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## Vera Polozkova's Ambivalent Feminism: Reimagining Russian Poetry in the Internet Age

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**Abstract.** This study is dedicated to the analysis of works by Vera Polozkova, a prominent figure of contemporary Russian women's Internet poetry, who gained her popularity through an ambivalent position in Russian society. The relevance of this work stems from Polozkova's inherent feminism as an implicit form of empowerment conveyed to the reader in her poems, offering a powerful paradigm for understanding Russian poetic culture in the Internet age. The analysis was based on 4 printed books by Polozkova as well as 7 interviews with her participation. Analysis of the material showed that despite distancing herself from feminism and any kind of political activism, Polozkova still became the symbol of the search for inherent feminism through offering new images and paradigms for exploring feminine agency and identity. The article also traces Polozkova's emergence as a prominent cultural figure through the context of female Internet poetry in Russian culture from the early 18th century to the present day. The article deals with the main themes and motives of Polozkova's Internet poetry, as well as provides an analysis of the linguistic and expressive means used in her works, including the classification of poetic elements of the feminist discourse delivered by the poet. The main conclusion drawn from the study is that in Russian literary-oriented culture, Internet poetry is one of the best ways to influence public opinion, taking into account some social contradictions.

**Key words:** Russian poetry; feminism; contemporary Russian society; literary analysis; Internet poetry.

Russian poet Vera Polozkova is a controversial figure. While readers are quick to place her alongside feminist thinkers, she has stated that this could not be further from the truth. If Polozkova is not a feminist, however, and her poetry does not convey activist ideas, she nevertheless speaks powerfully to female readers who respond to her depictions of women seeking agency, stability, success, happiness in chaotic and often predetermined settings. As a poet Polozkova walks an ambivalent ground in contemporary Russia, epitomizing the search for inherent feminism that shirks the label of political activ-

ism while offering new images and paradigms for considering feminine agency and identity to a largely female readership. This paper presents what I call Vera Polozkova's inherent feminism, a covert and implicit form of empowerment that also offers a powerful paradigm for understanding Russian poetic culture in the Internet age. The paper proceeds to examine Polozkova's emergence as a prominent culture presence first by examining the contexts of women's poetry in Russian culture leading up to the Internet age and then by presenting some background on Polozkova herself. Finally, analytical

overview of her writing is presented with an angle to her implicit search for a non-political form of feminist discourse.

The journey of Russian women in literature starts with Empress Katherine the Great. Not only did she put her best efforts to promote education of both sexes (she wrote a manual for education of young children), but she also took part in the movement herself. In 1769, she launched a periodic "Vsyakaya vsyachina" [Odds and Ends]. She also wrote for it under a pseudonym "Babushka" [Granny]. Due to her efforts several facilities for women education opened, and female authors began to appear.

However, aside from empress's literary efforts, the usual attitude towards female authors was negligent. The genres and themes of their works leaned towards love lyrics, the theme that was promptly marked unserious, if not vain. In 1840, Mikhail Katkov, editor of *The Russian Messenger*, described the appearance of women authors as "more or less pleasant". "Living souls", he opined, "may find many a joy in them, and for that we thank their authors. On the other hand, should they disappear, humanity will not find itself lacking in any way and will continue to perceive existence to the fullest, as it does now with them" [Katkov 1840: 27]. Despite such attitudes, the works of such female poets as Evdokiya Rostopchina, Karolina Pavlova, and Elizaveta Kulman found recognition. The Silver Age in Russian Poetry established women poets as equal in poetic statute to men. Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva, writers who embraced the task of writing in tragic and chaotic times, insisted on being called not "poetessa" (a term with derogatory undertones in Russian, suggesting second-ratedness), but "poet." These poets consciously distanced themselves from the "feminine" tradition. In the list of her predecessors, for example, Akhmatova mentioned Pushkin scholars, and Pushkin himself as her teacher [Akhmatova 1986: 6].

The second quarter of the 20th century triggered democratization of Russian society [Engel 2004: 35] and permitted women's literature to obtain an official status in the faces of Bella Akhmadulina, Yunna Morits, and others. From this moment on, women started to concentrate on such issues as woman's inner world, women's definition of life, self-analysis, and complex nuances of people's relationships. Contemporary Russian writers such as Tatyana Tolstaya, Ludmila Petrushevskaya, and Ludmila Ulitskaya demonstrate the unique aesthetic of female perception, covering a wide range of topics, creative techniques, making this works partially autobiographical and putting a female character into the center of the narrative.

The advent of the Internet allowed for a new, more direct relationship between authors and read-

ers. Before they had never been in contact directly, except through the work. The text of the work was checked not only for the norms of literary language, but also for artistic value, compliance with the objectives of the publishing house with which the author collaborated. The magazine's assessment of the potential popularity of the text influenced the print run and coverage [Kochetkova 2010]. Feedback in the form of a review in a magazine was also carried out within the professional environment. Thus, the process of producing texts was carried out within the professional community, while the reader acted primarily as the final consumer of the product. While this production chain remains largely in place, the Internet has allowed a new line to emerge. Publication on the Internet solves the issue of circulation, the need to comply with certain aesthetic and ideological norms is replaced by moderation and compliance with legal norms. The medium has changed dramatically: the published text could now be supplied not only with images, but also with references to various media, including audio, and video compositions. Hypertextuality and interaction with the media made it possible to turn the text itself into a complex media statement.

The most important changes occurred in the paradigm of relations between the author and the reader. Anyone can create a work and publish it on the Internet. The lack of entry threshold or a need to belong to the professional environment, on the one hand, facilitated the emergence of new authors, on the other has led to the emergence of a large number of works, the artistic value of which lied exclusively in their inclusion into mass literature. The role of the reviewer, who evaluates and gives the author feedback on their activities, for the first time fell on the reader. The review directly influences the text's reach. Direct work with a mass audience and lack of professional control have shifted the focus of improvement from the actual literary component to the emotional impact.

As for internet poetry, the mass character of it (meaning not only the existence of poetry for the masses, but also the number of authors) is also the result of the sublime romantic view of creative activities and the figure of a poet. The feeling of belonging to the sublime, both by the author and from the perspective of the reader, satisfies elementary spiritual hunger [Papkovskaya 2019: 210]. Poets resort to a number of techniques to make an attempt to belong to the high-minded: they use archaisms and obsolete vocabulary, wordplay and polysemy, introduce romantic confessionalism and missionary didacticism, which encompasses religious motives and images [Papkovskaya 2019: 211], imitate creative works by the poets belonging to the Silver Age [Orlitskij 2015: 207], thus exploiting the means of "mass innovation". However, from the literary per-

spective, they do not introduce any poetic innovations, rather they apply the above-mentioned poetic universals to make their text sound majestic and aesthetically pleasant [Papkovskaya 2019: 213].

One of the authors who appeared and became famous thanks to the Internet is Vera Polozkova. Polozkova was born in Moscow in the spring of 1986. Her father left the family when she was little. As she claimed in her interview with "The School for Scandal" [Tolstaya, Smirnova 2010], she had seen him only once, when she was two. The family situation could not but affect the prospect author's view of life. While father remained a mythical figure (according to the interview, mother believed Vera could not have remembered her father's visit), the mother became the figure of authority. That could not but impact her understanding of what a woman is capable of in society.

In 2003, Vera Polozkova opened a personal blog *vero4ka* (later – *mantrabox*) on the service *Livejournal.com*. Polozkova quickly became a "thousander", the audience of the Living Journal almost immediately responded to the poetic sketches of her blog. At the same time Vera takes an active part in poetic evenings, and competitions. In 2006, Polozkova became a finalist of the youth poetic SLEB. The poet also won the Poet of the Year Award, sharing it with another internet poet Oleg Borichev.

In 2007 Vera Polozkova first performed a solo creative evening in the Bulgakov House, a well-known Moscow cultural center. A few months later, the first serious edition of Polozkova – the book "Непонимание" ["Misunderstanding"] was published with the support of the writer Alexander Shitinsky, who got acquainted with her work through the blog. "Ununderstanding" quickly won the hearts of readers, and a year later the poet became the winner of the "Informat" award.

In 2008, the poet's first trip to India took place. The "Country of Contrasts" made a lasting impression, and subsequently an "Indian Cycle" consisting of works from that period was formed as a result of the trip. Now Polozkova tries to visit this country regularly and brings new poems from each trip. It was then that the intimate lyrics of her work to some extent gave way to reflections on their own spiritual experience and relationships with the Divine beginning. This year the poet publishes a collection of poems "Photosynthesis" illustrated by photographer Olga Pavolga. This work has been reissued three times with a print run of more than thirty thousand books. In 2009, the poet decided to expand the medium of her work and published her first audiobook called "Photosynthesis" where she read her work to the soundtrack. In addition, "Photosynthesis" included both the author's comments by Polozkova herself, and some of her phrases, uttered during the recording.

In 2009, the poet met Eduard Boyakov, the founder, director, and producer of the "Practice" theatre (then "Polytheatre"). Boyakov invites Polozkova to take part in the poetic play "Poems of Love" based on the texts of the poetess. The production premiered in October of the same year at the Hammer Scene Theatre in Perm. Two years later, the premiere of the new play "Poems about Moscow" took place.

In the spring of 2013, Polozkova's third book of poems titled "Осточерчение" ["Andrawyance"] was published. The book consists of thirteen parts, it also includes works from "Short Meter" and "Indian Cycle". The same year, Polozkova was nominated for the Andrei Voznesensky Foundation's "Parabola" award [Titarenko 2014].

Interestingly enough, her position is reflected in her poetry, even in the earlier works, on several levels: in syntax (she uses masculine forms while speaking about the heroine), in the system of imagery (both explicitly and implicitly).

At the root of her poetic world stands the figure of her literary heroine. Polozkova uses the minimal number of masks, thus making her heroine very close with the poet. She is a poet, and her name is Vera. This trait is the result of Polozkova being an advent of Internet poetry. She is supposed to be as sincere, as close to her real self as possible. Naturally, much of the descriptions and references are made using words that refer to the female gender. However, there are cases in which the lyrical heroine switches to masculine forms [Elistratova 2013: 71].

The heroine regularly compares herself to animals, gives herself animalistic traits ("Но всегда упираюсь лбом в тебя, как слепыш" ["I poke my forehead at you like a mole rat"]) (Polozkova 2008a: 27); "Уйти навьюченной как осел" ["to stroll away loaded as a donkey"]) (Polozkova 2008a: 31)). Doing so, she uses the masculine animal names referring to herself, but does it where it is justified rhythmically and figuratively. In another combination ("он змею на груди пригрел" ["warmed the snake on the chest"]) (Polozkova 2008a: 22)) she takes on the word – image of the female kind. The word "mole rat", however, the masculine is justified by the lack of a feminine option in the literary language. Another example is "Я твой щен" ["I'm your pupper"]) (Polozkova 2008a: 82). The form is chosen due to its poetic expressiveness. "Pupper" – is a name for one's beloved dog, to find an analogous female word is quite difficult. However, there is always room for a neology, an author's new word (and Polozkova routinely uses the possibility of forming words – where she considers necessary – for example, the word "люболъ" ["lubol"] that comes from molding together "любовь" ("love") and "боль" ("pain") (Polozkova 2008a: 9).

An interesting look at the question gives a turn of speech “Я глупый пингвин” [“I’m a stupid penguin...”] (Polozkova 2008a: 82) that references “The Song of the Stormy Petrel” by Maksim Gorky [Gorky 1980: 4]. In order to preserve the intertextual connection, Polozkova also preserves the masculine form. The apparent discrepancy with the gender of the heroine only emphasizes, draws attention to the reference. Another example of the same kind is “Я ловлю его ртом, как пёс”, [“I catch it with my mouth like a dog”] (Polozkova 2008a: 31). However, unlike with Gorky’s example, here we see not the statement, but the whole comparison. The masculine form as an emphasis is also used in conjunction with swearing. “И мама перестанет плакать о том, что ты такой урод” [“And mom will stop crying about you being such a freak”] (Polozkova 2008a: 100). Once again, the use of the masculine kind causes defamiliarization.

While introduction of feminities may help determine the gender of a person regardless of the context, Polozkova invites the reader for a more artistic use of words that do not have a pair of an opposite gender. That helps to demarginalize the gender-specific forms and the genders themselves: the ability to equally use the words of any gender in conjunction with gender-specific notions promotes the equality of the genders more than creation of polarizing pairs [Valgina 2001: 45]. These unconventional uses are easily recognizable and catch attention, making images more spectacular.

As for the topics of interest, social problems are outside of Polozkova’s heroine’s field of view. Her attention is caught by emotions and emotional life of a person. There are three main oppositions that are covered in the poems:

- The heroine and He
- The heroine and other women
- The heroine and her close friends

Male images in Polozkova’s poems can be divided into the following groups:

- Beloved (and his variant – a former lover)
- God
- Fictional characters
- Famous personalities

The beloved of the lyrical heroine is one of the central images of Polozkova’s work. Their relationship is presented in two phases: 1) the beloved man begins to lose interest and 2) meeting long after the breakup with the former lover. The phase dictates the vocabulary and the images used. The “still in love” stage’s vocabulary emphasizes the young age of the hero (baby, boy), prince, boo, (Polozkova 2008a: 20). The former lover is described in a drastically different way. The “knockout, daredevil” turns into the “money pig” (Polozkova 2008b: 47).

If a lyrical heroine periodically compares herself to animals, the male character is a hunter: “Раз охотник – ищи овцу, как у Мураками... / Раз ты вода – так догони меня и осаль” [“Once a hunter – look for a sheep, like in Murakami... / If you’re water, oh, catch up to me and tag”], (Polozkova 2008a: 81)). However, at some points the heroine ceases to be exclusively a victim. Just as her beloved, she becomes a predator: “Мы всплываем друг другу в сны иногда – акулами, / я слежу за тобой по картам. я иду за тобой по стрелкам” [“In our dreams we are sharks sometimes. / I’m watching you on the cards, I’m following you by the arrows”] (Polozkova 2008a: 103).

While emotionally she appears to be suffering, she does not lose her driving power, intentions. The appearance of the beloved emphasizes the external signs, while reflecting the assessment of the lyrical heroine: “Он ветер; за гранью; без вести; вне игры. / Пусть солнце бесстыдно лижет ему вихры” [“He’s wind over the edge, missing, out of the game/sun licks his kiss-curls”] (Polozkova 2008a: 60), “Ты мой первый крик. И последний вздох” [“You’re my first cry and my last breath”] (Polozkova 2008a: 40), “Черной сажей. Злых волос твоих, злых ресниц” [“Black soot of evil hair, evil eyelashes”] (Polozkova 2008a: 15).

The descriptions are stacked in two templates – a black-haired prince and a blond angel. The lyrical heroine of Polozkova compares him to famous literary characters: Harry Potter (“Маленький мальчик, жестокий квиддич, ... / Бедный Гарри, теперь ты видишь” [“Little boy, brutal quidditch ... Poor Harry, now you see”] (Polozkova 2008a: 169), Childe Harold (“Такой мальчик был серафический, чайльд-гарольд,” [“The boy was so seraphic, Childe-Harold...”], (“Вот был город как город, а стал затопленный батискаф” [“It used to be a city and now it’s like a sunk bathyscaph”], (Polozkova 2008b: 128)), Peter Pan (“Мы летали бы над землей – Питер Пэн и Венди. / Только ты, дурачок, не хочешь со мной играть.” [“We’d have flown over the earth – Peter Pan and Wendy. / But you, dummy, don’t wanna play with me”] (Polozkova 2008a: 95), The Little Prince (Polozkova 2008a: 175). Interestingly, the lyrical heroine knows about her bias (“у меня к нему, знаешь, детство” [“I have a childhood towards him, you know”] (Polozkova 2008a: 59)). Even the image of a woman who captured the main character’s attention is compared to a boy (“Но она дугой выгибает бровь и смеётся как сорванец” [“But she arches her eyebrow and laughs like a tomboy”] (Polozkova 2008a: 107)).

Love between the lyrical heroine and the male character fills the heroine with suffering. The heat of love turns blood into oil/syrup, burns, dries. The doom and suffering of love are not unique to the lyrical

ical heroine and her lover: “В том, как люто девушки любят девушек / Что-то вечно чудится / Безысходное.” [“Girls love girls so ferociously, one cannot but feel despair”] (Polozkova 2008a: 19).

Another representation of the relationship between the heroine and the beloved – war: “С таких войн, как ты, никогда не прийти назад” [“After wars like you, no one ever comes back”] (Polozkova 2008a: 29), “Eternal Fire”, “Ношу тебя как заложника в своей голове” [“Carrying you like a hostage in my head”] (Polozkova 2008a: 35).

In later poems masks take place of the beloved – Joe (Polozkova 2008b: 27), Shikinho (Polozkova 2008b: 62). Playing around with one of these masquerades, Polozkova even comes to a “happy ending”: the beloved, who, as Don Juan, sought the ideal, falls in love with the heroine.

The dichotomy of the masculine and the feminine, which constitutes the basis of Polozkova's love lyrics, is subject to criticism. The lyrical heroine, having met the ex-lovers, rejects their advances. Sometimes despite the fact that she has feelings for them. Saving dignity, after being rejected, left for other women, becomes a priority.

Another important incarnation of the masculine in Polozkova's lyrics is the figure of God. There are two main vectors in the lyrical heroine's relationship with God. On one hand, God is the father, the source of the poetic gift, “искра божья” [“the God's spark”] (Polozkova 2008a: 18), which has to be repaid. He is the gold standard, the measure of importance and the power the lyrical heroine compares herself to. On the other hand, he is the culprit behind the suffering of the heroine. Love is repeatedly compared to gambling (poker, blackjack, bingo). God is presented as a player, or, more often, a dealer. Flame and embers of love (“...он расплавит меня с тобой” [“...he will melt me with you”] (Polozkova 2008a: 15)) are but a deadly amusement to God (“Если я проиграю, то тебя самого в коробку уложит – Бог” [“If I lose, God will make sure to put you into the box next to me”], (Polozkova 2008a: 81)).

When referencing God, Polozkova uses phrases that compare the figure of God to the one of a father: “Боженька нянчит, ни за кого не прочит, / дочек делить не хочет, а сам калечит. / Если графа «отец», то поставлен прочерк.” [“God babysits, he won't court you to anyone, / he doesn't want to share his daughters, he cripples himself. / If the blank space is for “father”, then the dash will be in it”] (Polozkova 2008b: 16). At a certain point Polozkova's heroine falls into spiritual crisis: “Из его кружевного вымысла получился сплошной макабр” [“His laced fiction turned into a pitch-black macabre”] (Polozkova 2008b: 78).

After realizing that she is the chosen one, the heroine accepts the suffering sent to her by God,

considering it to be part and the key to the existence of her gift. She consciously sacrifices herself, her happiness to continue to write.

Polozkova uses a large amount of fictional male characters from literature and films (as well as famous figures from mass culture), but not as a reference, but rather as an emotional anchor. These include Harry Potter (Polozkova 2008a: 169), the Little Prince, Guinness, Terry Pratchett (Polozkova 2008a: 76), Dorian Gray. These names create a link to a piece of information. The link is engaging the reader into the circle of people with similar cultural background and brings in the emotional contents of the image. The philosophy and values that usually come with references in Polozkova's verses are left out. The simplification and inclusion are the basis of identity rhetoric. “Я была Ромулом – ты был Ремом ... / Мы как Джим Моррисон и Сэд Вишез.” [“I was Romulus – you were Rem ... We're like Jim Morrison and Sad Wishes”] (Polozkova 2008a: 68); “Мы мстительны, как Монтекки” [“We're as vindictive as Montagues”] (Polozkova 2008a: 76); “Мы идем к остановке, словно Пилат с Га-Ноцри” [“We're walking to a bus stop like Pilate and Ga Notsri”] (Polozkova 2008a: 101).

Poems contain emotional anchors connected not only to specific images, but to poetic figures. For Polozkova's lyrical heroine Iosif Brodsky, Vladimir Mayakovski, Velimir Khlebnikov become figures of poetic authority [Bryukhanova, Shevchenko 2018: 93]. While recognizing the authority, Polozkova repeats in all her interviews that she would prefer to be clumsy, clumped, but original than the second after a renowned figure [Vasyakina, Polozkova 2019].

Overall, the heroine always makes a choice whether she accepts the authority and feelings the male figure provides. Even if she cannot change her own feelings (as they are deemed to be of divine origin), even when facing the divine being's will, she consciously accepts (or declines) them, thus empowering the figure of a woman in the world view. We cannot really state that she is completely independent – she is still under the spell of her emotions. She is still a human. However, her dependency is within her control.

The relationship of the heroine with other women and their depiction indirectly reflects the author's position on woman's role in a relationship. The contact with them is always intermediated. The heroine always addresses mother and friends directly. Other women are necessary only as a contrast to the lyrical heroine in the relationship with the male character. To introduce the reader into a certain cultural context, Polozkova fills the world of the lyrical heroine with cliched images – for instance, cigarettes, samбуca, etc. However, it is the “other” women that are targeted with negativity for adherence to clichés:

“Вон уже дует губки подружка твоя и пялится за окно” [“Your girlfriend is already pouting her lips and staring at the window”] (Polozkova 2008a: 35), “That one will build a nest” (Polozkova 2008a: 38), “Я могу ведь совсем иначе: оборки-платьяца, мысли-фантики, губки-бантики, ближе к массам” [“I can do it, oh, so differently: frills-dresses, / thoughts-candy wrappers, lips-bows, closer to the masses”] (Polozkova 2008a: 104).

The two models are even compared directly:

Он хочет к той, из отеля Плаза. [He wants to go to the one from the Plaza Hotel.]

Они мила и голубоглаза [She’s nice and blue-eyed.]

И носит розовые чулки [And wears pink stockings.] ...

То, что меня узнают без грима [... That I’m recognized without makeup]

И то, что я, к сожалению, прима [And that I’m, regrettably, the prima]

И никогда не ношу чулок [I never wear stockings.]

Я ноль. Я дырочка в номерке. [I’m zero. I’m a hole in the check.]

Но – буду профилем на монете. [But – I will be a profile on the coin.]

(Polozkova 2008b: 159)

“Others” take upon themselves the clichés of traditional family life and thoughtless social flutter, both estimated negatively, “Fatal is where there’s a veil and a saucer for the rings” (Polozkova 2008a: 38).

Interestingly, describing the ideal man in one of the poems, the lyrical heroine uses specifically standard, banal phrases herself, despite seemingly despising those in others (“... to feel beside him like behind a stone wall...”, (Polozkova 2008a: 55)). While her and her counterparts’ ideals may concur, she is the only one with the voice. One hand, because the poems are her voice. On the other, because without such a strong voice a woman becomes a doll. The poetry itself becomes such a voice for the reader.

The images of heroine’s friends show that her fixation on her lover being her choice is not the only choice a woman can have. There are female characters in love with each other.

One of the themes not covered in the oppositions is the social one. Vera always mentions in the interviews that she is from a poor family, raised by a single mother. However, the social turbulences cannot really be included as one of the oppositions as the heroine does not really feel opposed. Her heroine struggles, yet the struggle is mostly internal, even concerning her work. “Прямо вот души не чает в Вере мыслящий народ./ Всё, что ей ни поручают – непременно \*\*\*\*” [“The smart people are fond of Vera / Whatever they ask of her she fails”] (Poloz-

kova 2008a: 80). Whatever struggles she overcomes to get a job, the hardest part for her is completing it. The same theme emerges in the heroine’s meet up with her ex-lover. “Если ты про книжку – то у меня тут случилась книжка, / Даже можно хвастаться тиражом. ... Что с тобой хотелось бы поделиться – / Если б ты когда-нибудь да пришел” [If you’re (talking) about the book – My book has happened / And I can even boast about the print run ... so much that I’d have loved to share with you / If you ever came.] Again, the focus is not on the struggle of getting there, rather, on internal feelings. The heroine achieves success once so desired. This image of a person, for who even major success is not the focus of attention conveys power. For a woman, this means she’s not just capable to achieve financial success, but she can strive for a deeper meaning while being financially successful.

The central image of the view of the world in Polozkova’s poetry is the image of the lyrical heroine. Her intentions breathe life into other images. Her pain gives life to the beloved, her prayers – to God, her resentment – to offenders and enviers. She always makes the decision herself, takes on herself the role of the suffering, the rebellious one and does so with full consciousness. Using the analysis, it is possible to define logical semantic nests – love, creativity, relationships, faith.

Love is an important element of the view of the world. The lyrical heroine’s anguish of love is the source of her inspiration. She accepts and welcomes it. Although she always on the losing side of the struggle (with the beloved) or game (against God), she consciously faces it and refuses to accept defeat. The linguistic means of description of emotions include popular images that invoke response – an associative connection in the reader’s mind.

The anguish of love helps the heroine to write. It is the source of creativity bestowed by God. Suffering is the payment for the gift, and the more talented, the more gifted a person is the more pain in struggle he or she must withstand. In the linguistic picture of the world there are no exclusively male descriptive images. Male forms are used as an artistic means for female characters – for the emphasis and at the same time as the distribution between the genders. The image of the lyrical heroine is formed in comparison and in opposition to other characters. Thanks to syntax and semantic contrasts, images of “other women” – the caricaturing shadows of the main character appear.

This technique of distancing oneself, describing emotions through events in the life of fictional characters – masks, is actively used by Polozkova in the collection “Photosynthesis” and later poems. Masked love stories, infidelities, passions are characterized by standard development. Stereotypical

situations become the object of the creative research. The subject is the emotional content.

Especially in early interviews, Polozkova was quick to distance herself from feminism [Dodolev 2015]. At the same time, she has been, admittedly, facing a fair amount of gender-specific criticism [Vasyakina, Polozkova 2019]. Feminism as an active movement has never been close to her: early in her career she found herself distanced from the main body of literary community and to an extent – from the social networks crowd that sparked her success in the beginning. Due to several personal conflicts the social activism became less of a priority [Kosyrev 2013]. At the same time, her poetry tells the story of personal struggle and empowers the heroine as the only person who makes decisions about her life. Whether she faces the struggle or accepts her own feelings, she does so in full consciousness, disillusioned of the consequences. The idea that a woman in our society is not just an incarnation of a trope (“be it a doll or a damsel in distress”), but a conscious independent person, equal in rights and possibilities, equal in weaknesses, is a strong tool of education. Nowadays, when social media activity tends to become more of a noise, a tool of self-promotion rather than a means to bring change to a field, this educational way of approaching women’s equality is more likely to make a difference. Moreover, it not only affects women, but also enlightens men on the matter. In Russian literature-centric culture this seems to be the most way to influence society’s opinion, considering the opposition to activism from the government and the church, this might be just the way to introduce ideas without creating an open confrontation [Johnson, Saarinen 2013].

I would like to emphasize that the emotional component is fundamental to the lyrics of the poet. It is the reason why she uses stereotypes and literature images as references – they are emotionally charged. Poems about the fate of masks as a study of emotions in this context become a tool of research, a search for answers to other people’s feelings, emotions, experiences, for conflict resolution in the real world. I believe that her uniqueness as a poet can be attributed to dialogues or quasi-dialogues: they often involve analyses of various actions, relationships, conversations, travelling and etc. Polozkova quite often addresses somebody or something, thus developing a message (resorting to self-analysis) and bringing the reader to the culmination, conflict resolution, when she faces the world or a real interlocutor.

Moreover, the uniqueness of Vera Polozkova’s work lies also in her ability to competently create individual-author words, thus emphasizing and highlighting key ideas and semantic aspects in her works [Elistratova 2012: 144]. The majority of “word-

forming occasionalisms” in the works of Vera are formed in a use way. The following examples illustrate the above-mentioned idea:

1. “Слезы повылей чуть...” [“Cry out a little...”] (“Повылей” [“Cry out”] means to cry to calm down; prefix used to emphasize incompleteness) (Polozkova 2008a: 110);

2. “Доумру” [“I’ll finish to die”] is an occasionalism created as an original antonym to the verb “доживу” [“I will live though”] (Polozkova 2013: 156);

3. “Можешь хмуриться большелобо и сощуривать взгляд медузий” [“You can frown foreheadly-enlarged and screwing up your Gorgonish eyes”] the word “медузий” [“Gorgonish”] is used with a negative connotation, but it is invented by analogy with the words “лисий” [“foxy”], “волчий” [“wolfish”]. // URL: <http://mirpoezy-lit.ru/books/6640/34/>

It noteworthy to mention that for creating author’s occasionalisms, Polozkova often resorts to substandard language, jargon, less often to swear words to express her unique, honest, inimitable, a little colloquial, but not fanciful expressiveness.

Vera Polozkova is an outstanding representative of the transitional generation, which grew up in the harsh 1990s and reveals its maturity in modern transition years. She, as once Igor Severyanin, boldly reveals the so-called simple, in some way mundane themes, feelings, and experiences. Of course, in a certain way, she is catering to the tastes of the audience, but she does it boldly and consciously. And, if previously poetry had always been regarded as something deeply spiritual, elevated, and detached from life, it was Polozkova who made it something natural, everyday, but therefore of no less spirituality or essence.

The topic of “transition society” at one time was also touched by Mikhail. Yu. Lermontov, but he like many poets of the past years chose to expose the vices of his contemporaries. Polozkova, on the contrary, as a creator praises and loves the society she lives in, becoming a friend to her reader, and not a reprover, which is especially valuable today. And this is even more valuable for literature, where most authors have taken and take the position of a punishing mentor rather than a good friend.

Today, Vera Polozkova’s name is a recognizable brand. And society needs her timely, friendly poems, written in simple words about everyday household problems, situations, and events to feel that they are not alone. There is at least one poet living life as it is, not as it is beautifully shown on Instagram.

As Polozkova once said in one of her interviews that half of her life she was a little shy of her “common” surname, she wanted to have a more delicate one. “But it is something internal, like a physiologi-

cal inability to wear hair extensions or false nails: in this life, I can only be myself. Loud, bulky, strange, uncomfortable to everyone, and Vera Polozkova". URL: <https://miridei.com/success-ideas/zvezdnaya-zhyn/razgovor-po-dusham-s-veroj-polozkovej-25-voprosov-i-otvetov/2/>

This is what makes contemporary poet Vera Polozkova, a young woman who has made poetry, in a good way, everyday for many people and it is very different from most of her predecessors.

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## **Амбивалентный феминизм Веры Полозковой: переосмысление русской поэзии в эпоху Интернета**

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена анализу работ Веры Полозковой, известной представительницы современной российской женской интернет-поэзии, которая завоевала популярность благодаря своему противоречивому положению в российском обществе. Актуальность работы обусловлена присутствием автору феминизмом как имплицитной формой расширения прав и возможностей, которая передается читателю в ее стихах и предлагает мощную парадигму для понимания русской поэтической культуры в эпоху Интернета.

Материалом для анализа послужили 4 печатных сборника, изданных автором, а также 7 интервью с ее участием. Анализ материала показал, что несмотря на свое дистанцирование от феминизма и любой политической активности, Полозкова стала символом поиска присущего ей феминизма, который предлагает новые образы и парадигмы для изучения женской сущности. В статье также рассматривается становление Полозковой как видного деятеля культуры через контексты женской интернет-поэзии в русской культуре с начала XVIII в. вплоть до наших дней. Описываются главные темы и мотивы интернет-поэзии автора, а также проводится анализ языковых и художественных средств, использованных в работах Полозковой, с учетом классификации элементов поэтики феминистского дискурса автора. Главный вывод, который позволяет сделать выполненное исследование, заключается в том, что в российской литературно-ориентированной культуре интернет-поэзия является одним из лучших способов повлиять на общественное мнение, принимая во внимание социальные противоречия между разными сторонами общества.

**Ключевые слова:** русская поэзия; феминизм; современное российское общество; литературный анализ; интернет-поэзия.