



# The Specificity of Myth in Russian Prose of the End of the XX–The Beginning of the XXI Centuries

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 30 January 2023	At the end of the 20th century, in world and Russian culture, there is a revival of interest in myth, in the specifics of the mythological worldview. The explanation for this can be found in the judgment of R. Barth, who argued that “the myth, as a living memory of the past, is able to heal the ailments of the present”. In this regard, it is quite clear that the awareness of the crisis of culture as a crisis of civilization, the desire of modern domestic literature to comprehend the crisis phenomena occurring
Corresponding Author: <b>Mukhamedova F.B.</b>	in spiritual, social, cultural life, have also intensified attempts to form a new model of the world that meets modernity and an idea of it through myth.
<b>KEYWORDS:</b> myth, mythopoetics, archetype, game, literature, mythmaking, folklore, neomythologism.	

## INTRODUCTION

The myth, due to its primordial symbolism, is a convenient language for describing the eternal models of personal and social behavior, the essential laws of the social and natural cosmos, it allows you to “go beyond” the socio-historical and spatio-temporal framework in order to identify “universal” content.

Such attention to the myth has generated a natural interest of researchers in the question of the peculiarities of its functioning in the literature.

Russian literary criticism has accumulated a significant baggage of scientific works devoted to the problem of mythopoetics. This topic has been especially successfully developed and is being developed in the Tartu school (Z.G. Mints, B.A. Uspensky, Yu.M. Lotman), Moscow (V.N. Toporov, S.S. Averintsev, T.N. and Petersburg schools. In addition, there are a number of studies devoted to more specific problems of the functioning of myths in literature.

At the same time, each researcher offers his own vision of the problem. In particular, E.M. Meletinsky in his fundamental work “Poetics of Myth” outlined the “results of the impact” of myth on literature, which, in his opinion, are as follows:

– a conscious rejection of the traditional plot and “topics” for the sake of the final transition from medieval “symbolism” to “imitation of nature”, to the reflection of reality in adequate life forms;

– an attempt at a conscious, completely informal, non-traditional use of the myth (not the form, but its spirit), sometimes acquiring the character of independent poetic myth-making.

In turn, G. Shelogurova, whose research attention was attracted by myth-making in the literature of symbolism, noted the following features of it:

– the use by the writer of traditional mythological plots and images, the desire to achieve similarities between the situations of a literary work with well-known mythological ones;

– an attempt to model reality according to the laws of mythological thinking.

But the study of the problem of the functioning of myth in literature is complicated by the fact that in modern literary criticism there is no clear literary definition of “myth”. So, T.D. Kobakhidze rightly notes the existence of a methodological problem: “there is no complete and comprehensive concept of myth”. This is due to the fact that the concept of “myth” is one of the most ambiguous in the modern language, used with different semantic content ranging from “fiction” (“illusion”) to “sacred tradition, original revelation”. In the fundamental scientific work of the famous philosopher and historian M. Eliade, “Aspects of Myth”, it is said: “It is difficult to find a definition of myth that would be accepted by all scientists and at the same time accessible to non-specialists. Myth is one of the extremely complex realities of culture, and it can be studied and

interpreted in the most numerous and complementary aspects”.

## THE MAIN PART

One of the general definitions of “myth” belongs to K. Levi–Strauss, who wrote: “The concept of “myth” is a category of our thinking, arbitrarily used by us to unite under the same term attempts to explain natural phenomena, creations of oral literature, philosophical constructions and cases of the emergence of linguistic processes in the mind of the subject”.

The symbolic theory of myth of the German philosopher E. Cassirer, who considered myth–making the leading manifestation of people’s spiritual activity, deepened and enriched the idea of the originality of mythological thinking. At the same time, the myth acts as a closed symbolic system, united by the nature of its functioning and the method of modeling the surrounding world (this definition is considered one of the most actively used in research on mythology).

The semiotic approach to the specifics of myth determined its understanding as well as the linguistic phenomenon of consciousness. Thus, the structuralist R. Barth proposed to introduce a distinction between “natural language” and “metalanguage” (mythological discourse), which in turn is multiplied into different types, taking into account sociolects. The spearhead of R. Barth’s structural analysis is mythological discourse—a special second semiological system, where mythological meanings are built on top of the first semiosystem (according to Saussure), setting an ambivalent characteristic of mythological discourse as a meaning and as a form.

A great contribution to the development of the structuralist theory of myth was made by the French ethnographer K. Levi–Strauss, who focused on describing the logical mechanisms of mythological thinking. He found out that mythological logic achieves its goals in a kind of “roundabout way”, resolving fundamental contradictions through mediation (replacing sharp contradictions with less sharp ones, and the latter with narrow oppositions).

In Russian science of the 20th century, for a long time, attempts to turn to myth, parable, fairy tale and other forms of conventionality were perceived as a concession to modernism. Science recognized two main directions in the theory of myth: ethnographic (religious and philosophical) – studies of V. Bogoraz, L. Sternberg, S. Tokarev, A. Zolotarev, A. Anisimov, M. Shakhnovich – and philological (in the context of studying the classics) – such, for example, are the works of M. Bakhtin, A. Losev.

According to E.M. Meletinsky, the historical reconstruction of the elements of the mythical topic did not help to realize that in the worldview system of various genres, in the artistic consciousness of modern times, these elements

can acquire a different meaning, most often opposite to their original mythological meaning.

At the same time, the mythical “archetype” is transformed into images that are opposite in meaning, and what in myth had an inherent value as faith and conviction takes the form of a metaphor, a symbol, and often also a travesty, or “decrease”, of the translation of former lofty ideas and beliefs in the laughter, comic aspect. In the context of understanding this fact, M. Bakhtin, putting forward the theory of “carnival culture”, speaks of the need to shift attention from the genesis of folklore to the essence of the folklore concept of the world, and A.F. Losev insists on the inseparability of the real and the ideal in the myth, as a result of which a specific for myth, the miraculous element.

In the process of research, the author comes to the following definition: a myth is a given wonderful personal history in words. Personality, history and word are a dialectical triad in the depths of mythology itself. This is the structure of the myth.

Yu. Lotman and B. Uspensky were engaged in the study of myth within the framework of semiotics. Mythological thinking, from the point of view of Y. Lotman and B. Uspensky, can be considered as paradoxical, but in no way as primitive, since it successfully copes with complex classification tasks. In the mythological world, a rather specific type of semiosis takes place, which in general boils down to the process of nomination: a sign in the mythological consciousness is analogous to a proper name. Myth is primarily a language–object based on the semiosis of nomination – a sign–name, and not a metalanguage of a descriptive description of the world that has a metalinguistic function. Myth is close to linguistic consciousness, for together with it, in the era of the beginning of mankind, it participated in the naming of things, through insight into their essence, and thus myth for the first time fixed in itself the place and meaning of the name of a thing.

Thus, the essence of the semiological phenomenon of myth is its expression as a special linguistic description of the world (nominal nomination) and the creation of a mythological discourse using various means of interpersonal communication.

Among the numerous studies on the theory of myth, the problem of “myth and modernity” is of no small importance. The French philosopher and philologist Roland Barthes, considering myth “a word, statement, communication system, message; (myth cannot be a thing, a concept, an idea; it is one of the means of meaning; a myth is a form)”, calls modernity a privileged field for mythologization. According to R. Barth, myth turns from an instrument of primitive figurative thinking into an instrument of political demagoguery.

As you can see, numerous studies on the theory of myth put forward “multi–vector” definitions of it. Such a variety of interpretations of “myth”, “mythological” makes it

possible to use and interpret mythopoetics widely in culture, art, and literature.

The problem of mythologization in literature is of great importance for our study. As is known, the interaction of myth and literature throughout the history of mankind has developed according to the principle of “attraction – repulsion”, remythologization – demythologization. Mythological motifs played a big role in the genesis of literary plots; mythological themes, images, characters are used and rethought in literature almost throughout its history (Renaissance (antique myths and “lower mythology”), Reformation of the 17th century (biblical themes and motives); Enlightenment of the 18th century (myth as a conditional plot); romanticism of the 19th century, etc.).

In Russian literature, the most vividly revived interest in myth manifested itself at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It was accompanied by a revival of romantic traditions. The founder of neo-mythologism in the West was R. Wagner, whose ideas about mythological art as the art of the future, as well as F. Nietzsche’s ideas about the saving role of the mythologising “philosophy of life” had a great impact on the development of myth-making in Russia. In Russian symbolism, with its cult of Wagner and Nietzsche, the search for a synthesis between Christianity and paganism, myth-making was declared the very goal of poetic creativity (Vyach. Ivanov, A. Blok, A. Bely, F. Sologub, etc.). Mythological models and images were sometimes very widely used by representatives of other areas of Russian poetry at the beginning of the century. Mythology became a peculiar form of poetic thinking for V. Khlebnikov, O. Mandelstam, M. Tsvetaeva, M. Voloshin. A consciously reflective attitude to myth is also noticeable in the late lyrics of B. Pasternak, in the prose of M. Bulgakov and A. Platonov.

However, the official persecution of various forms of conventionality within realistic prose hindered the process of mythologization in Russian literature of the 20th century. Mythological tendencies began to actively manifest themselves only at the turn of the 1960s–1970s, initially with the predominance of the national-folklore type of mythologism, the mythologisation of natural principles. As E.A. Balburov notes, “in the 70s, Russian literature, tired of the topic of the day and social matrices, begins to acquire a new quality. She resolutely expands her ontological horizon and renews the context of artistic research. Writers look into the depths of time, turn to myth, folklore.

Mythologization has “penetrated” into the work of many writers, it is enough to list a number of famous works: “Farewell to Matera” and “Deadline” by V. Rasputin, “White steamboat” and “Spotted dog running along the edge of the sea” by Ch. Aitmatov, “Usvyatsky helmet-bearers” E. Nosova, “King-Fish” by V. Astafiev, “Violist Danilov” by V. Orlov, “Live of the Earth” by G. Matevosyan, “Possessions”, “Turtle Tarazi” by T. Pulatov, “Father-forest” and “Squirrel” A. Kima, “A man was walking along the road” by O.

Chiladze, etc. At the same time, the folklore and mythological images used by the authors in the fabric of a work of art were interpreted as diverse forms of allegory and explained, for example, by the need to create an ethnopsychological portrait of images. However, in the work of a number of writers, the combination of the realistic method with elements of mythological logic contributed to the construction of the mythological spatio-temporal structure of the work, the comprehension of realities through stable mythological models and images.

The interest in myth, which revived at the end of the 20th century, manifests itself in five main forms: First, the use of mythological images and plots is sharply activated. Secondly, numerous stylizations and variations on themes set by myth, ritual or archaic art are created. At the same time, in connection with the entry into the arena of world culture of the art of non-European peoples, the circle of myths and mythologies that artists are guided by is significantly expanding. Thirdly, the creation of “author’s myths” is intensified. Fourthly, mythological traditions are synthesized with new literary trends. Fifthly, myth-making penetrates into all spheres of human activity—marketing, advertising, and many others. The features of mythological thinking (for example, the concrete-sensual and personal expression of abstractions, symbolism, the idealization of the “early” time as a “golden age” and the persistent assumption of the meaning and expedient orientation of everything that happens) are observed in the mass consciousness, in political ideological systems, in artistic poetic fantasy. We can say that myth-making is becoming a kind of industry.

The new myth is almost not connected with the ancient one, it is not recreated, but created anew as a concrete historical form of the existence of this phenomenon in modern times. But in both cases, the ethological function of the myth and its normative meaning are obvious: a myth is something that a person must believe in unconditionally and unconditionally, identifying himself with what he believes in. The myth, if not the ultimate truth, – notes V. Shpakov, – it still makes it possible to at least get closer to it.

The role of myth in the modern world cannot be overestimated – mythological structures are used to identify the fundamental principles of human existence, in relation to conflicts and situations of modern times, to comprehend the general patterns of being. However, despite the enormous importance of myth in society and the “active” interest in myth in literature, the role of myth in the modern literary process remains poorly understood.

The problem of the functioning of the myth in the artistic prose of the turn of the XX–XXI centuries remains open. Researchers, as a rule, touch upon only particular problems of the functioning of myths in modern prose. So, M. Kanevskaya in her work “History and Myth in the Postmodern Russian Novel” pays great attention to the problem of the historical novel genre in postmodernism,

“myth” in her study occupies only a secondary role. In turn, M.I. Meshcheryakova, in one of the chapters of her book “Russian neomythological prose in the circle of children’s and youthful reading of the second half of the 20th century”, pays special attention to the problem of “neomythologism in modern literature”, however, the subject of her research is the genre of “fantasy”.

Meanwhile, at the turn of the century, the role of myths is increasingly increasing. Researchers evaluate this phenomenon in different ways. For example, S.Yu. Neklyudov argues that in modern literature, the traditional “myth is impoverished and trampled down”. In its place come the political myths of modern times and the myths of mass culture. L. Pirogov emphasizes that “modern literature itself is a myth”. And V. Rudnev calls mythologism “the main principle of prose of the 20th century”.

Thus, despite the existing research, there is a need to clarify the reasons for turning to myth and the specifics of its implementation in the latest literature, and not only in individual works of certain writers (such works exist)<sup>1</sup>. It is necessary to identify patterns, characteristic features of the embodiment of the myth in the prose of the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries.

Myth in Russian prose of the late 20th – early 21st centuries is a surprisingly diverse phenomenon. He not only established himself in various artistic directions and genres, but also “penetrated” to all levels of the literary text. Such relevance of the myth is connected with the fact that it is an “eternal” way of artistic reflection of human existence, a “metaphor of life”. The reason for this is the special connection of the myth with human consciousness, with the help of which humanity is trying, through stable models and schemes, to rethink modern reality, to penetrate deeper into the essence of phenomena.

The desire of modern authors to “give form and significance” to the chaos of the world turns into a search or creation of a certain model, sample. Myth in this sense has a huge generalizing power, which creates an artistic world out of the debris and chaos of reality, endowed with meaning and internal logic. Mythological structures are used to identify the fundamental principles of human existence in relation to conflicts and situations of modern times, to comprehend the general patterns of being. At the same time, the myth has the meaning of an extremely generalized scheme that underlies the multitude of created plots and images. The core of the author’s myths is made up of plots, images–archetypes, and the artistic structure of classical mythology.

The mythologization of Russian prose at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries is carried out in two main ways: by incorporating mythological reminiscences into the “fabric” of a work of art; as well as the creation of an “author’s myth” (when the artistic structure of a work is likened to a mythological one).

Mythological reminiscences allow modern authors to conduct a kind of dialogue–polemic with the classical myth, while not only the destruction of the classical myth takes place, but also the creation of a new myth on its “wreckage”.

In turn, the author’s myth inherits its artistic structure from the classical myth, but, at the same time, it becomes much “wider” than its “framework”. The construction of a mythological artistic structure in modern prose is carried out by creating a mythological / mythological image; or mythological / mythological narrative.

Thus, we can say that the main forms of mythologization in Russian prose of the late XX – early XXI centuries are as follows:

1. In all works, mythological reminiscences found themselves at various levels of the text: from the title, which contains the key mythological name–signal, to the plot, plot situation, structure-forming motifs, the system of key phrases, words, symbolic names.

2. Mythologization in modern Russian prose is carried out through the organization of the artistic structure according to the principle of multiple points of view; through a system of mythological motifs and mythemes.

3. The technique of using mythological reminiscences lies in the fact that the name given by the authors in the title of the works becomes the key to interpretation, sets the “formula” of the text, setting the ratio of images, plot situations with a well–known myth. The principle of recoding operates, as a result of which a new myth is born with its own artistic structure. The old form is filled with new content. Moreover, one myth given by the title is often replaced by another, ancient, biblical or literary, synthesized with it, completely rethought, as a result of which a new one is born.

4. The most important elements in the artistic structure of modern myth are: mythological consciousness, mythological time and mythological space. These three components structure and organize the text, endowing it with the signs of a myth.

In works representing different trends in Russian prose at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the very process of mythologization is carried out in different ways, the same myths, mythological motifs receive completely different interpretations. Nevertheless, in the end, with all the undoubted differences, the goal of the artists is the same: using proven models and schemes, they are trying to rethink modern reality, to penetrate deeper into the essence of phenomena. The myth “grows” into reality, the image of an ordinary person, his everyday life, the civilization he created are mythologized.

But depending on the author’s attitude, the mythological worldview can acquire either sublime (“heroic”) (the novel “Medea and Her Children” by L. Ulitskaya), then tragic (stories by L. Petrushevskaya, stories by D. Lipskerov), then farcical (the novel “Kys” T. Tolstoy, the story “The Judgment of Paris” by N. Baytov) character. It



depends on how the artist sees reality, what are his aesthetic attitudes.

In general, it can be stated that in Russian prose of the late 20th – early 21st centuries, not only mythology in the narrow sense, but also historical legends, everyday mythology, historical and cultural reality of previous years, artistic images of famous and little-known artistic texts of the past. Such “metamyths” have a peculiar artistic structure, a special interconnection of their mythological “elements”, and, consequently, when organizing the mythological artistic space in modern prose, components other than the classical myth become dominant.

Since the myth does not directly correlate with reality, the connection between myth and modernity acquires a conditionally symbolic, indirect, “encoded” character, which is reflected both at the level of mythological reminiscences and, especially brightly, at the level of the mythological artistic structure of the author’s myths. It is no coincidence that the most important aspect of building a “new” myth is “dialogic”, which acts as the basis of modern mythopoetics.

It can be said that the myth in modern prose is realized as an ideological and artistic structure, built on the basis of the functional and poetic features of the classical myth, but in accordance with the creative goals of modern authors, on the principle of artistic synthesis and dialogue. At the same time, the interpretation of the classical myth is built on the basis of the literary tradition, enriched with new literary reminiscences and techniques. There is a kind of merging of the former forms of mythologizing with new trends in literature: mythologizing in modern prose, arising against the background of a kind of “fatigue” from postmodernism, in the end, while maintaining mythopoetic traditions, is “synthesized” with the techniques of postmodernism.

It is no coincidence that the “aestheticization” of myth, characteristic of previous periods of remythologization, in Russian prose of the 1990s – 2000s is replaced by “deaestheticization”, desacralization of myth, a game with its images, motives, leading to its deconstruction, destruction.

The game becomes the dominant and self-sufficient principle in modern myth-making: hence the motifs of “appearance”, “modeling”, playing “als ob” arise. Mythological images play only the role of a form, a mask behind which the “content” sometimes changes to the opposite.

## CONCLUSION

The artistic structure of the text is determined by the plurality of equally equal points of view, it deconstructs the stable structure of a well-known myth, which makes it possible to look at well-known events through the eyes of all participants and even imagine any person in the role of a mythological character.

Of great importance in the development of myth-making at the present stage is the awareness of myth as a

property of human thinking, as a way of manipulating public consciousness. The myth from the culturological category “passes” into the category of “technology” (the technique of creating a myth becomes universal for marketing, advertising, political technologies), which, of course, is reflected in modern prose. So, in the work of D. Lipskerov, the same technique for creating a myth is used in many works.

Thus, in our opinion, the study of the functioning of myth in modern literature is a scientifically promising and creatively productive literary approach.

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