

"Christian Socialism": The Fate of Russia in M.M. Prishvin's Novel "Osudareva Doroga" ("Tsar's Road")

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Abstract

The article discusses the idea of "Christian socialism" in Mikhail Prishvin's late novel "Osudareva doroga" ("Tsar's road"). The key concept of the novel is analyzed via the image of the "all-powerful" supervisor, Sutulov. The character's fate is purposeful, following a certain way to implement the planned governmental project, the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal (Belomorkanal - known as the Tsar's road). One of the central motifs of the novel, the motive of power, is expressed through the language of spatial relations. The power of one individual over another's destiny is shown through the spatial opposition "top-bottom". A myth-poetic analysis of Sutulov's image in the aspect of the central philosophical category of the novel, a dialectical opposition "would like to - have to" (personality and society), allows for the explicit "Christian socialism" phenomenon in the novel, which is a specific synthesis of "ethical" communism and Christian orthodoxy. In Prishvin's narration, Sutulov's image is associated with the mercilessness of the historical period, bringing both inevitable changes and the hope for a bright future for Russia. Considering the phenomenon of "Christian socialism" through the example of Sutulov's image, we found that Prishvin represents his special project in this novel. It is the project of the creation of the higher organization society type, the "social sobornost (unity, conciliarity, collegiality)". "Tsar's road" is a novel of "reconciliation", showing the way out of this difficult historical period that brings in the spirit of Christianity; it is an attempt to eliminate the dreadful warp towards spiritual poverty against the background of universal equality.

Keywords: M.M. Prishvin; "Osudareva doroga"-Tsar's road; philosophy; communism; power; "would like to-have to"; orthodoxy; general unity; Christian socialism; social unity.

1. Introduction

Mikhail Prishvin started his artistic way in the atmosphere and environment of the Silver Age in the last decades of the 19th century, then continued through the Soviet era, all through which the writer was trying to open himself to God. It is known that the Christian culture left a deep imprint on all of his works, while the novel "Tsar's road" became his principle work, summarizing the writer's creative and spiritual search.

The novel "Tsar's road" actualizes the motive of continuous historical course. Emphasizing the Vygovskiy region's "integrity" and its belonging to the Russian epic, the author confirms the inevitability of changes and transformations, their omnipresence. "The inexorable Time" will reach the even the most remote corners of the country: "This way, the Civil War passed Nadvoitsy by, and everything was preserved here as though all the people lived in the same house, all of them being relatives to each other and above all they were fearful of the new man" (M. Prishvin, 1984), who should bring change. Communist Sutulov becomes such a "new man", a converter and a reformer in the novel.

Prishvin's diary style, journal discourse tells us about the special attitude of the writer to the utopian idea of communism, which he expressed in the novel: "In my new work, I would like to show the way to communism but not the one which is suggested by this doctrine but the way I'm taking. My work is communist in its content and very specific in its form" (M. Prishvin, 1986). The reality addressed by Prishvin acquires a mythical dimension, allowing him to reflect on the historical path of Russia from a different perspective, on a universal scale. Yet even within the myth, the writer remains faithful to his central philosophical idea of Universal Unity (see Borisova N.V., 2004); a communion unity of the world and of man: "The difficulty of creating Padun (one of the draft-titles of the novel by S.L.) is that I want to create "a leading thing", in which I honestly defend our communism unlike individualism. I argue for maternal-service ideas in a struggle for the creative unity of all people on the Earth" (M. Prishvin, 1986). "Tsar's road" for Prishvin is the space for the fight of "each person with oneself and with other people for the universal unity" (M. Prishvin, 1986). The peculiar artistic synthesis of communism and Christianity in the novel reflects the author's main intention; social unity as a key to resolving acute contradictions of time through the spiritual revival of the Russian people, as the road to Unity.

2. Literature Review

Due to modern scientific literary studies, some new approaches in the study of Mikhail Prishvin's artistic heritage were found. He was unfairly assessed during his lifetime, called the singer of nature and the "inhumane" writer, which unnecessarily reduced the scope of his talent.

In the pre-revolutionary period, the young writer creativity awoke a wider interest from critics and readers. The first critic who commented on Mikhail Mikhailovich's creativity was R.V Ivanov-Razumnik (Ivanov-Razumnik R.V., 1922). In his article "the Great Pan" he appreciated the creative work of Prishvin, calling him a "creator-artist" and the "poet of space feeling". The critic was able to discern the writer's "chaotic soul" and the specificity of Prishvin's mythology.

While the writer passed the pre-revolutionary period "on a wave of success" from his first ethnographic essays ("In the land of fearless birds"(1907), "Following the fairy-tale kolobok (run-away bun)" (1908), "By the walls of the unseen castle" (1909) etc.), the attitude towards him, following the revolution, changed. Prishvin was recognized for his skill as a "folk characters" artist, nevertheless his works were perceived as merely "illustrative or didactic material" where "Prishvin's philosophy, his aesthetic program, as a rule, was not taken into account" (Tokareva G.A., 1999). At this difficult time, the writer encountered many obstacles on his way to his friend (the reader). Z.Y. Kholodova aptly characterizes the general idea that Soviet literature had about Prishvin as "stereotypical, profane and inadequate in its essence" (Kholodova Z.Y., 2000). Of course, there were positive moments. "Katschey's chain" (1927-1930), "Ginseng" (1933) and many of his other works were understood and accepted and found their devotional readers and true critics. The postwar critical thought was more objective towards Prishvin's creativity when the writer's "true face" began to return. A.I. Ovcharenko (Ovcharenko A.I., 1982), in the brightly titled article "Unprecedented peak into world literature" about Mikhail Prishvin and his heroes emphasizes the significance of the writer's creativity and defines such features of his writing as "undertones". Reiterating the critic's words, the researcher O.A. Mashkina notes: "the specifics of all of M. Prishvin's creativity is that his subtext is always wider than the text" (Mashkina O.A., 2000) and, accordingly, the most "cherished" thoughts are to be found in the underlying.

A new step in the development of Prishvin's works started in the post-Soviet modern period. At this time, the writer's "re-opened" art philosophy became of particular interest (Borisova N.V., 2002, Podoksenov A.M., 2010). This interest in Prishvin's creativity was attributable not only to the new reading of his philosophical intentions, but also to the writer's diary books publication, in which, like in a mirror, the history of several eras was reflected. It is known that Mikhail Prishvin was making daily diary notes from 1905 onwards and until the last days of life. Almost 50 years of historical records about the fate of Russia, permeated through the prism of the author's consciousness: where they received their assessment and interpretation. This situation leads to continued interest in Prishvin's prose and makes his works especially topical. In addition, by today's critics, a key link of the writer's artistic consciousness (mythology) is being studied: "It is the mythology which becomes a truly integrating factor, enabling one to consider Prishvin's most significant works of art as a single system, as a one-piece semantic continuum" (N. V. Borisova, 2004).

The study of the book "Tsar's road" began in the 70's. The subjects of scientific reflection were genre specificity (Pimenova G.A., 1978, Sinenko S.G., 1989, Habib'yarova E. M., 2005), the history of the novel creation (Kurbatov V.Y., 1986, Grishina Y.Z., 1998, Kramar' O.K., 2002, Afanasiev Y.Y., 2007), its imagery-motivic structure (Vykhodtsev P.S., 1986) and the poetics of the novel (Rudashevskaya T.M., 2005).

One should also mention the dissertation research by O.A. Mashkina. "M. Prishvin's novel "Tsar's road" in the literary-philosophical context of the era" (Mashkina O.A., 2000), in which the author examines the work while considering the philosophical vector of the writer's creative intentions. Considering the poetics of the novel, the researcher notes the philosophy of the work, the presence of a "mythological paradigm" and points to the importance of "forests" in the book that form the subtext of the novel.

In O.A. Kovyrshina's theses "Dialectics of time and eternity in the artistic consciousness of Mikhail Prishvin" (Kovyrshina O.A., 2005) the work is studied through the prism of time. The researcher notes the existence of two types of time movement in the novel (cyclic-mythological and linear-historic) and studies them at the level of the imagery system.

3. Methods

The present study uses structural-semantic, system-holistic, mythopoetic, contextual (biography) research methods. The theoretical-methodological base of the study is made by the fundamental works in the field of space theory and text (Bakhtin, M.M., 1975, Likhachev, D.S., 1979, Toporov, V.N. 1983, Tsivjan T.V., 1997, Lotman, Y.M. 1998, Zotov S.N., 2001, Tkacheva, R.A., 2002, Nikitina I.P., 2003) and in the theory of myth and mythopoetics (Jung, K.G., 1991, Meletinskiy E.M., 2000, Potebnya, A.A., 2000, Propp V.Y., 2000, Afanasiev A.N., 2008).

During the process of analyzing the "Tsar's road" novel we focused on the sense-creating function of space, acting as a sort of key to the comprehension of the ontological basis of the text. The fact that the space in the novel is not simply a text element, but is the dominant sense is especially important. It defines the deep semantics of the author's philosophical elements, hidden behind spatial characteristics and the author's mythological ideas.

4. Results

The imagery system of the novel is a traditional model of Russian world mentality. Its key characteristic is the polarity of the cosmogony, opinions about the future of Russia and its destiny. Thus, the heroes of the novel can be distributed into the "old" and the "new people". "Old people" are believers in the old system: Marja Mironovna, Sergei Moronovich. The "New people" are communists: Sutulov, Ulanova. For the first group it's the end of the world, for the others it is a bright future, so "it is one thing to go to heaven, leaving behind the cursed land, trying to leave is another, having changed the land itself for the better" (M. Prishvin, 1986).

When the writer introduces "new people" in the novel narrative for the first time, our attention is drawn to the figure of the "boss", a "tall", "young" man and it is "these sorts of people who have always become people's leaders" (M. Prishvin, 1984). With his appearance Prishvin introduces the motive of power and of responsibility at the same time, which this man voluntarily takes: "And the bags, Mironich said, seem to be heavy: look how *bent* he is: small bags but *what a burden* (italics added for emphasis - S.L.)" (M. Prishvin, 1984).

There is nothing superfluous, nothing distracting him from his "big business", the construction of the Canal, in Sutulov's actions. The writer describes him with the following epithets: "serious", "domineering", "solid", like a stone. His features clearly resemble the image of the tsar-reformer Peter the Great and a peculiar bond between the times appears: the past and the present seeming to converge at one local point, within the book's atmosphere.

In the language of spatial relationships in the novel, one of the central ideas of the work is expressed – the theme of power. The power of one individual over the fate of the people is shown through the spatial opposition "top-bottom". Sutulov, as the boss, takes the absolute top of the real geographical space: "Sutulov began to climb up from stone to stone to the place where he could see a panorama of the entire work in the Karelian mountain forest" (M. Prishvin, 1984). The rest of the people, in contrast to the boss, occupy the "bottom" space.

It is important to note that, according to Prishvin's idea, there can only be *one* "big" boss. Sutulov is therefore contrasted with the "bottom" as a single unit to many, forming a kind of "pyramid" highlighting the social model of absolute power, where power must belong to one man. This ensures that all the rest of the people are *equal* to each other (social cohesion), because they should not and cannot command others, only the "unit" can dispose of other people's lives. The role of the unit is not only "patronage" above the crowd, but also, according to the author, the great human sacrifice, the self-sacrifice for the benefit of Universal Man (see Borisova N.V., 2004). This circumstance involves Zuyek's metaphysical question to his "adorable" boss: "Tell me, comrade boss, do you have a soul?" (M. Prishvin, 1984).

The "Authoritativeness" of Sutulov's space is also marked by its fulfillment with things. The key subject, the symbol in his space, is a "stick", which he stuck into the turf: "At the very top, from where everything around was visible, Sutulov stopped and drove his stick into the peat which was embracing the Karelian rocks like a fur coat... And as he stuck the stick into the peat, he was standing motionless, watching the energetic work below" (M. Prishvin, 1984). This "stick" in mythic-poetic tradition is the attribute of power, the Owner's staff or crook: "A kind of world tree, the symbol of authority over the mastered, human space, and even over the universe, the sign of belonging to the powers that be" (Korolev, K.M., 2005). It is noteworthy that the authority attribute is made not by a subject of real historical space: a gun, which is basically retouched, but namely by the mythological space. This corresponds to the genre: Prishvin himself argued in his diaries that "Tsar's road" is a novel-myth.

Sutulov's image is multi-dimensional: he is a ruler, but also a victim and a servant of those who are subordinate to him. A kind of sovereign's image ideality is emphasized in the poetical interpretation by the fact that he gets his power not through violence, such as the force of arms (a pistol), but by being "worthy of it", by taking this power by law (with the crosier being passed from ruler to ruler).

In addition, the novel emphasizes the ambivalence of Sutulov's image. On the one hand, from the point of view of the "exclusive" sovereign, he is compared to Peter I and Stalin, as it was noted above. On the other hand, because of many Bible reminiscences, related to this character, we note Sutulov's correlation with Christ, the people's "shepherd": "The shepherd's crosier is in the hands of Christ the Shepherd, leading believers on the right path". In early Christianity this idea was embodied in the monogram of a Shepherd's "stick", one of the mysterious emblems of Christ (Vovk O.V., 2006).

Sutulov's comparison with Christ is actualized in the chapter containing Vasya Veselkin's death: "All were silent.

And finally the last one who descended from the mountain and saw Vasya was old Volkov, the head of the powder-men group. "Where were you looking?" Someone from the crowd asked. And the whole crowd roared at once like a single entity, repeating: "how did you watch the old dog?" And someone *was first to raise a stone*, combining in his malice, as a fault, all the good that was in the old man ...

*"Smash the old dog!" Ordered the first judge picking up his stone.
"Beat, break!" The crowd yelled.*

At this moment the site supervisor Sutulov came down from his watching post and stopped the mob in one hand movement. And it was reported:

- *"Veselkin is killed. What work is it! We want to smash the old dog".*
- *"The work is hard" Sutulov replied calmly. "Vasya was a worthy canal-builder and you all know Volkov: why is he bad? If anyone can do better than him let him be first to throw a stone at him and take up his job "(italics added for emphasis - S.L.)" (M. Prishvin, 1984).*

Here, in our view, the biblical motif of Christ's forgiveness of the sinner whom people were going to "beat" with stones is actualized: "Under the law, the witness for the prosecution was supposed to cast the first stone into the person, sentenced to death" (Bible, 2011). Sutulov utters the famous words which Christ pronounced on the Mount of Olives, "Jesus, bent, was writing something with his finger on the ground. They did not leave him alone, and then he raised his head and said to them: "Those of you, who've never sinned, cast the first stone at her!" (The Holy Bible, 2011).

Why then is Sutulov's image associated with Christ? We believe that the answer to this question lies in the third unpublished epigraph to "Tsar's road": "If I come down to hell, and be thou there" (M. Prishvin, 1986). The writer emphasizes that a person walking the path of power, at the same time, commits spiritual descent, all the way to hell. But no matter how deeply Sutulov descended in his quest for power, *even in his soul*, like the soul of anyone, the imprinted face of Christ will still be stored, able to appear wherever this way leads the person.

In the atmosphere of power, Sutulov is externally static, but it is a superficial perception. Internally he passes his way, and that is the way of creator, the demiurge. In this philosophical novel, the novel of ideas, Sutulov is the "scheme of man". Studies on the structure of the novel fairly mention the "dryness" and "stiffness" of Sutulov's image, largely associated with and explained by the stereotype of a "volitional excellent party leader" (Gorelov A.A., 1978). Furthermore, in our opinion, Sutulov's "hodulnost (pomposity)" is also explained by some kind of "ideality" of this character, a hypertrophic exaggeration of the positive qualities of the boss, the power image, his keen sense of fairness, empathy, knowledge, etc.

Thus, the image turned out to be surreal and the writer probably did that deliberately in an uncontrollable attempt to show that in this leader's image lies another type of communism, "ethical communism" as opposed to "political communism." In the diary for the year 1936, a time of intensive work on the novel, Prishvin writes: "Political communism does overshadow ethical communism, everything is devoted to the show, and the question of how people actually live is absent" (M. Prishvin, 2010). Besides, the law of the genre dictates Sutulov's "ideality". It is fairly noted that the "philosophical genre specifics does not allow tone to approach the characters of the novel with the criterion of full force" (Gorelov A.A., 1978).

The motive of power in "Tsar's road" is manifested through the interaction, the clash of the poles within the central motif of the novel; Prishvin's "would like to" and "have to" (personality and society). Here the motive of power is one of the manifestations of this complex multi-dimensional motif that has a long tradition in Russian literature.

Let's return again to the above-mentioned fragment, as we consider it to be extremely important in this aspect, and look at it through the prism of interaction: "would like to" and "have to", identity and society. From this we can observe that Vasya is the personification of "would like to" i.e. personality; canal builders, powder people where Sutulov, acting as the personification of power, constitutes a "have to" society. We witness a kind of clash of "would like to" and "have to". At first glance, this confrontation ends with the prevalence of "have to", with a suppression of personality, its interests and finally the death of the personality.

However, to better understand the author's concept it is necessary to delve into the writer's diary books, which, as we have said, are the key to understanding the novel. The writer compares the common man with a flower in the meadow: "There was a wonderful flower. A scythe came down on it: this is the King of nature mowing hay for his cattle. This flower in "Bronze Horseman" is Eugene, in "Faust" it is Philemon and Baucis. Dostoevsky is for the flower, for a child's Christmas tree, for Eugene, for Philemon. In our time, we are forced to close our eyes to this: the King of nature mows the hay for his cows. The Bible in relation to blood (Abraham's sacrifice to God: the sunrise lit the fire). Yes! This

whole scary question, for history and morality, is determined by the victim in religion and allowed by Christ" (M. Prishvin, 1986). Prishvin, combining temporary layers, claims allegiance to this religious permission in "his time respect," i.e., antiquity, and wonders: "how is the question of the victim solved in our time? Eternal questions are solved during every time period. New time requires new answers for the same questions" (M. Prishvin, 1986). The writer sees a nowadays way out from the eternal dispute in the birth of an individual. For Prishvin, the manifestation of the personality is the *comprehension*, and the birth of the individual comes with reevaluation: "reconciliation is that identity which brings with it a whole new dimension of all the values created by the Bronze Horseman. Reconciliation in that the previous dimension was *necessary*. Reconciliation is the personality's smile and, perhaps, gently and lovingly whispered words: "We speak different languages". And finally: "Love *your enemies*" (M. M. Prishvin, 1986). Vasya does not just die, but *sacrifices* himself for the good of the "community", thus, from his side (like a personality or "would like to") commits, according to Prishvin, an action of the highest morality: "higher morality is sacrificing one's personality for the sake of the team" (M. Prishvin, 1986).

5. Discussion

You can reproach the writer that he points at the way out of confrontation between the individual and society, shifting it from the real aspect into a metaphysical, religious one. However, we shall note that according to Prishvin, "the feeling of nature, the feeling of a woman and the feeling of God in different forms are the same feelings in their essence, and all this forms a meadow" (M. Prishvin, 1986). Prishvin brought a new dimension into this classic confrontation, a shift, showing the interaction between "I would like to" and "I have to" not in the statics but in dynamics which, in our view, fits into the concept of Prishvin's Universal Unity. Sutulov in the novel, as we have said, represents "I have to", the power and the interests of society. Yet, we paid attention to the fact that the ambivalent and, nevertheless, perfect Sutulov image also implies the semantics of the "sacrifice", the man who refused the joy of life to serve the people: "The question is, what should a man refuse if he wants to gain power over people? Most likely he must abandon the joy of life" (M. Prishvin, 1986). In addition, the unequivocal biblical allusion, where Sutulov correlates with Christ in an "unthinkable" way, allows one to assume that Sutulov will probably also be sacrificed, that the "highest immorality will occur, when the team makes the personality a sacrifice in favor of itself, the team (for example, Socrates' death, not speaking about Christ)" (M. Prishvin, 1986). He will become the flower mown by a new "king of nature" for his cows. In view of the difficult time, a time of massive repression, such a fate scenario as Sutulov's looks plausible; it is enough to recollect the fate of the "all-powerful" G. Yagoda, supervisor for the Canal construction, executed in 1937, four years after the construction was completed, as "an enemy of the nation".

6. Conclusions

Thus, we can conclude that "Tsar's road", for Prishvin, is a novel of reconciliation in which he shows "Christian socialism." We fully share the view of Prishvin's creativity researcher, O.A. Mashkina, who states that in "Preaching "Christian socialism", the writer comes to the thought of the necessity of Russian people's spiritual revival... for Prishvin it was associated with the destiny of the novel "Tsar's road" "(Mashkina O.A., 2000). Prishvin was neither an orthodox Christian, nor a consistent communist. In our view, the purpose of the novel was an attempt to show a way out of a complex historical time that resolves around the spirit of Christianity, to eliminate the dreadful imbalance towards spiritual poverty against the background of universal equality. Prishvin, the writer-philosopher, creating his neo-myth about the fate of Russia, raises the question of the individual's role in society and his place in the universe. The writer is drawing attention to Universal Unity, to which everyone should aspire for the sake of a bright future for Russia.

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