparison (“the moon was lowered as if on a rope from above”), then in the final phrase (“And the moon hangs on a rope”) the theatricality of the space is simply stated as a given.

In an article devoted to the analysis of Shukshin’s story “Strokes to the Portrait” (1973), O. A. Skubach comes to a general conclusion: “In the stories of the late 60s - early 70s. creative ambitions, “serious” semiosis, be it philosophy (“Strokes to the Portrait”), ideology (“Oratorical Technique”), art (“Pedestal”), etc., are given over to the hero and become his entire prerogative, while the author, who has thus relieved himself of all responsibility for the appearance of a symbol in his own text, is exclusively occupied with discrediting the semiotic claims of the hero, not allowing the reader to believe in the final acquisition of meaning” [Skubach, 2002, p. 72].

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis, without a doubt, remains relevant in relation to the story “Conversations under a Clear Moon.” Essentially, the heroes of Shukshin’s later works live not so much in the world of symbols as in the world of simulacra - signs without relation to the referent. According to J. Baudrillard, “simulation <...> calls into question the difference between “true” and “false”, between “real” and “imaginary””, “comes from the utopianism of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as a value” [Baudrillard, 2015, p. 8, 12. Italics by the author]. Soviet culture of the 1970s abandoned the sixties attempts to find the only true Truth. It is not surprising that in the last years of his life Shukshin also creates texts in which simulacra dominate. This is quite in the spirit of the times.

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