

ELEMENTS OF THE PAGAN CODE IN THE POETICS OF GUZEL YAKHINA'S NOVEL "ZULEIKHA OPENS HER EYES"

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Abstract

The present article is based on the thesis emphasizing the significance of the Slavic pagan mentality, elements of the pagan worldview and folk demonology in the poetics of Guzel Yakhina's novel – "Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes"². The analysis reveals the levels of poetics specifying the elements of the pagan code, presenting their content and determining their artistic role.

Keywords: *paganism, demonology, image, mythologem, character, artistic role*

Rezumat

Articolul dat se bazează pe rezultatele cercetării noastre doctorale asupra semnificației mentalității și viziunii păgâne a slavilor despre lume, demonologiei populare în romanul scriitoarei Guzel Yakhina „Zuleihei i se deschid ochii”. Cercetarea dă în vileag o prezentare pe niveluri a elementelor codului păgân și rolului artistic al acestora.

Cuvinte-cheie: *păgânism, demonologie, imagine, mitologem, personaj, rol artistic*

We examine Guzel Yakhina's debut novel about the dispossession of kulaks (literally "fist" in Russian) in a broad context – of Slavic culture and Russian classical literature (the novel reveals a wide range of allusions to the works of Russian classics from S. A. Yesenin, I. A. Bunin and others, to M. A. Sholokhov, A. I. Solzhenitsyn, V. T. Shalamov, etc.). The subject matter of the research is the mythological consciousness, and the object of this study consists of the elements of the pagan code, which play an essential role in the poetics of the novel.

1. Pagan world perception as a characteristic feature of the national identity

Zuleikha is a devout Muslim woman. However, like other representatives of the population in the novel, she reveals such a characteristic feature as dual faith: the religious perception of the world bears resemblance to a complex alloy of beliefs, ideas about the world and its people, values, attitudes, etc., characteristic, on the one hand, for Islam, and, on the other, for paganism. It seems that the overlapping and the combination of Islamic and pagan representations of the world were developed in the heroine from

²The novel is translated into English by Lisa C. Hayden, bearing the title "Zuleikha".

birth, and, at this point, the main roles were played by the mother and the immediate entourage. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Zuleikha perceives the space of the house, courtyard and, more broadly, the whole world as being alive and inhabited by demonological beings.

Here we provide a number of examples that testify to the dense population of the artistic world with spirits, as well as reflecting ideas about their association to a certain locus, functions and character. Evil spirits, as Zuleikha believes, live under the threshold of the house: «Делает шаг, переступая высокий порог, – не хватало еще наступить на него именно сейчас и потревожить злых духов, тьфу-тьфу! <...>»³ (Яхина/Âhina, 2015, p. 10). In the Slavic folk tradition, the house was often deemed not only as a dwelling; its space could expand to the limits of the entire courtyard, therefore in the novel the brownie, the household spirit (*bichura*), is located in the bathhouse (in the Slavic tradition, a separate demonological character is known – the *bannik* (банник)) and, like other spirits, it requires sacrifice: «Сыпануть орехов бичуре за скамью, чтобы не шалила, не гасила печь, не подпускала угара, не мешала париться»⁴ (*idem*, p. 27). Or another example of a demonic creature⁵: «Вот и околица. Здесь, под забором последнего дома, <...> живет басу капке иясе»⁶ (*idem*, p. 24). The dictionary of Tatar words and expressions, published by the author at the end of the novel, explains that *Basu Kapke Iyase* is the spirit of the gates. The text presents its duties and characteristics: «Зулейха сама его не видела, но, говорят, сердитый очень, ворчливый. А как иначе? Работа у него такая: злых духов от деревни отгонять, через околицу не пускать, а если у деревенских просьба какая к лесным духам появится – помочь, стать посредником»⁷ (*idem*, p. 24). The cemetery is ruled by another spirit – “*zirat iyase*” («зират иясе»⁸).

We believe that the examples given are quite sufficient to also illustrate the thesis that, in the popular perception, various demonological creatures possessed a number of constant characteristics, functions, a habitual way of

³In English: “She takes a step, crossing a high threshold – it was not enough to step on it right now and *disturb the evil spirits*, pah-pah! <...>”.

⁴In English: “To pour some nuts to *bichura* behind the bench, so as *not to be naughty*, *not to extinguish the oven*, *not to let the fumes out*, *not to interrupt the steam bath*”.

⁵In English: “Here is the gate. Here, under the fence of the last house, <...> lives *Basu Kapke Iyase*”.

⁶Italics by Guzel Âhina.

⁷In English: “Zuleikha herself did not see him, but, they say, he is *very angry, grumpy*. And how else? His job is this: *to drive away evil spirits from the village*, not to let them go through the gates, and if the villagers have any requests to forest spirits – he must help, become a mediator”.

⁸In translation from Tatar – “cemetery owner”.

life, associated to a specific space, etc. A person only needs to be aware of this matter and be able to negotiate, interact with them, appease through sacrifice in order to get what he wants, and remember that by getting angry, insulting or violating certain prohibitions, he can turn the demonic creatures against himself. Moreover, in the pagan worldview, there was a widespread opinion about the ability of spirits to be open to dialogue and cooperation. Let us illustrate this with the following example: «Ни один лист не вернулся обратно к Зулейхе – дух околицы принял угощение. Значит – исполнит просьбу: *потолкует по-свойски с духом кладбища, уговорит его.* <...> Говорить напрямую с духом кладбища Зулейха побаивалась – все-таки она простая женщина»⁹ (*idem*, p. 25). We must emphasize that the pagan worldview is not an exclusive attribute of the image of the main character, it is no coincidence that one of the characters declares: «Не привили еще социалистический быт, – извиняющимся тоном бормочет Мансурка, придерживая норвящие разъехаться в разные стороны сундуки. – *Язычники – что с них возьмёшь*»¹⁰ (*idem*, p. 80).

The belief of the pagans in the relationship of the man with the natural phenomena determined the idea of the ability of the deceased to take any shape. Therefore, for example, Zuleikha associates a tomtit with her eldest daughter Shamsia. It must also be underlined that the dead are capable of helping those still alive: «Вырыть схорон на деревенском кладбище придумал Муртаза. Зулейха сначала испугалась: тревожить мертвых – не грех ли? <...> А потом согласилась – *пусть дочери помогают по хозяйству.* Дочери помогали исправно – *не первый год стерегли до весны родительские припасы*»¹¹ (*idem*, p. 68).

Accordingly, the pagan worldview is one of the most important sign of a genuine national identity. Nevertheless, in some cases it indicates a certain backwardness: «Он выступит с новаторской инициативой: переименовать языческий праздник Сабан-туй – Праздник Плуга, отмечаемый в татарских селах в конце весны, – в Трактор-туй. Инициативу поддержат в центре; на торжество приедет делегация ЦИК из самой Казани и десант газетных корреспондентов. Однако праздник сорвется

⁹In English: “Not a single leaf returned to Zuleikha – the spirit of the gate has accepted the treat. It means that he will fulfill the request: *will talk, in his own way, with the spirit of the cemetery, will persuade him.* <...> Zuleikha was afraid of speaking directly with the spirit of the cemetery - after all, she is a simple woman”.

¹⁰In English: “They haven’t instilled a socialist way of life yet, – Mansurka mutters apologetically, holding the chests striving to disperse in different directions. – *Pagans – what can you expect from them*”.

¹¹In English: “Murtaza came up with the idea of digging a burial at the village cemetery. At first Zuleikha was frightened: to disturb the dead – isn’t it a sin? <...> And then she agreed – *let her daughters help with the housework.* The daughters helped properly – *not for the first year they guarded parental supplies until spring*”.

из-за неисправности самого трактора. Позже выяснится, что местная старушка-абыстай *из добрых побуждений решила задобрить духа трактора и тайно скормила мотору некоторое количество яиц и хлеба, что и послужило причиной поломки*»¹² (*idem*, p. 108).

The largest number of pagan appeals, according to our observations, are identified in the opening fragment and the first section of the second part of the novel, in which the ordinary existence of the heroine is presented. Later on, they will arise already in the course of the description of life in the camp settlement. Thus, for example, there is a note about the amulet protecting from the evil spirits of the forest: «В скупом закатном свете видит меж деревьев высокие колья, на которых скалятся два серых черепа. <...> Черепа повесил Лукка: *отпугивать духов леса*»¹³ (*idem*, pp. 304-305). We must point out that the neglected appearance of Ignatov evokes associations with the *leshny*: «Только сперва – отмыться и переодеться в чистое. А то испугается тебя личный состав, за лешего примет»¹⁴ (*idem*, p. 325). It is worth mentioning that Zuleikha retains her previous experience of respectful attitude towards demonological creatures in the settlement similarly. She still believes that they inhabit the entire surrounding space: «Духов местных не знала, почитать не умела, *лишь приветствовала про себя, входя в урман или спускаясь к реке, – и только*»¹⁵ (*idem*, p. 336).

It should be emphasized that 23% of the linguistic units registered in the dictionary of Tatar words and expressions from the novel, carefully prepared by the author, are associated with the corpus of mythology.

The river and the forest – the most important mythologems of the novel

The novel reveals a number of mythologems that play an important artistic role, but in this article, we will consider only two. By mythologems,

¹²In English: “He will come up with an innovative initiative: to rename the pagan holiday Saban-tuy – the Plow Holiday, celebrated in Tatar villages at the end of spring – into Tractor-tuy. The initiative will receive support at the centre; the celebration will be attended by a delegation from Kazan CEC itself and a crowd of newspaper correspondents. However, the holiday will fail because of a malfunction of the tractor itself. Later on, it turns out that the local old-abystay woman, *out of good intentions, decided to appease the spirit of the tractor and secretly fed the engine some eggs and bread, which caused the breakdown*”.

¹³In English: “In the stingy sunset light, he sees tall stakes between the trees, on which two gray skulls are grinning. <...> Lucca hung the skulls: *to scare away the spirits of the forest*”.

¹⁴In English: “But first – wash yourself and change into clean clothes. Otherwise, *the personnel will be afraid of you, they will take you for a leshy*”.

¹⁵In English: “She did not know the local spirits, couldn’t worship them, *only greeted them inwardly, entering the urman or going down to the river, and nothing more*”.

within the framework of the study, we mean those images that are characterized by universality, globality, widespread prevalence in culture and connection in the mythological picture of the world.

In the Slavic culture, the mythologem “river” is characterized by a wide symbolic potential. Particular attention, in the context of the novel under study, deserves such characteristics as the boundary between “own” and “alien” // “living” and “dead”, the ability to act as a type of metaphor of the path, the road, as well as the interpretation of a dangerous yet fateful element. Let’s consider each of the stated characteristics in sequence. In the Slavic tradition, the image of the boundary status of the river is persistent. The ethnolinguistic dictionary, «Славянские древности/Slavânskie drevnosti» (*Slavic Antiquity*), explains that the river, as well as other water bodies, “is interpreted as a border dividing natural space into «own» and «alien». The area beyond the river was portrayed in folklore texts as a mythical country or the other world” («осмысляется как граница, разделяющая природное пространство на «свое» и «чужое». Местность за рекой изображалась в фольклорных текстах как мифическая страна или потусторонний мир») (*Славянские.../Slavânskie...*, 1995-2012, p. 417). Another significant statement is worth our attention: an inappropriate collocation “In the Russian folk spiritual tradition, hell and heaven are separated by a river of fire” («В русской народной духовной традиции ад и рай разделяет огненная река») (*idem*, p. 93). We notice that in Yulbash, Zuleikha was happy in her own way, the only thing that worried her very much was failed motherhood. And Angara river acts as a kind of boundary between “own” (the usual way of life, an established system of values, certain aspirations) and “alien” (the real hell of the camp settlement). Crossing the border (within the framework of the mythological picture of the world) often requires sacrifice. In this regard, attention should be paid to the inner state of the heroine and her attitude to life. We emphasize that Zuleikha was “tired of living” and was seriously thinking about suicide: “She decided: once it becomes completely unbearable – she will eat it [poisoned sugar]. It would be better, of course, even before the birth of the child, so that they fall asleep together, without parting” («Решила: как только станет совсем невмоготу – съест [отравленный сахар]. Лучше бы, конечно, еще до рождения ребенка, чтобы им уснуть вдвоем, не расставаясь») (Яхина/Âhina, 2015, p. 216). Fallen into the river and, we must underline, not being able to swim, this woman resigns herself to her fate and, having stopped fighting for life, goes to the bottom. A child, who has not yet been born, brings her back to life: “*The child wakes up sharply, suddenly. It beats with legs, for the second time, the third. It twists his little hands, turns his head, flutters. Zuleikha’s tummy is shaking – small heels are pounding inside. Zuleikha’s legs are flinching in response. Once again.*

And again. Pushing off from the bottom” («Ребенок просыпается резко, вдруг. Бьет ножками, второй раз, третий. Сучит ручонками, крутит головой, трепыхается. Живот Зулейхи трясется – маленькие пяточки колотятся внутри. Ноги Зулейхи вздрагивают в ответ. Еще раз. И еще. Отгалкиваются от дна») (*idem*, p. 223). In such manner, Zuleikha undergoes a symbolic initiation ritual – she dies in one capacity and is reborn in another. Particularly worth mentioning is that the initiator of her return to life is her son, Yuzuf, who, in the future, will prove to be the only meaning and purpose of the heroine’s life. This episode, in our opinion, has a fateful meaning, which is quite consistent with the folk tradition, within which “to raft down the river meant to surrender oneself to the will of fate” («сплавляться по реке значило отдать себя на волю судьбы») (*Славянские.../Slavânskie...*, 1995-2012, p. 417).

At the end of the novel, Zuleikha, overcoming inhuman sufferings, is forced to let her son go. He floats away from her on a boat on the same river. He must build his life away from this hell, a different fate awaits him. As much as Zuleikha wanted to be always close, her concern about the future of her son requires to let him go to another world, more specifically, the world of other possibilities. We mention here the following statement from the ethnolinguistic dictionary: “The ability of river water to move (float) vessels and objects along the course explains the perception of the river as a path, a road leading to distant lands” («Способность речной воды передвигать (сплавлять) по течению суда и предметы объясняет восприятие реки как пути, дороги, ведущей в дальние края») (*Славянские.../Slavânskie...*, 1995-2012, p. 417). The author does not explain how his fate will turn out: the open perspective of the novel’s ending gives the readers an opportunity to think out for themselves, both the story of the aged mother and her grown-up son.

The mythologem of the “forest” in the novel is characterized by ambivalence, revealing positive and negative connotations, and is associated with the ideas of life and death.

On the one hand, the forest is a protector and guardian: “If it hadn’t been for the blizzard, many villagers would have pulled into the forest tonight. There, under the protective cover of spruce paws and crackling deadwood, each zealous owner had his own cache” («Если бы не буря – многие деревенские потянулись бы сегодня вечером в лес. Там под спасительным покровом еловых лап и трескучего валежника у каждого рачительного хозяина был свой тайник») (Яхина/Âhina, 2015, p. 47); “During the Great Famine, only they were saving – the forest and the river. Well, also the mercy of Allah, of course” («Во времена Большого голода только они и спасали – лес и река. Ну и милость Аллаха, конечно») (*idem*, pp. 17-18).

On the other hand, it (referred to in the novel as “urman” – a geographical or climatic area of conifer forest) appears to be a death space, a habitat for dangerous spirits: «Дальше пути не было. Лес заканчивался – начинался дремучий урман, буреломная чащоба, обиталище диких зверей, лесных духов и всякой дурной нечисти»¹⁶ (*idem*, p. 18). In the end, to Zuleikha’s question about why her mother-in-law went to urman in her youth, she answers: “Seeking death” («<...> Смерти искала <...>») (*idem*, p. 492).

It should be noted here that the attitude of the heroine towards the urman changes in the camp settlement. Having become a successful hunter, she not only ceased to be afraid of the dark, the remote part of the forest, but sought to go there, because in the wilds “the fattest, most delicious animal is found” («водится самое жирное, самое вкусное зверье») (*idem*, p. 392). Urman has become a familiar space for her, no longer frightening. The heroine has become so accustomed here that she began to perceive herself as a part of the forest, “of this large and powerful world” («этого большого и сильного мира»): “She still hasn’t realized if there are spirits in urman. In seven years, she passed across many hills, walked around many ravines, crossed many creeks – she has never met a single one. Sometimes, for a moment, it seems that *she herself is a spirit...*” («Она так и не поняла, водятся ли духи в урмане. За семь лет сколько холмов обошла, сколько оврагов исходила, сколько ручьев пересекла – ни одного не встретила. Иногда на мгновение кажется, что она сама и есть – дух...») (*idem*, p. 394).

Urman “has taught” her a different attitude to death, revealed to her the eternal law of nature about the dialectical unity of life and death: “*Death was closely, inextricably intertwined with life – and therefore not frightening. Moreover, life in urman has always triumphed*”. («Смерть была тесно, неразрывно переплетена с жизнью – и оттого не страшна. Больше того, жизнь в урмане всегда побеждала») (*idem*, p. 393).

Characters of folk spiritual culture and their artistic role

The two main heroines have nicknames belonging to the category of “speaking” names, which, in our opinion, not only refer to a rich layer of pagan culture, but also determine, to a certain extent, a number of important features of their inner picture or play another artistic role. Let’s elucidate this. In the house of her husband Zuleikha received the nickname “wet chicken” («мокрая курица»). For the first time it was her mother-in-law who called her like that, and “Zuleikha did not notice how, after a while, she began to call herself like that” («Зулейха не заметила, как через некоторое время и сама стала себя так называть») (*idem*, p. 12). This colloquial phrase

¹⁶In English: “There was no further way. The forest ended – a dense urman began, a windbreak thicket, the abode of wild animals, forest spirits and all kinds of evil wickedness”.

expresses a dismissive viewpoint and has two meanings: (1) 'weak-willed, spineless person'; (2) 'a miserable, depressed, pathetic person'. We believe, however, that the artistic role of the nickname cannot be reduced only to the specified meanings.

It is worth pointing out that in Slavic wedding rituals, the chicken is associated with the idea of fertility. This characteristic, it seems, is completely inapplicable to a childless woman who, as we learn at the beginning of the novel, buried all her daughters. However, already on the way to the camp, she will suddenly discover that she is pregnant. Now. On the way to the camp. Now. When Murtaza is dead. And this fourth child, finally, will not leave her, but will live on.

In the wedding rituals of the Slavs, the marriage and erotic symbolism of the chicken is also actualized. Noteworthy, in this respect, for example, is the Polish ritual name for chicken "beskura" 'wanton' ('распутница'). The passion that binds Zuleikha and Ignatov (the murderer of her husband!), according to the heroine (and Upyrikha), is criminal, but she has no control over this feeling. As we can see, Zuleikha's nickname, announced at the beginning of the novel, warns the reader, prepares him for certain plot conflicts.

More complex associative connections are perceived in relation to the nickname of Zuleikha's mother-in-law, which, in fact, acts as a substitute for her name - "Ghoul" («Упыриха»). This pejorative unit, according to the dictionary of V. Dahl, is applicable in relation to an evil, stubborn and obstinate person. In its first meaning, "ghoul" corresponds to "vampire". This common Slavic mythological character is represented as a deceased person rising from the grave at night, harming people and the livestock, drinking their blood, damaging the possessions (*Славянские древности.../Slavânskie drevnosti...*, 1995-2012, p. 383). And the mother-in-law really "drinks the blood" of Zuleikha in the sense that she tortures and exploits her.

It should be mentioned that distinctive features are relating Zuleikha's mother-in-law with a complex of demonic creatures from Slavic mythology, especially with Baba Yaga. This is specified by:

- age: "No one knew how old she really was. She claimed to be *one hundred*. Murtaza recently sat down to count, sat for a long time - and announced: mother is right, she really is about a hundred" («Никто не знал, сколько ей на самом деле лет. Она утверждала, что *сто*. Муртаза недавно сел подсчитывать, долго сидел - и объявил: мать права, ей действительно около ста») (*idem*, p. 11);

- portrait details: Upyrikha is *blind* and *deaf*, with a sharpened sense of smell (compared with the reaction of the fabulous Baba Yaga to the presence of a stranger in the hut - "Faugh-faugh-faugh, it smells of the Russian spirit"

(«Фу-фу-фу, русским духом пахнет»); she has a “bony leg” («костлявая нога») (*idem*, p. 22) (compared with Baba Yaga – bony leg), therefore she walks with a stick; she has “long and flat bags of breasts, hanging down to the navel” («длинные и плоские мешки грудей, висящие до пупа») (*idem*, p. 34-35) (compared with: “On the stove, on the ninth brick, there is lying a Baba Yaga, with bone legs, a nose that has grown into the ceiling, the snout hanging through the threshold, tits being wrapped on a hook, sharpening her teeth herself” («На печи, на девятом кирпичи лежит баба-яга, костяная нога, нос в потолок врос, сопли через порог висят, титьки на крюку замотаны, сама зубы точит»));

- superhuman abilities: Upyrikha sees prophetic dreams (Zuleikha is convinced that “Mother-in-law rarely saw dreams, but those that came to her turned out to be prophetic: strange, sometimes creepy, full of hints and ambiguous visions, in which the future was reflected vaguely and distorted, as in a dull mirror. <...> In a couple of weeks or months, the secret was sure to be revealed – something happened, more often – bad, less often – good, but always – important, with perverted accuracy repeating the picture of a dream half-forgotten by that time of sleep”. “The old witch was *never* wrong” («Свекровь редко видела сны, но те, что приходили к ней, оказывались вещими: странные, иногда жуткие, полные намеков и недосказанности видения, в которых грядущее отражалось расплывчато и искаженно, как в мутном зеркале. <...> Спустя пару недель или месяцев тайна обязательно раскрывалась – происходило что-то, чаще – плохое, реже – хорошее, но всегда – важное, с извращенной точностью повторявшее картину полузабытого к тому времени сна». «Старая ведьма *никогда* не ошибалась») (*idem*, p. 30));

- connection with the space of the forest: researchers observe that this character of the East Slavic tale reveals a connection with the most ancient (chthonic) pagan divinities. She is both the mistress of the forest, the mistress of animals and birds, and the prophetic old woman – the guide to the world of the dead, and the keeper of the kingdom of Death, as well as the personification of the ancestor mother. In our opinion, the connection of Upyrikha with the nature is one of the most important characteristics of her image. It is shaped taking into account Zuleikha’s narrative function, whose overall perception is impossible without considering pagan ideas. On the other hand, it is Upyrikha who plays the most important role in the development of the theme of motherhood. As a progenitor mother, she, first of all, cares about the continuation of the family, the happiness and well-being of her son, the compliance with the established norms and orders. Therefore, in Zuleikha’s visions, Upyrikha shows up at the most critical moments, for example, when she risks losing a child extremely emaciated by hunger, or to prevent the relationship with Ignatov when her mother-in-law threatens her with punishment.

Of a particular relevance is the example of the correlation of a portrait detail with the characteristic features of a representative of folk demonology, which will be reflected in plot collisions. Accordingly, in the image of Anastasia, such a detail as "mermaid" hair («русалочьи» волосы) stands out. We believe that the author uses such a comparison not only to emphasize its beauty and quality (long, thick, light brown), corresponding to the East Slavic perceptions about the appearance of one of the most variable and ambivalent images of folk demonology – the mermaid. We are underlying the fact that among the habitual models of mermaids' behaviour, scientists point out the seduction of men. This "role" is fulfilled by Anastasia: she tries to attract Ignatov's attention, inducing him to reduce the distance and, finally, she achieves her goal. Carnal pleasures in the mosque will be interrupted by the sudden screams of the mullah's wife, and "Ignatov, swearing, frees himself from the net of Nastasya's mermaid hair, patiently fastens his belt, pulls on his boots on the go" («Игнатов, чертыхаясь, высвобождается из сети Настасьиных русалочьих волос, терпеливо застегивает ремень, на ходу натягивает сапоги») (*idem*, p. 105).

The connection between man and nature

One of the key postulates of the pagan worldview is the assertion of the inextricable connection between man and nature, the first does not constitute the apogee of Divine creation, dominating the entire animal and plant world, but is seen as a link in a single chain. We find such a strong connection between the spheres of the human and the natural in this novel, for example, at the level of pictorial and expressive means. According to our observations, quite often G. Yakhina uses such tropes in which the human/what is related to a human being is transmitted through images/phenomena of nature. For example, the heart of frightened Zuleikha is compared to a broken egg: "The heart turns into the same viscous jelly, like an egg cracked in the hand, flows down the ribs somewhere down to the chilled stomach" («Сердце превращается в такой же вязкий кисель, как треснувшее в руке яйцо, стекает по ребрам куда-то вниз, к похолодевшему животу») (*idem*, p. 51). In the love couple Zuleikha-Ignatov, the first correlates with the arable land, and the second acts as a plowman. And the sleigh is referred to "alike a slow school of large fish, reaching out from the yard" («как медленный косяк крупных рыб, тянутся со двора») (*idem*, p. 106). Or the opposite technique: Murtaza counts the bags of bread, laying his palm on them "quaveringly, as on a lush female body" («трепетно, как на пышное женское тело») (*idem*, p. 47). This series can be continued, but the episode with the description of Upyrikha soaring in the steam bath deserves special attention, in which the concentration of such tropes (mainly metaphors) is the greatest: "Here she is, Upyrikha, very close: stretching from wall to wall, like a *wide field*. Lumpy

senile bones are sticking up, a hundred-year-old body scattered between them in bizarre *hills*, the skin hangs in frozen *landslides*. And all over this uneven, at times indented by the *ravines*, at times, lushly reared *valley*, glittering *creeks* of sweat flow and wriggle..." («Вот она, Упыриха, совсем близко: простирается от стены и до стены, как *широкой поле*. Бугристые старческие кости торчат вверх, столетнее тело рассыпалось меж них причудливыми *холмами*, кожа висит застывшими *оползнями*. И по всей этой неровной, то изрезанной *оврагами*, то пышно вздыбленной *долине* текут, извиваются блестящие *ручьи* пота...») (*idem*, p. 33).

We believe that such an abundance of natural images in the description of the human body is due to the specifics of the character, which, as shown above, turns out to be associatively related to a whole complex of goddesses and characters of folk demonology.

The special connection of Upyrikha with the image of a tree should also be noted here. In her statements, in the first part of the novel, this image appears in the context of the ideas of genus and kinship. So, for example, she is absolutely sure that she and Murtaza will outlive everyone, because they raise from "strong root and from a good tree" («крепкого корня и от хорошего дерева») (*idem*, p. 29), which cannot be said about Zuleikha (of "bad root" («дурного корня»)), who is not able to give birth to a son, an expected successor of the family, but also loses daughters one after another. In the novel's ending, Upyrikha (as perceived by Zuleikha), "turns" into a tree - a larch. Let us clarify that in folk culture the tree is a universal mediator: "simultaneously correlates with the upper (heaven, God and saints, heavenly bodies), middle (man) and lower (chthonic beings, ancestors, partly demons) worlds" («одновременно соотносится с верхним (небо, Бог и святые, небесные тела), средним (человек) и нижним (хтонические существа, предки, отчасти демоны) мирами») (*Славянские древности.../Slavânskie drevnosti...*, 1995-2012, p. 60). The repeated appearance of Upyrikha, who was deceased by that time, to Zuleikha in the most tragic moments of her life, seems to be explained by the desire of the former to ensure not only the continuation of the family, but also to force the daughter-in-law to obey the complex of moral, ethical and value foundations that were passed down from generation to generation. During her last appearance, the boundaries between natural and human become blurred: "Zuleikha wants to push Upyrikha away, she swings, but instead, for some reason, she falls on her chest, hugs a mighty body that smells of either tree bark or fresh soil. She buries her face in something warm, dense, muscular, alive, feels strong hands - on her back, on the back of her head, around her, everywhere. Tears are pouring down so generously and quickly that it seems - not from the eyes, but somewhere from the bottom of the heart, driven by its frequent and resilient beating. <...> - Tell

мом..." («Зулейха хочет оттолкнуть Упыриху, замахивается – но вместо этого почему-то падает ей на грудь, обнимает могучее тело, пахнущее не то древесной корой, не то свежей землей. Утыкается лицом во что-то теплое, плотное, мускулистое, живое, чувствует сильные руки – на спине, на затылке, вокруг себя, везде. Слезы льются так щедро и стремительно, что кажется – не из глаз, а откуда-то со дна сердца, подгоняемые его частым и упругим биением. <...> – Скажи мама...») (*idem*, p. 492).

A peculiar unity of previously opposed heroines occurs in a situation of the collapse of the mother's world, when her son leaves her, all this time filling her life with meaning.

We must also point out that the author resorts to the use of natural images, particularly the zoonyms, to characterize the heroes. And the most representative, in this aspect, is the image of Grunya, whose physical and physiological characteristics are described by establishing connections with a bear and a horse: Grunya "with the gaze of a hungry bear" («со взглядом голодной медведицы») (*idem*, p. 120); "a bear-woman disappointedly lets air out of her voluminous chest, slowly turns around and takes her overweight body out of the room" («женщина – медведица разочарованно выпускает воздух из объемной груди, медленно разворачивается и выносит свое грузное тело из комнаты») (*idem*, p. 121); "sweated abundantly, like a horse, taking out long and intricate words under Stepanov's dictation" («вспотела щедро, по-лошадному, выводя под Степанову диктовку длинные и заковыристые слова») (*idem*, p. 128).

The above-presented examples, we believe, are enough to substantiate the degree of significance of the pagan worldview in the poetics of Guzeli Yakhina's novel, and illustrate the variety of artistic functions of the elements of the pagan code at the levels of the character system, plot construction, ideological and thematic originality, pictorial and expressive means. We consider it promising to further study this novel in the aspect of mythopoetics.

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