

Specific Features of Depiction in “Village Prose” (Based on the Works of V. Rasputin and T. Qayipbergenov)

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the novella Farewell to Matyora by the prominent Russian writer Valentin Rasputin and the novel The Pupil of the Eye by the renowned Karakalpak writer Tolepbergen Qayipbergenov. Both works represent significant benchmarks within the genre of “rural prose” (village prose), jointly addressing a critical intersection of ecological, socio-cultural, and ethical dilemmas. Central to both narratives is the profound tragedy of environmental catastrophe caused by aggressive and unbridled technocratic developments impacting traditional rural environments. The study thoroughly examines key themes such as human responsibility, moral duty, historical memory, and spiritual conscience toward future generations. Furthermore, this research identifies typological similarities and culturally distinct variations in the artistic depiction of environmental ruin, while analyzing the literary devices and character portrayals utilized by both authors to convey these philosophical and humanistic issues.

Keywords: Rural prose, environmental issues, characterization, nature, technocrats, conscience, soul, requiem, journalistic style, comparative literature

INTRODUCTION

Tolepbergen Qayipbergenov (1929-2010), a People’s Writer of Karakalpakstan and Hero of Uzbekistan, occupies a prominent

place in the history of 20th-century Turkic and Eurasian literature. Leaving behind an extensive literary heritage of nearly a hundred works, he consistently focused on the inner life of human society. Reflecting on his monumental narrative *Karakalpak-Name*, the author emphasized: "I consider my novel 'Karakalpak-Name' to be relevant, thought-provoking, and highly contemporary, because I am convinced that the most pressing and acute of today's problems are moral and spiritual ones" [1].

Indeed, ethical concerns, the preservation of historical memory, and spiritual integrity permeate virtually every stage of Qayipbergenov's creative evolution.

In late 20th-century literature, these moral imperatives bound writers across different national traditions together – most notably within the phenomenon of "rural prose" (*derevenskaya proza*). During this period, the rapid pace of technological expansion often outstripped ethical reflection, turning local environmental changes into profound cultural and human crises. Russian prose, particularly through the works of Valentin Rasputin, addressed this clash by contrasting technocratic pragmatism with human conscience and ancestral roots.

Examining Qayipbergenov's literary legacy through a comparative lens with Rasputin's prose opens up important avenues for modern comparative literature. While both writers emerged from distinct national, geographic, and cultural backgrounds, they arrived at strikingly similar artistic conclusions regarding the cost of industrial progress.

Accordingly, this study centers on a comparative analysis of two defining works of this ideological vector: Valentin Rasputin's novella *Farewell to Matyora* and Tolepbergen Qayipbergenov's novel *The Pupil of the Eye*. By juxtaposing these texts, we aim to examine how two different literary traditions artistically processed the shared trauma of ecological destruction and the erosion of traditional moral values.

The subject of this study is a comparison of V. Rasputin's novella *Farewell to Matyora* with T. Qayipbergenov's novel *The Pupil of the Eye*.

METHODS

To achieve the objective of this study, a comprehensive methodological framework rooted in comparative literary studies is employed. The primary approaches include the comparative-historical and historical-typological methods, which allow for an in-depth examination of common motifs, thematic structures, and ideational parallels between the works of V. Rasputin & T. Qayipbergenov. Additionally, structural-semantic analysis and hermeneutic textual interpretation are applied to analyze character systems, narrative techniques, and the figurative representation of ecological themes within their broader socio-cultural contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The works of the Karakalpak writer T. Qayipbergenov have been the subject of research by many domestic scholars, such as Zh. Narymbetov, A. Kozhykbaev, K. Allambergenov, P. Nurzhanov, Z. Bekbergenova, M. Bekbergenova, N. Orymbetova, and others. For example, in K. Allambergenov's studies, the characters of the main protagonists of the novel *The Pupil of the Eye* – Zhaksylyk Davletov and Yerzhan Serzhanov are examined, and it is noted: "These two characters represent an innovation in Karakalpak prose of recent years. Through these characters, the author was able to artistically depict themes previously unseen in our literature: negative social phenomena such as favoritism, fraud, deviation from democratic principles, and one-sidedness in economic management" [2: 94], while P. Nurzhanov's works examine the writer's skill in creating conflict using the novel *The Pupil of the Eye* as an example. The scholar notes that "In T. Qayipbergenova's novel *The Pupil of the Eye*, conflict arises and develops in various ways: based on the conflict between the main character – the state farm director Zhaksylyk Davletov and the former director Yerzhan Serzhanov regarding the management of economic affairs, attitudes toward the environment and water resources, and people's outlooks on life" [3: 75].

It is gratifying to note that the works of the Karakalpak writer T. Qayipbergenov are discussed in studies by Russian scholars such as M. Lomunov and E. Kubel, and that his works have also been translated into Russian language [4: 21].

ANALYSIS

The novella *Farewell to Matyora* was published in 1976, and the novel *The Pupil of the Eye* appeared in 1984.

In V. Rasputin's novella *Farewell to Matyora*, the village is slated for demolition and the island for flooding due to the construction of a new hydroelectric power plant, while in T. Qayipbergenov's novel *The Pupil of the Eye*, the Amudarya river and the Aral Sea are drying up due to the irrational use of water resources for irrigating cotton fields.

V. Rasputin and T. Qayipbergenov, writing almost simultaneously but drawing on different geographical settings (Siberia and the Aral Sea region), sounded the alarm that technological progress destroys not only nature but also the human soul. As noted by P. Nurzhanov:

In the novel, the issue of ecology is examined in inseparable unity with issues of ethics, conscience, and morality. T. Qayipbergenov sees the disruption of nature's harmony in the moral impoverishment of humanity. Therefore, before it is too late, he must rectify the situation that has arisen. Everything depends on the individual on his conscience, integrity, justice, and moral perfection. [3: 55]

Throughout the novel, T. Qayipbergenov asserts the idea that we must cherish morality, humanity, and the harmony of nature as the apple of our eye. "The issues raised in the novel are resolved through clashes between conflicting characters and the successful resolution of various conflicts" [8:45].

Thus, in both works, an ecological catastrophe serves as the driving force of the plot, and destructive human interference with nature lies at the heart of the texts; in Rasputin's work, this is the flooding of the centuries-old village of Matyora for the sake of building a massive hydroelectric power plant. In

Qayipbergenov's work, it is the drying up of the Aral Sea and the demise of the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers due to the thoughtless diversion of water to cotton fields.

Conflicts between generations and worldviews are reflected in these works of fiction: V. Rasputin and T. Qayipbergenov contrast the "elders" with the "young." The elders, as bearers of traditions and folk wisdom, regard their native land and water as sacred; the older generation has a special reverence for human memory for example, in Rasputin's work, old women defend the graves of their relatives and drive away workers: "The cemetery lay beyond the village along the road to the mill, on a dry, sandy hill, amid birches and pines, from where one could see the Angara River and its banks stretching far into the distance.

Leading the way, leaning forward sharply and stretching out her arms as if picking something, was Darya, her lips tightly pursed, revealing her toothless mouth; Nastasia struggled to keep up behind her: she was short of breath, and, gasping for air, she often nodded her head. Behind them, Sima scurried along, holding the little boy by the hand. Bogodul, who had been stirring up trouble in the village, had fallen behind, and the old women burst into the cemetery alone.

"Get out of here, you evil spirit!" Daria screamed, gasping with fear and rage, and swung her stick again. The man jumped back. "Get out! I'm talking to you!" Daria lunged at the man. He backed away, stunned by her terrifying, defiant expression. "Get out of here right now, you wretched soul! Desecrating graves..." Daria howled. "Did you bury them here? Are your father and mother buried here?" Are your children buried here? You, you wretch, never had a father or mother. You're not human. What kind of person would have the nerve?! She glanced at the crosses and small tables that had been gathered and tossed about haphazardly, and howled even more sickeningly. O-o-o! Strike him down right here, Lord, don't spare him. Don't spare him! Nooo," she lunged at the man again. "You won't get away from here like this. You'll answer for this. You'll answer before the whole world." "Get off me, old woman!" the man roared. "You'll answer. I was ordered to do this, so I'm doing it. I don't need your dead people." An hour later, all four sailed away from Matyora.

And the old women crawled around the cemetery until late at night, sticking the crosses back in place and setting up little tables [7: 34], and at T. Qayipbergenov's house, the first request from old man Khudaybergen when they were holding a meeting regarding the appointment of Davletov as director of the "Zhanalyk" state farm the old man's request was strange:

We should fence off the cemetery on the southern side of the aul. The aul's livestock will trample the graves of our ancestors. Goats and sheep they never leave that place at all. I'm sure the souls of the dead are groaning. After all, they were once just like us; they thought about their affairs, they thought about us. But it turns out we don't think about them. We'll all have to lie down there, sooner or later. Where can you go? But when you imagine the hooves of cows and sheep trampling your grave, dying becomes unbearable... [8: 27]

As can be seen from the excerpts, village elders honor the memory of the dead and remember those who once lived among them. The authors thereby warn that a person who forgets their roots becomes like a "mankurt." When comparing T. Qayipbergenov's novel *The Pupil of the Eye* and V. Rasputin's novella *Farewell to Matyora*, distinct typological pairs of characters can be identified; in this way, the authors depict the clash between the traditional world and the advancing technocratic era. In V. Rasputin's work, the guardians of the land and traditions are Daria Pinigina, who perceives the flooding of the island as a personal sin against her ancestors; in T. Qayipbergenov's work, they are the elders Khudaybergen and Nurzhan, for whom the waters of the Amu Darya, the Aral Sea, and the land are not merely abstract resources, but living entities. Like Daria, they enter into a moral conflict with the authorities, believing that the thoughtless destruction of rivers for the sake of fulfilling a "plan" is a crime that robs their people of a future.

In the works, characters such as Vorontsov and Secretary Nazhimov, as well as the former director of the state farm, Yerzhan Serzhanovas representatives of the state primarily thought in terms of dry figures, plans, and metrics. Vorontsov the head of the project to flood Matyorasees the village of as nothing more than a temporary mark on a map, merely a "flood zone"; he

has absolutely no spiritual connection to the land. District Committee Secretary Nazhimov and Yerzhan Serzhanov are ready to squeeze everything out of nature for the sake of plans and reports. For example, neither Nazhimov nor Serzhanov give any thought to the fact that excessive water use is destroying the ecosystem. All these characters are technocratic destroyers, deaf to the voice of reason and the traditions of their ancestors.

In these works, characters such as Pavel Pinigin and Zhaksylyk Davletov reflect the inner conflict of a generation caught between filial duty and the demands of a new reality. They can be described as people “caught between two fires.”

Pavel Pinigin is Daria's son. He understands his mother's tragedy and loves Matyora, but as a modern man, he acknowledges the inevitability of building the hydroelectric plant. Pavel is torn between sympathy for the old world and submission to progress. Davletov, the new director of the state farm, is a man caught in the epicenter of administrative absurdity. He sees the fictitious nature of orders “from above” (when the cotton harvest is artificially held back for the sake of impressive reports), but is forced to maneuver within the system, trying to preserve what remains of his humanity and save the farm. The works feature a number of such characters who have completely lost their sense of homeland and respect for their ancestors. In *Farewell to Matyora*, Petrukha (Nikita Zotov) is an outcast who burns down his own hut without regret in order to receive monetary compensation from the state. In *The Apple of the Eye*, some of the local residents and petty officials, who withhold the harvest at Serzhanov's behest, are willing to silently watch the ecological destruction of their region for the sake of personal gain. The authors offer a grim diagnosis for Petrukha's greed and the passivity of the indifferent people of the aul: “a dormant conscience.”

Thus, the systems of characters in the works are constructed as mirror images of one another. Using these pairs of counterparts, V. Rasputin and T. Qayipbergenov have created a universal model of how administrative pressure divides society, forcing everyone to choose between the spiritual “pupil of the eye” and material gain.

In both works, natural phenomena cease to be mere backdrops. They become a powerful psychological parallel that directly conveys the characters' inner chaos, blindness, or tragedy. In *Farewell to Matyora*, V. Rasputin uses the image of thick fog, which symbolizes spiritual blindness and a descent into oblivion, while T. Qayipbergenov, in *The Pupil of the Eye*, employs the image of suffocating dust storms, which symbolize a "dormant conscience" and the fury of nature.

In V. Rasputin's work, the fog envelops Matyora at the end of the novella, just as preparations to flood the island are finalized. This is not merely a natural phenomenon, but a metaphor for the loss of bearings and the fading of the world.

Officials (Vorontsov) and reapers, who have come to burn and clear the island, wander through the fog. They cannot see where they are going, lose their way, and are unable to find Matyora. Through the fog, V. Rasputin reveals their absolute inner blindness: by destroying a centuries-old way of life, these people do not understand what they are doing and lose their humanity.

For the old women remaining on the island, the fog becomes a shroud. It cuts Matyora off from the rest of the world, plunging the heroines into a state outside of time. Deep down, Daria and her friends have already come to terms with the inevitable. The fog conveys their detachment, deep sorrow, and readiness to depart along with the island. Their home dissolves into the haze, symbolizing the demise of an entire civilization.

In T. Qayipbergenov's work, the action takes place in the drying-up Priaralie region, where the drying up of the Amu Darya gives rise to terrifying salt flats and dust storms. Here, the storm is an active, suffocating evil that reflects a crisis within society.

The dust storm in the novel literally blinds the characters, which directly echoes the metaphor of the title, *The Pupil of the Eye* (a damaged, blinded eye). The storm conveys the state of fear, panic, and helplessness experienced by the new director of the, Davletov, and the ordinary residents of Zhanalyk in the face of the looming catastrophe. The dust on their teeth and in the air symbolizes the filth of Serzhanov's and the officials' careerist intrigues, which suffocates all life in the aul.

T. Qayipbergenov uses the fury of the storm to show nature's own rebellion against human indifference. While the residents remain passive ("a strange people"), nature literally screams of danger. The storm lays bare hidden conflicts: in moments of natural chaos, masks are cast aside; careerists think only of saving their own skins and the numbers in their reports, while honest people keenly feel their guilt toward the scorched earth.

Both authors masterfully use climate and landscape to prove that when a person destroys the harmony around them, their inner world inevitably drowns either in the thick fog of oblivion or in the suffocating dust of their own blindness.

The final scenes of V. Rasputin's *Farewell to Matyora* and T. Kayipbergenov's *The Pupils of the Eye* vividly demonstrate the difference in the authors' literary approaches to addressing the same tragedy. While both authors share a common awareness of the scale of the catastrophe, V. Rasputin concludes his book with a mystical and tragic requiem, whereas T. Kayipbergenov ends his with a sharp, journalistic, and civic appeal to the reader's conscience. Rasputin's ending is completely immersed in the atmosphere of a local-scale apocalypse. The old women, led by Daria, along with little Kolcha and the cat, remain in the old barracks on the island. Behind them, a motorboat carrying "medics" (destroyers) glides through the thick fog but cannot find Matyora [9: 13].

The island vanishes into the fog. The farewell, mystical wail of the Island's Master, a fantastical creature embodying Matyora's soul can be heard. The motorboat wanders blindly, and the island metaphorically sinks to the bottom even before it is actually submerged. This is a requiem finale. It is imbued with a sense of tragic doom and the inevitability of fate. The old world is dying irrevocably, taking the righteous with it. V. Rasputin offers no recipes for salvation; he simply notes the demise of the spiritual Atlantis of the Russian peasantry. The reader experiences catharsis through grief and mourning for what has been lost. T. Qayipbergenov concludes the novel in a completely different way. His ending is devoid of mystical detachment; it sounds the alarm, bringing the reader back from the fictional realm to the harsh reality of the Aral Sea region [10: 22].

The novel concludes at the height of the ecological and moral crisis at the “Zhanalyk” state farm. Instead of submission to the forces of nature, the author brings the awakening of the characters’ consciousness to the forefront. Through the image of drying-up rivers and the encroaching desert, the author addresses the audience directly—society, officials, and humanity.

T. Qayipbergenov employs an open, strident, and journalistic conclusion. He does not mourn his homeland, but cries out that the catastrophe is still unfolding, and that it can and must be stopped. The title *The Pupil of the Eye* resonates in the finale like an ultimatum: if we do not begin to protect nature and our honor right now, we will be blinded forever. The writer acts not merely as a chronicler of misfortune, but as an orator appealing to the “slumbering conscience” of his contemporaries.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, V. Rasputin bids farewell to the past, realizing that Matyora can no longer be saved—the wheel of progress has run over her world. T. Qayipbergenov, on the other hand, writes about the present and the future: the Aral Sea and the Amu Darya are dying before the reader’s eyes, so his conclusion is not an epitaph but an ecological and moral manifesto. He leaves the ending open, placing the responsibility for saving the “apple of the eye” on the shoulders of each of us.

V. Rasputin’s *Farewell to Matyora* and T. Qayipbergenov’s *The Pupil of the Eye* had a colossal influence on the formation of environmental consciousness in the USSR at the end of the 20th century, effectively transforming literature into the primary instrument of civil protest. Amid strict state censorship, it was precisely these works of fiction that were the first to openly address the catastrophic consequences of technocratic exploitation of nature. *Farewell to Matyora* and *The Pupil of the Eye* served as the public conscience of their time. They shifted the conversation about ecology from dry scientific and technical reports to the realm of universal human suffering. These books taught an entire generation to view nature not as a free source of raw materials, but as a unique living heritage that for the sake of

future generations' survival must be protected as the apple of one's eye.

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