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## **A SLAP IN THE FACE OF SOCIALIST TASTE: THE NOVEL *NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH* BY YUZ ALESHKOVSKY AS A CONTESTATION OF THE RULES OF SOCIALIST REALISM**

POLICZEK GUSTOWI SOCJALISTYCZNEMU:  
POWIEŚĆ *UWAGA ORGAZM!* JUZA ALESZKOWSKIEGO  
JAKO KONTESTACJA REGUŁ SOCREALIZMU

Powieść *Uwaga orgazm!* Juza Aleszkowskiego — napisana w 1970 roku, a wydana po raz pierwszy w 1980, będąc protestem przeciw estetyce socrealizmu, łamie surowe tabu nałożone na tematykę związaną z seksualnością i stylistyczne rozwiązania wykluczające leksykę subnormatywną. Kompozycja powieści *Uwaga orgazm!* w wielu aspektach zbliżona jest do wzorca powieści produkcyjnej. Jednocześnie pisarz neguje wartości propagowane w sztuce socrealizmu: główny bohater to były złodziej kieszonkowiec, który urządził się jako dawca spermy w laboratorium i opowiada o swoich roboczych osiągnięciach językiem nasyconym wulgaryzmami i elementami żargonu kryminalnego. Fabuła utworu opiera się na zestawieniu komponentów charakterystycznych dla ideologizowanych tekstów literackich z elementami, które były w nich niedopuszczalne. Wprowadzenie do utworu tematu cielesności, seksualności człowieka wnosi znaczny dysonans i wywołuje efekt komiczny.

Słowa kluczowe: Juz Aleszkowski, *Uwaga orgazm!*, cielesność, seksualność, parodia

ПОЩЕЧИНА СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОМУ ВКУСУ:  
 ПОВЕСТЬ ЮЗА АЛЕШКОВСКОГО *НИКОЛАЙ НИКОЛАЕВИЧ*  
 КАК ПРОТЕСТ ПРОТИВ ЭСТЕТИКИ СОЦРЕАЛИЗМА

Повесть *Николай Николаевич* была написана Юзом Алешковским в 1970, а впервые была опубликована лишь в 1980 году. Она являлась протестом против эстетики соцреализма и нарушала строгий запрет на описание телесности и сексуальности, а также — на субстандартную лексику. Композиция повести *Николай Николаевич* во многих аспектах сходна с жанром производственного романа. Но вместе с тем писатель отрицает ценности, утверждавшиеся соцреализмом: главный герой — бывший вор-карманник, пристроившийся донором спермы, — повествует о своих трудовых достижениях языком общественных низов с элементами криминального жаргона. Сюжет произведения опирается на сопоставление компонентов, свойственных идеологизированным текстам с элементами, которые в них запрещались. Введение в повествование о труде темы телесности, сексуальности человека вызывает диссонанс и создает комический эффект.

Ключевые слова: Юз Алешковский, *Николай Николаевич*, телесность, сексуальность, пародия

Yuz Aleshkovsky wrote the novel *Nikolai Nikolaevich* in the 1970s. For a long time, the work was disseminated in samizdat and it appeared in print for the first time only in 1980 in the émigré publishing house “Ardis,” when its author was already in exile. Composed under the censorship conditions of socialist realism dominant in the arts, this work violates strict taboos imposed on subjects related to sexuality and stylistic solutions which exclude sub-normative vocabulary.

In Russia, the attitude to corporality and eroticism had been changing over the centuries, being influenced by folk customs on the one hand and the Russian Orthodox Church directives and recommendations on the other. For many decades, hardly anyone had dared to speak against Orthodox doctrines, including marriage, and it was only in the last decade of the nineteenth century that the problems of the body and sex began to be publicly discussed. The new aesthetics and philosophy were directed against both the Orthodox Church morality and the sanctimonious principles of nineteenth-century moralists. This new openness to carnal matters was quickly suppressed in the era of modernism. The October Revolution interrupted the regular process of the development of art and of its subject matter. The Bolshevik sexophobia meant that

creating any erotic art became impossible in Russia, and that every nude was considered to be pornography.<sup>1</sup>

The 46th volume of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia published in 1940 included the entry *Sex Life*, which emphasized the importance of not causing an “unhealthy interest” [in sex] and trying to “reasonably transfer the sex drive to one’s attentiveness to work and culture.” At the same time, it was reported that there was no “sex problem” in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> In two subsequent editions of the encyclopaedia, “the body” appeared in two entries: *Algebraic body* and *Geometric body*, and it was additionally mentioned in the entries *Corporal punishment* and *Bodily harm*.<sup>3</sup>

This “sex problem” (*половой вопрос*) — seemingly ignored and pushed into oblivion — was, nevertheless, permanently embedded in the Russian consciousness. As Nikolai Berdyaev wrote:

The problem of gender and love is central to our entire religious-philosophical and religious-social perception of the world. The main drawback of all social theories is prudery and the hypocritical ignoring of the source of life, the original cause of all human history: sexual love.<sup>4</sup>

Due to this approach to human sexuality, the old taboo on sex was reinstated in the Soviet Union. The censors did not allow the characters images dissemination whose sexual attributes were discernible. In particular, this pertained to representing men.

One can observe a great similarity in the manner of representing the male body in the arts of totalitarian states: the masculine body should be exclusively either heroic or athletic. These basic principles of the aesthetics of the representation of the male body were

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<sup>1</sup> И. Кон, *Мужское тело*, Слово, Москва 2003, p. 25–34.

<sup>2</sup> И. Кон, *Клубничка на березке: Сексуальная культура в России*, Время, Москва 2010, p. 100–126; А. Эткин, *Эрос невозможного. История психологического анализа в России*, Медуза, Санкт-Петербург 1993.

<sup>3</sup> “Как менялось отношение к сексу в России за последние 100 лет,” *Афиша* — *Daily*, 31.08.2017, [www.daily.afisha.ru/pokolenie/6593-kak-menyalos-otnoshenie-k-seksu-v-rossii-za-poslednie-100-let/](http://www.daily.afisha.ru/pokolenie/6593-kak-menyalos-otnoshenie-k-seksu-v-rossii-za-poslednie-100-let/) (14.05.2019).

<sup>4</sup> Н. Бердяев, *Метафизика пола и любви*, БММ, Москва 2014, p. 9.

implemented both in fascist Germany and Italy as well as in the Soviet Union. However, Bolshevik sexophobia, and especially sexless sexism, rejected any manifestations of phallocentrism, which was evolving towards the unisex. Soviet gender equality, aimed at lead women to the male standard, led to the elimination of sexual characteristics within the bodily canon. Particularly rigid censorship was applied to the image of male genitalia, which was not only forbidden but whose existence was not even allowed to be hinted at. This ban included even the best Soviet artists. The male body, especially the genitals, was presented bountifully in unofficial art, with eroticism most often associated with political satire.<sup>5</sup> This situation led to the “detachment of the man from the body,” as Viktor Yerofeyev wrote.<sup>6</sup>

Another taboo in Soviet literature was stylistic restrictions. A particularly severe ban was imposed on vulgar vocabulary, the so-called *mat*. As Dimitri Karalis wrote, “People, the same way as before, cursed in building entrances and at beer shops, but the area of literature was free from any profanity.”<sup>7</sup> According to Gasan Guseinov, the reasons for the widespread use of a sub-normative lexis lay in the feeling that high language was in danger,<sup>8</sup> which occurred in the Soviet era, when the official language was dominated by communist ideology.

These bans collapsed as late as the 1990s, when literature was flooded by a wave of profanity and the subject of sex in its various forms and aspects. The result of liberating vulgar vocabulary from taboos was also the extension of the linguistic norm and, consequently, a surge in interest in this recently banned linguistic material among the scientific community.<sup>9</sup> In 1997, few people were ap-

<sup>5</sup> И. Кон, *Мужское тело*, p. 142–143.

<sup>6</sup> В. Ерофеев, *Мужчины. Тираны и подкаблучники*, Подкова, Москва 1997, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Д. Каралис, “Немного мата в холодной воде, или ‘осторожно: ненормативная лексика’!,” *Литературная газета* 2002, no. 30, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Г. Гусейнов, “Точка зрения. Роль мата в русской культуре,” *ПостНаука*, 7.05.2014, [www.postnauka.ru/talks/25905](http://www.postnauka.ru/talks/25905) (10.05.2019).

<sup>9</sup> В. Мокиенко, Т. Никитина, *Словарь русской брани*, Норинт, Санкт-

palled when Viktor Yerofeyev wrote in his novel, *Men*: “Я никогда не назову мужские гениталии постыдным словом член. Хуй есть Хуй, и я буду писать это слово с заглавной буквы, как в слове Родина. Я вычеркиваю его из словаря нецензурных слов.”<sup>10</sup>

The novel *Nikolai Nikolaevich* had been composed almost 30 years earlier and its subject of human sexuality as well as its style, abounding in obscene vocabulary, excluded it from official circulation. In an interview Aleshkovsky stated:

All my books are about contemporary life in the Soviet Union. [...] This is how the Soviet reality seems to me fantastically absurd — that is, it does not fit any standard measurements, it does not correspond to any divine or human ideas; therefore, the method of reflecting this reality can only be fantastic. If I were a reviewer of Aleshkovsky, I would write that his favorite genre is a phantasmagoria, in which the discovery of reality is even more distinct than in the critical description of being.<sup>11</sup>

Andrei Bitov wrote the following words about Aleshkovsky’s novel:

The novel was not intended for publication, but initially not only because it could not be published. It was written, so to speak, not for this purpose. It was composed with delight and satisfaction, that is — for oneself, for one’s better mood and in a sense — for gaining self-confidence, that is to say, for two or three friends at most, to whom this work was dedicated. Therefore, even if this year the “Novy Mir” had not been closed, and our “glasnost” had been announced, the novel still, or even more so, was not intended for publication. This is because it was written not so much against the government, as against publication.<sup>12</sup>

Bitov noted in his essay that Aleshkovsky’s novel is in a sense “a great production novel, a dream of social realism.”<sup>13</sup> The analysis of the piece allows one to conclude that *Nikolai Nikolaevich* resem-

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Петербург 2003, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> В. Ерофеев, *Мужчины. Тираны и подкаблучники*, p. 149–150.

<sup>11</sup> Д. Глэд, *Беседы в изгнании: Русское литературное зарубежье*, Книжная палата, Москва 1991, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> А. Битов, *Новый Гулливер*, Эрмитаж, Нью-Йорк 1997, p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

bles in many aspects the model of a production novel.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, this similarity also reveals the negation of this tradition; that is, explicit opposition to the tradition of the production novel, a denunciation of its elements and composition principles by means of a “semiotic gesture.”<sup>15</sup>

In many aspects, the composition of the novel resembles the pattern of the production novel: the plot presents the story of the protagonist’s career; certain parts of the story correspond to the traditional scheme of the production novel; the portrayal of the main character is subordinated to the notion of his work; a love theme is woven into the plot; and the plot is depicted against the background of the country’s history. At the same time, all these elements of the composition negate the values propagated in the art of socialist realism: the main character is a former pickpocket, who built a comfortable life for himself as a sperm donor in a laboratory and talks about his professional achievements in a language saturated with profanity and elements of criminal jargon.

Naum Leiderman and Mark Lipovetsky subsume Aleshkovsky’s work within the grotesque trend in Russian literature of the 1970s and define his works as a carnivalised grotesque which, in their opinion, privileges a picture of the life of simple people with all manner of grotesque manifestations of the social system, which, by ridiculing and discrediting them, offers rebirth and purification. At the same time, the lowest natural properties of man and life acquire a higher meaning.<sup>16</sup>

The first novel by Aleshkovsky is a parody of the genre of the production novel, which reigned in Soviet literature in the period

<sup>14</sup> E. Tyszkowska-Kasprzak, “Пародия на жанр как отрицание традиции. ‘Николай Николаевич’ Юза Аleshkovского как пародия на производственную повесть,” in: I. Ratiiani (ed.), *Tradition and Contemporary Literature*, vol. 1, Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature, Tbilisi 2015, p. 202–214.

<sup>15</sup> S. Balbus, “Intertekstualność a tradycja literacka,” in: H. Markiewicz (ed.), *Problemy teorii literatury*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1998, p. 417.

<sup>16</sup> Н. Leiderман, М. Липовецкий, *Современная русская литература: 1950–1990-е годы*, vol. 2, Академия, Москва 2003, p. 138.

1929–1941. Parody as a kind of literary genre is a comical imitation of a given literary depiction (work, style, genre) which, thanks to the deliberate intensification of its formal and stylistic features and a substitution of themes, has a playful, polemical or satirical effect.<sup>17</sup> Parodying literary texts is a testimony to one's attitude to the original text, a form of polyphony, dialogicality of literature, a way of manifesting the folk culture of laughter,<sup>18</sup> hypertextuality as a category of a parodic relationship of a text with desecrated texts,<sup>19</sup> a rejection of all "holiness,"<sup>20</sup> and a ritual game.<sup>21</sup>

In this carnivalized handling of the original text, officially recognized as high culture, the author adopts the form of a trickster. Trickery is a conscious artistic technique that has its roots in the ancient theory of hypocrisies — an imitation of the language and the actions of others. The trickster is a phenomenon that recurs in the culture of different eras, but takes on a special significance in the Soviet society, representing the "closed" model, which is based on repressions and at the same time "organized" mass enthusiasm. The clownish behaviour of a trickster, his coarse language and paradoxical laughter, violating established norms and values, determine his attitude as an expression of rebellion against both history and the present. The attribute of the carnival is the mask, the multiplication of one's own "I." Thus, the use of the mask effect by authors attains a double meaning: the mask conceals, but also liberates; it covers and reveals at the same time. It may be a synonym of falsehood, games, hypocrisy, a loss of individuality, or of an alternative "I," which allows one to view the situation

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<sup>17</sup> R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat: Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze*, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa 1993, p. 201.

<sup>18</sup> М. Бахтин, *Проблемы творчества Достоевского*, Художественная литература, Москва 1972, p. 175.

<sup>19</sup> G. Genette, "Palimpsesty," transl. A. Milecki, in: H. Markiewicz (ed.), *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą*, vol. 4, part 2, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1992, p. 322–323.

<sup>20</sup> О. Фрейдберг, "Происхождение пародии," *Труды по знаковым системам* 1973, no. 6, p. 490–497.

<sup>21</sup> Ё. Хейзинга, *Ното Ludens: Человек играющий*, Айрис пресс, Москва 2003, p. 256–250.

from a double perspective and to build a self-ironic distance to the world in a state of decay. The mask draws attention to the relativity of all values, the degradation of ethical and aesthetic norms, it points to the meaning lying beyond it, so it can be interpreted as a means of seeking authenticity.<sup>22</sup>

Mikhail Bakhtin, analysing the issue of carnivalization and trickery in the 1930s, noted that these phenomena were a counterbalance to the Soviet culture of those years. In the debate about modernist literature, which was disparaged in particular by the socialist realist critics, it was in trickery that he found a form of discourse which could be accepted as popular, mass discourse: namely, not raising any suspicions of ideological hostility. At the same time, he stated that in the poetry of François Rabelais, the trickster's discourse was a tool for the destruction of the old model of the world associated with the medieval worldview and for replacing it with the new, anthropocentric model. This purpose was supposed to be achieved by an introduction of images related to the nature of man, and his corporeality: anatomy and physiology.<sup>23</sup> Aleshkovsky employs a similar strategy in his novel: a socialist ideology, which is detached from life and man, is contrasted with the hero's physicality, and sexuality, which is a natural source of pleasure.

The novel *Nikolai Nikolaevich*, being a parody of the production novel, comically imitates the original text, by transforming the elements of the composition in order to re-evaluate them and deride them. The writer uses elements consistent with the ideologized socialist realist literature and, at the same time, denies their truthfulness, which indicates the author's ironic intention. We are dealing here not only with rhetorical irony: irony is the principle of organization in the whole text.

In order to become aware of the ironic nature of the novel, it is worth following the guidelines of the Swiss literary expert Beda Allemann: "At the beginning of novels and stories with an ironic struc-

<sup>22</sup> М. Липовецкий, "Трикстер и 'закрытое' общество," *Новое литературное обозрение* 2009, no. 6 (100), p. 224–245.

<sup>23</sup> М. Бахтин, *Вопросы литературы и эстетики*, Художественная литература, Москва 1975, p. 307.



ture, the basic ironic tone is introduced from the first page. [...] The irony of such texts is easy to recognize from the first sentence.”<sup>24</sup> In the first sentences of the novel *Nikolai Nikolaevich*, the author presents the main character-narrator using his own speech and, simultaneously, prepares the reader for the playful form of the narrative: “Вот послушай. Я уж знаю — скучно не будет. А заскучаешь, значит, полный ты мудила и ни хуя не петришь в биологии молекулярной, а заодно и в истории моей жизни.”<sup>25</sup>

The ironic negation of the elements of the portrayed world concerns not only the Soviet reality, but is a protest against the poetics of socialist realism, which “became an instrument of the embodiment of a utopia, and its basic function was to supplant the images of reality with utopian ideas about reality.”<sup>26</sup> The narrator of *Nikolai Nikolaevich* explicitly expresses his opinion on works of social realism:

Все они, повторяю, на одно лицо, и стоит, ты уж поверь мне, одолеть страниц двадцать, как чувствуешь, что из тебя клещами душу вытягивают, опустошают тебя, то неумением интересно придумывать, то такой парашей, что глаза на лоб лезут. А главное, все они стараются так прилгать, чтобы казалось нам самим и в ЦК: ох, и приличная жизнь в советской нашей стране. Ох, и работают на совесть рабочие и крестьяне. Еще смена не кончилась, а они уже вздыхают: скорей бы утро — снова на работу! Парашники гнусные. Меня-то не проведешь за нос: я уже повидал житуху на всех концах СССР.<sup>27</sup>

Aleshkovsky rises against schemes and clichés that dominate socialist realist literature. The plot of the work is based on an amalgamation of components characteristic of ideologized literary texts with elements that were unacceptable in such texts. The introduc-

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<sup>24</sup> B. Allemann, “O ironii jako o kategorii literackiej,” transl. M. Dрамиńska-Joczowa, in: M. Głowiński (ed.), *Ironia*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2002, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ю. Алешковский, “Николай Николаевич,” in: idem, *Собрание сочинений в трех томах*, vol. 1. Рипол классик, Москва 2001, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> М. Берг, *Литературократия: Проблема присвоения и перераспределения власти в литературе*, Новое литературное обозрение, Москва 2000, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Ю. Алешковский, “Николай Николаевич,” p. 46.

tion into the novel of the theme of corporality, and human sexuality, which was a taboo topic in socialist realist literature, introduces a major dissonance and induces produces a comic effect:

Шутки шутками, я прислушался, и оказалось, что план у Кизмы таков: я дrouch и трухаю, что одно и то же, а малофейку эту под микроскопом изучают. Потом пробуют ввести ее в пизду бесплодной бабе и смотрят, пропадет она или нет. Тут я его перебил насчет алиментов, в случае чего. Заделаешь штукам пяти, а потом шевели рогами в получку. [...] И, веришь, встал мой сопливый от этих разговоров. Хоть сейчас начинай. А это мне не впервой. В лагере каждый сотый не трухает, а остальные дrouch как сто.<sup>28</sup>

From 1932 to 1934, after the theory of socialist realism had already been formed, erotic scenes were forbidden. Katerina Clark, in a monograph on the Soviet socialist realist novel, notes:

The Soviet novel was to be a sort of eclectic summa of all great literature (this is clear from the examples cited as models in official speeches of this period). The only kinds of writing to be specifically excluded were so-called formalist writing (e.g., parody, experimentalism, and varieties born of literary self-consciousness), decadent or erotic writing, 'pessimistic' literature, and writing coloured by the values of rival word systems, such as Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

As Jakub Sadowski writes, "It is difficult to imagine a greater enemy of totalitarianism than intimacy: the most personal sphere of life, most closely guarded, and, therefore, one most difficult to control by anyone."<sup>30</sup> The "New Man" in the Soviet system differed from the old one in that every realm of life was now supposed to be harmonized with the life of the collective and the state; hence, in the new system there was no place for the category of intimacy. The sex drive, as the factor that determined human behaviour to the greatest extent, was sought to be channelled in the way that would best serve the general public.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2000, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> J. Sadowski, *Rewolucja i kontrrewolucja obyczajów*, Ibidem, Łódź 2005, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 12.

Aleshkovsky combines the elements of the official and intimate spheres: he introduces scenes depicting physical intimacy — masturbation, and a sexual act — into the history of collective work. The main character/narrator gives a full and detailed account of the process of obtaining sperm for research, he talks about the ways of stimulating oneself, reaching an orgasm, and the temporary problems and feelings that accompany this process. The novel contrasts the ideologized values of socialism — work for the good of society — and the individual pleasures that result from human sexuality. The narrator, a simple man, who is uncontaminated by ideology, does not comprehend how one can separate sexuality from masturbation, which he practices in order to obtain sperm:

Вы отнеситесь к мастурбации, как к своей работе, исключите начисто сексуальный момент, как таковой. К примеру, мог бы дядя Вася работать в морге, если бы он рыдал при виде каждого трупа? Логикой она меня убедила, хотя я подумал, что как же это, если исключить сексуальный момент. Ведь тогда и стоять не будет.<sup>32</sup>

The breakthrough moment in the development of the plot is the scene in which an employee of the lab, Vlada Yurevna, assists Nikolai in reaching an orgasm, and thus in obtaining material for research:

[...] и тут вдруг одна младшая научная сотрудница Влада Юрьевна велит Кимзе и академику:

— Коллеги, пожалуйста, не беспокойте реципиента. — То есть меня. Закрывает дверь. — Отвернитесь, — говорит, — пожалуйста. И выключает свет дневной. И своей, кирюха, собственной рученькой берет меня вполне откровенно за грубый, хамский, упрямую сволочь, за член. И все во мне напряглось и словно кто в мой позвоночник спинной алмазные гвоздики забивает серебряными молоточками и окунает меня с ног до головы в ванну с пивом бочковым, и по пене красные раки ползают и черные сушарики плавают. Вот, блядь, какое удовольствие!<sup>33</sup>

This friendly help in the performance of official duties became the beginning of the characters' intimate relationship. The main

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<sup>32</sup> Ю. Алешковский, “Николай Николаевич,” p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

goal of socialist realist works was to have an effective impact on the recipient, and this was often achieved by means of devices derived from “non-ideological” popular literature, for example from love stories. In the texts of socialist realism, these stories are deprived of the characters’ motivation and independence which is typical of popular literature, and they are subordinated to the idea of shaping the awareness of readers.<sup>34</sup>

Socialist realism subordinates the theme of love to its ideological goals in two ways:

— first, it uses the genre of the romance as a specific proving ground of customs, “smuggling” moral postulates from the area of the so-called socialist morality by means of romantic motifs and

— secondly, it interweaves and entangles love motifs with the motifs of ideological shaping of characters, by making love either a teleological motivation of the characters’ deeds, or a “reward” for desirable (postulated) actions or attitudes.<sup>35</sup>

In Aleshkovsky’s novel, the love theme fulfils this second function, because love becomes a prize for Nikolai Nikolaevich for his “ideological maturity.” At the same time, the emotional bond between the characters is built on the foundation of eroticism and not ideological compatibility. The writer, contrary to the rules governing the texts of socialist realism, renders corporality, natural instincts, and open eroticism the basis for the relationship between the characters. These values are fully autonomous; they stem from the nature of man, and are devoid of ideological overtones. Aleshkovsky also recognizes such qualities as mutual respect, faithfulness, honesty, but satisfaction with sex holds an important place in this hierarchy.

Experiencing pleasure from intercourse thus becomes a reward for Vlada Yurevna for her commitment and the right attitude towards her professional work. Previously sexually frigid, she has her first orgasm with Nikolai Nikolaevich:

<sup>34</sup> P. Fast, *Realizm socjalistyczny w literaturze rosyjskiej*, Universitas, Kraków 2003, p. 213–214.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216.

Так вот, додул я, что пилить Владу Юрьевну надо ювелирно. А она и в натуре, как рыба, дышит ровно, без удовольствия.

— Вот видите, — говорит, — Николай, вот видите?

И я чуть не плачу над спящей царевной, но резак мой не падает. Век буду его за это уважать и по возможности делать приятное. Отчаялся уж совсем в сардельку, блядь, и вдруг что слышу?

— О, Николай! Этого не может быть! Не может... Не может!

И все громче и громче, и дышит, как паровоз “ФД” на подъеме, и не молкает ни на минуточку.

— Коля, родной! Не может этого быть! Ты слышишь, не может!

А я из последних сил рубаю, как в кино “Коммунист.”<sup>36</sup>

Aleshkovsky reverses meanings and values here: he integrates communist ideology with a sexual act, production work with the act of copulation. The juxtaposition of these ideologically separate elements evokes a comic effect, and constitutes a factor of carnivalization in the text of the novel. One of the main ideas of Aleshkovsky's prose is the apotheosis of the true nature of man, not subordinated to the conditions of the outside world with its overwhelming ideology. Acceptance of sexuality and human biology is a characteristic of simple people. In the dialogue between the narrator and his listener — a friend from prison — the writer emphasizes this accurate, primary understanding of the biological needs of man:

— Еб твою мать! — по лбу себя стучаю. — Я придерживать буду при спуске. А потом с понтом вторую палку сверх плана выдам.

— Не советую, — серьезно так говорит урка, — нельзя прерывать половое сношение хоть бы с Дунькой Кулаковой. Вредно. Я одну бабу из-за этого разогнал. Только и вопила: “Кончай куда-нибудь в другое место!” — “Может, в среднее ухо?” — спрашиваю. “Все равно куда, лишь бы не в мутер!” — у меня на этой почве на ногах ногти почти перестали расти. Верить? Пришлось разогнать ее. Так что уж кончай по-человечески!<sup>37</sup>

In Aleshkovsky's novels, representations of sexual acts are also employed to denote other spheres of human activity, most often associated with political and social spheres. Such metaphors were very popular in the mass culture of the 1960s through the 1980s. At

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<sup>36</sup> Ю. Алешковский, “Николай Николаевич,” р. 33–34.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, р. 9.

the end of the novel, masturbation becomes a metaphor of fruitless activities in almost all realms of life. An academic explains to the main character:

— Понимаю тебя, Коля, понимаю. У меня пострашней на душе мука, чем твоя, хотя грех такие муки соизмерять. Ты вот просто драчишь, пользуясь твоим выражением. А мы все чем занимаемся? [...] Вот именно, — говорит, — суходрочкой! Су-хо-дроч-кой! Полной, более того, суходрочкой! Вся советская, Коля, и мировая наука — сплошная суходрочка на девяносто процентов! А марксизм-ленинизм? Это же очевидный онанизм. Твоя хоть безобидна, Коля, суходрочка, а сколько крови пролито марксизмом-ленинизмом в одной только его лаборатории, в России? Море!<sup>38</sup>

As Michel Foucault argues, sexuality and love discourse remain in close connection to the system of social relations.<sup>39</sup> In a socialist society, orientated towards the actions and good of the collective, propagating intimacy — including eroticism — as undeniably individualistic concepts was undesirable. Thus, matters related to sexuality, eroticism and procreation were shrouded in silence:

Everything that protrudes or comes out of the body, all major protuberances, swells and branches — all through which the body goes beyond its limits and produces another body — is cut off, annihilated, covered, and softened. In the same way, all openings leading deep into the body are covered [...] The language norms of the official and literary style, defined by this canon, banned everything that was related to conception, pregnancy, childbirth etc.<sup>40</sup>

The narrative in Aleshkovsky's novel is written in the first person, which allows for a double perspective and some distance from the events presented. The writer copiously infuses the narrative/speech of the main character with vulgar vocabulary (the so-called *mat*), which the protagonist himself perceives as neutral, and with elements of criminal jargon). Unofficial language, including profanity and jargon, was taboo in literary works within the socialist real-

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2012.

<sup>40</sup> М. Бахтин, *Творчество Франсуа Рабле и народная культура средневековья и Ренессанса*, Художественная литература, Москва 1990, p. 89.

ist trend; the characters, regardless of their social status, expressed themselves in correct and complex literary language.

In Aleshkovsky's work, it is precisely the style that most distinctively defies socialist realist rhetoric. In the language of the narrator, communist slogans and Newspeak clichés collide with sub-normative vernacular and prison jargon. This style seems raw and uncontrived, just as seeing the world through the eyes of the main character is fresh and naïve. The writer explained his abundant use of profane, obscene vocabulary by the spread of such speech in common language. Addressing the first wave of Russian emigrants, he justified the use of profanity in his works in the following words:

Или вы полагаете в своей безмятежно демократической Америке, что если лагерная жизнь миллионов людей стала частью общей страдальческой жизни России, то ее язык должен был остаться прежним: мастеровой — мастеровым, крестьянский — крестьянским, пижонский — пижонским, гешефтерский — гешефтерским, а целомудренно-девичий — целомудренно-девичьим и так далее? Вы ошибаетесь. Язык лагерей и тюрем, в которых соседствовали судьбы святых и убийц, гениев и растлителей малолетних существ, рабочих и грязных мошенников, крестьян и скотоложцев, балерин и форменных каннибалов, священнослужителей и хулиганов, философов и карманников, язык невинных душ и неимоверных злодеев не мог не смешаться, не мог делать вид, что судьба людей не имеет к его судьбе никакого отношения. Но и приняв в себя то, без чего он вполне сумел бы обойтись, то, что даже безобразно выражало мытарства страны и народа, он не вымер, не утратил своей сущности, считая для себя более приемлемым и безобидным явлением живой воровской жаргон и самый грязный мат, чем мертвую фразеологию партийных придурков и прочих гнусных трекал. И сколько бы десятилетий подряд они ему ее не навязывали, как бы ни втесывали в самую душу с помощью всех средств своей взмыленной пропаганды, мой родной русский язык отторгает от себя ложь партийного мертвосолювья...<sup>41</sup>

The functions of inappropriate lexis were quite diverse in Russian culture: from using it as “punctuation marks” to supplementing the words of a literary language. *Mat* can also take on different meanings: it can be aggressive and vulgar, as well as delicate and intimate; it can be vague and cryptic, and it can also be completely transpar-

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<sup>41</sup> Ю. Алешковский, “Карусель,” in: idem, *Собрание сочинений в 5 томах*, vol. 4, АСТ—Астрель, Москва 2008, p. 156.

ent; it can express the vocabulary of the lowest social classes, and also act as jargon of intelligentsia; it can be profane or, the reverse, sacred, because it signifies concepts related to the sphere of corporality and intimacy.<sup>42</sup>

However, it would be inaccurate to assume that only the lowest social stratum uses *mat*. The use of profanity is polarized in Russian society: drunkards and addicts, as well as sophisticated intellectuals, use it in their speech. In Russia, the only person who is suspicious of *mat* is a man with a bourgeois mentality, who does not consider it to be something that enriches the language, but something indecent. The bourgeois worldview also erroneously equates the speech of man with his moral actions.<sup>43</sup>

The use of obscenities in Aleshkovsky's work leads to the carnivalization of the world he represents. Profane words were connected with primeval magical rituals, but, nowadays, these roots have been largely lost, and the nature of their use has significantly changed.<sup>44</sup> Also, Mikhail Bakhtin notes the altered essence of vulgar language in carnivalized communication. He writes that in the conditions of the carnival, the meaning of profane expressions changed considerably, because they lost their magical and practical nature, and attained independence, universality and depth. In such a transformed version, obscenities contributed to the creation of an informal, carnival atmosphere and the second, laughing aspect of the world.<sup>45</sup>

When the copies of *Nikolai Nikolaevich* began circulating in underground editions, where *mat* spilled from every page, all readers understood that the "honest" swearword was fighting in the novel

<sup>42</sup> П. Руднев, "Точка зрения. Роль мата в русской культуре," *ПостНаука*, 7.05.2014, [www.postnauka.ru/talks/25905/](http://www.postnauka.ru/talks/25905/) (12.05.2019).

<sup>43</sup> В. Руднев, "И это все о нем: 'Хуй': Феноменология, антропология, метафизика, прагмасемантика," in: А. Плущер-Сарно (ed.), *Большой словарь мата*, vol. 1, Лимбус Пресс, Санкт-Петербург–Москва 2005, p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Л. Панкова, "Карнавальная функция мата в художественных произведениях," *ДОКСА. Збірник наукових праць з філософії та філології* 2004, no. 5, p. 349.

<sup>45</sup> М. Бахтин, *Творчество Франсуа Рабле*, p. 23.



against a torrent of the official Soviet false speech.<sup>46</sup> Andrey Bitov said that the use of Soviet phraseology in the novel is more revolting than profanity and prison jargon.<sup>47</sup> According to Josif Brodsky, the main character of the book is the language, which is the voice of the consciousness of the nation and the individual.<sup>48</sup> It is the language in the novel that is the sturdiest form of opposition to socialist realist rhetoric. The artificial, naïve utopian socialist realist literature, based on journalistic schemas, distorted the literary style. Socialist realism was not only an aesthetic doctrine of totalitarian culture, but, above all, the space where power and language collided.<sup>49</sup> Aleshkovsky defied such treatment of literature, and his *Nikolai Nikolaevich* is a testimony to his protest.

It should be noted that vulgarity, which occurs frequently in the speech of the narrator in Aleshkovsky's novel, is something completely natural. The writer emphasized that as a realist he is trying to convey the way people actually speak. The main character of the novel cannot be accused of flaunting obscene lexis in his manner of speaking: it is not coarse, but natural and real. When talking about his work in the laboratory, he often uses different terms for penis: most often it is the term "dick" (*xyū*), but he also chooses other words which are listed in the dictionaries as profane. This way of expression is honest, unforced, and organic to him. When he uses the word "member" in a story, he apologizes to the reader for using an improper phrase. This way, the writer draws attention to the scope of vocabulary related to genital organs: in the literary language there are few such phrases and they are synonymous with scientific terms, and in the unof-

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<sup>46</sup> М. Чудакова, "Мат в литературе: pro et contra," *Literratura* 2018, no. 114, [www.literratura.org/non-fiction/428-mat-v-literature-pro-et-contra.html](http://www.literratura.org/non-fiction/428-mat-v-literature-pro-et-contra.html) (12.05.2019).

<sup>47</sup> А. Битов, *Новый Гулливер*.

<sup>48</sup> И. Бродский, "Он вышел из тюремного ватника," in: Ю. Алешковский, *Антология сатиры и юмора России XX века*, vol. 8, Эксмо, Москва 2004, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Е. Добренко, "Амфир во время чумы, или Лавка вневременности (метафизические предпосылки соцреализма)," *Общественные науки и современность* 1992, no. 1, p. 165.

ficial language this lexis is represented abundantly, but regarded as indecent or even vulgar.

The lexical system for marking parts of the human body is one of the oldest in every language. The development of civilization led to the development of social norms, which should be treated as historical categories. What is determined within the scope of these norms is the relationship of society to the human body, to uncovering its individual parts and to the linguistic labelling of these parts. Social norms allow exposing only part of the body, the so-called “top” of the body, while the “bottom” is hedged by taboos. This prohibition ensures that the “bottom” of the body is available only to its owner and should be hidden from the community. The taboo on exposing intimate parts of the body is also transferred into language: social norms do not allow public naming of these parts of the body and activities related to them.<sup>50</sup>

Aleshkovsky himself described his attitude to obscenities as follows:

I think that the so-called uncouth words were initially not abusive, but sacral, ritual. After all, our bodies —the genitals of men and women — create the lives of future generations. And the great-great-proto-ancestor could not help but feel admiration and fear toward his procreative activity. According to the importance of their performed functions, sexual organs are number one. I even think that their activity is more vital than brain activity.<sup>51</sup>

The writer’s opinion turns out to be true: the vocabulary denoting the genitals in pagan times was sacred, and with the transition to Christianity the systems of signs and symbols changed, as the words related to the “bottom” of the body and the reproductive process were considered indecent or a taboo was imposed on them. Vasily Rozanov wrote about it with a large dose of sarcasm:

[...] for Christians, everything is “indecent,” and as “obscenity” escalates, it shifts “into sin,” into “wickedness,” into “villainy”: that’s why of its own accord

<sup>50</sup> А. Дуличенко, “Язык и тело,” in: А. Плущер-Сарно (ed.), *Большой словарь мата*, vol. 1, Лимбус Пресс, Санкт-Петербург–Москва 2005, p. 35–36.

<sup>51</sup> Ю. Алешковский, “Виртуозы-матершинники.” Русские писатели о русском мате.” 2016, <https://moiarussia.ru/virtuozy-matershinniki-russkie-pisateli-o-russkom-mate/> (13.05.2019).

and without comments, hints and evidence, the sphere of sexual life and sexual organs — this part of global shyness, global hiding — descended into the “fiery pit” of Satanism, the demon of evil, taking as a base “terrible, unbearable wickedness,” “world odour.”<sup>52</sup>

Aleshkovsky, by introducing a first-person narrator and stylising the narrative as oral storytelling — the speech of a simple man (called *skaz* in Russian literature) — conveys vernacular truths about life and the world, a folk vision of man. Such a strategy can be compared to carnivalization in literature. Bakhtin wrote about the carnival as “the world upside down,” in which people free from social norms, prohibitions, barriers and hierarchy demonstrate free, pure, distanceless relationships between a man and the world. The deep sense of the carnival lies in the playful (“laughing”) rejection by the people of all sanctioned official truths, and the whole authorized, fixed world order.<sup>53</sup>

In the novel *Nikolai Nikolaevich*, the carnival laughter is ambivalent: it includes two poles of phenomena, the “top” is switched with “the bottom” and it abolishes hierarchical ideas about the world. Paintings associated with corporeality can be traced back to the folk culture of laughter, uninhibited by social, religious, or ideological precepts. Laughter has the power of purification here; it releases one from canons, dogmas and imperatives, it restores one to nature. Thanks to this, the novel moves beyond the aesthetic concepts of its time, and although it reaches back to original instincts and ways of perceiving the world, it points towards the future.

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<sup>52</sup> В. Розанов, *Уединенное*, Русский путь, Москва 2002, р. 92.

<sup>53</sup> М. Бахтин, *Творчество Франсуа Рабле*, р. 255–263.

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