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§ 3. M.I. Volokhov: Taboo and the Absurd

According to S.I. Chuprinin, “the history of literature can also be read as the history of creative transgressions, the consistent tabooing of lexical layers, themes, problems and plots that were not allowed by censorship and public opinion to public discussion” (Chuprinin, 2007: 535). This idea was expressed by this critic and literary critic in the 2000s, when it seemed that there were no taboos in art, since there was no censorship. ‘Tabooing’ then became ‘a widespread technical literary technique’ (Chuprinin, 2007: 535). Today the situation with obvious taboos is changing, which confirms the return of a new version of cultural supervision (for example, the notorious law on the use of *mat* in art). Nevertheless, it seems that even in the 2000s certain, perhaps the most important, taboos were preserved, but in a more veiled form, which almost always indicates the increased influence of such non-obvious taboos on mass consciousness. Above all taboos that have existed from time immemorial now increasingly assume implicative configurations. This is a taboo on people’s ability to think critically and express their opinions freely, which of course comes from language prohibitions. The initial restrictions and taboos, among other things, were associated with prohibitions on the utterance of certain words denoting sacred religious concepts, in particular, the ban on pronouncing the name of God (Tetragrammaton), which persists to this day in Judaism (see: Lightman, 2019). Don Quixote speaks of the ‘Golden Age’, with its characteristic absence of any separateness, mainly the division into ‘yours and mine’ (see: Cervantes, 2018), reconstructing ancient knowledge about that prehistoric period when man lived in harmony with his instincts. Unnatural taboos have not yet been invented, of course, testifying to certain stages of socialization, but also actualizing a certain degree of unfreedom, a feeling that gave rise to the first sense of absurdity due to the introduction of illusions into the natural harmonious world by man. But the understanding of absurdity simultaneously preaches liberation in the broadest sense, and first of all, liberation from taboos. While calling for the abolition of taboos in literature, the absurdist authors did not declare permissiveness at the same time, on the contrary, as we have seen, the classical textual version of absurdism, which is often taken as a basis by modern Russian writers, involves serious work with form,

expressed primarily in rigid structuring of the text. With regard to the content, their own laws also 'work', largely due to such strict formal verification. What specific taboos are violated in this case? The playwright M.I. Volokhov is positioned by critics as a rebel and provocateur; by researchers as an outstanding representative of the Russian-French theatre of the absurd. At the same time, when he himself has legitimate questions about his writer's identity in relation to the geographical territory, he perceives himself as the author of the 'Russian mentality' — and he has lived mainly in Russia since 1996: "I cannot write plays in the French mentality. It's not my native element anyway. I can only write in the Russian mentality. And through Russian problems" (Bukker, 2016: e-resource). In her work 'Dialogue with the Absurd. Notes on the Dramaturgy of M. Volokhov' the literary critic Lidia Mięowska, referring to a number of authoritative opinions about the drama of M.I. Volokhov (meaning the judgments of A. Zotov, J. Edlis, O. Schmidt, A. Zhitinkin, E. Boyakov), gives her own definition of the artistic specifics of his plays: "in the dramatist's plays one can find hints of texts, ideas, treatises, the philosophy of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Racine, Corneille, Camus, Sartre, Genet, Shestov, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Mikhail Bulgakov, Leo Tolstoy, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Nietzsche and Tertullian. The quote 'I believe, for it is absurd' (*Lat.* Credo quia absurdum), the author of which is precisely Tertullian, an apologist of early Christianity, best describes the worldview of Mikhail Volokhov" (Mięowska, 2016: 633). From our point of view M.I. Volokhov, in addition to all that has been said, is a methodical destroyer of taboos, both in literature and, consequently, in human consciousness. The most frequent aspect, which gives grounds for superficial denial or rejection of M.I. Volokhov's literary work, or polemics with it, has always been associated with an excess of taboo vocabulary in his plays. The playwright stopped all questions on this topic with an answer about the absence of the reception of *mat* in his own works as an end in itself: "This is the language of characters ... If a Russian soldier had cursed during the war, there would still have been a sacred message of protecting the country, the motherland. There is no vulgarity ... that is, it is not the *mat* itself that is shameful, but the fact that it reveals the inconsistency of a person" (Bukker, 2016: e-resource). The second part of the quoted (highlighted by us) fragment of the interview reveals just an understanding of the specifics of the functional use of swear words and expressions as a resource for the ritualization of certain areas of the text, returning to the original purpose of such vocabulary. In this regard,

we present the opinion of B.A. Uspensky about the primordial archetypal aspect of the *mat*, which explains its abundant presence in the plays of M.I. Volokhov: “swearing had a clearly expressed cult function in Slavic paganism, ... and is widely represented in various kinds of rituals of obviously pagan origin — wedding rituals, agriculture, etc. — that is, in rites somehow related to fertility: swearing is a necessary component of such rites and is certainly ritual in nature” (see: Uspensky, 1981: 49-53). M.I. Volokhov asserts the absence in his plays of the profane nature of the *mat*, unconsciously applied as opposed to the sacred nature. In addition, in the most complete edition of the playwright’s works to date (‘The Great Consoler’, 2016 — see: Volokhov, 2016) all the plays, including the most well-known to the reader and especially the lexically demonstrative ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’, have been reworked for almost continuous replacement of obscene words, but, in fact, not euphemisms, which could cause the opposite effect, depriving the plays of their characteristic sincerity and, on the contrary, vulgarizing them, but even more prominent in comparison with obscene lexemes (we will return to them). In any case, uncensored vocabulary (let us propose this word as absorbing the meaning of the presence of not only obscene, but also any special, uncensored vocabulary) is, according to the playwright, “an X-ray of the spirit. Ozone of speech. It is a sacred, supergenial language that enhances art, if there is one, and sweeps it to zero if it is the art of naked kings” (Volokhov, 2006: e-resource). Indeed, it is not by chance that always at the beginning of performances of the first Russian productions based on the drama ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’, directed by A. Zhitinkin, the audience was warned that the author writes “in *mat*, but this is not the language of actors, but the language of heroes”, and it is necessary “to be patient for 8-10 minutes, and then the story of the heroes ... will entice” (see: Volokhov M., ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’ staged by A. Zhitinkin, 1996, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AsFHUoAoFw).

After overcoming the initial barrier associated with *mat*, the reader first of all paradoxically finds himself inside the live, living Russian language, of ‘supremums’ and ‘infinums’ (to borrow terminology from mathematicians), which are transformed by M.I. Volokhov, and thanks to which all thematic boundaries are destroyed — the playwright manoeuvres from the apparently ‘small-scale’ to global problems, then to metaphysics, and as a result approaches the monumental image of the “world chaos at the beginning of the 21st century” (Razlogov, 2016: e-resource). Here we are talking not only and not so much about the

play 'Dead Man's Bluff', in which the element of censure of Soviet totalitarianism is very strong, although already entering the global level of philosophical analysis of causality and 'genetics' of any totalitarian device. We are talking now about all eighteen works of M.I. Volokhov, which are distinguished by the formulation of universal problems relevant to humanity at all times, presented through archetypal realizations. The individual's problems move into macro-areas, into metaphysical spheres, correlating with the discovery of the absurd as a unifying principle. "...The absurd is the meaning of life and the construction of any form and content in it together", says M.I. Volokhov (Dialogue..., 2016: 558). The generation of form and content occurs by creating an Image (according to M.I. Volokhov, with a capital letter), and "The Image is always the Whole and the Essence of the Whole lies in the Absurdity" (Ibid.). The avant-garde of literature, to which the work of M.I. Volokhov continues to belong in one way or another, always responds to the change of cultural and civilizational processes, which entails the emergence of something fundamentally new, unprecedented, and this, in turn, always implies some departure from the old, familiar, which is very often associated with the breaking of barriers and non-compliance with taboos. This is the reason for the forward progress of the avant-gardists, a kind of 'calling fire on yourself'. With M.I. Volokhov the elimination of taboos is carried out with the help of well-defined artistic means and techniques associated, of course, with the avant-garde, the literature of the absurd, and is implemented in at least two directions, both linguistic and thematic. But what are the tasks of breaking taboos? Let us turn to the play 'Dead Man's Bluff'. M.I. Volokhov began working on it in 1994, the year when the death sentence on murderer A. Chikatilo was carried out, it was published in the mid-1990s, and at the same time the first productions took the stage in Moscow and Paris (see: Filatov, 2016: 601). M.I. Volokhov continued to work on the play after its first publication, giving rise to several variations, the last of which dates back to 2016. In the early 2000s, with a corresponding increase in interest in the playwright, performances of 'Dead Man's Bluff' were resumed, again staged by A. Zhitinkin. The film of the same name, the author, cameraman and only actor of which was the playwright himself, was premiered as a participant at the 27th Moscow Film Festival in 2005 and shown in Russia and abroad, at the same time becoming available to the amateur cinema audience. I think it is the complex analysis of the play and the film as complementary texts that will allow us to approach the holistic perception of both works of

M.I. Volokhov as a single synthetic text. However, we do not set ourselves the task of considering all its aspects – that would make this section of the dissertation immense – but rather focus on certain aspects of its form and content (including those related to the elimination of taboos), which we will present below, outlining possible directions for further analysis. At the same time we will base our critique on the text of the latest edition of the play, published in the collection ‘The Great Consoler’ (this gives the date and place of writing as Paris 1994, Moscow 2016), it is also presented on the official website of M.I. Volokhov ([http://volokhov.ru/site/?page id=6](http://volokhov.ru/site/?page%20id=6)). We will not address the above-mentioned production, since it deserves a special analysis, comparative or not, since it represents a very loose interpretation of the play by director and screenwriter A. Zhitinkin (see: Volokhov M., ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’. Dir. A. Zhitinkin, actor D. Strakhov: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObO0zj3vjH0>), which was sufficiently reinterpreted by him and turned into a kind of new work in terms of the structure of the text and interpretation of the image. The play ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’ is, in fact, a twenty-page monologue of a character awaiting execution, the prototype of whom was a notorious serial killer. First of all, the initial words of the play attract attention, which are shown in the film as an epigraph, but not marked in the text itself, although they exist as Chikatilo’s verbal approach to his monologue. They run as follows:

While life still remains
incomprehensibly eternal,
human hopes and knowledge
are centred on love.
But true knowledge
correlated with eternity,
aimed at conquering mortality
and providing man with the opportunity
to dispose of the Universe at his own discretion,
can only be obtained, as in past centuries,
at the climax of bloody, barbarous acts
with the bodies and souls
of other favoured mortals... (Volokhov, 2016: 411)

These words contain the main message and key problems of the work in a concentrated form. The core theme, the problem of truth and the

related problems of understanding morality and distinguishing between good and evil, are solved at several levels. The essay 'The Theatre of Kairos in Essence', stylized by M.I. Volokhov on the basis of a conversation with N. Struve, which can be perceived as a kind of manifesto of the playwright in which he formulates his own aesthetic credo and understanding of modern theatre and its socio-artistic role, has the following important phrase that clarifies a lot in the play under consideration: "in the New Testament the term Kairos defines the Eve of the Great Achievements, when even opponents of the Will of God fulfil the Prophetic Right to Reveal the Infinite Truth and Beauty of the Universal God" (Dialogue..., 2016: 567). The above passage correlates with these words, and in both texts the main essence of the play is conveyed in a concise form: everything done in any form and by anyone is always aimed at approaching the Truth contained in eternal values common to all mankind and realized in such concepts as love and beauty. Of course, such statements, deduced, as we will see later, from the text of the play, contain a certain paradox, but the same paradox is present in the most important sayings immortalized in books sacred to mankind, although it is customary to either ignore these sayings, or interpret them from all sorts of 'convenient' points of view in different situations, or put them in suitable contexts removed from the real context, thereby prolonging the taboos on statements that were supposedly eliminated, but in fact preserved. It is during the periods of Kairos as an extraordinary moment in history that both the sacred and the base or sinful serve one higher purpose, as previously mentioned. Taboos on utterances are introduced, deepened and embody false meanings with their accompanying materialistic, non-spiritual ideology. It is with such taboos that M.I. Volokhov struggles: "In 'Chikatilo's Calvary' an attempt was made to recreate the transcendent, absurd content in the form of a Temple-Theatre, as well as Torture-Verification of God, and the Cathartic Resolution-Exit through Repentance from this diabolical abyss into the Cosmic Kairos of Revealing Meaningful Truth, when the most terrible Truth paradoxically, Metaphysically becomes Life-Giving Healing" (Dialogue..., 2016: 568). Numerous examples are contained in the Revelation of St. John the Theologian: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (Rev.3:9); "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev 3:19); "And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another

horse that was red, and it was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword" (Rev.6:4); "And I looked, and beheld a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Rev 6:8).

But let us return to the play. Further on, after the paragraph about the poet B.L. Pasternak in the edition under study, there are two phrases absent in the film: "There is no Morality — there is Truth on Earth. The emptiness is burned out and the words are burned into Eternity..." (Volokhov, 2016: 411), and after the recitation of the poem "I loved you, love still, perhaps..." (Pushkin, 1985: 454) there is a line from 'Boris Godunov', whose images will also be touched upon more than once in the play, — "Listening to Good and Evil indifferently" (Volokhov, 2016: 411) this also does not feature in the film). The basis of the potential script of the film was, apparently, an early version of the play (see: Volokhov, 1997), created by M.I. Volokhov even before the conditional manifesto ('The Theatre of Kairos in Essence'), with which the content of the phrase about morality correlates, and the second phrase is an autocitation from the play 'The Great Consoler' (1993-2016) (see: Volokhov, 2016: 58), the source for which is, of course, a quote from A.S. Pushkin's famous tragedy. It should be noted that all the plays by M.I. Volokhov to a greater or lesser extent communicate with each other. Hence the play under study is in dialogue not only with 'The Great Consoler', with which it has the most points of contact (in terms of hidden and explicit quotations and allusions), but also, in genre and other respects, with the monodrama 'Lyudmila Gurchenko Lives' (2012), where a real character is also displayed; with 'Dead Man's Bluff' (1987), which, in turn, corresponds to 'Rublyovka Safari' (2006), etc. ('Dead Man's Bluff' and 'Rublyovka Safari' artistically interact in terms of the themes, images and issues raised. The first is a long, exhausting dialogue between two former KGB executioners now working in a morgue. In the second the action also revolves around two main characters, representatives of the gas and oil oligarchy, who were 'killers' in the 1990s (joined later by another two characters)). The elimination of boundaries between good and evil, i.e., in fact, immorality in the plays of M.I. Volokhov seems to be only a fixation of the eternal world reception of these categories. This reception is the same, it is specific to their 'deabsolutization', which is emphasized by the special marking of

lexemes: 'Good' and 'Evil' are on the same level, despite the fact that it is highly emphasized – on the mental and spiritual plane, these concepts are equal ('Equally Soulful').

The film 'Chikatilo's Calvary' was shot from one vantage point, continuously, with one camera capturing the author-character crawling on it in the frosty snow-covered Bryansk forest and speaking the text of the play (see: 'Chikatilo's Calvary', film by M. Volokhov <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svYWn0VoWjQ>). The viewer gets the impression that Volokhov-Chikatilo is moving towards him/at him, and the text itself is addressed to him directly. The effect of W. Whitman's 'Song of Myself' is visually reproduced, only here the goal-setting is different. M.I. Volokhov, in a harsh and merciless form, seeks to evoke in the viewer a sense of kinship with the killer and does this persistently, to the point that the viewer may have a feeling of mutual identification between himself and the author's character. All this is exacerbated by the fact that the obscenities in the film are preserved, unlike the last edition of the play, but the use of *mat* in the film, as in the early editions of the play, is perceived purely abstractly by Chikatilo, in effect as a magical conspiracy, an incantation of his deeds. The main text of the play is conveyed practically verbatim, although there is an element of improvisation inherent in transgressive art, with its desire to overcome everyday attitudes and norms and to inspire similar impulses in the recipient. Having opened up the prison space in the film, replacing it with a winter landscape, M.I. Volokhov enlarges this space to the scale of a post-apocalyptic world. The winter forest is both a broken human consciousness, and the unconscious, and an expansive symbol of the transcendent, and the place where Chikatilo dealt with his victims. Prison, a solitary death row in the play, is also a metaphor with different interpretations – from the most obvious, having purely social aspects (prison as a metaphor for society, societal relations), to the existential, in the perspective of which prison is perceived as an expanded metaphor for the existence of a person who has enclosed himself in various kinds of conventional frameworks, into which he sometimes sinks, then tries to struggle free throughout his earthly life. One way or another, a person is always in a borderline state, he is always before death, because life in this physical body ends with it and always unexpectedly, i.e. in the end, the human perception of life is reduced to the perception of oneself, consciously or unconsciously, being on death row. The many examples in the play that contain metaphysical and philosophical reflections, to which we will return, give us the right for

such judgments. It is worth noting the conceptual relativity and universality of the concept of prison, brought to the play by the anecdotal context: “It's like anecdotal roll call in prison routine: ‘Is Chikatilo here?’ ‘Well, I’m Chikatilo here.’ The warden: ‘Where the fuck are you going to go.’ ‘And I say to him: ‘Where the fuck are you going to, you spermal penpusher, two balls and a pen?’” (Volokhov, 2016: 413). Prison is both the universe and the anti-world. In general, we should note the national grassroots culture widely represented in the play, its spacious folklore field, which includes, in addition to anecdotes, proverbs and sayings, ditties, folktale images, etc.

M.I. Volokhov makes the central and only hero of his play the taboo figure A. Chikatilo, revealing implicit levels in this, some of which can be designated as ‘poet’, ‘creator’, ‘prophet’, ‘god’, and the most obvious level among them is ‘all ‘humanity’’. M.I. Volokhov sets the poetic vector of the play from the very beginning: Chikatilo quotes A.S. Pushkin, M.Yu. Lermontov, talks from his bell tower about the cowardice of B.L. Pasternak. To a certain extent, of course, the character compares himself with poets, with creators in general, citing an excerpt from A.S. Pushkin’s ‘The Prophet’. The poet is called on by God only to ‘burn the hearts of people with a verb’, while Chikatilo creates poetry with a ‘useful knife’, becoming equal not only to poets, but to God in His Old Testament, punishing hypostasis. Another thing is that the maniac character punishes humanity through the murder of children, showing that it differs little from the maniac himself. On the one hand, he took it upon himself to show the true face of humanity in an extreme way, giving birth and nurturing tyrants, on the other hand, he tries to eradicate like with like (cf. the Buddhist extraction of one thorn with the help of another). The meaning of the poem that opens the play and closes the film, “I loved you, love is still, perhaps ...” in view of such a statement of the question is redesigned in accordance with M.I. Volokhov’s concept. The utterance of Pushkin’s stanzas by the playwright’s character is modelled in a different context, which we outlined above, in view of which the addressee of ‘fading’ love becomes the human race, which Chikatilo seems to be unable to love, judging by his deeds, but the paradox of the situation is that he loved and still loves, therefore he resorts to atrocities against humanity. Chikatilo is the image of all mankind, which is for itself a ‘tyrant’ and a ‘benefactor’. The absurd double morality of society allows some to destroy millions with impunity, positioning the exterminators as heroes, while others ruthlessly make scapegoats. (Here M.I. Volokhov’s thought is contiguous

with the interpretation of such problems by director A.O. Balabanov, in particular, as realized in the film 'Cargo 200' (2007)). Of course, M.I. Volokhov does not try to justify either of them, but suggests that we dare to see everything through a different prism; by changing the system of internal coordinates we can try to understand the nature of violence. M.I. Volokhov breaks the taboo on the ambiguity of perception, on the multiplicity of points of view, which will eventually bring the reader closer to a single Truth.

M.I. Volokhov transforms F.M. Dostoevsky's idea of salvation through suffering in an extraordinary way. Chikatilo appears as the arbiter of the will of nature and the universe — the murder of children becomes a vacation for sinless souls in paradise — here the paradigm 'Chikatilo is a poet — creator — god' comes to an end: "Then, if you're a wonderful World Spirit poet, you'll feel, you'll understand, that you should, can, live only ten years on Earth. And if you're a lofty genius and the very first friend of Cosmic Nature, if you've lived on Earth for forty whole years, then Nature herself will summon you to help her shine, to pluck baby flowers that are forty years old, no, ten years old, and set free their innocent angel souls, and wait for the grey-haired boy that will save us and destroy everything. Christ is Risen, you should Understand this." (Volokhov, 2016: 420). The quoted fragment is very indicative of how both liberation and enslavement occur through language in a broad sense. M.I. Volokhov achieves a special kind of effectiveness in his plays, which consists of opening new ontological facets to the reader. Firstly, the playwright discovers the dialectical specifics of his plays through language. In the analyzed drama and the rest, the method of expressing ontological duality is common by combining parts of lexemes with mutually exclusive or, conversely, complementary meanings in one complex occasional word (here – 'it is possible— it is necessary', 'sacral-genius', 'people-brothers', 'sons-daughters-babies', etc.); in other cases, a variant of successive lexemes with diametrically opposite semantics is likely – 'loving killing love', etc.). This aspect also has an emotive effect: an endless sojourn in a caustic-ironic context, which is created due to the absurdity of the fiction, literally exhausts the reader even with almost complete normative word usage characteristic of the editorial office in question. It is worth quoting an illustrative fragment: "But not thousands of blood kin, shit, the fifty naked kids I snuffed can't have that many parents. I'm not Boris Godunov, shit, I wasn't killing princes of the Russian dynasty. I'm not Ivan the Terrible, shitass, not fucking Uranus.

I'm not the funnyman Joe Stalin, shit, when he quipped that women will produce lots more! Everywhere, always, there is one problem – Power!” (Ibid: 414). The use of agrammatism, the author's neologisms ([translated to English as] 'kiddies', 'blood kin', 'Soviet', etc.), constant syntactic inversions — all this is transformed by M.I. Volokhov into his own individual techniques. In the case of M.I. Volokhov, this principle is used in relation to vocabulary with metaphysical connotation — the same can be seen in the 'manifesto'. All 'ultimate' concepts are written by the author with capital letters ('Life', 'Death', 'Truth', 'Spirit', 'World') in defiance of definitions of the transitory, while according to the dramatist's worldview other nouns begin in lowercase ('america', for example, as a conditional sign-symbol of vice and lack of spirituality). M.I. Volokhov's subjective and individual lexical etymology is also specific, for example, the associativity of the pseudonym Lenin and the word 'laziness' as indications of the lack of initiative, passivity and contemplation of the people (only the ruler carries out sentences, while the people are only silent and contemplative). Finally, M.I. Volokhov often resorts to some kind of analogue, his own version of rhythmized classic texts — Shakespeare, Homer, Pushkin, etc., with lines going back to folklore sources: “Not one Tsar allowed himself to philosophise and grant life to Dostoevsky the prophet, scoffing graciously! And who excommunicated Tolsoy because of his ideological Authority?” (Ibid: 416).

In the end, everything starts with Language. Prohibitions on the use of language give rise to all other prohibitions. That is why M.I. Volokhov puts, in fact, an equal sign between the lexemes 'verb' and 'knife', creating a 'Single Sacred Language of Narration': ‘... Language is the Spirit, the bone that the enemy is looking for ... the only weapon of struggle, of course, words, words, words ... and different, but which should converge in a Single Wise Righteous Word from the Truth’ (Dialogue..., 2016: 565). The original essence returns to the word: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1). ‘Language is sincere — there is nothing in the world more sincere than language,’ the playwright believes, ‘we always lie, but we justify this lie in a good sense and turn it into the truth ... through *mat*’ (Dialogue..., 2016: 563, 562). *Mat* is a manifestation of the highest moment of Being, *mat* is impartial, like the real truth, it always hurts the eyes and ears — this is the most naked form of human communication, the truth is the uterus. But ‘*mat* strives for self-destruction ... After resolving the situation through *mat*, *mat* can then be withdrawn’, M.I.

Volokhov said back in the early 2000s in his manifesto (Ibid: 563). I should say that the 2016 collection of M.I. Volokhov's plays entitled 'The Great Consoler', which we are focusing on, is not only almost completely free from obscenities. Many early plays have been reworked even from the point of view of the plot, which sometimes leads to radical genre changes. Many of his plays in the final version to date began to end, like Greek tragedies, with the death of all or at least the main characters ('Dead Man's Bluff', 'The Great Consoler', etc.).

The Chikatilo character, as with the concepts of L. Andreev or H.L. Borges on the betrayal of Judas, emphasizes that the ultimate measure, the 'calvary', is ahead of him from the point of view of cosmic scales – his real trial, as with all mankind, awaits him outside the visible world, especially since in this understanding he, like Judas, becomes equal to Christ, only from the opposite side. Judas was initially aware of the gravity of the sin that he took upon himself, but also subconsciously understood that without his act the Son of God would not fulfill his mission: 'it was necessary that in response to such a sacrifice, a certain person representing all people made an equivalent sacrifice. This man was Judas Iscariot. Judas, the only one of the apostles, guessed the secret divinity and terrible purpose of Jesus' (Borges, 1989: 118); also, "'Come on, clever Judas! Tell us, who will be the first beside Jesus – him or me?" But Judas was silent, breathing heavily and his eyes fervently sought an answer for something in the calm, deep eyes of Jesus. ... Jesus slowly lowered his gaze. And, quietly beating his chest with a bony finger, Iscariot repeated solemnly and sternly: "I! I will be beside Jesus!"' (Andreev, 1991: 27).¹ This, in fact, is the highest meaning of the concept of Kairos in the New Testament and, in fact, the meaning of Chikatilo's stay on Earth, his 'calvary' is the lofty task set for him by the higher powers. Here is the paradox of being, the supreme meaning of the absurdity of existence according to M.I. Volokhov. Meanwhile, such

¹ A. and B. Strugatsky go even further than their predecessors in their last novel ('Those Burdened by Evil'). Judas appears to them in the image of a weak-minded, hunted man who deeply loves the Saviour and receives instructions from Jesus Himself on what he should do: 'The Rabbi spoke for a long time, slowly, patiently, he repeated the same thing over and over again: where he should go now, whom to ask, and when they would put him before this person, what he must say and what to do next. ... Everything was exactly as the Rabbi predicted: they would praise him, give him money, and now he was already leading the guards. Everything is as the Rabbi predicted, and the trouble is getting closer and closer, and nothing can be done, because everything is going as the Rabbi predicted, which means it's right' (Strugatsky, 2019: 179-180).

meanings are inaccessible and incomprehensible to ordinary consciousness, since those in whose hands the spheres of influence and resources of massive manipulative influence are concentrated focus their attention on other less important aspects of life and being, thereby covertly tabooing the search for answers to fundamental existential questions. Humanity somehow strives to get rid of the present, the authentic, that which can return us to true nature. The absurd, through violation of the artificial taboos that actually separate people, actually becomes M.I. Volokhov's 'ubiquitous global reunifying life metaphor' (Dialogue..., 2016: 558).

In the film M.I. Volokhov goes even further, putting handcuffs-chains-shackles on himself as a character resembling a martyr, as well as a metal crown, thereby creating an allusion, including one to the image of Christ. Quasi-martyrdom is also indicated by crawling through the frosty snow. However, the knife, with which the character helps himself to crawl, does not allow us to forget both the ambivalence of the image and the fact that we still have the image of Chikatilo, albeit enlarged to universal proportions.

By choosing a real character, the effect of extreme realism of the narrative is achieved: here, the monologue of Chikatilo, and all the described villainies of the maniac begin to be perceived documentarily, as a documentary chronicle of events, which is facilitated by the simultaneous perception of the published text and the film. The paradigm of 'author – hero – reader' ceases to be an abstraction and is highly concretized. So the 'idea – person' model acquires a categorical resonance: 'Ideas are immaculate – no dirt sticks to them. Enter into the idea to become a person. This is understood. Sin, as a structural axiom of life, like words, must be redeemed immediately' (Volokhov, 2016: 412). Then – and here the dispute with F.M. Dostoevsky continues, more precisely, with his novel 'Crime and Punishment' – no matter how terrible the sin may be, it can always be justified by a timely admission of guilt. M.I. Volokhov reveals the hypocritical, artificial mechanisms of 'conditional self-repentance', by virtue of which 'you can do away with everyone', identified by F.M. Dostoevsky in 'Crime and Punishment' (Ibid: 415). Note, however, that the same playwright wrote about this in his afore-mentioned essay-manifesto, 'The Theatre of Kairos in Essence', emphasizing that this novel by the great writer is '... the most 'modern' Western novel because of the speculative repentance of the murderer Raskolnikov', which 'actually morally resolved our social, bloody revolution' (Dialogue..., 2016: 556). It is also worth noting the formal

proximity of polemics in the texts of M.I. Volokhov and in F.M. Dostoevsky's novels, which V.V. Nabokov referred to as overgrown plays (see: Nabokov, 1996: 183); in fact, M.I. Volokhov, on the contrary, calls his plays short detective novels: 'I always want to write a novel, but it turns out as a play. This is my 'dramaturgical' organism' (Dialogue..., 2016: 551).

In a short paragraph it is impossible to cover all the features of M.I. Volokhov's drama, as well as to analyze all the taboo topics that the playwright mentions. We have not yet touched upon the most interesting issues of the correlation of Chronos and Kairos in the plays, or other philosophical problems such as imaginary life in totalitarian conditions, universal guilt and loneliness, personal choice and freedom of choice; we will not attempt a more detailed study of the intertextual aspects of the playwright's work, his obvious connections with classical and modern Russian and foreign literature, classical and modern cinema (A.O. Balabanov, C. Dreyer, C. Lawton, L. von Trier, M. Haneke, A. van Warmerdam), etc. Nor will we analyze the specifics of reception in M.I. Volokhov's plays of national issues; of homosexuality, cannibalism and their ritualization, the specifics of sexual themes in general, etc. The range of problems raised by M.I. Volokhov is inexhaustible, but the playwright concentrates on the philosophy of death, globally expanding the perspectives of its study.

Thus M.I. Volokhov, as we have seen, removes the prohibitions of two levels:

1. Prohibition on the use of language in all its variety of forms.
2. Prohibition of discussion of the most important topics and problems for humanity.

Connecting the seemingly unconnected, M.I. Volokhov suggests that the reader should think in different categories, emerge from the yoke of imposed patterns of thinking and try to think globally, broadly. As a result the taboo on calling things by their proper names collapses. All prohibitions sooner or later lead to terrible consequences – this is also shown by M.I. Volokhov. It is prohibition, not opportunity, that generates violence. Even the smallest language prohibitions eventually lead to prohibition of the language of free art, because a person / reader / viewer is free to choose. Volokhov violates artificially created and already, perhaps, unnoticed taboos that implicitly enlarge the mutual alienation of people, forcibly distancing humanity from really terrible topics and problems, thereby hiding the genuine and the present deeper under the cover of an ersatz, thereby limiting the human in man. The

most obvious taboo violations identified, serving, at first glance, external purposes (shocking the audience, breaking patterns, scrapping stereotypes), at the deep level, when the mechanisms of the absurd are connected to the 'shock therapy' of the reader / viewer, can simultaneously demonstrate directly opposite meanings, behind which the continuation of not just the traditions of classical drama is visible, but reaching the global level of classical tragedy, where cultural and historical epochs are combined.

Obviously, M.I. Volokhov's absurdity can be categorized as a *'detabooization of absurdity'*.

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**Representation of the absurd in Russian literature of the late
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***The world is more complicated than any of our ideas about it,
and therefore reason alone is not enough...
B. Strugatsky***

A special aspect of the Absurd associated with its metaphysics is latently contained in texts of ancient knowledge (such as the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Upanishads, the New Testament, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tao Te Ching, the Yijing, Tatteki Tosui, etc.) and various adaptations,

empirical transcriptions and interpretations (books by A. Watts, Ram Dass, F. Merrell-Wolf, etc.). These books, in our opinion, carry perhaps the most profound and key component necessary for understanding and interpreting the object and subject of the proposed research in general cultural, theoretical, historical and literary aspects. Very unusual and constructive approaches to a definition of the essence of the category of absurdity are demonstrated by the writers themselves: V.V. Nabokov, E.V. Klyuev, Yu.V. Mamleev, M.I. Volokhov, S. Beckett, U. Eco, etc. Thus, within the framework of the object and subject of analysis, we study the works of M.I. Volokhov, V. D'rkin, D.A. Danilov, D.A. Gorchev, M.Y. Elizarov, V. Klimov, Yu.I. Koval, N.V. Kolyada, Y.P. Kuznetsov, E. Letov, Yu.V. Mamleev, O. Mukhina, D. Ozersky, L.S. Petrushevskaya, E.A. Popov, E. Radov, B.B. Ryzhii, V.G. Sorokin, A.P. Shipenko.

The purpose of the study is specified by its main **objectives**:
— to present in structural-semantic and motivic aspects and classify modes of the Absurd in the dramaturgy of the late 20th-early 21st century (with examples from the dramaturgy of N.V. Kolyada, O. Mukhina, M.I. Volokhov, D.A. Danilov, A.P. Shipenko);

Provisions for thesis defence:

10. Through the previous experience of the 1980s and 1990s, which showed a desire to violate various literary and aesthetic taboos, the absurdist drama of the 2000s demonstrates at the same time fundamental philosophical meanings, behind which one can see a continuation of the traditions of classical Russian literature with simultaneous access to the global level of classical Shakespearean tragedy, where cultural and historical epochs are combined (the 'detabooization of absurdity' by M.I. Volokhov).

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