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## **Valentin Rasputin: “What is in a Word, What is Behind a Word”**

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*The article analyses the speech part of old Darya (story “Farewell to Matyora”) as a means of materialization of the ontological sense of national existence.*

*Keywords: Rasputin, moderator, speech part, language focus.*

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### **Introduction to the problem**

In the year 1987 in Irkutsk, the essays, sketches and interviews of Valentin Grigoryevich Rasputin were published under the title which united the problem expressed in all of them: “What is in a word, what is behind a word?” This is a key question for the literary philosophy of the writer, who revealed the secret of the “true and only” word (Rasputin, 1987, 156). The answer to the question is formulated by Rasputin with the clearness so typical of him: the true writer’s word is a means of translation of “all previous historical and spiritual experience” of the people (Rasputin, 1987, 156). The writer succeeds to create a unique artistic form where each and every text unit “works” to bring back the ontological meanings of being. To our mind, in this aspect a special place in the literary biography of Rasputin is occupied by the novel “Farewell to Matyora” (1976) the critics

called “the apotheosis of Rasputin’s revelation” (Goreslavskaja, Chernov, 2013, 23). On one hand, the suggested metaphor does formulate the code of interpretation of one of the most complicated literary texts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is apocalyptic. On the other hand, it makes us contemplate over the conceptual inexhaustibility of the text, evoking associations with “The Book of Revelation”, the most mysterious book in the history of humankind, prophesies of the last times, last days of the humankind and the man.

“Farewell to Matyora” is a text comprised of symbolic pictures and philosophic dialogues, encompassing various meanings, developing, first of all, the eschatological prospective, discovered due to Orthodox eschatological anthropology. There is no coincidence that the story devoted to one of the global events of technocratic civilization, the plunge of a settlement with many

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centuries' history under water, presents a highly sophisticated series of protagonists, the core of which is the human, the person maintaining the eternal continuation of life, uniting all existence with the ideas of its unity inherited from the ancestors. There is no coincidence that the writer, having a perfect command of multiple diverse descriptive techniques, who has numerous demonstrated his brilliant talent of a landscape descriptor, is concentrated on the picture of a protagonist performing a unique function in the story, which is the function of a communication agent.

*Our task* is to reveal in the text by Rasputin the peculiarities of literary representation of the national rhetoric tradition, developed through the centuries, manifested, first of all, not in the peculiarities of interpersonal communication, but in the manner of communication between man and nature, a different reality.

### **Theoretical grounds**

To fulfil the task, we apply the modern methods of linguistic, stylistic and rhetoric analysis of literary text based on the ideas by B.A. Larin, G.B. Kolshansky, B.M. Gasparov, G.A. Zolotova, H. Weinrich, T.I. Vendina, N.L. Myshkina, L.A. Cherniakhovskaia, N.V. Kovtun, I.I. Plekhanova and others. These methods have been proven in the analysis of literary texts by Russian traditionalist writers (Tsvetova, 2012).

### **Old Darya: protagonist structure**

In our opinion, the brightest protagonist in the mentioned aspect is famous old Darya from the novel "Farewell to Matyora": not an "image", a "character", or a "heroine of literature", but a protagonist, as, according to B. Tomashevsky, "a protagonist is the leading thread taking you through the agglomerate of motives, an auxiliary means for the arrangement and classification of

motives" (Tomashevsky, 1996, 199). To let old Darya fulfil this complicated function in the plot, V. Rasputin, following the modern humanitarian classification, assigns her to moderate the endless polylogue between all the living, participating in it both explicitly and implicitly. But there are more than just old men and women populating the island; there is also the mystical Master appearing in the twilight, and the Tsar Larch, the symbol of invincibility and dignity; there is the Angara; till their time is due, the izbas are still there, until the "walls go blind" and the scary Petrukha, who burnt the "living house" (Rasputin, 1994, 239). Even a gooseberry bush is animate: "a gooseberry bush, pushed down by another bush, finally freed itself and stood up with a lurch" (Rasputin, 1994, 212).

The main manifestation of the eternal, universal, fragile and unpredictable life in Rasputin's book is the sounds both the narrator and all the protagonists are carefully listening to: "the pleasant crick crack of the harvesters, as though not technical at all" (Rasputin, 1994, 291), "clear, merry ring" of the Angara (Rasputin, 1994, 176), "the rustle of a mouse climbing out to hunt, the muted movements of a little bird sitting on its eggs in its nest, the weak, faint creak of a swaying branch that didn't seem comfortable to a night bird, the breathing of the growing grass" (Rasputin, 1994, 211). The continuation of harmonic play of this incredible, half-mystical living orchestra depends on Darya from the very node of the action; it is maintained by her – the protagonist, for whom Rasputin creates a highly sophisticated way of expression comprising the use of different sign systems due to its immeasurably complex task.

At first the character of Darya is created exclusively under the laws of traditionalist poetry, programmed in the proper name and portrayed; the protagonist is involved into the key events shaping up the plot, but the

uniqueness of such character primarily depends on its communicative status. Rasputin never ceases to emphasize that for some reason all the crestfallen gather around her to feel some "warmth", to entrust her with their inmost secrets; all the mystical characters of the novel enter into a dialogue with her. However, with the people around her Darya is strict, "doesn't like to hide the truth" (Rasputin, 1994, 266), never bears "pouring from one empty pitcher to another", she perfectly understands what words are needed to express the "root truth" (Rasputin, 1994, 269), not eliminating the human pursuit for the ideal. She perfectly remembers how in the past the main measure of dignity in Matyora was the attitude to work and to word. She remembers the alien "real talker" Orlik being forgiven only for being "a real keyman" at the same time.

#### **Peculiarities of the speech part of the protagonist**

At the general meetings in Darya's house big words are never wasted, but Darya still complains: "Our talks are like milksop: no weight and no point" (Rasputin, 1994, 220). Darya also avoids pointless wailings about the weak old woman's health which, for example, according to her daughter-in-law Sonya, should always finish with a fascinating "small talk" of the latest methods of healing of the self-found illnesses. But Darya never accepts any evil irony to the people close to her, except for, maybe, some playful teasing of Afanasy Kotkin-Koshkin, who gave in to the pressure of women around and changed his name, late in life. Darya is ironical only of herself, but also in a special way: her rude and bitter confession of coming to the end of life still sounds sad: "Three farts away from death" (Rasputin, 1994, 259); and bitter is her response to the proud quote of her grandson Andrei of "Man is kind of nature": "Yes, yes, king. Just reign a bit and you'll be sorry" (Rasputin, 1994, 266).

The reason why people turn to this tough old woman is the surprising sensitivity and spiritual delicateness hidden behind the external demonstration of her complicated character. What she values is not the words people speak, but "how they spoke, how their faces changed in the course of the conversation, whether words came easily or not, and what voice they turned into..." (Rasputin, 1994, 255). But to tell the truth, in the final scene of the novel, rendering account to herself, Darya bitterly confesses to the "girls": "And worse than that, I've become angry. That's not good at all. Before I didn't seem mean. But now, I don't like this, I don't like that» (Rasputin, 1994, 303).

Summarizing the foregoing, we inevitably arrive at the conclusion that, creating the character of old Darya, V. Rasputin is concentrated, first of all, on her speech part, on the details drawing attention to the specificity of dialogues she participates in, i.e. on her communication (spoken interaction) with the environment.

#### **Narrative function of the protagonist**

To our mind, the reason of her narrative function of a village woman, practical like the explorer of Matyora, able to be "far-sighted and clever", "the oldest of the women" (Rasputin, 1994, 174), is the purpose to find the form and grounds for the confrontation with the main feature of our age, which, according to "The Revolt of the Masses" by H. Ortega y Gasset, is the severe fracture between the present and the past, tragically determining the "sudden" loneliness of the present man and disappearance of the "traces of spiritual tradition" (Ortega y Gasset, 2003, 32). It is no coincidence that the key word in the protagonist's vocabulary is "eternity" (Rasputin, 1994, 196), which she mentions in different contexts; but as it appears, there is no

one else besides Darya to confront this destructive tendency.

It is for a reason that Darya sees her primary task as to maintain the inexorably fading dialogue with the past and the future; she sees the mission of the humankind in this stoical repression. She never forgets her parents, even for a minute. Every day and hour of her today's life is dedicated to observing her parents' heritage, her vital forces are produced by the sense of duty to her deceased father and mother. Her father, passing on his missions to Darya, gave her a strong directive: "... live, move, to tie us stronger to the world, hook us to it, for us to be" (Rasputin, 1994, 193). When Darya feels exhausted, she rises for her parents' reproach: "We depended on you, they'll say, and what did you do? <...> I was here, after all, it was up to me to keep an eye on it. And the water, it is like I am to be blamed again. And that I will lay down to die alone" (Rasputin, 1994, 193). All events of her life, all the deeds, calls and penitents are the replies to her father's last word: "Darya, don't take on too much – you'll wear yourself out, you take on only the most important thing: to have a conscience and not to be bothered by it. In the old days conscience was very important" (Rasputin, 1994, 196). The non-verbal dialogue of the old woman with the pilgrims of the island history, her existential and sensory bond with the motherland and with the whole world begins with, is not the less important.

And Darya is tortured by her failure to reach the equal mutual understanding with her son Pavel, grandson Andrei and daughter-in-law Sonya, though "Pavel never spoke a harsh word to her and ordered his wife never to, either" (Rasputin, 1994, 220). But Darya realizes how little it really is. The relationships between her son Pavel, her grandson and daughter-in-law represent a sort of descending gradient: the farther from the family keeper Darya, the farther from the centuries old family tradition, the understanding of basic

peasant life philosophy: "Everything that lived on earth had one meaning only – to serve. And every service came to an end" (Rasputin, 1994, 213). Probably, the scariest for Darya is to realize that her son and grandson cannot see eye to eye, that what she hears is a "disagreeable and somehow insincere, embarrassing conversation between father and son" (Rasputin, 1994, 258), which did nothing but "divided them who were related in the closest way" (Rasputin, 1994, 259). Sympathizing with her son, she addresses her "intense incomprehension" for being hurt with her grandson's "offended tone". The circumstances of Andrei's departure were especially distressing for Darya: "Andrei began saying good-bye to her back in the house, he didn't want her to see him off to the boat. But she still did. But there was another offence that was stronger and sharper, the one that can be hardly named since there is no appropriate word for it. It can be only suffered, like a depression or an illness, when one cannot even understand what it is that hurts. She remembered it all well: since yesterday, since he came, and until today, until departure, Andrei hadn't gone farther than the yard. He hadn't had a last walk around Matyora, hadn't dropped a secret tear, hadn't moved his soul..." (Rasputin, 1994, 285).

Fifty year old Pavel, feeling the tragic gap between himself and his own son, the spiritual deafness of his child, "is not clever on every turn", does not wave away his mother's requests, does not hide behind light irony from her seldom complaints, but blames himself: 'I'm getting old if I don't understand. The young people understand. It doesn't even occur to them to doubt. They accept whatever's done' (Rasputin, 1994, 235). But, however you see it, it turns out that the "young people" causing the envy of Pavel, suffering the loss of harmony in relationships with his own mother, have lost the main purpose: to "know why and wherefore, dig down to the truth"

(Rasputin, 1994, 236), the purpose actualized in the endless dialogue of a person with himself, with other persons and nature; the young break apart from the past, the motherland, the land of their fathers and grandfathers easily; the young people live without looking back, without a thought, confident in all-permissiveness. Pavel explains his own losses with the war that "hardened his soul", as "since the war, these many years, he still wasn't himself" (Rasputin, 1994, 341).

Inheriting the heavy burden of responsibility, Darya, in comparison with Pavel and Andrei, sometimes feels true happiness, though her life is much harder. She also finds no grounds to hide from life, to feel sorry for herself. And all those whose soul calls for care, all those entering the final phase of their life journey, turn to her. And though Darya modestly concludes: "There is no one left who would understand me" (Rasputin, 1994, 284), everyone who has gone through the time when it was allowed to "be pushy and pretend", "not to live real life", "show off", "always overdo it" gather around her, and so do the Matyora "fruitless seeds", Klavka the "loudmouth" and Petrukha the "liar" (Rasputin, 1994, 261). In a tragic situation people gather under her roof because she does not only know and feel how to talk to a person, but also knows what to say, what words and what meanings this person is in need for. Darya extracts this knowledge from her restless dialogue with all being. Darya can hear and recognize the great secret of life, which makes her strong, full-hearted, keeps her away from vanity, allows her to arrange the life in the most comforting way.

What secret is that? Darya formulates it clearly and concisely, builds up her rules of behaviour which are easy to reconstruct because the heroine is completely and perfectly aware of it: to search for your own place in this world and to "devote yourself to a task", "find a mission to invest yourself into" (Rasputin, 1994, 9); to

cherish the good, and believe that "you won't get out of here that easy, you'll answer for this. You'll answer to the whole world" (Rasputin, 1994, 183); to know that "God gave you life so that you would do your duty, leave children behind – and then into the ground with you... so that the soil stays rich" (Rasputin, 1994, 244); to remember "your place under God", look at this world "long", not "passing by" (Rasputin, 1994, P. 253).

Looking through this list of these principles of living and mindset, one cannot help but recall the famous saying of H.F. Hegel that "people never know what they want" (Hegel, 1993), as the ideas of simple people annoying with endless operative gaps are never logical. And Hegel's radicalness is salutarily smoothed with the philosophic utterance of V. Bibikhin that comes to our mind: "Such idylls always turn out to be artistic reconstructions" (Bibikhin, 1998, 162). These are the doubts of people belonging to the new world, of the civilized people whose state of mind can be described with the words synonymous to *loneliness*, *separateness*, *partiality and frustration*. Why Darya, unlike us or them, is so open to interaction with the whole world? Is it because the world she belongs to and the world belonging to her are dramatically different? Rasputin presents its perfect description in the hay making scene. In this materialization the communicative aspect is dominant again. In order to make sure of that, let us remember that there is a similar scene in the famous "Usvyat Helm Bearers" by Y.I. Nosov. It is a farewell scene: a scene of farewell to Russian world before the war. However, Nosov is mostly concentrated on the consciousness of the hero, on the work of all his senses that programs a specific complex and systematic perception of reality, a certain character of impact made on human by nature. With astonishing conviction this outstanding artist demonstrates the persistent richness of

life, supporting the continuous revival of the "merry joy of being".

For Rasputin, it is different. He is focused on the picture of the "splashing life" that filled the space with special sounds: the horses neighed, "the mowing equipment rattled and clanked", the voices of people who instantaneously grew ten years younger, "made noise, and played, and fooled" (Rasputin, 1994, 247). In the memory of the main mission all the living, "everything that was on the island' united under the "odour of old, long-dead smoke" (Rasputin, 1994, 249), and the voices, sounds, smells, senses and feelings were strangely merged into a song, making up a mystical picture: "it seemed that the houses moved closer together and swayed, humming in a single, interior voice" (Rasputin, 1994, 249).

In the old days the sounds of this song used to fill the whole world, and old Darya seems to remember about that, aware of the main condition of harmonic being: the necessary human ability to hear and see, without which the life-making eternal dialogue of all the existing in the world becomes impossible. To hear and see and feel the world as Darya herself saw and heard all the living. Let us remember how she said farewell to her little house. After everyone left, Darya "sat on the mound and, resting against the shack, feeling its worn out, rough, but warm and alive wood with her back, she let her trouble and insult free, crying dry and painful tears" (Rasputin, 1994, 326). Darya never goes soft ever again; she has been heard. The ones who rushed to help her were not people, who were never equal to her, but a little, "messenger from far away", a yellow-breasted bird that flew ahead and then to the side (Rasputin, 1994, 329). That bird showed the way to the fir-tree for the old woman, exhausted in the pointless search for a due farewell to her house. As though admiring her courage, wishing to support Darya in the hardest moment of her life, either in her dream or in reality there appeared the Master

of the island, who had never been caught by cats or dogs. Perhaps, he opened himself to Darya to save her from loneliness, to support her with the very fact of his existence.

And finally, finishing her earthly course, feeling the long-forgotten guilt to her tragically dead husband whose memory has flown away with the river of time, Darya, fostering repentance, finds the godly interlocutor. In her address to God she says a repentance prayer for which she finds the clearest, the easiest and the simplest words. At the end of this repentant speech Darya mentions the uniqueness of the earthly course of an Orthodox Christian, the unavoidability of the dialogue in the earthly being and admits the main principle of this all-encompassing dialogue, the principle of obedience: "Forgive me, Lord, for being weak, and not remembering, and being bankrupt in spirit <...> You will not ask a rock, as it is a rock, but you will a man. Or are you tired of asking? Why don't your questions reach us? Forgive me, forgive me, Lord, for asking. I feel bad. And you won't let me leave <...> I judge people, but who gave me that right? It looks like I've moved away from them, time to take me off" (Rasputin, 1994, 288). And in response to this high and pure repentance, the Lord let her see the shining Angara in the sun, gives her some more time: "The Angara flowed on in the sun – and time flowed under the weak upper wind with a light rustle. Behind her back lay Matyora, washed by both flows; the sky soared high above her head" (Rasputin, 1994, 289).

Darya's prayer is heard because her interaction with the world followed the centuries' old national communicative tradition excluding any "fury of word" (expression of Vladimir Monomakh) (*Pouchenie Vladimira Monomakha*, 1989, 125), impudence, provocation, but assuming care for the laws of bioethics that suggested offering a hand only to those standing on the borderline of the "peasant universe".

### Conclusion

The artistic space of this novel relies on such "eternal people" as old Darya; the space is constitutionally dialogical, its harmony is provided by the polylogue participated by every living being, but moderated by a human able to express both the other and himself. Perhaps, it is the most necessary reminding the writer gives of the *core of the Russian world*, the density of which is incredibly high, and the composition of which is inexhaustible. Under the pressure of V.G. Rasputin we have to accept such indicator of the national state as the attitude to the national communicative ideal (samples, rituals, principles of communicative cooperation) that has been determining the interaction and co-existence of all systems within the "Russian world" for ages. Acceptance of this indicator as the determining

factor for all Russian world is not unique. For example, the "linguistic focus" of Russian world was first mentioned in the years of the first Russian revolutionary catastrophe by O.E. Mandelstam, who claimed that "dumbness' for two or three generations could have brought Russia to historical death. Excommunication from language is the equivalent for us to excommunication from history" (Mandelstam, 1987, 60). Decades after, V. Rasputin could make out the aggravation of reasons for degradation of the national world not only in the primitivisation of language as a nominative system and a means of thought, but also in the diminution of its communicative function which, on one hand, is caused by the destruction of unity of all the living, and on the other hand, provokes destructive processes, making them irreversible.

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## **Валентин Распутин:**

### **«Что в слове, что за словом»**

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*В статье анализируется речевая партия старухи Дарьи (повесть «Прощание с Матерой») как средство воплощения онтологического смысла национального бытия.*

*Ключевые слова: Распутин, модератор, речевая партия, лингвоцентричность.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

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