NOTE

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Andrei Siniavskii: The Chorus and The Crit

Once again Andrei Siniavskii has taken up his pseudonym, the same pseudonym which he assigned to his "underground," and, according to the Soviet prosecution, "slanderous" literature. The details of Siniavskii's arrest and trial are already well known.¹ Suffice it to say, after five and one half years of hard labor in the Mordovian Gulag, Siniavskii seems to be saying that "Terts" is all and well. Voice from the Chorus (Golos iz khora), Siniavskii's latest book, originates from letters to his wife while serving out his sentence (1966-1971). The letters, which add up to more than 1500 pages, are the raw material for not on Voice, but also for two forthcoming works, "In the Shadow of Gogol" ("V te Gogolia") and "Strolling with Pushkin" ("Progulki s Pushkinym").

Voice must be seen as a result of authorial compulsion (see Terts' "Graph maniacs") and prison censorship. The former extends the boundaries of epistolary form; the latter checks these boundaries. It is the lack of boundaries in Siniavskii's style which gives Voice a rich texture: a patchwork of colloquial speech, Old Russian, prison camp jargon, loan words, vulgarisms, syntactical inversion and alliteration. There are, of course, no dark details about fellow prisoners and the rigors of a particular camp à la Dostoevskii or Solzhenitsyn. Siniavskii abstracts his daily experience into a series of uneven philosophical observations and deliberate word-play. In many respects, he continues the genre which he has already demonstrated in Thoughts Unaware (Mysli vsasplokhi), a fragmented diary with a measure of aphorisms.²

A recurring discussion of art, which yields diverse relationships, providing Voice with thematic substance and circular design. Art, which Siniavskii calls "


2. Margaret Dalton's Andrei Siniavskii and Juliij Daniel': Two Soviet "Heretic Writers" (Würzburg, 1973), is the most recent and most ambitious treatment of Siniavskii fiction. In her engaging analysis of "Thoughts Unaware," she points to the similarities between Siniavskii and Rozanov (p. 129).
provided prayer” (improvizirovannaia molitva) and “a rough copy of the Resurrection” (chernovik voskreseniia), becomes a crossroad specifically intersected by pressions of history, mythology, literature, architecture and iconography. From this crossroad, Siniavskii generalizes about Swift, Defoe, Stevenson, Dostoevskii, ekhov, Pushkin, Akhmatova and Mandel’shtam, or comments briefly about central Asian folksongs, Biblical episodes, dolls, masks, thieves and weather conditions. Finding, for example, relationships between convicts, Robinson Crusoe, illiver and arch-priest Avvakum, Siniavskii moves toward self-definition, toward understanding of his place in the human chorus. In this chorus, Siniavskii dures.

In a review of Voice, Henry Gifford points to Siniavskii’s shifting point of view, to a chorus of voices composed of Old Believers, intellectuals, simpletons, ndits and loners. Although this is a singular chorus of outcasts, Igor’ Iomshhtok (see afterward to Voice) indicates that the relationship of individual voices is illusive. On a stylistic level, this relationship is expressed in a polyphony of lexical selection and arrangement. This polyphony is mediated by Siniavskii’s constantly displaces literature with experience and experience with literature. ch displacement establishes harmonic intervals yet creates another set of relationships which give the entire composition a baroque quality.

In a key passage, Siniavskii speaks directly about voices, about what Gilles Deleuze calls la synthèse disjonctive: “And in yourself you can no longer dis- guish a name or a personality only a faceless chorus. . . .” Taking into account Siniavskii’s alternation of first, second and third person narrative not only in Voice but also in all of his fiction, this passage is important. It is the essence of “many voices” (mnogogolosie) which gives Siniavskii—Terts con- sional dispersion as well as a number of incongruities—the basis for irony. This irony is rooted in the Siniavskii—Terts relationship or, more specifically, in the k between a member of The Writers’ Union and a writer of underground nature, between the author and his picaresque characters, between the fate of anonymous narrator of “The Trial Begins” and the fate of Siniavskii himself.

Strolling with Pushkin, Siniavskii updates this irony: “Fate secretly makes art work of an author using the text of his works as a translation.” Having itten a Kafkaesque scenario about his own destiny, Siniavskii emerges as the object of a detective story complete with smuggled manuscripts, double identities, istic intrigues and biographical gaps.

5. Since Siniavskii was convicted according to an interpretation of his intent, the assertion of voices is germane. Andrew Field, Margaret Dalton and Deming Brown stress the problem of narrative leaps and inconsistent points of view. In Andrei Siniavskii and Juliia niel, p. 70 and 77, Margaret Dalton claims: “…it seems futile to try to pinpoint exactly at Tertz is trying to say “[The Tenants]” . . . its “[The Icicle]” crass subjectivity pre- des any unequivocal interpretation or evaluation.” In “The Art of Andrei Siniavsky,” vic Review, XXIX, 4 (1970), 665, Deming Brown states: “…it is often impossible to determine whether an assertion is serious or tongue-in-cheek.” Unlike most scholars, he indi- ces (p. 664) that Terts and Siniavskii speak with separate voices. It is Mikhail Bakhtin who rings the whole issue of voices to the forte in Problems of Dostoevskii’s Poetics.