THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY IN S. SERGEYEV-TSENSKY'S NOVEL *CRUELTY*: TRANSFORMATION FROM LATVIAN INTO RUSSIAN

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Abstract

After the end of the Civil War in Russia, the writer S. Sergeyev-Tsensky, who consciously abandoned the idea of emigration, remains in Crimea, where in the early 1920s he wrote four works: MIRACLE, IN THE THUNDERSTORM, CRUELTY and THE PROFESSOR'S STORY. The short novel CRUELTY was first published in two issues of the journal NOVYY MIR in 1926.

In this novel, S. Sergeyev-Tsensky traces the path of a boy who was born at the end of the 19th century in Talsi - a small Latvian town; the writer tries to answer the question of how historical events and social factors influence the formation of the protagonist's personality; how in the depths of a calm, remote German-Latvian Protestant town and in the unpretentious life of ordinary peasants revolutionary ideas are ripening; what makes cruelty, a thirst for struggle, faith in revolutionary ideals wake in a calm, peace-loving boy.

The sprouts of the subsequent cruelty are rooted in the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905, when the protagonist's childhood ends. Revenge for the death of his older brother becomes the meaning of the young hero's life. The revolutionary events of 1917 and the Civil War that followed make the hero rethink his attitude to the world. One of the key issues for the protagonist is the problem of identity. The hero who in the story is perceived both as a Latvian and as a German, before his death, declares that he is a real Russian.

S. Sergeyev-Tsensky was one of the first in Russian literature who created a typified portrait of a red Latvian rifleman, who would become one of the central characters in Soviet literature, both Latvian and Russian.

Keywords: *identity, ethnicity, nationality, Russian literature*

1. INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Civil War in Russia, the writer S. Sergeyev-Tsensky, who consciously abandoned the idea of emigration, remains in Crimea, where in the early 1920s he wrote four works: *Miracle*, *In the Thunderstorm*, *Cruelty* and *The Professor's Story*. The short novel *Cruelty* was first published in two issues of the journal *Novyy Mir* only in 1926. In this short novel, S. Sergeyev-Tsensky traces the path of a boy who was born at the end of the 19th century in Talsi - a small Latvian town in the Courland Governorate (at that time being part of the Russian Empire), trying to answer the questions: how historical events and the impact of the social environment affect the formation of the personality of the main hero, why in the depths of a calm, remote German-Latvian Protestant town and in the unpretentious life of ordinary peasants revolutionary ideas are ripening, why cruelty, a thirst for struggle, faith in revolutionary ideals awaken in a calm, peaceful little boy, and how this affects his identity.

It has been repeatedly noted that the rampant brutality and terror that gripped Russia during the Civil War were rooted in the events of Russian Revolution of 1905. The famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich later recalled: "The 1905 revolution was constantly discussed in our family. I was born after the revolution, but stories about it deeply touched my imagination. As I got older, I read a lot about how things happened. I think it was a turning point - people stopped trusting the tsar. This is always the Russian people: they believe and believe, and then suddenly they stop. And when people stop believing, it ends badly. But for this a lot of blood must be shed. In 1905, piles of dead children were transported on sleds. The boys sat in the trees looking at the soldiers, and the soldiers fired at them as if for fun.

Then they were loaded onto sleds and taken away. The sleds loaded with children's bodies ... And the dead children smiled. They died so unexpectedly that they did not have time to get scared" [1].

During the tragic events of the First Russian Revolution, the childhood of the protagonist of the short novel *Cruelty* ends. Revenge for the death of an older brother becomes the meaning of life for the young hero. The revolutionary events of 1917 and the Civil War that followed them make him rethink his attitude to the world and the people around him in a new way. S. Sergeyev-Tsensky was one of the first in Russian literature to create a typified portrait of the red Latvian rifleman, who would become one of the central characters, first of all, in Soviet Latvian and Russian literature.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. The problem of identity

In modern science, the concept of identity is viewed as a philosophical category, as a category of social knowledge, as a psychological category, thus, acquiring an interdisciplinary character [2], [3], [4]. The expansion of the meaning of the term 'identity' is since the reality reflected by this concept has acquired dynamics. This led to the actualization of two interrelated, albeit multidirectional, trends: the widespread use of the concept of 'identity' in public rhetoric and attempts to deconstruct it in the scientific discourse, aimed at overcoming notions of an integral, authentic, and unchanging identity. Both social groups and individuals have an identity. Moreover, they have multiple identities (territorial, ethnical, cultural, religious, etc.), the individual aspects of which mutually complement each other. National identity is a complex multidimensional, multifaceted phenomenon, the study of which includes social, socio-philosophical, psychological, culturological, and ethnic aspects as well.

It is assumed that the socio-philosophical concept of national identity is heuristic and methodologically productive, especially in crisis, transitional stages of the development of civilization, when the next 'change of identities' occurs and individuals, ethnical groups, nations, states need to determine new guidelines for their development. In this regard, the study of literary texts for understanding the author's individual models of ethnicity, identity and their comparison with the dominant general cultural and national model is of particular interest. "Ethnicity" as the scholar S. L. Gilman puts it "is certainly a lens through which literature, even Shakespeare's, can be read" [5].

2.2. The problems of national identity and ethnicity in Russia in the 19th - early 20th centuries

To comprehend, to understand the time and modern man, S. Sergeyev-Tsensky addresses the problem of identity. In fact, the triad proposed in the first half of the 19th century - Orthodoxy- Autocracy-Nationality - led to the creation of the national myth of the Russian monarchy of the 19th century. "Official writers incorporated the national idea into the imperial ideology. [..] Uvarov [an Imperial Russian classical scholar] defined the Russian nation not as an ethnos, but as a community united by the unlimited devotion to its rulers, which distinguished Russians from Western peoples [..]" [6].

At the same time, the ethnic structure of the population was unusually variegated (over 200 nations, nationalities, ethnic groups), in addition, the Russians made up only over 40% of the population; the historically established relations between peoples in many regions were very complex and contradictive. The autocracy's policy on the ethnicity issue, with a certain tilt towards Great Russian statehood, stimulated, especially from the end of the 19th century, discontent among Poles, Finns, Jews, and other ethnic groups. Initially, empires are not based on feelings of community and brotherhood. An empire is a state system based on conquest, because of this, the official point of view identified the nation with the Europeanized ruling elite, and therefore attempts to suggest that there was another, different from the official, national idea seemed anti-government.

"Tsarism never created a nation, that is, an affective community of supposedly equality and brotherhood throughout the empire, or even did not instil a sense of the nation among the main core of the Russian population, despite the fact that it managed to evoke enormous loyalty of important representatives of the country's elite and a lively discussion about nation and nationality among representatives of the Russian intelligentsia from Slavophiles and Pan-Slavists to ardent anti-Semitic reactionary writers" [7].

The Bolsheviks who came to power in Soviet Russia proposed a new doctrine for the creation of a state and, accordingly, a new system of values (anti-religious) and a new understanding of identity, which was based on the class struggle. Until 1917, the national policy of the Bolsheviks was based on the thesis of the right of nations to self-determination (up to the formation of independent states by the peoples of Russia). The thesis about the right of nations to self-determination was useful to the Bolsheviks in the struggle for power, attracting national movements on the outskirts of the Russian Empire to their side. In his book National *Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* the American historian David Brandenberger states that Stalinist ideology was more Russian nationalist than proletarian internationalist [8].

The ideologist of Bolshevism V. Lenin believed that the thesis about the right of nations to self-determination should be subordinated to the main goal at that time - the establishment of a new statehood (the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power) on the territory of Russia, and, ultimately, on the territories of other countries - as many as possible. The first legislative act of the Soviet government on the national question was the *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia*. "The concept of the titular nation demanded a campaign of indigenization, that is, the rooting of Soviet power within the boundaries of the national administrative-territorial unit. [..] To keep society under tight control, the state needed to know two main characteristics of its citizens: social origin and ethnicity" [9].

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. The System of characters and representation of ethnic identity

The short novel *Cruelty* is set during the Civil War in July 1919. The main characters are six commissars who establish Soviet power in Crimea and are forced to urgently evacuate from the peninsula because of the British troops who came to provide military assistance to the White movement. All six are quite young heroes - "all six were moustacheless and beardless" [10], none of them was married, each had his own path to the revolution and his own truth in choosing his side in the Civil War.

In the first part of the short novel, S. Sergeyev-Tsensky introduces the reader to the childhood of the heroes born in different parts of the Russian Empire. In these six portraits, the author creates five typified ethnical portraits - of a Russian (Ryazan), a Jew, a Ukrainian (Poltava), a Crimean Tatar and a Latvian -, and one social portrait of a student. Although it is known that the sixth hero was born in Tambov, his father Pitirim Petrovich served as an intern in a local hospital, it is said that he "had no childhood, no religion, even no ethnicity" [11].

In other five cases, the author also accurately indicates the place of birth of future commissars: (1) a village in the Ryazan Governorate not far from the small town of Spassk, (2) Kamianets-Podilsk (the modern name - Kamianets-Podilskyi), which is located on the Smotrych river in the Podolia Governorate, (3) a farm not far from the city of Talsen (the modern name - Talsi) in Courland, (4) the village of Zasulie, located not far from the town of Romny in the Poltava Governorate, (5) the village of Degermenkoy from which Mount Ayu-Dag (The Taurida Governorate) is seen. It is noteworthy that the majority - four out of six future commissars - are of peasant origin. Another is a descendant of the family of a small artisan, and one - of the family of intelligentsia, while there is not a single representative of the working class, who in the Soviet ideological system will be proclaimed a hegemon.

3.2. Language

Each of the six regions represented, of course, has its own identity, its own ethnical characteristics. Language becomes the main ethnical marker in the text of the short novel. The professor Benedict Anderson notes that language provides continuity and privacy; it cannot be taken away by imperial conquest as it is absorbed with mother's milk and remains with a person until the end of life, being an important means by which the past is recreated, communities are imagined, and the future is dreamed [12].

The most striking example is the character from Poltava (in the text he is not called a Little Russian (in the imperial paradigm) or Ukrainian (in the Soviet paradigm)). Several times in the text of the short novel, the hero and Ukrainians are called 'Khokhly' (derogatory or offensive nickname for Ukrainians). The first time of mention - this is the author's remark in the story about the childhood of the hero in the diminutive version 'khokhlonok'. Then, in the end of the short novel, the former sailor and anarchist, a supporter of the Soviet regime, admits that he "doesn't understand Khokhlatski" (meaning the Ukrainian language) and knows "you Khokhols" well: "Self-determination of nationalities without annexation and indemnity! .. We kno-ow! .. Have lea-arned! As they started in the year seventeen to be self-determined, to divide the Black Sea fleet - so they, your Khokhly, took the "Cahul"! .. Well, there appeared eight hundred Moldovans in our country, so let's give them "Will" - the best dreadnought. "We", they say, "will hoist our flag on it! .." And then we, - the Great Russians we were called, - gathered and there were only ninety of us for the entire fleet, - we didn't get a single ship" [13]!

Throughout the short novel, the man from Poltava speaks either Ukrainian or Surzhyk (perhaps S. Sergeyev-Tsensky himself does not always accurately convey the Ukrainian language, mixing it with Russian words or pronunciation peculiarities in border areas), sings Ukrainian songs (*Hope is Gone* [Propala nadiya], *The Winds are Blowing* [Viut vitry]) sometimes explaining the meaning of Ukrainian words to his comrades, for example, such as 'spidnytsya' - "a sewn skirt" [14]. "At the age of seventeen it became clear to him that Ukraine should be independent and that it would be ..." [15]. The character feels national pride that in all newspapers they write about independent Ukraine, that again they have "a hetman in Ukraine" [Vkrayni] and [..] not some kind of Pavel, as it is with Moskals, but Pavlo as it should be said [yak i treba kazaty] " [16].

The Tatar is the only one of the six who is a native of Crimea. He is convinced that the Tatars lived on these lands for a thousand years, so he considers Crimea to be his land, he feels himself the host here, and all others are considered guests. An important detail is the author's remark that the gaze of the Crimean Tatars is often turned to the south - "to the warm Turkish land, where it would be good for the Tatars to live among **their own people**" [17]. The sultan living in Constantinople is perceived as 'their sultan' - "the ruler of all the faithful in the world" [18].

Crimean toponymy retains the Turkic names. This is not only Bakhchysarai - the former capital of the Crimean Khanate, but also such names of the places as Yayla (a pasture from Turkic), Degermen (a mill from Turkic). Describing the hero's childhood, S. Sergeyev-Tsensky inserts phrases in the Tatar language and their translation into Russian, for example, "Yakhshi baranchuk! Kuchuk arabaji! (Good boy! Little master!)" [19]. The word 'Yakhshi' becomes the most frequent in the lexicon of the Tatar and no longer requires translation in subsequent episodes. The text of the Muslim shahada, which the hero chanted as a muezzin in childhood, remains without translation.

Polish 'folwarks' (a Polish word for a primarily serfdom-based farm) become the sign of the hero from Kamianets-Podilsk since this is the former territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In this world, where two Christmases and two Easters were celebrated, Jews lived and preserved their religious and linguistic traditions: "[..] there were about ten of them in the cheder, and they learned to read Hebrew so loudly that Russian passers-by plugged their ears" [20]. One of the problems of the young hero is that he cannot feel like being a part of this world: "The church is beautiful, the music of the organ is beautiful, panenki [Polish word for ladies] are beautiful ... but not mine! But they all are not mine! Is it possible to love something not yours?" [21]. The anti-Semitism of the local 'pans' (Polish noblemen), who, when they see a Jew, call him pejoratively "zhyd" in Polish [22] only strengthens the youth's sense of isolation and aloofness.

The town of Talsen in the text of the short novel represents the German-Latvian Lutheran world. "All the streets were neatly cobbled, all the houses with mezzanines and under rooftiles, in a decorous German style [..] Where the signs were either strictly German or cute Latvian, and only two were in Russian: on one side of the gate of the inn, it was sprinkled in ochre and white 'night', on the other - 'lech', which together meant 'lodging', and above one dirty grocery store on the outskirts was inscribed: "Sale of oats, tar, kerosene and other goodies" [23]. S. Sergeyev-Tsensky revives in his memory only those Russian-language inscriptions that contain grammatical errors. On the one hand, they generate a comic effect; on the other hand, they are intended to emphasize the exoticism of the presence of the

Russian language in a given topos. Full-voiced words and phrases from the Latvian language such as "How [Kā]", "Well, yes [Nu, jā]", "Nothing will happen! [Nekas nebūs!]" [24] the writer compares with round, elastic, rubber balls.

It is curious that when creating the image of the character from Ryazan the author also uses the language factor. The character's speech is replete with vernaculars: 'khodimshi', 'ne spamshi', 'zyamel'ki' (dialectic versions of 'go', 'haven't slept' and 'lands' respectively). Coarse expressions become another lexical characteristic of the character's speech. Paradoxically, these factors help him to discover his oratorical talent during the years of the revolution.

3.3. Conflict

The culminating event of the plot is the social conflict between the commissars and the peasants of one of the Crimean villages. The inhabitants of Beshurani, who by that time has lived under the rule of both the Whites and the Reds, mistrust any strangers. Since their arrival on the peninsula at the end of the 18th century, land has become their main value. The attitude to the authorities, to the state is formed among the local peasant population, depending on how this or that government resolves the land issue. It is no coincidence that at the first meeting with the Latvian commissar, one of the old-timers of the village finds out whether they are real "Bolsheviks, who stand for the people in order to cut more land for the people - as much as possible, that is why they are called 'Bolsheviks' or those who only call themselves Bolsheviks, but in fact - damned prisoners are" [25].

Although the conflict in the short novel is strongly social in nature, the ethnical aspect also finds its expression. The character from Ryazan is trying to negotiate with the peasants and fugitive soldiers as a Russian with the Russians, as his own among his own. The student perceives the crowd surrounding the commissars' car as his own, ethnically close: "familiar Tambov Russian faces - of men, women, - the imprint of hundreds of Mongolian, Finnish, Slavic and other faces. [..] The eyes of this all-Russian face were clearly hostile ..." [26]. National identity is based on the relationship 'Me - the Other', on the recognition of the 'Other'. In this episode, the transformation of individual Russian, Mongolian, Finnish faces into an all-Russian face is especially characteristic. The transformation of the particular into the general is always accompanied by the levelling and erasure of the particular.

The Tatar tries to deceive the local old people, saying that his fellows and he are Whites. The other five respond to the Tatar's lie with painful silence. And when, it would seem, six heroes are accepted as their own: "Well, then you are ours ..." [27], the student accidentally pulls the trigger of a revolver and kills one of the young peasants, hot with alcohol.

The elders of the village are deciding on adequate punishment, while they see the shooting as the easiest death for their deed. Each of the old people participating in the sentencing is convinced that it is necessary for the commissars to be punished not by the law, but by justice. Since the commissars, from the point of view of the locals, desecrated the land - the main value of a simple peasant-toiler, they should be buried alive in the ground so that the land itself would pass a harsh sentence. "At first, as they will be covered with earth, maybe these people will shout a little, but, when they are fully covered, they will suffocate and become silent ... and the earth will be silent ... [..] And how they have crapped all our peasant life, so they will be crapped on too" [28]! The main thing is to bring the village children to the place of execution, so that they will remember for the rest of their lives what it means to be a commissar.

During the execution, each of the characters also behaves differently. The Jew is trying to reach out to the class consciousness of the villagers, referring to them 'Comrades'. The Tatar tries to convince that he is not a communist and addresses everyone 'Mister'. The character from the Podolia Governorate also says that he is not a communist and asks the question 'For what?' The student says that only the government can pass the verdict - 'But who are you?' The character from Ryazan desperately swears and shouts that their people will come and avenge their arbitrariness. And only the Latvian calmly and unhurriedly begins to undress himself. "In two or three minutes it was all over: [..] covered up to their necks, but the tall Latvian had the edge of the ditch only at the height of his armpits, and he was sprinkled with bumps all the same up to the neck" [29].

The old woman called Yevsevna, spreading her legs wide above the head of a hereditary intellectual, relieved herself. The old man Nikita asked the Latvian of his real origin: "Not from the Germans? And for some reason he deceived the old man and said firmly: "No, I am a real Russian" [30].

At the beginning of the short novel, creating typological portraits of the characters, S. Sergeyev-Tsensky emphasizes a large with a square chin, like an overturned pyramid, fleshy, light-eyed, large-nosed, very full-blooded, close to Russian faces, but undoubtedly not Russian face of the Latvian Commissar. Throughout the story, the Latvian stands out not only for his physical qualities - tall as a pine, "with large hands, in which the revolver seemed like a toy" []; after the victory, he becomes a fearless fighter - efficient, methodical, cold-blooded, and incorruptible. "He acted calmly, like a machine gun, like a guillotine on two strong legs' [31]. The mighty Latvian is the only one who does not give up without a fight: "It was clear to the Latvian that it was the end, that a fight with a crowd was unthinkable, but a large strong body simply could not surrender without a fight: the muscles were contracting by themselves" [32]. The harsh words he said left no doubt in the interlocutor that he was telling the truth and, if necessary, was ready to kill or give his life for this truth.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Imperial Russia managed to unite the central regions of the empire, which are often referred to as 'inner governorates', with a single national identity, largely due to linguistic and religious factors. However, different administrative experiences, the density of local ethnic groups, and the influence of settlement policies preserved and exacerbated the difference between the Russian core and the non-Russian periphery.

These contradictions intensified and came to the fore during the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907. National and social unrest were suppressed by punitive expeditions that left an imprint on the ideological formation of a new generation for which the principles of the empire - legalized differentiation and inequality were incompatible with modern ideas about building a new society.

S. Sergeyev-Tsensky's short novel *Cruelty*, written in the early years of Soviet power, is an interesting example of the formation of a new national policy, Soviet Russia, and then the Soviet Union.

The text of the short novel lacks such important ideologemes for the future Stalinist policy as 'friendship of peoples' and 'brotherhood of peoples'. Only Ukrainians are called brothers, but the use of the lexeme 'Khokhly' as well as the entire context of the certain episode gives this comparison an ironic character.

As the American historian scholar R. G. Suny rightly notes: "the concept of 'brotherhood' implies greater closeness, it also includes the hierarchy between elder and younger brothers, and each one realized which nation would soon become an older brother. Compared with friendship, the reduction of the concept of kinship had the advantage of emphasizing equality between Soviet people. Friends are ultimately equal in relation to each other. Their relationship consists of trust, devotion, dependence, affection and reciprocity" [33].

It is not friendship or brotherhood that become a unifying feature for the main characters of the short novel. National and political integration is beginning to take shape on new principles that are still incomprehensible for the heroes and the writer as well.

National identity begins with empathic attachments to those in the group and distance and differentiation from those outside the group. A special role is assigned to the leader - in this case, the Latvian hero, who creates the emotional character of the group, makes the most important decisions. In the end, it is the Latvian hero who unconsciously abandons his ethnicity in favor of Russianness.

A few years later, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsy would propose a new universal formula - "that the world shall be / one human commonwealth, / without any Russia, / without any Latvia" [34], but the Stalinist years became the time of the formation of 'new pragmatism' in Soviet ideology; in the Soviet republics the policy of Russification was implemented with the focus on the Russian language and Russian culture. S. Sergeyev-Tsensky, who already in the 1920s had anticipated the attitude of the authorities to the solution of the national question, in 1941, became a laureate of the Stalin Prize.

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