

# Artistic Myth and its Interpretations of Cultural Heritage of the Eastern European Countries in the Popular Animated Films of the Post-Soviet Period

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*The article touches upon the issue of the need to study the myth in artistic practices as special phenomenon in the modern social life of Europe countries. The novelty of the study is as follows. We assert that among the newest myths, which significantly affect the value orientations and life standards of modern society, a special place is occupied exactly by the myth of ancient state in newest artistic practices. Such newest myth gives a new interpretation of cultural heritage. We analyses the animation blockbusters all created the newest artistic myth about Rus. We have focus on analyzing the artistic myth as special product of contemporary artistic practices and phenomenon of East-Central Europe culture which was formed as result of post-totalitarian practices and cultural policy of the state. The analysis of its features, as the social and cultural phenomenon, is carried out in our study taking into account problem of post-totalitarian practices in East Europe countries. As result, this myth transposed an idea of “cradle of fraternal nations” in East-Central Europe, and it created the other artistic myth about the Lord of Kiev Vladimir as a naive, capricious and ridiculous ruler of an ancient country.*

*Keywords: East-Central Europe countries, post-totalitarian practices, artistic practices, intellectual practices, mythologizing, artistic myth, artistic thinking, cultural heritage, cultural policy*

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## Introduction

Legends, tales or myths attract the attention of many contemporaries. Therefore, we can even be assumed that such an interest in fiction and the non-existent is one of the most important features of the spiritual life of modern people.

Although in the past, there could be countries or cultural heroes of a particular country, whose names were used by modern writers or screenwriters, less often painters or animators. The adventures of Thor and Locke, Jason and the Argonauts, the cunning Odysseus or the

courageous Robin Hood are interesting for current Europeans or Americans. However, they certainly were not the same as in blockbusters. A huge difference exists between the real Spartacus and his “Hollywood shadow”, and Rome was different than it is shown in films. Cultural features of a particular society or every modern nation are manifested in relation to its national tradition and cultural heritage. There are relations to the place of its country or the famous people in the history of our civilization, to national historical myths or popular beliefs, rites, etc. In the modern world, mythologizing can significantly affect to the public opinion of a particular country and the image of the last in opines of other countries. In particular, the newest myths have been generating or broadcasting through the mass media as the works of popular literature or cinema and, even, scientific researches in intellectual practices.

As an example of such unique art-product, it is a Canadian-Irish historical serial *Vikings*, created Michael Hirst for the TV channel of History. His premiere took place on March 3, 2013. This television series is inspired by the sagas of Viking Ragnar Lothbrok. This historical drama which not only entertains a viewer, giving him knowledge about *Vikings* and their raids on the different European countries such as England, Scandinavia and the Mediterranean, Vikings also created new interpretation of appearance of Normandy as legal political subject at the eighth century. However, the artistic myth in the cultural policy of the modern state can affect its development and have even significant changes at the social life when such myths, as popular cinema products, become the agent of influence in post-totalitarian social practices.

The object that attracted our attention is seven Russian animated films about heroes, culture, life, and values of the inhabitants of Kievan Rus. (As remember, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was the largest and most powerful state of Eastern and Central Europe in Middle Age, and the Queen of France, Anna, was also born in Kyiv). These blockbusters have been created in recent years and became popular among viewers (and not only children or teens). They also attracted the attention of many adults. We have focus on analyzing such art products in contemporary artistic practice as the newest phenomenon of spiritual life of East-Central Europe countries and its post-totalitarian practices.

We aspire, as the aim of the study, to pay attention to such a kind of the newest myth as the myth of an ancient state, created in the popular culture of our time in European countries thanks to art. Such a myth can be called an artistic myth about an unreal country and its unreal citizens or the unreal, invented history of a famous ancient state. The results of the research were obtained through the application of the following methods: discourse analysis in the study of popular animated films that allow analyzing the main interpretations of the cultural heritage of Kievan Rus in modern Eastern European countries; systematic and comparative methods that were used to determine the nature and characteristics of the art myths generated by them, as well as their role in the perception and assessment of the events of the past of their country under the influence of artistic and intellectual practices in the post-Soviet period.

## **Cultural Heritage and Mythologizing in the Artistic Practices of East-Central Europe Countries**

The myths have different origin and different meanings for the life of society. The myth about the Argonauts tells about the ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus and the Mediterranean. The myth of Theseus and Ariadne will be explained to us by the name of the Egeian Sea. Such myths are our knowledge of people in ancient times. This is an important part of the cultural heritage of mankind.

We know many mythical creatures, for example, Phoenix, Hydra, Sphinx and others. For centuries, humans told tales of wonderful beasts or exotic monsters. Besides, some people were convinced that these bizarre beasts or terrifying supernatural beings were real. Even though now freakish beings are accepted as product of fiction or fairy stories still have us interest to their and they give adventure for many contemporaries. In our opinion, mythologizing in the artistic practices of modernity is primarily commercial interest, because many contemporaries are entertained thanks to old legends and fairy tales.

Therefore, a book *Mythical creatures* by Linda S. Godfrey about mysteries, legends, and unexplained phenomena has 144 pages. In addition, she has written 41 books on paranormal topics, translated into 14 languages, and hundreds of articles [Godfrey, 2009:144]. It is also interesting that she worked as a newspaper reporter and columnist for *The Week*. How can you read about her biography, she won National Newspaper Association first-place awards for feature stories in 1996, 1998, and 2000. Besides, she is the author of *The Beast of Bray Road and Hunting the American Werewolf*. It is also interesting that she has appeared on many national television and radio programs as an expert on anomalous creatures, including *Inside Edition*, *Animal Planet Channel*, *The New in Search of (SCI FI Channel)*, *Travel Channel*, *Discovery Kids*, *Northern Mysteries on Canada's Global Network*, and others. However, the most striking thing is that she is an illustrator and artist, and she maintains a Web site [Godfrey, 2009:143].

Many scientists, both present and past decades of our time, have analyzed the problem of nature and the peculiarities of mythology as cultural phenomenon and the mythologizing of modern cultural policy. We want to focus on the researches within the Santander Universidades program by Wojciech Charchalis, Bogdan Trocha, Roman Sapenko, Maciej Czeremski, Carlos Pitel García, Anna Gemra, Andrzej Malkiewicz, Carlos Pastrana, etc. (There are such books as *Mitologizacja człowieka w kulturze i literaturze iberyjskiej i polskiej*, 2016; *Mitologizacja kultury w polskiej i iberyjskiej twórczości artystycznej*, 2015; *Mitologizacje państwa w kulturze i literaturze polskiej i iberyjskiej*, 2014). The myth should be considered, first of all, as a special type of experience, knowledge and understanding of human life. To our mind, it is an important idea, because a myth often becomes synonymous with false, untruth or illusion in modern humanitarian studios. In addition, mythological perception of the mass consciousness of certain cultural realities determines the variability of cultural processes in different regions and countries. Concept of “Film Thinking” by Rofal Koschany is devoted to analysis of special role of the myth in the newest cinema. “The cultural habits, which in the past included going to the cinema have undergone a big change. Today, the old cinema and its theories (today’s point of view makers it even clearer) already belong to a past”, as he says [Koschany, 2014: 46]. This idea is similar to the statement about “twilight of cinemaphilia” by Susan Sontag [Sontag, 1996].

We mean the following Russian artistic products and their key ideas about cultural heritage of Kievan Rus (as remember it was the largest and most powerful state of Eastern and Central Europe in Middle Age):

- a) The animated film *Alyosha Popovich and Tugarin-Serpent* as the film about the Middle Age knight Alesha Popovich which has to catch Tugarin-Serpent and bring back the stolen gold to Rostov town (in Russian — Альоша Попович и Тугарин Змей, 2004, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Konstantin Bronzit, Russia; the budget of the film: \$4,000,000, and his box office: \$6,720,288);
- b) Prequel *Dobrynya Nikitich and Serpent Gorinich* as a film of the Kievan knight Dobrynya Nikitich which goes on a quest to save the Kievan royal niece and finds out whether his old friend Serpent-Gorinich is loyal to him (in Russian — Добрыня

- Никитич и Змей Гориньч, 2006, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Ilya Masimov, Russia; the budget of the film: \$4 500 000, and his box office: \$6 864 576);
- c) Squadron *Ilya Muromets and Nightingale-Robber* as a film of the Kievan knight Ilya Muromets which has to rescue his trusty horse Burushka and Kiev treasury from the greedy hands of famous bandit, Solovey-Razboynik (in Russian — Илья Муромец и Соловей Разбойник, 2007, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Vladimir Toporchin, Russia; the budget of the film: \$2 000 000, and his box office: \$12 432 144);
  - d) The animated film *Three Knights and Shamakhan's Queen* (in Russian — Три богатыря и Шамаханьска царица, 2010, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Sergei Glezin, Russia; the budget of the film: \$3 000 000, and his box office: \$24 288 720); the idea of its plot is borrowed from the Crimean Tatar fairy tale (*Molodil'naya Voda*; in English—*Rejuvenating Apples*) and the Japanese fairy tale (*Fan of Youth*), as well as the tales of Alexander Pushkin about the young beautiful eastern witch ruler and the stupid old king (*Golden Cockerel*);
  - e) The animated film *Three Knights in Distant Lands* as the film about the three knight's wives which are united to rescue the Prince of Kiev from the evil old woman, who tries to regain her youth and beauty by means of magic (in Russian — Три богатыря на дальних берегах, 2012, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Konstantin Feoktistov, Russia; the budget of the film: \$3 500 000, and his box office \$32 000 000);
  - f) The animated film *Three Knights and their Unexpected Blow* as the film of the court horse Gaius Julius Caesar which learns a conspiracy against the Kievan Lord and his misfortune dignitaries, and the Prince of Kiev Vladimir who lost his city because of stupidity and naivety (in Russian — Три богатыря: Ход конем, its triser is shown in March 2014, and the film was shown from January 1, 2015, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Konstantin Feoktistov, Russia; the budget of this cartoon: \$3 500 000, and his box office: \$24 576 288);
  - g) The animated film *Three Knights and Lord of the Seas*; (in Russian — Три богатыря и морской царь, 2017, studio *Mill, STV*, directed by Konstantin Feoktistov, Russia; the budget of the film: \$4 000 000, and his box office: \$14 134 274).

On the Russian screens the film of Alyosha Popovich (it is a blockbuster about Alyosha, the son of a priest) was released in December 2004, but the first world show of *Alyosha Popovich* was held in Canada in 2005. Cartoon participated in various children's film festivals in many countries of the world, such as Great Britain Argentina, Iran, India, Italy, Taiwan, Turkey and was highly appreciated by the audience. World box office cartoons amounted to more than \$ 4 million, and in the Russian box office about 1.7 million.

Who is Alyosha Popovich as a person? He is a folk hero of Kievan Rus, a medieval knight-errant (i.e., a bogatyr). This medieval hero of East-Central Europe countries was the youngest of the three main folk heroes of Kievan Rus (Dobrynya Nikitich and Ilya Muromets were the other two medieval knight-errant and folk heroes of Kievan Rus). Alyosha Popovich is described as example of agility and craftiness by young man in a medieval folklore. In addition, he may occasionally be a liar and a "mocker of women." However, in the animated film this folk hero has opposite qualities. He is a bit stupid, simple-minded and faithful to a single woman. Moreover, this medieval knight-errant is very funny and gets into different difficult situations due to his strength and simple-minded. This "understatement" of the folk hero of Kievan Rus creates a comic effect, entertaining the viewers. However, in this way another reality is created that had nothing to do with the folklore tradition.

This is a kind of revision of the cultural heritage. So imperceptibly, there is a substitution of concepts of Kievan Rus in public consciousness. The artistic myth becomes the important agent of influence in post-totalitarian social life. Such myth becomes the special agent of influence in the public life of the country in the post-totalitarian period, because due to its form it attracts the viewer's interest. Its important instruments of influence are a playful moment in the dissemination of some idea, as well as laughter that arouses a favorable attitude towards this idea. Created by visual art, the artistic myth became an important agent of influencing the world outlook of modern people. Why is this happening? To better understand this, in our opinion, it is necessary to understand the connection between artistic thinking and modern mythologizing. We need to understand why such an artistic product as a mythological and artistic artifice or fiction is interesting for many of our contemporaries. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully analyze the main features of the modern artistic myth about the ancient people or the ancient state, which was created in animation, films, etc.

Animated films are not just products of art. Animated films are not just products of cultural activities of the newest days. Animated films are not the results of artistic production, when created qualitatively and interestingly. These are activators of such a strategy in human thinking, as artistic thinking or, may be, mythological thinking. In our opinion, the interest of contemporaries to them is due to the game, which is important for the strategy of artistic thinking.

This is a game with a sense of information. It is also a game in which fiction and fantasy are important. Such a game, it seems, is not just important for individuals or a small group. Nowadays, the passion for movies tells us something more important for human existence. Nowadays, the mass interest in animation, both children and adults, tells us something important to human existence.

In addition, this is something that needs to be understood both by cultural anthropologists and by specialists in aesthetics or other scientific fields.

### **Artistic Thinking and Artistic Artifice as Phenomenon of Mythologizing**

Can artistic thinking create mythological images as patterns of popular culture? Of course, it can. What artistic mythical creatures do we know very well? Feature films about the adventures of Harry Potter told us about many such creatures.

What is artistic thinking as phenomenon? In our opinion, it is phenomenon as [Polishchuk, 2014: 95]:

- a) A strategy of human thinking, having productive and positive results for the human life through their inhesion to a person;
- b) A strategy of human thinking, for which aesthetic components in the origin and results are of main importance;
- c) A strategy of human thinking, owing to the informational processing of the current issue, considerably different from the artistic discourse.

However, in public consciousness mythical cinema stories as artistic discourse may be the instrument of propaganda of the newest days. We consider that not always just an artist has artistic thinking as source of ideas for mythological images as patterns of newest mass culture and "the bearer of artistic thinking can be not only an artist" [Polishchuk, 2014: 96].

For example, mentioned artistic myth of Kievan Rus and its heroes has several peculiar features.

First of all, it is a product of the contemporary artistic fiction or artifice which has the form of animation. This newest myth is product of modern artistic practices, as the form of post-totalitarian social practices. It was broadcast to the audience through spectacular blockbuster. The musical compositions in each cartoon were interesting, dynamic and attracted attention. Consequently, the ideological core of such myth is pretty well memorized. There was a significant emotional feedback from the audience.

Secondly, it was designed for the mass consumer, but the target audience was not only the children's community because adventures and history are also interesting for many adults. In addition, indeed, the cartoons were funny. In addition, their copyrighters managed to create a number of interesting aphorisms-slogans. Each cartoon, in which the artistic myth of the mentioned ancient state was created, was qualitative, spectacular and intriguing. (Although the seventh of them was the least interesting, it seems). The genres of these cartoons were adventure, fantasy, and musical comedy.

Thirdly, in addition to the cinema, the viewers of the leading TV channels of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus saw cartoons. Animated films were featured at *Rus Time* (this is also a very interesting detail). Also on sale were discs for a moderate fee with these films. If desired, they can be viewed on *Youtube*. That is, each such animated film is a product of mass culture, which is very popular. Therefore, they are also interesting for our analysis of the artistic myth of the state in the modern popular culture of the post-Soviet times.

In addition, about what was this artistic myth of the Middle Age state in Eastern Europe? In the cartoon about Alyosha Popovich the main idea was reduced to the statement: "*There are a lot of heroes at Rus lands, and in Rostov as well, because hero Alyosha lives here*" (in Russian: "Богата богатырями земля Русская, вот и Ростов не отстаёт от других — богатырь Альоша здесь живёт"). And the second idea — you cannot trust Kiev and its lord or the dishonest people there, because they steal gold from Rostov town. Prince Volodymyr is a cunning and false coward (in the film he is called Vladimir).

Besides, he always behaves so funny that he can only be laughed at. (And this is an idea about the historical ruler of Prince Volodymyr, who threatened Byzantium, and therefore received, as a wife, a Byzantine princess. This was Kievan Lord, who baptized the peoples of the first Middle Age state in East-Central Europe, one of the prominent rulers of the state called "Rus"). In this way, the newest state's artistic myth penetrates the mass consciousness of Russian-speaking people, changing the image of Prince Volodymyr in them. This artistic image is very far from the image of this person and statesman, created in the ancient chronicles. The created image of the prince is also found in the following animation films about Dobrynya Nikitich and Ilya Muromets in their adventures. The specified artistic myth develops a plot, but the idea remains as we indicated above.

First of all these phenomenon of contemporary artistic practices creates problems include those associated with the formation of social and legal state life — it concerns the human condition in the state of person's freedom, rights, moral values and social guarantees in East-Central Europe countries. We want to pay attention, the screenwriters in cartoon's field or other mass media spheres, as a rule, are people with high educational qualification and considerable level of general culture. In an objective display discourse fixes a "many-sided crystal" (Konstyantin Sedov) various factors of influence on a person and its understanding of social reality and communicative functions. Many of the screenwriters in cartoon's field or

other mass media spheres united their scientific activity with artistic creative work. In an effort to create an interesting intellectual product in order to make good money, they can neglect the historical truth.

Then the cultural heritage of their country or other state for them will no longer be a value. They do not just create the newest myths about an ancient history and the famous persons; they distort deliberately information of cultural heritage.

To our mind, the epoch of “titans of Revival” remained in remote past. The modern society wants the contemporaries to be “narrow” specialists. Majority of modern young man or girl do not aim to become universal personality when they get knowledge in the different spheres. Now “narrow” speciality in education is a key social priority for majority. Such knowledge is needed only for implementation of professional duties. However, at a young man or girl such knowledge is not formed by a “broad” thinking on the world and its components. We have the situation of “one-sided” education. Is it badly for modern society, or it is vice versa good for it? Of course, this question requires the deep analysis of scientists of different fields of knowledge. However, a situation, which takes place in modern European education, is caused a disturbance. Such education creates condition for existence of “man with one-sided mind” which not is quickly oriented in the variable conditions of the modern life. Such person, of course, is difficult to understand the past of her or his country, and the events of cultural practice or social processes of a foreign country.

Therefore, the newest myth about ancient state in modern artistic practices or contemporary intellectual practices or mythologizing past events of particular country is distorting really information of cultural heritage of mankind. It creates an alternative history and an alternative reality, causing the reader or viewer to perceive the social reality the phenomenon of “a-logic” [Polishchuk, 2016: 41]. Presumably on this reason the National committee of television and broadcast of Ukraine forbade to sell on territory of this country books on the Kievan medieval knights, printed in Russia, such books as *Ilya Muromec and Alyosha Popovich: Fairy-tales about Russian Knights* (in Russian: “Илья Муромец и Соловей-разбойник: сказки о русских богатырях”) and *Russian Fairy-tales about Knights* (in Russian: “Богатырские русские сказки”). (Read in: *In Ukraine forbade Fairy-tales about Ilya Muromec and Russian Knights*, in Russian: “В Украине запретили сказки про Илью Муромца и русских богатырей” [Electronic resource], mode of access: <https://strana.ua/news/109403-v-ukrainu-zapretili-vvozit-rossijskie-knihi-pro-ilju-muromtsa.html>). Thus, an artistic myth arises, and it creates an illusion of knowledge about ancient times.

Analysis of these cartoons content gives us the opportunity to assert that they created several new myths about Ukrainian and Russian history. Such newest myths can be called artistic myth of the ancient state in the modern popular culture of post-Soviet time as fictions and hoaxes. It is argued that the artistic myth may be used for the revision historical facts by the public consciousness. This is a kind of revision of the cultural heritage of Kievan Rus.

These blockbusters support the myth about Rus as a “cradle of fraternal nations” in East-Central Europe, and they created the artistic myth about the Kievan Lord Vladimir as a capricious, naive and ridiculous ruler of a country.

To our mind, features of an artistic the myth about Rus which are indicated by me make it possible to improve the understanding of the role of mythologizing in modern society.

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, let us point out the following. As a product of the popular cinema or popular literature, such artistic myth has made revision the past by means of social suggestion and artistic fiction. The myth about the medieval state can serve as a means of manipulation of the public consciousness. It may be a means of hidden manipulation of the processes of public life and the revision of the cultural heritage, its values or rarities, as well as meanings on a universal human plane.

The artistic myth of on the Kievan Rus is the product of cultural policy in post-totalitarian practice, as phenomenon of social suggestion at the contemporary cinema (the popular animation films). Taking into account the time of creation of such artistic myth of Rus, as well as the subsequent events in the relations between the two states of Eastern Europe since February 20, 2014, one can assume its destructive role in the “perception of a neighbor” — Ukraine, for the general population in Russia. This newest myth about the ordinary people life or the state’s leader life in historical fields made a new interpretation of the past. It may fulfill the role of a hidden manipulation of the public consciousness, entertaining the reader or viewer.

A promising direction for further research on this topic is, in our opinion, development of the general theory of study of the newest artistic myth in visual art.

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