

## **Reinterpretation of Myth in Modern Gender Prose of Russian and Foreign Women-Writers**

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**Abstract:** The study covers the actual problem of mutual literary relations regarding myth context reinterpretation in modern gender prose. Using an empirical and comparative historical approach, ethno poetry of novels by German writer Christa Wolf, Russian writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Yakut and Evenk prose-writers Ariadna Borisova and Galina Keptuke is researched. Antique archetype of Medea-infanticide is reinterpreted from the point of woman outlook. Works comparison of different artistic levels and different times discovers reference of a woman prose to a novel genre. Arctic's antique myth content and cultural values are used by the authors in a functional way.

**Key words:** Ethnic poetry, novel, gender prose, woman, values

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### **INTRODUCTION**

A new literary situation on the verge of centuries accentuates a gender dominance of a woman prose, its text-forming role. The given article touches upon a mythical content of the novels of different times not similar but close by their interpretation. It is about famous novels of German writer Christa Wolf "Cassandra", "Medea. Voices", "Medeya and her Children" of Lyudmila Ulitskaya, novel-olonkho "Land of Udagans" of Yakut prose-writer Ariadna Borisova and "Having its own name, Dzheltula River" of evenk Galina Keptuke.

Significant material and spiritual changes at the end of the 20th century gave a chance to conduct more intensive and frank dialogue of cultures. Historical development of Russian and West-European literatures discovers a maternal basis of today's literature. Though artistic works have their own national peculiarities, they have common features in mutual relations of people, men and women, a state and personality, generations accentuating a textual problem (Magenau, 2013).

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In Russia, as well as in the West, gender researches are devoted to feminine works. N. Gabrielyan in her article "View About Feminine Prose" marks tendencies of a contemporary feminine prose and comes to the conclusions: first, unreal and constantly changing world is a dominance of most works; second, women are against

firmness of the masculine world; third, there is a tendency to reconstruct traditional masculine and feminine images, trying to look at the world through woman's eyes; fourth, the word "space" comes across very often in woman's prose, however it's not "physical" space but something else (Gabrielyan, 1996).

In our scientific discourse, the term "gender" is a synonym for "social gender and gender". Western science started to research gender in 60-70s of the 20th century in the fields of history, sociology, psychology and then linguistics. Researchers are I. Goffman, M. Fuko, O. Voronina, N. Pushkareva, A. Kirillina and others. The scientists affirm that a gender behavior is not from nature but its "constructed" by a society connected with culture, traditions and it is an important aspect of social organization.

In 1970s, the gender researches in the field of a language got its start due to a new feminine movement in the USA and Germany. One after another, works of feminine literature were published: "literary life" by E. Moers, "New feminine criticism" by E. Shoulter and others.

Women-readers, women-heroines and woman-writers are the central point of the research. Analyzing the works of women, E. Moers comes to the conclusion that a feminine creation is considered to be a question of minor importance according to "big" literature where men-writers prevail. However, the feminine literary criticism is not going to offer an abstract feminine theory against masculine one. Its aim is to prove equal and

competent existence of a great number of cultures in the world. Researchers E. Siksu and L. Irigaray pay a special attention to “feminine letters” in the feminine literary criticism. They suppose that concept of “feminine letter” releases women from masculine language aiming at the common truth.

Thus, there is a great interest in the works of women-writers in the Western literary criticism. Unfortunately, in Russia, creation of women-writers is not researched, though there are some scientific articles about women-writers and their works. A wave of feminism spread in the Western countries raised a problem of woman participation in a governing body party. In the middle of 80s, against a background of general democratic movement, an interest in woman problems was raised in the Soviet society. Thus, since 1980s, Russian scientists have began to research feminine literature as a separate problem and introduced the term “gender”. N. Gabrielyan, M. Ryutkenen, E. Trofimova and other are researching this problem in Russian literature.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Implementation of phrases “feminine literature”, “feminine creation”, “feminine history” are not approved in our native science and has some problems even today from the point of theory and subject of researching. The main argument of opponents to single out the feminine creation is that literature should be either good or bad. As well as there should not be any text analysis. Moreover, the literature should not be masculine or feminine, as well as divided by gender.

In artistic works of different times, a mythical material and its cosmological philosophical, ethical and aesthetical content was always used. The myth reflecting a man’s inner world creates people experience in culture in its harmony.

Ethnos always keeps ancient experience of mankind and is able to display a spiritual memory and inner rules of people relationship. Ch. Aitmatov said that myth and legends come back to a person’s memory when it is necessary. The myth is called “a raw material” for consciousness of a human and used in the works. Mythical elements are used on the level of interpretation and reconstruction depending on a conception (Zhelobstov, 2014). The interpretation supposes an effort to achieve a sense of the well-known and to connect it with the conception and style of the writer. Mythical plots and images can be “modernized” to some extent. The myth is used as a frame to express a new outlook and to think over today’s material of C. Wolf and A. Borisova (“Cassandra”, “Land of Udagans”).

Comparative analysis of woman pages of West European and Russian literature reveals a function of an archetype. According to C. Yung, there is always an archetype in any text. That is why most motives and ideas reproduce common to all mankind sense. A well-known archetypal paradigm makes characters recognizable and close to contemporary. In the novel, Medea’s family is given in its historical chronology. Children’s birthdays, marriages, facts about relatives and friends are counterpoints of the plot of both novels: “Cassandra” and “Medea. Voices” by C. Wolf. Her Medea remembers the first ship of the Argonauts, her first night with Jason that made her heart beat with happiness and foreboding to lose him. Later her repentance will bring her back to her father’s image.

Ulitskaya (2004). being wise and experienced person and due to her profession, understands value of life birth in chronology. “There was a rope stretched between a nut tree and old ailanthus, Medea was spreading dark-blued linen. Dark-blue shadows were walking along blue patched up bed-sheets. The bed sheets bent slowly trying to sail away to the dark-blue sky” (Ulitskaya, 2004). Trajectory of Sinoply’s fate, whose mother left Batumi for the sake of George, repeats bright events of life of Colchis King’s daughter and is filled with wisdom. The Crimean widow has a rare gift of mystical observation and to endow everything and everybody with a sense. Her husband choosing the house affirmed its special function to be “the nut of the earth”. They receive guests according to the natural cycle and kept it strictly. The names of twelve brothers and sisters of Medea, grandfather Kharlampy, his younger sister Polixena, long-awaited son George and his thirteen children, habits of adopted children are written down in the family book. Locks of hair of little Sinoply, letters are kept between pages.

Childless Medeya attracts people to herself creating a family. In the novel “Medea. Voices” by C. Wolf, the main character has quite an opposite temper. “I know now. They took care of accusing me of infanticide. What should I do? Curse them... Where should I go? Where is that place that time? There is nobody to ask. This is the answer”. The writer answers herself. “We will meet some day. I want to believe that she is here, it is a shadow with a magical name where the times and ages got together full of pain and impatience, this woman is furious... now we hear voices”.

Image of Cassandra, Trojan prophetess attracted C. Wolf’s attention by her powerful spirituality and whole-hearted nature. King Priam’s daughter Cassandra got a gift of prophecy from God Apollo who was turned down by her people. C. Wolf writes: “In this ancient myth

I see a sense of the myth to be used in any actual aim. Can a nuclear war destroy our civilization if we don't stop it? My main aim is not only to restore a myth to life, it's a warning", the writer shares a dramatic fate of the main character finding out a reason of war conflict using historical experience of the 20th century. In her novel, C. Wolf keeps a course of myth events described by Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides.

Psychological deepening into the novel affords to realize inner resources of monologue and to form a modern novel. Cassandra herself analyzes the past events in the background of the present time. In the work of Homer, Priam's daughter sets off and adds some features of the Trojan people punished by Gods but in the work of C. Wolf she is the main heroine and chronicler of the war. The author psychologically reasoned a woman's outstanding personality dared to interfere in public life. In this case, Cassandra is accepted as a woman ideal. She is able to love Aeneas sincerely and to hate Achilles bringing destruction and death. The writer deliberately "misses" a detailed life on Olympus. She pays attention to people to their relationship, to their behavior and thoughts in the real time. She dethrones the myth justifying inhuman theory. The story of beautiful Helen's abduction seems to be a lie covered with words of honor and duty. A warning enthusiasm of the novel explains another interpretation of traditional heroes of the Trojan War.

A genre searching gives a chance to enrich literary devices. Dreams distract personages from every-day deals, worries and joys. The plot of L. Ulitskaya's novel develops in the dream about Medea's husband where she learns his close relations with her sister in the year of his death. Ancient Greek heroine's revenge is denied by all-absorbing love of 20th century Medea to her niece Nika whose name symbolizes victory over ill-fate. In a feminine prose, a stereotype about a genre nature of a family novel described in a masculine classical literature is denied in a talented and principal way. Unity of different personages around the Sinoply's home took place not according to conjugal unions in a church but to a thirst for kindness and peace of mind. History continues to weigh "misfortune" and "fault" of Medea of ancient myth. Optimizing a mythical tradition, it supposes stylizing of mythical images and plots together with new artistic tendencies and gets a gender meaning discovering a casual and effective relationship in a purely feminine way. The Russian writer shows a picturesque and symbolic structure of myth stereotype block and due to her watchword she rehabilitates Medea, whose name she has, C. Wolf shatters people rumor about Medea's infanticide. She interprets the myth in her own-way

explaining Medea's sacrificing by a struggle between barbarian Colchis and civilized Corinth (Boldt, 1998). Culprits of her "crime" are men: "Big children, awful and unbearable they are, Medea. And there are more and more of them. But they shift off their despair on our shoulders, somebody should grieve but not he, then it is a woman". Both writers form a new level of archetypical content of a feminine mission on the earth.

A new literary time discovered the name of Russian speaking Yakut writer Ariadna Borisova. She is a laureate of Big Literature Prize in Russia, prize-winner of "Russian Booker". Readers know her fairy-tales for children, stories, novels "God's mark", "Land of Udagans" consisting of some independent parts. She manages to reconstruct a canonical form of Olonkho into composition of the work. In the first part of "Sign of Storm" the word "domm" (domm of the first evening, domm of the second evening, domm of the third evening, etc.) is understood as a "sacred sound" or "history" and replaces traditional "chapter". A similar genre transformation gives a magic power of Olonkhosut to author's words establishing a connection with a reader. Titles of the books: "Day full of ribaldry", "Colors of Betrayal", "Circle" and others enrich a spiritual inner world with artifacts. Novel "Land of Udagans" by A. Borisova is a novel-olonkho and recreates Yakut national traditions, ceremonies, mystical legends of folk-lore origin. Dramatic conflict is connected with a mysterious disappearance of the Udagans that influenced the life of Sakha people. The author reinterprets the ancient legend about White Creator and a sacred horse with sunny reins on its back. The horse that doesn't know good and evil is a totem of the Yakuts. He gave birth to three-faced four-legged blacksmith Kudai whose descendants settled on the Middle Earth. The image of horse Desegei becomes a leitmotif and lights up the legend that on the right cheek of the dead warriors a sign of lightning was seen: "Mourning about his children, the horse was running along a field and fiery reins were untwisting behind his back. Since that time mistresses of Circle, keepers of secrets and pottery started to mark a memory sign of a struggle with Gilgit army on the right cheeks of the warriors. Aelen's heroes were called quick lightning due to the zigzag scar on a dark skin" (Boldt, 1998). In the novel, spatial categories are related to peculiar points of the earth (chakra). Valley Aelen provides the warriors with live energetics and strong feelings. Naryiana, a warrior's wife has a gift of clairvoyance she is called a witch. Displacement of time layers in the novel exposition develops an archetype when a woman in child birth sees an awful face in the window of today hospital. The young mother suffering from pain and horror under the prayer of a doctor and old

nurse gives birth to her baby. Life concept, continuation of mankind race and family are realized in the final thinking of the writer about a water-drop where the earth-baby is born corresponding to the concealed secret of Cassandra (Borisova, 2008).

Novel "Having its own name, Dzheltula river" by G. Keptuke is complicated and multi-leveled in its content work. The book brought the writer fame. The novel is autobiographic describing the post war life of Evenk people (Boldt, 1998). It's a work of a new type. Mythical, folklore and literary traditions are united and it has become the best way to penetrate into the Evenk world. The main character of the novel is Gunilgen, a small girl learning and discovering the world for herself. The novel is about Evenk life during a year or two but timing of the work is much longer, it includes pre-revolutionary Evenk life till 50s of the 20th century. It's a kind of reporting from insight, but the author's voice is deposited on the narration as a recollection of the past. Thus, multi-level of the time is formed providing syncretism of work in a poetic form. The space described in the novel is archetypical and mythical. A man gets a spirit "omi" from Aikhit, he is tied with invisible thread to the sky which presents a man with a talent of storyteller, shaman, smith, hunter, tailor and etc. A man is guarded against diseases not to get into the Lower world of the dead. This is a vertical world connecting the middle world with the other world. A horizontal line is a man's fate, time-space, it's his life. The author titled the novel Dzheltula River and sings a hymn about its beauty and power. Ancient people worshipped nature, especially water. Gunilgen's family crosses the river with the help of guards-helpers following their people traditions. Thus, the girl overcomes her first difficulty in her life. In this case the river is not only a living force but it's an obstacle and border. There will be a lot of obstacles and a shaman foretells her a long way to unknown places and gives her a talisman. Half of her soul should stay in her land not to forget her native land and always to come back. This is a connection of a contemporary Evenk with his/her land and with a spirit of his/her ancestors. The Evenk literature gets a new functional quality due to G. Keptuke's works. Much attention is paid to shaman actions in the novel. The people believe in the other world and their connection with nature. They listen to the nature, look for signs of nature to predestine their fate. This close unity with nature has lasted for ages and it is kept up today. G. Keptuke describes history and fate of a man in all her works. Only in her novel "Having its own name Dzheltula river" the author shows Evenk's growing into a contemporary

model of life offered by the power, when she looks over the history of her people and discovers a conflict between "individual peasants" and the society of that time. The author uses skillfully folklore elements: poet lines, songs, invocations by which emotional and psychic state of characters is expressed. The author's outlook and her conception reflect the Evenk world.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of myth restoration authors try to keep historical plots, sense of ancient myth but try to make it close, understandable and acceptable for a contemporary reader. Prose aesthetics of these writers realizing a genre forming process of the new century on the base of archetype reveals author's beginning in the text. Feminine proses show spiritual national world; moral values and moral-ethic principles of the people to a reader. Artistic content enters integrally into the system of world outlook of a man's idea about the world, history, national traditions and time connection. A comparative analysis of feminine prose texts is fruitful for philological education and functional in the world literature study.

A myth provides present literature not only with everlasting plots, images, classical form and energy to create but also it becomes a base of genre transformation of a novel adequately into new culture aesthetics. At the same time, a contemporary feminine writer strikes readers imagination by her peculiar ethnic outlook at the world realized in the ethnic poetry of her works. Ethnic values of the people do not disappear, they are found very often in the works of today writers.

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