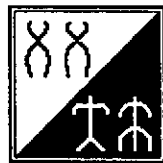

SIMPLE FORMS

An Encyclopaedia of Simple Text-Types in Lore and Literature

edited
by

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Častuška

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1. Definition: The č. (pl.: *častuški*) has been the most widely distributed genre of Russian oral and musical folk poetry since the 19th century, and it is still a very popular genre of Russian folklore in general. The č., which may be either simply recited or sung (and in that case is often accompanied by the accordion), consists of a short rhyming stanza of usually four lines. Because of its extreme structural simplicity one can even argue "that in the case of the *častuška* we deal with one of the most primitive forms of folk poetry" (Sokolov 1925: 1091; transl. P.G.); in fact, similar forms can be found all over the world.

2. Examples and Analysis: A typical example of a č. would be:

(1) Akh ty veter, veter, veter, Kogda dueš', kogda net.	Oh you wind, wind, wind, Sometimes you blow sometimes you don't.
Akh ty milyj, milyj, milyj, Kogda lyubiš', kogda net.	Oh you darling, darling, darling, Sometimes you love, sometimes you don't. (Stephan 1969: 25)

The term č. was introduced into the literary world by the Russian poet G.I. Uspenskij (1889), who wrote the first article which discussed the č. as a separate genre. The name, however, was well in use before this time (cf. Lazutin 1962: 261); it has its origin in the Old Slavic *čęsta* (i.e. 'often'), and it originally designated something that is often repeated. Additionally, a close relationship to popular quick dancing songs, so-called *častye pesni*, can be seen (Stephan 1969: 88). A number of further names, varying locally and derived from either the č.'s form, its contents, or from the manner of its presentation, have long existed (cf. Stephan 1969: 87ff). The č. is composed of a short stanza, which is complete in itself and independent of further context. During performances, however, several č.i can converge into a complete cycle. The performance of the č. is not bound by any definite folk custom, improvisation is one of its main characteristics. Usually in folkloristics, the term 'improvisation' describes the fact that missing parts are replaced by schematic passages, when the performer's memory fails; in case of the č., however, improvisation turns out to be a basic constructional principle. The č. tends to create an individual statement; it is dependent on temporal and local factors, and it always refers to the present or the most recent past. It is never theoretical or abstract; the fantastic, too, is foreign. There is no definite norm for the contents of the č.; thus, the performer can basically express his thoughts in his own words. He has to

regard, however, the basic structural characteristics of the genre, a complex artistic system to which formal as well as thematic components contribute. Within this framework, then, the performer has the choice between a wide range of options. In conclusion, the č. is neither merely individual nor mere common poetry: it is an individual act of creation within the limits of traditional generic rules.

The currently most popular form of four lines very often (but not necessarily) falls into two parts, with a caesura after the second line. The two parts which are in juxtaposition may form either a comparison or an opposition. In this context, Kaleckij (1936) applies the term 'psychological parallelism' created by Veselovskij (1898), a term which refers to the combination of a symbolic (and often traditional) description taken from the world of nature, and an actual fact from concrete human experience, as in example:

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| (2) Dve berezki, obe belye -
kotoruyu rubit'? | Two birches, both of them
white -
which one should be cut? |
| Dve milaški čemobrovyje -
kotoruyu ljubit'? | Two girls with black eye
brows -
which one should be loved?
(Bakhtin 1966: 99) |

The above-mentioned juxtaposition, first of all, becomes evident on a deeper level of meaning. In (2), for example, there is an implicit sexual allusion; the latter is not at all uncommon with the č., which has traditionally been current primarily among the youth and which, in addition to any other imaginable theme, has often been concerned with love. This kind of semantic juxtaposition may be mirrored on the surface level of the text by phonetic (rhyme), lexical (e.g. *white* vs. *black*), and syntactic phenomena.

The č. may show various rhyme forms; usually, however, the second and fourth lines rhyme. Historically, a strong tendency towards the *abcb*-form can be observed; nowadays, this type accounts for about 75% of all č.i (Selivanov 1982). A great variety of rhythms and metres can also be observed (Sobolev 1927; Trubetzkoy 1927; Stephan 1969: 227ff.); these cannot, however, provide reliable criteria for classification. If anything conclusive can be said about rhythm and metre at all, the č. has developed a variety of rhythmic schemes; all of which, however, always allow variation.

Literary devices which constantly reoccur in the č. include (often traditional) metaphors and symbols, hyperboles, and fixed epithets, such as 'grey eyes' or 'white birch'. The fixation of such stylistic motives may contribute to the formation of traditional structures. In particular, the

stereotypisation of the introductory lines (*začiny*) may produce certain subtypes of the č., such as the *yabločka* (i.e. 'small apple') or the *bočka* (i.e. 'barrel').

3. Typology: From a formal point of view, three groups of č.i can be distinguished. The most widely spread form at the present is the four-line č.; less common is the multi-line č. (6, 8, and more lines), and even more rare is the 2-line č., which is often called *stradanie* (i.e. grief). The historical development seems to have started with the multi-line č. and led to the 2-line č., which first appeared in the 20th century.

Concerning the function of the č., which is often related to its contents, one can distinguish the following types:

- (i) *lyric č.i*; this group is the largest. It is genetically related to the folk song and often deals with love themes. This type, in particular, is often used in the formation of cycles, which, apart from some obligatory unifying idea, may even take the form of a dialogue.
- (ii) *dance č.i*; this type, the main function of which is the accompaniment to music, belongs to the very early forms of the č.;
- (iii) *humorous č.i*, which serve predominantly entertaining purposes;
- (iv) *satiric č.i*, which usually thematize topical (social) problems and inconveniences;
- (v) *proverbial č.i*; the conciseness and often aphoristic form of the č. point to a similarity with the *proverb and related genres. This may be directly reflected in the text, too, when proverbs, proverbial phrases or idioms are explicitly integrated or quoted.
- (vi) *riddle č.i*, which function like actual riddles;
- (vii) *nonsense č.i*, which adopt the devices of absurdity and allogisms with regard to contents and form;
- (viii) *agitation č.i*; because of the č.'s capacity for direct comment deliberately created and often hymnic č.i have been used to propagate official slogans.
- (ix) *political č.i*, which refer to matters not officially approved, are usually excluded from collections by censorship (Kabronskij (ed.) 1978; Kozlovskij (ed.) 1982);
- (x) *erotic č.i*, which have usually fallen under censorship, too, because of tabooization, have nevertheless been widespread both in the past and in the present (Kabronskij (ed.) 1978; Kozlovskij (ed.) 1982; Raskin 1981);
- (xi) *children's č.i*, which are created by children, but not necessarily about them. They are seldom deemed worthy

of attention by collectors.

4. History: The question of the č.'s origin has been heavily disputed. It seems most reasonable, however, to assume with Lazutin (1960: 13ff.) the following development: The beginning of the č. as a separate genre started in the 1850/60s; its intensive distribution took place in the 60s and 70s. Its form then became stabilized and it received a specific name in the last third of the 19th century. This assumption does not exclude the existence of examples from the late 18th or early 19th centuries, which may be regarded as prototypes.

The early multi-line č. has remained connected to the traditional folk song; it represents a transitional or mixed form, before the condensation of the contents led to the four-line č. The č. initially seems to have served as a dancing song, whose close connection to music and dance, however, loosened later on. This tendency is most apparent after the revolutionary year of 1917, which brought about major changes in the tradition of the č.; when č.i became more and more distributed under the influence of Soviet cultural policy, and served as agitation poetry in newspapers, on placards, or on the radio, the concentration on the verbal text finally caused its partial independence from its original musical elements. Such deliberately created examples share often the most general generic characteristics. In (3), for example, the lack of the typical juxtaposition in folk č.i is mirrored by the untypical hypotactic sentence structure:

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| (3) Ya čitala Lenina,
ya čitala Stalina,
čto kolkhoznaya doroga
dlya derevni pravil'no. | I read Lenin,
I read Stalin,
that the way of the Kolkhoz
is the right one for the village.
(Stephan 1969: 136) |
|--|--|

Another major phase in the history of the č. began during World War II, when examples as the following came up :

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| (4) Sorok pervyj god nesčastnyj:

Na nas Gitler nastupil.
Menya sirotočkoj ostavil,
yagodinočku ubil. | The year of 41 is
unfortunate:
Hitler fell upon us.
He left me as an orphan,
he killed my darling. |
|---|--|

Although the č. is often referred to as being capable of serving general political, ideological, and pedagogical purposes (Vlasova 1960; Vlasova, Gorelov 1965), popular examples still are very much in use today as before; the č. remains an extremely important genre of contemporary Russian folklore.

5. Related Forms and Transformations: The č. shows similarities to a range of other folklore genres, as well as to literary poetry. In addition to its specific relationship to the folk song, and to the dancing song tradition in particular, there is also a close connection to the 'proverb (Simakov 1913a: 12; Lazutin 1960: 219ff.), so-called 'wedding songs' (Georgievskij 1915; Balov 1897: 101), joke songs of the *skomorokhi*, Russian medieval minstrels (Belkin 1975; Zguta 1978), and many other forms. Thus, the assumption of the č.'s polygenesis, first formulated by Koperzinskij (1939), is generally supported. It seems to be important, however, to separate the similarity the č. has with various other genres from the question of its genetic dependence and origin. In the genesis of the č., the folk song and the proverb seem to have played the dominant roles: whereas the folk song may be regarded first of all as a genetic source, imparting elements of the folk song tradition to the č., the proverb mainly functioned to support the final formulation of the genre from a stylistic point of view (Lazutin 1960: 219ff.).

6. Geography: The č. is well-known in all Russian-speaking parts of the former Soviet Union. According to Lazutin (1960: 18f.), it started in Central Russia; Stephan (1969: 67) assumes that the č. initially arose in a single place, and thus is essentially monogenetic from a geographic point of view. Similar "popular lyric stanzas" (Rotter 1909: 12), however, are found in many other cultures, such as the German *Schnaderhupferl* (cf. Holzapfel 1991-92), the Japanese *tanka*, or the Chinese *si-king*. As a result of the primarily sociological orientation of early Soviet folkloristics, the question of the č.'s rural or urban origin has been thoroughly investigated. Lazutin (1960: 54) has demonstrated the influence of both rural folklore and urban literary poetry with regard to contents, literary devices, and language. Consequently, regions which were in contact with both of these areas, like villages near towns, are the most likely places of origin.

7. History of Interpretation: After the č. had received a collective term by Uspenskij (1889), folklorists mainly concentrated on the collection of č.i from different regions. Directly connected to this interest, however, was the question of the origin of the č., its history, and its relationship to other genres. Whereas at the end of the 19th century most scholars regarded the č. to be a new genre (Uspenskij 1889), this point of view began to be seriously called into question after the turn of the century. This fact is most obviously reflected in the controversy between Zelenin (1901, 1903) and Sobolevskij (1902). Zelenin (1925) uttered the opinion later supported by Lazutin (1960): according to this point of view, the č. is a relatively new genre with early forerunners in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many Soviet folklore studies have been trying to understand the rise of the č. not as an isolated phenomenon, but

as a product of general social-historical factors as well (Smirnov-Kutačevskij 1925; Rozenfel'd 1929; Lazutin 1960). This stronger emphasis on the social function also explains, at least partially, the subsequent interest in the č.'s rhythmic-musical specifics, aspects of the č. which were previously neglected (Tufanov 1923; Sobolev 1927; Gippius 1936).

8. Collections: Bakhtin 1966, 1969a; Eleonskaja 1914; Kabronskij (ed.) 1978; Knjasev 1924; Koničev 1954; Kozlovskij (ed.) 1982; Moreeva 1958; Roždestvenskaja, Žislina 1956; Sidel'nikov 1941; Simakov 1913a, 1913c; Vlasova, Gorelov (eds.) 1965.

9. Bibliography: ASTAF'eva 1975, 1980; BAKHTIN 1966, 1969a; BALOV 1897; BELKIN 1975; FILATOVA-KMELL'BERG 1988; GEORGIEVSKIJ 1915; GIPPIUS 1936; HOLZAPFEL 1991-92; KABRONSKIJ (ed.) 1978; KALECKIJ 1936; KOPERZINSKIJ 1939; KOZLOVSKIJ (ed.) 1982; LAZUTIN 1960, 1962, 1965, 1975, 1980; RASKIN 1978, 1981; ROTTER 1909; ROZENFEL'D 1929; SELIVANOV 1982; SIMAKOV 1913a; SMIRNOV-KUTAČEVSKIJ 1925; SOBOLEV 1927; SOBOLEVSKIJ 1902; SOKOLOV 1925; STEPHAN 1969; TRUBETZKOY 1927; TUFANOV 1923; USPENSKIJ 1889; VESELOVSKIJ 1898; VLASOVA 1960; VLASOVA, GORELOV (eds.) 1965; ZELENIN 1901, 1903, 1925; ZGUTA 1978.

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