

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE "LITTLE MAN" THEME IN THE RUSSIAN LITERATURE OF THE XX CENTURY

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### ARTICLE INFO.

**Keywords:** Russian Russian literature of the nineteenth century, the humanistic position, the evolution of the "little man", the understanding of the theme of the "little man" in the Russian literature of the twentieth century.

### Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the theme of the "little man" in the Russian literature of the twentieth century. The material for the study was the works of I. Shmelev, M. Bulgakov and V. Shukshin. The relevance of the work is due to the need for a deeper study of the topic of the "little man" and its understanding in the Russian literature of the XX century.

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The theme of the "little man" is one of the main themes in Russian literature of the XIX century. This type of literary hero is an ordinary, extraordinary and unremarkable person who is at a low social level of the hierarchy of society. He is usually limited in his abilities and has a limited range of interests.

Many prominent Russian writers have addressed this topic. It was first touched upon by A.S. Pushkin in the story "The Stationmaster". The successors of this theme were N.V. Gogol ("The Overcoat"), F.M. Dostoevsky ("Poor People", "Notes from the Underground", etc.), L. N. Tolstoy, A.P. Chekhov and many others. They used the "image of a little man" to reflect on issues of social justice, morality and human dignity.

Revealing the image of the "little man", the writers express their humanistic position, emphasizing that everyone has the right to a happy and fulfilling life, to their own vision of life.

The topic of the "little man" in Russian literature goes beyond the study of social hierarchies and social constraints. She also delves into the intricacies of human nature, morality, and the search for personal meaning. For example, in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, the main character Raskolnikov personifies a "little man" in a psychological and moral sense. He is a poor former student who commits a monstrous crime in an attempt to prove his exclusivity and superiority. However, he is tormented by guilt and tormented by the moral consequences of his actions. Through Raskolnikov's inner struggle, Dostoevsky explores the themes of moral responsibility, redemption and the inner dignity of each person.

Writers of the 20th century, based on the material of their contemporary reality, continue the traditions of Russian literature of the previous century in covering the topic of the "little man" with talent. However, they solve it in their own way.

An example of an artistic interpretation of the theme of the "little man" is the work of I.S. Shmelev.

What is the peculiarity of his character?

The hero of his first novel "Citizen Ukleikin", a half-impooverished shoemaker, taking revenge on the society of the well-fed with drunken antics for insults and humiliations (his wife is cheating on him, everything around him is gray and hopeless). And suddenly he learns that soon there will be changes in the country, a simple working man will have the opportunity to defend his rights and seek justice, to be equal with the masters.[4, 416]

Ukleikin is literally reborn from the word "citizen", he participates in elections, vows not to drink vodka. The magical concept of "citizen" works wonders, it transforms the shoemaker. It is comparable to AkakyAkakievich's symbolic overcoat, which also gave the little official a pass, an entrance ticket to the society. But the overcoat turned out to be an unreliable, illusory "ticket" of a one-time action. So for Ukleikin, participation in the elections actually turned out to be just a game of politics. He sat with the famous people of the city, listened to the speeches of candidates for deputies, dropped his ballot paper into the ballot box, and that was the end of it. The usual gray days began to flow. The shoemaker returns to the old one, to a glass of vodka.

At first, he is full of enthusiasm and hope that the status of a citizen and participation in elections will bring him equality and justice. However, as the story progresses, it becomes clear that all this was just an illusion. Participation in elections and the status of a citizen do not lead to real changes in Ukleikin's life. His daily routine returns, and he plunges back into his everyday life.

By depicting the contrast between initial hope and ultimate disappointment, the narrative sheds light on the challenges faced by "little people" in their quest for justice and equality in a complex and often indifferent society.

Shmelev continues to develop the theme of the "little man", about the awakening of his social consciousness, in the story "The Man from the Restaurant" (1911). Masterfully using the technique of a fairy tale, the writer narrates on behalf of YakovSkorokhodov, a waiter from a first-class Moscow restaurant, where "the most select and highest audience" always gathers. It is no coincidence that, starting from the intention to create a portrait of a modern "little man", Shmelev initially chooses the figure of a footman / waiter, a person of "helpful" work. The simple-minded story of the waiter turns into a social criticism, a moral verdict on the powerful of this world.

Before his eyes, the lives of the rich and noble go on from day to day, from year to year. Every day, Yakov has to face humiliation and insults, despite the fact that he faithfully performs his duties, responds to the appeal "man!", depersonalizing him and depriving him of his name. Although he looks very "decent and even diplomatic ...", but others see him only as a lackey.

Working in a restaurant, the hero also saw how people with a higher status than him "bow and lick their heels, and not even for fifty kopecks, but for higher reasons!"[4, 416]. He himself "saw with his own eyes how an important gentleman, with orders all over his chest, with all speed ducked his head under the table and raised his nose The handkerchief that Mr. Minister was pleased to drop. Rather, he picked up mine and even pushed my hand away under the table... I, of course, do my job, and if I give a match, I give it according to the regulations of the service, and not over the set ..." [1].

The inquisitive gaze of the hero also notices the contrast between the external signs of nobility and the actual moral qualities or behavior of "noble gentlemen" who are "so subtle in their treatment and actions and speak different languages!.. They eat so delicately and carefully handle even a bone, and when the chair is dropped, and then they apologize, but sometimes...

"And here is such a polite gentleman in a uniform, and on his chest a round sign, sitting next to a lady in a huge hat with feathers, and I knew the lady from what origin she was, when I touched the edge of the fish dish, because of their closeness to each other, by the edge of the feather, called I'm a fool." [1]

The hero admits that he is guilty, but he was still very offended. "Of course, I received a whole piece of tea, but not as an apology, but in order to spread the dust and show my nobility in front of the lady, and not as compensation." [1]

Skorokhodov sees the possibility of increasing his social status in science. That is why it is important for him that his children get an education. Skorokhodov, addressing his son, says: "Of course I have not penetrated the sciences, but I am putting you on your feet and I want to provide you with a noble fate, not my own, lackey and halui ..." [1]

One day Yakov Skorokhodov became seriously ill and then he realizes that he did not have time to put the children on their feet, his wife's Soul remains without any funds, and there is no own house. Being in the heat and feeling dizzy, he decided, denying himself everything, to save money to buy a house.

One day, while tidying up the office, he found 12 rubles dropped by one visitor who was taking money out under the table for magic tricks. So everything in Yakov Sofronich was stirred up: "... Hands and feet are shaking, there are black circles in his eyes... That's how the Lord sent it. I kept thinking how to save up, and then immediately - on!"

From that moment on, Skorokhodov goes through a difficult path of internal struggle with conscience. He realizes that the money he has found can help him with his own needs and problems. However, despite his own interests and temptations, he decides to return them. He wonders about the correctness of his decision and even reflects that the Lord is watching him and waiting for him to act. The hero understands perfectly well that the money he returned will be spent on champagne or other entertainment, but he does not want to allow evil to overcome him inside, to violate the commandment "do not steal." This behavior of Yakov Sofronich speaks about his moral fortitude and decency.

Yakov Sofronich is faced with a considerable number of tragic events and disasters in his life. He lost his wife, his son is on the run, he was fired from his job, his daughter lives in an extramarital affair with a man who cheats on her and is in no hurry to marry her. And Skorokhodov remained alone. Despite all these trials, Yakov retains true human dignity, sincerity, spiritual purity and faith. In the image of Skorokhodov, spiritual evolution is traced – the hero acquires spiritual wisdom and peace of mind.

"Shmelev's ideological and artistic innovation in creating the image of a "little man" organically grows out of the traditions of Russian literature, which revealed not only the social, but also the psychological essence of this literary type. The author focuses on the hero's discovery of the ability to introspect and spiritual insight." [3, 239]. Shmelev's "Little Man" is shown by the writer with great compassion and attention to his most everyday needs and requirements. [2, 19]

The image of the "little man" occupies a central place in one of M. Bulgakov's "Moscow" novels, "The Devil's Tale". The main character, Bartholomew Korotkov, represents a typical "little man" — an ordinary employee who falls into the trap of a bureaucratic machine. In his perception, this system is associated with devilish power, although he himself is not explicitly aware of this. The hero strives for justice and the restoration of his place in society. He struggles with endless obstacles, bureaucratic instances that have mysterious and often absurd names, in the hope of regaining his position and stability, which he lost under the influence of the new head of Longjohn.

Like Gogol, the hero of the "Diaboliad" loses the meaning of life and plunges into the absurdity of his worldview. He begins to perceive the surrounding reality in a very unusual way. The delusional state of the protagonist reflects his hallucinations and the transformation of the world around him, where people become ridiculous statues floating in the air. He is haunted by the idea that Criminal Investigation officers are stalking him.

At first, he feels fear and confusion, but then these emotions turn into protest, indignation and a desire to protect his self-esteem. Eventually, in desperation and an attempt to avoid persecution, Korotkov commits suicide by throwing himself off the roof of a building.

The author's use of the phantasmagoria technique creates in the story a feeling of an atmosphere of unpredictability and mysticism, leading to a split perception of the world.

Moscow in Bulgakov's story plays the role of a symbolic center of evil and crimes that cause suffering to the "little man". While in St. Petersburg the sufferings of the "little people" were redeemed and brought a higher level of spirituality, in Bulgakov's Moscow the concentration of evil is accompanied by a general spiritual degradation. The story "Diaboliad" illustrates the destructive influence of the bureaucratic system on the life and psyche of an ordinary person.

The image of the "little man" in the work of Vasily Shukshin embodies simplicity, life wisdom and resilience to necessity. Shukshin's characters are often in a state of continuous mental search. They strive to find their place in life, understand their true nature and achieve happiness. This search can be painful, as the characters face difficulties, ridicule and misunderstanding from others.

In the story "Miles sorry, madam!" the main character Bronka Pupkov, as a "little man" living in the village, longs for something more significant and extraordinary in his life. He feels dissatisfied with his everyday existence and is looking for goals and adventures. To avoid the monotony of everyday life, he invents a story about how he almost shot Hitler. This story allows him to imagine himself as a hero, a man who has done something outstanding and significant.

When Bronka tells this story to others, he does it with tears in his eyes. He is so immersed in his own imagination that he "lives" this story as if it were real. Tears can be a mixture of joy when he momentarily transcends his everyday reality, and sadness when he realizes the stark contrast between his fictional narrative and his real life.

The tragedy lies in the fact that the hero, being a "little man", cannot realize his dreams and live the bright and wonderful life that he invented for himself. And when his wife reminds him that this story is completely made up, it causes him anger and suffering. The gap between his fictional narrative and the truth generates a deep sense of disappointment.

Thus, the theme of the "little man" in Russian literature serves as a powerful critique of social inequality, injustice and the struggle of man for self-realization. By shedding light on the lives of marginalized people, Russian writers of the 20th century, as well as writers of the 19th century, sought to show that even in such "little people" there are hidden human qualities worthy of attention and respect. By telling their stories, the writers tried to evoke sympathy from readers and emphasize that everyone deserves attention and support, regardless of their social status or origin.

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