

**MYSTIFICATION AS AN AUTHOR'S
MYTH CONSTRUCTION STRATEGY IN
A SHORT NOVEL BY A.USTIMENKO
"CHINESE MASKS OF CHERUBINA DE GABRIAK"**

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INTRODUCTION

The central vector of our academic interests is to identify and describe the strategies of interpreting the artistic atmosphere of the Silver Age of Russian literature in the prose of the 21st century, to create images of its iconic figures in contemporary works, and to identify in this regard the most important tasks set by the writer for himself.

The paper focuses on the short novel by A. Ustimenko "Chinese Masks of Cherubina de Gabriak" published in the journal "Druzhba Narodov" in 2010. On the one hand, the story represents a vivid example of artistic interpretation of the era of myth-creating and aestheticism of the turn of the past centuries. On the other hand, it shows the phenomenon of literary mystification as the author's myth construction strategy.

Studying the phenomenon of literary mystification in A. Ustimenko's short novel "Chinese Masks of Cherubina de Gabriak" as one of the dominant vectors of author's search of artistic identity presupposes considering it as an object of self-interpretation, analyzing author's intentions to expand the historical and artistic context of the work, tracing the change of the optics of the main character's representation and exploring the process of transforming the well-known myth about Cherubina into the author's existential myth about Li Sian-tszy, revealing the new self-identification guidelines. The chosen angle of the study is also conditioned by the fact that eccentric creative behavior was organic for the atmosphere of myth creation and aestheticism of the Silver Age. "At the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries, the mythologization of life becomes a life-creative program. Mystifying and creation of cultural and personal myths are perceived as an aesthetic act, equally significant both in the space of poetic creativity and in the space of real

destiny. Mythological experiencing of personal destiny leads both to creativity and life building”¹.

1. Contrast of E. Vasileva’s Self-Identification Samples

First of all, let us draw attention to the perspective of the artistic interpretation of the Silver Age chosen by A. Ustimenko. As the artistic optics he chose the most playful and aesthetic (or “elegant” as M. Voloshin defines it) situation, which caused a violent reaction of the poetic environment and formed into a dramatic plot (love intrigue, search for a stranger, exposure, duel, destruction of reputation). Apparently, according to the author, this story reflects the poetic atmosphere of the beginning of the century, with its tendency to aestheticize reality and change masks, as well as its inclination for the game element where myth and reality cause the phenomenon of life creation and mystification as its integral part.

This concerns a well-known mystification carried out by the poetess Elizaveta Dmitrieva and Maksimilian Voloshin, which drew Nikolai Gumilev, Sergey Makovskii, and all writers closely connected with the journal “Apollon” into a whirlwind of events. It is important within this mystification, that the intrigue of the search for the mysterious stranger was urged by refined poems reflecting the tastes of the time. Intrigue would have lost the sense of the aesthetic phenomenon without poems.

In our opinion, this indicates the author’s desire to remove the object of reflection (the aesthetic concepts of the Silver Age), to see the reflection of a profound in a small and strange; to model the contrast between different plans of being, which, in fact, occurs in the process of intensification of tragic, existential modi of the work.

Thus, opposing E. Dmitrieva’s mask and destiny, A. Ustimenko interprets the mystification, which is widely famous as a resonant joke on the literary public of the Silver Age. However, the writer appealed not to the famous Cherubina’s mask, but to a later image – self-identification, which was chosen by E. Dmitrieva after the fatal turn of her real, not fictional, destiny in Tashkent exile. Cherubina’s mask which was generated by aestheticism and myth-creation of the Silver Age can be seen in the light of a new image, world view and self-conception. This period of E. Dmitrieva’s

¹ Палачева В. Родословная Черубины де Габриак // Русская литература в XX веке: имена, проблемы, культурный диалог. Вып. : "Отцы и дети" в русской литературе XX века / Ред. Т.Л. Рыбальченко. Томск: Изд-во Том. ун-та, 2008. С. 3.

(E. Vasileva's) life and this new mask of her are studied and artistically interpreted far less than the brilliant mystification of 1909.

Let us emphasize that addressing this, later and undoubtedly, more tragic and philosophical mask, significantly changes the interpretation of the image of the poetess in A. Ustimenko's short novel, taking him out of the amusing connotations of the game, revelations and literary scandal. This also indicates the writer's intention to sum up not only the specific destiny of the poetess, but also to reconsider some aesthetic attitudes and creative utopias of the Silver Age within the context of the outcome of the cruel 20th century.

Scholars rightly find the connection between seemingly extremely contrasting samples of E. Dmitrieva's self-identification – Cherubina and Li Sian-tszy, as well as some artistic looping of the destiny of the poetess. V. Glotser notes in this regard: "In Tashkent, Vasileva was visited by her beloved. It was a young and talented specialist in Chinese philology Yu.K. Shchutskii (1897–1938). Vasileva created a cycle of 21 poems "House under the pear tree" in consultation with him about the form of her book of poetry. It was written as if on behalf of the Chinese poet Li Syan-tszy. "They are not Chinese inside at all, of course, – Vasileva confessed, – except for 3 or 4 samples"²[2, 201]. Just like at the beginning of her path, Vasileva chose to hide under the pen name and only then designate her soul. So she looped her life path. *«Здесь и в реке – зеленая вода, / Как плотная, ленивая слюда / Оттенка пыли и полыни... / Ах, лишь на севере вода бывает синей... / А здесь – Восток. / Меж нами, как река, пустыня, / А слезы, как песок»* ("The River").

In Tashkent, in exile, in a house under a pear tree, E. Vasileva's life path ended when she was 41. Her poetic prediction came true: *«И я умру в стенах чужбины, / Не разомкну проклятый круг...»*³. The short novel by A. Ustimenko claims to be a description and artistic interpretation of this so far unreflected integrity of the personal destiny and world view of the Silver Age.

² Грякалова Н.Ю. Стихотворения Е.И. Васильевой, посвященный Ю.К. Щуцкому. *Русская литература*. СПб, 1988, № 4. С. 201.

³ Глоцер В. Васильева Елизавета Ивановна // Русские писатели XX века. Биографический словарь / Главный редактор и составитель П.А. Николаев. М.: Научное издательство "Большая российская энциклопедия", Издательство "Рандеву-Ам", 2000. С. 141.

It should also be noted that the strategies of self-interpretation by means of an aestheticized and detaching mask (including the game elements), suggested by E. Dmitrieva, have found their followers, which is very important and worthy of special study in itself, since it indicates the actualization of the Silver Age artistic identity and the search for various strategies and forms of its implementation. Moreover, these forms have already taken into account, played up and stylized the experience of Cherubina's masks.

Thus, V. Palacheva notes that the revelation of the mystification neither ceased the disappointment of its "victims" and E. Dmitrieva's anxiety, nor prevented the attempts to repeat such jokes. "The myth resulted in the emergence of new "poetesses" who actually were male poets writing under female names. Many poets used M. Voloshin's discovery, considering Cherubina to be the mask of the poet himself. F. Khodasevich's poems appeared under the name of Elizaveta Maksheeva in 1913 (the name Elizaveta indicates Dmitrieva directly). In 1913, the book of poetry "Nelli's Poems" was published. It was dedicated to Nadezhda Lvova, who supported V. Briusov's mystification and positively assessed the new "poetess"; V. Briusov created an image of a high-society poetess ("a bored woman"), who tells about her amorous adventures in the manner of the heroines of Igor Severianin's poetry. The source of the mystification can be discerned in the poem "Nelli" from I. Severianin's book of poetry "Thunder-boiling Goblet" (1913). In 1915, E. Bagritskii creates Nina Voskresenskaia's poems. Another example of women's boudoir poetry appeared in the poems by Anzhelika Safianova ("Satirikon", 1913), in 1918, "Anzhelika Safianova's story and poems supplement with her family tree and poems dedicated to her" was published in a mystified edition "The Green Island". The author of the mystification was a young poet L. Nikulin, who created his Anzhelika Safianova according to Cherubina's "model": "the book describes a romantic story of meeting an unknown beauty who dropped a volume of Petrarch where also were her own poems put in, which gave rise to a poetic dialogue with "Russian Laura", bearing angelic name (Anzhelika in Latin means "angelic" by analogy with Cherubina)"⁴. Undoubtedly, all the above examples belittle and travesty E. Dmitrieva's Cherubina, which

⁴ Палачева В. Родословная Черубины де Габриак // Русская литература в XX веке: имена, проблемы, культурный диалог. Вып. : "Отцы и дети" в русской литературе XX века / Ред. Т.Л. Рыбальченко. Томск: Изд-во Том. ун-та, 2008. С. 20.

indicates that writers apprehended chiefly the game and mystifying modus. According to V. Khodasevich, “the unceasing endeavour to change thought, life, relationships, even everyday life due to the imperative of another “anxiety” involved symbolists into unceasing acting in front of themselves and “performing” their own lives as if at the theater of scalding improvisations”⁵.

The characteristic features of the romantic worldview of the Silver Age, its heightened aestheticism and life-creation crystallized under the cover of the mask which Dmitrieva had grown to. This side of the “mask”, its artistic innovation and prospects of discovery, was clear for a lot of contemporaries. Modern researchers often refer to the high appreciation of A. Dmitrieva’s creative work by A. Tolstoi and to significant words said by M. Tsvetaeva, that there was a small (three months of 1909) but indeed “Cherubina de Gabriak’s era” in Russian poetry, recognition of E. Dmitrieva’s primacy in many discoveries, which later became significant in the creative work of M. Tsvetaeva: “... the Akhmatova image, my blow, poems written before Akhmatova and before me”⁶.

The re-evaluation of E. Dmitrieva’s place in the hierarchy of the Silver Age authors can be signalized by her “discovery” in the post-Soviet scientific literature of the late 1980s – 2000s (this process started earlier abroad), which is important since Ustimenko’s short novel, that offered his own original artistic interpretation, was created in this context. Several editions of poems and autobiographical notes (confessions) by E. Dmitrieva, reminiscences of her contemporaries, offering options for self-reflection and artistic interpretation of this symbolic figure, appeared.

The new versions (A. Ustimenko dared to write one of them) seemed unpromising in comparison with highly artistic sourcebooks, namely, Maksimilian Voloshin’s “The Story of Cherubina”, Cherubina de Gabriak’s “Confession”, written by E. Dmitrieva and S. Makovskii’s memoirs. However, modern author ventured to offer his own interpretation, essentially turning the plot to the broadest and most tragic context of the entire twentieth century, to the problems of the fate of art, the relevance of the heritage of the Silver Age. The scandalous joke

⁵ Ходасевич В. Конец Ренаты // Ходасевич В.Ф. Некрополь. Воспоминания. М., 1991. С. 13.

⁶ Цветаева М. Живое о живом (Воспоминания о М. Волошине) // Стихотворения и поэмы / вступ.статья, сост., подг.текста и прим Е.Б. Коркиной.- Л., Сов. писатель, 1990. 800с. (Библиотека поэта. Большая сер.). С. 125.

turned out to be an event in literary life, which, on the one hand, can already be interpreted as frivolous and parodistic (“parody” is one of the motifs of the short novel) due to further literary and historical upheavals, and on the other hand leaves behind symbols of the aestheticism, poetic play, the ease of the “lost paradise”, the sunken Atlantis of the Silver Age. And from this perspective, the story of Cherubina can serve as an evaluating criterion for future literature and contemporary cultural crisis.

2. Broadening of the Context and Change of the Optics of Image Representation as a Vector for Constructing the Author’s Myth and Self-Interpreting the Symbol of the “Mask”

Broadening of the context and change of the optics of image representation in A. Ustimenko’s interpretation is realized in the author’s concept naturally and logically, following the turns of the real dramatic destiny of Cherubina’s creator. She at the time thought that her life was fatally broken after the mystification exposure (“Two things in the world have always been the most holy for me: verses and love. And it was a payment for the pain inflicted on N.S.: both love and verses were taken away from me forever. Only their signs remained”⁷). However, the real breakdown came later with the arrest and exile in the late 1920s after the story with Cherubina was over. They, as the author of the short novel shows, killed, but “took away” neither verses nor love. A. Ustimenko’s work depicts the poetess in her last and hardly known to the reader period of life, when the mystification remained in the distant past and captivating Western mask of the Catholic beauty Cherubina was replaced by another one that fitted the new self-identification guidelines. It was an imaginary poor exile, a stranger, patient poet Li Syan-tszy, who tried to accept his hard luck and resonate the world order in a wise oriental way. He was declared the “author” of Dmitrieva’s last book of poetry “A House Under the Pear Tree”. Thus, A. Ustimenko rewrites Cherubina’s story once more and creates an interpretative text preceding from the other prospective, namely, the late creative and existential findings of the heroine.

Prefacing the short novel epigraph was taken from the Li Syan-tszy’s preface to the book of poetry. It provides important semantic clues to the understanding of the author’s message. They are as follows: the idea of

⁷ Дмитриева Е. Черубина де Габриак. Исповедь // Антология русской женской поэзии. От Анны Буниной до Анны Ахматовой. М.: Эксмо, 2007. С. 678.

transforming fate into poetry, interpreting life as material for poetry (which is peculiar to symbolism and post-symbolism), pan-aesthetic ideas about the world filled with art, universal spirituality, the concept of life-creation. All these ideas received an unexpected embodiment in the spirit of oriental stylistics. They synthesized with Dzen enlightenment and resignation, thereby isolated and acquired a new perception.

В 1927 году от Рождества Христова,
Когда Юпитер стоял высоко на небе,
Ли Сен-цзы за веру в бессмертие человеческого духа
Был сослан с Севера в эту восточную страну, в город Камня.
Здесь, вдали от родных и друзей, он жил в полном уединении,
В маленьком домике под старой грушей.
Он слышал только речь чужого народа и дикие напевы желтых
кочевников.
Поэт сказал:
«Всякая вещь, исторгнутая из состояния покоя, поет».
И голос Ли Сян-цзы тоже зазвучал.
Вода течет сама собой, человек сам творит свою судьбу:
Горечь изгнания обратилась в радость песни <...>⁸

But let us emphasize another especially important point. Using this epigraph, and later also quoting and modeling the author plunges E. Dmitrieva's destiny into the broadest poetic context of exile reflection: from the poems of Ovidius Naso before the poetry and prose of emigration (reflections on his "inner Rome" in V. Nabokov's essays, imaginary journeys home in Bunin's stories, implications in B. Zaitsev's novels, metaphysical exile motives in B. Poplavskii's prose, etc.), to the interpretations of the Ovidius image by J. Brodsky and A. Tarkovskii and comprehension of loneliness and outcast. In Dmitrieva's poems, the traditional for Ovidian texts accent is made. Namely, this accent is on an enlightened exile amid savages in a remote province, ignorance of their language, salvation by creativity and preservation of one's own "ego".

The author's intention to expand the historical and cultural context is evidenced both by the "carnival" motif and one of the senses of the dominant symbol of the "mask". A casual acquaintance turned out to be a Russian woman who, nevertheless, wore a paranja – chichvan, hiding

⁸ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 130.

from those who knew her and was aware of her sins (prostitution). She developed an unexpected cultural association in her discourse: «Я в одной книжке карнавал видела – там все в масках, ну, прямо как я... Должно быть развратно до этого-то, до карнавала, всем городом жили. Вот и попрятались друг от дружки» И она засмеялась»⁹. The author's note that the particular story of this woman is real as well as references to sources only strengthen the chain of associations between personal and general historical, based on the archetypes of guilt – repentance, retribution and punishment (in this case it is an admitted exile, disappearance under the mask, attempt to hide from the world, the threat of losing oneself). The lifelike story, voiced in the backwater of the post-revolutionary Tashkent and perceived by the exiled Dmitrieva as close (dialogue which was impossible with others began precisely with this woman, her chador was tried on and an unexpected confirmation that the poetess wore masks was given) acquires a historical perspective. There is a wide spectrum of senses of the carnival: from the gaming, mystifying discourse of the Silver Age to the consequences of bloody actions of the revolution, when people, or even the country as a whole, “lost their faces”, acquired or changed masks, or, perhaps used these masks to protectively cover their essence, as a result of these actions. Such interpretations fit in with the traditional (since the Middle Ages) concept of the Divine retribution for sins.

Description of the semantic dynamics of the dominant “mask” symbol gives a reader the key to understanding of the work.

Dmitrieva took Cherubina's image as a mask, and a very close one – a “mask of the soul”¹⁰. It contains what Dmitrieva lacks, fulfills her dream of beauty, represents the desire to create an image and destiny opposite to her own that is devoid of pain, poverty, deformity reflected in a mirror. The “mask” motif contrasts with the “mirror” motif, adding a markedly tragic sense. It concerns disposing reflections, predictions of her own sad destiny, as well as a window glass that estranged her from the world, since only her own face was reflected in it, finally, a pocket mirror, which remained unclouded by the breath of the deceased heroine. “Mirror” removes the “mask”. The “mask” motif correlates with the motifs of “mystification” and “game”, reflecting the general artistry of the Silver Age. In Dmitrieva's

⁹ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 140.

¹⁰ Ibidem. С. 137.

memoirs, everyone plays and tries on masks. Moreover, the ability to create, to invent a mask is perceived as a criterion of depth and aesthetic value of a person, who is either rewarded with love or, on the contrary, is exiled from the world of the “unusual”, “higher” into the world of the “today’s”, that is routine, non-poetic. *«Я тогда примеряла маску Черубины де Габриак <...> Благородный Макс – маску разгневанной чести, но какую же примерял несчастный Коленька Гумилев? Влюбленного? Добывающегося моей руки человека? Бог весть <...> Один только Воля Васильев не надевал маски. И от этого был достаточно быстро разлюблен Елизаветой Васильевной, – он уже тогда стал для нее сегодняшним человеком <...>»*¹¹. The quoted episode emphasizes artistry of life-creation and reveals (according to F. Nietzsche), the “artistic metaphysics” of the whole Silver Age.

Addressing such a universal “mask game” reveals writer’s knowledge of the academic reception of this phenomenon. A lot of researchers note specific mythopoetic function of the mask as well as the guise and roles change in different movements of symbolism and postsymbolism. “The “devilishness” as non-existence and non-communication is rendered clearly in early works of Briusov, Balmont, Sologub, Gippius and other poets of 1890s. <...> By the end of the century this image became so usual and stylistically formed that it was inevitable that it would turn into positively and religiously definable, mystically motivated type of poeta vates, poet-demiurge, poet-thinker, poet-magician, rebel-artist, saver-artist, etc. All these roles can be found in works of “devilists” (they sometimes resemble their positive opposites indistinguishably), but the role is always the m a s k, stylization, gesture. The turn to the positivity of the symbolism, as an authentic model of the world and artistic creative work, can be prepared only by existentialization of anti-behaviour and anti-communication into the lifestyle of the devilist (in images of dandy, profligate, Lucifer, seducer, demon, vampire, Antichrist, etc.), by parareligious, heretical and gnostic “religion of the art” of panaestheticism”¹².

¹¹ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 134.

¹² Ханзен-Леве А. Русский символизм. Система поэтических мотивов. Ранний символизм / Ааге Ханзен-Леве / Пер. с нем. С. Бромерло, А.Ц. Масевича и А.Е. Барзаха. СПб: "Академический проект", 1999. 512 с. (Серия "Современная западная русистика", т. 20). С. 59.

Dmitrieva's story of masks change follows the described by the researcher way of overcoming the routinized images in a lite gaming manner. Poetess starts with the "devilish" which has become parodic by that time (according to M. Voloshin's recollections Cherubina was named by a toy imp called Gabriak by common agreement). The further change of masks meets the general atmosphere of game and aestheticism. And final mask signifies the world-view and aesthetic revolution, absolutely opposite to initial role.

The next vector of the interpretation of the "mask" motif is the intensification of its existential semantics and self-identification potential. The author demonstrates that Cherubina's narcissistic image is inseparable from Dmitrieva's "ego"; she takes it as a part of herself even in the conditions of its discreditation by reality. At the same time heroine abandons this image and finds herself in the state of loss of guidelines and search for new ones, in the mode of anxiety of an existentially confused person. *«Сейчас она не была Черубиной, как не была и Лилией Дмитриевой, невестой Воли. Сейчас она оставалась только лишь Елизаветой Васильевой, завтра встречающей любимого человека. А какая из этих частей ее души была в ней частицею настоящей, она никогда не знала. Может, даже и каждая являлась маской души какой-то другой, еще никогда не перед кем не явленной...»*¹³.

It should be noted that the state of existential confusion of a person who moved from one cultural paradigm to another is perceived by the modern reader as relevant and modeling parallels with the cultural crisis of our days. Presumably, the author set himself the task of drawing the transitional phases of the beginning of the 20th century and the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries closer.

Addressing the existential dimension of the short novel, we note that the short novel creates the outmost hard situation where the heroine experiences a deadlock and searches for a way out of it. The heroine loses external and internal support. Thereupon the particular significance has an image of the corset, medical in this case. This device supported sick and skewed body of E. Dmitrieva. The chapter "Without Corset" describes a number of existential doubts of the heroine, who lacks support

¹³ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 137.

and feels internally naked. The remaining erotic connotations, connected with the image of Cherubina, only aggravate the contrast between mask and reality. This contrast emphasizes the motif of the “mirror”. Let us pay attention to fundamentally different, painful, but also more humane and democratic (compared to the aristocratic Cherubina) self-identification guidelines. *«Ведь стихи – это как зеркало. А какой она может отразиться в них? Такою, какой отражалась в зеркале настоящим? <...> Без поддерживающего корсета <...> Одна нога в полуизгибе колена, другая вытянутая в напряженную струнку, будто худенький солдат на плацу. Хромоножка из Достоевского. Вечно мерзнувший Квазимодо <...> худенький солдат на плацу <...>*¹⁴.

The tendency to humanize mask, to give it a universal meaning can be traced both in replacing the demonstrative Cherubina with a wise and hiding philosopher-poet, and in refusing the masks as such in the scene of death insights. By the will of the author, the heroine gains desired integrity (the motif of the “center”), all roles of the “little spiritual theater” are united exactly in this transitional state¹⁵, one’s own essence (according to E. Dmitrieva) is “re-experienced” and “re-felt” internally and the “meaningfulness of further existence” is acquired. Each of the masks finds its place in this discourse of existential transition. Li Syan-tszy expands to the image of an eternal wanderer, grieving for equally eternal losses (of his world, his country). Cherubina, with her aesthetic artificiality, contrasts with the globality and incomprehensibility of a different, posthumous being: *«<...> теперь ей отъезжать не на две недели в Париж за шляпками, как отъезжала Черубина де Габриак, но в страну тьмы и света, света и тьмы, где не существует некрасоты, костистых и хромяющих тел, а только законченность и совершенство низменной землею не измятого творения»*¹⁶.

It is obvious, that the masks, made up by the heroine (Cherubina, the fatal paramour, Li Syan-tszy) and proposed by the author of the short novel (Lamer, Quasimodo, soldier on the parade ground, carnival participant, a sinner, hiding from the world under the veil), put together with the power of true creativity, poetry. The poetry, as the author shows in the subtext, becomes the justification and guarantee of E. Dmitrieva’s

¹⁴ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 135.

¹⁵ Ibidem. С. 148.

¹⁶ Ibidem. С. 149.

spiritual forgiveness and recognition. Poetry turns out to be stronger than the most terrible – the State Political Administration, moreover, it is regarded as an attribute of the “celestial”, inaccessible to “earthly” punitive forces. The correlation of the author’s subtext and the lines from Li Syan-tszy is significant in this respect. Describing the integrity of perception and indifference to the world and the fate of a dying poet, the author issues his verdict. *«Так, лежа, она однажды пропустила опасную для себя среду, но отчего-то никто не пришел, не поинтересовался, не забрал ее за тюремную решетку <...> Все произошло так, будто бы теперь сидящие в зарешеченном автомобиле знали, что она, хоть не отмечалась у них, в ГПУ, но уже отметилась на земле, а также – выше»*¹⁷. And Li Syan-tszy, in his turn, builds a spiritual vertical, highlights new landmarks and asserts a special, life-creating role of art in verses: *«Покрыло сердце пылью страха / Оно, как серые листья.../ Но подожди до темноты: / Взметнется в небо fuga Баха. – / Очнешься и увидишь ты, / Что он весь страх твой вытер / И наверху зажжет Юпитер»*¹⁸.

Broadening of the context of the short novel and a significant change in the optics of representation are deepened by the introduction of Orthodox discourse. All the “masks” are in its sphere – from the demonstrative Cherubina with her “criminal Catholic love for Christ” (according to the mocking remark of M. Voloshin’s co-author of the mystification) to meek Lee Xiang-tzu. And all the guises, in which the heroine exists for herself and others, fade into the background, moved away in a most abstract way. This is a person suffering in the vale of life, carrying her own cross, dying lonely, but having the opportunity to comprehend her existence and ascend. It is significant that none of the characters who dirged and buried the heroine, knew that she was a poet. Dmitrieva was a lonely mortal human being for compassionate Chinese neighbor and cemeterial old ladies. *«Неизвестная могила неизвестной поэтессы среди других неизвестных могил»*¹⁹. This author’s position signifies the trial of one of the basic symbolist ideas about status, the idea

¹⁷ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 149.

¹⁸ Ibidem. С. 147.

¹⁹ Ibidem. С. 149.

that “art is not only higher and more valuable than life, but is also stronger than it”²⁰.

In our opinion, this position is reinforced by estrangement. E. Dmitrieva’s existential in spirit verses, assembled in Chinese style (with traditional images of sleep, butterfly and flowers which embody life interpretations), and the sign of the cross, imposed by the same “unfamiliar” old ladies, are mounted in the final. This gesture can, on the one hand, be interpreted as a desire to “disown” from the unusual (“unfamiliar” silent smoking Chinese). On the other hand, it can also be taken as an all-forgiving outcome, a general ritual farewell and a Christian hope for the salvation of the soul, for resurrection (this is additionally hinted at by the name of the Church – “Joy of All Who Sorrow”).

«... И сон один припомнился мне вдруг: я бабочкой летала над цветами; я помню ясно: был зеленый луг, и чашечки цветов горели, словно пламя. Смотрю теперь на мир открытыми глазами, но, может быть, сама я стала сном для бабочки, летящей над цветком»²¹.

CONCLUSIONS

Consequently, the author of the short novel deals with the resurrection from obscurity, realizing, in fact, the Easter archetype characteristic of Russian literature as a whole²². However, he does not reconstruct Cherubina’s legend, a mystification, but creates a new author’s myth centred on the tragic fate and legacy of E. Dmitrieva, who managed to overcome the horror of reality, personal and historical disasters with her creative work, thereby implementing one of the most important principles of symbolism: “the poet is “the heir of the lyre”, who is capable, “to shake the world on his own, just like the spells of the ancients...”²³.

In the analyzed short novel, the author sets the creative task to eliminate the era of the Silver Age, to form a new view at the originality of the previous artistic experience, rather than to reconstruct the artistic image of this era and to stylize the texts of this period. This peculiarity is revealed in comparison between the cultural paradigm of the Silver Age, the period

²⁰ Колобаева Л.А. Русский символизм. М.: Изд-во Московского ун-та, 2000. С. 223.

²¹ Устименко А. Китайские маски Черубины де Габриак. *Дружба народов*. 2010. № 3. С. 150.

²² Есаулов И.А. Пасхальность русской словесности. М.:Кругъ, 2004. 560 с.

²³ Колобаева Л.А. Русский символизм. М.: Изд-во Московского ун-та, 2000. С. 223.

of totalitarianism and the current period (in the subtext), as transitional periods marked by crisis and change of ideological and aesthetic systems.

Thus, A. Ustimenko's short novel "Chinese masks of Cherubina de Gabriak" demonstrates the versatility of the Silver Age of Russian literature experience and its applicability to the description of modern catastrophic events, while the Silver Age reflection becomes a mode of self-reflection in modern literature, actualizing the process of myth-creation.

SUMMARY

The article deals with the phenomenon of literary mystification as the dominant strategy of the author's myth construction (a case study of the short novel "Chinese masks of Cherubina de Gabriak" by A. Ustimenko). This strategy results in the re-establishment of an atmosphere of myth construction and aestheticism of the Silver Age in the context of contemporary cultural paradigm with the aim of creating an innovative view on the uniqueness of the artistic experience of modernism. The literary mystification is considered as a vector of the author's interpretation of new self-identification guidelines in the process of transformation of the well-known myth about Cherubina into the existential myth about Li Sian-tszy. Scientific interest is focused on the equivalent research perspectives: the study of the contrast of the author's self-identification samples, analysis of the author's intentions towards expansion the artistic and historical context, changing the optics of the main character's representation and highlighting the semantic dynamics of the dominant symbol of "the mask".

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