

THE MAIN HERO IN PUŠKIN'S *KAPITANSKAJA DOČKA*

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I

In the academic literature on Puškin's novel *Kapitanskaja doška*, scholars disagree about Petr Grinev's function in the plot of the novel. Grinev's classification as an observer-chronicler, as stated by many soviet scholars,¹ has been questioned by Anderson. According to Anderson, Grinev's "struggle against paternal authority" (1971:480), followed by a "gradual development of a purely personal ethic" (ibid.:478) forms "his chief activity in the novel", and the personal ethic, when achieved, "represents his main contribution to the novel's overall meaning" (ibid.).² Anderson justifiably blames, for example, Oksman for having underestimated Grinev's role in the novel. However, a number of textual facts which will be examined in the following, contradict Anderson's description of the hero's character. They concern Grinev's relationship to his father and also his behaviour in key situations, and their analysis will allow us to re-evaluate his character: his "autonomous" ethical position 1) will show its origin from and its accordance with the Grinevs' family tradition and 2) will be relativized by the clever way he applies his passivity in order to avoid responsibility for his deeds.

It cannot be the task of a short critical essay to evaluate all the consequences concerning the "message" of the whole novel. However, a possible new direction of it will be outlined. Despite all criticism, this essay is substantially based on Anderson's findings concerning Grinev's importance and the key function of his relationship to his father. A major role in the novel of this relationship has also been stated by Debreczeny (1981:242): "The role that the father's moral judgment of his son was to play had clearly gained greater importance ...", he writes about the changes Puškin made

for the final version of the text. Such changes often reveal the author's intention, because they point to the details he is particularly devoted to.

II.

When Petr is leaving home, his father gives him some advice to take with him: he should adhere to his oath of allegiance and he should guard his honour. The latter advice Andrej Grinev couches in the proverb :

Береги платье с нову, а честь с молоду. (282)³

By placing the second part of the proverb, as a motto, in front of the whole text, the author offers these words as a key to the meaning of the novel. Following this suggestion, we can examine Petr's further action with regard to the proverb, finding in the father's advice, for example, a sound explanation for Petr's obstinate gallantry and honesty. Yet, in order to reveal the implications of the father's advice and to understand the relationship between father and son, a careful analysis is necessary. In Andrej Grinev's good advice, the admonition to adhere to the oath of allegiance plays a role as important as the proverb. This oath has antecedents in the Grinev family. Grinev's ancestor was executed because of his stubborn adherence to his belief, and his grandfather suffered for the same reason. The father's belonging to this series is not so obvious. His oath of allegiance has been subject to certain changes by the author: Debreczeny has presented the fact that Puškin had initially planned to link the date of the father's quitting the service with Catherine's palace revolution against Peter III in 1762. Such a connection would have suggested "that the elder Grinev, like Münnich, had adhered to his oath of allegiance to Peter III" (Debreczeny 1981:254). As this date does not harmonize with Petr Grinev's birthday, which has to be before 1754 to have him in the service at the time of the Pugačev uprising, Puškin omitted its last two digits, leaving, according to Debreczeny, no reason to draw any conclusions from the fact of Andrej Grinev's resignation. However, Puškin did not change the context of its date, like, for instance, Münnich's name, which has not been cancelled in the final redaction. The artistic aim to connect the circumstances of the father's service with his advice to his son may very well have been preserved, although it is not in conformity with the chronology of real history.

The following details support this assumption. The content of the "Pridvornyj kalendar'" upsets Andrej Grinev seriously:

Эта книга имела всегда сильное на него влияние <...>. Итак батюшка читал Придворный Календарь, изредко пожимая плечами и повторяя вполголоса: "Генерал-поручик!.. Он у меня в роте был сержантом!.. Обоих российских орденов кавалер!.. А давно ли мы..." Наконец батюшка швырнул календарь на диван, и погрузился в задумчивость, не предвещающую ничего доброго. (281)

Andrej Grinev clearly regrets having left the service. Yet his former comrades' progress annoys him not primarily because he himself missed the opportunity to rise in the ranks, but, since he left the service in consequence of his allegiance to the former emperor, because he has reason to accuse those, who did not leave but got promoted, of opportunism. This constellation not only recurs in the opposition between the straightforward Petr and the opportunist Švabrin, but also refers to an almost identical situation in Scott's *Waverley*.

Here, it should be mentioned that the far-reaching parallels between *Kapitanskaja doška* and *Waverley* by far exceed a "generic similarity" (Stepanov 1962:130). Most of the parallels have been collected by Jakubovič (1939). Like the other scholars who have discussed the relation between Scott and Puškin, Jakubovič examines the extent of Puškin's dependence from Scott and emphasises the innovation which represents *Kapitanskaja doška* in regard to Scott's novels. In my contribution, the intertextuality between the two novels will be understood as a complex allusion, in which Puškin uses *Waverley* as a background-reference which activates certain potentials of meaning in his novel. Now, what does the elder Grinev's resignation, and what does his reaction to the *court calendar* allude to?

Sir Everard Waverley, young Edward's uncle, who in almost every respect fulfils a father's role for Edward, kept his loyalty to the dethroned House of Stewart, yet not overtly opposing the new king. Instead, he leads a secluded life on his estate. Sir Everard's brother Richard, Edward's real father, plays the part of the opportunist; he had accommodated himself with the foreign - like Catherine - successor to the throne and "met with a share of ministerial favour, more than proportionate to his talents or his political importance" (Scott:68).⁴ Richard's rapid success met with Sir Everard's high disapproval, and, "Had the sum total

of his enormities reached the ears of Sir Everard at once" (ibid.), it would have "deeply wounded the Baronet's sensitive points in his character" (ibid.). Fortunately, "although these events followed each other so closely that the sacarity of the editor of a modern newspaper would have presaged the two last even while he announced the first, yet they came upon Sir Everard gradually, and drop by drop, as it were, distilled through the cool and procrastinating alembic of Dyer's Weekly Letter" (ibid.).

Obviously, the "Court Calendar", reaching its readers once a year, is a hyperbole of "Dyer's Weekly Letter", containing information of the same kind and of similar importance to its reader. The father's convictions as well as his reason for retirement, that is, his loyalty to the late king, hidden in Puškin's novel, find extensive explanation through the allusion to *Waverley*.

Yet, the father had sworn his oath to the late Emperor Peter III, while young Petr is going to serve Catherine, who has dethroned Peter III. Could we draw from this fact a conflict between father and son? In his farewell to Petr, Andrej Grinev carefully avoids to mention the Empress herself:

Служи верно, кому присягнешь ... (282)

In this way he reconciles his personal commitment with his son's duty, stressing their accord in a broader sense. Again, an allusion to *Waverley* makes this evident. When young Waverley is leaving home to join his regiment, his uncle admonishes him: "... but you will remember your duty to God, the Church of England and the - [this breach ought to have been supplied, according to the rubrick, with the word *king*, but as, unfortunately, the word conveyed a double and embarrassing sense, one meaning *de facto*, and the other *de jure*, the knight filled up the blank otherwise] - the Church of England and all constituted authorities" (op.cit.: 91). In an equivalent situation - farewell to the son with good advice - Sir Everard like Andrej Grinev carefully avoids a conflict between his commitment and his son's duty, using the same device: he abstracts from who actually is the king. A hidden constellation in *Kapitanskaja doška* is revealed by the allusion to a text where the equivalent configuration lies bare. It is his stubborn adherence to what he once decided to believe in which makes Andrej Grinev equivalent to his ancestors and his son equivalent to him.⁵ The person of Peter III is secondary in the context, and so is

Pugačev's claim to be the late Tsar.

Petr's similarity and accord with his ancestors in this respect seems to be refuted by his adolescent struggle, directed, according to Anderson (480) against paternal authority. But if Petr's loyalty and ethical judgment are of special importance to the novel, as implied by Anderson and also by Lotman (1962:14f.), it cannot be neglected that both features not only characterize all his ancestors but also are the essence of his father's advice. At the most critical moment, when Pugačev demands allegiance or at least recognition, Petr, after some hesitation, obeys his duty and thereby follows his father's advice. Later, when Zurin proposes that Petr should re-enter the service, Petr considers:

Хотя я не совсем был с ним согласен, однако ж чувствовал, что *долг чести* требовал моего присутствия в войске императрицы. (362)

By so formulating the basis for his decision, he discloses its source: the father's advice. There is no indication that "his own ethical judgment opposes him to his father's strict values" (Anderson:480). Here Anderson is probably misguided by Petr's struggle against Savel'ič, whom he takes for a surrogate for Andrej Grinev's views (comp. Anderson:481-2). But Savel'ič does not act in accordance with Andrej Grinev's instructions. Instead of guiding Petr in how to guard his honour, he is busy protecting his wealth and his life, things which Petr is more than once ready to sacrifice in favour of his honour. When Zurin calls in Petr's debts, the latter takes it as a duty of honour to pay, while Savel'ič searches for dishonourable excuses in order to preserve his master's wealth. Later, when Petr wants to defend Maša's honour against Švabrin, Savel'ič again interferes, this time to protect his life. Finally, when Petr is, in consequence of his concept of honour and duty, ready to hang on the gallows together with Mironov and Ivan Ignat'ič, Savel'ič goes so far as to beg at Pugačev's feet for his master's life. In this case, Petr is rescued, yet not by Savel'ič's advocacy but owing to the previous gift of the fur, of which the servant has disapproved at the time.

Who, if not the father, has instructed Savel'ič? Or does he act on his own account? There is evidence in the text which suggests that the servant acts by order of or at least in accordance with Petr's mother. When Petr is leaving home, his mother -

в слезах наказывала мне беречь мое здоровье, а Савельи-
чу смотреть за дитятей. (282)

These words are placed immediately after the father's good advice, as if to be contrasted with it. The phrase "ditja" will be taken up, in the same archaic form, by Savel'ič three times - at the end of chapter seven (325), at the beginning of chapter eleven (346) and in the middle of chapter thirteen (362).

Savel'ič's obstinate guardianship not only does not help Petr, but causes him harm again and again. In the duel scene, for instance, Petr, puzzled by the servant's crying his name, loses control over his opponent and thereupon gets wounded. With Savel'ič's forcing upon Petr his troublesome and sometimes even dangerous permanent company, Puškin seems to be making a comic allusion to the two big packages, given to Edward Waverley by his tutor, Mr. Pembroke. These packages, containing an eccentric treatise, are not only a heavy burden for the travelling Edward but also bring him into serious danger when found in his luggage (cf. Scott, *op.cit.* chapter 6 and 21). Savel'ič is himself a similar burden, and a source of danger for Petr.

III.

There are some situations where Petr seems to violate his father's will. Yet every time he finds a way to make us believe that he holds fast to his father's advice. When he gambles and drinks with Zurin, he seems to believe Zurin's claim that he has to prepare for the service in this way and subjectively adheres to what was to be his military duty. Savel'ič takes it differently:

"рано начинаешь гулять" (284)

Later, Petr's liaison with Pugačev, carefully construed in order to leave him without blemish, is taken by his father for treason. Andrej Grinev opposes his son's supposed action to the habit and the values of the Grinev family:

"Стыд и срам нашему роду!" (370)

But the father's judgment is erroneous and therefore does not conflict with the postulated identity of values in the Grinev family. On the other hand, the importance of the family tradition for Petr's action is stressed here. Earlier, a parodic refraction of what can be called the "seeming violation of the father's will" had taken place: the first part of the proverb

— береги платье с нову —

actually without function in the father's advice and therefore omitted in the motto, gains such a function, on the level of parody, in the scene when Petr gives away his fur:

"Вынь ему что-нибудь из моего *платья* <...> Дай ему мой заячий тулуп". (291)

he tells Savel'ič. Does Petr here violate the literal sense of his father's words, not keeping his clothes ("plat'e")? In my opinion, again only seemingly. The coat, already too tight for Petr, is not new. As Petr gives away only the old stuff, he does not trespass. Ironically, Savel'ič misinterprets Petr's action, commenting:

"Заячий тулуп почти *новешенький!*" (291)

IV.

Petr is guided well through his adventures by observing his father's instructions. Is obedience to his father the reason for his passivity, mentioned by several scholars? Here, it is important to see that he does not obey blindly.⁶ In most important situations he decides that passivity is the proper attitude for him. This is the reason why his behaviour in key situations is commented upon - by himself, by him as narrator or by others actually present: "nečego bylo delat'" or "sporit' bylo nečego". This occurs for the first time after his father's decision to send him to Orenburg instead of St.Petersburg:

Но спорить было нечего. (282)

Again, when Petr receives a note from Zurin, who is claiming a gambling-debt, Grinev-narrator comments:

Делать было нечего. (284)

With the same words the narrator describes Petr's situation when he gets stuck in a blizzard and Savel'ič scolds him; and the phrase again occurs when they are forced to stay overnight in an *umet*. We next read these words, when Petr explains his obstinacy to Pugačev as follows:

Велят идти против тебя — пойду, делать нечего. (332)

Even his most difficult task - coming to terms with Pugačev, not becoming a traitor - Petr masters by pleading passivity. Here it is obvious that Petr's reference to superior force is a clever tactic: he denies being responsible for what he does. Later, when Petr has decided to leave Orenburg, Savel'ič wants to accompany him, and again we read:

... с Савельичем спорить было нечего. (345)

Captured again by the insurgents, Petr gets invited to dinner by Pugačev, and he considers:

Я рад был бы отказаться от предлагаемой чести, но делать было нечего. (350)

When Petr is back in the service with Zurin, the latter comments the order to arrest Grinev and to send him to Kazan' with the words:

Делать нечего! Долг мой повиноваться приказу. (365)

These words are spoken by Zurin, but again Petr is the one concerned. In every case, the mentioned phrase contains a reference to superior force which explains Petr's passivity in the actual situation. Every time Petr could also have acted, protested, refused, but he always prefers not to oppose. Therefore the passivity which is expressed by the words "delat' nečego" does not express a real limitation to Petr's ability to act. It does not objectify the hero in order to humiliate him, but represents his own, deliberately chosen attitude. If we compare him with Edward Waverley in this respect, we can ascertain that Edward is objectified by his passivity, for the narrator explains his behaviour by his "desultory education" and his inexperience. His passivity is his fate and it is the cause for most of the trouble he gets into. For Petr, passivity is rather the way he avoids trouble. Petr's way of education, which is similar to Edward's is not employed to explain his behaviour as an adult.

This remarkable difference between the two heroes is illustrated by the respective reasons for their final success: while Edward succeeds through efforts of active heroism - he saves a government officer's life, and at the end of the novel he breaks with the insurgents in order to return home and to assume his duties - Petr, throughout the novel lets others act for him: in one desperate situation he is saved by Pugačev, in another by Maša. He does not save a government offi-

cer's life but is forced to watch idly his execution. He neither really joins the insurgents, nor does he break with them at the end.

But is the hero's portrait, developed so far, maybe one-sided? Is Petr throughout the novel always passive? In fact, there can be found two situations where Petr even bubbles over with activity. They shall be discussed in the following.

When the insurgents are attacking the Belogorsk fortress, Petr dashes out with Captain Mironov to fight them. However, this desperate activity leads to what can be called a "passive result": not only does Petr get no chance to do harm to anyone - an important detail because otherwise Pugačev could hardly spare him from execution later - but also he is prevented from rushing to Mironov's help:⁷

Я бросился-было к нему на помощь: несколько дюжих ка-
заков схватили меня и связали кушаками, приговаривая:
"Вот уж вам будет, государевым ослушникам!" (324)

Is it fortune or cleverness which keeps Petr from doing desperate and, most likely, perilous action? Is it the author's kindness which makes Petr fulfil the demands of honour and duty but spares him the consequences? Or is it the hero's narrational perspective, his tendency to gloss over his own part in the events that is involved here? In order to find an answer to this, let us proceed to Petr's second outburst of activity.

After the commander's refusal to send troops from Orenburg to the Belogorsk fortress, Petr seems to be ready to free his beloved in a lone attack. Of course, this is not a question of the requirements of honour and duty. Petr now wants to fight for his private fortune. But what happens now is similar to the scene discussed before: he gets captured by Pugačev's Cossacks and thereby is prevented from committing a dangerous and desperate act. Is this fortune? Or did Petr never really plan such action? Before he leaves Orenburg, an idea comes to his mind:

Вдруг мысль мелкнула в голове моей. В чем она состоя-
ла, читатель увидит из следующей главы ... (343)

In the manuscript version of the novel, it had been clearly said in the following chapter that Petr had made up his mind to apply to Pugačev for help. In that version of Petr's conversation with Pugačev, the former declares:

Я отвечал, что имею лично до него дело, что прошу его принять меня наедине. <...> "Я приехал сам от себя", отвечал я, "прибегаю к твоему суду". (347/8; footnote)

Yet because of his obligation to remain loyal and not to forget his duty, Petr really should not have applied to Pugačev. For that reason, Puškin changed the text to the following:

Я отвечал, что ехал по своему делу и что люди его меня остановили. "А по какому делу?" спросил он меня. Я не знал, что отвечать. <...> Странная мысль пришла мне в голову: мне показалось, что провидение, вторично приведшее меня к Пугачеву, подавало мне случай привести в действие мое намерение. Я решился им воспользоваться и, не успев обдумать то, на что решался, отвечал на вопрос Пугачева: "Я ехал в Белогорскую крепость избавить силу, которую там обижают". (347/8)

Now, it seems, Petr is free of guilt: he has been stopped by the enemy against his will, and he only uses Pugačev for his own purposes. However, the "strange idea" had come to his mind before, and, oddly enough, he had headed directly towards Pugačev's main camp. What happens then is exactly what happened before: he lets others act for him instead of risking his own head.

Instead of assuming repeated good luck, one should consider that Puškin managed to preserve this characteristic, without making his hero an (obvious) traitor, through the construction of a narrator who covers up some details of his biography.⁸

Petr's behaviour may superficially be in accordance with high moral standards - and this is necessary to preserve his spiritual heritage from his ancestors - but the way his behaviour is often motivated makes us suspect that morality as the main criterion of life has been replaced by success - and without doubt Petr is much more successful than any of his ancestors.

NOTES

1. Šklovskij (1955:60); Stepanov (1962:286); Makogonenko (1984:205) and others.
2. In a similar approach, Lotman has stressed Grinev's "widening the horizon of his behaviour, leaving behind the world confined by his class-consciousness" (1962:12).
3. Quotations of the Russian text from A.S.Puškin, *Sobranie sočinij*, t.VIII (Moskva 1938).
4. This and all the following quotations from *Waverley* see: Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (London/New York 1906, reprint 1969).
5. Sidjakov (1973:193) mentions the importance of the Grinevs' stubbornness for the understanding of Petr's feeling of his duty. Yet, in his comparison of the father's opposition and the son's seeming collaboration Sidjakov does not notice that the elder Grinev does not oppose Catherine but remains loyal to his Emperor according to the Grinevs' traditional commitment. This is all he expects from his son. Exaggerating a little, we could say that if Petr had sworn his first oath to Pugačev, the father would have expected him to be loyal to the peasant Tsar.
6. Astaf'eva states that Grinev "follows blindly his feeling of duty" (1956:125).
7. Compare Debreczeny, who notes both phenomena but interprets them as "unfulfilled expectation" (265) with the function of "a lesson in realism" (ibid.).
8. See also how busy Petr is apologizing for his decision to rely on Pugačev's help in liberating Maša: "... ne uspev obdumat' to, na čto rešilsja ...".

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