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The Concept of Beauty in O. Nikolaeva's Story "Kuks from the Kind of Seraphim": Christian Interpretation

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ANNOTATION

O. Nikolaeva's prose is devoid of mysticism. It is filled with light and hope even when reality appears in a tragic form. The story "Kuks from the kind of seraphim" is permeated with a sense of the value of being. Basically, this feeling is deeply Christian. A. Men wrote that in Christianity "man is an incarnated being, in the flesh, that God introduced the Spirit into matter, that the play of the flesh, the play of nature, the multicolor of the material world became the bosom in which the spirit sparkles" [5, C 302]. The author makes an attempt to reveal what the true salvation of a person is - in external, aesthetically beautiful, or in spiritual, internal beauty. Thus, the concept of "beauty", being the central object of the author's attention, is subjected to two-sided consideration in the story: as embodied in concretely expressed realities and as spiritual, that is, "the quality of that sphere of the personality that is associated with the transcendent principle, as something that is related to the spirit of God" [4, p.107].

O. Nikolaeva creates the image of the church tenor Seraphim - a man who by nature is deprived of external beauty. He is ugly, arachnid. External ugliness made him an outcast, from whom everyone turned away in horror, or subjected him to ridicule. The simple-hearted grandmother christened him Seraphim: "Since he was born like that, not like the human race, we will dedicate him to the family of seraphim and cherubim - let them look after him and take care of everything." [7, p.111]. His father, an alcoholic, did not call him otherwise than Kuks.

Seraphim is constantly tormented by the problem of beauty. According to the protagonist, beauty is an aesthetic category, that is, "that side of phenomena, which, in its specific features, is not subject to judgment either from the point of view of theoretical truth, or from the point of view of moral goodness, or material benefit, and which, however, constitutes the subject a positive assessment, that is, it is approved." [9, p.238]. It differs from the theoretically true and morally good by the indispensable requirement for the embodiment of its content in concrete phenomena and objects that give a person a feeling of aesthetic pleasure.

In his own work, Seraphim relentlessly follows the sense of beauty: "... he loved brilliance and chic in everything" [7, p.118]. He has a wonderful voice, which God gave him as if in compensation for bodily

deformity. Although he was a novice at the monastery, he had not yet been imbued with the Christian spirit. Father Abel's words that "inner beauty conquers everything external" and in the world "outer beauty is in price, we have spiritual beauty", he perceives with skepticism.

The image of the Seraphim is psychologically thin. His faith in God is contradictory, often overcome by doubts. Therefore, there is no peace in his soul. Seraphim thinks a lot about the reasons for his external deformity: "I am arranged intricately. I have an erysipelas - you can't make out where everything is. Where people have a hollow, I have a hillock. I'm all skewed twisted. Who will love this. After all, people don't forgive this - as if I offended someone: I distorted the image of God - I blaspheme, I walk like this. [7, p.113]. For him, God is beauty, in contrast to the true Christian position, which interprets that God is love, and to the most gray and miserable. "Look at the Lord," Seraphim says to Abel, "there is His most beautiful face, the finest features, without a flaw, all perfection - eyes, lips, nose. The arms and legs are straight and slender. Proportions are everything! He is handsome. He is the ideal. He is the most beautiful." [7, p.112]. Seraphim's thought is consonant with Dostoevsky's words: "Beauty is an ideal, and ideals have long been shaken in our country and in civilized Europe. In the world there is only one single manifestation of absolute beauty - Christ. This is an infinitely wondrous phenomenon, an infinite miracle. The entire Gospel of John is filled with this thought. John sees the miracle of the incarnation, the revealed beauty." [3, p.207].

However, the beauty of Christ does not mean here only an aesthetic principle, but consists primarily in inner power, it is the beauty of the enchanting personality of Christ, which is revealed and known by love, can save the world. "Christ is not only absolute beauty in himself, but also in his relation to all created things." [3, p.207].

It is impossible to perceive the God-man as simply a man called to become the son of God. The human overshadows, displaces in the image that through which the divine must be guessed in it.

The strict spiritually tested aesthetics of icon painting makes it possible to understand the reasons for the inevitability of the breakdown of such perception. The natural description of Christ as a man presupposes the division of His indivisible, God-human nature and the description of His human nature. Strange as it may seem, the depiction of Christ is possible only as a Hypostasis - the second person in trinitarian theology, but impossible as a person with his own individual nature. The God-man as a person can only be depicted symbolically, through a stylized reflection not of the essence, but of the manifestation of the features of God-manhood, that is, holiness, transfiguration. The depicted appearance is not a portrait resemblance, but only a necessary outline based on the physical data necessary to recognize the icon painting of the face. Icon-painting should be distinguished not by external "natural" realism, but by internal, spiritual. Man is created "in the image and likeness of God." One of the Fathers of the Church of the 5th century explains it this way: "Man is created in the image of God. This image is given to him in his mind and will. But the image must be revealed through the similarity, this is achieved in freedom and in giving oneself to Love" [8, p.70]. Thus, the similarity to God is manifested through effort and feat, it is found in grace, but not in following the external aesthetically beautiful, the transformation of the human soul becomes important here. The image of Christ will in this case be a bright guiding principle on the path to perfection. Seraphim, dreaming primarily of external transformation, completely denies "external beauty" and "internal beauty", arguing that "she is alone." Reflecting on the nature of beauty, he comes to the conclusion that beauty is not only sensual and aesthetic pleasure, but also power. It is not for nothing that in a conversation with Abel he remarks: "Beauty is your power." [7, p.111]. It gives the power to control not only the will of another person, but can also "dilute [7, p.115]. - his physical deformity, which he perceives as a punishment for the sins of previous generations.

Seraphim sees the only possibility of transformation in a child: "... even from such an undead as I am, he can overcome the ugliness of his father." [7, p.119]. Faith Seraphim perceives not in a Christian way. He is close to the words of Mary that faith is "a challenge to the final verdict, trampling on obvious things" [7, p.118]. Seraphim decides to find the most beautiful woman so that she conceives a child from him: "Only some angelic creature - the most perfect of women, powerful, divine beauty, with a capital letter - A wife could dilute ... an overflowing cup. Perhaps only there, in their common offspring, the Lord would have defeated the devil, trampled on the dark reptile, straightened out the features of the father in the baby. [7, p.115].

But "trampling on obvious things" is punishable. Seraphim was brutally killed, so his soul did not have time to transform into beauty. However, not only the world around him, which did not understand him, did not give him, is to blame for the hero's tragic death, but also Seraphim himself, who does not want to accept the truth of the Christian position: "God is Love" and the evidence that follows from it that salvation should not be sought in perfect beauty, but in the beauty of the human soul, transformed by faith in God, since inner peace and real satisfaction are achieved by faith, and not by the possession of all earthly values.

The aesthetic position of Seraphim is contrasted in the story with the ethical position of Father Abel, who believes that the organization of the inner world of a person, which in the trichotomy of the body-soul "should occupy a dominant position." [2, p.38]. For him, God is Love, and love is "God's gift." The handsome father Abel rejects every bodily temptation, thinking about the soul. His own outward attractiveness, causing Seraphim's outright envy, only weighs him down, hinders him on the path to moral perfection: "What did she become to me? What am I, a marriageable girl? Why is she a monk?"

Abel sees the cause of Seraphim's mental suffering primarily in his selfish love for himself, and not his deformity: "You love yourself, Seraphim. For this I feel sorry for you, you are wiser about yourself, you are wiser. There is no simplicity in you." [7, p.113]. Abel himself, having a difficult life experience, having gone through street fights "wall to wall - with chains, with brass knuckles, with rage, into a child", is full of patience and compassion for all "lost sheep". Hence his desire to go preach Christ "to the most vicious criminals", hence the lack of condemnation for the act committed by Seraphim. Abel is familiar with mental anguish, the state of "being out of his mind", perhaps that is why he understands the suffering of Seraphim better than anyone else. However, he also knows the way to get rid of these sufferings: by prayer and strict fasting for himself, by art - for Seraphim. He is trying to convey to the protagonist the Christian idea that art is the wisdom of God, that "the hermits conquered the world with art" [7, p.117]. Saying this, Abel means that "art can be closed in the boundless space of the soul in those areas where the soul comes into contact with the bodily nature, but it can also rise to the border areas with the presence of the spirit" [1, p.13].

According to their artistic subject, works of art can be divided into those that embody the spiritual and bodily sphere, which includes all the wealth of social, moral, psychological components, and those that "reflect the spiritual sphere" [4, p.32]. In the second case, we mean those works in which the soul of the creator undoubtedly embodied, his worldview, filled with deep spiritual meaning, thus making a connection between the inner world of the creator with the outside world. Abel, speaking of art as salvation, means, first of all, that "the soul, guided by the spirit, is not looking for beauty, but expression in beautiful forms of the invisible beautiful world, where the spirit beckons it with its influence" [4, p.32]

But Seraphim is convinced that you won't be saved by creativity, because he doesn't see and doesn't feel the inner connection between the creator and his creation: "While you work, it's nothing: the Lord directly helps - as if you have beauty at your fingertips. Well, if you do it, you look: product and product. You are here and it

is there. Separated from you, closed, ended: the current was interrupted. [7, p.118]. The "products" created by Seraphim are beautiful, but soulless, because they do not contain the spiritual experiences of the author.

Seraphim's soul is embittered; there is no single point of spiritual support in it. His desire to be transformed through "blood" remains untenable also because he is not driven by universal sacrificial love, like Christ, who atoned for earthly sins through the blood, but "beckons beauty for its own purposes," as he quite rightly said to Moria, in other words, he tried defeat God's plan, according to which he was to appear in this ugly image. "And the true strength and beauty is not in a passionate struggle, but in natural harmony and integrity, when spiritual perfection becomes not a challenge and confrontation, but an inner need." [6, p.335].

Spirituality, on the other hand, can serve as a unifying principle, regardless of cultural experience and even regardless of the language of communication. An example of this is the reaction of the Frenchwoman Helen, who was kidnapped by Seraphim. Although the situation is perceived by Helen in a certain way, in the final lines of the story, there is no doubt about the unifying and enlightening power of spiritual love: "She dreamed of Cooks. He confusedly explained something to her in French and passionately caressed her.

The night was filled with jubilation, love longing. When she woke up, she thought that she had never experienced such complete happiness, such complete love with anyone, neither in reality nor in a dream." [7, p.123].

Thus, Dostoevsky's thesis - "Beauty will save the world" - receives additional meaning in O. Nikolaeva's story. For her, only faith, Christian love, spiritual beauty can save the world. The ethical cancels the value of the aesthetic. The aesthetic is perceived as external, shown and therefore untrue - this is one of the common features for Nikolaeva's works.

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