

PERCEPTIVE AND FIGURATIVE REPRESENTATION OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DESCRIPTION OF HOLY FOOLISHNESS

Vyacheslav Dolgov,

Senior Lecturer

(Alec Russo State University of Bălți, Republic of Moldova)

Abstract: *This article describes the peculiarities of perception of foolishness for Christ expressed through language. Our attention is focused on the value component of holy foolishness, as well as on those characteristics of the stereotypical perception of this rank of sainthood reconstructed on the basis of the associative and perceptual aspect of linguistic and cultural type.*

Keywords: *concept, stereotype, cognition, linguistic and cultural type.*

In modern linguistics, linguistic identity presents a growing interest, which often stems from E. Benveniste's planned triad "language, culture, human identity" [1, p. 45], forming together "clusters of meaning", i.e. concepts [2, p. 79-95], [3, p. 10-50]. A special kind of concept is "the linguistic and cultural type", which denotes, in V.I. Karasik's terms, a personality type, a representative of a certain ethnic and social group, recognizable by the specific characteristics of verbal and nonverbal behavior and value orientation. Since the "linguistic and cultural type" is an abstract mental formation, retaining a recognizable image of a particular culture, its content consists of a personality type. The Volgograd linguistic school contributes most to the description of the linguistic and cultural type characterized by wide recognition, associativity, recurrence, signedness, brilliance, typicality, precedence [3]. Figurative, conceptual and value sides are marked out in this type of concept [2].

The linguistic and cultural whacky type, the landmark of the Russian culture, reveals the property of duality reflected in a linguistic sign. According to dictionaries which preserve the most relevant meanings of a word, a holy fool is a "mentally deranged patient, a freak, a crazy person" [7, vol. 4, p. 775-776]. At the same time, he is also a saint who "pretended to have become a mad man and who has, in the opinion of religious people, the gift of prophecy" [8, vol. 17, p. 2003-2004]. We emphasize that in the framework of a religious discourse there is no doubt regarding the mental health of a holy fool. This seeming madness is postulated as a prerequisite, necessary to do away with pride, allowing to strengthen the achieved dispassion, and, ultimately, to experience the fullness of the passion of Christ (a Christ centered holy fool is reflected in the way of giving a name- a Fool for Christ's sake).

In the popular perception, the moral potency of the holy fool is actualized. He is the one who refers to the alleged Christian philosophy concerning the axiological range of goodness, light, salvation, soul, spirit, truth, etc. People perceive holy fools as the only bearers of the Supreme Truth who are willing

to speak out loud to kings without any fear. It is only they who are able to destroy the system of imaginary values of “partite” peace, sometimes through provocations and “satire”, through working wonders and telling the truth. Everything is forgiven to these devotees: actions and deeds which are not in accordance with the circumstances of the time and place, their eccentric appearance, their strange speeches, the essence of which can not be understood at once, etc. Given the semi-legal character of holy foolishness, it is practically impossible to describe the holy fool-identification mechanism which allows to distinguish blessed fools from pseudo-holy ones, especially those, who pretend to belong to this rank of sanctity in order to achieve certain benefits and welfare. According to the definition, a holy-fool has to conceal true wisdom, piety and spiritual perfection under the mask of madness.

However, this article addresses only the perceptive and figurative representation of the linguistic and cultural whacky type (although this aspect is difficult to be separated from the valuable one, which we shall have to refer to) based on the most relevant characteristics, which reflect, in fact, a stereotypical perception. We have chosen one of Dmitri Rostov’s most authoritative texts, namely, “Четьи Минеи” as the basic source to reconstruct this type of character. The appeal to the hagiographic body is not a random one, as life stories intended for cathedral reading alongside with other Russian works about the ascetics of this rank of sanctity has had a decisive role in the formation of a certain type, which influenced the native speakers’ degree of assessment and their perception vector. It should also be emphasized that a person who has never faced a holy fool’s raunch in real life, could, as a rule, get some information about the given rank of sanctity from different secular sources (chronicles and foreigners’ confessions) or, more often, from the church written culture (life stories, religious services kontakions, troparions etc.). Following V. I. Karasik and O. A. Dmitrieva’s model, we shall turn to that aspect of the analysis which is called the passport of the linguistic and cultural type.

Sex. Despite the fact that the first holy fool of the Eastern Orthodox world was, according to experts, a woman, most adherents of this rank of sanctity were males. However, the names of other well-respected holy fool women, including the newly canonized ones, were mentioned in the Russian church culture.

Age. As a rule, the hagiographic tradition willingly discloses the circumstances and causes associated with the beginning of a deed, yet, it avoids to mention the age of the holy fool. The scribe uses such nouns as “дѣвица” - “maid”, “отрок” - “youth”, “юноша” - “lad”, “женщина” - “woman”, “муж” - “husband” (meaning - a man), “старецъ” - “old man” to indicate the age. It is noteworthy that only childhood is not present in this line. There are no holy fool children in the hagiographic tradition, despite the fact that the type of children's holiness has taken a strong position in the range of “apostles”, “laymen”, “martyrs”, and other official ranks of church sanctity.

Social position. There were people among the devotees who held different positions in the society: from slaves to top representatives of the higher upper class. We shall emphasize that the irrelevance of age, gender and social constraints are characteristic of a stereotypical holy fool. The linguistic and cultural whacky type is based on the perception of Christian heroism accessible for both women and men, regardless of their social status and age (except for children), when the person reaches a certain level of spiritual maturity.

Appearance. The way an ascetic looks like marks his “otherworldly” appearance that is perceived by others as an oddity, insanity or inability to live according to secular canons. A holy fool does not look like other people, for example, the nuns: “согласно правиламъ монастырской жизни, носили на головахъ своихъ куколь; Исидора же покрывала голову свою простой тряпкой” [4, p. 9]. This feature often acquires a modus character in life, i.e. it represents an evaluative judgment. Thus, in the life of the above mentioned Isidore the Holy Fool, the author speaks about the negative attitude towards the holy nun:

“Никогда не вела она ни съ кѣмъ ни длинной, ни короткой бесѣды и вообще ни с кѣмъ не разговаривала, несмотря на то, что другія сестры ее часто били и злословили” [4, vol. 9].

Such appearance and strange behavior will lead them to the conclusion that Isidore is “глупа и бѣсновата” (stupid and demonic) [4, vol. 9] and later, after learning about her holiness, they will bitterly regret it.

One of the incidental characters of the live story Xenia from Petersburg, desperate to cure her ill husband, describes the vision after which he had come back to life:

“Если бы я была сейчас дома, я бы поехала на Смоленское кладбище к блаженной Ксении. Там, припав к ее могиле, выплакала бы свое горе. Шум хлопнувшей калитки прервал мои думы. Кто-то вошел в сад к нам, подумала я. В это время в проеме открытой двери бесшумно появилась странная гостя. Лета ее нельзя была определить, но самым странным был ее наряд. Теплые, мягкие валенки, длинная шуба особого покроя, вся в сборках, а на голове большой белый пуховый платок: концы его были закручены на шее. Так, верно, глухой зимой в старину повязывали платки женщины-простолюдинки. Вся она была необыкновенно привлекательна” [4, vol. 5].

The character twice notes the oddity of the “The Winter Guest”. Though, as it seems, there is nothing extraordinary in her appearance, she will explained further one important fact:

“Тут только я поняла всю несообразность ее зимнего наряда при этой нестерпимой жаре” [4, vol. 5].

It is noteworthy that while describing the clothes and shoes, the hagiographic tradition will necessarily point to its incompleteness and partiality:

“рубище, едва прикрывавшее тѣлесную его наготу”, “почти необутая, едва одетая”. The assessment of appearance, is generally missing, however, in the context of other well-wishers, it acquires a positive characteristic. Thus the scribe, drawing an image of a holy fool, seeks to reproduce his struggle with the passion of men, based on the paradigm of the values of Orthodoxy, deliberately downplaying the aspect of carnal and physical aspects, to elevate the spiritual one. For example, the life story of the holy fool Maxim says: “онъ почти обнаженный ходилъ по улицамъ города Москвы, перенося и холодъ, и жаръ” [4, vol. 3].

Thus, the whacky, torturing his flesh can completely give up his shoes, regardless of the season. If there are shoes on, they will be unable to protect against weather adversities (Xenia “was wearing torn shoes on her bare swollen from cold feet” [4, vol. 5]). An ascetic sometimes does not hide his body under his clothes (which in some cases may be due to the provocative nature of foolishness). For example, St. Basil “ходилъ нагимъ и лѣтомъ и зимою, зимою замерзая от холода, а лѣтомъ страдая от зноя”, or wears something strange, inhuman, such as a goatskin or rags. Another holy fool is described in the following way: “снять ... съ себя одежду и, представляясь лишеннымъ разума, изрѣзать ее на части” [4, vol. 2].

The tradition of flesh torture, in some cases, turned into wearing fetters motivated by either the ascetic’s personal will, or by others’ decisions, as in the case of the holy fool Andrew, when his master states: “подумав, что Андрей одержимъ бѣсомъ, ... наложилъ на него желѣзные вериги и приказал вести къ церкви святой Анастасіи” [4, vol. 2].

Portrait. We did not find a single example of the description of the saints’ individualized portraits in their life stories. In rare cases, the scribe limits himself to the most general formulas, for example, in the life story of the fool for Christ Andrew, it is pointed out that “сей отрокъ быть прекрасенъ собою” [4, vol. 2]. It should be noted that the same characteristic (“handsome boy”) will be linked to the image of Jesus Christ who has appeared in Andrew’s vision.

Lifestyle and habits. One of the characteristics of holy foolishness is the conscious rejection of the ascetic’s desire “от всѣхъ удобствъ” to an “avaricious life” due to the rejection of all the worldly things, which is perceived as sinful in the context of a religious system of values, “contrary to God”. The holy fools are disinterested. The money that they get as a rule in the form of alms is immediately given it to the poor without being noticed. Thus, being well-to do in the world, Xenia “distributed all the manor”, and, leaving her home, she asked her friend only about one thing:

“Дом я подарю тебе, только ты бедных даром жить пускай; вещи сегодня же раздам все, а деньги в церковь несусь, пусть молятся об упокоении души рабы Божией Ксении” [4, vol. 5].

This circumstance makes holy fools become homeless and induces them to “подвижническое странствие” (ascetic wandering).

The place where the whacky has a rest is usually a mystery and if it is revealed in the life story, it is only used to add to the number of features of the saint’s “internal image” to emphasize his dispassion, the complete absence of pride, the desire for self-abasement, etc. The holy fool Andrew’s temporary shelter is described the following way:

«Когда же ему необходимо было уснуть и нѣсколько успокоить свое измученное тѣло, онъ искалъ мусора, гдѣ лежать собаки, и располагался между ними. Но и псы не подпускали къ себѣ» [4, vol. 2].

This is both “laughing at the world” and a kind of “a slap in the face of public taste”, which, at the same time, show the rate of extreme degree of “self-abasement” and martyrdom. The scribe writes: “Так страдалъ добровольный мученикъ и такъ смѣялся надъ всѣмъ міромъ юродивый” [4, vol. 2].

“Mortification of the flesh” motivates food restrictions. For example, the holy fool Andrew “иногда по трое сутокъ не вкушалъ ... хлѣба, иногда же голодать и цѣлую недѣлю, а если не находилось никого, кто бы подаль ему ломоть хлѣба, то онъ проводить безъ пищи и вторую неделю” [4, vol. 2].

Nobody saw Isidora to eat properly: “когда-либо ѣла кусокъ хлѣба или сидѣла за столомъ и вкушала вареную пищу, потому что она собирала крошки, падавшія со стола, и питалась ими; вмѣсто вареной пищи Исидора вкушала ту самую воду, въ которой мыла горшки и котлы” [4, vol. 9].

Adherents of this rank of sanctity are lonely. As the scribe states: “Оставивъ затѣмъ отчій домъ и родныхъ своихъ, блаженный Василій въ надеждѣ на будущія блага перемѣнилъ тлѣнное достояніе на духовное, такъ какъ вмѣсто отца у него было отсѣчение бремени грѣховъ, вмѣсто матери – чистота, вмѣсто братьевъ – желаніе стремиться къ горнему Иерусалиму, а вместо дѣтей – сердечныя воздыханія” [4, vol. 12].

Rejecting kinship and family ties, having no children are acts of the holy fool’s personal faith. These acts are symbolic to a certain extent: chopping off the horizontal ties, the devotees seek to establish a direct vertical relationship with God.

Fools are industrious, they are not afraid of heavy and dirty work, which they take it for granted. The holy fool Isidore, for example, “постоянно трудилась въ поварнѣ монастырской, служба всѣмъ сестрамъ, и исполняла всѣ монастырскія работы, не гнушаясь самыми трудными и грязными. Она своими руками очищала монастырь отъ всякой грязи и нечистоты. Такъ трудилась преподобная постоянно, отъ утра и до ночи, не предаваясь покою даже и на часъ, всегда измождая плоть свою” [4, vol. 9].

Their day is filled with these and other feats, and they pray secretly to God at night, not necessarily in the temple, but whatever place they can:

Andrew “въ теченіе дня представлялся лишеннымъ разума, а ночью молился Богу и святой Анастасіи” [4, vol. 2]. This holy fools’ typical behavior is explained by the fact that God’s space is not confined to the walls of the temple for them. In the life story of St. Xenia of Petersburg, it is written: “несмотря ни на какое время года, несмотря ни на какую погоду, уходит на ночь в поле, коленопреклоненно становится здесь на молитву и не встает уже с этой молитвы до самого восхода солнца, попеременно делая земные поклоны на все четыре стороны света. В поле, по ее словам, присутствие Божие было “более явственно”” [4, vol. 5].

The ascetic way of life, the martyrdom, the strict compliance with the Commandments of God and the constant presence within the religious system of values, which the holy fool sets up by his own example, transforms the holy fool’s way into a “pure life”. This definition is often associated with the ascetic’s way of life and is generally used in the meaning of “sinless” and “true”.

Appearance, speech, lifestyle, etc. induce others (with the exception of virtuous people who are able to see the truth with “spiritual eyes”) to think about madness. Yet, in the live stories, the hollowness of the ascetics’ madness is emphasized. In this regard, the episode from Xenia’s biography, who intends to give all her possessions away, is rather notable:

“Родные мужа подали прошение начальству умершего Андрея Федоровича, прося не позволять Ксении в безумстве раздавать свое имущество. По причине этого Ксения была вызвана на соответствующее обследование, которое заключило, что она совершенно здорова” [4, vol. 5].

Constantly praying, holy fools carry their cross without complaint; they are subjected to all sorts of attacks and ridicule, which they provoke by themselves.

Hagiography, revealing in detail all the hardships of ascetics’ lives, underlines the difficulty of such an inhuman lifestyle, which can only be described as a feat: “безропотно несла свой спасительный подвиг” [4, vol. 5], “провела достаточное число лѣтъ въ такихъ подвигахъ” [4, vol. 9], “так страдалъ добровольный мученикъ” [4, vol. 2], etc.

Superhuman abilities. In accordance with the Christian view of the world, having reached a certain level of spiritual perfection and dispassion, holy fools are endowed with different gifts.

Knowledge about the events that are sure to occur in the future, unavailable to others, makes them prophets and seers. Blessed Thomas, foreseeing the death of the church builder who had struck him and his own death, confesses: “Съ этого времени ни мнѣ от Анастасія уже ничего не придется принять, ни Анастасій не будет имѣть возможности что-либо подать мнѣ” [4, vol. 8]. The prophecy soon came true: Anastasius died one day later, and the blessed got sick on the way to the monastery and passed away: “престалъ къ безмерной жизни” [4, vol. 8].

It is worthy to mention that their speech is vague, it is incomprehensible to others, yet, people can understand the true meaning of their words only some time later when they come to realize how prophetically gifted holy fools are. Some of them, for instance Isidora, chooses silence as a form of “communication”. The life story of Blessed Basil explains that the ascetic “не говорить и представлялся какъ бы лишеннымъ дара слова, желая этимъ скрыть отъ людей свои добродѣтели и быть вѣдомымъ только Богу” [4, vol. 12].

Holy fools can miraculously provide people with whatever benefits they need: merchants can be ensured a successful trade, unmarried maidens can arrange a happy marriage, childless parents can “be given” a long-awaited child, the weak and the sick can be healed, etc.

These are real “philanthropists”, absolute altruists, realizing that it is not enough to attain some spiritual perfection, it is necessary to “serve God” for the redemption of human vices and the edification.

Thus, the holy fool is a saint who has attained dispassion (beyond one’s age, gender and social constraints), who has discovered the absolute primacy of the ideal, the spiritual over the material, the flesh; he/she is an ascetic and a lonely mendicant pilgrim, whose appearance, speech, and actions can be perceived as a manifestation of madness (however, it is a seeming one); he/she is endowed with the gift of foreseeing, prophecy and healing; secretly helping and caring for the redemption of human vices. This list motivates those definitions that characterize the holy fool type: meekness, gentleness, humility, “the spiritual and bodily misery”, love for one’s neighbor, the intercession, the virtue, the ability to endure all the hardships, beatings, mockery and bullying without complaint, which can be provoked by the ascetic himself/herself; etc. The list of relevant linguistic and cultural characteristics of the whacky type reflects the stereotypical perception of the adherent of this rank of sanctity and acts as a foundation (together with the conceptual and value aspects) to be identified by the masses.

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