

# M. D. Chulkov's novel "The comely cook or a Dissolute Woman's Progress": Onomatopoeia and mythological implication

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**Abstract.** The meaning of proper names always attracted the scientists of different humanitarian spheres. The researchers of literary texts also paid much attention to the names of characters since special semantics is hidden in such names. In this article we deal with M. D. Chulkov's novel written in the 18th century. Here the linguistic and cultural analysis of the names in the novel "The Comely Cook or A Dissolute Woman's Progress" has been made. The parallels with the Russian folklore tradition help to highlight the mythopoeic implied sense of this work.

## 1 Introduction

Onomastics is a complicated and constantly developing science as it is closely connected with history, cultural science, philology, archeology and semiotics (the works by A. Solomonik and K. Levi-Strauss [1]). "The ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman scientists also paid attention to proper names" [2]. So, it is complicated to present in one article the whole list of the works dealt with the nature of name giving; as V. D. Bondaletov fairly notes, a proper name may be the subject of different sciences studies [2]. But in our work this will be the main element of both linguistic research and literary analysis.

In some cultures a proper name is so important that it is turned into an index [2]. Each of the peoples can have its own set of onomastic units in a certain period of development. So that, the period of the 18th century was firstly characterized by foreign influence penetrating to all spheres of people's activity and, secondly, names were given not incidentally. The characterological use of proper names in Russian literature has a long tradition and N. A. Dobrolyubov paid attention to it back in the 18th century [25]. A name may be modern or "outdated" but "not each modern name is convenient for its bearer" [2]. M. D. Chulkov gives the central characters of his novel mainly the foreign names and in the French manner. Certainly, this may be due to French trends of that time however one should not forget that something "aesthetic and social can be combined in names" [2]. For these reasons we'll take here the literary period during which this work was created.

## 2 Materials and Methods

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In the 1760-80s, an active democratization of fiction was observed. The songbooks by Novikov, Chulkov and Dmitriev were published which kept in touch with folk culture. This is most clearly expressed in the works by Chulkov, namely in his "picaresque" novel "The Comely Cook" where the common tendency of that time - giving "national spirit" to literature, is manifested [1, p. 87].

Chulkov showed himself on different sides in his literary field. On the one hand, he is known for his songbook, though Chulkov himself "did not write down the songs but used a number of manuscript collections" [14, p. 220], as I.N. Rozanov noted. This Rozanov's remark is very important as it confirms once again Chulkov's good awareness of Russian songs and traditions, and due to this we can clearly see the division into bookish and oral lyrics, prose and folk songs in his collection. On the other hand, he proved himself as a talented prose writer. The central character of his novel "The Comely Cook" is a woman, Martona by name, with an individual temper specially created by the author. While analyzing this work, the researchers note the national peculiarities of the image and pay attention to the heroine's speech and the author's use of proverbs [7, p. 605] that indicates folklorism of the novel. But folklorism is "external" in this analysis [7, p. 605]. In this work we mainly find the description of Martona's everyday life, that does not fully reveal the heroine's inner world: "While creating the image of his heroine which is not a single-lined, Chulkov, being far from idealizing her, makes a reader to think that this not Martona's guilt but circumstances forced her to lead such way of life" [19]. However, versatility and complexity of the image are caused not only by external circumstances referring a reader to traditions of an adventurous and picaresque novel but also to deep rooted mythological and folkloric tradition. It is also interesting and, in our opinion, not incidental that Chulkov's hero-picaro (an adventurer) is a woman.

Almost in any archaic mythology and in cosmogonic myths we can see that the main role was assigned to the feminine demiurgic principle. The German mythologist Walter Otto noted quite exactly that the sacred maternal principle ran through all human existence [6, p. 103]. In Chulkov's novel Martona is deprived of this "right" to reign, she does not seem to have her own female state (earlier there were the female states [13, p. 403]). From the cosmogonic point of view, Martona loses her high female dignity but other side of a woman, her outer beauty, manifests itself brightly: "I was a desired woman in this town <...>" [24, p. 185]. This reveals her essence as the earthly Aphrodite. It is not incidentally that we meet Venus of Earth and Venus of Heaven in Greco-Roman complex (Aphrodite symbolizes "Eros" in Platon's works in various manifestations including vulgar and earthly one [15, p. 148]). We can easily find such a "manifestation" of the goddess, beautiful but insidious, capable to make a deal with people and resort to cunning, in ancient mythology, namely the myth about the deal of Aphrodite and Paris: "Aphrodite promised him that the finest of all mortal women will be his wife <...>" [9, p. 32]. Martona calls one of her first "love" dates as a deal: "Our first date was a deal and we did not say anything after conclusion of the contract ..." (186). There will be many such "deals" in her life for which she will receive various expensive gifts: a gold snuff-box, jewelry, dresses and, finally, just money. "After he went out, not so much Venus was so pleased with the apple given to her as I admired the snuff-box given to me" (186). Martona often failed, this is revealed by one good proverb chosen by Chulkov: "The bear is not right that he has eaten the cow and the cow is also not right that she has come to the forest" (188). A cow and a bear were both one of the ancient female totems. Artemis is one of the Great Goddess's names; a she-bear was "dedicated to her; and in Athens during Artemis Bravronia Holiday two girls of ten and five years old dressed in saffron-yellow clothes in honor of the moon, impersonated the sacred she-bears" [4, p. 226]. And the Goddess Hera was presented with the sacred cow [20, p. 29]. But in this very text the proverb reveals the following meaning: a woman

“exterminates” herself and refuses from her divine essence, from motherhood. Martona cannot develop the space; the chaos is created around her.

The great female deity always combines several beginnings in herself; she is ambivalent in nature [22, p. 7]. Martona herself understands quite well the duality of her female nature: “I always keep to such opinion that everything in the world is not permanent <...> and then how can a woman, born for changes, love one man till the end of her life” (191). After the marriage, although a false one, the heroine’s life greatly changes. The wedding fails, the woman is deceived but at the same time she seems to be *reborn* in a new quality. Wedding and burial rites have a genetic affinity [8]. Marriage and burial, love and death: all these have an identical analogy for all Slavic peoples” [8, p. 34]. This nature of *duality* [23] is embedded in the female archetype and certainly it also manifests itself in Martona.

After the failed marriage, we see death of the lieutenant colonel, one of Martona's sweethearts. The central heroine is in search and again becomes “a wanderer” but she cannot get out of the state of liminality [21, p. 169]. She herself, drawing a parallel between volatility of nature and inconstancy of a woman, notes that her beautiful body became a burden upon her soul. Besides, to reveal such problem of disharmony between a body and a spirit, it is necessary to turn directly to the name [26, p. 115] of the central character which is, as Shklovsky notes, though conditionally but possesses high *semantic tension*.

A name “forms a body”, it can characterize it [23, p. 25]. The name of Martona implicates a paradox of folk culture, notably the joking culture. Certainly, the text itself contains “a laughable and contagious” beginning which manifests itself at all levels of this novel. The moment with the heroes’ changing clothes takes its roots from the folk humor culture and refers us to a various kind of *travesty*. The theater characters constantly *change their clothes* [17, pp. 76-81], their speech is rich in oxymoron and their names are not simple. So, in one of the versions of the drama “Tsar Maximilian” one can meet the following oxymoron:

I don’t wish to take this bride.  
Her nose is like an onion  
and like a button are her eyes [17, p. 85].

The feature of this drama is a mixture of comic and tragic which is also characteristic for Chulkov's novel: “My dearest, is it possible for me to be unfaithful to you at the very beginning of my passionate love” (191). This cunning Martona says to her “lover” and then scornfully calls him the old man. Of course, it sounds comic in her mouth but this turns into the real tragedy for the lieutenant-colonel and finally leads to his death. On the one hand, the woman's name is similar to the name of Matryona, a common people name. If we take “The Register of Ladies and Beautiful Maidens”, we will see that the name of Matryona is used in the following context: “Matryona is a girl for going for a walk with bonny lads” [23, p. 36]. However, the author does not give his heroine such a name; he takes another name which implies something more.

The symbol of the higher being, the Great Goddess, can be hidden in the name of Martona, the integral part of which is *Mart* (March in Russian). March is a month of Artemis [16, p. 296]; and the third tree in the Alphabet of trees (an ash-tree (iundius), a leading tree), is dedicated to it. It was under this tree that the Triple Goddess held her court [4, p. 213]. This tree was depicted with five branches. If we compare the branches with fingers of a hand, [4, p. 249] then we can see the following: a symbol of an ash-tree is located on the little finger which is ruled by Mercury as a guide of the souls of the dead. Martona says of her arrival as follows: “According to the calendar, I arrived in Moscow on Wednesday and we signify this day by the ancient pagan God Mercury” (188). Noting the patronage of Mercury, the heroine knows well the Russian traditions and believes in them.

Beside, March was considered as a time when bears emerged from hibernation. The Greeks are known for bear holidays, called “komoedia” which served as the basis for future comedy.” [16] We can meet this combination of letters, the first letters Mar, in other cultures where it is also associated with the higher beginning: “The word Maria which is commonly met together with Allah and translated as “the Lord”, derived from the root ‘mar’- the initial upward principle that shines lighting and warming all things” [12]. From all the above, we can make the following conclusion: the name of the central character is given not by chance, it is given as it were “for the future” for her to be able to correspond it and be in balance with it, having overcome her ambivalent nature.

With the course of time and certain circumstances, Martona's spiritual level becomes higher; she meets true love but this takes some time. According to mythological ideas, the Muse, the Triple Goddess, had several singers of love, her adorers who entered the agon, a holly struggle for the right to be with her. Martona also has several admirers but finally only one of them can stay with her. The rest two of them, Ahal and Svidal, fought for her heart, Ahal passes “initiation” and Svidal “fictitiously dies” for Akhal. “The central part of the ceremony had the form of mortification and resurrection of the initiate who acquired magical power in such a way<...> The initiate did not kill himself but the other fictitiously died for him” [13, p. 186.] However, Ahal has already performed his first “rebirth” when he agreed to put on a woman's dress. The travesty motive becomes one of important motives of the whole novel. Akhal puts on a woman's dress in order to achieve his goal - to be with Martona; but in this very moment he really connected with sacral knowledge and eidology of the female kingdom. “The hero's changing clothes and exchanging clothes with a beggar, etc. found in folklore is an especial case of appearance change associated with being in a different world,” V.Y. Propp fairly notes. In our case, Akhal puts on a woman's dress and turns into a woman. “However Martona fails once again: Ahal leaves her and the heroine finds herself in the critical situation; she went to jail but after such severe trials she obtains new qualities since the prison symbolizes some kind of a barrier - *a threshold*. “It is enough to motivate the crossing by search for a bride, some curiosity, firebird, etc.,” and the end of a fairytale is the following: a bride is found” [13, p. 286]. Martona is also found; she was found by Svidal. There happens a turning point in her life; she seems that she meets true love in the image of Svidal.

But, as it was noted earlier, Ahal becomes the initiate. Firstly, he touches secret knowledge for the first time after putting on a woman's clothes. Secondly, the duel is also *a rite of initiation* as a result of which Svidal dies for him. Svidal receives all the privileges from Martona; he stays with her and they are happy. But being with Svidal, the heroine continues to lead the previous way of life: “we were idle persons ...” (202). Moreover, they both are caught up in a circle of the same vicious people: “I treated the hostess very gently and without any excessive courtesy since we had one and the same occupation.”

An unexpected letter from Akhal is a turning point in Martona's fate. Her lover dies and leaves his house and all his possessions to Martona. Since that time, the central heroine starts to live a new life. It would seem that Akhal's death is a tragedy but the woman is reborn only through such sacrifice and loss. Martona gives up her former life and finally, which is the most important, acquires the house: “Here is the proof of title to this homestead <...>, it is written in your name, and here is my will” (203). Here the house is as Cosmos, an organized space which the heroine always subconsciously strived at: “I heard, madam,”- he said, “that you are looking for such a place; then if you wish, please stay at my house ...” (190). She did not get accustomed at the lieutenant-colonel's house since this house was “alien”. The house given her by Akhal symbolizes a new state, the “cosmic space” [27, p. 31]. According to such a gesture, it becomes clear why it is this very young man who sincerely loves Martona and becomes *the initiate*: “Having heard these words, I

could not restrain myself from crying ...” (203). There comes catharsis, the spiritual purification.

### 3 Results and Discussion

The central heroine passes through *three hypostases*. The triplicity is characteristic for sacred world. Its model is arranged as the underworld, the terrestrial space and the heavens. And the Triple Goddess corresponded to these spaces: “The Goddess of Heaven, Earth and Underworld” [4, p. 497]. At first, Martona felt tempted to the things - jewelry, dresses and money: “At the feast I was going to mass and dressed up as beautifully as it came to my head <...>” (190), - that is to all things of this life. Afterwards, when she possesses all these things, she admires herself and feels love for herself: “My face has gotten the former beauty and my body has become white and tender as before” (196). Having met a genuine love, she, if does not refuse from the world of things, but at least “grew cool” towards it: “Akhal’s bad act against me was completely left my memory and only his benefactions were alive in my mind” (202).

M. D. Chulkov depicts not just a woman who found herself in difficult situation; he shows dynamics of the image behind which a personality is hidden. The author shows Martona’s spiritual growth, sometimes setting her on the right path. And it is not incidentally that the central character of this “picaresque” novel is a woman. In this case, there is a kind of productive *dispute* with European tradition, namely French comedy [7, p. 605], since we can find such a “picaresque and thievish ideal” in Russian fairy tales and folklore which Chulkov knew very well.

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