



SPIRITUAL AND MORAL FEATURES OF TRAINING MASTER'S STUDENTS: SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN ASPECT

CARACTERÍSTICAS ESPIRITUAIS E MORAIS NA FORMAÇÃO DE ESTUDANTES DE MESTRADO: ASPECTO SOCIAL E HUMANITÁRIO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The article explores the importance of spiritual and moral education in shaping the personalities of Master's students, particularly within the context of social and humanitarian studies. It emphasizes the role of literature in conveying values and fostering personal development through spiritual and moral teachings.

Methods: The research utilizes a combination of literary analysis, contextual study, and axiological methods. Key works by Russian writers such as I.S. Shmelyov, V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin, and N.D. Gorodetskaya are analyzed to identify the theme of Transfiguration as a tool for personal growth and moral education. The study also includes historical and cultural context analysis to explore how these works contribute to the development of spiritual values in students.

Results: The findings demonstrate that literature, particularly Russian emigration literature, plays a significant role in fostering spiritual and moral values. The concept of Transfiguration, central to many of the analyzed works, is shown to encourage students' personal reflection, self-improvement, and deeper understanding of moral principles. The integration of these literary themes into educational programs is suggested as a way to enhance the spiritual and moral development of students.

Conclusion: The article concludes that spiritual and moral education, supported by literature, is crucial in higher education. The study recommends incorporating the works of Russian authors into the curricula to promote the values of Transfiguration and personal growth, which can help students develop both spiritually and morally.

Keywords: Spiritual and Moral Foundations, Literary Education, Master's Degree, Value-Oriented Education.

RESUMO:





Objetivo: O artigo explora a importância da educação espiritual e moral na formação da personalidade dos estudantes de Mestrado, particularmente no contexto dos estudos sociais e humanitários. Ele enfatiza o papel da literatura na transmissão de valores e no fomento do desenvolvimento pessoal por meio de ensinamentos espirituais e morais.

Métodos: A pesquisa utiliza uma combinação de análise literária, estudo contextual e métodos axiológicos. Obras-chave de escritores russos como I.S. Shmelyov, V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin e N.D. Gorodetskaya são analisadas para identificar o tema da Transfiguração como uma ferramenta para o crescimento pessoal e a educação moral. O estudo também inclui a análise do contexto histórico e cultural para explorar como essas obras contribuem para o desenvolvimento de valores espirituais nos estudantes.

Resultados: Os resultados demonstram que a literatura, especialmente a literatura da emigração russa, desempenha um papel significativo no fomento de valores espirituais e morais. O conceito de Transfiguração, central em muitas das obras analisadas, é mostrado como um incentivador da reflexão pessoal, do autodesenvolvimento e da compreensão mais profunda dos princípios morais. A integração desses temas literários nos programas educacionais é sugerida como uma forma de melhorar o desenvolvimento espiritual e moral dos alunos.

Conclusão: O artigo conclui que a educação espiritual e moral, apoiada pela literatura, é essencial no ensino superior. O estudo recomenda a incorporação das obras de autores russos nos currículos para promover os valores da Transfiguração e do crescimento pessoal, o que pode ajudar os estudantes a se desenvolverem tanto espiritual quanto moralmente.

Palavras-chave: Educação espiritual, educação moral, análise literária, literatura russa, Transfiguração, desenvolvimento pessoal.

1 INTRODUCTION

Spiritual and moral education and upbringing have long been considered in higher education and became especially relevant in the 21st century (Berdyayev, 1990, p. 208). There is a fair opinion that “the study of the spiritual principles of national self-awareness relates to the current humanization and liberalization of education. At the spiritual level of our worldview, various scientific teachings and hypotheses, as well as art directions, are combined into a holistic, constantly developing picture of the infinite universe” (Gavrikov, 2003, p. 7).

The system of fundamental spiritual and moral values creates the basis for the spiritual and moral development of the individual. These values embrace the deeply lived experience of humanity and its potential and aspirations, which regulates





individual development based on the combination of secular and religious approaches to education (Kabkova, 2022; Nikolina, 2017; Zakharova, 2013).

In recent decades, a competency-based approach has taken root in secondary and higher education (Bodina, Telysheva, 2023; Volkova, 2023). The materials presented in this article help develop general cultural and subject-specific literary competence and competence in personal self-improvement.

This article aims to highlight the spiritual and moral component of education in the master's program "Modern Strategies of Literary Education" using the example of the artistic embodiment of Transfiguration in the short fiction by representatives of the Russian Diaspora: I.S. Shmelyov, V.A. Nikiforov-Volgin, and N.D. Gorodetskaya. This approach helps better understand the essence of national and universal human values reflected in the works.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research object was works by Shmelyov, Nikiforov-Volgin, and Gorodetskaya. Works by I.S. Shmelyov have already become the Russian classics of the 21st century. Due to numerous theses, monographs, and materials of the Shmelyov Readings, Shmelyov studies hold a prominent place in modern literary criticism. The legacy of Nikiforov-Volgin and Gorodetskaya is only beginning to enter the reader's everyday life and attract the attention of scholars. The research subject is the artistic comprehension of Transfiguration, one of the key ideas in the Bible. The main thesis is based on the judgments of Father Sergei Bulgakov who claimed that art "is powerless to gather the scattered rays of the Tabor light, although, seeing it in the universe, it bears witness to it and creates a prototype of the Universal Transfiguration" (Bulgakov, 1994, p. 331).

The study is based on literary analysis, synthesis, context analysis, and axiological analysis. Literary analysis and synthesis were applied to works by Shmelyov, Nikiforov-Volgin, and Gorodetskaya to identify and interpret the idea of Transfiguration. Synthesis of the results allowed us to determine common features and unique artistic perceptions. Context analysis included the study of the historical and literary context in which the works were created and the influence of cultural and religious factors on them. Axiological analysis assessed the values-based guidelines





presented in the works and their influence on the spiritual and moral education of master's students, the axiological systems in the works, and their correlation with fundamental national values.

The study included several stages. At the first stage, we selected key works by Shmelyov, Nikiforov-Volgin, and Gorodetskaya for detailed analysis. Then we considered these texts with a focus on the theme of Transfiguration and emphasized key moments where the artistic embodiment of this idea becomes obvious. At the stage of comparative analysis, we compared the approaches of various authors to the topic of Transfiguration and identified common and different features in the interpretation of the topic. At the stage of assessing educational significance, we analyzed the possibility of integrating the research results into educational programs and considered the influence of these works on the formation of spiritual and moral values in students.

3 RESULTS

Let us turn to the texts selected for analysis which are examples of “gathering” the “scattered rays of the Tabor light”, as described by Father Sergei Bulgakov.

Shmelyov (1873-1950) was born in Moscow into a merchant Orthodox family, whose life was entirely subordinated to the church calendar. The author's childhood impressions were reflected in the famous novel “Summer of the Lord. Holidays. Joy. Sorrow” (1948). The second half of his life was spent in exile in France. Shmelyov died in the Monastery of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God near Paris. His ashes rest in the cemetery of the Donskoy Monastery in the writer's birthplace in Moscow. At the funeral ceremony in 2000, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus Alexy II called Shmelyov “a great Russian Orthodox writer”. The writer's wish for his ashes to be returned to his homeland and be laid to rest next to his father's grave was realized (The Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus Alexy II, 2001).

In the pre-Revolution prose by Shmelyov, this process is most vividly reflected in the famous story “Man from the Restaurant” (1912). In Shmelyov's short prose (“Under the Sky”, “Fever”, “Hidden Face”, “Blessed”, etc.), one can find a psychologically subtle process associated with the spiritual quests and discoveries of the characters. However, it is better to start our analysis with “Carousel” (1914), which serves as an introduction to this series.





“Carousel” (1914) is one of those stories in which the plot is practically absent. The author sketches a colorful, multifaceted picture of an ordinary village day, full of petty and bustling concerns, i.e., a “carousel” of everyday life. It has been noted that “the kaleidoscopic nature, the diversity of Russian everyday life was combined with a hidden expectation of great ethical meaning, proper joyful existence” (Krutikova, 1972, p. 178). The title of the story contains philosophical symbolism typical of Smelyov. The mundane world that attracts the writer’s attention is at first glance kaleidoscopic. Like the running carousel, it is difficult to discover a deep meaning or reason behind it. Recreating motley mosaics, the writer sketches a generalized picture of the bustling “daytime human nomadism” (Shmelyov, 1915, p. 20). Next to this daytime world, there is a completely “different world”, for which the writer did not skimp on solemn iconographic colors: “The golden evening is falling... The church is different now – pink, light, warm... If one climbs up to the porch, to the third step, there is so much golden light at sunset... And a golden ball is burning in it. The entire river is burning, from one edge to another, golden mirrors are burning – the puddles left on the floodplain... Now the sky above the river is already in the red dawn... The modest crosses are caught in the red fire; in the red radiance, the All-Seeing Eye” (Shmelyov, 1915, p. 19). The colorful and striking expressiveness of Russian evening is not valuable in itself: it expresses the author’s conviction in the original beauty of the world that cannot but be purposeful. Its powerful radiance cannot but affect even “the experienced eye and the stunned ear” (Shmelyov, 1915, p. 20). The motif of the solemn evening beauty of the world relates to the motif of the sky *in its secret, world-transforming role*. Shmelyov’s “golden evening” “falls” – like rain, like a ray – from above. When the evening silence sets in, “other eyes look – eternal eyes – from the sky” (Shmelyov, 1915, p. 19). The author connects the dominant motif with this inspiring heavenly beginning, the motif of *hope for a happy transformation of existence*. In the finale, the author again immerses the reader in the poetry of night silence: “Everything has fallen silent, living in these untimely lights. Waiting for something... Everything is so tense, so quiet, as if any moment now something unknown and indescribably joyful will emerge *from this fresh spring night, something that everyone is waiting for without fully realizing it, and which must be foreseen as inevitable, this invisible Eye that calmly watches over everything*” (Shmelyov, 1915, p. 20) (here and further the italics in the quotes are ours).





It is impossible to underestimate this worldview of the writer, whose poetic sketches convey a confident feeling of the coming Transfiguration of existence in its spiritual essence.

According to the observation of L.A. Spiridonova (2001), “the world of the ‘bright Russian kingdom’ that appears in the writer’s works is based on the universal concepts of Slavic folklore and Old Russian literature. Shmelyov’s person is inextricably linked with nature, ancient beliefs and myths, and pagan or Christian symbolism. Through the earthly, they join the heavenly” (p. 134). As exemplified by the stories, this interconnection is revealed in the characters’ fates through the idea of Transfiguration.

The protagonist of “Fever” (1915) is the young artist Kachkov who is not religious but on the eve of the great Christian holiday of Easter, he reflects on its essence. Kachkov recalls his poor mother who “nevertheless retained her childish faith in some great truth” and thinks about thousands of people who, despite suffering, “live and believe”. As Kachkov imagines, life “gradually takes shape and moves toward some great goal. These sufferings reveal the bright face of life through the centuries” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 248).

This idea is reinforced in Kachkov by the solemn Easter night and the church service he attends with his neighbor, a medical student, who is skeptical about faith but cannot stay at home on such a night. This symbolic description of the external environment is typical of Shmelyov’s prose: “The evening sun had already entered the room, and a sunbeam danced on the wallpaper. This evening light was familiar, the festive light of a spring evening. Then the light started to redden, fade, and shift, and the cooling sky peered in through the window” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 250). Here we should add Kachkov’s confession that in his childhood, “when my soul was somehow especially clear and good”, the sky was special. “The clouds were drifting by, but it seemed to me that they weren’t clouds, but my own joy floating along, like white swans on blue water”. Later, only once, after visiting the monastery, he “*almost recognized it, the old, familiar sky... the sky of childhood*” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 248).

Here, we find leitmotif intersections, such as the motif of clear childlike faith, trustfully drawing the sky closer in its perception. Through this motif, the yearning for the return and the regaining of the lost paradise, as the world was seen by an innocent child, becomes apparent. A blessed shift occurs in Kachkov’s soul, as Shmelyov subtly shows, during his contemplation of the Easter ceremony. Through this ceremony, the thoughtful and impressionable young artist not only perceives the beauty of the event





but also its profound meaning. When “the procession with the cross circled the darkness with thousands of lights”, the character exclaims, “Here it is! Unity! All are bound by what lives in the depths of the soul which cannot be expressed... Only great ideas can bind people like this! Homeland, faith, the most precious things that no force can sell!” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 254). The motif of the spiritual strength of Orthodox unity rings out triumphantly. Captivated by the joyful faith of the people in the idea of “liberation, resurrection, and ascension”, the character marvels, “And this was created by the church, the church as a whole... created the idea of light and life!” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 255).

All people gathered in the church on this night, both sinful and weak, deserve reverence simply because they can honor a beautiful idea. “The greatest sacrifices itself to shame, to death, to kill death!”, exclaims Kachkov. “Such humanity, once it has managed to achieve this and honor it, no matter what mistakes it has made, can be forgiven anything, everything! One can believe in it!” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 252). For the first time in Shmelyov’s work, the motif of faith is widely covered, and this is connected to the author’s confident understanding of the ideas of Russian Orthodoxy.

The most heartfelt lines of the story are dedicated to the church service. Shmelyov poetically portrays it through the motif of the (1995) beauty of communal unity, leading to the motif of the harmonious connection of the city’s space suffused with beauty: “The chime filled the entire city. It floated, covered, and softly muted, making the chest tremble. It seemed that resonant crystal rain or frosty silver poured over the city” (p. 256). The motif of mirror reflection, which accompanies the main motifs, is also important. The Church of John the Theologian is described as “John the Theologian shone... The boys gazed at this wonderful, fiery, and colorful sight, and in their eyes, candles burned, their heads and freshly washed cheeks dimly gleamed. And above the white tent, the cross shone in red cubes” (Shmelyov, 1995, p. 253).

The writer acknowledged in his autobiography the impact the church had on him in his childhood and early youth: “A lot of poetry, many wonderful, elusive experiences... The beautiful, hardly understandable church words, the church spectacle – the service – nourished the soul, gave it impulses” (Shmelyov, n.d.).

“How astonishingly deep all of this is!” Kachkov says enthusiastically to his companion. “Look. Darkness surrounds us, not even the street lights are visible, the everyday lights have vanished... Now, wax is burning! Wax! It’s the dead of night, and when everyone should be sleeping, there’s some crucial necessity... and here are





grown people, who traded during the day, deceived, grew weary from hard work – now they've washed up, put on clean clothes, and are walking, singing... rejoicing! What kind of power must it take to compel them! And with joy!.. This is an idea! An idea of liberation, resurrection, and ascension! They might not understand it, but they feel it and passionately want to live by it!" (Shmelyov, 1916, p. 255). The character continues: "No, I won't go home! I will wander the streets and churches. I want to see today's people, washed and clean. And I want to behold the sky, and the stars, and the bells! The lights on the high towers! The lights under the crosses and on the crosses! These crosses will raise humanity to the heavens... Vasya... to the heavens! This crowned humanity is the crosses in the sky!" (Shmelyov, 1916, p. 256).

Through an expressive monologue of the character, Shmelyov expresses a profound Christian idea: the transformation of each person from the masses and all humankind. It is difficult to overestimate this. In this story, the writer included the main monologue into *the event*, in this case, a great Christian holiday.

In "The Hidden Face" (1916), the revelation that led the characters to the Christian Transfiguration relates to a plot that can be designated as a *meeting* (getting acquainted with the Book or the Gospel).

The symbolism of the story's title is related to one of the motifs in "Fever": the motif of the bright face of life, the character's confidence in the Transfiguration of life, revealing its bright face as the true one through centuries of suffering, through the great idea of resurrection. In Shmelyov's metatext, the motif of one work helps highlight the main idea of another, performing the function of apperception.

However, in "The Hidden Face", as the symbolism of the title suggests, it is not easy for the characters to grasp the benevolent Truth since the world is depicted in a state of global catastrophe, i.e., the world war. Shmelyov's views were in harmony with those of the prominent Russian religious thinker E.N. Trubetskoy. In 1914, Trubetskoy (1998) wrote: "It is not the power of arms alone that decides the fate of a battle, but the spiritual strength that guides the arms, without which they are dead" (p. 495). The motif of spiritual strength, both in the confrontation of war and in finding an unshakeable moral foundation in faith, becomes the main theme.

Shmelyov attached great importance to this story, as it bears a dedication: "To my son". The writer's only son, Sergey, a second lieutenant of artillery, was at the front at that time.





From the first lines, the reader learns that Second Lieutenant Sushkin received a leave of absence, and among his assignments, one struck him: an elderly divisional commander asked Sushkin to buy him a small-format Gospel in the synodal shop in Moscow, as his own was worn out and the one he had been sent was too large.

Sushkin's encounter with Captain Shemetov in the train carriage was life-defining.

Shmelyov's characters (army officers) grapple with the same "cursed questions" that tormented the Russian intelligentsia. Shemetov, who expresses thoughts closest to the author's own, is a fearless officer whose name became legendary among young soldiers. His agonizing chain of spiritual and moral quests, connected with the tragedies of war, makes him turn to the eternal Truths of the Gospel: "Humanity... must pass through the cross! It is only now assembling this cross to be crucified for future resurrection... There was the symbol, the ancient Crucifixion. It called, but they did not understand! And they tangled the knots... A wondrous path was indicated by milestones, earned through blood and suffering!" (Shmelyov, 1916, p. 245). Shmelyov introduces the motif of suffering on the cross as the only path to the future Transfiguration of humanity.

Within the plot, Shemetov is destined to be a spiritual mentor to the young Sushkin. According to Shemetov, humanity still needs to "grow up" to understand "whether we live only by external shells". "What is visible to the eye and measurable by numbers? Is there a hidden meaning, a Face of things and actions?" (Shmelyov, 1916, p. 249). Shemetov teaches that immense spiritual work is needed, a desire to be selflessly open to the world and to take on its pain so that a person can come closer to solving the agonizing mystery of the meaning of life.

In Shmelyov's designation of the true essence of things ("The Hidden Face"), there is a deep understanding of the complexity of this process. In Shemetov's appeal to the Gospel Truths, Sushkin is pierced by the idea of heroism combined with sacrificial love. The transformation of the young officer's views is depicted with psychological precision, as he parts with his egocentrism and becomes ready to take on suffering, "to take responsibility for everything that has happened, no matter who did it" (Shmelyov, 1916, p. 248). As the action develops, the motif of *active life-creation according to the laws of Gospel morality, which transforms the essence of things, becomes increasingly intense.*





The young hero ultimately understands: “There are stages in world history when a tremendous amount of confusion occurs, when the human path is covered with filth... Then comes the visible hour of the Scales, the hour of great purification... So that life can move towards the most wondrous milestones! Towards its beautiful Face” (Shmelyov, 1916, p. 248). Shmelyov’s beloved and heartfelt motif of faith in the inevitable Transfiguration of man and the world according to the laws of the Gospel acquires this poetic and elevated manner during the tragic years for Russia.

In 1926, already in emigration, Shmelyov wrote “The Blessed”, in which this idea is also vividly expressed. Since we have already analyzed this literary work, we will only note that Shmelyov masterfully plays out the situation of the meeting with different semantic connotations.

First and foremost, it is the significance of the meeting between the former locksmith and Bolshevik Semyon Ustinych and the general’s son Misha who had healed after the shock related to the attempt by Red Army soldiers to drown him in a pond. Misha forgives his enemies, and he and Semyon Ustinych travel across the Russian fields, from one village to another, preaching the Gospel which Misha knew by heart. The writer emphasizes the continuous chain of episodes of Transfiguration of the people encountered by Misha. In the short span of the story, there are only a few such episodes, but they are very eloquent and convincingly demonstrate the effective transformative power of encounters with Misha, and through him, with the Gospel.

The idea of Transfiguration is a key theme in Shmelyov’s prose, starting from the pre-October years (we did not touch upon all examples), receiving profound artistic interpretation in his autobiographical prose, “Nanny from Moscow” and especially “The Ways of Heaven”. There is a need for a more multifaceted scientific study of this topic.

The Tabor light flows and transforms people and the surrounding space on the pages of the short prose by the Russian émigré writer Nikiforov-Volgin (1901-1941).

Nikiforov-Volgin’s prose and fate were long unknown to the public. His works were first published as a separate collection in 1998 thanks to A.N. Strizhev. Nikiforov-Volgin’s works express a joy in being close to nature, the old way of life that he knew firsthand, and Russian Orthodox traditions. Nikiforov-Volgin’s works were acclaimed by the Parisian magazine “Illustrated Russia” and many were published and republished in Tallinn and Riga periodicals. For some time, Nikiforov-Volgin was a private tutor to Alexey Ridiger, the future Patriarch Alexy II. The writer’s fate was





tragically cut short in 1941, with the establishment of the Soviet power in Estonia. Nikiforov-Volgin was rehabilitated in 1991.

In the short story “Prayer”, we witness the heartfelt prayer of a village priest, Father Anatoly. Although “scholars and literates consider him a poor priest” because his education is scant and his sermons are “awkward, like peasant speech” (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 544), his prayers come straight from the heart. The others who “have come to love him” note that his prayer is transformative, “miraculous”. Paul the Apostle who expressed excellent thoughts about prayer confessed that he did not know what to pray for as he ought (Romans 8:26). Thus, the Spirit comes to help human weakness. Luke expressed this feeling of personal weakness by saying: “Lord! Teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:7). Just as the Tabor light of Transfiguration was fundamentally rooted in Divine love, so is the prayer of the simple village priest woven from his love for his flock. We perceive the image of Father Anatoly through the polarized views of those who know him and those who see the sacred in the simple things. The latter position is closer to us.

“Prayer” is written in the first person. At the end, we learn the name of the narrator (“the servant of God Vasily”) which contains an allusion to the author himself, also named Vasily, thereby enhancing the significance of the character’s image. The work in the priest’s soul before prayer is reflected on his face: “a spasm passed over his rough peasant face, and deep thought settled between his thick eyebrows” (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 407). He says his prayer in simple words, stumbling and sometimes forgetting the names of people from his congregation. Such a prayer by the priest is a high example of childlike, sincere faith. Kindness, simplicity, compassion, childlike naivety are the qualities that become characteristic of Father Anatoly and the common Russian person in general. “Only a Seer of God can pray like this”, the narrator notes. This reveals the tangible and transformative power of the prayer of a simple village priest.

In the novel “The Pilgrim’s Staff”, the exceptional kindness of the wandering priest, Father Athanasius, shines through like rays of uncreated light piercing leaden clouds, transforming everything in its path. His mere presence changes the lost-in-sin Russian person. In one episode of Father Athanasius’ prison life, we read about the condescension of a fellow inmate: “Lie on my cot... it’s warmer there, and I’ll take your place!’ It filled me with joy: ‘And here is Christ!..’” (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 30).





“And here is Christ” means that His Light is here, and He transforms people, erasing the beastly features from their faces. In the prison cell, the Sermon on the Mount sparkles: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

Despite the hardships, the image of the priest remains radiant, illuminated by God’s grace and bringing Transfiguration. Even hardened criminals notice this: “I befriended the inhabitants of our prison. They loved me for my calmness towards them, for my conversations with them, for my compliance” (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 30). The narrator attributes the change in their attitude not to himself or his positive qualities but only to Christ: “I noticed that the deeper you carry the image of Christ within yourself and arm yourself with humility, the sooner you illuminate the beastly nature of man” (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 30). The meekness and submissiveness of the priest testify to the beautifully crafted image of a person who honors the Sermon on the Mount and demonstrates the power of Christ’s commandments through his life. The hero’s purpose resembles the apostolic mission, that of a missionary, a pilgrim who brings God’s teachings and light to the sinful world: “Even if not immediately, eventually, the person will be illuminated. One just has to live alongside him so that Christ, living within you, constantly illuminates the darkened. One has to lead a person by the hand, like a child!” (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 30). Father Athanasius, like the hero of “The Prayer”, transforms the world around him. The Tabor light was much needed during the revolutionary upheavals.

Sometimes the Tabor light does not have conduits but descends upon a person in moments of heavy contemplation, before inevitable death. This happened to Red Army soldier Semyon Zavitukhin in “Mother Wilderness” (1927).

Zavitukhin is returning home to his mother from the fronts of the Civil War. His body is exhausted by illness, and he senses his impending death. The sinful life that extinguished his spiritual light torments him. However, the pull towards his native land, family hearth, and mother gives him the strength to reach home. The severe illness forces Semyon to reconsider his participation in the Civil War and the revolutionary chaos. The depiction of the blooming spring contrasts sharply with the dire state of the hero, highlighting the deep discord in his soul and the inhumane nature of the Civil War.

On the porch, the hero is met by his mother who is overjoyed at her son’s return. Zavitukhin, inspired by the long-awaited reunion with his loved one and full of energy, plans to repair the house and revive the garden. He envisions a new life of labor and





righteousness, something he could not do before. Unfortunately, his illness proves stronger than his will. Returning home, the former Red Army soldier feels humility before God's will. He no longer fears his inevitable death: "His thoughts reached out to that which is above the earth, above the sun and stars, to the eternal world" (Nikiforov-Volgin, 2018, p. 497). The light and warmth of his home help him strengthen his faith, believe in the Kingdom of God, and embrace the Tabor Light. He concludes his earthly journey in the Orthodox canon, with confession and communion. Dying in his mother's arms, who sings of the Heavenly Gardens, becomes a logical Orthodox conclusion to his life. Semyon's mother, like her son, accepts God's will, confident that she will meet her son in Heaven. Such a quiet death is a testament to Zavitukhin's transformation. The Tabor light shines upon the repentant sinner, transforming the hero.

In the typological chain of literary works by Russian émigré writers, it is essential to include the stories by Gorodetskaya (1901-1985). This first-wave Russian émigré writer is little known not only to readers but also to scholars, although her legacy undoubtedly deserves the close attention of all those interested in Russian literature. She was not only a writer but also a journalist, literary historian, and theologian. Gorodetskaya became the first woman to hold the title of professor as a member of staff at the University of Liverpool, where she led the Slavic Studies department for many years.

Modern readers get acquainted with works by Gorodetskaya and her biography thanks to the publication released by A.M. Lyubomudrov in 2013. The preface says, "The suffering of a person who survived the revolution and the Civil War, deprived of both homeland and loved ones, became the main philosophical theme of her books. But it did not give rise to any horror of fate, or hopeless despair, or curses upon destiny or the Bolsheviks. The author dares to accept the trials sent and, having suffered, to overcome them" (Lyubomudrov, 2013).

Within the limited scope of this article, we outline conceptual features in the artistic interpretation of the idea of Transfiguration by Gorodetskaya.

Gorodetskaya is characterized by her restrained style and conciseness in authorial commentary. The essence of the text is often captured in one or two sentences. Her short story "The Regular" (1935) depicts mundane domestic situations through which the key idea inevitably emerges, elevating the narrative to spiritual realms. This brief story is written in Gorodetskaya's distinctive manner: a blend of rich factual and sketch-like stylistics with a close-up of visual impressions and an





ontological understanding of life's realities. These realities are banal: they revolve around the lifestyle and manners of the Parisian bohemians with its established traditions. Parisian cafés were especially popular as a primary place for socializing. Among them is the *Rotunda*, which the author recounts as a long-time habituê. The café is presented briefly and vividly, describing how some patrons came to write, paint or, "as was the case with a young female teacher who huddled in a corner, correct school papers" (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 533).

The protagonist of this story is the model Jeanne, who flitted through life with ease and was liked by the old artist Bourgel. The essence of the story is expressed at the end, which is also typical of Gorodetskaya's style. In the final scene, the narrator returns to the *Rotunda* after a two-year absence. There, she encounters the older Bourgel and witnesses an extraordinary scene. Jeanne enters the café carrying a blanket. "It was a baby!" (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 534).

The café then comes to life; the old Bourgel and the new regulars surround Jeanne with great kindness: "The waiter with the newspaper, in his worn white jacket, stood behind her like a guardian angel" (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 535). The scene concludes with an allusion. Observing Jeanne, the writer reflects: "Her beautiful, bent forehead, her tender motherly hands, even the old Bourgel, the waiter, and the crowd around the baby resemble a classic story" (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 533).

In a single micro-narrative situation, the story vividly conveys, on the one hand, a deep understanding of the holiness and transformative light of motherhood by ordinary people and, on the other hand, the purifying and ennobling power of compassion.

A mundane story receives an elevated tone under Gorodetskaya's pen due to the author's profound understanding of the connection between human life, Gospel narratives, and Christian commandments.

Gorodetskaya, as her prose indicates, had a special sensitivity to the world of the child's soul. It has been noted that "love and virtue in the writer's prose become the criteria for a child's spiritual wealth, inner purity, and compassion" (Golovina, 2019, p. 81).

In this regard, we need to emphasize "Urban Legend". Its main character, and the urban legend himself, is 12-year-old Shurka. After the death of his mother, a poor Russian émigré, he is raised by the kind Madame Marten. However, "Shurka was raised not so much by the old woman as by the streets of Paris" (Gorodetskaya, 2013,





p. 475). The boy learns to read early on, “by the age of ten, he had read all the detective novels collected by a book-loving neighboring grocer” (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 476). During this time, he earns money in “street” ways, sometimes helping Madame Marten, but occasionally stealing from her, hoping that in the future he would provide for her old age. For illegal trading, he is often brought to the police station.

This is the background. The main event of the story is prepared by it. By chance, Shurka finds himself in a church. The circumstances leading to this are somewhat comical: since the police are not allowed to arrest people in cafés, Shurka frequently runs into them and stays for a long time. One day there was no café nearby, and with a bouquet that he was selling in the wrong place, Shurka burst into a church, which he had never visited before. Here, the real *meeting* happens that the story is written for: “He walked forward, looking at the paintings, and suddenly stopped: at the far end was a statue – a young woman with a baby playing with a garland. How much they resembled the cherished photo, his mother, and himself” (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 477). Embarrassed and stunned, Shurka “suddenly threw his entire bundle of flowers at the young stone woman who resembled his mother. His heart raced” (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 477). From Madame Marten, who was indifferent to religion, he learns who this woman with the child was. Since then, Shurka secretly, hiding from the caretaker, begins to bring her gifts. The climax of the story is in these words: “He looked at the Madonna and felt an inexplicable and unique happiness, which he could never forget” (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 478).

This event in Shurka’s life is woven, as is often the case with Gorodetskaya, into the fabric of life: the semi-criminal life typical of poor neighborhoods. In the micro-epilogue, it is stated that Shurka soon ended up in a reform school “remembered only by Aunt Martynchik and the priest, who occasionally tried to imagine where the humble and devoted creature who secretly brought simple flowers to the Virgin Mary was now praying” (Gorodetskaya, 2013, p. 478).

We believe the inner meaning of what happened is that the boy was touched by Divine love, and it transformed him. The encounter with the image of the Mother of God became a “meeting forever”. Despite the corruption of circumstances, the child’s soul shone in its infantile-angelic essence, which the priest understood, and this imparts a brightening note of hope to the finale.

In the writer’s short prose, other examples testify to her deep understanding of the idea of Transfiguration, which lives in the Christian world and manifests itself





strikingly (this is especially true for the cycles “From the Life of Katya Beloselskaya” and “French Stories”).

4 CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the results of our study, we should note the following. In the context of the main Christian idea (Transfiguration), short stories by Shmelyov (“Fever”, “Hidden Face”, “Blessed”, etc.), Nikiforov-Volgin (“Bow to the Ground”, “Atheist”, etc.), and Gorodetskaya (“Christmas Tale”, “Urban Legend”, etc.) show individual artistic perception and common understanding. The poetics dwell on the conceptual role of the meeting (real or metaphysical) and memory. The analysis proves that 20th-century authors gave prominence to the genre of short stories, especially Shmelyov addressing important ontological problems. During the tragic years for Russia, the authors used their creativity to assert the inevitable Transformation of man and the world according to the Christian laws of goodness and mercy.

For more effective integration of the works into educational programs, it is recommended to develop special modules, including lectures dedicated to the life and work of each author and the context of émigré literature; seminars, in which students can discuss the texts, analyzing and comparing different approaches to the topic of Transfiguration; practical assignments aimed at analyzing specific texts from the viewpoint of their spiritual and moral content and impact on the reader; term papers and final theses, where students can conduct research based on an analysis of the theme of Transfiguration in the works by the authors.

Another important aspect is to assess the impact of these literary works on the formation of students’ spiritual and moral values through regular surveys and questionnaires. This will allow one to track how students’ perceptions and attitudes toward the topics and ideas change during the learning process.

It is crucial to understand values-based guidelines in the perception of master’s students. These stimulate educational and cognitive activity and develop personal spiritual and moral potential.

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