

Soviet Mythology in Children's Literature

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Abstract

The article dwells upon the mythological and archetypal nature of the central topics of Soviet children's literature. The mechanism of merging heterogeneous symbolic elements and connecting the incompatible is revealed with the help of active reference to literary texts, which is a clear sign of mythologism. The synthetic nature of mythologemes in children's literature is associated with the combined influence on the writer; the idea and its embodiment of the Slavic folklore tradition, the foreign literary tradition of the adventure novel and Soviet ideology (on the one hand, neo-mythological in its nature, on the other hand, romanticizing characters, thirdly, describing so-called "religious atheism"). Soviet mythologism is considered in the context of the broader universal concept of neomythologism.

Keywords: Neo-mythologism, Soviet literature, ideology, cultural ideal.

1. Introduction

Historical periods of deep changes in the sociocultural context of civilization, for example, those that occurred at the beginning of the last century, lead to axiological uncertainty and diffuseness of mass cultural consciousness, the consequence of which is a return to ancient myths and archetypes, their rapid adaptation to the dramatically changed values of the "new" culture, subsequent idealization and sacralization of their archaic content (Panova, 2022; Saenko, 2022: 29). Direct appeal to the contrastingly demarcated content of the archaic myth, to its expressed Manichaeism, and its subsequent adaptation to new cultural conditions led to the resuscitation of equally archaic systems of social and governmental administration, to the dictatorship of the values of the dominant ideology and, finally, to the tyranny that this newly mythologized ideology served (Balina, 2012: 44). It is in this way and for the reasons stated above that the Soviet neo-myth also arises and is consolidated in the new culture of the young Republic of Soviets, the content of which includes its "gods", its heroes, its victims, its struggle, its own Manichaeism, etc.

2. Theoretical framework

Among the theoretical attitudes that lay the foundation for this work are introverted and extroverted attitudes. In the first case, we are talking about a situation where a work of art

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is directly related to the author's intention through his creation to carry out one or another impact on the public, achieving a specific result. The second is about a situation in which the author has no control over his work. Being uncontrollable by the author's intention, such work serves as a mouthpiece for his inner self, an exponent of his innermost nature, which sometimes allows the creator to talk about the things that he would rather remain unspoken of about outside this situation. Here we should mention the attitude according to which "all the most effective ideals are always more or less frank versions of the archetype" (Jung, 1992: 118). In our work, we proceed from the concept according to which changes in ideological culture and neomythologism of literary texts are in constant mutual influence: "...mythological consciousness creates the image of a protector and in this image there is an immanent image of the threat from which a little person wants to find a protector. In conclusion, when viewer forget the current heroes and love others, fundamentally others, this will mean that tectonic shifts have occurred again in the public consciousness and new times come" (Akim et al., 2019: 1221).

3. Methodology

The methodology of this research consists of general scientific methods (methods of analogy and integration), general philosophical ones (method of hermeneutics, method of interpretation, method of dialectics of part and whole) and methods of cultural studies (biographical method). The authors of the article deal with the issues of re-mythologization in Russian literature, especially noting the archetypal nature of the images of characters from different historical periods. This means that the main method was the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, who affirmed the mythological nature of the collective unconscious mind. We rely on the ideas by the researcher E.V. Bloshenko: "The creative mythology of the Soviet state used actively references to the ancestral experience and memory of people. Many phenomena of totalitarian symbolism were based on rituals of Christian and pagan times. There was an appeal to archetypes" (Bloshenko, 2012: 10).

4. Discussion

The purposeful mythologization of the sphere of a new culture becomes the main mechanism for the acceptance and subsequent internalization by mass consciousness of the content of the neomyth, which results in the education of a generation of persistent and devoted fighters who are ready to give their own lives for the triumph of new ideals, which the "correctly" educated personality of such a fighter begins to consider as his own (Nekrasova, 2002: 183). The center of this targeted influence is childhood and the teenage part of society.

One of the most urgent social problems for the young Republic of Soviets remained the issue of child homelessness. It turned out as a result of the revolution, the Civil War, mass migration and economic devastation. The Bolshevik leadership was fully aware that in the absence of proper targeted actions towards street children, the entire society would most likely face spontaneous and mass criminalization in the future. In order to prevent this, the energy of childhood and youth should have been reoriented, and its previously spontaneous emissions had to be canalized and used in an organized manner for the benefit of "socialist construction" (Arzamastseva, 2023). The social attractiveness of new ideas was also based on promises of stability through the unity of all the layers of society, turning it into a monolith, where everyone, young and old, was able to repel any enemy and in the process of this struggle could show readiness to sacrifice their own lives in the name of the triumph of future social ideals (Kyrchanoff, 2021). Childhood and youth of the Soviet Republic were in dire need of such examples and models, integrated into "adult" life mainly according to models of analogization, that is, copying adults. The

main means of creating such samples, subsequent transmission and education of generations of future “fighters” was intended to become new Soviet children's literature (Children's literature of the 20-30s, 2023).

Neo-myth, represented by literary means, obviously needed new characters, “understandable” and close to the perception and consciousness of young readers, since in this way a myth occupied its constitutive position in relation not only to literature, but also to the culture being formed and to art in general. The content of the neomyth, thereby, became capable of fulfilling and carrying out the most important ideological functions (Vagizova, 2021; Pogosyan, 2021). It was adapted through literary creativity to the new realities of a socialist construction and the defense of the fatherland from external enemies. The content of the accurately transformed and newly formed neomyth for the mass consciousness became the basis and means of shifting personal responsibility for one's own future on officially recognized ways of achieving a single social ideal. On purpose, we would like to emphasize that the party leaders responsible for the ideological education of the younger generation of the Soviet country were not pioneers in this regard. In fact, previously such an experience was offered to the mass consciousness by religion, integrating the thinking and behavior of the individual into the system of religious canons and the corresponding culture, based on the opposition of virtue and sin (Dimke, 2013: 95-96).

In the conditions of domestic sociocultural reality, these processes were definitely stimulated and intensified by two additional factors – the presence of a rich substantive, figurative and symbolic base in the form of historical ancient Russian mythology, as well as the pliability and receptivity of mass consciousness to new mythological constructions offered to it from the outside. The presence of a significant number of simple explanatory schemes in the content of the new Soviet myth, which do not require the mass subject to have any special abilities for rationalization, criticism and evaluation – all this made it extremely suitable precisely for transmitting its content to the perception and consciousness of the child reader – and that is why the ideological and propaganda tasks set for the creators of children's literature by the party and state leadership were solved consistently, effectively and successfully (Rudova, 2014: 99).

In addition, unnoticed by this mass perception, the ancient mythological content, previously “ideologically” ambivalent, began to be purposefully given an increasingly prominent ideological coloring, as a result of which the palette of symbols and characters offered by the Soviet neomyth to the child reader expanded significantly and diversely, while the general influence of neomyth, which had undergone an ideological transformation, on literature, culture, and art in the USSR was especially pronounced and noticeable. As a result, the space of children's literature has been enriched with many initially mythological plots, transformed by Soviet children's writers “to suit the topic of the day” – that is, to solve the most pressing and urgent ideological and propaganda tasks.

The example of this we may observe in the literary work of the recognized leader of this trend, A. Gaidar, the plots of whose literary works are filled with mythological constructs, references, connotations, linked together by the archetype of a fighter “for a bright future” – that is, a warrior of the Red Army (and to some extent as a collective image of such fighters) – the cult of devotion and loyalty to which literally interlaced almost all forms of “children's” and “adult” social reality in the works of this writer – “The Tale of Malchish-Kibalchish ...”, “Military Secret”, “Timur and his team”). The opposition of this protagonist to the necessary antagonist – the omnipresent “enemy” in the person of world imperialism and its corrupt hirelings – did not go beyond the framework of ordinary Manichaeism, but was skillfully adapted by the pen of the prose writer to the peculiarities of the “fairytale”, “fantasy”, thirsty for wanderings and adventures of children's perception.

The components of the image of the new character offered to Soviet childhood within the framework of the Soviet neo-myth were vigilance, consciousness, sacrifice, aversion to betrayal and traitors in any form – and all this formed a special kind of “military war” in the works of A. Gaidar at the micro- and macro-level.

“Armed”, military romance, “waited” for the next generations of “new fighters”. Thus, children’s literature consistently and purposefully fulfilled the orders of the party and the bodies of ideological control and regulation of literary creativity for children. The totality of the social utopia oriented towards the armed forces, ultimately created by A. Gaidar on the pages of his literary works, is shocking – but it shocks the adult imagination, and in the children’s imagination it was intended to merge with reality to the point of complete identification with it. Thus, the authorities controlling children’s literature just as purposefully implemented not only a new system of organizing literary creativity and subsequent mass publication of works for children, but also a new propaganda, paradigm of children’s reading (Rudova, 2014: 98).

To state that the artistic reality actualized on the pages of a number of works by A.P. Gaidar is an illustration of the creator’s exclusively introverted attitude seems too flat. It is enough to remember that the author of books addressed to children himself, almost as a child, found himself at the epicenter of events, which he talks about with great understanding. It is known that at the age of 13 he was given a rifle, with which he patrolled the streets of Arzamas, stopping atrocities against the civilian population by criminal elements, at the age of 15 he already had a shrapnel wound in the leg and received a concussion, and a year later, i.e. that is, at the age of 16, Gaidar became the commander of the 4th company of the 2nd battalion of the 303 regiment of the 37th Kuban division. Thus, it would be wrong to say that his literature is just cleverly executed propaganda. Behind each line one can hear the tragic notes of his such an adult childhood, his unfulfilled dreams, passions, hobbies, but at the same time a joyful and anxious expectation of future changes, as well as an inescapable faith in man.

Is this because his books are still loved both by the older generation – the boys and girls of yesterday and the day before yesterday, and by the present ones, although later the ideology visible in his books turned out to be secondary to the dominance of the new social ideologeme. This refers to the organization of life as a “society of creators of the most advanced social system”. Consequently, the image of a child formed in this new literature ideologically had to correlate unambiguously with the entire spectrum of “adult” tasks of social construction in the universalized form of a “conscious assistant to an adult”. To achieve this goal, educational literature on science and technology, adventure literature on geography, and entertaining literature on wildlife were created and mass-published especially for children (M.M. Prishvin, V.V. Bianki, V.V. Chaplina).

It is important to note that at the beginning of the described period of the 20s - 30s of the last century, Soviet literature, aimed specifically at young readers, was already half a century old from the moment of its creation. At the same time, the previous ideological guidelines contained in it, mainly of a class, educational and religious nature, did not meet the needs of the “new” proletarian ideology, nor could they contribute to solving the problems facing the new society. As a result, recognized as “reactionary”, “counter-revolutionary” and “ideologicalless”, Russian children’s literature at the turn of the 19th – early 20th centuries was forcibly and completely removed from the framework of “socialist construction”. Methodologically, a “departure” was proclaimed from the previous didactics and mentoring edification, declared “hopelessly outdated”, to an “advanced” ideological principle in the form of an artistic description of certain aspects of the future social utopia, “awaiting” the young reader in the very near future – the reader, with whom the author often wanted to “conduct a dialogue” or even “discuss” about the future of all humanity as a whole right in the course of the plot.

At the same time, “inflammatory” literary genres became means of attracting the attention of a potential reader of childhood or adolescence: fantasy, adventure (including military), wanderings and journeys, searches for unknown lands (“Far Countries” by A. Gaidar), missing travelers (“Two Captains” by V. Kaverin), or the solution to terrible “secrets”, very often with a “class” context (“The Bronze Bird” by A. Rybakov), edifying biographies of young heroes of the revolution, class struggle, Civil War, pathfinders and brave unmaskers of the traitors and betrayers of the “cause of the revolution” (“Red Devils” by P. Blyakhin and “Yunarmia” by

G. Miroshnichenko).

The writer often deliberately constructed the image of a “serious adulthood” – for example, in the character of Timur – a guideline and ideal for the child’s subsequent growth in the “ideologically correct” direction. In addition, the image of the “ideal adult” was also set (for example, “Uncle Styopa” by S. Mikhalkov) as a visual illustration of the correct completion of the process of growing up and the young reader’s feeling like an adult. It is obvious that “Uncle Styopa” does not fight with a rifle in his hands for the triumph of the future ideals of the revolution and does not punish traitors, but he punishes hooligans and helps everyone who needs such help (and in this aspect he is not different from Timur). Thus, in the images of Timur and Uncle Styopa, the imagination of the little reader is given not only an ideologically, but also a socially correct image – a symbol of “adulthood” in the form of a literary embodiment of the image of “the builder of the most advanced social system” – or an approximation to it.

From the point of view of the semiotics of the emerging culture, within the framework of the Soviet neo-myth, there is an actual splitting of the overwhelming majority of the ancient archetypes used by the myth, above which a sacred higher level is built – the level of the classics of Marxist-Leninist teaching, party leaders, legendary military leaders, heroes and victims who fell in the struggle for the triumph of the revolution ideals and for a bright future of the working people of all countries without exploitation and oppression. As a result of all these processes, the common cultural space of the Soviet neo-myth, both within the framework of children's and adult literature, becomes semantically and symbolically binary, but remains strictly demarcated ideologically (for example, the party “cleansings” unleashed in the 30s of the last century and mass repressions physically collapse almost the entire upper level, leaving on it only what is provided for by the “Short Course on the History of the CPSU (b)” and the propaganda-ideological catechism based on it) – but young readers were not informed about it. For children, the Soviet neomyth was supposed to remain a “bright image” and a sacred embodiment of future achievements and great ideas, and instrumentally – the most reliable teacher and the best “school of life” in its single “face”, or rather, in the numerous faces of the literary images of its characters, these “new heroes”.

From the point of view of creating the foundations of the mass culture of the “new” Soviet society, which initially had a pronounced propaganda character, the Soviet neomyth implemented in the space of children’s literature laid the foundation for the models of perception and social assessment necessary for the one-party ideology that would become inherent in the consciousness of future generations. This direction of myth-making was realized through the creation of more and more new literary plots and images of literary characters acting in them. Thus, the neomyth that was created, including this space, actively exploited not only the historically established palette of archetypes of the collective unconscious in the Soviet literary tradition, but also reoriented the interests of the children's reading public towards itself, skillfully manipulating them in favor of its purely pragmatic tasks and goals.

Moreover, using the extratemporal nature of the significant majority of historically established archetypes, in the literature (both children's and adult) the Soviet neomyth not only rewrote the past and reformatted the present, but also mythologized the future,

making every effort to shape the consciousness and then the behavior of readers in the service of future mythologized ideals. The most complex feature of this carefully veiled manipulation was the creation in the space of children's literature of the Soviet period of an archetype that had previously been manifested only in the religious sphere (the Child God, the sacrifice of a child, the sacrifice of Isaac) – the archetype of the child hero and the child victim (for example – “The Tale of Boy-Kibalchish...” or “The Fate of the Drummer” by A. Gaidar). Moreover, the expressed vulnerability and gullibility of a child, placed in the position of today's victim of the struggle for the triumph of the “bright ideals of the future,” according to the plans of the inspirers and creators of this kind of plots, should have contributed to the development and consolidation of the feeling of “revolutionary and class hatred” in relation to the most diverse “enemies” (Ryabtsev, 2017: 171). From a pragmatic point of view, this could not have been more conducive to the internalization into the child's psyche and the subsequent self-reproduction of the explicit and hidden foundations of the ideology of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” in the minds of future generations of consumers of such “children's” reading.

5. Results

In solving the problems of “communist construction”, the party ideology not only passively followed the thesis that “the staff decide everything,” but also comprehensively and actively influenced the consciousness of these staff in the most vulnerable, sensitive period of the evolution of this consciousness during their childhood and growing up, deforming this very consciousness, and after it – public morality, rearranging the accents within them as it was necessary to solve the most important problems. The main burden of rearranging all these guidelines and ideals was born by the Soviet neo-myth of the creation of a “new type of society” and a “new type of person” as a member of such a society. Literature and artistic culture, stylistically united by the genre of socialist realism, were specially created for this purpose and worked together to achieve precisely this goal. They functioned and were implanted in the mass consciousness of ordinary citizens, and directly fulfilled the task of redirecting mass consciousness. The fact that this promoted “realism” was purely myth-making in its content did not bother either children's or adult consumers of this ideology.

It is noteworthy that the experience of such education through the means of literature that has been developed over many decades contributed to the fact that the number of cultural characters who were guides for the citizens of the Soviet country when laying the foundation of their lives, along with real historical figures, also included characters acting in the artistic reality. However, if before it was Timur

(A. Gaidar “Timur and His Team”), Vitaly Banevur (1902–1922), Misha Polyakov (A. Rybakov “Dirk”, “Bronze Bird”), Arkady Gaidar (1904–1941), Alexander Grigoriev and captain Tatarinov (V. Kaverin “Two Captains”), Dmitry Karbyshev (1880–1945) and others, today the picture is somewhat different. Outside the state-controlled ideology, Russian children see a cultural hero in the form of Spider-Man (superhero of comic books published by Marvel Comics, created by S. Stan Lee and S. Ditko), Moomin Troll and Snufkin (T. Jansson. Series of books about Moomin-Tolls), Little Red Riding Hood (C. Perrault. “Little Red Riding Hood”), etc. (Volkova, 2013; Labutina, 2013). Without a doubt, the previously clearly visible binary in these images is absent, however, the value of such personality traits as heroism, prudence, responsiveness and kindness (Moomin Troll), passion for travel (Snusmumrik), caring for elders (Little Red Riding Hood) still remain attractive.

6. Conclusion

Archetypes begin to shine through from the depths of the collective unconscious during critical, fateful, turning-point eras, which form a new wave of neo-mythologism. In totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century the sociocultural step, following the revival of mythology, is the transformation of a number of archetypal images and schemes, which are consolidated not only in oral format, but also through art. Nevertheless, today when more than one generation of Russians have grown up without any ideology, those examples of fiction in which the creative process took place under the sign of an extroverted attitude have not lost their charm. In other words, in a situation where the artist's personality turns out to be much greater than propaganda slogans and archetypes of the unconscious, his creations remain relevant for all times, since love for his Fatherland, true friendship, willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of a higher goal (we must point out his personal sacrifice, but not others, which is the peak of immorality), selfless service to the cause that we choose, belong to the category of universal human values. Their absence can only mean how much inhumanity there is in a person.

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