

ORIGINALITY OF THE GENRE POETICS IN V.A. NIKIFOROV-VOLGIN'S STORY "THE ROAD STAFF" IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROSE OF THE RUSSIAN DIASPORA¹

ORIGINALIDADE DO GÊNERO POÉTICO NA HISTÓRIA DE V.A. NIKIFOROV-VOLGIN "THE ROAD STAFF" NO CONTEXTO DA PROSA DA DIÁSPORA RUSSA

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to study the originality of the genre poetics in V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin's story "The Road Staff" in the context of the prose of first-wave Russian diaspora – the works by I.A. Bunin ("Iz zapisok neizvestnogo" ["From the Notes of the Unknown"]) and I.S. Shmelev (short story "Blazhennye" ["The Blessed"]). The analysis convincingly shows that these works are an example of genre synthesis, which is dominated by features of the ancient Russian genres of "khozhenie" ["journey"], hagiography, and sermon. The authors emphasize the originality of the "The Road Staff" concept in Russian diaspora literature, demonstrating the genre synthesis under the influence of ancient Russian genres and biblical, saintly reminiscences and allusions.

Keywords: Tradition, Ancient Russian genres, Biblical allusions, Ontological meaning.

Resumo: O objetivo do artigo é estudar a originalidade da poética de gênero no conto de V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin "The Road Staff" no contexto da prosa da diáspora russa da primeira onda - as obras de I.A. Bunin ("Iz zapisok neizvestnogo" ["From the Notes of the Unknown"]) e I.S. Shmelev (conto "Blazhennye" ["The Blessed"]). A análise mostra de forma convincente que essas obras são um exemplo de síntese de gênero, dominada por características dos antigos gêneros russos de "khozhenie" ["jornada"], hagiografia e sermão. Os autores enfatizam a originalidade do conceito de "The Road Staff" no contexto da literatura da diáspora russa, demonstrando a síntese de gênero sob a influência de gêneros russos antigos e reminiscências e alusões bíblicas e santas.

Palavras-chave: Tradição, Gêneros russos antigos, Alusões bíblicas, Significado ontológico.

Introduction

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The study of the category of genre requires careful research and systematization. I. Tynianov (1977) notes that "the very signs of genre evolve," and "there are no ready-made genres" (p. 271). Of importance for our work is the idea of "genre memory" formulated by M.M. Bakhtin in "Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics" (1979), which asserts that a genre should be covered not only in the synchronic but also in the diachronic aspect, because "a genre lives in the present, but always remembers its past, its beginning" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 142). Furthermore, Bakhtin (1979) believes that in the contemporary literary process, genres are more prone to dynamism and development: "The genre is revived and renewed at each new stage in the development of literature and in each individual work of the genre" (p. 398).

Concerning the category of genre, we adhere to the idea that the genre of a particular work represents an inseparable link between the typological and the historical, the traditional and the innovative, the canonical and the individual, and the stable and dynamically living. In addition, it is important to bear in mind a significant idea voiced by L.V. Chernets (1964): "Content is the leading aspect in a genre, regardless of this or that relation to the genre form, it remains stable" (p. 27). Thus, the basis for our understanding of genre is the commonality of content, rather than the commonality of form.

When establishing contextual consonances, we proceed from the fact that the work of each writer is unique, and the philosophical and aesthetic attitudes of each author are distinguished by individual-authentic uniqueness. Our task is to prove the discovered affinity of the artistic world-modeling of V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin, I.V. Bunin, and I.S. Shmelev.

The purpose of this article is to research the originality of the genre poetics in Nikiforov-Volgin's story "The Road Staff" in the context of the prose of the first wave of the Russian diaspora – the works by I.A. Bunin and I.S. Shmelev.

Methods

In this article, we examine the genre poetics of V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin's "Road Staff," placing it in the context of the prose of the first wave of Russian Abroad, with particular focus on I.A. Bunin's "From the Records of the Unknown" and I.S. Shmelev's story "The Blessed". This comparative approach is taken to understand the originality and uniqueness of Nikiforov-Volgin's work. The works are analyzed for their shared

and unique features, with special attention paid to the elements of ancient Russian genres of “walking”, “life”, and “sermon” present in them.

The methodology adopted for this study involves a detailed textual analysis of the selected works. We trace the biblical and patristic reminiscences and allusions that each text is enriched with, examining how these elements contribute to the ontological enlargement of the works. We also delve into the genre form of "notes", common to all the authors, to understand how this form not only confers the features of confession and penetration to the texts but also anchors them in the reality of their time.

Our approach to the analysis is informed by the notion that even small genres can have significant implications, especially in an era marked by social upheavals and the disruption of age-old traditions. The goal is to comprehend how these works generate a sense of presence and action for the reader, giving rise to the perception of existence in its historical and spiritual unity.

Results and discussion

Content of "The Road Staff"

The content of the story gives evidence of the rich synthesis of the various genre origins inherent in it. This work gravitates not only to the short story or novel, like any story, but also to much older genres. Particularly noticeable here is the closeness to the genre forms of ancient Russian literature. We do not set out to delve specifically into this aspect of the study and only outline the most obvious paradigms of cultural memory reflected in the works by the analyzed authors. In so doing, we consider it necessary to clarify the following. N.I. Pak identifies two main approaches of literary studies to the question of perception of the traditions of ancient literature by the artistic consciousness of subsequent eras: source and genetic. The present study follows the genetic approach, which "enables the discovery of the deep levels of the ancient Russian literary tradition, which emerges in the specifics of content, genre originality, and the specific poetics of the works of new-time writers" (PAK, 2006, p. 8).

The composition of "The Road Staff", we believe, can be presented in three parts.

1. In the first part, the narrator-hero tells of a pre-revolutionary world in which especially sensitive people feel ever-increasing anxiety and fear of the unknown. There is already a sense of the apocalyptic rhythm that life itself has taken: "Something

formidable is coming to our land" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 12). The protagonist, the village priest Athanasius, notes that "it [the human soul] will be subjected to great temptations" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 13).

2. In the second part, we learn about the experience of the narrator-priest. He continues to serve the Lord in a world where the value of faith is trampled by a new way of life: "The lads dropped the big bell from the bell tower" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 18), "Kuzma chopped up the icon of Our Lady with an axe and threw it into the blazing furnace" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 18), "our temple was burned down" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 13). Upon becoming a prisoner of the Reds, the hero undergoes excruciating humiliation: "I did not eat prison bread at no cost: I was forced to clean latrines, scrub the floors, wash the convoy's laundry, and in this I excelled" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 30). The narrator managed to make great friends with the thieves and murderers who occupied the cell: "The deeper you bear the image of Christ and arm yourself with humility, the sooner you will illuminate the bestial world of man" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 30).

3. The third part begins with a "self-portrait" of the priest walking "down the high road", telling us about the wanderings and the preaching ways of the hero: "I have heard more than a hundred confessions (and those confessions were terrible), and all the repentants were ready to accept the hardest penance and any feat, so as not to remain outside the house of the Lord" (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 55). The story ends with the road and the hero's becoming a preacher.

Genre characteristics of "The Road Staff"

Based on the results of the analysis, "The Road Staff" is formally defined as a story. However, the genre of story is traditionally viewed as unstable, gravitating either to a novel or a short story.

However, the genres in "The Road Staff" are organically intertwined, and their origins can be found in Old Russian literature. The literature of ancient Russia is characterized by the frozen nature of genre forms, a special perception of man in space: the whole Russian land is placed in the author's field of view, and the life of man, therefore, acquires a heroic scale.

D.S. Likhachev (1979) explains the artistic consciousness of the Old Russian man as follows: "With his mind elevated above the events, the medieval scribe looks at the country as if from above. The whole Russian land fits into the author's field of

vision" (p. 347). A.N. Uzhankov (1995), developing these ideas, notes the associative thinking of the ancient reader and points to a special perception of Russia in the ancient texts: "There is no specific area, there is no specific description of it. The land of Russia is one, but there is not just one landscape in it" (p. 36). This also applies to "The Road Staff". Nikiforov-Volgin's spatial reach is undoubtedly broad and unconstrained. Like the old Russian writers, he sees the world as if with a *panoramic vision*. Nikiforov-Volgin makes numerous references to nature, mother earth, blooming gardens, and forests with almost no domestic details.

"The land is trembling", writes Nikiforov-Volgin (2018a, p. 17), and in this personification, he concentrates a person's heartfelt love for their homeland as a living being.

The style of the story also reveals the folklore tradition: poetic folk proverbs that run all through the text reveal the attitude of ordinary people toward their native land: "Soon spring will come, and, in our people's figurative expression, she will start embroidering her sweetheart's shirts with different flowers, herbs, and patterned leaves. She will dress the earth in the new embroidered shirt. The earth will walk in its new shirt!" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 11). That is why it is so bitter for Father Athanasius to realize that the protected forests are disappearing, leaving only desolation: "And our forests are being cut down! There used to be such reserves around the village, such wilderness, how many birds and animals there were, and now there's wasteland" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 13).

Examining Old Russian genre forms, echoes of which are present in "The Road Staff", we can distinguish hagiographic genres, namely the hagiography (in the meaning of its inverted canon, in which we know "The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, by Himself"), sermon, confession, as well as "khozhenie" ["journey"].

The main theme developed by writers in ancient Russia is the meaning of the life of a Christian person. In different genres, this theme is revealed peculiarly. Thus, in the sermon, it is manifested directly through the words of the clergyman. Since ancient times preaching has been the main means to strengthen faith, and the paragon of preaching is the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament. The preacher conveys the meanings enshrined in Christian doctrine, so the emotional mood, the pragmatic component of his speech is very important. The origins of Old Russian preaching should be sought in Byzantine culture and further – in the eloquent and solemn Sermon

on Law and Grace (1049) by Metropolitan Hilarion, the words of Kirill of Turov (the 1150-1180s) dedicated to the most important church celebrations.

The first part of "The Road Staff" has textual inclusions, which we can identify as sermons. The story clearly shows features of the Easter archetype of Russian literature, studied extensively by I.A. Esaulov. Esaulov (2004) finds its origins in Metropolitan Hilarion's "Sermon": "It was preached either before the Easter morning service or on the first day after Easter. Thus, the Easter sermon, apparently, is at the same time the origin of Russian literature as such" (p. 8). In the work by Nikiforov-Volgin, we find various manifestations of this archetype. The first part of the story even directly indicates the name of the genre: "Tomorrow I will begin my sermon with the words: 'The world is like a book of two sheets. One sheet is heaven and the other is earth. And all things in the world are letters'" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 9). The narrator-hero of the story repeatedly mentions his visits to the homes of the congregation, bringing a comforting word to the suffering and lost souls: "On the eve of Holy Week, I visited the homes of my congregation. [...] Now I feel the need to prepare it [my soul], to strengthen it" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 13). People find comfort in the pastor's words, which is why they seek to draw near to him and share their sorrows and griefs: "People are clinging to me. They are looking for comfort. I sit with my people until late at night and listen to their worries and grief. [...] I look at them and want to say something of comfort, but instead of words I lower my head and remain silent" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 18).

Close to sermon is confession. Confession is an expression of the spiritual life of the individual, one of the religious ways of repentance for sins. It focuses on revealing the inner world of a person in its development, always recounting the various twists and turns of fate. Confession is close to such concepts as remorse and repentance, which is why in the fictional text confession is always associated with the deepest tension. In the darkest of times, thieves and murderers who had almost lost their faith came to confess to Father Athanasius, and filled with bitter pain was their repentance: "During Holy Week, my fellow believers expressed a desire to confess before me, and one night I accepted their broken, desperately Russian confession" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 31). The path of the hero-narrator, walking along Russian roads and, like a shepherd, consoling his children lost in the revolutionary blizzard, seems like an Orthodox feat: "The whole Russian land was longing for the Blessed Comforter. All are tired. All drowning in grief. All are yearning for Christ's consolation", Father Athanasius writes

(Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 55). Heavy was the part of the pastor of human souls at that time.

The second part of the story is similar to the content of the hagiography, and especially to "The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, by Himself". Nikiforov-Volgin's narration is written in the first person, and the main narrator is a priest, which in itself can already remind us of this hagiography. Plot-wise and, more importantly, ideologically, Nikiforov-Volgin's story is also close to the text created by Avvakum because, first and foremost, we read about the torments and passions to which clergy was subjected in post-revolutionary Russia. Nikiforov-Volgin (2018b) describes with horror the persecution of the Orthodox Church, which became a natural extension of the separation of the people from traditions and Russian cultural grounds:

Our village commune started with parties in the cemetery, the lads dropped the big bell from the bell tower, and the windows in my banya were blown out. Aleksei Bakhvalov set fire to the chapel by the road. Kuzma chopped up the icon of Our Lady with an axe and threw it into the blazing furnace (p. 18).

The abandonment of the past brings only ruin. The events described by the narrator create a feeling similar to that experienced by the reader of the Revelation of John the Theologian. The beating of the priest, the terrible famine ("In the church [from hunger] the four-year-old son of Matvei the blacksmith died" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 19)), and persecution – these are the calamities comparable to those described by Protopope Avvakum. More than anything else, of course, the story is connected with the life of Avvakum with a description of deprivation in confinement, the horror of prison cells, and the plight of prisoners in the dungeon: "They gave me a place on the floor, in a darkened room, next to the basin for the needs. The floor was stone and foul-smelling" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 29), "I did not eat prison bread at no cost: I was forced to clean latrines, scrub the floors, wash the convoy's laundry, and in this I excelled" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 30).

With that, Nikiforov-Volgin's story shows how the sun's rays cut through the leaden clouds, illuminating the kindness and understanding of the surrounding people.

The following excerpt illustrates the mutual help in a prison cell:

" – Lie down on my bunk... it's warmer there, and I'll take your place!

This made me joyful:

– Here, too, is Christ!" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 30)

Despite all hardships, the priest's path remains light, blessed by the grace of God, and even the hardened criminals notice it: "I have made friends with the inmates in our prison. They grew to love me for my quietness to them, for my conversations with them, for my pliability" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 30). It is not to himself, not to his positive qualities, that the author-narrator attributes his change of attitude to himself, but only to Jesus Christ: "And I noticed: the deeper you bear the image of Christ and arm yourself with humility, the sooner you will illuminate the bestial world of man" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 30).

The idea of the entire life of the hero in "The Road Staff" is similar to that of the missionary hero, the pilgrim, bringing God's teachings and light to the whole sinful world: "If not immediately, a person will be illuminated eventually. It only takes living with him, so that Christ, who lives in you, may continually illuminate the darkened one. You have to lead a man by the hand, like an unsophisticated child!" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 31).

The story contrasts two worlds: the world of the Red Army, one of brute force and evil, and the world of the priest, one of spiritual humility and love for one's neighbor. This opposition is emphasized even on the external plane. All soldiers are rude in conversations, they speak barracks language, incapable of clarity and smoothness, and cannot think for themselves, so they are deprived of their innermost human traits. The images of the clergy, in contrast, are described vividly and lively. Their speech is rich and colorful. They lose their minds from fear for their own and others' lives and suffer heavily from the horrors they see, yet their language is affable and unmechanized.

The third part of the story gravitates toward the ancient Russian genres of journeys and pilgrimages. A.S. Koniukhova (2021) also notes the phenomenon of wandering, which manifests itself in this chapter:

V. Nikiforov-Volgin points to the main task of wandering as a spiritual feat: not just to give up everything in the name of the Lord, but also to bring to every person met on the way the good words of the Gospel, awakening the image of God even in the most lost soul (p. 126).

The topos of road and the motifs of travel and wandering are constantly repeated in the text: "I am walking down the high road" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 37), "I go and do not meet a single dwelling" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 40). The road in the

story connects man and God. On the difficult road, Father Athanasius is supported by his staff and the Christian faith. The motif of journey is transformed into a movement beyond this world: "For more than two months I was between life and death" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 48). The last lines of the story are life-affirming: "I go to them [people] as long as I am strong enough, and tightly still my arm holds the road staff" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 55). The courage and selflessness of the main character, his desire to comfort people, permeates the story, making it especially light and spiritual.

"The Road Staff" organically combines the traits of several Old Russian genres: in the first part – the features of the sermon, in the second part – the hagiography, and in the third – the journey and pilgrimage. The features of the confession we find in every part of the story.

It is worth noting that "The Road Staff" contains both proverbial elements and accounts of orthodox miracles. This expands the genre potential of the work. Stories of God's miracles are woven into the epic fabric of the author's story; this is how legends are created. Veneration of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God saved the lives of the heroes of the work: "Our Lady has covered the earth with snow" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 25), the heavy lock crumbled at the light touch of the axe, the horse seemed to know the way the stolen icon was being carried. In his grave illness, when "death stood at the bedside", Father Athanasius was helped by the prayers of his congregation – "Christ smiled" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 17).

"The Road Staff" is also related to the original Russian tradition of notes and autobiographical prose as a confessional genre. These traditions date back to Old Russian and early Byzantine literature. In early Russian literature of the 14th-16th centuries, there were several forms of hagiography, which served as a model for autobiographical prose. The first direction was associated with historical and biographical genres (predominantly hagiographic literature), and the second direction of transformation of the genre was linked to confession.

The encyclopedic definition emphasizes that the story "in modern Russian literary theory is an epic prose genre, intermediate between the short story and the novel, medium in the volume of text or plot" (Nikoliukin, 2001, p. 752).

The discovery of individuality in the fiction of the late 19th and early 20th centuries influenced not only the strictly personal genres, e.g. autobiographies, diaries, notes, etc., but also the genres that do not claim to be authentic and personalized. As

accurately observed by N.A. Nikolina (2002), the subject of representation in autobiographical prose over time becomes "not the past in itself, but the 'past' in connection with the establishment of the inner world of the text's author" (p. 98). This confirms once again how far the autobiographical genre has departed from the historical-chronicle narrative in 20th-century literature and how close it has come to artistic literature, which operates with the concepts of "transformed reality", "fiction", "the hero's inner world", "psychologism", and others (Nikolina, 2002).

The psychobiographical element in "The Road Staff" is very strong: the narrative is in the first person (the author-narrator), and it is evident that the writer's experience is transformed into that of the priest Athanasius. As we know from the writer's biography, Nikiforov-Volgin himself was a psalmist and was well acquainted with both church life and the persecution of the church. The author's direct experience with the events described is felt intuitively by the reader. The text also contains a mention of the diary form of narration. Nikiforov-Volgin (2018a) notes: "Many bitter roads have come and gone since the time I was able to find my notes again and bend over them" (p. 27). The hero-narrator himself points out that he writes "notes".

We can single out episodes from "The Road Staff" where the author shows the movements of the soul and where the reader observes the hero's reflection, probably similar to what Nikiforov-Volgin himself thought and felt. Often in such episodes, we encounter the concept of soul: "Every New Year's Eve I meet with trepidation. Something sad is coming to our land. My soul cannot imagine what it will manifest in; it only mourns to death!" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 8), "with my soul I feel, he loves" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 12). The author's reflection is therefore supra-emotional; it is the reflection of the soul. For example, the hero-narrator tells us that he acted in an eminently virtuous manner – he gave up his house to the refugees and stayed to sleep in the banya. He goes on to say: "I was very pleased with myself, but then I was ashamed: imperfect and self-loving people we are!" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 17). And then in a completely confessional-deprecating way: "We are not able to do good without looking back, without self-indulgence! We are still far away from a perfect light-giving deed!" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 17). Throughout the story we understand that any self-satisfaction is condemned by the hero: "Yes, again I am content, again I am self-satisfied, again I fall into 'spiritual lust'. I work too little on myself" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 17).

At moments when spiritual reflection is not possible, the emphasis in the text shifts from the inner world of the author-narrator to external, sensual experiences. In the dialogue with the investigator, we read: "He put the revolver barrel to my temple. My head was burning with unbearable heat, and from the touch of a metallic chill, I felt pleasantness" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 29). Even in such moments, the author leaves the room to explore the soul of another person: "Most of all I was frightened by the beastly face of a man I saw for the first time" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018a, p. 29).

In this way, we can identify the following features of notes as a confessional genre in "The Road Staff": first-person narration; confessional nature of the narrative, going back to the canons of ancient Russian literature; as a consequence, a deep reflection and a constant depiction of the life of the soul. One cannot but agree with the words of A.M. Liubomudrov about the writer's prose: "His luminous word heals the soul, fills it with life-giving light, and gives hope" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018b, p. 20).

Association of "The Road Staff" and Bunin's short story "From the Notes of the Unknown"

Works by many writers of the first wave of the Russian diaspora reflect the artistic consciousness of the early 20th century, characteristic of neorealism with its gravitation toward the synthesis of genre thinking with the activation of the subtextual-associative sphere. In our view, original consonances are found when comparing "The Road Staff" with Bunin's short story "Iz zapisok neizvestnogo" ["From the Notes of the Unknown"], which is part of the "Under the Hammer and Sickle" series of short stories (1930). In this paper, we outline the author's conceptual positions and provide additional examples from the text.

Similarly to Nikiforov-Volgin, here we find the same form of notes by a fictional narrator – as a rule, psychologically close to the author. Such a strategy provides the effect of deep self-disclosure, diary confessionality, and sincerity. "Notes" also appeal to the ancient Russian genre of "khozhenie" with their genre-compositional dominant.

The events of the work refer to the 1920s. The narrator, a representative of the intelligentsia, living in Moscow, is struggling to find something positive and reassuring in modernity, in its established post-revolutionary everyday life, yet he fails to "fit in" with the new life. Bunin's protagonist describes his "wanderings", as he calls his walks

and trips around Moscow and beyond, without sarcasm, without exasperation: just small sketches with factual objectivity are given. For example, on an April day, the hero sees Moscow "in blinding sunlight". On a festive day, on a crowded street in front of him "all the time, there was a boy in broken women's shoes running, selling the latest issue of a weekly magazine, the whole front page of which depicted God the Father sitting on the clouds and looking through a huge pince-nez at a flyer, the latest Soviet decree" (Bunin, 1991, p. 160).

The narrator does not comment on such impressions in any way. His reaction is as follows: "I left Moscow for an entire day – the whole day I spent in the village, in one manor house" (Bunin, 1991, p. 160). In the brief description-impression of the abandoned manor house of a once ancient aristocratic family, there is a clear allusion to Bunin's story "The Belated Spring" (1923), a masterpiece of the writer's prose, where the theme of farewell to an entire civilization of domestic noble culture is given poignantly and deeply.

One of the most prominent researchers of Bunin's work Iu. Maltsev (1994) writes that "these centers of Russian spirituality are shown by Bunin in remarkable harmony and unity with eternal Russian nature, from the marvelous unity grows a dazzling image of 'unforgotten and indestructible Russia'" (p. 286).

In the story, we found that pilgrimage "journeys" are associated with Bunin's desire to discover the enduring life of the sacred origin in Russian life, which was associated with the role of the Russian church, its ancient temples, monasteries, and the ringing of bells. Bunin's most inspired lines, in which he becomes a poet, are devoted to bell ringing. One example shocks with its drama and majesty. On his way out of the monastery, on a "rattletrap" driven by a monk, the narrator returns to town. The monk tells him of the fate of the famous fool for Christ who was buried in the monastery. Living as an ascetic in a dugout, in a dense forest, he every day, "hearing the monastery bell, came to the monastery church and stood on the porch – standing on it barefoot and in only a shirt, even in winter" (Bunin, 1991, p. 173). And when he didn't come one day, and the next day too, the monks got worried: a blizzard was raging. "They began to ring the bells. Day and night, through the storm and snow, in the dense spruce forests ... the bells were ringing – he never came" (Bunin, 1991, p. 173). After the storm they searched, but did not find the fool. Much later a peasant discovered him lying surrounded by snow drifts near his hut in the woods: "But not on the snow, but on the spring green grass, amidst fragrant flowers" (Bunin, 1991, p. 173).

It is hard to overestimate the depth of this monastic tale, which organically shows the best features of the national character: selfless devotion, mercy, and collectivity, naturally inherent in Russian life.

"Notes" is also enriched by biblical reminiscences and allusions. For example, two fragments of this cycle are devoted to the image of an old man living alone in the basement. He tells his visitor a "marvelous tale" about John the Suffering, whose cave instead of a lamp broken by a beast was illuminated by "a certain thin light, flowing from some unknown place", which shone upon him until his death. "And at his death", says the old man, "the angel of the Lord gently said to him, 'It was the light of your sorrow that shone upon you, John!'" (Bunin, 1991, p. 156).

The intonation of Christian humility before the trials sent is also highlighted in the fragment about the departure of another hero, "Rurikovich". The narrator confesses: "It has always struck me in these years: the more noble a man was in his time, the easier and simpler he entered all the trials of a new life" (Bunin, 1991, p. 165).

It appears that even the limited examples from Bunin's work suggest that the genre synthesis in "Notes" is multidimensional, combining features of a confessional diary prose, a pilgrimage essay, and a historical essay. The inclusion of biblical reminiscences and allusions brings Bunin's texts to the level of ontological reflections about world order.

All of these qualities typologically correlate with "The Road Staff".

Creative work by Shmelev and its association with "The Road Staff" and "From the Notes of the Unknown"

From the perspective of our study, among works by Shmelev, we should distinguish the short story "Blazhennye" ["The Blessed"]. It is rightly noted that

by the emotional depth and artistic subtlety, Shmelev's stories of the emigrant period are a new, higher stage in his creative journey. He has now fully assimilated the advantage of the first-person narrative. Adhering mainly to the storytelling manner, he can incarnate his hero, reflecting the natural human urge to confess, or, like Dostoyevsky, by creating a narrator who was a witness to the events described. In both cases, by incarnating in the characters, Shmelev could write from within the character portrayed, suffering not for him, but in him, and thus suffering with his people (Sorokina, 2000, p. 191).

This work also recounts the difficult years of post-revolutionary Russia, an era of persecution of the Orthodox faith. Since we have already undertaken an analysis of this story, here we will indicate the most salient points for comparison (Zakharova, 2015; 2020).

In terms of genre, like "The Road Staff", this short story gravitates simultaneously to such ancient Russian genres as "khozhenie", hagiography, and sermon.

The author's attitude is very close to Bunin's: the desire to leave the city in the hope of touching the still unspent spiritual reserve in the people: "I said goodbye to Russia, the old Russia. Much in it has been trampled and torn down, but there is still more of the old – in the Russia of the countryside" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 99).

The narrator's first impression is of a visit to the small estate of his acquaintances, an old teacher, a zemstvo employee, and his wife. After the glad news he brought them (of the well-being of their nephew, whom they thought to be dead), the elders wept. "and then I realized", the author recounts,

what a change had taken place with them [...] I had never seen a pedagogue baptized before. He had a reputation as an 'individualist anarchist', corresponded with Kropotkin, and was famous for his fierce struggle against church schools, calling them obscurantism and purely literal nonsense. Now there was even an icon in a wreath of forget-me-nots and a lampada over his bed (Shmelev, 1998, p. 100).

However, the strongest impact on the narrator is produced by the old man's account of an incident that occurred in the village and the meeting with the "heroes" of this incident: the general's grandson Misha and the locksmith Semen Koliuchii. The incident was far from ordinary: Misha, who had been lying paralyzed for several years after falling from his horse, was cured after an attempt to drown him, just as the rebels had drowned his grandfather. This event, of course, shook everyone, including the instigators of the massacre, among whom was Semen Koliuchii. The author introduces him to us as follows:

Tall, lean, with a crown of gray curls over his high open forehead, he resembled a thinker, and only his black hands covered with scratches and the smudged blouse of a stoker spoke of his working position. We used to talk with him about many things – he was quite well-read and naturally intelligent, and our good relations have lasted (Shmelev, 1998, p. 102).

Semen Koliuchii sincerely and sadly confesses:

I have cursed the meager pride of my mind, and I pray the Creator to give me the power to enlighten the wild tribe and seek Him. The spilled blood burns on me and all the 'enlightenment'. Go and preach the Gospel of Truth! Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie, thou shalt love thy neighbor! If you do not recognize these things, all is powerless, all is vanity. The Lord has given me wings (Shmelev, 1998, p. 102).

He goes on to explain how he now understands his purpose: "I have had an epiphany and I exclaim: 'My Lord and my God! – It should be written about our Russia in the Gospel and read in church. We have been baptized with fire and must take up the staff and preach to the world! I am the Vine of Truth.'" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 102).

The locksmith is eager to speak about his rebirth: "I listened to Semen Ustinych's enthusiastic, melodious speech. A gleam trembled in his eyes under his dusky eyebrows. And the glitter, the blue and golden glitter of the first autumn days, quivered both on the ground and in the sky" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 103).

The author incorporates the old man's story into the coloristic palette of the Rublev icon. The appearance of Misha strengthens the sacral allusions by a comparison of his appearance with the paintings of Nesterov and Old Russian icons: "And he was like an angel, which is painted on the icons of the Annunciation" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 104).

The author-narrator learns that after Misha was healed, he and Semen Ustinych began walking through the villages and preaching the Gospel, which Misha knew by heart. Misha's meekness, humility, and forgiveness captivate the listener. Especially his account of his visit to an intoxicated company at a wedding: "Yes, it was as if a voice said, 'Go and say the Holy Word!' And I went in. Everyone was drunk and shouted, 'The fool has come!' And they began to laugh" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 105). Misha then endured physical mockery, but at the same time read, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 105).

This had a strong effect on the offenders, and seaman Zabykin wiped his face and head with a clean towel and said quietly: "Pray for the damned, if you know God... And we have forgotten!", to which Misha answered, "He is already with you, here... and He has even gone down into hell!" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 105). It is noteworthy that Misha's story ends with the words illuminated by the joy of the reincarnation of people

through such a "gospel": "And it was joyful to see their good faces" (Shmelev, 1998, p. 106).

Returning to the capital, the narrator feels overflowing with lofty, radiant feelings:

I got off the tarantass and went straight on, through the fields, on a distant mountain that spread out far away. Along its golden edge, on the height, in the pigeon-colored sky, white human figures shone, glowing in brilliance. Whether in a woman picking up, whether in a man digging potatoes, I saw in every glowing speck in the fields the thin and bright Misha walking somewhere (Shmelev, 1998, p. 106).

Especially noteworthy here is the end of the phrase, the ending of the work: *in every glowing speck in the fields*. The narrator saw this young man who had miraculously formed such a necessary invisible link between Scripture and earthly life.

Thus, it becomes clear that the short story by Shmelev is also an example of genre synthesis, typologically related to the works by Nikiforov-Volgin and Bunin: these are features of the Old Russian genres of "khozhenie", hagiography, and sermon.

Conclusion

Each of the examined texts is distinguished by an ontological amplification owing to the activity of biblical and patristic reminiscences and allusions. The genre form of notes, common to all the authors, not only gives the texts the features of confessionality but also puts them in a direct connection with the modernity described in them and causes the effect of the reader's presence, the action being "here and now". This gives rise to the perception of existence in the unity of its historical and spiritual connections.

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study. Our analysis focused on a particular set of texts and authors, and further research efforts could explore a broader range of literary notes to gain a more complete understanding of the genre. In addition, the interpretations presented in this study are subjective and open to various perspectives. Future research may include several analytical approaches and comparative analyses to clarify the current understanding of the genre of notes in literature. Overall, this study provides a foundation for future research on the meaning of the genre and its broader implications in the field of literary studies.

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