# THE THEME OF THE CIVIL WAR IN CRIMEAN TEXT Xue Chen

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Abstract: The article analyzes the theme of the Civil War in Crimea in 1920 by the example of such works as the novel The Fall of Dair by A.G. Malyshkin, the novel The Sun of the Dead by I.S. Shmelev, the poem Perekop by M.I. Tsvetaeva and the novel *The Beast from the Abyss* by E.I. Chirikov. The purpose of the study is to identify the motives that reveal the mutually exclusive views of Soviet and emigre writers on what was happening in the 1920s in Crimea. In Malyshkin's The Fall of Dair and Shmelev's The Sun of the Dead, a contradictory image of the 'new man' of history is created, Malyshkin presents him as the creator of a new and wonderful life, while Shmelev views him as the destroyer of culture and civilization; in Tsvetaeva's poem, a "Volunteer legend" is created, the poet's sympathy for the Volunteer Army is expressed; and Chirikov in his novel reflects on the existential meaning of a person at a social turning point and objectively shows the destructive power of the Reds and the Whites. Therefore, in the prose of the metropolis and emigration of the 1920s, alternative approaches to understanding the truth — about the Civil War, about the revolution as the destruction of an established existence or hope for a brighter future —developed. The listed works reflect opposing attitudes of the authors to the "man of the masses", "the new man of history", "the coming Huns" and "the volunteers". As a result of the analysis of the texts, it is concluded that the mutually exclusive views reflected in Crimean text are considered as complementary in the artistic development of the Crimean cataclysm of the early 1920s, in understanding the fullness of the truth about the Civil War. At the same time, the works address similar existential, ontological, and social issues.

*Keywords:* Crimean text; the Civil War; I.S. Shmelev; A.G. Malyshkin; M.I. Tsvetaeva; E.I. Chirikov

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# ТЕМА ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ ВОЙНЫ В КРЫМСКОМ ТЕКСТЕ

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Аннотация: В статье анализируется тема Гражданской войны в Крыму в 1920 году на примере таких произведений, как повесть «Падение Даира» А.Г. Малышкина, повесть «Солнце мертвых» И.С. Шмелева, поэма «Перекоп» М.И. Цветаевой и роман «Зверь из бездны» Е.И. Чирикова. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении мотивов, раскрывающих взаимоисключающие взгляды советских писателей и писателей-эмигрантов на происходящее в 1920 году в Крыму. В «Падении Даира» Малышкина и «Солнце мертвых» Шмелева создан противоречивый образ «нового человека» в истории, у Малышкина он представлен как создатель новой и прекрасной жизни, у Шмелева — как разрушитель культуры и цивилизации. В поэме Цветаевой создана «Добровольческая легенда», выражется сочувствие поэта к Добровольческой армии. Чириков в своем романе размышляет об экзистенциальном смысле человеческой жизни в эпоху социального перелома и объективно показывает разрушительную силу красных и белых. Поэтому в прозе метрополии и эмиграции данного времени сложились альтернативные подходы к пониманию истины о Гражданской войне, о революции как сломе устоявшегося бытия или надежде на прекрасное будущее. В перечисленных произведениях отражено противоположное отношение авторов к вопросам о «человеке массы», «новом человеке истории», «грядущих гуннах» и «добровольцах». В результате анализа текстов сделан вывод о том, что взаимоисключающие взгляды, отражающиеся в указанных произведениях, рассматриваются как взаимодополняющие в художественном освоении крымского катаклизма 1920 года, в осмыслении полноты правды о Гражданской войне. Вместе с тем в произведениях решаются сходные экзистенциальные, онтологические, социальные вопросы.

*Ключевые слова:* крымский текст; Гражданская война; И.С. Шмелев; А.Г. Малышкин; М.И. Цветаева; Е.И. Чириков

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The theme of the Russian Civil War (1917–1922) is actualized in prose, drama and poetry of the 1920s. In Russian literature, the Civil War is understood not only as a social phenomenon, but also as an ontological one. Existential issues were not inferior to the interpretation of social conflict as the beginning of a new era in human history. There are many works of art devoted to the topic of the Civil War in both Soviet literature and in the literature of the Russian diaspora. But the truth about what was happening in the 1920s has long remained controversial in Russian literature. For obvious reasons, alternative approaches to understanding the truth emerged in the literature of the 1920s. As M.M. Golubkov writes: "On the one hand, the revolution was presented as the dismantlement of the fundamental foundations of life, leading to chaos, blood, war, destruction. On the other hand, blood and chaos were justified, since they were thought of as an inevitability — a completely acceptable payment for finding a new life based on the principles of goodness and justice" [Golubkov 2018: 142]. The real picture of the world in the works of art of that time is antinomic; in this regard, mutually exclusive points of view on the Civil War are formed, which are vividly reflected in Crimean text of the 1920s Russian literature.

The term 'Crimean text' appeared first in the scholarly work of philologist and cultural critic A.P. Lyusy<sup>1</sup>, and over the time it has been widely used and has entered the academic consciousness due to publications and dissertation research by Crimean philologists and literary critics. The Crimean text in Russian literature is understood as "a system of ideas about man and the world semantically connected with Crimea, which reflects the uniqueness of the Crimean land, is its iconic manifestation and is fixed in the works of writers" [Kuryanova 2015: 5]. Crimean texts include "works set in Crimea, descriptions of Crimean places, Crimean toponyms and ethnonyms found in the text" [Bilyk 2005: 112]. In a number of Crimean texts of the 1920s, writers depicted the Crimean reality during the Civil War and the existence of a personality. Among them, the novel The Fall of Dair by A.G. Malyshkin, the novel The Sun of the Dead by I.S. Shmelev, the poem Perekop by M.I. Tsvetaeva, the novel The Beast from the Abyss by E.I. Chirikov are vivid examples of the Crimean text: they highlight the Crimean theme and the Crimean myth, and form mutually exclusive points of view on Civil War. The irremediable contradictions in the depiction of the Civil War by Soviet writers and emigres in Crimean text are justified and logical, their opposition brings us closer to the knowledge of the fullness of being.

One of the first works of Soviet prose about the Civil War was the revolutionary romantic novel *The Fall of Dair* by Malyshkin, written in expressionist manner. In the story, Malyshkin described a premonition of the Crimean earthly paradise in the consciousness of a man of the mass and depicted an explosion of vital activity of such man. Malyshkin was a historiographer at the headquarters of M. Frunze and a participant in the siege of Perekop in 1920, so his personal impressions were reflected in the plot of the story. Malyshkin sang the praises to the masses, to those who corresponded to the spontaneous, stormy content of time, as Blok noted (*The Collapse of Humanism*). The barbarian people, hostile to the aging civilization, became the exponent of the spirit of music. The pathos of the masses corresponds to the ideas of the "Scythians", their apology for the revolution as a "universal impulse" and a "call to life". Socially, a new hero of history has come into the life of society and declares himself, the right

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Lyusy A.P. The Crimean text in Russian literature. St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2003. p. 12.

to his "place in culture, to actively participate in the historical process" [Golubkov 2002: 74]. But in Russian literary thinking, the understanding of the "man of the masses" has received an ambiguous interpretation. According to Blok, "man of the masses" means "fresh barbaric masses", "a new driving force", such people turn out to be "unconscious guardians of culture" [Blok 1962: 115, 94, 99]. The opposite understanding of the new historical force was expressed by D. Merezhkovsky; according to him, it carries with it the domination of an impersonal Future Boor ("the face of rudeness coming from below — hooliganism, boorishness, the black hundred" [Merezhkovsky 1906: 37]). The idea of the Red Army mass in Shmelev's story correlates with Merezhkovsky's point of view, whereas in *The Fall of Dair*, the image of a "mass man" corresponds to the definition of Blok.

The new hero of Russian literature acts. In The Fall of Dair, the Red Army soldiers replace the old-world order, aimed at achieving a well-fed and wonderful future. Malyshkin's characters correlate with Bryusov's "coming Huns", and they are depicted as dreamers: "Malyshkin has always written about people captivated by a dream. Each of them dreamed of the impending, elusive happiness in his own way" [Volpe 1983: 164]. The utopia of the earthly paradise formed over the centuries and is interpreted by them as a close reality. Malyshkin was imbued with the optimism and heroism of the revolution, as E.B. Skorospelova writes, he reflected "the spirit of the first years of the revolution, faith in the creative possibilities of time" [Skorospelova 2003: 66]. In The Fall of Dair, Crimea is a wonderful place, a magical Dair, where "golden roofs burned from fairy tales" [Malyshkin 1978: 148], where there is milk, meat and honey, and therefore the revolutionary reality "spewed huge echelons to the south for bread, for warmth, for the future" [Malyshkin 1978: 130]. As A. Voronsky wrote about this story: "This is the law of struggle, the law of revolution, the law of victories. It is created in illusions, in dreams of blessed islands <...>" [Voronsky 1987: 387].

The narrative in *The Sun of the Dead* by I.S. Shmelev is also based on autobiographical facts. Shmelev described the person's experience of the Crimean hell, he suffered from famine in Crimea and experienced depression. "For Shmelev, Crimea is like Cimmeria, a gloomy place where the entrance to Hades was located" [Solntseva 2017: 121]. In the epic, Shmelev, like Malyshkin, refers to the description of the emotional and physical state of the people. His position is the exact opposite of Malyshkin's romanticization of the new Hun. While in *The Fall of Dair* Crimeans welcome the arrival of the Red Army ("Welcome... Let the oppressed masses of the world hear... yes, long live" [Malyshkin 1978: 149]), in *The Sun of the Dead* there is a remarkable episode in which a

barefoot woman with a meaningless expression on her face, out of patience, says: "And they said — everything will be fine..." [Shmelev 1998: 466]<sup>2</sup>. As Shmelev shows, the Bolsheviks' social project "let us make a fortune for the whole generation!" (483) is an illusion ("Open robbery has gone... and on the steppe, they say, there is famine" (482)). While Malyshkin's Red Army men imagine that "these very elements in raccoon fur coats, which have cones of beards, live in Crimea: they came from all over Russia" [Malyshkin 1978: 126], the Crimean resident in Shmelev's image is ragged, dressed in rags, emaciated. Life itself, with the arrival of the Red Army, seems strange and unfamiliar: here, the beast "smashed the windows, tore up the beams... knocked down and poured deep basements, swam in the blood <...> with a festive hangover" (464), as if "a beast coming out of the abyss" (Rev. 11.7).

In the works of Shmelev and Malyshkin, the Red Army mass is represented as a horde, but the word 'horde' in Shmelev and Malyshkin acquires different semantic shades. There are more of them in The Fall of Dair, they are more expressive, the boundary between aesthetic and anti-aesthetic is destroyed. But the horde is fulfilling the historical mission of destroying the last enemy — this is what "the country demanded" [Malyshkin 1978: 124]. In The Sun of the Dead, the Red Army soldiers are depicted as punishers, they "go to kill" at night and sleep during the day. The behavior of the new Huns shows their tireless energy, but it is "directed not at creativity, but at destruction" [Golubkov 2002: 78]. The Red Army soldiers in Shmelev's perception are predators, savages, bearers of demonic images, they slaughter without investigation and trial. In the story, the government represents the dictatorship of the Bolshevik will. As M.M. Golubkov writes: "A new type of person arises and comes to power, who does not want to admit or prove the truth, but simply intends to impose his will. This is a person who asserts the right not to be right, and the right of arbitrariness" [Golubkov 2002: 79].

M. Tsvetaeva addressed the Perekop-Chongar operation in the poem Perekop (1929) about the last battle of the Volunteer Army for the Crimea. Tsvetaeva worked on the poem from 1928 to 1929 in France. In Malyshkin's novel, the Red Army defeated the enemies: "the enemy fled, threatened by the red divisions from the rear" [Malyshkin 1978: 143]. Tsvetaeva's plot geographically ends with the victory of the White Guards over the Latvian division of the Red Army: "And the power belongs to us" [Tsvetaeva 1994: 159]<sup>3</sup>. The poem is also based on real historical and biographical facts: S. Efron served in the Markov division, participated in

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Further links are provided for this edition with the page indicated in parentheses.
<sup>3</sup> Further links are provided for this edition with the page indicated in parentheses.

Crimean campaign of the White Army, which explains the dedication of the poem "To my dear and eternal volunteer" (148). At the same time, Tsvetaeva brings reality to the legend of volunteers: if they are forgotten in ten years, they shall be remembered in two hundred. Like Malyshkin, Tsvetaeva writes about a fight between Reds and Whites, but her attention is focused on the person. The volunteer, as in *The Swan Camp* (1917–1921), appears as a noble "God's warrior": "Not a raven / In a white tunic, / God's warrior, / And not an avenger — / Into battle!" (176). Tsvetaeva focuses on the dominance of volunteers not by reflexes, but by striving for victory: "Hold on, Pash! — / Hold on by yourself! / Even if they are sick, they are sick" (161). When describing the volunteer in Tsvetaeva's poem, the instinct of self-preservation is opposed to the will.

The plot of *Perekop* precedes the plot of Shmelev's story about the Wrangelites who escaped from prison and about those who did not emigrate and resisted. In the story of the seven Wrangelites, a real fact was used — false promises of amnesty, which corresponded to reality. The amnesty declared was understood by Shmelev as the beginning of the Russian Calvary, which follows from his letter to Gorky in 1921, where he asks to save his son. In Shmelev's emigre journalism, the Crimean events are designated as "our Calvary" [Shmelev 1999: 398].

Malyshkin is unequivocal in glorifying Frunze and the Red Army mass. Shmelev glorifies the volunteers, and his attitude towards the Wrangelites is also unambiguous. Tsvetaeva's poem contains an apology for the White Army, but at the same time the course of the Perekop-Chongar operation is complicated. O.G. Revzina notes that the idea of Tsvetaeva simply singing praises to volunteers is "simplified and onedimensional" [Revzina 2009: 202]. Firstly, Tsvetaeva expands the motivational range of the Crimean theme of the 1920s, and she introduces into the poem a plot about a defector, a Markovite nobleman [Durinova 2017: 264]. Secondly, the poem highlights the conflict of interests of officers and those soldiers who are tempted by the workers' and peasants' power and oppose it to the landlord power — "lordly", "loud", "heavy", "former", "serf, sweatshop" (159).

E. Chirikov's novel *The Beast from the Abyss* (1924) is also based on the events of the Civil War that unfolded in Crimea. Like Shmelev and Malyshkin, Chirikov is their witness and participant. The subtitle ("Poem of Terrible Years") of Chirikov's novel reflects the author's interpretation of the genre, and actualizes the lyrical line of the narrative. At the same time, the title of the novel is an allusion to the apocalyptic image of the Beast from the abyss, and reflects the existential meaning of the narrative, which also brings it closer to the story of Shmelev. The bloody feast of the Beast from the abyss is called the battle that lasted for several days, which devastated the souls of people drunk on blood, who became more terrible than the Devil. Throughout the narrative, Chirikov, like Shmelev, turns to religious axiology, talks about God's truth, looks for the face of God in what is happening, and ends the novel with a mention of the Virgin. Among the characters are people of different social strata and political beliefs, there are canonically believers and with sectarian experience; they sometimes doubt the very existence of God, then turn to Him, then fall under the power of the Beast from the abyss and become, according to the author's definition, manic idiots, then recover from it; they know that, following the Scriptures, it is necessary to move away from evil and create good; they perceive the events of the Civil War as a provocation of the Devil and they no longer understand what they are killing for.

Chirikov is skeptical of any political idea — monarchism or socialism; he believes that the Beast from the abyss should be opposed not by an idea, but by love for man. In The Beast from the Abyss, people hide in the mountains, but they run away from both the Reds and the Whites. They call themselves the Greens, but over time, as Chirikov writes, the Greens already pose a threat to peaceful Crimeans - both Russians and Tatars. The novel talks about the dictatorship of both Reds and Whites. At the same time, the White Army does not inspire the people with its pathos, and the people are more afraid of the Whites — the return of the lordly power. Chirikov does not take either the position of the Reds or the position of the Whites, which partly brings him closer to the attitude towards the Civil War of M. Voloshin, who wrote: "<...> when the children of a single mother kill each other, one must be with the mother, and not with one of the brothers" [Voloshin 1992: 81]. However, we note that Voloshin saw some similarities between the "revolutionary Russian autocracy" and the Bolshevik government: "according to facts and measures alone, we cannot give ourselves an account of what century and under what regime we live," which even prompted him to talk about the "state flexibility of the Soviet government" [Voloshin 1992: 76]. Voloshin proceeded from his historiosophical concept, according to which "the world is built on equilibria" [Voloshin 1992: 81]. Chirikov, revealing the essence of the revolution and the fate of the people at a crucial moment, followed the principle of balanced judgments and took the position of a nonjudgmental witness. In the preface to the novel, he wrote: "Reader, know and remember that my novel is life itself, and I am the author of this work — not a judge, but a witness, and not a historian, but only a living person who drank from the cup of torment and suffering of the Russian people" [Chirikov 2000: 478].

Chirikov showed the destructive energy of the Reds and the Whites: "The Reds have built their power on hatred and revenge. The Whites began to build on love for man and the motherland, but the flame of hatred and revenge spread from the Reds to the Whites, drowned out the idea of love, and the 'Beast from the abyss' enveloped the whole Russian land with its stench" [Chirikov 2000: 571]. Chirikov's statement, addressed to N. Karinsky in 1923, correlates with the idea of the novel: "Sincerity and truth are persecuted by both sides at this moment" [Chirikov 1997: 441]. The author portrayed people who have lost and preserved their ethical and moral guidelines in a social crisis. In Chirikov's novel, the idea of the determinants of human behavior - instinct, reason, and love for one's neighbor — is developed. Chirikov, like Shmelev, focused on the condition of people who were victims of a political conflict. At the same time, both authors care about the fate of the people. The Sun of the Dead and The Beast from the Abyss reflect the phenomena accompanying the revolution - violence and chaos, spiritual and moral desolation of man. They express concern about the fate of the Crimea, the fate of the people in its everyday and existential manifestation.

In Russian literature, especially in Crimean text, mutually exclusive interpretations of what was happening in Crimea in the early 1920s are simultaneously emerging. In the above-mentioned works, Shmelev expressed his rejection of Soviet power, created a negative image of the Red Army; Malyshkin, assessing the events of the Civil War, saw the historical truth in the offensive on the Crimea by the Red Army; in *Perekop* Tsvetaeva sympathizes with the Volunteer Army; in *The Beast from the Abyss*, Chirikov's position is above the fight, he does not lean towards either the Reds or the Whites, but objectively and fairly shows the destructive energy of the Reds and Whites. The personal experience of some writers complements the personal experience of others, thereby reflecting different truths about the same reality. At the same time, the texts we have considered complement each other and thus recreate the full picture of "revolution as a transformation of the world and revolution as a descent into darkness" [Skorospelova 2003: 66].

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