

“Я приехала просить милости, а не правосудия”: Masha Mironova and the Magic Tale

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While some argue that Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* may best have been named after Tatiana, critics have grappled with the problem of why the poet's historical novel, *The Captain's Daughter*, is named after the heroine. Since the publication of Cherniaev's monograph in 1897, critics have expressed sharply divergent opinions of Masha Mironova. For the most part, critics have dismissed her as a secondary or insignificant character, a disappointing departure from Pushkin's previous heroines. Indeed, the characters of Petrusha Grinev and Pugachev have received the most critical attention. Pushkin's choice of title, however, induces us to dig deeper to find her significance within the structure of the novel.

When reading the novel, it is impossible to overlook the frequent use of folk sayings, such as “*Dolg platezhom krasen*,” but these features are not representative of the excessive display of local color found in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Such details are absolutely necessary in a tale of simple folks living through a rebellion, led by a peasant tsar. Sometimes such a saying can replace lengthy descriptions and suggest poetic connections of meaning. Viktor Shklovsky, for instance, commented on both Pushkin's laconic style and his use of folk songs and sayings to characterize Masha within the novel.

In his well-known article, “*Ot skazki k romanu*,” I.P. Smirnov convincingly links the structure of the novel with that of the magic tale, describing the importance of the family, magical helpers and tests in Proppian terms. As in other studies of the novel, however, Smirnov mostly focuses on Grinev as the folk hero and Pugachev as his magical helper, claiming that “the female version of the folk plot is noticeably reduced.” I will extend Smirnov's logic to Masha by demonstrating that she, like Grinev, develops by facing three trials, taking into account the fact that the folk heroine's tests and trials often differ from those of the hero. Examining the novel through the folk lens will demonstrate how Masha's maturation parallels Grinev's, revealing the novel as Pushkin's second double *Bildungsroman*.