

METAPHOR AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION: RUSSIAN “IMAGINISM”

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Abstract

Living in the epoch of advanced media technologies we use to talk about communication with the definition “mass”. Together with that we can’t deny the growth of interest to some personal tools and channels for communication, the need to make it more targeted. In this case we can look at metaphor and at poetry in general like at the source of unique instruments for communication each one will truly believe. Russian “Imaginism” developed at the beginning of the XX century basically by the efforts of Russian poet Sergey Yesenin created the unique style of communication coming from poetry.

Key words: *poetry, communication, civilization, image, metaphor, imaginists, yesenin, toffler*

According to Elvin Toffler humanity is faced to “the death of industrialism and the rise of a new civilization”¹. The outstanding philosopher speaks about isolated changers with large significance in people’s life of the second part of the XX century. The changers will take place not only in economy and power relationships, the “Third Wave civilization” as Toffler called it will rebuild “the very structure of artistic production”². The thinker means that the society moves from developing of mass production and consumption provoking the need of sending mass messages towards the world of individual communication for the “prosumers” – people who are not satisfied by the mass-messaging system. Certainly, we can’t forget about technologies giving us a lot of help in building fast and wide-ranged communication. But a human being as a very complicated creation needs something for balance the technological communication he uses in everyday routine. In order to find the balance people turn to poetry as a different way of transferring their personal experience with the other tools of communication. This makes a great challenge for the model of taking poetry as a part entertainment available just for the minority. Poetry traditionally opened “for the few” as the well-known Russian poet of the XIX century Vasiliy A. Zoukovskiy used to say stars a new era beginning to talk widely. Mass public education made its great input in the process of renewing the attitude toward poetry. Long before the “Third Wave” in technologies began to take its time – just in the first decades of the XX century a new poetry started to develop. It was the base for the new role of poetry in human life.

A word as an image

On the 10-th of June 1921, as the historical sources tell us, in Moscow streets appeared the “poster session” of the new Russian poetry movement. They called themselves “Imaginists” and five of them have signed the “Declaration of Imaginists” – the basic document of the newborn literary movement. “Image and only image... It protects the creation of art from the moth of time”³, - declared the authors. The most distinguished among them were Sergey Yesenin (1895-1925) and his two friends – Anatoly Mariengof (1897-1962) and Vadim Shershenevich (1893-1942). In this article we will briefly look at the views of “Imaginists” and make an attempt to find out what communication tools they put into practice using lyrics as a way of dialog. The author of the article gives her own translations of the lyrics she analyses as the examples.

To work with a word taking it as an image – that was the basic thesis of the Imaginist’s theory. We can take an example of it from the poem by Vadim Shershenevich composed in 1931.

Прощай

¹ Elvin Toffler “The Third Wave”, p. 7, <http://www.crossroadscounsellinggroup.com/resources/ebook/Toffler-ThirdWave-complimentsofCRTI.pdf>

² Elvin Toffler “The Third Wave”, p. 27, <http://www.crossroadscounsellinggroup.com/resources/ebook/Toffler-ThirdWave-complimentsofCRTI.pdf>

³ http://dugward.ru/library/serebr/lit_deklaracii.html

Ты изменила, как жена,
Ну что ж, язвы, хули, злорадствуй,
О нищая моя страна
Неисчислимого богатства!

Ты хорошеешь с каждым днем
Таким соленым и жестоким,
Мы, очарованные, пьем
Заздравье годам краснощеким.

Ты позабыла навсегда,
Ты накрепко, страна, забыла
Всклоченные те года,
Когда меня ты так любила!

О, та ли ты? Иль я не тот?
Но ясно после расставанья,
Что говор твой не так поет,
Как горькое мое молчанье...

Прими ж последнее прости,
Спеша, смеясь и не краснея,
Но урну с пеплом помести
Ты в залу лучшего музея.

Ведь не совсем уж все мертво
В твоей душе невольно братской,
Я был любовник верный твой,
И трогательный, и дурацкий!⁴

Farewell to you
You gave me up like wife.
Ok, Darling, take your time!
Stand out like a beggar,
The rich one hiding the treasury!

⁴ «Поэты-имажисты», Санкт-Петербург, 1997, с. 126

You are looking better each day
While I am feeling salt of my teas,
Or, Charming, I 'm still
Drinking for your long life!

Darling, forget it all –
The days with my ruffled hair
You loved so much,
For so many years!

Who are you now?
And who am I?
After all – my silence sounds
While your voice is nothing.

So take my farewell,
Take it fussy, concealing the shame.
But remember – the dust of my love
Should be put in your best Museum!

For I am still loving you,
My Motherland, my hearty land!
I love you and am your friend,
Your trusty one, your silly lover!

The system of metaphors in this poem is complicated. The reader needs time to guess whom the author is speaking to. Only in the very end we find the concrete answer. But first of all we have to understand the metaphor and to “look above the words”. So here we see the word “wife” taken as the image of the poet’s Mother-country he truly loves and for whom he is trusted forever. Reading this lyric we seem to watch a movie – drama of love and struggling heart. After all we see the dialog between the two, almost impossible effects in earlier poetry.

“Off from Earth”

“An airplane moves in the skies off from Earth. But it needs Earth as a starting point. If Earth did not exist the flight of the airplane would be impossible. The art is just the same: it needs reality as point to start from. Making art to deal with reality forever you will get a tram instead of the plane”⁵ - declared “The Eight Items”, the other program document of the “Imaginists”. Published in the magazine called “Hotel for the Strangers in Beauty” (“Гостиница для путешественников в прекрасном”) in 1924 this statement made the stress upon the will of the poets to build a new poetry paradigm. The “Imaginists”

⁵ http://dugward.ru/library/serebr/lit_deklaracii.html

felt themselves courageous enough to stand opposite to the traditions. To study this case let's turn to one Yesenin's lyric composed in 1923.

Мне осталась одна забава:

Пальцы в рот - и веселый свист.

Прокатилась дурная слава,

Что похабник я и скандалист.

Ах! какая смешная потеря!

Много в жизни смешных потерь.

Стыдно мне, что я в бога верил.

Горько мне, что не верю теперь.

Золотые, далекие дали!

Все сжигает житейская мреть.

И похабничал я, и скандалил

Для того, чтобы ярче гореть.

Дар поэта - ласкать и карябать,

Роковая на нем печать.

Розу белую с черною жабой

Я хотел на земле повенчать.

Пусть не сладились, пусть не сбылись

Эти помыслы розовых дней.

Но коль черти в душе гнездились -

Значит, ангелы жили в ней.

Вот за это веселие мути,

Отправляясь с ней в край иной,

Я хочу при последней минуте

Попросить тех, кто будет со мной,-

Чтоб за все за грехи мои тяжкие,

За неверие в благодать

Положили меня в русской рубашке

Под иконами умирать.⁶

⁶ <http://rupoem.ru/esenin/mne-ostalas-odna.aspx>

Only one fun has been left for me –
To whistle with fingers in my lips!
Everybody takes me as a bully
My name has been hanged with scandals.

I am laughing about it!
So often we laugh about our losses.
I am sad just about belief
I've been earlier troubled about.
So far are my gold days,
They are burned by my everyday life.
So weak was my early attempt
Of making my days more bright!

Poetry is a mark of the doom,
Being sweeter from page to the other
You are trying to give Rose and Frog
A chance for becoming a couple.

No matter it never come true,
So precious thus were my dreams!
The Evil is eager to get
The Angel for sharing time with.

Now for all this shake
I am just begging for only thing –
Please, hey, who will stay with me?
Come to say me goodbye when I leave.

Please, put on me a simple shirt
And lay me above the icons
For my sins are too very hard
And I never believed in Angel.

First of all we see the metaphor of dialog again. Now it is the conversation between the Author and his audience represented as his friends. The poet insists on his right to live in this world according to himself and to find his own answers for the questions given by destiny. By the way we can find a number of dialogs inside. The metaphor of confession before leaving this world conceals the inside

discussion between the poet and the reader (the traditional for Russian literature) and between God and Evil, between losses and sorrow, between the artist and his art. Surprising though it is the poet does not try to find any “common decision”, he is eager to insist upon his individual views. To my mind it’s very significant – in the world ruled with technologies a human being wants to be represented with the help of individual communicative “environment”.

“More romantic”

“We are to make the reality more ideal and more romantic”⁷- the “Imaginists” told in their declaration. Did they really need more romantic or ideal reality? I venture to suggest they did not for in the same declaration they call themselves the fighters for new mentality. Reality as they stressed was the last for them. Could it mean they truly ignore reality? Certainly, they did not. Building the “reality of metaphor” on their own the “Imaginists” made an attempt to create a link, a dialog between the reality and the metaphor of reality. According to this very interesting are the two lyrics by Yesenin composed not long before his tragical destruction.

Клен ты мой опавший, клен заледенелый,
Что стоишь, нагнувшись, под метелью белой?
Или что увидел? Или что услышал?
Словно за деревню погулять ты вышел
И, как пьяный сторож, выйдя на дорогу,
Утонул в сугробе, приморозил ногу.
Ах, и сам я нынче чтой-то стал нестойкий,
Не дойду до дома с дружеской попойки.
Там вон встретил вербу, там сосну приметил,
Распевал им песни под метель о лете.
Сам себе казался я таким же кленом,
Только не опавшим, а всюю зеленым.
И, утратив скромность, одуревши в доску,
Как жену чужую, обнимал березку.⁸

Oh, Maple, my mate! You are kneeling out
In the snowy wind!
What are you hearing? What are you seeing?
What’s happening out of our village?
Maybe you sunk in the snow
And your foot terribly hurts now?
Frankly – I feel just the same,
It’s not so easy for me to reach my home...
So many songs I have sang
For Willow and Pine

⁷ http://dugward.ru/library/serebr/lit_deklaracii.html

⁸ <http://rupoem.ru/esenin/klen-ty-moj.aspx>

I've already meet.

Oh, Maple, it seemed to be summer
With plenty of heat and green leaves,
And I really lost my mind
Hugging Birch like the other's wife!

Я спросил сегодня у менялы,
Что даёт за полтумана по рублю,
Как сказать мне для прекрасной Лалы
По-персидски нежное "люблю"?

Я спросил сегодня у менялы,
Легче ветра, тише Ванских струй,
Как назвать мне для прекрасной Лалы
Слово ласковое "поцелуй"?

И ещё спросил я у менялы,
В сердце робость глубже притая,
Как сказать мне для прекрасной Лалы,
Как сказать ей, что она "моя"?

И ответил мне меняла кратко:
О любви в словах не говорят,
О любви вздыхают лишь украдкой,
Да глаза, как яхонты, горят.

Поцелуй названья не имеет,
Поцелуй не надпись на гробах.
Красной розой поцелуи рдеют,
Лепестками тая на губах.

От любви не требуют поруки,
С нею знают радость и беду.
"Ты - моя" сказать лишь могут руки,
Что срывали чёрную чадру⁹.

⁹ <http://rupoem.ru/esenin/ya-sprosil-segodnya.aspx>

“What is Persian word for Love?”
That was my question to the money-changer.
“What is the word for “kiss”
in the language spoken by lovely Lala?
How to tell her “be mine”?”
That’s what I asked
Trying to conceal my confusion.
The money-changer replied very briefly:
“Never look for the words of love
For love is a shine of your eyes.
Does anybody need the words
While kiss is melting on the petals of his lips?
Does anybody need the words
while his life is given forever
to one who belongs to him
in sorrow and in joy?”

The both poems contain metaphor of love story. Fables of the both stories look unhappy. The two stories also may be taken as funny. Otherwise how can we take seriously the conversation between a tree and a human being? And how can we feel sympathy for a reckless guy trying to enrich his vocabulary in order to seduce a young Persian girl? To answer these questions we are to keep in our mind the following. The two poems have a common metaphor – the metaphor of loneliness. The lonely person tries to communicate in the obstacles when communication is utterly impossible. The maple is a tree and the money-changer lives in different kind of reality. In fact the author does not know how to deal with his own reality, that’s why he uses the “romance” of impossible dialog. The poet needs to do something with his own life in order to find his own identity. The metaphor of dialog does not open the real dialog which could help a real man. But communication between the world of metaphor and the world of reality still may be successful. Metaphor does not come alone – it always has space where it has been placed. That’s why using metaphor we can come over the boundaries of standard practice and find some new solutions for better understanding.

In completion

“It is very easy to write about airplanes when they come into reality. You should describe them before they appeared”¹⁰, - say the “Imaginists” ironically in their basic declaration. “History teaches us to be patient”, - conclude the poets. Metaphor can give us a tool for communication able to solve the problem of dialog between those whose pictures of reality are different. Metaphor can be used as a bridge between the two sides of a dialog.

In November 1920 Anatoly Mariengof dedicated to his friend Sergey Yesenin the following lyric.

Есенину
Утихни, друг. Прохладен чай в стакане.
Осыпалась заря, как августовский тополь.
Сегодня гребень в волосах —

¹⁰ http://dugward.ru/library/serebr/lit_deklaracii.html

Что распоясанные кони,
А завтра седина, как снеговая пыль.

Безлюбье и любовь истлели в очаге.
Лети по ветру стихотворный пепел!
Я голову — крылом балтийской чайки
На острые колени
Положу тебе.

На дне зрачков ритмическая мудрость —
Так якоря лежат
В оглохших водоемах,
Прохладный чай (и золотой, как мы)
Качает в облаках сентябрьское утро¹¹

For Yesenin

Be quiet, my friend. The glass of tea is cold.
The sunrise dropped its leaves like autumn tree.
Tomorrow we are becoming old –
Tomorrow we are becoming free.

Our love and lack of love are burned with fire,
Are gone with wind together with the words.
I put my head upon your knees with crying
Like helpless wing among the flock of birds.

Let wisdom be your anchor at the bottom
Of cold lake of years passing by.
The gold tea and our gold Autumn
Are spread in clouds of September sky.

To my opinion the opposite side of the dialog is represented in the lyric by Yesenin composed five years later. And a few months later the author's life dramatically interrupted.

Жизнь — обман с чарующей тоскою,
Оттого так и сильна она,
Что своею грубою рукою

¹¹ http://slova.org.ru/mariengof/utihni_drug/

Роковые пишет письма.

Я всегда, когда глаза закрою,
Говорю: «Лишь сердце потревожь,
Жизнь — обман, но и она порою
Украшает радостями ложь.

Обратись лицом к седому небу,
По луне гадая о судьбе,
Успокойся, смертный, и не требуй
Правды той, что не нужна тебе».

Хорошо в черемуховой вьюге
Думать так, что эта жизнь — стезя
Пусть обманут легкие подруги,
Пусть изменят легкие друзья.

Пусть меня ласкают нежным словом,
Пусть острее бритвы злой язык,—
Я живу давно на все готовым,
Ко всему безжалостно привык.

Холодят мне душу эти выси,
Нет тепла от звездного огня.
Те, кого любил я, отреклись,
Кем я жил — забыли про меня.

Но и все ж, теснимый и гонимый,
Я, смотря с улыбкой на зарю,
На земле, мне близкой и любимой,
Эту жизнь за все благодарю.¹²

Life is a lie with charming sense of sorrow,
Therefore it always seems so strong.
Knowing the day before tomorrow

¹² <http://slova.org.ru/esenin/zhiznobman/>

What is going to be right and wrong?

Closing my eyes I pray in silence:

“If my heart will tremble on the nib,
Destiny is lie, but its reticence
Brings a little beauty to the fib”.

Turn you face – the skies are grey of cloud
And the Moon is lighting for your feet.
Take it easy, Earthborn, being proud,
Don’t demand the truth you never need.

It is good when flowers like snow
Cover all the trees in total white.
No matter why you have to go
Feeling free, without any sight.

Let them feel the lying words with honey
And begin to stab them like a knife.
Take it easy for it’s really funny
To conceal the cruelty of life.

Skies are high and their height is cold,
No warmth is coming from the stars.
If the love will be whenever sold
Don’t give up before the new one starts.
Giving thanks for each and every dawning
Coming up with sense of new belief,
Try again to start the life from morning,
Carry on, be grateful and forgive.

At the very beginning of the XX century the “Imaginists” opened the “new wave” in poetry. Metaphor since that time becomes not only a literary “belonging” but a tool for communication. The capability of this tool is to be used and studied.

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