

SYMBOLIST PUBLICISM AS AN OUTLOOK MODEL OF THE SILVER AGE

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Abstract

In the article the methodological and applied criteria of symbolist publicism as an independent form of analytical journalism are defined. The subject of the research is the argumentative basis and semantic resources of public statements of philosophers and writers, i.e. the representatives of Russian symbolism. The relevance of the topic is due to the crisis of modern publicism, which becomes similar to a product and leads to mental and moral enslavement. The general purpose of the study is the legitimization of the term «symbolist publicism». Genre-stylistic peculiarities of symbolist text-making, as well the outlook landmarks of symbolic representatives of the Silver Age, were studied by E. Kassierer, M. Voskresenskaya, A. Mazurchuk, O. Matyushkin, O. Ponomarev, L. Kravets, and others.

Keywords: symbolist journalism, semantic code, realistic/idealistic symbolism, metaphor, ideologeme

As a special kind of journalistic and literary art, publicism serves as a universal tool for comprehension of actual social issues, the way of representation and interpretation which is determined by the ideological and aesthetic dominants of one or another in a cultural-historical epoch. Research of journalistic discourse features of a particular age allows us to trace the influence of civilization's valuable achievements on a way of interpreting reality, as well as an author's manner of communicating with the reader. Taking into account the frequent leading of the modern publicism to phenomena or fact fixing (less often to analysis), learning past generations' experience, i.e. time, when functional spectrum of high-quality journalistic texts was modeled and implemented in depth, but not in width, is acquiring some special significance. Nowadays, publicism also implies influence, but the cumulative effect of many of these texts has a negative meaning. Manipulation of consciousness, population zombying or information space mythologization are all the factors, which worsen the "environment of the noosphere", cause "information fatigue and excessive pressure on the human psyche" [Potyatynyk, 2000], lead to the blocking of information by the information or ideological recruitment. Publicism vulgarization escalation, reducing it to a normal consumer goods' sale [Zhytariuk, 2008] are deepening modern macrotext crisis by atrophying the journalistic method itself. Under these conditions a version of *classical publicism*, being able to form intellectual and moral narratives, but not leading to mental enslavement, needs revival. *Silver Age prose symbolism* is endowed with the properties. Since this artistic-ideological trend at the

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turn of XIX-XX centuries arose, first of all, as a protest against positivist tendencies in science, artistic creativity and public life, its experience is able to open up new prospects for overcoming the "period of instability" in the publicism of modernity.

It is necessary to distinguish the names of D. Merezhkovsky, K. Balmont, F. Sologub, V. Bryusov, V. Rozanov, V. Ivanov, A. Belyi, partially A. Blok, M. Minsk among the Russian symbolists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The creation of the Silver Age representatives has moved beyond actually literature and has developed into a complex socio-cultural phenomenon with elements of philosophy, religion, politics, in the form of journalism, that is, multilevel communication; its main purpose was not just a search for a new artistic method of reality representation, but rather the process of finding answers to the "cursed" questions of time, such as prevention (overcoming) the bolshevik ideology, separation of the church from the state and its unity with the people, the enlargement of civil rights and freedoms in the conditions of social group polarization, etc. Publicism as an organic component of resistance, aimed at transforming the world under the "intellectual spirituality" cover, it played an important role in this context.

Some examples may help to establish the communicative essence and journalistic features of the synthesizing model of symbolist publicism. Dmitry Merezhkovsky can be called the authority in this area. A representative of the "deep" outlook type, a recognized master of the idealistic and realistic ways of entity symbolization, "a new religious consciousness" founder, a writer and a journalist enriched publicistic style with a large number of semantically inexhaustible concepts. For example, the multifunctional symbol "*Kham*" (eng. Boor) in the program article «The Forthcoming *Kham*» («*Polarnaya Zvezda*», 1905) has only a negative connotation and refers to any spiritual philistinism (incivility) manifestations across all the hierarchies of social stratification. There are spiritually paralyzed church (as a structure), autocracy, hooliganism, black-hundredists, chinazation on the principle "the state is an ordered antler", global militarism and chauvinism, "The Middle" (indifferent) Europeans and even futurists. *Kham* for Merezhkovsky is both a particular historical-political threat and the deepening of the cultural crisis and the traditional humanism decline, both the phenomenon of middle social class degradation and loss of value orientations among intellectuals, etc.

The numerical symbols are presented by Merezhkovsky in the articles «War and Religion», «East or West?», «Gogol and Russia», «Twice for Two is Four», «Iron under the Hammer», «Cross and Pentagram», «Scream of a cock», «Winter Rainbows», «Cracked Bell», «Triple falsehood» and others. The semantic spectrum of the numerical numbers "one", "two", "three", "four" and "five" here is so wide, that it allows to describe the basic doctrines of Christianity ("four-part cross") and to substantiate the Bolshevik ideology malignancy ("pentagonal star"): «Pentagram or Cross? There was a cross over Europe; will there be a pentagram? This is the question that has now faced all the humanity... Between the Four and the Five there are fates of the World shaking, how scary, how easy!» [Merezhkovsky, 1921]. The combinations of numerals in the complex philosophical and religious subsystems like "two in one", "three in one", "five against four" converted author's publicism into solid macrotext, due to which there is a special world-view system built with a unique transfer of Russia's, Europe's, Christianity's development concept content, etc. *The religious symbolism* of D. Merezhkovsky is combined in the following writings «Another step of the forthcoming *Kham*», «Red Devil», «When it rises», «The pale horse», «Swine mother», «The crown of thorns», «The heart of the man and heart to the beast», etc. The multiple semantic patterns of concepts such as "cross", "beast", "sword", "star" acquire a particular historical meaning in the publicism; despite the fact that their symbolist code tends to be a pejorative, the defining function of the cross as a symbol of love is salvific. Finally, the *symbolism of the spatial organization* of D. Merezhkovsky's journalistic discourse is defined by antagonistic terms like "up"/"down", "depth"/"flat", "East"/"West", "Russia"/"Europe", "here" (emigration)/"there" (Russia) and is conceptualized by the Russian revolutionary mode of the "abyss". In the articles «East

or West?», «Land in the mouth», «Split Bell», «Flowers of the Bourgeoisie», «Christian Anarchists», «Christianity and Caesareanism», «Bolshevism and Humanity», «Old and New Implicability», «De profundis clamavi» the author uses the mentioned lexical opposition to divide categorically the European population into God's people and atheists, to fix demonstratively political and religious extremes in the history of the Russian Empire, to glorify Orthodox emigration as a preservation symbol of Russian religious essence in the conditions of an apocalyptic animal's birth – i.e. Bolshevism. It is natural that the October coup of 1917 is interpreted through all kinds of resources of symbolist journalism and represents the abyss, the kingdom of Kham and the triumph of pentagram: «Now Russia is separated from all mankind with the same abyss as that world from this one. Everything happening in Russia is so incredible that none of us (foreigners) who have not visited "the other world" can neither only understand, nor imagine it» [Merezhkovsky, 1921]. Symbolic arsenal in the artistic heritage of the author is poorer, however, the connotation of the pictorial components such as "beast" and "cross" in the historical trilogy «The Kingdom of the Beast» is identical to the journalistic one.

Vasily Rozanov was a critic of Russian school education and the Orthodox Church, a philosopher-publicist, a representative of realistic type of symbolism. Although Rozanov's meditative essay sketches, internal dialogues and diary entries in late collections «Secluded» (1912), «Mortality» (1913) and «Fallen leaves» (1913-1915) were written in the total pessimism spirit (as a consequence of author's prolonged spiritual crisis – M.R.), still they were designed to look for ways out of social upheavals. Philosophical symbol "noumenon" is a "thing in itself", Kantian "intellectual contemplation", fundamental absolute compared to the phenomenon, this is the Gospel, wise books, the truth; "Leaves" are the flow of life, leaves as letters of the writer, a thought, a flight, personal uniqueness and grayness of the mass (the pile of fallen leaves); "Laughter" is the destruction of harmony, insidiousness (of mermaids), soul brutality, cynicism, malice, Gogol satire; "Homeland" means Russia, some artificial pathos, a curse, a stamped man, irrational love: «From knees to navel there is Asia, from the ribs to the top of the head there are Apollo Belvedere, Ellen, Rome and France. "But Rus is lying on the side". That is "on the side", as it personifies Asia and Europe. Try to make out where there are top and bottom, front and rear. It is not a country, but nonsense. It is our homeland...» [Fomin, 2010]. Speaking about newspaper magazine publicism, in the process of reality interpretation V. Rozanov fills the surname of Moscow university lecturer F. Buslaev boldly with new emotional shades. Idealistic and formal bureaucratic views on the education system opposition can be found in an article collection «Literary Essays». The symbol "Buslaev" here is an example of an intellectual, who is engaged in "vocation" work and does not take over managerial (and other) functions, that is the "Golden head" («Family Question»), and "The nobility of the creative person" («In the yard of the Gentiles»), and the exact opposite to "intellectually small Belinsky" («Disputes»), and moderation in combination with the kindness of patience and so on. Highly artistic epithets in the given series form a selective symbolist code; despite the researcher O. Matiushkin's assertion that Rozanov does not model life according to the laws of art, but creates exclusively his art, which erases borders with everyday life, active manipulation of characters "Buslaev", "sex", "death", "blood", "shadow", "window", etc. in the applied controversy with M. Chernyshevsky, M. Berdyaev, D. Merezhkovsky, as well as on the pages of specialized media crystallize the author's *literary and journalistic symbolist aesthetic life model*.

Symbolist tradition in journalism at the beginning of the 20th century is supported by the works of Fedir Sologub. The artist's potential (as a poet, a writer and a playwright) is significantly higher here, nevertheless, the publicistic performances of ethnic Ukrainian clearly update the symbolist codes of novels, stories and scenarios on the mass-media pages. Thus, being an advocate of the ideas of humane upbringing and learning, F. Sologub sharply criticizes the phenomenon of physical punishment in Russian families and schools, and programs the "window" symbol as a consolidating argument. An open

window is like a symbol of the way to better worlds, as a carelessness illusion, as a means of death (the massive children jump from high-rise floors) and as the unity of the earth life, material with heavenly angel's life (window). The publicistic essay «The Imps of War» («News of the Day», 1915) expands the semantic space of the conceptual "bes" (rus. Бес, eng. Devil) symbol. In the midst of the First World War, Sologub as a journalist warns mankind from excessive delight regarding the military industry's achievements, indicating, at the same time, the diabolical obsession of those statesmen and military leaders, who gave orders to subordinates to attack the enemy redoubts using chemical weapons. The plot about a cruel Russian teacher, who, above all, aspires to the inspectorate authorities, forms the symbolist code in Sologub's gothic novel «The Little Devil» (1892 – 1902), instead, in «The Imps of War» (1915), the religious-psychological potential of the cornerstone symbol is extrapolated into the actual socio-political background. To characterize the literary hero Peredonov F. Sologub uses specific Russian provincialism "nedotykomka" (Eng. a resentful person), which is a metaphor for the definition of eternal personal balancing between God and devil, and the ultimate victory of the latter one. Accordingly, "bes" (a nedotykomka) is a symbol of dullness and boredom of Russian province in the early twentieth century, the absurd symbol, the symbol of dishonor, hypocrisy, "the darkness of life", a symbol of the Russian state (both royal and Bolshevik) sadism, a voluntary self-destruction symbol and a meanness symbol of military victory with weapons of mass destruction.

Critics call Andrei Bely's novel «Petersburg» (1912-1913) the literary peak of Russian symbolism. Political ambivalence prevented A. Bely from sober assessing the prospects of revolutions in 1905-1907 and 1917, but the artist's talent and visionary sensibility were quite enough to comprehend the mystical and ephemeral nature of both the cultural capital of St. Petersburg and the empire itself. In addition to the traditional Russian symbols, "bes", "devilishness" (terror and provocations in the age of social catastrophes) and "window" (future, hope) in the novel, there are the following author's polysemantic constructions: *Petersburg* is the island of European hope in the Asian territory, Moscow's envy, at the same time cold, damp life under the laws of mathematics; Bolshevik *Petrograd* is a new trend, lost identity, the end of the traditions of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky; *Ableukhov's institution* its bureaucratic power, a gap between the poor and the rich, between the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie, the Mongolian essence of Russians; *Europe-Asia* are the antagonistic centers of the universe, the struggle of human opposites, good and evil; the *sun* is the "sun of consciousness" or the electric lamp on the desk, Jesus Christ, evangelical ethics, high ethical endeavors, Russian carriers of Western traditions (Lihutin's family) etc.

The publicism of the symbolist-idealist A. Bely is a delicate topic in the perspective of the statement of objective truth in the media and the impetus for subjective freedom in the literature. By blurring the boundaries of journalistic and literary genres, as well as pursuing the goal of congruent influence on the mass reader, Bely as a publicist in an unusual manner is trying to avoid "artistic images" and "rhythms", however, even the artificial minimization of verbal expression in publications of a topical nature is not able to hide all the features of the classical author's style. So, in the article «Stamped Kalosha» («Vesy», 1907) (long before writing the novel «Petersburg») the author deliberately forms a semantic code of the same literary symbol. Urban innovation in the form of laying glass pavements on Nevsky Prospekt creates an illusion of walking in the air for the citizens; however, the spiritual poverty of the "cultural capital" at the beginning of the twentieth century (censorship, the closing down of theaters, the persecution of modernists-writers) automatically actualizes visual deception in the metaphysical plan. Petersburg here is a spiritual abyss symbol, and the rubber kalosha is the same Petersburg, but also personification of its officials-careerists' meanness, who formally promise to improve the life of the intellectuals, but in fact, just leave the prints of the soles over the abyss (on the glass).

Contrary to meaningful and ideological contents, the symbols “East” and “West” compose the issues of the article «Russia» («Utro Rossii», 1910). The model of humanitarian state policy, according to A. Bely, is a synthesis of the best European and Slavophil traditions (such as Greek culture, German philosophy, British education, Russian religion and literature) without national great-power dictators. «Is Russia for Russians? But who are the Russians? The Northern ones are a mixture with the Finnish tribes; slightly more Russian could be the Little Russians...» [Bely, 1910]. Modeling a disappointing conclusion, according to which the motherland is infected with a virus of Mongolian (Eastern, Asian) barbarism, the author conceptually claims that «The present belongs to the West; it is impossible to oppose the present Russia to the present West; since the present is becoming just a relic of the past. Russia’s future is still possible to be believed in; but first of all it is necessary to say to true, sick Russia: disappear, Russia, disappear!».

The rigid opposition of the Bely-artist and Bely-publicist is unlikely to be appropriate. Publicism in this case served as the author’s laboratory, where ideas and images were sharpened, which subsequently appeared in significant literary works. Certainly, in newspaper articles there are not all the romantic symbols, and some publications, such as «The Truth about the Russian Intellectuals» (about the collection of «Vikhy») or «Symbolism as a Worldview» are generally devoid of the author’s own expressions and contain elements of academic style; however, the collective semantic code of strategic metaphors, images and ideologies is concentrated both in the literary and journalistic plans, that is the unique *synthesizing function* within the confrontation of symbolist realism / idealism.

Similar extrapolations can be observed in the work of other writers and publicists of the Silver Age: O. Block (the symbols “twelve”, “morning”, “evening”, “red”, “moon”, “blaze”), V. Ivanov (“cross”, “rainbow”, “ocean”, “rose”), M. Voloshin (“death”, “earth”, “fire”, “wind”), L. Andreev (“laugh”, “wall”, “lie”, “abyss”), Z. Gippius (“white color”, “flower”, “almond”), K. Balmont (“tower”, “light”) and others. The presence of solid illustrative and methodological bases, the correlation of symbolism with a particular cultural-historical period, and active civic position of significant representatives of the direction allow us to outline the defining boundaries of the original phenomenon in the national scientific space. Consequently, *symbolist publicism is a synthesizing communicative phenomenon, kind of analytical journalism, based on author’s interpretation, generalization and prediction of social facts and phenomena through the use of polysemantic verbal code, with the possibility of its decoding on the sensual-aesthetic and intellectual-ideological levels.* The given definition has polylingual and timeless characters, as a) directly depends on the immanent resources of a particular language (for example, French); b) is tested by writers, philosophers and journalists of the postmodern age.

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