

## Religious myth as the basis of the realism of Russian prose of the 1870s-1880s

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*Modern searches by national cultures for ways to strengthen social order and their own identity bring into focus interest in the sacral, fixed in religion and addressed through the word of myth and literature to human existence. Therefore, the object of this research is the religious myth as the basis of the realism of Russian prose in the period of 1870s-1880s, which was transitive for Russia. The reliance on Christian mythologism in solving social problems was fully realized by the work of Nikolai Leskov, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The purpose of the article is to conceptualize the correlation between the phenomena of sacral, religious myth and the realism of the prose of these authors as a basis for eliminating the opposition between social and artistic, asserting new principles of national identity. Analyzed: the Being of the sacred; the mythologizing of Russian literature; and the idea of myth as the embodiment of the sacral ideal, based upon which Russian prose writers formulated the idea of realistic literature – the nurturing of the best qualities of a person and society. What is new in the research is the consideration of the religious myth as a factor in the formation of the socially transforming role of Russian realistic prose. The research methodology includes philosophical, historical, hermeneutic and cultural approaches. The provisions of the article allow for expanding the scope of the study of the connection between myth, religions, national literature and cultures.*

Key words: *Dostoevsky, Leskov, literature, mythologism, realism, Saltykov-Shchedrin.*

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## *Introduction*

In modern times, man has finally lost the sense of the sustainability of being. A return to absolute sacral values seems especially relevant, one initially harmonizing the life of nations, sprouting from the word of myth and literature. In this article, the ontology of the sacredness of the mythological and literary word is considered as creating the highest values and principles of national identification of any nation, including the Russian nation. In the 1870s-1880s, the mainstay of Russian literature when solving social problems on Christian mythologism was fully revealed in the prose of Nikolai Leskov, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. These authors, relying on the idea of a religious myth as the embodiment of the universal human sacral ideal, formulated the idea of realistic literature – a nurturing of high morality, spirituality of man and society. The chosen topic is a complex system-structural and system-functional object of research, as it touches upon various aspects of human existence in history – socio-cultural, religious, and artistic. Therefore, the research methodology is interdisciplinary and includes philosophical, historical, hermeneutic and cultural approaches. What is new scientifically in the research is the consideration of the religious myth as a factor in the formation of the effective role of the realistic prose of Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky in the transformation of Russian reality in the 1870s-1880s and the establishment of new national identities within it. The provisions of the article allow for expanding the scope of the study of the connection between myth, religions, national literature and cultures, as well as ways of directing the processes of artistic critical realism in a creative direction.

### *1. The Being of the sacral in the word of myth and literature*

Genesis is a questioning about Being. Under this name God first revealed himself to man:

»Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them.' 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'« (Exodus 3:13-14).

Martin Heidegger, who revived the problem of Being in European philosophy, discovered its understanding through the difference from existence. »Every being is something, that is, it has its own ›what‹, and as a being has a certain way to be«<sup>1</sup>. Duration of essence or existence, translated from Greek *ὑπαρξις* as an *existentia*, has retained an exclusively existential meaning in modern

<sup>1</sup> Martin HEIDEGGER, *Osnovnyje problemy fenomenologii* [Basic Problems of Phenomenology], St. Petersburg, School of Religion and Philosophy, 2001, 12.

European languages<sup>2</sup>. Existential by Heidegger is not theological in nature. In his view: »Being as a priori is before existing«<sup>3</sup>. Russian religious philosophy, on the contrary, is based on the existence of man in God. Nikolai Berdyaev argued that the Kingdom of God is primary as the triumph of the spirit, which »is not Being, it is higher than Being and is outside of objectification«<sup>4</sup>. Without experiencing the spirit, the existence of a person is not free and not creative. »The struggle for personality is a struggle for the spirit«<sup>5</sup>. The sacral solves the problem of the existence of God and man, saving the latter from the need to combine the scientific picture of the world and confidence in the invisible.

As a universal ontological concept, the sacral took shape in the fundamental opposition to the profane in the works of Émile Durkheim, Rudolf Otto, and Mircea Eliade<sup>6</sup>. The sacred is forbidden, endowed with moral authority and power, however, it can be an object of love, respect and worship. The profane is the world of human »contentment and security«<sup>7</sup>. The ontology is revealed in accordance with the forms in which the *sacrum* manifests itself to the semiotic features of local cultures when interacting with the profane (in hierophany as a manifestation of the sacred principle in sensually accessible forms, in theophany as a direct manifestation of the deity in various religions, and in sacralization as imparting the properties of divinity to the elements of the profane world)<sup>8</sup>. The sacred, »being the modus of the concrete historical context, predetermines the exit from the sphere of existence into the sphere of Being«<sup>9</sup>.

Such a course of ontologization of the sacred was given by »the dialectical unity of ›mythos‹ as the primary experience of consciousness, the source of cultural sense-genesis and ›logos‹ as the articulation of this experience«<sup>10</sup>. To

<sup>2</sup> Aleksei GAGINSKY, On the Sense of Being and the Meanings of Being, *The Philosophy Journal*, 9 (2016) 3, 59-76.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, *Osnovnyye problemy fenomenologii...*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolai BERDYAEV, *Tsarstvo Duha i tsarstvo Kesarya* [The Kingdom of the Spirit and the Kingdom of Caesar], Moscow, Respublika, 1995, 213.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>6</sup> Émile DURKHEIM, *Elementarnie formy religioznoy zhizni* [Elementary forms of religious life]. *Mistika. Religija. Nauka. Klassiki mirovogo religiovedeniya* [Mystic. Religion. The science. Classics of World Religious Studies], Ed. Aleksandr Krasnikov, Moscow, Kanon-Plus, 1998; Rudolf OTTO, *Svyashchennoye. Ob irratsional'nom v ideye bozhestvennogo i yego sootnoshenii s ratsional'nym* [Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen], St. Petersburg, SPbGU, 2008; Mircea ELIADE, *Svyashchennoe i mirskoe* [Le sacré et le profane], Moscow, MGU, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Roger CAILLOIS, *Mif i chelovek. Chelovek i sakral'noe* [Myth and Man. Man and the Sacred], Moscow, OGI, 2003, 184-185.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Alan WRIGHT, »According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding«: The Cultural Context of Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon, *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*, 3 (2011) 4, 51-65.

<sup>9</sup> Aleksandr MEDVEDEV, *Lichnostnoe bytie sakral'nogo* [Personal Being of the Sacred], Doctoral thesis, Ural State University in Ekaterinburg, 2000, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ekaterina RAZDYAKONOVA, *Ontologicheskaya funkciya mifa: mif kak bytijnaya svyaz' mezhdru »mifosom« i »logosom«* [Ontological Function of Myth: Myth as an Existential

discover sacredness behind the primordial matter of sound means to reveal in the word the most intimate meanings of being, the truth of which is »perceived by the depth of our soul«<sup>11</sup>. Aurelius Augustine saw such meanings in »internal images« that are immaterial [»you know them without connecting in your thoughts with anybody, and you will recognize them by withdrawing into yourself«<sup>12</sup> (Confession X:19)], and exist independently of experience [»they were already in my memory« (Confession X:17)].

It is »behind the myth«, wrote Berdyaev, »that the greatest realities, the first phenomena of spiritual life, are hidden. The myth-making life of peoples is a real spiritual life, more real than the life of abstract concepts and rational thinking«<sup>13</sup>. Berdyaev argued that it is impossible to develop concepts about the spirit, you can only catch its signs: freedom, meaning, creative activity, love, and turning to God<sup>14</sup>. Verbal naming allows one to establish a spiritual connection between a person and the Creator. »The word is a sign of a person as a spiritual creature: spiritless animals are wordless«<sup>15</sup>. The flow of words of the myth recorded the rudiments of morality, in which a person was forced to overcome on his own the ambivalence of the sacred (holy and sinful, low and high, good and evil), gaining religious experience and religious faith. Sergei Bulgakov argued that, »The skeleton of a religious myth, its essential content is not created by thinking and is not created by the imagination – it is born in religious experience. The content of the myth relates to the realm of the divine Being, on the line of contact with the human«<sup>16</sup>. If the mythological faith finds confirmation of the truth in the existing order of things, then the criterion for the truth of religious faith is compliance with religious dogmas, which »are the hieroglyphs of religious secrets that are revealed only in religious experience and to the extent of this experience. They are, therefore, the norms and tasks for this experience, not individual, but church-catholic«<sup>17</sup>. Spiritual and religious experience, an act of faith (in the coming of the day, season, happiness, etc.) – is the extreme degree of manifestation of the individual in the collective and generalized mythological word about the sacred. As Aleksei Losev wrote,

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Connection between »Mythos« and »Logos«, *Bulletin of the Tomsk Polytechnic University*, 317 (2010) 6, 153-156.

<sup>11</sup> Ivan ILYIN, Put' duhovnogo obnovenija [The Path of Spiritual Renewal], Moscow, Respublika, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Aurelius AUGUSTINE (AUGUSTINE of HIPPO), *Ispoved'* [Confession], Moscow, Respublika, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Nikolai BERDYAEV, *Filosofiya svobodnogo duha* [Free Spirit Philosophy], Moscow, Respublika, 1994, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Berdyaev, *Tsarstvo Duha i tsarstvo Kesarya...*, 229

<sup>15</sup> Vsevolod TROITSKY, Formirovanie osnov kul'tury i mirovozzreniya uchashchihsy i prepodavanie slovesnosti [Formation of the Foundations of the Culture and Worldview of Students and Teaching of Literature], *Moscow, Conferense »Filologija i shkola«*, 1 (2003) 1, 36-37.

<sup>16</sup> Sergei BULGAKOV, *Svet nevecherniy* [Non-evening Light], Moscow, Respublika, 1994, 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

»The myth is this wonderful personal story given in the words«<sup>18</sup>. This is how the myth became in the course of its acquisition of symbolic meaning during personification, verbalization and interpretation.

A symbol as a polysemantic phenomenon of consciousness is »a sign endowed with all the organicity and inexhaustible polysemy of the image«<sup>19</sup>. The symbol does not give, but only sets the structure of the holistic grasping of the world and the active creative inner work of the perceiver. Non-verbal symbolic means of representing the sacred (relics, relics of saints, art objects, architectural monuments, church holidays, rituals, color designations, numbers, and gestures) accumulate basic religious, spiritual, and cultural meanings. Their verbal embodiment (lexical-phraseological units, further denoting the key concepts of religion) allows a person not only to express the presence of God in the world, but to act – to strive to possess the same miraculous power as God himself. In religious realization, cultural symbolic forms become reflexive. The experience of the symbol is the experience of faith, which is aimed at a »sacred object« and exceeds the immediacy of the object, which is brought to life in the symbol<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, within the framework of culture, the sacred in relation to the individual actively constitutes: the hierarchy of values, spirituality, the boundaries of human freedom and one's religious experience<sup>21</sup>. The entire depth of the symbolic embodiment of the mythological sacred in culture manifested itself when separating the appearance of thought from language, that is, with the formation of writing and literature.

The myth as a historical source of literature gave it a continuous symbolic-figurative and not discrete-textual message about the world and man, in accordance with the ontological nature of the sacral. The sacred symbolic word of myth has become a tool for building the expressive world of fiction literature, a guide in the emotional-aesthetic and value of its essence. In the literary text, the word-image began to detect the semantic, emotional and pictorial possibilities of the sacral being through cultural-historical and individual associations and reminiscences, special expressive means, a special rhythmic and sound organization of speech, and a system of symbols. Andrei Bely argued that a literary image is born from the word of a myth, is transformed into a symbol, due to the fact that it is »endowed with ontological Being«, becomes »a real acting cause«, a fact of the spiritual world, and a different reality<sup>22</sup>. The secret action of literary creativity not only reflects the mythological sacredness, but embodies it anew – at the level of the genre (mystery, parable, epitaph, Christmas story, vision,

<sup>18</sup> Aleksei LOSEV, *Dialektika mifa* [Dialectics of Myth]. *Filosofija. Mifologija. Kultura* [Philosophy. Mythology. Culture], Moscow, Politizdat, 1991, 129.

<sup>19</sup> Sergey AVERINTSEV, *Symvol v iskusstve* [Symbol in Art], Moscow, Nauka, 1987, 378

<sup>20</sup> Paul TILLICH, *Religionsphilosophie*, Berlin, Ullstein Verlag, 1925, 331-332.

<sup>21</sup> Medvedev, *Lichnostnoe bytie sakralnogo...*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Andrei BELY, *Polnoye sobranie sochineniy v 2 tomah* [Complete works in 2 vol.], Vol. 2, Moscow, Alfa-kniga, 2011, 327.

obsessive idea, prayer, of life, akathist, sermon), of the contentual components of the literary text (ideas about the Divine structure and world), of the concepts (sacred allegorism, sacred behavior), of the style (syncretic, religious), and of the symbols (God, sacred). The mythologization of fiction literature is not an emulation of reality, but its awareness, the desire to create a literary reality.

Mythological word as a diverse form of symbolic allegory expanded its own ontological horizon – it created ethno-psychological portraits of sacred images of local cultures and a national picture of reality. This made it possible for the literary word as an artistic-figurative projection of all meanings of culture to embody sacredness as being, in which a person identifies himself with a society striving for God. Therefore, in the context of this study, the concept of Vladimir Glebets about the sacred as a fundamental (and not instrumental) basis for building a national-civilizational identity and a method is important for:

- prevention of the processes of social disintegration, degradation, desecralization;
- building identity as a spiritual process;
- overcoming the suppression of the role of the phenomenon of the sacred in modeling social action;
- conducting an endless dialogue of civilizations.

In the context of the mono-civilizational approach, the sacred cannot be revealed as the main socially integrating force<sup>23</sup>. The sacral word of the myth forms the idea of humanity about socio-cultural, ethnic and national identity, combining them with the existential foundations (life, family, death) of one's being. Fiction literature, as noted by the American literary critic Gregory Jay, »is mainly engaged in the study and re-creation of identities«<sup>24</sup>. Sacredness allows the nationally identical in literature not to be limited only to the field of artistic creativity – to penetrate into the humanitarian thoughts of peoples, to determine the fate of world culture.

Thus, the Being of the sacred is in overcoming the ambivalence of the world and the establishment of the human code in a person in the phenomena of spirituality, religion and faith. In the word of myth and literature, the sacral takes on the objectified form of a cultural text. Verbalization of the sacred reveals its creative activity in relation to the being of the identity in culture. A symbolic word-image displays the sacred in myth and literature, which largely takes on the function of a mechanism of socio-cultural and ethno-national identification and memory. The analysis of the Being of the sacred allows one

<sup>23</sup> Vladimir GLEBETS, *Fenomen sakralnogo v sovremennom rossijskom obshchestve* [The Phenomenon of the Sacred in Contemporary Russian Society], Doctoral thesis, Buryat State University in Ulan Ude, 2006, 7-10.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory S. JAY, *American Literature and the Culture Wars*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1997, 27.

to study literature, penetrating into the logic of national self-comprehension, revealing the reasons for the creation and revision of identities (religious, axiological, sociocultural) by means of fiction literature of every nation, including the Russian nation.

## 2. Features of the mythologizing of Russian realistic prose 1870s-1880s.

The tendency to the demythologization of life, common for all mankind, was undone in Russia in the 1870s-1880s by a kind of watershed – prose literature, before it got lost in the depths of great history and culture. A new era of the mythologization of life had come. Why, exactly, during these two decades?

For Russia, this is a time of significant transformations in social life: serfdom was abolished, the estates lost the integrity of their existence, the nobility was losing its leading importance in all spheres of life, and the democratic strata of society became more active. History dictated an antithesis to the Russian people: the West or Russia, a new (progressive) content or an old (reactionary) form. Gleb Uspensky designated this period as a »transitional time«, which »in the last thirty years has become, as it were, the usual ›way of life‹ of the Russian person«<sup>25</sup>. In the 1870s-1880s Russia finally lost its stabilizing factors, and even the Orthodox Church, subordinate to the state, did not participate in supporting the people (Dostoevsky described this situation with the words »Russian Church in paralysis«<sup>26</sup>).

The alienation of the usual cultural norms from most of the Russian people formed a confrontation between the social and the artistic. For Russian writers, a myth became the best way to express one's own civic position, to order the chaos of life and thus to understand its events. In addition, time and circumstances, the destroying and devaluing of traditional norms and goals, turned the life of a Russian person into a field, more and more adapted for the cultivation of mythological fruits.

A return to myth is always an appeal to the origins of deeply allegorical (transcendental, sacred, religious) and collective discussion, and the solution of socio-cultural problems. In the Russian cultural tradition, Christianity plays a leading role, which considers myths not as part of the world (natural, historical), but directs their word inside the soul of the believer. The attitude of the Orthodox Slavs to the word as a gift of God is conditioned by two biblical indications of the omnipotence of the word emanating from God: The Old

<sup>25</sup> Gleb USPENSKY, *Oчерки perekhodnogo vremeni* [Essays in transition], Rasskazy i oчерki [Short Stories and essays], Moscow, Pravda, 1986, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Fyodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Dnevnik 1881 goda* [Diary of 1881], Complete Works in 30 vol., Vol. 27, Leningrad, Nauka, 1984, 65.

Testament – »And God said« (Genesis 1:3), and the New Testament – »In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God /... / Through Him all things were made« (John 1:1-3). Therefore, in Russian culture, the place of the center has always been occupied by fiction literature with its religious-moral charge. It was an attempt to go beyond the framework of the social and cultural reality within which man is trapped, like Abraham who had to leave his abode. It is an effort for a man like Abraham to open the way of life of the 'nomad of faith' - which is »full of adventure, exploring the unknown, getting out of the positions obtained and breaking the framework and the system that was considered to be the best, irrefutable and unchangeable«<sup>27</sup>.

In the 1870s-1880s, Christianity as an absolute mythology – an expression of the absolute truth of absolute being that reached the degree of myth – finally became the foundation on which Russian literature was combined with public views, art and philosophy, and exerted a religious and ethical influence on their development<sup>28</sup>. The critic Vladimir Stasov, in this regard, wrote: »Our main strength is that the new Russian art embraced Russian literature and creativity so tightly as, perhaps, no other art in Europe /... / Our literature and art are like two twins, inseparable, and unthinkable apart from each other«<sup>29</sup>. Vasily Rozanov noted that the large works of Fyodor Dostoevsky (*A Writer's Diary*, *The Brothers Karamazov*) and Leo Tolstoy (*Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*), »Can be taken as the foundation of the original Russian philosophy that has finally begun, where its plan and its location is derived, perhaps for many centuries«<sup>30</sup>. Philosophy is sometimes defined as »the art of forming, inventing, making concepts«<sup>31</sup>. Literature, considering the current problems, is also changing the old concepts with new ones. An author (philosopher or writer) creates in acts of thought a whole world of concepts, the starting point of which is personal and sacral<sup>32</sup>. The religious-ethical pathos of Russian literature was made tangibly clear by prose.

This is explained by the fact that the judgement on life, which Russia needed in the 1870s-1880s, had to go into the most acute critical realism with the disclosure of pressing problems by artistic means. Under the conditions of critical realism, Russian prose writers were solving the problem of not denying, but studying and passing well-founded judgements on the phenomena of life. In

<sup>27</sup> Ivan ŠAŠKO, *Vjera kao smještenost u Boga – premješta, Živo vrelo: liturgijsko-pastoralni list za promicanje liturgijske obnove*, 27 (2010) 9, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Losev, *Dialektika mifa...*, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir STASOV, *Nashi itogi na vsemirnoj vystavke* [Our Results at the World Exhibition], Selected Works in 3 vol., Vol. 1, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1952, 374.

<sup>30</sup> Vasily ROZANOV, *Umstvennye techeniya v Rossii za 25 let* [Mental Currents in Russia for 25 years], *Novoje Vremja* [New Time], April, 1900, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Gilles DELEUZE, Félix GUATTARI, *Chto takoe filosofiya?* [What is Philosophy?], St. Petersburg, Aleteya, 1998, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Jerry FODOR, *The Mind Doesn't Work That Way: The Scope and Limits of Computational Psychology*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2001.



addition, the prosaic words »governed by life« exist as »an instrument that creates an image of historical reality«, and verse, on the contrary, »like any skillful organization of the word is perceived as artificiality«<sup>33</sup>. The predominance of prose over poetry is a sign of a need that was ripe for a realistic depiction of reality. Therefore, only critical realistic prose could explain to the Russian public about the typical characters of the time together with the conditions that shaped them in order to influence the development of a social consciousness. Christian mythology has given particular effectiveness to the critical realism of Russian prose.

Christian mythology allowed both the author and the reader to go beyond everyday reality, to form knowledge not in reasoning, but in narrative schemes of transcendence (as in the stories told by the heroes of the Bible and the Gospel). Russian prose has affirmed ideal life as divine, the true word as the sacral »possibility of transformation and deification of the whole person, and through him and the rest of the world«<sup>34</sup>. The religious myth became for Russian prose that stylistic reference point that guided the creative process, and set the measure of the presence of the classical in it as harmonious, canonical and correct. This mythologized classical Russian prose was embodying new stylistic tendencies not rationally, but as an experience of the theurgic potential of the author, his personal experience of the unlimited and universal outflow of creative forces in the struggle for sacred meanings, and values and ideas within the work. Stylistically, it was not the polarity of the two worlds – real life and the artistic, but their unity that was affirmed. The myth did not become a stylistic prototype for Russian realistic prose. The myth has become a style of thought. It was not used by the authors to imitate or reproduce specific literary plots, characters, and poetic features. It was to translate the events of life into a plan that was taking place according to fate of different sorts: historical, cultural, sacred, mystical and personal.

Thus, the historical situation of the 1870s-1880s made Christian mythology, traditionally significant for the Russian people, an indicator of the effectiveness of the literary word. The life-affirming ideas of the Christian myth became for the authors a practical guide to transforming the space of Russian culture in a humanistic direction. The germination of the mythological and classical into each other gave rise to sharp contradictions (stylistic, substantive, and genre) of the text in realistic prose, which indirectly gave rise to creative contradictions for the authors. Only by connecting with the religious myth – its dialectics, universality and the aesthetics of the organic – did critical realism give maturity to prose, plunging the classical into a stream of historically prom-

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<sup>33</sup> Aleksandr MIKHAILOV, *Yazyki kultury* [Languages of culture], Moscow, Languages of Slavic Cultures, 1997, 408, 464.

<sup>34</sup> Fr. Georgy KOCHETKOV, *Ot vremeni bytija do vremeni Apokalipsisa* [From the Time of Being to the Time of the Apocalypse]. *Chelovek* [A Man], Vol. 2, Moscow, Nauka, 2007, 151-152.

ising philosophic-poetic tendencies. The combination in Russian literature of the questions of the existence of its own people with the universal human problems expressed in Christianity led to the formation of the ideas of myth and literature in the works of Nikolai Leskov, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

### *3. Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Dostoevsky: from the idea of myth to the idea of literature.*

Shining amongst the entire brilliant galaxy of creators of classical Russian literature of the 1870s-1880s only the works of Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Dostoevsky show fully revealed mythologism. These authors differ from each other in the originality of style, genre preferences, and manner of writing. The similarity lies in the talent to combine artistic instinct and social flair. These great artists of the word were myth-creators, and the images created by them were eternal myths. From the idea of a religious myth, they came to the idea of realistic literature. In the prose of Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky, mythopoetic thinking reached its ultimate concentration in bridging the gap between the artistic and the social, combining with the new goal of realism – to arouse the conscience of people.

A writer of that time, Uspensky believed this »presents us with a whole cart, heavily laden with stones of human grief, and irrefutably proves that we need to move this unbearable, heavy load from its place«<sup>35</sup>. There was a striving to provoke readers' feelings in order to change the situation, when the suffering of the widest masses became more and more unbearable every year, and the historical ways out of the terrible impasse were clear to very few. Therefore, it was important for the Russian realist prose writer to learn to judge a person poetically, according to Saltykov-Shchedrin, »average«, »herd«, or »torn from the crowd«<sup>36</sup>. Alternatively, as Dostoevsky noted: »With complete realism, to find a person in a person«, which means to portray »all the depths of the human soul«<sup>37</sup>. If earlier writers, »Judged a person by history: they explained his properties by the conditions of time, environment and new social demands«, now they, »Judge history by a person: they seek to show the movement of all mankind in the fate of an individual person«<sup>38</sup>. If the literature of the 1860s

<sup>35</sup> Gleb USPENSKY, *Volej-nevolej* [Willy-nilly], Selected Works in 9 vol., Vol. 6, Moscow, GLL, 1955, 131.

<sup>36</sup> Mikhail SALTUKOV-SHCHEDRIN, *Dnevnik provincialala* [Provincial diary], Selected Works in 20 vol., Vol. 10, Moscow, HudLit, 1970, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Fyodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Zapisnaya knizhka 1864-1865 gg.* [Notebook 1864-1865-ies], Complete Works in 30 vol., Vol. 20, Leningrad, Nauka, 1980, 74.

<sup>38</sup> Gurii SHCHENNIKOV, Liudmila SHCHENNIKOVA, *Istorija russkoy literatury XIX veka (70-90 gg.)* [History of Russian Literature of the Nineteenth Century (70-90-ies)], Moscow,

was dominated by the idea focused on the creation of typical socio-historical characters, then from the 1870s Russian prose affirms the idea of myth, the sovereign exponents of which are Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky.

The idea of myth is the idea of ordering the way of life and thinking of the individual to the perfect degree of the ideal - the beauty, integrity and meaning of which is not limited by time, space, or social conventions<sup>39</sup>. The idea of the myth is being realized by Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky in the poetic recreation of the universal moral ideal presented in Christianity and tragically lost in this historical period by their compatriots. The idea of myth in literature shifts the search for answers to life-determining questions from the socio-historical plane to the religious-ethical one.

»All morality comes out of religion«, Dostoevsky believed, »for religion is only a formula for morality«<sup>40</sup>. The discrepancy in the 1870s-1880s between the moral word, as reflected in the Orthodox faith, and the real devaluation of the individual, set a goal for literature – to form in Russian society a conscious attitude to reality, which, according to Saltykov-Shchedrin's definition, »already by itself represents the highest morality and the highest purity«<sup>41</sup>. And all this for the sake of gaining an even more significant spiritual ideal – the Christian one, to which, as Leskov argued: »You can swim out /... / if you only rowing against the drifting current of selfish, base passions«<sup>42</sup>. The desire of Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky for an ideal, not just moral, but Christian, is also due to their recognition of the conflict between a person who, as a result of the Fall, »is only a developing being on earth, therefore, unfinished, but transitional«, and the ways of solving social problems that he chooses due to the incompleteness of his ontological nature – destructive and theomachic. »The loss of a living idea of God«, according to Dostoevsky, is a »painful state«<sup>43</sup>. Salvation comes in striving to escape from extreme forms of moral evil to forms of absolute spiritual perfection, to a higher goal, without which humanity »would have gone mad by all of humanity. Christ pointed out. (No atheist who disputes the divine origin of Christ denied that He is the ideal of humanity.)«<sup>44</sup>

The astonishing insight of these authors allowed them to reveal the idea of myth in prose in different ways: Leskov, through an interest not so much in a ready-made myth, as in the process of myth-making; Saltykov-Shchedrin

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Vyshshaya Schola, 2005, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Elena BUYANOVA, *Romany F.M. Dostoevskogo* [F.M. Dostoevsky's Novels], Moscow, MGU, 1998, 70.

<sup>40</sup> Fyodor DOSTOEVSKY, *Neizdannyi Dostoevsky* [Unpublished Dostoevsky], Moscow, Nauka, 1971, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Mikhail SALTUKOV-SHCHEDRIN, *Peterburgskie teatry* [Petersburg theaters], Selected Works in 20 vol., Vol. 5, Moscow, HudLit, 1966, 182.

<sup>42</sup> Nikolai LESKOV, *Detskije gody* [Childhood Years], Selected works in 11 vol., Vol. 5, Moscow, GIHL, 1957, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Dostoevsky, *Zapisnaya knizhka 1864-1865 gg...*, 174, 192.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

through mythological allegory as a prologue to historical narration; Dostoevsky through myth as a sacred phenomenon that tells us about the birth of religion and the ideas of humanism. However, it is precisely the sacred nature of the idea of myth as a historically verified way of establishing the ideal principles of social morality in the works of these authors that was realized in a similar way: in Leskov, in the folklore, the old Russian, and evangelical background of plot formation; for Saltykov-Shchedrin – in speeches, plots, motives, parables, legends of Scripture, and traditional folk imagery; in Dostoevsky – in biblical and patristic sources, Christian and ancient mythology, the mystical fusion of everyday life with myth and God, a super intelligent insight into the essence of people and circumstances, and pagan agrarian mythology. The idea of the myth became for them an ethical reason and a spiritual basis for thinking about the real contradictions of life, about the attitude towards the writer's work, towards the literary and colloquial word, towards religion, history, and man. The idea of the myth formed the fateful idea of literature, for writers such as Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky, and for all Russian prose for generations to come.

The idea of literature is the embodiment of the mission of Russian fiction literature to foster confidence in society in the need for decisive action to restore a humiliated person, to bring him to the triumph of reason and conscience. There is an idea of literature as a way of comprehending universal human truth and universal human ideals from the position of combining the sacred and the everyday, with religious-ethical and artistic ideals within them. From this comes the challenge for the writer, and for literature in general, of how to express this.

Leskov saw these challenges in the discovery by the writer in everyday communication of those strong passions, the intensity of which lifts people of different classes above everyday life, and endows them with ideal qualities. The positive hero of Leskov's works is more often a righteous man, an ascetic of the Christian world and always a bearer of a collective ethical consciousness as a sacral norm, desired but unattainable by the entire mass of the people. Since, as Leskov wrote, »a person's life proceeds like a charter being drawn up with a laundry mangle«, the idea of literature is in the assertion of moral concepts (Christianity, traditional folk sacral imagery) that will direct the fluidity of life to the highest ideal<sup>45</sup>. Saltykov-Shchedrin considered the task of literature to be »that claiming educational value«<sup>46</sup> – not only direct communication with life, but also active »preparation of the soil for the future«, and the propaganda of useful truths<sup>47</sup>. For Dostoevsky, »The tasks of literature are truly grandiose,

<sup>45</sup> Leskov, *Detskije gody...*, 279.

<sup>46</sup> Mikhail SALTYKOV-SHCHEDRIN, *Itogi* [Outcomes], Selected Works in 20 vol., Vol. 7, Moscow, HudLit, 1969, 454-455.

<sup>47</sup> Mikhail SALTYKOV-SHCHEDRIN, *V razbrod* [Into confusion], Selected Works in 20 vol., Vol. 9, Moscow, HudLit, 1970, 361.

epoch-making«, and are associated with the ideas of a »moral center«, »all-mankind brotherhood«, a »higher type« of personality, capable of »voluntarily giving his life for everyone, going to the cross for everyone, on the stake«<sup>48</sup>. Dostoevsky did not invent ideas, but drew from reality (actual and sacred), creating artistic images of ideas: strength, passion, harmony, perfection, faith, love, and holiness. The life of ideas, according to Dostoevsky, is the life path of specific people, the artistic embodiment of ideas is in the images of people of ideas, and the beauty of an idea is their beauty.

The idea of literature, based on myth, has become the leading artistic strategy for the emergence of the critical realism prose writers Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Dostoevsky on the path of creating a single national myth and a single national idea. They are the essence of anthropological ontology, in the center of which man is affirmed impersonally and spiritually – acquiring the qualities of a theurge.

Thus, the artistic language of realistic prose by Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky formed two ideas – myth and literature. The idea of the myth indicated the tendency of retraction in Russian literature of all the narrative energies of reality into a previously unheard-of polyphony of the voices of society, identity, and culture. The dynamic system of eternal methods of achieving the transcendental behind the idea of the myth allowed the literature to declare that the real events of the Russian world did not correspond to universal standards of morality. The idea of myth became the basis for establishing the idea of literature as a way of objectifying the goals and objectives of the interaction of literary text and culture. The idea of literature made the text of realistic mythologized Russian prose semiotically heterogeneous, capable of entering into complex relationships both with the surrounding cultural context and with its readership.

### *Conclusion*

The sacral, addressed through the word of myth and the word of literature to human existence, becomes not only an ontological given, but also an axiological one – the *Sancta sanctorum* of national culture. The creative value of the symbolic-sacral images of the myth ensures the search by the national literature of its own (religious, artistic, and socio-cultural) identity. Religious myth, Christian mythology, in Russia in the 1870s and 1880s directed the consciousness of the writer and the reader to the joint comprehension of the sacred essence of Being as the basis for affirming eternal values for overcoming social disorder. Mythologism as a way of resolving the ontological crisis of the

<sup>48</sup> Fyodor DOSTOEVSKY, *O Russkoy literature* [About Russian Literature], Moscow, Sovremennik, 1987, 286.

social and artistic was fully realized in the critical realism of the prose of Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky. These authors, relying on the idea of myth as the embodiment of the universal human sacred ideal, formulated the idea of Russian realistic literature – the education of the best qualities of man and society. The idea of myth and the idea of literature by Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Dostoevsky became the formative ideology of all Russian culture. Study of the role of religious myth in the functioning of Russian realistic prose in the 1870s-1880s makes it possible to expand the scope of research into the influence of myth on changing the identity of national literature and cultures, to practically approve artistic critical realism as an effective way to harmonize sociocultural space.

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Svetlana A. Bezklubaya\*

*Religijski mit kao osnova realizma ruske proze 1870-ih i 1880-ih*

Sažetak

Suvremena potraga nacionalnih kultura za načinima jačanja društvenoga porotka i vlastitoga identiteta u fokus dovodi zanimanje za sakralno, fiksirano u religiji i upućeno kroz riječ mita i književnosti ljudskom postojanju. Stoga je predmet ovog istraživanja religijski mit kao temelj realizma ruske proze u razdoblju 1870-ih i 1880-ih, koji je bio tranzitivan za Rusiju. Oslanjanje na kršćanski mitologizam u rješavanju društvenih problema u potpunosti je ostvareno u djelima Nikolaja Leskova, Mihaila Saltikova-Ščedrina i Fjodora Mihajloviča Dostojevskog. Svrha je članka konceptualiziranje korelacije između fenomena sakralnog, religioznog mita i realizma proze ovih autora kao temelja za otklanjanje suprotnosti između društvenoga i umjetničkog, afirmacije novih načela nacionalnog identiteta. Analizirano: bitak svetog, mitologizacija ruske književnosti te ideja mita kao utjelovljenja sakralnog ideala, na temelju koje su ruski prozaisti formulirali ideju realističke književnosti – njegovanje najboljih osobina čovjeka i društva. Novo u istraživanju je razmatranje religioznoga mita kao čimbenika u oblikovanju društveno-transformirajuće uloge ruske realističke proze. Metodologija istraživanja uključuje filozofski, povijesni, hermeneutički i kulturološki pristup. Odredbe članka omogućuju proširenje opsega proučavanja povezanosti mita, religija, nacionalne književnosti i kulturâ.

*Ključne riječi: Dostojevski, književnost, Leskov, mitologizam, realizam, Saltikov Ščedrin.*

*(s engl. prev. Georgy Tananykin)*