

Kabbalistic Myth and Its Interpretation in A. Kuprin's Story Sulamith

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses main mythopoetic constants of the artistic system of A. Kuprin's story Sulamith. In the pieces of writing of the 20th century, the transformative author's element holds the foremost position, and the mythopoetic and psychological core of one or another archetype undergo more and more conceptual "tension" of the entire artistic system of reference. Under the influence of historical and social changes, the literary archetype more and more often shows actual sense which is "built into" the artistic conception and implemented in the piece of writing. The author notes that dialogic interreflections of several archetypal plots are found as biblical erotological myth in the Song of Songs, Kabbalistic myth, Egyptian myth of Isis, narrative motives of Sophian myth, ancient erotological myth and ancient tragedy. This paper analyses two storylines, dominant in the associative and symbolic contexts of the works: the plot of the myth of Isis and Osiris and the Kabbalistic myth of Shekinah. Both mythologems became artistically actualized in King Solomon and Sulamith's love story, reproducing in result a kind of universal neomyth, integrating invariant archetypal images and motives which can be regarded as a basis for the origins of the European culture.

KEYWORDS

Kuprin, mythopoetics,
European culture, paradigm,
archetype model

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 December 2015
Revised 11 March 2016
Accepted 22 March 2016

Introduction

Among a number of regular kinds of analysis of lyrical texts: problem and thematic, genre, stylistic, poem-studying, etc., a specific approach to poetry writing given the name "mythopoetry" in the scientific literature, is used widely enough.

What is mythopoetry? It can be said that in mythopoetry, the breath of something eternal, mythical is expressed with the help of different kinds of overtones which is expressed by symbolic performances, extended metaphors, and polysemantic epithets, stylistic and rhythm-and-music solutions (Bolshakova, 2003). Mythopoetry is always allusive: allusions and analogies are

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its daily bread. And they refer to important natural and cultural constants – generally known places, times, legends, to general notions obvious for everyone. Images collocated with the four classic elements, with parts of the body or with stages of life, from embryonic to post-mortal, after-world, play an important role in mythopoetry.

However, it should be mentioned that the notions of the mythopoetry and mythologems are very poorly developed in literature. Before offering a number of concrete observations, it should be mentioned that mythopoetry is understood not only like a broad range of notions ("mythologem", "archetype", "poetic cosmos") or a system of myths, but also like a special mindset (myth-thinking) and ritual. Cosmogony and eschatology are main motives of mythological conscience, and its dramaturgy is built on the battle between Chaos and Cosmos. Mythological conscience preserves the most ancient forms of world perception in their syncretism, equates micro- and macrocosm, and contains the idea of cyclical rebirth. The leading property of this model of the world is all-sacral (Jung, 1991).

Mythopoetic contexts in A. Kuprin's erotological trilogy – the stories Garnet Bracelet, Olesya and Sulamith – have already been marked at the thematic level and have repeatedly attracted literary scholars' attention (including the author of this article): (Strokina, 2010; Shyrokova, 1995; Ibatullina, 2014). Mythopoetic aspects of the creative work of A. I. Kuprin, supposedly, have been exhaustingly studied due to its obviousness and undisguised predetermined author's orientation at mythologization of readers' perception. But in reality it's quite different; constructively significant elements of the language of archetypes having the functions of sense-creation in the artificial system of the author's creative works, often remains beyond the vision of scholars studying A. Kuprin. The existing range of works dedicated to this range of problems isn't numerous. In such way, in the thesis work of S. P. Strokina (2010), the mythopoetic arrangement of the space in the artificial world of A. Kuprin is discussed, and herewith the author's point of view is focused on one aspect of the problem – the mythologem of the South in the writer's creative work. The erotological myth in the writer's creative work, and first of all in the three most read, canonical works – short novels titled *The Garnet Bracelet*, *Sulamith*, *Olesia* – also attracts the literary scholars' attention: (Khvan, 2003; Shyrokova, 1995; Ibatullina, 2011). However, in general the principles of mythologization of the narration in Kuprin's works create a problem field which still requires system-conceptual study; of course, within the frames of this paper we will not be able to offer a full-scale solution for the full range of the problems, such challenge remains the outlook for further research.

Paradoxically, *Sulamith* among them is one of the least studied works, perhaps owing to an apparent mythologizing and stylized narrative: erotological myth is obviously presented here quite as a kind of artistic reincarnation of the biblical *Song of Songs* and mythological legends of King Solomon. *Sulamith* short novel was published for the first time in 1908 in *Zemlia* ("The Earth") almanac. A. Kuprin himself called it "... either a historical poem or a legend about the love between Solomon and Sulamith" (Kuprin, 1964; Shirokova, 1995). The basis was *Song of Songs* narrating about the love of the great Israeli King Solomon, the wisest of men, and Sulamith, the daughter of Israel, an indigent girl from vineyard.

The story is very simple: King Solomon, the wisest of men, fell in love with a young rural girl from his vineyard in Baal-Gamon where he liked to seclude himself in the hours of great reflections, the most beautiful of women, and then abandoned her. Suffering Sulamith searches for her beloved one, suffers from jealousy and unshared love; later on the loving couple reunites. Solomon takes the girl to his palace.

The aim of this work is to conduct a comparative analysis of the short novel's fragments and of the original sources; to work out a list of methodical recommendations for study of Kuprin's short novel with taking into consideration the posed problem. The topicality of this subject lies in the fact that on the basis of comparative analysis and work with the original source, the scholars working with literature, and those studying Kuprin's works in particular, have to get an idea of the literary process (Rasskazova, 2007). The purpose of this article is to define the basic mythopoetic constants of the story's artistic world and dialogic interrelation between the two central archetypal plots: the myth of Isis and Osiris and the Kabbalistic myth of Shekinah. The more detailed analysis of the figurative-semantic and narrative structure of the work as a whole (including peripheral collisions mentioned above) is an outlook for further research.

Materials and Methods

The aim of the study is analysis of the mythopoetic paradigms based upon the material of Kuprin's story "Sulamith".

Using the methods of mythopoetic, structural and semantic and comparative-historic text analysis, we have discovered that another myth plays no less sense-generative part in Sulamith – the myth of Isis and Osiris which equally narratively came out in the storyline of Queen Astis. A figurative and semantic paradigm which is the source scheme, the model for posing problems and solving thereof, of this myth, comes into reflexive interreflections with symbolic and mythological contexts of the Song of Songs, reproducing as a result an internally dialogized constructive narrative core of the story, integrating both central and peripheral collisions in the artistic and philosophical metaplot of the story. It should be pointed out that the integral analysis of the novel reveals polyphonic unity of several narrative and semantic paradigms in its artistic system. Apart from the above mentioned plots of the biblical erotological myth and Egyptian myth of Isis, in the situation of artistic interreflections, the plots of Sophian myth, ancient erotological myth and the plot of antique tragedy revealed themselves at the fable level with the thematic complex related to the characters of Astis and Sulamith, themes of jealousy, revenge and murder.

In order to study the mythopoetic paradigm of Kuprin's work it is necessary to analyze the works of R. Barthes (1996) "Mythology", R. Barthes (1989) "Myth today", R. Beiman (Beiman, 1975; Eliade, 2001; Kosharnaya, 2001) "History of literature and mythology", S.G. Denisova (2001) "Interaction of the images and symbols in the fiction text (based upon the material of arabesque novels by E. Poe)", S.A. Kosharnaya (2001) "Mytholexeme as a linguocultural phenomenon", A.F. Losev (1989) "Myth dialectics", N.V. Rotova (2008) "The problem of mythological aspect research of literary work".

For the purposes of our study it is required to appeal to the methods of analysis of text and author's style. It is demanded in order to determine the

specificity of Kuprin's writing manner, the peculiarities of using lexical and stylistic devices, which the author uses to express his ideas. For doing this it is necessary to study the works by Bahtin M. (1975) "The problem of content, materials and forms in the verbal fiction literature" V.P. Belyanin (2006) "The psychological literature studies. Text as the reflection of internal author's and reader's worlds" N.M. Rakovskaya (2013), "Authors' worlds in the fiction text" V.A. Kukhareenko (2003), "A book of practice in stylistics" M.I. Kuznetsov (2013), "The peculiarities of character's speech as means of its portrait creation" (Kuznetsov, 2013) etc.

Also it is required to study the place of Kuprin and its works in the Russian literature. For this it should be appropriate to appeal to the works of V.V. Zamanskaya (2002) "Existential tradition in the Russian literature of XX century. Dialogues on the turn of ages", G.F. Shigapova (2013) "Sound symbolism in the story of A. I. Kuprin "Garnet Bracelet"", L.A. Kachaeva (1986) "Music in the works by Kuprin", L.V. Rasskazova (2007) "Semantic and compositional role of Beethoven's sonata in the story by A. I. Kuprin "Garnet Bracelet", N. Pinchuk (2008) "Stylization as a literary device "Song of songs" in Bible and "Sulamith" by A. I. Kuprin)", A.A. Khvan (2003) "Metaphysics of love in the works of A. I. Kuprin and I.A. Bunin", S.A. Tashlykov (2005) "Old Testament in the novels of A. I. Kuprin", K.A. Tityanin (2006) "Biblical motif in the works of A. I. Kuprin", L.O. Skubachevska (2007) "The specificity of neorealism".

In the literature studies there are some important works, it is necessary to take into account, which are devoted to the study of Kuprin's story "Sulamith". They will be useful for our research in order to understand the basic idea, characters and style of "Sulamith" writing. They include as follows: M. I. Darakchi "Autointertextuality in the works of A. I. Kuprin (on the material of the stories "Shulamith", "Garnet Bracelet" and the poem forever)" (Darakchi, 2012), M.I. Darakchi (2011) "Functional of gemological images in the story of A. I. Kuprin "Sulamith"", V. Khoroshilova (2013) "The strategies of A.I. Kuprin's "Sulamith" reading", E.V. Shirokova (1995) "The idea of Russian Eros in the story "Sulamith" by A. I. Kuprin". S.V. Kezina & Yu. Turkova (2003) "We'll meet, Sulamith...", P.L. Shulik (2006) "Song of song as a source of intertextuality in the works of Alexander Kuprin "Sulamith" and Shmuel Agnon "Agunot"", F.P. Shevelenko (2000) "Song of songs": Materials to the study of biblical "Song of songs", "Sulamith" by O. Kuprin and "Song of songs" by Sholem-Aleichem", Z.P. Barabanshchikova (1998) "Song of songs" – inexhaustible creative source": Comparative analysis of the biblical text with the stories "Song of songs" by Sholem Aleichem and "Sulamith" by O. Kuprin".

Results

The internal unity of the above mentioned narrative paradigms is provided by the main character of the story Sulamith, general and central for all of them. In our opinion, Sulamith's image reflects a number of archetypal models of the ideal feminine essence, the dominant among which are the guises of ancient Aphrodite, the Egyptian Isis and archetypes related to Old Judaic mythology: the Old Testament Sophia, the Wisdom of God and the Kabbalistic Shekinah. Moreover, the last two images reveal in Kuprin's presentation as a distinct internal unity in the context of the Judaic theological tradition, (Shipflinger, 1997; Scholem, 1997). The Parables of Solomon and the Song of Songs reflect

different aspects of the Shekhinah's prototype: in the first book she is presented in her demiurgic hypostasis of divine Wisdom, in the second – as the divine Beloved, symbolically embodied in the character of "a girl from the vineyard" (Patai, 1990). Shekhinah is an often used Talmudic term determining the seen and heard presence of God on earth. Having reached its ultimate development, as is evident from Midrashic literature, the concept of Shekhinah is an independent woman godhead, the compassionate nature of which stimulates it to argue with God, protecting human (Matt, 1995). In such way, if not by her personal traits, then by her function and status, Shekhinah is a direct ancestor of ancient Judaic goddesses of Canaanite origin as Ashera and Anat (Scholem, 1997).

Just like Aphrodite, Sulamith personifies universal cosmic life-asserting powers of Eros; as Isis – the perfect marital love and fidelity; as Sophia – the perfect divine wisdom, the one that gives the ability to unquenchable life creation and the one that King Solomon had been searching for and hadn't found before meeting her: "And the king understood that in much wisdom there is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. And one morning ... he dictated to Elihoreph and Ahiah: "All is vanity of vanities and vexation of spirits", – so Ecclesiastes says" (Kuprin, 1964). Shekhinah's archetype in this range is the most generic, integrating the different facets of the Eternal Feminine: beloved, wife, and demiurge. (In Isis, the personification of the divine wife and female polarity of deity-demiurge, the aspect of beloved is to some extent reduced and peripheral).

The peculiarity of goddess Isis's image lies, first of all, in the fact that it reflected the mystical obeisance which the feminine part of reality enjoyed in that times in the most prominent way among ancient pagan religious systems. Isis was not just a goddess, sister and wife of god Osiris, the mother of god Horus and patron of certain aspects of practical and everyday life of Egyptians. The main myth with participation of Isis narrative of the destiny of her husband, god Osiris – of his death, fetation of son Horus, resurrection, revenge and enthronement in the afterworld (Wilkinson, 2003).

As it is known, Osiris was treacherously killed by his younger brother Seth who took possession of his inheritance and thorn the body of his older brother to pieces and scattered them across Egypt. Isis, with the help of god Anubis assembled the husband's body and became pregnant in a magic way, eventually gave birth to god Horus, helped him to take revenge on Seth and to receive the father's righteous inheritance. This myth reflects the vision of Isis as the medium of such feminine qualities and functions as marital fidelity, self-devotion, care for children, etc. The character of Isis personified practically entire positive part of womanhood, embodying its best and most important traits. Isis posed the more passive, feminine part of life, which, uniting with a more active masculine element made the existence possible (Alford, 2008). The narrative motive of separated lovers in the story is also linked to the character of Shekhinah as will be discussed further.

The character of Kuprin's Sulamith is projected onto the mythologeme of Shekinah directly through its primary source – the heroine of the Song of Songs – but at the same time she acquires a more universal cultural nature, as it correlates not only with Old Judaic and Old Testament mythology, but also with the classical and the Egyptian, which gives it universal human and existential

sense. In the character paradigm created by Kuprin, the primacy, universality and ontological rootedness of the Shekinah's archetype in relation to all other perfect models of the feminine ideal are artistically explicated. In this respect, both the myth of Aphrodite and Sophian myth are perceived in associative and symbolic contexts of the narrative as a reflection of erotological and demiurgic aspect of the Shekinah, while the myth of Isis – as ethnocultural invariant of Kabbalistic Shekinah's character as a whole. If in cosmological terms, at the level of female deity archeomodel Isis and Shekinah are almost identical, in terms of cosmogony and at the level of the fate plot these characters are indistinguishable. In the end of a long travel Isis restores the integrity of Osiris, and therefore the harmony of the universe; Shekinah, according to Kabbalistic tradition (Scholem, 1997; Dennis, 2007; Laitman, 2006; Bokser, 1981) is wandering separated from her Divine Husband, until the world frees itself from sin and returns its lost integrity. The cosmogony of myth of Isis gives a complete vision of the universe; the myth of the Shekinah gives the vision developing and incomplete. In the story of Sulamith both archeoplots are updated.

Discussions

For Sulamith, embodying the life creating Eternal Feminine energies in her being, it is possible, similarly to Isis, to save her lover twice, revealing him from the destructive origins, both spiritual and physical: first her love releases him from the mortal grief and existential "vexation of spirit", and in the final – directly from death itself, approaching of which she felt with supernatural sensitiveness ahead of the king, and immediately protected him with her body from the sword. It should be noted that the motive of twice salvation finds its distinct parallels in many versions of the myth of Isis, where Osiris at first gains the bodily integrity, and then comes to life completely (Wilkinson, 2003); in the story of Sulamith and Solomon this sequence is inverted as the main plot collision is inverted too: in contrast to the myth, the heroine dies in the story, instead of a hero.

Sulamith's sacrifice has a wider socio-cultural sense: she saves not only the king, but his kingdom itself, which appears to be more and more in a grip of infernal cults, primarily of orgiastic rituals of queen Astis. "Dark, evil, fearful, and fascinating rumours were current about Queen Astis in Jerusalem. The parents of beautiful boys and girls hid their children from her gaze... But agitating, irresistible curiosity drew all souls to her, and gave all bodies up into her power" (Kuprin, 1964). The mystery of Osiris and Isis is reduced here to perverted demonic imitations that have nothing to do with the original purity of the ancient Egyptian myth. Revival of the true essence of mythological archetypes is incarnated into the mystery of Solomon and Sulamith love: they manifest themselves as true King and Queen, whose love takes character of cosmourgy and theurgy, transforming themselves and their surrounding reality. The result of the realization of these forces and energies is not only the destruction of demonic sorceries of Astis, ousted by the King, but also overcoming the ancient sad wisdom of death. The love and death opposition in the associative and symbolic contexts of the narrative contains a clear reference to the ancient Eros – Thanatos mythologems.

In the antique tradition, Eros appears the second after Chaos, therefore he is primary to Cosmos and Logos as its organizing arche. It is Eros who is the major creative force binding the world together and nourishing it with continuous birth and creativity. Eros of Hesiod and orphics is a cosmic element, a life-giving and all-pervading element. It arranges the world, and without it nothing existing would come to existence. It's not Cupids of the posterior Greek and Roman Poetry. It is the oldest god, and the first ever. We have seen that terms of reference of solar-chthonic myth as of one of fundamental eidoses of world modeling, expressed in the opposition "cosmos-chaos" habitual for the European cultural consciousness, are clearly set in the starting episode of the text. And the erotological myth is denoted here only indirectly as a hidden, thus far overtone subject, which will become leading further on. The logic of the author's artistic thought shifts the accent from the paradigm of solar-chthonic myth with its traditional axiological domination of the first elements of invariant oppositions (solar, cosmic, apollonian, logoistic) as creational-creative, fructuous, life-giving elements, to a system of figurative sense invariants within the frames of a new paradigm "Eros-Logos". And here the delusiveness of the apology of solar-logoistic principle peculiar to modern civilization reveals itself. It is the energy of Eros – the very "fifth element" among arche of the kingdom of Chaos which is able to transform this kingdom into fructuous bosom of peace – which possesses the truly life-giving, theurgic force.

Kuprin's artistic philosophy reveals the paradoxical sense of "transmutation" possibility of this mythology, which asserts the interdependence between differently directed origins. If Solomon is confident that "love is strong as death", Sulamith is given internal knowledge that love is stronger than death, and this truth is revealed to the reader by all the figurative-semantic and narrative logic of the story. Death is antithetical to life on earth rather than to love, but the energies of Eros overcome the opposition of life and death as well as any others opposition that limit the human spirit. However, the final semantic chord of the narrative includes dramatic motive of separated lovers as well, related to the Shekhinah and her Divine Husband characters, who, just as Solomon, cannot find the perfect existential fullness without a final reunion with Eternal Feminine polarity. The motive of free-will sacrifice is also related to Shekhinah's archetype: according to some versions of legends about Shekhinah, she was not just constrainedly separated from the Husband as a result of the Fall of man, but voluntarily adopted expulsion, accompanying his fallen children and helping them in their return to the truth and light of righteousness. It should be noted that the theme of salvation of spiritually fallen Solomon's kingdom due to the free-will sacrifice of the heroine allows seeing here archetypal connection to the New Testament mystery of Christ. If the Osiris – Christ parallel in the paradigm of myths about dying and rising God was updated in Kuprin's era in the culture of the Silver Age, the internal unity of the Shekhinah's and the Christ's victim (equal: the Virgin Mary and Christ) can be recognized as one of the writer's artistic reveals.

Conclusion

Thus, the thematic and semantic final of Sulamith integrates the basic paradigm of ontological myths created by cultures, being at the forefront of modern civilization in its Western European version: Old Judaic (Kabbalistic and the Old Testament) myth, Egyptian, antique, as well as the myth of the New Testament as a ultra-ethnic in and of itself. We came to the conclusion that their interrelations and interreflections are evident at the level of a specific culturological metaplot of the short novel by Kuprin; herewith, a universal transcultural neomyth emerges, which is constructed thanks to internally reflexive, polyphonic arrangement of the written work's plot structure and its artistic system as a whole. The profound studies of these reflexive artistic structures and of the principles of their functioning remains the outlook for our further studies. But the results which have already been achieved at this stage have both theoretical and practical significance because they open up the opportunity for a new, original interpretation of Sulamith short novel, the canonic text by A. Kuprin which is one of the most prominent pages of Russian Silver Age literature. Kabbalistic myth and its semantic interreflections with Sophian myth have not been described in Russian and world's studies of Kuprin creative works. The study conducted by us evidences that Sulamith by Kuprin is not only a brilliant stylization and artistically unique setting of ancient mythologems, but also a profoundly original re-thinking thereof in transcultural contexts, at the level of universal philosophic generalizations. Their interrelation and interreflection are read at the level of a peculiar culturological metaplot of Kuprin's story, generating a universal neocultural myth that is created due to internal reflexive, polyphonic organization of composition narrative structure and its artistic system as a whole. However, in-depth study of these self-analytical artistic structures and principles of their operation is the topic for individual studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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