

Myth as a Means of Expressing National Self-Consciousness

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Abstract:

This article examines myth as a key mechanism for expressing national self-consciousness, focusing on the poetic legacy of Sergei Yesenin. Myth is viewed as a dynamic symbolic structure through which cultural identity and collective memory are articulated and preserved. The study analyzes Yesenin's poetic imagery, which draws on folk traditions, religious motifs, and archetypal symbols to construct a national narrative rooted in Russian cultural consciousness. The article demonstrates how poetic myth functions not only as an artistic device but also as a cognitive and emotional instrument of national identity formation.

Keywords: myth, national identity, cultural memory, Sergei Yesenin, poetic myth, archetype, symbolism, Russian literature, mythopoetics

Introduction

In contemporary cultural studies, myth is increasingly understood not merely as a remnant of archaic thought but as a living system of symbolic meaning that continues to influence the way communities perceive themselves and their place in history. Myth retains a fundamental role in the formation of national self-consciousness by structuring collective memory, preserving value systems, and reinforcing cultural identity. As A.F. Losev aptly notes, myth is not fiction, but a profound ontological category that mediates between the visible world and its deeper spiritual structures [1, p. 42]. National self-consciousness itself is understood as a society's awareness of its historical uniqueness, cultural continuity, and collective identity. It finds expression in symbolic narratives, stable archetypes, and culturally coded values. Within this framework, myth functions as

a mediator between the individual and the collective, the temporal and the eternal, enabling the individual to participate in shared cultural meaning. Particularly in times of political or cultural upheaval, myth becomes a stabilizing force, reactivating foundational narratives that reconnect a society with its origins and traditional values [2, p. 88].

The poetry of Sergei Yesenin provides a vivid example of myth's continuing relevance in national discourse. Writing during a period of intense historical transformation, Yesenin used mythological structures not only as poetic devices but as tools to construct a vision of Russia's spiritual destiny. His work synthesizes Orthodox Christian themes, Slavic pagan motifs, and folk archetypes to create a mythopoetic space that reflects the inner world of the Russian people.

Methodology

The present study applies a qualitative textual analysis of selected works by Sergei Yesenin, using methods drawn from mythopoeitics, cultural semiotics, and literary hermeneutics. The analysis focuses on identifying key mythological motifs and examining their function within the broader context of national identity construction. Works by Russian scholars such as Ovchinnikova, Ermakova, and Chechel serve as a theoretical foundation for interpreting the symbolic and narrative elements in Yesenin's poetry. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the article seeks to explore how myth operates both structurally and semantically in poetic discourse.

Results

The analysis reveals that Yesenin's poetry consistently incorporates mythological images that serve to reinforce national identity. Among the most prominent are the motifs of the sacred village, the poet as a suffering prophet, and the mythologization of Yesenin himself as a national figure. The image of the Russian village in Yesenin's work is portrayed not merely as a rural setting, but as a spiritual center — a sacred space tied to the origins of national life. Often personified as a motherly presence, the village functions as a repository of cultural memory and moral values. This mythologization of the village is part of a broader symbolic system that aligns land and nature with spiritual purity, evoking Edenic imagery of a lost paradise and reinforcing the idea of a national "homeland" as sacred origin [3, pp. 112–114]. Another recurring figure is the poet as a prophet and sacrificial victim. In poems such as *The Song of the Great Campaign*, Yesenin uses the archetype of the spiritual journey to frame the historical suffering of the Russian people as a path of moral and metaphysical testing. The poet positions himself alongside the people, enduring the same pain, thus assuming the role of both witness and martyr. This aligns Yesenin's poetic persona with the mythic figure of the redeemer, elevating personal experience to the level of national allegory [2, p. 88].

Moreover, as N.I. Ermakova notes, Yesenin's own life and death became part of a literary myth, in which he is seen as a tragic embodiment of the Russian soul — sensitive, rebellious, and doomed by the clash between inner truth and historical reality. The widespread cultural mythologization of Yesenin reflects the desire to preserve his poetic image as a symbol of collective identity, emotional authenticity, and national loss [4, p. 71].

Discussion

These findings underscore the role of myth as a multidimensional construct that operates across literary, psychological, and cultural levels. In Yesenin's case, myth is not used to escape reality, but rather to interpret it. His poetry transforms historical trauma and social fragmentation into a symbolic narrative of spiritual journey and return to origins. This transformation allows myth to serve not only as a mode of artistic expression, but as a collective framework for coping with identity crises and redefining national purpose. In addition, myth provides a semantic structure through which the past is remembered and reinterpreted. The continuity of cultural identity is preserved by encoding collective memory in archetypal narratives. Through repetition of familiar

motifs — the village, the prophet, the journey — Yesenin's poetry allows readers to locate themselves within a shared symbolic world. This function of myth is particularly significant in times of radical social change, when traditional identities are threatened or destabilized.

Yesenin's mythopoetic strategy thus fulfills several interrelated functions: it sacralizes cultural tradition, mediates between personal and collective experience, and reaffirms belonging through shared symbolic structures. His poetic myth becomes a kind of "language of identity," through which the emotional and historical dimensions of nationhood are fused into an organic whole.

Conclusion

The study confirms that myth in the poetry of Sergei Yesenin serves as an essential means of expressing national self-consciousness. By drawing on deep-rooted cultural symbols and archetypes, Yesenin constructs a poetic universe in which the Russian people, land, and destiny are inseparably intertwined. His work demonstrates the continuing relevance of myth as a cultural force — one that unites, preserves, and gives meaning to collective experience. In broader terms, the article suggests that myth is not a vestige of the past, but an active mode of cultural cognition and communication. It remains a vital tool for understanding how nations narrate themselves, remember their histories, and envision their futures. Yesenin's poetry exemplifies how literature can become a site of myth-making, shaping and sustaining national consciousness in ways that are both emotionally resonant and intellectually profound.

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