THE MYTHOLOGICAL DISCOURSE OF THE ITELMEN POETRY (BASED ON THE WORKS OF G. POROTOV)

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The authors review the Itelmen poetry based on works written by Georgii Porotov. Mythological discourse analysis helps us reveal the Itelmen worldview.

Methodology: The poet focuses on the mythological character of the creator of Kamchatka, Kutkh the Big Raven, the main character of the poems composed by G. Porotov, in particular, the poem "The Winged Kutkh, or a Love Song". Discourse analysis is used on the material of the Itelmen poetry for the first time in order to study the manifestation of the epic in the artistic thinking of the peoples of Kamchatka. The subject of the study was the mythological story of Kutkh Raven's marriage.

Main Findings: Within the framework of the study, the authors base their research on the works of the famous mythologist and folklorist E. Meletinsky, which are focused on identifying the specifics of the mythology in the mentality of the Paleo-Asiatic peoples in the Far East.

Applications of this study: The article will be of interest to a wide circle of readers and researchers of the indigenous peoples of the world.

Keywords: *Itelmen Poetry, Itelmen Mythology, Georgii Porotov, Kutkh the Raven, Mythological Code, Marriage Story, Itelmen Picture of the World.*

INTRODUCTION

The literature of the Itelmens, the people living on the "outskirts of Russia", in Kamchatka, and numbering just over three thousand people, is virtually unknown to the Russian reader. The Itelmen T. Zaochnaya expressed a controversial, but quite definite, opinion: "There is practically no Itelmen literature. There are some very small books with Itelmen tales, poems based on the Itelmen legends..." (Zaochnaya, 2011, 129). One of the first researchers of the people of Kamchatka S. Krasheninnikov noted: "The inhabitants of Kamchatka have the same talent for telling tales as the ancient Greeks. This nation has great musical abilities" (Krasheninnikov, 1949). Therefore, we will focus our discussion of the Itelmen poetry on the work of Georgii Porotov.

Our interest in the work of G. Porotov is determined by its representativeness. Just like the sea is reflected in a drop, it would be interesting to evaluate all his poetic heritage through studying specific artistic material. For us, this material was the poem called "The Winged Kutkh, or a Love Song".

The selected text is not a sample of secondary folklorization. In its structure and style, the poem does not repeat oral poetic patterns. Nevertheless, the author turns to traditional subjects and characters of the Itelmen mythological epic about the Raven and his wife Mity, radically transforms them and creates, in fact, a romantic love story, consciously refusing to interpret these characters in the genre traditions of Paleo-Asiatic myths and fairy tales and "mythological anecdotes" about the marriage of the big Raven (according to E. Meletinsky). The comparative, typological, structural and semantic approaches that we used allow us to reveal the mythological code in the text written by G. Porotov, a poet, writer, collector and propagandist of traditional knowledge of the Itelmen people (Gobzev, 2011; Vorobiev, 2011; Tsivian, 1990).

The poem by G. Porotov "The Winged Kutkh, or a Love Song" testifies that this was also reflected in the work of other Itelmen authors and determined the specific character of its content. Moreover, the poem by G. Porotov is a return to the relatives of the almost lost oral-poetical plot. The author often emphasized that "the desire to ennoble the folk form leads to the emasculation of folk art" (Selivanova, 2011).

The goal of our study of the poem written by G. Porotov is to reveal the specific kind of mythological environment in the poem "The Winged Kutkh, or a Love Song" which has not previously been the object of literary reflection, using discourse analysis. In a myth, there is an essence, the "structural frame", a certain set of features and nuclear message-content, which is transmitted in different ways, both through language and through characters (Tolstoi, Tolstaya, 1995). Any culture is a "hierarchical system of different codes" and the myth reflects a structured reality (Hall, 1988; Bloch, 1977). In this paper, we focus on the mythological character of the Raven through which the Itelmen coded their views on the world, "the parameters of the universe and the rules of orientation in it – etiological, ethical, genealogical and other".

METHODS

The objective interest in the poem by G. Porotov is determined by the fact that it is not an example of the secondary folklorization of the text. In terms of its structure and style, the work is not a stylization and does not repeat the oral poetic patterns. Nevertheless, the author turns to traditional plots and characters of the Itelmen mythological epic about the Raven named Kutkh and his wife Mity, radically transforms them and creates, in fact, a romantic love story, consciously rejecting the interpretation of these characters in the genre traditions of Paleo-Asiatic myths, fairy tales and "mythological anecdotes" about the marriage of the big Raven (Meletinsky, 1979). The discourse analysis used in our study allows us to decode the meaning of mythological characters in the author's text. This explains the relevance and novelty of our research: the folklorist T. Golovaneva notes that "the traditional culture of the Itelmen at the beginning of the 21st century was on the verge of extinction ... the custodians of traditional culture are very old and the danger is that the existence of Itelmen folklore in oral tradition will be lost..." (Golovaneva, 2005, 3). In the poem "The Winged Kutkh, or a Love Song", Porotov's reference to the mythological code activates, on an unconscious level, the ethnogenetic memory of the members of the Itelmen cultural community, thereby contributing to its actualization and revival in the realities of everyday life.

RESULTS

Itelmen literature belongs to the so-called "newly literate" literature because the Itelmen language had no alphabet until the early 1980s. Due to this, there was no literature written in Itelmen until that time. Meanwhile, the Itelmen literature written in Russian existed and developed along with the literature of other Paleo-Asiatic peoples of the macroregion – the Koryaks, the Chukchi, the Yukagirs, and the Nivkhs (Jochelson, 1908; Tsivian, 1990). In this regard, the specific artistic features of the works of G. Porotov should be considered both in the context of Russian language literature of Kamchatka and literature composed in Itelmen. The Russian-speaking writers Nely Suzdalova, Tatiana Gutorova, and Klavdia Khaloymova, the author of the first book in Itelmen, were united by their appeal to folklore and Itelmen mythology, the Itelmen being "very fond of singing, stories about Kutkh, folk dances, comedies, imitating the sounds of wind and birds..." (Levi-Strauss, 1985, 130).

Only in 2011, thanks to V. Ogryzko (2011), the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Literary Russia", the book "Itelmen literature" (Itelmenskaya literature, 2011) was published. In terms of the mythological aspect in the poem by G. Porotov, in our opinion, it is important to identify and comprehend it at the plot level and the figurative level. Thus, the plot of the poem goes back to the marriage theme of the Itelmen mythological tales dedicated to Kutkh the Raven and his wife Mity. Using the material of this poem, one can consider the peculiarities of the manifestation of mythological discourse in the space of the artistic text of the modern Itelmen writer.

In the poem, G. Porotov retains the traditional beginnings of Itelmen myths and fairy tales and introduces the reader into the atmosphere of epic space and time: When it happened, / Nobody knows, / But people composed / Legends about the time / When long ago / Onto steep mountains / From the stormy sea / On his mighty wings / Kutkh flew // (Porotov, 2003).

Note that E. Meletinsky, referring to the Paleo-Asiatic mythological epic, emphasized the mythological component in the Itelmen fairy tales, manifested in the attribution of action to mythical times. The mythological tales of the Itelmen and Koryak usually begin with the phrase: "It was a time when the creator lived..." and contain "relics of the creation myths" (Meletinsky, 1979, 37). Moreover, in the early specimens of mythological plots, the Raven appears as a demiurge hero, a cultural hero. The character of the Raven as a trickster emerges later. Later versions already contain the character of the insignificant "raven-man", but the plot and the characters do not lose their mythological semantics. It should be noted that the above-quoted passage is saturated with mythological symbolism at the substantive-semantic level: the uncertainty of time, ascending rather to the times of the first creation, and the space marked by the movement of the hero, "from the stormy sea to the steep mountains" (Porotov, 2003). The movement of the hero to the shore, in our opinion, has a mythological coding. According to the Itelmen mythological tradition, Kutkh's movement in one direction or another indicates a specific time of day: in Itelmen spells and mythological tales about the marriage of the Raven, "the character's movement at dawn correlates with the direction towards the seashore" (Golovaneva, 2005, 11). The primary culture of the Itelmen interprets his movement from the sea to the coast, from heaven to earth, his finding his wife as gaining "his own" space, earth. Kutkh's wandering across Kamchatka brings the mythological Raven closer to the characters of cultural heroes (Meletinsky, 1979, 35). The reliance on the mythological plot of the Itelmen fairy tales and myths can be felt in the final words of the poem: Give me your hand, Mity, / Let's go to the inner regions of the country, / Not yet discovered, / But as young as we are! // (Porotov, 2003).

According to the Itelmen's mythological beliefs, Kutkh descended from the sky into the sea following his future bride Mity, the daughter of an eagle (Eggers, 1959; Fabian, 2002). In G. Porotov's poem, Kutkh comes down from the sky mountains at the beginning in order to save his betrothed. The marriage theme in G.Porotov's poetry is determined by the content of the Itelmen mythological epic itself: Kutkh the Raven is a character of many erotic or marriage stories in Kamchatka. "A lot of attention is paid" to Raven's marriage and family life in Itelmen and Koryak folklore (Meletinsky, 1979, 40). In the myths of Paleo-Asiatic peoples, the topic of marriage concerns the unsuccessful attempts to change Mithy (Meletinsky, 1979, 59) and bears an ethiological character. In the mythological epics, this marriage is viewed as

the first union of the male and the female principles in Kamchatka that gave life to the Itelmen. This is why the marriage of Kutkh and Mithy is viewed as a source of life. The outlined mythic semantics of the epic marriage can also be traced in G. Porotov's work: a woman is perceived as a transmitter of life, the "core" of the life cycle of the Itelmen race: You are strong and brave, / O my winged friend! // I am a girl. / I was born gentle. // I must be beautiful, / Thin and slender. // After all, a woman is a mother, / A great creator: / She contains the beginning of life, / and the end of life... // (Porotov, 2003).

The fairy tale collision of the Itelmen myths is connected with a threat to Kutkh's marriage and his rivalry with a monster. We should note here that the plot of the poem by G. Porotov, in our opinion, is a contamination of a number of plots of Itelmen mythological tales about Raven's marriage, his descendants, his rival suitor the god of the Ammekh tribe. Note that in the Itelmen tales about a marriage where the main characters are Kutkh's children and not Kutkh himself, the characters of the intermediary and the rival appear. G. Porotov transfers this motive into the story of the Raven himself: the god of the Ammekh tribe, against the will of the betrothed and her foster father, tries to woo the girl. Kutkh and Mity have to flee in order to prevent this. The main characters' escape and miraculous rescue give the poem a romantic feeling. Such a free interpretation of the plot of the Itelmen mythological tales is largely due to the very character of the mythological Kutkh (Gould, 1987). According to Krasheninnikov (1949), although the Itelmen considered Kutkh god, they did not address their requests to him. "They did not treat him with respect, did not praise him and often described him in very obscene terms" (Meletinsky, 1979, 35). In contrast to the description of the "indecent" Kutkh and his trickster actions, very typical of the mythological epic of the Paleo-Asians, the Itelmen poet romanticizes the image of the Raven in his poem. G. Porotov shows the romantic aspect of the poem by introducing the description of Kutkh and Mity's dreams into the text. Note that the motive of falling asleep is often mentioned in the Itelmen mythological tales concerning the Raven. Its meaning is clear: it is a transgression from one world to another. In the Russian and European literary traditions, the motive of sleep is also very stable and is viewed as the "step of life in the invisible" (Florensky, 1993). In the poem, the dreams of the characters appear as a dream-reality, a dreamlife, a dream-transition from death to life (Hertz, 1960). The introduction of dreams into the text of the Itelmen poem is a compositional technique, which makes the space of visible reality expand. The ending in G. Porotov's poem is also traditional: marriage, according to Itelmen beliefs, has the power to heal and bring back to life and after reuniting with his wife, the main character acquires special strength in mythological tales.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the discourse analysis, we came to the conclusion that G. Porotov follows the mythological interpretation of the motive of the successfully completed marriage test of the main character. This is a kind of initiation where the chosen bridegroom enters the space of the other (sea) world looking for his bride and frees her from Ammekh's house. By finding his woman, the main character acquires his strength again. The poem "The Winged Kutkh, or a Love Song", as well as other poems and plays by G. Porotov, where Kutkh is the main ("Kutkha and Mice", "How Kutha rode a humpback salmon", "The Winged Kutkha", "How Kutkha made Mity like work", "How Kutkha scared Ememkuta", etc.), is full of mythological discourse, which requires an in-depth further study.

A colleague in the writing workshop Natalya Selivanova wrote that on the visiting card of Kamchatka she would necessarily put the name of George Porotov (Selivanova, 2011). Obviously, this is due to the fact that Porotov was not only a poet and prose writer but also an Itelmen folklore holder. He, according to Vladimir Sangi, the Nivkh prose writer, poet, collector of the folklore of the Nivkhs of Sakhalin (Sangi, 2011), recorded and returned to the grandchildren of the ancient Itelmen storytellers and singers "vivid songs and dances, twilight tales" of the country of Uykoal. The cycle of stories about Kutkh the Raven is an example of folklore poetic tale not only in Itelmen literature but also in general in the literature of the peoples of the North, which requires analysis at the level of poetics.

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