

Svetlana Mihajlovna Tolstaja (Moscow, Russia)

TIME AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MAGIC: COMPRESSING AND PROLONGING OF TIME IN THE SLAVIC FOLK TRADITION

In the traditional folk culture of the Slavs, time, together with other elements and features of the external world, is given both a positive and a negative meaning: it could be good or bad, clean or dirty, dangerous or safe. From the time when a man is born, his destiny is established, and by the time he is dead his destiny after death is defined; the selection of the accurate timing is an indispensable condition for success of all beginnings: ploughing, harvest, taking the cattle out at the fields, building a house, weaving, getting married etc. Time is the most important regulator of all practical and ritual activities of people and it presents one of the main instruments for managing the world and structuring of human life (10). The notions of time determinants in folk tradition are well illustrated in the example stated by D. K. Zelenin in his book "East-Slav ethnography": "In the south-Russian areas (but not only in them), there are certain periods when the ploughing starts (in different places those are different days) - in the region of Rjazan it is the Clean Thursday, in the region of Kaluzs those dates are 1st or 17th of April, etc. Even if on that day the weather is cold and not suitable for fieldwork, the ground is ploughed in a village house that has an earth floor. The plough is taken on the terrace, one person is holding it as if he was the ploughed, and another person pulls it as an animal (3,54). This relation towards time does not exclude the attempts to present it through different forms, to establish a control over it, or to use it in order to create an object and instrument of magic activities. The main forms of magical activities are presented through compressing or making time dense, as well as through the reverse activities as prolonging or lingering of time.

In 1911 D. K. Zelenin has described the ancient East-Slav ritual, that according to its characteristics was thought to be pagan. This ritual included creation of one-day objects, known under the a/m term ("obidennih predmetov") (4). The one-day objects for the Russians and the Belorussians were those objects that were created for magical purposes (as a protection of epidemics, death and weather disasters), and they were used for a special one-day ritual (from dawn to dusk). The objects made included linen fabric, a shirt, a wooden cross, a church and very seldom other objects.

D. K. Zelenin did not know of analogous data from other Slav traditions, although this custom of creating objects in one day as a protective measure could be found on the wider territory of Eastern Slavs.

In Serb tradition the magical "birth" of the shirt was described at the end of the 19th century and was confirmed by other analogous testimonies.

The ritual of producing weaved objects started with a pre-arrangement that defined in which house or on which place in the village the women would gather (sometimes there were additional conditions: they should be only old women, "clean" women, usually widows), rarely girls, that would bring one hand of wool (or string) and tried to finish the weaving before the deadline, to produce the fabric, and if it was a matter of a shirt, to sew it. During the work they would often practice ritual silence. The linen or the fabric that they produced had to be as long as possible, sometimes a couple of dozen meters. The fabric would be sacrificed in a church, in a house or they would go around the village or the field with it, forcing the cattle to pass under or over it (in Chrnigovshtina after the ritual the fabric was burned). The weaving of one-day towel could be done through a parallel ritual - through producing and setting a one-day cross on the side of men (which was usually with big proportions). Sometimes crosses were made independently from the weaving of the fabric, for example, the Russian crosses against cholera ("холерные кресты"), or when it comes to the South Slavs

crosses against hard rain ("градовые кресты") that would protect the village from cholera or hard rain.

In Eastern Serbian, in the region of the town of Pirot, when the population would get the information that there will be a war, 9 old women would gather on midnight and in total silence would produce fabric until dawn. They would then make a shirt out of the fabric and everyone going to war had to pass through it. This, according to folk beliefs, would protect them from death.

One-day shirts were produced as well in cases of epidemics of plague, and they were called "plague shirts". In Kosovo and Metohija, during one night, two twin sisters (by the names that are associated with standing up, duration, as for example Stoja and Stojanka) had to spin, weave and sew the shirt.

In Belaruse, the fishermen on the holiday of St. Aleksej (17th of March, old calendar), produced a one-day net, for better fishing results. There are also cases of baking a one-day bread that had magical characteristics that could turn the wolf into human, to cure rabies and other diseases.

In Russia, since ancient times (since the 14th century) there was a custom that was performed when an epidemic would appear - a wooden one-day church was built. This memory has been incorporated in the names of many churches in the towns of ex-Moscow and Novgorodsk Russia (compare the example of the church Св. Илија Обыденный in Moscow). The construction of such churches has started with the cutting of the trees in the forest, and finished when the church was consecrated, when a liturgy was also carried out. The fourth Novgorod chronicle contains a text dated 1390: "there was a mor in Novgorod, in the month of October at 12, Wednesday, the villagers have constructed a church one morning carrying wood from the forest...which was consecrated by archbishop Ivan the same morning..." (4,210).

In all similar rituals the created objects and buildings have been consecrated and gained magical powers due to the completion the whole technological process and its concentration in time, that is the time "thickens" of the ritual.

The Slavs did not appoint similar characteristics of sacredness and magical power only to some of the rituals but as well to the verbal texts that contain the motif of a closed time circle (life, vegetative or production cycle). The motif of a man's hagiography or a certain plant or an object (artefact), created through the content of the text, was also considered as a magical protective or creative instrument.

The Slav folklore contains popular songs that describe, through strict adherence to all phases as growing up, maturing and reproduction of plants, as linen and hemp (but as well poppy, wheat, grapes, peppers, cabbages etc.) from the moment of sowing (or ploughing) until getting the final product - fabric, shirt, belt, a piece of linen, wine, bread etc. The songs that had such content had the power, according to folk beliefs, to chase away the hail clouds, to cure diseases, to protect from negative forces and wild beasts.

In Serbia the hail clouds were chased away by singing songs related to the problems and pains of the wheat or, most often the hemp, especially related to the worse tortures this plants have to endure: the pulling, the watering, the washing, the weaving (hemp), the boiling (wheat) etc. In the Zakarpatje region the story related to the treating of the hemp, the preparation of the fabric and the sewing of the shirt was used as a magical formulae against "volokno", a kind of swelling.

In Eastern Serbia the text related to the hemp treatment was used in order to cure a specific lung disease. The performer of the white magic would take nine spins, a wooden stick, a knife and a small shovel used for ember, and would wave them over the head of the sick person, pronouncing the following words: "I have sowed linen, linen on Vidovday. The linen has grown, grown on Vidovday. I have weed out the linen, linen on Vidovday..." etc., taking into account all activities like watering, washing, making a shirt out of it...). The white magic ritual ended with typical words of "expulsion": "Stop, quit. There is no place here for you. Go to the green forest!" - she would say to the sickness.

The "story of the linen" and some other plants served as an instrument of protection from negative powers and demons, due to the magical force of the "compressed time" that it included. The Lusatian Serbs have a belief according to which during the contact with the "poludnica" (female demonic creature that appears at noon), people could protect themselves by telling a detailed tale on the production of linen and hemp; otherwise it would kill the person, it would cut his head with the sickle, it would turn him into a stone, cripple him, cause him a serious disease, and during death it would torture the person by asking him questions on the linen, the spinning, the production of the fabric etc.

By the end of last century (the 19th - note of the translator), I. I. Sreznjevski has recorded a tale on the "pripoludnica" that was told among the Lusatian Serbs according to which: "in summer time, during harvest, when it was very hot, around noon, behind the river, and from the woods, a beautiful tall girl would come out, all covered with something white (sitting in the water, combing her hair, singing a sad song) and asking the harvesters how is their work going, if they are feeling hot, if they have a lot of work, how the wheat bloomed, how it ripened, how they harvest it, how they work on it..." (6).

The Guculs know a sort of a tale ("bilichka") related to the passenger that was saved from the she-vampire; as a protection the passenger has told a tale about the cabbage; the vampire wanted to drink his blood, but she could not - the "cabbage tale" has created a fence around him (8, 107). In Polesje, the story of the "brad hagiography" could serve as a protection from a wolf, when a person would meet one.

In Monte Negro and in Macedonia the dances and songs regarding peppers were quite popular, and they were performed through imitating all activities related to the peppers: women, though dancing, would "collect, carry, grind, roast, eat peppers". The Russian song "We have sown millet" that is derived from the spring ritual, that serves the purpose of recreating agricultural works, especially when it comes to the archaic type of agriculture that starts with lumberyarding (cutting of trees) and is completed through chaffing the chunks (see more detailed 11;12).

The magical form of time compression was used as well during white magic performances that could be found very often when it comes to the Slavs. Each day was a symbol of one of the following months or seasons. For example, according to the weather during the 12 days at the beginning of September one could predict the weather during the whole year, on monthly basis. Similar characteristics of prediction was included in the ritual of sowing and growing of different kinds of wheat, that was done before one of the major holidays in the year - Christmas, Easter etc. This custom is widely known in the North-western parts of the South-Slav ethnic territory (that is when it comes to the Slovenians and the Croats), but it could be found at other places, mostly as a pre-Christmas ritual: in one of the days at the beginning of Advent, for example on the day of St. Varvara (4th of December) a plate is filled with seeds of different plants - wheat, oats etc., and then, after they grow up, around Christmas, they can predict the harvest for the coming year. For preventive purposes in a short time period the whole production process is being "played", the process that happens at the fields - with a magical aim to provide good harvest and predict the fertility of different plants.

Another interesting example of magical compression of time is the popular ritual from the border Russian-Byelorussia area, called "borona". The participants of the ritual (women) gather and start to sing, at the same time, five calendar songs related to different annual holiday periods - Christmas, spring, St. Ivan day, harvest etc. Such a performance of different songs that according to their content are related to different periods in the annual calendar, songs that are performed at the same time, together, creates a powerful chaotic accord, a magical effect that is provoked through compression of annual time, creating a "knot" out of it through creating an audio chaos. The ritual is performed in order to initiate rain during draught or during witch expulsion (informant O. A. Pashina).

It is interesting to note that the notions on the magical force of "compressed" time are alive even today. During one of the field research expeditions, together with my colleague A. V. Gura, in Polesje, in the Kobrina region, on Pishtina, such a testimony was recorded: "during the last war it was said that it will finish when in one day three holidays coincide. So it be: on the 6th of May (23rd of April according to the Old Calendar), in 1945 it was the day of St. George, Easter and Sunday - and the war was over".

A reversed form - magical prolonging of time, was used mainly in the frames of the Catholic traditions, as well related to preparation of special magical objects, for example a chair or a bench, that were used during some of the main holidays, as Easter or Christmas, in the church during the mass to recognise a which among the present. Such a bench would be produced during the Christmas fasting period, and sometimes during the whole year, provided that at least once a day one would work on it with an axe.

In sub-Carpatian Russia it was considered indispensable to start producing a chair on the wholly dinner (that is on Christmas-Eve), to cut it every day of the year and to complete it the next holly dinner, the next year. When they went to an evening mass, they would take the chair along, together with one grain of corn that felt off the grindstone, that they put and roasted in bread. After all such preparations the one who carried the chair could see the ones that appeared as witches (9,23).

According to the Slovakian beliefs, if someone saw a "striga" during the Christmas liturgy (striga being a witch), he/she had to knit a weep from the day of St. Lucia (13th of December) until Christmas, prolonging the knitting over the whole period, and then attending the liturgy with the whip. Then they could see a "striga" even outside the church. Thus, it was necessary that at midnight, on Christmas Eve, to take the bench produced during the St. Lucia-Christmas period, and go to a crossroad, sit on the bench and draw a circle around oneself using a nut tree or a consecrated branch; one could stay back when the others went to the liturgy and wait sitting on the bench for the witch. If someone would scratch the door handle every day during the Advent period, he could then recognise the witch due to her scratched nose.

The one who would look himself in the mirror each night starting from St. Lucia to Christmas, he could see on Christmas the witch in the mirror. The witches would appear as well in front of the ones that during Advent each day have put a nail in the main pillar of the house. On Christmas the witches would come to "take out the nails with their teeth". They would appear in those homes where at Christmas dry wood would be burned, and have been burned each day in the period from St. Lucia till Christmas, until sun rise (14,40-41). In Polesje, at Zzitomirshatina, similar forms were used, but not during the Christmas, but during Easter fasting period: each week of the fasting, they would take out a piece of wood from the stow where they were dried, and then during the Eastern wake they would burn them all. Then, the witch would come to the house by herself, justifying her visit by saying that she wants to borrow something. And in the former Voljinska Gubernija (municipality) each Friday starting with the Eastern fasting period people would take one branch from the garbage and at Easter, before

sunrise they would burn all 8 branches in the stow, since the witch came from the stow, to ask for fire (5,276).

In Southern Poland, in the region of Zzeshuva, at the day of St. Lucia, the girls would go in the forest carrying an axe, and they would cut a young tree with one stroke. Then this tree would be cut into small pieces that would be carried each day, one by one, to the house, and would be put into the fire. It was important that the wood would last until Christmas. At Christmas night, people would make fire with the remaining trees. On the fire they would put water in which needles wrapped in fabric were boiled. Then the door would be opened, since it was believed that it was the moment when the witch could come and would "reveal herself" (12,211).

The Russians in Zaonezje practised the "prolonging of time" during the creation of the bride female shirt. According to testimonies of the well-known mourning song singers I.A. Feodosova, "the shirt was prepared during the 4 nights of the Immaculate Conception holiday, it was sowed during three Christmas nights and was embroidered after each morning mass on Easter. It was finalised after the liturgies on the day of St. Peter" (13,213)

According to the opinion of the researcher Zaonezznja K. Loginova, "such a shirt provided protection, especially because it was prepared during holly days, and the girls were at that moment equal with the female white magic performers, who did white magic while the guests visited the church" (7, 109)

In the context of the presented material one can conclude that in certain cases not only holy time, but as well "prolonged" time was of big importance.

Another interesting testimony related to the magic of "prolonged" time could be noticed in the frames of the Belarus folk terminology of the commemorations of the dead: the first annual commemoration was done in the week of Toma, and it is called "*снедане на раздзіцелях*", that is "breakfast" in the honour of the dead predecessors; the next commemoration, at Duovden is called "*вечера ўо родзійцелях*", that is, "dinner for the parents" (1). If according to the above-mentioned custom the first 12 days of September reflected the annual weather, in this case each commemoration resembles one of the parts of the 24-hour period.

There are numerous examples of this kind. Obviously, all similar magical forms of prolonging of time, as a method or form of object secularisation, aim toward turning them, through the process of preparation that takes place during a prolonged, continuous period of time, and through different phases, into objects with particular magical power and bestowing the person who created them or the one who owns them with a special ability of seeing what the others can not see.

This type of secularisation is reflected as if in a mirror when compared to the above-mentioned form of compression of time, but in both cases the usual way of object creation is not respected, either through prolonging or through making the process faster. This deviation of the normal behaviour is the source of magical characteristics. Thus the traditional attitude towards time of the folk culture differs from ours.

Since we are under the authority of time, this means that we ourselves cannot govern it, but the bearers of the traditional views of the world are in "business" terms with time - they can, to a certain level, be its managers and use it as a magical tool for influencing the environment.