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## MYTH AND EPOS IN A MODERN NORTH CAUCASIAN NOVEL

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### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the actual and little researched problem of neomythologism in the modern North Caucasian novel. Neomythologism, which became a characteristic phenomenon of world literature of the 20th century, has also spread in North Caucasian literature over the last three decades. The work considers novels "The Seventh Campaign of Soslan Narta" by Ossetian writer M. Bulkata and "The Stone Age" by Kabardi writer H. Beshtokov by Adygean writers: N. Kuek "Wine of the Dead", J. Koshubaev "Abrag". The purpose of the article is to investigate the character of mythology and peculiarities of mythography in the modern North Caucasian novel, to reveal types of mythology and types of mythography. The article analyzes the role and significance of national mytho-epic material for semantics and artistic structure of novels, determines the influence of mythopoeics on the subject. It is concluded that the character of modern North Caucasian mythology correlates with the main trends in world literature and can be defined as neomythology. Neomythologism, new mythology of modern authors is expressed both in creation of new myths, and in remythologization (new character of assimilation of mytho-epic tradition) and demythologization (travesti, parody of classic myth, creation of anti-myth). The material under consideration leads to the conclusion that the modern North Caucasian myth novel is a complex artistic and aesthetic system that, on the one hand, relies on its own folklore and mythological origins and, on the other hand, assimilates and reflects the traditions of world literature and modern trends in its development.

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**Keywords:** Myth, epos, novel, North Caucasian literature, neomythology.



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## **1. Introduction**

The novels of contemporary North Caucasian authors tending to mythology and mythmaking are sometimes the most bizarre interweaving of diverse and multi-temporal traditions, and their mythological connotations have the broadest paradigm, including their mythological and epos origins, the mythology of other people, and the author's myths of contemporary Russian and Western writers.

As Meletinsky (2000) rightly noted: "Mythology in the novel of the 20th century functions in a very wide area not reducible to Western European modernism of the 20-30s in the narrow sense of this term" (p. 364).

"In the 80-90s of the 20th century, North Caucasian literature clearly showed a tendency towards neomiphology, another return and a deeper immersion into mythological and epic origins" (Paranuk, Ankudinov, Panesh, & Kerasheva, 2015, p. 260).

The peculiarity of Caucasian authors' work is their strong reliance on the mythological and epic heritage of Nartiad, which is common to almost all North Caucasian peoples. After all, it is "folklore contains basic ideas about time, its events and heroes, psychology and moral and spiritual conquests of the people (nation), its mental and ethnic code, development of poetic language and artistic and philosophical thinking" (Jambekova, 2012, p. 63).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The paradigm of neomiphology, clearly marked in the modern North Caucasian novel, requires close research attention and interpretation.

There are a number of articles and monographs in North Caucasian literature dedicated both to the work of individual writers and to comprehending common issues of mythological-folklore and literary interconnections.

However, there is no generalizing work in the complex today that considers the artistic features of the modern North Caucasian myth novel and the nature of its interaction with the mythological and folklore tradition at the new stage of literature development. This is the reason for the relevance of the research undertaken.

## **3. Research Questions**

The article analyzed the novels of North Caucasian authors: "The Stone Age" by Khabas Beshtokov, "The Seventh Crusade of Soslan Narta" by Mikhail Bulkata, "Abrag" by D. Koshubaev, "Wine of the Dead" by N. Kuek (Meletinsky, 2000), in which neomythology and innovative interaction with mythological and folklore tradition take place. Such a phenomenon in North Caucasian literature requires comprehensive theoretical reflection and analysis. The article poses a pressing problem for North Caucasian literature studies of the mythology of the modern North Caucasian novel.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the work is to study the new nature of interaction of the modern North Caucasian novel with the mythological and epic tradition, as well as to define the peculiarities of mythology, types of myth creation.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The neomythologism of the 20th century, characterized by the synthesis of multi-temporal traditions and the revival of deep structures and mechanisms in the author's mythology, requires a synthetic approach to the study of genetic continuity and typological correspondences.

To analyze the problem of neomiphologism in the North Caucasian novel, the article uses comparative-historical and typological methods of research as well as achievements of psychoanalytic, structural and semiotic approaches that allowed to reveal implicit mythology of individual author's images and motifs, to differentiate levels of mythopoetics.

#### **6. Findings**

In the myth novel "The Stone Age", written in verse, he returns to the distant Stone Age epoch and through the image of the protagonist Anu reproduces the image of man at an early stage of social development, his way of life, worldview, world perception. The model of the world depicted in the novel "looks through" the archetypal structure of the national mytho-epic model of the world: its gradation is presented in the form of a world of people living on earth, souls dying go to "a distant (mythical) country". The world of higher beings in the novel is represented by totem animals (Black Bull, Eagle), which were worshiped by ancient people in those distant times. H. Beshtokov in "The Stone Age" creates his own, the author's myth, in which the literary consciousness interacts with the mythical and epic. Based on the peculiarities of mythological thinking, animistic, totemistic, fetishistic notions, the author at the same time creates a bizarre mythopoetic world where the life of an ancient man at one of the earliest stages of development is brightly and expressively reproduced. At the same time, archetypal motifs and structures characteristic of the national tradition are implicitly present in the context.

The space-time of Mikhail Bulkata's novel *The Seventh Crusade of the Saxon of Narta* is a space-time myth in which mythological and historical origins are intricately combined and intertwined. The author creates a mythological chronotope in which the model of the universe has a three-part structure: the afterlife world (consisting of hell and paradise), the sunny world where people live, and the Third World – the country of Dalmons (devils in Ossetian mythology).

The Third World is ruled by Chelakhsartag and Dzatsu – the lords of dalmons. Representatives of different social-historical epochs coexist here at the same time, and time is not divided into past, present and future. In the Third World Chelakhsartag conducts an experiment to create a new generation of people deprived of memory and conscience. The plot of the novel appeals to Ossetian cosmogonic myths and tells about the struggle for liberation from captivity of Khurzarin – "golden mother-sun" (in Ossetian mythology – the mother of the earth and the universe), kidnapped by dark forces. At the heart of the novel is a metaphorical conflict characteristic of mythology: the struggle between good and evil, projected on a

specific situation of confrontation between the famous Nart hero Soslan and the ruler of the Third World Chelakhsartag.

Soslan – one of the central characters of the epic of Narta, known for his bravery, fearlessness, is a cultural hero, who has performed many feats for the good of his tribesmen. Soslan is a solar hero, his image is associated with solar myths, he was one of the first to go in search of the abducted Khurzarin.

M. The Bulkatas in the novel create a space-time continuum, in which multistadial heroes coexist simultaneously: epic heroes (Soslan, Uruzmag, Khamitz, Batradz, Shatana, Zylat), mythological gods ("golden mother-sun" Khurzarin, master of the afterlife Barastyr), demonic creatures – dalmons and fictional mythological characters (Zatsu, mythical smiths Tserekk and Bidas), heroes of folk songs (Chermen Tlatov, Hazbi Alikov). In the mythological space of the novel the Ossetian pantheon of gods is widely represented: Uastyrdzhi – patron saint of travelers, Afsati – god of beasts, Kar and Karaf – gods of cold, Shuzhi, Safa – god of hearth, hearth chain and others.

The images of central heroes are based on ancient archetypes and mythologies. For example, female images of Khurzarin and Satan (Satan) realize such basic archetype as the archetype of the Great Mother.

M. Bulkaty in the novel uses such artistic means and methods of mythologization as werewolfism, twinning and duplication. The narrative of the novel clearly marks the vitality and multiplicity of evil that grows through all generations at all times. For example, "the Dalmons, in the image of the creator of the Third World, see their father Lagz, while Soslan recognizes his son Hyz Chelakhsartag, and Chermena reminds him of his uncle Dakko" (Alborova, 2013, p. 138).

The end of the myth novel by M. Bulkata demonstrates the triumph of light forces and the victory of good over evil: the Narts led by Soslan are released from captivity Khurzarin, so that she continues to illuminate all worlds with her loving mother's light.

Adygean writer Jambulat Koshubaev's novel "Abrag" reveals certain typological similarities with the novel by M. Bulkata on the type and methods of mythologizing. D. Koshubaev in "Abrag" also widely appeals to mythological and epic tales of Nartiada, on the basis of which he creates his own myth, sometimes turning into a travesti, a parody, or even an anti-myth. In the novel, which has a complex artistic structure and consists of four parts, the plot core is the second part that tells the story of Nartiad. It is a kind of "novel in a novel", in which the author, in search of ideal heroes, ... makes a kind of excursion into the "golden age", the mythological and epic past of the Adygs.

J. Koshubaev's use and interpretation of mythological and folklore material in different parts of the novel varies widely, from traditional techniques to postmodern ones, and is strikingly different from all previous reminiscences of this kind in Adyghe literature. The artistic retrospection of the Nart epos is carried out in the novel, as the author himself put it, "with an understanding smile". The author is interested not so much in the loud deeds of the famous epic heroes Sosruko, Badynoko, Batraz, Ashemez and others, as in the motives of their actions. In the image of D. Koshubaev, Narts are mostly envy, cunning and selfish. An essential feature of the style of the whole novel is the presence of tangible irony, so characteristic of post-modern poetics... The language of the novel, extremely concise and semantically meaningful, is not "perceived as a simple confirmation of brevity in language: shorter words and simpler sentences," which "facilitate communication (Meeuwis, 2015, p. 246).

The pantheon of Adyg gods is widely represented in "Abrag": the supreme almighty Tha standing over all (He is Uashho), Tlepsh – god of blacksmithing, Thagoledzh – god of agriculture, Psatha – god of soul, Sozeresh – god of welfare, Mazitha – god of forests, Amish – god of cattle breeding. But their image most often acquires humorous coloring, sometimes turning into irony.

The second part of the novel about Nartiad is contrasted with the third part, devoted to pictures of the life of the modern Adyghe city of Abrag. Here the thought is broadcast that the age of heroes has passed away, and "little people" have replaced them, immersed in sins and deceit.

In Koshubaev's novel, like M. Bulkata's, the heroes live and act in the real physical world and at the same time appear in the world of shadows, and vice versa, the shadows of the departed visit the world of the living. These are the grandmother of the main character Barymbukh and the mysterious trinity: Projector, Executor and Apologus, witnesses of Sodom and Gomorrah, "sent to Abrag according to God's will". The end of the novel is also mythologized, describing the sinking of the city of Abraghe and ascending to the eschatological myth.

Thus, M. Bulkata's novels "The Seventh Crusade of Soslan Narta" and D. Koshubaev's "Abrag" unite a new character of mastering the mythological and epic tradition, expressed both in remythologization, creation of a new myth based on a known myth, and demophilization, expressed in parodification of the classical myth, creation of an anti-mythic myth. They note a common trend in the world literature of the 20th century to modernize classical mythology and neomiphologism.

Conceptual change of attitude to mythological and epic heritage is traced in the novel "The Wine of the Dead" by the famous Adygean writer Nalbiy Kuek, where the whole national history of Adygs was presented as a holistic narrative about the past, present and future of the people. The novel became an outstanding phenomenon of Adyghe romanticism and was recognized by critics as a modern national epos. The author in it makes an attempt with the help of poetics and ontology of the myth to tell about the history of his people during all times of existence on the earth. "Wine of the Dead" consists of seventeen independent novels and is a synthesis of a wide variety of methods and techniques of mythologization, ranging from the use of individual mythologies to the total mythologization of the whole text.

The complex tragic history of the Adygs can be traced to the example of the Hatkoes family, descendants of the once great Hatts. The space-time continuum of the novel is complex, multi-faceted and represents space-time myth. The heroes are simultaneously in two plans – real and mythological, space is compressed and expanded to the size of the universal universe, and linear time is curled into a circle, symbolizing eternity.

The novel's mythological characters, heroes of folklore, historical figures, fictional literary heroes representing the formation, blossoming and extinction of the Hatkoes family are simultaneously present in a single stream of time, as well as in the novels of M. Bulkata and D. Koshubaev. From novel to novel a whole galaxy of brilliant warriors, fearless, selflessly devoted to military craft, native land: Nart Kuntabesh, Mameluki Deader and Kangur, Leader, Kasog Reded, brothers Chetav and Tepsav and others.

The author, like "the great and simple understanding of T. Carlisle's humanity of heroism" (Buckler, 2008), creates images of heroes who played an important role in turning points in the history of his people. For example, the image of the Leader of Hatkoes in terms of its greatness and epic scale, expressiveness is not inferior to the French epic Roland or the Spanish Sid.

The mythopoetic layer of the novel is expressed through the images of immortal heroes – Lyashin, Fanes, three grandmothers, which are cross-cutting and participate in almost all the events of the novel. All of them are mediators, living simultaneously in two worlds: the earthly and the other world, and carry out communication between them.

The author in the narrative skillfully combines external and implicit methods of mythmaking. On the one hand, he makes extensive use of images and motives from mytho-epics, on the other – travesties them, contaminated with other elements. But this, most often, is a paraphrase, romantic, enthusiastic, strikingly different from D. Koshubaev's postmodern poetics and ironic narrative.

It is quite remarkable that the gallery of images of Hatkoes in the novel is closed by the image of the God Man Tlepsh, which implements the ancient national archetype of the god of fire and blacksmithing craft Tlepsh. The author at the end of the novel again returns to mythological and epic heroes – Tlepsh, Satan, Adyukh to express the philosophical idea of the novel. The man of Tlepsh, "created by Hatkoes", dies, and his departure symbolizes the end of the next space cycle. But at the same time he and radiant Adyuh have a "sun-like" son, the heir of all the best that was steppin' in the centuries of Narts, Adygs, Hatkoes. So the end of the novel conveys the idea of eternity of life and repeatability of cycles.

Thus, N.Kuek's novel "Wine of the Dead", in which organically intertwined myth and reality, eternal and momentary, Adyghe and universal, there is a combination of two layers – realistic and mythological.

It should be noted that the world model, spatial and temporal coordinates, as its main components, reflected in the novels of N.Kuek, H.Beshtokov, D.Koshubaev, archetypically ascend to the mythopoetic model of the Adyghe world, which traditionally has a three-part structure: the upper world – the world of the gods, the middle world – the world of people and the lower world – the underground, chthonic. It is noteworthy that the sacral center of the Adyghe space is not always placed in the center, but "is carried out on the periphery of human space" (Kudaeva, 2012, p. 84).

## **7. Conclusion**

The analysis of the modern North Caucasian novel testifies to the deep folklore and mythological context in it.

The modern North Caucasian novel-myth is a complex and multidimensional artistic and aesthetic system, which, on the one hand, relies on its own folklore and mythological origins and, on the other hand, successfully mastered and reflected the traditions of world literature and modern trends in its development.

Summarising the path of development passed by North Caucasian literature, it may be noted that "the general trend of the revolutionary epoch of the 1920s–1930s of the twentieth century – a cardinal reassessment of life ideals and ideological and aesthetic values – determined the artistic quest for new literature" (Panesh, Paranuk, Ankudinov, Sokolova, & Ashinova, 2017, p. 469).

It is worth noting such an important fact as the emergence of a new genre modification of the novel myth in North Caucasian literature at the turn of the 20th and 19th centuries.

The character of the North Caucasian novel's mythology may be defined as neomythologism, which became remarkable for the entire 20th century world literature process. Neomiphologism and the new mythology of modern authors is expressed both in the creation of new myths and in remythologisation (a new character of assimilation of the mytho-epic tradition) and demythologisation (grass, parody of the classical myth, creation of the anti-myth).

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