

# Universal and eternal values in philosophical novellas by the Yakut writer Nikolay Luginov

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**Abstract**—The article focuses on the problem of universal human values representation in philosophical novellas of the Yakut writer Nikolay Luginov. The author criticizes soullessness of modern individuals along with abandonment of national traditions. Human soul is the center of the writer's focus. He is searching for protagonists who actively fight of spiritual freedom, standing up for values and wisdom which have accumulated through centuries. Luginov places the archetypical character of the Elder as representative of the people; the one who protects ethnic mentality and traditions, as well as the one who perceived the essence of being. Elders remember the past, teach how to survive in the future and reach harmony in the complicated world (chaos) and nature (Cosmos). Human destination and connection to nature become the central problem of Luginov's philosophical novellas. The author speaks of universal problems of human life and survival in the modern world

**Keywords**—Genre, novella, theme, problem, imagery, archetype, symbol, universal

## I. INTRODUCTION

N. Luginov's philosophical novella is a logical development of the writer's creative biography. The beginning of this development could be found in his earlier fiction which makes philosophical turn the result of longer artistic search. The imagery, problems and themes correlate with Luginov's earlier social and psychological novellas, and they continue those traditions. Philosophical nature of Luginov's works has been discussed previously. In this aspect the most characteristic example is the novella titled "Taas Tumus" which marks the beginning of the writer's later focus on philosophical problems. Characters written in the novella (namely, Grandmother, and Toybol) represent philosophic figures who interpret and perceive the world from the traditional perspective.

In philosophical novellas Luginov further concentrates on the conception of art in both universally human and individual realistic aspects. The author invites his readers to partake in the process of creation, reflection, and solving the central problem. Classics like A.Y. Kulakovsky, A.I. Sofronov, P.A. Oyunsky were among the previous generations of representatives of the philosophical movement in the

Yakut literature, who discussed global problems facing humankind, people, and historical eras. During the turbulent period of early XXth century they were deeply affected by the perspectives of social development and presented their own visions of present and future of their own people. Philosophical works written by them were predominantly written in the form of large poems. N. Luginov re-introduced the philosophical genre in modern context and became the pioneer of the genre of Yakut philosophical novella.

## II. OVERVIEW

The novella "Kustuk" depicts life in tundra in winter with its cold and snowy landscape. It contrasts with the novella "Smile of the old man" which is set in the summer tundra, colorful and vibrant with voices of birds singing and animals playing, and filled with warm fragrances. Contrarily, the tundra of "Kustuk" appears to be absolutely empty with all life having taken shelter from piercing cold and blizzard. The plot focuses on the life of the pack of northern sleigh dogs that face with daily challenges of not only physical, but also intellectual nature. There are seven dogs in one sleigh, each with their own personality. Leader who heads the sleigh is rather self-important and satisfied with his life. He enjoys the Master's favor and takes a privileged position in comparison to others. The Master does not chain him and the Leader is free to roam freely. Magan (White) and Kharas (Black) are rather dim-witted dogs who do not have their own views and follow the Master's orders. Kyrbyi (Troublemaker) his name hints is particularly difficult, aggressive and somewhat antisocial; he mostly keeps to himself. Syrbai (Bootlicker) as his name also indicates, is exactly the opposite: he watches each of the Master's mood swings and is ready to please him. Kharabyl (Guard) is strong, stable, and firm. Each of the dogs' personalities is shown from the viewpoint of Kustuk (Rainbow), a Yakut husky who the old Master loses to Baybal in a game of cards. Kustuk stands out among the pack of dogs due to his intelligence, observation skills and acute feeling of homesickness. He feels alien to the environment of the tundra, simply observing everything from the outside. His thoughts are in Taiga (forest) where he once was happy and at home, and this is where he longs to be. He waits for his real Master who (as Kustuk believes) only temporarily lent him to

a friend and is about to return after him. On the way to the village Kustuk quickens his pace expecting to meet his real Master. He observes Baybal tying the dogs near the house, children petting and playing with the dogs, Baybal's wife bringing food for the pack. Kustuk remains still, not touching the food, looking at the door and picturing Okhonoon (the old Master) slowly putting his clothes on to come outside, but Okhonoon never comes.

Baybal is very abusive towards his dogs; he mistreats and beats them, sometimes with chains, when in particularly bad mood. Kustuk and stubborn Kyrbyi usually receive the worst beatings – both take it stoically. Baybal is eager to demonstrate his absolute power over the pack and when he does so the more timid dogs had “a chilly wave of fear running from the tips of their tails and spreading all over their bodies” [1]. Leader is always given the biggest fish to eat, smaller one is given to Syrbai, while the smallest fishes are thrown to Kyrbai and Kustuk. Such feeding pattern is a routine aimed at showing not only the Master's contempt, but also at setting a hierarchy and obedience among the pack members.

Life of humans with its mundane problems parallels the dogs' plotline. It is also presented through the eyes of the dog. When in the village Baybal apparently receives severe scolding from his superiors; following it he becomes intoxicated and comes to his dogs in tears, as if “complaining” to them about his troubles. The dogs appear to empathize with Baybal, licking him and sharing his distress. Baybal is abusive towards his wife too. One night she leaves the house in tears and approaches Kustuk as if feeling a keen lonely soul. Kustuk feels sorry for the woman too, appearing to understand her plight and feeling of captivity.

In the end Kustuk manages to break free from his chain and runs back to his home, the Taiga. The pack sees a flock of wild reindeer and while they try to attack it, the chain tying Kustuk and Magan breaks and after a while they realize that they are free. Initially both are happy to run across the vast tundra. However, as the distance between them and Baybal's camp grows, Magan begins to doubt the decision and after some hesitation returns to captivity. The author sees this as a representation of slave psychology, which is emphasized by Magan being completely free of the chain while Kustuk is left to drag it behind himself. Magan's “chains” are invisible but they prevent him from being free.

Kustuk's longing for home is even stronger than his desire to break free. He runs across villages and mountain passages finally reaching his beloved Taiga. Along the way he comes across a series of adventures, running into other animals such as arctic fox and wolf. The wolf, ruler of both tundra and taiga enters the deadly fight with Kustuk. Kustuk is weak, hungry, and seemingly stands no chance against such a strong enemy. However he manages to outsmart the wolf, while constant thought of home gives him strength. He keeps attacking the wolf continuously while thinking: “He cannot give in. He cannot die without seeing the

Beloved Okhonoon! The Master is waiting for him! Kustuk must continue fighting and win, even if it is impossible. The Master cannot do without him – that is why!” [1]. As each prepares for the last charge, Kustuk's chain gets into the wolf's mouth, breaking his teeth. The wolf loses his grip which allows Kustuk to strike the final blow and kill the wolf.

However, his wounds are too deep and Kustuk is unable to reach home. He dies looking down at the lights of his village from the mountain. Still, his Hope and Faith survive: “... a sweet languor spread across his body. It felt good. Under the closed eyelids he was looking at a log cabin among the trees of the taiga, and an old hunter, the Beloved Okhonoon who Kustuk was about to meet never to part with again” [1].

Dog in this philosophical novella becomes an allegory, a symbol of human characters. The author commented that in the context of this work a soul takes the dog form, while human (Baybal) turns into an animal. The soul of Kustuk is presented through strive for freedom and true home, as well as devotion. Meanwhile human character loses his humanity when abandoning traditions.

“Kustuk” marks the beginning of N. Luginov's focus on the problem of soul search – both in the aspect of an individual and the people. This is when word combination “Ichchitekh sir” (abandoned land, a land without owner) becomes one of the key markers of human tendency for self-destruction. Love for one's homeland, home, and roots is the central theme which runs across the bulk of the writer's works beginning from the novella “Nuoraljyma Grove”. Kustuk is unable to live in an alien place preferring to give his own life for the chance of returning. He has no choice – but he cannot meet his old Master who had betrayed him either.

The theme of freedom (which was also introduced in the novella “Taas Tumus”) is particularly strong in “Kustuk”. Not only people took Kustuk's freedom – they are not free themselves as presented by both Baybal and his wife. They both suffer from injustice, just like Kustuk. The problem in the novella also has a strong moral aspect: people abuse those who are smaller and weaker – and their own world is far from perfect too. People's attitude and treatment of each other and the nature – one of the cornerstones of philosophical thought – form the basis of the novella. The idea of eternal longing, hope, and faith run through all of N. Luginov's novellas.

Raven is the central character of another philosophical novella (“Ballad of the Black Raven”). Raven and human share mutual connection, both being children of the nature, representing balancing aspects of natural phenomena, and sources of harmony. There is an old Yakut saying “Raven rejoices when a boy is born”. Man, being hunter and provider, is bound to share his luck and trophies with Raven. Raven lives for centuries, while human life is short. However, the value of life is not measured in length; rather, it is the beauty of its moments. Philosophic idea introduced here is revealed through the irony of humans who

believe they are the rulers of both nature and life, while only living for a brief period of time. Human life in fact is so short that one is unable to fully perceive their role and place in this world.

The novella is once again set in winter, the time of cold and hunger. Both humans and animals struggle for food and survival. Hare is hunted by fox, who is hunted by lynx, who in its turn is hunted by human. Raven flies above them all, seeing both moose hiding behind the trees, as well as a wolf hunting reindeer. In his vision everything is alive and has a living soul: trees breathe, laugh and sing; ravines, mountains, springs, and winds talk. Each element of the nature comes to life. Human is the master of the land; without humans the land is empty; they link each element of nature to another. Old hunter's grandson is born, and all the nature rejoices recognizing him as the master (Ichchi).

Humans must realize their destination – this is the only guarantee of them fulfilling their duty and making their lives complete. The writer glorifies the birth of a human to the world where everything has to begin and to end. This is the great mystery of the nature which only the wise could solve. The concept of thinking becomes a separate motive in the novella – one lives as long as one is able to think. Interestingly, here the Raven serves as the central representation of thinking, which makes it the carrier of the supreme human ability. Human life in “Raven” is also presented through the eyes of an “outsider” – the Raven. When a child is born, people try to predict their future. They say, that the newborn boy, Ayaal cries loudly, which is a sign that the baby will become a skilled and lucky hunter and a good owner of the land. His voice also bears resemblance to the voice of his roamer uncle, which is a cause for concern. These details also allow the author to introduce the idea of family traits which are passed genetically from generation to generation.

Even the Raven notices differences of human personalities. He divides them into “his own” people, the people of taiga, and “the strangers” who live across the river and whose interests are alien to him. The Raven is frightened by human greed and cruelty which can cause great harm to nature. He waits for the real master of taiga to come, and sees Ayaal as one, not wanting him to join the people across the river. Ayaal is sent off to school, but he keeps coming back every summer, bringing joy back to the nature. Both the grandfather and the Raven wish for him to become a hunter and to continue the traditional lifestyle.

The novella accentuates the link existing between the three generations. The strongest, the deepest, and the most authentic link exists between grandfather and the grandson, making the middle generation somewhat outsiders. Here the author focuses on the contrast between the two worlds: the ancestral lifestyle, and that of the modern world. The author is optimistic when approaching this problem: if grandchildren continue their grandparents' traditions, they will be preserved in the future. Only the great Eternity rules the world, and all is equal before it. Life flows as river, undergoing changes along the way; only the eternal values remain

unchanged – birth of a child, one's love for their homeland, faith, and hope. While Kustuk is an allegoric character who symbolizes people's longing for freedom, the Raven is a more independent image, somewhat distant from the human world, an outside, yet interested observer of people's lives.

In the novella titled “Sergé” (tethering post, traditional symbol of family, prosperity and happiness) a solitary sergé stands in the abandoned alaa (an opening near a forest, usually serving as a place for summer encampment). Sergé is filled with different thoughts. Here the author personifies an inanimate object which also serves as an outside, yet interested observer. The narration opens with the following introduction of winter setting: “It's cold! It's cold!” [1]. Cold and abandoned, the Sergé longs for the past life when the alaa was inhabited by people, their voices, their love, and their routine. Nevertheless the Sergé does not lose hope and waits for people to return. Its memories bring life to the days of the past. Sidor is a hard-working breadwinner and protector of his family. He brings his young wife to the alaa holding the bridle of the horse she is riding. They make a stop near the Sergé and then enter the house. Their family life begins here. They build their house, and have children according to the ancient traditions of their people. Their first children die which results in them “hiding” the surviving children behind each other's names in order to “trick” death: the older two are named the Big Miite and the Big Nyuku; the younger ones are the Small Miite and the Small Nyuku. All four went to war and only two younger sons returned. Following the deaths of both parents, children move to the city, abandoning both the alaa and the Sergé. Thus the theme of loneliness and abandonment of the land is even more pronounced in this novella.

The writer is one of the first authors to focus on the deep social and moral problem here: the abandonment of native traditions by modern people. Sergé keeps recalling and longs for the past happier life when the Yakuts lived according to the old traditions and on their native lands. It is now destined to eternally wait for the people to come back home. The Wind visits the Sergé complaining bitterly about search and failure to find its Ichchi (soul). Thus, according to the author, the vagrant people who abandoned their native roots remain soulless, living like automatic puppets while their native land is abandoned. Lack of morals and spirituality of the modern society is the central idea of the novella.

People eventually return to the alaa, but it is not the homecoming the Sergé had dreamed of. Sidor's children drink and at one point nearly chop the Sergé for firewood. This representation of sheer negligence and contempt for one's own past is the subject of the author's outrage. The drunkards never stop to contemplate the idea of the Sergé being the symbol and embodiment of the traditions they have abandoned. In the Yakut mythology “... each object has its own soul (ichchi). These souls are the allegory of the people's spirits. If these spiritual traditions are abandoned and destroyed, does that not mean that the future is lost for

this ethnos? Does not it die both physically and spiritually? Is not this the cause of the modern society's critical state?" [2].

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In his philosophical novellas N. Luginov reflects and operates with philosophical categories. The central problem of "Kustuk" is the problem of individual freedom. Along with this the author addresses the idea of love and devotion to one's native land lending a clearly romantic note to the novella where justice and truth are always with the suffering and the abused. In "Raven" and "Sergé" the main characters are observing people's lives, judging each deed and eventually reaching a final verdict on their judgment. Here the central idea of is revealed through the concepts of Life, Being, and Human destination. Both the Raven and the Sergé wait for people to return; the former as the Master of Nature, the latter as the Master of the land and home. As the supreme embodiment of spirit they remember the human destination even as people themselves forget or are unaware of it.

In the system of the writer's imagery the central focus is on the archetypal image – the Elder as a representative of the people, not only protecting their native mentality and traditions, but also serving as the wise thinker who has perceived the meaning of being. The Elders remember the past and teach how to survive in the future and reach the harmony of the complex world (Chaos) and nature (Cosmos). The younger generation should realize their higher calling – to reach true humanity, to manage nature and life sensibly like the ancestors did for centuries. The Elders are the philosophers who have their own vision of the world and profess their own attitude towards it. "The traditional view of the world is doubling" (G. Gachev), as the author reveals the worldview of older generations and establishes his artistic conception of reality. Almost all of N. Luginov's novels center on the idea of the strong link between three generations of a family. Within this link the Elders function as keepers and protectors of native traditions as the author establishes the idea of national character. The image of old people and their link with the younger generation who continue the traditions form a strong basis of the cosmic world-order and the harmonious progress of the humankind: "The form of individual people's life contains the universal, the world-wide essence" [3]. In his works N. Luginov once again persuades that universal values are formed through perception of a national world.

In his novellas N. Luginov is revealed as a great connoisseur of various aspects of reality, be that the depiction of everyday life, personalities, or destiny. The choice of themes and characters "depends on a writer's outlook, as well as on social attitudes and ideas" [4]. N. Luginov's novels are thematically rich. The significance of this aspect could be expressed by N. Gogol's comment on A. Pushkin's variety of interests: "What was the subject of his verse? Everything and nothing in particular. It seems impossible to perceive the endlessness of his subjects.

What failed to astonish him, and what failed to make him stop in amazement? From the cloud-reaching Caucasus and its picturesque people to the poor northern village with balalaika and drunken dances near the tavern – everything is his subject. He reacted to everything there is in human mind, from the highest and the greatest trait to the smallest sigh of weakness and humility – he reacted just like he did to everything there is in the nature that could be seen" [5]. Gogol himself meanwhile was able to perceive not only ordinary human lives, but also the inexplicable and supernatural aspects of human reality and being.

"The precise naming, systematization and classification of the animal and plat world demonstrates cultural development of a nation, type of their original occupation, and many other categories" [6]. The Yakuts are traditional hunters who lived in harmony with their environment. This aspect makes N. Luginov's perspective, as that of the Northern hunter particularly fascinating for international readers. The most characteristic feature of Luginov's style is the fact that he persuasively reveals new tendencies in the Yakut literature, a previously unknown field for fiction to depict: the lives of nature, animals, and material world. At the same time no fiction writer is able to completely step away from reality; any depiction eventually correlates with people and their deeds, especially so if the images depicted are based on allegory. Therefore, "personification" as an object of art and fiction is built on mythological roots, stemming from the early years of the humankind. Ancient Yakut mythology was represented by myriads of living entities. Everything had a soul: both animate and inanimate objects were viewed as equals, and only humans had three souls [2]. Both the Raven and the Sergé have direct link to lives of people while remaining outside observers. Kustuk, just like people, wants control of his own fate, and actively struggles for justice and freedom.

The plot of the philosophic novellas is concentric, making it more comprised, where a small text reflects the whole worldview. The writer shows the tragic circumstances of modern life and people's equally tragic position in it. At the same N. Luginov is proud of the Yakut people who have withstood the test of the "stagnation" period: "Conspiracy of silence, immorality, apathy, negligence in professional sphere, chaos was prevailing everywhere... But our people went through these trials with decency" [7].

N. Luginov develops philosophical discussion by addressing the universal problems of the life and survival facing modern people. While social and psychological novellas mainly focus on Home and Alaas, the philosophical works center on Ichchi (in the meanings of both "soul" and "master"). These images comprise the essence of the writer's artistic conception of returning to one's roots, traditional lifestyle and worldview. That is why the ideas of waiting, hope and faith become the basis of the main characters' plotlines: elders Toybol, Sylkan, and grandmother wait for the newborn as bearer of family line, while the

Raven and the Sergé wait for Master of all the living on the native land.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Philosophical novellas are the precursors of N. Luginov's larger epic work, the nove "At the Behest of Genghiz Khan" where the problems are depicted on the national and historical levels. In the novel the writer operates such universal categories as nation, empire, international relations, and others.

Nikolay Luginov has already established himself as writer-philosopher who made a great contribution to the Yakut literature and introduced the new perspective of people and reality. This is determined by the fact that all his works are based on the wealth of oral traditions and unique ethnic outlook: "Luginov's works show signs of artistic interpretation and interesting re-thinking of poetic folklore structures (legends of ancient Mongol and Tukic chiefs and "Ballad of the Black Raven"), and it makes one happy for the writer who never fails to find new themes in the original culture of the ancient Yakut people" [8].

Innovative nature of Nikolay Luginov's works goes beyond the establishing the genre of philosophical novella in the context of Yakut literature. It is also about his deeply original and comprehensive idea of people and reality; the idea which is realized through all the elements of the writers' system of imagery and poetics.

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