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### “Without Me” by Egor Letov: Text and Context

“Sin mí” por Egor Letov: texto y contexto

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#### ABSTRACT

According to the collection of poems, in the poetry of Igor Fedorovich Letov, there was a four-year period (from 1998 to 2001), when not a single poetic text was created. And it was the composition “Without Me” (2002), which became the first written work after a long break and later a part of the album of “Grazhdanskaya oborona” (civil defence) “Dolgaya schastlivaya zhizn” (long happy life) (2004). It was found that this composition fits into the context of Yegor Letov’s entire work. The team of authors considers the so-called “texts of death” in which the theme of death is central.

**Keywords:** “Without me”, Egor Letov, russian rock-poetry, textological commentary.

#### RESUMEN

Según la colección de poemas, en la poesía de Igor Fedorovich Letov hubo un período de cuatro años (de 1998 a 2001), cuando no se creó un solo texto poético. Y fue la composición “Sin mí” (2002), que se convirtió en la primera obra escrita después de un largo descanso, y posteriormente una parte del álbum de “Grazhdanskaya oborona” (defensa civil) “Dolgaya schastlivaya zhizn” (larga vida feliz) (2004). Se descubrió que esta composición encaja en el contexto de toda la obra de Yegor Letov. El equipo de autores considera los llamados “textos de muerte” en los cuales el tema de la muerte es central.

**Palabras clave:** “Sin mí”, Egor Letov, poesía de rock ruso, comentario textológico.

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## INTRODUCTION

The poem "Without Me" by Yegor Letov is dated from September 12, 2002. According to the poet's latest collection of poems (having in mind "Stihi" (Poems) (2011)), it was written after a five-year creative break (dating preceding this poem text "U Menya Ruka Byla..." (I had a hand ...) on October 15 and 17, 1997). However, despite the exact and not time-stretched dating, according to Igor Fedorovich Letov's memoirs, the text was written for a rather long time: "Generally, at first it was the album dissertation "Dolgaya schastlivaya zhizn'" (long happy life) and "Reanimatsiya" (resuscitation) - A.A., T.B., Ju.D., M.V.> emerged on the principle of "Pryg-Skok" (hop-hop) or "Russkoye pole eksperimentov" (Russian field of experiments), as one long, endless song, for example, "Without Me", I composed it for a whole year (Letov: 2016, p.546). The result was a huge conglomerate. Then it began to fall apart into a bunch of fragments that were inside the song with different rhythms" (Koblov: 2020). Unfortunately, we do not have the earliest drafts of this poem (everything that is published refers to late drafts and white autographs). From the above quote, we can draw two conclusions we need:

a) society dilogy (another author's definition is "mini-opera") is single (one can say, indivisible) whole: each composition exists, first of all, in the context of other compositions;

b) the composition "Without Me" is a kind of pretext for other dilogy songs. This thesis, it seems to us, is very promising: a study of the entire body of texts of two albums is likely to reveal the "sledy" (traces) of the composition "Without Me" in many poems - not general motives and images, but the proof of the poem "Without Me" as a source text. However, as we have said, this is still a prospect (Dodge: 2020).

The final version is a song with a "traditional" composition: three verses and a refrain, although the residual polyrhythmic of the original intent remained in both the verses and the refrain. The selected form is also not random. It will be discussed below (Galeeva et al.: 2017, pp.517-525).

We managed to find another commentary on the creation of the poem: "The impetus <to the plan/idea of the text - A.A., T.B., Ju.D., M.V.> was Kuzma proper. I remembered how he once divined on I-Jin. And he had the hexagram 33 - "Begstvo" (hasty retreat). In the original, I wanted to call the song "Heksagramma 33" (hexagram) but decided that it would be completely stupid and pathos" (Letov: 2020). In addition to the disappearance of "stupidity" and "pathos", the name change quite rigidly shifted the semantic accents of the poem: if the original name fixed the motive of running / movement in space and time, then the final version of the title makes the subjective organization of the poem meaning- and structure-forming (Lisina: 1980, pp.153-169).

## METHODS

This article continues the research of a team of authors in the field of studying domestic rock, in particular, studying the features of Yegor Letov's work (Afanasev et al.: 2017, pp.367-374; Afanasev et al.: 2018, pp.15-19). The two main research methods were biographical, which allowed us to create both "real" and textual commentary on the text (Ayupova et al.: 2018, pp.681-684), and structural and semantic, the use of which contributed to the penetration into the figurative and semantic element of the work (Vafina & Zinnatullina: 2015, pp.47-50; Zinnatullina & Khabibullina: 2018, pp.87-94).

## RESULTS

The creative break at the turn of the millennium affected not only Yegor Letov's poetry proper: for seven years it shared the last album "Grazhdanskaya oborona" (civil defence) of the 20th century "Nevynosimaya legkost' bytiya" (the unbearable lightness of being) (1997)) and the first album of 21st century consisting of Letov's works - the first part of the "Dolgaya schastlivaya zhizn'" (long happy life) (2004) (in this case, we

exclude the 2002 remix album "Zvesdopad" (Starfall). Here it is necessary to give a rather voluminous answer by Yegor Letov to the interviewer, containing the author's idea of the concept of the album:

28 compositions, 14 on the album, 28 different points of view on the same situation. The 28 opinions of the same person who was born and walks, dangles between hell and heaven, between heaven and some unprecedented shit. He cannot return back, as it is impossible to be born back, and it is also impossible to go forward, because there are certain laws of evolution, being, etc. That is, this is an overcoming of this situation. This is a state of war. The state of unprecedented passions, sensual, energetic, spiritual, psychological, physiological, a mental nightmare. A kind of war, overcoming being. Absolutely extreme state (Koblov: 2020).

In this self-comment, two thoughts seem important to us: first, here we specify the running motive we have already noted as running not in a straight line and not in a circle, but between - between heaven and earth, heaven and hell, life and death, consciousness and the unconscious. The fact of being in this between becomes fundamental. Secondly, the fixation of the extreme psycho-emotional state of the lyrical subject, which is literally on the verge (on the border, in the borderline state) and the fact of the accent of the lyric subject (28 views of the same person who was born and walks, hangs between hell and paradise, between heaven and some unprecedented shit) (Borisenko: 2016).

The psycho-emotional state of the lyrical subject is primarily due to its sagging in time and space. Letov's thesis about the lyrical subject hanging between heaven and earth, between life and death in this composition has a very vivid expression: it is not clear where the lyrical subject is, - "nad nebom on ili - pod nebom" (above heaven or under heaven) (A. Nepomniachtchi). Such ambivalence of meanings, which will model the artistic world of the text, with its sources can be associated precisely with the interpretation of hexagram 33: hasty retreat is interpreted in both positive and negative sense. It is impossible to establish where the lyrical subject is, and this is a conscious author's attitude: on the one hand, the lyrical subject is somewhere here, and all his thoughts are directed to the future when he will no longer be in this place. On the other hand, the gaze of the lyrical subject can be interpreted as a gaze from somewhere from where he is now and recalls/observes the place where he is no longer there, realizes how life flows there without him (Doyle: 2016, pp.63-85).

## **DISCUSSION**

This position of the lyrical subject is singled out not only at the ideological-semantic level. It is easily detected at the compositional level of the text. We can say for sure that the lyrical subject, if not of all the verses, then definitely of the third one is here: "Bez Menya moya ten', bez Menya-/ posdravleniya ottuda syuda" (without me my shadow, without me - / congratulations from there to here) <our italics - A.A., T.B., Ju.D., M.V.>. Since there is no change in the state and position of the lyrical subject in the third verse compared to the previous two, we can conclude that in other verse his location is also here (Moiseev: 2017, p.240). The chorus after various verses is variable. Variability concerns the adverbial series: in the collection of poems, the earth and the world run away "bez oglyadki" (without looking back), "naveki" (forever) and "otsyuda" (from here). We dare to assume that in this case, the lyrical subject is there, in a place opposite to where he is in the verses. Of course, the interpretation of the location of the lyrical hero may be different, but the fact remains: Yegor Letov declaratively denotes the antinomy "ottuda - otsyuda" (from there - from here) in relation to the position of his subject (Makleeva et al.: 2016, pp.199-202).

The last level that we would like to address in the framework of the article is the title and its relationship with the subsequent text. According to the general performing mood, melodic, some lexical features ("oslik" (donkey), "dozhdik" (rain), finally, according to the existing context of Chinese philosophy, where the situation of leaving has positive connotations, it can be concluded that this song stands out among the compositions of

the dilogy that it does not have a "mental nightmare", "war", etc. However, it seems to us that here we are observing the same effect that takes place in the song "Dolgaya schastlivaya zhizn" (long, happy life): a name taken out of the general context does not allow to understand the content of the song correctly. For such a positive name, one cannot read the irony of the author. And if you connect the author's recognition regarding the writing of the text

The song, and indeed the image, arose after the next visit to the intensive care unit. At some point it seemed that it would happen one day that it would become physically, vitally impossible to take, let us say, substances that can change, expand consciousness, and this, in my opinion, is a necessary component of real rock-and-roll. Now. And if this happens, then what's next? When there are no holidays (Miftakhova et al.: 2018, pp.1118-1121). Then it is a Long Happy Life. To each of us. Forever and ever ... This is one of my darkest songs (Semelyak: 2020); positive connotations will completely disappear. In the composition

### Without Me

The feeling of the tragedy of appearing mainly from connecting the context of the entire album. Leaving the world "here" is understood not as an introduction to eternity, comprehension of oneself, etc., but as the end of being - the earth and the world run away "forever", moreover, as the "DSG" of holidays "here" will also not be - congratulations there will only be "from there to here," congratulations on the fact that perhaps they no longer celebrate here (Wilson & Soblo: 2020).

The borderline situation of the work is also supported by the chronotopic organization of the text. By and large, we can say that the whole song is one huge chronotope "na grani" (on edge), consisting of individual loci and chronos. There is another statement: the whole song (at least all the verses) is built according to one formula - "someone/something / somewhere + without me", in connection with this the hypothetical variability of the first part of the formula is quite high. Thanks to the publications of Yegor Letov's autographs (Avtografy: 2009, p.192), we can trace which options the author worked out at the last stage of working with the text when he thought over the space-time continuum.

### CONCLUSION

Now let us turn to the beginning of the fourth line. In addition to "Ognya" (fire) we have already mentioned, there was the option [tot svet] (the next world) (rhyme to the word from the third line [rasvet] (sunrise) and [potudan] (the name of a river) (in the second draft -[potudat], but this is a clear slip). This is the only word in the composition that has an explicit literary reference - to the story of Andrei Platonov "The River Potudan" (1936). The central symbolic image in the title of the story is perhaps one of the most profound in the writer's work. The river Potudan acts as the border between the world of the living and the dead (it is no coincidence that Lyuba drowned in it and Nikita wanted to drown himself), moreover, a permeable border. Nikita Firsov is very similar to the lyrical subject of the composition "Without Me", there are roll calls at the semantic level (as it seems to us, another promising area for analyzing this summer composition is the consideration of "Potudan" by Andrey Platonov as one of the possible sources of "Without Me" and the whole dilogy: "During the day Nikita began to work in the workshop again, and in the evening he visited Lyuba and spent the winter quietly: he knew that in the spring she would be his wife and from that time on a happy, long life would come") (Platonov: 1937, p177). The rejection of it, is thought, occurred because this image-symbol a) destroys the imaginary simplicity of the poetics of composition, b) cannot be considered a mass listener (cf. it was refusing to name the song "Geksogramma 33" (hexagram 33).

As for the chorus, the drafts presented a relatively stable text. All that remained was the questions in what order to construct the variative adverbs "bez oglyadki" (without looking back), "naveki" (forever), "otsyuda" (from here), "kudato" (somewhere).

Thus, as a result of the study, we examined the main structural features of the composition, identified the main semantic dominants and conducted a small textual analysis, trying to get into Yegor Letov's creative laboratory.

To draw the conclusion, one can say that in three drafts in the first couplet we see two variable places. In the earliest version there is a shaded word, instead of which the word "teper" (now) is inserted. We cannot say with absolute accuracy, but the word "kapel" (drops) is supposedly crossed out (six letters, the initial "ka" and the final "l" do not raise doubts). One can explain the replacement of words by two circumstances at least: firstly, the lack of an exact rhyme with the word "dver" (door) (and in this text almost all rhymes are exact), and secondly, the fact that the adverb of time "teper" (now) declaratively indicates chronos than a noun "Drops" (all words of the first part of the found formula contain either an indication of the place (cassette, door, house), or for time (sunrise, now, a joke with a beard); let it say right away that Yegor Letov's lexeme "kapel" will be in demand in the second couplet).

The poet's creative "metaniya" (jactitation) is interesting between the phrase "kazhdyy den" (every day) and the word "navsegda" (forever) at the end of the last line of the stanza (the last fifth line written by the three-foot anapaest rhythmically stands out against the background of the chorea of the first four lines). "Navsegda" (forever) seems to be more suitable for two reasons: firstly, an important antinomy "teper/ navsegda" (now / forever) is fixed with it, supplementing the antinomy "zdes/ tam" (here / there) we have already commented on, and secondly, "navsegda" (forever) is a synonym for "na vek" (forever), having in this context the semantics of the irreversibility of what is happening / the inevitability of fate.

At the very beginning of the second verse, images and an idiom appear that do not directly characterize the chronotopic continuum with the common semantics "na grani" (on the verge), but they support this continuum associatively. The crust of bread refers to the funeral practice of putting a loaf of bread on a glass (and the funeral practice associatively connects the heavenly space), and the idiom "pal'tsem v nebo" (shot in the dark) loses its figurative meaning here: the finger becomes a "perstom ukazuyushchii" (finger pointing) - denotes the vector of the lyrical subject moving to the sky. In the following lines, the vocabulary characterizing the time (April, January, calendar) is updated again. The words on the fourth line are varied: "kapel" (drops) (as an option we already saw it in the first couplet), "metel" (blizzard) (even in the draft there is "bez meny - kisse!" (without me - kisel), written in a different color to the main text, apparently it was a later find, but it did not enter the final version - it does not fit too much into the chronotopic series being built by the poet. It seems to us that, despite the equivalence of the semantic components, the choice in favour of the words "kapel" is again explained by working with a rhyme (more accurate - [kapel'] (drops) - [aprel'] (April). In addition, in the word "kapel" the semantics of transition are more clearly present (spring as a transition between winter and summer).

Finally, the history and fate of the third couplet, which in its structure is somewhat different from the previous two ones. are the most interesting from the point of view of textology. The first two lines in all three variants are the same (in the first draft, the first word of the second line is crossed out, but most likely it is just a slip of the word - the word "dobry" (kind) from the first line is crossed out). Multiple variability is observed in the third and fourth lines. The third line shows a permutation of the two tokens "siren" (lilac) and "geran" (geranium) (there is also a crossed out "rassvet" (sunrise), but it was already at the very beginning, and the repetition does not seem very appropriate). Our explanation for this phenomenon: Egor Letov wanted to change the type of rhyme here: if two verses have clearly traced exact inner and end rhymes, then there was an option to rhyme the end rhyme of the third line with the inner rhyme of the fourth line. In addition, there was a variant with a dissonant rhyme [geran/ ogon'] in the work. The last remark about the rhyming features: the final phrase "posdravleniya ottuda syuda" (congratulations from there to here) generally remains unrhymed

(by the way, the anapaest is also violated here), which indicates the importance of this statement in the structure of the whole text.

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