

## Ships in Russian Literature: Folklore Aesthetics

Marianna A. Dudareva<sup>1</sup>, Anna V. Pogukaeva<sup>2</sup>, Evgeniya A.

Polyantseva<sup>3</sup>, Yulia V. Karpova<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

The paper studies a genesis of the ship image in the Russian literature and folklore, an idea of “other kingdom” in the Russian literature poetics of the 19-20 centuries. An emphasis is put on the issues related to the metaphor of a ship, a boat in the artistic world of Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky and in the poetry of the early 20th century. A paradigm “the Moon – boat” is studied in detail. The image of a boat, which regularly appears in Russian literature, various word-painters’ art works, is associated with semantics of funeral ceremonial boat typical for different folk genres. Addressing to riddles about death, to Russian epic tradition, to plots dedicated to Razin demonstrates complexity and significance of the symbol of a boat/ferry/ship for the national culture. This symbol encapsulates the supreme idea of death as cosmic regeneration, character’s initiation, which appeared highly sought by Russian literature, both realistic prose and avantgarde and modernism poetry.

**Keywords:** literature, poetics, folklore, ship image, the moon, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Mayakovsky, Yesenin.

### Introduction

Ethnographic material and world folklore make it possible to have a complete idea of the image of a ship as a transport means between worlds, a means for achieving the character’s goal. Afanasyev (1994) and Anuchin (1890) did write about it following the traditions of comparative ethnography. However, the best part of modern studies is dedicated to “the ship of the dead” in the culture of Oceania and Indonesia nations (Petrukhin, 1980) due to the material for study itself: these people’s life is tightly bound to the sea, water transport. Although it should be nonetheless mentioned that ship for them is not just a means for crossing but a *ritually significant* thing; a parallel is drawn between ship and the World Axis. Braginsky (1988) wrote about ship typology in the world culture, paying great attention to the Sufi ship. Ship is also of considerable

<sup>1</sup> Dr., Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russian Federation, [dudareva.marianna@yandex.ru](mailto:dudareva.marianna@yandex.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Dr., Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russian Federation, [annapogukaeva1@rambler.ru](mailto:annapogukaeva1@rambler.ru)

<sup>3</sup> Dr., Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russian Federation, [evgeniya.said@icloud.com](mailto:evgeniya.said@icloud.com)

<sup>4</sup> Dr., Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russian Federation, [Julia475@yandex.ru](mailto:Julia475@yandex.ru)

importance for Russian folklore and national axiology, however, it may not be so distinct as in the Scandinavian tradition. The goal of the paper is studying a genesis of the ship image in the Russian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For analysis purposes the texts of Lermontov, Turgenev, Mayakovsky, Yesenin and others are used.

### Methodology

The methodology of our study entails the use of historical-functional, historical-genetic, system-typological and structural analysis methods. Folkloristic commenting the works of Russian literature will allow revealing complexity, multidimensionality of the ship image, which is transformed into different forms – boats, ferries.

### Results and their discussion

The first unusual ship to be mentioned is *Falcon Ship* from Russian epics. This ship is a *cosmic model*, since it has animals-totems located on each side (the nose snakes) and star patterns. Notably, a song about Falcon Ship, which people sang on the holiday at the *turning point* of the year cycle (from Christmas to the Baptism of Christ), incorporates it in the ritual context (Ivanova, 2001). It is reasonable to give here statements on the metaphor of cloud = ship from the views of Afanasyev (1994), who analyzed the image of a ship in the culture of Teutons and Slavs and concluded the world ideas of the cope of heaven as the sea, and heavenly bodies as a ship, boat. A question can be therefore put on the direct correlation of the ship archetype with celestial, star symbolics, which also makes us wonder about cosmic, mediating meaning of ship/boat. We meet the archetypal structure “bird” + “boat” in a Russian riddle, where both symbols are transitional, belonging to the other world. Moreover, if we touch upon the image modification, we need to recall wonderful *Ivanov’s yard* or *czarevna’s tower* from Russian folklore, which personify a *cosmic model*. House is sacral in Russian axiology, it’s located between this world and the world to come, inviting the main character to get to know the knowledge of other order (Petrova, 1999). The shared pattern and mediating functions unite the image of ship and house. The comparison is seemingly unexpected, but when we addressing the texts of Russian literature we also meet a *cosmic ferry* or the image of a boat, a ship also matched with lunar, star symbolics. For example, Turgenev’s *Asya* has a remarkable moment we’re interested in in the context of the subject. When *Asya* is putting across her new friend after their

date, she cries: “You’ve *broken the moon pillar*”. This detail could be attributed to the girl’s contentious temper (she’s wild, a chameleon, high-handed) or vagrancy of the Turgenev’s landscape, which echoes the characters’ psychology, however, firstly, it is Asya who agreed on the crossing, before the young people, secondly, this gesture in the *ritual language* indicates the man’s incapacity, the difference between Asya and him. The image of the Moon accompanies the protagonist all the time, highlighting different sides of his character. In this episode the boat and the moon (the moon pillar) take on a ritual meaning within the single paradigm. The girl’s secret nature is ambivalent – it’s both moon and sun. Afterwards the protagonist understood it: “<...> she appeared to me a half-mysterious creature (Turgenev, 1955).

The similar matching of the image of a boat and celestial bodies are found in the poetics of Lermontov. In Hero of Our Time Pechorin, having met a gang of honest smugglers, comes into contest with an undine girl turning into an agon, a ritual battle (according to Freudenberg (2008), agon is understood as a cosmic ritual contest, a catartic sacrifice). The offer to “go boating” has a sacral meaning itself. Let’s remember the Olga’s offer to “go boating” addressed to the Drevlians. Pechorin was to grow suspicious, besides, his “fellow traveller” had a strange dialogue with him shortly before that. It was rather a challenge test, than a common talk:

"Tell me, my pretty one," I asked, "what were you doing on the roof today?"

"Looking where the wind blows from."

"Why?"

"Whence the wind blows, thence blows happiness."

"Indeed, were you invoking happiness by song?"

"Where there is song there is also good fortune."

"Supposing you sing in grief for yourself?"

"What of it? If things will not be better, they'll be worse, and then it's not so far from bad to good."

"Who taught you that song?"

"No one taught it to me. I sing whatever comes to my mind; he to whom I sing will hear; he to whom I don't won't understand."

"What is your name, my nightingale?"

"Whoever named me knows."

"And who named you?"

"How should I know?"

"You are furtive! But I've learned something about you" (Lermontov, 1957).

This dialogue consists of two parts: Pechorin's questions and girl's *answers-riddles*. The man gets ciphered answers to his mediocre questions, where the moment of sacral letting/ not letting Pechorin into the secret of an honor circle of smugglers is the key one: "he to whom I sing will hear; he to whom I don't won't understand" (Lermontov, 1957).

The ritual context of the boat image is seen in Dostoevsky's *Demons*. It is no coincidence that Verkhovensky offers Stavrogin to go boating in a nonexistent boat with maple oars: "We shall *take to our barque*, you know; *the oars are of maple, the sails are of silk*, at the helm sits a fair maiden, Lizaveta Nikolaevna ... hang it, how does it go in the ballad?" (Dostoevsky, 1957). Folklore specialists interpret this plot through the poetics of a *cosmic boat*, where Stavrogin could be Helmsman (Smirnov, 2001), and the "boat", being an *esoteric symbol*, could unite Verkhovensky, Liza, and Stavrogin. In this case Liza is a kind of apophasis, but she arranges and manages *the journey* at the same time. This fragments was also in the spotlight because of Razin's plot, "Razin's painted boat" (Bocharov, 1995), however folklore *ritual* logic should be taken into account as well.

The ship, *facade* image can be found in the literature of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in new peasant Yesenin's esthetics, poetics. The poet described it in detail in his philosophical tractate of 1918 *Mary's Keys*: "The creativity essence in images is divided the same way the human essence is divided into three components – soul, flesh and mind. The image given by flesh could be named *facade*, the image given by soul – ship, and the third image by mind – angelic one" (Yesenin, 1997). Yesenin's ship (boat) is related to the star and moon symbolics:

*Yellow reins*

The moon dropped.

The ship represents a *cosmic model*, which is also related to the woman archetype, with a motif of *death – rebirth*:

In the charms of *star tune*

Poplars are startled

.....

The *bicorn crescent* like a carrying pole

Smoothly *slides across the sky* (Yesenin, 1996).

Or in I'm Tired of Living in My Land:

*The moon will float up in the sky*

*Dropping the oars into the water...*

As ever, Russia will get by

And dance and weep in every quarter (Yesenin, 1995).

The echos of the image of a boat/ferry that takes the character to other space and performs a mediating function is also found in the poetics of V.V. Mayakovsky (1957a; 1957b). In the poem *About It* the protagonist turns into a bear, and the room, space around is being transformed into the sea; the bed, pillow – into a raft:

There's the ice of pillow.

It blows from Ladoga.

The water is flowing.

*The pillow-raft flies.*

I'm floating.

*Fevering on the ice raft-pillow* (Mayakovsky, 1957a).

The imagery of a Russian riddle about death, about “a duck on the raft” sheds light on a ritual raft /boat – a means of transportation into the world of the dead, land of ancestors:

There is a duck

Just on the raft

And no one can escape from it -

Nor tsar in Moscow,  
(Nor) fish afloat,  
Nor beast that's in the field (Sadovnikov, 1876).

The Mayakovsky's character is floating on the raft, fevering and looking at "the second person" ahead, as of made by him:

He!  
He —  
next to heavens against inflamed background,  
*a man I tied stands.*  
*Stands* (Mayakovsky, 1957a).

However, Mayakovsky has other image of a boat, which is seemingly simpler, – in his poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*:

*People - boats.*  
Although on land.  
When you're  
getting  
through life,  
Many different  
dirty shells  
stick to  
your sides (Mayakovsky, 1957b).

There's an idea of man's managing his life at the bottom of this seemingly simple metaphor. The man is a *steerer*, helmsman, who struggles through the fraud of daily life (Yigit, 2017). Besides, a similar ship-travesty motif is found in Yesenin's iconic *A Letter to the Woman*, where the Earth itself is represented in the form of a ship:

*The world is but a ship!*

But all at once,  
Someone, in search of better life and glory,  
Has turned it, gracefully, taking his chance,  
Into the hub of storm and flurry (Yesenin, 1998).

A pronounced *mortal* and cosmogonical implication also reads beyond the boat image in Nikolay Tikhonov's (the Serapion Brothers) works. Here we can find matching the boat symbol and the Sun symbol:

The bush has melted and the pine trees  
Have got so sparse, one cannot run.  
And only *boat there has been resting*  
*Within the chips* of the broken Sun (Tikhonov, 2002).

Notably, the boat is associated with the "world's end", which, obviously, suggests *a boundary nature of the situation*, a space model implicitly related to the next world:

And thus it rested on its side  
Alone on golden sand,  
And seemed to speak to you and me -  
So, welcome to the world's end.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the Russian literature texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the early 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates the boat/ship image importance for Russian writers. In the creative works of Turgenev, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, and Yesenin, Mayakovsky, Tikhonov the ship, boat image is related to cosmic, moon, star symbolics, it also reads a mortal implication. On the one hand, it is due to the Old Russian literature based tradition (the Drevlians and Olga plot), on the other hand – folkloristic world view, national axiology. All the above-mentioned word-painters well knew Russian and world folklore. The typology of cultures demonstrates the significance of the ship

structural-archetypical complex in different nations. This complex is complicated with the ideas about the next world, which was reflected in Russian folklore both openly (in ritual funeral complex – the Maslenitsa funeral) and latently (in fairy-tales, in the wonderful house/palace archetype, in riddles).

## References

- Afanasyev, A.N. (1994). Slavs' poetics opinions on nature in three volumes. Moscow: Indrik.
- Anuchin, D.N. (1890). Sledges, boat and horses as funeral tradition accessories. In: *Antiquities. Works of the Moscow Archaeological Society* (81-226). Moscow: O.O. Gerbeks printing and word-making.
- Bocharov, S.G. 1995. French epigraph to Eugene Onegin (Onegin i Stavrogin). In: *Moscow pushkinist: V Annual collection* (212-250). Moscow: Heritage.
- Braginsky, V.I. (1988). Sufi symbolism of ship and its ritual and mythological archetypes (to historical-poetological studying of topography). In: *The issues of historical poetics of East literatures* (198-242). Moscow: Science.
- Dostoevsky, F.M. (1957). *Collected works: in 10 vol. Vol. 7: Demons*. Moscow: Goslitizdat.
- Freudenberg, O.M. (2008). *Antiquity myth and literature*. Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriya.
- Ivanova, T.G. (2001). "Small epicenters" of the North Russian epic tradition. In: *Research and texts* (7-14). St. Petersburg: Dmitry Bulanin.
- Lermontov, M.Yu. (1957). *Collected works: in 6 vol. Vol. 6: Taman*. Moscow; Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR publishing house.
- Mayakovsky V.V. (1957a). *Collected works: in 13 vol. Vol. 4*. Moscow: Goslitizdat.
- Mayakovsky V.V. (1957b). *Collected works: in 13 vol. Vol. 6*. Moscow: Goslitizdat.
- Petrova, M. (1999). The image of home in folklore and myth. Esthetics today: status, prospects. *Scientific conference proceedings* (59-61). St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Philosophical Society.
- Petrukhin, V.Ya. (1980). Viking's funeral boat and Oceania and Indonesia nations' "ship of the dead" (comparative analysis experience). In: *Symbolics of abroad Asia nations' cults and rituals* (79-91). Moscow: Science.

Sadovnikov, D. (1876). *Russian people's riddles: Collection of riddles, questions, parables and problems*. St. Petersburg: N.A. Lebedeva printing house.

Smirnov, V.A. (2001). *Literature and folklore tradition: poetics issues (archetypes of woman in the Russian literature of the 19th – the early 20th century)*. Ivanovo: Yunona.

Tikhonov, N.S. (2002). *A Crossing of Utopias. Poems. Essay. 1913-1929*. Moscow: New Key.

Turgenev, I.S. (1955). *Collected works: in 12 vol. Vol. 6: Asya*. Moscow: Goslitizdat.

Yesenin S.A. (1995). *Collected works: in 7 vol. Vol. 1*. Moscow: Science: Voice.

Yesenin S.A. (1996). *Collected works: in 7 vol. Vol. 4*. Moscow: Science: Voice.

Yesenin S.A. (1997). *Collected works: in 7 vol. Vol. 5*. Moscow: Science: Voice.

Yesenin S.A. (1998). *Collected works: in 7 vol. Vol. 2*. Moscow: Science: Voice.

Yigit, M. F. (2017). Value Priorities of Public and Private University Students. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 2(1), 1-17.