

Gogol's traditions in the works of M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin

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Annotation. *The article is devoted to the work of Saltykov-Shchedrin – a bright follower of Gogol's tradition of satirical laughter. Shchedrin, then still a young satirical writer – was not going to imitate Gogol, write in his manner. However, the power of Gogol's sly-ironic intonation was so strong that it appeared as if "by itself", "in addition" to the will of the writer. Shchedrin, like Gogol, was endowed with an amazing, rare talent, had the gift of capturing life's comedy in its most diverse manifestations, instantly grasped the inner comicality of what looked solid, significant, noble.*

Keywords: *traditions, Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin, genius, creativity, weapons of satire*

Satire is a vast and extremely diverse field of art that has given humanity many aesthetic masterpieces, executing with its merciless laughter the evil of life in its most harmful, socially dangerous manifestations. One of the most valuable examples of world satire are the works of M. E. Saltykov - Shchedrin. It is even more admirable that his work as a satirist was strikingly versatile, multi-colored. Like all great masters of the word, Shchedrin was a hard worker in literature, for whom writing was a daily work. He considered himself "an active writer, a hard worker, obliged to hold a pen in his hand every minute..." [8, p. 6].

Saltykov-Shchedrin continued and revolutionarily deepened the traditions of Gogol's satire [3, p. 63]. It is not without reason that Gogol is considered the closest predecessor of Shchedrin, who created a satirical and philosophical picture of the modern world. In his satirical activity, Shchedrin, without a doubt, not only relied on the traditions of Gogol, but also developed them. In his writings, a similar creative task has acquired greater purposefulness and greater scope. However, Shchedrin is also infinitely far from him, since he set himself a fundamentally different task – to track down, expose and destroy. The world of his ugly heroes and masks is the severely realistic world of contemporary Russian reality, more gloomy and oppressive than the world of "pig snouts" that tormented Gogol. The Decembrist writer Mikhail

Lunin claimed that "the scourge of sarcasm is whipped in the same way as the executioner's axe"[8, p.7].

From the very early childhood, the desire for the ideal was awakened in the future writer Saltykov, there was a desire to change and rebuild this life, which can and should be different. Acquaintance with the advanced Russian literature, first of all with the works of Gogol and Belinsky's articles, awakened in the future writer an aspiration to the high human ideals of freedom, equality, justice. The young Shchedrin was among those in whom the desire for an independent identity did not fade away, who did not succumb to oppression, but opposed it. After returning from exile, the writer is inspired by the satirical tradition of Gogol [3, p. 68], turns to satire. And this right, like other satirists, he was forced to defend, because he, like Gogol, was reproached for writing about negative, bad things, that it was time for him to portray the bright, gratifying things that exist in life.

Saltykov was worried about the question of an oppressed, "lost" person, crushed by the oppression of circumstances. He advocated "a restored human image, enlightened and cleansed from those shames that centuries of prison captivity have layered on it" [5, p.86]. Gogol, for example, actually set himself a similar task, choosing his own aspect of its creative solution, which he defined as the image of the vulgarity of a vulgar person. If Gogol particularly focused, first of all, on the socio-psychological and moral aspects of the problem, then Saltykova occupies along with them its socio-political aspect, which becomes the main determining factor for all the others. Therefore, the subject of Shchedrin's satirical research is no longer the "vulgarity of a vulgar person", but the dehumanization of people who are in the power of ghosts [5, pp. 86-87].

Shchedrin, like Gogol, was endowed with an amazing, rare talent, had the gift [4:6] to sensitively catch the comic life in its most diverse manifestations, instantly grasped the inner comicality of what looked solid, significant, noble. He was able to turn this "solid" and "noble" (or nightmarish, terrible) in such a way that his inner inconsistency, his worthlessness was immediately revealed. On closer examination, the "solid" turned out to be empty, the "noble" - base, and the nightmarish and terrible-pathetic and ridiculous.

If Gogol was outraged by "dead souls", then Saltykov is outraged, in addition, by "dead forms of life". In all his works, the writer paints a society confused by these "deadening forms", numb, rotting [5, p. 57]. But even in this gloomy, heavy atmosphere, Saltykov continued to maintain optimism and hope. The writer saw the triumph of dark forces striving to stop life, to strangle all living things.

In the XX century, we began to really realize what a colossal phenomenon this is - Shchedrin's satirical laughter. According to N. G. Chernyshevsky, "laughter is a comic beginning, inseparable from satire, awakening in us a sense of self - esteem" [7, p. 3]. "This is not Gogol's laughter [3, p. 65], but something much more deafeningly truthful, deeper and more powerful" [1, p. 109]. His sharp, penetrating mind never stopped at the surface of life, he penetrated into the phenomena, into their innermost essence. In an atmosphere of violence, fear, and darkness, Saltykov stood on the side of truth, life, and light; in defense of the sleeping, destitute, and oppressed. The writer decided to debunk the gloomy, hostile world that prevailed around him. He realized that it was necessary to fight this nightmarish world with the weapon of laughter – satire." Saltykov stressed many times that "laughter was never an end in itself for him, it was a form of discovering the truth, a means of distinguishing truth from lies" [5, p. 263]. When one of Saltykov's acquaintances got into an absurd, ridiculous situation, the writer said: "Everyone is mocking him, and it is unlikely that he will rise again. The funny is the scariest of all" [1, p. 112]. These words brilliantly characterize the incomparable effectiveness, the effectiveness of laughter, which performs a traditionally cleansing, cathartic function [1:2]. Only laughter can dispel fears, help get rid of fright. Only laughter is stronger than fear, more terrible than fear. Shchedrin's laughter is born of the tragic situation of a person in a terrible world of violence, lies, arbitrariness and disenfranchisement.

Gogol's great merit in the development of Russian satire was that he abandoned the plot conflict, in which negative heroes were necessarily opposed to positive ones, and replaced it with another type of conflict based on the collision of negative heroes with negative ones. This replacement was natural and necessary and expressed a significant shift in the poetics of satire, which rose in Gogol's work to a new stage of its historical movement.

In the "Inspector", the main "clash" takes place between Khlestakov and city officials led by Draughty-Dmukhanovsky. As a result, both city officials and Khlestakov are exposed. The plot conflict of "Dead Souls" is based on the same principle. Chichikov, the hero who embodies the nascent acquisition, enters into negotiations and transactions with various landowners, pillars of the existing order. Although formally the victory is won in one case by Khlestakov, and in the other by Chichikov (because they leave the city on time), in fact both sides are defeated, since both are exposed.

Gogol himself, unfortunately, could not continue his fruitful searches in the field of poetics of conflict and plot. Moreover, in the 40s (after a change in his worldview), he goes back in this regard and tries to contrast the "ideal" landowner and the "ideal" tax collector with negative, satirical characters in the second volume of "Dead Spirits". It should be noted that in

Shchedrin's work, the plot conflict, in which negative characters face negative ones, has acquired a special sharpness and many varieties.

Saltykov-Shchedrin, following the Gogol tradition in the poetics of conflict and plot, refused to depict a "positive" hero, allegedly successfully fighting evil. In his works we will not find either virtuous landowners or ideal officials. The writer draws numerous and diverse manifestations of the activities of negative, satirical characters. These characters can have conversations, or deceive each other, or do something together, or fight for something together. In all cases, however, they self-expose or expose each other, and their "exploits" and "deeds" appear to us as a "comedy of empty talk and empty bravado", as a "painstaking transfusion from empty to empty", as "business idleness" [5, p.185].

In the cycle "Pompadours and Pompadours", the writer brilliantly demonstrated that the struggle between the young pompadours-liberals and their conservative predecessors is pure fiction, that in the main, essential they do not actually differ from each other. The satirist paints this kind of "struggle" as a comic, empty struggle. Pompadours are ignorant, limited dummies who are endowed with power, put at the head of cities, provinces, territories. There is something of Khlestakov in them. Especially in young pompadours. They are just as frivolous and uneducated. In their heads, like Gogol's hero, "the lightness of thoughts is extraordinary". They are always ready to brag, fanfaronit, hang around. The plot of a number of stories in the cycle is really based on the very "points" of Pompadour activity, situations that are not at all funny in themselves, but completely "serious". It is their writer who turns them in such a way that the reader can see their immense, inner comedy [3, p. 63].

If Khlestakov was a "fityulka" who was mistaken for a "statesman", then the pompadours are empty people who are actually "statesmen", they are in power, they control the destinies of many thousands of people. However, it is probably not worth calling them such. Shchedrin himself called such figures "state babies" [5, p.124]. Very interesting is "The Story of how one peasant fed two generals", which clearly bears traces of the influence of "The Story of how Ivan Ivanovich quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" and at the same time differs significantly from it (the similarity of these two works is obvious. Shchedrin did not even think of obscuring the creative connection of his "Story..." with Gogol's, but, on the contrary, emphasized it by the very title of the work).

In "The Story..." Gogol's main characters are two landowners; in Shchedrin's "Story..." there are two generals (civilians). The plot conflict of "The Story..." Gogol consists in a quarrel and the subsequent "war" of the heroes. In the plot of Shchedrin's "Novella..." there is also a

motive for the quarrel of the heroes; however, it is only a certain moment in the development of the action and is of a secondary nature. The main thing becomes another conflict – not between the generals among themselves, but between the generals and the peasant; or rather, not even a conflict, but a collision, because there is no conflict between the generals and the peasant: the latter obediently does everything that the generals tell him.

If in the 30s and 40s of the XIX century the main task of satire was to show the internal insolvency of landowners and officials (and this task was brilliantly solved by Gogol), then in the 60s, after the abolition of serfdom, another question arose with no less acuteness-about the passivity of the peasantry, which turned out to be incapable of active, purposeful actions, about the remnants of serfdom in the minds of the broad masses. Shchedrin put both of these problems in "The Story of How One peasant fed two generals". Having based his satirical work on the collision between generals and a peasant, the writer managed to simultaneously show both the parasitism and parasitism of representatives of the ruling class who live at the expense of the labor of the broad masses of the people, and the passivity, downtroddenness of these masses, obediently bearing the usual yoke instead of being outraged and throwing it off.

Thus, the two types of plot conflict characteristic of Shchedrin's satire are combined here, and the one that expresses the main social contradiction of the era – between the ruling class and the exploited people-comes to the fore. It is very curious, by the way, that the peasant in Shchedrin's "Story..." is opposed not by landowners (which seemed to be much more logical), but by generals.

Saltykov-Shchedrin was a true master of the satirical plot. He instantly grasped those comic situations that he encountered in life, and was able to purposefully sharpen them, subordinating them to the solution of certain creative tasks. Moreover, he was an unsurpassed inventor of comic scenes and comic plots. His imagination, starting from certain facts of reality, immediately began to work actively, generating new and new funny episodes that clearly revealed the inner comicality [2, p. 66], the absurdity of the displayed life collisions.

In all the satirical works of N. V. Gogol, the plot is based on an anecdote, an incident. In "Marriage" - this is a household joke, in "The Inspector" – an administrative one, in "Dead Souls" – a social one. This is a completely plausible anecdote, as in "The Carriage", or grotesquely fantastic, as in "The Nose", thanks to which Gogol's plots have a clearly expressed comic character [3, p.63] and very clearly reveal certain comic contradictions of reality. Saltykov-Shchedrin's anecdotes are of a slightly different nature. They are not only funny, but also dramatic, tragic [2, p. 69].

If N. V. Gogol took some one anecdotal story and, putting it as the basis of the plot, sought to extract all its potential possibilities for the sake of a more complete identification of characters, Shchedrin in each of the mentioned stories presents several such stories at once. These stories are generally of the same type, they follow one after another, as if strung on some invisible rod. This core is extortion, bribery, the utter arbitrariness of the authorities.

Mikhail Yevgrafovich uses anecdotal stories differently from Gogol. We are struck by the main scenes, which can hardly be called comic. They are rather dramatic, even tragic, since almost in every chapter of the novel someone dies. Throughout the novel, Shchedrin draws scenes in which the dramatic and even tragic are organically merged with the comic [1, p.109]. Satirical ridicule can be carried out in such forms as: humor, sarcasm, irony, wit [2, p. 66]. A. N. Pleshcheev in one of the letters noticed that Shchedrin "has his own special humor [3, p.68] ... which involuntarily makes you laugh" []. "In my literary works, the humorous element is predominant," Mikhail Yevgrafovich once remarked, and these words quite correctly formulated the main direction of his artistic searches [5, p. 260].

Saltykov-Shchedrin's style was bright and very individual. The satirist was immediately recognized by readers. They were recognized by the style, by the manner, even in cases when another work was published under some new pseudonym. "He writes well," Lev Tolstoy said about Saltykov – "and what an original syllable he developed", "a magnificent, purely folk, apt syllable" [5, p. 386].

On many pages of the "Provincial Essays", the influence of Gogol's manner of narration, Gogol's style, Gogol's ironic intonation was clearly felt, which was so brilliantly manifested in "The Story of how Ivan Ivanovich quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" and in "Dead Souls". And only at the end of the last of the above phrases, something else breaks into the familiar Gogol intonation – more sharp, more sarcastic ("And you feel that your respect for Porfiry Petrovich increases to frenzy") [5, p.266]. Of course, Shchedrin-then still a young satirical writer – was not going to imitate Gogol, write in his manner. However, the power of Gogol's sly-ironic intonation was so strong that it appeared as if "by itself", "in addition" to the will of the writer. It sounded like a "tuning fork" somewhere in the depths of consciousness, and, tuning his satirical lyre on this tuning fork, the author often fell into stylistic imitation.

It is very important to emphasize that already in the "Provincial essays", Shchedrin finds his own voice, develops his own manner of ridicule, different from Gogol's. There is also irony in the intonation, in the manner of narration. But this is an irony [3, p. 63] of a different type, not the same as that of Gogol. It is more "dry" and "businesslike". There are no notes of that

touching admiration and unrestrained pathos of praise that are characteristic of Gogol's style. At the same time, it is more prickly, more sarcastic, more evil.

In one of the articles, Saltykov wrote about "that energetic, merciless wit" possessed by D. I. Fonvizin and N. V. Gogol. These words can be attributed to Shchedrin himself. After all, it was him who was called by Lunacharsky "the most witty writer of the Russian land" [4]. In wit, more than in irony or humor [3, p.68], the author's subjectivity, his desire to "impress", brand, ridicule the depicted are visible. He was a master of all shades of funny. In his works, humor and irony [3, p. 63] are interspersed or combined with wit, caustic sarcasm. Both of these forms of ridicule turned out to be the closest to Saltykov, who is inclined to express his attitude to the surrounding outrages sharply and uncompromisingly. In them, the activity of his mind was most clearly and clearly manifested, boldly analyzing the contradictions of life, exposing them from all those veils with which they are covered.

Another important feature of Shchedrin's poetics is the much broader use of such artistic forms and techniques as hyperbole, fantasy, and grotesque, which have reached an even sharper and more distinct expression than Gogol's [5, p.82]. Saltykov-Shchedrin turns to sharp satirical exaggeration much more often than his predecessors in Russian literature. The personality of the satirical writer Shchedrin at the same time manifests itself especially actively, vividly – in all the brilliance of his mind, resourcefulness, erudition. No matter which work of the writer we turn to, everywhere we are struck by the sniper accuracy of comparisons, metaphors, laconic verbal formulas that instantly expose the most various comic contradictions of reality.

Gogol in "Dead Souls" compares the guests at the governor's ball with flies flocking to sugar. Shchedrin in the "Provincial essays" compares officials with fish. Shchedrin says through the mouth of his character that there are "sturgeon officials, ... piscary officials and another special kind-a pike official who swallows piscaries during the zhor..." [5, p. 275]. Just as Gogol compares Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich, Shchedrin similarly compares the state councillors of the Rack and the Boa Constrictor ("Abroad"). Lunacharsky V. A. believes that "the highest form of Shchedrin's art is his idea in a mask. It was the fact that he was able to masterfully dress his most subtle and poisonous analysis of the Russian public and the state in funny masks that saved him from censorship and made him a virtuoso of the artistic and satirical form [5, p.298]. It is also characteristic that Shchedrin was opposed by Gogol, who, they say, ridiculed "no less deep ulcers of Russian reality", and "did not resort to" aesopism", "parables", "slave language" [5, p.336]. It should be noted that this kind of opposition is completely illegal.

Firstly, the thesis according to which Gogol allegedly has no "aesopism" at all is not quite correct. It is there. It is enough to recall at least the parable about Kief Mokievich and Mokiya Kifovich, included by the writer in "Dead Souls". And the name itself is "Dead Souls"? After all, it has long been clear that it has not only a literal, direct meaning (denoting those audit dead souls that Chichikov buys), but also another, allegorical (referring to the landowners depicted).

Secondly, there are images in Gogol's works that, although they are not allegorical by their very nature, at the same time grow into broad, capacious symbols (Mirgorod as the embodiment of vulgar existence, Nevsky Prospekt as the personification of false, soulless St. Petersburg...).

Thirdly, Shchedrin's poetics was born of a new stage in the development of Russian satire. And to present Gogol's style as a "model" for the writer means not to understand either the general shifts that occurred in Russian literature in the middle and second half of the XIX century, or the ideological and artistic originality of Shchedrin's work.

The most important difference between Shchedrin's satire and Gogol's satire, as already mentioned, is that it has acquired a clearly expressed political character, that the writer's focus was on life constrained by existing state and social forms. The so-called "Aesopian manner" and "Aesopian language" became organic, necessary components of his poetics and his style.

From the very beginning to the end, the novel "Dead Souls" is full of numerous arguments on a variety of, sometimes very topical topics. Some of these arguments are given on behalf of the narrator, they have long been called "lyrical digressions". Others are attributed to Chichikov, although in fact, of course, they also belong to the author. This Gogol tradition [3, p.68] was picked up by Saltykov-Shchedrin. And not just continued, but also developed, raised to a new level. In his work, the combination of an artistic representation of reality with sharp journalistic reasoning has become an important, constantly operating creative principle.

The writers of subsequent generations have constantly turned to the artistic experience of the great satirist. His traditions at different stages of the development of our literature were inherited and continued by M. Gorky and V. Mayakovsky, E. Zamyatin and M. Bulgakov, A. Platonov and M. Zoshchenko, etc. Modern satirists also rely on them: S. Mikhalkov, F. Iskander, A. Zhukov... They learn from Shchedrin not only the depth of comprehension of life and ideological uncompromising, but also the ability to master a variety of poetic forms and means—from careful everyday life, scrupulous psychological analysis to outright fiction. Shchedrin's satire has a global ideological, aesthetic and educational significance, because humanity still continues to fight against ghosts.

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