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The Archetype of a Cultural Hero in the Works of A. De Saint-Exupery (Based on “Southern Mail”, “Night Flight” and “Wind, Sand and Stars”)

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This article is devoted to the analysis of a pilot's character in the works of A. de Saint-Exupery in the context of mythopoetics and the archetype of a cultural hero. The theme of aviation and the character of a pilot are the main elements of Saint-Exupery's poetics. Being a professional pilot he described true events and created a heroic and mainly mythologized character of a pilot. In his works there are such functions of a cultural hero as fighting with nature or mythical beasts, breaking new ways, formation of human society. There are also motifs of initiation, magic transition to another world, death and rebirth. Such archetypic spaces as desert, night, sky/earth are connected with the character of a pilot.

Keywords: archetype, aviation, French literature, mythopoetics, Saint-Exupery.

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Research area: philology.

Introduction into the problem

For many centuries the idea to conquer the sky has been concerning the minds of people. They created drawings of flying machines, conducted experiments, dreams of flying were realized in the legends and myths, and the most famous of them is the myth of Icarus. Even at the beginning of the 20th century, at the dawn of aviation, when flights already became reality, they still were a magical phenomenon in the public consciousness: “people could not understand that a heavy winged machine controlled by a man could fly through the air” (Zheltova, 2008, 165).

Due to the dangerous and unusual nature of this profession romanticization of pilots in the first half of the 20th century has led to the fact that the pilot's character became mythologized and acquired the features of exclusivity. This trend can be found in the works of a French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery. A professional pilot, war correspondent, inventor, known primarily as the author of a philosophical fairy tale “The Little Prince”, Saint-Exupery throughout his short life wrote a number of novels and essays that reflected his views on the profession of a pilot. Aviation is a key theme in all his books, except for the last

unfinished work “Citadel”. In his works we can trace connection between the pilot characters and the ancient archetype of a “cultural hero”, and compare their profession to actions of heroic ancestors. In this article we consider the basic elements that make up the image of a “cultural hero” and draw parallels with the character of a pilot in the works of A. de Saint-Exupéry.

Theoretical grounds

From the earliest times myth pervaded human life and all its aspects. Myth embodied views on the external world, on relations within the human society, on the daily lives of people; for example, the emergence of the ancient settlement “was always surrounded by myths, legitimization of its existence occurred through the myth of foundation, belief in which was shared by all members of the community” (Kovtun, 2013, 413). Myth as one of the fundamental categories of human culture, as a means and result of a man’s understanding of the world and himself, finds its expression everywhere in literature. And just like in ancient times “the mythological material for the myth-maker-peoples was a form of self-expression, a form of thinking, and a form of life” (Jung, 1997, 15), in the 20th and 21st centuries it is used by writers to express their worldviews. Saint-Exupéry in his work, unlike other French writers of the time (Jean Giraudoux, Jean Cocteau, Jean Anouilh), did not directly address the subjects of ancient myths, however his parable-like, lyrical and philosophical prose was focused on archetypic constants of natural and human existence.

The myth of a cultural hero is one of the oldest myths in folklore of various peoples of the world; it is an essential component in the development of any culture in general and mythology in particular. Tales of cultural heroes appear as generalization of work experience and “from the very beginning poeticize creative

possibilities of human, even though they belong to the prehistoric time” (Meletinskii, 1998, 356). As part of the primitive folklore “it is myths of cultural heroes that condense a positive human experience and transfer achievements of a human thought and work to the mythical past” (Meletinskii, 1998, 334). Many different motifs are linked to the character of a culture hero, which we will discuss below.

Motifs that make up the archetype of a “cultural hero” and their transformation in the image of a pilot

Cultural heroes perform many different functions in myths. Most often, it is the creative function of a cosmic scale: “the main achievements of characters are reduced to acquisition <...> of cultural or natural objects, i.e. formation of the human world, to protection of the created cosmos from the forces of chaos and to protection of the state-tribe from foreigners and infidels” (Meletinskii, 1994, 21). The idea of connection of the cultural hero with people, society is especially significant. According to E.M. Meletinskii, “the cultural hero embodies the human community <...> confronting gods and spirits that symbolize natural forces” (Meletinskii, 1994, 18).

Connection between people, their spiritual unity is the most important theme in the poetics of Saint-Exupéry, and the pilots play a significant role in it. They perform an important mission – they deliver mail and thus provide connection between people and make the world stronger. In the novel “Southern Mail” (“Courrier sud”, 1928) the Aviation Company instructs its employees: “courrier précieux, courrier plus précieux que la vie” (Saint-Exupéry, 1928, 21). At that time, the transportation of mail over long distances and especially over the ocean was a very dangerous deal, so the flight was like a battle, and a pilot – like a soldier: “On passe un papier au pilote

Bernis: le plan de bataille” (Saint-Exupéry, 1928, 9). Like the mythical cultural heroes, his enemies are not only natural disasters, but also their own weaknesses and fears. Meanwhile, an aircraft is only a tool for the cultural hero, a kind of an instrument of knowledge, it helps to get to know the Earth, the world, its miracles, “qu’il vous plonge directement au coeur du mystère” (Saint-Exupéry, 1939 75).

The cultural hero in myths fights with evil forces: “on the verge of myth and epic, in its archaic forms, fighting monsters is the main activity of heroes” (Meletinskii, 1994, 20). The pilot is struggling with the natural elements just like cultural heroes in myths fought with nature: “since the initiative of all the innovations is attributed to the cultural hero, at the same time a myth about him is a kind of a chronicle of victories of a man over nature, a chronicle of the achievements in the field of the technological progress” (Meletinskii, 1998, 338). So, Saint-Exupéry said: “Ainsi Mermoz avait défriché les sables, la montagne, la nuit et la mer. Il avait sombré plus d’une fois dans les sables, la montagne, la nuit et la mer” (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 34). Often these elements are metaphorized and act in the works in the allegorical images of monsters. The pilot turns into a warrior defeating the dragon, which refers to the image of the warrior Archangel Michael. The author said about the pilot who performed a difficult flight: “ce camarade aux lourdes épaules me parut d’une étrange noblesse; il laissait, sous sa rude écorce, percer l’ange qui avait vaincu le dragon” (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 10). This image also appears in other episodes: “celui qui, trois heures plus tard, affronterait dans les éclairs le dragon de l’Hospitalet... qui, quatre heures plus tard, l’ayant vaincu” (Saint-Exupéry, 1939 17); “j’affronterai, avant deux heures, les dragons noirs et les crêtes couronnées d’une chevelure d’éclairs bleus” (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 21).

In prospective, a battle with the sky is a battle with death. During a dangerous flight the pilot is sort of dwelling in two worlds – the living and the dead worlds balancing between them. It is expressed especially brightly in the novel “Night Flight” (“Vol de nuit”, 1931), where the main enemy of the pilots is night. It is not only a natural phenomenon, but also a culturological concept embodying different philosophical meanings. The image of the night is inextricably linked with the motif of disease. But the disease is not defined as a specific physical illness, but as a fatal, deadly condition. A creature that enters into the space of the night acquires characteristics of the disease teetering between life and death: “Le vol de nuit durait comme une maladie: il fallait veiller.” (Saint-Exupéry, 1931, 39). The work often mentions such a disease as eczema, one of the characters, Inspector Robineau, suffers from it. The same motif appears in a modified form in the episode when the pilot almost crashes in the night and has to light his main weapon – his hands, with red light to see them: “Velours des mains révélé seul dans ce bain rouge de photographe” (Saint-Exupéry 1931, 39-40). At the beginning of “Wind, Sand and Stars” (“Terre des Hommes”, 1939) Saint-Exupéry emphasizes that it is at night when victory of the spirit is particularly important: “Chacune signalait, dans cet océan de ténèbres, le miracle d’une conscience” (Saint-Exupéry 1939, 6). In many respects, whether the pilot will survive or not depends on his personal qualities, spiritual power and will.

If the pilot flies, he defeats nature and becomes its master: “Cette nuit de vol et ses cent mille étoiles, cette sérénité, cette souveraineté de quelques heures, l’argent ne les achète pas” (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 38). All the available spaces of the earth and almost all the mysteries of the planet are available to the pilot from the height of the sky. And a man in this space acquires other qualities, other thoughts, he is close to nature. A man, who

devotes himself to aviation and having passed through the dangers that inevitably accompany this profession, acquires wisdom. In the human world he may seem ridiculous and absurd, because, having understood the wisdom of his business, he already belongs to another space. In the novel "Southern Mail" Saint-Exupéry describes condition of the main character before the flight: "Les mains encombrées de sa montre, de son altimètre, de son porte-cartes, les doigts gourds sous les gants épais, il se hisse lourd et maladroit jusqu'au poste de pilotage. Scaphandrier hors de son élément. Mais une fois en place, tout s'allège" (Saint-Exupéry, 1928, 8).

Having completed their mission, mythical cultural heroes usually leave the earthly world, they "go into the ground or the sky where they turn into stars or float away into the vast ocean" (Meletinskii, 1998, 337). This motif of a pilot's wonderful passing into another world is presented in the works of Saint-Exupéry and is dictated, first of all, by the realities of time and the degree of danger of the profession. Many pilots vanished without a trace in the mountains or crashed into the sea. It happened with a friend of Saint-Exupéry, the famous pilot Jean Mermoz, who made great contribution to the development of postal airlines over the Andes. Description of his death in the book "Terre des Hommes" is full of tragic poetry: "Mermoz, décidément, s'était retranché derrière son ouvrage, pareil au moissonneur qui, ayant bien lié sa gerbe, se couche dans son champ" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939 35).

The rite of initiation as part of a pilot's image

Initiation as a key stage of the process of the human formation takes a significant place in the human mind and history, which is reflected in myths and fairy tales. The rite of initiation involves transition of an individual into another, new status. The initiation is related to "the most important

part of the plot in heroic myths and fairy tales reproducing the ritual scheme of the initiation, which is the adversity that the hero undertakes in the realm of the dead, or in heaven" (Myths of the Peoples of the World, 1998, 544). Cultural heroes in myths also undergo the initiation rite that allows them to acquire the necessary heroic qualities. Initiation involves "temporary isolation from society, contacts with other worlds and their demonic inhabitants, painful adversity and even temporary death followed by a revival in the new status" (Meletinskii, 1994, 21).

The pilots in the novels of Saint-Exupéry go through a kind of initiation rite, which can take many forms. Firstly, initiation into the profession is the first flight or the flight in which the pilot is hanging between life and death. Meanwhile, the sky and the pilot's actions in it belong to the realm of the sacred, the holy. In the novel "Southern Mail" the first flight of Jacques Bernis is described with particular pathos: "Mais je me souviens de tes premiers pas, de mes derniers conseils, la veille de ton premier courrier. Tu devais, à l'aube, prendre dans tes bras les méditations d'un peuple. Dans tes faibles bras. Les porter à travers mille embûches comme un trésor sous le manteau <...> Je me souviens de cette veillée d'armes" (Saint-Exupéry, 2008, 13). In the sky, a novice pilot triumphs over space, over death and over himself. He no longer belongs to the earthly, profane world, and says of himself: "J'étais un guerrier menacé: que m'importaient ces cristaux miroitants destinés aux fêtes du soir, ces abat-jour de lampes, ces livres" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 16). And the pilot becomes a defender initiated in the mysteries of nature, the mysteries of flight. This is how the book "Terre des Hommes" describes the feelings of a novice pilot who had just realized his mission: "Ils m'ignoraient, ces barbares, mais leurs soucis, mais leurs élans, c'est à moi qu'ils les confieraient au lever du jour avec la charge des sacs postaux. C'est entre mes

mains qu'ils se délivreraient de leurs espérances" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 15). E.L. Zheltova writes about it: "While flying on an airplane the pilot makes a transition to the eternal, spiritual life, completely loses touch with his body and with the earthly life" (Zheltova, 2007, 172). In the "Terre des Hommes" there is a scene where the hero gets an admonish message during a flight – when taking off he turned too close to the hangars. This quite common notice causes unusual irritation of the pilot: "Nous tenions en main nos destinées, celle du courrier et celle de notre navire, nous avions bien du mal à gouverner pour vivre, et cet homme-là purgeait contre nous sa petite rancune" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 27). When on the ground, the pilot is an ordinary man, but in the sky he tosses a challenge to nature and acquires the status of exclusivity, becomes a hero.

Another space of initiation – a desert, it is there where the plot of "Terre des Hommes" unfolds. The space of the desert itself is mythological, sacral, its image goes back to the Bible, where the desert is home to the temptation of Jesus Christ. Saint-Exupéry's image of the desert is associated with loneliness, solitude. It is terrible because the connection with a familiar world is lost here: "On ne s'y effraie point d'une jeunesse qui s'use dans un paysage minéral, mais il y apparaît que, loin de soi, c'est le monde entier qui vieillit" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 84). The desert is a place of human testing for endurance, humanity, love for people. In a desert a man changes, goes through a struggle with himself, and rebirth: "Le Sahara, c'est en nous qu'il se montre. L'aborder ce n'est point visiter l'oasis, c'est faire notre religion d'une fontaine" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 87).

Often pilots are on the verge of death, as if they go through a rite of death-resurrection,

which is also a kind of initiation. Initiation is interpreted as death and a new birth, "which is associated with the notion that by transforming to a new status, an individual is sort of destroyed in his old quality" (Myths of the Peoples of the World, 1998, 544). This happened to the main hero of the "Terre des Hommes" during the crash of his plane in a desert. Noteworthy is also the episode, which describes the incredible rescue of Saint-Exupéry's friend – Pilot Guillaume. He crashed in the Andes in winter and was presumed dead for several days, but managed to survive thanks to his physical and spiritual strength. The miracle of salvation is a result of an extremely developed sense of duty: "Sa grandeur c'est de se sentir responsable. Responsable de lui, du courrier et des camarades qui espèrent <...> Responsable un peu du destin des hommes, dans la mesure de son travail" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, 52).

Conclusion

Thus, despite the fact that Saint-Exupéry does not directly refers to the mythological subjects, we can speak of the archetypal part of the image of a pilot in his works, the approximation of the archetype of the cultural hero and his main functions and motifs with a dangerous profession of an aviator, as it is shown in the works of Saint Exupéry. The images of pilots appear as defenders, discoverers of the new earthly ways, warriors carrying secrets of nature. Such interpretation of this image is associated with the cultural context of the time, and the attitude of the writer himself and his humanistic conception, which, along with mythological motifs, will have further embodiment and a deeper understanding of the writer in the last book of the Saint-Exupéry "Citadel".

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**Архетип культурного героя
в творчестве А. де Сент-Экзюпери
(на материале произведений «Южный почтовый»,
«Ночной полет» и «Планета людей»)**

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Статья посвящена анализу образа пилота в произведениях А. де Сент-Экзюпери с точки зрения мифопоэтики и древнейшего архетипа культурного героя. Тема авиации и образ летчика являются ключевыми элементами поэтики Сент-Экзюпери. Будучи профессиональным пилотом, он строил свои сюжеты на основе реальных событий и создал героический, во многом мифологизированный образ летчика. В трансформированном виде в его романах присутствуют такие функции культурного героя, как борьба с природными стихиями / мифическими чудовищами, прокладывание новых земных путей, устройство человеческого общества. Присутствуют также мотивы инициации, чудесного перехода в другой мир, смерти и последующего воскрешения. С образом летчика связаны архетипические пространства, такие как пустыня, ночь, небо/земля.

Ключевые слова: архетип, авиация, французская литература, мифопоэтика, Сент-Экзюпери.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
