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The Motif of Initiation in V. Rasputin's Prose

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This article analyzes the recurring motif of initiation penetrating V. Rasputin's creative works. There are three types of initiation: the incorporation of others in the community, growing up of a child and getting a spiritual status (shamanism). The initiation of a child becoming a full-fledged member of the community is more common for the writer's prose. The initiation of children (under 7 years old) is accompanied by getting connection with the natural source: it happens when a child faces death or the elements. The initiation of adolescent girls does not appear at all or occurs on the order of others, it does not help to acquire a new status and get the feminine essence. The initiation of boys is presented in different ways, however, in the later prose boys are not able to transform into adults. The rite involves the formation of the traditional, i.e. (in the context of V. Rasputin's prose) patriarchal type of the character, whose appearance in the crisis period is impossible, because the type itself is doomed, it is not viable.

Keywords: Rasputin, motif of initiation, patriarchal character, recurring motifs.

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Introduction

Recurring motifs reflect and structure the picture of the world of a writer or literary trend. K. Parte states: "Readers and critics who were looking for a story in rural prose did not find it. <...> A better way to understand the form in rural prose is to define the most frequent and most significant narrative motifs" (Parte, 2004: 38).

For V. Rasputin, the repetition of images and motifs is typical, many of which can be found in his works and create the artistic world of the author.

Statement of the Problem

Within the framework of this article, we will consider the motif of initiation, which penetrates the author's prose and displays the main transformations of his worldview.

The purpose of initiation is to change the social status of the initiate. The rites associated with adulthood are outlined, with the inclusion of a stranger in the community and with the attainment of a spiritual status (shaman) (Eliade: 1999, 25). Initiation rites belong to the field of archaic practices, incorporation in the community is possible only through familiarization with the

archetypal principle, the symbolic death of an individual and his birth in the new life as a bearer of a certain type of consciousness predetermined by the community.

A. van Gennep identifies the following stages of rites: preliminal (separation), liminal (threshold) and postliminal (incorporation) (Gennep: 1999, 15). Respectively, symbolic death is a preliminal rite, trial is a liminal rite and revival is a post-liminal one.

Incorporation of a stranger in the community

V. Rasputin's prose has not so many examples of the motif of initiation as the incorporation of a stranger in the community. A cycle of stories "The Edge Near the Sky" includes episodes of the incorporation of a stranger into the sacral space. Mark Pusse and his friends step-by-step discover Tofalaria: "They sailed. <...> At one of the turns it bared its black teeth-rapids and with a force pulled the boat inside. The boat could not resist. Accompanied by a spiteful, slobbery laughter of Kazyr, it obediently went to the bottom, and three sailors, struggling to fight off the foamy drunken current, swam to the blue ice" (Rasputin, 1966: 8). The described situation is similar to initiation, only those who have passed the trial can become incorporated in the sacral space. The following year Pusse returned to Tofalaria: "That summer, Kazyr surrendered to him. A year later the Sayans allowed him to the Bear Lake, which made those who saw it to agree on the following: it is a miracle" (Rasputin, 1966: 8). The rite is passed, the hero is incorporated into the space, therefore, gets the right to function inside it.

The story "From the Sun to the Sun" describes the gradual incorporation of the lyrical hero into the sacred space: "We are sitting in a tent and drinking tea. Drinking – it is said very modestly and with the same degree of accuracy, if we say about worshipers that they are waving

their hands. We are having a rite" (Rasputin, 1966: 17). The joint meal of the stranger and the initiates allows him to enter the "family circle". The next stage of approximation is the song by the fire (Rybalchenko, 2002: 235-261). The hero catches the main meaning of the song, but he still needs clarification. The "initiation" ends with the adoption of the traveler by the mountains themselves: they "enter our veins, and the veins swell from their mighty confidence. In medicine, this is called blood transfusion" (Rasputin, 1966: 25).

In "Farewell to Matyora" there are a number of "alien" heroes, but their incorporation into the community in terms of narration is already an event that has happened. The description of the "initiation" and acceptance of the stranger occurs in the story "Senya Is Riding" (1994): the acquisition of the new status through initiation takes place through symbolic death and subsequent rebirth of a new person to a different life. The "a lifeless body of an unknown person" was dropped from the ship, which "did not show any signs of life" (Rasputin, 2007: 284). The body is left "under the supervision of dogs", so the stranger is incorporated into the family circle through the patronage of animals – the traditional element of the initiation rite in primitive communities. The placement of a stranger in banya – on the border of the worlds – is also symbolic, while it means his being in a transitional state, in banya he is ritually born for a new life.

M. Eliade notes the importance of forgetting the neophyte's former life, in particular, gives the following example typical in some way or another for most cultures: "The neophytes, allegedly killed by the Forest Spirit, revive to a new life, they get tattoos and are given a new name in order to forget their past life" (Eliade, 1999: 85). Thus Senya loses memories of the last trip on the ship, in Zamory he also gets a new nickname:

“there was Brodya, who one day stopped living his life fast, picked up the best bride in the village and became “our eagle” (Rasputin, 2007: 283). Author’s irony emphasizes the playful beginning of the hero’s first steps in the new space, but, nevertheless, the rite of initiation is completed.

The prose of the writer provides much more detailed and multifaceted examples of the transition from a child, pre-reflective state to the status of a full-fledged member of the community. Initiation of the child is connected with finding self-consciousness as such, for the teenager the certain gender model becomes relevant.

Initiation of children

The infant (up to 7 years) state does not presuppose gender differences. In the early story “Eh, Old Woman” (1961), the child’s growing up is provoked by confronting death, after the funeral of the shaman her granddaughter acquires a voice: interrogative intonation is replaced by an affirmative speech justifying the old woman, the girl commits a posteriori rite of closing the death (the same will be done by the teenager Olga in the story “Commemoration Day” (1996): the song will finish her father’s seeing-off). It is important that the girl returns to the grave alone, which marks the change in her status. In the story “The Last Term”, the five-year-old Ninka promises the dying old woman to sleep in her place, the child unconsciously testifies to the continuation of the life cycle, however it cannot be called a full-fledged initiation – the status of the girl does not change.

The story “Mom Has Gone Somewhere” (1966) records the child’s first encounter with loneliness. Separation from the mother is an important stage of the initiation of the neophyte. In the story, the boy awakens from a dream (from non-being) and discovers that he has been left alone. The material world loses its meaning for him: the objects “stood just like that, occupying

the space”, at the same time the immaterial world becomes especially important: “Everything around him listened to him, and everything was silent” (Rasputin, 2015: 8). The child feels someone’s invisible presence, actions cease to obey him, the past sinks into oblivion: “He has forgotten about everything, this boy” (Rasputin, 2015: 11). The story describes the initial stage of initiation, the rite is incomplete, there is no qualitative change, but growing up has begun.

In the essay “Down and Upstream” little Vitya experiences the shock of confronting with the natural power, which is a different type of initiation: getting to know the natural, archetypal origin, finding a connection with the sensible, which is significant for the writer’s prose. The initiation takes place on the night of his birthday: the whole day the boy was unsuccessfully waiting for the opening of the river connecting his happiness with it. In the evening, the child goes home, he feels desperate: “There is no sense in living further” (Rasputin, 2007: 220). The loss of the meaning of life means the symbolic death, the beginning of initiation; it is also important that this happens on the child’s birthday, i.e. after reaching a certain age – 6 years.

At night, Vitya, submitting to “some extraneous power”, comes to the river bank, a traditional place of initiation. The episode is permeated with symbols: the action takes place in the darkness, the child leaves the house alone, overcomes his fear. The thunderstorm deprives the child of the feeling of himself: “Holding his head in the shoulders, the boy sobbed – frantically, helplessly and already unconsciously. He was on his feet, but he had long stopped feeling the earth under his feet, as if he had been caught and carried away somewhere like a feather, and no one will ever find the trace of this little unhappy man” (Rasputin, 2007: 222). The loss of the personal origin, the loss of himself, merging with the archetypal is the sign of revival.

It is noteworthy that the description echoes the experience of the boy from the story "Mom Has Gone Somewhere": the child "was so tired that he stopped feeling, and did not understand that he was crying" (Rasputin, 2015: 8), Vitya sobs unconsciously, in the story the traces left by the child on the floor, "were cooling down, dissolving and disappearing" (Rasputin, 2015: 8), in the essay "no one will ever find a trace". The repetitions record the significance of the attributes of initiation for the poetics of the writer's prose. The river that opened after a thunderstorm, breaking up of the ice announcing the onset of spring, closes the initiation, marks the return to life. Confrontation with the elements repeatedly acts as a catalyst for initiation – the same happens with mature characters in the stories "The New Profession" and "In Bad Weather".

In the story "What to Tell to the Crow?" (1981) the narration is focused on the experience of the autobiographical hero, what happens to the daughter is broadcast from outside. However, the indirect signs allow us to say that the girl is reborn as an adult. A. Gubaidullina notes that in V. Rasputin's works "not only the adult has an ability to be in two times simultaneously <...>, but the child also looks to the future, beyond the childhood, each time shaking his ideal integrity" (Gubaidullina, 2012: 146). Father's refusal to stay is perceived by the child as forced separation, but in the initiation rite, the child separates from his parents (more often from the mother), here the father, in defiance of the daughter's request, separates himself, such a violation of the rite does not contribute to acquiring a new status, but leads the girl to a fever with a high temperature.

Initiation of adolescents

Let us note that the motif of initiation in the prose of the writer is deeply described in relation to the growing up of boys. The acquisition of a different status by girls is given insignificantly

in the stories "Rudolphio" (1965), "Women's Conversation" (1995), "In the Same Land" (1995), "The Daughter of Ivan, Mother of Ivan" (2003). Becoming an adult in the face of death occurs in the story "In the Same Land", it is unusual that the moment of growing up is clearly and imperatively indicated: "From this moment on, you will have to become quite grown up <...>. There's no time for us to wait until this happens. The time of children's joy has passed away..." (Rasputin, 2007: 265). In the world that has lost its former benchmarks, the girl is not given time to grow up, this is immediately dictated from outside by Pashuta, who transforms the world according to her will (Stepanova, 2014: 276-287).

In other works, which tell us about adolescent girls, growing up is associated with becoming a woman, which corresponds to the actual meaning of the rites. In V. Rasputin's works, growing up of a girl is fraught with the danger of losing herself. In the story "Rudolphio", the sixteen-year-old Io, who dreams of love, merges her name with the name of her lover into a single whole, but growing up appears after Rudolph rejects her: the girl escapes alone, does not spend the night at home, returns completely different. This growing up is not associated with the acquisition of a new status or the initiation of the archetypal origin, but with disappointment and loss.

The same occurs in the story "Women's Conversation": a sixteen-year-old Vika is sent to her grandmother after abortion: physical maturation does not mean gaining the status of an adult: "She is a grown-up girl, in fact, almost a woman, but she has a child's mind" (Rasputin, 2007: 322). Grandmother, as the eldest in the family, instructs her granddaughter, but the initiation is not completed. It goes in a reverse order: traditionally, instruction should precede the process of becoming a woman, here the reverse order leads to abortion, infanticide, which contradicts the very essence of the female

mission. In the story "The Daughter of Ivan, the Mother of Ivan", the girl who has been subjected to violence never gets a different status: though she has become a mother herself, she is still in a childlike, weak-willed state, fearing Tamara Ivanovna's return from imprisonment. Adolescent girls in V. Rasputin's prose do not undergo initiation: it either does not happen at all, or occurs due to external conditions, which does not allow to get a new status and accept their feminine essence.

Initiation of boys is described more variably. In the early story "There, on the Edge of the Gully" (1968), it is said that boys grow up when they are left alone. And indeed, this principle will be found in all works of the writer. Isolation is an important aspect of initiation in traditional communities, in V. Rasputin's works this aspect is reduced to going through a certain experience in solitude.

In the story "The Red Day" (2012) almost no importance is paid that the boy spends a night alone: this is necessary in order to get up before dawn, however, the rite is observed. The recurred run from the river to the mountain symbolically duplicates the revival. A. Gubaidullina notes: "The first phase, the separation, is due to the awakening of independence, ability to act in the boy. In the second phase, accompanied by pain and fatigue from heavy physical labour, the hero balances between the two ritual worlds (in the story – the river and a steep red bank). The initiate experiences the symbolic death (plunges into the water, gets wet from head to foot)" (Gubaidullina, 2012: 144).

In the story "Live and Love" (1981), Sanya initiates his own independence: he gets away from his parents (the preliminal stage), and after his grandmother leaves, stays alone in the house. The boy has to cope with his fear when he sleeps alone in the house, and after overcoming this fear he gets a mentor-conductor, Mityai, who leads

him to the taiga. Going to the taiga to gather berries is directly correlated with dying: "People who went to the dark interspace past non-residential houses, like past someone's coffins, seemed to be leaving in search for their own eternal shelter and carrying the results of their lives in these strange vessels" (Rasputin, 2007: 419). Here begins the stage of trials: "Here you have to change your legs three times like horses, and you will be all sweating" (Rasputin, 2007: 420), Sanya starts to gather berries, acquires a skill that should improve his status.

The boy stays alone awake by the fire in the night taiga: the sleep of the conductors seems intentional to the child, given by the supreme law, the adolescent senses the presence of the extraterrestrial: "something senses all his feelings, the entire silent secret life coming from him and determines whether he has and is it enough that there is, for certain actions" (Rasputin, 2007: 436). The young man gets attached to the natural beginning, gets connected with the sensation, the result of the initiation is unpredictable: at the end of the path it is found that the berry collected by Sanya, after the night in a galvanized bucket, is poisonous, Uncle Volodya, one of the companions, commits a mean act by keeping silent and not telling the boy about the meaninglessness of his labour. At night Sanya had a dream: "And only one voice said such dirty and rude words and in such a habitually confident tone that there was not and could never be in him. He woke up terrified: what is it? who is it? where did it come from?" (Rasputin, 2007: 446). In the closing part, Sanya is in an intermediate state, the revival to a new life remains beyond the text.

In the story "Lessons of French" (1973), the autobiographical hero begins an independent life at the age of 11: he leaves his house to study at the district centre, thereby separating himself from his mother. The teenager experiences cold, hunger, homesickness, physical pain in fights.

E. Poleva sees the infantilism of the hero in his inability to “understand and accept the ethical attitude of the other” (Poleva, 2015: 216), which is expressed in refusing to accept the help from the teacher: an invitation to a table or a parcel by mail. In the process of communicating with the teacher, the boy learns a foreign language, which can be one of the signs of initiation. During the game, the distance between the teenager and Lidiya Mikhailovna disappears, the boy acquires a different social status. Initiation is proved by a changed attitude toward the second parcel sent by the teacher from Kuban.

In the story “The Commemoration Day” (1996), an insignificant episode about the experience that Bronislav suffered in childhood is focused on the de-heroization of the adult world: sailors which village boys usually admire become tormentors, the adult world ceases to be safe for the child, it is distorted: “Tender words, smiles, and behind them everything is different, all the way around. They played me like cats with an exhausted mouse” (Rasputin, 2007: 337). The decision of the boy to get a free ride to visit his grandmother turns into a series of trials – he ends up imprisoned on the ship, forced to jump from the side into the water at night. Falling into the water means symbolic death: “I was falling for a long time, I was flying lifeless” (Rasputin, 2007: 339).

Then the boy repeats the same way as the hero from the story “The Red Day”: from the water he climbs on the bank, walks 30 kilometers barefoot to the house. The feeling of the teenager's victory, his growing up, marks the accomplished dedication, but the most important is the absence of actions from the community, to which the new man returns: “Why was Sokol given all the navigation, why did not the peasants from the village get up to him and say a couple of words to him once, questioning the boy Bronka, after which Sokol would not want to stay any

more on the Angara?” (Rasputin, 2007: 432). The community, which rejects its member, also prevents new initiates from active action: it is not accidental that Bronislav leaves the village before flooding, refuses to become a defender, which is predetermined by his name.

In the final story “The Daughter of Ivan, the Mother of Ivan” the image of a adoscelent is one of the most dynamic, but artistically one-dimensional and set. After family misfortunes, Ivan remains alone, separated from his mother, and the father is not able to become a mentor. The young man will pass the trial with water, after which the movement – again – will go uphill, to the bank. Ivan perceives the archetypal beginning through the connection with nature and the Old Slavic language, but in part his grandfather becomes his mentor. In the closing part of the narration the young man goes to build a temple in the homeland of his grandfather, which marks the return to the origins, which means continuation of life. The main attributes of initiation remain, but do not carry the meaning as in the previous texts, they are reduced to a sign, in part this is due to the fact that the process of growing up of a young man passes through the entire text, it is not concentrated on one episode, which makes it difficult to determine the stages of initiation.

Conclusion

Initiation as one of the most important rites of the traditional society reflects its mental foundations, forms the image of a full member of the community. In V. Rasputin's prose, the recurred motif of initiation shows the destruction of the unity of the signifier and the signified: formal conditions can be observed, but a qualitative change is impossible if there is no content, an incomplete rite also does not help the individual to gain a new status.

For late prose it is especially typical that adolescents do not undergo initiation. The rite

assumes the formation of the traditional, i.e. in the context of V. Rasputin's prose, patriarchal hero whose emergence in the crisis period is impossible, since the type itself is doomed, not viable, refuses to act or his activity is no longer able to give a result, it only wears him out. The patriarchal hero gives place to marginals, wanderers, people who have lost their destiny, who turned into destroyers themselves (in their destiny, both plots of destructing the reserved space are realized: they are outside of it, alienated from the family and are able to destroy, being strangers).

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Мотив инициации в прозе В. Распутина

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Статья посвящена анализу повторяющегося мотива инициации, проходящего через все творчество В. Распутина. Выделяются три варианта инициации: включение чужого в сообщество, взросление ребенка и обретение духовного статуса (шаманство). Для прозы писателя наиболее характерна инициация, знаменующая становление ребенка как полноценного члена общины. Инициация детей (до 7 лет) сопровождается обретением связи с природным началом: происходит при столкновении со смертью или стихией. Инициация подростков-девочек либо не случается вовсе, либо происходит по воле извне, что не дает обрести новый статус и принять женскую сущность. Инициация мальчиков представлена вариативно, однако в поздней прозе юноши также не способны преобразиться во взрослых. Обряд предполагает становление традиционного, т.е. в контексте прозы В. Распутина патриархального героя, появление которого в кризисный период невозможно, поскольку сам тип обречен, не жизнеспособен.

Ключевые слова: В. Распутин, мотив инициации, патриархальный герой, повторяющиеся мотивы.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
