

### Mythological Metamorphosis as a Cultural Code in Russian Prose of the Border of the Xx-Xxi Centuries

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#### ABSTRACT

*The motif of metamorphosis in modern Russian prose is analyzed as an element of neo-mythological poetics.*

Describing the Russian cultural situation at the turn of the 20th–21st centuries, researchers write about its transitional nature, associated with a systemic crisis of the whole society. This crisis in the literature of the late twentieth century. results in “an experience of deep power”, a desire for “transformation, rebirth of being itself and its nature” [Yakovenko, p. 138, 141]. In the transitional era, according to N.A. Khrenov, the presence of a “jump”, “mutation” is clearly expressed [Khrenov, p. 435]. In the Russian humanities, a new paradigm is being consolidated, formulated in the book by I. Prigogine and I. Stengers “The New Alliance: The Metamorphosis of Science”, published in 1986 under the title “Order out of chaos. A new dialogue between man and nature. In our opinion, the idea of metamorphosis, penetrating all levels and forms of human existence at the end of the 20th century, deserves close attention.

Exploring the phenomenon of metamorphosis, which reflects the “essential features of early mythopoetic thought” [Ivanov, p.147], the authors of the late 20th century actively use the energy of the archaic myth and the mythological layer of modern culture – the archetypes and stereotypes generated by them. The teleology of an aesthetic act among modern authors is often associated with an attempt to overcome the boundaries between the "sacred" and the "profane", the transition between which is possible only through mandatory metamorphoses.

As noted by V.V. Ivanov, one of the most characteristic types of mythological metamorphoses are werewolf and death as a transition to the realm of the dead, "allowing a long (in principle, infinite) series of metamorphoses" [Ivanov, p. 148].

The motives of transformation, transition, werewolves, metempsychosis are plot-forming in modern prose. Thus, in V. Sharov's novel "Before and during" (1993), the central character of Germain de Stael has the magical gift of self-rebirth, overcoming her own death, which allows her to live three lives. In the novel by V. Sorokin "Blue Fat" (1999), Stalin, trying to gain world domination, injects a secret substance into his brain and turns into a servant of an insignificant "handsome" from the future. T. Tolstoy's anti-utopia "Kys" (2000) depicts the consequences of a global explosion, as a result of which a powerful civilization undergoes a metamorphosis, returning to its primitive state. Mythological metamorphosis as a symbol of the crisis of human identity, considered on the material of A. Korolev's novels, also characterizes the works of V. Pelevin. In his novel *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*, the crisis of "identity" is connected with another cross-cutting theme for the writer of the search for Truth. The caricature of cultural and historical realities and the idea of the illusory nature of existence put *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* (2004) on a par with the novels *Chapaev and Emptiness* (1996) and *Generation P* (1999).

The narration in the "Sacred Book of the Werewolf" is conducted on behalf of the main character - a werewolf fox, who, like Peter the Void and Vavilen Tatarsky, is looking for an answer to the secret question "Who am I really?". With the help of the tail, the fox induces "wraith" on people - it creates the illusion of pleasure, as a result of which people emit energy of a complex psycho-physiological nature, which the werewolves "eat" on. The illusory reality created by the fox is not much different from the "collective visualization" in which "Petka" participates, or from the digital simulation of the world created by Tatarsky. Alisa Li (the pseudonym of the heroine on a fake passport, playing on the cliché of the mass consciousness "Alice the Fox") is brought closer to the named Pelevin characters by the status of the poet, which predetermines the chosenness of the hero, using the metaphor of Peter the Void, the ability to "shoot at the mirror ball of this fake world from a fountain pen" [Pelevin, 1999, p. 358].

For the artistic embodiment of the subject of the transitional era, the werewolf is the most adequate image, since it is characterized by an unstable identity. Pelevin exaggerates this quality in his heroine: the fox explains that she "has up to five internal voices, each of which conducts its own internal dialogue; in addition, they can start a dispute among themselves on any occasion" [Pelevin, 2004, p. 45]. The final detail in the portrait of the heroine is the profession of a currency prostitute, which gives her the status of a cultural outcast, who is also a "hero of our time".

As in the novel "Chapaev and Emptiness", the heroine's notes are, according to D. Polishchuk, "a chain of circumstances from a certain point of bifurcation, after which events take the form of a predetermined movement to the finale" [Polishchuk, p. 174]. According to the prophecy of the heroine, the moment of her exit from the "spiritual impasse in which she spent the last five centuries" was approaching [Pelevin, 2004, p. 264]. When creating her own text, the heroine not only writes a guide to achieving "enlightenment" (the status of a "super werewolf"), but also her own confession, clearing her mind before the final metamorphosis.

Metamorphosis accompanies the life of a werewolf heroine by her nature. She discovers her fox essence during a "supraphysical shift" provoked by the realization of the hunting instinct (foxes hunt chickens or English aristocrats - in the second case, the technique of inverse poetics, beloved by Pelevin, "works"). The supraphysical shift is accompanied by the transformation of the werewolf and her pursuers, the latter comprehend the wonderful essence of the world: "When a fox undergoes a supraphysical shift, the pursuers see something that destroys all their ideas about the world. And then they run not for the stolen chicken, but for this miracle. They are

chasing the glimmer of the impossible that first lit up their dull lives. Therefore, it can be quite difficult to escape from them” [Pelevin, 2004, p. 229].

The perception of reality as “dull”, inferior, will later turn into an interpretation of the famous painting “Black Square” by K. Malevich: “However, Malevich, although he called himself a Suprematist, was true to the truth of life - there is most often no light in the Russian sky. And the soul has no choice but to produce invisible stars from itself - this is the meaning of the canvas” [Pelevin, 2004, p. 341]. These reflections, which are the first step towards achieving the state of a super werewolf, reveal in the heroine her “hidden content” (E.G. Etkind). The concept of the subject in V. Pelevin's novel, thus, fits into the Russian existential tradition, a prominent representative of which was A. Platonov, who wrote that “the last means of life and suffering is the poor man himself” [Kornienko, p. 4].

Describing the events of the last time, the heroine recalls her dream, which shows that she is subconsciously ready for the mission of the prophet. “I dreamed of a fantastic garden,” writes A, “drenched in the sun and full of bird chirping <...>. In front of me was a sheer cliff, and in it was a cave covered with a stone slab. I should have moved this slab, but it was heavy and there was no way I could do it. Gathering my strength, I planted my feet on the ground, tensed all my muscles and pushed her. The slab fell off to the side, and the black hole of the entrance opened <...> And then chickens went out of the darkness towards the sunny day - one, the other, the third ... They all walked and walked towards the light and happiness, and nothing could stop them now – they understood where the exit was” [Pelevin, 2004, p. 276]. In this case, the symbolism of the garden is not associated with the image of Paradise, but rather with the concept of the fullness of being, which is opposed by the image of a cave - a limited space of everyday, earthly reality.

On the way to the goal, fox A is waiting for the “last test of the adept”: the heroine falls into the clutches (in the literal sense) of the FSB representatives, who turn out to be werewolves (Pelevin does not miss the opportunity to beat the common metaphor - “werewolves in uniform”). If in the novel “Being Bosch” Lieutenant Korolev ironically over the vigilant attention to himself from the KGB, which turns “private life into an occasion for history”, then V. Pelevin depicts grotesque, caricatured images of “representatives of law enforcement agencies”. The werewolves Mikhalych and Alexander are perhaps the most expressive images in the novel, and the scene of their collective “sacrifice” in front of the skull of an oil cow is perceived as Gogol’s “laughter through tears”: “... everyone howled, raising their faces to the moon, howled and cried about to himself, about his country like no other, about a miserable life, a stupid death and a coveted fifty kopecks per barrel” [Pelevin, 2004, p. 253].

The love that arose between the fox A and the wolf Alexander turns out to be a turning point in the fate of both heroes and plays the role of their initiation. Alexander claims the status of a super werewolf not because of his chosenness, but because, according to the discovery of the heroine, “everyone can change himself, going beyond his own limits <...> The super werewolf does not come from the East or the West, he appears from within” [ Pelevin, 2004, p. 151].

If, having experienced love, the heroine continues her ascent (she comprehends the last earthly practice of werewolves, called the “tail of the void”), then Alexander, on the contrary, degrades, turning from a “noble terrible beast” into a “stray garbage dog” (the apotheosis of the author's sarcasm according to attitude towards the “siloviki”).

The whole plot of the main character is a movement towards the final metamorphosis, followed by silence: she will stop keeping her diary.

Such a movement, according to M.B. Yampolsky, “coincides with the movement of language, which reaches such a limit of expressibility, beyond which comes the silence of untranslatable intensities” [Yampolsky, 2004, p. 62]. As the heroine notes, “there are no philosophical

problems, there is only a suite of linguistic dead ends caused by the inability of the language to reflect the Truth” [Pelevin, 2004, p. 260]. The limit of the metamorphosis of the heroine is the acquisition of the fullness of being in herself. "Rainbow Stream", reminiscent of the URAL ("Conditional River of Absolute Love") from "Chapaev and the Void", is the final point of the heroine's ascent. To determine the essence of the “rainbow stream”, the heroine uses the images of “light” and “water”, two ancient symbols and real sources of life: “The radiance was like a stream under the spring sun. Sparks of all possible shades played in it, and one could step into this gentle light” [Pelevin, 2004, p. 365].

The search for a way out of the spiritual impasse in Pelevin's poetics embodies the motif of wandering in a labyrinth. In *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*, the labyrinth is also a through image. Thus, fox A considers reality to be a "hellish labyrinth"; she calls her dreams "Borgesian"; the oil viaduct seen by the heroine forms a “maze of pipes stretched above the ground”; Mikhalych's narcotic fantasies - movement in the tunnel, "constantly forked to the sides", etc. However, in the finale, the image of an "empty morning field" appears, symbolizing the true freedom gained by the heroine.

So, in this article, we examined the "phenomenon of transformation in the border zone" [Yampolsky, p. 161], artistically comprehended by Russian prose of the late XX - early XXI century. For modern writers, myth becomes one of the adequate forms embodying the idea of the Absolute in a thoroughly relativized picture of the world of the transitional era. The mythological metamorphosis considered by us in the structural-semantic aspect is an element of the system of text leitmotifs, characterizing the multidimensionality, the inconsistency of the external and internal space of the hero. Playing with realities, their doubling or tripling symbolizes the spiritual and moral search for true reality - romantically subjective "being", as in Pelevin. Through metamorphosis, the author creates a certain cultural and historical type of personality, for which the classical situation of moral choice is associated with tests for self-identity. Mythological metamorphosis as a deformation becomes a metaphor for the author's vision of modern man as a subject of inversion culture. The return to the "norm", the acquisition of one's "I" occurs in the realization of one of the invariants of human destiny - the Artist, the Prophet, the Father.

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