



 Research Article

## TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE "LITTLE MAN" IN R. SENCHIN'S FAMILY SAGA "THE YELTSYSHEVS"

**Submission Date:** November 04, 2024, **Accepted Date:** November 09, 2024,

**Published Date:** November 14, 2024

**Crossref doi:** <https://doi.org/10.37547/philological-crjps-05-11-02>

**Journal Website:**  
<https://masterjournals.com/index.php/crjps>

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### ABSTRACT

In R.Senchin's family story "The Yeltyshevs," the portrayal of the "little man" is presented in a novel manner, representing one of the most enduring and ideologically profound themes in 19th-century Russian literature. A meticulous examination of the saga's text, augmented by an analysis of literary scholars' and critics' conclusions, reveals that the "little man" is increasingly not merely a victim of circumstances, but rather an individual attempting to conform to societal norms, ultimately becoming a source of difficulties for both others and his family. In contemporary fiction of new realism, the "little man" transcends the role of a mere societal archetype of suffering, evolving into a protagonist accountable for both family and others. R.Senchin examines the moment at which an individual relinquishes such obligation.

### KEYWORDS

Family saga, "little man", "The Yeltyshevs", new realism.

### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary literary process in Russian literature is a swiftly evolving phenomena. The variety of genres and the range of writing styles suggest that the literary process is experiencing substantial transformations. A. Yu.Bolshakova asserts that the categories of "realism" and "modernism" represent a synthesis of specialized sciences, characterized by mutual infiltration and

enhancement. Contemporary prose primarily evolves at the convergence of realism and modernism." [1., p. 20]. An illustration of this intersection is "The Yeltyshevs" by R.Senchin, demonstrating that the family saga genre persists in its evolution within the framework of new realism. R.Senchin is among the select realist authors who successfully elevated the



family saga genre, transforming both its conceptual framework and creative methodology. V.Toporov observes that “The Yeltyshevs” constitutes a brief familial narrative. In the essence of Maxim Gorky. This narrative illustrates not the establishment and prosperity of the family, but its dissolution and demise. Consequently, the critic highlights a divergent development within the designated genre, which undeniably represents the writer's innovation. “The Yeltyshevs” narrates the tragic tale of a Russian family interred alive in a pit-village, leading to their extinction. To enhance accuracy, the text includes dates of significant events, prices of products and services, and the amounts of pensions and salaries. Information regarding rural life and commerce is also provided. The author of this book is a pochvennik and a traditionalist. Critic K.Milchin states, “Senchin is an urban writer who documents the total demise of traditional lifestyles and the impossibility of reverting to them, regardless of whether this is lamentable or satisfying.” [3.] This quotation accurately encapsulates the narrative of the Yeltyshev story, whereby the protagonists are a typical family that originated during the Soviet period and nearly vanished in the sovereign state of the new millennium. The Yeltyshevs exemplify typical provincial characteristics. S.Shargunov accurately observes that “Roman Senchin writes about individuals who are seldom depicted.” Concerning the loss. Concerning the diminutive individual” [7].

In Russian classical literature, there exists a gallery of “little people,” initially identified by A.S. Pushkin, with Samson Vyrin from the tale “The Stationmaster” being the inaugural character. Nearly two centuries have elapsed since that time, however the Yeltyshev epic exemplifies that this archetype persists, albeit in a somewhat altered form. The literary encyclopedic dictionary defines the ‘Little Man’ in literature as a term for various heroes who share the commonality of occupying a low position in the social hierarchy, which

influences their psychology and social behavior, characterized by humility, a sense of injustice, and wounded pride. Consequently, the ‘Little Man’ frequently operates in contrast to another character, a high-ranking individual, a ‘significant person’ (as defined in Russian literature influenced by N.V.Gogol’s ‘The Overcoat’), with the plot’s progression primarily structured around a narrative of insult, offense, or misfortune. [2., p. 368].

Upon substituting the image of the protagonist with this description, it becomes evident that nearly all the attributes align with him: “Like many of his contemporaries, Nikolai Mikhailovich Yeltyshev maintained throughout much of his life that one should act as a human being, fulfill one’s obligations, and as a result, one would be gradually rewarded.” A promotion, an apartment, a salary increase, from which one can initially save for a refrigerator, subsequently for a wall unit, a crystal service, and ultimately for a car. While Samson Vyrin, Akaki Akakievich, and Makar Devushkin each possess a singular, cherished aspiration characterized by their affection for a beloved—be it daughter Dunya, neighbor Varenka Dobrosyolova (Vyrin, Devushkin), or an object such as an overcoat (Bashmachkin)—Nikolai Yeltyshev harbors numerous ambitions that ascend in complexity, yet his existence unfolds without direction. While the “little man” from ancient literature experiences profound loneliness and societal invisibility, Nikolai Mikhailovich, in contrast, is a devoted family man, a father of two sons, and serves as a police captain. Nonetheless, he is a “little man” due to his inability to withstand the circumstances that obliterated his family, subjecting them to humiliation, ridicule, and gossip: the youngest son is confined to a correctional facility for incapacitating an individual with a blow to the forehead; the remainder of the family finds themselves homeless after Nikolai Mikhailovich perpetrates an official crime; his wife,



Valentina Viktorovna, is compelled to resign from her position as the entire family relocates from the city to the village, to the residence of her aunt Tatyana. The state reclaims the apartment. Valentina is likewise a "little man". Her retirement from the position of library director does not alter the status quo for others. No one convinces her to remain. Both partners are 50 years of age. The majority of their lives have been experienced. In advanced age, both encounter the most challenging living circumstances. Having previously sought refuge from all challenges in the city, Valentina Yeltysheva was unaware that her existence would devolve into a cyclical pattern, ultimately leading her back to its origin - the village of Muranovo. In contrast to the protagonists of Pushkin and Gogol, R.Senchin's character endeavors to contemplate and assess the moment he deviated from the correct path: "Later, painfully clenching his fists, Nikolai Mikhailovich recalled how he was urged to resign, 'get busy,' 'enter into a share,' and how various opportunities to genuinely alter his destiny presented themselves. However, he lacked the courage. He may have acted correctly; numerous individuals who extended their assistance subsequently perished, were murdered, or imprisoned, while others currently exist in a manner that renders them inaccessible—they operate on an other plane. The diminutive individual questions the validity of the decision rendered, although we recognize that it is motivated by timidity. The coerced "escape" to Muranovo dictates subsequent developments, illustrating the unavoidable marginalization of the Yeltyshev Nikolai Mikhailovich, after encountering the Kharin family, who engaged in fooling guests, loses 2,500 rubles—a significant amount for the acquisition of a fictitious chainsaw. The Kharins' swindle incenses Yeltyshev. His escalating internal aggravation ultimately manifests in action, resulting in his transformation into a murderer. The initial casualty is the elderly aunt Tatyana, whose

continued existence vexes Nikolai Mikhailovich with her incessant lamentations. He escorts her to a dilapidated, deserted house adjacent and abandons her there to succumb to the cold. He inadvertently kills his neighbor Kharin, akin to his own kid, yet endeavors to conceal his involvement entirely, framing the events as mere accidents. Valentina Viktorovna Yeltysheva possesses comprehensive knowledge on all subjects. Nevertheless, she remains faithful to her spouse. Following her diabetes diagnosis, she consistently implores Nikolai: "Consider me." The Yeltyshevs are incapable of constructing a dwelling, integrating into village life, or effecting any positive change in their residence. They commence the sale of alcohol, something they had previously deemed inappropriate. They intentionally reject their grandson, the sole heir and perpetuator of their family name. They are victimized by theft, gradually succumb to alcoholism, and are unable to account for the demise of their youngest son, Denis—their final hope for a better, promising future. N. Severnaya accurately observes that "The Yeltyshevs" is "a novel concerning the absence of love, the presence of hatred and spiritual void, as well as poverty, which has eroded not only the human spirit but also the nation." [7.] The research enables us to derive the subsequent conclusions: "The Yeltyshevs" is a familial narrative by R.Senchin that explores the disintegration of a family, its obliteration, the erosion of familial bonds, and the deterioration of collective memory. The principal characters are a typical regional family, the Yeltyshevs, who struggled to acclimate to contemporary reality. R.Senchin's novelty resides in his invocation of the "little man" archetype, exemplified by the Yeltyshev family. The quintessential characteristics of the "little man" in their representations are spiritual destitution, degradation, and the incapacity to advocate for individual satisfaction.



Innovations reflecting the metamorphosis of the "little man" are depicted grotesquely: pettiness and envy, bewilderment in the face of adversity, inflexibility in decision-making, and steady decline, culminating in the terrible demise of the entire provincial family. The issue of family is addressed in the tale through the increased emphasis on the "little man" archetype, illustrating how the protagonists self-destruct. The traditional perception of Russian literature is reconceptualized not as melancholy, but rather as tragic and simultaneously grotesque. This is no longer a victim, but a character; yet, those reliant on him become casualties.

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