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FOOLISHNESS AS A DOMINANT STRATEGY OF THE ARTISTIC TEXT

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of works by Veniamin Blazhenny. On the material of the collection «Co-crucifixion», the thesis about foolishness as one of the key literary strategies is justified. The strategy is implemented at substantive and formal levels. Repeating plot situations determine a special set of ideas and motives representing the author as a literary fool. The Kenotic plot referring to the Byzantine hagiographic texts is also realized in poems by Blazhenny. The New Testament and Old Testament modes of consciousness determine the ambivalence of his poetics. On the one hand, the center of the worldview of his lyrical hero is the Sermon on the Mount; but, the images of cruel and punishing deities are an integral part of it. The poet uses images of animals as independent units for describing a lyrical hero and for visualizing the divine image. Equality is the most important idea of his philosophical poetics. The prayers for animals, experience of cross passions as own ones, and ecstatic faith provide a basis for comparing Veniamin Blazhenny and Francis of Assisi, one of the most foolish saints of the Western Catholic Church. It was concluded that the carnival inversion of the top and the bottom, the appeal to the plots of medieval fables, deliberate corporeality while maintaining a seriously elevated attitude to the issues of faith and death allow us to speak of Veniamin Blazhenny as one of the main holy fools in the poetry of the XX century.

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Keywords: Theory of literature, modernism, literature strategy, Russian poetry, foolishness.



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1. Introduction

In studying the phenomenon of foolishness in the space of a literary text, the dominant strategy is extension of the phenomenon of “Blazhenny bugs” (Ivanov, 2005) to a behavioral symbol. Analysis of dissertations (Voronkova, 2011; Motiejunaite, 2007; Yanchevskaya, 2004) and articles (Busurkina, 2017; Esaulov, 1998, 2001; Yangulova, 2001; Yoffe, 2013) devoted to foolishness as a religious, cultural, literary and artistic phenomenon, allows for a number of conclusions about scientific interaction of the concepts “foolishness”, “Christianity”, “literature”, “postmodernism”.

1) Literature, especially poetry, are non-canonical activities, allowing for games and provocations when formulating existential questions, suggesting the absence of a hierarchy and rational relations between all participants in a rhetorical act. 2) Convergence of Christianity and literature involves the search for religious in the literary and the study of game («literary») trends in religious traditions. 3) Theological concepts of kenosis and apophasis are studied by postmodern culture: various literary projects (from Benedict and Viktor Yerofeev, Monastyrsky to Sorokin, Pelevin and Kibirov) use the style of non-signature, characterological irregularity, ethical ambivalence, and irony. 4) Foolishness as a portrayed object (including Christian culture) is inferior to foolishness as a space of emerging discourse with a special position of the author, intuition of complex, fundamentally non-ritual relations between God and man.

2. Problem Statement

This study is devoted to the phenomenon of foolishness as a key literary strategy in the works by Veniamin Blazhenny.

3. Research Questions

The research subject is forms of artistic embodiment of foolishness in the poetry of Veniamin Blazhenny, as well as religious and philosophical models used by the author to implement foolishness as a literary strategy.

4. Purpose of the Study

The research aims to describe the nature of foolishness as an aesthetic and worldview center of the poetry of Veniamin Blazhenny, identify forms and ways used for creating an artistic image of the foolish.

5. Research Methods

The specificity of the problem is due to an integrated methodological approach combining comparative, mythological, biographical, and intertextual research methods which allow for revealing and describing features of medieval culture, biblical allusions, figurativeness and ideas of Russian modernism in the works by Veniamin Blazhenny.

6. Findings

Constant obligatory presence of high contexts, images of God and soul, death and its overcoming speaks for the foolishness as an author's position and form of the presence of a lyrical hero in the poetry of Veniamin Blazhenny. The vertical plot gives a special character to the artistic grotesque, does not allow it to evaluate the risky mixture of high and low as cynicism. Eva Thompson believes that with mixture can be fit into the code of the image of the holy fool: "A holy fool code of contrasts that defined Russian moral traits: foolishness-wisdom, impurity-purity, rootlessness-tradition, meekness-aggression, veneration-derision" (Thompson, 1988, p. 243).

The poetry of Veniamin Blazhenny, despite its strong lyrical character, has a plot. Motives and plot situations are repeated: search for God and meeting with him; joint ordeals of the foolish wanderer and Christ; visions of deceased parents, canonized by the author and staying near the Lord; fight with the devil; meeting with the world and provocation.

Blazhenny (2016) seems to confess with a living style (for example, «Blazhenny»), while remaining both provocatively frank and canonically uncomplicated. It was the holy fool's mask that allowed Blazhenny to occupy a border position; the holy fool is not a hero running from the world. If in the version of hagiography, reckoning for hard life of the holy fool is provided for, in the world of Blazhenny, this plot is denied.

The lyrical hero of Blazhenny is characterized by the desire to «drink the cup to the bottom», to reach the bottom: "The Fool carries the idea of self-stripping and humiliation by voluntarily taking upon himself the Cross of madness" (Kobets, 2000, p. 381). The fool (for example, in "The Life of Simeon the Fool") experiences kenosis causing aggression of the world, hiding and preserving his true treasures - true faith and pure soul. There are a lot of body plots in the poems by Blazhenny (2009). They of provoke the reader: "Ухожу и от вас – продавщицы роскошного тела..." (Blazhenny, 2009, p. 34).

Numerous allusions to the Gospel texts are fused into the artistic language of Blazhenny (2009). Within the limits of his language, they are no longer perceived as abstract, objective, and supreme, but as personal. The Sermon on the Mount is an obvious epicenter of the author's interest. Motives of poverty of spirit, humility, close gates, narrow path, carelessness of the birds of heaven permeate the collection of poems «Co-crucifixion».

The lyrical hero is in a special relationship with the Divine - this is a situation of personal acquaintance, friendship. The poet does not perceive God as an abstraction, He is a person, a real interlocutor: "Сколько лет нам, Господь?.. / Век за веком с тобой мы стареем..." (Blazhenny, 2009, p. 57). Using a generalizing «мы-pronoun», the hero emphasizes his status as a person close to the Divine, his otherness. In this aspect, the plot of the vision of God, His immediate sight is extremely important: the lyrical hero does not need to be tormented by doubts of faith, because the miracle of God-manifestation for him has long been accomplished, the Lord is present in routine life, in everyday life as an ordinary phenomenon: "... Ах, Господь, ах, дружок, ты, как я, неприкаянный нищий ..." (Blazhenny, 2009, p. 44). From here, as well as from the short distance between the ego and the sacral a special image used for describing a deity originates: "Я б в бороду божью влетел, как разбойник, без страха..." (Blazhenny, 2009, p. 96).

Ambivalence which, according to the author, is inherent in being, is expressed primarily in the image of God. He has two sides, two hypostases, Old Testament and New Testament: cruel justice and supreme goodness. Christ is portrayed as a miserable beggar, deprived of any power, lonely carrying the world to the truth, and a gloomy deceiver, voluntarily disposing of human life (for example, in the poem “Уже из смерти мать грозила пальцем”). Blazhenny (2009) has an idea of blind divine providence, indifferent to human destiny, to earthly sorrow. In the context of this image, a blissful feat is possible – love for God. Blazhenny insists that God is found in the dark, dirty and heavy parts of the universe. At the same time, overcoming the polarity of the image, Blazhenny (2009) writes about a special morality, which is higher than human understanding, rational comprehension: “Я на голой земле умираю и стар и безгрешен, <...> / ...А как вспомню Его – до чего же Он всё же потешен: / Он и скачет, и пляшет, и рожицы кажем мне – Бог” (p. 59). This ambiguous image is an object of prayer worship which saves the lyric hero, comforts him before his death. The correlation of images of the Old Testament prophet and the New is offered by Kobets (2008): “The hagiographic imagery and phenomenology of the fool for Christ or iurodivyi and Hebrew prophet share key traits: both are believed to be God’s chosen and mediate between the sacred and profane realms; both are known to be mentors, clairvoyants, and miracleworkers; both come from various social backgrounds and are represented by both genders” (p. 14).

Blazhenny (2009) builds a cosmic hierarchy which traditionally implies that God is on the top, man is his vicegerent on the earth. The lyrical hero puts an equal sign, internal identity between himself and the Divine, himself and animals (“Давно я стал попутчиком / Бездомной малой твари, / И согреваюсь лучиком, / Когда со мною в паре / Собаки лохмоногие, / Пичужки одинокие...” (Blazhenny, 2009, 93)). The unity of the living, equality before the Lord’s gaze is the most important idea of the philosophical poetics of Blazhenny. At the same time, “he <...> perceives himself as a conductor, a thread stretched from the earth to the sky, an incarnated symbol, behind object hiding the reality of heaven existence” (Chebannaya (Khomukhina), 2016, p. 196).

The life of Blazhenny is in harmony with his works. The foolishness is not a spectacular posture. It is truth. Let us compare the life of Veniamin Blazhenny and Francis of Assisi. They lived in poverty, did not complain about their fate and loved the poor. They perceived nature as a living creature, but they were not pantheists. They loved animals, sometimes putting them above people.

For both poets, images of suffering are important. Francis of Assisi, a representative of Catholic culture, experienced the Crucifixion physically, existentially (stigmata on Good Friday). Nevertheless, the theme of suffering in Blazhenny’s (2009) works is present to a much greater degree than in almost always joyful Francis. “The suffering of the living beings in the works by Veniamin Blazhenny reminds an atoning sacrifice” (Tatarinova, 2014, p. 44). The whole world is subject this kind of suffering.

“Francis of Assisi sought to renew the soul through the revival of Christianity in its primitive purity” (Turbina, 2010, p. 165). In his latest poetic work (“Hymn to Brother Sun”), Francis of Assisi sings all the elements — water, wind, earth, sun, moon ... and Death: “Вся хвала да будет Тебе, мой Господь, от сестры Смерти, / Чьих объятий никому из смертных не избежать. / Горе тем, кто умирает в смертном грехе! / Блаженны те, кого она застанет за исполнением воли Твоей! / Вторая смерть не причинит им вреда. / Хвалите и благословляйте Господа моего, и / благодарите Его, / И служите Ему с великим смирением!” (Straub, 2001, p. 58). Veniamin Blazhenny did not write hymns or odes, but his perception

of death was close to that of Francis of Assisi. For Blazhenny (2009), there are no dead ... He writes about the deceased parents (describing their clothes, habits, speech, etc.), acquaintances, neighbors as living: “Пока я жив, никто не умирал, / Умершие живут со мною рядом.

In the spiritual poems by Francis of Assisi and Veniamin Blazhenny, religious ideas or plots of Holy Scripture are reflected (and ambiguous personality). We see existential creativity: incredible closeness of the act, deeds and words, artistic image. In European and Russian culture, foolishness can be a kind of reception, the mask of the author, as, for example, in the literature of the American “black humor” of the twentieth century (Vonnegut, Pynchon, Donliwi, etc.). However, in the poetry of Veniamin Blazhenny, foolishness is his lifestyle, authentic face. “Умру я свято, бестолково, / Но воскресу себя сперва – / И загорятся в нимбе Слова / Мои безумные слова...” (Blazhenny, 2009, p. 73).

In general, duality of official and marginal cultures is characteristic of the creative manner of Blazhenny. “Interest in foolishness is intensified in transitional periods” (Zhibul, 2012, p. 216). The poet “lived in the era of worship of Reason” (Ankudinov, 2009, p. 391), but he was blissful. On the one hand, he agrees with the role of an outsider, certifies himself as far from the success of the Soviet prostitute, the son of a “holy fool” Jew (“Родословная”), not rooted in standard sociality. On the other hand, in his poetic system, there is a desire for classic verse, confidence in the limitations of the avant-garde experiment and a desire to be heard by masters of poetry (communication with B. Pasternak, A. Tarkovsky, V. Shklovsky). Blazhenny appeal to the images and poetic systems of Russian and foreign poets: “Pushkin, Lermontov, Akhmatova, Gumilyov, Mayakovsky; Lermontov, Yesenin, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva; Byron, Verlaine, Khlebnikov” (Verina, 2011, p. 22).

Important positions are taken by the provocative nature of artistic generalizations, which implies re-creation of a holistic spiritual concept as a process of descent and enslavement of the “high” “low”, as permanent “foolishness” (“Жизнь”, “Любовь”, “Что же делать, коль мне не досталось от Господа-Бога...”, “Боже, как хочется жить!”). Grotesque physicality, low forms of eros, pornography (according to Soviet aesthetic concepts) are significant for the poetics of Veniamin Blazhenny; all of them can be interpreted in line with the carnival culture, which ensures the ambivalence of the artistic event.

Self-deprecation and pride of the lyrical hero, defending his stay «at the poles» are evident: “И все-таки я Бог, и даже больше Бога” (“Опасен и убог...”). At the same time, the critique suggests that Blazhenny loves God much more than people. Irina Makarova calls it “the divine trap set up by Veniamin Blazhenny” (Makarova, 2012, p. 11). “The imperial rod of the fool” an implicit key sign of Veniamin Blazhenny's poetic system.

There is a fabulous presence of the image of God as a high subject eliminating the distance separating the hero from the highest being (“В калошах на босу ногу”). “The unbridled Lord,” “God the Executioner” (“Прийти домой, чтоб запереть слезу...”), “Lord with an ax for slaughter” (“Отец мой напялил сюртук...”), “the filthy God” (“Blessed”) are the most famous images of this series in the poems by Veniamin Blazhenny.

7. Conclusion

The mixture of high and low, old and young, divine and human, animal and spiritual can be perceived as a poetic solution to the problem of death (for example, “I am not quite sure ...”), a phenomenon

of escapism typical of marginal intellectuals of the Soviet period (for example, «Poems of care»), an apophatic attitude to being-related issues (for example, «How deceptive is the word» dead «...» or «I will go to God at a distance of crying ...»).

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