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**INTERPRETATION OF MORDOVIAN MYTH AND FOLK**  
**TRADITIONS IN A. PUDIN'S DRAMA CORDON**

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***Abstract***

The author's interpretation of myth and folklore is an inevitable feature of national literature, it expands its artistic and aesthetic boundaries and adds ethnic individuality. However, the myth and folklore element as a significant component of modern Mordovian literature remains unexplored. This study clarifies and supplements the genre-thematic and artistic-aesthetic boundaries of modern Mordovian drama, which are closely related to the artistic development of oral folk tradition and myth.

The paper discusses the work of A. Pudín, modern playwright whose artistic experience exhibits a wide range of folklore and mythopoetic devices. A rich and diverse folklore and mythology context of his works is created through variation of these devices from external to implicit ones. The author both includes them directly in the context as ornamental functioning and employs conceptually.

The authors of the study emphasize the writer's focus on myth and folk traditions through the analysis of the drama *Cordon*, in which mythopoetics is defined as a means of semantic and structural organization of the text. The paper proves that A. Pudín uses elements of national myth and folklore in the play *Cordon* to expand genre and aesthetic boundaries of national drama. The playwright creatively reinterprets ethnic mythology and folklore, and artistically and reliably depicts the reality and traits of the characters. The playwright interprets the national myth and seeks to reveal the conflict.

The analysis of A. Pudín's drama *Cordon* identifies the patterns of the use of the myth and folk tradition in Mordovian drama.

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## 1. Introduction

Interpretation of the national myth and folklore is an integral feature of fiction that contributes to its aesthetic enrichment. The study of the use of myth and folklore in the literature is relevant and facilitates identification of the national world view embodied through an individual author's vision. The analysis of the myth and folk element in the literature is an important component of the literary science aimed at identifying artistic and aesthetic features of literature.

The ethnic aspect of this problem becomes essential in the identification of national features of a literary work. Some components of the myth interpreted in the literary text "can be considered as peculiar ethno-aesthetic microunits, which present poetic, emotional, philosophical and socio-psychological information about spiritual and material culture of people" (Dalgat, 1981, p. 14). Through artistic understanding of national myth and folklore, literature reveals the author's genetic relationship with his ethnic group and that of modern artistic thinking with the archaic one.

The analysis of the interpretation of a myth in a literary work helps reveal a rich range of colors of the world literature as a whole. In this aspect, Mordovian literature, which in terms of linguistics belongs to Finno-Ugric languages, deserves attention.

The aforementioned problem for Mordovian literature is poorly studied. It was not the subject of a separate study. In some papers, researchers of the national literary process indicate the use of the myth and folk elements in literary works. The monograph *Mythology in the Cultural Consciousness of the Mordovian Ethnos* by Yurchenkova includes a chapter in which the author makes a general comment on the relationship between national myth and literature. Pudín's drama has not been the subject of a special analysis in terms of the folk tradition either.

This study attempts to use a Mordovian drama to consider the multifaceted problem of interpreting a national myth through the author's embodiment of the ethnic world view.

The paper explores the drama of Pudín, one of the brightest representatives of modern both Mordovian and Russian drama as a whole.

Mythopoeics as an object of study makes it possible to reveal analogies between artistic images and symbols, literary transformation of the national myth and the author's interpretation of the mythological image in Pudín's play *Cordon*.

## 2. Problem Statement

The myth and folk material used and interpreted in artistic experiments varies widely from traditional methods to individual author's models significantly affecting the semantic and structural field of literary works. The myth and folk tradition enrich the poetics of the works causing certain transformations in style, plot organization, character depiction and genre modifications. The study of this kind of reminiscences is of current relevance and one of the primary challenges of modern literary criticism. The indicated problem is multifaceted; it attracts researchers of verbal art and is studied in various aspects. The significance and functionality of the folk and mythological context in the artistic narrative are considered both in national and in domestic literary criticism.

### 3. Research Questions

The subject of the research is mythological and folk motifs in Pudín's drama *Cordon*. The poetics of the play is defined as a synthesis of different, primarily mythological and folk components. Interpretation of the mythological and folk components in a literary work aimed at identifying artistic and aesthetic features of literature determines the ethnic specificity of Mordovian literature

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to estimate the functional significance of the myth and folk tradition in the author's world-modeling: identification of the role of folklore and mythopoetics as a means of semantic and structural organization of the artistic text, analysis of mythologization methods, specific structural options, features of the problematique and plotting, principles of creating images, tenor systems, and image-symbols, which makes up the overall structure of the work

### 5. Research Methods

A cultural-historical method is used to trace the trends in the use of folk and mythological elements at different stages of Mordovian drama development, and to reveal national specifics of the myth and its literary interpretation. The contextual and cultural principles of the hermeneutic method are also used and help immerse in the ethnic (Mordovian) cultural and historical tradition to identify artistic and national features of dramatic works that display the author's interpretation of the national myth. Mythopoetics identifies analogies between artistic images and symbols, literary transformation of the national myth, and the author's interpretation of the mythological image.

### 6. Findings

The mythologism of the literary text is one of the most important problems of modern literature, which has been repeatedly emphasized by both Russian and foreign researchers (Dalgat, 1981; Lotman, 2001; Yurchenkova, 2009; Antonov, 2012; Bolatova, 2016; Ganiyeva, 2017; Paranuk, 2015; Zhelobtsova, Oschepkova & Rumyantseva, 2007). In the context of this problem, Mordovian literature deserves attention, since the expansion of its genre-thematic and artistic-aesthetic boundaries is closely related to the artistic development of folk and myth traditions. At different stages of its development, national artistic literature has always used folklore, therefore there is a need to consider "myth, folklore and literature as part of a single metasystem" (Paranuk, 2015, p. 88).

Folklore was used most fruitfully in drama. In the period of the development of dramatic art, fledgling authors and amateur theater groups often directly addressed folk works. The folk wedding ceremony rich in various genres of verbal art has frequently been staged. *Mordovian Wedding* by M. E. Evseyeva, which embodies a rich folk rite and individual author's skill, was the first transition from oral drama to its literary form. In the play *Tashto Koise (As in Good Old Days)* by K. Petrova, the use of elements of wedding poetry bears an obvious social context that reflects aspiration of Mordovian literature of the 1920s and 30s to the artistic embodiment of reality, which was characterized by acute social conflicts, in particular, the struggle to eradicate patriarchal attitudes that prevent equal marriages. In the play written in the spirit of the young

Soviet reality, the heroes fight for their love, thus they revolt against the centuries-old traditions of marriage according to the parents' will.

From other artistic perspectives, the folk tradition during this period is mastered by P. Kirillov in drama *Litova*. The playwright uses historical legends and songs to draw a social protest of the Mordovian population against oppression imposed by landlords and the church. The playwright also uses lyrical songs to reveal the conflict and the characters, which help the author to unveil the features of the behavior of the characters and represent a dramatic life of the Mordovian peasantry in the second half of the XVII century.

Further development of national drama is also distinguished by striving for artistic mastery of the folk and myth tradition. Kolomasov was one of the first to address the national myth in Mordovian drama. In the midst of hard times of World War II, he created the play *Norovava (Mother of the Harvest)*. The playwright intentionally and artistically interprets the national myth. In his work, he turns to one of the most worshipped patron gods, Norovava, the patroness of harvest, who was perceived as "benefactress, <...>, and peasant-farmers hoped to be in her good graces to have new harvest" (Mokshin, 2004 p. 211). People affectionately call Nasta, the main character of the play who devoted herself to growing and preserving the harvest, as Norovava. She tries to grow crops in the difficult wartime to help people and does her best to make them prosperous.

In the post-war drama, when the so-called theory of absence of conflict did not allow active development of reality, folklore became one of the few possibilities for onward movement of dramatic art. Many playwrights borrowed the entire folk works. Thus, I. Prokin took an Erzyan folk tale to create his comedy *Jester Maxim*. The elements of the spectacular ritual forms of popular laughter are found in K. Abramov's comedies, *Od Teyter (Young Girl)*, N. Vasiliev's *Costo Moli Moros (Where the Song is Coming from)*, and others.

One of the most significant works of the national drama of the 1960–80s that explored the folk and mythological layer of folk culture was the play-legend by F. Atyanin *Atyams Kelgi Mokshen Wash (Thunder's Bride)*.

The playwright emphasizes close relation of his work to the folk tradition genre. "The plot is based on a folk legend. The author managed to preserve and convey all the charm, all the "flavor" of the folk poetry" (Antonov, 2012, p. 134).

In Mordovian mythology, the marriage of the god of thunder Purgine pasa / Atyams shkaya and an earthly girl is a motif wide spread in poetics. "Mythological legends and songs tell about love of Purigin paz towards an earthly girl Aldunya and his desire to marry her" (Devyatkina, 1998, p. 69).

In the play, for the sake of loved ones, Aldunya agrees to marry the god of thunder personifying in mythology such formidable atmospheric phenomena as thunder, lightning and rain. The god of thunder is endowed with other functions. Over time, the Mordovian cult of the god of thunder was associated with the cult of a terrible god of the first tribal warriors. As a result, Purgin paz acquired additional functions.

In the play, the author managed to use the mythological ideas of the ancient Mordovians in order to create outstanding characters that embody positive qualities of human character. The main character emphasizes such traits as sacrifice for the good of loved ones and desire to help others.

An outstanding example of artistic reinterpretation of the folk tradition and national myth in modern Mordovian drama is the work by Pudín, one of the most successful authors of Mordovian literature of the

XX and XXI centuries. Almost all his plays exhibit a sharp conflict, the solution of which requires incredible efforts made by the characters. Another distinctive feature is the appeal to traditions of people expressed in folklore and mythology. The mythopoetic approach, which is effectively applied by the author, enables identification of the most significant plots, motifs and characters, which in turn helps "enrich even a small text with significant and sometimes "multi-layered" content" (Abdullina, 2009, p. 5). Pudín refers to mythology "as a device for the artistic organization of the material and a means of expressing some "eternal" psychological principles, or at least persistent national cultural models" (Schelling, 1966, p. 210). A creative rethinking of folklore and myth can be observed in most of his historical dramas and in plays that artistically analyze contemporary reality. National mythology became a source of knowledge of ethnic individuality and a basis for "flourishing of art works" (Yurchenkova, 2009, pp. 105–106). In this regard, we can note the drama in two acts *Cordon* written in 1992 and published only in 2007. In the work, "the author uses traditional mythological plots and images and tries to achieve similarity of literary situations with those known from the mythology" (Schelling, 1966, p. 135).

In the national world view, a special role is assigned to universal images and symbols. One of these symbols is a tree. The mythology of many nations uses the symbol of the world tree. Artists often refer to this symbol in their works, since it is "connected with the memory of culture" (Meletinsky, 2000, p. 225). In Pudín's drama, the symbol of the world tree is effectively employed in his work *Cordon*. The tree image used in the drama is its semantic center. All the action takes place around the tree, and the main idea of the work is connected with the tree as well.

A tree is already present in the exhibition "There is a huge oak tree in the foreground, which top cannot be seen. The harrow tines are hammered into the tree so that they form a ladder" (Pudín, 2007 p. 74). The author introduces us to the mythological locus, in which the tree symbolizes three levels of the world.

In Mordovian mythology, the division into three levels – upper (sky), middle (earth) and lower (underground world) – is the feature observed in many myths and folk art. All the levels in national mythology are connected by "the Great Tree as the most specific and visible image of the universe" (Yurchenkova, 2009, p. 112).

A large tree with branches against the sky is a symbol frequently used in the mythology of the Finno-Ugric peoples, which was further interpreted in the works of the national epic. In the Karelian-Finnish *Kalevale*, the tree is depicted as *a spreading huge Oak, / it gave a lot of wide branches, / branches with thick foliage, / its top touched the sky ...* (Lenroth, 1956, p. 28).

In the Mordovian *Mastorava*, we can read about *a white birch on the hill, / a white beautiful birch / its branches ascended to the sky, / covered the radiant sun* (Sharonov, 2003, p. 13).

Similar to the mythology, an oak in the drama is the world tree. In the national myth, a birch, an apple tree, sometimes a pine, a spruce, and a linden can also be the world tree. Oak "is the most common object and place of worship for the Mordovians (usually it was a lonely tree on the edge of the forest, on the outskirts or in the center of the village on the elevated area). Various public prayers, ceremonies with sacrifices took place around the oak tree (Devyatkina, 1998). In the drama, all the action is also concentrated around the oak. This is evidenced by the scenery for the second action that does not change, and the tree remains the semantic center of the drama.

An oak in the drama acts as a bridge not only between the real world and the afterlife, but also links the reality and thoughts of the characters. It shows their spiritual aspirations, which are all different.

Anastasia Khristoforovna and Nikolai Grigorievich are the central characters of the drama, who have lived a long and difficult life and finally want to find peace of mind. But each of them feels differently about it. Nikolai Grigorievich wants a warm and trusting relationship between him and his relatives. Anastasia Khristoforovna cannot find inner harmony. She doubts about the correctness of the path chosen once in her youth.

The play begins with a monologue of the heroine, in which the playwright shows a conflict and traits of the characters. In addition, the monologue employs many mythopoetic images that give the play a special artistic coloring and ethnic individuality. The myth of Tyushtya, a legendary Mordovian king, is interpreted in the monologue. "It's good for us to climb a holy tree to reach heaven. As our king Tyushtya did when his life here became completely unbearable... " (Pudin, 2007, p. 75).

The story about Tyushtya leaving for heaven is found in the epos *Mastorava* based on the Mordovian myths, epic songs and legends: Tyushtya went to the forest and disappeared. / *There was a fir in the forest up to the sky. / He climbed the spruce tree easily. / And he went to the heights of heaven. / An erzyan prince went to heaven, / Fog raised as a white cloud / And it hid him from human eyes* (Sharonov, 2003, p. 324).

Similar to the mythology, there are three levels in the play – the upper one, where some characters aspire, but only the dead grandfather Nikita goes there; the middle one, where the main action takes place; the lower one, where the negative aspects of life are concentrated.

In Mordovian mythology, the upper world is associated not only with the gods, but also with the world of ancestors. The folklore tells that "in primitive state the Mordvinians practiced tree burials, that is, they buried dead people in trees in the forest" (Mokshin, 2004, p. 146). This is evidenced by the works of oral poetry, for example, the tale *Dubolgo Pichai* and the lyrical song *Teyteres Paro Karpan Okhima* (*A Good Girl Karpova Efimiya*). Subsequently, the national literature also used this motif. It can be seen in the poems *Uliana Sosnovskaya* by D. Morsky and *Tyushtya* by V. Radaev.

The lower level in the play *Cordon* is closely connected with the actions and the state of Eudocia, a woman fallen into many sins. Her fate is sad and ends tragically. Life circumstances and people around her push her to actions that lead the young woman to a complete moral collapse. Marriage makes her disappointed. She cannot have a child because of the physical illness of her husband. For the sake of her son, Eudocia's mother-in-law, Anastasia Khristoforovna, forces Eudocia to give birth to a child in sin. However, the born child does not bring joy to the family, on the contrary, this worsens the existing conflicts, and the death of her son finally knocks Eudocia down, and she starts drink deep. Her husband punishes her for all her actions and behavior – he locks her in a damp and dark cellar. In the play, the cellar symbolizes the bottom of life, its negative sides. The lower zone in the play is identical to the mythological lower zone – a place for sinners' souls.

The dualistic worldview of the ancient Mordovians is reflected in the myths about the creation of the Earth. In the mythological plot about the creation of the Earth, Nishkepaz (the Supreme God) creates an assistant, Idemevs (Shaitan) and charges him to get sand from the sea bottom to create terra firma. Idemevs obeys, however, he does not give all the sand. Nishkepaz creates terra firma, but he discovers

deception and forces him to spit out the hidden sand. He spits out the sand, and thus ravines and slopes appear on a perfectly flat earth.

Later, dualistic worldviews were preserved, and everything negative was associated with the actions of Idemevs. In folklore, there are a number of memorates and myths about changelings. These plots tell that Idemevs steals a human child and puts his own child instead. The changeling begins to cry and feels sick. A stable idea was formed in public consciousness that if a baby cries or is not healthy, it is Idemevs who is to blame. And all the negative phenomena of reality are associated with his tricks.

The motif of changelings is the author's interpretation in the play *Cordon*. In the dialogue between Nikolai Grigorievich and Kostya, the playwright reproduces the plot of the Mordovian memorate.

Kostya. *Interesting. And you know, Uncle Kolya, I didn't really believe that in Cordon you have all the children substituted, and now I believe. Bitter to be here with you.*

Nikolai Grigorievich (sighs). *Substituted. Bitterly. One and all substituted. But it was a long time ago.*

Kostya. *I've recently read about this in one book. It is just like with your children.*

Nikolai Grigorievich. *Really, has food begun to disappear first?*

Kostya. *Yes. And then an old woman came to the priest and said, "They say, a child, when left alone at home, eats everything he can find in the stove. Moreover, he eats the most delicious food". And the priest replies: "You have a little demon in your cradle, not a child. This demon is a changeling. A human child was taken, and this one was put in his place" ... (Pudin, 2007, p. 83).*

Nikolai Grigorievich believes that all troubles are associated with evil forces. It is the cause of not only personal, but also social problems.

In another episode, Anastasia Khristoforovna explains the negative character traits of her daughter-in-law by demonic intervention. *"You are involuntary, Dusya! You are a changeling! You are a demon! Demons have substituted you. Yes ... They put a little demon in your place!" (Pudin, 2007, p. 94).*

Pudin (2007) uses this mythological motif to explain the behaviour and actions of his characters. Hence, all the troubles of his heroes stem from this fact since they are not themselves. They are substituted by devils that do not allow them to live a human life...

## 7. Conclusion

Interpreting the mythological motifs, the playwright seeks to artistically analyze the reality and to identify the relations between the characters. The national myth enables immersion into psychology of people and identification of their spiritual impulses and national traits of their characters. This is due to the fact that the specificity of national literature that allows us to distinguish it from other kinds of literature is formed through artistic understanding of the ethnic world perception.

The analysis of A. Pudin's drama *Cordon* makes it possible to identify patterns of the use of myth and folk traditions in Mordovian drama. The use of mythological motifs contributes to a deeper analysis of the characters' behavior, exposing their individual ethnic features. Mythologism in the play is a semantic component that combines both actions and characters. The playwright seeks to reveal the conflict of the work and to show its implication.

Thus, it can be concluded that the folk material and mythopoetics were one of the priority components in the semantic and structural organization of the text of A. Pudín's drama *Cordon* and determined its structural and stylistic specificity.

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