

**ISCKMC 2020****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****APHORISTIC FOLKLORE IN THE NOVEL BY M. GORKY  
“KLIM SAMGIN’S LIFE”**

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**Abstract**

The article deals with the genres of the aphoristic folklore, represented by proverbs and sayings in the polyphonic novel by M. Gorky “Klim Samgin’s life”. Most attention is given to the repeated proverbial sayings as means of disclosing ideological-literary peculiarities of the novel, arranging of its ideas. Evaluating historical events, describing characters’ personal peripeteia, determining their world view and political opinions, proverbs transmit ideological-psychological atmosphere of life in the Russian society changes. Being a part of author’s narration, creating speech portraits of the characters, aphorisms characterize both the main character and secondary actors. Pronounced by different characters, in different contexts, denied and subjected to review, the proverbs reflect inconsistency of reality, polyphonies of the epoch, post-modern view of the world described in the novel. Using punctual and grammar variants of the proverb or some of its part which allows remembering the other one, presence of proleptic guideline, as a rule, the word “proverb”, is determined by the speech situation and corresponds to the authors aim in every case. Deeply intertwined with the novel text; popular aphorisms make the narration bright and imaginary, beautifying author’s speech and characters. Creative mastering of the aphoristic folklore by M. Gorky makes genre-style specificity of the novel. Value-based world of the proverb, refracted in the author’s consciousness allows creating the state of the Russian intelligentsia at the key point of the history. Aphoristic folklore updates popular understanding of the events, whose loyalty is confirmed by the age-long experience.



## **1. Introduction**

The problem of cultural reference in the many-sided novel by M. Gorky “Klim Samgin’s life” (1936), which requires high erudition from the reader and intellectual activity, attracted attention of literary critics even during publishing (Lukach, 1936; Lunacharsky, 1932). Variety of literature, scientific and philosophical material, included into the novel, motivated a group of writers together with A.I. Ovcharenko to prepare “A real commentary” (as cited in Gorky, 1976). Studying a creative dialogue of the writer with classical Russian literature becomes deep and wide in the works of 70-ieth years in XX century (Ninov, 1973; Vainberg, 1972; Volkov, 1978). Gavrish (1999) shows the novel as literary “encyclopedia” of the epoch shown by the author in the theses defended at the end of 90-th years of the last century. However, in all variety of the novel conceptualization contexts, its folklore component, important in understanding M. Gorky artistic search, was beyond the scope of the research interest, and the issue of the aphoristic folklore in the novel poetic style has not been studied.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The present work studies the issue of the folklore influence on the artistic world of the novel by M. Gorky “Klim Samgin’s life”. Its topicality is conditioned by the priorities of the modern literary studies which turns to religious, folk-poetic sources of national literature and aphoristic folklore its genre-stylistic meaning in the text of literary work.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the study is genres of parhemic folklore and their role in the literary context of the novel by M. Gorky “Klim Samgin’s life”. Studying the folklore component in author’s interpretation allows clarifying the ideas about the author’s folklore, his literary-esthetic ideas.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the work is to study aphoristic folklore in the novel by M. Gorky “Klim Samgin’s life”.

## **5. Research Methods**

The work uses descriptive-analytical, contextual-logical, comparative-typological, system-structural method of studies.

## **6. Findings**

The polyphonic novel “Klim Samgin’s life” by M. Gorky reflects many epochs: from ancient life to contemporary to the author Soviet life. As early as Lunacharskiy (1932) noted the breadth, high

culturedness as “great merits” of the work. Traditional folk life culture is introduced by different folk genres. Bylines, fairy-tales, anecdotes, signs, legends, bywords, proverbs, and sayings are understood creatively by the author. Among many opinions expressed in the novel there are speculations about folklore, in particular proverbs and sayings. In the talk with his wife the main character of the novel says for the importance of the proverbs: “Proverbs are not stupid, – Samgin said competently. – Thinking by aphorisms is characteristic for people, – he continued and felt displeased: his wife did not listen to him”. The reader learns that Samgin had a notebook where he collected “aphorisms and maxims” (Gorky, 1979). On the other hand, being alone, Klim states that “proverbs are always evil”. He comes to this conclusion remembering the saying “Happiness is on the bridge with a cup” – it is about beggars (as cited in Gorky, 1979). In the “Explanatory Dictionary of the Live Great Russian Language” by Dahl (1998) we find: “Such is our happiness – to go onto the bridge with a cup”. The word “cup” is understood as fate, doom, fatality” (p. 402). Samgin contradicts: “Happiness is when a person makes peace with himself” (as cited in Gorky, 1979, p. 90). Duality in the assessment of the situations and events, positional uncertainty, doubts between “yes” and “no”, which constitute personal traits of an “average intelligent” (Gorky, 1979), are reflected in his attitude to proverbs.

Peculiarity of the “good-minded speech” of the historian Kozlov is expressed by the author’s narration via figurality of the popular phraseology: “He was rich in proverbs and they sounded as accords of the same melody” (as cited in Gorky, 1979, p. 123). Gorky uses the word “saying” to denote a skeptic phrase heard after Boris Varavka died, which became a key tune, basis of the character’s world view: “Was there really a boy?” Klim liked such sayings, intuitively feeling their weaselly ambiguity and noting that exactly such proverbs are considered wisdom. At nights, lying in bed, before sleeping, remembering everything he heard during the day, he sifted everything dull and dim, as husk, carefully storing the best wisdoms in order to use them and confirm his reputation of a thoughtful juvenile” (Gorky, 1979). Expressing doubts in evident, striving to appear, but not be in reality, “excogitation” himself, plagiarism are characteristics for Klim Samgin. Ambiguity of Samgin’s legal activity is also characterized via two sayings “to serve two masters” (Gorky, 1979).

Some proverbs are used several times in the novel “Klim Samgin’s life”, in different context, thus discovering new meanings. The proverb “what soberness conceals – drunkenness reveals” is firstly used in a situation not flattering for the main character. In Petersburg, Klim trying to seem a smart young man kept silent in discussions. Once, being drunk, he talked too much and revealed himself, disappointing elder brother Dmitry: “You were considered a serious, thoughtful young man but you are being so childish. I don’t know how to understand you” (Gorky, 1979, p. 80). This proverb shows Vladimir Lutov sincerity, while he did not understand Samgin and compared Klim with “engineer corps”, “general staff”. Klim’s distrust disappeared when he made sure that Lutov speaks with sincerity which is described as: “What soberness conceals – drunkenness reveals” (Gorky, 1979). Punctuation in the proverb which stresses the word “reveals”, corresponds to the speech expression, some abandonment of an alcoholic Lutov. The third time this proverb is used relative to Valentin Bezbedov, when Samgin lived in his house in Staraya Russa. In the novel Gorky surrounded his character by “mirrors” – characters who reflect the features of the main character. In this respect Klim Samgin’s guess about Bezbedov is correct: “He as if tried to convince me that you arranged us to be together intentionally, due to some similarity of our

characters as if to mutually educate each other...” (Gorky, 1979, p. 81). However, Marina Zotova, turning red, rejects Klim’s guesses: “Do you want to remind “What soberness conceals – drunkenness reveals?” No, Valentin is a dreamer, but it is too superfine for him” (Gorky, 1979). In the story of Bezbedov we learn about Klim Samgin’s life, being established in cheating for him and the others. “In the childhood I had dispositions, – Bezbedov tells. – It is correct to say, I had no dispositions, my mother and God father made me think so: “Valentin, you have dispositions!” Of course, it made me show different tricks. I composed something, lied, – what is to do? It is necessary to justify confidence. <...> I still have a habit to lie, think out something improbable and tell as a secret; no sooner tells the one – lies fly!” The same with Klim; being convinced from the childhood that he is extraordinary, “noticing to be thought out he started thinking him out himself” (Gorky, 1979). The repeated proverb stresses pretence, fraud, excogitation, illusoriness, impossibility “to tell himself”, which became normal in relations among people in pre-revolutionary reality.

A proverb “True love never rusts” is used three times in the novel. When it is used as a question it reminds about youth love of Inokov to Lubasha Somova and starts a story about her unhappy love affair abroad. The second time a proverb-question: “If the true love ever rusts?” (Gorky, 1979) is said by Klim Samgin to Alina Telepneva when she speaks about Turoboev. Refusing to marry rich Lutov, feathers and down trader, beautiful Alina sacrifices rich future for the sake of love to aristocrat Igor Turoboev. Soon parting with him turned Alina into a courtesan. The proverb with the changed beginning “First love never rusts” is in Samgin’s thoughts about his spouse Varvara after their last meeting: “She has seen a lot of people but I am the brightest figure. I am her first love. Somebody said: “First love never rusts”. In fact I had no serious reasons to divorce her” (Gorky, 1979). In the “Big dictionary of Russian proverbs” there is one more variant of this proverb “First love is remembered for ever” (Mokienko, 2010). Love for most of the characters is only in memories. All of them Alina, Varvara, Klim have no happiness in love. Expecting unusual love, Samgin becomes disappointed in relations with Lidia, seeing the truth that this love is “thought out” by him. Frivolous, at first, feelings to Varvara turns into something deeper, surprisingly after she had done the abortion. Being worried about her life and health, who did not want to shame him with a child, understanding his blame and helplessness and “instinctively approving” her act our hero finds “a new feeling of intimacy to this known and unknown woman” (Gorky, 1979). “New wonderful days” have come for him, the world changed and “everything around became pleasant”. However, starting with unnatural death of an inborn child, a child who traditionally, means future, their coupled life was doomed to misfortune and ended in separation. Samgin suspects his wife in unfaithfulness, loses trust and soon interest to her. Characters’ love is not real, not lasting and fails tests. Seemingly strong relations of Lubasha and Kutuzov end due to Lubasha’s death, Lidia and Marina become widows, only Duniasha and Inokov find each other although being far from the motherland. The motif of lost, illusive, opposed to reality, love which did not happen, is confirmed by the proverb “True love never rusts”, it creates the atmosphere of life of pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, with individualistic consciousness and wrapped conceptions about reality, constraining human happiness.

Alina and Lutov speak about inaccessibility of an ideal, including love, playing with the proverb “A bird in a hand is worth two in a bush” (Mokienko et al., 2010): “– Fiancée! Have you ever caught a cat-fish?”

She passed by saying:

– Neither fish nor birds in a bush ...

– Understand! – cried Lutov. – You prefer a bird in a hand! I approve that!” Images in proverbs place on the events in the novel and can be related to characters. A bird is associated with Alina’s agreement to marry Lutov, promising wealth. Relation with Turoboev is considered as a try to find happiness in love as the main hearty human need and is associated with two birds in a bush. A symbolic scene with catching a cat-fish, which starts a dialogue of characters, is understood as a constant search for truth by Russian intelligentsia its idealistic strivings.

A Latin proverb “Healthy mind in a healthy body” (Sobolev, 1983) is repeated twice in the novel. In Petersburg Marina Premirova, caring about Serafima Nekhaeva who was ill with tuberculosis says: Your thoughts are bad because you eat poorly. Samgin the older, what is the Latin for...? Hear? A healthy mind in a healthy body (Gorky, 1979). An aphorism in this case is a means of argumentation confirmed by centuries-long experience of people. Listening to Marina, Klim asks a question about friends’ relations: why does “fleshly Marina need nearly un-fleshly Nekhaeva?” (Gorky, 1979). Marina’s image is created by Gorky basing on a folklore tradition. Smart, strong-willed, confident, who can “speak about wise things in a simple manner”, achieved internal equilibrium, with majestic beauty, Marina Zotova excited in Samgin “interest like no other woman” (Gorky, 1979). Her speech is nationally laconic, with proverbs and sayings. Objecting to Samgin she refers to a saying that is a rhymed saying telling about something serious in life: “Firstly, Gnosticism is not a mystery, secondly, there is a proverb: “A big bag is not a clay pot, whatever you put knowingly everything will be safe, carry, and do not shake” (Gorky, 1979, p. 84). Telling about an Englishman Creighton’s proposal, Marina uses folklore phraseology: “Having broken a leg and went to head!” Marrying her, a rich widow attracts many but does not coincide with her plans: “They propose, me hide” (Gorky, 1979). This answer goes to aphorisms “Who proposed – hid” (Dahl, 1998), “Proposed, proposed and hid”, recorded by Dahl (1989). Marina uses proverbs and saying talking about politics. Cadet party actions aimed against Duma dissolution in 1906, are excessive and late for her: “They have laid it on thick!”, “They have done it in a temper! With an empty spoon in to other’s porridge! It should have been done when Tsar said that he won’t touch landed estates” (Gorky, 1979, p. 84). Sayings “to lay it on a thick” and “with an empty spoon in to other’s porridge” which remind the proverb “It is OK with your ideas to solve other’s problems” (Mokienko et al., 2010), figuratively describe Cadets’ actions. The period of terror, murder of the Governor of Staraya Russa, revolts she characterizes with a proverb “No sin – no confession, no confession – no saving”, perceiving it as wise and “such a human that no other is necessary...” (Gorky, 1979, p. 84). Dahl (1989) has a complete, three-parted variant of the proverb “No sin – no confession, no confession – no pray, no pray – no saving”. However, Marina’s humanism, strange to Klim, her mystery, her effect not easy to get rid of, “enchantment by her” make Klim to react to sudden death with a proverb “A little bird is content with a little nest”.

For the second time the proverb “A sound mind in a sound body” is used in a native town of the character, in Klim’s house, when archpriest Slavorossov calls it “a pagan statement, that is why erroneous”, thinking that “A spirit of a true Christian is always hungry for Christ love and fears for him” (Gorky, 1979). Accepted by some characters and denied by others, used in different contexts this proverb

becomes a means of expressing contradictoriness of being, freedom of speech, personification of postmodern view of life, peculiar to the artistic concept (nature) of the novel “Klim Samgin’s life”.

Said by different characters it makes similar at first different characters. His ideas about people who wish “freedom baldly and in all ways to make sin to frighten and sing another song for three hundreds of years in itself” (Gorky, 1979, p. 83), archpriest Vladimir Lutov supports with a proverb “No siny – no confession, no confession – no saving”. A grammatical form “siny” is a means of individual speech hidden by Slavonic sayings of a “repenting merchant” Lutov. As Marina Zotova he applies proverbial wisdom to contemporary events, trying to understand their meaning, helps the revolutionist, and understands the necessity of changes. Both characters are original, unconventional, and experience the author’s sympathy.

A proverb “One is with a plough (that is a worker), and seven are with spoons” (Dahl, 1998) has a political meaning in the novel “Klim Samgin’s life”. Under the influence of Lubasha Somova Samgin collected dangerous pictures. One of them showed “a Russian man who ploughs land with a Tsar, a general, a pope, an officer, a merchant, a scientist and a poor with spoons; “One is with a plough and seven are with spoons”, – was written under the picture” (Gorky, 1979). For the second time the proverb arises in the character’s mind as a part of the associative row with a numeral seven. Determining the collection of works “Vekhi” by seven authors-raznochintsevs as denial of “the tradition of Russian intelligentsia – its criticism to reality, traditions of intellect its driving force”, Samgin remembers a proverb: “One is with a plough, seven are with spoons”, a fairy-tale “About seven Simons, blood brothers” (Gorky, 1979). Striving to make money out of somebody’s labour equals to borrowing, exploiting somebody’s ideas.

Creating a description of a character, a proverb discloses his or her character. In the editorial office of the news paper “Nash Krai” Samgin got interested in a local historian Vasiliy Eremeevich Kozlov. Comparing him with himself Klim hypothesizes that being old; he would sit abandoned among strangers. Way of life, political ideas of this neat and tidy old man are determined by the proverb “We never plough land in a hurry” (Mokienko et al., 2010), which is pronounced with the inversion of two first words which stress the semantics of deliberateness, slow nature. Speaking about disdain to history nowadays Kozlov turns to a saying “But we should not plough in a hurry”. <...> And here everybody urges each other with a liberal horsewhip to catch up with Europe”. “Quiet diligence is more heroic than hoyden pounces. Believe me: they never plough the land in a hurry, – Kozlov repeated his favourite proverb” (Gorky, 1979). A proverb that corresponds to monarchial ideas of a historian, lover of the ancient times, faithful to traditions is “Every ox was a calf”, which he “from time to time slotted into his speech” (Gorky, 1979).

On the pages of the fourth part of the novel “Klim Samgin’s life” a proverb appears “You climb a mountain – a devil pulls you down” (Mokienko et al., 2010), which is applicable to the history of every character and the whole Russian people. A newsman Ivan Dronov, who Samgin knows from the childhood, tries to become rich in a new time, understanding the meaningless of existence, states his bad situation with a popular phraseology: “And I am on my loop. It is still wide, does not press. However, it is uneasy. “You climb a mountain – a devil pulls you down” Tos’ka does not answer the letters – why?” (Gorky, 1979). Being in disagreement with himself, worrying about Taisia who was busy with revolutionary work, and became dear and necessary for him, Dronov was worried about coming

misfortunes. Next time this proverb is used to estimate historic events. “You climb a mountain – a devil pulls you down”. It is difficult to understand why do we need this war?” (Gorky, 1979), – Vasiliy Denisov, a town principal gasps. Irrelevance of the war in 1914 year, which disturbed trade links, not clear reasons of the war reflect nationwide ideas about the situation.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, aphoristic folklore in the artistic structure of the novel by M. Gorky “Klim Samgin’s life” has a lot of important functions. Repeated proverbs help to disclose ideal-artistic content of the work, recreate illusiveness of the Russian intelligence existence in pre-revolutionary time, who as the main character finds truth neither in love nor in profession. Commenting faces, types of behavior, situations proverbs reflect endless variety of human characters, created by Gorky, reflecting contradictoriness in all forms of life events. The polyphony of folk sayings forms a specific genre nature of the writer’s polyphonic novel.

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