

Maria Yuryevna Smirnova  
Ph.D. Student at  
the department of Russian Literature  
St. Tikhon's Orthodox University of the Humanities  
(Moscow, Russia)  
m.smirnova89@mail.ru

## **Originality of the interpretation of I. Shmelev "The Sun of the Dead" in Russian and English-speaking critiques**

At present, there is an increasing interest towards the works of I. Shmelev in critical Russian and Western literature. Different articles and scientific dissertations are being written about his works in China, France, Poland, the Czech Republic and other countries. Articles about Russia in English mention him as one of the most Russian realist writers of the 20th century. A comparative analysis of Russian and English works devoted to the epic "The Sun of the Dead" by I. Shmelev gives an idea of the different approach in the interpretation and reception of this work.

Even though the Western critics recognized that I. Shmelev had achieved a continental glory in 1920-1930, they were not familiar very well with his innovations and works in those years. Therefore, they considered the epic "The Sun of the Dead" as a truthful and documentary story about the political situation and the problems that Russia faced in the first years of Bolshevism: "The Sun of the Dead ... was written ... for the purpose of presenting the civilized world with a truthful, first-hand picture of what was done in the Crimea during and after the Russian Revolution" (1, v). Thanks to this work, according to Rudyard Kipling, readers began "through it to comprehend in some small measure the deeps through which Russia is passing" (2, 42).

I. Shmelev and all those who helped him with the promotion and translation of his work in the West looked at the "Sun of the Dead" as a weapon against Bolshevism. They all believed that the translation of the work was needed because the Soviet authorities destroyed and monopolized Russian literature. Translation of

“The Sun of the Dead” and his other works was another way to help Russia regain its artistic, cultural, spiritual and material values. In a letter dated back to January 25, 1927 written to A.V. Tyrkova, a figure of the Russian pre-revolutionary liberal opposition, who emigrated after the revolution to England where she helped I.Shmelev in promoting the publication of the epic, I.Shmelev wrote: “I thank you ... for the promise to help with my book in England, to do even something to clarify the abominations and horror of Bolshevism. For that purpose I wrote it, as if appealing to God and honest people” (3). For Robert Kipling, the work was “out of space and time” and the voice of the author of the epic sounded like a warning about possible disasters that can be felt both in Britain and other countries: “there are possibilities that one day it can become a terrible reality in some countries” (4). During 1920-1930s for many English-speaking readers the works of I.Shmelev also served as a reason to reflect upon the outcomes that Bolshevism can cause and threaten in America and Britain, whether these countries will be able to accept the philosophy and politics of this regime. Thus, Charles Hogarth, the English translators of I.Shmelev theorized in his preface to “The Sun of the Dead” that the ideas of communism did not hold in the British Empire because they did not experience popular ignorance, political disagreements and social apathy of the masses as Russia did leading to the events of 1917 (1, vii). Making conclusions about the significance of the Russian revolution, C.Hogarth summed up several letters of I.Shmelev, saying the Russian people did not acquire, but, on the contrary, did lose much, were humiliated and insulted, deprived of the right to speak (1, ix). In other English-language works, critics reflected on how much I.Shmelev adhered to the political ideas of the revolution and how those ideas changed. In addition, they talked in detail about the leaders of the revolution in Crimea (Bela Kun, Rosalia Samoylovna Zemlyachka, G.L.Pyatakov) and their inhuman orders. In Russian critical literature, the historical, political, ideological questions raised in the works of I.Shmelev are ignored, because for Russia the events described by I.Shmelev are part of a recent history, which is interpreted

differently every ten years. Therefore, Russian critics pay more attention to the poetics of the work.

In both Russian and English criticism, I.Shmelev's skill and imagery of "The Sun of the Dead" was compared to other works of world literature. Since outcomes of the revolutions in the UK or in the United States in terms of their losses and scale do not compare with the events experienced in Russia, English-speaking critics rely on the works describing the French Revolution. According to the New York Times Literary Supplement columnist, the uncomplicated prose of "The Sun of the Dead" is much stronger, brighter, richer in color than the historical literary work about the French revolution of Thomas Carlyle. The expression of fright, suffering is much stronger in I.Shmelev's work than the all-together eloquence and virtuosity of the French historian (5). The New York Times columnist explains that, unlike T. Carlisle, I.Shmelev himself was a participant of the described events: "was not sitting securely after the event, troubled by nothing worse than dyspepsia"; "he lived through the days of ravishment and the nights of blood" (5) in Crimea, and his life was really under threat. In Russian criticism, the epic is only compared to the works of literature. In Russian foreign criticism of 1920-1930s, "The Sun of the Dead" was compared and put above the epic novel of General P.N Krasnov (6, 24) "From the Two-headed Eagle to the Red Banner", which was immensely popular among emigrants in the 1920s (the novel tells about the era of Nicholas II and the first years of the revolution). According to A.Amfiteatrov, I.Shmelev addresses more to the "feelings", writes about men getting wild, surrender of his intellectual and volitional abilities to the instinct of self-preservation. Therefore, the author surpasses Edgar Poe in his veracity, in the bitterness of bold sarcasm he connects with William Thackeray, and by the courage of penetration into the dark areas of the human spirit and its gloomy depths he echoes with F.Dostoyevsky (6, 25). In modern criticism, "The Sun of the Dead" is brought together on the social and political aspects with the works of L.N.Andreev of the emigrant prose: his political articles "S.O.S." and a not finished novel "Satan's diary" (7, 140).

In Russian foreign criticism of the 1920s they wrote about “The Sun of the Dead” as the strongest and most terrible of all books that was ever written in Russian about the civil war and the horrors of Bolshevism, where all the accumulated suffering, grief and bitterness of a man who had lost both his homeland and his people, and his only son, “where the social and political had dominated literature” (8, 218, 9, 552). This book is especially scary because, unlike all other works about such topics, I.Shmelev has “no resistance to the triumphant Bolshevism” and “there can be no longer any resistance any more”, “for the population is under the double yoke of slavery and hunger” (9, 552). This work is so much full of pain and horror that English-speaking critics in the analysis of the epic always say that the reader of “the Sun of the Dead” must have multilevel readiness. In their opinion, to really understand and feel what the author describes, one must be able to give up comfort, have a certain information base, empathize with the poor and the sufferers, and be ready for action. C.Hogarth wrote that I.Shmelev may not be understood by that part of British public who had “never shed a tear for, and scarcely ever given a thought to, the undeserved agony of a nation which, until stabbed from behind through treachery, fought with unsurpassed gallantry, and with an almost unparalleled lack of warlike resources” (10, xxiv). Columnist to the New York Times Literary Supplement had a similar conclusion. “The Sun of the Dead” will not be a pleasant reading for those who, having come home after a tireless working day, had lunch and sit, settled comfortably, by the fireplace. This work is also not for those who prefer not to interfere and quietly observe on the side (5). Russian critics compared the process of reading this book with torture, which the reader is exposed to without having the strength to tear himself away (9), but they never mention the readiness of the reader, as it was the history of the Russia, that affected the fates of and many people.

While analyzing “The Sun of the Dead”, English-speaking researchers pay more attention to contrasts than to the analysis of form, style, language, and artistic means that create them. Among the episodes of incessant bloodshed, the killing

without trial of 100,000 innocent people, massacres and terror, there are small passages that are striking in description of the natural beauty of Crimea, the “pearls of Russia,” which at another time would only delight and enthrall the reader with its charms. In this case, these episodes are even more prominent and emphasize the horror of everything that is happening (for example, the episode of the death of a beloved peacock) (5; 10, vii). Many abominable crimes were committed before, during, and after the revolution in Russia. The most terrible of all according to C.Hogarth, is the existing contrast between boastful, rude, cynical, opulent commissars along with other powerful men and a crowd of ordinary people dying in pain and starvation (1, vii). English-speaking readers also pay attention to the fact that the narrative is in first person, present tense, thanks to which the already terrible events become even more aggravated, happening in real time. Therefore, in the preface to “The Sun of the Dead”, the translator considers it necessary to point out that the work was written in exile. Both for the English translator and for the reviewer of the New York Times Literary Supplement, it is important that the author describes all events plausibly, without worrying about what the reader would say. He is not afraid of tarnishing his reputation, is not afraid of vulgarity, posturing, political falsity, and clichés. In addition, instead of a direct description, the author very often resorts to the method of conjecture and surmise, forcing the reader to think and guess. In contemporary Russian literary criticism, more attention is paid to the analysis of the artistic means used in the work, different concept images such as the sea, the sun, the earth, stones, mountains, emptiness, deserts, God, religion, dreams that define a model of the world presented in the work. The critics count their number, consider how their meaning throughout the work changes, what these new meanings give (7, 12, 13, 14, 15). An oxymoron in the very title of “The Sun of the Dead”, and the way it influences the context also attracts the attention of literary critics (7). In lyrical digressions addressed to Europe (“old Europe”, “glorious Europeans”), modern Russian literary scholars see the peak of typologization, they relate the epic to the neo-mythological context of

modernism. In English-speaking criticism about “The Sun of the Dead”, everything that is addressed to Europe is always seen as a warning.

Critics with different cultural backgrounds who wrote about “The Sun of the Dead” had completely different allusions. Western critics see “The Sun of the Dead” as a reference to the Old Testament book “Lamentations of Jeremiah”. The columnist of the New York Times Literary Supplement called the book “Lamentations”. While the prophet Jeremiah mourns the destruction of Jerusalem, I.Shmelev mourns entire cities, provinces, the whole nation. Even though the scope of the work is limited to Crimea, the lamentation is applicable to the entire country (5). In the preface to “The Sun of the Dead”, C.Hogarth writes that in Crimea, “as elsewhere, the Communists served Marx, just as the children of Israel used to serve Jehovah in Palestine”. Russian critics saw in the work a description of the decline of Europe, where “hunger and death, like the fate of the Greek tragedy, dominates everything” (11, 217). They also saw in the work a reference to the arrival of the Antichrist before the Second Coming (the Bolsheviks are the ones equated with the Antichrist and his assistants), which will be preceded by the impoverishment of love and intensification of natural disasters.

A comparative analysis of I.Shmelev’s “The Sun of the Dead” reveals the traditions of national literatures and the distinctive features of the world outlook of Russia, Britain and America. Thus, the various allusions that the work brings to English and Russian-speaking criticism, and different comparisons with other literary works, point to the differences in the cultural and historical readiness of the readers. In addition, while analyzing the critical works of “The Sun of the Dead” in English-speaking countries, we see a better knowledge of the Old Testament, compared with the Russian-speaking audience. There is also a difference what American, English and Russian critics primarily pay attention to when they read the work by I.Shmelev. Russians tend to be more interested in the analysis from the particular to the general: they analyze form, style, language of the work and draw conclusions about how these all they influence the context and the meaning

of the entire work. English speakers in their analysis go from the general to the particular: they consider how the author achieves the power and vivid imagery of the work – through contrasts with the help of the narration in the present tense. For the English audience, the historical and political component of the work is very important, while the Russians try to avoid these issues.

#### References.

1. C.J. Hogarth. Introduction // Shmelev. I. S. The sun of the dead. Translated from the Russian by C.J. Hogarth. London: J.M. Dent and Sons ltd., 1927.
2. Correspondence of the Russian writers with Lund Slavists / Prep. By G.Jaugelis // Slavica Lundensia. 1974. Vol.2. 117p. Page 48.
3. Columbia University. Rare book and manuscript library. Bakhmeteff Archive. A.V.Tyrkova-Williams Coll. Cataloged correspondence. Box 3.
4. R.Kipling's letter to I.Shmelev about Russia // Возрождение. Париж. 1936. February, 20. №3914.
5. Lamentations for Russia that is Fallen. The New York Times Book Review. 19 February 1925.
6. Amfiteatrov A. Literature in exile. Public lecture given in the Milan Philological Society. Belgrade, 1929. Pp.24-25.
7. Kamanina E.V. The meaning of the title and subtitle "the epic" of "The Sun of the Dead" of I.S.Shmelev.
8. Amfiteatrov A. A horrible book // Россия и славянство. 1926. November 17. №533.
9. Zinoveev V. Современные записки. 1927. №30. Pp. 552.
10. C.J. Hogarth. Preface // Shmelev, I. S. That which happened. Translated from the Russian by C.J. Hogarth. London; J. M. Dent & Sons. 1924. 168p.
11. Sorokina O. Творческий путь И.С.Шмелева // Russian Émigré Literature. A collection of articles in Russian with English resumes. Department of

Slavic Language and Literatures. Faculty of Arts and Sciences. University of Pittsburg. 1972. Slavic Series, №1. Pp. 215-233.

12.Fedotov O.I. The black sun of Ivan Shmelev // Moscow State University Bulletin 2013. № 4.

13.Zhavoronkov I.V. The concept and image of sea in the novel of I.S.Shmelev “The Sun of the Dead” //

14.Kuzminuch E.O. The Spatial symbolism in the epic of I.S. Shmeleva “The Sun of the Dead” // Научный вестник Воронежского Государственного Архитектурно-Строительного Университета. 2014. № 15.

In the 1770s, the English spoken by the colonists in America hardly differed from the English spoken in Britain. These people still referred to Britain as the mother country and their language was a last, lingering link with the homeland they had left. But once the political breakaway had occurred, contact between the two countries diminished and American English began to develop a character of its own. Successive editions of the dictionary gave proof that the gap between British and American English was widening. Languages are constantly changing and English is no exception. But in the case of American English, mass immigration speeded up the pace of change. New influences. The subject matter of this paper is the Russian and English language picture. This investigation is an extension of my previous work [1]. The article is aimed at determining inherent and the most original traits of national character and mentality and their reflection in the Russian and English language - at both lexical and grammar levels. The further comparative analysis has been carried out to reveal common and varying features of the two nations to draw conclusions concerning cross-cultural communication. Language is the most important way of formation and existence of knowledge of a person about the world. Reflecting the objective world in activity process, a person fixes the results of his/her knowledge of the world.