



# Comical as a way of reflecting political daily occurrence In A. Platonov's novel "Tchevengur"

*Nadezhda Vlasova*\*

\**Begovaya str. 130-71, Voronezh, 394088, Russia*

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## ABSTRACT

In this research an assumption that A. Platonov often subjected socio-political realities to comical judgment is proposed. The novel "Tchevengur" is not satirical. A. Platonov's narrative manner shows irony in relation to heroes of "Tchevengur", and sympathy to their views. Definition "comical" in relation to a way of judgment of political daily occurrence, in my opinion, reflects well this feature of practically all A. Platonov's works. At the same time it is necessary to emphasize that comical in the "Tchevengur" is not total (this in general corresponds to the anecdote's nature).

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most mysterious A. Platonov's works, the novel "Tchevengur" has being attractive to researchers for many years. Different techniques and approaches are used in order to analyze the novel, however riddles do not become less. The most interesting researches are devoted to the so-called "real comment" of A. Platonov's fiction. Inclusion of A. Platonov's works in a political context modern to them significantly corrects our idea of a writer's creative manner. Certainly, elements of other, nonliterary system (speaking to language of Russian formalists, "material") keep only indirect communication with the unaesthetic sphere in the text of a novel. The text subordinates them to its own tasks.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the way such "material" integrates into fabric of the "Tchevengur". I make an assumption that A. Platonov often subjected socio-political realities to comical judgment. It is well known that there are two incoincident systems of values in an anecdote, and none is preferential. Another characteristic featcher of an anecdote is the sharp shift of accents. It occurs in the very end of the text and as a rule is unexpected for the reader. The novel "Tchevengur" is not satirical. Unlike satirical works with "outsidedness" of the storyteller, characteristic to them, A. Platonov's novel shows (if to paraphrase M. Bakhtin), at the same time "out-"and "insidedness". That is irony in relation to heroes of "Tchevengur", and sympathy to their views. Definition "comical" in relation to a way of judgment of political daily occurrence, in my opinion, reflects well this feature of A. Platonov's narrative manner. At the same time it is necessary to emphasize that comical in the "Tchevengur" is not total (this in general corresponds to the anecdote's nature). Also separate fragments of the "Tchevengur" aren't always comparable to an anecdote in the strict sense of the word.

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## 2. Methodology

Considering these remarks, I will turn to the analysis of an episode about the "revolutionary sanctuary" (or "revsanctuary" as A. Platonov writes). Commentators of the novel "Tchevengur" consider that A. Platonov wrote this fragment not earlier than in 1927. N. Korniyenko has paid attention that the revsanctuary is not mentioned in the famous letter of G. Litvin-Molotov (1927), A. Platonov's friend and editor. Most likely, this story about Dvanov and

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\* *Corresponding author:* [nad.vlasova@mail.ru](mailto:nad.vlasova@mail.ru)

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Kopenkin's travel to the province was written already in response to G. Litvin's letter. The topic of "a revsanctuary-1919" also appears in the story "Appropriate Actions (the Christmas Story by 10th Anniversary)", and in the incomplete libretto of the film script with the same name (Kornienko, 2005). The last one N. Korniyenko, proceeding from political hints, dates back to the beginning of 1928, and the story to November, 1927. Both the story and the libretto comment an episode of a revsanctuary in political contexts of 1927, the 10th anniversary of revolution, but not 1921. Also conjunction between an episode with revsanctuary and the story "The Doubted Makar" which A. Platonov wrote approximately at the same time is obvious. In "Appropriate actions", as well as in the incomplete libretto of the film script and in "The Doubted Makar" A. Platonov's irony in relation to political struggle in communist party and to large-scale celebration of 10th anniversary of revolution is evident. However in a novelistic episode the author's relation to the described events and heroes is not so unambiguous.

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### 3. Results

Revsanctuary of Pashintsev was named in honor of "the world communism". In the hand-written newspaper which hangs at entrance it is possible to read an article about "Problems of the World Revolution" (Platonov, 1999). At the same time the newspaper pretends to be "the agency of the Velikomestny Village Council and an Authorized District Revolutionary Committee for safety in a southeast zone of the Pososhansky county" (Platonov, 1999). The name of the revsanctuary as well as the name of the newspaper is very ambitious. However, they correspond very well to the spirit of the first years after Revolution.

Then the storyteller describes the former estate of the landowner architect in which the revsanctuary is situated. A keynote of this description is desolation, e.g.: "On the left, as *graves on a churchyard*, the remains of services and small houses layed in thickets of herbs and bushes. Columns guarded the *empty buried world*. Decorative noble trees held their thin trunks over this *equable death*" (Platonov, 1999; translation and italics in quotations are my own. – N.V). This description in "funeral tones" is not surprising when the pre-revolutionary world is concerned, presented by the former landowner manor.

However the narration is constructed in such a way that "the empty buried world" of the landowner estate and revolution "in untouched heroic category" (Platonov, 1999) turn out balanced. Revsanctuary, in fact, also represents "the empty buried world". E.g., at the first approach to a shelter of his owner Kopenkin who sees traces of "huge human legs" (Platonov, 1999), is afraid of "the giant – the keeper of an old system" (Platonov, 1999). Under "an old system" Kopenkin means a pre-revolutionary system, of course. But as heroes are in the territory of a revsanctuary as the inscription at entrance to the estate warns about, Kopenkin's assumption sounds ambiguously in general. Further it turns out that "comrade" Pashintsev, "the keeper of an old system" in fact, is literally dressed as the knight of revolution. He carries a knightly armor with the Red Army star screwed on it.

Consecutive comparison of "the empty buried world" of feudalism and revolution "in untouched heroic category" can be read as nostalgic. However the realized metaphor "the knight of revolution" brings an ironical shade in the narration. The owner of a revsanctuary, Pashintsev, who is leading up excessively the service to revolutionary ideals is, in my opinion, a comical character.

Pashintsev calls himself "the private person" (Platonov, 1999); he "has taken out to himself the resolution that in the 1919th everything had come to an end for us – the army, the authorities and orders had gone on, and for people – again become in a system, begin since Monday..." (Platonov, 1999). The keeper of a revsanctuary considers that the main gain of revolution is anarchy. Revolution "in untouched heroic category" as it's faithful "knight" understands is first of all lack of any coercion that the state is.

However the author of the "Tchevengur" did not share these ideas. E.g., the manuscript of the story "Intimate Person" keeps an epigraph to it: "Poverty is anomaly. Ford". A. Platonov writes the "Intimate Person" in 1927 and the way he chooses the ally for Foma Pukhov is remarkable. The name of the famous American millionaire, theorist and practician of scientific production organization Henry Ford was widely known in Russia in the 1920th. His books were published and his ideas were propagandized by the Central institute of work. N. Korniyenko considers that the first pages of the "Intimate Person" are penetrated by hints from Ford's book "Today and tomorrow", published in Russia in 1927. These are Pukhov's maxims about automation of work and especially sad semi-recognitions about causes of death of the wife. Ford ideas of management, the concept of the creative relation to work, machine poeticizing – all this is close to the workman Pukhov who considers that "there are a lot of leaders, but no steam locomotives", "we put on only ideas, but there are no trousers". Pre-revolutionary Russia of inventors and the developing national economy constantly emerges on roads of a civil war which Foma Pukhov comes: in a snowplow of the engineer Burkovsky, in "old adverts".

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### 4. Conclusion

Nevertheless it should be considered that there is no complete negation of the ideals professed by the owner of a revsanctuary in the A. Platonov's novel. There is a comical image which can be read in several systems of values. Its unambiguous assessment can be found nowhere. Moreover, nostalgic notes are traced in relation to "the knight of revolution", in the description of his reservation, despite of an irony. O. Alejnikov notes that "sendings to events and moods not only 1919, but also 1918 are kept in structure of the novel as an internal, conceptual subject" (Alejnikov, 2005). This subject is comprehended anecdotically, which means ironically and sympathetically in the same time. Desire to turn "into visible circumstances" (A. Platonov) propaganda slogans, tendency to implementate in practice various propaganda metaphors is a distinctive feature of characters in the novel "Tchevengur". This makes them very similar to the comical foreigners who do not know a foreign language well and therefore do not catch a difference between direct and figurative word meanings. Such characters take language metaphors literally and accept as the guide to action. As a result they bring to life "an absurd picture of the world" inducing researchers to recover destroyed semantic worlds from fragments of several sign systems.

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