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The Little Man in R. Senchin's Short Prose of the Late 1990s and Early 2000s

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Roman Senchin, a winner of prestigious literary awards and a recognized master of social prose, is one of the most brilliant representatives of the "new realism". The main character of the author's works is a little man who survives the cataclysms of the late 20th century, losing himself in the historical and social chaos. The author develops this type of character in the novels *The Eltyshyevs* (2009), *Flood Zone* (2015), *Rain in Paris* (2018), the anthologies *Day Without Number* (2006), *Moscow Shadows* (2009), etc. However, the peculiarities of R. Senchin's interpretation of the image of the little man were formed in the writer's early stories. The article offers a classification of the variants of the image of the little man, depending on the author's goals, based on the material of the stories published in the magazines *Znamya*, *Novy Mir*, and *Oktyabr* in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It reveals the characteristics of the "portrait of the transitional period" created by R. Senchin. The aim of the study is to identify the typical features of the author's description of the image of the little man in the short prose of this period. The poetics of four representative stories of the author were analyzed by means of motive analysis, compositional analysis, intertextual and narrative methods. The principles of the representation of the little man in connection with the domestic and foreign paradigm of marginal heroes, the trend of "new realism" and its focus on the treatment of traditional images not only of the little man, but also of the superfluous and underground hero are revealed. Specific characteristics of R. Senchin's artistic world are revealed. A complex descriptive analysis of the stories shows that the author, referring to the classic type of the little man, mercilessly destroys the illusions of his characters, accusing them of passivity and their need for escape from themselves. Senchin's Little Man is a product of the post-perestroika era, having missed his former opportunities and failed to acquire new ones. However, deprived of the author's compassion, this type still appeals to the reader's empathy: behind each, even the most repulsive hero, one can see a human being in general and oneself in particular.

Keywords: little man, "new realism", Roman Senchin, Inspiration, Athenian Nights, Alekseyev is a Happy Man, Common Day

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Научная статья

Маленький человек в малой прозе Р. Сенчина конца 1990-х – начала 2000-х гг.

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Роман Сенчин – один из ярчайших представителей «нового реализма», лауреат престижных литературных премий, признанный мастер социальной прозы. Герой произведений автора – маленький человек, переживший катаклизмы конца XX в., потерявший себя в историческом и общественном хаосе. Данный тип героя писатель разрабатывает в романах «Елтышевы» (2009), «Зона затопления» (2015), «Дождь в Париже» (2018), сборниках «День без числа» (2006), «Московские тени» (2009) и др. Однако особенности интерпретации Р. Сенчиным образа маленького человека сложились в ранних рассказах писателя. В статье на материале рассказов автора, опубликованных в конце 1990-х – начале 2000-х гг. в журналах «Знамя», «Новый мир» и «Октябрь», предлагается классификация разновидностей образа маленького человека в зависимости от авторских задач; раскрываются отличительные черты создаваемого Р. Сенчиным «портрета переходного времени». Цель исследования – выявить характерные черты

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авторской трактовки образа маленького человека в малой прозе указанного периода. Методом мотивного анализа, композиционного анализа, при использовании интертекстуального и нарративного методов проанализирована поэтика четырёх репрезентативных рассказов автора. Продемонстрированы принципы изображения маленького человека в их связи с отечественной и зарубежной парадигмой героев-маргиналов, направлением «нового реализма» и его установкой на обращение к традиционным образам не только маленького, но и лишнего, и подпольного героя. Раскрыты конкретные свойства художественного мира Р. Сенчина. Комплексный дескриптивный анализ обозначенных рассказов показывает, что автор, обращаясь к хрестоматийному типу маленького человека, беспощадно разрушает иллюзии своих героев, обвиняя их в пассивности, желании сбежать от себя. Маленький человек у Сенчина – продукт постпрестроечной эпохи, упустивший былые возможности и не обретший новые. Однако лишённый авторского сострадания, данный тип по-прежнему апеллирует к читательской эмпатии: за каждым, даже самым отворотительным героем можно увидеть человека вообще и себя, в частности.

Ключевые слова: маленький человек, «новый реализм», Роман Сенчин, «Вдохновение», «Афинские ночи», «Алексеев – счастливый человек», «Общий день»

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Introduction. Roman Senchin is a Russian writer, the author of several novels, novellas and short stories. His works are characterized by high moral significance, deep thought, and vivid imagery, making him one of the most talented and influential Russian-speaking writers of our time. Senchin's work is known for its profound, philosophical approach to life and death. His critically acclaimed book about the decline and decay of the Russian village, family, and human being under the new economic conditions, *The Eltyshyevs* («Елтышевы», 2009), is a gritty work of naturalistic genre that has been shortlisted for several awards. The novel was the quintessence of the author's previous creative activity, touching on the themes of fate, love, human destiny, and attempts to find one's place in a rapidly changing reality. The origins of the artistic world of *The Eltyshyevs*, as well as of the author's other *big* works, can be found in the early stories published at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s in the magazines *Znamya*, *Novy Mir* and *Oktyabr*, which received little critical attention.

The works under review are problematically close: the author creates a "portrait of a transitional period" (Ganieva), his own generation, whose youth and adolescence fell in the 1990s. Senchin's prose is acutely social, and this correlates with the author's belief that literature should be considered as a social process and in connection with other similar processes [1]. The main and constant theme is the gnawing of man by the environment, domestic slavery, lack of willpower, powerless degradation, hopelessness and inertia [2]. By turning to the classical image of *the little man*, rethinking it, and standing on the threshold of the new mil-

lennium, Senchin realizes his writing strategy – "to write close to life" [2].

In connection with the mentioned characteristics, R. Senchin's work is considered within the framework of "new realism" – "social prose about a *little man* forgotten on the periphery of Soviet construction sites"¹. The author also associates himself with this movement, although he notes its certain spontaneity: "I have nothing against the term New Realism, although there has never been such a group of writers as the Serapion brothers, who got together and discussed what we should write and how we should write. Fate somehow brought us together, many of us, for a while, but we did not discuss the literary question. But it is good that we met and formed such a community" [2]. In the typical search for a new hero, writers turn to a range of traditional images, from the trickster to archaic figures. *The little man* has become one of the classic characters of the trickster paradigm, updated in the works of New Realism, with its setting of "existential impasse", alienation, search, dissatisfaction and tragic gesture [2].

The stories *Inspiration* («Вдохновение», 1997), *Athenian Nights* («Афинские ночи», 2000), *Alekseyev is a Happy Man* («Алексеев – счастливый человек», 1995), *Common Day* («Общий день», 1999), which are underdeveloped in the critical literature, but representative of the author's work, were chosen in order to reveal the peculiarities of the author's interpretation of the image of the small man in the early works of R. Senchin. The poetics of the selected texts is studied. The classification

¹ Черняк М. А. Проза цифровой эпохи. Тенденции, жанры, имена: учеб. пособие. – М.: Флинта, 2018. – С. 125.



of the characters was made on the basis of the realistic tradition and characteristic features of R. Senchin's work.

Literature Review. The work by R. Senchin is actively considered by many Russian and foreign researchers, also through the prism of the image of *the little man*. However, the author's early prose has been insufficiently studied in this context. The attention of literary experts and critics is directed mainly to the novels of the writer or to his later short stories.

It is necessary to mention, among others, the articles of the critics A. Ganieva [1], S. Belyakov [3; 4], A. Danilkin [5], in which the authors, using R. Senchin's novels as an example, reflect on *the little man* as a character of the transitional period of the 2000`s.

On the revision of the constants of the "tradition" in the image of the hero of the "new realism" the following researchers write: N. Kovtun, who identifies the reasons for the appeal to *the little man* as the weariness of postmodernism and the nostalgia for national values [6]; N. Klimovich, who explores the poetics of the mythology of the "new realism" from the perspective of the attempt to reconcile Soviet and anti-Soviet discourses [7].

A number of studies are devoted to the comparison of R. Senchin's prose with the works of authors of the previous generation. A. Wawrzyńczak notes a decrease in the status of the character in R. Senchin, a change in the author's attitude to *the little man* in comparison with the mythopoetic perception of his literary predecessors, especially V. Rasputin. Senchin's characters appear as apathetic philistines, unable to resist the blows of fate, gradually turning into degenerates. The Russian man, the Siberian, represented for decades by Rasputin as the last stronghold of humanity, is ruthlessly exposed by Senchin. He presents his heroes not as victims, but as participants, albeit involuntary, in the social and economic processes caused by the crisis of the 1990s [8]. K. Jastrzębska considers the heroes of Senchin's prose, the author's contemporaries, as the next "lost generation" [9]. A. Borkowska analyzes the author's strategy of the "new realism", comparing the story of the Eltyshev family with V. Astafyev's novel *The Sad Detective* (1986) [10].

The following articles are devoted to certain aspects of the author's work. K. Jastrzębska examines the image of Russia as a topos of the fictional universe of the author's novels [11]. E. Pankowska analyzes the world of the dying

Russian village in the works of R. Senchin [12]. E. Novikova studies the complex of mortal motifs connected with the perception of death as a personal drama of *the little man* and as a traumatic experience of the modern age as a whole on the example of the novels *The Flood Zone* («Зона затопления») and *The Eltyshevs* («Елтышевы») [13]. *The little man* "deprived of the aureole of transcendence" is the subject of the researcher's article "The image of the literary character in the early work of R. Senchin" [14]. T. Ponomareva studies the characters of the novel *The Eltyshevs* («Елтышевы») as a type of "marginal heroes" [15].

One of the most recent works on the subject is the section in the anthology "The Crossing of Epochs... Russian Prose of the 1960–2020s" ("Эпох скрещенье... Русская проза 1960-х – 2020-х годов") by O. Bogdanova and N. Tsvetova. The authors study the autopsychological protagonist in the story *Minus* («Минус», 2001), which is devoted to the ordeal of a worker, a theatrical set designer, in the "eternally sleepy" and "sour" Minusinsk [16].

As we can see, the question of the peculiarities of the image of *the little man*, its classification in the early stories of the author needs further development, even though the study of the peculiarities of the character of R. Senchin's prose is quite productive.

Methods. The hypothesis of the study is as follows: in his works, R. Senchin systematically refers to the classical image of *the little man*. But this type of character has its own poetics, characteristics, developed in the stories of the late 1990s and the early 2000s.

The primary importance of *the little man* for the solution of the author's goals is proved by its repetition in the works of R. Senchin. In order to reveal the characteristic qualities of the studied image in the stories *Inspiration* («Вдохновение», 1997), *Athenian Nights* («Афинские ночи», 2000), *Alekseyev is a Happy Man* («Алексеев – счастливый человек», 1995), *Common Day* («Общий день», 1999) the intertextual method is used to integrate the characters into the literary process, to trace the typological similarities in the images of protagonists and heroes of Russian and foreign prose. Using the narrative method, the autopsychological figure of the protagonist in each of the selected stories is analyzed, which allows us to identify the techniques characteristic of the author's method.

Motif analysis is the basis of the study of the poetics of the selected texts. Specific mo-

tifs are emphasized: theater, puppetry, illusion, etc. Their peculiarities are supplemented by the methods of compositional analysis, which most fully reveals the image of the "human thing".

Findings and Discussion. The heroes of Senchin's prose are "shallow, crushed by everyday life" and dream of escape. In a broad sense, most of them continue the paradigm of marginal characters of Russian (S. Dovlatov, V. Yerofeev, V. Makanin) and foreign (J. Kerouac, W. Burroughs, C. Bukowski) prose. The unique peculiarity of the R. Senchin's *little man* becomes **his specific perception of the world**. N. V. Kovtun writes about the "deeschatologization of consciousness" of the characters of the new realism, the absence of a feeling of eternity, when experiencing the most important events is extremely formalized [17, c. 194]. The characters are locked in themselves. They resemble a thing. There is a return of the image "to the origins" – Gogol's Akaky Akakievich, with an adjustment to the time.

In the author's works of the late 1990s, it is possible to distinguish **two types** of the *little* heroes. **The first type** is connected with a kind of "romantic impulse" (Ganieva), **the will to change**: "The weak-hearted immersion in everyday life is replaced by aimless struggle, an attempt to escape the situation. Consumption of the environment transforms into a losing battle against it" [1]. As a tendency, this type in Senchin's work is close to *the superfluous people* who suffer from the impossibility of escaping from their coarse and miserable existence. The attempt to act in such characters is connected with an obsession with some idea of improving life and escaping into illusion – hence chronic drunkenness and a connection "with art". The metaphor of "art" – theater, painting, cinema, literature – becomes one of the keys to the unveiling of the image. In R. Senchin's artistic space, culture does not fulfill its functions, the attitude of "sowing the wise, the good, the eternal" does not work, but only feeds the illusions of the characters.

The second type – *the little man, resigned to his position*, gradually losing his human traits, leaving his disguise, becoming either an "empty puppet" or a "decomposed corpse" – appears less frequently in the author's works, but is no less revealing.

This period is **a pseudo-documentary** in the author's style: Senchin describes in detail the nuances of life in the late 1990s, reproduces advertising slogans, brands of products and

things; he endows the protagonists with his first and last names, the facts of his own biography. As **inhabitants of the threshold, of the crossroads**, Senchin's characters **are mobile**: they move from the city to the village and back again, from the province to the capital, from Tyva "to Russia". They almost never have a shelter, the main toposes of the stories – the service quarters, the dormitory, the "kandeyka", the railway station, the dilapidated rustic hut, the back of the theater. The main impulses of the actions are illusions – dreams of a different existence, of life, which go hand in hand with thoughts "of the high": spirituality, the meaning of life.

In the 1997, short story *Inspiration*, the classic *Oblomov/Stoltz* pairing is expressed in 1990s Russia as **the antithesis of "successful man"/ "scum"**, where "scum" is the protagonist, Roman, a poor student at the Literature Institute, and "successful man" is his friend Andrey, who has become rich selling shoes. Andrey sees creativity as a craft, tries to teach Roman, to help him organize his life (he fixes a heater in his room and gives him money for a typewriter). However, all his efforts are in vain: the writer friend cannot produce a single line, and he systematically embezzles the money allocated to him.

Roman sees Andrey as a burden and puts up with him for the sake of money. Poverty, longing and frustration are the basic constants of the failed writer's existence. He sees himself above earthly concerns and relationships, and cultivates a romantic hero complex: "I pondered the towels hanging on the wall. They needed washing a while back... Is it love? Dissolve into love. Tell yourself that you love and dissolve. Just pretend you're in love and let the feeling consume you. Stare at each other's eyes and disregard everything around you. It's simple to be happy! This alien and dangerous place is filled with foes, beasts, snares, and hazards. Everyone seeks salvation. In others. But fear must be conquered to attain freedom and solitude". ("Я сидел и с задумчивым видом смотрел на висевшие на стене полотенца. Их давно надо бы постирать... Любовь, да? Раствориться в любви. Внушить себе, что любишь, и раствориться. Смотреть друг другу в глаза и не замечать окружающего. Как легко быть счастливым! Вокруг ведь чужое, хищное пространство, там полно врагов, чудовищ, ловушек, опасностей. Все ищут спасения. Друг в друге. Но нет, нужно победить страх, быть одиноким и свободным") [18].



The hero is a *superfluous man*, but this is more of a pose, a game, which he does not hide, noting in his own voice "the pain of a rejected, crushed genius" or adding that he likes to be pitied. As a *superfluous man*, Roman is capable of introspection, which limits everything: "I don't have the energy and brains to live like Andrey, to do what he does. So, I had to say that his life was boring, unacceptable for me" ("У меня нет энергии и мозгов, чтобы жить, как Андрей, заниматься тем, чем он. Поэтому нужно было сказать, что у него скучная, неприемлемая для меня жизнь") [18].

The characters' argument about literature traditionally turns into a discussion about "how to live one's life". Roman realizes that Andrey is right, but the protagonist's masochistic confession reveals that the reason for his failure is not his lack of strength to change. Roman's final monologue resembles a passage from a Romantic work; the hero has finally found his inspiration: "I'm proud, I'm proud that I'm insignificant, weak, will-less, I don't mind humiliating myself again and again, I can lie and moan endlessly and a light joy fills me; I'm proud that I'm stronger than them after all. I am stronger than Andrey, who portrays him as a prosperous, clean, civilized fellow; he can do many things, he can and will be able to do even more if he does not give up, stays on the path he is on. Or rather, he walks over it. And I am proud of the fact that I am stronger than Lena; she wants warmth, love, tenderness, and I spread myself out in front of her like a stinking sewer sludge, pointing at myself and claiming that everyone else is like that. And I'm right. They hide, make up, hide their sludge, their habitual, sweet-sweet, necessary rottenness under a shell..." ("Я горд, я горд тем, что ничтожен, слаб, безволен, я не прочь унижаться еще и еще, я могу бесконечно врать, стонать, и светлая радость наполняет меня; я горд тем, что я все-таки сильнее их. Я сильнее Андрея, который изображает преуспевающего, чистенького, цивилизованного малого; ему, дескать, многое по плечу, он может и сможет еще больше, если не опустит рук, не отступит с того пути, на котором стоит. Точнее – идет. И я горд тем, что я сильнее Лены; ей хочется тепла, любви, нежности, а я растекаюсь перед ней вонючей канализационной жижей и, показывая на себя, утверждаю, что таковы все остальные. И я прав. Они скрывают, гримируют, таят под оболочкой свою жижу, свою привычную, сладковатую, необ-

ходимую гниль...") [Ibit]. But the author's irony is ruthless: Roman's passionate monologue remains in his head, not on paper. In reality, the hero's rebellion is limited to the fact that Roman drinks away the hundred rubles that Andrey left him as help.

Failed artists appear in the short story *Athenian Nights* (2000). Roman, Dan, and Boris are struggling painters, the "Three Comrades" of the late 1990s. Roman is forced to make a living by controlling the sale of cheap soda. His friends are more successful, but just as unhappy. Stifled by everyday life, the characters hope for a trip to the suburbs – "to have fun". But *Athenian Nights* – the orgies of jaded high society – turn out to be a pathetic parody. The very title of the story refers the reader to **popular carnival cults**; the author uses the symbolism of an **"inverted" carnival act**, placing *the little man*, the trickster, at the center.

The story is set in a **time of transition**: the narrator (Roman) notices the sudden arrival of spring and his own obsessive desire to "break free" from his tired routine. Deceiving his wife, Roman runs away to his friends who are waiting for him at the train station.

The beginning of the "holiday" is marked by a change of status: the purchase of more expensive cigarettes (Senchin's characters traditionally buy "Soyuz-Apollo" instead of "Prima" in the days of "the triumph") and a change of name. His friends greet Roman with the nickname "Chrono", which in the characters' interpretation means "chronic alcoholic". But at the same time, Chrono is the absolute time in the Orphic cosmogony, one of the beginnings of the world¹, which gives the hero a kind of "divine" status that is immediately downgraded: "Uh-oh, here comes Chronynsh! – Boris shouted to me" («О-о, вот и Хроныш! – заорал мне навстречу Борис») [19].

Accompanied by alcoholic drinks, the heroes' journey from the cafeteria of the Belorussian Railway Station to the necessary station repeats Venichka Erofeev's wanderings in the Moscow electric train. Mozhaisk – "Petushki", where the heroes find themselves, is depicted in their dreams as an earthly paradise with alcohol and available women. However, the initially declared "element of freedom" turns out to be **"the image of the underworld"**. The au-

¹ Энциклопедический словарь Ф. А. Брокгауза и И. А. Ефрона. – URL: https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz_efron/111172/%D0%A5%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD?ysclid=li33dw42th394203491 (дата обращения: 02.06.2023). – Текст: электронный.

thor places the three friends in an empty ghost town on the edge of life and death: "Next to the market, there is a narrow paved road with a swampy wasteland to the right and left. <...> The wasteland has been replaced by woods, with five-story buildings crooked and slanting" («После рынка – узкая асфальтированная дорожка, а справа и слева болотистый пустырь. В кювете валяется то ли пьяный, то ли умерший <...> Пустырь сменился лесочком, среди которого вкривь и вкось стоят пятиэтажки») [19]. The dwellings of the Mozhaik people are compared to a cellar.

Chrono, who, according to mythology, created the egg from which Eros emerged, has nothing to offer his friends in the artistic world of the story but "forbidden love": the novel wonders why they cannot invite underage girls to a cafe, and in the episode in the woods the image of Svidrigailov with his dreams appears.

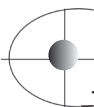
The "feast imagery" in the story is expressed by the poems of the poet Odinoki, quoted by Dan, which frame the journey of the three friends. Odinoki is the pseudonym of the Russian literary decadent Alexander Ivanovich Tinyakov. This person is important to the problematic of the story. Odinoki, who knew many of the Silver Age poets personally and partied with them in his youth, gradually descended and became a professional beggar in 1926. R. Senchin himself, in an article devoted to Tinyakov with the telling title "He Quit Pretending" [20], writes about the impression the beggar-poet made on his more successful colleagues: "Tinyakov was described by them (Ivanov and Khodasevich) with that squeamish interest which is peculiar to those who are respectable, but who like to celebrate with those who have fallen to the bottom of life in their youth. And there he perished" [Ibit]. In the story *Athenian Nights*, Dan quotes a poem by Tinyakov that once made M. Zoshchenko 'shudder' <...> Because of these poems, Tinyakov was shunned in Leningrad in the 1920s, accused of being responsible for Gumilev's arrest and death (these accusations have not been documented). But if I compare the disgustingly outspoken Tinyakov with those young generals of literature who appeared in those years, who wrote poems and novels about courage, honesty, sacrifice, revolutionary asceticism, and at the same time drowned each other for rations and apartments, the first one is more sympathetic to me personally. 'He didn't want to lie anymore. He stopped pre-

tending' – as Zoshchenko wrote" [Ibit], – noted R. Senchin.

In the story *Athenian Nights*, this problem is embodied in the fate of Boris and Roman, who betrayed art for the sake of a more prosperous life. Thus, in the painting that Boris dreamed of painting in his youth, "a remake of *The Appearance of Christ Before the People*", God appears to the well-fed Philistines as a beggar (a reference to the fate of the Odinnoki): "So Christ appears to the people and they run away in terror. They run into the woods, throw themselves into the water, ride away on horses. The people are all beautiful, well-groomed, like ancient demigods, and their Savior is dressed in a kind of rags, with wounds, with a leper's bell around his neck" ("Появляется, дескать, Христос перед людьми, а те в ужасе разбегаются. Мчатся в лес, кидаются в воду, ускакивают на лошадях. Люди все красивые, ухоженные, такие античные полубоги, а спаситель их в рванине какой-то, в язвах, с колокольчиком прокаженного на шее") [21]. Now, however, Boris is of the opinion that his project is "childish", "infantilistic".

Boris opposes the philistines, the "trash", "bydlo", while possessing all the vices and interests typical of "bydlo", without realizing his total complementarity to the dead city around him: the province is the characters' essence, Moscow the disguise behind which they hide. The little people who have abandoned themselves, who have somehow made it in life, find no way out, and their paradise turns out to be the Mozhaik cemetery.

In the same pattern of development are the outwardly "prosperous" and atypical of Senchin's world. In the story *Alekseyev is a Happy Man* (1995) there is a sense of ideal life, harmony in the family. The exemplary hero – the cameraman Ilya Pavlovich Alekseyev begins his day with training. The morning routine is described in detail: Alekseyev always tidies up, wipes himself down, washes his face, dabs on cologne, puts on a pressed suit. The author paints an idyllic picture: "The fresh, blinding sun is shining through the window, his wife is cooking breakfast in the kitchen. The record player plays the 'Space' record, to which Ilya Pavlovich exercises every morning, gaining strength" ("В окно смотрит свежее, слепящее солнце, на кухне готовит завтрак жена. Проигрыватель крутит пластинку "Спейс", под музыку которой Илья Павлович каждое утро делает зарядку, набирается бодрости") [Ibit]. The quiet life is only oc-



asionally disturbed by minor annoyances (the son not coming home on time, the overcrowding on the bus) that are easily resolved. The hero tries to live by the rules. He has no illusions about his colleagues – to make a feature film "no worse than Mosfilm" – Alexeyev does not strive for anything, he knows his place.

At the same time, real life outside Alekseyevs' apartment is tragic, cruel, and hopeless. This is shown most vividly in the episode in which a report on the factory strike is being filmed, and Ilya Pavlovich and his colleagues are nearly killed by half-starved, angry workers. The Alekseev family's philisterial happiness contrasts with the passions raging around them; the tragedy of life does not seem to affect them. However, Alekseyev's apparent prosperity is shattered by a chance encounter with the hero's former friend, the failed poet Maxim Petrov, who diagnoses Ilya Pavlovich with the following illness: "You're a happy man, Ilyukha. I envy you. It's like everyone else's fever and flu, but you're healthy. Nothing shakes you. A rare man..." («Счастливый ты человек, Илюха. Завидно даже... Это вот как у всех лихорадка, жар, а ты – здоровый. Ничего тебя не колеблет. Редкий человек...») [21].

Maxim is a typical character of R. Senchin's fictional world. Abandoning his family, trying to create "art", a drunken loser, he is contrasted with the well-fed and prosperous Alexeyev. The conversation with Maxim makes Alexeyev's deadness and cardboard nature more and more obvious.

Each character in the story is possessed by some idea-illusion: Maxim – to publish the collection of poems he has been working on for five years; Davydin – to make a movie about Sologub, etc. Alexeyev is a "happy man", because such "illusions" and suffering for their sake are alien to him, and he has long forgotten how to feel compassion: "Ilya Pavlovich felt sorry for Petrov and wanted to say something sincere and kind to him. But there were no such words" («Илье Павловичу стало жаль Петрова, захотелось сказать ему что-нибудь искреннее, хорошее. Но таких слов не нашлось») [Ibid].

Every hint of emotion throws the hero off balance for a moment, causes irritation: Davydin's joy at shooting, a young colleague's declaration of love ("a kind of savagery"), Maxim's outbursts are perceived by Alexeyev as an attack on his own well-being: "The mood had gone completely out of whack. Something

heavy pressed on his shoulders, bent him, crushed him. The heels of Masha's shoes clattering on the parquet floor pricked his ears like needles... First the idiot Davydin, now this one was giving him a hard time..." («Настроение испортилось окончательно. На плечи надавило что-то тяжелое, гнуло его, мяло. Стучащие по паркету каблуки Машиных туфелек иглами кололи уши... Сначала идиот Давыдин, теперь вот эта проходу не даёт...») [Ibid].

As a result, it becomes clear that we are not a "happy man", but a wound puppet, living according to a predetermined script. This effect is intensified by the naturalistic "substantiality" of the author's syllables (the author describes every detail of Alekseyev's routine) and the circular composition. The story begins and ends the same way, as it is repeated every day: sunny morning, getting up, gymnastics, the wife prepares breakfast... The life of the Alekseyevs is a vicious circle of little people who have abandoned all pretensions, all self-consciousness. Their escapism is not an attempt to break out of a stale environment, but a deadening one.

The hero of the story *Common Day* (1999) is an opposite example of a "humiliated" and deadened *little man*. The author paints the picture of a morally degenerate subject, practically an inhabitant of the other world. The protagonist is an unemployed drug addict who dreams of money and lives with his elderly mother in a musty-smelling hole-in-the-wall apartment. By his own admission, he beats his mother "for fun" and takes her last pennies: "I hate her, her aging and her whole stinking life, and this apartment where everything is rotten and yellow-white fungus, like dried foam, crawls out of the cracks... She screams and fights back, and I know that she hates it as well" («Я ненавижу её, её старость и всю её вонючую жизнь, и эту квартиру, где всё сгнило и из щелей ползёт жёлто-белый, как засохшая пена, всё пожирающий грибок... Она визжит, отбивается, и я знаю, что она тоже ненавидит») [22].

The topos, cold, ghostly St. Petersburg, and the confessional form of the story refer to a classical model – Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. An attempt of R. Senchin's little hero "to go out into the world". Senchin also becomes an encounter with a woman he "feels sorry for". Every two years, the nameless protagonist meets his former classmate Alyona and spends the day with her. The life of both characters is "a chain of equally dead days",

and for Alyona the day they spend together is an attempt to escape the crushing routine: the heroine wants to go to Petrodvorets, to the Hermitage, to talk about art.

Alyona is a representative of the majority: she works as a librarian, unhappy in her family life, "drinks and dreams of better things". Her companion (the narrator), a more unique subject, describes himself as a "decomposed corpse": "The thin sheath of skin still holds back the putrefaction that's ready to spurt out, but it's about to burst, and I'll spill out, spread out. The fresher corpses will stagger away and then begin to look at my remains with interest, sniffing, shaking their heads, expecting the same end for themselves. And the snow will gradually cover me, and everything will disappear" («Тонкая оболочка кожи еще сдерживает готовую брызнуть наружу гниль, но вот-вот она лопнет, и я вытеку, расплзусь. Более свежие трупы шарахнутся в стороны, а затем с интересом начнут разглядывать мои останки, принимают, качать головами, предчувствуя такой же конец и для себя. И снег постепенно покрывает меня, и все исчезнет...») [22]. The narrator rejects everything social: work, marriage, family, history, beauty, culture.

Traditionally, the characters argue about art and literature, and the narrator, in contrast to the not-quite-desperate Alyona, remarks: "In the words 'A man – it sounds proud' I can hear a mockery of the person who said it to everyone and first of all to himself, and after these words he must necessarily spit in his face" («В словах "Человек – это звучит гордо" мне слышится

издевательство сказавшего над всеми, и в первую очередь над самим собой, и после этих слов он обязательно должен плюнуть себе в лицо») [Ibid]. People's lives are hopeless, closed in on themselves, fearing the lack of an outcome.

Conclusion. What is difficult to convey in the short story, the author continues to develop in larger genre forms. Both types of the little man are reflected in Roman Senchin's novels and novellas. In particular, in the novella *Minus*, where the protagonist, suffering from the imposition of "stupid books", will give up his dreams and aspirations for a better life in favor of some kind of work and a bottle of alcohol.

Nikolai Eltyshev, having once crossed the line, will not be able to stop, gradually turning into a murderer and degrader.

Staying true to his illusions, Andrei Topkin will rush to the beloved Paris, but, immersed in the memories of a wasted life, will never see the city on the Seine.

R. Senchin's *little people* live in a double reality, they fantasize, they make unsuccessful attempts to act. Showing "a painful gap between man and existence", the author does not pity his little heroes, he puts part of the responsibility on them. But he does not ridicule them, does not despise them. As M. Remizova notes, the author's pathos is different here: "Senchin refrains from being snobbish and judgmental. While it may be tempting to omit these individuals from an idealized picture where goodness, beauty, and justice prevail, such a simplistic approach rings false. Alternatively, one may seek to comprehend and empathize with them" [23].

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