

THE ARCHETYPE OF THE FOOL/THE JESTER/THE WHACKY AND ITS ARTISTIC EMBODIMENT IN THE CHARACTERS – “OUTSIDERS” IN SERGEI DOVLATOV’S PROSE

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Abstract. The article deals with the fiction by Sergey Dovlatov, the famous Russian-American writer and journalist of the last third of the 20th century. The main aim of the article is to show the influence of the Russian folklore on the formation of the leading type of characters in Dovlatov’s prose. The paper shows that this type, which received in criticism the name of “Dovlatov’s outsiders”, is the realization of the archetype of the fool/the jester/the whacky, widespread in Russian and world folklore, a kind of variation of the fairy-tale “hopeless hero”. On examples of S. Dovlatov’s story “Pushkin Hills”, his collections of short stories “Ours” and “The Compromise”, the authors study not only the genesis of this type of characters but also their functions in the literary text, the impact on the content of works and readers’ perception. Much attention is attributed to the mechanisms of humor in Dovlatov’s texts. His characters are rebels and outlaws, whackies and jesters at the same time. They cannot “integrate” into the Soviet reality and destabilize it with their clownish behavior. The analysis of his prose shows that S. Dovlatov’s characters, and the humorous world in general, have an emphatically symbolic character. Therefore, the authors of the article, along with the traditional for the study of Dovlatov’s stories historical and genetic approach, involved mythological and structural-semiotic methods that contribute to the consideration of the symbolic nature of humor and its counter-sign function in the literary text.

Keywords: Sergei Dovlatov, humor, Russian prose of the 20th century, folklore, archetype, semiosphere, “outsiders”, good sense of humor, whacky, absurd.

Introduction

Sergey Dovlatov (1941 – 1990) is one of the most interesting Russian writers of the second half of the 20th century. In a sense, he became a cult writer for the Russian public consciousness of the 1980-90s. Cult authors are those whose life merges with literature, becomes its continuation, is mythologized, turns out to be the object of worship and “cultural paganism”. Beyond any doubt, the work by Sergei Dovlatov reflects many of the leading trends in modern Russian literature and, therefore, deserves the most intent attention.

Turning to the object of our study, that is, the characters of Sergei Dovlatov, combining the traditional Russian classical literature features of a “little man” and a “superfluous man” (the so-called “outsiders”), we put forward a hypothesis about the folklore origin of this type of Dovlatov’s hero. Due to the folklore influence, these Dovlatov’s characters become a modern variation of the images of the fool, the jester and the whacky, which are close to each other, because they coincide in several basic parameters, and, therefore, can be considered as a kind of one archetype in certain situations.

Our research rests on three basic ideas, on which we rely and which we develop further:

1. Sergey Dovlatov is a writer with a strong attraction to humor and irony, to the comic perception and re-creation of reality. Thus, Dovlatov’s characters are viewed here through the prism of comic poetics.

2. Dovlatov’s humor is a direct successor of the folk comic forms. His prose inherits both the general principle of folk verbal creativity – the benevolent acceptance of the world, and specific borrowings, development and special refraction in literary texts of folklore archetypes. Therefore, the type of character, which received the name of “Dovlatov’s outsiders” in critical studies and regarded earlier in the course of the development of the traditions of the Russian classical literature, will be conveyed from the point of view of folklore influences.

3. The mechanisms of S. Dovlatov’s humour are largely based on the semiotic characteristics of the artistic space of his prose, reflecting the communicative field of the epoch. The sign saturation of the semiosphere, ordered in a certain way, reveals under the pen of the writer its redundancy (congestion) and is destroyed as a result of a collision with the semiosphere of another coding or an element acting as a counter-sign and being a destabilizing factor. At the same time, in the area of intersection of different semiospheres, at their interaction, the humorous laughing energy is released, producing a comic effect. Speaking about Dovlatov’s version of the archetype of the fool/the jester/the whacky, we will consider these properties of the writer’s prose.

Among the up-to-date works, dedicated to Dovlatov, there are many articles of biographical, autobiographical, historical and journalistic nature. Often, the writer’s works serve to interpreters only as a convenience to recreate the atmosphere of the Dovlatov’s era. At the same time, in several literary works, we find valuable observations about the

humorous poetics of Dovlatov's prose, about various aspects of the character system, about the autobiographical hero-narrator.

Primarily and quite naturally, the personality and creativity of Dovlatov attracted Russian-speaking scientists. Many interesting things in the coverage of these issues are contained in the book by I. Sukhikh "Sergey Dovlatov: Time, Place, Fate" [39]. In this work, written scientifically and at the same time fascinatingly, S. Dovlatov's work is analyzed in detail on the background of the epoch and in the context of the literary process. The creative individuality of Dovlatov-the writer, the evolution of his poetics and genre specifics were considered by J. Motygina [29]. J. Vlasova based her work [41] on the genre approach to Dovlatov's stories. K. Docheva devoted her research to the identification of the hero of Dovlatov's works [9]. J. Fedotova analyzed the expression of existential consciousness through the poetics of absurdity in the writer's prose [12]. The traditions of the Russian classical literature reflected in Dovlatov's work were studied by A. Plotnikova [32] and G. Dobrozrakova [8]. Dovlatov's humor was revealed in one of the sections of the work by N. Vygon [42].

Since Sergey Dovlatov had lived and worked in the United States for 12 years (in a number of sources he is referred to as a "Russian and American writer and journalist"), it is quite natural that English-language philological researches on Dovlatov appear as well. Among them, let us name the most relevant ones: J. Young [44]; Karen L. Ryan-Hayes [35] (the 4th chapter is devoted to Dovlatov's book "Ours"); N. Pakhomova [31]; O. Pushkar [33]; Yana Meerzon [25]; D.M. Fiene [13].

Dovlatov's humor appeal to European scientists, as well. Significant thoughts and observations, relevant to our article, are contained in the works by Laura Salmon, the Italian researcher and translator of S. Dovlatov's prose. First of all, we imply to her interdisciplinary research "Mechanisms of Humor. About the Works by Sergey Dovlatov" [37]. In this book, the author combines the heritage of Russian and Western European literary studies with the philosophical thinking of the West and East, as well as with the latest data of cognitive sciences.

However, despite the active interest in Dovlatov on the part of critics and contemporary literary study, many aspects of his work are still poorly understood. Among problems needed to shed light on are semiotic mechanisms for creating a comic field of Dovlatov's texts. The influence of folklore traditions on the prose of the writer also remains aloof from the main ways of literary reflection on the phenomenon of S. Dovlatov. In this, we see the relevance of bringing up this topic.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to study the influence of folklore traditions on the formation of the leading type of the characters of Dovlatov's prose ("outsiders") and the nature of its deviation from the social norm.

Methods

The analysis of S. Dovlatov's prose shows us that the creation of the writer's humorous world is actively involved in the semiotic mechanisms that manifest themselves both in the reflection of the writer's contemporary semiosphere and in the process of his artistic comprehension of folklore.

Therefore, the authors of the article set it as a fundamental task in the field of methodology to attract mythological, structural and semiotic methods for the study of the elements of Dovlatov's humor, along with the traditional method for the study of Dovlatov's stories via historical and genetic methods. Besides, the consideration of the symbolic nature of humor and its counter-sign function in the literary text is also substantial.

In the course of the work, we relied on theoretical and methodological works on problems of humor, semiotics, folklore, archetype theory [4, 5], [7], [36], [42], [2, 3], [34], [20-22], [38], [6], [45], [28], [24], [19], [14], [26, 27], [18]. Interesting ideas on the conjugation of semiotics and humor are contained in the work by Dmitriy Gluscevsij [17]. Our research also gained a lot from the consideration of the archetype of the trickster in the work by Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist [23].

As noted by Yuri Lotman, the inner space of the semiosphere is, on the one hand, single, unified, uniform, and on the other hand, it is uneven, asymmetrical. This space consists of conflicting structures [21: 257-268]. Humor is the force that actively comes into collision with the dominant sign system. We reckon that one of the basic ideas for further research can be taken from Y.M. Lotman's theoretical position where he claims that any self-developing system should have mechanisms of destabilization, mechanisms for generation of uncertainty along with mechanisms of stabilization [20]. Additionally, we rely on Dmitry Likhachev's opinion that "the function of laughter is to detect the truth, to strip the reality from the veil of etiquette, ceremonialism, artificial inequalities, from the complex symbolic system of a certain society" [19: 16].

Humour has an ability to create around itself a special world, that is, semiosphere with its specific characteristics. In M. Ryumina's work "Aesthetics of Humor. Humor as Virtual Reality", the author draws parallels between the buffoonish world and virtual reality. The scientist considers the motive of illusion (imaginary, "waking dream", deception and self-deception, etc.) to be one of the main motives of the comic [36: 74]. Basing on the observations of M. Ryumina, we can come to some conclusions concerning the problems of our study. First, the motive of illusion (imaginary) entails the recognition of the symbolic nature of the created space. Secondly, the marginality as the leading property of this world strengthens the role of the semiotic opposition "friend-foe" (oneself – others) and the boundaries between the sections of the semiosphere. Third, the relevance and autonomy of the waggish reality, its constant desire for renewal show us the dynamic processes of creation and destruction of the semiosphere with the release of "output" of the laughing energy.

We should add that such dynamics is possible, as we assume, only in case of interaction (collision) of “differently charged” (that is, structured according to different principles) semiospheres. There is a “doubling of visibility” and, in the future, “self-destruction of the illusion.”

According to Y. Lotman, any culture involves partitioning of the world into one’s own (internal) space and someone else’s (external) (“ours-or-theirs”). Between these spaces, there is a boundary, which is one of the important mechanisms of semiotic individuality. This boundary is the line on which the periodic form ends [21: 257]. The binary opposition of “friend-or-foe”/“ours-or-theirs” correlates in a sense with the dichotomy of “Myself” – “Others” [15].

The desire to break out from one’s usual cultural space, to find an external or at least marginal position from which this space can be subjected to “deconstruction”, had a liberating intellectual effect. S. Dovlatov in his works tries to create a new spiritual space, attacking the “totalitarian” spiritual order from the periphery, from the outside, as if from the position of “other” people. In the space of the text, there are constant collisions of “one’s own” and “somebody else’s”, as a result, strictly arranged and regulated sign system is subjected to dynamic influence from the sphere of signs with a different semiotic code. This destabilizing semiosphere acts as a “counter-sign” in relation to the first one. Respectively, from their interaction laughing energy is released. In addition, there is a rejection of the ideal of a single model of the world, the writer’s (and, to some extent, the reader’s) acceptance of chaos and fragmentation as an integral feature of the world, the awareness of the relativity of logical criteria of knowledge.

It should be noted that Dovlatov’s humour is based on the axiological paradigm, which is typical not for satirical, but for jesting attitude to life contradictions. Assessing humor from a worldview, N. Vygon in her study notes that it not only destroys, but it also creates, preserves cultural values, acts as a means of harmonization of disharmonious life [42]. Facetious type of artistic thinking in the literature of modern times is considered by N. Vygon as a personal successor of mythological consciousness and laughable perception of the world of folklore [43: 290]. This continuity is manifested in a common source – archaic culture, in a common gnoseological goal – to create a model of the world as a unity, in the acceptance of being (that is, existence) as an integrity. M. Bakhtin said on this issue that humor has a deep worldview, it is one of the most significant forms of truth about the world in its whole, about history, about man; it is a special universal point of view on the world. Humor allows you to see the world differently, and this view is even more important than a serious one [4: 78].

It is necessary to consider that of all forms of the comic, humor is the most complex and philosophical matter. According to its ethical content, it is also close to the national system of values expressed in folklore. Folklore sources of mirthful attitude to life in the Russian literature give us the grounds to carry out literary analysis of the stated problems with the consideration of the traditions of folk-laughter culture in Dovlatov’s texts.

Results and Discussion

Among the numerous characters-actors in S. Dovlatov’s prose, the greatest weight (and perhaps the greatest ethical and aesthetic value from the point of view of the author’s concept of existence) is the paradigm of characters forming the literary type of the so-called “outsiders” or “superfluous people”. Critics and literary men immediately noted the connection of this type with the Russian literary tradition [1: 17]. A. Plotnikova noted that in S. Dovlatov’s works the features of a “superfluous”, “humble” man are intertwined and a new type of the character associated with the contemporary to the writer reality is created [32: 16].

However, this type is also notable for the fact that in it the literary tradition clearly intersects with folklore. At the same time, the folklore roots of Dovlatov’s images (in contrast to the literary genesis) remain practically unexplored to this day. Such unexplored issues include borrowings from folklore and the specific refraction of the image of a fool in Dovlatov’s prose.

The fool (a traditional fairy-tale character), was called an “unpromising (hopeless) hero” by E. Meletinskii. The fairy-tale fool is characterized by a nondescript appearance, laziness, at the beginning of the plot, he either does not take active actions at all or acts out of place (cries at a wedding ceremony, dances at a funeral, etc.). He has a low social status, which is emphasized by nicknames: Ivan-the-Peasant’s-son, Ivan-the-Cow’s-son, Ivan-the-Widow’s-son. However, behind those nicknames there lie the true values of the soul, giving the protagonist reward at the end of the fairytale. It is necessary to make certain adjustments to the concepts of “the fool” and “stupidity”. The folklore fool is not stupid at all: he is prudent and canny. A. Panchenko points out that in the exposition and in the initial episodes of the fairy-tale the fool’s opposition to the world looks like a conflict of stupidity and common sense, but later, with the course of the plot, it turns out that this is fake or imaginary stupidity [19: 100-101].

N. Vygon concludes that Ivan-the-Fool possesses an alternative kind of wisdom, which is highly valued in the folk perception and gives it all possible advantages [43: 295]. The researcher refers to O.M. Freudenberg’s approach, where the ritual figure of the madman (jester) is elevated to mythological ideas about the temporary insanity of heroes, who later become intelligent [14: 129-130].

However, the dialectical nature of the folk image of the fool suggests another mode of existence, reflected, in particular, in the work by the Russian religious philosopher Y. Trubetskoy, who believed that in the Russian fairy tale, sympathy for laziness and theft borders on the apotheosis of the lazy and the thief. Y. Trubetskoy expresses his hostility to the fact that the exaltation of a fool over a hero, the replacement of a personal feat with the hope for miraculous help, are common elements of a Russian fairy tale [40: 137].

Figures of ancient Russian whackies (holy fools) are close to folklore fools. In A. Panchenko's opinion, the words "whacky" and "fool" are, in fact, synonyms. In the dictionaries of the 16-17th centuries, the words "foolishness", "stupidity", "craziness" are in one synonymic row [19: 100]. Modern literature actualized such traits of the foolish, as austerity, social exclusion (abandonment), violation of vanity, revealing the contradictions between profound truth and superficial common sense, true morality and ostentatious piety, the defiant behavior of the foolish up to the scandalous "anti-behavior", with the implication of public protest.

Marginal characters of S. Dovlatov absorbed many features of the fool/the whacky/the jester, fancifully combining folklore and literary lines.

In his book "Dovlatov and Surroundings" A. Genis defined Dovlatov's outsiders as "eccentric ones" and drew parallels with Shukshin's characters [16: 119]. Although the well-known critic pointed primarily to the literary genesis of this type, in modern science there is a rather convincing idea of the impact of the folk image of the fool on the formation of Shukshin's characters. It is reasonable to raise the question of this influence in relation to S. Dovlatov's characters as well.

One of the leading features of this type of characters is social abandonment, dereliction. Folklore fool was subjected to ridicule and rejection among the villagers and relatives, the joker was forbidden to settle among respectable citizens, the fool himself "spews himself out of the world", breaks all ties with it [19: 129-30]. When one of the brightest Dovlatov's marginals, journalist and "degrading man" Bush, trying to behave in the same way, gets a job in the boiler room, he unexpectedly meets among the workers other marginals-intellectuals. One of them is a Buddhist, a follower of Zen school, seeking peace in the monastery of his own spirit. Another one is an avant-garde painter, who works in the tradition of metaphysical synthetism. He draws, as ironically notes the author, primarily containers – boxes, cans and cases. The third one introduces himself as "a humble man", who indulges himself in music theory in his leisure [10].

In the Soviet Union, the young people of free professions (freelancers) (aspiring poets, artists, rock musicians, etc.) often got a low-paid job, which was unpopular in the eyes of the society but allowed them a lot of free time for creativity. It was the work, not requiring high qualification and presenting special requirements to the employee: a janitor, a guard, an elevator operator, a porter, etc. The boiler, described by Dovlatov, is from this category.

In fact, Dovlatov's "outsiders", his "hopeless characters", can be divided into two subtypes. The first one is clearly represented by the characters from the boiler room described above – socially adapted intellectuals, smart, talented, versatile personalities, who did not find themselves in the contemporary to the writer society or did not accept the system of values, dominant at that time. This subtype also includes the autobiographical character-narrator, whose marginality is not in doubt in the vast majority of Dovlatov's works. The second subtype represents ordinary men "out of people", "rabble", using the words of the writer. They are carriers of a primitive thinking and, unlike those from the first subtype, seek to break ties with the world; they are marginal initially – so to say, by definition. These are prisoners, vividly described in the novel "The Zone", drunkards, such as Mikhail Ivanych from the story "Pushkin Hills" or regulars of the beer stand in the short story "Driver's Gloves". There are also several characters not decidedly marginal, but showing some deviation from social norms, demonstrating illogical or weird-unusual behavior that immediately catches the eye against the background of dismal standard living. We argue that all the above-mentioned types have folklore traits of the fool/the jester/the whacky and are close to the hagiographic image of the Holy Fool.

Dovlatov's character (like a folklore fool) is passive both in a personal and civil sense, he is not a "builder of a new society" and, furthermore, he "does not know how to live", that is, how to benefit himself. Such a deviation from social norms can be easily detected, for example, in Eric Bush ("The Tenth Compromise"). It is significant that this story was originally printed separately from the cycle, under the title "Extraneous".

The very acquaintance with Eric Bush and Galina leads the narrator to the conclusion that they both were complete schizophrenics. At the same time, the author does not hide his sympathy for them.

Eric Bush is certainly not stupid, but common sense often leaves him. As a result, he gets a rejection from society, becomes a social outcast. The character is poor and virtually homeless (he lives at the expense of aging women in love with him). He is eking out a half-starved existence. He does not have a permanent job (in the best of his times he was a freelance correspondent in the Tallinn newspaper, at his worst times – unemployed). In this character, we can clearly see "the paradigm of alienation", using Lotman's notions.

The character's alienation is evident from the first pages of the novel: he addresses the narrator with "smooth melodious verses." The strangeness of the nature and behavior of Bush is further enhanced by the sharp contrast between the elegant appearance of the character and the miserable environment (the dining table is littered with dirty dishes, scraps of wallpaper hung to the floor, on the ragged carpet there is a thick layer of newspapers, empty bottles line up at the door. Inattention, indifference to household facilities, reluctance to equip one's house and regulate one's daily life become characteristic features of folk fools and Holy fools, deliberately and intentionally exposing themselves to vagrancy.

Bush's appearance is confusing, as, at first glance, it sharply contradicts this conclusion. He has a dark, masculine face of an American movie hero. The lapel of a good-quality foreign jacket is decorated with cloves.

The shoes are shining. Against the background of the cluttered home, Eric Bush looked like *a space alien* [10]. In fact, this difference even more sharply emphasizes the “otherness”, “foreignness”, “alienation” of the character.

By some miracle, almost from birth, he was an anti-Soviet and nonconformist, – the author writes about his character. The revolting behavior of this personage is also homogeneous with the traditions of foolishness. Denunciation of social vices is one of the most important functions of clowns, whackies and holy fools. It also assumes personal impunity, which Bush does not have. Perhaps, this is the reason why strong non-conformism coexists in him with an absolute lack of scruples, and his social protest is often chaotic, ridiculous and largely comical in nature.

An apparent lack of common sense in the “exposures” makes the figure of Bush comical and folk-clownish. The character not only criticizes the existing order: Bush denied the historical reality itself. He questions the indisputable Soviet achievements – the victory over Nazi Germany, free medicine, Gagarin's flight into space. Madness as a behavioral paradigm of the character is manifested not only in the denunciations of the regime but also in his everyday life: when meeting with bullies on the night street, Bush chooses the most destructive, the most non-standard way of behavior, enraging the muggers with an exquisite phrase “Did we drink with you on the brudershaft?!” Beaten for these words, and addressing the bullies in his high style, Bush reminds us of the suffering holy fool, persecuted and banished by the crowd.

The unlucky Dovlatov's personage, constantly getting into ridiculous situations and making the reader doubt his mental adequacy, however, speaks quite sensibly and tries to find ways out of unfavorable situations. Thus, a fictional interview with Captain Paul Rudy gives journalist Bush trouble from the KGB, but the character defends himself in that situation quite skillfully, claiming that he described everything as it was, knowing nothing about the past of Captain Rudy. At the demonstration to the anniversary of the revolution, Bush was carrying a plywood poster “Give a stern rebuff to the enemies of world imperialism!” Made in the spirit of the Soviet style, and having the sign system of Soviet ideology, the poster did not arouse anyone's suspicion; only later the police figured out who the “enemies” were and who deserved “rebuff”. However, debunked Bush masks everything as an accident. He answers the questions calmly and briefly. He categorically does not confess his guilt. He says that everything that happened is a misunderstanding, a mistake made by absent-mindedness. Thus, the image of the hero is teetering on the border between the whacky (holy fool) (the poster as a social protest) and the imbecile (the poster as an error, the result of the idiocy of the character).

According to Y. Lotman, the behavior of a madman is characterized by the fact that the bearer of the disease gets additional freedom in violation of prohibitions, he can do things that are prohibited for a n adequate, “normal” person. His actions are doomed to be unpredictable [21: 41]. The scientist sees this as the ability to demonstrate individual initiative, a breakthrough in the sphere of a fundamentally new action.

Perhaps the most striking example of Bush's anti-social behavior is an incident at a corporate New Year party at the editorial office when Dovlatov's character performs a difficult-to-explain act: he kicks a tray of coffee out of the hands of the editor-in-chief's wife. This blow, at first glance, does not have the slightest practical sense. Moreover, it completely negates Bush's career hopes. Thus, the act absolutely fits into the scheme of the behavior of the fool/the jester. The character himself later explains his motives to the narrator: “a daffy party”, “obscene conversations”. The performer of this act deliberately shocks the audience, “blows up” an ordered semiosphere of well-fed and “decent” (in the society's opinion) life.

It is common knowledge that foolishness destroys established etiquette and decency rules, removes social and all other differences. Y. Mann notes that the fool looks at the world through free eyes, bypassing prejudice about truth, tradition, human judgments and opinions, etc. In relation to the untrue, the whacky shows sarcasm, condescension or feigned reverence, and *even outright and defiant epatage*... Behind all this, we guess certain logic, though not easily explainable, suggesting some sort of irrational residue [24: 165].

In this context, the behavior of Dovlatov's “foolish”, superfluous people-outsiders once again actualizes the most important Dovlatov's antinomy “norm – absurdity”. The narrator in “The Tenth Compromise” notes in connection with Eric Bush, that human madness is not the worst thing. It gets more and more close to normal with advancing years. At the same time, the norm becomes something unnatural [10: I]. Sometimes the writer characterizes the world as “absurd”, and sometimes – “normal”. A. Aryev believes that this is a fruitful contradiction. According to Dovlatov, human life is absurd, if the world order is normal. But the world itself is absurd if it is subject to the norm if it has lost the quality of the original chaos [1: 16].

The narrator of Dovlatov's prose is “a friend to every rabble” and has a weakness for the plebs. This circle of characters also presents many examples of clownish behavior. One of the most memorable characters is an alcoholic Mikhail Ivanych Sorokin from the novel “Pushkin Hills”. Even outwardly, it resembles a folk character:

This was a broad-shouldered, well-built man. Even tatty, filthy clothes could not truly disfigure him. A weathered face, large, protruding collarbones under an open shirt, a steady, confident stride... I couldn't help but admire him... [11].

An aristocratic alcoholic (he is shy to hand over empty bottles, shy to wake his guest), Mikhail lives in a dilapidated house, he has no family, no household. It is noteworthy that the villagers are jealous of him: it occurs

to them that he lives for fun, as well as the folklore Ivan-the-Fool, without making much effort and without seeking anything.

The character is also brought closer to the folk image of the fool/the buffoon (and especially to the hagiographic image of the Holy fool) by the characteristic speech manner. The author describes his manner of speech like this:

...Misha's speech was organized in a remarkable way. Only nouns and verbs were pronounced with clarity and dependability. Mostly in inappropriate combinations. All secondary parts of speech Mikhail Ivanych used at his sole discretion. Whichever ones happened to turn up. Never mind the prepositions, particles and conjunctions. He created them as he went along. His speech was not unlike classical music, abstract art or the song of a goldfinch. Emotions clearly prevailed over meaning [11].

Tongue-tied mumbling of the character is most reminiscent of the examples of the glossolalia of the idiots, about which A. Panchenko noticed that their statements are unintelligible, but always brief, they are either cries, interjections, or aphoristic phrases [19: 95].

Like that of a whacky, Michail Ivanych's speech is obscure (Copper-trouble pussberries be hullabaplonking an' God knows whatsa at the centre...), replete with paradoxes, logical inconsistencies:

I was a pup when the Germans installed here. Truth be told, they did no harm. They took the chickens, old man Timokha's pig, but they did no harm... And they hadn't laid a finger on the dames. The skirts took offence, even... My old man cooked his own brew and traded it for food with the Nazis... They did fix the Yids and the Gypsies, though... [11].

The "randomness" of the language and the "randomness" of the character's actions complement each other in the best possible way, showing us a ridiculous, but free and unprogrammed life.

In the space of the text of "Pushkin Hills" the figure of a local jester, photographer Valera Markov, perfectly complements Mikhail Ivanych:

Long-haired, ridiculous and scraggy, he gave the impression of someone feigning schizophrenia. But with the single-minded determination of being exposed as soon as possible. He could have passed for a lunatic were it not for his triumphant smile and expression of common *everyday tomfoolery*. A cunning, shrewd insolence was detectable in his crazy monologues. In this stomach-churning mixture of newspaper headlines, slogans and unfamiliar quotations... [11].

The whole gallery of departing from the social standard characters-relatives is represented in Dvlatov's book "Ours". It is notable that Dvlatov avoids depicting those relatives, who are perfectly correct, virtuous, and decent. It is easy to see that the writer remains true to the previously selected position, suggesting an interest in "quirks of reality", in unpredictable people, deviant behavior, breaking out from the "system". The writer considers a "decent" person to be an ideological sign, a fiction. "A good man is not interesting to love," admits, for example, Tanya, the wife of the main character of the novel "Pushkin Hills". Alikhanov responds to this characteristic reasoning: "It is an amazing era we live in. 'A good man' for us sounds like an insult" [11]. Presently, it is relevant to recall many Russian writers who stuck to a similar position: from N. Gogol to V. Voinovich, who discoursed on the reasons for not using the image of "a virtuous man."

Many characters of "Ours", whose behavior is illogical, paradoxical, unusual or even shocking, exist in a significant meaningful level, which allows to interpret them within the range of the fool/the jester/the whacky. Uncle Aron, as it seems, copies in his biography all the complex curves of the Soviet history and preaches Communist mythologems (he curses rock music, Baryshnikov and General Andrei Vlasov), though in the old age he changes his behavior, saying that he is tired of living and that he does not believe in communism in one country.

This change in the mode of worldview can hardly be called an enlightenment. Dvlatov's character "is going left" and "going right", depending on the course of his disease. The comedy comes from the collision of the semiosphere of the official ideology and dissidence (as its countersign). Some unknown force throws Uncle Aron from one semiosphere to another. The worse his state is, the more critical this character is in relation to power and communism. But temporary recovery returns the uncle to Orthodox Marxist positions. His conversion makes the reader skeptical about any ideological formulas and stereotypes. With the help of humor, Dvlatov creates a character, which is not only funny but ambiguous as well.

The humor of the situation does not allow readers to take the uncle's actions seriously – neither when he writes anonymous notes to Brezhnev ("Where do you lead Russia, monster?"), nor when he says to the narrator: "Bring forth a good idea with no connection to communism!" Perhaps, the only sincere character's breakout is in the following exclamation: "How pointless my life is!" [10: Ours].

The Ninth Chapter, which tells the story of the narrator's brother, begins with a paradoxical message: "Life has turned my cousin into a criminal. I think he was lucky. Otherwise, he would inevitably become a major party functionary" [10: Ours].

The narrator's brother's destiny is full of paradoxes, it is a destiny of "an unconscious spontaneous existentialist" who lives "as he should", as required by the system, sometimes breaking down and making several controversial and somewhat pointless actions. By his actions, he also resembles the figure of a fool/the whacky. His action against the Headmaster of the school before the final exams are akin to a spontaneous protest of "the degradant" Bush from the book "The Compromise", who kicked the tray of coffee from the editor-in-chief's wife's hands. Even the motivation, announced by the characters is the same.

We emphasize that this ability to act does not mean a conscious "rebellion", especially that of the political dissidence. The behavior of the personage can be characterized as belonging to the rebels in one coordinate system, as belonging to the "builders of communism" – in the other frame of reference. The narrator's brother suddenly "switches" himself from one coordinate system to another, then switches himself back. The character acts as a destabilizing factor in the ordered semiosphere: a situation, typical of Dovlatov's humorous world. At the same time, the writer adds some diversity to the scheme. His character does not invade the system from the outside. Firstly, he carefully creates and then destroys the created model of officially approved social behavior.

Brother works hard to make a career. A picture of his life-building is saturated with the signs of "officialdom". It was a role model of a Soviet boy: a pioneer, an excellent student, a football player and scrap metal collector. He kept a diary where he wrote wise sayings. He even planted a birch tree in his yard. (The Compromise).

After depicting his brother's first "failure" – a story with the school headmaster – the narrator continues the enumeration of the features of his brother's "correct Soviet life", talks of his ability to become a guide for others, including the narrator himself: "graduated with honors", "virgin land pioneer", "commander of construction site", "activist of the team", etc. Then comes the robbery of the twelve foreign tourist buses.

Each "failure" completely negates, demystifies all the above signs of officialdom, destroys the semiotic space of public morality and is somewhat reminiscent of the myth of Sisyphus, because it destroys everything created by the same character before.

A. Camus provided his book "The Myth of Sisyphus" with a subtitle "An Essay about the Absurd". S. Dovlatov checks the world for normality with the help of such atypical, abnormal characters and absurd situations.

One of the ways of the Dovlatov's characterization is comic mythologizing.

Critics and literary men have already noted the similarity in the image of the older generation of the writer's family with the heroes of myths. I. Sukhikh mentions that Dovlatov's first grandfather, Isaac, was as mighty as Hercules and as voracious as Gargantua. In the following description, a metaphor is implemented and carried out: he gobbles a whole wine shop together with his friend Zamarayev; he cuts bread not across, but along the loaves; he pulls the gun through the swamp, replacing the tired horses; being in anger, he lifts and rotates a truck; he punches a table with his fist; he breaks down American cots when he barely perches on them [39]. It is clearly seen that this hyperbolization is comic, carnival. This is how Dovlatov describes Isaac's physical stature:

My grandfather was about seven feet in height. He could have put a whole apple in his mouth. His moustache reached his shoulder straps [10: Ours].

Or: My grandfather ran into the attack ... but the guns were silent. As it turned out, my grandfather's back obscured enemy fortifications [10: Ours].

Such description fits into Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism. Consider the phrase:

If the horses were exhausted, my grandfather dragged the weapon along the swamp (Ours).

It is not only a demonstration of force but also the creation of a ridiculous picture due to semantic substitution: "livestock vivification" – grandfather instead of a horse. The male attractiveness of Isaac is also humorously accentuated: both daughters-in-law were keen on the writer's grandfather.

His second grandfather Stephan has much in common with Isaak. Stephan dares to fight with God, so he throws a comic, but at the same time, a serious challenge to the whole universe. Thus, mythological, archetypal features enlarge Dovlatov's characters. Meanwhile, comic features "down to earth" these "giants of the past", make them closer to each reader. At the same time, Dovlatov appreciates some special deviation from the norm in his every character, something out of the usual course of things.

Many features of surrounding the narrator outcasts are projected onto the figure of the main character. The central character of S. Dovlatov's prose, being a native of St. Petersburg's intelligentsia, feels his ethical and psychological kinship with the "plebs". During his entire adult life, the narrator, according to his confession, was instinctively drawn to flawed people – the poor, the bullies, budding poets, etc.:

Only in the society of savages, schizophrenics, and scums, I felt confident (The Suitcase).

According to K. Docheva, relations between people of "non-standard" type and autobiographical character are based on the principle of identity [9: 7]. Indeed, Dovlatov's "I-character" and outcasts from the lowest social strata, the plebs have much in common. There are certain features that bring the main character closer to the surrounding marginals. These same features give him the characteristics of the traditional for the Russian religious culture type as "the fool". These properties include:

- a. techniques of self-abasement;
- b. contempt for public decency;
- c. special behavioral and verbal expression;
- d. wandering and total loneliness of the rejected by the world character;
- e. his paradoxical worldview;
- f. ambiguity of his perception by people (the Holy fool/mad);
- g. relationship with democratic culture [30].

'You have neither address nor property, neither purpose... Nor deep attachments,' his girlfriend Marina (The Compromise) says to the protagonist of the story "The Fifth Compromise". Homelessness, restlessness, lack of either a strong family or constant work are repeatedly manifested in the pages of Dovlatov's prose.

Dovlatov-the-author visibly focuses the readers' attention on failures of his autopsychological/autobiographical character. This caused A. Genis to call the writer "a singer of his defeats". His narrator is a loser, rewarded later by fate, which is a typical figure in the Russian folklore. For the writer, this opens up additional opportunities. A low level of self-esteem allows Dovlatov to seem equal to other characters and, which is really important, equal to the reader. This gives him an ability not to judge others, but to judge himself, without seeming weak or ridiculous.

Anti-behavior of the protagonist is not as obvious as that of some other characters, but it is represented in a broader spectrum. The narrator, by his own admission, "was perniciously universal": he drank, scandalized, showed ideological shakiness. Finally, his family life became increasingly confused (The Compromise). The most shocking act of the autopsychological protagonist, comparable to the actions of Eric Bush, who knocked the tray out of the hands of the wife of his editor-in-chief, is the theft of the shoes from the Chairman of the Leningrad-city Executive Committee.

This inexplicable fact of mysterious theft without any reasonable purpose comprises several possible interpretations. First, it is characteristic of the whackies "reproach to the world", a protest against the comfortable and mired in the sin of life (the victim is a high-ranking government official with bossy-lordly habits). Second, the characteristic of a fool paradoxical behavior: the narrator (like a Holy fool foreseeing the mysteries of human life) says that the shoes are too tight and bring the mayor anxiety and suffering, so, with his theft, he relieves the officer from suffering. Third, the act acquires a metaphysical meaning, presenting fanciful and distinctive characteristics of the protagonist ("...I can't make out what happened to me"), and Russia in general ("Such things do happen in Russia").

Often Dovlatov's character deliberately "fools around", as the requirements of the system and the laws of formal semiosphere are so absurd that it seems best to give a feel for the absurd with an alleged "misunderstanding" of a set of "game rules" by the character. So, the protagonist, a journalist, in the story "The Fifth Compromise" almost sincerely wonders why the newborn jubilee resident of Tallinn must be a boy and why a newborn Jew or an Ethiopian are not suitable as candidates. In the story "The Fourth Compromise" the narrator deliberately confuses the concepts of "West" and "East", playing on the contradictions of geographical and ideological semantics. In "The First Compromise" the author of the newspaper article lists the countries in the alphabetical order, while it is required in the political one (first the countries – the allies of the USSR, then neutral ones, then its opponents).

It should be noted that surrounding people (especially representatives of the official ideology) relate such actions of the narrator to bewilderment and suspicion. Their perception of such model of behavior is teetering on the borderline between the ideas of speech and behavioral practices of the fool, on the one hand, and the jester, on the other hand. In other words, the characters in contact with Dovlatov's autobiographical hero cannot decide who is there in front of them: a simpleton who does not understand simple truths (logical for any Soviet man but intricate from the point of view of consistency), or a clever and insightful jester, consciously focused on mocking the ideologies of the contemporary society.

Jokes of Dovlatov's autopsychological character also do not get support: "It is impossible to talk to you!" – says the chief of the protagonist, Turonok by name. The same phrase is addressed to the narrator by the guide Aurora in "Pushkin Hills". The keeper of the Museum of Pushkin Hills, Victoria Albertovna, reacts to the words of the protagonist even more impatiently: "Your jokes here are entirely inappropriate." (The Compromise).

The narrator as the main character of Dovlatov's text acts in a specific role of a kind of "trickster" (i.e. a magician-trickster), ridiculing various patterns – ideological, political or literary ones. He scoffs at the expectations of the "naïve" reader, at the stereotypes of the reader's literary and everyday mindset. The author, delegating his own inner thoughts and feelings to the autopsychological character, at the same time has the fun of creating a mask, introducing a game moment to the structure of the text, allowing the reader to treat his "tricks" both seriously and frivolously. Expressing his judgment, with the help of irony, he seems to take his words back and thus recalls the relativity of any truth.

Dovlatov's "non-standard" character reflects characteristics of the folklore social position of an outcast, "off-track", desperate, provincial bully. From the point of society and the government, he is a renegade, not bound by any norms of behavior, who can "do whatever". Y. Lotman suggests that the very concept of "being an outsider" is subject to a gradation in any society and has a relative nature: it is possible to distinguish social

positions, perceived as “alien” in a particular society and those of a relative character, noticeable only on a certain socio-structural background [22: 230]. It is amazing that characters-the misfits do not always find a common language between themselves either, suspecting each other of being stupid or crazy. Thus, Mikhail Ivanych from “Pushkin Hills” says to the wife of the main character:

“Borya and I are doing good..., in terms of behaviour and in general... In the sense – no white, no red, no beer... Not to mention cologne... He just reads those books. He reads and he reads and he’ll die a fool.” [11].

We can also relive, by the way, the fact that in “The Tenth Compromise” the autobiographical character- narrator (“a hopeless one”) was called, though with a sort of sympathy, “an absolute schizophrenic” by marginal Bush and his wife Galina.

However, it is worth mentioning that Dovlatov’s autobiographical hero is not reducible to the image of the jester/the fool. The Holy fool leaves the house voluntarily, out of contempt for world treasures. In the case of Dovlatov’s character, the situation is more complicated. It is difficult to establish whether Dovlatov’s heroes renounced social life or were thrown out of it. This process is interdependent. The subtlety of the plots in the stories by the writer are especially pointed on this peculiarity [1: 10-11]. Unlike the holy whackies who reject the “sinful” world for the sake of true Holiness, Dovlatov’s character does not reveal his connection with the divine. The unselfishness of the “I-character”, his asceticism, persecution by society are rather enforced on the protagonist than consciously chosen by him. His “anti-behavior” usually takes subtle forms, it is reduced, muffled (cf.: *secret* abduction of shoes of the mayor by the main character and *overt epatage* of Erica Bush at a corporate party). The compromise of the marginal figure of the “I-character” does not allow the main character to get closer to the moral absolute, but it gives rich opportunities for the manifestation of the semantic dynamics of the image (as opposed to behavioral statics).

Conclusions

Thus, we have considered the folklore-semiotic mechanisms as a special way to characterize S. Dovlatov’s characters and to organize the humorous space of the writer’s prose. Dialogical thinking, excluding the “authoritarian word”, is realized in the binary oppositions of Dovlatov’s prose, which is especially characteristic of humor. In his works of art, S. Dovlatov creates a semio-space, operating on the “totalitarian”, “monological” spiritual order from the periphery, from the outside, as if from the position of “someone else”, whose functions are performed by characters typologically correlated with the image of the fool/the jester/the whacky. In the space of the text, there are constant collisions of “myself” and “others”, as a result, the ordered sign system is subjected to dynamic correction by the sphere of signs with a different semiotic code.

The era in which Sergei Dovlatov worked and which he described, actualized the format of the individual with features, having its roots in the folklore culture, with its archetypal folk-based and socio-ethical and philosophical perspectives. The problem of “non-heroic” (“non-standard”) character, marked earlier by N. Gogol, came to the fore in the “unofficial” literature of the 20th century, opposing Soviet ideologies. It finally received its productive development in the works by Dovlatov. Dovlatov’s character-the-trickster, playing a fool, a prankster, a rebel, an outcast, whose antisocial behavior and paradoxical statements deplete the system of “false signs” of preconceived ideas and obvious truths, opens the reader’s eyes to the true state of things via the magic of humor.

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