

**DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v6i4.1154**

**Citation:** Matveeva, V., Domanski, Y., & Skvortsov, A. (2017). Image, Mask and Persona in the Russian Poetry at the Turn of 21st Century. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 6(4), 615-622. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i4.1154>

## **Image, Mask and Persona in the Russian Poetry at the Turn of 21st Century**

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### **Abstract**

Poetry at the turn of 20-21<sup>st</sup> centuries is a heterogeneous and largely unexplored phenomenon. The works, in which the issues of contemporary Russian poetry development are considered systematically, are of fundamental importance. One of the important problems of this period is the tendency to a literary game - including image, mask nature and character in poetry. For all its obviousness, this problem was not studied conceptually. The purpose of this work is to examine the ways of image-making, masking and character in modern poetry and their interpretation from the point of view of genesis. The following conclusions were drawn after the study: 1) Masking and character in poetry are more often manifested in 1980s - 90s (and during an earlier period), whereas 2000s and subsequent years are marked by image-making. 2) The authors of the older and middle generation tend toward masking and character, while the younger, on the contrary, prefer image design (although exceptions are found in all three groups). 3) Masking and character in its origin are the phenomena of the late Soviet era. 4) Image making comes to the forefront during the last period when literature began to experience a serious pressure from the modern media environment, dictating new ways of interaction between a poet and an audience. The performed analysis of these trends determined the final conclusion: the propensity of modern authors to character and masking will continue to decrease, and the impact of image-making will be growing for some time until the change of the social-cultural paradigm from postmodern to another one.

**Keywords:** Modern Russian poetry, Image, Mask, Character, Development trends.

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## **Introduction**

The turn of the millennia is the time of exceptional stylistic and genre diversity in Russian poetry. During this period, literature as a whole developed under the conditions of a sharp change or even the collapse of a number of social-cultural institutions, in the situation of readers outflow and the encapsulation of literary space.

An extensive, diverse and largely contradictory poetic material requires evaluation, analysis and general historical and cultural findings. S.I. Chuprinin drew attention to the acute shortage of analytical work on the relevant topics: there is no "(...) author who would undertake a concentrated and responsible explanation of the things happening (...) in contemporary poetry and how the thing is with the table of ranks, with the rivalry of gifts, with the ratio of proseisms and poeticisms, with traditions and innovation (...) nowadays. I have not heard anything about sophisticated statements of stylistic trends and genre transformations for a long time (...). And it's sad. Because the only knowledge that is not inherent to others is the knowledge of context" (Chuprinin, 2003).

Indeed, there are a few studies devoted to the general state of Russian poetry during the last thirty years. Not each of them sets the task of the most complete description or, even the presentation of the present poetic culture development concept. Even the consideration of this or that part of modern Russian poetry through the prism of a certain problematics is rare (Zubova, 2000, 2010; Skvortsov, 2005). This is understandable: modern Russian poetry is wide and heterogeneous, it does not contain a clearly presented main phenomenon, in relation to which currents and trends, groups and individual figures are determined. The poets themselves are not in a hurry to help analysts: even the authors with similar poetics are rarely united in groups and do not come out with notable manifestos (Skvortsov, 2015). Besides, being inside an ever-changing process, it is difficult to find a viewpoint on it that would allow to see if not the whole picture, but at least its significant part.

## **Methodological basis**

One of the main problems of this period is the tendency towards a literary game (Skvortsov, 2005) - including image, masking and character in poetry. For all its obviousness, this problem was not conceptually considered.

The problems of mask and character have long been known in literary criticism (Levi-Strauss, 2000; Ivanov, 2006; Bakirov & Pashkurov, 2015; Amineva, 2014; Bowra, 1952; Eliot, 1945; Fowler, 1985; Levin, 1972; Miner, 1990; Zholkovsky & Shcheglov, 1987; Skvortsov, 2014, 2015), but they were poorly studied on the basis of poetry, especially modern ones. The

problem of image in contemporary poetry is even less investigated - there are no academic works on this subject, except for the works in the related field of Russian rock poetry that somehow addresses this issue (Domanskiy, 2010; Nikitina, 2011; Afanasev & Breeva, 2016; Afanasev, 2015).

The context of contemporary Russian poetry, that is, all the authors deserving a reader's attention and the professional evaluation of philologists, contains at least 250-300 names (Skvortsov, 2015). Thus, literary historians face the problem of material classification, at least the primary one.

One of the most promising research approaches is the definition of the authors' attitude to the problem of a lyrical hero or a lyrical subject (an important step in this direction was made in (Shtrauss, 2009)). From this perspective, modern poets can be divided into three broad groups.

The largest one should be attributed to those for whom the creation and the constant presence of a lyric hero / a subject is an organic part of their poetics and aesthetics (O. Chukhontsev, A. Timofeevsky, E. Rein, A. Kushner, A. Tsvetkov, S. Gandlevsky, I. Ermakova, M. Boroditskaya, I. Melamed, M. Amelin, O. Dozmorov, and others) (Afanasev, 2015).

Another group, a smaller one, can include those who adhere to the opposite creative strategy - the withdrawal of the very idea of a stable lyric "I" from the artistic world; usually they are the authors of an experimental avant-garde warehouse developing the most radical types of writing (M. Eryomin, V. Sosnora, S. Biriukov, A. Skidan, S. Zavyalov, D. Beznosov, et al.) (Zagidullina, 2016).

Finally, the third intermediate group includes the authors, who variously construct a certain individuality in verse (or individuality), which in some way differs from an author's image, and sometimes sharply contrasts with it. It is this approach to the poetic cause that is the subject of our research interest.

In its turn, three creative strategies stand out within this group: the authors' desire to create an image, a mask or a character. Naturally, in some cases, poets turn to the combination of two or even all three approaches, but more often they adhere to some line of creative behavior.

## **Discussion**

### *1. Image as the way of the author's "I" development*

Many poets at the turn of the millennium emphasize the presentation of their creativity to readers. Extra-literary elements (the author's behavior, including speech, its appearance, relations with others, etc.) and internal (creativity) are a special type of creative individuality

expression in the aggregate, that is, an image carefully created and supported by a poet.

The image is realized as something self-sufficient and self-valuable. After its development, it begins to live a separate life, different from an author's life, and often exist virtually before and apart from literary creativity, sometimes replacing and substituting it. Image is an author's creative image, as he would like to look before a public. With a successful combination of social-cultural circumstances, an image substitutes a real person completely. Such life-building strategies became popular in Russian culture during the period of modernism and reached their culmination during the first and second waves of the Russian literary avant-garde.

In modern poetry, image-making is quite common as a behavioral practice, however bright and creatively successful image-makers are rare. One of the most famous and long established authors on the cultural market is Vera Pavlova (born in 1963). She developed the image of the "erotic poetess". The poetry by Pavlova is deliberately intimate and frank. The title of the book "Intimate Diary of a high achiever" in 2001 largely reflects the concept of her work. The collections of poems by Pavlova are often built according to the canon of diary entries. Each poem, if necessary, can be motivated by one or another event in the author's life, but at the same time Pavlova's poems are not the retelling of her personal history, but the development of a certain image, "the history of a woman in general," or even "the description of a female origin as such".

In contrast to her Dmitry Vodennikov has an equally vivid image (born in 1968) - emphatically narcissistic, on the verge of auto-parody, "my male self". He cultivates the manner of sophistication à la the silver age and an intense "tragic" image of a salon hero-lover purposefully. In his case, not poetry as such, but it is the author's image that is almost the main creative achievement.

In addition to these authors, the most notable "image" contemporary poets are Andrei Turkin (1962-1997), Julius Gugolev (born in 1964), Andrey Chemodanov (born in 1969), Andrei Rodionov (born in 1971), Boris Ryzhy (1974-2001), Linor Goralik (born in 1975) and Vera Polozkova (born in 1986).

## *2. Mask as the way of a real author's image hiding*

If a certain image is fixed once and for all, as a rule, then the masks can change with enviable constancy, which allow the author to play different roles while remaining himself.

O. Yu. Osmukhina determines a number of signs which designate the author's mask: "autobiographical parallels and correspondences; Motives of duality and specularity; The prefaces mystifying a reader, in which an author presents his own text for someone else's

work, acting as a publisher, etc., an auto-parody at the level of intonation, "twisting" of one's own subjects, comic distortion of "one's own" language when the means of description do not correspond to the subject of description; Hidden auto-allusions, functional autoreminiscences" (Osmukhina, 2009).

These signs allow us to attribute to the author's masks such unique figures of the literary process as Remont Priborov and Shish Bryansky. These are not just the pseudonyms of the poets Bakhyt Kenzheyev (born in 1950) and Kirill Reshetnikov (born in 1975), but the images that are radically different from real authors and from their more traditional artistic practices. Remont Priborov and Shish Bryansky are the creative individuals with a distinctive and recognizable poetics and poetic biography.

According to the remarks of the researchers, Reshetnikov inherited the traditions by N. Klyuev and M. Kuzmin in his poems, but he gained a creative individuality only when he put on the mask of Shish Bryansky. In his case, the designed image was so powerful over the creator that in one of the interviews the author states: "Kirill Reshetnikov is a mask in which Shish must exist" (Reshetnikov, 2009).

"Masked" poets are also represented by Julius Kim (born in 1936), Lev Losev (1937-2009), Vladimir Storchkov (born in 1946), Igor Irtenev (born in 1947), Lev Rubinstein (born in 1947), Victor Koval (born in 1947), Alexander Eremenko (born in 1950), Timur Kibirov (born in 1955), Mikhail Sukhotin (born in 1957), Alexander Levin (born in 1957), Vladimir Druck (born in 1957), Vsevolod Emelin (born in 1959), Elena Fanaylova (born in 1962), Alexander Kabanov (born in 1968), Ivan Volkov (born in 1968), Maria Stepanova (born in 1972) and Dmitry Tonkonogov (born in 1973).

### *3. Character as a temporal role*

A character is a figure most remote from the author's life and biography. It is firmly embedded in the plot of the work and acts as the means of motive stringing on the one hand, and as if embodied and personified by the motivation of motive relation (Tomashevsky, 1999).

In the character lyric, the narration is from the first person, but this person is nothing more than the role that the author consciously plays before a reader / a listener / a viewer.

Character texts are usually ambiguous and impersonal. Since the heroes of role-playing poems often have a "sharply characteristic speech style" (Korman, 1978), the author's consciousness is not manifested directly, but through the contrast with a character speech and the system of values presented by him, obviously different from the author's. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the author "exposes" a character, either internally, pulling back from him ironically

and implicitly criticizing, or simply exposing the exaggerated features of someone else's character and the axiology foreign to him.

The following figures of contemporary literature should be classified as "personal" poets: Dmitry Prigov (1940-2007), Oleg Grigoriev (1943-1992), Eduard Limonov (born in 1943). A separate completed cultural phenomenon is represented by the "Order of Courteous Mannerists" (Vadim Stepantsov (born in 1690), Andrei Dobrynin (born in 1957), Victor Pelenyagre (born in 1959), Alexander Bardodym (1966-1992), Konstantin Grigoriev (1968-2008), Dmitry Bykov (born in 1967)). He gave the collective image of a specific character in 1980-2000 - a narcissistic graphomaniac who writes stylized grotesque-erotic poetry.

## **Conclusion**

The tendencies to the development of image, mask and character within modern Russian poetry are evident. However, they have different genesis and require a different interpretation. The following conclusions became the result of this study.

1. Mask and character nature in poetry were manifested more often during the 1980s – 90s (and during an earlier period), whereas the 2000s and the subsequent years are marked by image-making.
2. The authors of the older and middle generation tend toward masking and a character. The younger ones, on the contrary, prefer to develop an image (although exceptions are found in all three groups).
3. Masking and character in its origin are the phenomena of the late Soviet era. On the one hand, this is the result of "Aesopian language" use in Soviet literature and culture - the spread of this phenomenon is characteristic of the older generation of poets. On the other hand, these phenomena began to be actively used by the middle generation of poets during the era of post-Soviet social-cultural traumatism, which can be perceived as a demonstration of postmodernist influence on authors.
4. Image making comes to the forefront during the last period when literature began to experience serious pressure from the modern media environment, dictating new ways of interaction between a poet and an audience.

Without the exhaustion of all the wealth of modern Russian poetry, the phenomena of image, masking and character characterize a certain cultural period, allow us to recognize its important aesthetic currents and systematize philological knowledge about a subject. The performed analysis makes it possible to believe that the attraction of modern authors to a

character and masking will continue to decrease, and the impact of image-making will be increasing for some time until the change of the social-cultural paradigm from a postmodernist consumerist to another one.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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