

BORIS REVCHOUN: THE TOOLS OF THE LAUGH-MAKER

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The debate about the value of laughter in life, if you throw a retrospective look at the issue and the eloquent list of the participants of verbal battles, can convince us that laughter is a serious matter. The ability to make people laugh is a fine art that demonstrates a deep and flexible mind, the ability to place the appropriate emphasis. So the analysis of the "laugh-making treatise", or "creative development" as defined by the author – Boris Revchoun – requires the attention to the techniques used by the known humorist and satirist, and this is the purpose of the article. He started making fun of public and private stupidity from the mid of 1980's to make metropolitan large circulation newspapers and respectable magazines less insipid with the help of his aphorisms. Revchoun's broad soul successfully worked in the spirit of the time, the author being a true versatility: Associate Professor, PhD in Economics, the member of the NUWU (The National Union of Writers of Ukraine), frequent habitue of the then Ukrainian republic-wide comic broadcast («А ми до вас в ранковий час», «Від суботи до суботи» ("Here we are in the morning", "From Saturday to Saturday,"), the co-author of «П'яте колесо» ("The Fifth Wheel") anthology of laughter, joker-philosopher who is published in Kyiv, Moscow, New York, and the author of numerous academic and publicistic articles, nonfiction, memoirs, traveler notes, and the sole author of humorous collections «Мініатюри без цензури» ("Uncensored Thumbnails"), «Куточки зору» ("Angles of View"), humorous explanatory dictionary for English language gourmets «Dictionary for Fun», all of them having wide publicity.

His writing matter serves as a model of aphoristic writing in the anthology of contemporary laughter compiled by V. Chemeris [7] and one of the sources of the research of idiomatic neologisms of the post-Soviet era in the book by O. Semeniuk [6, 224], yet the peculiarities of Revchoun's methods of laugh making have become the subject of research for the first time.

Due to B. Revchoun's tireless hard work his book «Усякі думки в чотири рядки» ("Various thoughts in four lines") was released in 2017 in which the writer, sticking to his genre, explores a new form – poetic, keeping detailed attention in the field of political and economic conjunctures, the spread of hedonism in a technocratic society, the road to love and its roundabout ways, labyrinths of creativity, holy and sinful, market relations and spiritual degradation – all this being not in any way a complete list of thematic artistic interpretation of our contemporary life. The bitter irony of the Ukrainian dream («садок вишневий біля хати скраю») [5, 5] ("cherry garden near the house, me – aside"), the fusion of Shevchenko's romantic ideal with the well-known proverb turns into nuances factors of the state of being robbed («Занапастив продажну душу / Наш липовий суспільства цвіт») [5, 5] ("they selfcorrupted their souls / the members of the fake elite"), and ends with sardonic laughter of the hero-teller-narrator, whose fate is bound with the fate of the nation: "we" serves as a source of self identity («Свої не тримаємось країни, / Якщо за бидло тут тримають нас») [5, 7] ("we do not stick to our native country / If we are treated like cattle"). The proposed «злобинки» (themes of current interest) and «нетлінки» (imperishable themes) (nearly nine hundred quatrains) paradoxically combine lyricism and philosophic stand, psychological oversight and conclusion.

The need for harmonization of social and interpersonal relations produces the thought about the ideal of decency, but the harsh reality captures the increase in the proportion of negative phenomena. Only laughter is capable to balance the unbalanced system by taking on the role of the main character and positive tool to transform the world.

Awareness of laughter as the art of the word originates from the "Poetics" by Aristotle [1], although its second book, as rightly noticed by U. Eco, was as if deliberately lost [2, 135], for obvious reasons: it is much easier to manage people by manipulating their feelings of fear, rather than impose behavioral patterns in their heads, that are able to question everything. And B. Revchoun is also truly convinced of it, subtly combining known aphorisms («вити мотузки» ("twist somebody round one's little finger"), «втягуватись у нитку») ("overexert"):

«З м'яким характером старих і молодих

Цінує можновладець деспотичний.

Мотузки завжди легше вити з тих,

Хто в ниточку витягуватись звичний» [5, 49].

("Despotic lord appreciates old and young folks with mild nature because it is always easier for him to twist round his little finger those who have used to overexert themselves").

Laughter as the most mysterious form of human response to the world around us usually operates with situational and verbal means [3, 56]. Among the components of funny in one's actions and statements we, according to V. Marko, should distinguish the following things: identification of the best as the worst, and vice versa, repetition as a means of typification of phenomena, method of "screen shot", situational shift of the meanings of words, phrases build according to the laws of paradox, and burlesque [3, 57-60]. In B. Revchoun's quatrains, alongside with the traditional for Ukrainian literature methods of humor, funny moments are obviously produced due to deliberate violations of logical relations in society («Гарант прогарантує мізер») [5, 5] ("The Guarantor will guarantee scantiness"), the diffusion of high and low («Незалежність! Ми на волі! – / Розкатали губи») [5, 7] ("Independence! We are free! – / Full of rosy expectations"), the exhumation of beauty («В коханні більше чистого й святого, <...> А секс купити можна у чортів») [5, 224] ("In love pure and holy prevails, <...> and sex can be bought from devils"), and the search for the grains of aphoristic truth as one of the signs of higher quality of poetic work («Душа однаково страждає в будь-кого: / Чи там тягар, чи щент вона порожня») [5, 254] ("Soul suffers both: / Whether there's a burden inside it or when it is completely empty"), herefrom is the author's selection of appropriate heroes-jesters.

Therefore, humorist and satirist consciously assumes the role of a jester, who is allowed to say anything he likes and to look at things from an unexpected angle. In his remarks ridiculous stems from burlesque (the use of high style words to describe mundane and prosaic things and events); as the result – the author creates confusion of certain verbal-semantic units to mean different things; he applies the techniques of verbal games, contrasting comparisons to extract the precious grain of discovery from the chaff. It's also worth mentioning that the postmodern age offers the expansion of subtexts of contemporary works through intertextual comparisons with ideological and aesthetic concepts of high classics. This is first. To interpret the painful problem Boris Revchoun dares to take great Shakespeare as a co-author:

«Нема на світі більш сумної повісті,

Ніж повість про паплюження ідеї.

Ми дочекалися-таки свободи совісті,

Та більше виграли безсовісні від неї» [5, 22].

("For never was a story of more woe/Than the story of vilification of the idea./We've waited to get the freedom of conscience,/But those who are more unscrupulous benefited from it").

Secondly, the findings of the humorist stem from the modernized interpretation of folk sayings:

«Чужа дитина виростає швидко,

Ба більше – як дитина урядовця,

Що надшвидкими темпами нерідко

Зростає до державного службовця» [4, 72].

("Not own baby grows very quickly / Moreover – when he's a child of the official, / Whose tempo of growth is the greatest / With finish in the high position of a civil servant").

The quatrains of B. Revchoun zoom the boundary realities of life, striving to achieve the artistic goal – the negation of the deformed values of the modern world. In the virtual projections of the human nature expert and philosopher sad laughter turns into a sardonic one, which is aimed at waking up the "lulled" Ukraine:

«У черзі першою звикає бути влада,

Народ стоїть далеко за порогом.

Тоді, як за народом стане правда,

Попереду не буде вже нікого» [4, 72].

("Those in power are accustomed to be first in lines, / The rank and file are far beyond the threshold. / When common people rightly get the upper hand, / There will be no one ahead").

It is both easy and difficult to depict the satirical face of a certain epoch. While the social processes are in progress and cautious people stay waiting how to adjust their statements to the prevailing public opinion demonstrating their loyalty to the regime, the writer does not get tired proclaiming: global changes are to be determined by human values, otherwise in the worst case, social flaws and shortcomings that have not changed for thousands of years – fears and prejudices, lust for power and material things possession reflex, the conquest of a weaker, the search for motes in someone's eye – is the movement to the abyss of nothingness.

To denote the core of artistic discovery, the artist must not only combine the two incarnations – those of a philosopher and a resolute fighter for truth (and this is no exception, rather an axiom), but also find the intonation pattern. While the philosopher reflects on typifying events («Що хама, що бандити грізні – / Для типажів важливо це...») ("What is important for both boors and menacing thugs – / are their common features...") the resolute fighter veracity states the truth recklessly: «Обличчя у людей всі різні, / А морди – на одне лице» [4, 84] ("faces of people are all different / while muzzles look like one and the same face"). Due to the narrative contrast of detached

contemplation and blatant injustice – the blocks of the art world of this book – there sprouts the miracle of a "normal" finding.

Syntheses-analyses of the philosopher provide grounds to conclude that in the world of absurdity where the rules change during the game, only healthy laughter can save mental health of the player who every second risks to get a yellow (or even red) card and lose the chance to realize his own abilities and skills. It looks like the world inside out, where the player can become a pawn in someone else's game ... So laughter plays the role of protest against the reification of man:

«Інтелігент вам не влаштує сцен,

Інтелігент не збреше вам ні грама,

Інтелігент не лізе на рожен,

Інтелігент – це знахідка для хама» [4, 93].

("Intelligentsia do not arrange scenes, / Intelligentsia do not say lies at all, / Intelligentsia do not kick up a row, / Intelligentsia are godsend for boors").

Boris Revchoun, an economist by profession, a philosopher judging by his outlook, and the "quiet" rebel by nature, armed with a scalpel of doubt, undertakes the artistic exploration of the concepts, phenomena, and human relations. His sober mind has the childish desire – to break a toy to see its inner construction and connections that determine its functions. This banality has an interesting twist: you yourself is a toy in the system of certain stereotypes...

«Коли щось дороге стоїть на карті

І в голову думки зрадливі пруться,

Є диваки, які чогось та варті,

Якраз тому вони не продаються» [4, 95].

("When something valuable is at stake / And treacherous thoughts obsess one's mind, / The cranks may have some worth, / Just because they are not purchasable").

A rich palette of the research of the humorist and satirist is packed in a concise form for the satisfaction of the fans of aphoristic sayings: «Весь світ сьогодні завалив Китай / Дешевою, добротною халтурою» [4, 117] ("The whole world today is filled / With the Chinese cheap, quality trash"). «Дарма варити кашу з тим, / Кого не переварюєте ви» [4, 144] ("There's no sense to cook porridge / With those whom you do not stand"), «Поганий дурень той, який / Не мріє стати ідіотом» [4, 166], "That fool is bad / Who does not dream of becoming an idiot", «За дурістю дорослий ідіот / Обов'язково перевершить немовля» [4, 169], ("In terms of stupidity the grown-up idiot / Will surely surpass a baby"), «Утерпіти так важко без жінок, / Та значно важче довго їх терпіти» [4, 177], "It's hard to abstain without women / And much more difficult to stand them for a long", «За собою вимкніть світло, / Як виходите в тираж» [4, 191], ("Turn off the light, / When leaving the premises of popularity"), «Не переходь начальникам дорогу / У місці, не дозволенім тобі!» [4, 226], ("Do not cross the road of the boss / In places that are not allowed to you!"), «Совок не може жити без сміття» [4, 263] ("The Soviet "scoop" can't live without garbage"), «Якщо в раю росте один лиш райський сад,

/ То як там жити без свинарника й городу?» [4, 267] ("If paradise is no more than a garden / Then how to live there without pigsty and vegetable plot?"), and so on.

The information density of the technogenic world needs healthy laughter, which, on the one hand, provokes the change of the perspective of the vision of the world as well as ourselves in it, and on the other hand – underlines the fragile boundaries between good and evil, physical survival and moral timeserving. U. Eco on behalf of the hero of the Middle Ages announced the step-by-step project of the spiritual development of human civilization: "... wisdom is in the liberation from fear", "... laughter will appear as a new art, unknown even to Prometheus, that will help destroy fear" [2, 514] and if someone "will raise the art of laughter to the dignity of sophisticated weapons, if the rhetoric of ridicule replaces the rhetoric of persuasion" [2, 515] and the topic of debunking and overthrow replaces the topic of patience, then (adding from yourself) a person will gain a true inner freedom. The collection of quatrains "Various Thoughts in Four Lines" by B. Revchoun shows: it is written by the internally free man who mastered and developed the techniques of laugh-making, who aptly applies the innovations in the development of the genre to make society become healthier and secure its liberation from fear of the future. The quality of Revchoun's laughter therapy, the sharp blade of his sardonic writings are hard to miss – they are in the aphoristic nature of expression, in philosophical definitions of reification, in daring comparisons, in shifting of verbal meanings, in filling the traditional sayings with modernized content, etc. This is the scalpel, which will help break down the last Berlin Wall, because "of all the flying seeds joke has the strongest wings, due to which jokes are sown very far away from the place of their origin" [4, 184]. The book by Boris Revchoun provides the spreading material for the observation of artistically meaningful constants of the modern Ukrainian life.

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