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DOES “CLASSIC” MEAN “OBJECTIVE”? ON EARLY REPORTAGE BY DMITRY SOKOLOV-MITRICH

The aim of this article is to analyze the narrative strategies and techniques present in Dmitry Sokolov-Mitrich's reportage. The author of the article focuses on the relationship between the „objective” genre form of reportage and the ideological message hidden in the text. The study includes objectivizing narrative techniques as well as persuasive forms that are linked to the reader's automatic psychological mechanisms and by „soft” means update the image of the world that Russian state propaganda tries to impose aggressively.

The author of the article comes to the conclusion that the classic form of reportage, based on a system of objectifying strategies and not containing textual determinants of fiction, cannot guarantee the objectivity and truthfulness of the presented facts. Belief in the truthfulness of the story told can only be the result of the „referential pact” and not the formal procedures used by the reporter. The analysis of Sokolov-Mitrich's work shows that the text of a reportage can be used not only to secretly influence the audience, but also to disguise views and ideas criticized in the primary (literal) layer of the text.

Keywords: Dmitry Sokolov-Mitrich, reportage, persuasion, propaganda, narrative

Dmitry Sokolov-Mitrich (b. 1975) for many years was one of the most popular and most recognizable authors of a large press reportage in Russia. His press releases consisted of the following book items: *Нетаджикские девочки. Нечеченские мальчишки* (2007), *Враги народа: от чиновников до олигархов* (2007), *Непоследние времена* (2012) and *Реальный репортёр* (2012). Strictly reporting period of the journalist's work ended in 2014 with the publication of the book *Яндекс.Книга*. From this moment a new stage of Sokolov-Mitrich's creative activity began, which the author himself calls “dependent journalism” or “story management.” This is an activity from the border of journalism and marketing, which the reporter carries out within the company under the name of “Once Upon

a Time” Laboratory (Лаборатория “Однажды”). This article deals only with Sokolov-Mitrich’s early work (2007–2014), i.e. works that appeared earlier than *Яндекс.Книга*.

Sokolov-Mitrich worked in the newspaper “Izvestiya” (2000–2008), and then held the post of deputy editor-in-chief in the magazine “Russkiy reporter” (2008–2015). The owner of the latter was the holding “Expert”, managed by Valery Fadeyev, advisor to the president of Russia (since 2019), and financial support was provided by an oligarch Oleg Deripaska. The main editor of the periodical was Vitaly Leybin, known for his support for the separatists of Donbas.

In my analysis of Sokolov-Mitrich’s reportage, I assume that in the post-truth era any text, especially one that emphasizes its impartiality and professionalism, should also be examined from the point of view of implicit persuasion. This is especially important in the case of texts written by people close to the camp of power in a country where press freedom is restricted by political factors and propaganda activities are carried out not only through aggressive methods of influencing public opinion, but also in a more subtle way, implemented with the participation of scholars, intellectuals, cultural activists, as well as journalists.

I would like to emphasize at the outset of this article that I will be interested not in the political aspects of Sokolov-Mitrich’s writing, but in the narrative strategies and techniques present in his reportage work, in particular, the relations that arise between the “objective” genre form of reportage and the ideological message hidden in the text.¹ The study will include, on the one hand, narrative techniques that objectify, and, on the other hand, persuasive techniques that appeal to the automatic psychological mechanisms of the recipi-

¹ Reportage in both Russian and western European journalistic theory belongs to the information genres with a strongly marked individuality of the author, who reports the events he or she observes, or reconstructs past episodes based on the accounts of his or her informants — eyewitnesses. The most important thing for a reportage text is to create a “presence effect.” It should be added that the presence of the authorial “I” can give the reportage a certain shade of journalism. See for example: С.М. Гуревич, *Репортаж в газете*, Мысль, Москва 1963, pp. 3–32. Some contemporary scholars classify reportage as a journalistic or personal genre, but, as one can see from the examples they cite, they refer rather to reportage in the style of *New Journalism* than to the classical theory of the genre developed in the times of the USSR. See: А.В. Колесниченко, *Практическая журналистика*, Московский государственный университет, Москва 2008, p. 41).

ent,² or refer to the principle of emotional valence, which often manifests itself in the form of affection, update the picture of the world created by Russian state propaganda. It should be noted that despite the cooperation with periodicals with a specific political profile (“Izvestiya”, “Russkiy reporter”), not all reportages of Sokolov-Mitrich contain a direct or hidden ideological message. A substantial number of his works consists of solidly developed and written materials of journalistic nature, in which propaganda intentions cannot be tracked.

A review of research positions on persuasion, manipulation, and propaganda shows that it is difficult to clearly delineate the meaning of these concepts,³ especially since they are understood somewhat differently in psychology, social communication theory, or linguistics.⁴ In my research, I will be interested in implicit persuasion,⁵ treated as a kind of manipulation, which consists of “a hidden communication layer, implicit suggestions, and implications, undisclosed connotational elements, emotional distress.”⁶ Manipulation is carried out without the consent of the recipient, often he does not even realize that he is the object of such actions.⁷ Propaganda — in relation to the system of manipulation present in modern Russia — I see as a more aggressive action, a kind of coercive persuasion⁸ or “invasive action on the subconscious.”⁹ The aim of such propaganda, acting by shaping the views and attitudes of citizens in the aspect of socio-political issues,¹⁰ is the legitimization of any actions of the authorities.

² R. B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*, Pearson Education, Boston 2009, pp. 11–12.

³ G. N. Gordon, *Persuasion. The Theory and Practice of Manipulative Communication*, Hastings House, New York 1971; G. S. Jowett, V. O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks 1992; D. J. O'Keefe, *Persuasion. Theory and Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks 2002, pp. 1–28.

⁴ See R. Garpiel, K. Leszczyńska (eds.), *Sztuka perswazji. Socjologiczne, psychologiczne i lingwistyczne aspekty komunikowania perswazyjnego*, Nomos, Kraków 2004.

⁵ M. Tokarz, *Argumentacja, perswazja, manipulacja. Wykłady z teorii komunikacji*, GWP, Sopot 2006, pp. 294–295.

⁶ J. Warchala, *Formy perswazji*, Wydawnictwo UŚ, Katowice 2019, p. 220.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁸ E. Hunter, *Brain Washing in Red China. The calculated destruction of men's minds*, The Vanguard Press, New York 1951, pp. 3–11.

⁹ J. Warchala, *Formy perswazji...*, p. 9.

¹⁰ See I. Borkowski, *Świt wolnego słowa. Język propagandy politycznej 1981–1995*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2003, p. 16.

CLASSICAL STRUCTURE AND OBJECTIVITY

Sokolov-Mitrich combines the objectivity of the reportage with the formal aspect, disagreeing with the aestheticism of the reportage — the formal “equilibrium” of the text. The author argues that reportage, as a journalistic genre, cannot turn into literature.¹¹

The opposition of reportage to literature is very significant in the case of Sokolov-Mitrich because his work as a reporter differs in formal aspect from the achievements of such masters of Russian literary reportage as, for example, Valery Panyushkin.¹² Sokolov-Mitrich relies on the classical form of press reporting, which, in his opinion, guarantees the objectivity of the message, while Panyushkin is a supporter of the tradition initiated by representatives of the American *New Journalism* and he willingly uses techniques appropriate to narrative prose. In the reportage of Sokolov-Mitrich we will not find such elements.

If we look at the genre distinctions of Sokolov-Mitrich’s texts and refer them to Maksim Kim’s classifications, popular in Russia, we will notice that they usually represent two types of reportage: analytical and special. In Russian typology, ‘special reportage’ is a large-scale reportage on current and widely discussed topics; in turn, ‘analytical reportage’ focuses not only on the description of an event but also on the explanation of its origin.¹³

The structure of the reportage text, in contrast to other genres of the press, allows for individual, authorial modifications of the genre structure, as well as for stylistic innovations.¹⁴ Sokolov-Mitrich makes innovative use of the entire catalogue of journalistic tricks and techniques (including a wide range of means of linguistic expression), however — unlike many masters of world reportage¹⁵ — definitely avoids fictionalizing his message. As noted by Natalia Avdonina and Anna Malakhova, the documentality of the information presented

¹¹ Д.В. Соколов-Митрич, *Реальный репортёр. Почему нас этому не учат на журфаке?!*, Питер, Санкт-Петербург 2012, pp. 22, 27.

¹² See G. Czerwiński, “Memories and Memory in New Russian Literary Journalism (Illustrated with Reference to Reportage Books by Yulia Yuzik and Valery Panyushkin).” *Russian Literature* 2022, vol. 133, pp. 49–77.

¹³ М.Н. Ким, *Основы творческой деятельности журналиста*, Питер, Санкт-Петербург 2011, pp. 336–337.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ E. Żyrek-Horodyska, “Reportaż literacki wobec literatury. Korzenie i teorie.” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2017, no. 4, pp. 119–131.

is evidenced in the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich by frequent quoting of statements of witnesses and participants of events (with a decisive advantage of direct speech), the presence of analytical elements, references to empirical data, official documents, and statistics.¹⁶ Objectification is also achieved through the deliberate elimination in the text of narrative strategies typical of fiction prose and often used by representatives of *New Journalism* (this includes the internal monologue and the technique of stream of consciousness).

The most important aspect of the manifestation of documentarism is the presence of the authorial “I,” in which we recognize the journalist Sokolov-Mitrich himself. From the first paragraph of the text, we are aware that we are dealing with the account of a reporter who goes to the scene of events to give readers an eyewitness account.

Sokolov-Mitrich strives to clearly separate his own position from the opinions of his informants — the protagonists of the reportage, whose statements play a purely informational role¹⁷ and do not contribute to characterization. This is in line with the requirements of Soviet media coverage.¹⁸

In the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich, the statements of several different people on a given subject are very often cited, including usually opposing positions. This strategy takes a developed form, for example, in the reportage *Сапсаново бешенство* (2010). On the one hand, it cites the arguments of residents and local authorities of the village, through which passes without stopping the express “Sapsan,” running between Moscow and St. Petersburg (the train causes danger on platforms, traffic jams on road crossings over tracks, delays in running local trains, because it runs on the same tracks). On the other hand, a strong position is presented by the regional authorities and the Directorate of Russian State Railways, focusing on the need for the country’s development and technological progress. Although we feel that the author stands on the side of local residents, he does not directly share with the reader information about his attitude to the expressed judgments and does not decide who is right and who

¹⁶ See Н.С. Авдони́на, А.М. Малахова, “Особенности формата «человеческий документ» в публицистике Дмитрия Соколова-Митрича.” *Вестник Воронежского государственного университета. Серия: Филология. Журналистика*, 2019, no. 1, p. 92.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Г.Я. Солганик, *Стиль репортажа*, МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова, Москва 1970, p. 56.

is wrong. If he wants to show which view is reliable, he does it by quoting an additional account from the informant, which confirms what his predecessor said earlier. In this way, the persuasiveness of the text is hidden (at the level of the structure of the text), and the reader should believe that the author's strategy is not to persuade, but to prove, and consequently to search for objective truth. The protagonists of the reportage (parties to the conflict) play the role of adversaries in the "dispute over rations," in which the reporter allegedly does not participate, leaving the reader the opportunity to independently interpret and evaluate the described facts.¹⁹

A similar example of "objectification" of the character's statements can be seen in the reportage *Олимпиада на всю голову* (2008), which addresses the issue of possible expropriation of real estate on the eve of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi (2014). Residents are full of fears, while the city administration assures that there will be no displacement. The author, wanting to speak in favor of the inhabitants, and at the same time to maintain formal neutrality, uses the technique of confirming one position by another:

— В начале девяностых здесь осели многие беженцы из Абхазии, — рассказывает местная жительница Мария Ивановна Крухт. — [...] Мы все находимся в подвешенном состоянии. Будут нас сносить или нет, а если будут, то что дадут взамен, — пока нам ничего на эту тему не сказали [...].

— Пока все питаются слухами, — подтверждает Эльза Чулукова. — Вот недавно кто-то пустил информацию, что якобы выплаты будут зависеть от количества проживающих семей, — и тут же в поселке началась эпидемия фиктивных разводов.²⁰

In the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich, one can also meet situations in which the author himself becomes a participant in a "dispute over rations." In this case, in contrast to the protagonists of the reportage, who in their disputes often express themselves very emotionally, the author always relies on a "rational Court of justification" in his argument.²¹ In order to "objectively" admit the truth of one of the parties to the conflict, he provides the facts that he has collected in the process of analyzing the problem or presents his own eyewitness testimony. Importantly, the reporter's personal testimony can be easily verified.

¹⁹ Jacek Warchala analyses the concepts of 'persuasion,' 'proof' and 'argumentation' in his book *Formy perswazji...*, pp. 10–11. My own statements in this article are based on the findings of this study.

²⁰ Д. Соколов-Митрич, *Реальный репортёр...*, p. 147.

²¹ See: J. Warchala, *Formy perswazji...*, pp. 10–11.

In the text *Олимпиада на всю голову*, the image of the village of Mirnyi near Adler emerging from the words of the heroes of the reportage is confronted by the journalist with what he himself saw and what could be confirmed in 2008 by each of the readers.

Спускаемся вниз. Поселок Мирный действительно имеет печальный вид. Рядом с более или менее цивилизованной застройкой стоят халупы, которые способны испортить олимпийское настроение любому. Когда-то это была земля совхоза «Россия», но потом он развалился и она стала полигоном партизанского предпринимательства. На самозахваченных участках кто-то уже успел построить гостиницу сарайного типа, кто-то втихаря сеет кукурузу.²²

In Sokolov-Mitrich reports, information about a given problem can also be presented using an author's narrative, and in this case, it is the sum of general knowledge and knowledge based on the experience of the reporter. In the first case, information is given that anyone can get (or confirm its veracity) by opening, for example, an encyclopedia. In the second variant, this is knowledge taken from the site of events — for example, acquired during a trip to the winter Saratov, as described in one of the paragraphs of the reportage *Саратов должен быть разрушен* (2010).²³ In turn, in *Сапсаново бешенство*, the general knowledge presented in the author's narrative is the result of a query made by the author in the archive of newspapers published in the Tver region. The journalist not only does not hide his source of information but with information on this subject begins a paragraph reporting on the history of the conflict between residents and the Directorate of Railways.²⁴

The author's reconstruction of past events, based on information obtained from informants, is relatively rare in the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich. It seems that this technique, very willingly used by other reporters, is not the preferred form of presentation in the case of Sokolov-Mitrich, because it can evoke associations with the narrative of a novel. Sokolov-Mitrich usually uses it when presenting the biographical data of the characters of the reportage (thus summarizing and condensing information about the life of the characters — this information often has no direct connection with the events described). Such a variant can be traced for example in the text *Иран*

²² Д. Соколов-Митрич, *Реальный репортёр...*, p. 146.

²³ Ibid., p. 192–193.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 179.

*устал ждать войны.*²⁵ In situations where we are talking about events to which the author was not an eyewitness, he almost always gives voice to the characters and quotes their statements in the form of a direct speech. This is one of the most important and basic narrative techniques of Sokolov-Mitrich.

If, on the other hand, the author does not cite facts, but expresses his own opinion, he tries not to use any literary means of expression. In this case, he emphasizes the fact of the transition from presentation to the expression of opinion. When voicing a thought of his own, the reporter begins by emphasizing the subjectivity of his statement, stressing that it is only his opinion. One way to separate the “objective” from the “subjective” is, for example, to use humor, and to take the problem lightly. This is how the peripheral areas of the city of Saratov are described.²⁶

Another attempt to objectify the reporter’s statement in the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich is to quote “original” facts which, however, do not affect the overall narrative, without concretizing anything in the factual plane and without enriching the reportage in the cognitive layer. An example can be found even in the reportage *Беслан. Возвращение в август* (2004), where the story of a deaf-mute resident of the city is quoted, who, due to the fact that he wore a beard and did not respond to the commands (shouts) of police officers, was considered a fugitive terrorist. In the plot, this thread can act as a humorous interrupter. However, it seems to play yet another role. He tries to make his readers understand how accurate and meticulous the observation of Sokolov-Mitrich is, as he not only does not repeat the current opinions expressed by journalists who did not bother to visit North Ossetia, nor formulates opinions and analyses of various versions of events from behind his desk, but also sees more than his colleagues who spent the first days of September in Beslan.

**KEEP THE READER INTERESTED,
OR NOT INNOCENT GAMES WITH LANGUAGE AND EMOTIONS**

According to Sokolov-Mitrich, playing with the reader’s emotions is aimed at attracting the recipient, getting his attention, and evoking in the addressee feelings of not only aesthetic but also psychological

²⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 193.

nature. In the book *Реальный репортер*, we find a passage in which Sokolov-Mitrich shares his experience with novice journalists. To his less experienced colleagues, he addresses the following message:

Вот что я имею в виду. Вы с читателем бежите вместе в одном направлении. Вы точно знаете, что впереди обрыв, а он не знает. Перед пропастью вы прибавляете скорость — читатель думает, что, раз вы ускоряетесь, значит, вам известно, что впереди хорошая прямая дорога. Но вот вы тормозите, а читатель с ходу летит в бездну. У него захватывает дух. Получилось! Это и есть правильная работа с эмоцией. [...]

Когда работаешь с эмоцией, читательские ожидания нужно самым наглым образом обманывать. Выражать эмоцию через контрэмоцию. Если читателю кажется, что сейчас автор начнет хихикать, надо сделать подчеркнуто серьезное выражение лица — получится еще смешнее. Если же он ждет, что сейчас автор будет плакать и ужасаться, надо выразить этот ужас через безразличие, как будто ничего ужасного и не случилось вовсе. Это пробьет его сильнее, чем заламывание рук и прочие дешевые жесты.²⁷

One could say that the reporter uses a technique close to the principle of *catharsis*, only not in Aristotelian terms, but in the sense taken from modern psychoanalysis.²⁸ In this way, the emotion of the message is transferred by the journalist to the sphere of the psychology of art. However, it should not be forgotten that in this way the reader's attention is also detached from other entanglements of emotional transmission. Jacek Warchala noted that the emotionality of statements does not occur either in argumentation or in proof, and therefore in the strategies that Sokolov-Mitrich uses in the process of objectification of the presented facts. It is a typical treatment in messages with the characteristics of implicit persuasion, where the author's actions, aimed at influencing the emotions of the recipient, affect not only the mood of the reader but also his psyche, shaping the desired image of the world by the sender.²⁹

In the previous part of this article, I tried to show how Sokolov-Mitrich hides the persuasiveness of his reports, making a formal transformation of an inciting message into an information message. We deal with a similar situation when it comes to the emotionality of the message. Her persuasive charge is somewhat depreciated. The author consciously emphasizes other aspects related to emotions — those

²⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁸ E. Powell, *Catharsis in Psychology and Beyond: A Historic Overview*, The Primal Psychotherapy Site, <<http://primal-page.com/cathar.htm>> (11.02.2022).

²⁹ See J. Warchala, *Formy perswazji...*, pp. 10–11, 176–203.

that focus the reader's attention on the text, and not on the author's extratextual intentions. In this part of the article, I would like to trace various ways of emotionalization of the message which occurs in the reports of Sokolov-Mitrich. Strategies for evoking emotions, and building relationships between the author and the reader, as well as narrative techniques that appeal to emotions, will be analyzed.

According to psychologists, the most obvious manifestation of the emotionalization of the message is the creation of images that imply strong emotional states.³⁰ Creating expressive scenes allows one to evoke emotions such as fear, anger, or compassion.³¹ In the work of Sokolov-Mitrich, in the text *Беслан. Возвращение в август*, we encounter the following passage:

Я стою у забора зажмурившись и пытаюсь дышать через ворот куртки. Не помогает. Затыкаю нос и дышу ртом. Вечером очень сильно об этом жалею, потому что мясо есть не могу. Видеть свое тело тоже не могу. Очень странно, что оно шевелится. [...] Чтобы справиться со страшным привкусом во рту, напиваюсь водки и засыпаю.³²

The author recalls his visit to the place where the bodies and remains of the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan were laid, describing the shock he experienced at that time. The reporter not only shares with readers his psychophysical state but also shows his personal, human (and not only professional) face. Thus emphasizing the barbarism and anti-humanist nature of the actions of the Chechen separatists, he tries to influence the reader's assessment of the armed conflict that was then taking place in the North Caucasus. In addition, it seems that the reporter uses the human tendency of readers described by Gerald Clore to the fact that in a situation of emotional arousal, they will habitually treat their own feelings, born as a result of reading, as a source of information.³³ However, it must be admitted that such a way of in-

³⁰ G. L. Clore, D. A. Reinhard, "Emotional Intensity: It's the Thought that Counts." *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*, A.S. Fox, R.C. Lapate, A. J. Shackman, and R.J. Davidson (eds.), Oxford University Press, New York 2018, pp. 162–165.

³¹ On the definition of emotion, see: C. E. Izard, *Human Emotions*, Plenum Publishing, New York 1977, pp. 4–8.

³² Д. Соколов-Митрич, *Реальный репортёр...*, p. 71.

³³ G. L. Clore, "Emotions: Causes and Consequences." *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions...*, pp. 15–19. To this day, Sokolov-Mitrich holds only the terrorists who attacked the Ossetian school responsible for the deaths of 314 hostages, including 186 children. Independent journalists prove that the blame for

fluencing the audience is relatively rare in the writing of Sokolov-Mitrich. A typical treatment in his work is rather a conscious abandonment of the use of categories of fear and appeal to a rational attitude. It seems that this may be due to the belief that the lack of “typical” emotionalization will not arouse suspicions of manipulative intentions of the author. This perception is reinforced in the context of public statements by Sokolov-Mitrich, in which he expresses the belief that it is the Liberal opposition that is playing a “game of fear” in order to denigrate the current political system in Russia, and therefore its representatives, referring to negative emotions, are trying to manipulate public opinion. In fact, as the researchers of this issue prove, implicit persuasion can also be based on positive emotions or evoke negative emotions in a veiled way.³⁴ In Sokolov-Mitrich, the game with emotions is employed primarily in the plane of text composition and in the plan of stylistic shaping of the language of utterance.

Representatives of linguistics drew attention to the language of Sokolov-Mitrich’s reports. We owe many findings to the research of linguists, which prove to be extremely helpful in critical literary studies. For example, Natalia Vereshchagina and Elina Bulatova³⁵ look for meanings in Sokolov-Mitrich’s texts that function beyond linear linguistic transmission, at the interface between psychology and verbal creativity. Linguists prove that indirect communication plays a key role in the author’s reporting style, which consists in encrypting the message using techniques and strategies such as ellipticity, presupposition, imagery, language play, subtext, irony, etc.³⁶ The main intention of the stylistic features of the text is the desire to attract the attention of the reader. The researchers add, however, that the parallel goal is to program the recipient’s interpretation and direct their attention as desired by the sender.³⁷

In Sokolov-Mitrich’s writing, the encryption of the message is accompanied by efforts to build an appropriate relationship with the

such a large number of victims is equally borne by the Russian special forces, who decided to storm the building filled with hostages.

³⁴ V. Griskevicius, M.N. Shiota, S.L. Neufeld, “Influence of Different Positive Emotions on Persuasion Processing: A Functional Evolutionary Approach.” *Emotion* 2010, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 190–206.

³⁵ Н.О. Верещагина, Э.В. Булатова, “Языковые средства непрямого коммуникации в медиатекстах Дм. Соколова-Митрича.” *Известия Уральского федерального университета. Серия 1*, 2014, vol. 132, no. 4, pp. 19–28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

reader. The whole range of linguistic means used by the reporter (personal commitment, emotionalism, optimism, etc.), is aimed not only at getting closer to the reader, and gaining their trust, but also at showing that the reporter is an “ordinary,” “normal” person, not different from his readers also in the linguistic aspect. It also seems that the more the distance between the author and the reader decreases, the more often the reporter uses subtext, irony, allusion, euphemisms, humor, etc., as if he was aware that the recipient will be more easily influenced by a person liked and similar to themselves.³⁸

Based on the elements of indirect communication indicated by linguists in the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich, I would like to discuss the most important strategies of implicit persuasion that occur in the author’s reports. I will be interested, among other things, in allusion, presupposition, subtext, irony and humor, but they are understood much more broadly than in linguistic terms.

The allusion in Sokolov-Mitrich’s works is very often based on a certain presupposition relating to everyday reality and the physical sphere of man and is intended not only to inform about something indirectly but also to certify the truthfulness of the information conveyed. One encounters such a situation in the article *Хомячкам холодно* (2012), which jokingly describes the inhabitants of Moscow, who in winter instead of warm clothes wear clothes that would be better in the summer. The author, describing examples of poorly dressed passers-by, refers to the natural, physiological need of man, striving for the economy of heat in the body, and presents the “fashionable” inhabitants of the capital in an ironic way:

Вот, например, идет девушка, от одного вида которой бросает в дрожь. Между поверхностью ее тела и окружающей агрессивной средой всего лишь черные лосины, рассчитанные на карельское лето. А тоненькая синтепоновая курточка начинается настолько выше пояса, что это скорее топик для летнего отдыха на Баренцевом море. Чисто теоретическая сексуальность этой девушки не вызывает в моем хорошо одетом организме никаких реак-

³⁸ The similarity itself also influences, as psychologists prove, the degree of sympathy that we give to others. See: J.M. Burger, N. Messian, S. Patel, A. del Prado, C. Anderson, “What a Coincidence! The Effects of Incidental Similarity on Compliance.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 2004, no. 30 (1), pp. 35–43. Fondness and sympathy is indicated as one of the basic tools of influence. See: R. B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice...*, pp. 142–173. This strategy is also used by Sokolov-Mitrich to create his chosen (“positive”) heroes of reportage.

DOES “CLASSIC” MEAN “OBJECTIVE?”...

ций: что бы там ни говорили фрейдоманы, простое человеческое сострадание все-таки сильнее первобытного полового инстинкта.³⁹

The logical conclusion that should appear to the reader is that in Russia it is necessary to dress according to the prevailing weather conditions in this country. On the principle of presupposition, there is also a belief that Western European fashion is inadequate in relation to the Russian weather, and therefore people who imitate Western culture, harm their health. Additionally, a suggestion can be triggered in the subtext⁴⁰ guiding the thoughts of the addressee toward a general reflection on the fact that European values are inadequate in relation to “Russian civilization.”

In his works, Sokolov-Mitrich uses subtext⁴¹ in order to imply a vision of the world presented in the official broadcasts of state propaganda. One of the best examples of the use of such a strategy in the author’s work is the text *Люди в черном* (2014), devoted to the events in Ukraine in January 2014. The article was published immediately after the flight of President Viktor Yanukovych to Russia. A reporter goes from the description of the exhibit *Хаотичный маятник*, which he saw in the Moscow Museum “Experimentarium.” In the description, we find a reference to the omnipotent power of mathematics, and therefore science is generally considered one of the most objectives:

Особой популярностью у детей и взрослых пользуется экспонат под названием «Хаотичный маятник». Очень смешная штука. Выводишь ее из равновесия — и она забавно мечется в пространстве, будто какой-то сумасшедший геометрический инвалид, взбунтовавшаяся супрематическая конструкция. [...] Хаотичный маятник (или двойной маятник, поскольку он устроен путем присоединения к обычному маятнику еще одного «плеча») — это наглядное опровержение тезиса о всеилии математики.⁴²

³⁹ Д. Соколов-Митрич, “Хомячкам холодно.” *Русский репортёр* 2012, no. 6.

⁴⁰ H. J. Eysenck, “Personality, Primary and Secondary Suggestibility, and Hypnosis.” *Suggestion and Suggestibility: Theory and Research*, V. A. Gheorghiu, P. Netter, H. J. Eysenck, R. Rosenthal, K. Fiedler, W. E. Edmonston Jr., R. M. Lundy and P. W. Sheehan (eds.), Springer-Verlag Publishing, Berlin 1989, pp. 57–67.

⁴¹ The subtext is introduced with the help of various linguistic and stylistic means (language games, phraseological units, irony, metaphor, expressive syntax, etc.). See Н. О. Верещагина, Э. В. Булатова, “Языковые средства не прямой коммуникации в медиатекстах...”, p. 22.

⁴² Д. Соколов-Митрич, “Люди в черном.” *Православие.ру*, January 27, 2014, <<http://pravoslavie.ru/67885.html>> (15.02.2022).

The chaotic pendulum is described as something interesting and funny, but at the same time it is compared to a cripple, who is referred to as “сумасшедший,” which can be understood either in a humorous sense as “crazy,” “mad,” or in a caricature dimension as “mentally disturbed.” Referring to the laws of mathematics (although it should rather be based on the principles of physics), the author explains that the state of dilation can be stopped by the intervention of an external force or the exhaustion of the energy of the exhibit itself.⁴³ The journalist compares the characteristics of the pendulum (unpredictability, lack of control), as well as the ways to stop the state of swing to the situation in Ukraine, adding that the analogy between the described exhibit and the “dance of war” had been noticed long before and he is not the author of this comparison. The author in a literal layer, in the spirit of love of the neighbor, advocates the internal discharge of chaos (restraint of both sides of the conflict and “demonstration of weakness”), because the “reasonable, passive Ukrainian majority”⁴⁴ is all about stopping the war. In turn, the external intervention is prayed for by “men in Black” — monks from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra and other monastics, who with a prayer on their lips and icons in their hands stand between the parties of the conflict, separating the protesters and the officers of the “Berkut” Special Forces:

Сменяя друг друга, эти люди в черном предотвращают столкновение уже несколько суток. Рискую отморозить до ампутации промокшие ноги и задохнуться от копоги горящих шин, рискуя получить в голову камень или гранату, рискуя в любой момент оказаться под ногами толпы, они молятся о вмешательстве той самой внешней непреодолимой силы, которая одна может остановить раскачавшийся маятник.⁴⁵

The monks pray not for a military solution to the dispute, but for divine intervention in the fate of Ukraine to stop the bloodshed. By reference to the authority of the clergy, the authority of the sciences, and unnamed authorities⁴⁶ who saw in the image of the pendulum the mechanism of war, the typical non-alternative choice of propa-

⁴³ See: linguistic method of analysis of this report: Н. О. Верещагина, Э.В. Булатова, “Языковые средства непрямой коммуникации в медиатекстах...”, pp. 21–22.

⁴⁴ The very combination of the words “reasonable” and “passive” is an expression of the negation of the patriotic activity of Ukrainians and contains a hidden thesis that the pro-Russian attitude is “reasonable”.

⁴⁵ Д. Соколов-Митрич, *Люди в черном...*

⁴⁶ The strategy of appealing to authority as a method of influencing people was critically analyzed by R. B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice...*, p. 191.

ganda messages is created, which consists in legitimizing only those solutions that are unfavorable for the Ukrainian process of European integration: either a voluntary end to the protests or a civil war, for the unleashing of which Yanukovych's opponents will be responsible.⁴⁷ The author does not allow the possibility of reconciliation of the Ukrainian people in the spirit of patriotism and the peaceful return of Ukrainians as a whole to western Europe.

The article is enclosed by a composition frame, in which there is a reference to the first sentence of the text: “У вас есть дети? Сходите с ними в московский «Экспериментариум».” At the end, the author addresses the supporters of the protests and, using a kind of emotional blackmail, tries to strengthen the non-alternative choice created on the basis of subtext and suggestion: “Вам не нравится быть слабым? Ну, тогда давайте, меряйтесь силой дальше. У вас есть дети?”

One of Sokolov-Mitrich's most favorite persuasive strategies is laughter but it is not only an aesthetic category. Sometimes it is actually an expression of optimism, cheerful mood, and sense of humor, as, for example, in the following quotes:

На родине Ленина решили ударить наглядной агитацией по грустным демографическим показателям. На днях здесь стартовал агитпоезд под названием «Роди патриота в День России». [...] На реализацию губернаторской идеи брошены лучшие силы, которые в течение года будут [...] возбуждать в местных жителях желание плодиться и размножаться. На днях эти силы побывали в поселке Верхняя Маза Радищевского района. Корреспондент «Известий» Дмитрий Соколов-Митрич решил к ним присоединиться, чтоб хотя бы со свечкой рядом постоять.⁴⁸

Хорошо, если усопший был верующим — хотя бы в церкви полежит, подышит.⁴⁹

In many cases, however, this is only an apparent attempt to create authorial distance. Much depends on the subject of the reportage, and in particular on whether it deals with political or ideological problems. If it concerns, for example, Ukraine, ethnic minorities in Russia, or geopolitics, one could see that humor and irony smoothly

⁴⁷ This is an example of the faulty logic on which aggressive propaganda is based: Н. Т. Conserva, *Propaganda Techniques*, Author House, Bloomington 2003.

⁴⁸ Д. Соколов-Митрич, *Реальный репортёр...*, стр. 127.

⁴⁹ Д. Соколов-Митрич, “Дайте умереть.” *Фома*, April 2, 2013, <<https://foma.ru/dajte-umeret.html>> (15.02.2022).

transform, on the one hand, into an action aimed at ridiculing people, attitudes, or ideas with which the reporter does not agree (for example, the influence of foreign fashion in the article analyzed above *Хомячкам холодно*), and on the other hand, in the creation of negative images of specific individuals or national-ethnic and religious communities. The reporter uses one of the functions of emotion described by Paul Ekman, which consists of an automatic assessment of the situation before a rational assessment is formed in the mind.⁵⁰ Sokolov-Mitrich's dislike of indigenous ethnic minorities in Russia can take the form of, for example, a seemingly innocent joke about the external appearance of a Muslim woman:

Глядим в соседний вагон — там еще двое таких же плюс ярко-выраженная мусульманка с не самой узкой талией.⁵¹

Also, the comparison of protesting Ukrainians who oppose the policy of President Yanukovich to collaborators from the time of the Second World War is supposed to look like an ironic-humorous euphemism.⁵² Instead of the label “Bandera” spread in the pro-government Russian media, the reporter uses the following formula: “духовные потомки тех, кто уничтожал львовских евреев в 1941-м.”⁵³

In the text *Замороженный* (2009), telling the story of the mining operations carried out by the Russians on Spitsbergen, due to the cited negative stereotypes (the carriers of which are not the “objective” reporter, but his heroes), a belief is created about the superiority of the Russians over the Norwegians, who are described as stupid, lazy and prone to alcoholism. The characteristics of the Norwegians, as well as statements about the circumstances of granting Norway the right to the peninsula, are conveyed both through the statement of the main character of the reportage (proclaiming the belief in Russia's right to Spitsbergen), and in the author's narrative, in which it

⁵⁰ P. Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 2003, pp. 20–22. In the case of Sokolov-Mitrich's reports, such a procedure entails even further consequences: it will be difficult for the audience to take seriously and credibly someone who has been ridiculed, especially since the reader himself has been drawn into the very process of ridicule.

⁵¹ Д. Соколов-Митрич, “Звуки Ме.” *Вечерняя Москва*, October 16, 2013, <<https://vm.ru/opinion/160970-zvuki-me>> (15.02.2022).

⁵² K. Barbe, *Irony in Context*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam 1995, pp. 112–118.

⁵³ Д. Соколов-Митрич, *Люди в черном...*

is difficult to determine whether he summarizes the worldview of the hero, or expresses his own views.

The blurring of intent does not prevent the author from launching one more method of influence. The statement refers in the subtext to the imperial resentments of the Russians and repeats the conviction of the historical “injustice” that is contained in the “taking away” from Russia its territories and zones of influence by the abstract West. In this way revisionist historical views are conveyed to the reader with the help of social proof of rightness. The “loss” of Spitsbergen is put in the context of events such as the inclusion of Crimea in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the collapse of the USSR, the defeat in Afghanistan, the loss of influence in the Balkans, etc.⁵⁴

This example also shows how an apparently innocent situation, which in itself is not persuasive, is endowed with a persuasive charge when placed in the appropriate context, for example, in the context of common knowledge, television propaganda, etc. After all, we can treat the position of the protagonist of the reportage with a wink, which in a sense is encouraged by the irony of the author himself. However, in the appropriate reference system, a completely different dimension of the presented problem is updated, which makes reporting a way of persuasion that goes beyond its linguistic aspect.⁵⁵ In addition, it can be noted that Sokolov-Mitrich very cleverly protects himself from accusations of practicing propaganda. His text in the language-narrative layer does not have the characteristics of propaganda. The report only “opens” the reader to certain codes of meaning, using the sense of humiliation rooted in the collective consciousness of Russians. Evelin Lindner, describing the problem of humiliation in National, international, and global relations, pointed out a mechanism that fits perfectly with Russia, which consists in the fact that there are certain cycles of humiliation in which the cessation of humiliation of others will be a humiliation of ourselves.⁵⁶ Referring Lindner’s thought to the work of Sokolov-Mitrich, it can be assumed that the fact of humiliation

⁵⁴ See on social proof of rightness: R. B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice...*, pp. 138–139.

⁵⁵ On the role of context and wider than *strictly* the linguistic dimension of persuasion see: J. Warchala, *Formy perswazji...*, pp. 12–14, 69–70.

⁵⁶ E. Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict*, Foreword by M. Deutsch, Praeger Security International, London 2006, pp. 89–92.

can strengthen susceptibility to manipulation and hate speech in the same way as shame or guilt.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Sokolov-Mitrich is a master of reportage, who, adhering to the classic determinants of reportage, is able to interest the reader and keep him in suspense while increasing the level of stimulation of the audience. In a large part of his publications written before 2014, he became known as a reliable and talented reporter. A literary analysis of the author's work, however, allows us to see that in many of his texts, there are certain strategies of ideological transmission, based on techniques of implicit persuasion and other means of psychological influence. In the author's texts, although they bear the characteristics of a traditional reporting form, in addition to the informational and aesthetic function, there is also a hidden propaganda function. For comparison, the persuasiveness of the reports of Valery Panyushkin and Julia Yuzik depends largely on their journalistic character, on the inclusion in the text of a certain position, the correctness of which the authors, on the principle of openness of intentions, want to convince the reader, who is left with freedom of choice. The ability to choose, as Daniel J. O'Keefe writes, is a necessity in the case of overt persuasion.⁵⁸ The narration in Sokolov-Mitrich's reports is often constructed in such a way that the recipient believes that the author's intention is to present "dry facts," and objectification is carried out in the process of reading and consists in forming his own, independent, and uninfluenced opinion. However, the author does not reveal to the reader the ways of processing the material or the rules according to which the text prioritizes presented information. The recipient is offered a finished image, only that it is legitimized by accounts of informants. This tactic is aimed at persuading readers to believe in the truth of the story. In reality, however, the recipient is subject to subtle manipulation based on the specific emotional state evoked by the reporter's message and the hidden purpose of the texts

⁵⁷ J.P. Tangney, "Shame and Guilt in Interpersonal Relationships." *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*, J.P. Tangney, K.W. Fischer (eds.), Guilford Press, New York 1995, pp. 114–139.

⁵⁸ D.J. O'Keefe, *Persuasion. Theory and Research...*, p. 17.

of Sokolov-Mitrich seems to be the formation of a worldview among readers that could not be accepted by them as a result of the process of critical analysis of the arguments “for” and “against.”⁵⁹

Reconstruction of the ideological layer of Sokolov-Mitrich’s reportage requires increased analytical effort since the author’s proper intention is hidden behind the curtain of professionalism, optimism, declared sincerity, and a gesture of openness to another person. It is also important that in the stories of the reporter everything is logical and based on common sense, there are no conspiracy theories or aggressive attacks on opponents. Linguists analyzing the ways of expressing indirect communication in the texts of Sokolov-Mitrich see in him the features of a rational-heuristic personality,⁶⁰ which would explain the ability to make hypotheses that do not require proof, but at the same time are consistent and logical, because they are independently confirmed by the reader based on his or her knowledge.

The analysis of topics and issues, in relation to which the reporter uses strategies of secret persuasion, allows to reconstruct of the basis of the ideological message included in the text. The promoted worldview consists of aversion to the broadly understood West and to liberal ideology, belief in the superiority of “Russian civilization,” negative attitude to the idea of cultural autonomy of indigenous people, lack of criticism of the supreme authorities of Russia (with extensive criticism of the lower levels of state power), xenophobia, support for the ideological postulates of the Kremlin, distrust to representatives of the democratic opposition and independent civil movements. It is also significant that the author uses a cultural code that can only affect citizens of the countries created on the ruins of the USSR, and his books, unlike publications by Panyushkin, Yuzik, or Loyko are not translated into western languages.

It turns out, therefore, that the classical form of reportage, based on an extensive system of objectifying strategies and devoid of textual determinants of fiction,⁶¹ cannot guarantee objectivity, and even

⁵⁹ Scholars specializing in language of political propaganda argue that the inability to make a choice is one of the characteristics of propaganda messages, which seek to create a “common sender and receiver of the world and the language they use” (I. Borkowski, *Świt wolnego słowa* ...op. cit., p. 18). The essence of propaganda is also the “mechanism of nonalternative reception” (ibid., p. 19).

⁶⁰ Н. О. Верещагина, Э. В. Булатова, “Языковые средства непрямо́й коммуникации в медиатекстах...”, p. 20.

⁶¹ See J. Jeziorska-Haładyj, *Tekstowe wykładniki fikcji. Na przykładzie reportażu i powieści autobiograficznej*, IBL PAN, Warszawa 2013, pp. 139–206.

more so the veracity of the facts presented. It also confirms the thesis that belief in the truthfulness of the story told can only be the result of a “reference pact,” and not formal indicators.⁶² Sokolov-Mitrich’s works show that with the help of a reportage text one can not only try to influence the audience in an implicit way but also in a camouflaged way to promote views and ideas, which in the linear layer of the text can even be questioned or criticized. The report, which is by definition a witness account of events, and in this sense a reliable text, may turn out to be a “subtle” way of forming opinions and a tool for creating a picture of the world, which the state propaganda tries to impose on Russian citizens by aggressive means; with the help of psycho-manipulation, it seeks not so much to change the position of its citizens as to change their identity and control over their minds.⁶³

The article was written under a project financed by a grant received from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education under the Regional Initiative of Excellence program for the years 2019–2022 (project number 009/RID/2018/19).

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⁶² P. Zajas, *Jak świat prawdziwy stał się bajką. O literaturze niefikcjonalnej*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2011, p. 13.

⁶³ See: J. Warchala, *Formy perswazji...*, p. 15.

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