

THE DISCOURSE OF EDUCATION IN THE PUBLICISTIC WORKS BY D. I. FONVIZIN

O DISCURSO DA EDUCAÇÃO NAS OBRAS PUBLICÍSTICAS DE D. I. FONVIZIN

EL DISCURSO DE LA EDUCACIÓN EN LAS OBRAS PUBLICISTICAS DE D. I. FONVIZIN

Valeriy Yu. MERINOV¹

Aleksandr P. KOROCHENSKIY²

Andrey V. POLONSKIY³

Svetlana V. USHAKOVA⁴

ANNOTATION: The article examines the discourse of education in the publicistic works of the outstanding Russian writer and playwright D. I. Fonvizin, whose worldview was formed under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, including the concept of S. Montesquieu about the predisposition of peoples to a particular type of political government. In the dramatic and journalistic work of the Russian satirist, two mutually exclusive educational and social ideals are clearly revealed: authoritarian-traditionalist and democratic. Fonvizin believed that it is the authoritarian model of society that is most suitable for countries such as France and Russia, so he paid great attention to the question of the qualitative difference between the elite and the subordinate segments of the population. The discourse of education and social inequality, which included, among other things, the demonstration and evaluation of various models of social behavior, legitimized the social privileges of the aristocracy, its right to rule and own slaves.

Keywords: Fonvizin. Enlightenment. Russian literature. Education. Social inequality. Authoritarianism.

ANOTAÇÃO: O artigo examina o discurso da educação nas obras publicitárias do destacado escritor e dramaturgo russo DI Fonvizin, cuja visão de mundo foi formada sob a influência das idéias do Iluminismo, incluindo o conceito de S. Montesquieu sobre a predisposição dos povos a um determinado tipo de governo político. No trabalho dramático e jornalístico do satirista russo, dois ideais educacionais e sociais mutuamente exclusivos são revelados claramente: autoritário-tradicionista e democrático. Fonvizin acreditava ser o modelo autoritário de sociedade mais adequado para países como a França e a Rússia, por isso deu grande atenção à questão da diferença qualitativa entre a elite e os segmentos subordinados da população. O discurso da educação e da desigualdade social, que incluía, entre outras coisas, a demonstração e avaliação de vários modelos de comportamento social, legitimava os privilégios sociais da aristocracia, seu direito de governar e possuir escravos.

¹ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobedy Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia, E-mail: merinov@bsu.edu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2724-1819>

² Belgorod State University, 85 Pobedy Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia, e-mail: korochenskiy@bsu.edu.ru <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0557-2203>

³ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobedy Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia, e-mail: polonskiy@bsu.edu.ru <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9112-8995>

⁴ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobedy Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia, e-mail: ushakova@bsu.edu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8482-5226>

Palavras-chave: Fonvizin. Iluminismo. Literatura russa. Educação. Desigualdade social. Autoritarismo.

ANOTACIÓN: El artículo examina el discurso de la educación en las obras publicitarias del destacado escritor y dramaturgo ruso DI Fonvizin, cuya cosmovisión se formó bajo la influencia de las ideas de la Ilustración, incluido el concepto de S. Montesquieu sobre la predisposición de los pueblos a una determinada situación. tipo de gobierno político. En la obra dramática y periodística del satírico ruso se revelan claramente dos ideales educativos y sociales mutuamente excluyentes: el autoritario-tradicionalista y el democrático. Fonvizin creía que es el modelo autoritario de sociedad más adecuado para países como Francia y Rusia, por lo que prestó gran atención a la cuestión de la diferencia cualitativa entre la élite y los segmentos subordinados de la población. El discurso de la educación y la desigualdad social, que incluyó, entre otras cosas, la demostración y evaluación de varios modelos de comportamiento social, legitimó los privilegios sociales de la aristocracia, su derecho a gobernar y poseer esclavos.

Palabras clave: Fonvizin. Fonvizin. Ilustración. Literatura rusa. Educación. Desigualdad social. Autoritarismo.

Introduction

Russian literature and journalism of the 18th century is represented by such outstanding cultural figures as F. Prokopovich, A. D. Kantemir, M. V. Lomonosov, A. P. Sumarokov, V. K. Trediakovsky, M. M. Kheraskov and others. A brilliant playwright, whom his contemporaries called a kite for his ability to pointedly expose social follies, the author of two satirical plays *The Brigadier-General* and *The Minor*, included into golden pool of Russian classics, D. I. Fonvizin occupies his rightful place even against this significant background. Satiric play as a form of attitude toward reality implies the entwining of the artistic and journalistic principles proper, while critical pathos prevails in satire. At the same time, representing a specific type of outlook, satire implicates that the writer has high civic ideals [KRZYCHYLKIEWICZ, 2006]. Hence, there is its “denunciatory-predicatory character” [Gornfeld, <https://>].

The subject field of the article is the discourse of social inequality in the publicistic works by Russian writer and playwright D. I. Fonvizin, whose worldview was shaped under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, including C. Montesquieu’s concept about the predisposition of peoples toward a particular type of political government [Whelan 1991; Długach 2006; Outram 2019]. In the dramatic and publicistic works by the Russian satirist, two mutually exclusive social ideals are expressly revealed: authoritarian-traditionalist and democratic. D. I. Fonvizin believed that it was an authoritarian model of society that was best

suiting for countries such as France and Russia, so he paid much attention to the issue of the qualitative difference between the elite and the subservient population strata. In the discourse of social inequality, including the demonstration and evaluation of various social behavior patterns [MANSTEAD, 2018], the social privileges of aristocracy, its right to ruling and slave-owning were legitimized.

The historical and cultural approach applied in the study made it possible to analyze the publicistic works by D. I. Fonvizin and present his system of views in the context of a particular epoch. The key research method that provided an adequate semantic interpretation of the subject-logical, figurative and ideological content of publicistic works was the semantic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Already after the appearance of the first works, D. I. Fonvizin, in the minds of his contemporaries, and later in the attitude of his descendants to him, acquired a reputation for a defender of the oppressed, a denouncer of social injustice, who externalized “a consistent defiance ... of the idea of despotic control” [LOTMAN, 2000, 39]. A. S. Pushkin himself called Fonvizin “a friend of freedom”, mentioning him in his works again and again (see: [TOMASHEVSKY, 1990, 62-63]), and V. G. Belinsky saw “the beginning of the French revolution” in Fonvizin’s “scary picture of French society” [BELINSKY, 1953-1959, 205]. In Soviet times, there was a scientific tradition associated with the names of prominent researchers of Russian literature of the New Time, in particular G. M. Makogonenko, D. D. Blagoy, P. N. Berkov and others, not only to rank Fonvizin among the representatives of the Russian Enlightenment, of which the author of *The Minor*, beyond all doubt, was, but also to represent him as a supporter of almost revolutionary political transformations in Russia, a “characterful” follower of the ideas of J.-J. Rousseau (see: [LOTMAN, 2000]). This position can be illustrated by the words of G.M. Makogonenko, “... denouncing the deformities of social life ... and showing the true face of the Russian landowner ... (Fonvizin – M. V.) continued that struggle of the noble educators with the ideology of serf owners ...” [MAKOGONENKO, 1969, 229-230]. An unchallenged ideologist of this approach was G. A. Gukovsky who called Fonvizin’s political views “noble liberalism” [GUKOVSKY, 1999, 237].

Meanwhile, the research and biographical and social-political literature expressed other opinions, giving a lukewarm assessment to the political position of the satirist. So, doubts about D. I. Fonvizin’s belonging to a group of “fiery fighters against autocracy” in the

19th century was expressed by an astute historian, publicist, literary critic and poet, P. A. Vyazemsky. P. A. Vyazemsky in his work *Fon-Vizin*, in fact, put forward the concept of two Fonvizins. He wrote, “At home, the scourge of prejudice, an adherent of education and the prosperity of wits, Fon-Vizin the traveler sees everything through the eyes of prejudice and not openly, but in unfavorable sophistication, preaches the benefits of ignorance.” [Vyazemsky, http:]. This point of view proved to be more nuanced at the end of the 20th century in the works by S. B. Rassadin. D. I. Fonvizin appeared, on the one hand, a controversial figure, a patriot and a social critic, including, so to speak, “foreign caftans” fitting over Russian life. On the other hand, he was a writer who combined, in a paradoxical way, traditionalist and enlightenment political sets in his work (see: [RASSADIN, 1980]). This line was continued by A. Zorin, who, in the preface to the book by G.A. Gukovsky’s *Russian Literature of the 18th Century* stated that “the measure of opposition, for example, of Fonvizin ... turns out to be exaggerated to a significant degree.” [ZORIN, 1999, 10]. V. I. Moryakov made a clearer statement, “Fonvizin’s opposition to the emerging bourgeois society in France points to the fact that, in our opinion, the Western European concept of the individual as a free subject of conscious volitional activity had not become the basis of his beliefs. He was also ... to a large extent subordinated to the mostly archaic Russian society, identified with his social role” [MORYAKOV, 2011, 65]. Indeed, analyzing the relentless criticism of the ruling classes, Soviet literary critics did not pay or did not want to pay their attention to the goals pursued by D. I. Fonvizin, replacing them with their own ideological constructs.

We believe that, on the one hand, D. I. Fonvizin’s creation is more integral as, for example, P.A. Vyazemsky and S. B. Rassadin could see. On the other hand, it contained internal contradictions caused, as we think, by a prevalent view of the history and political culture of peoples at that time. This is about the so-called theory of geographical determinism of C. Montesquieu. The French philosopher-enlightener in his book *The Spirit of the Laws* revealed, as it seemed to him, the direct dependence of social (family, political, civil) relations on the geographical location of the people and the climate. Through his contemplation he discovered “the great reason for the weakness of Asia and the strength of Europe, the freedom of Europe and the slavery of Asia” [MONTESQUIEU, 1969, 237]. Montesquieu, according to G.A. Gukovsky, greatly influenced the entourage of Count N. Panin, whose confidant was D. I. Fonvizin.

Montesquieu’s teachings as interpreted by D. I. Fonvizin turned out to be a rather flexible ideological tool. It made it possible to form, within a single system of views, not one, but at least two mutually exclusive social ideals. In this context, it was assumed that each nation,

once and for all forming its “nature” in specific climatic and political conditions, had its own special way of life, laws and “spirit of government”. That is, some peoples were declared more inclined, for example, to authoritarian-traditionalist political forms, which were “natural” and salvific for them, and less inclined to other forms of social community (for example, democratic), allegedly carrying the destruction of national and cultural identity, morality and, ultimately, threatening their very existence.

At the same time, as it turned out, peoples could make mistakes, go against their nature, damaging historically established social relations. Because of this, a respectable and sustainable social system could enter a kind of “phase of turbulence”, social collapse and moral degradation. An example of such “unnatural” development, according to D. I. Fonvizin, were the Russian provincial aristocracy and France, undeservedly, in his judgment, pretending to the role of the world cultural leader. The first came under devastating criticism in satirical plays, the second was brutally exposed in letters from abroad.

D. I. Fonvizin believed that for “natural” Russia, that corresponds to a political form of government, the national spirit was self-moderation, based on social stratification and even segregation, that is, on a clean-up separation of social functions and social tasks between self-contained estates, on the fundamental difference in social behavior, even in appearance, clothing, manners, including speech behavior, as well as the emotional sphere and intellect (mode of thought), the main groups of the population: rulers (noble aristocrats) and the subservient (“slaves”, i.e. menials, kholops).

The idea of naturalness and vital necessity for Russian culture of class inequality and the insurmountability of social boundaries will become one of the most popular in all works by D. I. Fonvizin. Basically, it was the problem that was touched upon in his social satire (*The Brigadier-General*, *The Minor*). In it, the aristocratic stratum of society, which the author himself belonged to, was subjected to moral “cleaning”. Logical enough is that in Fonvizin’s concept of an autocratic society the nobility was the main and, in general, the only socio-political, cultural and moral fortitude. As rightly wrote Y. V. Stennik, “...The ideas of high moral duties of a nobleman kept possession of Fonvizin” [STENNIK, 1983, 6]. But it should be borne in mind that an ultimate goal of these “high moral duties”, if we consider them from the point of view of social ideal, in our opinion, was the duty to preserve and maintain the “natural” state of society, that is, social hierarchy, height and reliable impenetrability of class boundaries.

The main conflict in dramatic creative works was a clash of two types of Russian aristocrats. The first type is “sound”, “inherently cultural” [KOKOVIN, 2013, 32] landowners

and “servants of the Fatherland” (Starodum, Pravdin, Milon, etc.), who observe the code of common behavior and thus deserve their class privileges ... The second type is the same negatively idealized social models of “malevolent violators of civil order”, that is, the rules of conduct of a Russian aristocrat (Prostakova, Skotinin, Counselor, Ivanushka, Mitrofanushka, etc.), “half-people ... shallow-brainy, eye-cultured” [KOKOVIN, 2013, 32], approaching in their appearance (behavior, manners) to the muzhik (“slave”, “brute”), which, according to D. I. Fonvizin, absolutely inexcusable. Animalistic markers (the expressive surname which says it all – Skotinin, the love of the nobles for swine), applied to the provincial aristocrats, are very eloquent and indicate that the social boundaries between the social upper and lower classes become thinner, which is dangerous for the serf system. Prostakova and Skotinin are funny not because they fight, swear at each other, use bad language, but because they do it not in a form well-beseeming for honorable members of a noble society, but in a form more suitable for the behavior of the “vile” estates (menials, kholops), for whom such a way of life is “natural” and causes rather not surprise and laughter, but the understanding contempt of the noble higher-ups for the rude lower masses. The main danger of Prostakova and Skotinin, from the point of view of the Russian satiric, is that they bring discredit not only upon themselves, but also the estate as a whole, thereby querying as to its high social mission, its natural right to command, control and judge.

For fear of the loss of social dominance and authority, in our opinion, there is another problem that gives cause for the author’s concern. It refers to the problem of excessive physical and emotional togetherness of slaves and their masters. So, *The Minor* presents a picture of a disastrous, unnatural for Russia, mixing of social roles and statuses, when from a pair with the required qualitative differences the owner (Mitrofanushka) – the slave (Eremeevna), as a result of violation of the principle of segregation, it looks like two slaves, not one, “... How many noble fathers who trust their praedial serf with the moral upbringing of their son! Fifteen years after, there results two slaves instead of one slave, an old uncle and a young landlord” (*The Minor*).

D. I. Fonvizin’s social temperament could not be satisfied with only the dramatic form, and required its explicit realization in translations and in epistolary creative works. Fonvizin’s resort to the genre of letters was in line with the main sentimentalist art trends of his time. Sentimentalism as an art movement was not limited only to formal searches, that is, the use of certain genre forms. The use of such was determined by ideological and moral tasks that the European artists in words focused on. The traveler’s letters became a convenient form of transmission of ideology of the Enlightenment, made it possible to empathize with the vic-

tims of social injustice, stand with them, cultivated a new sensitivity in society, developing the morality of the New Time, its anti-class social ethics.

D. I. Fonvizin embarked on his journey on the days of really dramatic events for Western Europe. It was an era of rapid transformation of a society of traditional autocratic legitimacy based on strict hierarchy and social division into a society of a modern type the contours of which had not been still discerned. It is this devaluation of the familiar and understandable hierarchical social behavior that the Russian satirist not only fixes, but also passionately rejects in his letters written on hot scents and intended rather for a wider circle of addressees, "... than a family circle and friends ..." [STERANOV, 1986, 220].

At first glance, the letters stick to humanistic canons of enlightenment sentimentalism. Among those are, for example, the sympathetic portrayal of the poorest of the poor, the appalling conditions of life of ordinary French people, "almsmen", the afflicted surrounding the traveler's carriage. Restraints on royal power do not work, arbitrariness, favoritism and corruption flourish in the country, "... the king sends you into exile and imprisons you, ... Every minister is a despot in his department ... Frequent overtaxes serve to accumulation of wealth of insatiable superior officers" [Fonvizin, [http:](#)]. Fonvizin is of the belief that the reason for the existing situation lies in ill-breeding of the nobles, in their neglecting and their reducing their status and the entire set of ideas about class duties to the level of their own servants, the set of values and moral and psychological traits of which is almost the opposite. Thus, the quotes cited by us acquire the opposite meaning of sorts in the general semantic structure, becoming a kind of authoritarian manifesto.

The cross-cutting idea of all works by D. I. Fonvizin is a conviction that France cannot serve as an example for Russia. Moreover, from this point of view, Russia is viewed not as a backward slave-owning state with an archaic system of government, police arbitrariness, etc., but as a country at the forefront of the struggle for the naturalness and preservation of the purity of the estates, acting as a model of loyalty to their nature. In his judgment, Russian serfs feel much better than pseudo-free French subjects.

At a young age, D. I. Fonvizin concerned about the problem of pure class blood. In 1761, he selected and briefly translated the apologues by Baron Golberg. Judging from the fable *Donkey-Nobleman*, even then his mind was poisoned against the desire of the lower strata of society by hook or by crook to break into the circle of masters. "The donkey bought the nobility," writes Fonvizin, "and began to be proud of that in front of his comrades. The magpie, having heard about that, said, "It is impossible for such a stupid creature to be proud of, and he with all his nobility will always remain a stupid donkey." [FONVIZIN, 1959, 357]. The

same issue is discussed in letters through the example of France, where “the sale of ranks and titles” has become a widespread phenomenon, as a result of which “a lot of vile people by nature and by origin”, that is, representatives of the lower classes began to penetrate the ruling class. The “pernicious consequences” of the mixture of master’s and “vile” blood led, as D. I. Fonvizin believed, to what in modern political science is called “the crisis of the legitimacy of government”, when “credit to superior officers gave way to spiritual contempt for them” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)].

The crisis of power and hierarchical order is confirmed by numerous examples designed to complete the picture of general moral decay. So, the lower ranks allow themselves brazen attempts in the presence of their masters. D. I. Fonvizin indignantly describes a case of similar behavior in Montpellier, “Once, when the loge was filled with the best people of the city, a watchman, getting bored of standing in his place, was out from the door, took a chair and, having placed it next to everyone sitting noble persons, sat down to watch a comedy ... I was surprised by the insolence of a soldier ...” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]. The traveler feels insulted and “... of the impoliteness of the French lackeys, “The local lackeys are ignoramus insomuch that, let into the hallway in the best houses, they won’t budge, and, sitting, do not take off their hats whoever passes by, a lady or a man ...” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]. Servants, “... drawing their hat over their eyes, they do not look at anyone, except for their master... if there is no lackey, then the unfortunate one, at least dies of hunger... and a lackey of your neighbor won’t take away your plate (“... I do not serve anyone, except for my genteel”). The order is none the better for the army, “Every soldier philosophizes, consequently, is ill-obeyed. ... Being ignorant in this art, I could notice that the soldiers had not a speck of respect for their commanders..., talking to one another about their affairs, the soldiers were laughing with all their might” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)].

The lower strata behave in the way their masters, the nobles, allow them to behave. In France, as D. I. Fonvizin believes, flagrant violations of class decency do not meet any counterstand from the noble chiefs, “The major of his regiment and the cavalier of St. Louis was sitting beside him (the soldier – V. M.). I was surprised at the insolence of the soldier and the silence of his commander who I dared to ask: why was the sentry sitting with him like that? “C'est qu'il est curieux de voir la comedie” {Because he is curious to watch comedy (French).}, - he replied with such a look that he did not notice anything strange here.” The lack of an adequate response indicates, from the point of view of D. I. Fonvizin, the depth of decay of the entire vertical of society, “It is true that there are ranked soldiers (Russian: скотинки) among gentlemen” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]. Fonvizin meets his French Skotinins among the

“first persons in the state”. The author of the letters previses the destruction of noble patterns of behavior, mixing them with common people. So, the prince of blood speaks “rudely, snapping the words off”, walks “with a waddle, with his mouth agape, neglecting everybody,” pushes “everyone he meets,” roars “with laughter, without cause, with all his might” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]. The example of the elite is contagious to others, “... all young people imitate his (the prince’s – V. M.) tone ...” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)].

D. I. Fonvizin describes the impertinent behavior of ordinary Parisians with hardly disguised irritation and suspicion. The third estate acts sassy and frighteningly: it applauds, extols, worships, deifies, yells at the top of their voice, organizes a torchlight procession, clearly demonstrating their civic identity. It creates their idols and makes them, as in the case of Voltaire, involuntarily accept the rules that are written by the townspeople themselves. The activity and excessive noticeability of ordinary townspeople so annoys Fonvizin that, in the end, he deduces that they are lazy and idle, “Everyone loves fun to the degree that they hate work; and especially people hate dirty task... Without mentioning the gardens, five theaters are packed to capacity each day” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)].

Quite perspicaciously prevising the outstanding role of the third estate in the general structure of modern society, D. I. Fonvizin extrapolates the assessment given to the Parisians on the whole nation. In his eyes, French people are greedy (“money is the first bliss of this land” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]), they are corrupted to the extreme (“The corruption of morals has reached the point that a contempt no longer punishes a vile deed” [Fonvizin , [http:](#)]), deceivers (“the French cheat incomparably with great skill and know no measure or shame in deceit” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]); at the same time, they are wasteful of words and stupid (“words are weaved masterly, and if that is reason, then every fool here has a great deal of it. They think very little here, and they have no time to do it, because they speak a lot and in rapid-fire delivery” [FONVIZIN , [http:](#)]), idle and careless (“Fun is the only thing of his desires ...” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)]).

The catastrophe of French society is aggravated by the rapid redistribution of moral and ideological and intellectual dominance. It passes from the nobles into the hands of new leaders of public opinion (the phenomenon of that influence was observed by D. I. Fonvizin) – representatives of the Enlightenment who are presented as fools and tricksters in the letters of Russian traveler, who are undeserving of national leadership, “D’Alamberts, Diderots are in their way the same charlatans ... the difference between a charlatan and a philosopher is only that the latter adds unparalleled vanity to the love of money ...” [FONVIZIN, [http:](#)].

Conclusion

D. I. Fonvizin was a man of brilliant gift for satire and publicism, which he used, in particular, to justify the need for an autocratic-traditionalist political rule in France and Russia. The basis of the moral and political order, in D. I. Fonvizin's judgment, was a clear line between estates, non-allowability of mixing the behavior of the owners and their serfs. His claims to the aristocracy – French and Russian – consisted in its inability and unwillingness to qualitatively differ from the social lower classes and strictly control the social behavior of the main groups of society. France for D.I. Fonvizin proved to be a country in which moral and social decay reached its climax.

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