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## **PECULIARITIES OF THE ‘BODY – SOUL’ DICHOTOMY IN THE COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES BY LUDMILA ULITSKAYA *THE BODY OF THE SOUL***

**ABSTRACT:** The article analyses the works of Lyudmila Ulitskaya from the point of view of a dichotomous description of anthropological reality in her new collection of stories *The Body of the Soul*. The authors come to original conclusions connected with the author’s mythologism, especially with the two-variant narrative line developed by the author in the previous periods of her creative work. We were able to prove that in the case of one of the variants, in the collection *The Body of the Soul*, the author actually revealed the nature of her religious and theosophical views. At the same time, we have shown that Ulitskaya’s literary imagination is not confined to the existing schemes of the metaphysical world, but, on the contrary, it helps Ulitskaya to present this world more colourfully and vividly. Sometimes, for the sake of plot integrity, the writer deliberately changes the elements in the mosaic of the conceptsphere employed.

**KEYWORDS:** Ludmila Ulitskaya, *The Body of the Soul*, the conceptsphere of the metaphysical world, dichotomy.

### **Cechy dychotomii „ciało – dusza” w zbiorze opowiadań Ludmiły Ulickiej *Ciało duszy***

**STRESZCZENIE:** Artykuł został poświęcony analizie twórczości Ludmiły Ulickiej z punktu widzenia dychotomicznego opisu antropologicznej rzeczywistości w jej nowym zbiorze opowiadań *Ciało duszy*. Autorzy dochodzą do oryginalnych wniosków związanych z mitologizmem autorki, w szczególności z dwubiegunową linią narracyjną wypracowaną przez autorkę w poprzednich okresach jej twórczości. Udało nam się wykazać, że w przypadku jednego z wariantów, w zbiorze *Ciało duszy*, autorka faktycznie ujawniła charakter swoich poglądów religijnych i teozoficznych. Jednocześnie pokazaliśmy, że wyobrażenia literacka Ulickiej nie ogranicza się do istniejących schematów świata metafizycznego, a wręcz przeciwnie – pomaga Ulickiej przedstawić ten świat barwniej i żywiej. Czasami, w trosce o integralność fabuły swoich utworów, pisarka celowo zmienia elementy w mozaice wykorzystanej conceptsfery.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Ludmiła Ulicka, *Ciało duszy*, conceptsfera świata metafizycznego, dychotomia.

A great deal has been said and written about Lyudmila Ulitskaya, both scholarly and critical. Nevertheless, there are some works in her oeuvre that deserve special attention and have not been sufficiently studied. As for the writer herself, she believes that literature can solve the existing crises in society, so in her works she has always tried to depict unresolved political, social, and even religious issues<sup>1</sup>. There is no doubt that the writer's prose is anthropological. Man is at the centre of her books – his personality, his scale of values, his relations with other people, his relations with God. The writer's books are characterised by high artistry, increased expressiveness and increased publicity – states Na<sup>2</sup>. The unravelling of Ulitskaya's prose and plays, according to Benjamin Massey Sutcliffe, lies in the commentary to the book *Merry Funeral* (*Веселые похороны*)<sup>3</sup>.

Ulitskaya is very sensitive to religious issues, which is clearly reflected in the rich corpus of her characters' religious denominations. The spatial organisation of the writer's texts is based on the principle of the complementarity of the sacred and profane spheres. The poetic space of Ulitskaya's books is also marked by the sacred, which is particularly evident, in particular, in the titles of her books: *О теле души*, *Лестница Якова* (*Jacob's Ladder*), *Дар нерукотворный* (*The Gift not Made by Hands*). In her books Ulitskaya clearly contrasts such global opposites as good/evil, atheism/theism, sinfulness/righteousness, heaven/hell.

Natalia Korotkova, in considering Ulitskaya's prose for the presence of elements of mythological perception and description of reality, identified two variants of the novel's myth construction. In her opinion, mythology in Ulitskaya's novel is presented in two variants, the writer builds the narrative on two planes – the real and the mythological, and presents each of them as a fully-fledged structural (compositional) textual element<sup>4</sup>. From the subject of our study, we are interested in the second variant, because, in our opinion, it is the one that can help us understand the nature of Ulitskaya's mytho-religious and theosophical views.

We are talking about the so-called 'mythological mosaic', in which the author introduces into the text numerous elements of legend (plots, images) deconstruction, motifs, philosophy<sup>5</sup>. As will be shown below, it is thanks to the second method that we will try to show the essence of Ulitskaya's views in the field of research we are considering.

<sup>1</sup> B. Sutcliffe, *Secular Victims, Religious Aggressors: Liudmila Ulitskaya's Muslims, Radical Islam, and the Russian Intelligentsia*, "The Russian Review" 2015, no 74, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Лю На, *Художественное своеобразие малой прозы Людмилы Улицкой* (На материале сборника "Люди нашего царя"), (На правах рукописи), Тамбов 2009, с. 4.

<sup>3</sup> B. Sutcliffe, *Liudmila Ulitskaya's Literature of Tolerance*, "The Russian Review" 2009, no 68, p. 495. Text quote: "This is a book about a man who did his best to ensure that after his departure, what was left behind was not a black hole of despair, but an atmosphere of reconciliation and love". See the text on the cover of the book Л. Улицкая, *Веселые похороны*, Москва 2006. Here and elsewhere in this article, all translations from Russian into English by the present authors.

<sup>4</sup> Н. Короткова, *Два варианта мифологизма в романах Л.Е. Улицкой*, "Верхневолжский филологический вестник" 2020, № 1 (20), с. 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, с. 45.

In her collection of short stories *The Body of the Soul*, Ulitskaya addresses the theme of contact, the coexistence of two interrelated anthropological elements: the human body and the soul. Ulitskaya explores this theme, writes thirteen stories in which, to a greater or lesser extent, she touches upon mystical and religious themes<sup>6</sup>, expanding the semantic and dichotomous relationships between the two constants. It should be noted that the degree of exploration of this theme in Ulitskaya's work is insufficient and deserves special attention.

In the programme "A Novel in the Museum – Lyudmila Ulitskaya and Katerina Gordeeva. *The Body of the Soul*", Ulitskaya said that of all the books she had written, this was the easiest, because the stories contained in it had been nurtured by the writer for a long time, and their roots should be sought in Ulitskaya's own life<sup>7</sup>. In an interview for "Forbes" magazine, Ludmila Ulitskaya talked<sup>8</sup> about the genesis of *The Body of the Soul*, noting that these are in many ways stories of reconciliation<sup>9</sup>. "I have reached the limit of my personal possibilities – it is very difficult to talk about this fragile, shaky and dangerous subject: vulgarity lurks under every line"<sup>10</sup>. And another revealing quote: "Близость к смерти – says Ulitskaya – хорошее испытание. Когда осознаешь, что она рядом, очень многие вещи, которые прежде имели ценность, обращаются в прах"<sup>11</sup>.

The dichotomous relationship between soul and body can be traced, on the one hand, as oppositional and, on the other hand, as inseparable, complementary and interdependent constants. The body becomes synonymous not only with the material world, but also with passions, carnal love, chaos, impermanence, while the soul is associated with the higher world, harmony, order, eternity, sensitivity. Modern Christian anthropology, however, sees the body in a more positive light: the body is the temple of the soul, the value of its matter is demonstrated by the incarnation of God, transformation according to the divine plan<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Gorelik emphasises the Christian, mythopoetic, ecclesiological, soteriological and theological context in Ulitskaya's prose. See children: М. Горелик, *Прощание с ортодоксией*, "Новый мир" 2008, № 5, с. 169-176.

<sup>7</sup> *Роман в музее. «О теле души. Новые рассказы»*. Читают Людмила Улицкая и Катерина Гордеева. Directed by Anton Tsarev. YouTube channel: The Museum of Russian Impressionism, 2020, 36:55, [в:] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4ZM718WJ3o>, (06.09.2023).

<sup>8</sup> Н. Ломыкина, "Близость к смерти – хорошее испытание. Людмила Улицкая о новой книге, женской дружбе и отношениях с возрастом", publication dated 18.11.2019, [в:] <https://www.forbes.ru/forbes-woman/387365-blizost-k-smerti-horoshee-ispytanie-lyudmila-ulickaya-o-novoy-knige-zhenskoj> (06.09.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem. See also: Э. Мороз, *Не говори с тоской - их нет...*, "Знамя" 2020, № 5, с. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Н. Ломыкина, "Близость к смерти – хорошее испытание. Людмила Улицкая о новой книге, женской дружбе и отношениях с возрастом"...

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem. English translation: "Proximity to death is a good test. When you realise that it is near, many things that had value before turn to dust".

<sup>12</sup> Антоний, митрополит Сурожский, *Жизнь. Болезнь. Смерть*, Москва 2018, с. 60.

The problem of the dichotomy of body and soul still has its relevance today. For centuries, philosophers, theologians, poets, writers, and even artists have tried to understand and express the dilemma of the coexistence of the material body and the immaterial soul. All concerned with the same question: what happens to the soul after the death of the body (?); is there a heaven and a hell where it will find blissful peace or will experience eternal torment (?)<sup>13</sup>. The writer Ulitskaya being no exception. In her book she tries to find the between the material and mystical dimensions<sup>14</sup>. In an interview with “Literatura.today”, Ulitskaya noted that the book is dedicated to the theme of death. Perhaps, Ulitskaya suggested, this book is for people who have lived a bit of life and have had time to think about something that young people don't think about.<sup>15</sup> In another interview Ulitskaya stated:

Для меня наука и религия не противоположны друг другу, а работают совместно. Занимаясь научными исследованиями, человек только приближается к восхищению перед мудростью мироздания<sup>16</sup>.

Galina Yermoshina made an interesting observation long before *The Body of the Soul* appeared. According to her, Ulitskaya was not initially satisfied with “a simple description of the simple life of ordinary people”.

Улицкая – мастер бытописания. Ее эпопеи последовательно и подробно прослеживают житие главного персонажа, вместе с ним – историю всего рода данного индивида. [...] Но Улицкую перестает устраивать простое описание простой жизни простого человека. „Маленький” человек достоин большего – философского осмысления своей жизни<sup>17</sup>.

– she wrote back in 2000, even then noticing that Ulitskaya liked to show the transition, the characters’ exit from the present *grey* reality into a certain surreal space.

<sup>13</sup> С. Ибрагимова, *Поэтика дихотомии “Тело – Душа/Ева-Психея” в творчестве М.И. Цветаевой*, Казань 2017, с. 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> И. Ничипоров, *Предметный мир в сборнике рассказов Людмилы Улицкой “О теле души”*, “Art Logos” 2020, № 3 (12), с. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Л. Улицкая, *О теле души*, “Literatura.today” 2020, YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3b1KbL-pisc>, (06.09.2023).

<sup>16</sup> Н. Ломыкина, *“Близость к смерти – хорошее испытание. Людмила Улицкая о новой книге, женской дружбе и отношениях с возрастом”*... English translation: “For me, science and religion are not opposed to each other, but work together. By engaging in scientific research, one can only come closer to admiring the wisdom of the universe”.

<sup>17</sup> Г. Ермошина, *Людмила Улицкая. Путешествие в седьмую сторону света*, “Знамя” 2000, № 12, с. 202. English translation: “Ulitskaya is a master of everyday life. Her epics consistently and in detail trace the life of the main character, together with him – the history of the whole family of this individual. [...] But Ulitskaya is no longer satisfied with a simple description of the simple life of a simple man. The ‘little’ man deserves more – a philosophical reflection on his life”.

Обычная жизнь в какой-то момент прекращается, и героиня попадает в потустороннюю среду, похожую на бред, наполненную, как кажется автору, непомерным философским смыслом и высшими идеями о добре и зле, жизни и смерти. Героиня блуждает то ли в своем помраченном сознании, то ли в загробном мире, каким он представляется автору, то ли в песчаной пустыне безвременья-сна<sup>18</sup>.

However, the afterlife of *The Body of the Soul* is a different phenomenon – it is surrealism of a new order, a conceptualised spiritual topos constructed by Ulitskaya based on her long experience of reading spiritual literature, which tells of a different vision of the afterlife. In the stories from *The Body of the Soul*, the characters do not simply die, crossing the boundary of physical life; they analyse what has happened and do not regret what has happened. It is important to note the author's depiction of the spiritual and physical bodily lightness caused by the separation of soul and body.

In another television Ulitskaya noted that different religious systems offer different variants of the postmortem. Moreover, the author analysed does overly like the Christian doctrine, for she views it not as a divine, but as a human idea. Such a degree of cruelty – invented by man for sinners – is astonishing, the writer continues<sup>19</sup>. Perhaps this is why death in the author's stories is more phantasmagorical than realistic. And yet Ulitskaya raises questions about man's spiritual and mystical experience, about the immortality of the soul, about the hereafter.

In the author's new book, the constants of 'soul and body' become the building material, the framework of the planned construction. In all the stories, external events are necessary to reveal and discover the certain character traits of a given hero, which are revealed through everyday prose as the reader approaches the story's finale. The epicentre is always a man, or rather his body and soul. All events revolve around this perspective.

The book *The Body of the Soul* consists of two chapters that begin with poems. The first, *Girlfriends (Подружки)*, is dedicated to the writer's friends – stories about love in its various manifestations: the love of a woman and a man, a mother's love for her child, for close relatives, love that overcomes all obstacles and changes a person's attitude to life and death. The theme of same-sex love and the attitude to it in traditional families is completely new in the book. This theme is vividly expressed in the story *Дракон и Феникс (Dragon and Phoenix)*. Perhaps it was the writer's boldness that led Galina Yuzefovich to define Ulitskaya's works as having the flavour of guilty pleasures<sup>20</sup>.

And although the feeling of love is at the heart of the relationships between Ulitskaya's characters, in *The Body of the Soul* it takes on many situations and circum-

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem. Yermoshina's article was devoted to L. Ulitskaya's book *The Kukotsky's Enigma*. English translation: "Ordinary life ceases at some point, and the heroine finds herself in an otherworldly, delirious environment, filled, it seems to the author, with exorbitant philosophical meaning and higher ideas about good and evil, life and death. The heroine wanders either in her darkened consciousness, or, as it seems to the author, in the afterlife, or in the sandy desert of a timeless dream".

<sup>19</sup> Л. Улицкая, *О теле души*, "Literatura.today" 2020...

<sup>20</sup> Г. Юзефович, *Удивительные приключения рыбы-лоцмана: 150 000 слов о литературе*, Москва 2016, с. 171.

stances, usually connected with illness and death. In addition to love, there is the theme of relationships between people: sisters who are strangers to each other and to their mother before her death, and the story of a woman who finds peace after receiving a vial of lethal medicine as a wedding present from her own husband. Ulitskaya deliberately focuses on death, bringing it to the fore. The novelist is not so much interested in death itself as in “the liminal state when the soul separates from the human body and flies off somewhere”<sup>21</sup>.

Body and soul, which for Augustine are integral parts of the human being, are bound together by inseparable bonds, the manifestation of which the theologian saw in the inevitable reunion after death in a new ontological reality<sup>22</sup>. The distinguishing feature of the bodies of the new age will be their spirituality. Today human bodies are essentially soul bodies, hence their synonymous definition as flesh, i.e. corruptible substance, subject to suffering, passions and ultimately death. This anthropological view of man is fully consistent with and directly derived from the Scriptures.

The end of the Middle Ages and the development of Western philosophy contributed to the discussion of human metaphysics. For example, René Descartes, the author of the famous phrase “I think, therefore I am”, based his argument about the soul and the body on Christian beliefs, but on slightly different principles. In his famous discourse on *The Passions of the Soul*, the French philosopher identifies the criteria for distinguishing between the soul and the body as visible and tangible functionality, the manifestation of which can be observed in the form of actions, as well as

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem. Original quotation: “пограничное состояние, когда душа отделяется от человеческого тела и куда-то летит”. It is important to note that the theme of death has always been present in literature. Eschatological ideas were peculiar to ancient thinkers and were reflected in chronicles, epistles, moral and polemical works. Eschatology, as the end of the end, including death, has always preoccupied Russian writers and creators. The eschatological concept can be viewed in two ways: optimistically and pessimistically. For the consciousness that has not been enlightened by the Christian view of the world, any eschatology is only a sad conclusion to the already sad history of the world. The moral teaching of Christian teachers, on the other hand, regards the eschatological end of the world as the beginning of a new epoch in the life of the individual and of humanity as a whole. In this respect, death is only a temporary cessation of earthly life, the contact and entry of the human soul into eternity, which in turn has its limit – the end of the world and the universal resurrection (John 5:28).

In particular, death as a thanatological problem deeply concerned Greek thinkers. For Socrates, philosophy was the study of death. Plato, for his part, believed that “true philosophers always desire death and think about it. They are concerned with dying, that is, with the death of bodily passions. They are the least afraid of death of all people” (Original quotation: “истинные философы всегда желают смерти и думают о ней. Их волнует смерть, то есть смерть их телесной страстности. Из всех людей они меньше всего боятся смерти”. Н. Василиадис, *Таинство смерти*, Свято-Троицкая Сергиева Лавра 1998, с. 28-29). According to Aristotle, death is merely the separation of the soul from the body (Н. Василиадис, *Таинство смерти...*, с. 33). Blessed Augustine, in his *Theological Treatises*, uses the classical form of the distinction between soul and body, treating man as a dichotomous unity of two elements: the rational soul and the body, the latter being synonymous with the concept of flesh (Блаженный Августин, *Творения. Теологические трактаты*, Санкт-Петербург 2000, с. 26).

<sup>22</sup> Блаженный Августин, *Творения. Теологические трактаты...*, с. 54.

passions, with the help of which it is possible, in particular, to “investigate the difference between soul and body”<sup>23</sup>. The philosopher, absorbed by the scientific and medical discoveries of his time concerning the structure of the human body, could not fail to take them into account in his reasoning. In his doctrine, Descartes made a distinction between the function of the body and that of the soul, the latter belonging only to thinking<sup>24</sup>. It is significant that it was Descartes who first characterised the cause of human death as a consequence of physical causes related to the life of the body, and not as a fact caused by the soul leaving the body<sup>25</sup>. The philosopher’s merit lies precisely in the fact that he was able to distinguish purely physical action from mental action.

One of the authors who made a significant contribution to this debate was Bruno Snell, the author of *Discovery of the Mind*<sup>26</sup>. By analysing the works of philosophers such as Homer and Socrates, Snell showed how the concept of soul and spirit evolved over the centuries. Similarly to Descartes, Snell was interested in exploring the boundaries between body and soul, although the approaches of both philosophers were different. Bruno Snell demonstrates that for the ancient Greek language and visual arts, the body was not conceptualised as a unified entity; instead, it was understood as a collection of individual limbs. Similarly, terms for mental faculties such as sight and emotions were initially described in terms of their outward expressions rather than their essential functions. Regarding the soul, early Greek lacked a single word like “psyche” to characterize it. Instead, various terms such as “thymos” and “noos” were used to describe different aspects of mental and emotional life. The departure of the soul from the body, as described by Homer, was depicted in various ways, such as leaving through the mouth or wounds, leading to different interpretations among scholars<sup>27</sup>. Snell’s main thesis is that the ancient Greeks somewhere practically invented the modern mode of thinking, which became the basis for European civilization as an entirety. At first sight it may seem that the world of the soul presented in the writer’s new collection is a summary of all the above-mentioned schools, but this is not so. More on this later.

If the first chapter of the book is devoted to the theme of love, the second entitled *The Body of the Soul (О теле души)*, draws a kind of line between life and death that makes it impossible to distinguish between reality and mysticism. The author, as Aleksanyan notes, “is not afraid to talk about death and the soul”<sup>28</sup>. She presents different versions of the ‘other’, the other world, which cannot be understood rationally. These include a good son who grows transparent, shimmering wings and plays heavenly music on his flute; a weak woman who, after divorcing her husband, eats

<sup>23</sup> Р. Декарт, *Рассуждения о методе. Начала философии. Страсти души. Перевод с французского*, Москва 2019, с. 355.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, с. 369.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, с. 357.

<sup>26</sup> В. Snell, *Discovery of the Mind*, Oxford 1953.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 7-10.

<sup>28</sup> А. Александян, *Есть душа. О новом сборнике рассказов Людмилы Улицкой*, [в:] <http://vovkuse.net/ulickaya> (06.09.2023). Original quotation: „не боится говорить о смерти и душе”.

only apples and turns into a butterfly; and a library worker who, through forgetfulness, says goodbye to her former life and for whom the loss of memory becomes “a spring-board for a flight to knowledge beyond reason”<sup>29</sup>.

It is interesting that the physical world is directly related to the world of things. Things take on characteristics of physicality, important, often life-changing events are connected with them. In the story *Туши, туши, где их души...* (*Carcasses, carcasses, where are their souls...*) Zhenya, the protagonist, works in biochemistry. She is attracted by what seems to her at first to be the simplicity of the structure of a living organism. Zhenya is sure that hormonal processes and the statics of molecules are very easy to control. The heroine remains in this delusion until she receives an order to go to a meat-packing plant and collect pigs' epiphyses for research. After witnessing the spectacle of skinning pigs, the heroine wonders for the first time in her life about the boundary between the animate and the inanimate. Consequently, Zhenya realises the fragility and precariousness of the outer and inner worlds, their depth and understatement, their complementarity and distance<sup>30</sup>. In the story *Carcasses, carcasses, where are their souls...* it is necessary to note the duality on several levels: 1. the opposition ‘body – soul’; 2. the conflict between the rational and the irrational; 3. the clash between scientific experience and sensitive perception, which shows the difference between logic and simplicity.

It is worth noting the author's choice of the image of the pig, interpreted in various religions as the quintessence of lust, aggression and gluttony<sup>31</sup>, which also appears in other stories in this collection. The heroine of the story is overcome by the smell of pork: “Женя глубоко вдохнула смрадный воздух – и тут на нее напал столбняк. Выдохнуть она не могла – произошла полная остановка жизни. Все ее существо отказывалось принимать этот ужас”<sup>32</sup>.

In Christian sacred theological thought, the image of the pig is quite homogeneous, not only as an object to be eaten, but also as an animal with a certain association. It should not be overlooked that in Judaism, as well as in other Abrahamic religions such as Islam, the pig is still an animal that is forbidden to be eaten. The Old Testament not only explicitly defines the pig as an unclean animal, but also gives it an explicitly negative association<sup>33</sup>. It is worth noting that, despite the absence of an explicit prohibition of pork in Christianity, the New Testament also contains an explicitly

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> И. Букал, *Мифическое и обрядовое в сборнике Л. Улицкой «О теле души»*, [в:] *Утопический дискурс в русской культуре конца XIX – XXI века*, Москва 2021, с. 82.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, с. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Л. Улицкая, *Туши, туши, где их души*, [в:] Л. Улицкая, *О теле души. Новые рассказы*, Издательство АСТ, Москва 2019, с. 151. English translation: “Zhenya took a deep breath of the stinking air and then she was stunned. She couldn't breathe out – her life stopped completely. Her whole being refused to accept this horror”.

<sup>33</sup> Lv. 11:2-8, Proverbs. 11:22, Isaiah 65:4, Isaiah 66:3.



negative connotation attributed to this animal<sup>34</sup>. Interestingly, the Church Fathers also used the image of the pig as a negative object to illustrate spiritual phenomena<sup>35</sup>. It is possible that Ulitskaya's borrowing of this image was not accidental at all.

In accordance with the main theme of the article, we shall also highlight the plot of *Aqua allegoria*, in which observed is a blurring of the boundary between spiritual and physical reality. The protagonist, Sonya Solodova, after her separation from her husband, perceives the meaning of life as food, specifically in eating apples. Before immersing herself in the pleasure of eating apples, she makes a concerted effort to remove her ex-husband's traces from her apartment, actively trying to get rid of the smell of roast pork, for which he had a special affection. The atmosphere of fried meat that she creates is perceived as a "stench"; this smell reminds the heroine of the betrayal of the man with whom she lived for ten years. By cleansing her space of the domestic negativity associated with her husband, the heroine turns to asceticism and restricts her diet to apples. This process involves not only the surrounding airspace but also her own physical body. In time, she begins to experience spiritual ascent and physical lightness, which confirms the correctness of her choice of apple asceticism. Finally, at the end of the story, she finds inner and outer harmony with herself and her environment, which contributes to her eventual transition to another metaphysical realm.

The process described is accompanied by a constriction of physical space: first, the heroine is confined to her apartment (without leaving its boundaries), then to her bed, on which her transition to the other world takes place. In the present story, we can observe the interweaving of several contexts that form a kind of semantic grotesque that includes elements of Christian hagiography, biblical allegorism and mystical phantasmagoria.

Лежала как куколка, вся опечатанная тонкими волосками своего родного естественного цвета – русого, с красивым пепельным оттенком. А квартира была наполнена благоуханием, которое шло не от оставшихся в коробке антоновских яблок, а от самой Сони<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> The episode of casting out demons into a herd of swine (Mark 5:5-15) is remarkable, as are the sayings, "Do not give holy things to dogs and do not cast your pearls before swine" (Matt. 6:7), "A washed pig [goes] to wallow in the mud" (2 P. 2:22), and others.

<sup>35</sup> "Just as a pig wallowing in the mud feels pleasure, so the soul possessed by a bad habit does not even feel the stench of sin" (И. Златоуст, *Творения Святого Отца Нашего Иоанна Златоустого*, В русском переводе, vol. 12, Санкт-Петербург 1906, с. 536). "It makes pigs of men, and worse than pigs. The pig wallows in filth and feeds on uncleanness; and the voluptuary feeds on an even more disgusting table, inventing unlawful intercourse and unlawful love" (Ibidem, с. 569). "As a pig rejoices in filth, and the demon in our destruction" (Ibidem, с. 606).

<sup>36</sup> Л. Улицкая, *Aqua allegoria*, [в:] Л. Улицкая, *О теле души...*, с. 164. English translation: "She lay like a doll, all sealed up with the fine hairs of her natural colour – russet, with a beautiful ash tint. And the apartment was filled with a fragrance that came not from the Antonov apples left in the box, but from Sonia herself".

It is noteworthy that in this fragment the author creates an image that is peculiar to the hagiographic description of the moment of the death of a Christian saint: the fact that the fragrance of the physical body of a saint crosses the boundary of earthly existence is quite often present in the lives of saints. We find descriptions of such phenomena not only in relation to the time of the mysterious departure from the physical world, but also long after the saint's death, as a sign of the undeniable holiness and godliness of his life. We read further: “Сорок дней пролежала на Сониной постели русая волосяная куколка. А потом треснула снизу доверху, и вылезла из этой волосяной кожуры мокрая бабочка с ясными зелеными глазами, из множества фасеток составленными”<sup>37</sup>.

Ulitskaya's inclusion of the forty-day narrative certainly juxtaposes the present scene with broad biblical allegorism, not to mention purely Christian afterlife mysticism<sup>38</sup>. Christianity perceives the forty days not only as the time of the soul's sojourn on earth after death, but also as the time of a woman's purification after childbirth. In addition, despite the lack of biblical connotation, the butterfly element has been widely used by many Christian thinkers to represent the maturation process of the human soul. A notable example of this can be found in the thought of Saint Theophanes the Hermit, who often used this image in his reasoning<sup>39</sup>.

In this way, Ludmila Ulitskaya, with an artist's imagination, bestows on the real idea an artistic design, enhancing it with her own colours and her own literary vision: “А Соня поселилась в непростом месте: вокруг нее порхали такие же, как она, бабочки, и другие, покрупнее и поярче. И некоторых она узнавала. Одна была определенно ее первая школьная учительница Маргарита Михайловна”<sup>40</sup>.

It can be assumed that the presence of her teacher in the phantasmagorical world of the afterlife Sonia finds herself in, is, according to the author's logic, a peculiar manifestation of the spiritual community, designed to unite kindred souls living in the physical world according to the same spiritual rules. The size and beauty of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, c. 165. English translation: For forty days the red-haired chrysalis lay on Sonia's bed. Then it cracked open from the bottom up, and out of that hairy skin emerged a wet butterfly with clear green eyes made up of many facets.

<sup>38</sup> The number 40 appears in the Old Testament texts in various semantic contexts: 40 days the Lord pours rain on the earth during the Flood, 40 days Moses communicates with God on Mount Sinai, 40 years the Jews waited in the desert before entering the Promised Land, 40 days the Lord Jesus Christ fasted in the desert before setting out on his evangelical mission, 40 days Christ stayed with his disciples on earth after his miraculous resurrection. 40 is always a passage of some kind of trial, a turning point.

<sup>39</sup> “With an ugly exterior, inner beauty matures, like a beautiful butterfly in its ugly shell. When the butterfly is mature, it tears the shell and begins to enjoy life in the light of God. So our hidden man, having matured in a weak body, when God judges him, throws off this shell, climbs the mountain and begins to live a completely new life at the source of life” (Святитель Феофан Затворник, *Созерцание и размышление. Краткие получения*, Москва 2007, с. 509).

<sup>40</sup> Л. Улицкая, *Aqua allegoria...*, с. 167. English translation: “And Sonya had settled in a difficult place: there were butterflies just like her, and others, bigger and brighter, fluttering around her. And she recognised some of them. One of them was definitely her first school teacher, Margarita”.

individual butterflies, in our opinion, reflect the spiritual beauty and depth of the spiritual life of these same individuals, which can only truly manifest itself in a new metaphysical dimension – this being the writer's main ideological message.

In another story entitled *Autopsy (Аутопсия)*, Ludmila Ulitskaya continues to surprise the reader with multiple variations on the blurring of the boundaries between the spiritual and physical worlds, as well as with her artistic imagination on the issues of life and death. The narrative in this story is organised according to the principle of circular composition, where a minor character, Kogan, becomes the starting and ending point of the spiralling course of events described. Kogan, an elderly pathologist with a wealth of experience, is a medical man “with a broad outlook and rational thinking, without any metaphysical wanderings”<sup>41</sup>. He sees himself as “a priest of pure physicality, the last purifier of the temple that the soul has left”<sup>42</sup>. One can envy the accuracy of the psychological portrait with which Ulitskaya describes Mr Kogan, thus creating a plot background for the development of the main idea of *Autopsy* – a story about physical death and life in a new dimension and in a new anthological reality, its central character – a boy musician named Vsevolod, born under mysterious circumstances with a claim to messianism from a priest's daughter: “Сколько их было, непорочно рожденных? Один говорил, его не услышали, другой писал, но никто не понимал написанного, был такой, который пел, и его тоже не услышали”<sup>43</sup>.

The author has filled the text with several such coded premises relating to spiritual-religious issues: the view of the pre-existence of souls<sup>44</sup>, the experience of traditional post-clinical death recollections<sup>45</sup>, and other eclectic religious attitudes.

So, Kogan is invited to the morgue in order to give his opinion on an unusual corpse. While examining the corpse, the doctor is confronted for the first time in his life with uncertainty, because the structure of the cavities under the ribs of the murdered man resembles the anatomical arrangement of the central organs of a wing. This murdered man turns out to be the hero Vsevolod, whose music and flute playing, considered heavenly, caused fear and irritation in the spiritually weary, leading to the decision to kill him: “Она огненная была, его музыка. Небесная...”<sup>46</sup>. Ludmila Ulitskaya not only describes the process of Vsevolod's transition from the physical to the spiritual world, but also presents a new anthropological model of spiritual man, in which the human soul

<sup>41</sup> Л. Улицкая, *Аутопсия*, [в:] Л. Улицкая, *О теле души...*, с. 221. Original quotation: “с широким кругозором и рациональным мышлением, без всяких метафизических блужданий”.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, с. 217. Original quotation: “священником чистой телесности, последним уборщиком храма, который покинула душа”.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, с. 233. English translation: “How many of them were there, the pure-born? One spoke and was not heard, another wrote, but no one understood what was written, there was one who sang and he too was not heard”.

<sup>44</sup> “No, this world was not unknown. We have all been here, been here, been here...”. (Л. Улицкая, *Аутопсия...*, с. 234).

<sup>45</sup> “And then he was pushed out of the black tube by a powerful force...”. (Л. Улицкая, *Аутопсия...*, с. 232)

<sup>46</sup> Л. Улицкая, *Аутопсия...*, с. 230. English translation: “It was fiery, his music. Heavenly...”.

acquires angelic wings and their mysterious trace remains visible on the physical body. The spiritual world is presented as a source of reigning harmony and happiness.

The story ends with the same pathologist, to whose soul comes the new Vsevolod, reborn after his physical death – either an angel or a man.

Перед ним стояла смутная светлая фигура, неузнаваемо знакомая. Коган сделал движение навстречу, привстал на кровати. Точно, точно это был сегодняшний покойник. Никаких слов не было произнесено. Только звучала тихо, как будто от соседей, бедная светлая музыка. Флейта. Пришедший приглашал последовать за ним. И Коган последовал<sup>47</sup>.

And yet, despite the presence of several phantasmagorical elements, the overall impression remains of the integrity and thoughtfulness of the picture drawn by the author. Ulitskaya demonstrates great artistic imagination, with which she draws her vision of the afterlife, even if it is controversial from the point of view of accepted theological dogmas.

The following story from the cycle *The Body of the Soul* is indicative in terms of the stated theme of our research. In the story *Ava (Ава)*, as it seems to us, Ulitskaya openly reveals the system of her religious, as it would be correct to define in this case, theosophical views, as well as their sources. *Ava*, based on the principle of gradual disclosure of the domestic history, tells the story of a stuffed dog that three generations of the same family played with. It is a family toy relic with which the children share their joys and sorrows, secrets and mysteries, in a word, pour out a stream of their innocent and pure feelings. The toy wears out with time, especially its eyes, one of which is forced to become a coloured button. It would be easy to forget this toy, especially after its last use and loss in a dacha fire, were it not for one fact: a boy named Andrew is born into the family, whose multicoloured eyes perfectly match the colour of the famous dog, Ava. Sasha, Andrei's mother, eventually finds a surprising answer to the question of the reason for her child's uniqueness. In *Ava*, Ulitskaya uses the method of documentary prose to tell the story of Daniil Andreyev and his seminal work, *Rose of the World (Поза мира)*. It is in this book that Sasha finds the answers she needs: "Среди прочего Даниилу Андрееву было дано знание о происхождении душ. Прежде этот вопрос несколько не занимал Сашу, она даже и не знала о существовании такого вопроса. Даниил Андреев открыл ей глаза"<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, c. 235. English translation: "A vaguely pale figure stood before him, unrecognisably familiar. Kogan moved towards it, stood up on the bed. Surely, surely it was the dead man of today. No words were spoken. Only a faint, faint music played softly, as if from the neighbours. A flute. The visitor invited to follow. And Kogan followed".

<sup>48</sup> Л. Улицкая, *Ава...*, c. 214. English translation: "Among other things, Daniil Andreev was given knowledge about the origin of souls. Before that, Sasha had not thought about this question at all, she had not even known that such a question existed. Daniil Andreev opened her eyes".

If in *Autopsy* the author partially lifts the veil of her views on the origin of the human soul, here we have an open statement of this question. However, it is not so much the borrowing of Andreyev's original concept of the pre-existence of souls that we find controversial, but its modification to suit the needs of Ulitskaya's plot.

Сохраняется и тонкий ручеек созидания новых монад – путем накопления и концентрации любви в среде людей. Например, если любовь ребенка интенсивно направлена на какой-то неодушевленный предмет, на игрушечную собачку, скажем, и поток этот целенаправленный и мощный, то после физического уничтожения этого объекта накопленная им любовь концентрируется в новую монаду, и она опускается в наш земной мир<sup>49</sup>.

Thus, in Sasha's interpretation, the soul of "discordant Andrei" and the fate of her favourite toy are "connected by a mystical knot", which, thanks to Andreyev, she is able to see for herself. And yet, in this fragment, one cannot help but notice documentary fiction and the substitution of ideas. It is a fact that in the famous work *The Rose of the World*, the question of the creation of souls is considered by the author in two parts of the book<sup>50</sup>. In neither of them, therefore, are there any theses or preconditions for this kind of interpretation or understanding of the text.

The writer and philosopher Andreyev does indeed tell of the existing processes of saturation with the 'immortal shelt'<sup>51</sup> of the children's favourite toys and their subsequent bonding in a 'divine act' with monads, but it is not about the creation of a human being or his soul, but of some miraculous creatures resembling animals. It is appropriate here to quote Andreyev himself.

Существа<sup>52</sup> эти поражают не красотой и тем более не величием, а той невыразимой трогательностью, какой размягчает наши суровые души вид зайчонка или олененка. В Эрмастиге эти существа тем прелестнее, что даже в соответствовавших им игрушках никогда не было ни капли зла. Они чудесно живут там вместе с душами настоящих медведей и оленей, получают там астральное тело, а потом поднимаются в Хангвиллу, как и все остальные<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, с. 215. English translation: "A subtle stream of creation of new monads is also maintained – through the accumulation and concentration of love in the environment of people. For example, if a child's love is intensely directed towards an inanimate object, say a toy dog, and this stream is purposeful and powerful, then after the physical destruction of this object, the love accumulated by it is concentrated into a new monad and it descends into our earthly world".

<sup>50</sup> Книга II. *О метаисторическом и трансфизическом методах познания* и Книга V. *Структура Шаданакара. Стихали*, [в:] Д. Андреев, *Роза мира*, Москва 1991.

<sup>51</sup> The term 'shelt' is an untranslatable English term coined by Andreev.

<sup>52</sup> I.e., monadless reborn children's toys.

<sup>53</sup> Д. Андреев, *Роза мира...*, с. 101. English translation: "These creatures do not impress us with their beauty, and even less with their majesty, but with that ineffable tenderness that the sight of a hare or a fawn brings to our hard souls. In 'Ermaстигue', these creatures are all the more endearing because

Perhaps the writer's artistic imagination lacked one element in the poet's and theophilosopher's creative thought, and she found her original authorial solution by linking the monads of the "animal kingdom" of the *Rose of the World* with the monads of the "God-born and God-created higher selves"<sup>54</sup> and putting into Andreyev's mouth what the author of the mystical work himself had never said.

Thus, having analysed the selected works of Lyudmila Ulitskaya from the perspective of the dichotomous description of anthropological reality in the new short story collection *The Body of the Soul*, we have come to the following conclusions. The mythology of these stories is presented in two variants, in accordance with the narrative line developed by the author in the previous periods of her work, in particular in the novel *The Kukotsky Enigma*. We have managed to prove that in the second variant, the mythological mosaic, the author actually reveals the nature of her religious and theosophical views, in which Daniil Andreyev plays an important role. At the same time, we have shown that Ulitskaya's literary imagination is not confined to the existing conceptsphere of the metaphysical world, but, on the contrary, helps Ulitskaya to present this world in a more colourful and vivid way. Sometimes the author not only fills in the missing elements of this mosaic, but deliberately changes to maintain the integrity of the plot in her works. At the same time, despite the author's declaration of disinterest in Christian ideology and its shortcomings, Ludmila Ulitskaya's literary vision of the afterlife is clearly rooted in biblical interpretation and follows directly from it, albeit with some modifications that are convenient from the point of view of the artistic image of the work.

It is also relevant to note that Ulitskaya leaves her stories open to interpretation, adding to their intrigue. Each story encourages reflection on broader aspects of humanity, transcending the immediate subject matter to delve into existential speculation. The theme of death, central to Ulitskaya's mysticism, fascinates her for several reasons. Firstly, it is informed by personal experience of witnessing the passing of loved ones whose behaviour reflects their dignity. Secondly, it explores cultural attitudes to death. Thirdly, it explores the concept of 'other worlds' after death. Mystical episodes in her work span different life situations and psychological states, often unfolding in the realms of sleep, delirium or mental illness, intricately woven into the plot. A key aspect of these experiences is the fluidity between worlds, where characters may inhabit otherworldly spaces or encounter them in their own lives, often marked by spatial elements such as doors and windows.

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there has never been a hint of evil in the toys that have been made to represent them. They live there wonderfully with the souls of real bears and deer, receive an astral body there and then ascend to 'Hangvilla' like the rest".

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, c. 45.

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