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**ANDREI PLATONOV IN SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE:
WAYS OF COMPREHENDING THE ETERNAL VERITY, THE
ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE AND HAPPINESS. WANDERING**

**АНДРЕЙ ПЛАТОНОВ В ПОИСКАХ СМЫСЛА ЖИЗНИ: ПУТИ
ПОСТИЖЕНИЯ ИСТИНЫ, СМЫСЛА СУЩЕСТВОВАНИЯ
И СЧАСТЬЯ. СТРАННИЧЕСТВО**

Abstract:

The rich conceptual sphere of Andrei Platonov's prose underlying his ontology receives its artistic saturation from the intertextual semiotic interaction of the author's system of philosophical concepts and includes elements of the writer's philosophical thought and his existential worldview. Platonov's spiritual and philosophical quests are distinguished by the author's special understanding of various philosophical theories and life values and are expressed in semiotics and concepts, artistically voiced using his unique language. Platonov's view on the search for the meaning of life and existence acts as a key position of Platonov's entire ontology. The writer's search for the meaning of life fully reflects his existentialism. Platonov's dystopian texts are filled with capacious utopian symbolism and with the idea of searching for the Eternal Verity.

Keywords:

Andrei Platonov's ontology, conceptual sphere of Platonov's prose, philosophical concepts, the intertextual semiotic interaction, Platonov's existentialism, the eternal verity, the meaning of life, the eternal verity of existence, the organic interdependence of eternal verity and intellection, the concept of wandering, the concept of wanderer-seeker of the eternal verity of existence, the concept of happiness, the substance of existence

Аннотация:

Богатая концептосфера прозы Андрея Платонова, лежащая в основе его онтологии, получает свое художественное насыщение в результате интертекстуального семиотического взаимодействия авторской системы философских концептов и включает в себя элементы философской мысли писателя и его экзистенциального мировоззрения. Духовно-философские искания Платонова отличаются особым пониманием автором различных философских теорий и жизненных ценностей и выражаются в семиотике и понятиях, художественно озвученных его уникальным языком. Взгляд Платонова на поиск смысла жизни и существования выступает ключевым положением всей онтологии Платонова. Поиски писателем смысла жизни в полной мере отражают его экзистенциализм. Тексты-антиутопии Платонова наполнены емкой утопической символикой, идеей поиска Вечной Истины.

Ключевые слова:

Онтология Андрея Платонова, концептуальная сфера платоновской прозы, философские концепты, интертекстуальное семиотическое взаимодействие, платоновский экзистенциализм, истина, смысл жизни, истина существования, органическая взаимозависимость истины и мышления, концепт странничества, концепт странника-искателя истины существования, концепт счастья, вещество существования

Introduction

The idea of searching for the eternal verity, the meaning of life, and comprehending the eternal verity, or the eternal verity of existence, being a distinctive, autochthonous (i.e., primordial) feature of the Russian mentality, has been and remains the eternal and most burning issue of Russian philosophical thought and the spiritual quest of Russian literature. The author's view on the search for the meaning of life and existence acts as a key position of Platonov's entire ontology. In the context of the short novel *The Foundation Pit* [11], Platonov's ontology is built on the intertextual artistic-semiotic interaction of the system of his philosophical concepts. A.K. Bulygin [4], when considering the text of *The Foundation Pit*, also places special emphasis on the defining ontological role of the concept of the eternal verity in the general civilizational system of spiritual values, which, in general, underlies Platonov's entire ontology:

*“<...> one of the aspects of understanding pathos may be as follows: in *The Foundation Pit* Platonov carries out a “test of objectivity” of the forms of monistic consciousness that were relevant for that time with the Goal of development in which the Eternal Verity is contained among them <...> One of the main questions heard in *The Foundation Pit* is the question that was asked in the most laconic form by the Evangelical Pilate to Jesus: “What is the Eternal Verity?” (as you know, the latter's response was silence). But it is hardly possible to find another question that has worried humanity so much throughout its history. <...> There is no doubt that these questions were extremely relevant for Andrei Platonov, who, despite the obvious danger of a critical position in those years, tirelessly spoke in his works about problems of an ontological nature.” [4, p. 16] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]*

Discussion

The idea and concept of the eternal verity are artistically realized by Platonov in *The Foundation Pit* in the form of the concept substance of existence [11, p. 20], which can be considered as a key concept along with the central concept: the foundation pit. A. Khudzinska-Parkosadze [7] defines the concept substance of existence, which, according to her research, is present in almost all of Platonov's works:

"It seems that all the motives and images of his artistic world find their denouement and solution precisely in this concept. "The Substance of Existence" defines both the path of Platonov's artistic search and its goal. However, the meaning of this concept has evolved in the writer's work. At first it was associated with the semantic experiments of Platonov, who was strongly influenced by the philosophy of N. Fedorov, then he attributes it to the phenomenon of communism to finally come to the conclusion about its universal, almost Christian in nature, meaning." [7, p. 1] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

The concepts reflected in the language and semiotics of *The Foundation Pit* are closely related to Platonov's spiritual and philosophical quests and are a symbolic embodiment of his author's reading of many philosophical categories and universal human values. As in other Platonov's dystopian texts in thought and author's conclusions, which are also filled with capacious utopian symbolism, the entire artistic space of *The Foundation Pit* is permeated with the idea of searching for the eternal verity. Yu.I. Levin [8] includes the eternal verity in the list of the most important and most often found existential categories in *The Foundation Pit*:

"Meaning, eternal verity, meaning of life and expressions close to them (essence, meaning of life, plan of life, essential verity of life, eternal verity of existence, eternal universal verity, meaning of existence, etc.) belong to the most common words of the story. <...>. The most common are negative contexts such as: they do not feel the essence, the weakness of the body without eternal verity, had no meaning in life, slept without feeling the eternal verity, without eternal verity the body weakens, did not see the meaning of life and became weak, the world hid <...> the eternal verity of all existence, I am ashamed to live without the eternal verity, still not comprehending life, I could not sleep without the peace of eternal verity inside my life, a life spent without conscious meaning, living <...> without eternal verity, etc. These are precisely the categories designed to replace the "dead God" to which existence is trying to transcend." [8, p. 407] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

In this eternal search for the meaning of life, Platonov's existentialism is manifested. The negative contexts for the manifestation of this idea are related to the fact that one thing is the search for the general meaning of life, and another is in a closed system, unsuitable for a decent and life-acceptable human existence. The life of ordinary people on the pages of *The Foundation Pit* appears in a form that is difficult to explain and unbearable for ordinary people, an antithetically ugly form:

[peasants] Everyone of us lives because he has his own coffin <...> [11, p. 53]

"We don't know, Comrade Chiklin, we ourselves live by accident." [11, p. 60]

His sister did not write anything to him; she had many children and was exhausted and lived as if in unconsciousness. [11, p. 51]

– Why was he there?

– He was afraid not to be. [11, p. 61]

<...> an elderly poor man. He was constantly surprised that he was still alive in the world <...> [11, p. 71]

– Look, Chiklin, he's all gray!

– I lived with people – so I turned gray from grief. (77) [11, p. 77] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

The search for the substance of existence is figuratively realized in *The Foundation Pit* through life experience, actions and the view of a character symbolizing the concept of wandering. The image and the concept of the wanderer-seeker of the eternal verity of existence is present to one degree or another in all of Platonov's works. In *The Foundation Pit* the wanderer-seeker of the meaning of life is Voshchev, who prefers to escape into the world of the endless horizon and nature over a meaningless everyday existence:

He walked along the road until he was exhausted; Voshchev quickly became exhausted, as soon as his soul remembered that it had ceased to know the eternal verity. [11, p. 18] Having moved away a little, Voshchev disappeared into the field with a quiet step and lay down there, invisible to anyone, happy that he was no longer a participant in crazy circumstances. [11, p. 54]

<...> he could not continue to work and walk along the road without knowing the exact structure of the whole world and where to strive. [11, p. 17] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

K.A. Barsht [1, p. 49] makes an interesting allegorical connection to the narrative of *The Foundation Pit* in his monograph dedicated to the work of Platonov, concerning Voshchev's age (according to the text, he is 30 years old). He refers to the words of R. Steiner, who "loved to repeat that in the life of every person, at any biological age, his "33 years" must occur, which indicate his anthroposophical maturity"¹ [Anthroposophy is the path of knowledge called upon the spiritual in lead a person to the spiritual in the Universe – V.B.]. Barsht continues to develop this idea:

"Until now, the age of Voshchev, the "hero of The Foundation Pit," was explained by the "age of Christ," to whom he, apparently, bears no resemblance. However, it is possible that the whole point is in introducing the hero of the story to the search for eternal verity in the "earth" – "the substance of the universe", according to Steiner's anthroposophical concept. "33 years," believed R. Steiner, is the time when a person renounces a dissolute life and moves on to ideological maturity, as evidenced by the decision to participate in saving the world from entropy, the renunciation of oneself as a social sexual being. <...> The spiritual transformation of "33 years" in the destinies of Platonov's heroes leads to an attempt at a conscious transformation of all the flesh of the Universe (including one's own)." [1, pp. 49-50] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Voshchev's search for the eternal verity leads him to the foundation pit/ kotlovan, which, according to his original plan, meant only a temporary break in his wandering. Engaged in free wandering in search of the substance of existence, he no longer risks openly expressing his painful and politically dangerous thoughts and doubts, provoked by the meaninglessness of the general and his own existence:

*"I don't exist here," Voshchev said, ashamed that many people now feel him alone.
– I'm just thinking here.
– Why do you think, you're torturing yourself?
– Without the eternal verity my body weakens, I can't feed myself by work, I thought about it in production, and they laid me off... <...> [11, p. 21] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]*

¹ Footnote of K.A. Barsht: [3, p. 325]

Voshchev rethinks his own ideas about the role of labor in his life, hoping that it is in collective work that he can learn the eternal verity. In such political conditions, Voshchev replaces his politically disgraced wandering and thinking with “free” physical labor. He quickly merges with the crowd of ordinary diggers, very quickly assimilating and adopting their life perception, their worldview. Employment is the dominant thing for the people, a non-alternative existential and ideological imperative and the equivalent of the eternal verity:

– *What is your eternal verity! – said the one who spoke before. – You don’t work, you don’t experience the substance of existence, how can you remember a thought!*
– *Why do you need the eternal verity? – asked another man, opening his lips, which were caked from silence. – Only in your mind it will be good, but outside it will be disgusting.*
– *You probably know everything? – Voshchev asked them with timidity of faint hope. [11, p. 21] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]*

Line of thought N.F. Fedorov about the relationship between the meaning of life and the joy of a common cause and the role of social labor in the resurrection of life and in building happiness was comprehensively substantiated by him in his work *Philosophy of a Common Cause* [5, pp. 146-148; 6, pp. 69-78] These ideas received their direct continuation and concrete artistic and philosophical embodiment in *The Foundation Pit*. I.A. Makarova [9] evaluates the author’s specificity of artistic translation in Andrei Platonov’s texts of these ideas of Fedorov about the place of labor in the resurrection of life and the achievement of general happiness:

“<...> this is an opportunity through work to achieve what only religion previously promised. Fedorov proposed to engage in a “common cause” for all of humanity: the resurrection of the dead will be achieved if all people work only for this. And in Platonov one can find thoughts about resurrection as a result of a “deed” rather than a miracle, but at the same time Platonov understands Fedorov’s ideas in a more universal sense. It is not resurrection, but “eternal verity” (it also contains the moment of resurrection) that attracts him, “to work towards the eternal verity” – this is the universal formula for the life of Platonov’s master.” [9, p. 145] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Voshchev, the main romantic hero of *The Foundation Pit*, leaves his wanderings to voluntarily devote himself to hard physical labor, which is for him the hope of realizing his spiritual renewal in his own search for the eternal verity of life. Platonov unfolds complex philosophical existential constructs, trying to express this new understanding of the eternal verity of existence, which is based on spiritual and physical overcoming and an orientation toward *collective intensive physical labor*:

Voshchev was given a shovel, he squeezed it with his hands, as if he wanted to extract the eternal verity from the dust of the earth; Dispossessed, Voshchev agreed not to have a meaning of existence, but he wanted to at least observe it in the substance of the body of another, the person closest to him, – and in order to be close to that person, he could sacrifice for work his entire weak body, exhausted by thought and meaninglessness. [11, p. 24] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Based on the vision of K.A. Barsht [2] of the symbolism of Platonov’s story “Garbage Wind,” such a rejection of one’s own body as “personal property” can be interpreted as a manifestation of the desire of Platonov’s heroes to achieve the essence of the “the substance of existence”. Thanks to such a stoic rejection of their own flesh, their soul and vital energy go

into the eternal “substance”, and their body becomes alienated, loses sensitivity to pain, and overcomes dependence on physical factors:

“In Platonov’s poetic system, man is an ontologically free being and not limited by anything in his existential perspectives. Death, illness, wounds seem to be not so important events in the conditions of his existential belonging to the “the substance of existence”; there are no real grounds for the feeling of pain or even the fear of pain. At the maximum of his “innermost” development, a person is identified with all the “the substance of existence” and therefore pain, as a signal of a suffering organism, ceases to be significant – just as his ego ceases to be significant. On the other hand, the characters in Platonov’s works can feel pain for the entire “the substance of existence” <...>” [2, p. 194] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Faced with such human physical self-denial, the extremely ascetic thinker and wanderer Voshchev inspiredly observes this proud isolation and inner spiritual strength of the diggers. By working hard and persistently and being surrounded by such people, he receives from them a powerful impulse of vital energy and gains greater confidence in his search for the substance of existence and in his own awareness of the eternal verity:

Voshchev <...> observed these sadly existing people, capable of keeping the eternal verity within themselves without triumph; he was already pleased with the fact that the eternal verity was in the world in the body of the person closest to him, who was just talking to him now, which means that it is enough just to be near that person to become patient with life and able to work. <...>

“Yes,” answered Voshchev. – Now I also want to work on the substance of existence. [11, p. 22] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

The spiritual and physical overcoming that underlies such a new understanding of the eternal verity of existence presupposes a radical change in the very consciousness of a person, his spiritual and moral attitudes. The highest degree of generalized ability of Platonov's heroes to overcome their physical beingness can be well expressed by the characterization that Barsht [2] gives to the level of self-awareness achieved by the hero of Platonov's aforementioned story “Garbage Wind” named Albert Lichtenberg:

“<...> his consciousness has already overcome the limitations of the objectivity of his body and has entered the entire world “the substance of existence”. Therefore, he is able to overcome the sensory limitations of his “ego”, perceiving his body as one of the many parts of “the substance of existence”. [2, p. 193] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

A.K. Bulygin [4], in turn, offers an interpretation of Platonov’s understanding of the eternal verity, which is determined precisely by the organic interdependence of eternal verity and intellection, and which could be considered as an obvious ontological axiom and the best alternative to a meaningless existence:

“A thought is incandescent with resistance” – this can be said about almost all of Platonov’s main works of the 20s and 30s, which reflected his concern about fate for “something beloved, the loss of which is tantamount to the destruction of not only the entire past, but also the future” In “The Foundation Pit” the need, first of all, to comprehend reality is stated from the very first pages: “Without thought, people act

meaninglessly,” these words of Voshchev are certainly an expression of the author’s position.” [4, pp. 14-15] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Such an interpretation of the interdependence of the eternal verity and thought, in our opinion, explains a lot in the text of *The Foundation Pit*. In the deformed reality of the short novel a simple person, with a hyperbolically dulled absence of thought, lives blindly without knowledge of the eternal verity, not even daring to care about trying to find it. People continue to exist, reaching the point of complete physical and psychological exhaustion in the absence of thought:

Their body now wanders automatically,” Voshchev observed his parents, “they don’t feel the essence. [11, p. 17]

<...> soon he felt doubt in his life and weakness of the body without eternal verity <...> [11, p. 17] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

On the other hand, the class-conscious Safronov has a completely different, ideological approach to the eternal verity, always ready to show revolutionary vigilance, constantly “staying on the alert.” Especially when it concerns such a controversial concept from a political point of view as the eternal verity. The text of *The Foundation Pit*, partly openly, partly implicitly, leads us to a clear understanding that from the point of view of power, the eternal verity may be undesirable and will be clearly considered a “class enemy” if it begins to be supported by active thought:

Safronov, who loved the beauty of life and the politeness of the mind, stood with respect for Voshchev’s fate, although at the same time he was deeply worried: was not eternal verity only a class enemy? [11, p. 37] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Platonov’s “deputies of the proletariat” (a sarcastic expression used by him in *The Foundation Pit*), in their deep conviction, know better what kind of eternal verity the “the normalized mass” (it is also Platonov’s key expression from *The Foundation Pit*) needs. The “deputies of the proletariat” imperatively replace the eternal verity for the proletariat with exhausting labor, the physiology of primitive existence and purposeful the development in them of the instinct of consumption and a sense of mass, crowd. Such a centrally planned substitution of value and existential principles can be explained by the fact that the totalitarian authorities don’t need thinking and reasoning, but only always working mass of people. The further, the more. The activist, whose personality is an excellent illustration of the moral degeneration of representatives of the class of “deputies of the proletariat”, has his own special materialized and mercantile-opportunistic, already completely corrupted, perverted understanding of the eternal verity:

– Is eternal verity due to the proletariat? – asked Voshchev.

“The proletariat is supposed to have a movement,” said the activist, “and whatever comes along, it’s all his: be it the eternal verity, be it the kulak’s looted jacket – everyone will go into the organized cauldron, you won’t know anything.” [11, p. 61] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

The existential mindset of Platonov's thinking in his search for eternal verity sometimes manifests itself in such emotional and plot twists that, in their romantic expressiveness, or, on the contrary, drama, go far beyond the framework of everyday reality. Considering the main philosophical components that make up the concept of meaning of life, and in the particular

case the concept of the eternal verity—the substance of existence, Yu.I. Levin [8] singles out the philosophical motive and concept happiness as a particularly significant category:

"In Platonov's 'The Foundation Pit', the correlate and almost synonymous with the 'meaning of life' is happiness or universal happiness (together with the word joy there are more than 70 uses): the exact meaning of life and universal happiness must languish in the chest <...> of the proletarian class, they <...> owned the meaning of life, which is tantamount to eternal happiness. It, like the meaning of life, must be invented (I could invent something like happiness). But alas, happiness <...> is a distant matter, happiness is unattainable, and only the trees rustle about it. Only the bosses have the exact recipe for happiness: happiness will come from materialism, happiness will come historically (Pashkin's words), the activist tried to organize happiness (we see from the story how this happened and how it ended for the activist himself). It is no coincidence that words slip through (in Prushevsky's improperly direct speech) about a tower where the working people of the whole earth will enter for an eternal, happy settlement. In reality, at most, one can feel partial happiness, plaintive happiness or domestic happiness – a pitiful, this-worldly substitute for transcendental happiness – the meaning and eternal verity of life <...>" [8, p. 408] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

With all this, in the ideologically limited artistic space of *The Foundation Pit*, very far from Platonov's dream of happiness, it is still very difficult to find not declared, but real happiness. Here, the romantically attractive Utopia comes into direct conflict with the dystopian reality of the pitted life. The joy of a happy life is replaced here by noisy slogans and declarations calling to the future and promising this joy of happiness in the future:

"Well," he usually said during times of difficulty, "all the same, happiness will come historically." [11, p. 29]

<...> cemetery where proletarians were buried who died before the revolution without happiness <...> [11, p. 23] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

To confirm such declarative promises, there is also an ideological justification. Based on the practiced political attitudes, before the revolution, dialectically and in a class sense happiness simply did not exist. The lack of happiness now, after the revolution, is explained by the fact that it has not yet "had time" to arrive. Following this directive logic, even for the happiness of future generations it is necessary to fight. And when, as a result of this struggle, happiness comes, then, according to Platonov's text, the main guarantee of its acquisition through competition and its organized distribution "in the order of the general queue" will be a party ticket:

"Whoever has a party ticket in his pants must constantly take care that there is enthusiasm for work in his body. I challenge you, Comrade Voshchev, to compete for the highest happiness of your mood!" [11, p. 47] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

In *The Foundation Pit*, when Platonov identifies the main signs of happiness and the conditions for its manifestation, the happy and the sorrowful are often conceptually united in the writer's bitter grotesquery, returning the reader to the sad reality of life. At the same time, the motive and concept of happiness is presented to him in its most dramatic, even tragic form. Thus, the peasants "liquidated at sea" on the scaffold raft, who have long since forgotten what happiness is, consider the happiest person to be the unfortunate legless disabled cart driver Zhachev, overwhelmed with sorrowful sympathy for them and remaining alone on the steep

bank, so that helplessly, from a height shore and his wooden cart, to see them off on their last journey. Zhachev, physically “shortened” in half by the First World War and mercilessly defined by the new Soviet government as discarded human material and “a freak of imperialism”, is himself also psychologically preparing for his own physical liquidation:

The kulaks looked from the raft in one direction – at Zhachev; people wanted to forever notice their homeland and the last, happy person on it. [11, p. 80] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

What is noteworthy is that in *The Foundation Pit* we are faced with a phenomenon incorporated by Platonov into the artistic fabric of the short novel and associated with the joy of life that existed in the text before the appearance of the earthen foundation pit. It turns out that all the spiritually intact characters in *The Foundation Pit* in the past had a personal life filled with happiness and events. They live in the memory of the past, constantly returning in dreams and memories to the happiest moments of their former existence. Platonov reverently and expressively describes Chiklin’s energy-filled life and state of mind at the time of the boiling of his youthful passions:

<...> Once he was younger and girls loved him – out of greed for his powerful body, wandering anywhere, which did not protect itself and was devoted to everyone. In Chiklin at that time, many needed shelter and peace among his faithful warmth, but he wanted to shelter too many so that he himself would have something to feel <...> [11, p. 25] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

As paradoxical as it may sound, the motif of happiness continues to develop in *The Foundation Pit*, and it is connected precisely with the natural and full-fledged continuation of life outside the earthen foundation pit in that conditionally old world – class alien, but in a Platonov’s way romantic and nostalgically human “ehuman space”, obviously condemned by the authorities to extinction:

Returning back, Prushevsky noticed many women on the city streets. The women walked slowly, despite their youth; they were probably walking and waiting for their finest hour. [11, p. 52] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Despite all the tragedy of the time described in *The Foundation Pit*, Platonov finds the eternal verity of happiness in the spiritual purity of the unity of two generations. With special psychological sensitivity, he develops the motive of the inspired adult, fatherly tender love of the diggers for an orphaned child, the girl Nastya, who embodies the spontaneity and spiritual purity of human relationships. In the final part of the short novel, the writer thus conveys the feelings of the digger Chiklin who is usually stingy with feelings:

The weakened Nastya suddenly stood up and kissed the bent Chiklin on the mustache – like her mother, she knew how to be the first to kiss people without warning. Chiklin froze from the repeated happiness of his life and silently breathed over the child’s body until he again felt concern for this small, hot body. [11, p. 95] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Platonov focuses in *The Foundation Pit* on problems related not only to existence, but also raising the topic of death and violent interruption of life. Almost immediately after the episode with the child’s kiss, Chiklin learns about the death of Nastya, who died of exhaustion and illness in the earthen belly of the foundation pit. The tragic departure of the child becomes the culmination of the short novel. And Nastya’s kiss, which became happy for Chiklin shortly

before her death, one of the few childhood kisses in his childless bachelor life, becomes the last kiss in Nastya's life.

With the help of an outwardly laconic description of the events that followed, Platonov, with subtle psychologism and dramatic tension, conveys Chiklin's internal state at this tragic moment – the suffocating, overwhelming grief. The shocked reader traces the gradual unwinding of the spiral of despair vainly restrained in the depths of Chiklin's hardened soul, releasing the blind energy of unconscious actions:

"But the girl, Comrade Chiklin, isn't breathing: she's cold for some reason!"
Chiklin slowly rose from the ground and stopped in place. <...> cleared the entire barracks of various debris that had accumulated during the uninhabited time. Having put the broom in its place, Chiklin wanted to dig the ground <...> went to the foundation pit <...> he pierced there with the cutting blows of an iron shovel and soon disappeared into the silence of the depths almost to his full height, but even there he could not get tired and began to smash the ground sideways, opening up the compactness of the earth in breadth. In these actions, he wanted to forget his mind now, but his mind still thought that Nastya had died. [11, p. 96] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Conclusion

Nastya's departure makes the seeker of the substance of existence Voshchev, who also fell in love with this bright girl in a fatherly way, understand a lot. The events of such tragic intensity, emotionally described in *The Foundation Pit*, cannot force Platonov, as a writer, to stop thinking and reasoning. For Platonov, they are a reason to express difficult thoughts for him. As the author, figuratively replacing the hero and completely dissolving in him, Platonov himself thinks and acts here as an Eternal Wanderer-Seeker of Verity. Later, a similar grief overtook the writer himself – in January 1943, he had buried his own 20-year-old son Platon [10], who died from tuberculosis, which he became infected with during his almost 3-year imprisonment in Stalin's Gulag² camps (the initial sentence for a political article for a 15-year-old boy was 10 years):

Voshchev stood in bewilderment over this quiet child; he no longer knew where communism would be in the world now if it was not first in a child's feeling and in a convinced impression? Why does he now need the meaning of life and the eternal verity of universal origin, if there is no small, faithful person in whom the eternal verity would become joy and movement?
Voshchev would agree to know nothing again and live without hope in the vague lust of a vain mind, if only the girl was whole, ready for life, even if she was tortured with the passage of time. Voshchev picked up Nastya in his arms, kissed her on her parted lips and pressed her to him with greed of happiness, finding more than what he was looking for. [11, p. 96] [engl. transl.: V. Bouilov]

Behind the outwardly harsh statement of the signs of the impending death of this highly spiritualized child and the painful description of the grief of the harsh working people who love her more than their own lives, the diggers, is the cry of the soul of Platonov himself. In this scene, Andrei Platonov, as a writer, reaches the highest degree of creative inspiration in the

² The abbreviation "GULAG", used since 1930, stands for "Main Directorate of Corrective Labor Camps" and was used to officially designate the system of Stalinist concentration and forced labor camps, which during Stalin's reign covered the entire territory of the Soviet Union with a dense network.

emotional and artistic transmission and comprehension of the entire abyss of hopelessness of this melancholy. Selflessly talking about this, he cannot come to terms with it. Not wanting to share this grief with everyone, Platonov, with his soul and heart, takes personally upon himself all this melancholy of the world. He reveals himself here as a subtle psychologist and expert on the human soul. His highly spiritual hero-wanderer Voshchev begins to realize that he has been looking for the wrong thing all this time, while simultaneously coming to the realization of the veritable essence of existence, which is Nastya's forever-young life as the life of one of us. Here Platonov spiritually approaches the highest point of comprehension of the tragic essence of any life manifestation, burning and combustion – the substance of existence.

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