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MYTHOLOGEMS OF HEROISM AND THEIR LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS (A. RYBAKOV “THE DIRK”)

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Abstract

The research underlying the article answers the questions regarding the "function" (according to Propp) realized in the plot and ideological levels of the novel by Rybakov. The questions concerning recoding of mythologems of the goodie and the villain in the adventure literature of the 40s; about changes in the Soviet mythology of heroism in children's literature of the 40s XX century. The article traces the continuation and development of the theme of a heroic deed and a young hero, a fighter for revolutionary ideas and a bright future for the Soviet country, in the story by Anatoly Rybakov "The Dirk" (1948). Soviet mythologism is considered in the context of the broader universal concept of neomythologism. The social and political prerequisites for the transformation of neomythologism in Soviet literature of the 40s of the XX century are revealed. The mythological and archetypal nature of the central motifs of the story is affirmed. The mythology of Soviet heroism is seen as a response to folklore stories about noble robbers. Particular attention is paid to folklore stories about hiding treasures, which is associated with the idea of a bright future, which appeared in children's literature of the 40s, which should come soon, fueled by a miracle (by finding innumerable treasures). With the help of an active appeal to the text of the story, the article reveals the mechanism of forming the image of a new Soviet man.

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Keywords: A. Rybakov “The Dirk”, archetype, myth, soviet culture



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1. Introduction

In 1948, Anatoly Rybakov pursued the theme of revolutionary heroics in children's and youth literature, creating the novel "The Dirk". The characters of this book continue the tradition, which begins to take shape in the prose of the 1920s: young heroes of this period are portrayed as subjects of active social activity. The aesthetic ideal in the story of Rybakov continues to be considered in relation to revolutionary heroism. A detective adventure line unfolds against a historical background, against the backdrop of a revolutionary struggle and the echoes of a civil war, which have not yet died out. "The Dirk" was written in 1946–1948 – at a time when the ideological climate in the USSR was rapidly changing. Therefore, the text contained depressed and woeful military experiences, and post-war hopes for renewal, and attempts to comply with the new state ideology (Propp, 2006).

2. Problem Statement

It is necessary to describe the continuity in the mythological motifs of the Soviet heroic story of the 40s (based on the work of Anatoly Rybakov's "The Dirk").

It is necessary to consider the historical and ideological transformations that occurred in the mass consciousness during the first decades of Soviet culture, and which are reflected in the genre of children's heroic tales.

We proceed from the concept, according to which a change in the 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).

3. Research Questions

1. What are the "functions" (according to Propp), realized in the plot and ideological levels of Rybakov's novel?
2. What is the reason for the conversion of mythologies of the goodie and the villain in the adventure literature of the 40s?
3. How has the Soviet mythology of heroism in children's literature of the 40s changed?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research underlying the article was to discover the social and political prerequisites for the transformation of neomythologism in Soviet literature of the 40s of the XX century.

5. Research Methods

Krinichnaya in the book “Russian folk historical prose. Issues of genesis and structure” concludes that the genre of tradition can, like a fairy tale, be decomposed into functions (according to the terminology of Propp (2006) or motifs. Accordingly, from the point of view of Krinichnaya, it is possible to identify the functions, or motifs, which are in the basis of the composition of the genre of legends about bandits. We rely on this methodology and use the term by Propp – function. Since the basis of Russian prose, as it is known, are fairy tales that arose in those times when a person deified and spiritualized nature, endowing it with human abilities (Panova & Chernitsyna, 2019). Correspondingly, a magical storytelling becomes a leading way of narrating in the works of many writers (Panova, 2014). Semikina, researching the issues of the formation of totalitarian state neomythology, considers that the rejection of "mythological" history can be manifested through the motif structure of a literary text (Semikina & Semikina, 2008).

6. Findings

We proceed from the assertions that the 40s in Soviet Russia became a new stage in the formation of political ideology, to which literature has sensitively reacted as a lever in the mechanism of the formation of a new Soviet man.

A new stage in the development of the adventure genre in literature begins in the 20th century when the main content in public life was the social struggle, the clash of two worlds, which were most vividly embodied in the events of the October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent struggle for upholding and strengthening revolutionary gains. This social struggle has become the main content of adventure books of the new time (Borisov, 1984, p. 42).

Rybakov, creating a book for children and youth, like his predecessors, experienced not only the influence of Western European adventure literature (in this case, the influence of Mark Twain and his novel “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer”), but also the folk tradition, namely the genre of legends about robbers and enchanted treasures. The events in the “The Dirk” occur after the Civil War. Legends about the robbers and the "enchanted" treasure become the basis of the composition of the work, forming a detective, adventure plot of the story. Nevertheless, from an ideological and aesthetic point of view, Rybakov comprehends the content of traditions in a different way. Due to the fact that robbers and treasure hunters often violate the laws of spiritual life, they join the anti-world and become hostages of evil spirits. The youth stories of the Soviet period absorbed the structure of folk traditions, but interpreted their ideological and artistic significance from the point of view of Soviet ideology; the revolutionary heroism, depicted and comprehended in the spirit of romantic traditions, becomes the main theme of the stories.

We should analyse the compositional structure of the story. In folk legends about robbers, the motif of social origin is relevant – they are all kinds of runaways from bondage, from imperial service, from all kinds of arbitrariness and violence, for whom robbery becomes a way to survive due to certain socio-economic conditions of class society (Krinichnaya, 1987).

As a rule, in folk traditions, this reason for the conflict between a simple person and the government is lawlessness committed by those in power. For example, in the legend “Miracle and Lithuania in Valdiev,” the insulted husband became a bandit because, as a reward for healing, the governor allowed the wizards “to take away from a living husband a wife of excellent beauty” (Folk prose, 1992, p. 296).

The origin of the robber in the story “The Dirk” is determined by the social problems of Russia, relevant to Rybakov. The revolutionary events split the country into two warring camps, and the losers became social renegades, exiles, asocial elements in the new society, people who found themselves on the other side of the new government, robbers (a motif of alienation).

Also, “the author creates a new type of a positive hero, who stems, to some extent, from the folk traditions about the “noble robbers” (Panova et al., 2010, p. 37). In “The Dirk”, the prototype of the robber himself becomes a certain bandit Nikitsky, who was famous not only for his robber actions but for some mystery, the enigmatical colouring of which accompanies the image of Nikitsky to the end of the story.

About Nikitsky Uncle Senya said: “He cannot be called a bandit. Moreover, they say that he is a cultured man, a former naval officer. This is a guerrilla war, equally legal for both sides” (Rybakov, 2002, p. 2). However, Polevoy tells a story about Nikitsky’s distant past when he served as midshipman on the battleship “Empress Maria”. He saw how the midshipman killed officer Vladimir and wanted to rob him: steal the coveted dirk. There was a fight between them, and Nikitsky killed his rival. These actions are comparable to the function of gaining strength by a robber – physical and magical. The robber, “leaving for fishing, will kill the first comer. This motif (the term by Krinichnaya) is associated with the motif of bloodshed weapons” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 176).

Turning to oral folklore, we should consider such folklore legends as “The Villain Zelenin”, or “The Robber Cave”, or “Mashenka”, or “Ahmet” (Folk prose, 1992, p. 290; 292; 294; 298), in which the robbers with a dagger went out onto the road, into the forest and killed a lone passerby. We should consider the motif of the presence of robbers in an abandoned house, forest, river (Sokolova, 1970, p. 147). The characters themselves and their place of action are static. They are enclosed in this indefinite space and represent organic unity with it. It is as hostile to humans as the antagonist himself. The motif of residence is filled in later traditions with a combination of specific household details, socio-economic motivations, geographical and historical realities. Nikitsky hides in the woods during the Civil War and commands a gang, and at the end of the story, Nikitsky hides in a remote house in Pushkino, where the young pathfinders find him.

It is necessary to consider the motif of the appearance: “robbers are endowed with an unusual appearance”. In the book “Folk Prose”, we find the following portrait of a robber: “Ataman of the gang Popov was tall, strong in build, dressed in a red shirt and plaid pants” (“Robbers from Khedostrov”) (Folk prose 1992, p. 297). “Previously the people were not like they are now, there were many strong men, but Mashenka was in awe, and five dozen could not do anything against one” (“Mashenka”) (Folk prose 1992, p. 290). “Naumko grabbed this stone with anger and threw it to its original place / ... /. This stone, weighing about fifty pounds, lies to the present day near the gardens / ... /” (“Naumko and robbers”) (Folk prose 1992, p. 299).

The following details are emphasized in the appearance of Nikitsky: a tall, thin stature, a black forelock, a keen attentive look, a familiar voice, and a smoking habit.

The door of the house opened. A tall man in a short fur coat draped over his shoulders stepped out onto the back porch. He stood with his back to Misha and smoked. Then he threw the cigarette butt into the snow and slowly turned (Rybakov, 2002, p. 30).

“ tall, thin man appeared in the gateway / ... /. He stopped and lit a cigarette, holding a match to the cigarette and covering it with his palms from the wind. The palms covered his face, from under them, an attentive gaze slid down the street”(Rybakov, 2002, p. 12). “The match struck. A dull torch illuminated a tall man in a burka / ... /. Misha opened his eyes; a prickly look flickered over him from under a black forelock and hat” (Rybakov, 2002, p. 6). “The leader fixed his eyes on Field. A black forelock hung from beneath his Astrakhan hat worn at a rakish angle” (Rybakov, 2002, p. 4).

The robbers are endowed with extraordinary functions (robbery, torture, murder). The main robbery action is the forcible appropriation of property, robbery, both accompanied and not accompanied by murder" (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 180). Robbery can occur both in the village itself and in the houses. It should be noted that in the texts of folk traditions this is the main plot function: "Despite the fact that people lived in large villages then, he fearlessly entered every village and took what he liked. Everywhere, the gates were voluntarily opened for him if only he would leave a soul in a body" ("Mashenka") (Folk prose, 1992, p. 290). "I must say that on that day in the village there were none of the neighbours, except the children and the old women; they were all in the hayfield, and therefore robbers could safely dispose of the property in the house of Chirov" ("Robbers from Khedostrov") (Folk prose, 1992, p. 297). In the novel "The Dirk" the gangs led by ataman Nikitsky make regular raids on villages, trains, robbing and killing the population.

The motif of getting rid of the pursuers by cunning is realized when the robber, changing clothes, fools the pursuers. Nikitsky, disguised, turns up on the streets of Moscow, so the guys (Mishka and Genka) do not immediately recognize him: "A tall thin man appeared in the gateway in boots and a white Caucasian shirt, belted with a black strap with a silver set" (Rybakov, 2002, p. 85).

«Persecution of robbers by those in power is portrayed because the robber is thought of as a hostile creature. Another motif that defines the image of the robber is the motif of “pursuing the robber» (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 181). “The victim is the bearer of social protest, and the persecutors are the powers that be" (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 182).

So, in the legend “Robber villages” it is said that “the tsarist government obliged them with subscriptions, that if another one is killed, the whole village will be sent to Siberia (Folk prose, 1992, p. 302). In the story “The Dirk” the bandits are tracked down and exposed by children.

The function of reprisal against a robber is realized in the situation when Nikitsky was arrested in Pushkino in the house of Terentyev (mother of the murdered officer Vladimir). Mishka and Genka identified Nikitsky during the confrontation; as a result, he was charged with the murder of the officer and the abduction of the dirk.

The function of alienation also finds its realization in the novel: Nikitsky leads an alienated lifestyle. He is hiding from the new Soviet power and is trying to discover the secret of the dirk. At the beginning of the story, some motives that relate to the traditions of the struggle against external enemies

are revealed. The story begins with the fact that one can still hear the echoes of the Civil War swept through the country. The Soviet government strengthened its position, and the remaining gangs of bandits continued to wield in some places in the country.

“We must consider the motif of the sudden attack of enemies”

(Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 153). Nothing foreshadowed a change of power in the village, the boys played in their hut and dreamed of being scouts, when they suddenly heard machine gunshots.

The road to Nosovka was covered with clouds of dust, there was shooting at the station, and a few minutes later riders in red-winged hats stormed through a deserted street whooping and whistling with their whips. The White broke into the city (Rybakov, 2002, p. 3).

“The motif of the destruction of civilians and the ruin of villages (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 157) is implemented in the following episodes: bandits attacked civilians, Nikitsky broke into Mishkin’s house and assaulted Polevoy, beat him, demanded to return the dagger. Mishka acted heroically and saved Polevoy’s life. Nikitsky was preparing an attack on the train, “burned villages, killed communists, Komsomol members, workers” (Rybakov, 2002, p. 17).

“The motif of getting rid of enemies by cunning” (Krinichnaya 1987, p. 167) is observed in the following situation: the guys accidentally found out about Nikitsky’s attack on the train and secretly managed to warn Polevoy about the gang’s attack, which saved people from death.

“The motif for fighting enemies in an open battle. The battle is waged by an epic hero” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 169). The motif of battle in an open battle ends with an episode of the enemy’s flight, often expressed by the stable formula: “the enemy leader is in a stampede” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 170).

The Nikitsky gang was defeated. “A detachment of railroad workers surrounded the village, and not all the bandits managed to race on their fast horses [The motif of overcoming space with extraordinary speed (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 168)]. However, Nikitsky slipped away” (Rybakov, 2002, p. 7).

The formation and interaction of these motifs in the system of traditions were largely influenced by the semantic opposition “friend or foe”, the most universal for primitive thinking.

The genre of the legend about treasures is another folklore genre, the structure of which organizes the space of the novel “The Dirk”.

Let us turn to the motif of hiding a treasure. The burial of the “enchanted treasure” is attributed to external enemies or robbers (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 110). Landowners or some other rich people can bury the treasure (“Money in the grave”, “Raven pointed the treasure”) (Folk prose, 1992, p. 314; 309).

The motif of their location is associated with the motif of hiding (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 110). The treasure is often buried under a pine tree. Such a pine tree has several persistent symptoms. For example, its height, thickness, age, location, distinctive features, wonderful properties are indicated. In some cases, a similar role is played by “one of the fir trees,” or “old birch”. “No less common is the indication of the location of the treasures under the stone” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 111).

For example, in folk tales, the raven indicated the location of the treasure to the Cossack under the tree, under the old elm (“The raven pointed the treasure”). It is possible that a peasant would discover a treasure on a lake in a boat. Often, they find a treasure in the house, in the crib, in the barn or in the

bathhouse (“I could not take the treasure”, “The treasure was given”, “The treasure in the bath”, “The treasure for the granddaughter”). Often the storehouse of treasures was considered “the remains of old fortifications, mounds, graves, the origin of which was explained historically” (Folk prose, 1992, p. 197) (See about this: “About the treasure buried by the Swedes”). “The location of the treasures, according to legend, can often be also rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, whirlpools, bays, wells” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 112).

The location of the treasure in the story “The Dirk” is the aquatic environment; in this particular case, this environment is the seas and oceans. The map shows the location of the sunken ships, which had been carrying gold.

According to legend, the “enchanted treasure” is not always guarded by only one amulet. Often it has two or three charms at the same time, for example, water or a tree, or water, a mountain and stone. As the position of Christianity strengthened, the location of the treasure became associated in tradition with churches (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 112).

In the novel “The Dirk” water turns out to be an amulet for buried treasures since the treasures are found at the bottom of the oceans and seas on sunken ships.

Usually, a treasure consists of gold and silver (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 113).

As a rule, the treasure was buried in a chest, pot, and coffin. However, it could often appear to a person in the form of living creatures, in the form of a kid (“Treasure was given”), in the form of a cat (“Treasure for the granddaughter”), in the form of a dog (“The dog turned into gold”), in the form of a girl (“Embers instead of gold”). If you manage to hit or grab this living creature, it will fall to pieces turning into gold and precious stones.

In the story “The Dirk” sunken ships transported gold, silver, jewelry. “Each treasure has its own watchman, spirit. The one who was sacrificed during the burial of this treasure usually becomes such a spirit. It can be not only an animal or a bird, it can be a person, too” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 114). “The origins of the beliefs about treasures are rooted in the ancient folk beliefs, in the ideas of the wealth hidden in the interior of the earth, which in due time will open; about spirits, their “masters”, treasure keepers”, writes Sokolova (1970, p. 188). The murder of Vladimir in the novel “The Dirk” by Nikitsky somewhat resembles a sacrifice.

According to the views of the people of that time, treasures possessed sacramental power.

They seemed to materialize the happiness and success of their owners. That is why riches were hidden so that no one could use them. If someone discovered the treasure, its owner could lose not only magical power but even life (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 115). Let us turn to the motif of the treasure that eludes the grasp, no matter what attempts are made to take it by treasure hunters. Providing that the treasure is captured, it leads to the treasure hunter’s death or the treasure itself gets lost (gold turns into coal, for example). In the legend “Treasure was given”, the worker saw a kid and hit him, but he again slipped away under the barn. “Out of fear, the worker immediately fell down; after this, he soon died. And, it was due, apparently, to the fact that the treasure was given to him” (Folk prose, 1992, p. 320). Accordingly, in that example, the motif of the treasure that is difficult to achieve is actualized, providing the treasure is seized, it leads to the treasure hunter’s death. Rybakov, following the folk tradition, depicts how the treasures in the story “The Dirk” seem to slip Nikitsky’s hands, no matter what titanic efforts he

makes and what tricks he dares. “The motif of seizing a treasure as innumerable wealth was generated largely during the period of destruction of traditional views on treasure and the associated with it beliefs and taboos” (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 116).

The next type of traditions of this cycle is composed of the texts, which reflect the hopes of overcoming poverty with the help of finding some treasure (Krinichnaya, 1987, p. 117). The motif of overcoming poverty, the search for treasure for the sake of personal profit are the main and leading motifs in building the plot of the story. However, the treasure is given into the hands of unselfish people who care about the prosperity of the people and the new young Soviet state. The author believes that the Soviet government is able to dispose of richness, not for personal benefits but to meet social needs.

An interesting moment in the story is when Genka dreams that he and the guys will find a treasure and dispose of it in their personal interests. Mishka, however, does not make any doubts that he will spend the found treasures on the needs of the new nascent state. Soviet ideology brought up a different worldview in people: to live not for oneself, but in the name of a great goal, for the prosperity of the state and people, for the bright future of Russia. Soviet ideology brought up a different worldview in people: to live not for oneself, but in the name of a great goal, for the prosperity of the state and people, for the bright future of Russia.

7. Conclusion

A new hero appears in the literature, whose actions are comparable to the actions of noble robbers, fighters for social justice, defenders of the poor and oppressed. Such a social struggle for the freedom of the working people is conceptualized as a heroic feat. Enemies of the Soviet regime belong to the robbers themselves, and they are those who commit a crime in the name of their interests. They rob, steal and kill, defending the previous system. In the folk consciousness, both images are conceptualized as the bearers of the dark, destructive world of darkness, in the atheistic Soviet state the robbers themselves are bandits, and the noble robbers are poetized and romanticized, they become heroes defending the ideals of the revolution. The mythologems of heroes, implemented in Rybakov's novel, are cleansed of demonism and infernality, but the images of villains are still built on the archetype of the trickster (conterminal: beauty vs evil; this world vs another world). In comparison with the novel by Blyakhin, a change in Soviet mythology is observed: a positive hero is clarified, freed from demonic characteristics, villain heroes appear not as evil comic characters, but as cunning, smart opponents.

The development of plots about hiding treasures, treasure hunting and the mysterious role of treasures is associated with the idea, which appeared in children's literature of the 40s, of the bright future that should come soon, fueled by a miracle (finding an incalculable treasure).

Thus, Rybakov uses the structure of Russian traditions and legends but radically reinterprets in the plot of the story "The Dirk" their ideological and artistic content, their moral basis. The genre of folk tradition, on the one hand, helps the author build an entertaining intrigue, and on the other hand, serves as a tool for designating the moral and ethical tasks, elaborated by the communist ideology.

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