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Leonid Andreev's Story *Chemodanov* as a Hagiography of the 'Nizhechelovek'

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Abstract. The story *Chemodanov* (1916) is considered as a parody version of a hagiography (anti-life), as well as a version of the collision 'Man – Fate' developed in the work of Leonid Andreev. The first part provides an analysis of the existing context: some features of the writer's artistic world are identified, including clarifying the nature of the comic in Andreev's work. These observations relate both to the image of the philistine hero and to the genre game. At the same time, the appeal to genre transformation seems typical for the turn of the 19th–20th centuries and it is found not only in Andreev's work, but also in the works of other contemporary authors. The second part offers the experience of reading the novel *Chemodanov* as a 'twisted' hagiography. The narration is built on a hagiographic model: the description of the hero's life is presented from the moment of birth to death, the events are miraculous in nature, the hero occupies a special position, the narrator acts as an impartial chronicler, the presentation is not rhetorical, but historical and documentary in nature. At the level of content, the author, creating a generalized image of a modern person, debunks the ability of the average person to act as a martyr, which is emphasized by the ironic tone of the narrative. The story of the ordeal of Yegor Yegorovich Chemodanov is a parodic version of the conflict 'Man – Fate', which was previously developed in *The Life of Vasily Fivevsky*. Unlike the story, the conflict in the novella is presented in an ironic modality and is not recognized by the hero as a struggle. The variability of the depiction of the same collision allows us to question the thesis of Leonid Andreev's totally pessimistic worldview, and the rethinking of the hagiography genre anticipates the turn to hagiography in the literature of the 20th century.

Keywords: Leonid Andreev, anti-life, life, parody, genre, hagiography

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Рассказ Леонида Андреева «Чемоданов» как житие «нижечеловека»

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Аннотация. Рассматривается новелла «Чемоданов» (1916) как пародийный вариант жития (антижития), а также как вариант разрабатываемого в творчестве Леонида Андреева конфликта «Человек – Судьба». В первой части анализируется существующий контекст: определяются некоторые особенности художественного мира писателя, в том числе проясняющие природу комического в творчестве Андреева. Эти наблюдения относятся как к образу героя-обывателя, так и к игре с жанром. При этом обращение к трансформации жанра кажется характерным для рубежа XIX–XX вв. и встречается не только в творчестве Андреева, но в произведениях других авторов-современников. Во второй части предлагается опыт прочтения новеллы «Чемоданов» как «вывернутого» жития. Повествование строится по агиографической модели: описание жизни героя представлено от момента рождения до смерти, события носят чудесный характер, герой занимает особое положение, повествователь выступает в качестве беспристрастного летописца, изложение носит не риторический, а историко-документальный характер. На уровне содержания автор, создавая обобщенный образ современного человека, развенчивает возможность обывателя выступать в качестве мученика, что подчеркивается ироническим тоном повествования. История мытарств Егора Егоровича Чемоданова представляет собой пародийный вариант конфликта «Человек – Судьба», разрабатывавшийся до этого в «Жизни Василия Фивейского». В отличие от повести в рассказе коллизия представлена в иронической модальности и не осознается героем как борьба. В результате делается вывод, что вариативность изображения одной и той же коллизии позволяет нам поставить под сомнение тезис о тотально пессимистическом мировоззрении Леонида Андреева, а переосмысление жанра жития предвосхищает обращение к агиографии в литературе XX в.

Ключевые слова: Леонид Андреев, антижитие, житие, пародия, жанр, агиография

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Introduction

One of the central themes of the literature of the early 20th century is the image of an ordinary person. The object of reflection is the question of the limits of the possibility of personality. In the tradition preceding modernism,

F.M. Dostoevsky, for example, turns to the type of a dreamer, a crank; L.N. Tolstoy creates understandable, socially defined characters. Later, A.P. Chekhov portrayed an ordinary person in ordinary circumstances, and finally, Leonid N. Andreev focused on an ordinary person in unusual circumstances, or in circumstances that are read as unusual (*The Grand Slam*, 1899). The difference in perception depends on the position of the author or the character she is portraying.

In connection with this remark, it seems necessary to refer to the classification of Northrop Fry (1987, p. 232), which is based on the hero's ability to act. The researcher identifies five types of works: the hero surpasses people in quality, he is a deity; the hero surpasses people in degree, character, strength, spirit, he is a hero; the hero surpasses others in degree, but depends on the earthly conditions of existence, he is the leader; the hero does not surpass either his environment or other people, he is one of us; the hero is inferior to the reader in strength, intelligence, the reader takes a position of superiority over the hero. The latter type of work is the most interesting for us.

Leonid Andreev, creating the image of a modern man in the street, puts the reader "above" the hero, however, "high tools" are used for the image: a collision with Fate, collisions that previously generated a tragic picture of the world, now create a contrast in which the hero belongs to the "ironic mode" (Fry, 1987, p. 233).

Experiments with both the form and the problems of artistic works do not allow Leonid Andreev's work to be attributed to any of the trends existing at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, as researchers point out, calling the place occupied by the writer "intermediate" (Keldysh, 1975, p. 211). T.Y. Ganzhulevich (1908, p. 209) writes about this quality, and I.I. Moskovkina and Galina N. Boeva further develop this idea in their works. In the monograph, G.N. Boeva (2016, p. 7) notes that with the "stylistic and genre polymorphism" that characterizes Leonid Andreev's work, the writer rethinks existing plots and ideas of previous eras.

Another researcher, Yu.V. Babicheva, draws attention to Leonid Andreev's development of the same collisions, but presented in different modalities. Yu.V. Babicheva (1982, pp. 71–72) writes about this as follows: "Like the ancient playwright, who considered it necessary to balance the high importance of the tragic trilogy with a ridiculous travesty (the 'fourth drama'), Andreev is a crooked mirror of irony. He controlled himself all the time, measuring the depth and importance of the universal 'damned' questions that worried him". One of these issues, according to I.I. Moskovkina (2005, p. 219), is the conflict between 'Man and Fate', the 'funny' version of which is presented in the story *Chemodanov*.

The desire to create works at the junction of genres, the desacralization of evangelical plots, and playing with intertext give reason to discover in the writer's work a "pre-postmodern complex" (Babicheva, 1982, pp. 71–72), the features of which are "a significant increase in irony and playfulness, having a tragiferous character; the important role of metatext; the pairing of myth-making with demythologization – the game with a myth, an ironic reinterpretation of symbolist, Christian, ideological myths and their own, created before; the 'flickering' of meanings, leading to a multiplicity of interpretations of works", and Leonid Andreev is called a pre-postmodernist (Babicheva, 1982, p. 77). In this respect, the writer's work coincides with the development vectors of literature at the turn of the century. Ironic overplay of existing artistic systems, demythologization, experiments with genre – the appearance of anti-sacred stories (Dushechkina, 1995, p. 229), the appeal to "anti-life" (Davydova, 1998, pp. 20–25) are also characteristic of the work of Evgeny Zamyatin (*County, The Life of a Flea*), Fyodor Sologub (*Fairy Tales*), Mikhail Kuzmin (*An Example to Others*).

Results and Discussion

The appeal to the anti-genre system as an attempt to comprehend what is happening and find a form of expression consistent with it is explained by the crisis situation at the turn of the century, filled with premonitions of catastrophes. Leonid Andreev's prose, according to E.I. Petrova, is formed surrounded by pre-surrealist tendencies. This explains the appeal to biblical motifs and plots that the writer "turns inside out" (2010, p. 15). In this case, our attention is drawn to 'anti-life', which is based on playing out the existing features of the genre that 'gave rise' to it, where recognizable signs of the form are distorted and filled with the opposite content.

An example of this is the short story *Chemodanov*, published in *Ogonyok* magazine No. 1 dated January 3, 1916 with illustrations by S.P. Lodygin.

The story is a biography of Egor Egorovich Chemodanov from birth to death. In infancy, he was thrown onto the porch of the merchant Egorov, and after the death of his adoptive parents, he ends up in a juvenile delinquent colony instead of an orphanage. Throughout his life, Fate tests Suitcase with troubles and hardships, but the hero, without indulging in reflections on the meaning of what is happening, continues to exist. He dies by a ridiculous accident, having come to his homeland in order to find his mother.

I.I. Moskovkina (2005, p. 243) defines the genre of *Chemodanov* as a myth novel, explaining this definition by referring to the legend of Ahasuerus, the tragedy *Oedipus*, the philosophical novel of the 18th century such as *Candida*, as well as the ironically philosophical playing of the conflict 'Man – Destiny'.

We propose to look at the novel *Chemodanov* as the “life of a lower man”, where the archetypal collision ‘Man – Fate’, previously developed in the writer’s work, is presented in an ironic modality and not only demonstrates the inconsistency of the ‘lower man’¹, but reveals the meaninglessness of the existence of modern man in general. This idea is reinforced both at the chronotope level, which, despite the use of specific details, is universal, and at the character level.

The time of the action refers to the present, as indicated by the mention of the revolution (the revolution of 1905–1907 was the closest at the time of writing the story). Accordingly, the years of Chemodanov’s life can be approximately determined as follows: from 1875/77 to 1905/07 (Chemodanov was executed by mistake during the revolution). However, despite the specifics of the time, the description of Egor Egorovich’s life is perceived as timeless.

The same applies to geography, which covers events: Siberia, Tiflis, Africa, Cairo, Naples, Switzerland, France, Siberia. So, the place of action is the whole world, the world “in general”. At the same time, the space is desacralized: it does not save the hero from evil Fate, the hero is constantly being tested by Fate. Finally, Siberia, the birthplace of Chemodanov, becomes the most dangerous and disastrous place for the hero’s life. The trials that befell Yegor Egorovich are devoid of cause and purpose: the hero never acquires a new quality his transformation does not occur. Thus, the motif of “the persecution and protection of the holy by the sacral space” (Shatin, 1996, p. 28) is consistently deconstructed, overturning the idea of the native land as a place of salvation.

The plot of the novel is based on a metamorphosis that has neither a reason nor a purpose: a series of trials falls to the lot of a man in the street (the ‘lower man’). In the preface, the narrator sets the vector of perception of Chemodanov’s life, calling him the “strange chosen one” of Fate². The beginning of Chemodanov’s stay in this world is perceived as a miracle: he was born “in one of the Siberian cities and thrown on the parade to the merchant Egorov”³, who had no children of his own. It is worth noting that throughout his life, Chemodanov continues to be in the role of a “foundling”: by chance, he finds himself in circumstances in which another must die, but good forces save Egor Egorovich every time. The trials that befell him are listed in the work impartially, according to the principle

¹ The definition of ‘lower man’ is the L. Andreev, it appears on the pages of the feuilleton *Actor* in 1901. In other works of the writer, we do not find the definition itself, but we see carriers of this type of consciousness. A ‘lower man’ is a man in the street who claims to be an outstanding person. More often, the originality of thinking is replaced by an inadequate self-image (*Donkeys*), ostentatious pessimism (*People of the Shadow Side*), and an inability to reflect (*Chemodanov*). This type of hero is characterized by a “decorative” understanding of life with complete indifference to both his own life and life in general.

² Andreev, L.N. (2021). *The Complete Collection of Novels, Novellas and Short Stories in One Volume* (p. 1215). Moscow: Al’fa-kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

³ Ibid.

of a catalog: a fire in the house of merchant Egorov – a stay in a colony for juvenile offenders – a fire in an orphanage – three escapes to Siberia – work as a junior telegraph operator in Tiflis – the death of a lover – serving in the navy – desertion and life in Africa (read as removal into the desert is a significant plot element for the hagiographic genre literally presented here) – three train wrecks – life in Italy, Switzerland, France – shipwreck off the islands of Majorca – fame of “the happiest man in the world” – return to Russia during the revolution – execution in Siberia. However, due to his limitations, the hero is unable to assess the scale of the events that befell him.

Leonid Andreev recodes the story of the martyr: before us is a “consistent story reflecting the main events” of the life⁴ of Egor Egorovich Chemodanov. The description of each test is constructed as a “relatively independent micro-plot”⁵, with compositional completeness. However, the object of the image of the ‘high’ sample becomes the ‘lower man’, which leads to the destruction of the boundaries of the existing canon and the creation of a travestied version of life (‘anti-life’) corresponding to the time.

L.A. Chernaya (2008, pp. 140–141) identifies the following pivotal positions of life and builds mirror pairs with them: “Good birth – Vile birth; Godliness – Godlessness; Mercy – Mercilessness; Humility – Pride (rage); Love of poverty – Greed; Kindness – Malice; Inner beauty – Ugliness; Miracles – Evil deeds; ‘Own’ (Christian, ‘we know by people’) – ‘Alien’ (filthy, ‘unknown among people’); Posthumous fragrance – The stench from the grave; Like God – Possessed by the devil”.

At the same time, the researcher notes that the saint is an example of an ‘inner man’ turned to God, and the antihero is an example of an ‘outer’ man who has fallen under the influence of the devil. It is difficult to call Egor Egorovich Chemodanov an antihero, this is hindered by the very component of the definition of ‘hero’, which presupposes the presence of exceptional qualities in a person, however, the characteristic ‘external person’ accurately describes the character. The same applies to the second part of the thesis about the influence of the devil on human life: despite the fact that there is no mention of evil spirits in the work, the cruel Fate under which Egor Egorovich falls is opposed to certain good forces and is essentially comparable to the devil. Moreover, it is precisely to him that the fate of Chemodanov is submitted: good forces do not save Yegor Egorovich from execution.

The mediocrity of the Chemodanov is also emphasized at the level of name choice: since as a child he enters the house of the merchant Egorov, he acquires

⁴ Tamarchenko, N.D. (Ed.) (2008). *Poetics: A Dictionary of Current Terms and Concepts* (p. 71). Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Kulaginoi, Intrada Publ. (In Russ.)

⁵ Ibid. P. 72.

the name and patronymic – Egor Egorovich. The suitcase in which the foundling was found becomes the source of the surname⁶.

The image of Egor Egorovich Chemodanov is devoid of psychological accuracy. The series of sufferings that the hero has to go through does not affect his character. The static nature of the image is emphasized by the author at the beginning of the narrative: “he retained the appearance of a person who was either falling asleep or not yet fully awake for the rest of his life, along with his other qualities: yellow, soft baby hair and small stature”⁷. The only trait that Egor Egorovich acquires is a painful one thinness.

Here we have an ‘external person’ whose values are limited to a reverent attitude towards white collars (the motif of high heels and starched collars, similar in function, was previously found in the feuilleton *The Tyranny of Small Things and the Criminality of Individuality*⁸, then in the essay *The Death of Gulliver*, where it is paired with Swift high heels⁹ as privileges and emphasizing the status of his majesty): “in getting a collar and a decent suit, he revealed wild energy and almost genius: hungry, he spent the last three kopecks on a collar; chased by a bear, half-dead with fear, he ran among the bushes in such a way that he would not tear up and not ruin the costume¹⁰. So, in general, he was honest, but he stole vests and collars all his life, and – strangely! – I didn’t even consider it a sin!”¹¹. The narrator’s ironic remark about the honesty of the Suitcase defines the reader’s attitude towards the hero as a simple man “not without sin”, “a man in general”. Serving God as the true purpose of the “inner” man, the hero of canonical life, is replaced by serving collars, an external attribute of importance not only for the hero, but also for others. We find confirmation of this in the text:

⁶ The choice of the first and last name for the hero of L. Andreev is comparable to the nomination of Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, the hero of the novel *The Overcoat* by N.V. Gogol. Andreev, unlike his predecessor, does not offer a list of possible names, the very logic of naming through the duplication of the patronymic in the name points to Akaky Akakievich and updates the existing anecdote. When choosing a surname, Andreev rejects the absurdity proposed by Gogol (the Bashmachkins still wear boots with such a surname, not shoes), however, he means it and replaces it with direct logic, thereby reinforcing the absurdity: Egor Egorovich, planted in a suitcase, receives the surname of Chemodanov (Suitcase).

⁷ Andreev, L.N. (2021). *The Complete Collection of Novels, Novellas and Short Stories in One Volume* (p. 1215). Moscow: Al’fa-kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

⁸ Andreev, L.N. (1913) *Collected Works* (Vol. 6, pp. 168–172). St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Tovarishchestva A.F. Marksa Publ. (In Russ.)

⁹ Swift, J. (2010) *Gulliver’s Travels* (p. 26). Public Domain, 1727; 2010. (In Russ.)

¹⁰ The line of semiotics of clothing goes back to the biblical texts, in which clothing was recognized as a luxury item. In literary works, appearance as a non-verbal message to the interlocutor about his status is found, for example, in Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Theatrical Novel (Notes of a Dead Man)*: Sergei Leontievich Maksudov considers it important to buy six shirts and eight ties, the hero of the story *The Heart of a Dog*, Dr. Bormental shyly covers his throat without a tie during a night search. Finally, Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin from N.V. Gogol’s story was obsessed with buying a new overcoat.

¹¹ Andreev, L.N. (2021). *The Complete Collection of Novels, Novellas and Short Stories in One Volume* (p. 1215). Moscow: Al’fa-kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

“<...> Chemodanov owed his success solely to his suit <...> he wore his uniform so eloquently that it completely replaced the most, lofty conversations about the purpose and meaning of life; for the same reason, his morality was beyond doubt”¹². This also explains the hero’s speechlessness, and can be interpreted as a distortion of Isaiah’s prophecy: “As a lamb is dumb before his shearer, so He did not open his mouth”¹³.

Guided by the classification of L.A. Chernaya (2008), some features of the antihero can be distinguished in the image of Chemodanov: nothing is known about his birth, he was thrown into a merchant’s family as a baby; Chemodanov’s faith in God is replaced by a love for white collars; he considers himself honest, although he is capable of theft; he is quite stubborn (escapes to Siberia three times), but This rebellion is committed “in the name of submission”¹⁴; it does not pass the test of temptation, although temptation is understood as an unmotivated “dangerous” desire to return to Russia and find information about the mother.

At the same time, the features we have highlighted indicate that we have a generalized image of a modern man in the street, who in his own life plays the role of a ‘foundling’ who relies on chance, the status of an “antihero” seems disproportionately greater than the character himself.

The finale of anti-life is also significant: in canonical hagiography, a significant place is given to the description of miracles after the death of the saint (‘bones of the naga’ continued to exude healing (Klyuchevsky, 1988, 361 p.)), Leonid Andreev condemns his hero to oblivion: “And since he had no friends, no relatives, and no significant deeds, he did not If he did, then with his death all memory of him disappeared, as if he had never lived on earth”¹⁵. In the writer’s artistic world, the death of a layman means no more than the end of life: the question of rethinking life at death’s door is not raised (unlike in *The Tale of the Seven Hanged Men*), the ‘lower man’ cannot claim to be resurrected (as, for example, we see it in *Eliezer*), there is not even a hint of the afterlife (as it is done in the story *Peace*). In the *Chemodanov* Leonid Andreev gives the average man the opportunity to live a unique life, as if realizing the desires of his other heroes: Sergei Petrovich (*The Story of Sergei Petrovich*, 1900), Dr. Kerzhentsev (*Though (Mysl’)*, 1902). However, Egor Egorovich Suitcase, possessing a primitive consciousness, is unable to realize his strange chosen one.

¹² Andreev, L.N. (2021). *The Complete Collection of Novels, Novellas and Short Stories in One Volume* (p. 1216). Moscow: Al’fa-kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

¹³ Isaiah, 53:7.

¹⁴ Andreev, L.N. (2021). *The Complete Collection of Novels, Novellas and Short Stories in One Volume* (p. 1216). Moscow: Al’fa-kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 1220). Moscow: Al’fa-kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

Conclusion

Leonid Andreev violates the canons of hagiography in order to rethink them and reassemble them in the original text, a sacred parody. Following the principles of aesthetic maximalism, the writer not only exposes the essence of the life of the ‘lower man’, but also makes fun of Fate himself, putting an unworthy rival in his opponents.

Thus, in *Chemodanov*, the deconstruction of the life is carried out on an ideological and thematic level: a stylized, traditional, but limited only to its plot scheme, a system of events unfolds in front of the reader, within which the hero of the new life, the ‘lower man’, acts. The external similarity with life at the plot level is reduced by the author to the level of motive, “the description of the way to salvation”¹⁶ remains at the level of biography; the dotted character designation makes the image of the hero conditional, allegorical, therefore the sufferings that befell the hero are not interpreted as collisions with a cruel Fate, but reveal the meaninglessness of modern man’s life.

The appeal to the genre of anti-life is explained by the playful nature of Leonid Andreev’s work: developing the same plots in different modalities, Andreev rejects a single version of the world, giving it stereoscopy, emphasizing the instability and mobility of the existing system. The focus on demythologizing and turning old and new myths into literary anecdotes makes it possible to call Leonid Andreev a “man of modernity” and outline a range of intertextual connections with the works of both the “golden age” of literature and the postmodern era.

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¹⁶ Zhivov, V.M. (1994). *Sanctity. A short Dictionary of Hagiographic Terms*. Moscow: Gnozis Publ. P. 10. (In Russ.)

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