

Gabriella Elina Imposti, Irina Marchesini, Gloria Politi
[Editors]

Women's Voices Between Russia and Poland

Myths, Nature, and the Creation of a New Identity



— Women's Voices Between Russia and Poland —

Gabriella Elina Imposti, Irina Marchesini, Gloria Politi
[Editors]

Women's Voices Between Russia and Poland

*Myths, Nature, and the Creation
of a New Identity*



Il lavoro è stato svolto nell'ambito del progetto PRIN 2022 "From Post-Trauma to Ecology: Contemporary Gender Narratives in Slavic Cultural Texts", CUP J53D23013520006, codice progetto 2022S3XZZ5_002.

Volume finanziato dal Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne dell'Università di Bologna.



L'opera, comprese tutte le sue parti, è tutelata dalla legge sul diritto d'autore ed è pubblicata in versione digitale con licenza Creative Commons Attribuzione-Non Commerciale-Non opere derivate 4.0 Internazionale (CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0).

L'Utente, nel momento in cui effettua il download dell'opera, accetta tutte le condizioni della licenza d'uso dell'opera previste e comunicate sul sito <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.it>

ISBN volume 979-12-5568-249-3

2024 © by Pensa MultiMedia®

73100 Lecce • Via Arturo Maria Caprioli, 8 • Tel. 0832.230435

www.pensamultimedia.it

Indice

1. In Lieu of an Introduction. Reflections on Myths, Nature, and Identity 7
Irina Marchesini
2. Toppling the Myth of Saintly Polish Womanhood, with a Glance at Russia's Current Gender Culture 23
Helena Goscilo
3. *Финист ясный сокол* Светланы Петрийчук и Жени Беркович. О взаимодействии документального и сказочного дискурсов 71
Katarzyna Syska
4. Constructing the Self: Autobiography as Myth in the Short Stories *Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams* by Elena Shvarts 91
Kristina Vorontsova
5. Mythical Tarot, Archetypal Tarot and Esoteric Ways of Writing Feminity. Manuela Gretkowska and Olga Tokarczuk 109
Piotr Sobolczyk
6. "Oh, Lament of Women in All Times": Clusters of Mythological Traces in Works by Russian Women, Composers, Poets and Novelists 141
Elena Petrushanskaya-Averbakh

7. Contemporary Myths and Posthuman Ethics of Storytelling in Olga Tokarczuk's Writing <i>Monika Świerkosz</i>	169
8. The Presence of the Great Goddess in Contemporary Polish Literature (and Beyond) <i>Alessandro Ajres</i>	189
9. Мифопоэтические стратегии и травматический нарратив в романе <i>Время женщин</i> Елены Чижовой <i>Gloria Politi</i>	211
10. Вечные повторения: мифологические образы в романе Татьяны Толстой <i>Кысь</i> <i>Iryna Shylnikova</i>	243
11. The Mistress of the Mountain: 2017 by Olga Slavnikova <i>Gabriella Elina Imposti</i>	281
Abstracts	313
Biographical Statements	321

I.

In Lieu of an Introduction. Reflections on Myths, Nature, and Identity

Irina Marchesini

1. The Nature of Myths

Since ancient times, narratives¹ have always helped civilizations make sense of their existence. This was, in fact, the original meaning of the word, which the English language borrowed partly from French, partly from Latin (OED 2024: online). *Narro*², the Latin verb from which the English noun is derived, comes from

- 1 Scholarship has described this notion in a plethora of different ways, often using it interchangeably with the similar concept of “story”. This, in Scholes’ words, is “a narrative with a certain very specific syntactic shape (beginning-middle-end or situation-transformation-situation)” (1980: 210). More recently, narratology has linked narratives to experientiality because, as Fludernik observes, “there can [...] be narratives without plot, but there cannot be narratives without a human experience of some sort at some narrative level” (1996: 13). Throughout this article, I use the term “narrative” with elasticity, embracing Marie-Laure Ryan’s position on the boundaries of its definition (2007: 32). From a methodological point of view, the choice of a broader understanding of the concept makes it possible to include in the discussion creative expressions that are not in written form, such as music, art, cinema, performance.
- 2 Literal meaning: “to tell someone about something” (IL 1996: 819).

gnārus, an adjective that means “the person who knows”³ (IL 1996: 540). Contemporary narratology frames the discussion in very similar terms, describing narratives as “a distinctive and powerful mode for explaining experience and organizing knowledge” (Scholes, Phelan, Kellogg, 2006: 286)⁴. Narrative, posits Louis Mink, is “a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension” (1978: 132).

As a distinct type of narrative, the concept of “myth” is likewise often used interchangeably with other notions, such as “traditional story”, “belief”, even “allegory”, “legend”, “misconception” (OED 2024: online). Its etymology, though, interestingly shares eloquent similarities with the core idea of “narrative”. Etymons of “myth” are both the Latin *mythos*, *mythos* and the Greek *μῦθος*, or “story” (OED 2024: online), and this was its original sense, as Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg observed (2006: 12). On the basis of this preliminary, and very rudimentary, digression in the field of historical linguistics, one might be tempted to conclude, with Roland Barthes, that “everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse” (1986: 109). Yet, myths display an array of distinctive features that differentiate them from other narrative forms.

In *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade foregrounds the “sacred, exemplary, significant” value that these stories possessed amongst archaic societies (1975: 1). Only later in ancient history, as a result of a process of “demythologization”, this word acquired the second meaning now generally associated to it, that is “what cannot really exist” (1975: 3). In a similar vein, Lauri Honko provides a

3 Hayden White linked the Latin etymons to the Sanskrit root *gnā* or *jnā* (1987: 215, note 2).

4 Likewise, David Herman claims that narratives function as “a basic human strategy for sense making” (2003: 3).

comprehensive definition that highlights both the features and the functions of the myth:

a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created together with all the parts thereof and given their order, which still obtains. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides patterns of behaviour to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and establishes the sanctity of cult. The true milieu of myth is to be found in religious rites and ceremonial. The ritual acting out of myth implies the defence of the world order; by imitating sacred exemplars the world is prevented from being brought to chaos. The reenactment of a creative event, for example, the healing wrought by a god in the beginning of time, is the common aim of myth and ritual. In this way the event is transferred to the present and its result, i.e. the healing of a sick person, can be achieved once more here and now. In this way, too, the world order, which was created in the primeval era and which is reflected in myths, preserves its value as an exemplar and model for the people of today. (Honko, 1972: 15-16)

Not only Honko's extensive characterization of myth pinpoints many of its structural aspects, but also links them to the idea of "value" that it produced in a given community. Myths can be indeed considered as value-laden narratives that possess a very strong, systematizing power, as also Mark Schorer recognized. In his view, myths are

the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the

facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing *value* [emphasis mine] for experience. A mythology is a more or less articulated body of such images, a pantheon. Without such images, experience is chaotic, fragmentary and merely phenomenal. (1968: 355)

It seems evident that myths display a very strong connection to the societies that produced them. However, their sphere of influence is not limited to the original community but extends to all the social groups where it has considerable relevance. Consequently, myths not only generate exemplary stories⁵ for populations to look up to, but it is at the same time expression of the context that conceived them. Henry A. Murray underlines this peculiar trait of myths, that acts both as a regulatory force and major model for future societies:

myths are simple or compound narrative units, many of which, carried in the mind, have had extraordinary permanence and potency, inasmuch as generations of people have been disposed to live – feel, think, and act – to a considerable extent in these terms, and hence that knowledge of the myths of any given society should enable us [...] to explain many of the otherwise unintelligible conceptions, emotional reactions, and modes of behavior of its members. (1968: 305-306)

In a similar vein, Claude Lévi-Strauss maintains that human societies “express, through their mythology, fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind, such as love, hate, or revenge or that they try to provide some kind of explanations for

5 For further insights on the exemplary function of narrative, see MacIntyre (1984); Ricoeur (1983), (1990); Taylor (1989).

phenomena which they cannot otherwise understand – astronomical, meteorological, and the like” (1962: 207). Over the course of several decades, many scholars from different research fields focused their attention on the strategic, ordering function that myth exercises over societies. For example, to the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, it “expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man” (1926: 19). Moreover, according to Eliade, myth “supplies models for human behavior and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life” (1975: 3). Wherever they are present, they “still establish and justify all human conduct and activity” (1975: 5).

If, as also Schorer observed, myths regulate “how things are and must be” (1968: 149), it is then important to discuss *how* old and new myths function in contemporary societies and what values⁶ they (still) generate. Of course, the necessary theoretical premise is the idea that “myths are narrative, and that narrativity plays a crucial role for identity formation individually and collectively”⁷ (Feldt 2013: 22). Narratives, as briefly discussed, are “a primary cognitive instrument” (Mink 1978: 131) and “one of the primary means of creating continuity between past, present and imagined worlds, [...] a fundamental mediating link between individual and collective selves” (Feldt 2013: 22). Stories, after all, “are our major moral teachers” (Booth 1988: 20) and they “crucially [shape] what

6 For further reference on the study of “value” from a narratological perspective, see Alber (2017); Berning (2013); especially Korthals Altes (2014).

7 For further reference on the contiguity of myth and narrative, see Geertz, Jensen (2011) and Jensen (2009). On narratological approaches that specifically target myth as a narrative form, see Segal (2004: 79-90); Zgoll (2019); Zgoll, Zgoll (2020); Zgoll, Cuperly, Cöster-Gilbert, (2023). Zgoll et al., in particular, introduced the term “hystic narratology”, a field of research that focuses in particular on the narratological study of written myths.

we value” (Meretoja 2018: 128). In keeping with Algirdas J. Greimas, who understands narrative as a form of organization of values (1973: 35), a focus on the value that narratives generate would be helpful to identify the ethical stance of the text.

Taking these basic definitions scholarship gave of myth and narrative as a starting point, it is already possible to see some ideas that are consciously or unconsciously injected in society. Let us consider, for example, Joseph Campbell’s description of the monomyth: “[t]he hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a realm of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on *his* fellow *man* [emphasis mine]” (2004: 28). This, as well as previous appraisals of myth, clearly show a gender-biased focus oriented towards a man’s figure.

The scope of the present study is to investigate how, through the rewriting of myths, such established gendered paradigms, that have been dominating societies for centuries, can be challenged or even reversed. Particular attention is devoted to the discussion of the role of Nature in catalyzing this shift. Taking as its focus the representation or narrativization of myths in literature, visual culture, music, and performance, this collection of articles emphasizes the necessity of repositioning of the feminine element on the broader map of Literary, Cultural, and Myth Studies.

In this respect, the past research experience carried out by some of the authors featured in this book for the National Research Project PRIN n. 2015KAZ284, entitled “Myth (De)construction in Contemporary Women’s Literature in Russia and Poland. A Comparative Study” (2015) proved to be invaluable. As published results show, this line of inquiry proved to be particularly fertile and helped identifying the crucial role played by Nature in the context of myth rewriting. As a matter of fact, it is in stories that engage with the complexities and ambiguities of the relationship

between humankind and other forces that values and ideas about them are challenged. This, in essence, is the core of the National Research Project PRIN “From Post-Trauma to Ecology: Contemporary Gender Narratives in Slavic Cultural Texts” (protocol n. 2022S3XZZ5, 2023), as well as of this publication.

Space too is widely recognized as a fundamental narrative category⁸ that shapes, directly or indirectly, characters and events that belong to a specific fictional world. Over time, several literary critics attempted at describing this dynamic relationship, thus providing a solid theoretical ground to explore its diverse functions, other than that of the mere setting. This is the case, for instance, of Mikhail M. Bakhtin and his polysemic notion of “chronotope” ([1938] 1975)⁹, of Geràrd Genette’s “diégèse” ([1972] 1980), and, more recently, of David Herman’s term “storyworld” (2005). Although “there is no established terminology to distinguish the laminations of narrative space”, as Marie-Laure Ryan maintains (2014: online), it is nonetheless pivotal to acknowledge the complexity of this concept, as well as its inherently abstract nature. However, in the context of the present research, space serves as a helpful standpoint to assess the values and ideas that a given individual or collective societies hold as true. The interaction of space and nature in the rewriting of myth, as some of the contributions specifically highlight, produces new values, new openings, new models for a more inclusive society.

The impact of these discourses on society is no less important for the participants of this volume, especially in view of the

8 For further reference on the definition of space in classic narratology, see Chatman (1978), Friedman (1993), Werth (1999), Zoran (1984).

9 It should be mentioned that this term was first introduced in the field of physiology by Aleksei A. Ukhomskii (1875-1942).

uncertainty which permeates contemporaneity. According to Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Sjoerd-Jeroen Moenandar “there is a real need for the intellectual and social capacity to handle diversity. The understanding of how narratives can be at the center of clashes of interpretations and valuations is an important asset if we want to make our societies more sustainable” (2024: 11). Such understanding becomes even more urgent if considering the geographic area under scrutiny in this collection, which comprises two post-Soviet countries: Poland and Russia. In this particular context, myth rewriting serves as an instrument to overcome the trauma caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991). This catastrophic event elicited the need to regroup values to build a new identity. To this end, myths (as a narrative model) and their rewriting (as a fundamental strategy) aim at discarding dysfunctional elements in favor of a new order.

2. Myths and Identity

The contributions gathered in this volume analyze a wide range of creative works produced by women authors and artists in Poland and Russia between the 20th and the 21st centuries. Notably, they investigate some facet of myth in a variety of media and genres, tracking the mechanisms of their rewriting and studying their functions in the creation of a new identity, without forgetting the role of nature in this regard. Born as powerful responses to catastrophic events, whose long-term, wide-ranging consequences are still tangible to these Eastern European societies, these rewritings of myths demonstrate the incredible vitality of the practice, as well as the significance of this specific type of narration. The proliferation of rewritten myths, a selection of which is thoroughly discussed throughout this collection, allows us to overcome the idea that myth ceased to perform any function in

modern societies, as in Joseph Campbell's opinion¹⁰ (2004: 338). The choice to compare contemporary female-authored works from diverse cultural contexts, such as the Western – Poland, and Eastern – Russian – Slavic cultures, will hopefully encourage the development of fresh, cross-cultural perspectives.

Helena Gosciło's fascinating article about the portraying of womanhood in contemporary Polish culture opens this collection. In dialogue with French Feminism, Marxism, and Postmodernist Theory, the author offers a vivid fresco of the revolution that characterized Polish women's cultural production after the dissolution of the Eastern bloc. Understanding myth as a social stereotype, Gosciło poignantly discusses the ways in which artists as Ewa Juszkiewicz, Manuela Gretkowska, Olga Tokarczuk, Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Małgorzata Szumowska, Olga Chajdas overturned a centuries-long myth of womanhood. The contribution is enriched with parallels and contrasts with Russian artists, including Tania Antoshina, Viktoriia Lamashko, and Liudmila Ulitskaia.

Katarzyna Siska too devotes her attention to art, and namely to theatre. Her article provides especially interesting insights on how the patriarchal discourse that dominates Russian society has been challenged by such artists like Svetlana Petriichuk. Her thorough analysis of the play *Finist iasnyi sokol*, staged by director Evgeniia Berkovich, explores the psychological and sociological reasons that induced young Russian women to join Isis fighters in Syria to

10 “[T]he democratic ideal of the self-determining individual, the invention of the power-driven machine, and the development of the scientific method of research, have so transformed human life that the long-inherited, timeless universe of symbols has collapsed”. Cfr. Schorer “[e]ven when, as in modern civilization, myths multiply and separate and tend to become abstract so that the images themselves recede and fade, even then they are still the essential substructure of all human activity” (1968: 356-357).

marry them. Special attention is devoted to the function of myths from mass culture, as well as to the elements derived from folkloric discourse, like the name Mariushka.

Kristina Vorontsova's contribution remains in the field of folkore analysis, as she reads Elena Shvarts' autobiographical short stories entitled *Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams* (1996), interpreting them as an evolution of the Russian genre of scary stories, the so-called *bylichkas*. Moreover, the author examines how the Leningrad poet deconstructs and reconstructs myths from a wealth of traditions, like the Ancient Greek, the Roman, and the Egyptian, to create the portrayal of her own identity.

Piotr Sobolczyk's comparison of two Polish novels from 1993 takes the reader even further from the shadowy, otherworldly atmospheres of Elena Shvarts. Manuela Gretkowska's *Parisian Tarot* and Olga Tokarczuk's *The Journey of the People of the Book* both deal with esoterism and unnatural landscapes. Here, the female presence is investigated with reference to the Tarot and its 22 Major Arcana. Although the analysis shows a difference in the use these writers make of such imagery, the author finds a common ground by focusing on the representation of archetypes, thus applying a Jungian and post-Jungian approach.

Elena Petrushanskaya's research revolves around the notion of "clusters", a term pertaining to the musical sphere, but connected to the idea of archetype. In her understanding, this concept highlights the agglomerations of mythological traces used in narratives of different kinds, including musical, literary, and cinematic ones. In her article, the author focuses on contemporary Russian artists, such as composer Iraida Iusupova, writers like Ekaterina Ru, Olga Shamborant, Viktoria Platova, and director Kira Muratova. This technique gives their compositions an unprecedented density and complexity that fuse elements from different myths, classical, folklore, and to today's icons of popular culture. Moreover, the notion of "clusters" seems particularly

useful to disclose the complexity of the cultural and intertextual references contained in their works. Ultimately, this erudite analysis foregrounds a trend of narrative construction that consistently characterizes the women authors of the last couple of decades, regardless of the media they use.

Monika Świerkosz describes the subversive use of dolls, puppets, monsters, saints-freaks, and goddesses in Olga Tokarczuk's work, commenting on her mythmaking strategy against the framework of posthuman ethics and the politics of storytelling. In keeping with Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, the author interprets this technique as a way to deconstruct "grand narratives" and monolithic identities through a posthuman figuration of the subject. Consequently, Świerkosz's contribution puts a feminist approach in dialogue with the ecocritical one.

Alessandro Ajres devotes his attention to the figure of the Great Goddess, which, in his view, has recently been particularly popularized in culture and mass media. Therefore, he retraces the presence of this figure in contemporary Polish literature, from the poem *A Paleolithic Fertility Fetish* by Wisława Szymborska (1967), to the most recent works by Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk. Interestingly, the author also includes Szczepan Twardoch's novel *The King of Warsaw* (2016), to problematize how the image of Great Goddess is presented.

Gloria Politi too proposes a discussion on the construction of the feminine identity, shifting the focus back to the Russian context. Through an attentive analysis of female characters in Elena Chizhova's novel *In The Time of Women* (2009), Politi shows how the writer deconstructs and rewrites ancient and modern myths to convey the traumatic memories experienced and shared by mothers, daughters, and grandmothers.

Iryna Shylnikova's contribution continues the line of inquiry related to trauma and history, but turning her attention to the post-apocalyptic, supernatural world presented in Tatyana

Tolstaya's *Kys'*. The author describes the mythological images contained in the novel, which, in her reading, function as signifiers for the philosophical ideas underpinning the novel.

Gabriella Imposti's research on *2017*, a novel by Ol'ga Slavnikova (2005), is centred on myth rewriting and the so-called "Urals' text" (as opposed to the S. Petersburg text). Throughout her research, Imposti demonstrates how the radical act of myth deconstruction is closely related to the ecocritical approach.

This volume is aimed at scholars in literary and Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Ecocriticism, and Environmental Studies, since it offers up-to-date readings of a wide range of fictional and cultural works from the most prominent names in the Polish and Russian literary fields. However, the present book can also be of interest to both general readers and students, insofar as it explores the ways in which growing concerns related to gender, identity, and environmental issues are reflected in artistic texts.

Bibliography

- Alber Jan (2017), "Introduction: The Ideological Ramifications of Narrative Strategies", *Storyworlds*, 9, 1-2: 3-25.
- Bakhtin Mikhail Mikhailovich (1938), "Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane. Ocherki po istoricheskoy poëtike", *Voprosy literatury i estetiki*, Sankt Peterburg, Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975: 234-407.
- Barthes Roland, (1986), "Myth Today", *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York, Hill and Wang: 109-159.
- Berning Nora (2013), *Towards a Critical Ethical Narratology: Analyzing Value Construction in Literary Non-Fiction across Media*, Trier, WVT.
- Booth Wayne (1988), *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Berkley, University of California Press.
- Campbell Joseph (2004), *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* [Commemorative ed.], Princeton, Princeton University Press.

- Chatman Seymour (1978), *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Eliade Mircea (1975), *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York, Harper & Row.
- Feldt Laura (2013), “Myths and Narratology: Narrative Form, Meaning and Function in the Standard Babylonian Epic of Anzû”, *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, 42, 4: 22-29.
- Fludernik Monika (1996), *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Friedman Susan Stanford (1993), “Spatialization: A Strategy for Reading Narrative”, *Narrative*, 1: 12-23.
- Geertz Armin W., Jensen Jeppe S. (2011), *Religious Narrative, Cognition and Culture*, London, Equinox.
- Genette Gérard (1972), *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Greimas Algirdas Julien (1973), “Un problème de sémiotique narrative: les objets de valeur”, *Langages*, 31: 13-15.
- Herman David (2003), “Regrounding Narratology: The Study of Narratively Organized Systems for Thinking 1. Prolegomena for a Future Narratology”, *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, ed. Tom Kindt, Hans-Harald Müller, Berlin, De Gruyter: 303-332.
- Herman David (2005), “Storyworld”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman et al., London, Routledge: 569-570.
- Honko Lauri (1972), “The Problem of Defining Myth”. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis*, 6: 7-19.
- Jensen Jeppe S. (2009), *Myths and Mythologies: A Reader. Critical Categories in the Study of Religion*, London, Equinox.
- Korthals Altes Liesbeth (2014), *Ethos and Narrative Interpretation: the Negotiation of Values in Fiction*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.
- Korthals Altes Liesbeth, Sjoerd-Jeroen Moenandar (2024), “By Way of Introduction – Reflections on Narrative and Values, and the Value of Narratives”, *Narrative Values, the Value of Narratives*, ed. Sjoerd-Jeroen Moenandar, Barend van Heusden, Berlin, De Gruyter: 1-21.

- Lévi-Strauss Claude (1962), “The Structural Study of Myth”, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, New York, Basic Books: 206-231.
- MacIntyre Alasdair (1984), *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press.
- Malinowski Bronislaw (1926), *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, New York, W.W. Norton.
- Meretoja Hanna (2017), *The Ethics of Storytelling. Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Mink Louis (1978), “Narrative Form as Cognitive Instrument”, *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary, Henry Kozicki, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press: 129-140.
- Murray Henry A. (1968), *Myth and Mythmaking*, Boston, Beacon Press.
- Ricoeur Paul (1983), *Time and Narrative*. Vol.1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Ricoeur Paul (1990), *One-self as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Ryan Marie-Laure (2007), “Toward a Definition of Narrative”, *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 22-36.
- Ryan Marie-Laure (2014), “Space”, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, <<https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/55.html>> (last accessed 30/08/2024).
- Scholes Robert (1980), “Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative”, *Critical Inquiry*, 7, 1: 204-212.
- Scholes Robert, Phelan James Phelan, Kellogg Robert (2006), *The Nature of Narrative* [1966]. Fortieth anniversary ed., rev. and expanded, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Schorer Mark (1968), “The Necessity of Myth”, *Myth and Mythmaking*, ed. Henry A. Murray, Boston, Beacon Press: 354-358.
- Segal Robert A. (2004), *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Taylor Charles (1989), *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Werth Paul (1999), *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse*, London, Longman.
- White Jr., Hayden (1987), *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zgoll Christian (2019), *Tractatus mythologicus. Theorie und Methodik zur Erforschung von Mythen als Grundlegung einer allgemeinen, transmedialen und komparatistischen Stoffwissenschaft*, Berlin, de Gruyter.
- Zgoll Annette, Zgoll Christian (2020), *Mythische Sphärenwechsel. Methodisch neue Zugänge zu antiken Mythen in Orient und Okzident*, Berlin, de Gruyter.
- Zgoll Annette, Cuperly Bénédicte, Cöster-Gilbert Annika (2023), *In Search of Dumuzi: An Introduction to Hylistic Narratology, The Shape of Stories. Narrative Structures in Cuneiform Literature*, ed. Helle Sophus, Konstantopoulos Gina, Leiden, Boston, Brill: 285-350.
- Zoran Gabriel (1984), "Towards a Theory of Space in Fiction", *Poetics Today*, 5: 309-335.

Dictionaries

IL

- Castiglioni Luigi, Mariotti Scevola (1996), *Vocabolario della lingua latina. Latino-italiano, italiano-latino*, 3° Edizione, Milano, Loescher.

OED

"Myth"

- Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, September 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8278590036>.

"Narrative"

- Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2274550557>.

II. Toppling the Myth of Saintly Polish Womanhood, with a Glance at Russia's Current Gender Culture*

Helena Goscilo

“All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciliatory mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. [...] If a revival of the myths gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place”.
Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*

“Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily”.
Dorothy Day¹

Myth, according to Roland Barthes, constitutes a social stereotype that has become naturalized in a process that converts ideological imposition into a perceived truth or reality that may be taken for

- * I am most grateful to Ewa Juskiewicz, Victoria Lomasko, and Aleksandra Waliszewska for granting me permission to reproduce their works as well as sending me high-definition versions of them. My thanks also to Ronald Meyer and Lisa Small for facilitating contacts, and, as ever, to Bożenna Goscilo for responding to an earlier version of my text.
- 1 A devoted Catholic political activist and the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Day reportedly repeated this sentiment multiple times (See Martin 2012).

granted and therefore requires no commentary or explanation. Since cultures generate myths to present their norms as facts of nature, myth is a form of communication creating a system of second-order meaning (Culler 1983: 33-40). For centuries Polish culture aligned with Europe's myth of womanhood, identified by Hélène Cixous and other French theorists as institutionalizing a binarism anchored in polarized complementarity. That misogynistic binary predicated womanhood as the secondary category, defined as the polar opposite of the purported primary category – manhood (Cixous, Clément 1986). Accordingly, the quintessence of womanhood cemented into Western thought comprised passivity, subservience, nurture, materiality, irrationality, and so forth. Born to support men (the Adam's rib scenario), women as the weaker sex were the pale moon (*menses*, after all), drawing light from the sun, which was equated with manhood. Recall the edict of the male-authored Bible: "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" (Corinthians 11: 7). Or, as the French feminist Luce Irigaray phrased it, "woman serves as reflection, as image of and for man" (1985: 187). Such a paradigm of womanhood governed assumptions about gender until the late-twentieth century's international women's movement, which eventually led to feminist revisionism and undermined centuries-long unexamined clichés.

Those timeworn paradigms were strongly entrenched in Poland owing to the cultural dominance of the Catholic Church, whereby the Polish woman historically was conflated with the Virgin Mary and abstracted into an allegory of the long-suffering nation (*Matka Polka*) (Gosciło, Holmgren 2021). One of the most egregious instances of such an ontological legerdemain occurs in Andrzej Wajda's WWII film *Holy Week* (*Wielki Tydzień* 1995), contrasting the male protagonist Jan's pregnant, blonde, blue-eyed wife, Anna, to Irena – the aggressive, unmarried, sexualized, Jewish brunette

who finds refuge in the couple's home and indirectly causes Jan's death². In one sequence the sun streaming through a window haloes the loving, compassionate Anna, symbolically confirming her sacred status as *Matka Polka/Matka Boska*, in value-freighted contrast to the fatal "dark" forces personified by Irena. Transforming woman into allegory in this way eliminates her from sociopolitical terrain, as copiously documented in Marina Warner's superb *Monuments and Maidens* (1996). This suppressive strategy, which creates the illusion of pedestaling "the second sex," instrumentalizes women: they represent instead of being represented (Goscilo 2004: 19-37).

With the dissolution of the Eastern bloc and Poland's recovered independence, an extraordinary revolution in Polish women's cultural production by feminist *Kulturarbeiter* has overturned this hardy but improbable icon of femininity, to reclaim a dramatically different and differentiated womanhood. That reclamation has occurred in multiple cultural domains.

Art

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive."
Robert Browning, *My Last Duchess* (1842)

Perhaps the foremost and certainly the most original female artist to expose the sexist erasure of women as individuals in male art of previous eras is Ewa Juszkiewicz (b. 1984). Tom Folland, Linda Hutcheon, and other theorists of postmodernism have identified citation of existent representations in a new, ironic context as a

2 That stereotype colludes with an unexamined ethnic cliché – that of the dark-haired and, more importantly, Jewish woman as highly-sexed alterity.

mode of postmodern critique (Hutcheon 2002). Since gynocentric critique is precisely Juskiewicz's goal as a self-declared feminist, revised quotations ideally serve her purposes. She recasts familiar portraits of women on canvas, palpably violating their identities through a dehumanizing technique that amplifies their initial "cosmetic" dehumanization, exposing it in the process – what the Formalists labeled *obnazhenie priema*. Working in oils, she revises museum'ed portraits of women on canvas, blatantly infracting conventions through an ironic, discrediting dialogue that exposes male artists' unconsidered perception of their female subjects in generic terms, as beautiful, passive beings, ornaments on display rendered famous, if at all, by their male portraitists – though the fame usually accrued to the artists or the men commissioning the artwork. Such portraits exemplify the Marxist John Berger's contention that traditional portraits of female nudes in art serve the purpose of edifying or titillating the male viewer and buyer, inasmuch as "the 'ideal' spectator is presumed to be male" (Berger 1972: 64). As Juskiewicz told an interviewer, "I noticed that most of the women are portrayed with the exact same pose and gesture. There's a feeling that they were trapped in their corsets and crinolines with no room for individuality or emotion" (Rees 2019). They are xeroxes of one and the same essentialized image, and Juskiewicz's motivation to unmask that fact has led a commentator on her works to note, quite accurately, that she favors "a style that is at once classical in technique, yet subversive and rebellious in content" (Almine Rech 2019).

Juskiewicz's fundamental device in such reworkings is the absence of a recognizable face, which indicates the deletion of an individual identity. What replaces that physiognomic projector of subjectivity is an assortment of organic matter – plants, flowers, etc. – relegating womanhood to a uniform realm of nature, yet grotesquely clad in culture's socially prescribed finery, to radically jarring effect. Upper-class women wearing formal gowns

appropriate for a ball or a soir ee at a salon sit or stand in contemplative poses, but lack faces, which have been replaced by leaves, grasses, or fungi (Fig. 1). Misogynistic traditions, of course, cast nature as women's domain, in contrast to the male domain of culture (physical vs. intellectual), and Juskiewicz renders explicit the polarization of nature and culture, perceived female and male, by topping women's bodies with organic matter.



Fig. 1. Ewa Juskiewicz, *Untitled* (2019). After Charles Howard Hodges. Oil on canvas, 115 x 90 cm. Aesthetically harmonious, the portrait eliminates the sitter as an individual

If natural elements expose the immemorial dichotomous concept of gender that exiles women from culture, Juskiewicz resorts to a kindred device consisting of highly disturbing images

that bind women's heads in cloth resembling ribbons or bandages that entirely envelop their faces (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Ewa Juszkiewicz, *Untitled* (2017). After Aleksandr Roslin. Oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm. The strips of cloth evoke the Victorian practice of winding bandages around the corpse's head to hide the dead's final facial expression

In addition to effacing individual identity, these visuals evoke war victims or, one might say, female warriors wounded in the often cited “battle of the sexes”. Moreover, these swathed heads illustrate how women occupy the space between the human and the inhuman, a liminal area to which conventional thinking through the ages consigned the so-called second sex – *La deuxième sexe*, as Simone de Beauvoir aptly named it more than 70 years ago

(1949) (de Beauvoir 1989). The label of “Untitled” accompanying the majority of these “refurbished” portraits underscores the sitters’ lack of identity and is a more accurate designation than the original names that especially for contemporary viewers have no meaning, providing no reference points whatsoever (Fig. 3). With their identity visibly eliminated, Juskiewicz’s women become overtly rather than covertly neither fully human nor inanimate matter (male possessions?), demoted to the interstices – the locus of horror, as Noel Carroll, and other film theorists maintain (Carroll 1990).



Fig. 3. Ewa Juskiewicz, *Girl in Blue* (2013). Response to *Girl in a Blue Dress* (1641) by Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 x 160cm. A plethora of fungi substitute for the face

Juszkiewicz's approach to her gendered challenge is founded on her dialogue with artists of the past. In an interview she declared, "[w]hen my work is based on reproduction, I deconstruct certain fragments of the painting, trying at the same time to recreate the other fragments faithfully". "In this process", she elucidated, "following [...] the strokes of the original author's paintbrush is an important element, which enables me to meet, metaphorically, the original author" (Longhi). (Fig. 4)



Fig. 4. Ewa Juszkiewicz, *Untitled* (2017). After Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun. Oil on canvas, 150 x 115 cm. While credited with efforts to individualize her female subjects, Le Brun basically accepted the conventions of portraiture codified by the male artistic establishment

Quite apart from these encounters with her historical sources, Juszkiewicz's works evoke the sui generis portraits of the 16th-century Mannerist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593) and above all the works of the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte (1898-1967). Unlike them, however, she focuses on overturning the immemorial gender disposition that has denigrated women and simultaneously elevated them into ideal abstractions safely removed from sociopolitical activity.

“Terror made me cruel.”

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

A contemporary compatriot likewise shattering essentialist concepts of girlhood and womanhood is the bold, unaccommodating Aleksandra Waliszewska (b. 1976), whose untitled mixed-media works are the stuff of provocative nightmare. To a considerable extent Waliszewska demolishes the notion of girls and young women as vulnerable innocents prone to compliance and guided by tender emotions. If, as de Beauvoir and other feminists have argued, aggression and power seem to inhere in men, Waliszewska's art depicts cruelty as not only inflicted upon but also practiced by sadistic pubescent girls in a world of brutal violence and alienation, singularly devoid of adults. Bleeding bodies, faceless heads, goats, arachnids, insects, mouths disgorging liquids, repellent bugs, humunculi, hybrid beings that are part-human and part-arachnid or inanimate matter, intimated intercourse between humans and animals, and the sexualization of almost everything in sight constitute the elements of this surreal universe, which appears to be “post-everything”. That space evokes Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) crossed with the Canadian film director David Cronenberg (b. 1943). Men rarely appear in this realm and the icon of Polish womanhood could hardly be more remote from it.

Instead, a girl cold-bloodedly watches a goat drowning; elsewhere three schoolgirls seem to be busy with gymnastics, but wear S/M restraints and one of them bares her vagina to viewers; a man decked out in armor and brandishing a spear stabs a horrified mermaid whose fishtail is at least twice his size³; female bodies expose their innards; a grinning dog walking on its hind legs brings a tray with cup and teapot to a naked, bleeding girl manacled to a wall on which crawl three spiders; and blank space or blood substitutes for various girls' faces – not unlike the eerie translocations in Juszkiewicz's portraits. Few if any norms remain unviolated in this bleak, sinister environment of universal abuse and dislocation that seems suspended in a terrifying matter-of-factness.

Waliszewska is the supreme mistress of dispassionate dread, which presides over a relentlessly minatory universe that uproots traditional boundaries and viewers' expectations. What reigns is the elimination of borders, as theorized by Julia Kristeva about abjection (Kristeva 1980) and Noel Carroll about cinematic horror (Carroll 1990). That boundarylessness or absence of fixity undermines the conceptual categories that order our world. It creates what appear to be impossible, grisly hybrids and incapacitates our ability to make sense of what we see. The New York art curator Lauren Cornell cogently characterizes this environment in the following terms: "Waliszewska revels in lawlessness and depravity. Her works seem to be set in the aftermath of catastrophe, in a time and place where civilization has been leveled, and all of its repressed fears and desires animated" (2016:

- 3 Mermaids recur regularly in Waliszewska's work, and she designed the opening credits for Agnieszka Smoczyńska's debut feature, *The Lure* (*Córki dancingu* 2015), a radical revision of Hans Christian Andersen's misogynistic fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* (1837).

9). And the omnipresence of goats symbolizes the animalistic lasciviousness pervading this sphere, in which females consort with them as well as with cats, dogs, snakes, bears, or the devil.

A brief glance at three works in a single collection from 2008-2011 conveys the original perspective of Waliszewska's sadistic/sadomasochistic, postapocalyptic world. In an untitled visual eight girls with identical faces dressed in school uniforms, upright bows in their hair, and squeezed into the frame, stare outward (Waliszewska 2016: 37). (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5. Aleksandra Waliszewska, *Untitled* (2008-2011). Mixed media on cardboard, 25 x 35 cm. Challenging idealized notions of proper schoolgirls in uniform, Waliszewska's uniform vampiric coven menaces the viewer

Their eyes fixed, teeth bared, and their expressions predatory, they evoke nothing less than a collective vampirism or what Cornell calls a readiness for “an impending attack on a viewer whose lurid fantasy – that good girls are bad – has come true, but to a violent

end” (Cornell 2016: 7). They are the antipodes of sweet or hypothetically average schoolgirls. Another untitled work from the same period features an upright guitar, with a female head topping it at the end directly above where the player would grasp the instrument (51). (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6. Aleksandra Waliszewska, *Untitled* (2008-2011). Mixed media on cardboard, 35 x 25 cm. The dismembered female head as part of the instrument to be fingered by the guitarist offers an ironic variation on the concept of pornography as focusing on women’s body parts

Yet again transgressing boundaries between human and inanimate matter, the image may be viewed as a comment on

women's playfulness or their adjusting themselves metaphorically to others' tunes, but the immediate impression is of dehumanizing fragmentation. Probably the most disconcerting visual recurs in several variations and depicts a spider with the head of a female (27) – a ghastly culmination of other works such as that of a naked supine female in a forest approached by a bear or of a naked woman sprawled on her back, her mouth open in a scream, with spiders, centipedes, lobsters, and other creatures descending upon her “with intent” (81). (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7. Aleksandra Waliszewska, *Untitled* (2011-2012). Mixed media on cardboard, 35 x 25 cm. This chilling advance by the group – all pink and red – toward the naked female redefines the slang expression “gang bang”

This strongly implied miscegenation or bestiality recurs frequently in Wasilewska's other collections, such as the hefty album *Problem: Solution 4* (2019).

Throughout her oeuvre, the body is the painter's favorite site

of vulnerability and articulation of the unthinkable, and the overt or implied scenarios of her works recall such films by Cronenberg as *Shivers* (1975), *Videodrome* (1981), and *The Fly* (1986). The cinematic Spider Man may crawl up and down walls, but Waliszewska's female analogue is, quite literally, part spider – trapped as well as trapping victims – just as Cronenberg's Seth Brundle metamorphoses into a human-sized fly. (Fig. 8)



Fig. 8. Aleksandra Waliszewska, *Untitled* (2012-2014). Gouache, 25 x 35 cm. As both seductive girl and spider, the horrific hybrid simultaneously catches and is caught in her web

Nothing benign exists in this dark universe, in which some viewers occasionally may detect humor, though the majority likely would find that humor inaccessible. Just how beguiling some find Waliszewska's art may be deduced from sundry current adoption of her images: “[h]er work emblazons the album covers of musicians in disparate genres, from Cleveland noise rock to Polish hardcore”, in addition to being converted into tattoos and

inspiring a film by the Greek filmmaker Athina Rachel Tsangari, *The Capsule* (2012) (Cornell 2016: 8). Those indentured to the timeworn concept of Polish womanhood doubtless would be bewildered and possibly appalled at her popularity today, for Waliszewska takes no prisoners. And the absence of titles permits viewers to indulge their imaginations unhampered by pointers from the artist.

Literature

“Why are women so much more interesting
to men than men are to women?”
Virginia Woolf

Writing several years after the end of WWII, de Beauvoir lamented that “insurgent females who have challenged this unjust society” in a “literature of protest”, such as George Eliot, Jane Austen, and the Brontë sisters, “have had to expend so much energy negatively in order to free themselves from outward restraints that they arrive somewhat out of breath at the stage from which masculine [sic] writers of great scope take their departure”. What they lack, she claims, is Stendhalian irony and calm sincerity, Tolstoyan and Dostoevskian richness of experience, and the sweep of *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*) (de Beauvoir 1989: 709). One could (and I would) argue that irony is one of Austen's chief devices and that Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, George Meredith, and numerous other British male prosaists also lack elegant irony as well as the extraordinary breadth of the two major Russian nineteenth-century novelists. So do Poland's foremost male representatives of the genre, such as Bolesław Prus and Henryk Sienkiewicz, though Ignacy Krasicki's earlier *Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom* (*Mikołaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki* 1776) contains sufficient Voltairean irony for several works.

Nonetheless, the features typically ascribed to female texts dictate narrowness of purview – a prejudice abetted by Austen’s own remark in an 1816 letter penned to her nephew, where she metaphorically refers to his “strong, manly, spirited sketches, full of variety and glow”, by contrast to her “little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labour” (Austen 2001: 280)⁴. “Little”, in fact, was the dismissive scale of women’s supposed contribution to culture, instanced in the noxious phrase “the little woman”, invoked as a synonym for wife, which diminished women’s (uxorial) standing into a man’s small possession safely confined to the hearth and home.

Contemporary Polish literature boasts a dramatically different landscape, with its female representatives enjoying international acclaim and prestigious awards, including two Nobel Prizes, received by Wisława Szymborska (1923-2012) in 1996 and Olga Tokarczuk (b. 1962) in 2018. A philosophical poet with a gift for irony and paradox, Szymborska in her verses engaged history and universal dilemmas that belied the hoary dismissal of women’s writing as circumscribed in scope. Like Szymborska in poetry, so in prose, Tokarczuk and Manuela Gretkowska (b. 1964) are two female fictionists who likewise have subverted the myth of Marian Polish womanhood in appreciably different ways in works that reflect their peripatetic lives and careers. A native of Łódź, Gretkowska spent the early nineties in Paris, in 1997 moved to Sweden, but now resides outside of Warsaw. Her political credentials include founding a feminist initiative, Partia Kobiet, in 2007, which agitated for women’s, LGBTQ, and other rights until it dissolved in 2020. Ranging from her *Metaphysical Cabaret*

4 I have replaced contemporary spelling for Austen’s capitalization of nouns, a practice now outdated.

(*Kabaret metafizyczny* 1994) to her rather self-indulgent ruminations on her pregnancy, *Polish Woman* (*Polka* 2001), and *Europejka* (2004), she focuses on the sexual body and its prohibitions in a manner at complete odds with musty gendered assumptions. Her lurid, oversexed script for Andrzej Żuławski's film *Female Shaman* (*Szamanka* 1996) resulted in what many considered a scandalous film with countless scenes of copulation and a young woman's devouring the brain of the male professor with whom she has an affair and then kills. In general, Gretkowska depicts willful, sexual women more inclined to control men than submit to them. Importantly for undercutting the repressive myth of obligatory maternity, she advocates the autonomy of the female body, on which, however, she can dwell far too long, her feminism occasionally – as in *Female Shaman* – barely skirting fatuity. And though one may question her taste, her gender politics has been irreproachable.

At the other end of the spectrum and far weightier is the fearlessly individualistic Tokarczuk (b. 1962) – a controversial writer among political conservatives in her native Poland. Universality, life's significance, ethical values, and the metaphysical reverberations of the dynamic chronotope – movement through space and time – constitute the philosophical framework of her prose, which shows the influence of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) and particularly his concept of individuation, whereby an individual attains fulfillment through realizing fully the potential of her conscious *and* unconscious. Her *Flights* (*Bieguni* 2007)⁵, which won the Booker award in 2018 (trans. 2017), and *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* (*Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* 2009)⁶, which Agnieszka Holland (b. 1948) adapted into the film

5 The original Polish version appeared in 2007.

6 The original Polish version appeared in 2009.

Spoor (Pokot 2017), are two of her richest meditations on humanity writ large. As one critic put it, Tokarczuk is “the dreadlocked feminist winner the Nobel needed” (Armistead 2019). And, tellingly, the Nobel Committee commended her “for a narrative imagination that with encyclopedic passion represents the crossing of boundaries as a form of life”. They insightfully elaborated, “[s]he circles the poles of nature-culture, reason-madness, male-female, and scoots like a sprinter across socially and culturally fabricated borders” (“The Nobel Prize” 2018). Breadth and depth, in other words, are her forte.

A vegetarian atheist with a degree in psychology, she is outspoken, openly critical of the current ruling political party in Poland, and self-assured in all situations. Her feminism manifests itself in bold political engagement, including support of LGBTQ and animal rights, the comprehensive philosophical sweep of her vision, and a confrontation of gender imbalance. *Drive Your Plow* pits the first-person female narrator, also a vegetarian and an environmentalist, against a clutch of powerful, aggressive men in a remote Polish village who enjoy killing animals, including the beloved dogs of the signally named narrator, Janina Duszejko (*dusza* = soul). Advanced age and gender notwithstanding, Duszejko exacts vigilante justice by eliminating the killers and skillfully hiding her tracks; at novel’s conclusion, she remains unpunished and, with friends’ aid, simply crosses the border to the Czech Republic⁷. Doubtless, that is why Holland in an internationally broadcast interview called her “a Tarantian character” (“Live Discussion” 2021). A thoughtful protagonist, receptive to diverse and new experience, Duszejko reflects

7 Tokarczuk uses the device rendered famous in Agatha Christie’s *Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) of the first-person narrator as the killer – a fact revealed toward the end of both works.

Tokarczuk's stance on manifold issues, encompassing ethics, gender inequities, and encounters with novel phenomena: "[i]t occurred to me that every unjustly inflicted death deserved public exposure" (2020: 158); "I had never heard one woman referring to another one as 'my wife'. But I liked it" (2020: 152); "[w]ith age, many men come down with testosterone autism, the symptoms of which are a gradual decline in social intelligence and capacity for interpersonal communication, as well as a reduced ability to formulate thoughts" (2020: 33).

Flights, which unfolds a dizzying assortment of locations across the globe in dramatically different eras, ruminates on death and human relationships – most pertinently for my discussion here, gender relations. Meditations on temporality, its losses and gains, suffuse the itineraries of men and women throughout centuries. In one of the longer sections, titled "Godzone", a female biological environmentalist living in New Zealand spends endless hours flying to Poland to administer a merciful death to her terminally ill, suffering high school sweetheart, whom she has not seen for three decades. A brief autobiographical piece, "Cabinet of Curiosities", discusses the female first-person narrator's fascination with "freaks of nature" and habit of writing wherever she finds herself. She observes, "[w]ith the years, time has become my ally, as it does for every woman – I've become invisible, see-through" (2017: 19). That awareness is repeated in "Godzone": "[i]n the last few years she has realized that all you have to do to become invisible is be a woman of a certain age, without any outstanding features: it's automatic. Not only invisible to men, but also to women, who no longer treat her as competition in anything" (2017: 300). Such a development is but one of countless disparities between men and women, for, with age, the former are viewed as "distinguished", while the latter supposedly become "extinguished".

The same discrepancy obtains in marriage, whereby, especially during their midlife crises, men cling to the illusion of youth by

marrying women decades younger than they. Accordingly, Tokarczuk says of a professor who is becoming senile, “[h]e was eighty-one years old, with a wife twenty years his junior, a woman he had married prudently, as the air was leaking out of his first marriage, his adult children having left the nest. And it was a good thing, because that other wife now needed to be cared for herself” (2017: 366). Later, when the ruminations on her own life of the woman, Karen, expand into a summary of women’s lot in general, she concludes, “[t]he truth was simple: men needed women more than women needed men. In fact, [...] women could get along perfectly fine without men altogether”. Why? Because “they tolerated solitude well, took care of their health and cultivated friendships, lasted longer” (2017: 371). In general, Tokarczuk’s female personae are thoughtful, deductive, and forthright; they frequently work in professions typically deemed masculine (Duszejko is a bridge-construction engineer), have no qualms about berating authorities, and kill in the name of ethics and justice or to relieve suffering. As cerebral, creative, decisive, and self-confident beings, they are a far cry from the sacrosanct *Matka Polka*.

Furthermore, Tokarczuk is a mistress of the irony that de Beauvoir found lacking in some British female authors and directs it at a multitude of absurdities in contemporary life. For instance, in the miniscule segment titled “Mobility Is Reality,” she writes:

At the airport, a big ad on a glass wall all-knowingly asserts:
MOBIL’NOST’ STANOVITSIA REAL’NOST’IU
[in Russian]
Mobility is becoming reality.
Let us stress that it is merely an ad for mobile phones⁸. (226)

- 8 I have adjusted the translation of the Russian for the sake of accuracy, because the translator has rendered it as “Mobility is reality,” whereas the verb (“*stanovitsia*”) means “is becoming,” not “is.”

Advertising's hyperbolic claims likewise serve as a target of her irony in an even shorter fragment, titled "Even": "[d]riving, I pass billboards that announce in black and white, in English, 'Jesus loves even you'. I feel uplifted by the unexpected encouragement; I'm only slightly alarmed by that 'even'" (2017: 329)⁹. Various other examples illustrate Tokarczuk's ironic perception of the delusional posturing rampant in today's society and its contentious modes of self-promotion. She has no hesitation about passing judgment on those aspects of social, political, and individual life that flout logic and humane values, for her concern is with universal categories, not Austen's "little bit of ivory", and her bold "imperialism" contributes immeasurably to an altered, expansive vision of women's intellectual/aesthetic province.

Not only literature for the highly educated, but also popular prose genres have subverted the notion of solicitous maternity or conciliatory, stoic passivity as the ideal of Polish womanhood. For instance, Kaja Malanowska (b. 1974) in her hefty crime novel *Mgła* (*Fog* 2015) features a strong, rational, professionally successful woman who outclasses her male counterparts and offers incisive insights into the insecurities that motivate male aggression and dismissal of women as colleagues on an equal footing in the workplace.¹⁰ Transferred from Wrocław to a new police unit in Warsaw, Adela Rochniewicz encounters belittling ridicule and animosity from the all-male group, including Commissar Marcin Sawicki, who is designated her investigative partner in the murder of a young woman. Her crude coworkers nickname her *Mimoza* (frail hothouse plant) even before she arrives, ignore her, and

9 A similarly skeptical view of the billboards inundating American society find expression in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955).

10 All translations from the novel into English are mine.

discount the significance of her well-reasoned input into the complex case – a male attitude to which her many years of service have habituated her. Malanowska reverses age-old gender prejudices by contrasting Ada’s logic, calm, and steadfastness with Sawicki’s emotional volatility, dearth of social skills, self-indulgent, sloppy habits, and near-hysteria when confronted with difficulties or challenges¹¹. His instinctively prejudicial reaction to the news that she has been assigned as his case partner is to protest in vulgar terms that he has no intention of “babysitting the cunt” (*piję niańczyć*) (2015: 29).

Both have problems with families, but Ada leaves hers at home, whereas Sawicki cannot control his moods anywhere. Diligent and balanced, with outstanding analytical abilities, after a meeting of the unit at which the men unanimously ignore her, she finds that once she is back at her desk, everything falls into place: “[s]he was doing what she knew best and at which, she had no doubts, she was really good. She was conducting an investigation again. Neither the unpleasant recollection of the morning meeting nor Sawicki’s moods could disturb her equilibrium” (2015: 125). After eight years in the police force, “[s]he’d learned long ago that one could easily become accustomed to men’s fear of women” (2015: 191), just as she knows that “[t]he majority of men cannot cope with expressing their pain” (2015: 436), seeking refuge in sullen silence or physical violence. Sawicki’s worldview comprises the typical range of ignorant brutes’ prejudices – against women, other ethnicities, and anything unfamiliar in his pitifully narrow experience. His tired wife, Olga, accurately notes that he is in a constant state of rage, ready to explode, and his male colleagues are no better, repeatedly trespassing across the threshold of acceptable

11 The Netflix crime series *Signs* (*Znaki* 2018) mirrors such a pairing, with the female policewoman likewise called Ada.

police behavior. As he barks at a witness who corrects him that a suspect whom he calls a Chechen is, in reality, Georgian, “What’s the difference whether he’s a Chechen or a Georgian?” (2015: 284)¹². When Sawicki and his colleague Wiktor brutalize the arrested but innocent Georgian, Ada prevents them from beating him. And when Sawicki is crushed by useful evidence that she has uncovered and shares, though she feels sorry for him, as Malanowska writes, “[n]either his feelings nor sympathy really interested her. What counted was the investigation” (2015: 369). More intelligent, talented, and tolerant than her male counterpart, Ada tolerates his imbecility and compensates for his inadequacies because her primary devotion is to the job at which she excels.

Ultimately both solve the case, by which time Sawicki, the married father of two but left by his long-suffering wife, has become enamored of Ada, who, however, has other plans: she opts for sexual pleasure with a young man rather than a liaison with the overweight, mercurial, middle-aged Sawicki (2015: 688-89). By any standards *Mgła* qualifies as a feminist text that intermittently recalls the British Fay Weldon’s (b. 1931) novels of the eighties. Small wonder that the film director Borys Lankosz hailed the mystery with the following compliment: “[t]his novel is material for a crime series, and the female protagonist is a dream role for a new star”, while Tokarczuk commended it for containing all the elements of a good crime narrative¹³. Though as yet Malanowska does not have the reputation abroad of that enjoyed by Zygmunt Miłoszewski (b. 1976), her Adela Rochniewicz is at least as intriguing as his detective, Teodor Szacki, and Malanowska’s

12 His retort duplicates that of Danila Bagrov in Aleksei Balabanov’s jingoistic film *Brother* (*Brat* 1997), when he denigrates an American who, he learns, is French: “[w]hat’s the difference?”

13 Imprinted on the cover of the novel, Malanowska (2015).

command of both style and structure, as well as human psychology, is more than a match for Miłoszewski's.

Film

“I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine
ladies instead of rational creatures.
None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives.”
Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818)

Film similarly boasts some formidable feminists, such as Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Małgorzata Szumowka, and Olga Chajdas, who focus on women as individuated, independent beings with social acuity, considerable brain power, and rewarding if demanding jobs. All three directors are prizewinners at international film festivals and intrepid in tackling highly controversial topics, most clearly in the area of sexuality, about which the current ruling Polish political party (mislabelled Law and Justice/*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) promulgates notoriously Neanderthal views. *Nina* (2018), the first full-length feature by Chajdas – married to Agnieszka Holland's daughter, director Katarzyna Adamik – stars one of Poland's premier actresses, Julia Kijowska, received multiple positive reviews, and won the major award at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam. At its center is the titular married woman (Kijowska), a school teacher of French who unexpectedly finds herself drawn to Magda (Eliza Rycembel), the young, free-wheeling lesbian chosen as the surrogate mother of her child and increasingly eager to have close relations with Nina. After some soul-searching Nina decides to leave her husband, Wojtek (Andrzej Konopka), from whom she feels distanced, for the more promising same-sex relationship (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Olga Chajdas, *Nina* (2018). Nina flirtatiously seeks reassurance about her bodily appeal from the younger Magda as they share a bath

Much too long at 130 minutes and weak on plot motivation, as noted by several critics (Calhoun 2019; Bradshaw 2019), the film nonetheless is important for its topic and the director's concept of gender disposition and human interaction¹⁴. Sensitivity, equality, and responsiveness characterize the lesbian relations that Chajdas films with both tact and insight, bypassing negative stereotyping of the husband, who likewise senses a lack of intimacy within the marriage and seems interested in Magda not solely for her surrogate potential. Although in a country that is overwhelmingly Catholic it is extraordinary, to say the least, to favor a lesbian commitment over heterosexual conjugal ties, the film was screened in Polish movie theaters and released on DVD. Poland does not legally recognize same-sex unions, whether as marriage or civil union, and under the current regime the country certainly will not repeal Article 18 of the Constitution, which explicitly defines marriage

14 In his overstatedly annihilating response to the film, Peter Bradshaw called it laughable, preposterous, silly, crass, and the like.

as solely heterosexual. Yet what Chajdas dramatizes is a woman's choice of an emotionally fulfilling relationship over an officially sanctioned one with its attendant social and political rights, but in the specific case short on meaningful attachment. While not cinematically original, the film marks a significant moment in gender politics and particularly LGBTQ rights, which, as history has documented, enjoy significantly more support by women than by men. Perhaps because patriarchal structures have sidelined women for so long, they are ideally positioned to recognize the sociopolitical importance of championing myriad forms of alterity.

In a kindred vein, Szumowska's *In the Name of...* (*W imię...* 2013) portrays a highly sympathetic gay priest who struggles to combat his sexual orientation but finally succumbs to the loving pursuit of a younger man. (Fig. 10) Free from judgmental pronouncements, both through its camera work and the delineation of characters, the film celebrates the genuine love between the two men, contrasting it to other relationships, including a loveless heterosexual marriage and a purely physical homosexual encounter.



Fig. 10. Małgorzata Szumowska, *In the Name of...* (2013). Once away from the institution and its various members, the priest and his young admirer silently acknowledge their mutual attraction

Heterosexual relations and men's insatiable, self-serving drive for power dominate Szumowska's first anglophone film, *The Other Lamb* (2019). It dramatizes developments amidst an isolated religious cult in which a charismatic male leader, transparently called Shepherd (Michiel Huisman), exercises complete control over his exclusively female acolytes and enjoys sexual intercourse with many of them, so that the women are all either his daughters or his wives. The film smacks of untethered male sexual fantasies, revealing, in the words of a male commentator, the "toxic logic" of male patriarchy (Bailey 2019). Ultimately, a young rebel, Selah (Raffey Cassidy), realizes the hypocritical ruthlessness of the so-called Shepherd – sooner a wolf in sheep's clothing – and triggers the events that result in his well-deserved demise.

Here, as in many of her works, Szumowska grounds her psychological dramas in the body – which serves as the title (*Ciało* 2015) of her best and most successful film, where she interweaves three categorically dissimilar approaches to the connection between the body and the soul. Recalling Gretkowska's musings, but in an incomparably more nuanced vein, the film posits the body as the foundation of human life, suggesting that the soul is, in a sense, the superstructure. (Fig. 11) And the implication, as in *The Other Lamb* and her lesser-known *Mug* (Twarz 2013), is that women have a more intimate relationship to the body and its links with emotions, while also yearning for the indefinable or ineffable that is the spirit.



Fig. 11. Małgorzata Szumowska, *Body* (2015). Previously at odds, the skeptical attorney and his anorexic daughter, Olga, reconcile after a self-proclaimed pseudo-spiritualist's failure to conjure up the dead during a séance elicits their shared mirth

Perhaps that explains why her film *Elles* (Sponsoring 2011) presents two young female prostitutes in an attractive light as sympathetic and capable of compassion, while exposing their male clients as brutal, sleazy, or pathetic hypocrites.

Unquestionably the most explicit feminist in Polish film, however, is Smoczyńska, as attested by her two audacious films: her debut feature, *The Lure* (*Córki dancingu* 2015), and her second outing, *Fugue* (*Fuga* 2018). The latter posits the choice between motherhood within a loveless marriage and a woman's freedom to realize her potential as a self-reliant being. Contrary to the ideological blueprint of self-abnegating Polish womanhood, Smoczyńska's protagonist, Alicja (Gabriela Muskata), chooses the latter, despite the pain of leaving her son with his father and the woman who clearly will replace her and to some extent already has done so. (Fig. 12)



Fig. 12. Agnieszka Smoczyńska, *Fugue* (2018). Alicja plays one last game with her son before leaving her former straitjacketing family life for one of self-discovery

The screen narrative abets de Beauvoir's dismissal of the truism that maternity is every woman's natural fate and desire, the pinnacle of womanhood. For Alicja it entails an imprisonment in domesticity beyond which she has encountered alternatives that speak more persuasively to her sense of self. In that regard, her case of fugue – temporary loss of memory owing to a trauma, specified in the title – ultimately proves a blessing, though one that goes against the grain of conventional thinking about women's "sacred duty".

The Lure is somewhat more complex and startling. Revitalizing the genre of the musical through horror, it upends Hans Christian Andersen's universally acclaimed but profoundly misogynistic literary fairy tale, *The Little Mermaid*, which applauds a young woman's self-mutilation, willing loss of voice, and suicidal self-sacrifice out of witless love for a male, superior to her only in class. Two mermaid sisters in Smoczyńska's film embody two immemorial gender options: Silver (Marta Mazurek), who imitates the trajectory of Andersen's silly protagonist and ends up evaporating into the air, and Golden (Michalina Olszańska), her loving, skeptical sibling, who dictates the terms of a sexual

relationship, with men and with a policewoman, and literally eats men's hearts after intercourse. (Fig. 13) After dispatching the mundane man who entralls Silver, she returns to her natural environment, away from earth's noxious heterosexual praxis.



Fig. 13. Agnieszka Smoczyńska, *The Lure* (2015). Golden and Silver flank their adoptive mother substitute, the nightclub singer whose act they join

Both films overturn mythical paradigms of womanhood and certify Smoczyńska's credentials as an uncompromising feminist and original filmmaker, whose *Lure* unexpectedly entered the male-dominated Criterion Collection of films.

The Russian Counterpart: A Brief Look

"Censorship is advertising paid by the government".
Federico Fellini

How do current Russian female *Kulturarbeiter* and images of womanhood stack up against their Polish counterparts? For a start, like everyone else, they are constrained by the revival of Soviet censorship under Putin. And, secondly, the absence of a well-defined and broad-based feminist movement in the country militates against gender revisionism, let alone fundamental

rethinking of womanhood and what it entails, as all too evident in the distribution of wealth, the political hierarchy, and the frivolous, cosmeticized images of women generated by multiple media within Russia.

Film

“We hang the petty thieves and appoint
the great ones to public office”.
Aesop

Whereas in Poland the government established and underwrites the Polish Institute of Film (Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej/PISF 2005), which supports domestic film in all conceivable ways, the Russian Ministry of Culture, a mouthpiece for the Kremlin, funds only those films that further the Kremlin's agenda and resorts to a range of punitive measures against artists and directors who do not adhere to its dictates (illustrated by the stage and film director Kirill Serebrennikov as the most recent case). Each year the Ministry publishes a list of desirable topics; these glorify Russia's past and present, suppress genuine dialogue, and invite what in the Soviet past used to be called *lakirovka* – a rosy veneer superimposed upon grim reality. The Ministry's caveats operate on the level not only of theme and but also of language. Prohibited categories include so-called “obscenities”, alternatives to the official version of history, and sympathetic or even objective depictions of sexualities other than the heteronormative model trumpeted by the government. Andrei Zviagintsev's well-documented problems with the release of his *Leviathan* (*Leviafan* 2014) stemmed chiefly (though not solely) from the accurate use of what represents brutish or ignorant men's standard speech, peppered with expletives, but was deemed improper, even though one hears much worse in the streets on a daily basis.

In the realm of women's representation, the most rewarding film in recent years is the nationally acclaimed and internationally admired feature *Beanpole* (*Dyllda* 2019) by the Circassian newcomer Kantemir Balagov (b. 1991). Based on the Nobel-prizewinning Svetlana Aleksievich's compilation of oral histories, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (*U voiny ne zhenskoe litso* 1965), the young Balagov's drama of two brave women's bond forged during the harrowing years of WWII is unapologetically feminist. (Fig. 14) As one critic remarked, at film's conclusion "its remaining heroines realize they have little need for the impotent men in their lives" (Fegerholm 2019).



Fig. 14. Kantemir Balagov, *Beanpole* (2019). The titular "Beanpole," a nurse whose real name is Lia, suffers multiple traumas before she and the equally traumatized Masha commit to a future life together

After demonstrating courage and resilience amidst unimaginable suffering and enduring each other's traumas, they decide to live together and raise a child as their shared offspring.

Shortlisted for the Oscar in the Best International Film category, it lost to the South Korean entry *Parasite*, directed by Bong Joon-ho, but garnered other awards, and, more importantly, established Balagov as a talented director devoid of typical macho posturing, with an appreciation of women all too rare among Russian male colleagues. His, however, is a unique voice in Russia's cinematic landscape.

No films by Valeriia Germanika (b. 1984) or Anna Melikian (b. 1976) – currently two popular female directors – compare to Balagov's fresh perspective on gender under duress¹⁵. Moreover, a juxtaposition of Melikian's *Mermaid* (*Rusalochka* 2007) with Smoczyńska's *Lure* is instructive: both adapt Andersen's fairy tale, but whereas *The Lure* contrasts the love-smitten, self-abnegating Silver with her resolute, self-reliant sister, Golden, Melikian focuses on a foolish protagonist who expends her energy on servile "feminine" devotion to the indifferent male whom she desperately wishes to snag at all costs (Goscilo 2019). The domestic reception of the film was predictably positive, but it is a foregone conclusion that a mainstream film dramatizing a woman's decision to leave her husband for another woman, as in Chajdas's *Nina*, would never be released in Russia. Given the devastating, officially sanctioned murders of homosexuals in Chechnya, documented in the distressing film *Welcome to Chechnya: Inside the Russian Republic's Deadly War on Gays* (2020), which premiered at the Sundance Festival and aired on HBO (Hasan 2020), as well as the violence against them throughout the country, the likelihood of LGBTQ narratives on Russian screens remains a utopian fantasy.

15 That ending, however, recalls the conclusion of Valerii Todorovskii's *Land of the Deaf* (*Strana glukhikh* 1998), which shows Rita and Iaia about to live together without men.

Art

“Transformation for the sake of painterly or sculptural construction is a revelation of our artistic revolution.”
Liubov’ Popova¹⁶

Much art in Russia today seems to have regressed by at least fifty years: a 2014 posting by the Russian site AdMe.ru and reproduced by a western site, “10 Contemporary Russian Painters Worth a Look”, includes no women and features works that recall those of Il’ia Repin (1844-1930) and the Itinerants (*Peredvizhniki*). Female artists who made an impact more than thirty years ago, such as Irina Nakhova (b. 1955), Elena Elagina (b. 1949), Ol’ga Chernysheva (b. 1962), and the feminist Tania Antoshina (b. 1956) still create, but no longer enjoy their earlier status, though during the pandemic, museum activity, especially that of MMOMA and Garazh, has thrived, offering virtual exhibitions and featuring a broad range of artists. Actionism, perhaps the most original art genre in recent memory, by such groups as the all-women Pussy Riot, Sinie nosy, Voina, the PG Group, and other collectives, practically has vanished from the streets¹⁷. Probably stimulated by the British Banksy, the popularity of street art in Moscow and its outskirts since the first festival in 2012, however, has introduced two exceptions. One is the young street artist Ol’ga Inei, who earlier focused on female cartoon characters until she acquired a studio (Yulia 2017). The other and more interesting artist is the feminist Mikaela, whose work has paid homage to late-19th-century female revolutionaries and documented prostitution

16 Cited in Knight (1991).

17 For a thorough survey of Actionism and other forms of artistic political protest in Russia see Jonson (2015); Jonson and Erofeev (2018).

and abuse of women (Bambic 2014)¹⁸. Predictably, however, new rules issued by the Moscow government in mid-2019 established a set of forbidden topics, encouraged “patriotic” themes, and mandated approval of all street projects by the city’s housing department in consultation with six other authorities. Often reminiscent of Soviet propaganda murals, contemporary street art in Russia reflects topics favored by the authorities, mainly those fostering national pride, including in the Soviet past. As a consequence, contemporary street art recalls Soviet propaganda murals, with graffiti dedicated to topics supportive of Putin and promoted by the authorities (“Moscow draws up” 2019).

In this dispiriting context, it would be remiss to neglect the singular Victoria Lomasko (b. 1978) – a graphic artist with a degree from Moscow State University whose genre is graphic reportage. She stands out by virtue of her attention to and demythologization of the marginalized, which means that, as a reviewer noted, “no gallery in Russia will touch” her (Groskop 2018), though she has exhibited in various “lesser” venues. After co-authoring a book transparently titled *Forbidden Art: A Moscow Exhibition*¹⁹, in her later, more widely circulated volume, *Other Russias* (2017), she presents images and comments by and about Pussy Riot, other protesters, the LGBTQ community, prostitutes, and the like²⁰. (Fig. 15) As she declares, “I make working at the crossroads of journalism and human rights activism my creative method” (Lomasko 2017: 9). Accordingly, a section labeled “The Girls of

18 During the mid-2010s several feminist street artists worked successfully in Moscow and elsewhere. See Raspopina (2015).

19 A graphic novel documenting the trial of the organizers of the 2006 *Forbidden Art* exhibition at the Sakharov Museum in Moscow, the slim book was nominated for the Kandinsky Prize in 2010.

20 For an incisive analysis of Pussy Riot in the context of gender politics, see Borenstein (2021).



Fig. 15. Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias* (2017). While an invisible woman holds a placard proclaiming, “Women’s business is revolution, not borshch,” another raises an image of a crucified figure symbolizing Pussy Riot

Nizhnii Novgorod” (*Devochki Nizhnego Novgoroda*) depicts sex workers, one of whom draws on a cigarette and remarks, “Some

clients ask us to piss on them, but I'd be happy to shit on them on behalf of all women" (Lomasko 2017: 116-17)²¹. (Fig. 16) Like the rest of the book, this individual entry – which resonates with Szumowska's *Elles* – spotlights the bypassed and denigrated Russian citizens on the streets, giving them visual form and individual voice²².



Fig. 16. Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias* (2017). The prostitute's expressed contempt for men who request "golden showers" possibly may be extended to all male clients

21 That request, for what is known as a "golden shower," also is shown in Szumowska's *Elles*.

22 On Lomasko, see Shayevich (2017).

While documenting her subjects Lomasko makes astute observations about gender in diverse contexts. After attending the annual Side by Side (*Bok o Bok*) LGBTQ international film festival in St. Petersburg, founded in 2008, she perceived the sexism of male gays, who did not bother coming to a film about lesbians; indeed, one gay man declared, "...lesbian sex is disgusting to watch" (2017: 242). Without sharing such prejudices, Lomasko's oeuvre fearlessly focuses on those whom governments and the mainstream prefer to ignore or penalize, such as members of "the oldest profession" – who "service" a huge male population. Hers is a completely original voice, accompanied by unique visuals that explode conventional notions of womanhood. Especially striking are the cameos of older women – traditionally viewed as grannies (*babushki*), the unacknowledged constabularies of decorum in public spaces during the Soviet era, chiding strangers about "inappropriate" behavior and dress, or pensioners babysitting grandchildren at home. Instead, Lomasko shows a broad spectrum of old women, from the homeless former schoolteacher turned out by her son so that he could drink freely who now finds refuge with one acquaintance after another (Fig. 17), to the woman with a walking stick who asks where she can obtain a machine gun to kill Putin (2017: 42-43). (Fig. 18)



Fig. 17. Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias* (2017). Thrown out of her dwelling by her boozing son, the homeless former village schoolteacher relies on a series of old acquaintances for refuge and narrates her life story to chance fellow passengers on trains. She interprets a recent encounter with a tomtit as auguring her death



Fig. 18. Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias* (2017). “Where can I get a machine gun to kill Putin?” asks an elderly woman whose belligerent attitude could hardly differ more dramatically from that of the Soviet-era granny

In short, Lomasko spotlights precisely what the Kremlin discounts or attempts to eliminate, and in that respect her gender politics resembles Juskiewicz’s.

Literature

“When truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie.”

Evgenii Evtushenko

Quite apart from the retrograde consequences of state censorship, feminism has been embraced by only a tiny percentage of the Russian population. Balagov aside, no film directors or painters with the combined daring and inventiveness of Juszkiewicz, Waliszewska, Chajdas, Szumowska, and Smoczyńska have emerged in recent years. That leaves literature, and what complicates discussions of literature today is the shrinkage in readership under the impact of visual genres such as film and TV series, while graphic novels have become popular, as have comics. To my knowledge, the only female author with a huge following remains Liudmila Ulitskaia (b. 1943), who decidedly is *not* a feminist and whose novelistic penchant is to create a chain of biographies, held together by the presence of the implied author as a generous, humane woman – a persona that coincides with Ulitskaia herself²³. Ultimately, the aim of Ulitskaia's novels is a balanced reassurance, for she operates on the principle of “accentuate the positive”. Tellingly, her eponymous Medea in her first novel functions as a loving haven for all her family members, not as the vengeful murderess of her own children. She is the gatekeeper of memory (Mnemosyne, the mother of the nine Muses), materialized in the house that welcomes generations. Memory, in fact, is a *dominanta* in Ulitskaia's oeuvre, and that mode aligns her perspective with that of current Russian officialdom, though with a contrary valency.

The author who demythologized womanhood and revealed the warts and wounds of Soviet society was another Liudmila –

23 For a thorough examination of Ulitskaia's prose see Skomp, Sutcliffe (2015).

Petrushevskaiia (b. 1938), whose prose and plays even before the Soviet Union's disintegration inscribed female alcoholics, domestic violence, and sexual perversity. She, however, abandoned literature for cabaret song approximately a decade ago and, true to a longstanding literary tradition, rejected her own fiction. Unlike her Polish counterparts, Petrushevskaiia conceived of humanity at large in the darkest possible terms and in person claimed that maternity was sacred, though in her best narrative, *The Time: Night* (*Vremia noch'* 1992), the superbly limned Anna Andrianovna is the archetypal monster mother. But that was almost three decades ago and the only other woman author who enjoys a significant reputation today is Svetlana Aleksievich, author of documentary prose. The indefatigably ambitious O'lga Slavnikova (b. 1957) has found her place in the literary establishment and garnered domestic prizes, but, unlike Tokarczuk and Gretkowska, not found a wide readership abroad, largely because her prose smacks of pasting and deleting rather than creating – all too visibly in *The Man Who Couldn't Die* (*Bessmertnyi: povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* 2001).

Anyone seeking vivid portrayals of a new female subjectivity will not find it among long-established writers, but needs to look elsewhere. The recent *Russian Women's Decameron* (*Russkii zhenskii Dekameron* 2019), an anthology of 27 narratives edited by Svetlana Vasilenko (b. 1956) and Nadezhda Azhgikhina (b. 1960), for instance, offers a gynocentric range of stories with a feminist edge. Its very title explicitly references Iuliia Voznesenskaia's 1985 *Women's Decameron* (*Zhenskii Dekameron*) and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1348-53?), while the narratives, as the co-editors state in their brief introduction, engage “what for a long time was considered taboo, indecent” (Vasilenko, Azhgikhina

2019: 6)²⁴. Those proscribed topics constitute sexuality, sensuality, aging, maternity, and a gamut of negative emotions. Quotidian existence and imaginative flights, desire and disgust, loneliness and love's siren call, naturalism and romanticism, humor and melancholy – all find expression in these colorfully distinct voices detailing Russian women's experiences. Few other contemporary works, if any, cast a comparable light on the inner lives of current Russian womanhood as portrayed by several generations.

Additionally, Gretkowska may have her Russian parallels among the youngest generation of female poets, who identify themselves as feminists, publish their works on the internet, and collaborate with foreign specialists in Slavic for translations in book form (Haynes 2020). They, however, live in the provinces and are barely known. Convinced, not unlike Juskiewicz but in another medium, that language can change the world, Galina Rymbu (b. 1990), in support of the LGBTQ feminist-activist Iuliia Tsvetkova, wrote the poem *My Vagina*, which recalls Judy Chicago's 1979 memorable installation, *The Dinner Party*. Rymbu's work reflects the activities of F pis'mo (F Writing), a collective of feminist and LGBTQ poets founded in 2017 to galvanize civil rights movements. In November 2018 the organization launched the first Russian magazine and online platform dedicated to queer and feminist writing. Oksana Vasiakina in Siberia similarly authors poems about gender inequities and publishes her own work in the revived form of *samizdat*. In other words, at least women raised during late perestroika and after the USSR imploded embrace a bold new vision of gender and have no hesitation in wresting womanhood from the secondariness to which stale myths repeatedly downgraded it.

24 Translation mine.

Conclusion

Societies are slow to change, and it is difficult to imagine Russia under Putin – widely touted as an icon of machismo – ever recognizing LGBTQ rights or granting women even a measure of equality. Poland, with its history of multiple, longstanding Western ties and a less repressive government, despite the current conservative party in power, headed by the 71-year-old Jarosław Kaczyński, has more gender flexibility as regards women's status and also greater though far from adequate tolerance of LGBTQ efforts at political enfranchisement. PISF, the film organization founded on the government's initiative, focuses on underwriting efforts of fledgling directors, funding and preserving domestic films, and orchestrating events that promote them. Unlike Russia's Ministry of Culture, neither it nor the government has any interest in censoring directors' projects, leaving professional questions to genuine professionals. Accordingly, such films as Holland's *Spoor*, Szumowska's *In the Name of...*, and Chajdas's *Nina*, which could never be produced in Russia, encountered no censorship in Poland. Kindred circumstances obtain in literature: those Russian writers exploring women's lives from an unconventional standpoint or committed to promoting gender issues do not belong to the literary mainstream, have modest print runs, and are published by small, little-known presses. The *Russian Women's Decameron*, for example, appeared in 200 copies, released by the ironically named *Matushkina kniga* (*Mater's Books*). Vasiakina relies on self-publication.

Overall, a new generation of female *Kulturarbeiter* in both countries, to substantially different degrees, has conceived of women anew in the spheres of agency, individuation, social identity, profession, sexuality, and life choices. One can only hope that those visionary women who dare to dispel the myth of passive, domestic, subservient womanhood will attract sufficient followers

in multiple spheres of culture to topple that superannuated but still coercive paradigm for good. Whether that happy day will eventuate is unforeseeable.

Helena Goscilo, 2021

Bibliography

- “10 Contemporary Russian Painters Worth a Look” (2014), *Museum Studies Abroad*, 23.07.2014, <<https://museumstudiesabroad.org/10-contemporary-russian-artists/>> (last accessed 18/11/2019).
- “Almine Rech announces representation of Polish painter Ewa Juszkiewicz” (2019), *Artdaily*, 18.12.2019, <<https://artdaily.cc/news/-119310/Almine-Rech-announces-representation-of-Polishpainter-Ewa-Juszkiewicz#.XfpOevx7mUk>> (last accessed 5/1/2020).
- Armistead Claire (2019) “Olga Tokarczuk: the dreadlocked feminist winner the Nobel needed”, *The Guardian*, 10.10.2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/10/olga-tokarczukthe-dreadlocked-feminist-winner-the-nobel-needed>> (last accessed 24/12/2019).
- Austen Jane (2001), *Pride and Prejudice*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co.
- Bailey Cameron (2019), “The Other Lamb”, <<https://2019.tiffir.com/shows/the-other-lamb>> (last accessed 25/2/2021).
- Bambic Ana (2014), “New Dawn of Russian Street Art”, *Widewalls*, 18.02.2014, <<https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/street-art-graffiti-russia>> (last accessed 5/2/2020).
- Barthes Roland (1973), *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers, New York, Hill & Wang.
- Berger John (1972), *Ways of Seeing*, London, BBC and Penguin Books.
- Bible, New International Version*, <<https://biblehub.com/niv/1-corinthians/11.htm>> (last accessed 20/2/2021).
- Borenstein Eliot (2021), *Pussy Riot: Speaking Punk to Power*, London/New York, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bradshaw Peter (2019), “Nina review – deeply silly softcore lesbian drama”, *The Guardian*, 24.01.2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jan/24/nina-review-olga-chajdas-lesbian-drama>> (last accessed 12/12/2020).

- Calhoun Dave (2019), "Nina", *Time Out*, 23.01.2019, <<https://www.timeout.com/movies/nina>> (last accessed 12/02/2020).
- Carroll Noel (1990), *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, London, Routledge.
- Cixous Hélène, Catherine Clément (1986), *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Cornell Lauren (2016) "Girls in Trouble", *2000 Words*, ed. Aleksandra Waliszewska, Athens, DESTE: 6-17.
- Culler Jonathan (1983), *Barthes*, Glasgow, Fontana Paperbacks.
- de Beauvoir Simone (1989), *The Second Sex*, trans. by Howard M. Parshley, New York, Vintage Books.
- Fagerholm Matt (2019), "Beanpole", *Roger Ebert*, <<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/beanpole-2020> 28/1/2020> (last accessed 5/2/2020).
- Goscilo Helena (2004), "Negotiating Gendered Rhetoric: Between Scylla and Charybdis", *Representing Gender in Cultures*, ed. Elżbieta H. Oleksy, Joanna Rydzewska, Berlin, Peter Lang: 19-37.
- Goscilo Helena (2019), "Mermaid/Rusalka", *The Contemporary Russian Cinema Reader 2005-2016*, ed. Rimgaila Salys, Boston, Academic Studies Press: 89-113.
- Goscilo Helena, Beth Holmgren (2021), *Polish Cinema Today*, Lanham MD, Lexington Books.
- Groskop Viv (2018), "Victoria Lomasko: the brutally funny artist no gallery in Russia will touch", *The Guardian*, 2 March [interview], <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/02/victoria-lomasko-brutally-funny-artist-russia-on-the-eve-putin-election>> (last accessed 5/4/2020).
- Hasan Mehdi (2020), "Chechnya Is Trying to Exterminate Gay People. Our Silence Only Emboldens Vladimir Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov", *The Intercept*, 28.06.2020, <<https://theintercept.com/2020/06/28/welcome-to-chechnya-gay-men/>> (last accessed 11/3/2021).
- Haynes Suyin (2020), "How Russia's Feminist Poets Are Chancing What It Means to Protest", *TIME*, 23.12.2020, <https://time.com/5908168/russia-feminist-poets-protest/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email-share-article&utm_term=world_russia> (last accessed 10/1/2021).

- Hutcheon Linda (2002), *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge.
- Irigaray Luce (1985), *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press.
- Jonson Lena (2015), *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia*, London, Routledge.
- Jonson Lena, Andrei Erofeevs (2018), *Russia – Art Resistance and the Conservative – Authoritarian Zeitgeist*, London, Routledge.
- Knight Christopher (1991), “ART REVIEW: Popova Exhibition Confirms Russian's Avant-Garde Stature”, *Los Angeles Times*, 21.06.1991, <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-06-21-ca-816-story.html>> (last accessed 30/07/1997).
- Kristeva Julia (1980), *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- “Live Discussion with Agnieszka Holland” (2021), organized by Loyola University, 4 March 2021.
- Lomasko Victoria (2017), *Other Russias*, trans. Thomas Campbell, London, Penguin/Random.
- Longhi Lucia (2019), “Classical Female Portraiture and the Art of Constraint: An Interivew with Ewa Juszkiewicz: Berlin Art Link”, 01.03.2019, <<http://www.ewajuszkiewicz.com/about/statement>> (last accessed 3/11/2020).
- Malanowska Kaja (2015), *Mgła*, Kraków, Znak.
- Martin James (2012), “Don't Call Me a Saint?”, *America*, 14.11.2012, <<https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/dont-call-mesaint>> (last accessed 28/2/2021).
- “Moscow draws up official rules for graffiti” (2019), *BBC*, 30.07.2019, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-49164044>> (last accessed 5/2/2020).
- Raspopina Sasha (2015), “All the rage: Russian feminist artists against the status quo”, *The Calvert Journal*, 11.05.2015, <<https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/3983/feminist-artistsactivism>> (last accessed 5/2/2020).
- Rees Lucy (2019), “Ewa Juszkiewicz's Surreal Portraits Challenge the Role of Women in Art”, *Galerie*, 09.10.2019, <<https://www.galerie-magazine.com/vaughn-spann-gagosian/>> (last accessed 10/1/2020).

- Shayevich Bela (2017), "Victoria Lomasko: Drawing in the Dark", *Harriman Institute Newsletter*, Fall: 43-51.
- Skomp Elizabeth A., Benjamin M. Sutcliffe (2015), *Ludmila Ulitskaia and The Art of Tolerance*, Madison WI, Wisconsin University Press.
- Sural Agnieszka (n.d.), "Ewa Juszkiewicz (b. 1984)", *Culture.pl*, <<https://culture.pl/en/artist/ewa-juszkiewicz>> (last accessed 24/11/2020).
- "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2018" (2018), *Award ceremony speech*, <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/ceremonyspeech/>> (last accessed 23/12/2010).
- Tokarczuk Olga (2017), *Flights*, trans. by Jennifer Croft, New York, Riverhead Books.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2020), *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, trans. by Antonia Lloyd-Jones, London, Fitzcarraldo Editions.
- Vasilenko Svetlana, Nadezhda Azhgikhina (2019), *Russkii zhenskii Dekameron: Sbornik zhenskikh rasskazov*, Moscow, Matushkina kniga.
- Waliszewska Aleksandra (2016), *2000 Words*, Athens, DESTE.
- Waliszewska Aleksandra (2019), *Problem: Solution 4*, Houston TX, Timeless.
- Warner Marina (1996), *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Feminine Form*, New York, Vintage.
- Yulia S. (2017), "7 Russian Street Artists You Need to Know About", *Culture Trip*, 22.12.2017, <<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/-russia/articles/7-russian-street-artists-you-need-to-know-about/>> (last accessed 7/10/2019).

III.

Финист ясный сокол

Светланы Петрийчук и Жени Беркович.

О взаимодействии документального

и сказочного дискурсов

Katarzyna Syska

Документальный спектакль Евгении (Жени) Беркович (1985) *Финист ясный сокол* по одноименной пьесе Светланы Петрийчук (1980) с мая 2023 года посмотрели в Youtube десятки тысяч зрителей. Печальную известность эта работа, представляющая истории женщин из Российской Федерации, завербованных членами Исламского государства, завоевала из-за возбуждения 4 мая 2023 года уголовного дела против Беркович и Петрийчук. Судебные эксперты нашли в спектакле признаки оправдания и пропаганды терроризма, а также «радикального феминизма и борьбы с андроцентричным общественным укладом России»¹. Женщины были задержаны и больше года провели в СИЗО. 8 июля 2024 года суд приговорил Беркович и Петрийчук к 6 годам лишения

1 Официальное, хотя пока необоснованное законом, признание «радикального феминизма и борьбы с андроцентричным общественным укладом» преступлениями наглядно демонстрирует движение российских властей в сторону патриархатного экстремизма. (Комментарий на эту тему см: Медведев 2023: online).

свободы по статье об оправдании терроризма. Дело носит явно политический, показательный характер. Это спектакль – исследование, предупреждение, и оправдания терроризма в нем нельзя усмотреть при хоть сколько-нибудь профессиональном прочтении, о чем неоднократно высказывались как театроведы (см. Петербургский театральный журнал 2023: online), так и сами авторы, еще задолго до ареста². Женя Беркович поясняет в интервью за октябрь 2022 года:

<...> многие из этих женщин совершили преступление, как минимум соучастием <...>. Нужно ли им сочувствовать? Не знаю. Нужно ли их понимать? Обязательно. Потому что если ты не понимаешь этого механизма, то ты просто сам там окажешься. (Беркович 2022: online)

Читка пьесы Петрийчук состоялась в рамках фестиваля драмы «Любимовка» в октябре 2019 года, а в 2020 году вышел спектакль, реализованный Женей Беркович и ее независимым женским театральным коллективом «Дочери СОСО». О художественной значимости постановки свидетельствуют четыре номинации и две премии на самом престижном театральном фестивале России – Золотая Маска (2022).

Пьеса состоит в основном из документального материала. Это прежде всего фрагменты протоколов судебных заседаний³

- 2 См. например обсуждение читки пьесы со зрителями на фестивале «Любимовка», в ходе которой Петрийчук объясняет систему вербовки, помещает российскую проблему в мировой контекст и однозначно осуждает действия радикалов (см. Обсуждение... 2019: online).
- 3 Андрей Мальгин приметил, что Беркович в своих постановках регулярно обращалась к жанру театральной судебной драмы, как будто

по делам девушек из Российской Федерации, которые подались на манипуляцию исламских вербовщиков, вследствие Интернет-переписки влюбились в радикальных мусульман и уехали к ним на территории подконтрольные Исламскому Государству. Вторая группа текстов – размещенные в Сети инструкции заключения мусульманского свадебного обряда по Скайпу, повязывания хиджаба, испечения халяльного торта и прочих моментов религиозного быта. Третья группа – отзывы новообращенных девушек о том, что дает им ношение хиджаба и – в противовес – агрессивные комментарии пользователей Интернет-форумов, осуждающие поступки героинь. Композиционным и сюжетным каркасом этого речевого коллажа является история Подсудимой-Марьюшки⁴ (коллективный персонаж, созданный путем монтажа документов дел нескольких женщин), рассказанная в виде ответов на вопросы Судьи. Сценарий спектакля расширен – в него добавлены пять монологов женщин, написанных на основании дополнительных интервью, личного опыта актрис, форумов, которые являются психологическими зарисовками типов личностей и жизненных ситуаций, делающих женщин уязвимыми к подобной вербовке.

художественно репетируя момент реального заключения. Она поставила пьесу Жана Ануя *Жаворонок* (суд над Жанной д'Арк, 2012) и выпустила спектакль *Человек, который не работал. Суд над Иосифом Бродским* (2012), который шел на театральной площадке Общества «Мемориал». *Финист ясный сокол* - третья «судебная» работа режиссерки (см. Мальгин 2023: online).

- 4 Документальной основой для диалога Судьи и Подсудимой-Марьюшки стало нашумевшее дело Варвары Карауловой, студентки философского факультета МГУ, в 2016 году приговоренной к 4,5 годам колонии за пособничество террористам. Кроме того, в пьесу добавлены отрывки из протоколов еще трех похожих дел.

Петрийчук вплетает в эту документальную ткань казалось бы полностью чужеродный ей жанр – популярную русскую волшебную сказку *Перышко Финиста ясна сокола*, известную прежде всего в редакции Александра Афанасьева (1985: 190-198)⁵ – об угнетаемой злыми сестрами Марьюшке-красавице, которая отправляется в тридцатое царство, чтобы, пройдя ряд испытаний, вернуть себе возлюбленного сокола-жениха.

Как это характерно для докудрам, смонтированных из кусков готового материала, классическое действие почти отсутствует, и его заменяет речевое действие – динамика взаимосвязей между разными задействованными в пьесе дискурсами, «исследование языка» – как выразилась драматург Дана Сидерос (Петербургский театральный журнал 2023: online) о совместной работе Петрийчук и Беркович. Поэтому, оставляя в стороне наиболее ныне актуальный социально-политический контекст, присмотримся ближе к функциям сказочного прототекста и его взаимодействию с другими жанрово-речевыми составляющими пьесы и спектакля. При этом основываться будем как на текст драмы, так и на ее сценическое исполнение в виде читки и спектакля⁶.

Прямых цитат и косвенных отсылок к сказке о Финисте относительно немного, преобладает документальный пласт, однако само заглавие задает прочтение целого в контексте данного гипотекста. Можно выделить три способа введения в пьесу интертекстуальных вкраплений, каждый из которых несет разную смысловую нагрузку.

- 5 Судя по цитатам, приводимым в пьесе, автор опиралась не на книжные варианты, а на распространенный в Сети текст сказки, при котором редактор не указывается.
- 6 Записи спектакля и читки доступны на Youtube (Спектакль «Финист ясный сокол» 2023: online; Финист ясный сокол. Читка пьесы Светланы Петрийчук 2019: online).

Первый – автоматическое, как будто невольное переключение персонажей на сказочный нарратив. Подсудимая, заявленная в списке действующих лиц как «МАРЬЮШКИ (Неустановленное количество. По некоторым данным, до 2000 человек за последние несколько лет.)» (Петрийчук 2019: online)⁷ – вдруг меняет стиль, органично продолжая давать показания от лица фольклорной Марьюшки:

СУДЬЯ. Вы ехали в Сирию, чтобы стать террористкой?

ПОДСУДИМАЯ. Я ехала, чтобы выйти замуж.

СУДЬЯ. За кого?

ПОДСУДИМАЯ. *За Финиста. За Влада. За Карима. За Надира — я не знаю, как его зовут. Но он мой суженый, счастье мое, сокол мой ясный.*

СУДЬЯ. При каких обстоятельствах вы познакомились?

ПОДСУДИМАЯ. Он написал мне в группе «Спартака» «ВКонтакте». Сказал, что ему 21 год и что он националист. Мы обсуждали жизнь и футбол. Я гуляла с собакой пораньше, закрывалась в комнате, включала компьютер, и *являлся мне молодец красоты неописанной*. Я поняла, что влюбилась. (Петрийчук 2019: online) [курсив мой – К.С.]

Переключение происходит в те моменты, когда эпизоды из жизни подсудимой рифмуются со сказочными (тайные беседы

7 В июне 2023 года в независимом эмигрантском издательстве *Freedom Letters* вышел сборник семи пьес Петрийчук *Туарег*, в состав которого входит и *Финист ясный сокол*. Мы опираемся на электронную версию, доступную для скачивания на сайте фестиваля «Любимовка» (см. Петрийчук 2019: online).

с появляющимся из ниоткуда красавцем; внезапное исчезновение суженого; призыв Финиста, чтобы искать его в тридесяти царстве; необходимость преодолеть на этом пути испытания, вражду окружения, помехи итд.). Между фигуранткой дела и Марьюшкой нет никакой дистанции – это трансное перевоплощение, выявляющее архетипическое тождество судеб, неосознанное повторение современной российской женщиной закрепленных в культуре поведенческих моделей.

Однако в конце пьесы (9-ая из 11-и частей) Подсудимая сама ссылается на историю сказочной Марьюшки в качестве желаемого жизненного сценария:

Любовь же не данность, по талонам ее не выписывают, каждому на руки поровну. Самой хватать надо. И всегда приходится чем-то жертвовать. *Вон в сказке Марьюшка и серебряные пальца, и золотую иголочку, и веретенец — все отдала, лишь бы на Финиста ясна сокола ночью поглядеть.* Вот и я думала, если ты ничем не платишь, значит, и не любовь это, а фиговина. (Петрийчук 2019: online) [курсив мой – К.С.]

Следовательно – здесь мы уже имеем дело не со слепым повторением социокультурных штампов, а с активным мифотворчеством – выстраиванием собственной жизни по выбранной мифопоэтической схеме. Петрийчук и Беркович в немногочисленных авторских комментариях к спектаклю дружно указывают именно на женское страдальчество⁸,

8 Стратегии выживания в патриархатном укладе современной России – постоянные темы пьес Петрийчук. Вопросу – на этот раз материнской – жертвенности она посвятила свою дебютную драму: *Вторник – короткий день*. Основательную рецензию на сборник пьес Петрийчук см. Хитров 2023: online.

готовность ради любви «три пары башмаков железных истоптать, три посоха чугуновых изломать, три просвиры каменных изглотать» (Афанасьев 1985: 191), как ту ценностную установку, которая мотивирует девушек вступить в насильственные отношения:

<...> это супер российская история – про эту бесконечную жертвенность, про то, что если ты ничем не платишь, то любовь – это фиговина. Ничего не должно даваться просто. Надо страдать. Это очень христианское, православное. (Беркович 2022: online)

Однако мы попытались сойти с позиции осуждения, с точки «самавиновата» и исследовать этот архетипичный сюжет, убеждение, что только выстраданное является чем-то настоящим. (Золотая Маска 2022: online)

Стоит оговориться что, драматург и режиссер работают с фольклорным материалом с позиции современного реципиента, который, «лишь смутно ощущая отзвук фольклорной традиции» (Ковтун 1999: 129), неспособен актуализировать первоначальное значение сказочно-мифологических образов. Елена Ковтун пишет, что это приводит к существенным сдвигам в понимании функции персонажей. Если в древней волшебной сказке испытания героя должны были выявить его особый онтологический статус и «магическую оснащенность» – умение применить поколениями накопленные общиной знания и опыт, то в современном восприятии преобладает нравственно-социологическое прочтение действий персонажей, «ориентированное на нынешние нормы морали» (Ковтун 1999: 129).

Третий «канал» трансляции сказочного интертекста –

дистанцированные реплики Судьи, которая в какой-то момент присваивает предложенный Подсудимой нарратив, (начинает называть ее «Марьюшкой», задавать вопросы при помощи цитат из сказки), лишая ее таким образом полноты контроля над мифотворческим повествованием. Перехват сказочного слова субъектом извне сказки приводит к его (т.е. слова) саморазоблачению:

СУДЬЯ. Допустим. Итак, вы вышли в стамбульском аэропорту. Шли чистым полем, шли темным лесом, высокими горами. Птички веселыми песнями вам сердце радовали, ручейки лицо белое умывали, леса темные привечали. И никто не мог Марьюшку тронуть: волки серые, медведи, лисицы — все звери к ней сбегались? Так все было?

МАРЬЮШКА. Почти. В аэропорту я взяла такси. <...> Меня встретил у подъезда один чеченец, сумку не взял, сама из багажника достала. Чеченец-брат сказал, что я теперь со своими, и завел в квартиру. <...> Пахло горохом и стираным бельем. <...> Мне сказали выбросить сим-карту и не выходить в интернет.

Однако постепенно нейтрально-ироническая интонация Судьи сменяется в агрессивно-саркастической.

СУДЬЯ. Да какая, на хрен, любовь?! Ты что, дитя малое? Ты не видела, что ли, что тебя вербуют? Да из его этих аккаунтов тебе наверняка целая толпа народа писала по очереди. <...> Так ты себе рисовала свое семейное счастье?

МАРЬЮШКА. А может, и так. Много вы понимаете.

СУДЬЯ. Или как в сказке? Что капнет слеза твоя на голое плечо Финиста ясна сокола, и пробудится он? На Марьюшку свою посмотрит, к сердцу ее прижмет. <...>

Но вы снова попытались уехать в Тридесятое королевство. И это <...> после того как тебя курды чуть на границе не подстрелили. Так все было, дура ты ненормальная без инстинкта самосохранения?

Динамика функционирования фольклорного интертекста в драме – от неосознанной идентификации героини со сказочной схемой судьбы, через целенаправленное ей подражание (романтизация собственной жизни) к рационально-иронической деконструкции с позиции Судьи – доказывает несбыточность следования романтическим сказочным моделям в реальной жизни. И вместе с тем Петрийчук констатирует силу воздействия этих моделей на современное общество. Не являясь типичной «постмодернистской сказкой», пьеса *Финист ясный сокол* реализует одну из важнейших, по мнению Кристины Бачилеги, функций этого жанра:

Like meta-folklore, they constitute an ideological test for previous interpretations, and doing so, postmodern fairy tales exhibit an awareness of how the folktale, which modern humans relegate to the nursery, almost vindictively patterns our unconscious <...>. (Bacchilega 1997: 22)

Петрийчук и Беркович обыгрывают некоторые узнаваемые элементы поэтики волшебной сказки – вполне в русле сложившейся уже в конце 1970-х годов практики социокультурной и феминистской реинтерпретации сказок, которую писательница Анжела Картер назвала «делом демифологизации» («demythologizing business», Carter 1983: 71), направленным на «деколонизацию нашего языка и основных стереотипов мышления» («decolonising our language and our basic habits of thought», Carter 1983: 75).

Итак Финист, в исходном тексте относящийся к типу «искомого персонажа-награды», у Петрийчук выполняет скорее роль «вредителя» и «отправителя» одновременно (см. Пропп 1928, 35-73), сама же героиня не обладает компетенциями, позволяющими выполнить задачи и успешно пройти испытания. Эта подмена подрывает сюжетную логику волшебной сказки, которая подчинена «важнейшей сказочной цели – ликвидации [героем] первоначальной потери, беды, “недостачи”» (Мелетинский 1970: online) и восстановлению таким образом нарушенного миропорядка. В современной пьесе справедливость и любовь не торжествуют – дорога Марьюшек из РФ, обманутых виртуальными Финистами, оборачивается провалом и еще усугубляет первоначальную беду⁹. В театральной постановке Беркович ставит акцент именно на психологически понимаемую «недостачу» (нехватка внимания, заботы, любви, общины, ценностный вакуум, тоска по внятным идеалам итд.), на попытку разобраться, «чего же так не хватает человеку, женщине, что она готова поставить на карту абсолютно всю свою жизнь, поверить даже не мужчине, а картинке на экране, и рвануть за тридевять земель искать своего Финиста» (Золотая Маска 2022: online) и «где эта потребность, где этот голод, которые в итоге женщина удовлетворяет так» (Беркович 2021: online).

Макс Люти, автор литературной теории сказки, называл сказочных персонажей плоскими фигурами и их апсихологизм считал одной из основных черт жанра (см. Lüthi 1982: 22). Неудивительно, что в современных пересказах

9 Инверсионные трансформации мифологических претекстов, которые обманывают ожидания читателя, сам Мелетинский называл «антимифом» и считал заметной тенденцией в литературе 20 века. См. Мелетинский 2001: 140.

традиционных сюжетов психологическая разработка героев стала одной из самых распространенных стратегий трансформации претекста. Петрийчук однако скорее сохраняет эту черту поэтики народной сказки, следуя логике второй жанровой матрицы своего текста – судебному протоколу, где реально совершенный поступок важнее психологического бэкграунда. В репликах персонажей мы найдем только намеки, сжатые формулировки на причины их решений, например: «женщина всегда под покровительством мужа <...>, а мужчина обязан ее обеспечить. Мне нравились эти идеи»; «Из-за зефира. <...> я представила, как я делаю ему зефир <...>, и стало мне внутри так хорошо-хорошо»; «Дома не мужики, а перекасти-поле. <...> А Финист представляет собой <...> образ сильного, бесстрашного мужчины, готового убивать и умирать ради своих идеалов»; «Через меня же дома все смотрели, как будто я прозрачная» (Петрийчук 2019: online), упомянутое выше убеждение о том, что ради любви нужно страдать. В спектакле же – и в этом его главное отличие от пьесы – психологическая разработка «коллективной Марьюшки» гораздо сильнее. Монологи пяти разных женщин, исполняемые актрисами в жанрах от стендапа до трагического исповедального признания – попытка раскрыть побуждения завербованных девушек, понять особенности личности и социального опыта. Женья Беркович рассказывает, что монологи появились по просьбе актрис, для которых слепая наивность героинь была настолько неправдоподобной, что они не могли справиться с актерской задачей (см. Беркович 2021: online). Анализ предлагаемых авторами спектакля причин уязвимости к манипуляции исламскими радикалами не является нашей целью, поэтому только кратко назовем несколько из числа тех, которые напрямую следуют из монологов: бедность, патриархатное унижение, отсутствие возможностей, детские травмы, абьюз, приведенное в норму

сексуальное и психологическое насилие, безыдейность, гендерные стереотипы (в том числе поддерживаемые самими женщинами). Для нас важнее констатировать, что этот вполне ожидаемый, и от этого не менее болезненный диагноз свидетельствует, на наш взгляд, не об интеллектуальной банальности спектакля, а о массовости, обыденности опыта, который побуждает женщин предпринять столь радикальную и рискованную попытку изменить свою судьбу. Критики отмечали: «в объятая военизированного домостроя девушек парадоксальным образом толкают патриархальные нравы, царящие на родине» (Золотая Маска 2022: online); «То, что заставило этих девушек бежать в ИГИЛ <...>, то, что выталкивает их из одного круга в другой – инертное стагнирующее равномерно распределенное ординарное насилие» (Куприна 2021: online).

Такая линия интерпретации спектакля, безусловно, оправдана. Загнанность женщин между «родным» русским и «экзотичным» (исламские радикалы) подчинением отчетливо видна в сцене 11, когда Судья озвучивает агрессивные комментарии с Интернет-форумов – своеобразный народный «самосуд», в котором та же инструментализация женщин, жесткое гендерное распределение ролей:

Выпустить, если кто-нибудь у нас ее замуж взять согласится. <...> Я б ей вдул по-православному. Нацию русскую позорит. Тут еще четыре тысячи комментариев – слушайте давайте, чего вы уши закрываете? <...> Ты тут будешь идеалы наши топтать, предавать исконное предназначение русской женщины, а мы молчать должны? (Петрийчук: online)¹⁰

10 В спектакле Беркович еще обостряет сексуализированную жестокость

Однако она осложняется, в частности, за счет расширения концепта сказки, который уходит от конкретного сюжета и выступает маркером более общих явлений.

Первое из них – живучесть архаических форм сознания в современном мире. Ведь в попытках изменить свою участь героини пьесы способны лишь воспроизводить закрепленные в текстах и практиках народной культуры (мифы, сказки, ритуалы) традиционные сценарии женской самореализации. И с философского факультета МГУ, и из провинциального городка они бегут на территории подконтрольные ИГИЛ, чтобы «готовить еду. Стирать одежду. Быть женой, как повелел Всевышний и моя физиология» (Петрийчук 2019: online).

Таким образом Петрийчук не осовременяет сказочный претекст, а привлекает его для того, чтобы выявить архаичность современного общества. Один из ее признаков – потребность героинь в четком ритуальном урегулировании жизни, которая в пьесе выражена множеством инструкций (в спектакле актрисы произносят их текст восторженными голосами) и репликами Марьюшек, мечтающих о том, чтобы их собственная семья была «крепкая, как в книжках по домоводству» или признающих: «А он мне писал “маленькая моя глупенькая девочка”, и я от этого форму приобретала» (Петрийчук 2019: online).

В театральной постановке сценография и костюмы (Ксения Сорокина) тоже обыгрывают проблему, которую условно назовем «красотой женского подчинения» – завораживающую привлекательность традиционных нарядов и ритуалов, скрывающую однако несвободу, жесткую регламентированность ролей и поведения. Актрисы одеты в платья, напоминающие

угроз юзеров (напр. «Хотела по кругу среди карабасов пойти, пойдешь по кругу теперь в тюрьме»).

одновременно и русские сарафаны, и ближневосточные халаты, рукава которых по краям обшиты натуральными женскими волосами. Самая характерная деталь костюмов – пышные головные уборы родом из русских сказок (кокошники, рогатые кички, коруны, бывшие маркерами социального и семейного положения), под которыми, как под хиджабом, тщательно упрятаны волосы артисток, тоже шиты или сплетены из стриженных женских кос. Этот главный концептуальный прием в оформлении сценического пространства становится емкой метафорой многовекового воспроизведения репрессивных социальных практик, которое легитимизирует их продолжение – ведь стриженные волосы прежних/других женщин служат материалом порабощения нынешних/этих. И все это не отменяет эстетическую красоту нарядов, причесок, обрядовых танцев и хрустального пения.

В читке и спектакле сильнее чем в самой пьесе актуализирована вторая функция концепта сказки как обрамления документального материала, то есть известное родство традиционной культуры с массовой, которая, по мнению Вадима Руднева, «в XX веке <...> заменила фольклор» (1999: 157), и роль масскульта в воспитании наивного магического мышления, трансляции упрощенных архетипически-мелодраматических сценариев с их бинарным видением мира (добро/зло, любовь/ненависть), чудесным решением сложных конфликтов и обязательным счастливым финалом. Паразитирование голливудского кинематографа на структуре волшебной сказки и архетипах коллективного бессознательного – общеизвестный факт (см. напр. Седых 2019). Читку открывает пение актрисами под укулеле баллады *Over the Rainbow* из фильма *The Wizard of Oz* 1939 года – о чудесной стране, в которой мечты сбываются, а проблемы тают, как лимонные леденцы во рту. В финале же приговоренная Марьюшка, слушая инструкцию завязывания платка в тюрьме,

которую хором читают остальные артистки, тихо напевает песню *A Whole New World* из мультфильма Дисней *Аладдин* (1992) – ее словами Аладдин уговаривает принцессу улететь с ним на ковре. Заканчивается читка совместным пением – сначала робко-обреченным, потом громким и торжественным, на фоне высвечиваемых на стене фотографий восточных дворцов и кадров из диснеевских сказок *Аладдин*, *Русалочка*, *Красавица и Чудовище* – продукции начала 1990-ых годов, на которых выросло поколение драматургини, режиссерки и актрис. В спектакле Беркович отказалась от такой однозначной интерпретации и убрала как песни, так и видеоряд. Тема зависимости сознания героинь от сказочно-мелодраматических сюжетов, ожидание чуда как единственной стратегии решения насущных проблем частично переведены в дописанные монологи. Аллюзия на тесную связь фольклора и масскульта сохранилась лишь в музыкальном оформлении постановки. Большую часть документального текста актрисы поют, и порой традиционные русско-восточные запевы переходят в мюзикл или джазовую импровизацию. В монологах актрис отчетливо звучит также мотив мифологизации неизвестной исламо-арабской культуры («у них там все четко», «женщина в исламе – королева, мужчина делает все для нее», «мусульмане не пьют, не курят, сбрасывают все волосы», «жена для мужа – королева, и он не может ее обидеть» итд., Петрийчук 2019: online) и обыгрывается концепт «восточной сказки» – в том обыденном понимании, которое это выражение приобрело в поп-культуре 2000-ых годов (роскошная жизнь со страстным экзотичным женихом).

Главным композиционным и смысловым принципом пьесы является столкновение судебных протоколов с народной сказкой. На первый взгляд кажется, что они сопоставлены контрастно (или, как выразилась Марина Давыдова – контрапунктно, Золотая Маска 2021: online): романтические

мечты и наивные идеалы Подсудимой-Марьюшки не выдерживают испытания рациональной реальностью в лице Судьи. Они оказываются не просто несбыточными, а преступными.

И все же, как вскользь отметила Дана Сидерос, если вслушаться, можно обнаружить, что «сказочный и документальный слои рифмуются, обнаруживают общую структуру, сюжетные повороты, фольклорные повторы» (Петербургский театральный журнал 2023: online). Судебный текст напоминает сказочный¹¹ жесткой последовательностью действий, устойчивыми формулами, отрешенной интонацией исполнения. В спектакле и рассказ Марьюшки про Финиста, и ее путь к нему, и протоколы, а в особенности приговоры порой произносятся актрисами в непсихологической манере, с интонацией трансового мелоречитатива, как будто они не просто произносят текст, а посредничают в вершении чего-то, что больше их самих. Судья при этом зачитывает приговоры с закрытыми глазами. Можно найти параллели и на уровне смыслового наполнения – стремление к редукции сложности мира, четкому разделению на добро и зло, восстановлению порядка. Петрийчук, сопоставляя этих два дискурса, указывает на их общий знаменатель – связь с ритуалом¹² и первобытным мифологическим сознанием, признак которого – магическое отношение к слову. Нина Мечковская, опираясь на рассуждения Романа Якобсона о магической функции речи, пишет, что у ее истоков лежит: «отождествление знака и

11 Мы имеем здесь в виду именно чисто документальные пассажи, а не упомянутые выше, явно художественно обработанные фрагменты, когда Судья подражает сказочному нарративу Марьюшки.

12 О связи сказки с мифом и ритуалом, а также о возникновении волшебной сказки как результата постепенной десакрализации сознания см. Мелетинский 2000: 48-50.

обозначаемого, слова и предмета, <...> представление о том, что слово – это не условное обозначение некоторого предмета, а его часть, поэтому, например, произнесение ритуального имени может вызывать присутствие того, кто им назван» (Мечковская 1998: 42). Перформативность судебного приговора, который, устанавливая виновность или невиновность подозреваемого, приводит к реальным изменениям в реальности, очевидна. Петрийчук намекает однако на собственно магическое отношение к слову в российском институциональном дискурсе, настойчиво чередуя две казенные формулировки «имя изъято» (21 раз) и «организация, запрещенная в России» (4 раза), в которых сквозит архаическая практика табуирования опасных или нежелательных феноменов. И если удаление личных данных фигурантов в выложенных в общий доступ судебных документах, маркированное выражением «имя изъято», рационально мотивировано¹³, то требование Роскомнадзора добавлять при каждом упоминании в СМИ названия Исламского государства пояснения, что оно запрещено в России, драматургия обыгрывает именно как признак словесного волшебства (как будто информация о запрете уменьшает силу названного объекта). Неслучайно в рамках этой фразы совершается первый переход документального текста в сказочный: «СУДЬЯ. И вы решили отправиться в Тридешатое государство (*Организация, запрещенная в России)?» (Петрийчук 2019: online).

Как в пьесе, так и в спектакле, в финале звучит *Инструкция №6 «Как правильно завязывать платок в колонии»*, которая

13 В обсуждении читки Петрийчук пояснила, что имя и фамилию фигурантов нельзя называть в документах тех дел, судопроизводство по которым еще не закрыто.

точно рифмуется с второй по порядку инструкцией «*Как правильно носить хиджаб*». Этот ритуальный повтор, с одной стороны, подчеркивает роковое попадание героинь в положение несвободы. С другой однако проблематизирует взаимоотношения религии и государства, сакрального и институционального дискурсов.

Финист ясный сокол Петрийчук/Беркович – любопытный пример оформления и остранения документального материала сказочными интертекстом. Как мы старались показать, этот концептуальный прием сопоставления столь непохожих речевых ready-made действует в двух направлениях: выявляет актуальность фольклорной сказки как поведенческой модели современных женщин и архаичность общественно-государственного уклада России.

Библиография

- Bacchilega Cristina (1997), *Postmodern Fairy Tales. Gender and Narrative Strategies*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Carter Angela (1983), "Notes from the Front Line", *On Gender and Writing*, ed. Michelene Wandor, London, Pandora Press: 69-77.
- Lüthi Max (1982), *The European Folktale. Form and Nature*, trans. J. D. Niles, Philadelphia, Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Афанасьев Александр (1985, ed.), «Пёрышко Финиста ясна сокола», *Народные русские сказки А. Н. Афанасьева: в 3 т., т. 2*, Москва, Наука: 190-198.
- Золотая Маска (2022), сайт премии, <https://goldenmask.ru/spect_2294.html>, (дата обращения 20/08/2023).
- Ковтун Елена (1999), *Поэтика необычайного: Художественные миры фантастики, волшебной сказки, утопии, притчи и мифа (На материале европейской литературы первой половины XX века)*, Москва, Издательство МГУ.
- Куприна Владислава (2021), «Что тот солдат, что этот», *Петербургский театральный журнал*, 1, 2021,

- <<https://ptj.spb.ru/archive/103/process-103/что-то-солдат-что-то-тет/>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).
- Мальгин Андрей (2023), «Женя и Жанна. Андрей Мальгин – о Беркович и Мейерхольде», 13.05.2023, <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/zhenya-i-zhanna-andrey-malgin—o-berkovich-i-meyerholjde/32405200.html>>, (дата обращения 20/08/2023).
- Медведев Сергей (2023), «Мужское государство. Сергей Медведев – о маскулинности войны», 19.05.2023, <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/muzhskoe-gosudarstvo-sergey-medvedev-o-maskulinosti-voynu/32404334.html>>, (дата обращения 20/08/2023).
- Мелетинский Елеазар (1970), «Миф и сказка», *Фольклор и этнография*, ред. Борис Путилов, Ленинград, Наука: 186-198, <<https://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/meletinsky11.htm>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).
- Мелетинский Елеазар (2001), *От мифа к литературе*, Москва, РГГУ.
- Мечковская Нина (1998), *Язык и религия: Пособие для студентов гуманитарных Вузов*, Москва, Агентство «ФАИР».
- Петербургский театральный журнал* (2023), «Финист ясный сокол Светланы Петрийчук и Евгении Беркович. Экспертное мнение профессионалов», 6.05.2023, <<https://ptj.spb.ru/blog/finist-yasnyj-sokol-mnenie-professionalov/>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).
- Петрийчук Светлана (2019), *Финист ясный сокол*, <<https://lubimovka.art/performances/9>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).
- Пропп Владимир (1928), *Морфология сказки*, Ленинград, Academia.
- Руднев Вадим (1999), *Словарь культуры XX века*, Москва, Аграф.
- Седых Оксана (2019), «Миф и антимиф как основа киносценария (о прагматических возможностях фольклористики В.Я. Проппа)», *Материалы VIII Международной научной конференции Феномен творческой личности в культуре. Фатющенкоковские чтения*, выпуск VIII, Москва, ФГБУ Издательство “Наука”: 169-181.
- Хитров Антон (2023), «В независимом издательстве Freedom Letters вышел сборник пьес Светланы Петрийчук *Туареги* Она ищет связи между частными проблемами людей и недостатками

системы. И всегда находит», <<https://meduza.io/feature/-2023/06/30/v-nezavisimom-izdatelstve-freedom-letters-vyshel-sbornik-pies-svetlany-petriyчук-tuaregi>>, (дата обращения 20/08/2023).

Видео

Беркович Евгения (2021), «Мне недавно перестало сниться, что я голая стою посреди школы», интервью на канале «Скажи Гордеевой», 29.06.2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DqBVQQ4jMCQ&t=4403s>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).

Беркович Евгения (2022), «Женя Беркович о спектакле *Финист Ясный Сокол*. Интервью», канал театра «Пространство внутри», <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxUIAGei4UM&t=23s>>, (дата обращения 24/08/2023).

Обсуждение пьесы Светланы Петрийчук (2019), Независимый фестиваль «Любимовка», <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Y8yfxAo1gJs>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).

Спектакль «Финист Ясный Сокол», канал Независимого фестиваля «Любимовка», <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dr0iYOJPr0Q>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).

Финист ясный сокол. Читка пьесы Светланы Петрийчук (2019), канал Независимого фестиваля «Любимовка», <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjiHrh-D438>>, (дата обращения 25/08/2023).

IV.
Constructing the Self: Autobiography as Myth
in the Short Stories *Miraculous Incidents*
and *Mysterious Dreams* by Elena Shvarts

Kristina Vorontsova

Introduction

Elena Shvarts (1948-2010) is considered to be a woman of letters of significant interest whose outstanding contribution to Russian literature of the 20th and 21st centuries is a particular subject of research by Russian, Polish, Italian, Swiss, British, American, Estonian, Bulgarian, and German scholars. Thanks to Shvarts's use of multileveled metaphors, sophisticated intertextuality, cultural contexts found in her creative work, she still remains of universal relevance and could be interpreted through a variety of lenses and scientific approaches according to the postulates of postmodernity. Although Shvarts is known mostly for her ingenious, complex poetry, her prose works – short stories, memoirs, intimate diaries, and novellas – also represent her creative universe and can be viewed as stunning examples of “non-fiction in prose written by a poet” (Иванова 2011: 201), as well as so-called women's writing. Although she never associated herself with the latter literary trend, her prose contains all its specific features, such as:

1. The universe shown from the woman's point of view.
2. The focus on the family and childhood as a lost paradise.

3. The contamination of fiction and non-fiction, the absurd and the “gritty realism” of autobiography.
4. Intertextuality, mythopoetics, and biblical allusions.
5. Plots built on the author’s ability to see miracles in everyday life. (Воронцова 2019: 30)

Oleg Dark felt justified in describing Shvarts’ prosaic pieces of writing to use the medieval term “miracle”, scilicet “the story of something miraculous” (Дарк 2004: online). On the one hand, the basis of the plot could be a miracle of transfiguration, on the other hand, sometimes it is a real anti-miracle. Interestingly, myths and miracles are significant even in the autobiographical short stories. Due to postmodern irony and the use of real names and circumstances, readers struggle to determine whether the author is addressing the depicted events seriously or whether they should be interpreted as a form of mystification.

The unofficial Leningrad culture retrieved the modernistic approaches of the Silver Age to mythology and the supernatural in Soviet literature in the context of extremely specific postmodern aesthetics. The Myth, its reconstruction and deconstruction, including autobiographical myths, became a representative feature of the works created by members of this community (See: *Вторая культура...* 2013; Колымагин 2018; *Самиздат Ленинграда...* 2003; Эпштейн 1988; Baharova 2021; Schmitt 2021: 19-34; Zitzewitz 2015; Zitzewicz 2021).

Mythopoesis as a Defining Feature of Elena Shvarts’s Creative Work

Being a key figure of the Leningrad underground culture, which was extremely spiritual and visionary, Shvarts paid a great deal of attention to the role of myths, not only in her creative work but

also in everyday life. Mikhail Epstein, the literary scholar, philosopher, and essayist, writing about postmodern Russian literature, claimed that the traditional philosophical and aesthetical antithesis between myth and document was simultaneously sharpened and destroyed in contemporary literary practice. According to him, this process resulted in deeper enriched cultural integrities (Эпштейн 1988: 8). Thus, Shvarts, while considering her own life to be a piece of art, did the same and tried to reveal cryptic coincidences and symbols everywhere and decipher them as evidence of the presence of transcendent powers in our world. This quest was highlighted by the author herself: “[a]ll my life is a miraculous incident and mysterious dream. And the most mysterious miracle is poetry”¹ (Шварц 2008а: 298). As a poet, she and her lyrical subjects always felt like successors of the God-Demiurge who had a link with the supernatural and metaphysical and who lived in a mythical world every moment of their life. Her self-image, even in memoirs and diaries, is influenced by this striving for the transcendent. This is not surprising, given that Shvarts’s poetics experienced the long-term impact of her participation in literary salons and home readings with philosophical discussions prohibited by official authorities, an attitude that outlived the collapse of the USSR (Бунтури 2011: 89-101).

In her holistic imaginative world, both in poetry and prose, Shvarts traditionally appeals to diverse Myths belonging to different geocultures (Замятин 2003: 69-75) and pantheons: from archaic eschatology to ancient Greek mythology, from the aesthetics of death in Egyptian stories about gods and goddesses to Christian apocrypha, from characters of Chinese fairy tales to

1 «Вся моя жизнь есть чудесный случай и таинственный сон. А таинственнее всего чудесного – стихи».

the Eastern practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam (Vorontsova 2020). These levels naturally overlap, reflecting the author's perspective on the traditional East-West dichotomy, which is virtually absent in her creative work. So, it goes without saying that Shvarts, born in Leningrad (formerly Saint Petersburg) – a city steeped in spirituality and myth-making, and a crossroads of various civilizations – was naturally inclined to infuse her everyday life with mythology, especially during the Brezhnev-era stagnation. For instance, she always repeated that she had spent her childhood at a pyramid because of her first address – the so-called “Egyptian house” at Zakharyevskaia street, 23, a building full of ornaments in Art Nouveau style and symbolism, which was reflected in her creative work. A vivid example of this is the repetitive comparison of the river Neva to the Nile in Shvarts's poetry (Воронцова 2016: 126-127).

In this paper I seek to investigate Shvarts's use of Myths in creating her image of Self in the sequence of autobiographical miniatures *Чудесные случаи и таинственные сны* (*Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams*, 1996) and to prove that miracles were the basis of the postmodern aesthetics not only in her creative work, but also in her philosophy, self-fashioning, and attitude.

Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams: Autobiography Told by Myths

Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams is a part of *Veritable Incidents of My Life* (*Истинные происшествия моей жизни*), a section in Shvarts's collected works which is consciously detached from poetry and fiction. Thus, the autobiographical and documentary nature of this work is emphasized by the author herself. It consists of 12 pieces with titles and one unnamed post scriptum added after the date. Even this numerology could be

treated symbolically: 13 is suitable figure to speak about the creepy and spooky incidents that took place in Shvarts's life. The significance of the number 13 varies from negative to positive depending on the cultural context. In Western tradition, it is often considered unlucky, leading to the emergence of triskaidekaphobia – fear of the number 13 (McElroy 2005: 69-71). This superstition is associated with various historical and religious events, such as the fact that there were 13 people present at the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. However, in some cultures, like Ancient Egypt, 13 symbolized the transition to a new life and was considered a number of transformations. In Jewish tradition, 13 is the age of maturity when boys undergo the bar mitzvah ceremony (Lachenmeyer 2004).

13 pieces in the analyzed book are not arranged in chronological order because Shvarts sought to represent her life inside a mythical space where time is perceived not historically but according to repetitive cycles. The author started narrating when her autobiographical character was three (or even younger), continued with descriptions of miracles in her maturity and then reverted to childhood. Supernatural powers, encounters with transcendent beings, and esoteric practices like table-lifting, as described in the book, are often regarded in this paper as myths. This interpretation aligns with Mircea Eliade's concept of hierophany – the manifestation of the sacred (Eliade 1972:13). This is particularly relevant when considering children's transcendent experiences. According to Svetlana Adon'eva, in childhood, the experience of hierophany often manifests through games, where children engage in manipulating value and power on the "outer" boundary between worlds (Адоньева 2009: 103). So, Shvarts's intention was to show that hierophany, i.e. miracles and mysteries, was the leitmotif of her life. In the short Preface Shvarts reveals that the most miraculous things she had in her whole life were poems, so the rest could be interpreted as the norm

for the life path of a real Poet who is said to be a successor of God. Moreover, *Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams* is a real postmodern text with a rhizome structure that includes self-references to other prose and poetic pieces of writing. For instance, *A Broken Glass* (*Лопнувший стакан*), although a part of this sequence, contains only one line: “See *Definition while the Weather is Bad*” (Шварц 2008а: 301). This is another autobiographical book consisting of small essays in which the story about a broken glass has the title *Two Glasses*. The main idea of this episode is that Shvarts has the gift of foresight and can predict what will happen next, or even influence the subjects. Taking these narration strategies in overlapping texts into consideration, it is obvious that the author wanted to broaden the context, linking the image of self in previous works with the book in question and making it more plausible for readers. Furthermore, it became – which is a typically postmodern game – an intimate talk or game with the audience who must be familiar with the whole body of literature by Elena Shvarts to recognize all the references, realizing simultaneously that it is the prose of a poet, created because of the poems.

While constructing Self through myths, the author emphasized once again her extraordinary nature as a creative essence. Her poetry has much in common with the transcendent, as she explains: “I just want to tell you about a few incidents from my life, when through the sheath of Maya, through the curtain of everyday life, other forces appeared clearly – whatever they were”² (Шварц 2008а: 298). According to Hinduism and Vedanta

2 «Я просто хочу рассказать несколько случаев из моей жизни, когда явно через оболочку Майи, через занавес обыденности проступали иные силы – какие бы они не были». All the translations were made by the author of this research.

philosophy, the sheath of Maya, or Kosha, covers the Atman which is supposed to be the true self (or the soul, the spirit). Traditionally, it is believed that there are 5 koshas: food, energy, mind, discernment and bliss (Roeser 2005: 301). In fact, Shvarts didn't specify which sheaths were meant, so that the author depicted her own essence as a crossroad of different cultures and mythologies, always open for any supernatural experience. A reader familiar with her poetry is naturally inclined to accept everything described in the short stories as true.

The story begins with the episode *The Jam Theft* (*Кража варенья*), where the autobiographical character, as a young girl, attempts to steal her aunt's jam. As in a fairy tale, the breaking of the interdiction occurred, but instead of the expected punishment, young Shvarts encountered the mysterious "figure in white" for the first – though certainly not the last – time in her life. From that moment on, it seemed as though she allowed miracles to intrude upon her existence. The character, who was terrified with the experience, never stopped stealing jam, but as a result she started seeing angels, or what she believed to be angels, quite regularly, especially during readings. As she writes: "[o]nly during the reading of poetry, I always do not really see them, but I foresee and feel them in the back row. They always feel sorry for me, as if I was some kind of a victim – crucifying in public – they were always with me, wherever I read..."³ (Шварц 2008a: 300). That could explain why the autobiographical character was not punished after the violation of the rule. "The figure in white" might be a guardian angel, who accepts her imperfection and agrees to be on her side

3 «Только во время чтений стихов я всегда их не то чтобы вижу, но провижу и чувствую в заднем ряду. Им всегда меня жаль бывает, будто я жертва какая-то – распинающаяся на публике, – всегда они были со мной, где б я ни читала».

because of her divine sparkle as a Poet, but who is also frightening as evidence of the transcendent.

Traditions of Soviet Scary Stories and *Bailichkas* in Shvarts's Autobiography

If meetings with angels could be interpreted as a sign of author's being chosen by God and were linked straightforwardly with Christian discourse, which is extremely important in the whole body of literature by Shvarts, the majority of the other episodes are rooted in typical Soviet scary stories (*страшилки*), which were told by children around a bonfire at nights in pioneer camps, their main purpose being to terrify listeners. According to scholars, this genre weaves together archaic myths, demonology from traditional Russian *bailichkas* (stories of encounters with spirits), and themes from American urban legends, where children routinely face everyday objects and situations imbued with supernatural qualities (Лойтер 1997: 185). All these features are relevant for Shvarts's *Miraculous Incidents* as well. Speaking mostly of her childhood, she consciously chose the form of traditional children's folklore which was well known to every potential Russian-speaking reader.

In Shvarts's book, the most frightening and eerie experiences are tied to sounds, which inevitably occur when the main character is completely alone at home. Silence in poet's creative legacy is always connected to specific spiritual states, often existential, threshold, and liminal. Therefore, sudden sounds that break this sacred silence are perceived as otherworldly and transcendent (See: Vorontsova 2023). In popular scary stories about "red hands" and "coffins on the wheels" the protagonist usually encounters supernatural events in a world without adults or after their death when there is nobody to rely on. In *The Jam Theft* "terrible music"

is mentioned. The narrator confesses that “probably, there is nothing supernatural” (Шварц 2008: 299), since the music is part of a radio broadcast. However, according to the rules of the folklore genre, even casual subjects could cause harm and frighten:

... it [the music] smelled of transcendent inhuman melancholy. It looked like an ancient snake, it coiled around me, there was something more terrible in it than just death. It grew, soared, crawled closer and closer. I ran in horror to the doors leading to the corridor of our communal apartment (there was no one either), and for some reason I stood with outstretched arms, ready to run away, fleeing into the corridor, but even there there was something conspiring with the music. I don't know what it was, but never in my life have I felt such horror, such hopelessness⁴. (Шварц 2008a: 299)

The snake is one of the most ancient and universal symbols, found in various cultures around the world. Its symbolism is multifaceted and can include both positive and negative meanings⁵.

4 «... от нее веяло запредельной нечеловеческой тоской. Она была похожа на древнюю змею, она обвивалась вокруг меня, в ней было нечто более ужасное, чем просто погибель. Она нарастала, взвивалась, подползала все ближе. Я побежала в ужасе к дверям, ведущим в коридор нашей коммунальной квартиры (там тоже никого не было), и так стояла почему-то с распростертыми руками, готовая убежать, спасаясь, в коридор, но и там, как будто таилось нечто сговорившееся с музыкой. Что это было – не знаю, но больше никогда в жизни я не чувствовала такого ужаса, такой безнадежности».

5 In different cultural traditions diverse interpretations could be found and often depend on the context in which it appears. For instance, Wisdom and Knowledge (Ancients Greece, India), Rebirth and Immortality (Ancient Egypt, Mesoamerica), Danger and Evil (Christianity, Norse Mythology), Fertility and Sexuality (Africa, Ancient Near Eastern Cultures), Protection

On the one hand, it is a symbol of infinity and God's self-sufficiency and this correlates with Shvarts's understanding of her poetical nature. God in her creative work means not only love, but he can also be cruel. In other words, the transcendent experience of encountering the Demiurge is not always a positive one. On the other hand, the snake, being in different archaic mythologies a symbol of cosmic order, also means death and chaos, step aside the divine plan, which is supposed to be "more terrible than just death".

Another episode featuring mysterious music emanating from nowhere, linked to an object specifically designed for it, is found in *The Guitar*. But the circumstances make these incidents creepy (the isolation of the main character, night as a time when everything is possible etc.). Classically and traditionally for children's scary stories, an inanimate thing is personified: "A guitar that no one needed stood in the corner of my room. One late night, it suddenly began to play. More precisely, it made two or three drawn-out sounds for no apparent reason. And it fell silent"⁶ (Шварц 2008a: 302). Such unexpected "behavior" by the musical instrument causes consternation, being evidence of some invisible musician's existence.

In the episode *Sounds and Knocks (Звуки и стуки)* Shvarts's experience of living inside spooky stories is traced again. She describes her former room in the communal flat (presumably, in the Egyptian house) which had always been a source of mysteries, where someone's supernatural presence was felt. In fact, Shvarts

and Power (Ancient China, Japan). See: (Davis 1985; Condren 1989; Fourcade 1994; Eliade 2005).

- 6 «... никому не нужная гитара стояла себе в углу моей комнаты. Однажды глубокой ночью она вдруг заиграла. Вернее, издала ни с того ни с сего дватри протяжных звука. И замолкла».

emphasizes that she was never afraid. While some episodes could be interpreted as moments of sleep paralysis accompanied by the hallucinations typical of that state, others seem to draw from horror movies, employing techniques borrowed from cinematography: suspense, sound effects, montage, terrifying expectation of the unknown which is getting closer and closer. Shvarts tells that she was absolutely alone in the night (again, like in previous stories) and sitting in the neighboring room when thrilling knocks from her bedroom started, together with tangible vibrations. The frightened girl ran to the entrance door in order to be saved but there were someone's slowly approaching steps. As she states, "which was worse – knocks or footsteps – I could not choose..."⁷ (Шварц 2008a: 303). Definitely both had a threatening inhuman nature. But when someone was going to turn to her flight of stairs, a phone call returned her to "ordinary reality" (Шварц 2008a: 303), so she shut the door and never found out who was coming. Interestingly, the phone was silent, but the knocks and footsteps stopped immediately. Shvarts was saved, but by whom? By her guardian angel? Or by God himself? As a skilled mystery writer, Shvarts leaves the ending open, allowing readers to arrive at their own interpretations.

Table-lifting as a Leitmotif of Shvarts's Creative Work

One of the climactic points of the sequence about contacts with spirits is the story *Table-lifting*, with additional materials in the form of the protocol *Conversations with Cagliostro* (*Разговор с Каллуостро*) and the poem *The Ballad about the Spiritualistic Session and the Shadow of Alexander Pushkin* (*Баллада о*

7 «Что было страшнее – стуки или шаги – я не могла выбрать».

спиритическом сеансе и тени Александра Пушкина) from 1968. Shvarts even noticed: “Perhaps there wouldn’t have been any knocks or the lonely guitar playing in the night if I hadn’t been involved in this dark business long before”⁸ (Шварц 2008a: 304). According to her, these seances, which were a sin from a religious point of view, were the definite starting point for all the miracles in her life. In fact, table-lifting is a frequent motive in the whole body of literature by Shvarts, but, in contrast to other short stories, here everything is shown to be as plausible and serious as possible. For instance, in the text *Unearthly Reward* (*Нездешняя награда*) a session with the spirits of great Russian men of letters is depicted as farce, its absurdity intended to show the worthlessness of contemporary Russian literature. Spirits are chosen to be on the jury of a literary prize, but Shvarts intentionally describes the process of communication and the interpretations by the event organizer of the “authoritative personalities” (Шварц 2008b: 301) comments with deep irony to show the decaying condition of contemporary literature and the literary community. In *Table-lifting*, on the other hand, the author represents her own mystical experience with the Soviet variant of the Ouija board, which is meant to register messages from spirits: letters, yes-no signs, the goodbye sign, and the small heart-shaped planchette indicate messages from another world. Certainly, classical talking boards, available in the US and Europe since 1890, were not accessible in the USSR. Consequently, those seeking mystery had to create their own equipment. This was widespread among children even in the pioneer camps. Instead of the planchette an ordinary saucer with the drawn arrow on it was used. That’s why Shvarts called the process a “saucer-lifting” and described how she came into it:

8 «Может быть, ни стуков, ни игры одинокой гитары в ночи не было бы, если б я задолго до этого не занималась этим темным делом».

“Someone forgotten gave me a little book, which described in detail how all this must be done. Zhenia, my husband, a skilled type designer, cut out a large circle from thick paper, inscribed the alphabet on it and – in the form of small black collars – the entrance and exit for the expected spirit” (Шварц 2008а: 304). Remarkably, the source of all this magic could be found in the book given by somebody, who can also be interpreted as a spirit without a name or a human being mediator between this and the other world. Furthermore, Shvarts here mentions her first husband – Evgeny Venzel (1947-2018), one of the so-called Poets of the Malaya Sadovaya Street, to incorporate this incident into the autobiography and make the readers believe every word.

The author lists the guests: Pushkin (a rather typical spirit in Soviet school discourse); Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, who was supposed to be a significant mystical figure for the participants of Shvarts’s meeting, the occultist, magician and alchemist; protopope Avvakum, whose elder scrolls in the style of an autobiography have much in common with Shvarts’s understanding of this genre; and some real acquaintances recently deceased.

They were asked about profane matters which were not considered to be a part of conversations with the spirits, but at the same time were extremely important for the Soviet common man. For example, Shvarts asked them if it would be possible to change her flat, while Pushkin and Cagliostro were requested to say if there would be a war (quite a disturbing topic in the 70s). The author estimated their credibility as follows: “[t]hey always spoke at first

- 9 «Кто-то забытый подарил мне книжонку, где подробно описывалось, как все это делается. Женя, мой муж, умелый шрифтовик, вырезал большой круг из плотной бумаги, начертил на нем алфавит и – в виде маленьких черных воротцев – вход и выход для ожидаемого духа».

the truth, which was startling, and heaped it with a pile of lies, as if in a mockery”¹⁰ (Шварц 2008a: 305). These spiritualist séances did more harm than good, leading Shvarts to conclude that her encounters with the transcendent had dramatically altered her life: “[w]e asked who died first, I don’t remember who the spirit had indicated. There was no need to do this – I opened the door myself, and a strange crowd of capriccio-like creatures burst in there, a mixture of astral mockery and mortal cold”¹¹ (Шварц 2008a: 305). A human’s death is one of the biggest mysteries in the life of Shvarts’s characters; no wonder that when asking about it, she violated an interdiction much worse than not stealing the jam, and the atonement must have been terrifying. Capriccio-like creatures, partly fantasies, partly real beings, flooded the whole body of literature by Shvarts and her own life, and the one always interacted with the other.

Conclusions

To sum up, in constructing her image of Self, Elena Shvarts wrote her autobiography as a consequence of mystical experiences, meetings with spirits, and contacts with the supernatural. Being sensitive to the transcendent, she believed them to be solid evidence of her belonging in the ranks of real Poets, Demiurges, who are related to the God. The author used diverse mythology from different cultures and types of civilizations (Egyptian pantheon,

10 «Они всегда говорили сначала правду, которая поражала, и заваливали ее грудой лжи, как бы в издевку».

11 «Спрашивали – кто раньше всех умрет, не помню уж, кого дух указал. Делать этого было не нужно – я как бы сама открыла дверь, и туда ввалилась странная толпа каприччиоподобных существ, смесь астральных издевок и смертного холода».

Slavic demonology, Christian bestiary, etc.) to represent her own understanding of an ecumenical and united imaginative world ruled by supernatural powers, whose long-term impact on people's lives became obvious only for chosen ones. For sure, Shvarts identified herself as a visionary who is able to foresee and hence is able to write poems (or to catch them from other spheres). At the same time, the author, working within the framework of postmodern discourse, blurred the lines between earnest narration and irony. The infinity of possible interpretations implies that it is the reader who decides whether to believe or not.

Bibliography

- Адоньева Светлана (2009), *Духи народа и другие духи*, Санкт-Петербург, Амфора.
- Бунтури Влада (2011), «Здесь всё так тонко, так интеллектуально...», *Парадигма. Философско-культурологический альманах*, 18: 89-101.
- Воронцова Кристина (2016), «*Пространство-Время – Андрогин...*»: модели пространства в поэзии Елены Шварц, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Воронцова Кристина (2019), «Произведения Елены Шварц в контексте направления женской прозы», *Opera Slavica*, 3: 21-32.
- «*Вторая культура*»: Неофициальная поэзия Ленинграда в 1970-е–1980-е годы (2013), ред. Жан-Филипп Жаккар, Виолет Фридли, Йенс Херльт, Санкт-Петербург, Издательство «Росток».
- Дарк Олег (2004), «Волна и пламень», *Знамя*, 8, <<https://znamlit.ru/publication.php?id=2418>>, (last accessed 23/02/2021).
- Замятин Дмитрий (2003), *Гуманитарная география: пространство и язык географических образов*, Санкт-Петербург, Алейтея.
- Иванова Наталья (2011), *Русский крест. Литература и читатель в начале нового века*, Москва, Время.

- Колымагин Борис (2018), *Русская религиозная поэзия 1960–1980 гг.*, Москва, Российский университет дружбы народов.
- Лойтер Софья (1997), «Детская повествовательная традиция», *Рябининские чтения–95: Международная научная конференция по проблемам изучения, сохранения и актуализации народной культуры Русского Севера. Сборник докладов*, под ред. Татьяны Ивановой, Петрозаводск, Кижы: 184-187.
- Самиздат Ленинграда. *Литературная энциклопедия* (2003), Москва, Новое литературное обозрение.
- Шварц Елены (2008a), *Сочинения Елены Шварц*, т. 3, Санкт-Петербург, Пушкинский фонд.
- Шварц Елены (2008b), *Сочинения Елены Шварц*, т. 4, Санкт-Петербург, Пушкинский фонд.
- Эпштейн Михаил (1988), *Парадоксы новизны*, Москва, Советский писатель.
- Baharova Katina (2021), *Der Traum in der neueren russischen Lyrik. Elena Švarc, Ol'ga Sedakova und Gennadij Afgi*, Berlin, Peter Lang.
- Condren Mary (1989), *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland*, San Francisco, Harper&Row.
- Davis Wade (1985), *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, New York, Simon&Schuster.
- Eliade Mircea (1972), *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Eliade Mircea (2005), *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Lachenmeyer Nathaniel (2004), *13: The Story of the World's Most Popular Superstition*, Boston, Da Capo Press.
- McElroy D.C. (2005), *A Handbook of Folklore, Myths, Legends from around the World*, New York, Quatro Publishing Group USA.
- Fourcade Patricia (1994), "Mythology", *Snakes. A Natural History*, ed. by Roland Bauchot, New York, Sterling Publishing:184-193.
- Roeser Robert W. (2005), "An Introduction to Hindu India's Contemplative Psychological Perspective on Motivation, Self, and Development", *Advances in Motivation and Achievement, Volume 14: Religion and Motivation*, eds. M.L. Maehr & S. Karabenick, Amsterdam, Elsevier: 297-345.

- Schmitt Angelika (2021), "Inspiration als Ekstase. Schamanische Motive in der Poetik von Elena Švarc". *Close Reading – Distant Reading. Spannungsfelder der slavistischen Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften*, eds. Eva Kowollik, Tijana Matijević, Iris Bauer, Yvonne Drosihn, Joanna Sulikow-ska-Fajfer, Halle, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg: 19-34.
- Vorontsova Kristina (2020), «Мифопоэтическая структура книги Елены Шварц "Литературные гастролы"», *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 37: 201-217.
- Vorontsova Kristina (2023), "Silence in Elena Shvarts's Creative Work". *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Rossica*, 16: 115-29.
- von Zitzewitz Josephine (2015), *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar 1974–1980. Music for a Deaf Age*, Oxford, Legenda: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing.
- von Zitzewitz Josephine (2021), *The Culture of Samizdat. Literature and Underground Networks in the Late Soviet Union*, London, Bloomsbury.

V.
Mythical Tarot, Archetypical Tarot
and Esoteric Ways of Writing Femininity.
Manuela Gretkowska and Olga Tokarczuk

Piotr Sobolczyk

Witches in Polish literature

A good point to start might be comparative etymology. In a way, etymology can be mythical, as it connects us to the history of our ancestors' voices. The Gaelic word *Mamau* was used in the Celtic religion to designate "fairies", but its root and original use comes from the word "mothers"¹. This shows how with the advance of patriarchy mothers and goddesses were becoming "fairies" or "witches" (Evans 2015: 63-64). The Polish language has two main words for "witch", "czarownica" and "wiedźma". The latter etymologically comes from the verb "to know", "wiedzieć" in Polish – "wiedźma" is "the one who knows". The link between these meanings is one where Christianity plays a part – it is the story of how a fairly neutral word meaning an "enchantress" (who knows magic and enchantments) in Proto-Slavic language changed

- 1 In Welsh fairies were known as Bendith y Mamau, which translates to "blessings of the mother". Celtic religion had mother goddesses. With the advance of Christianity, and a shift towards patriarchy, they became "suspicious".

to the enemy of good faith in the 16th century (Boryś 2005: 692). *What* she knows might be problematic or disturbing from the normative perspective (she knows an alternative), although the fact that she knows some things is not denied.

The generation of female voices in Polish literature that debuted in the early 1990s could be called half-seriously, half-jocularly “witches”, or at the very least writers who invoked and played with the archetype of the “witch”. They had their “mothers”, too: an example of the archetype of “witch” in Polish literature could be Maria Komornicka / Piotr Odmieniec Włast, and another important “mother” in the 20th century could be Anna Świrszczyńska. Alongside these figures, Polish culture created another major matrilineal line, and thus usually each “madwoman” or “witch” has a rational, suave and well-adjusted shadow or double. Komornicka’s shadow could be perhaps Zofia Nałkowska, Świrszczyńska’s – Wisława Szymborska. As cultural hierarchies were typically engineered by men, these better adjusted writers are usually more prominent in the canon. The generation of “witches” partially subverted this canon-making process. Contesting the canon and its rules went hand-in-hand with a more general contesting of Western epistemologies through the use of Postmodern (Western) theories, esoterism (Tarot, astrology, Kaballah), gnosis, and Eastern spiritualities and philosophies (Buddhism, zen, Dao). Natasza Goerke, who studied (or completed studies in) Indology, in her short stories alludes to the genre of “koan” and employed many Eastern philosophical paradoxes, and even sceneries. Izabela Filipiak (now Morska) in her multi-genre literature studied madness, female monstrosity and cruelty, combining it with gnosis and, at times, esoterism. Manuela Gretkowska, a philosopher and anthropologist by education, employing her syncretic imagination and baroque taste for conceit, imbued her novels and stories with fresh insights on varied spiritual and philosophical traditions.

Olga Tokarczuk is a quite curious example in this context. Her three peers did not enter the dominant (and still somewhat masculinised) contemporary canon fully (although Morska's career was at one point close to it), but then moved farther thanks to their "ever so crazier" works, and with Gretkowska being seen increasingly as "popular" (rather than highly artsy). Tokarczuk was once seen as one of them, but was gradually moved towards the centre where – not at her demand – the "rough", "witchy" qualities of her works were either unnoticed or diminished (Świerkosz 2014: 12-13, 127-128, 354-355), although she continuously tried to use her position to introduce "marginal" topics.

In this article, I shall examine and compare two novels from 1993, one by Manuela Gretkowska entitled *Tarot paryski* (*Parisian Tarot*), and one by Olga Tokarczuk, *Podróż ludzi Księgi* (*The Journey of the People of the Book*), her debut work. Neither of them has been translated into English. They both use esoterism and Tarot in particular, although in rather different ways. In both cases, the discussion and use of Tarot has implications for the construction and writing of femininity.

Before I move to these novels, however, I would like to recall one ironic (and likewise not translated to English) short story entitled *Zmowa* (*Plot*) by Natasza Goerke from her debut collection *Fraktale* (*Fractals*). Here I offer my provisional translation:

[i]n the village I met a four-legged hag [baba]. She had three heads and five arms. It was said that she can tell the cause from a distance, that she is a Baba Yaga. I greeted her exceedingly politely. Welcome, Baba, I cried, something must be in the air today, because since the morning I have watery eyes! There is nothing in the air, it must be something with your eyes, Baba Yaga responded and thus having set the cause, she went to the forest at a trot. She is

not a Baba (hag), I saw it with my own eyes: she's a mare, I whispered to my neighbour. And what did she tell you, Maciej was interested. I froze. Maciej had eight heads and seventy arms. In the village they were saying that he collaborates with Baba, that he is a Wyle [Dziad]. Now I understood. (Goerke 2004: 50)

Read as an allegory, it shows how a dominant rational mind (the narration is written in masculine voice which can't be rendered in an English translation) "meets" and "creates" a witch. When he tries to read "magic" and "sympathy" or "correspondences" in the air and receive confirmation or appreciation from the supposed expert, i.e. the lady taken for a witch, she demystifies his attempts by pointing to physical reality, especially to the viewer's eye (the synecdoche of subjectivity). It is not clear if the woman has indeed four legs, three heads and five arms (and her collaborator likewise), or if that is just the product of the "rational" (yet perhaps going insane) mind that adds cubist monstrosity and folly in a wishful projection. Neither is it clear if the "witch" just hides her specific wisdom and runs away; that would be a rule for Western normative gaze. I also want to borrow this image as another version of the adage about the devil; here: "the witch is not so black as she is painted". Even if she has Tarot cards in her hands.

Gretkowska: The Hopscotch of Archetypes

Who, then, is the witch with Tarot cards in her hands? The title of Gretkowska's novel, *Parisian Tarot* (or *Paris Tarot*) makes a clear allusion to one of the eldest Tarot's decks (graphic versions) called "Marseilles Tarot". This deck is not only still in use, reprinted constantly, but also, according to many specialists, is the only deck

that depicts or enables one to get into the archetypal dimension. The Jungian Sallie Nichols, who will be our major guide in this paper, and whose major work, as I will argue, was most probably studied by Olga Tokarczuk and perhaps known by Gretkowska, says on a few occasions that the Marseilles deck has the advantage of not being designed by one single person and therefore shows the collective archetypes. It was never accompanied by any explanatory text, leaving its perception entirely to visual contemplation, and it shows many facets of a given archetype. In her words, “some modern Tarot decks (notably the Waite version) present Trump number one as the priestly ‘good’ magician, eliminating entirely his more questionable aspects. [...] the Marseilles version alone offers us the full enchantment of the Magician’s multiple facets” (Nichols 2019: 49). Gretkowska puts a similar idea into a conversation between the main characters of her novel, all of them involved in Tarot. Xavier, a French painter and visual artist, decides to paint his own Tarot deck, which would be a faithful repetition of the Marseilles deck that at the same time would bear his own auctorial “stamp”, an impossible task, most probably. However, this is another explanation of the novel’s title, which is the new deck to come, painted in Paris. Xavier’s wife, Charlotta, who is the main narrator most of time², is a specialist in Tarot and the *spiritus movens* of the whole plot. The two hold a discussion about the idea of painting all the characters on the cards with one model, Michał.

– Charlotta, that would be a Megalomaniac Tarot, not the Marseilles one; Michał as an angel, Michał as a devil,

- 2 Gretkowska passes the narrative voice to a few other characters on a few occasions, however this fact makes no difference for my interpretation focused on Tarot.

Michał dressed, Michał naked as a male, as a female and as a neuter. From what you said, there is no point in painting other Tarots than the Marseilles one, because you change some details and you blur the archetype. – You can't use the altered Tarot for meditation, but you can use it for fortune-telling. (Gretkowska 1999: 104-105)³

In later editions of the novel, the publishers actually reprinted (in black and white) the full Trumps or Major Arcana of the Marseilles version. I see it as a shrewd decision by Gretkowska or / and her publisher; I see it as a kind of marketing “bait” that is also another explanation of the title. (On the other hand, certainly seeing the card's imagery helps to understand the plot as well). The early 90s in Poland saw a rapid proliferation of esoteric books about fortune-telling, astrology, afterlife experiences etc., published by private companies, in many cases with very little value. There was certainly a hunger for such publications, which, during Communist times, were not accepted by the State publishing houses (although, if I am not mistaken, there was no official ban on these subjects as “antisocialist”). Anyone who remembers those “popular” bookshops in the 90s in Poland (smaller “district” bookshops for instance, because back then it was customary to have a bookshop in every district), remembers that Postmodernism took them over as well. Hence, prescribed reading books for schoolkids had their place, but “bodice ripper” novels mingled with classics of (mostly American) literature – popular horrors about werewolves and swamps were placed next to young contemporary Polish narrative – and sometimes even poetry was next to clairvoyance manuals. If a customer spotted in this colourful mosaic a book entitled *Parisian Tarot*, flipped it through and saw

3 All the provisionary translations from Gretkowska and Tokarczuk are mine.

the pictures of Tarot cards, they could have bought it not only as a “novel”, but also – or even in the first place – as a “manual”. This might also explain why this novel had numerous reprints.

The paragraph above might have seemed a digression; however, it is not necessarily. Postmodernity or New Age, and even Deconstructivism, as they are mentioned in the characters’ conversations, are one of the topics in the novel and they also influence – or explain – the narrative form. As the novel is primarily set in Paris, these phenomena relate mostly to French, and more broadly, “Western European” culture. However, there are a few places when the narrator (Charlotta, who is half-Polish, half-French) has flashbacks to Communist-era Poland and recalls her recent visit to Poland under transformation. She also receives letters from her Polish friends that depict this transformation. Moreover, another of the major characters, Michał, is a Polish expatriate. The Polish transformation and its “collapse of a great narration”, along with a certain Central-European post-Soviet “Postmodernism”, is a topic in the background of the novel. Yet, in this fictional space, there is no synthesis or comparative study of the differences between the Parisian mosaic and Postmodernity and the Polish *in-statu-nascendi* Postmodernism in the novel. This is understandable, though: the novel was written, as I count, around 1991-1992 (Gretkowska still lived in Paris at the time), meaning it was too early to see the “Western” traces and the “original Slavonic input”⁴ in the ongoing transformation, especially from a distance.

4 Although she mentions a discussion of Józef Tischner’s concept of *homo sovieticus* on the train from Łódź to Toruń that she witnessed (Gretkowska 1999: 14). Tischner’s concept from 1991 points to this original local input to the ongoing “Westernisation” (Tischner 2005: 141-145). On the other hand Gretkowska puts into the mouth of Michał a brilliant paradox that it was Deconstructivism that dismantled Communism (Gretkowska 1999: 86-87). On the other hand, it seems to be one of Michał’s verbal and intellectual tricks

Perhaps throughout her first three novels set in Paris, Gretkowska was trying to show what Postmodernism might look like eventually also in Poland, the multi-culti mosaic, the polyphony of narratives, of which she was a fan.

Parisian Tarot could be called a “contemporary *silva rerum*” (*sylwa współczesna*) (Nycz 1996). This genre is not known in the English literary criticism and its dictionaries, but it is commonly used in the field of Polish literary studies (in English the word “potpourri” seems to be a similar concept). Gretkowska’s novel does not have a “traditional” plot, organised as a sequence from A to Z, so to speak. Instead, it is made of small scenes – “scraps of life” – and includes fragments written in sub-genres notably different from the main narrative style. It also includes re-writings, just as in the traditional Polish *silva rerum* genre where you had a diary entry next to a recipe for a cake, for example. The reproduction of the Marseilles deck is just one aspect of this mixture. As I have said above, the main “umbrella” that organises or encompasses the whole book is Tarot. Now, even though the dominant stylistic figure is the “fragment” (or scrap), there actually is an interplay between the “complete”, “unabridged” or “original” story and the fragments. There are two places in the novel where Gretkowska incorporates an explanation of all the 22 Tarot Trumps (or Major Arcana) *in a sequence*, i.e. “from A to Z”, from 0/I to XXI/XXII. The first description is almost complete and delivered in a conversational manner by Charlotta to Michał as an explanation of Michał soul’s journey through the archetypes (Gretkowska 1999: 42-44); it is also there where the cards are reprinted in the book. The second is a full list of divinatory meanings that Charlotta writes down for Michał to memorize

or paradoxes, a product of his participation in the archetype of Trickster, or the Magician in the Tarot (more on that later).

(Gretkowska 1999: 72-74). I will now forget about the “marketing bait” aspect of this second list; I am more interested in it as this “*silva* place”. The meaning of the Trumps is “re-written”.

In this respect, I have to explain that Tarot cards do not have one universal explanation or interpretation, although they do have a “core meaning”, and many authors propose their own understandings (it is believed that a person who works deeply with the cards acquires their own understandings, “personalizes” Tarot). I believe I know the source of Gretkowska’s knowledge of Tarot, or at least one of them, and therefore the source of the “re-written” fragment. It is one of the best Polish books on Tarot, published just after the beginning of the post-Soviet transformation (although written earlier) in Łódź⁵: Jan Witold Suliga’s *Tarot. Karty które wróżą* (Suliga 1990). As I will argue later, it was most probably one of the sources that Tokarczuk consulted for her novel, too. Let me compare some of the moments – as samples – from Gretkowska with the explanations of Suliga. Suliga’s interpretations are more expanded and they sometimes use synonymous words, which is why I have put “rewritten” in quotation marks. Take Trump X, The Wheel of Fortune. Suliga:

[c]hange, transformation. Happy solution. Inevitable entangling in actions that end well. Activity. Sudden change of fate. Happiness. Winning, prosperity. Good turn of the fate. Using the chance one receives. Luck in business, in marriage, in work. Flux of money. Lucky happenstance. Explosion of emotions, sexual activity. Stamina and concentration. Reversed: unfavourable change of fate. Bad luck. Weakened will. Difficulties. Conflicts. A sequence of unhappy incidents. Defeat.

5 It should be noted that this was Gretkowska’s birthplace, also mentioned in the novel.

Setback. Impossibility of avoiding trouble. Stagnancy.
Inanition. Difficulties in sexual relations. Cruelty,
ruthlessness, vindictiveness. Suspiciousness. Jealousy.
(Suliga 1990: 54-55)

Now the corresponding passage in the novel: “happiness, prosperity, happy solution. Reversed card – inanition, dissipation, difficulties” (Gretkowska 1999: 73). This shows that in the regular position all the concepts in Gretkowska are literally taken – though selected – from Suliga. While in the reversed position, she quotes two of Suliga’s meanings and adds one paraphrase; her concept of “dissipation” seems different to any definition given by Suliga when considered alone. However, in the context of all these definitions, “dissipation” seems to inscribe to the same chain of meanings (being most close to “weakened will” probably), adding her “personal” meaning. In addition to this, the first and more personal journey through the meaning of the Trumps might at least partially draw from Suliga’s book. Certainly, my point is not to compare all these quotations and paraphrases. The question of “how she made this”, from what she composed her work, is not irrelevant, neither is it crucial. On the one hand, this comparison somehow “certifies” Gretkowska’s undoubtful competence and erudition in Tarot. On the other, it also confirms my idea of this novel pertaining to the *silva rerum* genre. In the novel, it also seems an internal (both chronological explanations are somewhere near the middle of the novel), central or “focal” idea, representing the concept of the wholeness, “a book”, “a story”, a point of reference for readers unfamiliar with Tarot to potentially understand better what lies outside the focus or the centre of the novel.

The novel shows a dispersion of meanings and fragments, rather than the whole “chronological” story. Notably, the construction of the novel does not reflect the Trumps from 0/I to XXI/XXII as they appear in a newly bought deck; it shows *shuffled* cards. Paris in this

novel is this “shuffled” story, a mosaic, a potpourri⁶; the (postmodern) era is similarly a shuffled deck of cards. Likewise, Poland in transition is also a deck of cards that was shuffled (or simply they fell on the floor and thus ruined the organised story). Charlotta says once to Michał about Tarot cards: “just imagine that they are pages wrenched off from the book of world creation” (Gretkowska 1999: 75), and also: “when I look at the cards, I have an impression of looking at a mirror broken into tiny pieces. Each of them shows a fragment of my figure” (Gretkowska 1999: 76). Interestingly, the construction of the novel is something of a duplex: there is the evident presence of Tarot and there is also a hidden scheme or plan of the novel, which invites the reader to perform their own “hopscotch” readings. As we shall see, Tarot in Tokarczuk’s novel is present only in the hidden form. If we wanted to display this duplicity using the archetype of the witch – again – I would say that on the surface the novel does not abstain from showing a modern “witch” and her accessories, rather as the archetypal Magician, but it also has a hidden side of true wisdom, of “wiedźma”, “the woman who knows”, the archetype of the High Hierophantess (also known in some Tarots as the Popess or Priestess). “He [the Magician] represents Inteligence, she [Popess] – Intuition [...] the most beautiful thing would be to unite the energies of the Magician and the Popess and consolidate their positive aspects”, says Suliga (Suliga 1990: 31). Arguably, the former aspect of the construction, the overt or the explicit, complies with what is “pop” and “good marketing” in this novel (cf. Miszczak 1998).

- 6 There is also an interesting comparison of Paris as colourful [pstrokaty] and of the whiteness of a cloister where unity rules over multiplication and blending (Gretkowska 1999: 134). This comparison of Michał in the archetypal set of the novel expresses his current preference for the archetype of the Hermit instead of the Magician.

Let me show a few examples of both, starting with the explicit aspect. I have already mentioned a few places, including all the discussions, relating to painting Tarot, and the “textbook meanings”. Now I would like to mention three interesting passages. The first (Gretkowska 1999: 117-120)⁷, a long and erudite discussion of the Trump XVIII (The Moon), might be another instance of “quotation” or “re-writing” as is customary in *silva rerum* genre, or this fragment might be a beautiful meditation directly from Gretkowska (as a compromise we could say that it is a quotation from her personal book of notes on Tarot meditations). The other two places are exercises in reading plots as myths and archetypes using Tarot as a “book of archetypes”. Both these kinds of readings were used by other authors, too. Michał and Thomas went to the cinema to see David Lynch’s full *Twin Peaks* series, “you should see it, Charlotta, it’s Lynch’s movie about Tarot”, Michał claims and a longer explanation follows (Gretkowska 1999: 100-102). I am not denying the authenticity of this gesture of either Gretkowska or the real people who inspired her characters⁸, but I do have to say that this idea has an extremely

7 She delivers it as a letter or a note by Thomas who is completing his Ph.D. in philosophy and theology. Gretkowska however jocularly “ridiculed” – not the content, rather the seriousness of tone, by adding an absurd note by Xavier and a surreal drawing by Charlotta.

8 On a personal note, once I performed the same gesture watching the movie *Matrix* with a person who had some knowledge of Tarot. Just like in Gretkowska’s novel, later I found a reading of *Matrix* in the context of classical gnosis and it also fitted perfectly. It does not invalidate neither of these readings, though. My second anecdote is about the very Gretkowska’s novel which I read with my students alongside with Calvino’s novel. As an exercise to prove that Calvino was utopian (consciously?), I asked one person who knew Tarot very well to lay a synopsis of a very famous Polish novel that I would guess. She chose *Lalka* and I failed to recognise. I chose *Bramy raju* by Andrzejewski and she failed to recognise. Now, a good metaparadox would

interesting literary shape as well. I am thinking of Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* from 1973 (Calvino 1979). Calvino's novel expressed both the ironic and the utopian aspect of postmodernity, the utopian one possibly predominantly, at least in my interpretation. The concept of the novel is that one night a group of lost people meet at a castle, but all of them lose their ability to speak, so they use a Tarot deck to tell their stories. The utopian element is the idea of a universal language (they all understand the same story), which Tarot actually is not. The same sequence of cards, due to their multiple meanings, can be read by different people as completely different stories. In Gretkowska's novel, Thomas points to this idea, crossing Michal's reading of *Twin Peaks* through Tarot and showing how the same movie can be read as a reading of the myth of Daphne. Later, Thomas develops this idea and shows how the Oedipus myth can be told with Tarot cards (Gretkowska 1999: 111-113), concluding: "honestly I am telling you – Thomas raised his hands in the gesture of blessing – the mind strays also among regularities. Any myth, be it Greek, Egyptian or any quotidian experience, can be shown with the use of Tarot. And so what? Nothing, completely nothing, it only proves your erudition" (Gretkowska 1999: 113). This gesture of re-reading classical myths through Tarot has, though, its tradition. There is a deck with a long book of explanations called *Mythical Tarot*, first published in the 80s, that uses famous Greek myths (Sharman-Burke & Greene 2011). When we compare Gretkowska's accounts with Calvino's "utopian" idea, however, these readings seem accurate – even brilliant – only if they come with commentaries, particularly ostensive ones (e.g. Trump III, the Empress, is Jocasta; Laius is Trump IV, the Emperor, etc.).

be, could you – and how – display *Parisian Tarot*. What would anyone understand?

The “hidden” dimension of Tarot’s presence in the novel is an invitation to find on one’s own the aspects of the cards in the story – a bit like Michał and Thomas do with *Twin Peaks* and myths. Unlike in Tokarczuk’s novel, here the “aspects” of cards are almost exclusively archetypes; another difference is that Tokarczuk almost always separates the cards. Gretkowska, on the other hand, makes an accurate point that both people and actions usually combine different archetypes or swing between them: “once I am wise and cautious like the Hermit, on another occasion I become the malicious baby monkey jumping over the Wheel of Fortune – I shuffled the cards”, says Charlotta (Gretkowska 1999: 77). I will point just to a few possibilities. Michał is described explicitly by Charlotta as the Magician because he is a philosopher; moreover, he studies Descartes, the father of French rational philosophy, and skilfully joins it with the study of Tarot. However, he experiences a combination of the archetypes of Trump VI (The Lover) and XII (The Hanged Man), as he is left by his wife who chooses another man, forcing Michał into a period of stationary introspection. Eventually Thomas takes him to a cloister and they both experience the archetype of the Hermit (Trump IX). Michel, a background character, a satanist, represents the Trump XV (the archetype of Devil) and the fact that he appears as a “pure”, i.e. one card archetype, is due to his scarce and background presence (also Trump XV, the Devil, has a more complex meaning that perhaps would be revealed in the novel, had the character of Michel been more developed). An interesting case is Gabriella, Charlotta’s friend, a famous French writer who specialises in occultism and, at the time of the novel, is studying necrophilia. She represents Trump XIII (Death), which is usually perceived as a “state”, “situation”, “process” archetype, not as a description of personality; however, it can also refer to unconventional, independent people gifted with “vision”. The use of Trump 0/XXII (The Fool) is also very interesting. It appears explicitly very

early in the novel and is the first mention of Tarot in a flashback of Charlotta's past in Poland when she became friends with "rumdums", people living on the street and "freaks" (a perfect incarnation of the Fool).

But in addition to this explicit presence there is also, I will argue, an implicit one. First of all, this flashback comes up as a "free association" when the post-communist transformation is mentioned. This allows us to see the transformation itself as a combination of the archetype of the Wheel of Fortune (X) and the Fool (0/XXII), when change through collapse (here also Trump XVI, the Tower, appears) is an opportunity for a new beginning, full of expectations, although happening instinctively at this point (this is exactly the Fool). I see one more employment of the Fool: "the condition and fate of the expats", Polish expats, precisely, as incarnated by Michał and Ewa. This enumeration is no doubt incomplete, but I must mention also Thomas. Throughout most of the novel, he seems to incarnate the archetype of the Hierophant (or Pope, Trump V), as he studies theology and is spiritual, yet his spirituality is grounded in existing systems. When he gives his comments on Tarot, the form of his ideas seems to deprecate Tarot, which gives the impression that he prefers to keep to the Hierophant and stay away from the Magician, the trickster. However, his comments are a game of illusion (the Magician) and disillusion (no wonder he delivers an elaborate treatise on Trump XVIII, the Moon, which represents the exchange of illusions and disillusion). Gretkowska plays a trick on the "cognizant" readers at the end of the novel, however. Thomas is about to leave Paris and on his final night the whole pack of friends goes to Le Mazet, their favourite bar, where Thomas explains that in Hebrew and Arabic "mazet" means "the dead". The same day Michał, long time depressed, commits suicide. "Gabriela, Thomas knew that Michał was dying. He said: 'mazet' means – dead. He said it just today. Just when Michał was

sticking his head to the cooker” (Gretkowska 1999: 166). Was Thomas the real Magician (rather than Hierophant), the best Tarotist of them all? The only one who “read” correctly that one of them is that depressed? Or was it “just” a coincidence? Or Jungian synchronicity? Or perhaps, in order to read such information, one has to be the Hierophant rather than the Magician (i.e., less Tarot, more psychology and empathy)? Or (the most “realistic” and the least esoteric interpretation – which I rather disclaim) perhaps Michał told Thomas that he would kill himself and Thomas did not stop him, instead playing a little “trick” on the others? This is the hidden question for meditation that Gretkowska wants to leave us with. Nonetheless, we might repeat Thomas’ question: while such a reading of hidden matters can be performed, and even if it contributes something about the construction of the novel (that it is more elaborate than it seems at first glance for instance), “so what?” Specifically, so what that we named Poland’s transformation the Fool’s new journey? Does this prove anything besides a reader’s erudition? But does it have to? Perhaps Gretkowska just wanted to invite us to play with literature (the hopscotch) and with cards (shuffle them!).

Tokarczuk: The Priestess becomes the Book

It might be more complicated to ask the “so what?” question in the case of Olga Tokarczuk’s novel, *The Journey of the People of the Book*. I have already said that the presence of Tarot in this novel is not explicit at all – it all is left to the erudition of the “cognizant” reader. If you have never seen a Tarot card before, you shall not read the alternative story that Tokarczuk tells in this book; the “surface” and the “depths” here are contrasted more acutely than in Gretkowska’s text. I have also said that, unlike Gretkowska, Tokarczuk employs the whole sequence of Major Arcana or

Trumps chronologically⁹, not as “shuffled cards”¹⁰. Thus her story, composed of different archetypes (because in her spin Tarot is exclusively archetypal, i.e., it is not divinatory or mythical), is itself an archetypal story, even somewhat normative at first glance. However, the most interesting questions arise only after reading and understanding the relation between the “surface” story and the use of Tarot and archetypes.

It is necessary to make a few preliminary remarks on Tokarczuk and Tarot. This novel, her first, was finished in 1989, as the date at the end informs (it does not preclude later revamping though) and not published until 1993. In 1987, Tokarczuk completed her degree in psychology at the University of Warsaw focusing on “depth psychology” and Carl Gustav Jung’s version of psychoanalysis. Collaterally, she was involved in the alternative group and centre and a magazine “Mandragora” (1983-1990). The milieu of Mandragora was composed of academic scholars

- 9 Curiously enough in an interview in 2014 Tokarczuk said that the experience of writing this novel was very different from writing on the computer where you write in a “patchwork way”, while *The Journey* was written on a typewriter and that enforced thinking linearly and chronologically. She did not reveal the Tarot secret, however (Nogaś & Tokarczuk 2014).
- 10 It is worth mentioning in this context a book written around 1992 and “almost published” that year, Witold Jabłoński’s *Kochanek Czerwonej Gwiazdy* (*The Lover of the Red Star*), a gay pop novel eventually published in 2011. Spreading Tarot cards is present inside the novel, like in Gretkowska. But the chapters take their names from the Major Arcana (only sometimes court cards such as King and Queen of Pentacles are also used) and in each case the archetype of a chosen Trump has connections to plot twists, however unlike Tokarczuk, the Trumps are “shuffled”, they do not come in the original sequence. For instance in the chapter 14, The Tower of God, homosexuality of a Russian soldier and of a Polish clerical student are revealed by the authorities of the army and of the convent respectively, and both of the boys, who are in love, are kicked out of their institutions (Jabłoński 2011: 153-161).

and free thinkers, oftentimes contesting the dominant Western ideas of science and spirituality, and focusing on themes such as humanist psychology, esoterism, Eastern philosophies, and ecology. Tokarczuk's actual debut was in the "Mandradora" magazine (noteworthy, also Natasza Goerke published there). Among the authors invited was Jerzy Prokopiuk, a modern Polish gnostic and Jung's translator. The novel also has other references to gnosis, not only Tarot (cf. Woźniak 2014, who does not mention Tarot, but some other gnostic concepts). Also the above-mentioned Suliga, the author of the first Polish professional book on Tarot, himself a scholar (in geography), was in contact with Prokopiuk; Suliga's vision of Tarot makes use of some of the ideas that Prokopiuk studied. What I am trying to say is that, although Suliga's book on Tarot was published a year later than Tokarczuk officially finished her novel, she might have known Suliga personally (through Prokopiuk perhaps) and participated in discussions of his book before it appeared in print; or her novel got reedited later when Suliga's book was already available. There are connections between her novel and Suliga's book, such as in the way she shows the Tarot as an archetypal journey of the Fool. Another and perhaps even more important source is Sallie Nichols' book *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*, which first was published in 1980 (I suppose Prokopiuk or some other Polish Jungist might have known it or even had it), and republished in 2019 as *Tarot and the Archetypal Journey. The Jungian Path from Darkeness to Light*. Jung himself was an expert on alchemy, but he also wrote studies on I Ching and astrology with which he was quite familiar. He also knew some numerology and in his lectures (not in his writings though) he mentioned Tarot; he coined the concept of "synchronicity", later elaborated on by his student Marie-Louise von Franz, which is an attempt to explain how divination is possible with the use of archetypes (Franz 1980). Olga Tokarczuk's literature started under the sign of "alternative"

knowledge and continues to contest dominant Western “scientific” epistemologies.

Until now, no literary critic has ever pointed to Tarot in Tokarczuk’s novel. The most obvious “external” signal of Tarot’s hidden presence is the novel’s division into 22 chapters – from 0 to 21. Early readers might have thought that “chapter 0” is some kind of postmodern extravagance. This choice is, however, completely in accordance with the sequence of the Major Arcana. There are 22 and they can be counted from I to XXII (i.e. from Magician to the Fool) or from 0 to XXI (from the Fool to the World). The Fool has no fixed position, he starts the cycle, yet he also ends the cycle (in a spiral motion, each closing is the new opening). Moreover, his quality is of being able to attach to any Trump (Crowley saw it a bit differently, he said that there are no 22 Trumps, all the 21 are housed in the Fool – see Crowley 1992). Nichols says of the Fool: “[his] designation is zero, has no fixed position. He strides along at the top, looking down on the other cards. Since he has no pigeonhole, the Fool is free to spy on the other characters” (Nichols 2019: 10). Elsewhere she adds: “since he has no fixed number he is free to travel at will, often upsetting the established order with his pranks” (Nichols 2019: 23). See also Suliga’s comment:

[n]umber 0 implies that if you stick him to any other card, The Fool acquires its qualities, he can be found anywhere and everywhere, depending how his fates turn. The letter ‘aleph’¹¹ – the first cry, the first word one phonates – refers to innocence, infantility, to the state of unconsciousness of one’s own individual “I”. When the Fool meets the card The World, he billows into a human whom we might call the “Old Child”. (Suliga 1990: 30)

11 Following a long tradition, Suliga connects 22 Trumps to the 22 letters of Hebrew alphabet. The Fool is connected to ‘aleph’.

This paragraph from Suliga actually sounds like a summary of Tokarczuk's novel – they are a perfect match¹². The Fool of the novel with whom everything starts in chapter 0 and with whom everything ends, is called Gauche¹³. Gauche was born mute and his great dream is to be able to speak. In chapter 21 he, the only one from the whole quest who survived, finally speaks: “– Gauche – said Gauche in the garden to his dog. – I am Gauche” (Tokarczuk 2019a: 244). Thus he billows from the archetype of *puer aeternus* to the archetype of *puer senex*. This is the “hidden frame” of the novel, the one that opens it in a different direction and dimension. On the “surface”, the topic of the novel is the quest for a Book; the Book that only Gauche finds – and leaves. From this perspective (i.e., the dominant story on the surface), the quest fails, and Tokarczuk is right to say in the last chapter: “Gauche is not an important character in this story. Just like all the other characters that appear here. Even the story itself is not important. The intended aim was not achieved, thus the way to it loses its meaning” (Tokarczuk 2019a: 244). Yes and no, I daresay. The “surface” story might not be important, but that is because there is also the hidden story – and there it is the way or journey that is important, rather than achieving an aim; and there the Fool is our guide. There is another fascinating concurrence between Suliga and Tokarczuk's *The Journey of the People of the Book*. Suliga included a sub-chapter where he explains the esoteric journey of self-discovery in and through Tarot. This sub-chapter is entitled *The Fool and the Pearl* (Suliga 1990: 26-29). Alluding to the old

12 I am not trying that only Suliga came up with this interpretation though. I mention Suliga because he most probably is the source of Tokarczuk.

13 Let me just note *en passant* how his name is significant: in French it means of course “Left”, why “left”?, left in esoterism is always understood as the intuitive and instinctual against the rational and structural as represented by “right”.

gnostic text, *Hymn of the Pearl*, Suliga shows the individuation as the Fool's quest for the Pearl: "each human just like the Fool has a sack on their back, and at the bottom of this sack there is the pearl – the symbol of the mission, the task, and the aim for which he [the Fool] came into being in an individualised shape" (Suliga 1990: 27). In 2001, Tokarczuk published a beautiful short essay *Lalka i perła (The Doll and the Pearl)*, a Jungian and gnostic reading of *The Doll*, the great novel by Bolesław Prus, in the context of the *Hymn of the Pearl*¹⁴. Tokarczuk defines *The Doll* as an inner journey (Tokarczuk 2001). I wish to stress that the (hidden) point of the journey in her debut novel is not the book – at least, not the book that the group in the novel is looking for – but the Fool and his "pearl". But what Book, actually? Even the title of Tokarczuk's novel hides two keywords connected to Tarot. We have already seen how Tarot uses the concept of the "journey" (or quest, if you will), Suliga writes on that, and the new title of Sallie Nichols' book makes it evident: "the archetypal journey". There is a long tradition of calling Tarot a "book" (we saw one instance of such use in the quotation from Gretkowska). In one version, this book is "Tora" (read "Tarot" backwards remembering that in French the last "t" is mute). Suliga recalls the square of word combinations: ROTA – TARO – ORAT – ATOR¹⁵, the wheel (rota) of Tarot makes speak (orat) Hathor, the Egyptian goddess

14 It would be possible to rewrite *The Doll and the Pearl* with the use of Tarot cards and also, noteworthy, with her own novel *The Travel of the People of the Book*. Accordingly, it would be also possible to read Prus' masterpiece through Tarot (like in Gretkowska), following the interpretation of Tokarczuk. I am not trying to say that she purposely abstained from using Tarot in her interpretation though.

15 There is also a different reading passed by Hajo Banzhaf, a German expert on Tarot: ROTA TARO ORAT TORA ATOR, which is supposed to mean "the wheel of Tarot announces the Law of Hathor" (Banzhaf 2005).

of the dead (Suliga 1990: 13). There is another tradition of calling Tarot “The book of Thoth”, another Egyptian god (of wisdom, art, and magic, our “Hermes”). Aleister Crowley’s famous book on Tarot has exactly this title (Crowley 1992; Milo Duquette 2003). Let me conclude by stating that the journey of the people of the book in Tokarczuk’s novel is a quest for the wrong or mistaken book. In the final paragraphs, I will show how Tokarczuk gives this book a different and feminist meaning.

Each chapter in *The Journey of the People of the Book*, then, corresponds to a collateral Trump. Unlike Gretkowska, Tokarczuk (almost without exceptions) does not join archetypes-Trumps in combinations, save for The Fool and his “unfixed positionality”. The presence of the consecutive Trumps in the chapters is of various kinds, however. Sometimes the archetype is used, sometimes it is the basic pictorial setting, sometimes it is just one smaller detail from the Tarot picture, and sometimes it is not exactly the archetype, but some divinatory meaning (sometimes a psychological description of a character and sometimes an “action”). Therefore, I decided to create a schematic chart and point to these relations (and the places in the novel). One thing has to be said. These allusions to Tarot cards do not constitute or build a hidden alternate text, like a palimpsest, or like a hermetic (kabbalistic) reading procedure where you pick some phrases and rewrite them and this constitutes the hidden story / message. This procedure of noticing Tarot’s presence is just an invitation to further interpretation.

Chapter /Trump	Trump Name	The relation of the novel to the Trump ¹⁶ (number=page)
0 / XXII	The Fool	The role of the hazard in life and in Gauche's life: "Gauche is an accidental character in this story. Nothing indicated that he would join the travel. He was not in the plan. His life story is full of such accidents, but we still don't know what hazard is" (5); Gauche as a newborn baby (5); inability to speak as being unformed (6); the company of the dog and Gauche's dress as in iconography (8; cf. also 244) implying instinctual connection to nature (7); start of the journey to the world (where the Tarot 0 meets XXII) (7-8).
I	The Magician	The Marquess as a versatile user of language and communication, an <i>bomme de lettres</i> (poems and political pamphlets), and also an alchemist (14); alchemy and secret societies, incl. The People of the Book (16, 19); narcissism and mirrors, mirror images (12-13). ¹⁷ One of the rare meanings of the reversed Magician is going blind which seems to be happening to the Marquess in subsequent chapters.
II	The Popess	The Book (as in iconography) (20-21); the Book "was a shimmering, not very specific promise of a change, of adventure, of a revelation taken straight from the cathedral frescos. It was for him the Graal, the Golden Fleece, the Water of Life, and in its honour he was becoming a knight in a silver armour" (25) – here also the cathedral or church or convent as a place (cf. 27 – the Book is hidden in a small hidden convent); hermetic, hidden knowledge (20-21); the Kaballah (22); intuition (26).
III	The Empress	The exclusive courtesan Weronika who only has rich clients and lives in comfort (29, 31-32), "she loved her chevalier because he was beautiful, rich and respected" (33); a banquet table (29); a woman taking care of her body, an aesthete (36).

16 The significance of Trumps is reconstructed based on Suliga and Nichols in the first place, but also on other sources.

17 In Raider-Waite deck the Magician has all the Minor Arcana symbols, including the pentacle which is understood to symbolise also a round mirror. The connection between magic and mirrors is obvious though with the concept of "magical mirrors" where you can see future, past, or spy on people (like in the Gothic novel *The Monk* by M. G. Lewis for instance).

IV	The Emperor	An auberge called “Under The Emperor” (direct allusion to the name of the Trump) (41); the perfect plan that goes wrong and the confrontation of two male attitudes: monsieur de Berle is an organised proponent of living by plans (as the archetypical Emperor), and the Marquess (the Magician) is the more flexible one (44-45); chevalier d’Albi’s illgal duel and loss of leverage (the significance of the reversed Emperor) (47); the father (de Berle) leaving his children (the significance of the reversed Trump) (48).
V	The Pope	The roots and planning on leaving them (less frequent yet known significances of The Pope), “people identify with the place where they have their roots, as if life without this growing into soil was but an ersatz, something of no importance” (51); chapels on the road (51); a different or foreign language (54); the idea of plans being designed by somebody superhuman, God (55, 57).
VI	The Lover(s)	The necessity of making a choice (59-60); the choice between empiricism and metaphysics, science and spirituality, magic and reason (63-64, 66-67); desire (Burling’s to Weronika) that influences choices (65); Weronika’s considerations who of the two men (de Berle or the Marquess) could become her lover (70); lovers’ intrigues and gossip (reversed Lovers) (75-76).
VII	The Chariot	The road, travelling, exodus, caravans and stagecoaches (77); conflict ¹⁸ (here – religious, the expulsion of Huguenots) (77-78); important conversations (on politics and religious conflicts) (80); a black servant – possible allusion to a black horse on the iconography of the card (80); painting of a young knight on a horse, St. George who killed the dragon (while this myth seems to refer more to Trump XI, Trump VII represents a young knight on his way, just before the final action) (82-83); controlling oneself, restraining temptations and sins (84-85); discovery that everything leads up to a wrong end – the case of de Berle (reversed Chariot) (86-87).

- 18 The Chariot symbolizes conflict because there are two horses, a white horse and a dark horse, who, like in Plato’s myth, want to go opposite ways, but the driver has the power to make them collaborate.

VIII	Justice	Calculation, balance of income (93); laws (97, 99); algebra, geometry (100); false self-assessment – of the painter Ucello (reversed Justice) (102); judicial trial – of chevalier d’Albi (110).
IX	The Hermit	“The ability to see things that remained in the shadow” (115); abandoned monastery in Uterus Mundi in a place not indicated on any map (118); the Sun as an enemy (120); “in a mature human there lives a child all the time and it bears the whole truth about the human – loneliness, the experience of forlornness, waiting for attention and love, anxiety without a reason – here a sage, great politician, common man, anyone, begins” (121); ill eyes – of the wise Marquess (123).
X	The Wheel of Fortune	God’s plan, no surprises, everything has already happened (126); alchemic transmutation (130-132).
XI	Strength	Illness – of eyes (reversed Strength) (140); physical forces taking over the spiritual ones (reversed Strength) (143). This chapter is an exception, because there is more presence of Trumps IX, XII and XIII here, all referring to various aspects of “melancholy” and Saturn, than XI; while the sexual aspect of XI is present in chapter 12 (151) as well as the idea of feminine strength: “she had submissiveness in her which was stronger than force” (152).
XII	The Hanged Man	The scaffold on a hill – iconography of Trump XII (148); desiccating of the soil, waste land (150).
XIII	Death	Pest in a town (157); falling from a horse – Weronika (159); an older unconventional medic who sees-through – Delabranche (163), “I am taken for a weirdo, not for a medician” (164); homunculus (172-174) – in Crowley’s system the image of homunculus appears in the Trump IX and it looks like a sperm cell after the drawing by Nicholas Hartsoecker from 1694.
XIV	Temperance	Vegetarianism as continence (176); logical harmony (179); “everything that surrounds us is living and perfectly harmonious, led and maintained by a consistent force” (182); the balance of forces (183).

XV	The Devil	Incapacitation as addiction or dependence (192); deception (193-194).
XVI	The Tower of God (/Destruction)	Clandestine and illegal crossing the border (198); the necessity of a change of attitudes (200); falling down from a rock – Gauche (203-204); the tower (metaphorical but alluding to the iconography of the Trump) (205).
XVII	The Star	Brisk air, lungs (traditionally XVII governs lungs and bronchia) (206-207, 214); river (iconographical element) (210); new hope, vanquished fears (215). In chapter 18, the idea of a guidance by an angel appears (222), traditionally connected to Trump XVII, although in the context of XVIII it seems an illusion.
XVIII	The Moon	Deep fog in the night (218); almost visible path and a chubby-cheeked moon (iconographical element) (223); illusions – a bird taken for a dragon or an angel (223-224).
XIX	The Sun	Sunrise (iconographic element) (232-233, 237); the young person or child goes into the lead (236); garden (iconographical element) (236); primal scream – Gauche (one of less known aspects of XIX in reverse is “inability to have one’s say”) (238-239).
XX	Judgment	Church, monastery (elements of iconography) (239); dance macabre painting (240); discovery of the treasure – here Book (241); disregarding an information (this is one of the aspects connected to reversed Judgment, here it means Gauche’s disappointment with the Book and leaving it where it was) (242-243); the first words (rebirth, calling or vocation) – Gauche (243).
XXI	The World	One of the meanings of reversed World is “giving up something just before achieving it” and this is what happens on the two pages of this chapter (244-245), however here XXI turns into 0/XXII, a new beginning, a new story.

One of the more general readings or meanings of the “surface story” in the novel might be the forthcoming breakthrough in the epistemological system(s) of Western culture, i.e., the solstice of high Baroque and the advent of early Enlightenment, or the clash between cartesianism (rationalism) and alchemy, or science (rationalism and empiricism) and esoterism, especially in French and English cultures, which influenced the dominant notions of Western modernity dating from the Enlightenment. Tokarczuk’s sympathy or even investment in the non-rational alternative Western tradition is not explicit, and now we understand it through the context of her later works when we employ the hidden esoteric context. Another reading could be a feminist one, where Weronika is read as just a function or complement to male characters or as the incarnation of “female mystery”, or as the impossibility of female genealogy (Świerkosz 2014: 200, 206). While the most general reading of the novel with the employment of the esoteric sub-code can be formulated as “the individuation process with the use of different archetypes” – and this reading does not have to preclude the idea of the birth of the new rationality and science – some more specific readings can be delivered as well.

I am particularly interested in the feminist reading with the reference to Tarot in the novel. Most of the Trumps represent “feminine” and “masculine” qualities or characters. The Fool is sometimes seen as neuter or representing both (in Crowley’s interpretation this is greatly stressed). Dominantly masculine Trumps are: I, IV, V, VII, IX, XII, XV. Dominantly feminine are: II, III, VIII, XI, XVII. As for VI, Lovers, it represents the meeting of both; XIX represents the child (usually in a grown person though); XIV and XXI represent angel-like or androgenic characters (Crowley also considered IX to be a masculine, though ambivalent, character). It cannot be said, then, that Tarot does not represent “femininity” sufficiently. Certainly, the masculine or

feminine quality of the Trump does not mean that this card has meaning only for men or women, or, as Nichols clarifies, “the terms masculine and feminine, as Jung uses them, are not intended to correlate with the physiological dichotomy man-woman” (Nichols 2019: 76). This comparison of more or less balanced or “equal” esoteric tradition with the novel shows clearly that while there are many different male characters and masculinity is multifaceted, the only relevant feminine character in the novel is Weronika. Tarot distinguishes two dominant masculine and feminine archetypes, IV and V for men, and II and III for women. However, in Jungian terms, II also represents “anima” in men and V “animus” in women. (Let me remind passingly that in her reading of Prus, Tokarczuk suggested that Izabela Łęcka might be the anima of Wokulski.) Taking all that into account, Weronika represents just one archetype of femininity, the one related to the Empress, the more material one, the one more connected to the body. Let me quote Nichols once again, who clarifies this distinction: “the Popess is connected with Isis and gestation, the Empress is associated with Ceres and vegetation. [...] The Popess is High Priestess and Virgin; the Empress is Madonna and Royal Queen. The Popess serves the spirit; the Empress fulfills the spirit. With the Popess, the spirit (the Holy Ghost) descends into matter to be made flesh” (Nichols 2019: 90), and that happens in the body of the Empress. All in all: where is the spiritual woman, where is the wise woman, where is the animus – in the novel? In the iconography of the Trump II, we see a woman who studies a book – and shows the book to the others. In Tokarczuk’s novel, chapter II refers only to the Book. The woman is erased! In one way it might mean that all the masculine characters in the novel – and more broadly in these times between alchemy and science – ignored their anima, or projected it onto a Book, while being able to recognise femininity only in the archetype of Empress. We can go further, however: the “erased” or invisible woman who holds a

book is... Olga Tokarczuk. She holds the book with the novel, as well as “the book of Thot”, the Tarot Trumps with their Jungian interpretation. This gesture certainly seems postmodern, a meta-gesture, but it might hold more value than just a play on the author’s presence (or significant non-presence) in the novel. The idea of the author who withdraws for the sake of the story and “becomes” the book is precisely the understanding of the role of the tender (empathetic) narrator that Tokarczuk expressed so beautifully in her Nobel lecture (Tokarczuk 2019b: 21)¹⁹.

Conclusions

Finally, let us try to read both strategies of using Tarot in Gretkowska’s and Tokarczuk’s novels in the context of the critical debates of Poland in the mid-90s. Tokarczuk was accused of being “too traditional” in her storytelling and of creating consciously a likeable “kitsch” – a false imitation of old-time “masterpieces” (Świerkosz 2014: 174-175), while Gretkowska was accused of looking for false scandals (Gutkowska 2003: 264-265). Both these novels contradict or at least complicate these notions. The source of Tokarczuk’s “traditional” story – the sequence of Major Arcana – comes from a non-normative, non-traditional and somewhat “suspicious” source, rejected by the dominant notions of Western culture. Gretkowska’s “scandalous” and “chaotic” (as opposed to “over traditional”) display of Tarot cards in the hands of a witch is a scandal only in the eyes of a very normative (culturally masculine

19 In *The Doll and the Pearl* she also asked an important question: whose projection is the Author? (Tokarczuk 2001). The Tarot game in *The Journey of the People of the Book* is a good illustration of this question. There are some ideas in this essay which come back in the Nobel lecture.

and rational) reader, when in fact it hides literary erudition and esoteric wisdom. In this regard, both these novels reveal the secrets of canon and canon-making, too: the former is too organised and the latter too chaotic – lack vs. excess, two traditional patriarchal approaches to female presence. Both these strategies are subversive: Tokarczuk implements a non-traditional load inside the “familiar”, waiting for a bold reader who will unveil it one day; Gretkowska does more or less the same, only openly, thus risking her image as “respectable”, yet also hoping that one day an unprejudiced reader will come and unveil all.

Bibliography

- Banzhaf Hajo (2005), *Tarot Handbook*, tr. by Christine M. Grimm, Stamford, U.S. Games.
- Boryś Wiesław (2005), *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Calvino Italo (1973), *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, Segrate, Einaudi, trans. William Weaver, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, Orlando, Florida, 1979.
- Crowley Aleister (1992), *The Book of Thot by Master Therion*, New York, Samuel Weiser.
- Evans Arthur (1978), *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, Boston, Fag Rag, trans. Valentina Ripani, *Brujería y contracultura gay*, Barcelona, Editorial Descontrol, 2015.
- Franz, Mary-Louise (1980), *On Divination and Synchronicity*, Toronto, Inner City Books.
- Goerke Natasza (2004), *Fractale*, Warszawa, Prószyński i S-ka.
- Gretkowska Manuela (1999), *Tarot paryski*, Warszawa, W. A. B.
- Gutkowska Barbara (2003), “Intymność w *Polce* Manuelei Gretkowskiej”, *Godność i styl*, ed. M. Kisiel, P. Majerski, Z. Marcinów, Katowice, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego: 264-274.
- Jabłoński Witold (2011), *Kochanek Czerwonej Gwiazdy*, Warszawa, Abiekt.pl.

- Milo DuQuette Lon (2003), *Understanding Aleister Crowley's Thoth Tarot*, New York, Weiser Books.
- Miszczak [Lachman] Magdalena (1998), "Manueli Gretkowskiej zabawy (z) kiczem", *Teksty Drugie*, 6: 135-153.
- Nichols Sallie (2019), *Tarot and the Archetypal Journey. The Jungian Path from Darkness to Light*, New York, Weiser Books.
- Nogaś Michał & Tokarczuk Olga (2014), "Historię trzeba opowiadać na nowo", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, <<https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/historie-trzeba-opowiadac-na-nowo-22900>>, (last accessed 29/03/2021).
- Nycz Ryszard (1996), *Sylwy współczesne*, Kraków, Universitas.
- Sharman-Burke Juliet & Greene Liz (1986), *The Mythic Tarot*, Stamford, U.S. Games Systems, pl. tr. by Dorota Ziółkowska, *Tarot Mityczny*, Iwaniska, Wydawnictwo Synergie, 2011.
- Suliga Jan Witold (1990), *Tarot. Karty, które wróżą*, Łódź, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie.
- Świerkosz Monika (2014), *W przestrzeniach tradycji. Proza Izabeli Filipiak i Olgi Tokarczuk w sporach o literaturę, kanon i feminizm*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IBL.
- Tischner Józef (2005), *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo Sovieticus*, Kraków, Znak.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2019a), *Podróż ludzi Księgi*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2019b), *The Tender Narrator. Nobel Lecture by Olga Tokarczuk*, Stockholm, The Nobel Foundation.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2001), *Lalka i perła*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Woźniak Kamila (2014), "Olga Tokarczuk w poszukiwaniu prawdy", *Teologia Polityczna*, <<https://teologiapolityczna.pl/kamila-wozniak-olga-tokarczuk-w-poszukiwaniu-prawdy/>>, (last accessed 29/03/2021).

VI.
“Oh, Lament of Women in All Times”*:
Clusters of Mythological Traces in Works
by Russian Women, Composers,
Poets and Novelists

Elena Petrushanskaya-Averbakh

Myth, in the definition by Olga Freidenberg, is

a structural system of figurative representation, [...] which lacks our accustomed understanding of formal-logical causality, and in which the world of things, space and time is seen as an indivisible and concrete entity where man and his environment form a subjective-objective unity [...].
(Freidenberg 1998: 34)

Such an approach to myth is remarkable for the absence of the usually mandatory linkage of cause with effect; the indivisibility and specificity of the subject-matter produce a union of space and

* Marina Tsvetaeva: *Yesterday you still looked in my eyes*, 14 June 1920 (Tsvetaeva 1990: 77): «Я глупая, а ты умен, / Живой, а я остолбенелая. / О вопль женщин всех времен: / ‘Мой милый, что тебе я сделала?!’» «Stupid creature, and you are wise, you, / live, while I’m stunned. / Now for the lament of women in all times: / ‘My love, what was I did to you?’» English translation of the poem by Elein Feinstein in M. Tsvetaeva, *Bride of Ice: New Selected Poems*. The article was translated from Russian by Anthony Philips.

time. If we analyse a range of recent productions by women composers and writers, we can discern in them a qualitative symbiosis. In former times this might have suggested eclecticism, fuzziness, ill-defined imagery. But today such a symbiosis (considered independently of the aesthetic level of the finished work of art) is a marker of innovation, a mode that can sometimes be spontaneous, elemental, other times calculated. In it we may detect a multifarious continuum consisting of a complex of simultaneously occurring mythological traces, which bring to the composition a new textural quality made up of indissoluble, multilayered, densely incorporated ingredients. It may be argued that a similar manifestation appeared earlier, in the concept and practice of polysemanticism. Latterly, as it appears, the overarching objective is less to achieve perfect lucidity, precision of meaning, quintessence, than to accumulate images – verbal or sonic – through an aggregation of signs that would previously have been considered incompatible. In the era of post-postmodernism, they chime with the particularities of the way we now apprehend reality.

It is a quality most visibly featured in works by women artists. Women are especially drawn to symbioses, mixing elements of various myths and mythologies. Typical markers are hints of sources in sonic and verbal characteristics that lend colour to situations and dramatic “events”, amalgamated so as to form an indissoluble conglomeration. Perhaps the roots of this tendency lie in women’s long, predominantly silent ages: the powerful tradition of *voicelessness* in music and literature considered proper to creative artists belonging to the ‘weaker sex’. But once having glimpsed “liberation”, women’s voices seized avidly on every opportunity to give the widest possible expression to their experiences as fully-fledged members of society, communicators, historical personages, emotional beings. As participators and observers alike, women’s capacity to perceive and to act

polyphonically – the phenomenon sometimes referred to today as “multi-tasking” – is far greater than that of men. Consequently, work produced by women can be less concentrated, less focussed on the integrity of the underlying thought – commonly dismissed as “muddled thinking” – but whose aim, nevertheless, is to achieve a multi-voiced synthesis of particular sonic and verbal qualities.

In our view the description of such manifestations as “multi-mythological bricolage” is inadequate to characterise them. The French term “bricolage” implies improvisation, the *spontaneous* construction (often amateurish, deliberately conceived at random) of a project or object out of materials that just happen to be ready at hand. The term may be employed to describe a project or object itself that has come about by making use of materials irrespective of their original function (Lévi-Strauss 1994). In such cases it suggests that a new something has been created by utilising and re-fashioning arbitrary elements unconnected with myth. In Lévi-Strauss’s formulation it functions like a kaleidoscope, generating a new pattern from the fragments of its predecessor. “Bricolage” proposes that the trajectory of conceptual activity proceeds independently of the usual subordination of means to ends, as distinct from that of a planned operation. The recombination of images and symbols is inherent in the intentionality of the thought.

In contrast to the foregoing, when discussing the complex of different myths in the work of Russian women we have identified, we propose to introduce a new term: *clusters of mythological traces* into the field of academic research into mythology. Applied to literature, “cluster” would signify an explanatory scheme, an index of influences, the sum of the sources of the phenomenon. When used in music the term refers to “chords consisting of seconds in close configuration [...] one of the fundamental means of organising verticals in sonoristics” (Grove 2007: 414). To be precise: a musical cluster is a specifically generated simultaneous

sonic combination. It is not a traditionally structured chord, but a combination of adjacent sounds, sometimes in a microtonal relationship, a continuously sounding “smudge” of a specified timbre and range. What is the essence and the point of this device? The answer is: to generate a strong, striking, discordant effect by combining densely contiguous sounds.

Appropriately enough, the first known example of a musical cluster occurs in the depiction of “Primordial Chaos” in *The Elements*, an orchestral suite of 1738 by the Baroque composer Jean-Féry Rebel (1666-1747). Rarely encountered in music before the twentieth century, Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) employed a cluster to create the sonic effect of a storm at the start of his opera *Otello* (1887). And in the preliminary plan for his unrealised opera *Earth and Heaven* (1905-1906) based on Lord Byron’s eponymous “Mystery”, Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) conceived a seven-note tonal cluster to personify the “life of heaven”, the “initial miasma of the universe”, in the context of the apocalypse (Tsvetkova 2008: 23). Since the start of the twentieth century, when dissonance became normalized as a component of musical material, certain formations of cluster confirmed their status as a legitimate expressive device in the poetics of Leo Ornstein, Henry Cowell, Isaac Albeniz, Alban Berg, Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy (in “La Cathédrale Engloutie”, etc.), John Cage, George Gershwin, Sergej Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich. Clusters come to the fore in the context of sonoristics, for example in the works of Olivier Messiaen, György Ligeti, Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, as well as in jazz and film scores. They fulfil a variety of functions in the music of the second half of the twentieth century. One example of their integration with literary prosody is their sequential employment in the vocal cycle *Sad Songs*, Op 22 (1962) by the St. Petersburg composer Boris Tishchenko (1939-2010), who studied with Shostakovich. In “Christmas Romance” the clusters in the piano part consist of the

sounds made by the reciting/singing of the poet himself. The published version of the cycle includes a marking above the score: “Verses and Melody by Josef Brodsky” (Volkov 1971: 91; Petrushanskaya 2007: 46).

What distinguishes the term we have chosen, in its application to myth, from the term “multi-mythological bricolage” that has already found its way into academic discourse? As we see it, a “cluster of mythological traces” contains separate elements, signs, motifs, tokens whose association is not merely one of contiguity but of actual integration and transformation into mythological holisms, whether consciously revealed as such by the authors of the works or unconsciously suggested. Many resonant and vivid examples may be found in the works of a range of contemporary Russian women writers, where syntheses, cross-cuttings and transformations of mythologies predominate. The kind of intensity, incorporation and opposition found in a “bundle of myths” is what we propose to define as *clusters of mythological traces*.

Creative musical and literary composition has long been considered primarily a male activity. Similarly, the (male) *Logos* is contrasted with *Myth*, a manifestation originating from female illogicality. Characterising the work of his women colleagues, the well-known composer Iurii Kasparov said in an interview:

The primacy of the irrational over the rational, and the discovery in that tendency of a particular logic [...] is a principle emanating specifically from female psychology, sense of form, sense of time, emotionalism, [...] everything interwoven [...] into an integrated conglomeration. There is no hint of calculation. This does in no way impoverish the music, nor does it cause the musical dramaturgy or the form to disintegrate, but rather creates a special imaginative structure. (Lialenkova 2006)

Feminine creativity, with its tendency to irrationality, engenders the most elemental, seemingly impossible fusions, coagulations, clusters of mythological traces. In her work, the world-famous composer Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), who defines herself as a “representative of archaic consciousness”, brings together mythological symbols of the East, the West, Egypt, antiquity, Slavdom, Tatar pagan epics. Elements of Christian mythology and the philosophy of Martin Buber are newly reinterpreted in her works. Her composition *Warum?* echoes Schumann’s piano piece in his *Kinderszenen*, op 15 with its eternal Romantic search for a *Weltausschauung* revealing the meaning of life. In addition to these sources, according to Gubaidulina, it was also inspired by the “connections to two personalities of extreme importance to all of European history: Plato and Nietzsche [...] and our own intellectual history, as well as my own personal pain [...]” (Gubaidulina 2016: 14). Her oratorio *Über Liebe and Hass* (*On Love and Hatred*, 2015-2016) for soprano, tenor bass, chorus and orchestra, built on texts from the Psalms and prayers in Russian, German, French and Italian, combines Christian myths from different nations into a unified whole.

Let us consider another example by composer Elena Firsova (b. 1950), who fuses aural mythological traces from the Silver Age with others drawn from antiquity and Christianity, Russian with European. However, we will now turn our attention to a less well-known but (for our theme) more conspicuous instance, one which is, however, at the same time more problematical.

“Spontaneous polyphony and cryptophony” (the combining of hidden musical signs) are important elements for the composer Iraida Yusupova (b. 1962). We shall examine clusters of mythological sources in one of her compositions: the media-opera *Einstein and Margarita, or Discovered in Transfer* (2006) for recorded sounds, live symphony orchestra, five soloists and chorus. The composer regards this genre – a synthesized screen-and-stage

production – as her own invention, for which she created not only the musical score but also the concept of the entire work, the dialogue and the selection of video sequences, their reformulation and editing. The verse text was written by the poet Vera Pavlova (b. 1963) and translated by her husband Steven Seymour. The role of the sculptor Konenkov was played by Dmitrii Prigov (1940-2007), who himself trained in that art-form.

The subject, as described by the authors of the ‘opera-myth’, is the seemingly implausible love-story of two ‘incompatibles’: the creator of the Theory of Relativity and Margarita Ivanovna Vorontsova (1895-1980), an exceptional woman and the wife of the sculptor Sergei Konenkov (1874-1971), the “Russian Rodin”, who lived for many years in the USA. Some documentary evidence does exist for their liaison. Alongside the playfully postmodernist incorporation of quotations, references and allusions, the media-opera invites ironic and paradoxical associations with familiar works of art and concepts encrusted with their own mythological connotations. The name Margarita itself refers to a corpus of legends extending from Faust to its de-mythologization in Bulgakov’s well-known novel. The figure of Einstein presents the complex image of a twentieth-century Faust, the interconnectedness of everything with everything and their relativity. Especially in the cross-cutting visual imagery of the media-opera, this Einstein figure links it to the 1976 minimalist opera by Philip Glass *Einstein On The Beach*¹. In that work, as illustrated by musicologist Tat’iana Cherednichenko,

composing [...] reverts to a pre-innovatory era. The task of composing music from the creation of the unprecedented

1 The first work in a trilogy “about people who transformed the world by the power of their ideas”, as it was described by the composer himself.

has turned into the placement of whatever can be found available, ready to hand, which, according to Lévi-Strauss, is the job of the *bricoleur*, the bearer of mythological thought. (Cherednichenko 2002: 282-283)

Yusupova's romanticized music uses materials-signs of the time, which have already crystallized into mythological traces. Polysemantic and polycultural palettes are widened via the addition of music, words and video-sequences with estrangement and montage. Visual tropes, scenes from Hollywood movies, revue and other soundtrack stylistic devices accompany scenes depicting the American way of life, the verses (thanks to the translation into English) turned into hit-song lyrics – all of this points to a world of American mythology.

Another layer connected with German myth is uncovered when on her deathbed Einstein's second wife starts singing in German. There is also a hint at Mata Hari, when clips from the 1933 film *Ninotchka*, an image of Greta Garbo embodying the myth of the femme fatale in her role as the representative of a Soviet trade delegation is superimposed on the heroine, Margarita. In other clips from *Queen Christina* Greta Garbo also appears as a different cinematic heroine, counteracting the daring feminist and secret adventuress represented by Ninotchka. The appliqué of the image of the cinematic heroine from the past foretelling the future is "cut out" of the frame. It is translated from her upright position to the horizontal, thus forecasting the death of the character to whom a complex of mythological associations and traces goes back. At the same time, the musical intonations of "Isolde's death" refer back to Celtic and Wagnerian mythologies.

The physicist's first wife is portrayed as a fairy-tale wicked woman. Mentions of her are accompanied by intonations of florid Hungarian melodies that meld with her singing in Italian with overtones of the passionate nature of the vocal style of the Italian

Peninsula. A note of devilish mystery in her make-up is suggested by the wailing of a Thereminbox, invisibly introducing a mythical evocation of its inventor Lev Sergeevich Termen, *aka* Léon Theremin, who used his electronic invention as cover for successful activities as an industrial spy in the USA. But this is exactly what the hidden devil, the charming and mysterious Margarita, inclined the great physicist to do.

The opera's finale adds to the mix the sound of a Jewish funeral prayer, Hebrew and Latin *Alleluias*. But still more insistent is the dialogue between the Western world and emblems of Soviet culture. Acting as hidden motive forces, key twentieth century sounds are revived mythically in the opera: saccharine songs celebrating the “American Dream”, a screaming A-A-A-A-h! (the letter A inscribed on dancing girls clad in nuclear warhead-shaped costumes) as the Kremlin is threatened with an atomic bomb attack. Both aural myths are combined in a caricature of the Hollywood aesthetic in the spirit of the satirical Soviet magazine *Krokodil*.

The vocal score of *Einstein* is a *mélange* of American leading-man musicals with echoes of melodic and instrumental arrangements from Hollywood extravaganzas. There are frequent repetitions of the visual equivalent of an operatic leitmotiv in a montage of a photograph of the physicist smoking his invariable pipe along with his image seen on the shore of a calm lake. Einstein is projected as on the brink of discovering incalculable new dimensions, referencing both the actual times the hero romantically met his Margarita aboard a yacht on the lake, and the metaphysical sense of the Biblical statement in the Book of Job: “[...] thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away” (Job, 11: 16). Margarita, by contrast, inhabits a differently modulated expressive sphere replete with allusions to bright, tuneful Soviet songs and film music à la Isaac Dunaevsky's marching songs. Margarita's confession scene, “Margarita

penitent”, is yet another re-interpreted myth in which her revelation that she is a NKVD agent displays the lineaments of a remorseful albeit apparently infatuated, cynical temptress.

Clusters of mythological traces is the most succinct and cogent definition of the musically and visually interwoven commixture of mythological references in the portrayals of these characters. Running in parallel, paying due respect to traditional musical language and dramaturgy in what Yusupova, after all, presents as a lyric opera, is the familiar conflict between forbidden love and public duty. An accretion of mythological recollections thus borders on the domain of legendary operatic heights such as Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* or Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*. There are clear references to the myth of the forced betrayal of the beloved and the guileful revelation of a state secret, reminiscent of Aida’s action in Verdi’s opera.

Another layer of reading is also recognizable, revealing in the central images an association with the Faustian mythology. After all, in his exploration of unknown realms of knowledge, Einstein may be compared to Goethe’s scholar. However, Albert has fallen in love with a younger Margarita, who harbours a most unromantic secret. As in real life, the opera reveals the conflict inherent in the “Mephistophelean pact” between the child-like trailblazing scientist and the Soviet Mata Hari. Her mission, apparently successful, was to extract from the besotted physicist and his associates details of America’s Manhattan Project on the atomic bomb. For this the Konenkovs, having spent two decades living in America, were subsequently rewarded after the war, when by special command of the Soviet Government, they were urgently sent to the USSR. This all adds another perspective from which to listen to the music, another meaningful line into the dissonant clusters of mythological traces.

A comparable situation can be observed in literature, where manifestations of irrational *mythological clusters* appear more

vividly in middlebrow novels written by women. Let us examine three books that present “musical” features.

The heroine of Ekaterina Ru’s novel *The Dead Pianists* (*Mertvye pianisty*, 2019), which won the Grand Prize for Best Submitted Manuscript in 2019, is Nadia, an autistic girl who when we first meet her is unable to speak. Like many characters in Russian fairy tales, her muteness turns out to be imaginary, it is “the mark of a certain quality of having been singled out for fabulous achievement” (Dobrovolskaya 2019: 149). Generally in Russian fairy tales, as this expert defines the trope,

a physical or psychic defect is, on the one hand either a curse of the gods, or on the other a sign of having been singled out for membership of the ‘enlightened’, connected with another world, the gift of special sacred knowledge [...] it was considered that blind soothsayers were able to make more accurate predictions, people with physical defects were more effective healers (the phenomenon of the Holy Fool) [...] Muteness was a comparatively rare condition [...] in folklore to all intents and purposes identical with silence, which came in itself to be a form of ritual behaviour. The inability to speak is a distinctive sign of relations with another world, with supernatural powers, with dangerous connections to unclean powers. The mute or deliberately non-speaking person is seen as strange, alien [...] Conventional wisdom leads us to believe that such an individual cannot possess unusual capabilities. The logic of the fairy tale, however, tells quite another story, suggesting that precisely a handicap of this kind may coexist with an arsenal of unusual qualities [...] and its owner may be capable of miraculous achievements. (Dobrovolskaya 2019: 142, 146)

Thought by her mother and by the external world to be a dumb idiot, Nadia has the gift of listening attentively to sounds both

hostile and otherwise, learning about the world and changing herself. The subtlety and refinement of her hearing cause her to develop into a talented self-taught pianist. Musical studies help her to escape from the pain of everyday life, with the aim of “restoring inner silence, [...] auditory cleansing and relief from unwanted noise, so that afterwards music would have somewhere to sound inside Nadia” (Ru 2019: 123). The miracle of finding her voice, the myth of the musical Wunderkind and the innate cast of mind of a researcher and taxonomer, coalesce in the girl. Suffering from Asperger’s Syndrome, she was obliged to “populate” her cosmos, bringing order into her inner world, mentally classifying lists of buttons, batteries, sounds, students of imaginary classrooms and deceased pianists of her native city. The idea recalls the complex myths surrounding Cthulhu, the myth created by H. P. Lovecraft of the “sleeping dead”, that is to say of cultural memory and cultural traces. Fictional images come to life and encroach upon reality.

Symbolically, the first sound Nadia is heard to utter is: “Wake up!” In this transformational awakening can be found a motif from a magic fairy tale. The insurmountable handicap of muteness vanishes with the mastery of a new and complex awareness and/or skill-set; this mastery is in its way a miracle. Here may be traced myths of metamorphosis, “resurrection”, the discovery of a new and wonderful quality. And the interior speech of Nadia Zavyalova connects her with the myth of Netochka Nezvanova, while threads of other mythological associations are woven into the “clustered” composite from which the character of the heroine is compounded. Detectable also is a hint of *Lives of the Saints*. Like the biblical Jonah, Nadia feels herself to be inside a huge, dead whale; like Robinson on his uninhabited island she has to construct her own civilisation. Talent is a “thing in itself” (even though one chapter is headed “A thing outside itself”). The philosophy and mythology of an exceptional child, brought to life

in the particular story of this girl, are templates for the solitariness of every human being.

In the imprint of mythological traces a slew of different references merge to form the uniqueness of a particular situation. In Olga Shamborant's (1945-2020) cycle of stories entitled *Experiments on Myself: A Diverting Diagnostic (Opyty na sebe. Zanimatel'naiia diagnostika, 2010)*, one of the stories, *Metamorphosis (Prevrashchenie)*, presents us with the source of re-mythologization. Here it is a 'metamorphosis' of the eponymous Kafka myth as the narrator openly states at the beginning of the story:

I am turning into a domestic animal. It is not such a terrible and exhausting metamorphosis for imagination as Kafka's story of the same name. On the contrary, it is funny, but it still reveals the essence of the mechanisms of our way of existing. (Shamborant 2010)

This metamorphosis, so it seems, is gradual rather than catastrophic. The lover can transform into the beloved. The heroine lives with a family of neutered cats and a dog. Her life, as she herself, is similarly castrated by loneliness. Verbal speech is meaningless. Essentially, communication is carried on only with animals; she interprets the sounds they utter and the gestures they make as language. The outside world is an ever more frightening jungle; to obtain food for her "people" she is forced to live by laws more predatory than those of her pets, and such becomes her way of life within the confines of her household. She transforms into a beast, mentally, without any hint of the occult: this is a transformation into a female werewolf, into the head of the pack. While werewolves are usually lean and muscular characters, this one is more of a guide and leader, a sort of female Akela. She no longer needs people.

Integrated into the narrative and the laconic portrait of the heroine's character are typological instances of the victimised status women occupy in society. Together they generate a cluster of mythological traces containing a variety of impulses, albeit closely related, amalgamated into an inseparably intertwined, tormenting mass. This is spiritual castration, a denial of speech whose power has been replaced by imitating the language of animals. It is not a simple re-mythologization of Kafka's concept: here we encounter a folklore-derived version of Hans Andersen's tale *The Little Mermaid* sacrificing herself for her love. Implied also is a variant of the werewolf myth: the fluid, voluntary transformation of a woman into a feral animal. The specifics of this version of lycanthropy radically differ from the ancient understanding of the process (alteration of appearance while the essence remains unchanged) and from later treatments familiar from the Romantic conception (conflict, ousting and substitution of former identities)². Under the conditions described in the book where an intelligent woman is forced to exist in isolation, the motivation is purely love for the domestic animals in her charge, and the loss of humanity is willingly undertaken.

The strange transmutation results from what can happen to an educated woman, disappointed in life, abandoned by her husband and her son, deprived of the feminine functions she craves. Although appearing to be freed from the tyranny of men, she is boundlessly unhappy. This circumstance permits the development of an inner monstrosity, a radical transformation of the former natural order of things, leading to a post-human alteration of personality and the formation of a new reality.

In the past decades there have been many instances in the landscape of national cultures where, contrary to the usual

2 There is a curious comic opera about a werewolf "Le loup-garou" by Louise-Angélique Bertin (1805-1877), a female composer of mid-nineteenth century.

dominance of men playing the leading role in detective fiction and movies, a woman detective takes centre stage. This change and other new modifications to social arrangements have come about not merely because women possess greater powers of observation and attention to detail. More and more “liberated women” assume a variety of masculine roles and functions without necessarily, however, in so doing abandoning all their former obligations. A correspondingly rich and varied diet of responsibilities greatly complicates character and outlook; no doubt it also underpins opportunities for reflection and action. More so than for men, it has become natural for women to exhibit properties of the unexpected, the unpredictable, to have powers of deduction that may be far distant from straightforwardly linear cause and effect. All such tendencies lead to a more individual, even apparently irrational, train of thought directed at the unravelling of the mechanism of crime.

Trained as a writer of movie screenplays, Viktoriia Platova (pseudonym of Viktoriia Solomatina, b. 1965) has written many novels that fall into the gap between mass culture and more elite literary works. Mostly she identifies herself with the “principal character” of the text, sometimes embodying and sometimes evading his or her perspective on events, which has the effect of switching on and off any empathetic response. The result is to generate a powerful tension on the reader’s complicity and to create uncertainty about how the narrative should be interpreted. The writer is given to sophisticated psychological analysis, paradox, and a rich palette of references to vivid manifestations of culture and art. The plots of Platova’s detective novels, notably the early ones, feature surrealism with elements of mysticism and the fantastic mixed in. In the best of them, through the alluringly accessible tone of the narrative, characteristic of mass detective literature, we sense a distinctive substrate of our theme. Hidden, but present nonetheless, is a hook to ancient folkloric traditions,

to the totemic period of thinking. In the present instance this also surfaces in the influence of another layer connected to folklore: the narrative methodology of adventure film. A key device for Platova as a screenplay writer has been for the written text to create a mosaic picture of the world by means of both concealed and overt filmic quotations. And in the delineation of characters, the main motive force of the plot, we can detect fused complexes of mythological sources and influences that impact on us in a manner parallel to aural clusters.

To examine this aspect in more detail let us consider her novel *The Ship of Ghosts* (*Korabl' prizrakov*, 2005). The sleuth-as-narrator is a serial device we have already met in previous books by the author, initially incarnating the Cinderella myth. The author's alter-ego, a clever but unattractive girl, a failure in life, in the novel's imagined realm, has been transformed into a beauty thanks to a necessary cosmetic operation. She changes her name to Eva, adopting the aura of "the first woman", and achieves every girl's dream of swapping her old identity and image for a new one. But by the time we reach *The Ship of Ghosts*, the former Cinderella has already been de-mythologised back again from her Princess incarnation, and is once more an impoverished, desperate, drab, grey-haired old woman. To earn money she has managed to get a job making a travelogue film of an interesting tourist route. Symbolically, the position she has been hired for is that of director and editor, which means that she is literally directing and editing the narrated events for the reader.

Detective fiction lies within the genre of thriller or adventure story, with an admixture of horror. *The Ship of Ghosts* relates to the myth of the Flying Dutchman, but turned "inside out": here it is the crew, not the ship, that becomes spectral. Significantly the *Ship* herself, initially impersonal, has been incorporated in the title: she is the principal character. Olga Freidenberg spells out the significance of the image-concept:

motherhood, birth, regeneration, [...] the semantic weight of the ship (resembling an animal or a fish) is as a deity and the abode of a deity [...] at first the ship possessed significance as a cosmic entity and a living creature, later a symbol of fertility, linked to the cult of woman. (Freidenberg 1997: 183)

Another mythological layer is revealed by the ship’s name: *Excalibur*, which recalls King Arthur’s miraculous sword in the Celtic legends of Merlin and Morgan le Fay as related in *The Spoils of Annwn* and *Culhwch and Olwen*.

Certainly the novel brings together and embodies a number of myths relating to the Russian North. It also has its “journey to the ends of the earth”, to the uninhabited land of ice with its own mythology. The essence of the voyage on a former hunters’ boat is a rite of initiation for wealthy young men playing at being simple hunters in the harsh conditions of the North; the initially privileged tour turns into a physical and spiritual ordeal. The chapter entitled “The Painful Silence of the Seals” evokes references to the real medically acknowledged neurological condition known as “painful numbness”; to Alexander Sokurov’s eponymous 1986 film, and to the film *Silence of the Lambs*, whose subject is cannibalism. The seals condemned to senseless sacrifice are the least predatory of animals; they are defenceless, like children. Therefore, the theme of “the massacre of the innocents” continues to resonate, from the prophecies of Jeremiah through to New Testament mythology.

The book is divided into two parts: “The Hunters”, and “The Hunt”. Preparing for their initiation into hunting, the passengers only once venture out on to the ice. The senseless slaughter proves to be the first “tragic motif” of the novel, devoid of the usual detective story lightness of touch, enjoyment, all of which is destroyed by the crime. The episode of the cruel seal-hunt followed by the characters’ ecstatic, almost ritualistic slipping and sliding

over the blood-soaked deck of the “ship of fools” is destined to be an initiation into nothing but dissolute excess, aimless curiosity and vainglorious, indefensible murder. The pointless destruction of nature uncovers what has lain hidden beneath, provokes in the characters an eruption of feelings, revealing their vices, and driving them eventually to insanity, transforming and killing many of them. The boat’s crew goes missing, the passengers fight for their lives: it is as though the ship herself has set about the destruction of her passengers, recalling the fate of the *Titanic* and embodying the myth of the Machine’s diabolical aim to annihilate Mankind. Buried in the cluster of mythological traces that surrounds the imagery of the ship, in the text there are traces of the Bermuda Triangle myth (the inexplicable disappearance of entire crews without trace or evidence of any struggle); mythological elements introduced by Agatha Christie’s into her novel *Ten Little Niggers*; and a descent into the “rules of the horror film” (Platova 2005: 336). Alongside myths of Nosferatu and vampires, demythologised and travestied motifs drawn from the New Testament are introduced when the “apostles” of this extreme tour, Peter and Paul are mentioned.

We have mentioned the *Titanic* and *The Flying Dutchman*: the Ship is compared to a powerful living male creature “crawling over the ice as if in pursuit of a wife who has become hateful to him” (Platova 2005: 28). Paralysed, bereft of its crew, the vessel has turned into a labyrinth enclosing “a mighty Minotaur, a hit-man executioner fulfilling the bidding of a murderer” (Platova 2005: 144). The ship-monster announces its decrees by means of “symbolic objects”, mysterious signals akin to the ominous semantics of destruction promulgated by flags hoisted by unknown hands. The passengers hear the dreadful notes of the ship’s siren with a terror comparable to that experienced by the heroes of Leo Perutz’s expressionist novel *The Master of the Day of Judgment* hearing the “unbearable purple voice of the trumpet”.

Like the utterances of the Everlasting Trumpet, the Tuba mirum, the siren is understood as the voice of the ship herself, causing inexplicable dislocations and cessations of time connected with a mysterious photograph of the *Excalibur* of 1929 with the same captain. The novel also builds on themes from Edgar Allan Poe and Dostoevsky. The myth of the *Flying Dutchman* is connected with the theme of the “prisoners of the ship”, while the compounding of imprisonment with cold is linked with Dante’s Ninth Circle of Hell through the most terrible punishment of all: freezing inextricably in blocks of ice.

The plot advances according to dicta similar to those of Expressionism. Hired to make a travel advertising film, the director suggests choosing a depressing scenario modelled on an “American hard labour prison for tourists” as a cruel sort of “game”, a secret code for an extreme, and costly, tour (Platova 2005: 337, 344). The novel’s dramatis personae embrace “groups” of embodied mythological sources, among them the Ship, the Narrator (these we have mentioned above), pop divas and a teenage girl nicknamed Karpik. At the epicentre of the plot, however, is the evocatively named Clio, a pop star and male fantasy-object, who is a passenger on the ship. To possess her is to possess history, time, and fate. She is the center of attraction of men’s interests, like the Beautiful Helen of Troy; according to the first pages, she is flawlessly beautiful, acutely modern, cruel, cold, heartless. But Clio also has a wonderful singing voice that reveals her inner warmth and, like the Tsarevna Nesmeyana, melts completely under the spell of her rescue from the seal-hunting expedition. She falls in love with the man who saves her, the father of the teenage girl Karpik.

But Karpik, into whose lap a star has fallen from heaven, has a flagrant Electra complex. The over-developed young girl is a graphically described portrait of a binary, if not multiply divided, nature: wildly jealous, clever, refined, loving, knowing and responding to Chopin’s music, a neglected child, a protean,

slippery Karpik apt at the drop of a hat to morph into a shark, a malicious intriguer, a closet Lolita, a devil-child without a shred of compassion, a child-killer, a perpetrator of bloody crimes, the living incarnation of a people-destroying mechanism, a vicious embodiment of the Deus ex Machina into which the Ship has now materialised in the imagination of her hunter-passengers, and – a *cripple*.

Crippledom, in the semantics of many mythologies, is a sign of significant abnormalities: among them a difficult childhood; congenital vice; propinquity to diabolical powers incarnate, to Mephistopheles, Woland or the “Anchutka”, the evil spirit of Russian fairy tales (Afnas’ev, Glinka 2012); irredeemable ugliness (Hephaestus, the son of Hera, who ejected him from Olympia because he was born ugly as a result of which he was lamed for life). The condition of being crippled in literature has a rich legacy in meaning and implication, but is ambivalent in interpretation, from Louise de la Vallière, mistress of the King Louis XIV of France to the inclusion of cripples in Dostoevsky’s motive plot structures (Krinitsyn 2010). A common folk adage is that such individuals have the power to create a breeding ground for any evil that arises around them, and to produce it themselves.

It is symptomatic that from the perestroika era to the last years of the twentieth century, roles featuring liberated adolescents had become very popular in cinema. They range from light-hearted and superficially playful cynicism (Karen Shakhnazarov’s *Courier*, 1986) to the demonic amorality of Artur Ursuliak’s *The Jester* (1988) with its taste for destruction; *Dear Yelena Sergeevna* (1988) by Eldar Ryazanov; and Viktor Aristov’s *Satan* (1990). But only from the turn of the millenium onwards did the misdeeds of youthful heroes become freighted with bloody crimes, the fruits of unbridled egotism, cruelty and an obsession with evil. In Platova’s book the teenage girl, repellant in appearance, crippled, and secretive, is the outcome of radically changed times.

True to the canonical rules of detective fiction, only at the end of the novel do the dominos fall to reveal the dénouement of the chain of iniquity and depravity: the girl’s ungovernable jealousy of the pop star her infatuated father has fallen for. But there is also another, universally shared guilt: punishment for the collective sin of hunting down their innocent quarry, even if “so I have the right! [...] because they are only animals” that looms inexorably over everyone. Only one sailor from the former crew still remains in the ship-labyrinth, but he proves not to be the route to salvation; instead he is himself the secret Minotaur, the killer, egged on by the ruthless and wicked young girl. Desperately trying to avert tragic situations, Eva sticks to the mythologically genre-hallowed script of the male victor, even perhaps a superhero/heroine, overcoming obstacles in water and on land. The mythologically justified outcome, a happy one for Eva, bears out Olga Freidenberg’s analysis that:

as it plays out in tragedy, one aspect is lamentable, grievous, oriented towards death, murder, desecration, injustice, annihilation. This aspect is the core of tragedy. But inasmuch as mythological images persist in Greek ethical concepts, the disastrous fate-driven aspect inevitably mutates into another, that of rebirth and creation. In myth, death is the beginning of life. (Freidenberg 1998: 448)

What can we learn from the compounded nature of cluster characteristics in the above-mentioned literary texts? What common elements are there in the infusions of clusters into the works of women composers and writers? So enriched are they by accumulated references that it is impossible for readers’ and listeners’ imagination not to be stirred into action. But can we not detect in the voice of the author a note of alarm at such an immersion in the multi-layered mythological depths of the female

soul – dangerously unpredictable as it is, motivated by mysterious elemental instincts? Is there no hint of disquiet at the possible restoration of a matriarchal world order?

In the instances we have chosen, all kinds of mythical elements – historical, literary, ancient, biblical, evangelical, personal, national, and so on – associate freely with one another. The phenomenon may not be a special pathway to highbrow art, but it is possible to discern in it an interesting and significant tendency, perhaps especially characteristic of Russia at the start of the twenty-first century where ever since Soviet times the indispensable but publicly unheralded functions of women in the family, in society, at work, have become exceptionally demanding and polyphonic. That tendency to incorporate what we have defined as clusters of mythological traces testifies to the desire of women not to be limited in their artistic productions to a single voice in which to express themselves. They detect in their heroes and heroines multiple assonances in which a variety of important trace elements come together from their unvoiced experiences: mythologies from the past as well as the present. It can be an anarchic and eclectic mixture, in poor taste even, thrown together with less than scrupulous finesse, not so far removed from despised mass culture. Fashioning a multi-mythological cluster is no automatic guarantee of a positive outcome. But art draws its initial imagery from myth, and the cluster creates new opportunities for women’s “creative kitchen” to concoct dishes from ingredients that would previously have been regarded as logically incompatible from the perspective of high art. Freedom and irrationality, manifesting as creative freedom and fantasy in the formation of a cluster, can bear fruit, generating meaningful formative pathways that allow women artists to extend the boundaries of their identity. Their logic-free, arbitrary impulses open the door to creating new syntheses that emerge from a new, unique mythological entity – an entity consisting, apparently, of elements that by rights ought not to fit

together but, nonetheless, manage to chime with the image of the twenty-first century world that is the special purview of women artists with their powers of simultaneous polyphonic observation, understanding, action and creativity. It is characteristic of the highly complex conditions of life in Russia today in which people are obliged to think simultaneously on two, three or even more levels, that it can stimulate and produce this brand of aggregated poly-meaning.

From the dramaturgical point of view, the practice we are discussing produces ‘coagulations’ of motifs analogous to those that have been identified by Georges Polti in his typology of 36 plot situations. It also enhances potency, reconstituting ambivalence, solidifying the texture of the narrative sequence with actions inherent in reality. The themes derived from mythological sources condense into a coagulated mass that surfaces in complex texts and images. In Yusupova’s media-opera a whole series of typological situations are combined: the involuntary killing of someone close; an adulterous crime of passion; the disgrace of the beloved; the path of love not running smooth; love for one’s enemy; betrayal.

Such a saturation of characters, plots, and descriptions that reveal variously significant personality traits would seem to risk the dismantling of an integral intellectual message. Yet the erosion of clear boundaries between the created images into a field of amorphous meanings generates an atmosphere of anxious expectation we may define as a “phenomenon of semantic indeterminacy”. As an “index of the hidden tension between an event and its cognition” (Kondakov 2018: 173), it nags at the reader’s imagination until it energises a “heuristic response”. If in poetry “the pragmatic potential of semantic indeterminacy runs from elusive hints and unresolved ambiguities to nonsense and cryptographic writing” (Evgrashkina 2019: 159), then this potential is boosted in our examples by the power and variety of mythological sources, which result in the formation of clusters. In

essence, they are devices of musical and verbal imitation contributing to the “suspense”, which is a feature of cinematic art. Indeed, it is in the subtlety of cinematic imagery, especially in the most outstanding reels, that the forerunners and embodied instances of what has been discussed in this paper show themselves most plainly for us to see, to hear, to appreciate and absorb. It is no accident that in Platova’s writings and in Yusupova’s media-opera *Einstein and Margarita* the shadowy images of cinematic myths serve important functions. In conclusion, I wish to suggest one more example of an analogous presentation from the film world, a rich seam of mythical realisation and transformation.

Preceding any of the instances cited above from the twenty-first century of Russian music and literature, we find similar syntheses and complex transformations of myths in the work of the film director Kira Muratova (1934-2018). Turning her attention to the most seminal historical and other myths, she shapes them to contemporary situations, producing some surprising connections. We shall look at how she metamorphoses a “hagiographical story” in her film *The Sentimental Policeman* (*Chuvstvitel’nyi militsioner*, 1992), which – in a far cry from the usual representation of a man of his profession and in stark contrast to the attitude of Soviet people en masse – treats an unusual policeman’s altruistic love for a foundling. The film opens with a sort of visual epigraph introduction that may be summarized – in conformity with the style of the story – as “once upon a time a new-born baby was found in a cabbage, but the cold and murk of the night were dispelled by wrapping her in a shirt to warm her”. The nocturnal tale on a mythological theme has nothing to do with immaculate conception but concerns the rescue of an abandoned baby girl, a literal retelling of the folk-lore motif of “finding a baby in a cabbage”. In addition, it is filled with implications of Christianity’s Christmas myth. The long, wordless introductory sequence with gestures of amazement, leaps and cavortings of joy is accompanied

by the final piece of Tchaikovsky’s *The Seasons*: “December. Christmas Time”, repeated twice, which connects it to the setting and symbolism of Christmas. Later in the film there are unspoken hagiographic threads linked to mythological and fairy-tale traces of the “good policeman” found in Soviet children’s verses, legends of “the saviour”, the cleansing of the body and soul, the “blessed family”, who gladly renders up its most beloved possessions to be rewarded by another and even greater gift: the hope of the birth of their own child.

The subject of myth in the screen language of Kira Muratova is an important one, and is treated in another of my researches. Here, however, we have focussed our attention not so much on the voices of individually strong women as on the evidence of an integral and continuous corpus of multiple mythological sources: the “lament of women in all times” (Marina Tsvetaeva). The corpus forms a richly orchestrated and insightful unity, akin to a cluster infusion, of linking concepts that fuse into an expansively gathered and powerful “lament”, which we believe to be emblematic of the masterpieces in different art-forms that have been created in Russia in recent post-Soviet times.

Bibliography

- Afanas’ev Aleksandr, Glinka Grigorii (2012), *Volkhvy, kolduny i upyri v religii drevnikh slavian*, Moskva, Algoritm.
- Cherednichenko Tat’iana (2002), *Muzykal’nyi zapas, 70-e, Problemy, Portrety, Sluchai*, Moskva, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Dobrovolskaya Varvara (2019), “Nemota i rechevye anomalii geroev v russkikh volshebnykh skazkakh”, *Quaestio Rossica*, Vol. 7, 1: 140-154, <<https://qr.urfu.ru/ojs/index.php/qr/article/view/qr.3G8/3102>>, (last accessed 09/04/2021).
- Evg rashkina Ekaterina (2019), *Semioticheskaia priroda smyslovoi*

- neopredelennosti v sovremennom poeticheskom diskurse*, Berlin, Peter Lang.
- Frank-Kamenetskii Izrail' Grigor'evich (1929), "Pervobytnoe myshlenie v svete iafetcheskoj teorii i filosofii", *Iazyk i literatura*, tom 3: 70-155.
- Freidenberg Olga Mikhailovna (1997), *Poetika siuzbeta i zhanra*, pod red. Braginskaia Nina Vladimirovna, Moskva, Labirint.
- Freidenberg Olga Mikhailovna (1998), *Mif i literatura drevnosti*, Moskva, Vostochnaia literatura RAN.
- Grove George (2007), *Muzykal'nyi slovar' Grouva*, per. s angl., red. i dop. Akopian Levon, 2-oe izd., Moskva, Praktika.
- Gubaidulina Sofia (2016), *Così parlò Zarathustra: il significato della parola e il significato generale della musica si sovrappongono*, Interviews and texts from Emilia Romagna Festival, a cura di P. Pacola, Imola.
- Kondakov Igor' Vadimovich (2018), "Poetika smyslovoi neopredelennosti", *Vestnik RGGU. Serii "Literaturovedenie. Iazykoznanie. Kul'turologiia"*, 2-2: 172-178, <<https://cyberleninka.ru/philologyarticle/n/poetika-smyslovoy-neopredelennosti>>, (last accessed 31/03/2021).
- Krinityn Aleksandr Borisovich (2010), "Obraz Khromonozhki v perspektive motivnoi struktury romanov F.M. Dostoevskogo", *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Serii 9. Filologiya*, 3: 54-59, <<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obraz-hromonozhki-v-perspektive-motivnoy-struktury-romanov-dostoevskogo>>, (last accessed 09/04/2021).
- Lévi-Strauss Claude (1994), *Pervobytnoe myshlenie*, per. Ostrovskii Arsenii, Moskva, Respublika, (in French *La Pensée Sauvage*, Paris, Plon, 1962; in English *The Savage Mind*, London, George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).
- Lialenkova Tamara (2006), *Svoeobrazie zhenskoi i muzhskoi kompozitsii v muzyke*, Interview with composers Iraida Yusupova and Iurii Kasparov, <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/1G4777.html>>, (last accessed 11/01/2021).
- Petrushanskaya Elena (2004), *Muzykal'nyi mir Iosifa Brodskogo*, Sankt-Petersburg, Zvezda.
- Platova Viktoriia (2005), *Korabl' prizrakov*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo AST.

- Ru Ekaterina (2019), *Mertvye pianisty*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo AST.
- Shamborant Olga (2010), *Opyty na sebe. Zanimatel'naia diagnostika*, Moskva, RA Arsis-Dizain.
- Tsvetaeva Marina (1990), *Stikhotvoreniia. Poemy. Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*, Moskva, Izd. “Khudozhestvennaia literatura”.
- Tsvetkova Anastasiia (2008), “Zemlia i nebo' – neosushchestvlennyi zamysel N.A. Rimskogo-Korsakova”, *Musicus*, 4 (13): 19-24, <http://old.conservatory.ru/files/19-24_musicus_13.pdf>, (last accessed 01/02/2021).
- Volkov Solomon (1971), *Molodye kompozitory Leningrada (V. Arzumanov, S. Banevich, G. Banshchikov, G. Belov, V. Gavrilin, B. Tishchenko)*, Leningrad-Moskva, Sovetskii kompozitor.

VII. Contemporary Myths and Posthuman Ethics of Storytelling in Olga Tokarczuk's Writing

Monika Świerkosz

In her famous *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*, Donna Haraway proclaims: “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (1985: 66). She also stresses the need to create epistemologies that could describe this complex experience of the merging of imagination and social reality, the past and the future, and of human and post-human conditions in times of late capitalism. In creation of a new narrative framework for the world, figurations play a vital role. By figurations she means specific “dense symbols”, combining social facts and fiction (or lived experience and fiction), which have not only descriptive but, above all, critical or, more precisely, ironic power. Haraway believes that by looking at how these figurations are culturally and politically fashioned, we may be able to deconstruct the cognitive orders of power that underlie our knowledge of the world and our identities.

Figurations – as Rosi Braidotti adds in *Nomadic subjects* – allow us to investigate symbolic and material connections between things. In this way, they allow us to look closer at how we collectively and individually perceive differences: racial, gender, class or sexual. Cyborg-like machines, monsters, mother-goddesses are contemporary political myths that ironically (and at the same

time seriously) map the boundaries of what is human and nonhuman, rational and irrational, familiar and strange (Braidotti 1994: 75-76). Their metamorphoses – transfigurations and reconfigurations – are much easier to grasp by stories than ideologies, because their dynamics is based on a non-contradictory, non-binary combination of opposites. As argued by Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, “we also live with each other in the flesh in ways not exhausted by our ideologies. Stories are much bigger than ideologies. In that is our hope” (2003: 17). This is precisely why we still need new political myths to help us apprehend our complex relationship with the world: not so much to explain it as to demystify it, to deterritorialize it, and thus to re-think and reinvent ourselves.

Olga Tokarczuk recognizes and acclaims a similar, ethical and epistemological role of the myth in her writing¹. Despite the fact that critics (especially in the 1990s) have frequently attributed pedagogical and comforting properties to her writing², I would stress that she has been consistently deconstructing rather than reconstructing the cognitive foundations of the world. In spite of

- 1 I would place my readings of Tokarczuk’s mythmaking alongside the psychoanalytic interpretations in which myth is usually understood in Jung’s terms as an archetype and therefore a picture of a hidden, deep and universal truth. Contrary to the archetype, a figuration does not stand for any cultural pattern of the notion but rather is a critical tool to observe the process of the cultural production of the notions.
- 2 Tokarczuk was praised by some critics for her traditionalism and humanism that restores faith in man, who experiences cultural uprooting and defragmentation and is stripped of old myths (see: Orski 2002; Mizerkiewicz 1996). Others criticized her for practicing literary kitsch and cultural pedagogy, which replaced myth with fairy tale (see Uniłowski 2010; Bieńkowska 2000; Nowacki 1996). Krzysztof Uniłowski devoted his three-part essay entitled *Cała prawda o prozie środka* to this process of trivialization and desacralization of the myth in Tokarczuk’s writings.

some limitations of her narrative strategy, it is hard to ignore what constitutes the very heart of her literary mythmaking. Namely, the critical gesture of dismantling of two essential modern concepts: rationality and identity, as well as the great narratives built on them.

In order to carry out this act of deconstruction of both categories mentioned above, Tokarczuk uses two figures, which conceal the potential of posthuman subjectivity: the figure of the monster and the figure of the doll, which is a cultural relative of the cyborg (Bogalecki 2013). The story of Julia Pastrana presented in the short story *The Ugliest Woman in the World* brings together questions about the performative spectacle of identity, the violence of gaze, and narratives which, referring to various (pre-modern and modern) orders of knowledge, mark our places in the space of visibility. A monster – like a theatre puppet – is put on display and at the same time deprived of the ability to look back and of the right to possess and manage its own genealogy (Muniak 2010; Świerkosz 2020). The secret of the freak's origin is taken away from him/her and henceforth becomes the source of the audience's entertainment and a political tool to mark the borderline of so-called "normal" subjectivity (Cohen 1996; Wiczorkiewicz 2009).

Although the monstrous woman in Tokarczuk's story can speak in a surprisingly logical and meaningful way, it is not she, who tells the story of her monstrosity. This story is not so much retold to the audience, but rather performatively invented by a man, who is her husband and impresario at the same time. Thus, he deprives her of the right to possess her own biography, and in this way, he places her outside the order of nature and culture, in the sphere of pure fantasy.

When he returned, he had a new story of her ugliness on his hand, remembering that a thing does not exist from the beginning to the end, unless it has a story of its own. [...]
– The mother of this unfortunate creature you see in front

of you and whose appearance is unbearable to your innocent eyes, lived in the countryside on the edge of Schwarzwald. And here, one day, when she was picking berries in the forest, the wildest pig tracked her and, fired with the most animal, senseless lust, attacked and possessed her. (Tokarczuk 2001:154, transl. M.Ś.)

Her monstrous body becomes a metaphor to interpret and a mystery to explain, and ultimately transforms into a mythical “body of culture”, demonstrating something other than itself. As Jeffrey Cohen argues, the monster plays a useful role in the discourse of “normality”: it “policing the borders of the Possible” (1996: 12). The moment when Julia becomes pregnant turns out to be a disturbance in this fictionalization show. Her pregnant body forces the viewers to descend to the level of matter, restoring her gender. However, the perplexed and intimidated gaze of onlookers becomes ultimately hyperbolized. When the woman gives birth to a daughter even more deformed than herself, she becomes doubly monstrous and doubly mythical. Objectified in a new, modern, scientific way, the bodies of both women will eventually end up in the university’s Museum of Pathology as specimens. Despite all the differences between pre-scientific and post-scientific construction of knowledge, this demonstrates that there is a close and terrifying connection between the ludic freakshow space and the interior of a rational clinic that studies “genetic aberrations”. Maybe there isn’t any single story that could save individual “freakish subjectivity” from subjugation³.

- 3 It seems that Tokarczuk goes even further in her criticism of knowledge production than Rosi Braidotti, who has showed the essential distinctions between prescientific and scientific (or “the baroque and enlightened”) teratologies, suggesting that there were some subversive representations that enable monstrosity to be visible and somehow acknowledged (Braidotti 1994:

From the cultural perspective, the monster retains its critical and epistemic potential, because as a defiant figuration of modern subjectivity it allows to expose the modern identity discourse as full of violence and grounded on the dualistic mechanism of repression of the “inappropriate/d other” (Haraway 1999: 229). *The Ugliest Woman in the World* does not so much reveal her own monstrosity as she enables the author to reveal the inhuman face of humanity.

The idea of the bearded saint, Wilgefortis⁴, appears in a similar, but slightly different (and more rebellious function) in *House of Day, House of Night*. The monstrosity of this character is the result of the transgression of both biological and cultural gender boundaries. The daughter's disobedience to her father's authority is demonstrated here through the transformation of a woman's body into a man's body, which is Kummernis's form of protest against forced marriage and her way of protecting her right to personal freedom. Endowed with a male beard, which makes her face resemble that of Jesus, Wilgefortis becomes a monster in its original Greek meaning – *teras* – something both demonic and divine. A woman's masculinity is a clear sign of her being anointed

85). Furthermore, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in her classical for disability studies book on starring (back) and the cultural repercussions of “freak shows” notices some possibilities in the so-called “baroque gaze” (Garland-Thomson 2009).

- 4 Wilgefortis is a female saint of the Catholic Church whose legend arose in the 14th century. Her name is probably derived from the Latin “virgo fortis” (“courageous virgin”). In many countries in Europe, she is known by different names: Uncumber (Eng.), Ontkommer (Dutch), Kummernis (Ger.), Frasnoblwa (Pol.), Liberata (Span. and Italian), Débarras (Fr.). Both, her historical origin and her status as a saint, have been doubtful for the Church – she has disappeared from *Roman Martyrologium* after the Second Vatican Council and from canonical art. The cult of Wilgefortis, however, was preserved locally and in folk religiosity.

by God. However, from the perspective of paternal authority, it is a monstrous contradiction to the natural order in which the engendered body is supposed to function as a biologically stable, unchanging, and unambiguous foundation of our identity.

In the windowless room stood Kummernis, but it was not the same woman that they all knew. Her face was covered with a silky beard and her hair fell flowing to her shoulders. From the tattered bodice of her dress there protruded two naked, girlish breasts. The gaze of her dark, but gentle eyes moved across the faces of the inquisitive onlookers and finally came to rest on the baron. The harlots began to make the sign of the cross and knelt down one after another. Kummernis, or whoever it was, raised her hands, as if to enfold them all to her breast. In a quiet voice she said: My Lord has delivered me from myself and has bestowed His face on me.

That same night the baron gave orders for the freak to be walled up in the room. (Tokarczuk 2002: 63)

The wench gathered in front of the chamber no longer know who or what Kummernis is as a being, but in their “baroque gaze” they do not refuse to look at this confusing transformation. Only the baron looks away, wanting to deny the existence of something that he does not understand and appears to him as monstrous. Olga Tokarczuk uses the image of the “monstrous saint” in the novel to denaturalize the notion of sex/gender identity as “regulative fiction”, or more precisely “performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo”, to use Judith Butler’s words (Butler 1988: 520). To emphasize the political implications of gender spectacle, Tokarczuk reaches through time the character of Kummernis and the monk Paschalis, who writes her biography and raises questions about the apocryphal or canonical frames of cultural myths. Why do we trust

some stories (and identities) and not the others? What are the mechanisms of authorization, authentication and validation of any narrative, the mythical one in particular?

As we see in the novel, the apocryphal character of this story, which is to undermine the truth and religious significance of Kummernis' biography, is not "objective" and comes from the clash with the institution of the Church, which refuses to perform the canonizing gesture. The bishops to whom Paschalis goes on pilgrimage justify their negative response by claiming that a member of the Church will not benefit from the story of the "bearded saint". According to the interpretation of religious authorities, Wilgefortis goes beyond any known and safe paradigms: she brings with her anarchy that undermines the order of power. Although her monstrosity does not give the heroine the power to regain control over her body – the girl's rebellion ends with her crucifixion and symbolic exile to the margins of the canon – with this figure, Tokarczuk deconstructs the canonical discourse itself as conservative, pragmatic, controlling and artificial. It is neither divine, nor truly human, but rather inhuman since its ultimate goal is to "protect the purity of the faith" and thus to preserve the power of the institution.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that what leads Tokarczuk to discover the complexity of the subject's entanglement in power relationships, is undoubtedly the gender trope employed in a subversive way. This is most evident in attempts to rewrite the patriarchal myths of mothers, whose figurations Braidotti considers so important for her nomadic project (1994: 77). Interestingly, very often and not as openly as in *Anna In in the Tombs of the World*, Tokarczuk links motherhood with a forgotten matriarchal tradition of female divinity, not necessarily to sanctify or elevate it. There is something definitely nonhuman about being a mother, and Tokarczuk's affirmation of this state has some features of critical utopia.

Cornspike (Kłoska), who in the most painful moments of her life experiences an epiphany in contact with the “large woman”, is herself a symbol of such motherhood in its transgressive dimension. When her first child dies, Cornspike sees a woman as big as a tree in a dream:

Cornspike looked into her eyes at close range, and saw in them something she had never known before, and had never thought existed. ‘You are mine,’ said the enormous woman, and caressed Cornspike’s neck and swollen breasts. Wherever her fingers touched Cornspike, her body became blessed and immortal. Cornspike surrendered entirely to this touch, spot after spot. Then the large woman took Cornspike in her arms and cuddled her to her breast. Cornspike’s cracked lips found the nipple. It smelled of animal fur, camomile and rue. Cornspike drank and drank. (Tokarczuk 2010: 24)

The strength that Cornspike draws from contact with the “large woman” does not erase the meaning of death but makes it an element of life, its continuation, not denial. In the space of maternal (or even matriarchal) myth, the recovered contact with the Mother changes the way of perceiving the world, which suddenly appears to Cornspike’s eyes as one large, animal-human organism.

Her subsequent sexual relationship with the snake Złotyś exceeds not only the established and safe border between man and animal, but also between the sacred and profane, which is reflected in the revision and reinterpretation of the biblical theme. Tokarczuk refers to one of the key motives in the Bible (also from a feminist point of view): the origin of the sin, for which Christian theology blames Satan in the first place, and then the woman. However, in *Primeval and Other Times*, the serpent turns out to be not an insidious incarnation of the devil, a deceptive tempter,

but rather a passionate and generous lover, who brings Cornspike love gifts.

She situates herself on the border of the world of humans, plants, and animals, just like her lover, who also appears in the novel in the hybrid form of a man-angelica, and her daughter Rue (Ruta), born of this passionate relationship. This, in turn, makes her monstrous. The priest, scandalized by the sight of a woman in the embrace of a serpent, trying to stigmatize her disobedient, dangerous womanhood, calls her a witch, Satan. Cornspike responds to him, however, with a matriarchal gesture of showing bare genitalia called *ana-suromai*⁵.

The history of the relationship between mother and daughter in *Primeval* is also an attempt to rewrite Christian symbolism by overwriting it with images taken from pagan (Greek) mythology. Cornspike is therefore a figure of the Great Mother united with the "mother of humanity": she is both Eve and Demeter. Furthermore, her presence in the novel indicates the fact that in the Christian symbolic order the story of the daughter's suffering was replaced by the story of the son's sacrifice. Within the realms of History the power of matriarchal myth cannot protect Rue's body from rape and patriarchal domination. In spite of this, Tokarczuk tries to re-write femininity, which consists of a mixture of vulnerability and agency. Making the old Florentine Rue's adoptive grandmother, the author broadens the sphere of the female continuum with the darkest, archaic component of the matriarchal triad, associated with death and anger.

- 5 The *ana-suromai* gesture is an old, known in many cultures, ritualistic act of lifting up the skirt to show a woman's vulva. It was used to intimidate or shame the enemy, to protect against misfortune or to increase the fertility of crops. Among women, it was also used as a source of obscene laughter. For example, in the myth in this way Baubo tries to cheer up Demeter, who is distraught over the loss of her daughter Persephone.

Tokarczuk uses the potential of this narrative by creating other characters of angry women in her subsequent books: Ninna and Inanna (a dethroned goddess and her daughter), who fight with injustice and meanness of patriarchal gods, Janina Duszejko, who takes revenge on the patriarchal world for harming animals in the moral thriller *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*⁶, and Parka from *Final Stories*. The latter connects two post-humanist figurations of femininity in a particularly intriguing way: the goddess and the puppet. Her name “Parka” is an abbreviation for the Ukrainian Paraskevi, and it evokes strong associations with the mythological figure of Moira, who holds the threads of human life. She is also an immigrant, a foreigner, a displaced woman who lost a child travelling from East to the West. She cannot cure the wound inside her body after the death of her daughter Lalka (Doll), who was the fruit of a forbidden affair with a Ukrainian boy. Nor can she stop the anger she feels towards her Polish husband who, like a little god, sets new maps of the world over people’s heads. “You go here and you go there” – they say – and Petro (Piotr) is on their sides of the History, where details, trifles, and individual stories do not count. He is the one who wants to adapt to the order of objectivity: dates, calendars, country borders, new names (Tokarczuk 2004: 137). She suffers from the loss of continuity, the loss of both female genealogy and future, after she buried her beloved daughter “in shitty Kluczbork”. In an act of her private revenge, she refuses to acknowledge another daughter, although she cannot cut off the threads that link her with Ida. From a cosmic perspective, mother-daughter relationship resembles the movement of tectonic plates moving closer together, followed by an inevitable abrasion. Constantly confronting the traces of her past, Parka presents her future death as a moment of relief and

6 See for example Kowalcze-Pawlik 2021.

consolation. It will take the form of an imaginative transformation of herself into a wooden figurine living in a dollhouse (Lalka's house) that resembles the lost space of her family home from the past.

The second time, on my next visit, I see the old world become tiny like a dollhouse. Doll's House. Also, Aunt Olga is getting tiny, dry and she says little words, a wish: "załyszys" from *namy*. He will die soon and I will never come here. I'll only show up after my death, and we'll live forever here, little posthumous state of chestnut men. No now, I would have to crouch to stay here, Auntie. (Tokarczuk 2004: 179)

The affirmative nature of Parka's voluntary act of "abandoning humanity" and reification turns out to have ultimately positive effects on the subject. It allows her to reunite with her lost daughter, and with death itself.

The figuration of female subjectivity as a mother hides the tropes of both continuity and discontinuity, and thus remains open to nomadic deterritorializations. Paradoxically, despite the essentialist assumption⁷, it suggests that there is no unequivocal scenario of establishing subjectivity as a woman: all myths must remain open forms, susceptible to rewriting, distortion, and overinterpretation.

7 Braidotti does not consider the "mother figure" nor "maternal function" in an essentialist or normative way as the emanation of femininity or women's nature, but rather she employs it to retain the importance of a sexual difference. Her understanding of the difference involves the necessity to go beyond the dualistic schema in which it can only play the role of a negative element in the opposition. The nomadic difference is placed not simply between a woman and a man or even between women themselves, but rather inside each woman as a subject described in a process of unfinished becoming.

Searching for new ways of understanding and presenting the contemporary subject, Olga Tokarczuk works on ontological frontiers. She explores borderline spaces, where humans, animals, plants, objects, gods and mortals live with one another interconnected to such an extent that they sometimes merge into hybrid beings. Hence, the repetition of the motifs of dolls, monsters, mother goddesses, which re-locate (or to use nomadic term, deterritorialize) both contemporary imagination and rationality. New ontologies demand new epistemologies (the use of plural forms is intentional here). They are to challenge the monolithic understanding of the rational, in order to generate new (or perhaps simply to extract already existing) semantic, political, and epistemic dependencies. In this way, Tokarczuk demonstrates that the alternative world of concepts is not somewhere else, but exactly where we are. As for centuries, the “discourse of monstrosities” has not taken place on the fringes of science, but at its very heart:

Park and Daston (1981) situate the continuity of teratology in a set corpus of canonical texts: first, the biological works of Aristotle and his classical followers, primarily Albertus Magnus; second, the tradition of divination canonized by Cicero in *De Divinatione*; third, the cosmographical and anthropological components. (Braidotti 1996: 140)

If we look carefully enough, just beneath the surface of a very well-known and established History of Reason or History of the Self, we will see these monstrously hidden other stories. Maybe, like the protagonists in Tokarczuk’s debut, we even do not have to travel in order to find a mythical Book, the Truth itself. Instead, we should more often take a deeper look under the surface of the world to see the constant movement of concepts, the flow of meanings, symbols, representations and narrations. This is how we

can become epistemic nomads, the “Flights”, remembering and forgetting the past, catching the threads, and losing them. Or sometimes cutting them off just like Parka.

Interestingly, to construct her protagonists Tokarczuk very often overcomes the opposition between myth and biography. On the one hand, she often creates an aura of ontological uncertainty around them: we do not really know who or what are Cornspike, Martha (from *House of Day, House of Night*), Jenta (from *The Books of Jacob*) and even Erna Eltzner (from *E.E.*), or Weronika (from *Journey of the People of the Book*). On the other hand, however, she takes us back to the history (and to literature) characters, who have been wandering around the apocryphal fringes of culture. And once again, she deliberately combines “facts and fictions”. Some of her protagonists just embody forgotten “myths”, gods (Kairos) and goddesses (Inana), while others are historical figures treated as if they were from legends: Julia Pastrana, Enheduanna (priestess of Inana and the first woman author), Filip Verheyen, Jakub Frank, Elżbieta Drużbacka, Benedykt Chmielowski. Tokarczuk writes their individual and possible biographies and in that sense, she tells their stories rather than fictionalizing them, she recovers them instead than simply making them up. Or maybe she recovers them by fictionalizing them?

As Tokarczuk argues in her latest collection of essays *The Tender Narrator* (*Czuty narrator*), paradoxically, only through being fictional, do stories or myths retain their truthfulness. Myth is the opposite of “fake news” precisely because it does not hide its fictional nature. Moreover, it helps us to redefine and rethink the notion of reality itself. Myth is the vivid source of perverse realism in literature that takes place in the space between truth and fabrication. In the essay *The Land of Metaxy* (*Kraina metaksy*), Tokarczuk emphasizes that literature is created along the lines of a philosophy “as if” (Hans Vaihinger) and by definition cannot stand any “literalism”, which affects our ability to read the world.

Nowadays, we can observe many symptoms of the “disease of literalism” that plagues us today: suing artists for the offence of religious feelings, looking everywhere for symbols that are hostile to us (like the rainbow or hello kitty) and the simultaneous inability to see metaphors, irony, paradox, and finally, the aversion to what is written but cannot be reduced to any pragmatic function.

In the “as if” philosophy, reality – full of tangled, sometimes improbable connections and dependencies between things – escapes our understanding. In getting to understand the world, we can only use guesses, spin hypothetical but possible stories about it. Myths, which are, in the first place, fictional narratives full of figurative meanings, help us to apprehend interconnections. But we need also something more: tenderness. How does Tokarczuk understand this rather old-fashioned, sentimental and underestimated term?

Tenderness is deep emotional concern about another being, its fragility, its unique nature, and its lack of immunity to suffering and the effects of time. Tenderness perceives the bonds that connect us, the similarities and sameness between us. It is a way of looking that shows the world as being alive, living, interconnected, cooperating with, and codependent on itself. (Tokarczuk 2019)

Tenderness is therefore more of an epistemological attitude than an internal feature of an individual. It neither distinguishes between rational and emotional reactions, nor separates the human self from other beings. It teaches us special awareness, which enables us to personally engage with the world, to fully respond to it. This is a measure of the storyteller’s responsibility for the word. Tokarczuk believes that the ethical imperative of storytelling implies the necessity to go beyond the “persistence of the first-person narrative” towards other perspectives, other stories, not

(only) autobiographical, maybe strange, bizarre, unbelievable, and scary. And in this process, myths can be helpful again, for communing with myths is like communing with ghosts. When we keep telling only our own story, we lose access to the universal and this condemns us to see the world only in fragments. The remedy for the cognitive and ethical effects of the lack of ability to see the whole and to see its interconnections, which Tokarczuk calls 'ognosia', is the art of storytelling, the art of fiction (Tokarczuk 2020).

And yet, I think that we should be very vigilant in our flirting with universality. Its seductive power of mystification can delude us in various ways, and no matter if it takes the form of the old myths or the new (posthuman) ones. In this strive for universality and non-human transcendence, so close to Tokarczuk's post-secular mythmaking, how can we apprehend the radical immanence of life, which is so important to posthumanist thinkers like Braidotti or Deleuze (Braidotti 2013)? I do not claim that the idea of combining these two aspects of non-human condition (immanency and transcendency) is somehow false or contradictory, however, it is definitely aporetic. Nevertheless, I do admit that there are some risks of connecting everything too easily, too smoothly without critically recognizing the materiality of differences, sharp frictions, and real inequalities. This is precisely the accusation that critics make to Tokarczuk's works, which they perceive as the emanation of liberal values that support the logic of capitalism. In this argumentation "the myth is precisely what relieves this creativity of the importance given to it, it is an escape from the actual and strong approach to the problem, as it inadvertently legitimizes neoliberal capitalism" (Kusiak 2020)⁸.

8 Other leftist critics of Tokarczuk's strategy are Paweł Kaczmarczyk (2020) and Zuzanna Sala (2020), who generally repeat in a new way (postmodern)

I wish to argue, however, that Olga Tokarczuk has demonstrated many times in her novels, that she takes myths not as descriptive neither normative structures, but rather as a tool of deconstruction of our epistemic doxies⁹. Her political and ethical strategy of storytelling is aimed for – so to speak – centrifugal action. I would rather agree with the opinion of another woman writer, Izabela Morska (Filipiak), expressed in her brilliant essay *Monstrous Literature* (1999), where she wrote prophetically:

Olga is a surprise. Her talent grows and buds. Nobody expected her to start peopling literature with monsters like Kummernis. Canon will be forced to deal with the woman who ate the mycelium. This woman [writer] introduces parthenogenesis, female pacifism and transsexual mysticism, while being obliged to restore the sense of world harmony to all concerned. And the Stranger became familiar. Pampered against her will? I wonder what will happen next? (Filipiak 1999: 6)

In the late 1990s most critics emphasized (and approved) the comforting aspects of Tokarczuk writing rather than the critical ones, for the obvious reason that no one linked them with affirmative, posthuman sensitivity. Her artistic strategy, which has been openly presented in her Nobel Prize lecture through the category of tenderness, can also be very easily mistaken for an

arguments of Krzysztof Uniłowski from his essay *Cala prawda o prozie śródka*. Interestingly, such readings were published in the magazine “Nowy Napis Co Tydzień” – associated with the cultural policy of Polish conservatist government, which ruled that time.

- 9 Tokarczuk’s understanding of the myth and her strategy of using it in literature have changed in time. I have observed her shifting from the universalization of the mythical narratives (as in Jungian tradition) to more political archeology of culture (see: Świerkosz 2015: 178-188).

attitude of sentimental compassion or empathy, which is traditionally attributed to women not only in literature. Tokarczuk – like Donna Haraway – hopes that “stories are much bigger than ideologies” and her hope might also become a powerful tool of affirmative criticism.

Bibliography

Books by Olga Tokarczuk

- Tokarczuk Olga (1993), *Podróż ludzi Księgi* [*The Journey of the People of the Book*] (in Polish), Warszawa, Przedświt.
- (1995), *E.E.* (in Polish), Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- (1996), *Primeval and Other Times*, tr. by Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Prague, Twisted Spoon Press, 2010.
- (1998) *House of Day, House of Night*, tr. by Antonia Lloyd-Jones. London, Granta Books, 2002
- (2001), *Gra na wielu bębenkach: 19 opowiadań* [*Playing on Many Drums: 19 stories*] (in Polish), Wałbrzych, Ruta.
- (2004), *Ostatnie historie* [*Final Stories*] (in Polish), Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- (2006) *Anna In w grobowcach świata* [*Anna In in the Tombs of the World*] (in Polish). Kraków, Znak. 2006.
- (2007) *Flights*, tr. by Jennifer Croft, New York, Penguin, 2018.
- (2009), *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, tr. by Antonia Lloyd-Jones, New York, Penguin Random House/Riverhead Books, 2019.
- (2014), *The Books of Jacob*, tr. by Jennifer Croft, New York, Penguin, 2021.
- (2019), *The Tender Narrator*, Nobel Prize Lecture, tr. by Jennifer Croft and Antonia Lloyd-Jones <<https://culture.pl/en/article/olga-tokarczuku-nobel-lecture-the-tender-narrator>>, (last accessed 31/03/2021).
- (2020), *Czuły narrator* [*The Tender Narrator*] (in Polish), Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie.

Others

- Bogalecki Piotr (2013), "Od kukły do cyborga. Teologia i technologia", *Teksty Drugie*, 1-2: 115-124.
- Bieńkowska Magdalena (2000), "Hoffmann - Schluz - Tokarczuk - estetyczne powinowactwa", *Kresy*, 41: 239-250.
- Braidotti Rosi (1994), *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia UP.
- Braidotti Rosi (1996), "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Differences", in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs. Feminist Confrontation with Science, Media and Cyberspace*, ed. N. Lykke, R. Braidotti, London, Zed Books:135-152.
- Braidotti Rosi (2013), *Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Butler Judith (1988), "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal*, 40 (4): 519-531.
- Cohen Jeffrey Jerome (1996), "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)", *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 3-25.
- Filipiak (Morska) Izabela (1999), "Literatura monstrialna", *Biuletyn OŚKI*, 1: 1-7.
- Garland-Thomson Rosemarie (2009), *Staring: How we Look*, New York, Oxford UP.
- Haraway Donna (1985), "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s", *Socialist Review*, 80: 65-108.
- Haraway Donna (1991), "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others", in Eadem, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York, Routledge: 295-336.
- Haraway Donna (2003), *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press, <http://xenopraxis.net/readings/haraway_companion.pdf>, (last accessed 31/03/2021).
- Kaczmarek Paweł (2020), "Zaczarowanie, samokształcenie i mądrość ze wschodu", *Nowy Napis Co Tydzień*, 45, <<https://nowynapis.eu/>

- tygodnik/nr-45/artukul/zaczarowanie-samokształcenie-i-madroszc-ze-wschodu>, (last accessed 1/03/2021).
- Kowalcze-Pawlik Anna (2021), "Madwoman at Large: Prophetic Anger and Just Revenge in Olga Tokarczuk's Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead", *The Polish Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2: 187-202.
- Kusiak Paweł (2020), "W stronę wyjścia", *Nowy Napis Co Tydzień*, 2020, 50, <<https://nowynapis.eu/tygodnik/nr-50/artukul/w-strone-wyjscia>>, (last accessed 1/03/2021).
- Mizerkiewicz Tomasz (1998), "Stylizacja mityczna w nowej prozie polskiej", *Dykcja*, 9-10: 81- 88.
- Muniak Radosław F. (2010), *Efekt lalki. Lalka jako obraz i rzecz*, Kraków, Universitas.
- Orski Mieczysław (2002), "Mitopoetyka bytu", *Odra*, 6: 61-63.
- Sala Zuzanna (2020), "Zainteresowania obserwatora", *Nowy Napis Co Tydzień*, 2020, 43, <<https://nowynapis.eu/tygodnik/nr-43/artukul/zainteresowania-obszawatora>>, (last accessed 2/03/2021).
- Uniłowski Krzysztof (2002), "Cała prawda o prozie środka", *FA-art*, 2002, 3: 10-15.
- Uniłowski Krzysztof (2002), "Cała prawda o prozie środka", *Fa-Art 2002*, 4: 32-41.
- Uniłowski Krzysztof (2003), "Cała prawda o prozie środka", *Fa-Art*, 1-2: 72-75.
- Uniłowski Krzysztof (2010), "Proza jako pedagogika społeczna. Przypadek *Domu dziennego, domu nocnego* Olgi Tokarczuk", in *Dwadzieścia lat literatury polskiej 1989-2009. Idee, ideologie, metodologie*, ed. Inga Iwasiów, Arleta Galant, Szczecin, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego: 215-234.
- Świerkosz Monika (2021), "Time of Microhistory and Time of Microtheater in Olga Tokarczuk's Novels", tr. by Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik, *The Polish Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2: 56- 79, (this article is a translation of a chapter of the book Monika Świerkosz, *W przestrzeniach tradycji. Proza Izabeli Filipiak i Olgi Tokarczuk w sporach o literaturę, kanon i feminizm*, Warszawa 2014).
- Wieczorkiewicz Anna (2009), *Monstruarium*, Gdańsk, słowo / obraz terytoria.

VIII.

The Presence of the Great Goddess in Contemporary Polish Literature (and Beyond)*

Alessandro Ajres

1. Introduction

The Great Goddess is a primordial female deity who appears in various pantheons as the mother of human beings or other deities. Her presence extends over a very long period of time, between 35,000 and 3,000 BC, which in some areas of the Mediterranean (Crete) even reaches up to the second millennium BC, thus involving the Paleolithic and Neolithic. In Neolithic cultures she takes on various names and functions: as the creative force of the universe, she is the goddess who embodies the power of life, protector of the earth and its fruits, nourisher and healer, the one who governs the processes of birth, development as well as death and resurrection of people, offering them immortality and liberation.

Until recently, the idea that the ancients worshipped the gods

* Instead of *Great Mother* (or *Mother Goddess*) we will prefer the term *Great Goddess* here, according to Marija Gimbutas (1989: 316) that considers: “[...] The term *Great Goddess* as best describing her absolute rule, her creative, destructive, and regenerative powers”.

(intended as male deities) first and foremost was almost universally widespread. Today, however, we know that before the religious and social structure we have learned to take for granted, there were absolutely peaceful communities, governed in the absence of fortifications and that, from the archaeological studies conducted, do not appear to be marked by signs of destruction attributable to armed conquests. The forms of art of these societies do not record images of men clashing in battle, nor of them using violence against women.

These societies appear to have been extremely equitable, and women and the feminine occupied important social positions. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence that while both male and female deities were worshipped in these societies, the highest power in the universe was believed to be the female power of giving and preserving life, the power embodied in the body of the woman. (Eisler 1992: 9-10)

In almost all societies, legends emerge that speak of a harmonious age preceding the one centered on the figure of the warrior-man. The transition to a new type of society and culture occurs gradually, first as a coexistence and then as an overlapping of the two models, until the almost complete supplanting of the one centered on the Great Goddess. The period is that relating to the Indo-Europeanization of Europe, between 4500-2500 BC¹, in which a social system dominated by males and male divinities begins and completes its work of replacing the previous model.

In Greece, the centrality of the Great Goddess definitively fades

1 Gimbutas (1992: 50) writes about it: "Only around 3500 BC, with the invasion of south-eastern Europe by patrilineal populations, did the system of symbols of the old Goddess undergo a radical transformation".

with the reduction of the power of Crete and, conversely, with the great expansion of that of Mycenae. With the imposition of the great monotheistic religions, the concept of a goddess-creator is banished by theologians: by the Christian ones 2,000 years ago and, even earlier, by the Jewish ones. The figure of God the Father definitively supplants that of Goddess the Mother and the Catholic Virgin Mary will represent the only mortal figure within the Celestial Family, in which Father and Son are, instead, divine.

Over the course of the last century, an increasingly popular Marian cult (just think of the phenomenon of the apparitions of the Madonna), has been accompanied by a revival of interest in the figure of the Great Goddess, who has become a point of reference for many artists. In this regard, Olga Tokarczuk, recent Nobel Prize winner for literature, starting from the comparison with the Blessed Virgin, observed:

The feeling that the Goddess is returning does not leave me. [...] The woman becomes an active subject, she is no longer a creation of nature, to whom nature dictates its own ways of living. She has ethical dilemmas, she poses philosophical questions, so she can be tragic; she is complex, but she has the possibility of a choice, and so she is free. As usual, it is this spirit from below, pop culture, or something that comes from the collective unconscious, that makes us realize more than what we would have learned through the conclusions of respectable conferences. (Tokarczuk 2019b)

2. The return of the Great Goddess in cinema (and beyond)

The iconographic representation of the Great Goddess is closely related to the Venus statuettes, as were called the thousands of sculptures depicting extremely stylised women, often pregnant and

with wide hips, found in Paleolithic caves (Eisler 1992: 12). The name *Venus* clearly maintains the connection of these statuettes with a superior divinity, even if it sounds ironic because of their external features. Initially, they were interpreted in various ways²; more recently Marija Gimbutas has resolved the question in an almost definitive manner:

The “Monstrous Venus” is a *religious* representation, the religious reification of the *Genitrix vitae*. The parts of her body that appear exaggerated or grotesque to our eyes are those parts of her that are most significant, magical and sacred, the visible and productive source of the cyclical continuity of life. [...] The aspect of procreation was not only present in the pregnant womb, or the vulva, but also in the buttocks and breasts, often depicted as two eggs. She was the All-Giver. She was the more-than-human mother. (Gimbutas 1992: 44)

Gimbutas’ interpretation therefore links the Venus statuettes to the myth and the peculiar characteristics of the Great Goddess. The Venus of Willendorf, among the many statuettes discovered, is certainly the most well-known. Many times it has been deprived of the *intrinsic* characteristics of the Great Goddess, to be reduced, instead, to the *external* ones, which at the same time have begun to indicate a model of beauty different from the one currently prevailing.

In the broad world of the arts, the recent return of the Great Goddess must certainly be noted starting from the cinematographic field. *God exists, her name is Petrunija*, the multi-

- 2 Marija Gimbutas reconstructs the various interpretative hypotheses projected, over the years, on the Paleolithic Venuses: depictions of real women, aesthetic or erotic ideals, images of fertility, priestesses, ancestors (1992: 29-30).

award-winning 2019 film directed by Macedonian director Teona Strugar Mitevska, stands out not only for its explicit challenge to the traditional and male chauvinist structure of the society it describes, for which it has been defined “A feminist cry against patriarchal Macedonia” (Weissberg 2019), but also for its references to the Great Goddess. Petrunija, the protagonist, brings to mind the prehistoric deity not only because of her physical characteristics, but also because of the various scenes in which she is involved. What sets the plot in motion is her conquest of the sacred cross of the country at the end of a competition in which she (as a woman) could not have participated. “Is it really such a big problem if a woman takes the cross?”, she reiterates to those who would like to take it away from her to restore peace in the city. It is the Slavic Epiphany or the manifestation of divinity in visible form. Here the subversion is not only social, but even religious, with Petrunija (and therefore: the woman) who takes possession of a typically male symbol to affirm her own centrality and elevate herself to the same divine plausibility, as well as to redeem the narrow-mindedness of her fellow villagers. Already starting from the triggering event of the film, therefore, the script suggests a new hierarchy of society and spirit, where a woman, now far from the symbolism of typical Christian suffering, could take care of *all* men in a charitable manner like that operated by Jesus. Another scene allows us to legitimately glimpse, in addition to the figure of Petrunija, the one of the Great Goddess: the film’s protagonist, who always wears a floral dress, is surrounded and enraptured by lush nature behind her during an interrogation at the police station.

Petrunija, now locked within the walls of the police station, will have to redefine and renegotiate the socio-political relationships of her “role”. She brings with her the cross, a symbol of torment/resurrection [...] but also reflection: the walls in which she is imprisoned are

characterized by transparent surfaces, mirrors of faces and bodies that challenge and/or include each other to the point of exhaustion. The boundaries expand and the frame in which, behind Petrunija, who is wearing a dress decorated with leaves, we see a green wall depicting a forest with thick vegetation is significant. The glass table is a screen that reveals her double appearance: she is the custodian of the natural law and, at the same time, witness of the civil law. God (and if she were a Woman?), Nature and Reason contribute to the same universe of justice/equality, (in)forming an identity. (Sasso 2020)

The coexistence of nature and reason in the same figure of a female divinity recalls, once again, the Great Goddess: for our ancestors and worshipers of the Goddess, in fact, there were no such defined polarities between male and female, between spirituality and nature. The Great Goddess, therefore, was not only the source of life and nature, but also of spirituality, wisdom, mercy and justice (Eisler 1992: 23).

A feature film in which the presence of the Great Goddess is strongly felt is *Wieża. Jasny dzień* (*Tower. A Bright Day*) by Polish director Jagoda Szalc from 2017. The director motivated the film's environmentalist urgency as follows: "Since we are incapable of such change by ourselves, we need a guide. Every profound change begins in some way with death" (*Wieża. Jasny dzień*). The guide the director refers to is the one who, sequence after sequence, becomes the film's protagonist: the aunt, who has come to celebrate her niece's communion and who, after just a few scenes, reveals herself to be her biological mother. The tension between her and her sister, who in turn acts as the child's real mother and demands that the secret not be revealed, gradually grows until the conclusion in which all the adults will be killed with a poisonous infusion by the guest occasionally readmitted into the family; but immediately afterwards they will return to life.

From the very first scene the arrival of Kaja, the protagonist, tends to shake up the bourgeois and artificial order of the families present in this idyllic place in the Polish mountains to bring everything back to the dimension of nature, the one of the Great Goddess. It is not so much a question of parenting, to which the cyclical nature of the universe is indifferent, but rather a real reconstruction of society on different bases. Kaja lives in a symbiotic relationship with nature: she sunbathes naked on the meadows, feels the ground while walking in the mountains, is carried by the wind when she is on a rock, stares at the crackling fire in the fireplace, listens to the splashes of water and the sound of the fish flowing, thus synchronizing her heartbeat with the rhythm of the universe (Kempisty 2018). When she eliminates the adults of the company, she will do so with the help of nature's herbs. She also witnesses the distorted relationship that has been created with religion: her granddaughter, Nina, is forced by her mother to learn by heart the liturgy and the songs of the first communion ceremony³, because, she is told, this is the only way she can go to Heaven. Religion is thus reduced to a series of rules and rituals that offer only a false sense of stability, exactly like the society that the families in the film have surrounded themselves with.

The tower (*Wieża*) in the title certainly refers to Babel, an emanation of human pride destined for destruction; but, as Marcin Kempisty points out, in the tarot the tower is also the symbol of the imminent revolution (Kempisty 2018). On the battlefield are

- 3 The reference, in terms of criticism and opposition, to the First Communion ceremony returns in many recent films made by Polish women directors. Just think of *Komunia* (*Communion*, 2016) by Anna Zamecka or *Dzikie róże* (*Wild Roses*, 2017) by Anna Jadowska. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the convergence with *God exists, her name is Petrunija*, where everything is also triggered by a religious celebration, namely the Orthodox Epiphany.

arrayed the tendencies that have frozen the existing equilibrium, on the one hand, and the revolutionary desire to return to the natural state, on the other. Kaja, whose name is a clear reference to Gaia⁴, embodies this possibility of a return to the Great Goddess. The ending of the film, with the poisoned adults walking towards a bright day (*Jasny dzień*) as if to indicate the starting point for a new knowledge, must be interpreted taking into account one of the peculiar characteristics of the Great Goddess: death does not exist, if not inextricably linked to regeneration. “Because the Goddess, although she loves only to destroy, destroys only to awaken to life” (Graves 2009: 501).

Smoke Sauna Sisterhood by Estonian director Anna Hints, awarded at the 2023 Sundance Festival as the best documentary, opens with the image of a naked woman inside a sauna that recalls the Venus of Willendorf: we see only her breasts, but not her face or her legs. The dialogue that soon ensues with her female friend who keeps her company focuses on the clash between appearance and being, between aesthetics and content: the bitterness for her external appearance far from contemporary canons of beauty, which made her childhood and adolescence difficult, slowly dissolves in the regained awareness of the centrality of her role in the nature. The sauna environment conveys to the viewer precisely this sense of sweat and cleanliness: cyclically, at the end of the various discussions in which they engage, the protagonists emerge from the steam that had surrounded them until a moment before

4 “*Gaia* is an ancient Greek name for the Creator Mother, one of many names given to the female deity worshipped for thousands of years as the giver and sustainer of life. [...] But if she was invoked by different names in different places, everywhere she was the symbol of our fundamental unity, of the identity of every life form on this earth: the Mother from whose womb every life form springs and to whom every life form returns at death, as in the cycles of vegetation, to grow again”. (Eisler 1992: 10)

and immerse themselves in the icy waters of a nearby lake. They talk about abortion, sexual violence, abuse suffered by men and the sauna (or rather: the sisterhood of the title that is established within it) gives them the possibility of freeing themselves from reality to immerse in nature, which welcomes them as its direct emanation. In this inseparable union, a re-proposition of the one sculpted in the Venus of Willendorf, lies the hope of the film.

3. The Great Goddess in contemporary Polish literature

Still in the most contemporary context, the Venus of Willendorf also appears in Szczepan Twardoch's book *Król* (*The king of Warsaw*) from 2016: "Jakub hits with all his strength, but his opponent dampens the most powerful blows, the big boxer sneers, and then transforms into the Venus of Willendorf, gigantic, an enormous black jaw there in place of a face" (Twardoch 2020: 440). Jakub is the book's protagonist, a Jewish gangster and boxer in Warsaw who is living the last moments before the outbreak of the Second World War. The reference to the Venus of Willendorf is used by the author to describe the protagonist's dream, in which Jakub measures himself against an enormous boxer who transforms – precisely – into the representation of the Great Goddess, with an enormous black jaw in place of a face (one of the characteristics of the Venus is precisely that of not having any facial features). If on the one hand, therefore, the Venus of Willendorf is used by Twardoch as a metaphor to describe the face of the boxer faced by Jakub, and the way in which it transforms during the fight, on the other hand its presence in the text takes on a particular significance. Jakub, in fact, is the protagonist of a novel that is very masculine, at times chauvinistic.

The Great Goddess, in her representation of the Venus of Willendorf, is inserted into a text like Twardoch's, "masculine"

one, if not “macho”, certainly as the antithesis of the society described and the mechanisms that dominate it; and if the author does not hesitate to invest her with such responsibility it is because the values that she conveys seem to be clear to him and he believes are clear (or could, realistically, be) also to the readers of his book. Moreover, Twardoch’s use of the Venus of Willendorf is only one of the latest pieces of a rather close relationship between contemporary Polish literature and the primordial divinity that it embodies. Wisława Szymborska already refers to the Great Goddess in the poem *A Paleolithic Fertility Fetish* included in the collection *No end of fun* of 1967.

I have explored this poem in depth in another essay published in the framework of PRIN (Ajres 2020), so I will limit myself here to reiterating how Wisława Szymborska looks at the Great Goddess as a symbol of Nature, of balance, of the universal and divine that allows the cyclical nature of things. From this text by Szymborska opens a parenthesis on the Great Goddess that will then be expanded by another Polish Nobel Prize winner for literature, namely Olga Tokarczuk. As a part of an international project dedicated to the rereading of the myth in a feminist key, Tokarczuk focuses on the Sumerian myth of Inanna and writes in 2006 *Anna In w grobowcach świata* (*Anna In in the Tombs of the World*), prefacing the text: “Today, just as in the past, we need ancient myths and we need new interpretations that concern them to unite the world again...” (See Szczuka 2014: 319).

Inanna represents the most important Mesopotamian female deity; a complete restitution of her nature, however, is almost impossible. Goddess of beauty, fertility and love, understood more as eros than as a sentimental bond, Inanna has sometimes been compared to the Great Goddess⁵. Her direct emanation is considered

5 “In a celestial manifestation, the Goddess was also known to the Sumerians in

to be the Babylonian and Assyrian goddess Ishtar, protagonist like Inanna of a descent into the underworld: Ishtar, however, is driven by reasons of love, wanting to bring her beloved Tammuz back to life, whereas Inanna aims to offer the dead eternal life⁶.

In Olga Tokarczuk's text, although some characteristics are similar, the Great Goddess is not completely identifiable with Inanna (transformed into Anna In), but with another protagonist, Ninma⁷. She lives in the steppe, "which in the Sumerian conception of the world is the realm of chaos and disorder" (Amenta 2018: 206), that is, she remains alien to the laws of civilization, while the plot takes place mostly in a megalopolis of the future. Ninma is introduced into the text with the function of unblocking a stalemate: in the attempt to recover and bring back Anna In's corpse from the underworld, in fact, Nina Szubur finds herself faced with the refusal of all three of Anna In's fathers, who do not intend to help their daughter. This is how Nina Szubur, Anna In's assistant, comes into contact with Ninma, who, for her part, elaborates a threat to submit to Anna In's fathers. The threat, which has an effect, is to stop taking care of everything, to let the seasons cease and the sun stop, to mix languages, to make people abandon the cities to return to the wild. In this passage Ninma seems to have been tailored by the Author to the features and

the person of the pure and beautiful Inanna (also named in the text on the Flood), who descended from heaven through seven gates to the afterlife, to bring the dead to eternal life". (Campbell 1992: 64)

- 6 The poem is called *Inanna's Descent into the Underworld* and represents the longest and most complex text on Inanna that has reached us, discovered for the most part during the archaeological excavations carried out on the ruins of the city of Nippur, in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq) between 1889 and 1900.
- 7 Ninmah, the incarnation of the Earth, represented for the Sumerians one of the aspects of Ninhursag, who "gave life to what was dead" (Campbell 1992: 63) and therefore recalled even more closely the Great Goddess.

characteristics of the Great Goddess, captured as she is in her dual role as dispenser of life and death⁸. In the religion of the Goddess, moreover, the tension is always directed towards life, not towards death: at the end of the journey on earth what awaits us is “not a process of disindividualization, but of an intensified and renewed individual existence” (Gimbutas 1992: 50).

When Olga Tokarczuk confesses to feeling that the Goddess is returning, she certainly does so on the basis of her own (and not only)⁹ personal perceptions, which however she contributes to making closer and more real. What the Writer invests in the figure of Ninna is not limited to indicating a return to the Great Goddess, but a real cultural revolution connected to it:

Tokarczuk’s is a wide-ranging critique that does not only target sexism, but any form of domination based on submission and exploitation. It is also an anti-capitalist, luddite, ecologist, anti-urbanist critique: motifs such as the city that supplants nature, technology that manipulates identities, paternalism as a totalitarian form of ‘good government’, the enslavement of bodies to the demands of productivity, genetic manipulation as exploitation of the weakest have always informed his writing. (Czapliński 2006: 14)

- 8 Marija Gimbutas connects the Great Goddess first of all with two concepts: giving life, that is, promoting life and rebirth; giving life and taking back life, that is, death (1992: 32).
- 9 Marija Gimbutas had already stated this many years before: “The Goddess gradually withdrew... The result was human alienation from the vital roots of earthly existence, and the results are clear in our contemporary society. But the cycles never cease to follow one another, and now we find the Goddess re-emerging... bringing us hope for the future...” (1992: 51).

Olga Tokarczuk confirms this commitment, social even before political, in her next work to *Anna In in the Tombs of the World*, which is *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* (*Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, 2009). It is a sort of metaphysical horror, in which animals take revenge on men (in particular hunters) “orchestrated” – so to speak – by the book’s protagonist, Janina Duszejko, an animal rights activist and convinced vegetarian. In the novel, the life of a small provincial town is suddenly turned upside down by the reversal of hierarchies in the face of death, as if to indicate a possible reconstruction of society on different bases, in which nature (and animals) occupy the same place as man. It is no coincidence that the Author places a woman at the head of such a social overturning, evoking once again (indirectly, this time) the figure of the Great Goddess¹⁰. A woman whose description is marked by clumsiness, “an expressionistic mirror of an increasingly evident social inadequacy” (Greco 2017): some judge her to be a strange person, a madwoman.

The protagonist of *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* takes on some of Ninma’s characteristics; while in other ways she distances herself from her. Both are characterized by advanced age: “She’s older than you think”, it is said about Ninma (Tokarczuk 2006: 76), whereas Janina Duszejko is an English teacher who is very advanced in years. The age of the two figures is already, in itself, a form of contestation for Olga Tokarczuk:

10 Tokarczuk (2019a), in fact, contrasts Janina Duszejko with the gods: “Janina Duszejko, on the other hand, is far from the gods: she is old, neglected, with dirty nails and a messy room, she has failed in her life, she is lonely and bizarre”. It is needless to point out how, in this passage, the Author compares the protagonist of her book with the superficially perfect image of the deities and, in doing so, pushes her back towards that of the Great Goddess.

Patriarchy has a problem with older women because they no longer have a sexual role, so they are not attractive and do not participate in the women's exchange market, their children are grown up now, so their maternal role is also exhausted. Older women, however, have enormous wisdom and experience, they are spontaneous and potential authorities who threaten men in power. That is why old age, not only of the Goddess, but also of women, has been repressed, ridiculed and demonized. It always amazed me: this lack of space for older women, this peripheral existence of theirs. (Tokarczuk 2019b)

By supporting the return of the Goddess, the Polish author insists at the same time on the return of women to the sacred sphere, which means of the whole woman, with her body, her wisdom, her strength and her old age (Tokarczuk 2019b). The Great Goddess has a multifaceted nature in various aspects: she is a grandmother, but also a mother and a virgin and these traits bring her closer once again to Ninma and Janina Duszejko. In fact, there are no male figures at their side¹¹, although Ninma can be considered the mother of men and Janina Duszejko the mother of nature and of the animals that inhabit it.

They are virgins and mothers, as in the tradition of the

11 "At first in Europe there were no male contemporaries of the Goddess who could challenge her prestige and power. She had, however, a lover, who was alternately the beneficent Serpent of wisdom and the beneficent Star of life, her son. The Son incarnated in the male demons of the various totemic societies governed by her, who attended the erotic dances held in her honor. The Serpent, incarnated in the sacred serpents, which were the spirits of the dead, distributed the winds. [...] The Star-Son and the Serpent are still mere demons, and in Crete the Goddess is not even depicted with a divine infant in her arms. She is the mother of all creatures: her sons and lovers participate in her sacred essence only by her gracious permission". (Graves 2009: 444-446)

Goddess, and like her they are also avengers¹². They are both rebels against the patriarchal system that surrounds them. Janina Duszejko, now retired, did a job typically considered for men: she was an engineer in charge, in particular, of the construction of bridges¹³. Anna In's fathers, for their part, represent the *status quo*, the maintenance of the established order regardless of external circumstances: they are the rationality that Anna In, for her part, tends to contest. Her return from the underworld signifies the breaking of the cyclical nature that has become a system and, at the same time, the beginning of change: "The feminine is here synonymous with innovation and renewal" (Amenta 2018: 205), which would not have been possible without the mediation and the threatening anathema of Ninma.

If in *Anna In in the Tombs of the World* the criticism of patriarchal society is clear, but man is observed with suspicion only as a representative of power, and not of gender, in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* the opposition becomes even more acute. The abuse exercised towards animals continues to be a question of power, of course, that the strongest asserts towards those who cannot defend themselves, but the denunciation concerns exclusively the male universe: such are the hunters. The animalist instance is therefore assimilated to that of the criticism of the violence inherent in the patriarchal system. In Tokarczuk's

12 "Ninma reveals herself not only as a mother, but also as a goddess of vengeance. She is a multifaceted and polyhedric feminine who shows off her immense power in her creative and destructive aspects, she is both wonderful and monstrous, in any case terrifying", writes Amenta (2018: 206).

13 In her lecture specifically dedicated to the construction of the character of Janina Duszejko, Tokarczuk (2019a) compared the protagonist's passion for astrology to her previous activity as an architect and bridge engineer, as if to underline her inclination to discover and create connections between different elements of existence.

text, anger is praised several times as a condition capable of showing things clearly¹⁴; later, we discover that anger is the feeling on which the Author has built the main character: “The most important work that allowed me to create Janina Duszejko was done by observing closely one of the most important human emotions, anger, because the mission that this character required from the beginning was to explore the many potentials of anger” (Tokarczuk 2019a). Without Janina Duszejko and her positive anger, the Author even confesses that she would hardly have gone so far as to take such radical positions (Tokarczuk 2019a).

Janina Duszejko, moreover, finds herself dealing with another order shaped by the will and needs of men: the religious and Christian one. Faith in the values that the Great Goddess brings clashes irremediably with the Christian one in the main scene of the book, in which the protagonist interrupts the homily by calling everyone present “murderers”. And turning to the parish priest, she says: “Hey, you, jump down from there”, “Come on!”, “I’m talking to you. Don’t you hear? Jump down”, “Get down from that pulpit immediately! And get out of here!” (Tokarczuk 2012: 312)¹⁵. Here the rebellion is clear and direct, aimed against a

14 In this case the reference is direct to Jung: “The woman whose destiny it is to disturb is only in pathological cases exclusively destructive. Normally she is a disturbing element shaken by disturbance itself, a transforming factor that transforms itself. And the reverberation of the fire that kindles, shedding light on all the victims of the plot, simultaneously illuminates them. What appeared as senseless disturbance becomes a process of clarification. [...] If the woman of this type remains unaware of the meaning of her function, if, that is, she does not know that she is a part of ‘the force that always wants evil and always works good’, she too perishes by the sword she carries. It is awareness that transforms her into the one who separates and redeems” (1980: 96).

15 On the wake of this scene, in various more recent Polish films, there will be a succession of similar cross-sections of religious ceremonies, originating above all from that of the First Communion. As mentioned, the position of authors

patriarchal system that for millennia has used violence to subjugate the weakest and has also subjugated the spiritual dimension, excluding the female presence.

This scene, which actually takes up several pages of the text, has caused quite a stir and controversy in Poland, especially after the film adaptation of the book by Agnieszka Holland in *Pokot* (2017)¹⁶, in which Olga Tokarczuk collaborated as a screenwriter. On the day of St. Hubert, the patron saint of hunters, the village church is dressed up and packed to the rafters. Some of the students Janina Duszejko teaches English wear animal-face masks, while others wear peasant clothes. Soon the children will act out a play about St. Hubert meeting a deer in the woods, a prelude to the heroine's outburst of rage.

The situation becomes even more unbearable because man, the representative of reason, is ready to distort to his own goals even the logic inherent in the apparition to Saint Hubert, who, by converting, stops killing and becomes a saint. "In all this, a substantial lack of logic is striking. Because if the followers of Hubert wanted to imitate him, they should stop killing. But since they take him as their patron, the hunters make him the patron of what was the sin of Hubert and from which he freed himself. Therefore they make him the patron of a sin" (Tokarczuk 2012: 305-306). It is pure and simple abuse, therefore, exercised against

and directors, in the interpretation of these scenes, is constantly one of rejection and denunciation of the underlying hypocrisy.

- 16 The term *pokot*, which is very complex to convey in a direct and unambiguous way, indicates a traditional solemn rite at the end of the collective hunt, during which a report is made on the course of the hunt, on the slaughtered animals (arranged in a row) and it is announced who has become the king of the hunt. The film was nominated for an Oscar as best foreign film in 2018 (and the English title translated as *Spoor*) and the Oscar nomination has further inflamed the spirits in Poland.

those who are weaker and legitimized in the forms of Christian religiosity. At the moment in which the young parish priest climbs onto the pulpit and begins his sermon, raving about hunting as an ecological system and hunters as God's helpers in maintaining order and balance, Janina Duszejko will explode denouncing the deadly inconsistency of that speech.

4. Conclusion

It can be assumed that the direction towards the Great Goddess that Polish literature (and art in general) has taken in this last period is not only in contrast with what has happened in the country at a socio-political level recently. Previously, in fact, there was an image of women to fight against that had been based for decades on the ideal figure of the *Matka polka* (Polish mother), understood as an angel of the hearth on which to lean the maintenance of traditions and of the Polish people themselves: “a syndrome of a heroic woman”¹⁷.

In Poland, due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church, the image of the woman merged with that of the Virgin Mary, later

17 “When Poland lost its independence in 1795, Polish women faced a challenge that would endure for many years to come. Since the maintenance of the national identity depended on having future generations to preserve its culture, raising children became a political imperative. When their husbands were in prison, sent into exile, or had taken part in uprisings from which they would never return, women had to take care of the home and the family business. And they fulfilled their roles remarkably well. The need to cope with all these duties gave rise to the syndrome of a heroic woman who could bear any burden, the *Matka Polka* (Polish mother)”, Izabela Kowalczyk writes (Maurovich 2020).

abstracting into the allegory of the long-suffering nation¹⁸. Transforming women into allegories means eliminating them from the socio-political terrain: a repressive strategy that exploits women, who find themselves representing rather than being represented. When Tokarczuk reflects on the Madonna as a “simulacrum of femininity”, as “something unreal”, she marks the definitive break with this identification at the end of a long journey and, immediately after, indicates the path for faith towards a female figure that is both new and very ancient at the same time:

Mary is a figure who exists only in her visible meekness, that is, she is incomplete. Being a virgin, she is not even completely a woman, since she is deprived of her sexual aspect. In a certain sense, she is an immature being, that is, once again, incomplete. Her passivity and subordination leave her in the background. [...] Fundamentally, it is difficult to identify with such a vision of women. It seems to me that, nowadays, Mary represents a simulacrum of femininity, something that is not real. [...] For Western religions, the lack of a woman is significant and painful. It is a disease that has lasted for so long that, by now, we consider it normal. (Tokarczuk 2019b)

In *Księgi Jakubowe* (*The books of Jakob*, 2014) Tokarczuk tries to fill this gap, imagining the possibility of a female Messiah in the encounter between different religions: “Until now you thought – she says one cold winter morning – that the Messiah would be a man, but it cannot be in any way, because the

18 Bożena Tieszen writes in this regard: “With the Catholic Church playing a pivotal role in Polish society for centuries, the close connection between the concept of Mother Poland and the Virgin Mary in the Polish social mind has been very strong – after World War II it increased even more” (2007: 221).

foundation is the Virgin, she will be the true Savior” (Tokarczuk 2023: 576). Tokarczuk’s work fits into the international context of the recovery of the figure of the Great Goddess, as foreseen starting from Marija Gimbutas. In the arts, we witness this phenomenon in the cinematographic field, first of all, but also other forms of expression seem sensitive to the call of the Goddess. In all of these, Poland plays a key role: the poem *A Paleolithic Fertility Fetish* (1965) by Wisława Szymborska leads the way, followed by a long series of films and literary works, in the country and beyond. In this sense, it is enough to think of the case of the Macedonian film *God exists, her name is Petrunija* (2019); while, focusing on Polish literature, the Great Goddess is evoked in the form of the Venus of Willendorf also in *The king of Warsaw* by Szczepan Twardoch (2016), a novel inclined towards machismo in various of its parts.

In its secular interpretation, on the one hand the Great Goddess can reconcile us with respect for nature. The balance found with the environment could lead man, immediately afterwards, to review his own battle aimed at good. Finally, the return of the Great Goddess could also restore a balance in the area of gender respect:

The real alternative to patriarchy is not matriarchy, which is only the other side of the coin of domination. The alternative, which now turns out to have been the original direction of our cultural evolution, is an egalitarian society: a way of organizing human relationships where – starting from the most fundamental difference present in our species, the difference between male and female – diversity is not synonymous with inferiority or superiority. (Eisler 1992: 18)

Bibliography

- Ajres Alessandro (2020), “Riscrittura femminile del mito nella poesia di Wisława Szymborska”, *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 37: 143-183.
- Amenta Alessandro (2018), “Anna In w grobowcach świata di Olga Tokarczuk. Una rilettura femminista del mito sumerico della dea Inanna”, *Studi slavistici*, XV: 197-216.
- Campbell Joseph (1992), “Il numero misterioso della Dea”, *I nomi della Dea*, ed. Campbell Joseph, Musés Charles, Roma, Ubaldini: 55-122.
- Czapliński Przemysław (2006), “Cyberpunk sumeryjski”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 213: 14.
- Gimbutas Marija (1989), *The Language of the Goddess. Unearthing the hidden symbols of western civilization*, London, Thames & Hudson.
- Gimbutas Marija (1992), “La ‘Venere mostruosa’ della preistoria”, *I nomi della Dea*, eds. Campbell Joseph, Musés Charles, Roma, Ubaldini: 28-53.
- Graves Robert (2009), *La dea bianca*, Milano, Adelphi.
- Greco Salvatore (2017), “Pokot – Ode pagana a un’altra Polonia”, *PoloniCult*, <<https://polonicult.com/pokot-ode-pagana-unaltra-polonia/>>, (last accessed 31/8/2024).
- Jung Carl Gustav (1980), *Gli archetipi e l’inconscio collettivo*, Torino, Boringhieri.
- Kempisty Marcin (2018), “Pęknięcie – analiza filmu ‘Wieża. Jasny dzień’”, *Pelna Sala*, <<https://pelnasala.pl/wieza-jasny-dzien>>, (last accessed 30/8/2024).
- Maurovich Giorgia (2020), “Polonia: l’“inferno delle donne” in due secoli di femminismo, arte e storia”, *Estranei* <<https://estranei.org/-2020/12/06/polonia-linferno-delle-donne-in-due-secoli-di-femminismo-arte-e-storia/>>, (last accessed 31/8/2024).
- Sasso Sergio (2020), “Dio è donna e si chiama Petrunya’ di Teona Strugar Mitevka”, *Uzak*, <<https://www.uzak.it/rivista/uzak-35/teorie/dio-e-donna-e-si-chiama-petrunya-di-teona-strugar-mitevka.html>>, (last accessed 30/8/2024).
- Szczuka Kazimiera (2014), “Mit”, *Encyklopedia gender – Płeć w kulturze*, red. Czeczot Katarzyna, Mroziak Agnieszka, Nadana-Sokołowska Katarzyna, Nasiłowska Anna, Rudaś-Grodzka Monika, Serafin Ewa,

- Smoleń Barbara, Szczuka Kazimiera, Serafin Ewa, Wróbel Agnieszka, Warszawa, Czarna Owca: 317-319.
- Tieszen Bożena (2007), “Matka Polka (Mother Poland) and the Cult of the Virgin Mary: Linguistic Analysis of the Social Roles and Expectations of Polish Women”, *Language and Religious Identity: Women in Discourse*, ed. Jule Allyson, London, Palgrave Macmillan: 220-228.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2006), *Anna In w grobowcach świata*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2012), *Guida il tuo carro sulle ossa dei morti*, Roma, Nottetempo.
- Tokarczuk Olga (2019a), “Jak urodziłam Janinę Duszejko”, *Soundcloud*, <<https://soundcloud.com/unilodz/jak-urodzilam-janine-duszejko-wyklad-olgi-tokarczuk>>, (last accessed 21/8/2024).
- Tokarczuk Olga (2019b), “Nie opuszcza mnie poczucie, że Bogini wraca”, *Więź.pl*, <<https://wiesz.pl/2019/10/10/tokarczuk-nie-opuszcza-mnie-poczucie-ze-bogini-wraca>>, (last accessed 12/8/2024).
- Tokarczuk Olga (2023), *I libri di Jakub*, Milano, Bompiani.
- Twardoch Szczepan (2020), *Il re di Varsavia*, Palermo, Sellerio.
- Weissberg Jay (2019), “Berlin Film Review: ‘God exists, her name is Petrunya’”, *Variety*, <<https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/god-exists-her-name-is-petrunya-review-1203134497>>, (last accessed 20/8/2024).
- “Wieża. Jasny dzień”, *Official website of Trieste Film Festival*, <<https://www.triestefilmfestival.it/archivio/2021/film/wieza-jasny-dzien/index.html>>, (last accessed 20/8/2024).

IX.

Мифопоэтические стратегии и травматический нарратив в романе *Время женщин* Елены Чижовой

Gloria Politi

«Жены ваши в церквах да молчат, ибо не
позволено им говорить, а быть в подчинении,
как и закон говорит».

Коринфянам 14: 34

Введение

Многочисленные театральные постановки романа Елены Чижовой *Время женщин* на сценах крупнейших российских театров представляют собой крайне интересное явление, являясь своеобразным продолжением современного прозаического произведения, удостоенного в 2009 году премии «Русский Букер» и оказавшегося в центре многочисленных дискуссий, вызвав тем самым пристальный интерес критики. «Вторая жизнь» текста началась в 2011 году с первой постановки в московском «Современнике»¹, а затем

1 Пьеса продолжительностью три часа до сих пор остается одной из жемчужин репертуара театра. См. <<https://afisha.yandex.ru/moscow/theatre/places/sovremennik?page=3>>, (дата обращения 25/11/2024).

в феврале следующего года – в Большом драматическом театре имени Г.А. Товстоногова в Санкт-Петербурге. Хотя сама Чижова отмечает, что предложение о второй постановке поступило к ней первым, и что режиссер Геннадий Рафаилович Тростянецкий приобщил ее к рабочему процессу как в работе над сценарием, так и во встречах с актерами, задействованными в спектакле (Чижова 2012).

Успех романа в его театральном воплощении, на наш взгляд, определяется не только положительным откликом со стороны аудитории разных возрастных категорий, но в большей степени именно драматургическими особенностями самого нарратива. *Время женщин* не является ни биографическим, ни автобиографическим, ни историческим произведением, однако его, без всякого сомнения, необходимо рассматривать как в исторической, так и в мифопоэтической перспективе и одновременно с тем как выражение литературного мировоззрения Чижовой, противопоставляемом русскому постмодернизму последних десятилетий, от которого автор определенно дистанцируется:

Лично для меня российский постмодернизм последних десятилетий – явление глубоко провинциальное, в частности, именно потому, что одним из его свойств является принципиальный антиисторизм. Конечно, это долгий разговор, <...> но если говорить коротко, с моей точки зрения, русская литература интересна не тем, насколько успешно она перекладывает на русский язык то, что на Западе давно открыто, переложено и по большей части преодолено, а в первую очередь своими собственными, условно говоря, открытиями, которые в нашей несчастной стране невозможно сделать, игнорируя ее трагическую историю. (Чижова 2012)

В данной статье роман анализируется сквозь призму теории травмы, которая подразумевает проявление реального, как такового, что нарушает символический сюжет, как поток «означаемого» в бытии индивидуума. Целью анализа является выявление взаимосвязи между катастрофическими событиями истории России за последние семьдесят лет и последствиями, которые они оказывают на сознание человека. Этот «новый реализм», сформированный именно травматическими потрясениями, представляет собой переломный момент, в котором реальность передается субъекту еще до какой-либо концептуализации, и является результатом трансформации, затронувшей философскую культуру в современном мире (Ferraris 2012; Caruth 1996), которую нельзя рассматривать с близорукой точки зрения как принадлежащую лишь Западу и не применимую к советскому опыту (Brintlinger 2004; Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011). Одновременно с этим мы рассмотрим миф, прежде всего в его мифопоэтическом проявлении как способ конструирования идентичности, с тем чтобы отследить смещения, фрагментарность и разломы в рамках повествовательных стратегий, наполняющих семейные узы новым содержанием.

2. Прошлое, которое нужно забыть?

26 декабря 1991 года СССР прекратил свое существование. Для одних это историческое событие ознаменовало зарождение надежды или даже уверенности в том, что свобода была наконец достигнута, для других – вступление в небезопасную и хаотичную эпоху. Однако, без всякого сомнения для всех оно стало экономической, социальной, психологической и экзистенциальной травмой: крах коммунизма и Советского Союза означал не только окончание

организационной модели, которая определяла политическую и общественную жизнь, но и утрату смысла жизни. Таким образом, этот опыт можно охарактеризовать как «неинтегрированный», используя терминологию французской школы психологии и, в частности, первых теорий психической травмы, сформулированных Жаном-Мартеном Шарко (1998), использованных впоследствии Йозефом Брейером и Зигмундом Фрейдом (Breuer, Freud 1977). И действительно, кажется, что Чижова в романе *Время женщин*, погружая главных героинь в своеобразное трансное состояние, применяет технику гипноза, и прибегая к использованию мнемонического повествования, отмеченного сновидческими и геотопографическими (де)локализациями, воплощает взаимнопроникаемую связь и контаминацию между реальностью и субъективным измерением персонажей.

Действие романа берет свое начало в рабочем Ленинграде, переживающем преобразования в конце пятидесятых и начале шестидесятых годов прошлого века², и завершается в 1980-

- 2 Для понимания исторической значимости этих событий уместным будет прояснить, что происходило в СССР в послевоенный период, когда Сталин и Политбюро приняли Четвёртый пятилетний план (1946-1950), направленный на восстановление экономики, сделав упор на развитие тяжёлой промышленности как в западных, так и в восточных регионах страны. План предусматривал массовое производство угля, электроэнергии, стали и сельскохозяйственной техники. Демобилизация десяти миллионов человек обеспечила трудовые ресурсы в виде рабочей силы, необходимой для восстановления разрушенных городов и деревень, а также для увеличения объёмов производства. Этот план, выполнение которого было объявлено окончено через четыре года и три месяца, не ограничивался восстановлением экономики до довоенного уровня, но стремился превзойти его, повышая качество и производительность за счёт увеличения капиталовложений на одного рабочего. Пятый пятилетний план (1951-1955), действовавший и после смерти

1990-х годах, перемещая повествование в эпилог, с которого все и начиналось.

Распад Советского Союза стал кардинальным переломным моментом в истории страны, и именно необходимость преодоления преобразований в трех сферах общества – экономической, политической и ценностной – стала той величиной, которая трагическим образом охарактеризовала первое десятилетие в постсоветской России. Определяющие черты 90-х годов в виде инфляции, безработицы, преступности и крайней институциональной нестабильности неизгладимо обозначили один из самых драматических моментов новейшей российской истории, который отличался значительным ухудшением уровня жизни населения не только с точки зрения

Сталина, был ориентирован на развитие таких стратегических отраслей, как оборонная промышленность, авиастроение и атомная энергетика. Несмотря на его формальное выполнение, результаты оказались неоднозначными и сопровождались значительными затратами и трудностями. Последовавший за ним Шестой пятилетний план (1956-1960) был приостановлен в 1958 году из-за существенного отставания от производственных целей. На смену ему пришел семилетний план (1959-1965), формально обусловленный обнаружением новых природных ресурсов, но в действительности мотивированный новой фазой централизации власти. Предвестники этого процесса проявились уже в 1957 году в рамках реформы, инициированной Хрущёвым, которая предусматривала передачу части промышленности из-под контроля московских министерств в ведение новых региональных советов, с целью более равномерного распределения полномочий на местах, но без ослабления централизованного управления. Помимо стремления повышения финансовой эффективности, эта мера имела очевидную политическую подоплёку: ограничение влияния руководителей экономической отрасли, приближенных к Георгию Маленкову, сопернику Хрущёва, и укрепление власти последнего в Кремле (Boffa 1995; Gershenkron 1971; Ulam 1981; Zaslavsky 1981).

экономической устойчивости и в сфере здравоохранения, но и в частной сфере (Aragona 2018).

В начале 2000-х новая российская власть попыталась выстроить новый общественный договор, уделяя больше внимания потребностям населения и одновременно с тем концентрируя власть и полномочия по принятию решений в своих руках. Однако политический и экономический переход еще далеко не завершен, и особенно за последнее десятилетие он характеризуется отсталостью в институциональной и гражданской сферах. Подобное положение вещей позволяет провести параллель между современной Россией и Советским Союзом второй половины 1970-х годов, когда относительное благополучие брежневской эпохи скрывало политический и экономический застой, который в конечном итоге привел к краху СССР (Гудков 2021).

В трансформациях, охвативших российское общество с момента распада Советского Союза и до настоящего времени, литература играла дуальную роль, тщетно пытаясь сохранить и укрепить свою приоритетность. С одной стороны, она пыталась закрепить доминирующие дискурсы, а с другой – подвергала их жесткой критике, предлагая альтернативные подходы к конструированию личной и коллективной идентичности. Так, если представление о литературе как об отражении социальной реальности осталось в советском прошлом, то современная литература предлагает новые определения именно потому, что она формируется в условиях перехода от травматического или ностальгически туманного прошлого к несколько неопределенному будущему, в котором литература пытается вновь утвердить свою созидательную роль (Dobrenko, Lipovetsky 2015). И действительно, если 90-е годы следует считать уникальными с точки зрения исключения любой цензуры, то настоящее время знаменуется трагическим возрождением ограничения свободы слова, что помещает русскую литературу

на новый виток развития, за которым, однако, неизбежно стоит опыт прошлого. Ведь не так легко сбросить с себя пусть и мимолетное бремя свободы девяностых годов после жизни в советской реальности, где бытие всегда поглощало сущность, а человек обретал смысл собственной жизни не через самостоятельный и независимый выбор, а во имя системы власти, которая, законодательно провозгласив смерть бога, обозначила партийную веру как единственный путь к спасению.

3. Литературный мейнстрим и женский нарратив в романе *Время женщин*

Исключительно на литературном уровне переход от 1990-х к 2000-м годам характеризуется, как утверждает Марина Петровна Абашева, все бóльшим смещением в сторону реального: «Литературу 1990-х годов в большей степени интересуют писатели не вымышленные, а реальные. Литература факта, ‘непридуманное’, дневники, мемуары уверенно потеснили популярные в начале 90-х годов постмодернистские тексты» (Абашева 2001: 50).

Результатом этой тенденции стал так называемый литературный мейнстрим, который, помимо отражения неоспоримого развития книгоиздания, четко обозначил общее стремление авторов и читателей к литературе, которая не только является выражением советской традиции 1960-1980-х годов и андеграунда, но в то же время интересна и доступна широкому кругу читателей:

От массовой культуры литературный мейнстрим
вобрал в себя такие качества, как адапционность,
открытость, доступность, масштабность, широта,
простота, тривиальность, опора на общеизвестное,

смысловая и эстетическая вторичность, апелляция к обыденному опыту, обращение к архетипическим образам и представлениям, особая эстетическая система, включающая наряду с категориями прекрасного категории сверхъестественного, ужасного, трогательного, безобразного, и пр.

У литературы мейнстрима так же, как и у произведений массовой культуры, заметна настроенность на самопроизводство, цитирование, сериальность, вариативность, самоотждествленность и т. д. (Казакова 2017: 62)

В социальном контексте современной русской литературы понятие «мейнстрим» приобрело специфический смысловой заряд, превратившись в действующий современный демократический канон, где литература рассматривалась как процесс с определенными параметрами и определенным вектором движения. В силу этой базовой предпосылки русский мейнстрим стал идеальным местом для зарождения новых тенденций, примером которых может выступать творчество «новых амазонок». Их потенциал далеко не исчерпан и продолжает давать новый заряд прозе, которая представляет собой уникальное сочетание литературного вымысла и реального жизненного опыта, сотканного из быта и повседневности, пережитых именно женщинами в советский и поздний советский период и описанный ими в попытке понять и прояснить способы функционирования власти, обращаясь к прошлому, которое так и не разорвало своих связей с настоящим. Таким образом, попытка современных женщин-писательниц низвергнуть традиционную концепцию биографии/автобиографии заставила критиков заговорить о «новой искренности» или «новой документалистике», свидетельствующих появление нового современного литературного направления, одной из главных характеристик

которого является стирание границ между вымыслом и реальностью, где на основании событий из реальной жизни автора рождается произведение, персонажи которого полностью вымышлены (Сивакова 2014). Это повествование характеризуется фрагментарностью, частыми аналитическими и пролептическими процессами, постоянным смещением временной оси в попытке восстановить память прошлых поколений как альтернативу логике власти, навязываемой современной реальностью.

Выше перечисленные черты и особенности в полной мере соответствуют литературоведческой картине мира Елены Чижовой (Ленинград, 4-ое мая 1957 года), плодовитой писательницы, которая в 2009 году неожиданно для всех стала лауреатом престижной премии «Русский Букер» за роман *Время женщин*, опубликованный впервые в том же году в журнале Звезда (Чижова 2009), а год спустя – в издательстве АСТ (Чижова 2010). Изображая срез жизни советской России, повествуя о судьбах простых женщин, их страданиях в период, наполненный революционными потрясениями, войнами и экономическими преобразованиями, Чижова не стремится представить эпоху посредством стереотипных персонажей, поскольку для автора время отнюдь не является категорией прошлого, а принадлежит все еще приносящему боль настоящему:

Временной промежуток, вмещающий в себя действие всех пяти «ленинградских» романов Чижовой (рожденной в этом городе, пишущей о нем), неизменно возвращается к 70-м годам: миновали яркие, рубежные 60-е, несмотря ни на что проникнутые своеобразным историческим оптимизмом, наступили годы глухие, переломные для человеческого сознания, годы не столько страха («Сейчас не то время», – то и дело повторяют друг

другу герои чижовских романов, помнящие иные, куда более нечеловеческие, времена), сколько – вины и стыда, пронизанные – и это для Чижовой особенно важно – одновременно стремлением к возмездию и мыслью об искуплении. (Погорелая 2010: 208)

Исторические, политические и социальные события отражаются в повествовании *Время женщин* через судьбы пяти главных героинь – матери (Антонины Беспаловой), дочери (Сюзанны/Софьи) и трех «бабушек» – соседок по коммунальной квартире (Евдокии, Гликерии, Ариадны), которые в силу присущих им специфических черт ведут маргинальное существование, перемещаясь как в городском пространстве, так и в пределах личной сферы, представленной парадоксальным образом коммунальной квартирой. Именно она возводится в оборонительный бастион для защиты от грубого вмешательства со стороны государства, оперативным инструментом которого является коллектив фабрики, где работает Антонина, простая деревенская девушка, которая, приехав в город, следуя фельетонным традициям XIX века, очаровывается таинственным и обаятельным красавцем.

От соблазителя в ее памяти осталось лишь лицо, которое девушка мельком увидела в толпе несколько лет спустя:

Глаза закрыла, а сердце так и заходится. Мужика опять вижу, того, с бородой. На стенке у него висел... Душно мне! Я ведь сколько ходила, найти его надеялась. Да разве вспомнишь дом-то... В городе дома большие, одинаковые. Не то что в деревне... (Чижова 2010: 40)

Плодом этой мимолетной встречи для Антонины станет рождение дочери, которая до семи лет будет немой; мать назовет девочку Сюзанна, а ее «приемные бабушки» дадут ей имя Софья, тайно покрестив ребенка:

Тут, за столом, едва получив ребенка на руки, пришли к согласию: первым долгом – покрестить. Тайком, не докладываясь матери. В этих делах мать – сторона. Слава богу, в Никольском звонарь знакомый. Сам глухой, а все понимает. Согласился переговорить с батюшкой, позвать на дом.

По метрикам значилась Сюзанной. Имечко басурманское, прости Господи. В прежние времена срамных девок кликали, чтоб заступниц святых не позорить. А теперь мать родная выбрала – кличку собачью...

Думали-думали, листали Святцы. Имен хороших не счесть, но первое попавшее не выберешь. Отец Иннокентий сказал: ищите сообразно метрике. Хоть по смыслу, хоть по заглавной букве.

Гликерия чего надумала: может, говорит, Серафимой... Нет. Решили в честь Софии. (Чижова 2010: 10)

Этим женщины демонстрируют, что судьба для них – не незримая и неотвратимая сила, а сущность, которой можно противостоять, уподобляясь современным Антигонам, изменяя узор пряжи, наподобие новых Мойр, тем самым меняя исход событий.

Антигона, о которой идет речь – это центральный персонаж трагедии Софокла, впервые представленной на сцене в 442 году до н.э. В своём романе Елена Чижова возрождает традиционный миф, хотя и со значительными изменениями: Евдокия, Гликерия и Ариадна воскрешают в памяти благородный образ дочери царя Фив Эдипа и его матери Иокасты и их неустанную защиту нравственных и духовных ценностей в условиях безжалостного государственного гнета.

Антигона воплощает верность императивам сердца и совести, решительно противостоя требованиям земных

законов (Griffith 2001: 122-125). Три пожилые женщины, подобно этому классическому образу, восстают против принудительной власти системы, воплощённой в советском режиме, который стремится контролировать не только общественную, но и интимную сферу жизни своих граждан. Эти женщины, прошедшие через революции, войны и репрессии, с трепетом хранят традиционные ценности – память, культуру и веру, которые они стремятся передать маленькой Софье/Сюзанне. Для них этот поступок является священным долгом, подобно тому, как для Антигоны категорическим императивом была необходимость предать земле тело её брата Полиника, несмотря на запреты закона (Sofocle 2023).

Подобно греческой героине, женщины вынуждены действовать втайне от властей, ведь их вера в Бога, их моральные убеждения и мудрость противоречат советской доктрине. Они берут на себя роль хранительниц духовного наследия, находящегося под угрозой идеологии времени, в котором они живут. Их сопротивление молчаливо и незаметно, но оно символизирует борьбу, столь же значимую, как и жест Антигоны: как героиня греческой трагедии, три пожилые женщины стремятся сохранить и защитить человеческое достоинство, осознавая при этом риск быть непонятыми и даже осуждёнными обществом.

Очевидный мифопоэтический прием, характерный для повествования Елены Чижовой, позволяет рассматривать Евдокию, Гликерию и Ариадну и как своеобразных Мойр древнегреческой мифологии. Подобно богиням судьбы, которые пряли, отмеряли и обрезали нить человеческой жизни, три женщины в романе берут на себя роль хранительниц и вершительниц судьбы, оберегая и направляя жизнь Софьи/Сюзанны, защищая её от опасностей и гнетущего влияния окружающего мира.

Каждая из них вносит свой вклад в формирование девочки, сплетая паутину историй, традиций и наставлений, которые становятся для неё источником силы и нравственным ориентиром. Как Мойры определяли судьбу людей в античном мире, так и эти пожилые женщины в своей незримой борьбе с советской системой стремятся обеспечить для ребёнка иное будущее, отличное от анонимного, безликого существования, на которое её обрекал режим. Они определяют жизнь Софьи, прививая ей понимание важности памяти о прошлом, духовные ценности и любовь, превращая эти заветы в необходимую опору, на которой она сможет построить свою судьбу. Таким образом, бабушки выполняют функцию не просто опекунов, но своеобразных хранительниц судьбы девочки, определяя ход ее дальнейшей жизни.

Сила советских женщин, оказавшихся в измерении экзистенциальной «золотой середины», проявляется в становлении идентичности через детализацию описаний тягот повседневного существования. Повествование Елены Чижовой, запечатлевая пространство реально прожитого времени, уходит от репрезентации того абстрактного этапа, когда жизнь советского гражданина возвеличивалась пропагандой, когда каждое удручающее и досадное событие принудительно заменялось радикальным ощущением триумфа и счастья при абсолютном несоответствии реальности. Здесь раз и навсегда прекращается лакировка действительности, которая во временном парадоксе советской эпохи превращала прошлое и настоящее в эпические и идеальные образы, где каждый участвовал в иллюзии обмана, безнадежно предаваясь торжеству «лучезарного будущего»:

Chi guardava sapeva che quel mondo non era vero, ma ci credeva ed entrava immediatamente in sintonia con l'euforia collettiva. La realtà contingente, la carestia, il

terrore, i processi e le privazioni s'identificavano, per la cultura collettiva, con un altrettanto epico mondo del male (fatto di traditori della patria, di nemici del popolo), mondo che in confronto a quello «buono e felice» era minuscolo, privo di posto nel reale (!) spazio geografico. (Piretto 2001: 142)

Роман *Время женщин* представляет собой наглядное воплощение современного литературного тренда как результата трансформаций, произошедших на политическом и социальном уровне.

Так, основополагающие центры притяжения повествования отображают ниспровержение истин, некогда считавшихся незыблемыми. С этой точки зрения российская деревня перестает быть Эдемом на земле для *homo sovieticus* и становится «пространством», из которого нужно бежать, особенно после ужасных событий, связанных с войной, воспоминания, о которой размыты в сновидениях наяву Антонины:

Лежу, а не сплю вроде. Только понять не могу. Будто в деревне я, за околицей.

А дорогу не помню, вроде и нет дороги. Снег. Все белым-бело. Назад обернулась следы свои найти. Нету: ни своих, ни чужих. Огляделась деревню поискать – может, дымки? над крышами. Гляжу: ни крыш, ни дымков. «Как же, – думаю, – я-то сюда пришла?» <...> Ближе подхожу – узнала место. Это ж землянка наша, на краю леса. С войны еще осталась. Детьми часто от дождя прятались. Бревна у ней погнивши – скрипят. «Кто ж это, – гадаю, – в землянке поселился да огонь жгет?». (Чижова 2010: 40-41)

Таким образом, индивид стремится найти утопическое убежище в «не-месте» (Augé 2018), представленном здесь

новым советским городом, который становится пространством анонимности, населенным множеством похожих друг на друга и в то же время чрезвычайно одиноких людей. Именно в городе фрагментация идентичности происходит под воздействием быта, отмеченного нестабильностью и значительной степенью сложности построения взаимоотношений в нем. В отличие от сталинской эпохи, когда искусственная «лакировка» действительности создавала иллюзорное чувство счастья, в описанном Чижовой контексте мир становится более проблематичным и неопределённым, подрывая личностную идентичность человека и его ощущение безопасности.

4. Женские образы в бытовой прозе Елены Чижовой

Время, на фоне которого разворачиваются события и о которых идёт речь в романе *Время женщин*, озаменовано трудностями трагического послевоенного периода, смертью Сталина и общеизвестными происшествиями, которые привели Никиту Хрущёва к вершине правления в Кремле. Процесс десталинизации, начавшейся именно в период правления нового генерального секретаря Партии, затронул политическую, экономическую и, не в меньшей степени, социальную сферы, в рамках которой была произведена реформа семейного законодательства в отношении нетерапевтических аборт и детей, рожденных вне брака. На первый взгляд, это указывало на появление новых и существенных показателей по сближению с западным семейным правом, однако в действительности реформы в этой области представляли собой нечто большее, чем компромисс, направленный на баланс между свободой выбора и законодательным закреплением семейных обязанностей

(Nakachi 2021). Можно заметить, как в рамках конкретной задачи побудить «основную ячейку общества», семью, максимизировать свой вклад в строительство коммунистического государства закон, являясь прямым отражением политической мысли, претерпел значительную эволюцию: из инструмента преобразований он превратился в средство мобилизации, а затем – в механизм, направленный на максимальное использование социального потенциала, реализуемого семьей (Juviler 1967: 35-40).

Именно в этом контексте разворачивается повествование Елены Чижовой, обнажая всю несостоятельность планов, выстроенных железной логикой государства; катастрофичные «побочные эффекты» в виде расщепления индивидуальности обнаруживают драматизм реальности, не делая, однако, роман произведением, обличающим сложившуюся власть. Бытовая проза Чижовой, представлена избыточным обращением к временной данности, которая, прорисовываясь в жизни главных героев, является проявлением всепронизывающей силы прошлого, иллюзорности и призрачности настоящего и невозможностью освобождения от последнего. Очень часто прошлое становится ключевым событием, обладающим травматическим характером с целым рядом тягостных последствий, как отмечает Елена Гоцило (1994: 205-228), ссылаясь в целом на современную женскую прозу, которая, в силу этих и других обстоятельств, становится самостоятельной отраслью современной русской литературы:

It is the feminist revisionary imperative necessitated by women's ubiquitous cultural alienation, their social marginality and exclusion from 'the great parade of culture,' that confers significance and validity upon women's literature as an independent object of study. (Goscilo 1989: XVI-XVII)

Елена Чижова, обращаясь к быту, использует его как экспериментальную плоскость, в которой она очерчивает в резкой и категоричной форме различия между жизнью мужчин и женщин. Именно женщины проявляют себя в повседневной действительности, разрушающей стереотип патриархальной семьи, восстают против эстетического канона социалистического реализма, демонстрируя, с одной стороны, дисфункциональное и страдающее женское тело, которое сильно отличается от официальной иконографии, а с другой – представление о женщине, которая существует благодаря насыщенной эмоциональной семейной жизни, пропитанной в том числе болезненными воспоминаниями, связанными с утратой своих корней и близких людей. Именно это происходит с «бабушками» Гликерией, Евдокией и Ариадной, когда они в своей коммунальной квартире впервые включают телевизор – тотемное приспособление нового общества, которое как машина времени переносит их в прошлое, в разгар первомайского парада 1941 года:

Ариадна глаза закрыла:

– Помню. Мои тоже ходили. Младшего дома оставили
– втроем пошли, с институтом.

– Господи... – Гликерия осеклась, руки на груди сводит.
Ариадна сидит, впилась глазами.

<...>

– Если в сорок первом, они же все, почитай, мертвые...
Которые в блокаду, которых – на фронте... Когда ж они
начали? Перед войной? Кино-то, – вспоминает, – и до
войны снимали. Ох, – за стол взялась. – Тошно мне...

<...>

Ариадна входит.

– Нет, – глаза сухие, темные, – не могу. Как подумаю,
что мои там идут. Живые...

Евдокия говорит:

– Сядь-ка.

Выслушала – молчит.

Гликерия морщится, морщится, сейчас заплачет.

(Чижова 2010: 47-48)

Реакция трех женщин наглядно демонстрирует, как утрата опорных элементов в жизни человека, уход близких, чувство потери приводят к тому, что навязанные проявления силы, победы, мачизма, экономических и военных достижений терпят крах раз и навсегда; именно здесь якобы наступившее всеобщее процветание обнаруживает всю свою несостоятельную и иллюзорную сущность.

Весь нарратив разворачивается, таким образом, на фоне равнодействующих и одновременно с этим противоположных сил: тогда как государственная программа была направлена на искажение представлений о семье, отцовстве и материнстве, а также на деформацию самой сущности этих понятий³, героини

- 3 Именно в этот период безбрачие и добровольное решение не иметь детей впервые были признаны государственными преступлениями. Принятые меры оказались достаточно жесткими, и, учитывая демографическую асимметрию между полами, можно предположить, что эти меры в первую очередь были направлены на мужчин. Однако наблюдались весьма любопытные явления: государственная политика сводилась к исключительно количественным показателям, с тем чтобы установить, сколько раз каждый мужчина мог стать отцом, вступая в союз с одной или несколькими женщинами, и кого из детей, появившихся в результате этих связей, он бы воспитывал.

С целью оптимизации уровня рождаемости пронаталистская политика правительства признала более эффективной возможность для мужчин участвовать в процессе деторождения как находясь в браке, так и за его пределами, позволяя тем самым незамужним женщинам становиться матерями с одобрения государства, которое таким образом обретало в определенной степени родительские права по отношению к детям, рождаемым в неполных семьях: “Khrushchev’s project instead proposed a system where both unmarried women and prospective fathers would not be

романа воссоздают и оберегают семейный очаг; в то время как в обществе отмечается явный демографический дисбаланс, возникший после Второй мировой войны – когда во имя героизма и патриотизма было принесено в жертву целое поколение молодых мужчин, а большинство из тех, кто остался в живых, были в основном пьяницами, бабниками или бездельниками – действия женщин становятся гимном жизни, хотя и ознаменованным изображением смерти в самом начале романа, когда похоронная процессия с гробом матери вырисовывается в памяти ее дочери:

Мое первое воспоминание: снег... Ворота, тощая белая лошадь. Мы с бабушками бредем за телегой, а лошадь большая, только почему-то грязная. А еще оглобли – длинные, волокутся по снегу. В телеге что-то темное. Бабушки говорят: гроб. Это слово я знаю, но все равно удивляюсь, ведь гроб должен быть стеклянный. Тогда бы все увидели, что мама спит, но скоро проснется. Я это знаю, только не могу рассказать... (Чижова 2010: 5)

Глядя на свое отражение в зеркале времени, «Софья-Сюзанна», теперь уже молодая женщина, которой

discouraged from procreation in their relationships and where the welfare of their existing and future children could be assured. This was done by providing government support to single mothers, reintroducing out-of-wedlock births, and giving the unmarried mothers the 'right' to leave their children in state orphanages. Because of the state's full involvement in raising out-of-wedlock children, women would not have to be afraid of getting pregnant, and male partners would not have to be afraid of impregnating their sexual partners. Khrushchev's proposal was designed to encourage both men and women to have non-conjugal sexual relationships that would result in procreation" (Nakachi 2021: 37).

принадлежит эта реминисценция, пытается восстановить свою жизнь из воспоминаний, сплетая из них крепкое полотно событий, над которыми возвышается триада женских фигур, заменивших ей умершую мать. Перед нами матриархальная семья в самом специфическом смысле этого слова, состоящая из целого круга женщин, голосов ушедших эпох, связанных между собой не родственными узами, а глубокой любовью к маленькой девочке, символу хрупкости будущего, которое нужно оберегать и поддерживать любой ценой. Главных героинь романа объединяет еще одна сила, противостоящая предыдущей – а именно скорбь из-за утраты дорогого и привычного: как дочь лишилась присутствия матери, ее ласки и заботы, так и три пожилые женщины утратили свою идентичность, принадлежность к тому прошлому, которое было уничтожено настоящим. Однако, так называемая советскость, одной из наиболее характерных черт которой является совместное проживание в коммунальной квартире, обретает здесь противоположное значение, превращаясь в интенсивный процесс «ткачества», устанавливая таким образом новый семиотический порядок (Kristeva 1979: 32). Он возрождает женщин-ткачих, которые борются за то, чтобы утвердить свою внутреннюю самостоятельность в процессе восстановления прошлого через «логос», поток которого проявляется в гетерогенности, призванной прервать монотонность повседневной речи. Чижова, как и другие славянские писательницы современной литературной арены, прибегает к классической мифологии, чтобы возобновить ее в соответствии со своими замыслами и нуждами, реализуя стратегию «воссоздания» мифических, библейских и сказочных фабул патриархального склада в соответствии с приемом, определяемым феминистскими критиками как «апокрифизация» мифа (Szybowicz 2010: 36). Возникающее в результате этого процесса эхо становится носителем новых

смыслов, одновременно позволяя выявить, как патриархальное общество манипулирует женщинами, применяя в их отношении репрессивные меры.

Ряд антиномий запечатлен и в противопоставлении городского и домашнего пространства. Первое, понимаемое в основном как результат гражданского процесса, касается последовательного ряда взаимоотношений, которые создаются производственными силами, социальными институтами, учреждениями и нормативными структурами (Pérez Prieto 2017: 14-17). Многочисленные современные исследования не только демонстрируют дифференцированное использование общественного пространства мужчинами и женщинами (Sánchez de Madariaga 2013), но и подтверждают, что последние испытывают в нем больше ограничений и внутреннего дискомфорта (Valentine 1989; Darke 1996). Согласно модели «trip-chaining», женщины склонны к более локальным и фрагментированным перемещениям, которые необходимы им для удовлетворения потребностей и забот о доме, семье и нуждающихся в уходе родственниках (Criado-Perez 2020), в то же время они варьируют свои ежедневные маршруты и места, в которых они бывают, а также время выполнения определенных действий из-за страха и чувства незащищенности. Домашнее пространство по своей природе не только является пространством уединения и эмоционального покоя, но и представляет собой – в особенности в случае коммунальной квартиры – пространство, обусловленное экономическими обстоятельствами, что радикально ограничивает возможность индивидуальной и общественной автономности, выхода за рамки правил, структурирующих общество (Aureli, Shéhérazade 2020).

Город, по территории которого перемещаются главные героини – Ленинград, парадигматическое место, символическое и реальное одновременно, с явными топонимическими

отсылками, позволяющими осуществить его историко-географическую идентификацию:

Вчера, на Офицерской, гляжу, опять копают. Яму огромную вырыли, пар из нее – клубами. Сбоку мостки, по краю треноги выставили. Софью веду, батюшки, нечистая сила: из под земли-то голоса.

<...>

На Офицерской-то – где? <...>

– Да тут, за углом. Как она у них? Декабристов.

Гликерия сахарок сосет – задумалась:

– Декабристы-то эти когда прославились? В революцию или в войну?

– Бог с тобой. – Ариадна плечиком пожимает. – Это же еще в прошлом веке. Декабрьское восстание восемьсот двадцать пятого года. Против крепостного права. (Чижова 2010: 12)

Городской мираж захватывает Антонину, которая, покинув родную деревню, полностью погружается в новую социальную реальность, сразу же нарушая нормы патриархальной системы. Незапланированная беременность – плод случайного знакомства – приведет ее к попытке сделать аборт, подвергая свое тело истязаниям распространенных подпольных практик, в надежде не потерять работу и не быть вынужденной вернуться в родной город. Попытка не увенчалась успехом и у нее родилась дочь с отклонением в виде особой формы «селективного мутизма». Сюзанна-Софья не разговаривает, ее психическое состояние не позволяет ей говорить ни в незнакомых, ни в привычных ситуациях, хотя она и проявляет большие способности к изучению иностранного языка и заметную склонность к художественному творчеству. Как и в *Дочери Бухары* Людмилы Улицкой, в романе Чижовой дисфункциональная личность становится объектом любви,

заботы и исключительной опеки: Антонина будет всячески стремиться оградить свою дочь от нездорового любопытства посторонних, осознавая опасность возможного вмешательства «государственных органов» коллектива завода, где она работает.

С одной стороны, немота Сюзанны-Софьи может рассматриваться как конкретная репрезентация экспрессивной афазии современности, когда грубая тривиальность повседневной жизни фактически препятствует самовыражению личности. С другой стороны, на символическом христианском уровне, который здесь ко всему прочему обладает негативной коннотацией, временная неспособность говорить может представлять собой наказание, которому подвергается женщина-мать за стремление освободить свое тело от социальных ограничений и этико-религиозного диктата, за вопиющий призыв к свободе как при зачатии внебрачного ребенка – у девочки нет отца – так и при попытке прервать беременность. Таким образом, несмотря на мирской образ жизни общества, в котором живет Антонина, здесь сохраняются граничащие с суеверием представления о том, что непрощенные грехи предков могут влиять на здоровье и даже на душу будущего ребенка.

В коммунальной квартире, вдали от любопытных глаз, даже «названные» бабушки отказываются от настоящего времени, пошлость которого сокрушает их души, и предаются ностальгической тоске по ушедшим временам. В созерцании прошлого, состоящего из воспоминаний об учебе, влюбленностях, благополучии, уюте и близких людях, три пожилые женщины с любовью заботятся о ребенке:

Евдокия за кашей направилась: мать с ночи сварила, сунула под подушку. Из-под подушки каша рассыпчатая. Гречинка к гречинке. Другую и не станет:

ни манную, ни овсянку. Евдокия ворчит: в садах-то что попало суют. Греча – дорогая, еще и достань поди. Хорошо, Антонине на производстве выписывают. По два кило в месяц: на саму и на ребенка.

Ариадна одела, вывела. Софьюшка приучена – сама к крану идет. Гликерия с ковшиком наготове. Летом в трубах тепленькая. А зимой греть приходится, чтоб на ручки слить.

<...>

Евдокия командует: ну, отдыхайте. Пусть ребенок в спокойе поест.

Потом Ариаднин черед: сказку читать. У ней свои, французские. Книжка пухлая, с картинками. (Чицова 2010: 12)

Они обучают ее французскому языку, водят в театр, напитывая душу и тело девочки, они ухаживают за ней, в особенности, когда ее мать заболевает раком, и сплетают полотно из обстоятельств, которые приведут к тому, что государство передаст в опеку ребенка, теперь уже сироту, этим трем женщинам, совершенно чужим для нее в глазах ограниченных законов Коллектива.

То что происходит в квартире противопоставляется тому, что происходит за ее пределами, в «чужом» пространстве. Прежде всего, это завод, управление которым полностью доверено женщинам, выполняющим специфические роли по уже отработанной в советском обществе схеме, которая начала формироваться с начала послевоенного периода. Речь идет о сочетании ролевых моделей трудолюбивой и неутомимой работницы и руководительницы, призванной соблюдать и обеспечивать функционирование государственной машины. В этой связи вспоминается персонаж Зои Ивановны, высшей инстанции завода, на котором работает Антонина – именно она дергает за ниточки «женского совета», который был

созван в срочном порядке для того чтобы разобраться с «душей» Антонины:

За мешками на склад иду – Зоя Ивановна навстречу: «Вот, – говорит, – Беспалова. Хорошо, что попалась. В местком зайди после смены – дело к тебе есть». <...> Женщины за столом расселись, а Зоя Ивановна – во главе.

«Заходи, – кивает, – Антонина. Мы вот тут женским советом собрались – побеседовать про твою душу. Поговорим, о жизни твоей подумаем. Раз уж меня не слушаешь». Голос ласковый, тихий – будто муха осенняя. Жужжит. (Чижова 2010: 57-58)

В соответствии с установками советского государства, «новое», а то есть Коллектив, олицетворяемый Зоей Ивановной, представляет собой на самом деле прошлое, фаллогоцентрическую культуру, где язык, используемый в обиходе, тоже является выражением патриархата. Антонине не оставляют другого выхода – женсовет перечисляет ее недостатки, клеймит ее «распутную» жизнь и в качестве единственного решения указывает на необходимость вразумиться и исправить ситуацию прибегнув к репаративному браку:

Зоя Ивановна узел поправила. «Вот, – приступает, – Антонина. Сигналы на тебя идут – на твою беспутную жизнь. Я уж и так и эдак – можно сказать, по-матерински, а тебе – и горя мало: по-своему норовишь. Нехорошо, чтобы женщина себя не соблюдала – ребенок подрастает, а тем более – дочь. Какой ей с тебя пример? Женщина, она – мать. А потом уж – остальное. По-женски, – оглядывается, – мы тебя понимаем, только и в стороне стоять не намерены – не имеем такого права. Вот и ответь нам: как у вас с

Ручейниковым Николаем – серьезно или так?» <...>
«Женщина, – Зоя Ивановна лямку поправила, –
хранительница домашнего очага».
«Чего-чего?» – Сытина переспрашивает. «Да, –
объясняет, – пословица такая. По-нашему, плиты или
печки, – руками повела, будто уголья загребают. –
Значит, порядка в доме <...>». (Чижова 2010: 58)

Эта сцена отражает женоненавистническое мировоззрение советского государства, где мужчины по-прежнему играют роль героев посредством спасительной практики брака «по договоренности» в случае незапланированной беременности, а женщинам все еще отводится исключительно роль матерей, дочерей, сестер, невест. Антонина, наоборот, всячески пытается вырваться из «логики» законодательной косности; ее «дисфункциональность», грубо подчеркнутая нарративом женщин с завода, становится детонатором своего рода анархического бунта, который внешне может показаться проявлением смиренности: «Головой киваю, а слов-то не вымолвить. Будто кол в горло вбили. Ни охнуть ни вздохнуть» (Чижова 2010: 59).

Этот бунт – это не интеллектуальная позиция, он порожден исключительно внутренней силой и любовью к дочери, которую она всячески пытается оградить от агрессии внешнего мира, не допускающего разнообразие:

<...> немоту-то от них скрыла. А ну как всплывет? <...>
К ним попади только – затаскают по врачам. Совсем
загубят девку. Нет уж, решаю. Не отдам. Живем
хорошо, не хуже других. Ишь, театры у них... Так наша
тоже пойдет в Мариинский. Обещали же – на балет. А
праздники... Так и мы праздник устроим – елку
нарядим, поглядим еще, чья лучше... (Чижова 2010: 23)

Взаимосвязь матери и дочери, очевидная даже в диегетической организации романа, проявляющаяся в заботе друг о друге и выходящая за пределы земного и потустороннего, должна рассматриваться здесь как процесс самостоятельного и автономного конструирования женской идентичности. Становится очевидным, что каждый отдельный элемент повествования, будь то внутри квартиры или за ее пределами, когда речь идет о пяти главных героинях, выражает определенные представления о доминирующем символическом порядке, существующем вовне.

Те же прогулки, которые совершают Ариадна, Гликерия и Евдокия с Софьей, отнюдь не случайны и не являются всего лишь развлечением для маленькой девочки. Прodelанный во время прогулок путь менялся в зависимости от времени года и обладал более глубоким значением: постоянным эпицентром являются дом и церковь, где была покрещена маленькая Софьюшка и куда ее водят причащаться, учиться молиться, слушать о житие святых. С этой точки зрения христианская символика имеет позитивный смысловой заряд как предвестник света. Так, посещение церкви, рассказы бабушек, особенно Гликерии, слова которой окутаны некой меланхолией о собственном существовании, становятся для девочки непрерывным Богоявлением, поскольку открывают ей новый мир – мир икон, мир праведников и грешников, а также представления о рае и аде:

С бабушкой Гликерией лучше ходить. С ней к Николаю-угоднику: «Молись, – учит, – Софьюшка, за странствующих и путешествующих».

Он и в комнате у нее. А под ним огонь – в красной чашке. Бабушка подойдет. Стоит, разговаривает. Шепчет, шепчет. А он молчит. Видно, не умеет говорить.

«Николай, – рассказывает, – Святитель за всех заступается. Кто по морю плавает, кто в лесу заблудится – вот он на путь и наставляет. Во тюрьмах сидящих посещает, в болезни лежащих исцеляет...»

К иконе подведет – объяснит: «Вот, гляди. Вся жизнь человеческая представлена. И на этом свете, и на том. Там-то у них светло.

<...>

А внизу-то, – пугает, – ад. Тут уж муки: плач и скрежет зубовой. В аду, небось, грешники. Только Он и к ним спустится – снизойдет <...>». (Чижова 2010: 14)

Софья становится для трех бабушек своеобразным ключом к Царству Божьему и спасению их душ от грехов, совершенных или пережитых ими в настоящем, в котором они живут. Став взрослой и лишившись этих женских фигур, она полностью берет на себя роль повествователя и, перенимая диегетические приемы у своих «бабушек», которых больше нет в живых, создает систему связей и отсылок к памяти, переосмысления и репрезентации материнской фигуры на уровне реминисценций, воспоминаний и фантазий:

Иногда я стелю камчатную скатерть с розами и представляю, как мы садимся вокруг стола – и отец, и мама, и бабушки. Это для них я купила такую большую квартиру. Чтобы у них был дом, в котором больше не страшно, потому что это – наши комнаты и их никто не отнимет.

Теперь я всегда с ними, даже если они меня не видят, как будто между нами глухая стена. Но я все равно хожу. Сяду, посижу и снова встаю к мольберту, чтобы, превращаясь в другую, памятливую девочку, слушать их голоса. (Чижова 2010: 100)

5. Заключение

Елена Чижова посредством женских фигур романа *Время женщины* пытается восстановить идентичность, основанную на прочном женском символическом универсуме, противопоставляя его таким образом бинарной концепции «мужское-женское». Для этого используется система языковых и литературных образов, обращенных к альтернативным формам коммуникации, с тем чтобы продемонстрировать, что идентичность может быть обретаема лишь в результате сложного пути становления. Изображая разрыв отношений между дочерью и матерью, обусловленный наступлением болезни последней, а затем и ее уходом, который здесь приобретает символическую функцию разрыва между прошлым и настоящим, автор отвечает метафизике смерти, на которой построено западное мышление, понятием «рождаемости» (*natality*) Ханны Арендт (2017), рассматриваемым как пространство для альтернативного понимания свободы. Монолитной концепции женщины-матери, насаждаемой коллективом фабрики и государством, Чижова противопоставляет материнство как этическую, политическую и экзистенциальную возможность, которая, выходя за границы самореференции, в романе реализуется в «логосах» памяти, воспоминаний и явления призрачных фигур.

Библиография

- Абашева Марина Петровна (2001), *Литература в поисках лица. Русская проза конца XX века: становление авторской идентичности*, Пермь, Издательство Пермского университета.
- Казакова Галина Михайловна (2017), «Мейнстрим в современной

- литературе: культурологический аспект», *Вестник культуры и искусств*, 1 (49): 60-64.
- Погорелая Елена Алексеевна (2010), «Букер–2009: ‘Роман: проект или прозрение?’», *Вопросы литературы*, 3: 203-229.
- Сивакова Наталья Александровна (2014), «Специфика эволюции документальной литературы в XX веке», *Вісник МДПУ ім. І.П. Шамякіна*, 3 (44): 139-143.
- Чижова Елена (2009), «Время женщин. Роман», *Звезда*, 3: 7-102.
- Чижова Елена (2010), *Время женщины*, Москва, АСТ.
- Чижова Елена (2012), «Мы не можем остановить процесс осмысления нашей истории», *Петербургские старости*, <<http://spbstarosti.ru/kulturnyj-sobesednik/elena-chizhova-my-nemozhem-ostanovit-process-osmysleniya-nashej-istorii.html>>, (дата обращения 28/07/2024).
- Aragona Giancarlo (2018), *La Russia post-sovietica. Dalla caduta del comunismo a Putin: storia della grande transizione*, Milano, Mondadori.
- Arendt Hannah (2017), *Vita activa. La condizione umana*, trad. di Sergio Finzi, Milano, Bompiani.
- Augé Marc (2018), *Nonluoghi*, trad. di Dominique Rolland e Carlo Milani, Milano, Elèuthera.
- Aureli Pier Vittorio, Giudici Maria Shéhérazade (2020), “Orrore Familiare. Per Una Critica Dello Spazio Domestico”, *Disagiotopia. Malessere, Precarietà ed esclusione nel tardo capitalismo*, a cura di Andreola Florencia, Roma, DEditore: 130-166.
- Boffa Giuseppe (1995), *Dall’Urss alla Russia, storia di una crisi non finita*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.
- Breuer Josef, Sigmund Freud (1977), *Casi clinici*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, vol. 1.
- Brintlinger Angela (2004), “The Hero in the Madhouse: the Post-Soviet Novel Confronts the Soviet Past”, *Slavic Review*, 63: 43-65.
- Caruth Cathy (1996), *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Charcot Jean Martin (1998), *L’hystérie*, Paris, L’Harmattan.
- Criado Perez Caroline (2020), *Invisibili. Come il nostro mondo ignora le donne in ogni campo. Dati alla mano*, trad. di Carla Palmieri, Torino, Einaudi.

- Darke Jane (1996), "The Man-Shaped City", *Changing Places: Women's Lives in the City*, eds. Booth Chris, Darke Jane, Yeandle Susan, London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.: 88-99.
- Dobrenko Evgeny, Lipovetsky Mark (2015, eds.), *Russian Literature Since 1991*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Dobrenko Evgeny, Shcherbenok Andrey (2011), "Between History and the Past: The Soviet Legacy as a Traumatic Object of Contemporary Russian Culture", *Slavonica*, 17: 77-84.
- Ferraris Maurizio (2012), *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*, Bari, Laterza.
- Gerschenkron Alexander (1971), *Lo sviluppo industriale in Europa e in Russia*, Bari, Laterza.
- Goscilo Helena (1989, ed.), *Balancing Acts: Contemporary Stories by Russian Women*, Bloomington and Indiana, Indiana University Press.
- Goscilo Helena (1994), "Paradigm Lost? Contemporary Women's Fiction", *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, eds. Clyman Toby W., Greene Diana, Westport-London, Greenwood Press: 205-228.
- Griffith Mark (2001), "Antigone and Her Sister(s). Embodying Women in Greek Tragedy", *Making Silence Speak. Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, eds. Lardinois André and McClure Laura, Princeton, Princeton University Press: 117-136.
- Gudkov Lev (2021), "The Unity of the Empire in Russia Is Maintained by Three Institutions: the School, the Army, and the Police", *Levada-Center*, <<https://www.levada.ru/en/2021/05/12/levgudkov-the-unity-of-the-empire-in-russia-is-maintained-by-three-institutions-the-school-the-army-and-the-police/>>, (дата обращения 25/11/2024).
- Herman Judith Lewis (2005), *Guarire dal trauma*, trad. di Roberta Russo, Roma, Magi Edizioni.
- Juviler Peter H. (1967), "Family Reforms on the Road to Communism", *Soviet Policy-making: Studies of Communism in Transition*, eds. Juviler Peter H. and Morton Henry W., New York, Washington, London, Frederick A. Praeger: 29-60.
- Kristeva Julia (1979), *La rivoluzione del linguaggio poetico: L'avanguardia nell'ultimo scorcio del diciannovesimo secolo: Lautréamont e Mallarmé*, trad. di Silvana Eccher Dall'Eco, Angela Musso, Giuliana Sangalli, Venezia, Marsilio.

- Nakachi Mie (2021), *Replacing the Dead: The Politics of Reproduction in the Postwar Soviet Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Pérez Prieto Laura (2017), “Epistemología feminista y conocimientos desde el Sur global”, *Ecología Política*, 54: 14-17.
- Piretto Gian Piero (2001), *Il radioso avvenire. Mitologie culturali sovietiche*, Torino, Einaudi.
- Sánchez de Madariaga Inés (2013), “Mobility of Care: Introducing New Concepts in Urban Transport”, *Fair Shared Cities: The Impact of Gender Planning in Europe*, eds. Roberts Marion and Sánchez de Madariaga Inés, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing.
- Sofocle (2023), *Antigone*, Milano, Rusconi.
- Szybowicz Eliza (2010) “Inne historie kobiet. Apokryfy feministyczne w prozie Izabeli Filipiak”, *Beatrycze i inne. Mity kobiet w literaturze i kulturze*, pod red. Borkowska Grażyna i Wiśniewska Lidia, Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria: 34-44.
- Ulam Adam B. (1981), *In nome del popolo*, Milano, Garzanti.
- Valentine Gill (1989), “The Geography of Women’s Fear”, *Area*, 21 (4): 385-390.
- Zaslavsky Viktor (1981), *Il consenso organizzato. La società sovietica negli anni di Brežnev*, Bologna, Il Mulino.

Х.

Вечные повторения: мифологические образы в романе Татьяны Толстой *Кысь*

Iryna Shylnikova

1. *Кысь* – сказочная антиутопия в русском фольклорном ключе

С середины 1980-х годов видоизмененное направление социалистического реализма не справлялось с вопросами, связанными с новой ролью писателей в обществе и их уверенностью относительно того, могут ли они сконструировать миробраз нового общественного устройства в культурно-социальном контексте. Именно в это время такие культурологические факторы как делегитимация идеологического и утопического дискурса, кризис иерархической системы миропонимания, осознание симулятивности общественного бытия, способствовавшие зарождению русского постмодернизма, достигли своего апогея (Липовецкий 1997: 211). Литература этого периода формировалась в недрах постмодернизма, основываясь на интертекстуальности как средстве мифологизации и демифологизации окружающей действительности, на новой философской стратегии, дающей ключ к постижению секретов саморегуляции хаоса, направленной на поиск гармонии внутри него же (Липовецкий 1997: 33). Все эти черты нашли

свое художественное воплощение в романе Татьяны Толстой *Кысь*.

Первый и последний на сегодняшний день роман писательницы, опубликованный в 2000 году, писался на протяжении долгих 14 лет, с 1986 по 2000 год, о чем указано в конце произведения. Упоминание столь долгого периода написания подчеркивает сложность и масштаб работы над текстом, который требовал от автора осмысления важных философских вопросов о языке, культуре, памяти, наследии и обществе в целом, что, вероятно, требовало многочисленных подходов и пересмотров. Указание на годы работы может быть связано и с тем, что в течение этого времени Россия пережила важнейшие исторические и культурные изменения: в стране произошло множество глобальных социальных и политических перемен, изменился идеологический и политический внутренний климат, менялись отношения между человеком и государством. Опыт этих изменений и личные наблюдения Татьяны Толстой за обществом обрели свое выражение в романе через символические образы и сюрреалистическую постапокалиптическую реальность.

Начало работы над романом *Кысь* относится к середине 1980-х годов и можно было бы предположить, что оно напрямую связано с катастрофой на Чернобыльской АЭС, однако несмотря на то, что в романе, действительно, присутствуют упоминания о радиации, писательница неоднократно проясняла, что в ее понимании по-настоящему катастрофическим событием для российского государства стала революция и именно она скрывает под собой метафору «большого взрыва»: «У всех свои взрывы, катаклизмы, войны, гибель привычных миров. А 1917 год? Ничего хуже этого в нашей истории не было» (Толстая 2007: 331).

Итак, отправной точкой событий в романе становится условный взрыв и это не просто катастрофа на Чернобыльской

АЭС или революция, уничтожившая прежнюю систему ценностей, но и метафора глобальной катастрофы, приводящей к разрушению устоявшегося образа жизни. Именно в этом контексте и начинается формироваться сюжет романа *Кысь*. Взрыв, конец света, регрессия к доцивилизованному первобытному обществу, утрата культурной и национальной памяти, переходящая во всеобщую амнезию, разрыв между поколениями, мутации биологических форм жизни, утрата культурного наследия, трансформация языка – все эти темы раскрываются в романе Толстой. Новый мир, возникший после катастрофы, сохраняет отголоски древних мифов о мироздании, основанных на традиционных мифологемах славянской культуры. Однако рядом с этими архаичными мифами в романе уживаются и новые, сформировавшиеся в XX веке: подходящий налог в тринадцать процентов, Майские и Октябрьские выходные, а также «Бабский Праздник» – Международный женский день.

В романе *Кысь* автор предлагает собственную модель русской истории. Действие романа разворачивается на семи холмах, на месте бывшей Москвы через двести лет после атомной катастрофы, именуемой героями «взрывом»: «А зовется наш городок, родная сторонуха – Федор-Кузьмичск¹, а до этого,

1 Эпонимом, давшим название городу, является его правитель Федор Кузьмич, чье имя создает более чем очевидную отсылку к одноименной исторической фигуре. Старец Федор Кузьмич, живший в Сибири в XIX веке, по одной из легенд, возникшей еще при его жизни, считался российским императором Александром I, инсценировавшим свою смерть и ставшим скитальцем. В 1984 году Федор Кузьмич был канонизирован Русской православной церковью в составе Собора сибирских святых. В романе *Кысь* именем праведного старца Татьяна Толстая нарекает шарлатана и трикстера, трансформируя авторитетный миф в игру с ним. Связанная с «русской идеей» основа системы

говорит матушка, звался Иван-Порфирьичск, а еще до этого – Серей-Сергеичск, а прежде имя ему было – Южные Склады, а совсем прежде – Москва» (Толстая 2015: 18). В новом постапокалиптическом обществе наступили определенные «последствия»-мутации: у кого-то вырос хвост или гребешки, кто-то зарос шерстью и ходит на четвереньках; зайцы вьют гнезда на деревьях, а куры в холодное время года улетают в теплые края. Для управления в условиях некоего «вторичного мезолита» правительство использует осколки чего-то советского, чего-то золотоордынского, и чего-то первобытно-общинного, в сопровождении тоже мутировавшей, но вполне опознаваемой национальной самобытности (Рабинович 2000: 18). Федор-Кузьмичск недоступен для внешнего мира, и в этой недоступности усматривается отголосок советского общества, находившегося за железным занавесом. Однако в романе присутствуют и некоторые более актуальные отголоски российской внутренней политики: «Посреди городка стоит дозорная башня с четырьмя окнами, и во все четыре окна смотрят стражи. Чеченцев высматривают. <...> Если завидят чеченцев, велено кричать ‘Чеченцы! Чеченцы!’; тогда народ со всех слобод сбежится, палками в горшки бить начнет, чеченцев стращать» (Толстая 2015: 8-9).

Сама же Толстая, размышляя о своем замысле, признается, что выбор образа «недруга» для ее антиутопического мира был продиктован не историческими реалиями, а отголосками литературных и фольклорных представлений. В этом контексте чеченцы, знакомые автору по произведениям Лермонтова²,

ценностей деконструируется через десакрализацию мифа о Федоре Кузьмиче. Более глубоко эта тема была рассмотрена Е.Б. Гайдуковой в статье *Цикл легенд о Федоре Кузьмиче на рубеже XX-XXI вв.: проблема демифологизации сюжета* (Гайдукова 2008).

2 Кавказская тема в творчестве Лермонтова занимает особое место, и

стали лишь символическим воплощением врага. Толстая подчеркивает, что в ее тексте нет политического подтекста, а лишь игровое использование мифологических и культурных архетипов:

Например, у меня еще в 1986, относительно невинном году было придумано, что главный враг моих персонажей – чеченцы. Просто так, потому что чеченцев я знала только лермонтовских: «злой чечен ползет на берег, точит свой кинжал». Это еще моя няня пела нам колыбельную. <...> на тот момент чеченцев в природе не было. Время идет, появляется Хасбулатов... <...> Потом Дудаев... <...> А уж когда началась первая

заметную роль в ней играет так называемый «чеченский след». Этот мотив прослеживается практически во всех его «кавказских произведениях». Оттуда же и его знаменитые строки «злой чечен ползет на берег, точит свой кинжал» из его *Казачьей колыбельной песни* (1838), которые отнюдь не демонстрируют предвзятое отношение Лермонтова к чеченцам. Во время пребывания в станице Червленной поэт услышал, как молодая казачка напевала над колыбелью, и, вдохновленный этим моментом, сразу же написал стихи, которые впоследствии стали народной песней – его целью не было подчеркнуть враждебность по отношению к чеченцам. И в повести *Бэла* Лермонтов восхищается именно умением русского человека адаптироваться к обычаям народов, среди которых он живет; это тему впоследствии он более подробно раскрыл в очерке *Кавказец*. В этом проявляется одна из ключевых черт «кавказского цикла» Лермонтова – интерес, уважение и даже восхищение чужой культурой, причем не с позиции покорителя, а с позиции чувствующего, наблюдающего человека. Интересно, что среди горцев у Лермонтова был лишь один близкий друг – чеченец-кунак Галуб, о котором он говорит в стихотворении *Валерик*. И, наконец, Мцыри, один из самых ярких персонажей русской литературы, также связан с чеченской темой. Некоторые литературоведы считают, что в поэме *Мцыри* отразилась судьба художника Петра Захарова, который по происхождению был чеченцем (Гапуров 2014: 60-61).

чеченская война, то надо было текст менять, но я разозлилась: что это я за раба политкорректности, – и оставила все как было. Никаких намеков тут нет, чистая мифология. (Толстая, Толстая 2008: 19)

Никита Елисеев полагает, что Татьяна Толстая описывает шовинистическую, ксенофобскую мечту – чаемый «русский мир», замкнутый со всех сторон, избыной, снежный сказочный остров во главе с народным вождем. По мнению критика, писательница настаивает на том, что эта мечта может осуществиться только в результате вселенской всемирной катастрофы, только после «взрыва» может всплыть обломок-остров Федор Кузмичск или Кудеяр-Кудеяровск:

Взрыв – метафора любого катаклизма, срывающего поверхностный слой культуры, разрушающего скрепы цивилизации. Взрыв может быть и атомным взрывом и взрывом социальным – революцией. Разоблачение славянофильской мечты о русском XVII веке, издевательство над «избыным» раем соединено у Татьяны Толстой с попыткой понять «утопию» как осуществление народного «подсознательного», изобразить революцию и постреволюцию как торжество национального «подсознательного». (Елисеев 2000: 17)

Народ в романе представлен тремя социальными группами: это «голубчики», «прежние» и «перерожденцы». «Прежние» это те, кто жил до взрыва, а значит помнит «прежнюю» жизнь; в качестве «последствия» они обрели способность не стареть, однако это не спасало их от возможной смерти, которая могла наступить, к примеру, в результате отравления зайцами или «огнецами» (Толстая 2015: 16). «Голубчики» – это постапокалиптические люди, родившиеся после взрыва, а разделение между первыми и вторыми

своеобразно разделению населения на интеллигенцию и народ. Что касается «перерожденцев» – это своеобразные нелюди, в тексте они описываются как создания с человеческим лицом и туловищем, покрытым шерстью, передвигающиеся на четвереньках, и для Татьяны Толстой они являются воплощением деградировавших слоев современного общества:

Что касается социальных слоев, которые нашли отражение в романе, дело в том, что перерожденцы – это не народ. Народом являются все в романе. «Прежние» более или менее относятся к интеллигенции, если это понимать очень широко. А перерожденцы, скотина, хамье – это люмпен. Перерожденцами в романе являются только бывшие таксисты. Меня всегда поражало, что русские таксисты и в России, и в Америке – это абсолютно чудовищная группа людей, которые если вешают фотографию, то либо Сталина, либо о-о-очень голой девушки. То есть это такой уровень сознания, ниже которого только тьма смертная. (Толстая 2021)

Автор конструирует свой особый мир, с его социальной иерархией, фантастической историей и географией, флорой и фауной, колоритно описывает нравы и обычаи «голубчиков», их песни, пляски, игры и забавы. Фантастический мир романа пронизан атмосферой глубокой первобытности, создающей ощущение времени, оторванного от цивилизации и современных достижений. Народ здесь живет в простых избах, разбросанных среди бескрайних полей, где отсутствует электричество и какие-либо признаки технического прогресса. Местные жители ловят и едят мышей³, пьют и курят «ржавь»,

3 Марк Липовецкий убежден, что вездеприсущие мыши в романе для

вместо хлеба едят «хлебеду», а вместо грибов – «грибыши». Создается парадоксальное ощущение, будто изображенное будущее отбрасывается назад, в глубины доисторического прошлого.

Основу сюжета составляет попытка приобщения «темного», архаического человека из «голубчиков», Бенедикта, к культуре. Предпосылкой для удачного окультуривания героя является тот факт, что его мать – одна из «прежних», а то есть выживших после «взрыва» людей. Именно она настаивает на том, чтобы ее сын обучился грамоте, и Бенедикт становится переписчиком, получая возможность читать книги, доступа к которым у обычного населения не было, поскольку они изымались. Однако попытка приобщения Бенедикта к культуре оказывается неудачной и приводит к плачевному результату. Несмотря на чтение книг и стремление к знанию, он остается во власти архаических, «темных» инстинктов и иллюзий, характерных для современного ему общества. Таким образом, в абсурдном и смешном мире романа *Кысь* ключевым элементом становится словесность, а точнее, стремление к обретению «Главной книги», в которой можно было бы найти ответ на вопрос о том, как жить. Именно эта жажда запускает цепь исторических, культурных, политических и других процессов, которые, как следует из текста, обеспечивают устойчивость «русского мира» даже несмотря на потрясающие его катастрофы и катаклизмы. Главный герой, «литературоцентричный неофит» Бенедикт, попадая в культурный мемориал, представляющий из себя

Татьяны Толстой, филолога по образованию, являются символом из греческой мифологии, олицетворяющим забвение (Липовецкий 2008: 383).

своеобразную борхесовскую библиотеку, испытывает литературу как «учебник жизни» на своем комически ущербном опыте и убеждается в «собственной неполноценности и в своем предательстве по отношению к старшему поколению – ‘прежним’» (Липовецкий 2008: 382-383).

Толстая воссоздает в романе парадигму человечества через мифологическое повествование, которое можно определить как «воспоминание о будущем», однако сама писательница его называет повествованием о «нашем вечном настоящем» (Толстая, Толстая 2008: 425). В качестве интертекстуальных ссылок проводились параллели с антиутопиями *История одного города* (1869-1870) Салтыкова-Щедрина, *Мы* (1924) Замятина, *Отклонение от нормы* (1955) Джона Уиндема, *Улитка на склоне* (1966) Братьев Стругацких, отмечалось (чаще в негативном ключе) фабульное сходство с антиутопиями 80-х годов *Лаз* (1991) Маканина, *Не успеть* (1989) Вячеслава Рыбакова. Возникновение столь многочисленных ассоциаций проясняет высказывание Юрия Михайловича Лотмана об архетипичности романа:

Пристальный анализ убеждает, что безграничность сюжетного разнообразия классического романа, по сути дела, имеет иллюзорный характер: сквозь него явственно просматриваются типологические модели, обладающие регулярной повторяемостью! <...> При этом непосредственный контакт с «неготовой, становящейся современностью» парадоксально сопровождается в романе регенерацией весьма архаических и отшлифованных многими веками культуры сюжетных стереотипов. Так рождается глубинное родство романа с архаическими формами фольклорно-мифологических сюжетов. (Лотман 1988: 325, 348)

По мнению Ирины Савкиной, Толстая лишь одна из длинного ряда тех, кто пытался понять Россию умом, постигнув суть русского мифа, в то время как одним из «ключей к шифру» в романе становится обсуждение важнейших составляющих этого мифа – таких как книга, литература, духовность, душа (Савкина 2023: 23). Сама же Толстая утверждает: «*Кысь* – это была попытка литературно описать живущее в этой парадигме общество с его особой логикой, наплевательством на идеи равенства, кумовством, nepотизмом. Пока все это сохраняется, ничего в России особо не изменится» (Гусарова 2015).

В произведении писательница подняла темы цикличности российской истории, невыученных уроков, тему памяти и забвения; тему литературоцентричности русского общества – ожидания от книги, и в целом от культуры, «высшего знания»: Толстая исследует темы счастья, соблазна и трагедии этого ожидания (Липовецкий 2001: 77). Мнения в отношении романа разделились на диаметрально противоположные, однако ни у кого не было сомнений в том, что роман стал важнейшим событием в современной русской литературе. Татьяне Толстой удалось реализовать успешный эстетический эксперимент, заключающийся в органичном соединении жанра антиутопии с элементами русской фольклорной и литературной сказочной традиции. И действительно, поэтическая структура романа удивительно богата сказочными образами: здесь и метель, и Мороз, и терема с остроконечной крышей, и «Окаян-дерево», и «Рыба – голубое перо», и величественная «Князьня Птица Паулин». Эти элементы сказки перемежаются с пословицами, приметами и заговорами. В этом разнообразном литературном пространстве соседствуют легенды, пафосные речи диссидентов и слоганы современности, создавая уникальный синтетический стиль, где границы между эпохами стираются (Спиридонова 2005: 98).

Романная форма *Кыси* имеет сложную структуру, вобравшую в себя многочисленные элементы различных жанровых моделей. Это прежде всего неомифологическая, сказочно-притчевая форма, включающая в себя социально-сатирические и антиутопические жанровые разновидности. Произведение называли сатирой, романом-фельетоном, антиутопией, ретроантиутопией, энциклопедией русской жизни (Савкина 2023: 56); Елена Гоцило определила *Кысь* как антиутопию, подводящую итог историко-культурной одержимости России (Goscilo 2003: 10). Липовецкий утверждает, что, поскольку в намерения автора не входило предсказывать будущее, роман не может считаться антиутопией, и что Толстая ставила перед собой задачу передать сегодняшний кризис языка, посткоммунистический распад иерархических отношений в культуре, когда культурные порядки советской цивилизации рухнули, погребая заодно и альтернативные, скрытые внутри антисоветские культурные иерархии (Лейдерман, Липовецкий 2003: 471).

Наталья Иванова высказала мнение о том, что роман *Кысь* был задуман автором именно как пародия на антиутопию:

Толстая не антиутопию очередную пишет, а пародию на нее. Причем не в иртеньевском, а тыняновском смысле. Она соединила антиутопию «интеллектуальную» (последствия Взрыва – от знаменитого американского фильма *На том берегу* до *Последней пасторали* Алеся Адамовича) с русским фольклором, со сказкой; соединила «научную фантастику» (популярный сюжет: взрыв отбрасывает страну в средневековье) со жгучим газетным фельетоном: то есть массолит с элитарной, изысканной прозой. Соединила, да еще и приперчила. Чем? Разочарованием, скепсисом, горечью. Пеплом несбывшихся иллюзий, надежд и мечтаний. Скорбью по потерянному-растерянному. (Иванова 2001: 218)

В романе соединяются элементы притчи, сказки, былички, анекдота, памфлета, фельетона, утопической легенды, сатирического произведения. Слои поэтического текста представлен многочисленными цитатами поэтов XIX и XX вв. из произведений А.С. Пушкина, М.Ю. Лермонтова, О. Мандельштама, А. Блока, М. Цветаевой, В. Маяковского, Б. Пастернака, С. Есенина, И. Анненского, Б. Окуджавы, Б. Гребенщикова и многих других.

Толстая часто использует цитаты как точное воспроизведение какого-либо «чужого» фрагмента, преобразуя смысл авторского текста прежде всего за счет его комического переосмысления. В *Кыси* именно правитель государства, Федор Кузьмич, является автором представленных «чужих» текстов, однако большинство из них не имеют атрибуции, так как истинный автор строк не упоминается. В романе встречаются и цитаты, сконструированные из нескольких источников. Так, «Великий Мурза» строит свой монолог на основе цитат из стихотворения Владимира Маяковского *Разговор с фининспектором о поэзии* и стихотворения *Ночь* Бориса Пастернака: «Думаете, мне легко сочинять? Изводишь единого слова ради тысячи тонн словесной руды, ага. Забыли? Я ж об этом сочинял. Не спи, не спи, художник. Не предавайся сну. Да и окромя искусства дел невпроворот <...>» (Толстая 2000: 76).

Цитаты, рассредоточенные по репликам персонажей, состоят из стихов, библейского текста, народной мудрости и несмотря на отсутствие атрибуции, они тем не менее легко узнаваемы: «Нате!» (В.В. Маяковский), «Суждены вам благие порывы, / Но свершить ничего не дано» (Н.А. Некрасов, *Рыцарь на час*), «Слышу речь не мальчика, но мужа» (А.С. Пушкин, *Борис Годунов*), «Митрофанушка, недоросль» (Д.И. Фонвизин), «страх, петля и яма» (Н. Гумилев, *Звездный ужас*), «Гордись, таков и ты, поэт, и для тебя закона нет» (А.С.

Пушкин, *Езерский*: «Гордись: таков и ты, поэт, / И для тебя *условий* нет»), строки из Библии: «в великом знании многая печали» и «плодитесь и размножайтесь» (Пономарева 2007: 163).

Что касается самого языка романа, он представляет собой особый лингвистический феномен, поскольку состоит из смеси демотической, архаической и фольклорной речи, сленга и жаргона. Язык Толстой, стилизованный под сказ, соответствующий «новой первобытной культуре», которая возникла после того, как современная цивилизация перестала существовать, на самом деле является барочным артефактом, умышленным, но убедительным как сама реальность и тем самым подчеркивающим ее искусственность (Липовецкий 2001: 78).

Мутировавшая национальная самобытность ярче всего выражена в самой фактуре повествования: главы обозначены по алфавиту от аза до ижицы (как рапсодии Гомеровых поэм!), практически изгнаны из лексикона варваризмы, а где оставлены, то лишь сугубо в народной форме (как *калитор* и *каклетта*), зато много примечательных неологизмов, частью описывающих мутировавшую среду (деревья *клель* и *дубельт*, съедобные растения *хлебда* и *грибыши*, универсально эйфорическая *ржавь*), частью – социально-бытовые реалии вторичного мезолита. Эти вторые даже интереснее, потому что являют собой неологизмы семантические (старые слова в новом значении), а такие удивляют сильнее: скажем, люди вместе и порознь именуется исключительно *голубчиками*, деньги – *бляшками*, а на дозорных башнях стоят *мурзы*. (Рабинович 2000: 18)

Толстая демонстрирует, как язык, теряя нормативные рамки, становится инструментом создания нового мира. Установка на воссоздание «неписменной» речи в говоре «голубчиков» приводит к тому, что орфографические и орфоэпические правила теряют свою силу, и ключевые слова записываются «на слух». Измененное правописание таких слов как «энтелегенция», «фелософия», «оневерстецкое абразавание», «тродиция», «мараль», «ринисанс» демонстрирует, что суть этих понятий совершенно непостижима этой части населения, и хотя они и оперируют данными терминами их понимание недоступно для них. Эти искажения подчеркивают разрыв с культурным наследием и указывают на упадок языка как инструмента мышления, высмеивая стереотипное, поверхностное восприятие высоких понятий, обнажая их превращение в пустые, лишённые смысла термины. Вследствие расщепления структуры знаков теряется принятая условность и уникальность «называния», и имена собственные становятся нарицательными: «идол *пушкин* в романе *Кысь* ‘долбится’ из *дубельта*, *браме* превращается в междометие, *шопенгауэр* – в название жанра ‘вроде рассказа, только ни хрена не разберешь’, скульптура *Давид* воспринимается как глагол *давит*” (Фатеева 2004: 263).

Говор «голубчиков» становится маркером трансформации культурной и социальной идентичности, а разрушение языковых норм передает атмосферу разрушенного мира.

2. (Де)конструкция мифов в романе *Кысь*

Наряду с перечисленными выше особенностями немаловажное место в романе Толстой занимает миф. Семиотик и лингвист Вадим Руднев обращает внимание на то, что одним из главных направлений культурной ментальности XX века, начиная с

символизма и кончая постмодернизмом, является неомифологическое сознание, и что с 1920-х годов, времени расцвета модернизма в литературе, практически каждый художественный текст прямо или косвенно строится на использовании мифа. Чрезвычайно характерным является то, что в роли мифа, «подсвечивающего» сюжет, начинает выступать не только мифология в узком смысле, но и исторические предания, бытовая мифология, историко-культурная реальность предшествующих лет, известные и неизвестные тексты прошлого. Нарратив пропитывается аллюзиями и реминисценциями, а художественные произведения XX века сам начинает уподобляться мифу по структуре:

Основными чертами этой структуры являются циклическое время, игра на стыке между иллюзией и реальностью, уподобления языка художественного текста мифологическому предязыку с его «многозначительным косноязычием». Мифологические двойники, трикстеры-посредники, боги и герои заселяют мировую литературу – иногда под видом обыкновенных сельских жителей. Порой писатель придумывает свою оригинальную мифологию, обладающую чертами мифологии традиционной. (Руднев 1999: 184-185)

Ярчайшим примером подобного создания авторского мифа является рассматриваемый нами роман Татьяны Толстой, поскольку он содержит в себе великое разнообразие мифов: космогонических, эсхатологических, тотемных, мифов о культурном герое.

Кысь – это мифовая парадигма человечества, линейное сознание которого обычно клишируется такими оборотами как время «до н. э.» – «н. э.», «до Октябрьской революции»

– «после Октябрьской революции», «до перестройки» – «после перестройки»; у Толстой цикличность времени выражается в историческом времени «до взрыва» и «после взрыва» (Шафранская 2002: 36).

Жители города Федор-Кузьмичск создают новую реальность и формируют новую мифологию, однако их представление о мире строится на основе хорошо знакомых архаических моделей. Мифотворческая реальность, формируемая в романе, исходит в том числе и из сказочных мотивов. Описания нового мироустройства, построенные на мифологических представлениях, порождают прозу, насыщенную богатым арсеналом изобразительно-выразительных средств и выполненную в ключе архаической стилизации. Так в романе воссоздается пространственная модель мира:

На семи холмах лежит городок Федор-Кузьмичск, в вокруг городка – поля необозримые, земли неведомые. На севере – дремучие леса, бурелом, ветви переплелись и пройти не пускают, колючие кусты за порты цепляют, сучья шапку с головы рвут. В тех лесах, старые люди сказывают, живет кысь. <...>

На запад тоже не ходи. Там даже вроде бы и дорога есть – невидная, вроде тропочки. Идешь-идешь, вот уж и городок из глаз скрылся, с полей сладким ветерком повеваает, все-то хорошо, все-то ладно, и вдруг, говорят, как встанешь. И стоишь. И думаешь: куда же это я иду-то? Чего мне там надо? Чего я там не видел? <...>

На юг нельзя. Там чеченцы. Сначала все степи, степи – глаза вывалятся смотреть, – а за степями чеченцы. <...> Мы все больше на восход от городка ходим. Там леса светлые, травы долгие, муравчатые. (Толстая 2015: 7-14)

Здесь присутствуют также календарные мифы, которые необходимы «голубчикам» для объяснения восхода и заката, смены времен года:

Есть большая река, отсюда пешего ходу три года. В той реке живет рыба – голубое перо. Говорит она человеческим голосом, плачет и смеется и по той реке туда-сюда ходит. Вот как она в одну сторону пойдет да засмеется – заря играет, солнышко на небо всходит, день настает. Пойдет обратно – плачет, за собой тьму ведет, на хвосте месяц тащит, а часты звездочки – той рыбы чешуя. <...>

На севере стоит дерево вышиной до самых туч. Само черное, корявое, а цветики на нем белые, ма-а-ахонькие, как соринки. На дереве мороз живет, сам старый, борода за кушак заткнута. Вот как к зиме дело, как куры в стаи собьются да на юг двинутся, так мороз за дело принимается: с ветки на ветку перепрыгивает, бьет в ладоши да приговаривает: ду-ду-ду, ду-ду-ду! А потом как засвищет: ф-щ-щ-щ! тут ветер поднимается и те белые цветы на нас сыплет: вот вам и снег. (Толстая 2015: 10-11)

Немаловажное значение занимает в романе и эсхатологический миф, составляющий антитезу мифу космогоническому, о конце, после которого обязательно последует новая жизнь, новое начало. В романе *Кысь* мир, возникший после взрыва, пройдя заданную траекторию круга и приблизившись к точке замыкания, должен обнаружить «червоточину», признак разрушения, разложения и возрождения одновременно. Этот миф амбивалентен: в нем космос и хаос, жизнь и смерть смыкаются (Ломакина 2016: 52):

<...> лежит на юге лазоревое море, а на море на том – остров, а на острове – терем, а стоит в нем золотая лежанка. На лежанке девушка, один волос золотой, другой серебряный, один золотой, другой серебряный. Вот она свою косу расплетает, все расплетает, а как расплетет – тут и миру конец. (Толстая 2015: 9-10)

Астральные мифы служат «голубчикам» способом для упорядочивания их ограниченного мира, поскольку звезды не открывают перед ними великих космических тайн и законов физики, а лишь подтверждают их веру в предопределенность и незыблемость существующего порядка:

А над головой – небо, тоже чернее черного, а по небу, узором, голубоватые пятнышки звезд, то гуще, то слабее, словно бы дышат, пошевеливаются, словно бы тоже задыхаются, ежатся, хотят оторваться, а не могут, намертво приколочены к черной небесной крышке, накрепко прибиты, не сдвинутся. Прямо над головой у Бенедикта, всегда над головой, куда ни отойди, – и Корыто, и Миска, и пучок Северных Хвощей, и ярко-белый Пупок, и россыпь Ноготков, и мутно, тесно, густо сбитое, полосой через весь ночной небосвод Веретено, – все тут, всегда, сколько себя помнишь. <...> они все тут, всегда тут, бледно мигающие, подслеповатые, вечные, молчаливые. (Толстая 2015: 81)

Повествование о Федоре Кузьмиче, главном «Мурзе», также выстраивается в соответствии с канонами мифологического сознания: для горожан, «голубчиков», он культурный герой, демиург, для читателя – трикстер. В этом персонаже фигура трикстера находит двойное воплощение, как в качестве мифологического героя, так и культурного архетипа. «Наибольший мурза» в мире после взрыва издает

указы, пишет стихи, благодетельствует простых людей, именно он в сознании народа является изобретателем всех благ, защитником:

Все-то он возвел и обустроил, все-то головешкой своей светлой за нас болеет, думу думает! День и ночь не спит Федор Кузьмич, все по горенке похаживает, пышную бороду поглаживает, о нас, голубчиках, кручинится: сыты ли мы, пьяны ли мы, нет ли в чем нам досады какой али увечья какого? Есть у нас малые мурзы, а Федор Кузьмич, – слава ему, – Наибольший Мурза, долгих лет ему жизни. Кто сани измыслил? Федор Кузьмич. Кто колесо из дерева резать догадался? Федор Кузьмич. Научил каменные горшки долбить, мышей ловить да суп варить. Дал нам счет и письмо, буквы большие и малые, научил бересту рвать, книги шить, из болотной ржавы чернила варить, палочки для письма расщеплять и в те чернила макать. Научил лодки-долбенки из бревен мастерить и на воду спускать, научил на медведя с рогатиной ходить, из медведя пузырь добывать, растягивать тот пузырь на колках и этой левой окна крыть, чтобы свету в окне и зимой хватало. (Толстая 2015: 20-21)

Помимо этого в романе он выполняет функцию Прометея – «голубчики» убеждены, что именно он изобрел огонь: «А было время, говорят, огня не знали. Как же жили? А так и жили: ползали во тьме, как слепые червяки. А принес огонь людям Федор Кузьмич, слава ему. Ах, слава ему! Пропали бы мы без Федора Кузьмича, ей-ей, пропали бы» (Толстая 2015: 20).

Согласно классификации основных характеристик мифологического трикстера, предложенной Вильямом Гайнсом, главный «мурза», Федор Кузьмич, обладает большинством из них:

At the heart of this cluster of manifest trickster traits is (1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster. Flowing from this are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shapeshifter, (4) situation-inventor, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur. Not every trickster necessarily has all of these characteristics. Still, more times than not, a specific trickster will exhibit many of these similarities. (Hynes 1993: 33)

Центральной фигурой государственного мифа можно рассматривать образ Петра Великого, приметы царствования которого присутствуют в тексте: от регалий Федора Кузьмича – «Секлетарь и Академик и Герой и Мореплаватель и Плотник» (Толстая 2015: 325), отсылающих к стихотворению Пушкина *Стансы* (1826)⁴, до указа праздновать Новый Год по *Домострою*. Однако образ правителя «голубчиков» невольно создает ассоциации и с фигурой Ленина, который в карнавальном развенчании коммунистических кумиров оказался одним из самых клишированных образов, заслужив определение «мифологического трикстера». Ссылаясь на статью Левона Абрамяна *Ленин как трикстер* (2005) между «вождем народа» и «великим Мурзой» можно найти более чем одно сходство. Как в случае Федора Кузьмича, так и в случае Ленина, речь идет о политических деятелях, творящих импровизированную историю, при помощи тех же трюков, кои имеются в арсенале классического мифологического трикстера. Фигуру Ленина роднит с трикстером то, что,

4 «<...> Самодержавною рукой / Он смело сеял просвещение, / Не презирал страны родной: / Он знал ее предназначенье. // <...> То академик, то герой, / То мореплаватель, то плотник, / Он всеобъемлющей душой / На троне вечный был работник. <...>». (Пушкин 1950: 344)

будучи революционером, он является изменителем мира и культуртрегером, однако новый мир творится им посредством хитрости и трюка, как впрочем и правителем «голубчиков», объявившим себя творцом всех без исключения благ и произведений искусства, сохранившихся после взрыва. И наконец сюда же можно отнести неказистую внешность и небольшой рост: глупость фольклорных гигантов обычно прямо пропорциональна их высокому росту и громадной силе, и их всегда побеждает и одурачивает маленький, слабый, но хитрый и юркий герой именно с чертами трикстера (Абрамян 2005: 69, 71, 79).

Не может остаться незамеченным и сходство Федора Кузьмича с персонажем Гофмана Крошкой Цахес из-за иллюзии величия и власти, окружающей эти две фигуры. Как и Крошка Цахес правитель одноименного себе города воспринимается окружающими как гениальный и выдающийся человек, в то время как у него напрочь отсутствуют какие-либо таланты, и все имеющиеся у него (с его же слов) достижения являются результатом лицемерного присвоения себе чужих заслуг. В сказке Гофмана Циннобер становится притягательным для окружающих благодаря чарам, которые заставляют людей видеть в нем качества, которыми он не обладает, в *Кыси* авторитет Федора Кузьмича держится на идеологическом диктате и слепом поклонении, основанном на страхе и кризисе культуры. Сходство между ними прослеживается и на внешнем уровне ввиду гротекстного диссонанса между внешностью и восприятием их окружающими.

«Голубчики» славят своего правителя Федора Кузьмича, думая, что все блага исходят от него, но владеющий истиной читатель понимает, что перед ним наглый, безграмотный, умственно убогий мошенник и шарлатан. Однако во время первой встречи «великого Мурзы» с «голубчиквами» даже у

Бенедикта вера в великого и благородного повелителя омрачается, перед его глазами – несуразное и мелкое существо:

И смотрит Бенедикт как сквозь туман, и диву дается: ростом Федор Кузьмич не больше Коти, едва-едва Бенедикту по колено. Только у Коти ручки махонькие, пальчики розовенькие, а у Федора Кузьмича ручищи, как печные заслонки, и пошевеливаются, все пошевеливаются. <...>

А Бенедикт не знал, что и думать: первый свежий страх вроде отступил, а заместо него в душе – смурно, что ли. Надо бы сильнее благоговеть, а благоговется как-то слабо, что ли. <...> на табуретке сидючи какой восторг? Вроде как ты, простой голубчик, Наибольшему Мурзе ровня: ты сидишь, и он сидит; он тебе слово, ты ему слово. Не дело это. (Толстая 2015: 71, 74)

Толстая закладывает зерно сомнения в главного героя, чтобы подчеркнуть одну из главных тем романа – разоблачение мифов и иллюзий, на которых строятся человеческие представления о правде, справедливости и величии. «Наибольший Мурза», являющийся самозванцем и скриптором, присваивающим себе чужие открытия, литературные тексты и произведения искусства, напрочь лишенный способности постигнуть их смысл, к концу произведения низвергается и из великого правителя он становится «злодеем-мучителем», «угнетателем», «иродом», «тираном-кровопийцем», «гнидой» (Толстая 2015: 315-321).

Помимо мифа вождя в рамках политической мифологии, становящейся предметом карнавализации истории, в романе присутствует и другая государственная мифология – советская. Аналогию с советской реальностью, можно увидеть в образе Санитаров, которые занимаются тем, что увозят людей на

«лечение» за хранение или чтение старопечатных книг, которые строго настрого запрещены. Фигуру санитаров можно сравнить с основным орудием массовых репрессий в СССР – Народным комиссариатом внутренних дел. Голубчиков охватывает дикий и панический страх при упоминании о них, так как после «терапии», которую они оказывают, никто и никогда не возвращался.

Неотъемлемой частью советского мифа являются государственные праздники и выходные: Новый год, Майский Выходной и Октябрьский, Женский день. Все они празднуются благодаря изданным Федором Кузьмичем указам; для «голубчиков» же праздники играют важную роль в их мироустройстве, хотя и представляют собой церемонию в честь событий, значение которых никому из них неизвестно и непостижимо (Крыжановская 2005: 38). Октябрьский выходной, который празднуется в ноябре, имеет прямые аналогии с советским праздником – Днем Великой Октябрьской социалистической революции. В этот день, жителям Федор-Кузьмичска «велено из дома выходить на главную площадь, где дозорная башня, и по шестеровряд, с песнями, пройтись» (Толстая 2015: 124). Присутствует здесь и ритуал празднования Международного Женского дня, который представляет собой пародию на празднование «8 марта», подчеркивая факт ущемления прав женщин:

Женский День значит навроде Бабского Праздника. В энтот день всем бабам почет и уважение как есть они Жена и Мать и Бабушка и Племянница или другая какая Пигалица малая всех уважать. <...> С работы придя поздравить <...> с Международным Женским Днем. Сказать: «Желаю вам Жена и Мать и Бабушка и Племянница или другая какая Пигалица малая счастья в жизне успехов в работе мирного неба над

головой. Всякую бабу, хоть Соседка хоть кто такими же словами вежливо поздравлять. Опосля пей-гуляй, ешь что хочешь веселись, но в меру. (Толстая 2015: 121-122)

Толстая высмеивает поверхностное отношение к празднику не только в мире «голубчиков», но и в современном российском обществе, где формальность этого праздника, декларирующего уважение к женщинам, контрастирует с трудностями и ущемлениями, с которыми они сталкиваются в повседневной жизни. Восьмое марта, символ борьбы за равенство и права женского пола, давно превратился в клише о женщинах как хранительницах домашнего уюта, матерях или объектах восхищения, а не как равноправных участницах общественной жизни. Женщины у «голубчиков» удостоиваются поздравлений и подарков, но лишь на один день, в остальное время их положение остается угнетенным: «не бить не колошматить ничего такого обычного не делать» (Толстая 2015: 121).

Как было указано выше, ввиду интертекстуальности произведения литературный миф занимает огромное пространство в повествовании, но именно Пушкину отведено особое место в романе. В тексте присутствует как прямое цитирование пушкинских текстов, так и неявные отсылки к произведениям поэта, рассчитанные на ассоциации и реминисценции читателя. Автор сохраняет образ Пушкина как неотъемлемую и незабываемую часть русского наследия, но в то же время высмеивает через реплики героев и доводит до абсурда национальную традицию создания храмов-музеев пушкинистами, подвергая пародированию непосредственно образ поэта, сложившийся в национальном сознании (Новрузова 2023 :101). Однако подобная ироническая оценочность не имеет ничего общего с осмеянием классика.

Пушкинская мифология формировалась на протяжении двух веков, ее основы заложил сам поэт, при активном участии его друзей, врагов, соратников и литературных оппонентов. Каждое поколение создавало «своего» Пушкина, а каждый уважающий себя русский писатель или мыслитель создавал собственный образ, называемый «Мой Пушкин», воплощая его в стихах, прозе, статьях или устных высказываниях. Все это стало неотъемлемой частью русской культуры, прочно укоренившись в жизни общества и языке (Новиков 2007: 8-9).

Согласно классификации мифов о Пушкине, произведенной Владимиром Новиковым, можно говорить, что Толстая в романе не ограничивается использованием лишь одного из них. По мнению критика, почти к каждому из мифов (которых он насчитал двадцать два) легко подбирается миф диаметрально противоположный, и в *Кыси* благополучно уживаются несколько, пускай не антимифов, однако, на первый взгляд, противоречащих друг другу, в частности таких как «Пушкин – наше все», «умнейший человек России», «дурак», «донжуан, сексуальный гигант», «пророк, учитель» (Новиков 2007: 9-11, 15). В романе эти мифы не являются взаимоисключающими; напротив, они отражают вариативность и многогранность образа поэта в общественном сознании.

Для «прежних» Пушкин – архетип ушедшей цивилизации, эквивалент культуры; для Бенедикта, как и для всех голубчиков, имя поэта лишено как семантического потенциала, так и его культурного наполнения. Комичным эффектом обладают высказывания главного героя о «пушкине-кукушкине»: несмотря на искреннее стремление познать величие русского классика, он в этом не преуспевает. Рассуждения Бенедикта о поэте невольно напоминают пародийно-сюрреалистичные строки Даниила Хармса из

*Анекдотов о Пушкине (1939)*⁵, которые представляют собой своеобразный ироничный отклик на культ Пушкина в официальной советской пропаганде. Как и Хармс, Толстая, играя с каноничностью и прибегая к сюрреализму, наполняя текст абсурдными деталями, не столько разрушает образ Пушкина, сколько показывает его многослойность, превращая «великого поэта» в живого, абсурдного и смешного человека,

- 5 «Анекдоты из жизни Пушкина: 1. Пушкин был поэтом и все что-то писал. Однажды Жуковский застал его за писанием и громко воскликнул: 'Да никакo ты писака!' С тех пор Пушкин очень полюбил Жуковского и стал называть его по-приятельски Жуковым. 2. Как известно, у Пушкина никогда не росла борода. Пушкин очень этим мучился и всегда завидовал Захарьину, у которого, наоборот, борода росла вполне прилично. 'У него – растет, а у меня – не растет', – частенько говаривал Пушкин, показывая ногтями на Захарьина. И всегда был прав. 3. Однажды Петрушевский сломал свои часы и послал за Пушкиным. Пушкин пришел, осмотрел часы Петрушевского и положил их обратно на стул. 'Что скажешь, брат Пушкин?' – спросил Петрушевский. 'Стоп машина', – сказал Пушкин. 4. Когда Пушкин сломал себе ноги, то стал передвигаться на колесах. Друзья любили дразнить Пушкина и хватали его за эти колеса. Пушкин злился и писал про друзей ругательные стихи. Эти стихи он называл 'эрипгармами'. 5. Лето 1829 года Пушкин провел в деревне. Он вставал рано утром, выпивал жбан парного молока и бежал к реке купаться. Выкупавшись в реке, Пушкин ложился на траву и спал до обеда. После обеда Пушкин спал в гамаке. При встрече с вонючими мужиками Пушкин кивал им головой и зажимал пальцами свой нос. А вонючие мужики ломали свои шапки и говорили: 'Это ничаво'. 6. Пушкин любил кидаться камнями. Как увидит камни, так и начнет ими кидаться. Иногда так разойдется, что стоит весь красный, руками машет, камнями кидается, просто ужас! 7. У Пушкина было четыре сына и все идиоты. Один не умел даже сидеть на стуле и все время падал. Пушкин-то и сам довольно плохо сидел на стуле. Бывало, сплошная умора; сидят они за столом: на одном конце Пушкин все время со стула падает, а на другом конце – его сын. Просто хоть святых вон выноси!». (Хармс 1939)

вскрывая через смех и парадокс проблемы сакрализации культуры и шаблонного мышления, создавая при этом уникальное, гротескное зеркало своего времени:

Этот пушкин-кукушкин тоже небось жениться не хотел, упирался, плакал, а потом женился – и ничего. Верно? Вознесся выше он главою непокорной александрийского столпа. В санях ездил. От мышей тревожился. По бабам бегал, груши околачивал. Прославился: теперь мы с него буратину режем. (Толстая 2015: 181)

Вот он стоит, как куст в ночи, дух мятежный и гневный: головку набычил, с боков на личике две каклеты – бакенбарды древнего фасону, – нос долу, пальцами как бы кафтан на себе рвет. На голове, конечно, птица-блядуница расселась, а такая у ей манера, у бессовестной: чего увидит, то и обгадит, оттого и прозвище ей дано срамное, за срамотишу за ее. (Толстая 2015: 197-198)

Маленькой черной палочкой в путанице улочек стоял пушкин, тоненькой ниточкой выделась с вышины веревка с бельем, петелькой охватившая шею поэта. (Толстая 2015: 313)

<...> пушкин-кукушкин, черным кудлатым идиолом взметнувшийся на пригорке, навечно сплюснутый заборами, по уши заросший укропом, пушкин-обрубок, безногий, шестипалый, прикусивший язык, носом уткнувшийся в грудь, – и головы не приподнять! – пушкин, рвущий с себя отравленную рубаху, веревки, цепи, кафтан, удавку, древесную тяжесть: пусти, пусти! (Толстая 2015: 341)

Можно заметить, что для Бенедикта «пушкин» является именем нарицательным и пишется исключительно со строчной буквы. Благодаря инициативе одного из «прежних», Никиты Ивановича, главный герой участвует в изготовлении и возведении памятника Пушкину. Однако и этот оскверняется как самим его творцом – памятник получается у Бенедикта шестипалым и безногим –, так и стихией огня – во время пожара у Пушкина сгорает лицо и шестипалая рука:

Это верно, кривоватый ты у меня, и затылок у тебя плоский, и с пальчиками непорядок, и ног нету – сам вижу, столярное дело понимаю. Но уж какой есть, терпи, дитяtko, – какие мы, таков и ты, а не иначе! Ты – наше все, а мы – твое, и других нетути! Нетути других-то! Так помогай! (Толстая 2015: 289)

В уста Бенедикта Толстая вкладывает критику о деградации культурных ценностей и лицемерное отношение к ним в современном обществе, которое продолжает формально поклоняться символам высокой культуры, потеряв, однако, понимание сути их творчества. Монолог отражает горькую истину: культура и ее наследие существуют в том виде, в каком общество способно их воспринять.

3. Мифы о пугающей Кыси и прекрасной птице Паулин

Кысь в романе предстает как неведомое мифическое существо, легенда, передаваемая «старыми людьми», которые утверждают, что в глухих и непроходимых лесах неподалеку от Федор-Кузьмичска живет этот загадочный зверь. Он внушает страх всем жителям городка и одновременно олицетворяет мифическую силу, на которую люди перекладывают свои беды,

недостатки характера и все то, что выходит за пределы их понимания. Голубчики описывают Кысь как неуловимое, мистическое и зловещее существо, которое символизирует нечто необъяснимое и разрушительное. Она является воплощением иррационального страха и силы, разрушающей не только тело, но и душу человека, оставляя после себя его пустую оболочку, символизируя угрозу, которая исходит из неопознанного мира, и пугая своей мистической природой:

В тех лесах, старые люди сказывают, живет кысь. Сидит она на темных ветвях и кричит так дико и жалобно: кы-ысь! кы-ысь! – а видеть ее никто не может. Пойдет человек так вот в лес, а она ему на шею-то сзади: хоп! и хребтину зубами: хрусь! – а когтем главную-то жилочку нащупает и перервет, и весь разум из человека и выйдет. Вернется такой назад, а он уж не тот, и глаза не те, и идет, не разбирая дороги, как бывает, к примеру, когда люди ходят во сне под луной, вытянувши руки, и пальцами шевелят: сами спят, а сами ходят. (Толстая 2015: 7)

Бенедикт, выделенный из числа других «голубчиков» как герой, размышляющий о жизни настоящей и будущей, очень боится Кыси. Часто молодой человек задает себе вопросы, которые на протяжении многих веков волнуют человечество: «Да и что мы про жизнь знаем? Ежели подумать? Кто ей велел быть, жизни-то? Отчего солнце по небу катится, отчего мышшь шебуршит, деревья кверху тянутся, русалка в реке плещет, ветер цветами пахнет, человек человека палкой по голове бьет?» (Толстая 2015: 64). Неоднократно Бенедикт предается тоске, размышляя о собственной жизни, полагая, что такие мысли его посещают именно, когда Кысь направляет свой взгляд не него: «Опять в голове раздвоение какое-то. То все было просто, ясно, счастливо, мечты всякие хорошие, а то вдруг будто кто сзади подошел да все это счастье из головы и выковырнул... Как

когтем вынул... Кысь это, вот что! Кысь в спину смотрит» (Толстая 2015: 109). Бенедикту постоянно кажется, что кто-то невидимый следит за ним, вглядываясь сквозь сумрак, чтобы разглядеть его во тьме. По мере того как Кысь «подбирается» ближе, незримые нити, связывающие ее с героем, становятся все крепче. Именно под ее влиянием происходит приобщение Бенедикта к деятельности Санитаров: после очередной «встречи» с Кысью он берет крюк, садится в Красные Сани и отправляется вместе с Кудеяровым «лечить людей», изымая запрещенные книги. Когда же Бенедикт вместе с Главным Санитаром устраивают расправу над Набольшим Мурзой, главный герой словно становится воплощением Кыси: «Мягким длинным прыжком Бенедикт прыгнул к полкам; если закрыть глаза, звуки лучше слышно; закрыл глаза, поводит головой из стороны в сторону; еще бы уши прижать – совсем хорошо бы; ноздри раздулись – можно и по запаху» (Толстая 2015: 322).

Жажда накопительства книг, стремление к чтению, желание постичь смысл читаемого не приводят героя к духовному и нравственному росту, а наоборот, способствует разрушению его человеческой сущности. Чтение не идет впрок герою вовсе: он не задумывается о том глубоком смысле, который вкладывает каждый автор в свое произведение, а самое главное – он просто не в состоянии постичь его. Критик Павел Ладохин полгагает, что Кысь это не одухотворенное существо, а часть души: «Кысь – эгоизм человеческий, а не животный. Кысь – человеческое, к сожалению, явление, способность убить, оправдывая убийство высшими целями, это – оторванность от прошлого, от опыта поколений, это жалобный и озлобленный взгляд в беспредельность» (Ладохин 2002: 41).

Загадочное существо, давшее название роману Толстой, несет множество символических смыслов. Образ Кыси

становится символом человеческого упадка, он является метафорой утраты связи с культурным наследием, существования без опоры на опыт поколений. В частности, в современном российском обществе попытка переосмысления памяти о советском времени продолжает оказывать значительное влияние на мышление и восприятие настоящего, порождая противоречие между ностальгией по ушедшему времени и болезненным осознанием неудовлетворенности текущей реальностью. Толстая затрагивает ключевую проблему такого восприятия:

Тоска по прошлому вторична, а первично недовольство настоящим. Чем больше люди недовольны настоящим, тем больше они заинтересованы прошлым, тем чаще они думают, что раньше было лучше. Дело и не в амнезии, хотя многие историки говорят о постсоветской амнезии, когда люди не интересуются прошлым. Моя позиция противоположна: люди думают о нем слишком много, но они все еще не знают, как и что об этом думать. Для очень многих современных людей советское прошлое – это навязчивое состояние, которое никак не пройдет. (Эткинд 2016)

Роман Татьяны Толстой построен на оппозиции двух центральных мифологических образов: неведомой темной силе, символизирующей хаос и несущей людям зло, безумие и смерть противостоит прекрасная Птица Паулин – символ духовной чистоты, невинности, гармонии, любви, мира, вселенского порядка. Миф о сказочной Птице Счастья всегда символизировал надежды и мечты для русского человека. В романе Птица Паулин появляется лишь в снах и фантазиях Бенедикта, успокаивая его и вселяя надежду. В его воображении она живет на лесной поляне, покрытой красным

ковром из тюльпанов, и приглашает его, предлагая утешение и безопасность:

А на ветвях-то хвост белый резной, как сеть кружевная, то сойдется, то опять распуститься. А поверх того хвоста хозяйка – Княжья Птица Паулин, глазами смотрит, сама на себя любит. А рот красный как тюльпан. А говорит она ему: «Здравствуй, Бенедикт, сокол ясный, проведать меня пришел?.. А нет от меня вреда никакого, а ты это знаешь... Иди сюда, Бенедикт, целовать меня будем». (Толстая 2015: 176)

Прототипами Княжьей Птицы Паулин служат фольклорные образы волшебных птиц-женщин, таких как Сирин, Алконост и Гамаюн. Эти образы являются популярными персонажами литературы русского модернизма: Дмитрий Мережковский, Константин Бальмонт, Сергей Соловьев, Вячеслав Иванов, Николай Гумилев, Николай Клюев, Сергей Есенин и многие другие обращались к этим образам, символически осмысляя и переосмысляя их (Спивак 2015: 331).

Алконост выглядит, как птица с женской головой и руками. Это священная птица, жительница Ирия, славянского рая; ее образ присутствует в русских легендах, сказках, а также в изобразительном искусстве, зодчестве. В народной традиции птицы Сирин и Алконост являются практически двойниками, это видно, в частности, из определений, которые даются им в *Толковом словаре живого великорусского языка* Владимира Даля: «Алконост – сказочная райская птица, с человеческим лицом, изображавшаяся на наших лубочных картинах» (1978: 11); в словарной статье о Сирине фактически повторяется та же дефиниция: «Есть лубочные картины, изображающие райских птиц сирин и алконоста (сирена?), с женскими лицами и грудью» (Даль 1980: 189).

Гамаюн – еще одна священная птица славян. В народных легендах – это глашатай богов, вещая птица, которая пророчит счастье и может предсказать будущее. Наряду с птицами Сирин и Алконост, ее часто представляют живущей в ветвях Мирового Древа, с которого она спускается к людям только для того, чтобы сообщить что-то важное. Ей приписывается роль рассказчицы, так как Гамаюн знает обо всем, что было, есть и даже будет, повстречав ее, человек может узнать все, что захочет, если Гамаюн решит открыть эти тайны человеку. По легенде, когда птица Гамаюн начинает петь, люди забывают обо всем на свете, считается, что она не вредит людям, а неизменно приносит счастье: человек, который услышит ее пение, обретает знания и избавление от своих несчастий и бед.

Таким образом, культурно-семантический комплекс добра и зла будущего представлен мифологическими образами неведомой и непостижимой Кыси и величественной прекрасной Княжьей Птицы Паулин. Эта поляризация отражается и во внутреннем мире центрального героя: на одном полюсе – ужасная Кысь, которую Бенедикт боится, на другом – прекрасная Птица, воплощение мечты героя. В начале повествования в своих фантазиях Бенедикт стремится найти Птицу Паулин и обрести духовную гармонию, однако в финале человеческое невежество берет верх над светлой надеждой о внутреннем мире и духовном благополучии, которые подавляются мощной силой нравственной безграмотности и бездуховности. Мечта, к которой так стремился главный герой, низвергается и финальные размышления Бенедикта ясно свидетельствуют об этом:

Брел, волочил лапти на отвыкших, квелых ногах и знал ясным, вдруг налетевшим знанием: зря. Нет ни поляны, ни Птицы. Вытоптана поляна, скошены

тульпаны, а Паулин – что ж, Паулин давно поймана силками, давно провернута на каклеты. Сам и ел. Сам и спал на подушках снежного, кружевного пера. Знал – а все же брел, брел, почти равнодушно, как перед смертью или сразу после смерти, когда все уже совершилось и ничего не поправишь <...>. (Толстая 2015: 338-339)

4. Заключение

На протяжении всего произведения главный герой терзается извечными вопросами, и в определенный момент становится возможным предположить, что в романе мы сможем наблюдать эволюцию героя через развитие его моральных и нравственных качеств. Однако заключительный приговор автора именно о неспособности современного человека читать книги и постигать их смысл. Этот приговор разрушает привычную для русской культуры литературоцентричную модель, в которой мировоззрение человека зависит от влияния литературы. Мы приходим к этому выводу, осознавая, что язык и ценности главного героя остаются неизменными: «Книга» не сумела преобразить примитивный ум Бенедикта, не смогла повлиять на развитие его интеллекта и открытие нравственных законов и ценностей внутри себя. Ни в книге, ни во власти не находит герой высшей истины и смысла; они лишь приумножили в нем ощущение пустоты и безвыходности, в то время как он изнемогает от тягостного знания об отсутствии искомого им смысла жизни.

Писательница использует мифологические и культурные образы для создания многослойной картины реальности, в которой переплетаются мифы разных эпох, превращаясь в инструмент для воплощения авторской задумки. Мифы, культурные символы и образы фольклора становятся

важными носителями не только традиций общества, но и демонстрируют цикличность российской истории, которая в попытке создать «будущее» неизбежно воспроизводит «прошлое».

Библиография

- Абрамян Левон (2005), «Ленин как трикстер», *Современная российская мифология*, сост. Ахметова Мария Вячеславовна, Москва, Российский государственный гуманитарный университет: 68-88.
- Бараньска Анна (2013), «Федор Кузьмич – сибирская жизнь после смерти императора Александра I. История легенды», *Славянский альманах 2012*, под ред. Вендина Татьяна Ивановна, Никифоров Константин Владимирович и др., Москва, Издательство «Индрик»: 98-113.
- Гайдукова Елена Борисовна (2008), «Цикл легенд о Федоре Кузьмиче на рубеже XX-XXI вв.: проблема демифологизации сюжета», *Вестник Томского государственного университета*, 307: 7-10.
- Гапуров Шахрудин Айдиевич (2014), «Чеченские мотивы в творчестве М.Ю. Лермонтова», *Лермонтов в исторической судьбе народов Кавказа*, под ред. Чумаченко Виктор Кириллович, Краснодар, ООО «Экоинвест»: 58-70.
- Гусарова Юлия (2015), «Татьяна Толстая: С моей родословной начинать писать было стремно», *Сноб.ru*, <<https://snob.ru/selected/entry/94953/>>, (дата обращения 01/07/2024).
- Даль Владимир (1978), *Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка. Том 1*, Москва, Издательство «Русский язык».
- Даль Владимир (1980), *Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка. Том 4*, Москва, Издательство «Русский язык».
- Елисеев Никита (2000), «Татьяна Толстая. Кысь», *Новая русская книга*, 6: 17-18.
- Иванова Наталья (2001), «И птицу паулин изрубить на каклеты», *Знамя*, 3: 219-221.

- Крыжановская Оксана Евгеньевна (2005), *Антиутопическая мифопоэтическая картина мира в романе Татьяны Толстой «Кысь»*, Тамбов, ТГТУ.
- Ладохин Павел (2002), «Кыш, Кысь, Кыш», *Русская словеность*, 1: 39-41.
- Лейдерман Наум Лазаревич и Липовецкий Марк Наумович (2003), *Современная русская литература. 1950–1990-е годы. Том 2*, Москва, Издательский центр «Академия».
- Липовецкий Марк (2001), «След Кыси», *Искусство кино*, 2: 77-80.
- Липовецкий Марк Наумович (1997), *Русский постмодернизм. Очерки исторической поэтики*, Екатеринбург, Уральский государственный педагогический университет.
- Липовецкий Марк (2008), «Бесконечный конец истории, или как кысь загрызла ‘Кысь’, *Паралогии: Трансформации (пост)модернистского дискурса в русской культуре 1920–2000-х годов*, Липовецкий Марк, Москва, Новое литературное обозрение: 380-406.
- Ломакина Екатерина Владимировна (2016), «Мифопоэтика романа Т. Толстой ‘Кысь’», *Нижевартовский филологический вестник*, 1: 51-58.
- Новиков Владимир Иванович (2007), «Двадцать два мифа о Пушкине», *Роман с литературой*, Новиков Владимир Иванович, Москва, Intrada: 6-19.
- Новрузова Анастасия Алексеевна (2023), «Пушкинские реминисценции в романе Т. Толстой ‘Кысь’», *Пятый этаж*, 9: 97-103.
- Пономарева Ольга (2007), «‘Чужое слово’ в романе Т. Толстой ‘Кысь’», *Известия Российского государственного педагогического университета им. А.И. Герцена*, 20: 160-164.
- Пушкин Александр Сергеевич (1950), «Стансы», *Полное собрание сочинение в десяти томах. Том II*, под ред. Корчагин Александр Иванович, Москва-Ленинград, Издательство Академии наук СССР: 344.
- Рабинович Елена (2000), «Татьяна Толстая. Кысь», *Новая русская книга*, 6: 18-19.
- Руднев Вадим Петрович (1999), *Словарь культуры XX века*, Москва, Аграф.

- Савкина Ирина (2023), *Пути, перепутья и тупики русской женской литературы*, Москва, Новое литературное обозрение.
- Спивак Моника Львовна (2015), «Сирин, Алконст, Гамаюн: между В.М. Васнецовым и А.А. Блоком», «*Вечные сюжеты и образы в литературе и искусстве русского модернизма*», под ред. Топорков Андрей Львович, Москва, Индрик: 330-355.
- Спиридонова Татьяна Николаевна (2005), «Мифопоэтика романа Т. Толстой 'Кысь'», *Культура и текст*, 1: 98-103.
- Толстая Татьяна (2015), *Кысь*, Москва, АСТ, 2015.
- Толстая Татьяна Никитична (2008), «Мюзики и Ностардамус», *Двое (рассказы, эссе, интервью)*, Толстая Наталья, Толстая Татьяна, Москва, ЭКСМО: 427-435.
- Толстая Татьяна (2001), «Татьяна Толстая: 'Опыт взаимной глухоты'. Семинар писательницы в Токийском университете, 26 октября 2001 г.», *Виртуальные Суси*, <<https://www.susi.ru/stol/-tolstaya.html>>, (дата обращения: 01.06.2024).
- Фатеева Наталья (2004), «Абсурд и грамматика художественного текста (на материале произведений Н. Искренко, В. Нарбиковой, Т. Толстой)», *Абсурд и вокруг: Сборник статей*, под ред. Буренина Ольга Москва, Москва, Языки славянской культуры: 261-272.
- Хармс Даниил (1939), «Анекдоты о Пушкине», *Творчество Даниила Хармса*, <<http://хармс.gorodok.net/stories/709/default.htm>>, (дата обращения: 05.06.2024).
- Шафранская Элеонора Федоровна (2002), «Роман Т. Толстой 'Кысь' глазами учителя и ученика: Мифологическая концепция романа», *Русская словесность*, 1: 36-39.
- Эткинд Александр (2016), «Интервью. Историк Александр Эткинд – о том, как память о репрессиях влияет на нас сегодня», *Новое литературное обозрение*, <https://www.nlobooks.ru/books/-biblioteka_zhurnala_neprikosnovenny_zapas/26762/review/8548/>, (дата обращения: 01/05/2024).
- Goscilo Helena (2003), "Dystopian Dreams", *The Women's Review of Book*, 20: 10.
- Hynes William J. (1993), "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide", *Mythical Trickster Figures. Contours*,

Iryna Shylnikova

Contexts, and Criticisms, eds. Hynes William J., Doty William G.,
Tuscaloosa & London, The University of Alabama Press: 33-45.

XI.

The Mistress of the Mountain: 2017 by Olga Slavnikova

Gabriella Elina Imposti

In 2006 Olga Slavnikova published the novel *2017* and in December of that year she was awarded the prestigious Russian Booker¹. The author claims that the first idea for this book dates back to the mid-1990s, but at the time she had to acknowledge the fact that she did not have the necessary skills and experience to fulfil her project². After her move to Moscow in 2003, she started to work on her new novel, which was announced several times in the literary journal *Novyi mir* under the title of *The*

- 1 See the reports in some online papers *Novaia Gazeta* 11 December 2006, *Radio Svoboda* 7 December 2006, *Lenta.ru* 7 December 2006.
- 2 In her review of the novel Mariia Remizova (2006) quotes a long excerpt from a conversation between O. Slavnikova and K. Reshetnikov published in the newspaper *Gazeta* (May 17, 2006, № 81), where she says: “It was my first attempt with a big format. But at the time I couldn’t handle it, maybe because I didn’t have enough experience in constructing the plot.” (“Это был мой первый подступ к большой форме. Тогда я с этим не справилась — может быть, потому, что мне не хватило опыта в построении сюжета”). In another interview published in the journal *Uknizhnoi polki*, Slavnikova says “The first variants of the novel were written and burned in Yekaterinburg” (“Первые варианты романа были написаны и сожжены еще в Екатеринбурге”, Slavnikova 2006b: 5). All the translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

Period. Fragments of the novel were published as self-contained stories in literary thick journals³. When it was finally published as a volume by Vagrius, the date 2017 was chosen as a title, which is a clear reference to Orwell's famous novel *1984* and suggests inclusion in the genre of dystopia.

The year in the title of this novel clearly marks the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution, which, when the book was published, was 11 years in the future. The time when this novel is set is unquestionably meaningful and relates to the 'celebrations' of the centenary of this fateful event that "shook the world"⁴. In the novel these celebrations take the aspect of tragic and meaningless bloodshed that in a way makes history go back in a circle, hence the dystopian character of the novel, on which several critics have commented⁵. According to Beliakov, however, the initial title of the novel *The Period* was also connected to the idea of the repetition of the October Revolution, a repetition that smacks of farce (Beliakov 2006).

Olga Slavnikova, however, does not consider that her novel

- 3 As Slavnikova (2006b) explains, after her move to Moscow, it took her three years to complete the novel, because of the many work commitments she had. She did not always have time to devote to writing and there was even an interval that could have compromised its being finished. She thinks that the right time for writing a novel is two years.
- 4 The exact date (June 7, 2017) when the main story line starts is stated only at the beginning of the English translation but not in the original Russian edition. It should also be noted that in the English translation entire paragraphs are placed in different positions compared with the original or are even missing (for example two pages that precede the episode of Krylov being attacked by a gang of youths in the industrial zone of the city on pp. 35-36 of the original edition and also on p. 206 of the English edition where two paragraphs on p. 265 of the original are missing).
- 5 See for example Chantsev 2007, Pustovaia 2007, Ågren 2014, Possamai 2019, Possamai 2020.

belongs to the dystopian genre, as she states for example in an interview with Maia Kucherskaia:

My novel is not a dystopia. Naturally, the title of the book immediately reminds the reader of George Orwell's novel "1984", written in 1948. But in that novel, there was a rather large distance between the date of its creation and the time of its action. In mine it is a lot less distant. The world won't have time to change much by then⁶. (Slavnikova 2006c)

Elsewhere, describing the process that led her to the conception of the novel, she states:

The present [...] could not be the space of the novel, at the time everything was happening too quickly and meaninglessly. And I thought, what should I do? Should I take it all back to the past? But the Soviet past was dull and plotless. And finally, I realized that events needed to be moved to the future⁷. (Remizova 2006)

- 6 "Мой роман не антиутопия. Естественно, по названию книги читатель сразу вспоминает роман Джорджа Оруэлла «1984», написанный в 1948 году. Но там расстояние между датой создания и временем действия довольно большое. У меня намного меньше. Мир не успеет сильно измениться." In Russian the term "antiutopia" is prevalently used as an equivalent of both the English "dystopia" and "antiutopia", despite the theoretical distinction between the two terms.
- 7 "Настоящее время [...] не могло быть пространством романа, тогда все происходило слишком быстро и бессмысленно. И я думала — как же быть? Перенести все это в прошлое? Но советское прошлое — это глухая бессюжетность. И наконец я поняла, что события надо перенести в будущее." This is Remizova's quotation from Slavnikova's interview with Kirill Reshetnikov published by the newspaper *Gazeta*, No 81, on May 17, 2006. The site of *Gazeta* is no longer available.

In this novel, Slavnikova skilfully manages several narrative lines and plots, each implying a variety of literary genres and modes. There are not only the features of dystopia, but also of a love story, a detective story and the fantastic. As many critics have pointed out, however, what is particularly remarkable in this book is not just the balance that these narrative lines manage to keep within the novel, but the complexity and the mastery of the author's style:

Slavnikova indeed surprises [...] by the very quality of her writing, which has long become her trademark. This trademark is a dense metaphorical writing [...] Slavnikova works with the word, striving to find the only possible name for things. Her metaphor is not an end in itself but only a revelation of the essence of things [...] in spite of all the metaphorical load of the text, the transparency of the style is not obscured by anything superfluous⁸. (Elagina 2007)

According to the author herself, however, the main narrative line is the love story⁹ between Krylov and a mysterious woman who

- 8 “Славникова и удивляет другим. Самим качеством письма, давно ставшим ее фирменным знаком. Этот фирменный знак, метафорическая густопись [...] Славникова [...] работая со словом, стремится к называнию единственно возможным образом. Метафора у нее не самоцель, но лишь выявление сути [...] при всей метафорической нагруженности текста прозрачность стиля не замутняется ничем лишним.” Beliaikov (2006) agrees with this statement and adds: “Slavnikova is a rare master. Perhaps she is the best stylist in our literature today. She is amazingly inventive in coming up with new comparisons and metaphors.” (“Славникова редкий мастер. Быть может, она лучший, на сегодняшний день, стилист в нашей литературе. Она поразительно изобретательна в придумывании новых сравнений и метафор.”).
- 9 “2017 is actually a love story. Two persons meet, fall in love, but they do not believe in what is happening to them.” (“На самом деле «2017» – роман о

happens to be at the railway station at the same time when he is seeing Professor Anfilogov leave for his expedition in the North in search of precious stones. In their relationship, they do not reveal their real names to each other. They choose fairly common names: Ivan for Krylov, and the woman calls herself simply Tania¹⁰. They keep their relationship constantly on the brink of dissolving by “practising the topographical correspondent of Russian roulette”¹¹ (Remizova 2006), which consists in randomly choosing the place of their next encounter in the city’s atlas. This has much of superstition and is definitely a challenge to Fate. In the end, they will lose track of each other when the riots of the “masked revolution” start. As it turns out in the final chapters of the novel, the woman’s real name is Ekaterina Sergeevna, and she is Anfilogov’s wife. The other woman in Krylov’s life is his ex-wife, Tamara, who is a successful businesswoman and owns a very exclusive funeral home. In the novel she also plays a role similar to that of the *raisonneur* and in her dialogues with Krylov she “explains [...] the metanarrative foundation of the urban world as opposed to the surrounding wild [...] world of precious stones” (Ågren 2014: 142). Baudrillard’s (1994) concept of simulacra

любви. Двое встречаются, влюбляются, но не верят в то, что с ними происходит.” Slavnikova 2006c).

10 These names, however, suggest some interesting intertextual connections. For example, the main male character shares his name and surname with the well-known nineteenth-century poet and fable writer Ivan Andreevich Krylov (1769-1844). This could be a hint at the fantastic, fable-like component of the novel. Sutcliffe (2007: 10) interprets his surname as derived from the word “kryl’ia” (wings): “Krylov is seemingly blessed by the wings of success”. Krylov’s real name and patronymic is Veniamin Iur’evich. It is mentioned only once towards the end of the novel (Slavnikova 2006a: 334). Tania is clearly a ‘literary’ name linked with Pushkin’s ‘novel in verse’ *Evgenii Onegin*, but its literary intertexts do not limit themselves to this, as we will show in this paper.

11 “практикуют топографическое подобие русской рулетки”.

underlies her vision of the globalized world, where the distinction between reality and representation vanishes and what she defines as “the world molecule” (Slavnikova 2010: 164-168, *passim*) keeps the status quo.

Another major plot of the novel is linked with Krylov’s mentor, Professor Anfilogov, a “rock hound” (*khitnik*) who explores the Urals, *aka* the Riphean mountains, in search of precious stones and in the end finds his death there. This narrative line introduces the fantastic element with the appearance of the spirits of the Mountains and above all Bazhov’s Mistress of the Mountain, who in turn in the love story plot also appears in one of her multiple transformations as Tania/Ekaterina.

It is interesting to notice how frequently the word “myth” occurs in the first reviews of Olga Slavnikova’s novel. In Belyakov’s review (2006), for example, this word and its derivatives occur seven times. As Elena Elagina (2007) points out, in Slavnikova’s novel a specific myth of the Urals is developed. Unlike the much older and better-known Petersburg myth, the myth of the Urals was created by a single author, Pavel Bazhov (1879-1950), and in much more troubled times: during the notorious 1930s of the Great Purge. Bazhov’s Uralian “faklore” (or “quasifolklore”) (Lipovetsky 2008: 265) was in fact based on “rather vague folkloric beliefs and moulded [...] into an original mythology” (Lipovetsky 2008: 264)¹². However,

12 Bazhov’s biographer, Liudmila Skorino, underlines the fact that Bazhov was born in the family of an iron puddler, Petr Vasil’evich Bazhov, who worked in the iron factories of the Sysert district, 40 km. south of Yekaterinburg. Because his father often moved from one factory to another, young Bazhov got to know the industrial area very well. He also had the opportunity to meet several old workers that would tell stories about the ore mines and their folklore. When he was 12 years old, he met Vasilii Khmelinin, who “was one of the best storytellers [...] and his tales left an indelible impression on him, he

as Slavnikova remarks in an article about the “Upper and lower landscapes of Yekaterinburg”,

Pavel Bazhov’s relevance lies in the fact that, drawing much more from imagination than from folklore, he created a specific Ural mythology, which was needed by the equally specific consciousness of the inhabitants of the Riphean range. As it turned out, he not only created, but also artistically legitimized the world of mountain spirits, which previously vaguely existed in the boastful and scary tales of prospectors, tricksters, and the restless mass of mining people and convicts. He established hierarchy and kinship ties among the spirits, which is important for the viability of the myth and of the plots that can be developed out of it. Despite being a stylization and a mystification, the “Malachite Casket” corresponded to a reality much deeper than the reality of folklore.

This is above all a deep geological reality in the literal sense of the word. Bazhov’s images correspond to the structures of the underground mountain world, the mysterious elements of the hidden landscape, which is no less plastic and expressive than the visible upper landscape that traditionally serves the interests of literature¹³.

remembered them for all his life” (Skorino 1947: 32). Bazhov himself recalls some episodes of his youth in the essay “At the old mine” (“U starogo rudnika”, *Uralskii sovremennik*, n. 3, 1940, pp. 179-199).

- 13 “Актуальность Павла Бажова заключается в том, что он черпая из воображения гораздо больше, нежели из фольклора, создал специфическую уральскую мифологию, в которое нуждалось столь же специфическое сознание обитателей Рифейского хребта. Мир горных духов, смутно существовавший в хвастливых и страшных байках старателей, хитников, в беспокойной массе горнозаводского и каторжного люда, оказался не только оформлен, но и художественно узаконен между духами были установлены их иерархические и

Since their first publication, the *skazy* – later collected in a volume under the title *The Malachite Casket* (*Malakhitovaia shkatulka*, 1939) – and the Uralian mythology they create, with fantastic creatures like the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, took firm roots in the imagination of Soviet citizens and are still very much alive in today's Russia (see Lipovetsky 2008). In 1943, Bazhov was even awarded the Stalin prize for his collections of 'folk' stories and his books are still present among recommended readings in Russian schools. A major contribution to the popularity of Bazhov's *skazy* is due to the film *The Stone Flower* (*Kamennyi Tsvetok*), directed by Aleksandr Ptushko (1900-1973) and released in 1946. It was seen by over 20 million people in the USSR and was also awarded the prize for Best Colour at the 1946 Cannes Festival¹⁴.

Lipovetsky suggests that at the time Bazhov's Uralian folklore produced an uncanny effect on the Soviet reader:

The promise of escape from Soviet history and the discovery of the uncanny in the place of a protective private, local, home – these effects produced by Bazhov's tales were indeed both frightening and comforting for

родственные связи, что важно для жизнеспособности и сюжетности мифа. Будучи стилизацией и мистификацией, «Малахитовая шкатулка» соответствовала реальности гораздо более глубокой, чем реальность фольклора. [...] Прежде всего это глубокая в буквальном смысле слова реальность геологическая. Образам Бажова соответствуют структуры подземного горного мира, загадочные элементы скрытого пейзажа – не менее пластичного и выразительного, нежели видимый глазу верхний пейзаж, традиционно служащий интересам литературы». (Slavnikova 2000: 295)

14 See the review of the *New York Times* of December 30, 1946 at <<https://cinemafirst.ru/the-new-york-times-o-filme-kamennyj-tsvetok-1946/?ysclid=m87j9pt61r839486518>> accessed November 2024.

Soviet readers. *Skazy* were frightening as the sightings of death and self-destruction in the realm of the familiar. They were also comforting as the articulation of hidden and repressed trauma. Bazhov's tales thus directly communicated to the Soviet unconscious, collective, and individual alike. This explains the uncanny popularity of *Malakhitovaia shkatulka* among several Soviet – and possibly post-Soviet – generations. (Lipovetsky 2008: 281)

According to Slavnikova, Bazhov's mythology is an essential ingredient of the literature created by authors of the Urals:

[Uralian] Mythology is not only alive but also enters the metabolism of the Ural people and their interaction with the environment. Pavel Bazhov gave a literary treatment of this mythology consistent with his time and his readers. I have tried to do the same thing in the present day projecting it onto the year 2017. When people go to the mountains in search of precious stones, they enter the realm of the unpredictable. Thus, they get into a relationship with the “genius of the place”: the Stone Girl, the Dancing Pyralid and similar creatures¹⁵. (Slavnikova 2006b)

- 15 “[Уральская] мифология не только жива, но входит в обмен веществ уральского человека с окружающей его средой. Павел Бажов дал литературную обработку этой мифологии применительно к своему времени, к своему читателю. Я попыталась сделать то же самое в сегодняшнем дне и в проекции на 2017 год. Когда человек идет в горы за драгоценным камнем, он вступает в область непредсказуемого. Тем самым он вступает в отношения с ‘гением места’: Каменной Девкой, Пляшущей Огневкой и подобными существами”.

As an example of the persistent popularity of Bazhov's *skazy*, Lipovetsky mentions the creation in Chelyabinsk in the early 1990s of a neo-pagan sect that used Bazhov's tales as their sacred texts. The members of the sect, or Academy of the Innermost Knowledge, called themselves *bazhovtsy*, Bazhov's followers (Lipovetsky 2008: 265; Semenova 2004)¹⁶.

In the novel, the Urals are constantly referred to as "Riphean Mountains", adopting the ancient denomination of a mythological mountain range that since the seventh century BC was thought to be situated somewhere at the extreme northeast end of the world known at the time. They were also mentioned and described in Latin and late antique literature and in geographic texts during the Middle Ages. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, "the mythical Ryphean and Hyperborean mountains invariably appeared" in the maps of 'Sarmatia', "by Bernard Wapowski (1507) and by Martin Waldesmfller (1511), [...] based on old concepts" (Zantuan 1968: 330). However, Krakow scholar Maciej Miechowita (1457-1523), in his *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* (1517), "questioned the vision of a remote land, vague and fantastic, [...] based chiefly on the writings of Aristotle and Herodotus" (Zantuan 1968: 328), denying the existence of the "fantastic" Riphean and Hyperborean Mountains. In this he was supported by Baron Sigismund von Herberstein (1486-1566), who in the 1510s visited Moscow and later wrote *Rerum Moscovitarum Commentarii* (1549), in which, while confirming the nonexistence of the Riphean Mountains as Miechowita maintained, corrected a series of factual errors of his *Tractatus* (Zantuan 1968: 335-336). After that, the Riphean Mountains gradually disappeared from geographical maps.

16 See also Abashev 2014a for other examples of how mass culture has used and reinterpreted Bazhov's mythology.

From this brief historical overview, we can infer that Slavnikova adopted this rather transparent pseudonym for the Urals not only as a means of estrangement, but more probably because of the evanescent and phantasmatic nature of the millenary myth that surrounds this mountain range. Indeed, these features fit well in the general conception of the novel, in which, as we have seen above, the discrepancy between reality and illusion, copy and imitation, is continuously emphasized. This is aptly synthesized in Krylov's perception of "the world [...] as a string of copies without an original."¹⁷ (Slavnikova 2010: 57). Even the centenary of the Revolution in this civilization of mystification is celebrated through its imitation (see Remizova 2006).

As critic Beliaikov (2006) noted, Slavnikova "belongs to that rare type of writer who not only create their own isolated artistic world but also become creators of their own mythology. [...] [She] has radically reinterpreted Bazhov's mythology"¹⁸. A clear example of this process of mythologization can be the city where the story is set. Its name is never mentioned, it is often referred to as "the four-million Riphean capital"¹⁹ (Slavnikova 2010: 179). However, the reference to Yekaterinburg / Sverdlovsk is rather transparent, and reinforced by certain details like "the abandoned TV tower

17 "Мир предстал перед юным Крыловым чередой копий без оригинала". (Slavnikova 2006a: 58)

18 "Она относится к тому редкому типу писателей, что создают не только свой, изолированный художественный мир, но и становятся творцами собственной мифологии. [...] [Она] радикально переосмыслила бажовскую мифологию".

19 "в центре четырехмиллионной [...] рифейской столицы" (Slavnikova 2006a: 223). This is an example of Slavnikova's mystifying play with reality and fiction: Yekaterinburg is indeed the fourth city in the Russian Federation for number of inhabitants, but it does not reach four million, it amounts to approximately one and a half million inhabitants in total.

that the Riphean called the Toadstool”²⁰ (Slavnikova 2010: 62), or “the open-air geology museum, where the big chunks of jasper flushed out by the dam looked like pieces of stone meat shot through with quartz veins”²¹ (Slavnikova 2010: 69). For somebody familiar with it, this is enough to recognize the city. There are plenty of details, however, that Slavnikova adds, creating “a space of its own, which is only partly copied from the original, and partly artificially synthesized”²² (Beliakov 2006). For example, she represents the pulling down of the tower, which in fact happened more than a decade later, in 2018²³. Afterwards, the city’s skyline assumes a “spectral nature” (Sutcliffe 2007: 10) with the lingering “of the dusty spectre of a fatter Toadstool”²⁴ (Slavnikova 2010: 71). It is not surprising that for her novel Olga Slavnikova chose Yekaterinburg, which became infamous because of the slaughter of the imperial family in July 1918. This allows her to mix the story of a new cycle of revolution beginning on the centenary of the Bolshevik upheaval with Bazhov’s mythology. This city, which the two lovers explore in search of a temporary refuge, offers only desolate concrete landscapes and is inhabited by gangs of aggressive

20 “зброшенную телебашню, именуемую у рифейцев ‘поганкой’”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 64)

21 “геологический музей под открытым небом, где орошаемые плотиной яшмовые глыбы напоминали куски проложенного кварцевыми жилами каменного мяса”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 73)

22 “[...] создает собственное пространство, которое лишь отчасти списано с оригинала, а отчасти – синтезировано искусственно”.

23 When the novel was written the Tower was still standing, and there was even talk of restoring it. It was finally pulled down in 2018, despite the inhabitants’ protests. See the report at <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/03/24/v-ekaterinburge-snesli-zabroshennuyu-telebashnyu-samoe-vysokoe-zdanie-v-gor-ode-reportazh-meduzy>, accessed November 2024.

24 “пыльный призрак как бы растолстевшей ‘поганки’”. (Slavnikova 2006: 76)

teenagers²⁵. The Toadstool in it represents an anomaly and in fact it is “the true symbol and expression of the Riphean spirit”, it is “the largest of those irrational phenomena that seemed to have come about purely to arouse the Ripheans’ principal instinct [...] to conquer what you weren’t supposed to, or, even better, were forbidden to”²⁶ (Slavnikova 2010: 69).

Slavnikova introduces her long digression about the Riphean Mountains by describing them as “an old, stretched out scar [...] on a relief globe” (Slavnikova 2010: 53)²⁷. The Ural region represents a completely different model of geological space in comparison to the dominant one of Russian “flat vastness”. Rather than underlining, as in the case of the Caucasus, the vertical dimension of the mountain range, it stresses the idea of the “bowels of the earth” and their “dark and inexhaustible underground depth”²⁸ (Abashev, Abasheva 2012: 146), where “untold natural resources are stored: gold and precious stones, copper and coal, marble and malachite” (Skorino 1986: 3).

Because “the Riphean range²⁹ is in one of those enigmatic

25 Slavnikova (2010: 39-41; Slavnikova 2006a: 35-39) describes how Krylov was attacked by a group of youths in a desolate industrial zone.

26 “В действительности истинным символом и выразителем рифейского духа была лиловешая над городом “поганка” – самый крупный из тех иррациональных феноменов, что возникали, казалось, только для того, чтобы возбудить в рифейцах их главный инстинкт [...] к освоению не предназначенных, а лучше запрещенных [объектов]”. (Slavnikova 2006: 73)

27 “Рифейские горы на рельефном глобусе похожи на старый растянутый шрам”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 53)

28 “На Урале русскому человеку едва ли не впервые открылись земные недра, их мощь и тайна, и с Уралом в русскую культуру вошла новая модель геопространства, доминирующим началом которой стала не равнинная бескрайность, а темная и неистощимая подземная глубина”.

29 “Это Урал, в недрах которого хранятся несметные природные богатства: золото и драгоценные камни, медь и каменный уголь, мрамор и малахит”.

regions where the landscape directly affects people's minds"³⁰ (Slavnikova 2010: 29) and "the true Riphean's thinking [is] fantastic thinking"³¹ (Slavnikova 2010: 31), Slavnikova creates a myth of her own about the "true Riphean mentality"³² (Slavnikova 2010: 55), and the "essence of true Riphean-ness"³³ (Slavnikova 2010: 68):

In the Urals, there are the so-called rock hounds, people who mine gems without a license. They are not professionals or geologists. [...] their true life is a "romance with a rock" [...] The "romance with a rock" is excitement, luck, fortune. It is hazard [...] All people who engage in risky activities are superstitious. The Riphean person is deeply connected with the world of mountain spirits. At his time Bazhov described this world. But this world also exists outside his fairy tales. For a Riphean person it is real³⁴. (Slavnikova 2006c)

The Riphean Mountains represent an anomaly 'zone' in contrast to the city, which stands as a symbol of human civilization

30 "Рифейская гряда, несомненно, располагается в одном из тех загадочных регионов, где пейзаж непосредственно влияет на умы". (Slavnikova 2006a: 78)

31 "мышление истинного рифейца есть мышление фантастическое". (Slavnikova 2006a: 81)

32 "в коренную рифейскую ментальность". (Slavnikova 2006a: 57)

33 "суть природного рифейства". (Slavnikova 2006a: 72)

34 "На Урале существуют так называемые хитники – люди, без лицензии добывающие самоцветы. Они не профессионалы, не геологи. [...] их подлинная жизнь – это «роман с камнем» [...] «Роман с камнем» – это азарт, удача, фарт. Это риск [...] Все люди рискованных занятий суеверны. Рифейский человек глубоко связан с миром горных духов. Этот мир описал в свое время Павел Бажов, но этот мир существует и вне бажовских сказов. Для рифейца он реален".

in its current state. They are an alternative to the abomination produced by humanity. The rock hunters are familiar with this anomaly and its “phenomena”:

Like many others, he [Krylov] had seen lesser phenomena in campfires, when the flame, after crumbling the fragile blazing coals like wafers, suddenly seemed to rear up on its toes and start dancing, turning the team’s faces into a flickering movie. Later, in the ash-gray fire ring, they would find characteristic “bruises”: solid patches of dark purple which led prospectors in the know to gold-bearing sand within a twenty-meter radius³⁵. (Slavnikova 2010: 73)

Here Slavnikova is describing the manifestation of one of the spirits of the Mountain, the Dancing Firemaid (Ognevushka-Poskakushka)³⁶. She is a little girl who appears dancing in the fire and makes the snow melt revealing where to find gold. A few lines after introducing her, Slavnikova describes the rock hunters as “stalkers” (*stalkery*), repeating the word a couple of times in similar

35 “ему, как и многим, приходилось видеть слабые феномены в кострах, когда огонь, раскрошив, как вафли, пышущие хрупкие уголья, вдруг словно привставал на цыпочки и принимался танцевать, превращая лица артельщиков в дрожащее кино. Потом в поседевшем костровище обнаруживались характерные ‘синяки’: плотные пятна темно-лилового цвета, по которым знающие люди отыскивали в радиусе двух десятков метров золотой песок”. (Slavnikova 2006: 90)

36 Literally the “jumping / hopping fire girl”, also translated as “The Fire-Fairy”. In the novel, during his second expedition to the Northern Urals in search of precious stones, Anfilogov and his companion find a malignant version of this spirit, the Dancing Pyralid (Pliashushchaia Ognevka), who on the contrary transforms fire into ice and reveals nothing to the rock hunters, trying to kill them (Slavnikova 2010: 193).

contexts of the novel³⁷. This is a clear reference to Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, who introduced this word into the Russian language in their philosophical science fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* (*Piknik na obochine*, 1972). In this book, stalkers are people who trespass into the forbidden area known as the Zone where an extraterrestrial event, the so-called Visitation, has occurred. They steal valuable extraterrestrial artifacts from there in order to sell them. In 1979, Soviet film director Andrei Tarkovsky based his film *Stalker* on this novel, and the screenplay was written by the Strugatsky brothers themselves. Slavnikova adds to Bazhov's mythology this element taken from science fiction and from Tarkovsky's film. Along with the mythical spirits of the Mountain that haunt the Urals, she even mentions UFOs³⁸.

Slavnikova's own mythmaking is in conflict with the traditional reproduction of "the nature logos"³⁹ (Slavnikova 2010: 30) of the Urals, as she calls the visual clichés of decorative folklore connected with Bazhov's *skazy* (Abashev 2014a: 152). Her representation of one of the most iconic figures of Bazhov's mythology, the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, "looks nothing like the beautiful actress in the fake blue eyelashes and green headdress who represents the Mistress in local theater matinees."⁴⁰ (Slavnikova 2010: 33). Unlike what happens in Bazhov's *skazy*, where she appears to the mine workers in the full glow of her beauty, she can take the form of

37 The English translator uses instead the word "aficionados" (Slavnikova 2010: 73).

38 On pp. 39 and 299 of the English translation and pp. 265, 267, 413 of the original one.

39 "Природные логотипы". (Slavnikova 2006a: 80)

40 "Каменная Девка, она же Хозяйка горы, вовсе не похожа на красивую артистку в синих накладных ресницах и в зеленом кокошнике, что представляет Хозяйку в утренних спектаклях драмтеатра". (Slavnikova 2006a: 85)

ordinary women and easily mix with the population of the Ural region and appear even in the middle of the city:

The Stone Maiden can appear to a rock hound in the most ordinary guise – for instance, like the middle-aged vacationing schoolteacher stained with berries, besieged by mosquitoes, and carrying a pail of cucumbers; or like the woman at the little train station’s snack bar with the starched tower of bleached hair and puffy, yearning eyes; or like the fifteen-year-old girl who has a breeze flying down the neck of her loose t-shirt as she bends over and works the pedals of her rickety bike⁴¹. (Slavnikova 2010: 33)

In Bazhov’s *skaz* the Mistress of the Copper Mountain has an imposing and stately appearance:

It was a sort of deep black, that plait of hers, and didn’t dangle as our maids’ do, but lay close and straight down her back [...] Her robe, now, it was something you’d never see anywhere else. It was all made of silk malachite, that’s a kind you get sometimes. It’s stone but it looks like silk, you want to take and stroke it⁴². (Bazhov 1945: 12)

41 “Каменная Девка может явиться хитнику в виде самом обыкновенном: показаться, например, немолодой интеллигентной дачницей, испачканной ягодами и раздавленными комарами, с ведром огурцов; или буфетчицей на маленькой станции с накрахмаленной башней обесцвеченных волос и тоскующими глазами в припухлых мешочках; или девчонкой лет пятнадцати, у которой в горловину свободной майки залетает ветерок, когда она, пригнувшись, жмет на педали бряцающего велосипеда”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 85)

42 “Коса ссиза-черная и не как у наших девок болтается, а ровно прилипла к спине. На конце ленты не то красные, не то зеленые. Сквозь светеют и тонко этак позванивают, будто листовая медь. [...] А одежда и верно такая,

Tanya, who, as we have seen above, is in fact one of the incarnations of the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, does not at all resemble her, she is rather transparent and immaterial. Perhaps it is exactly this transparency that attracts Krylov to her:

The stranger shone through her thin, gauzy dress and was silhouetted in a sun cocoon, like a shadow on a dusty windowpane. [...] A cursory glance had taken in vaccination scars like oat flakes, a tiny patent leather purse, and a pink, mannish ear, behind which unconscious fingers kept tucking a lock of hair cropped short. Standing close to the stranger, Krylov for some reason lost his sense of his own height and couldn't tell whether he was in fact taller or not. This woman seemed wholly self-contained⁴³. (Slavnikova 2010: 9, 11)

The choice of the name Tanya in Slavnikova's novel acquires further significance, if we consider that the protagonist of *skaz* "The Malachite Casket" is called Tanyushka. At the end of the previous *skaz* "The Mistress of the Copper Mountain", Stepan dies

что другой на свете не найдешь. Из шелкового, слышь-ко, малахиту платье. Сорт такой бывает. Камень, а на глаз как шелк, хоть рукой погладить". (Bazhov 1986, I: 53-54)

- 43 "Незнакомка просвечивала сквозь тонкое марлевое платье и рисовалась в солнечном коконе, будто тень на пыльном стекле. [...] мельком бросаемый взгляд выхватывал то следы прививок, похожие на овсяные хлопья, то крошечную лаковую сумку, то крупное, мужского кроя, розовое ухо, за которое небрежные пальцы, нарушая равновесие очков, то и дело заправляли коротко обрубленную прядь. Стоя близко от незнакомки, Крылов почему-то терял представление о собственном росте и не мог определить, выше он ее или все-таки нет. Эта женщина казалась ему абсолютно замкнутой в себе" (Slavnikova 2006a: 6, 8). For a Russian reader the fact that in this first encounter Tania is defined "neznamomka", here translated as 'the stranger', is a clear hint at Alexandr Blok's well known poem.

leaving his widow a precious malachite casket the Mistress had given him before his marriage. They have a daughter, Taniushka, who “wasn’t like her mother or father either [...] with dark hair and [...] green eyes” (Bazhov 1945: 23-24)⁴⁴, just like the Mistress. Unlike her mother, who felt discomfort when wearing the jewels contained in the casket, Taniushka

tried on this and that, and it was a wonder, whatever she put on, you’d have thought it was made for her. [...] She kept on saying: “Oh, Mummie, I feel so nice in Father’s presents, they’re all warm, it’s like sitting in the sun and somebody stroking you very, very softly.”⁴⁵ (Bazhov 1945: 24)

Not only the jewels from the casket make Taniushka feel comfortable when she’s wearing them, but their radiance probably saves her by blinding a robber that slips into her home (Bazhov 1945: 25; Bazhov 1986, I: 65). Later, a mysterious woman vagrant, “not very tall, dark, with sharp, keen eyes”⁴⁶ (Bazhov 1945: 27), turns up at their home asking to stop there for a rest. She keeps calling Taniushka affectionately “child and daughter”. The girl takes a liking to her but Nastas’ia, her mother, is not very pleased and thinks “[she] found herself a new mother”⁴⁷ (Bazhov 1945:

44 “а эта, как говорится, ни в мать, ни в отца. [...] Сама черненька [...], а глазки зелененьки”. (Bazhov 1986, I: 64)

45 “И вот диво – которую примеряет, та и по ней. [...] Да еще говорит: – Мамонька, сколь хорошо тятино-то подаренье Тепло от него, будто на пригревинке сидишь, да еще кто тебя мягким гладит”. (Bazhov 1986, I: 64-65)

46 “Приходит к ним женщина. Небольшого роста, чернявая, [...] а востроглазая”. (Bazhov 1986, I: 67)

47 “«Нашла себе новую родню»” (Bazhov 1986, I: 68). Stepan would explain the fact that his daughter did not resemble him or her mother, with his work

28). After Tania reveals to her the existence of the casket and its precious content, the old woman shows Tanya the same vision of the fantastic malachite underground palace that Stepan saw when he met the Mistress of the Copper Mountain. This is a clear sign that the mysterious woman is in fact the Mistress of the Copper Mountain herself in one of her hypostases. Taniushka's own appearance is transformed in this vision,

[...] like in a mirror, stood a beautiful maiden, the kind you hear in fairy-tales. Her hair was dark as night and her eyes shone green. She was decked with precious stones, and her robe was of green velvet that gleamed all shades⁴⁸. (Bazhov 1945: 29)

As it turns out at the end of the *skaz*, when Taniushka is taken to the empress's palace in St. Petersburg, after showing her stunning beauty, she disappears melting into the malachite walls of the palace. “[...] Talk started going round that the Mistress of the Copper Mountain had a double: folks would see two maids in malachite robes, two of them together”⁴⁹ (Bazhov 1945: 46).

In Slavnikova's novel there is another hypostasis of the Mistress, whose name is linked with another female character in Bazhov's

underground digging up huge quantities of malachite all of his life (Bazhov 1945: 24; Bazhov 1986, I: 64). However, it seems that through him, the Mistress of the Copper Mountain transmitted her features to his daughter, thus acquiring the role of her real parent.

48 “в зеркале, стоит красавица, про каких только в сказках сказывают. Волосы, как ночь, а глаза зеленые. И вся-то она изукрашена дорогими камнями, а платье на ней из зеленого бархату с переливом”. (Bazhov 1986, I: 69)

49 “Сказывали, будто Хозяйка Медной горы двоиться стала: сразу двух девиц в малахитовых платьях люди видали”. (Bazhov 1986, I: 83)

tales. It is the case of Anfilogov's third wife, whom he marries a few months after his discovery of the fabulous corundum vein. Her name is Ekaterina Sergeevna, and this is in fact the true identity of Krylov's "blonde". During the expedition, when the professor and his partner are looking in vain for precious stones, he dreams of a woman, "a lizard-narrow creature"⁵⁰ who is crying and whose tears "aroused Anfilogov incredibly"⁵¹:

At the same time he was aware that the woman was by no means a stranger to him; moreover, it was very definitely one of his distant relatives, a decent, ordinary young girl whom Anfilogov occasionally slipped a little money and who, in gratitude, in thanks, dashed over to clean his inviolable apartment and once broke a delicate porcelain teacup that had lived a grand life⁵². (Slavnikova 2010: 110)

In the morning, he reflects on his dream, "at the thought of this schoolmarm of a woman, always dressed in crummy little sweaters and stupid jean skirts that looked like they'd been dyed with ink, his heart for some reason contracted" (Slavnikova 2010: 111)⁵³. Exactly when he is reaching the decision to leave the camp and

50 "В узком, словно ящерица, существе". (Slavnikova 2006a: 135)

51 "беззвучные слезы невероятно возбуждали Анфилогова". (Slavnikova 2006a: 135)

52 "В то же время он осознавал, что женщина ему не вовсе незнакома, более того – это совершенно точно одна его дальняя родственница, обычная гуманитарная девица, которой Анфилогов иногда подбрасывал немного денег, а та ответно порывалась сделать уборку в его неприкосновенной квартире и однажды разбила тонкую, прожившую большую жизнь фарфоровую чашку". (Slavnikova 2006a: 135)

53 "Но при мысли об этой женщине типа 'училка', всегда одетой в нищие свитерочки и в какие-то нелепые, будто крашенные чернилами джинсовые юбки, у него почему-то заходило сердце". (Slavnikova 2006a: 136)

return home, he notices “a woman’s silhouette as if through tissue paper”⁵⁴:

The woman was standing under a deep umbrella, and he couldn’t see her face, but Anfilogov recognized her by her slender legs and her laced boots sunk in the clay. The woman turned around very slowly and began walking uphill [...] the creature vanished, without reaching the limit of visibility but simply dissolving in the thickening drizzle [...] Trying to walk decisively, feeling his heavy heart grow heavier with each step, he climbed up to where the Mistress of the Mountain had lingered a few minutes before. There, in the diluted clay, the traces from her heel prints were distinctly visible⁵⁵. (Slavnikova 2010: 113)

It is the Mistress of the Mountain, who has taken the appearance of Anfilogov’s cousin in order to show him where to continue searching for the rich corundum vein in the prospecting pit, which had been abandoned because before nothing valuable was found there.

However, after finding the precious stones, Anfilogov and

54 “блеклый, видный словно через папиросную бумагу женский силуэт”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 138)

55 “Женщина стояла под глубоким зонтом, лица ее было не разглядеть, но Анфилогов узнал ее и по ногам, составленным тесно, точно росшим, как двойное деревце, из общего корня, и по утонувшим в глине шнурованным ботинкам. Очень медленно повернувшись, женщина стала подниматься в гору [...] существо исчезло, не дойдя до предела видимости, а просто растворившись в загустевшей мороси [...] Стараясь шагать решительно, ощущая, как с каждым ударом прибавляет в весе тяжелое сердце, он поднялся туда, где несколько минут назад топталась Хозяйка горы. Там, на разжиженной глине, были отчетливо видны похожие на следы от табуретки отпечатки каблучков”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 138)

Kolian cannot stop digging at the risk of starving. They are literally obsessed with the vein that “demanded that the rock hounds die alive, that they burn the last calorie there was to burn in their human bodies and, emptied, remain here, so that they would always – with their dead sight – see this terrible beauty”⁵⁶ (Slavnikova 2010: 116). They are replicating Danilo’s obsession for the stone flower that makes him leave his fiancée Katia and stay in the Mistress’s Mountain workshop for a few years in Bazhov’s *skaz* of the same name. In *The Mountain Craftman*, however, Katia keeps waiting for him and in the meantime, she learns the craft of making malachite brooches with stones she finds up on Serpent Hill. She thinks that Danilo has left them for her to find, because he has not forgotten his Katia even in the underground realm of the Mistress of the Mountain. For this reason, she finally manages to make the Mistress let Danilo go back to her.

In Slavnikova’s novel it is Anfilogov, alias Danilo, who, by remembering the name of the woman he has dreamed of and whose appearance the Mistress has taken, manages to free himself of the obsession for the corundum pit:

[...] Distracted, Anfilogov tried to remember the name of the humanitarian girl. Irina? Inga? He thought it started with an “I.” The names that collected in his mind seemed artificial. “Ekaterina,” a distinct, honey-filled voice said at the professor’s ear. Instantly the professor felt the charms of the corundum river recede and how much room there was everywhere. [...] Anfilogov stood up and looked around. There, to the southwest, beyond the thick, furlike

56 “Жила требовала от хитников умереть живьем: сжечь до последней калории то, что годилось для сжигания в их человеческих телах, и, опустев, остаться здесь, чтобы всегда – и мертвым зрением – видеть эту страшную красоту”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 141)

forests [...] in a city [...] there was a real woman for whom the professor was now experiencing a passionate and painful curiosity. He realized that the Mistress of the Mountain was herself dragging him out and back to life [...]”⁵⁷. (Slavnikova 2010: 117)

However, once he is back home and has married Ekaterina Sergeevna, Anfilogov cannot stop thinking about the precious stones he found and comparing his new wife with the vision he had near the pit: “[he] did not find in her standard, somewhat papery appearance any specific signs of aging, but she did not at all match the subtle, milky, tear-stained image in which he dreamed of her by the corundum prospecting pits on the eve of his main find”⁵⁸ (Slavnikova 2010: 195). He visits his wife’s apartment on set days to perform his conjugal duty but does not show much affection towards her. He does not even give her any money for

57 “Отвлекаясь, Анфилогов попытался вспомнить имя гуманитарной девицы. Ирина? Инга? Что-то как будто на И. Имена, подбираемые в уме, казались искусственными. ‘Екатерина’, – произнес над ухом профессора отчетливый голос, наполненный медом. [...] Он понимал, что Хозяйка горы сама выводит его обратно в жизнь, но пока не представлял, как сумеет этим воспользоваться”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 142-143)

58 “Анфилогов не находил в ее стандартной, несколько бумажной внешности никаких конкретных признаков возраста. Она совершенно не совпадала с тем сублильным, молочным, заплаканным образом, в каком приснилась ему вблизи корундовых шурфов накануне главной находки” (Slavnikova 2006a: 248). Krylov also notices that Tania seems “young but at the same time completely ageless; [...] Tania could have been thirty or fifty. He didn’t like thinking just how old. ... At times Krylov thought Tania was in some – by no means Christian – sense immortal” (Slavnikova 2010: 45). “Она была как будто молода – но при этом совершенно без возраста. [...] Тане могло быть и тридцать, и пятьдесят, и страшно подумать сколько. [...] Минутами Крылову казалось, что Таня в каком-то – вовсе не в христианском – смысле бессмертна”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 45)

clothes, tolerating her shabby and “faded wardrobe. For some reason the professor found the notion of Ekaterina Sergeevna in a mink coat highly distasteful”⁵⁹ (Slavnikova 2010: 195). However, he starts thinking about death, and rewrites his will, leaving everything to her. Only a few days before leaving on his expedition to the North, does Anfilogov fleetingly experience a sort of tenderness towards his wife. The night before his departure he gives her all the codes of his credit cards and reveals to her where his precious stones are hidden. But once he left for his expedition, and “Ekaterina Sergeevna was back in the city, [...] the sole heir and mistress of all his secrets, Anfilogov had the feeling he would never return”⁶⁰ (Slavnikova 2010: 198).

Krylov’s ex-wife, Tamara is probably the female character whose appearance most recalls that of the Mistress of the Mountain as in the cliché illustrations of this character. While Tania is an evanescent “through-the-looking-glass creature”⁶¹ (Slavnikova 2010: 25), she is statuesque, elegant and beautiful. She favours an emerald necklace (Slavnikova 2010: 24; Slavnikova 2006a: 26) and the colour green, like the Mistress of the Mountain. Her name, however, is not connected with a character of Bazhov’s *skazy*, but rather with the actress Tamara Makarova (1907-1997), who played the role of the Mistress of the Mountain in Ptushko’s famous film *The Stone Flower*. In spite of having divorced her, Krylov is still emotionally attached to her, and spends much time with her listening to her monologues, which convey some of the main

59 “Он не давал супруге денег на тряпки и сознательно терпел ее линейный гардероб: отчего-то представление об Екатерине Сергеевне в норковой шубке было профессору крайне неприятно”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 250)

60 “Но теперь, когда Екатерина Сергеевна осталась в городе полной наследницей и хозяйкой всех его секретов, у Анфилогова было ощущение, будто он никогда не вернется домой”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 252)

61 “Таня была существом Зазеркалья”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 27)

conceptions that lay at the basis of the novel. She is very rich and has a successful funeral home, and she is also called “Mrs Death”⁶² (Slavnikova 2010: 302), not only because of her business, but above all because of her connection with the “cyanide heap leaching sectors for the Severzolino gold-processing plant”⁶³ (Slavnikova 2010: 298), which has polluted the groundwater for miles, ultimately causing the death of Anfilogov in the far North of the Urals. The reader cannot but wonder if at the time when she was briefly the owner of the plant, the Mistress of the Mountain might have “taken up residence” in Tamara’s body, creating the conditions that would lead Anfilogov into the mountains, destroying him, “and then, as if nothing had happened, [she went] back to her job and family”⁶⁴ (Slavnikova 2010: 284).

After learning from Tamara about Anfilogov’s death and its real reasons, Krylov gets Tania’s address and finally finds her. She has radically changed her appearance, she has had some kind of facelift and is wearing “a pink fur jacket, and rhinestones sparkle[d] on her legs, which wobble[d] in pink boots with mirror heels”⁶⁵ (Slavnikova 2010: 385). Her appearance makes her resemble Tamara, they share the same makeup and even some jewellery that

62 “Да она и есть Госпожа Смерть!”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 416)

63 “Это один из участков кучного выщелачивания золотообогатительной фабрики ‘Северзолото’”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 411)

64 “Женщины, в которых вселяется Каменная Девка, говорят, берутся вовсе не из воздуха. [...] Такая загубит человека, заведет его в горы, а потом как ни в чем не бывало возвращается на службу и в семью”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 396-397)

65 “ветер раздувал до укромного светлого пуха распахнутую шубку розового меха, на ногах сверкали стразами и виляли зеркальными каблучками розовые сапоги” (Slavnikova 2006a: 507). These high heel shoes clash with the flat, worn sandals Tania used to wear.

seems to be coming “out of one of Tamara’s safes”⁶⁶ (Slavnikova 2010: 397). She has inherited Anfilogov’s treasures and is not going to let them go. As she explains to Krylov, she is not interested in money as such. Hers is a dream of eternal youth, a variant of the dream of immortality. She needs money to struggle against women’s “only one illness: old age”⁶⁷ (Slavnikova 2010: 396). Paradoxically, however, she can win this battle only at the cost of losing her humanity and crossing through the looking-glass into the dimension of the spirits of the Mountain, as Taniushka does in the *skaz* *The Malachite Casket*, completely merging with the Mistress of the Mountain and acquiring her mineralized consistence: “What Krylov had taken for a facelift done at a beauty spa may have been the onset of mineralization. Tat’iana’s skin looked like it had been seized from the inside by cold quartz ice”⁶⁸ (Slavnikova 2010: 399). Furthermore, she seems to have grown in height, in her transformation she will probably reach the gigantic dimensions of the “the Mistress of the Mountain, the richest woman in the world, [who] is nearly four meters tall”⁶⁹ (Slavnikova 2010: 399).

When Krylov leaves the luxurious but lifeless apartment Tania has inherited from Anfilogov, having given her his telephone number in a futile attempt to keep in contact, in the hall he sees a “blue-curled old lady who had been there before [...] sitting in the

66 “золотое украшение от Tiffany [...] казалось взятым в одном из Тамариных сейфов”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 521)

67 “Но у женщин, пойми, есть одно заболевание: старость”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 520)

68 “То, что Крылов принял за подтяжку лица, сделанную в салоне красоты, было, возможно, началом минерализации: кожу Татьяны словно схватило изнутри холодным кварцевым ледком”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 525)

69 “Говорят, Хозяйка горы, самая богатая женщина мира, ростом под четыре метра”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 524-525)

leather armchair, her very soft hands folded on the knob of her cane [...] and her rejuvenated silicon face” raised to look at him. Is it a reminder of what Tania might be in a few years or another hypostasis of the Mistress of the Mountain?

After this encounter, Krylov has a dream that in a way confirms his intuition about Tania’s transformation and her being engulfed in the underground realm:

In the freezing shroud a four-meter female silhouette could be made out just barely. The Mistress of the Mountain’s bright, faceted eyes were wide open, and a frozen pink fur coat that stung like a brush hung on her stone shoulder. Broken suitcases lay open at the feet of the richest woman in the world, on the snow-speckled boulders, and delicate women’s dresses fluttered, turning to ice⁷⁰. (Slavnikova 2010: 406)

Thus, Krylov is finally free of his obsession with Tanya and a few days before the ominous date of the centenary, from the very same station where Anfilogov left a few months before and where he met her, he leaves with Farid in search of Anfilogov’s corundum vein, which they have managed to locate in the Northern part of the Riphean Mountains. Like the Strugatsky brothers’ novel quoted above, Slavnikova’s *2017* has an open ending: the expedition might be successful or turn into a tragedy. Perhaps the Mistress of the Mountain will spare Krylov and his companion

70 “Белым дымом дымились черные леса. В мерцающей пелене едва рисовался четырехметровый женский силуэт. Светлые граненые глаза Хозяйки горы были широко раскрыты; на каменном плече ее висела мерзлая, колючая, как щетка, розовая шубка. Под ногами самой богатой женщины мира на рябых от снега валунах валялись разбитые чемоданы, трепетали, стекленея, нежные женские тряпочки”. (Slavnikova 2006a: 533)

Farid, whose great secret is his goodness, or maybe, like Danila and others, they will be taken prisoner in the chthonic realm that Bazhov described so well in his *skazy*.

Bibliography

- Abashev Vladimir (2014a), “Intermedial’nye transformacii gornoj mifologii P.P. Bazhova v romane Ol’gi Slavnikovoi ‘2017’”, *Vestnik permskogo universiteta*, 1 (25): 143-158.
- Abashev Vladimir (2014b), *Obrazy gornoj mifologii P.P. Bazhova v romane Ol’gi Slavnikovoi ‘2017’*, in P.P. Bazhov v meniaiushchemsia mire. *Sbornik statei Vtoroi Vserossiiskoi nauchnoi konferencii s mezhdunarodnym uchastiem, posviashchennoi 135-letnemu iubileiu pisatelja (Ekaterinburg, 13-14 fevralia 2014 g.)*, Ekaterinburg, Ob”edinennyi Muzei pisatelei Urala: 152-167.
- Abashev Vladimir, Abasheva Marina (2012), “Literatura i geografiia. Ural v geopoetike Rossii”, *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta*, 2 (19): 143-151.
- Ågren Mattias (2014), *Phantoms of a Future Past: A Study of Contemporary Russian Anti-Utopian Novels*, Stockholm, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis.
- Amusin Mark (2007), “Novaia rossiiskaia futurologiia”, *Zvezda*, 12, <<https://magazines.gorky.media/zvezda/2007/12/novaya-rossijskaya-futurologiya.html?ysclid=m5fn838ggeG7304289>>, (last accessed November 2024).
- Baudrillard Jean (1994), *Simulacra and Simulation*, Engl. transl. by Glaser Sheila Faria, Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan Press.
- Bazhov Pavel (1940), “U starogo rudnika”, *Ural’skii sovremennik*, 3: 179-199.
- Bazhov Pavel (1945), *The Malachite Casket: Tales from the Urals*, trans. by Manning Eve, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Bazhov Pavel (1986), *Sochineniia v trekh tomakh*, Moskva, Pravda.
- Beliakov Sergei (2006), “Natiurmort s kamnem”, *Znamia*, 12, <<https://magazines.gorky.media/znamia/2006/12/natiurmort-s-kamnem.html?ysclid=m34jt3fe2b2552878GG>>, (last accessed November 2024).

- Chantsev Aleksandr (2007), "Fabrika antiutopii: distopicheskii diskurs v rossiiskoi literature 2000-kh", *NLO*, 4, <<https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2007/4/fabrika-antiutopij.html?ysclid=m5ffctzww52353G9G23>>, (last accessed November 2024).
- Elagina Elena (2007), "Postizhenie prozrachnosti", *Neva*, 2, <<https://magazines.gorky.media/neva/2007/2/postizhenie-prozrachnosti-yazyk-uliczy-v-akademicheskome-formate.html?ysclid=mG2j571mdy404350040>>, (last accessed November 2024).
- Lipovetsky Mark (2008), *Pavel Bazhov's skazy: Discovering the Soviet Uncanny*, in Balina Marina, Rudova Larissa (eds), *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, New York, Routledge: 263-283.
- Possamai Donatella (2019), *Stoletie revoliutsii: roman Ol'gi Slavnikovoi "2017" v kontekste sovremennoi russkoi literatury*, in Ichin Korneliia (red.-sost.), *Iskusstvo i revoliutsiia: sto let spustia. Sbornik statey*, Belgrad, Filologicheskii fakult'et Belgradskogo Universita: 361-329.
- Possamai Donatella (2020), *Distopia ed ecocritica: 2017 di Olga Slavnikova*, in Berti Francesco, Dell'Asta Adriano, Strada Olga (eds), *La Russia e l'Occidente. Visioni, riflessioni e codici ispirati a Vittorio Strada*, Ricerche Marsilio, Venezia: 192-203.
- Pustovaia Valeriia (2007), "Skifiia v serebre: 'Russkii proekt' v sovremennoi proze", *Novyi mir*, 1, <https://magazines.gorky.media/novi_mi/2007/1/skifiya-v-serebre.html>, (last accessed November 2024).
- Remizova Mariia (2006), "Mnimye velichiny. Recenziia na roman 2017 O. Slavnikovoi", *Novyi mir*, 9, <<https://nm1925.ru/articles/2006/200609/mnimye-velichiny-2563/>>, (last accessed November 2024).
- Semenova Oksana (2004), "Iazychniki s Mednoi gory. Proizvedeniia skazochnika Bazhova stali znamenem okkul'tnoi sekty", *Novosti Moskvy. Religii*, 03.08.2004, <https://ruskline.ru/monitoring_smi/2004/08/03/yazychniki_s_mednoj_gory/>, (last accessed November 2024).
- Skorino Liudmila (1947), *Pavel Petrovich Bazhov*, Moskva, Sovetskii pisatel'.
- Skorino Liudmila (1986), *Pavel Petrovich Bazhov*, in Bazhov Pavel, *Sochineniia v trekh tomakh*, tom I, Moskva, Pravda: 3-50.
- Slavnikova Olga (2000), "Verkhnie i nizhnie peizazhi Ekaterinburga", *NLO*, 5 (45): 294-304.

- Slavnikova Olga (2006a), *2017*, Moskva, Vagrius.
- Slavnikova Olga (2006b), “O kamniakh i ural’skikh mifakh, o premii ‘Debiut’ i knigakh”, Conversation with T. Pavlova, I. Romanova, *U knizbnoi polki*, 3: 3-6, <https://library.by/portalus/modules/-russianculture/readme.php?subaction=showfull&id=144551G81G&archive=&start_from=&ucat=&>, (last accessed 20 November 2024).
- Slavnikova Olga (2006c), “Starshee pokolenie provotsiruet tvorcheskii klimaks u molodykh’. Beseda s Ol’goy Slavnikovoi o ee novoi knige, mire gornyx dukhov i premii ‘Debiut’”, *Interview with Maia Kucherskaia*, *Polit.ru*, 7.03.2006, *Novaia literaturnaia karta Rossii*, <<https://www.litkarta.ru/dossier/starshee-pokolenie-provotsiruet/?-ysclid=m5yqq35a3jG53G22986>>, (last accessed 20 November 2024).
- Slavnikova Olga (2010), *2017*, trans. into English by Schwartz Marian, New York, Overlook Press.
- Sutcliffe Benjamin (2007), “Writing the Urals: Permanence and Ephemerality in Olga Slavnikova’s *2017*”, *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 41: 1-17.
- Zantuan Konstanty (1968), “The Discovery of Modern Russia: *Tractatus de Duabus Sarmatiis*”, *The Russian Review*, 27 (3): 327-337.

Abstracts

AJRES, Alessandro

Abstract

In these most recent years the figure of the Great Goddess has conquered the covers of magazines and was the protagonist of an acclaimed film, such as: *God Exists, her Name is Petrunija* (2019). Its presence in contemporary Polish literature can be observed starting from a poem by Wislawa Szymborska, *A Paleolithic Fertility Fetish* (from the collection *No End of Fun*, 1967), up to the most recent books by Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk, such as *Anna In in the Underworld* (2006) or *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009). Along this path, the Great Goddess “strengthens” her presence in Polish literature to the point of also appearing in Szczepan Twardoch’s novel *The King of Warsaw* (2016) where the point of view is mainly male, when not macho.

Keywords: Literature; Cinema; Poland; Polish literature; Great Goddess.

GOSCILO, Helena

Abstract

Myth, according to Roland Barthes, constitutes a social stereotype passed off as something natural, whereby ideological imposition appears as “what goes without saying”. Since cultures generate

myths to present their norms as facts of nature, myth is a form of communication creating a system of second-order meaning. For centuries Polish culture aligned with Europe's myth of womanhood, but with the dissolution of the Eastern bloc and Poland's recovered independence, an extraordinary revolution in Polish women's cultural production has overturned this hardy but improbable icon of femininity, to reclaim a different womanhood. While the postmodern art of Ewa Juszkiewicz exposes the erasure of women as individuals in male art of previous eras, the prose of Manuela Gretkowska and Olga Tokarczuk, as well as the films of Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Małgorzata Szumowska, and Olga Chajdas, reconceives women as individuated, active, creative, sexual, independent, strong beings. Russian parallels and contrasts, and notably Tania Antoshina, Viktoriia Lamashko, and Liudmila Ulitskaia, are discussed.

Keywords: Marxism; French Feminism; Virgin Mary; Polish Women; Women Studies

IMPOSTI, Gabriella Elina

Abstract

In 2006 Olga Slavnikova published the novel *2017* and at the end of that year she was awarded the prestigious Russian Booker. The date *2017* in the title is a clear reference to Orwell's well-known novel *1984* suggesting the inclusion into the genre of dystopia. The time when this novel is set is unquestionably meaningful and relates to the 'celebrations' of the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution, which turn into a tragic and meaningless bloodshed that in a way makes history go back in a circle. Hence the dystopian character of the novel that combines romance and "fakelore" (Lipovetsky) created by Pavel Bazhov in the 1930s and set in the mines of the Urals. His tales (*skazy*), with their fantastic creatures, while recalling the trauma Soviet citizens were experiencing at the time, "were both frightening and comforting for Soviet readers" (Lipovetsky). They soon took firm roots in the

imagination of the Soviet citizens and is still very much alive in today's Russia.

In this paper we examine how Slavnikova transforms Bazhov's *skazy* into a new contemporary myth, starting from the setting in the Urals, which the author renames 'Riphean Mountains'. She also develops the motif of the "true Riphean mentality" and the "essence of true Ripheanness", which are embodied by the so-called "rock hounds". They are not professionals or geologists but explore the mountains in search of precious stones. In this they are similar to some characters of Bazhov's tales. Krylov and Professor Anfilogov belong to this category. The professor, who is the protagonist of one of the major plots of the novel, after finding a fabulous corundum vein in the North of the Mountain range, dies there as a consequence of deadly pollution. This narrative line introduces the fantastic element with the appearance of the spirits of the Mountains in shapes and ways that deeply differ from the fantastic characters of Bazhov's mythology. Slavnikova focuses her attention on the transformations of the Mistress of the Mountain, who plays a central role in Bazhov's tales. She takes the shape and the personality of ordinary women and makes her appearance even in the main city of the region. Krylov's lover, Tanya and Anfilogov's wife, Ekaterina Sergeevna are the same person. They both are hypostases of the Mistress of the Mountain, and they are also linked to other female characters from Bazhov's tales, as we show in the paper. Another female character, who physically resembles the most conventional representations of the Mistress, is Krylov's ex-wife, Tamara, a successful businesswoman who owns a very exclusive funeral home. In Slavnikova's novel the spirits of the Mountain come back to take their revenge on humans creating a messianic and eschatological neo-mythology of the Urals (Abashev).

Keywords: Slavnikova; Women Studies; Myth Studies; Folklore; Ural Mountains

MARCHESINI, Irina

Abstract

Considering myths as value-laden narratives, this article discusses a possible narratological framework to investigate their deconstruction and rewriting within the wider perspective of Gender Studies. This theoretical approach proves to be particularly useful not only in hermeneutical terms, as it helps disclosing new meanings, but most importantly in terms of social intervention. The second part of the contribution offers an overview of the essays contained in the book, presenting their innovative aspect. Through to the rewriting of myths, the Polish and Russian artists discussed in this volume sought to redefine feminine identity not only in relation to other traditionally excluded groups or to other participants, but also in relation to Nature and the nonhuman world.

Keywords: Narratology; Narrative Theory; Myth Studies; Ecocriticism; Value of Narrative

PETRUSHANSKAYA-AVERBAKH, Elena

Abstract

The term “cluster” in music refers to a consonance similar to a sound “spot” generated by adjacent dissonant sounds that do not fit into traditionally structured chords. In literature it means a diagram indicating the influences and sources of the phenomenon which is the object of this study. In the works of Russian women composers, especially in the twenty-first century, the features of various mythologies, with their transversal points of junction and fusion, are particularly clear. This trend acquires the quality of a “cluster of mythological traces”. For example, the composer Sofia Gubaidulina’s music and ideas are combined with the features of the ancient and more recent mythologies of the East and West, like Egyptian mythology, Slavic and Tatar pagan epics, Biblical

and Christian mythology, and the philosophy of Martin Buber. Such phenomena testify to the boldness of women composers in exploring the horizons of their identity. The article offers a comparison of the mythological “clusters” that can be traced in the books of a number of popular Russian women writers, mainly of detective stories, including Victoria Platova, Guzel Yakhina and Ekaterina Ru. The field of observation is prose associated with “musical themes”, “musical mythology” and its cluster connections with other mythological traces.

Keywords: Clusters; Music Studies; Russian Women Composers; Russian Women Writers; Myth

POLITI, Gloria

Abstract

In *The Time of Women* (2009) by Elena Chizhova, the legacy of Stalin, marked by suspicion and fear, infiltrates everyday life, driving people to live beneath the surface in a silence that becomes a stronghold for the construction of a feminine identity. The history of Russia runs through the lives of the protagonists – mothers, daughters, and grandmothers – revealing difficult relationships and complex events. The proposed analysis focuses on the artistic processes employed by the author in deconstructing and reconstructing ancient and modern myths within a dramaturgical narrative deeply marked by memory and trauma. The novel captures historically significant moments and traumatic events, such as the consolidation of the Soviet system and its subsequent collapse following the disintegration of the USSR.

Keywords: Women’s prose; Byt; Trauma; Myth; Identity.

SHYLNIKOVA, Iryna

Abstract

This article analyzes mythological images in Tatyana Tolstaya's *Kys'*, where myths emerge as significant symbols and metaphors that reveal the philosophical ideas of the novel. The author explores how myths, cultural symbols, and reality intertwine in the novel, creating an image of "eternal repetitions" where the past, present, and future merge into a unified whole. The article addresses issues of cultural perception, literary centrism, historical memory, and human self-discovery, demonstrating that myth functions as a tool for the author's worldview to illuminate fundamental themes of human existence and the recurring patterns of human history.

Keywords: Tatyana Tolstaya; Myth; *Kys'*; Deconstruction of Myths; Ecocriticism.

SOBOLCZYK, Piotr

Abstract

The text offers a comparative reading of two Polish novels from 1993 by two female writers of the new postmodern and feminist wave: Manuela Gretkowska's *Parisian Tarot* and Olga Tokarczuk's *The Journey of the People of the Book*. Both these novels are read in two interwoven aspects – feminism and female presence and esoterism as represented by Tarot and its 22 Major Arcana. Gretkowska's employment of Tarot is overt and in Tokarczuk's case it is hidden and "hermetic". However, both these novels have a double-coded address which implies also a "cognizant" reader who understands esoterism. In reading esoterism, a Jungian and post-Jungian approach is used, including the understanding of archetypes and synchronicity.

Keywords: Tarot; Gnosis; Feminism; Archetypes; Jungism

ŚWIERKOSZ, Monika

Abstract

The paper demonstrates how Olga Tokarczuk refers to the critical, non-anthropocentric tradition of mythologization in order to deconstruct from within homogenous “grand narratives” of any (clear) identities. The author points out the subversive usage of the figures of dolls (puppets), monsters, saints-freaks, and goddesses, which, following Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, might be understood as posthuman figurations of the subject. The article discusses the possibilities and limitations of Tokarczuk’s narrative strategy of mythmaking and her search for a new form of universality in context of posthuman ethics and politics of storytelling.

Keywords: Olga Tokarczuk; Mythmaking; Figuration; Posthuman Ethics; Storytelling.

SYSKA, Katarzyna

Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the interrelation of fairy tale and documentary discourse in Svetlana Petriychuk’s play *Finist the Bright Falcon* (2019) – about young women from the Russian Federation recruited by the militants of the Islamic State. Furthermore, this study extends its inquiry to the corresponding performance by Yevgenia Berkovich (2020). We analyze the ways of introducing and functioning of folklore intertext in the material, which consists mainly of court session protocols. We come to the conclusion that the folktale becomes a profound metaphor for the Russian socio-political contemporaneity with its mythological and archaic orientations.

Keywords: Svetlana Petriychuk; Evgenya Berkovich; New Russian Drama; Postmodern Fairy Tale; Rewriting Myth

VORONTSOVA, Kristina

Abstract

Being one of the key figures of Leningrad underground culture and Russian postmodernism, Elena Shvarts not only did deconstruct and reconstruct different traditional myths extensively (Ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, eschatological), but she also perceived her own biography as a Myth in the context of Russian Silver Age's concept of Life and Creative Work, and mystifications of the Postmodern era. This paper focuses mostly on the autobiographical short stories *Miraculous Incidents and Mysterious Dreams* written by the author in 1996. Strategies of narrating, evolution of the genre of scary stories (bailichkas) and the usage of Myths while creating the image of Self are considered.

Keywords: Elena Shvarts; Myth; Autobiography; Table-lifting; Monsters.

Biographical Statements

AJRES, Alessandro

Alessandro Ajres is at the moment research fellow at the University of Bari, teaching Polish language. He mainly works on Polish contemporary literature. He published two recent books about the contemporary history of Poland (*Storia della Polonia dal 1918 a oggi*, 2023) and the language of Polish protests against the new law on abortion (*Aborto senza frontiere*, 2022). For the academic year 2020-2021, he obtained a grant by National Polish Agency NAWA to work on the language of Polish rap.

GOSCILO, Helena

Professor of Slavic Studies at The Ohio State University, Helena Goscilo specializes in contemporary culture and visual genres. She has chaired the Slavic Department at the University of Pittsburgh and at OSU. Her publications include *Debexing Sex*; *TNT: The Explosive World of Tatyana Tolstaya's Fiction*; *Fade from Red: The Cold War Ex-Enemy in Russian and American Film 1990-2005*; approximately 100 articles and 20 (co-)edited volumes, such as *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*; *Celebrity and Glamour in Contemporary Russia*; *Poles Apart: Women in Modern Polish Culture*; and *Polish Cinema Today: A Bold New Era in Polish Film*.

IMPOSTI, Gabriella Elina

Gabriella Elina Imposti is Full Professor of Russian Literature in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the

University of Bologna (Italy). She is the author of a book on a major Russian philologist and scholar of versification, *Aleksandr Christoforovič Vostokov. Dalla pratica poetica agli studi metrico-filologici* (2000). She has studied Russian Romanticism and its reception of English and German literature “The Reception of Thomas Moore in Russia During the Romantic Age” (2013). She has written about Russian and Italian Futurism, “Velimir Khlebnikov’s ‘Christmas Tale’ *Snezhimochka*”, *Russian Literature*, 135-137 (2023). She has studied contemporary Russian women writers and the development of gender studies in Russia, *L’Immortale di Olga Slavnikova: esperienze corporee del tempo attraverso gli oggetti*, “Russica Romana”, XXX, 2023; “Il romanzo di Svetlana Vasilenko Duročka. Tra mito e agiografia”, in *Studi Slavistici*, XVII, 1, 2020. She has also published several articles on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and on cinema and literature. She is interested in the theory of translation, Russian linguistics, in particular word formation, and teaching Russian as a foreign language in Italian universities.

MARCHESINI, Irina

Irina Marchesini is associate professor of Russian Studies at the University of Bologna, Italy. The study of extreme, experimental narratives in the context of 20th and 21st century Russian literature, such as Nabokov’s, Kharms’, Sokolov’s, and Bitov’s works, are among her primary academic interests. She has published a monograph devoted to the concept of “absence” in contemporary Russian literature (*Molded By Absence*, 2018) and a monograph on Church Slavonic in Soviet and Post-Soviet novels (*The Mirror of Time*, 2018). She has also recently published a monograph in the field of Women Studies entitled *Weaving Myths. Two Women’s Voices From The Caucasus* (2023). She has also edited a collection of essays on the centenary of the Russian Revolution (*Faces of the October Revolution*, 2022).

PETRUSHANSKAYA-AVERBAKH, Elena

Elena Petrushanskaya-Averbakh is Chief Research Fellow at the Department of Media Arts of the Moscow State Institute for Arts Studies (Gosudarstvennyj institut Iskusstvoznaniia) (since 1993). She is author of a number of monographs: *The Birth of Sound Image: the Poetics of Phonography in the Cinema, Radio and TV* (1985, 1999); *The Musical World of Joseph Brodsky* (2004, 2007); *Mikhail Glinka and Italy* (2009); *The Adventures of the Russian Opera in Italy* (2018). Furthermore, she has published over 120 research papers devoted to the relationship between music and literature, mass media and twentieth century artistic culture, music for the cinema and TV series. She is also the author of a preface to a collection of works by Shostakovich.

POLITI, Gloria

Gloria Politi, PhD, is Tenured Lecturer and Researcher in Slavic Studies and Adjunct Tenured Professor of Russian Language and Translation at the Department of Humanities – University of Salento (Lecce, Italy). Principal Investigator of the P.R.I.N. 2015 project *(De)construction of Myth in Contemporary Women's Literature in Russia and Poland: A Comparative Study*, currently she leads the P.R.I.N. 2022 project *From Post-Trauma to Ecology: Gender Narratives in Contemporary Cultural Texts of the Slavic Area*. She is also the scientific coordinator for research funded by the PNRR (National Research Program Fund) on the project *Digital Strategy and Platforms for Cultural Heritage: Study, Translation, Digitalization, and Open Source-Open Access Dissemination of Pilgrims' Registry Correspondence from Slavic Regions (Archive of the Basilica of San Nicola, Bari)* within the Horizon Europe framework. Her research interests include Russian linguistics, Russian L2 teaching, contemporary Russian literature – especially female authors – and comparative and critical translation studies. Her academic contributions are published in leading Italian and international journals.

SHYLNIKOVA, Iryna

Iryna Shylnikova, PhD, is researcher at the University of Salento (Lecce, Italy). From 2017 to 2019 she participated in P.R.I.N. 2015 “(De)construction of myth in contemporary women’s literature in Russia and Poland”. Currently, continues her research in the field of women’s contemporary Russian and Ukrainian literature (P.R.I.N. 2022: *From Post-Trauma to Ecology: Gender Narratives in Contemporary Cultural Texts of the Slavic Area*). Her scientific papers have been published in scholarly journals on teaching of Russian as a foreign language, on Russian and Ukrainian culture and literature.

SOBOLCZYK, Piotr

Piotr Sobolczyk, dr hab., Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences, piotr.sobolczyk@ibl.waw.pl. Research interests: Polish literature of the XXth and XXIst centuries, queer theory, cultural studies, gothicism, Spanish literature. Recent publications: *Polish Queer Modernism* (2015), *Gotycyzm - modernistyczny sobowótór odmieńca* (2017), *The Worldview - the Trope - and the Critic. Critical Discourses on Miron Białoszewski* (2018), Baltasar Gracián, *Sztuka Geniuszu. Traktat o koncepcie. Wraz z antologią poezji hiszpańskiego Siglo de Oro*, translated and edited by Piotr Sobolczyk (2020), *AAAMeryka With an Even More Capital A. Białoszewski’s Two Accounts on America*, „Pl.It. Rassgena Italiana di Argomenti Polacchi” (2020), *New Polish Queer Literature and its Anglosphere Reception*, “Lambda Nordica” (2022). He is the co-founder and editor of „MiroFor” yearly (vol. I 2020, vol. II 2021, vol. IV 2024), he also co-edited with Piotr Seweryn Rosol the volume *Langages de la littérature polonaise du XXIe siècle* (Paris 2024). He was a guest lecturer at Universitat i Oslo, INALCO Paris, Sorbonne University, Universidad Pablo Olavide, Edge Hill University, Université Clermont Auvergne, Università di Milano, Università di Napoli L’Orientale.

ŚWIERKOSZ, Monika

Assistant Professor at the Jagiellonian University (Cracow). Her main interests include gender literary studies and critical theory, problems of body and materiality and posthuman ethics. She is the author of two monographs: *Within the Realms of Tradition: Prose Works by Izabela Filipiak and Olga Tokarczuk in Disputes about Literature, Canon and Feminism* (2014) and *Arachne and Athena: Literature, Politics and Women's Classicism* (2017). She has also edited several collections: *Disputed figures in Polish feminist criticism after 1989* (2016), *Reading into Dąbrowska* (2018, with Dorota Kozicka) and *Critical Constellations* (2020, with Dorota Kozicka and Katarzyna Trzeciak). She is an editor in the academic journal "Wielogłos".

SYSKA, Katarzyna

Katarzyna Syska, associate professor, Institute of Eastern Slavonic Studies, Jagiellonian University, katarzyna.syska@uj.edu.pl. Areas of research: contemporary Russian drama and theatre, contemporary Russian literature, Russian literature of 20th century. Publications: *O neosentymentalnych tendencjach w najnowszej literaturze rosyjskiej* (monography, 2015), *Культура, ностальгия, интеллигенция: польский опыт* (2015), *Философия театра М. Угарова и его пьесы преддоковского периода* (2020), *Неосентиментальность: идилическая, элегическая, комическая* (2020), *«Иллюзии» Ивана Вырыпаева: поэтика созерцания* (2023), *Пьеса «Антигона. Редукция» Аси Волошиной. Перформанс бунта* (2024).

VORONTSOVA, Kristina

Kristina Vorontsova, PhD, Associate Professor in the Institute of Eastern Slavonic Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Her main area of research is Russian poetry of the second half of the 20th–21st centuries. She has published books on concepts of space in creative work by Elena Shvarts and the image of Poland in official and underground Soviet poetry: *«Пространство-Время – андрогин...»: модели пространства в поэзии Елены Шварц* (2016),

«Мы связаны, поляки, давно одной судьбою...»: Польский текст русской культуры в поэзии второй половины XX века (1945–1991 гг.) (2020).

Finito di stampare
nel mese di DICEMBRE 2024 da



per conto di Pensa MultiMedia® • Lecce
www.pensamultimedia.it

Gabriella Elina Imposti is Full Professor of Russian Literature in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Bologna (Italy). She is the author of a book on a major Russian philologist and scholar of versification, *Aleksandr Christoforovič Vostokov. Dalla pratica poetica agli studi metrico-filologici* (2000). She has studied Russian Romanticism and its reception of English and German literature “The Reception of Thomas Moore in Russia During the Romantic Age” (2013). She has written about contemporary Russian women writers and the development of gender studies in Russia, “L’Immortale di Olga Slavnikova: esperienze corporee del tempo attraverso gli oggetti”, *Russica Romana*, XXX, 2023; “Il romanzo di Svetlana Vasilenko Duročka. Tra mito e agiografia”, *Studi Slavistici*, XVII, 1, 2020. She has studied Russian and Italian Futurism, *Notes on the Beginning of the Myth of Khlebnikov in Italy*, in Luca Cortesi e Gabriella Elina Imposti eds, *Velimir Khlebnikov 1922-2022. One Hundred Years of a Myth*, Bologna, 2024; “Velimir Khlebnikov’s ‘Christmas Tale’ *Snezhimochka*”, *Russian Literature*, 135-137 (2023). She has also published several articles on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and on cinema and literature. She is interested in the theory of translation, Russian linguistics, in particular word formation, and teaching Russian as a foreign language in Italian universities.

Irina Marchesini is associate professor of Russian Studies at the University of Bologna, Italy. The study of extreme, experimental narratives in the context of 20th and 21st century Russian literature, such as Nabokov’s, Kharms’, Sokolov’s, and Vaginov’s works, are among her primary academic interests. She has published a monograph devoted to the concept of “absence” in contemporary Russian literature (*Molded By Absence*, 2018) and a monograph on Church Slavonic in Soviet and Post-Soviet novels (*The Mirror of Time*, 2018). She has also edited a collection of essays on the centenary of the Russian Revolution (*Faces of the October Revolution*, 2022). Thematically linked to this publication is her last book entitled *Weaving Myths. Two Women’s Voices From The Caucasus* (2023).

Gloria Politi is a specialist in contemporary Russian literature, with a particular focus on themes such as memory, trauma, gender, and ecocriticism. She is the author of numerous internationally recognised academic publications, including studies on contemporary Slavic women writers and essays dedicated to authors of classical Russian literature. She has served as the principal investigator for various national and international research projects, including the PRIN projects “Myth (De)construction in Contemporary Women’s Literature in Russia and Poland: A Comparative Study” and “From Post-Trauma to Ecology: Contemporary Gender Narratives in Slavic Cultural Texts”. She has also organised conferences and seminars with a strong interdisciplinary focus. Gloria Politi holds editorial roles in prestigious journals both in Italy and abroad and is actively engaged in teaching Russian Language and Translation, as well as Russian Literary Civilization, at the University of Salento. Her academic work stands out for its dialogue between the humanities, its focus on translation, and its promotion of intercultural exchange within contemporary literary studies.

Myths have long shaped the way societies understand identity, gender roles, and power structures. Given their regulatory function, it is then important to reflect upon what values old and new myths (still) generate in contemporary societies. What happens when these ancient narratives are reimagined? This research question guides the essays included in this collection, which explores how the rewriting of myths can challenge – or even overturn – deeply entrenched gender paradigms that have dominated cultures for centuries.

Focusing on literature, visual culture, music, and performance, the contributors reveal how Nature acts as a powerful catalyst for this shift, offering alternative perspectives that reshape our understanding of identity and social values. By weaving together myth studies, cultural theory, and gender narratives, this volume highlights the need to reposition the feminine within the broader landscape of literary and cultural discourse.

Notably, the exploration of space too plays a pivotal role in this study. By examining how space interacts with myth and nature, the authors uncover strategies and frameworks that offer vital insights for contemporary Russia and Poland. In fact, in these post-Soviet countries, myth rewriting serves as a powerful tool for addressing the traumas of the past and forging new, collective identities.

This publication is the result of multiple National Research Projects, including “Myth (De)construction in Contemporary Women’s Literature in Russia and Poland: A Comparative Study” (PRIN 2015) and “From PostTrauma to Ecology: Contemporary Gender Narratives in Slavic Cultural Texts” (PRIN 2022), and demonstrates the powerful role nature plays in the retelling of myths.

In a world marked by uncertainty, this volume underscores the transformative potential of narratives – crucial for understanding cultural shifts, challenging outdated values, and fostering more sustainable, resilient societies.

