УДК 141.7+111+159.942.3

Pankova L.A.
Candidate of Philosophy,
Ass. Prof. of the Humanities Department,
International Humanitarian University

THE COMIC ELEMENTS IN THE STRUCTURE OF MYTHOLOGICAL THINKING

Summary. The article shows the function of the comic elements such as the trickster, ritual humour, the folk festival in the binary structure of mythological thinking grounding on the researches by K.Levi-Strauss, C.G.Jung, E.Durkheim, P.Sorokin, V.Ja.Propp.

Key words: mythological thinking, binary opposites, the trickster, ritual humour, the folk festival.

The essence of humour in human society can be revealed through the studying of primeval mythological thinking. But at first it is necessary to define the meaning of the concept of myth I am going to be based on. The common sense treats myths as fiction and invention that is opposed to reality, but the interpretations of this kind are unacceptable within the frameworks of this research. The problem of myth and mythological thinking is well-elaborated in the humanitarian tradition. I will regard myth as the initial social world view that is one of the most important features of the culture as such. Any social phenomenon or material object becomes the fact of culture only when it corresponds to practical and symbolic (i.e. mythological) need.

Myths precede religion, art, philosophy, science; they go with individuals and societies through historical stages from the ancient times till nowadays. According to A.V.Gulyga, the history of culture is the sublime of myth [1]. As written by A.M.Pyatigorsky, myth is the universal balancer that resolves the essential conflicts of individuals' lives. It is the myth that determines to a certain extent the appropriateness and necessity of all the man's deeds [8, 40]. A.F.Losev believed that myth is not a fiction but the most vivacious and genuine reality. Myth is a perfectly necessary category of thought and life that is free from any fortuity and lawlessness. Myth – is vivacious and genuine, perceptible and substantial, bodily reality that is the complex of not abstract but experienced categories of thought and live. This reality has its own verity, reliability, regularity and structure but at the same time it presupposes the abstraction from the routine state of affairs and possibility of hierarchy of being [5].

L.G.Ionin gives the social interpretation of myth that conveys the relation between myths and the social life. He supposes that myth is a sort of well-structured social reality that allows to settle the unity of object and subject, thinking and action, dynamics and static, and thus to give the consistent picture of a certain historical period [2].

Mythological cognition hence can be regarded as the initial and universal way of comprehending the world. Mythological cognition realizes itself through the mythological thinking. There is a point of view that mythological thinking is a primitive thinking based on the primitive syncretic logics that is indifferent to contradictions and cannot clearly distinguish between the subject and the object, the object itself and the sign of it, the thing and the word, the spatial and temporal relations [3]. The followers of such approach admit the existence of two different in quality ways of thinking – the primitive syncretic one and the logical one.

Another approach to the studying of mythological thinking belongs to C. Levi-Strauss who believes that "the logic of mythological and scientific thinking is the same" [4, 207]. According to Levi-Strauss the logic of mythological and positive thinking does not vary. The difference concerns not so much the logical operations themselves as the phenomena that are subjected to the logical analysis. The changes take place not in the thinking but outwards, where the mankind faces new phenomena during the historical development. Levi-Strauss suggests finding the elements of myths which can help to see the logic and structure of mythological thinking.

It is important to consider the logic of reconciling the contradictions of human being because the comic elements play a significant part in it. A man belongs to the physical and the social world at the same time so he lacks the harmony of existence and his life is exposed to the conflict of opposites. The function of humour in society is to defend a person from the imperfection of the world when its contradictoriness and absurd can be ruinous. Humour helps to cope with the cultural trauma as it reconciles the opposites of being for a short

while and that is the essential feature of the comic in society.

Mythological thinking grounds on recognition of some binary opposites and tends to reconcile them by mythological mediation. The principle of binarity was discovered by E.Durkheim who supposed that the dual constitution of thinking is a sort of pattern used for the classifications of the outer world.

Developing Durkheim's ideas, Levi-Strauss believed that the initial units of mythological classifications are such elementary oppositions as: the highest/the lowest, left/right, the nearest/the farthest, etc. Next these oppositions are developed into spatial and temporal relations: the sky/the earth, the earth/the underground kingdom, the North/the South, etc. Then the oppositions reveal themselves in society: native/strange, man/woman, elder/younger, etc. The fundamental oppositions are the following: life/death, good/evil, sacred/secular.

Analyzing the logic of mythological thinking that helped to realize the passage from life to death, Levi-Strauss finds out an intermediary element – the trickster (swindler, wag, joker). Such mediator is a humouros principle of reconciling the contradictory phenomena and as such it has a dual contradictory nature itself. The trickster balances between the extreme logical opposites and makes it possible for human mind to realize both of them. Levi-Strauss shows the function of trickster by the example of Coyote or Raven in the North-American Indian's mythology. Coyote who eats carrion is a gradation between herbivorous and carnivorous animals. As written by Levi-Strauss, trickster is a mediator because he has a dual nature that he must overcome [4, 203]. Trickster as a humouros mythological element helps not only the ancient but also the contemporary people go from duality to unity in comprehending the reality as the fundamental principles of thinking does not change with the course of time.

Similar views to the nature of trickster in myths can be found in works of C.G.Jung [10]. According to Jung myths are produced by the collective unconscious and they consist of archetypes – the patterns of structuring the outer experience. Jung supposed that myths refer to the psychological field while Levi-Strauss believed that myths belong to the sphere of logic. As noticed by E.M.Meletinsky, Jung speaks about coordinating the psychological contradictions while Levi-Strauss – about the logical ones; Jung studies the relations between the instinctive and the conscious, while Levi-Strauss – between the nature and the culture [6, 468]. Jung like Levi-Strauss is certain about that the trickster's function is to reconcile the contradictions that occur in mythological narration. Jung points at triple nature of trickster that combines the features of god, animal and human. The trickster is a primeval cosmic creature that on the one hand excels humans in its supernatural abilities but on the other hand the trickster is inferior to people in its foolishness. The trickster isn't animal's equal also as it is clumsy and awkward and doesn't have developed instincts. These shortcomings of the trickster indicate its human nature that isn't well-adopted to the environment as animals' one but in return for it the trickster has the potential ability to acquire knowledge and improve mind [10, 347-348].

The mind of archaic man distinguished between the notions of human spirit, nature and god. These notions contradict each other and the archaic mythological thinking creates such a comic character as trickster that possesses the elements of each notion to reconcile the opposites.

The mythological thinking not only reflects the contradictoriness of human being but also represents it in the social field by means of a rite as a source of socially acceptable behaviour. The rite can be defined as socially regulated and collectively performed succession of actions that do not create new objects and do not change the situation physically but use symbols and lead to symbolic change of the situation [2, 133].

The binarity principle of mythological constructing the social reality and the function of rites in reproduction of this binarity were studied by E.Durkheim within his social theory. Researching the primary forms of religion Durkheim noticed that Australian aboriginals differentiate the everyday routine reality associated with making for a living from another peculiar reality that does not come to empirical world. Durkheim defines secular reality as a daily routine intended for maintaining life. He insisted on collective, social character of the other sacred reality when a person could get rid of the routine affairs and experience common emotions with his tribesmen [9, 80].

Durkheim differentiates the negative and positive kinds of rites. The negative rites have as their object the distinct demarcation of the two realities and prevention of their merging. Such rites support the "closed" myths that restrict creative work and free thinking. The positive rites are aimed at bringing people nearer to the sacred reality for changing their lives for the better and for the world to renew the energy spent for existence (entropy). The positive rites are: imitating rites (reproducing the sacred events that took place 'in days of old' ('in illud tempus'); the commemorative rites (recollecting the past events); redemptive rites (the redemption of the sacrilege) [2, 136].

Durkheim's typology of rites allows reveal the functions of comic elements in mythological construction of reality. The ritual humour can be a part of the positive rites in accordance with its intermediary mythological function in reconciliation the opposites of human being. If it is necessary to demarcate the opposites, e.g. life and death, humour is strictly forbidden. V.Ja.Propp notes, that there is a ban on humour in fairy tales that tell about penetration of a living being into the kingdom of dead. The hero who belongs to the world of alive is advised not to laugh when descending underground (into 'the other world'); otherwise he can give himself away [7, 228]. The ritual humour in folklore, according to V.Ja.Propp, is able to awaken the vitality of the living beings, to increase the fertility of land, to help nature revive after winter.

The ritual humour also is able to overcome the duality of the secular and the sacred. P.A.Sorokin develops the Durkheim's idea of distinguishing between these two realities and gives an example from the life of Australian aboriginal tribes. Their life is divided into two periods. During the first one the natives hunt, fish and provide their families with the necessary foodstuff. Then another period comes when the daily routine changes into 'corrobory' festival. On that day all the bans are lifted and dances, decorations, new tattoo and masks help everyone become a renewed and free creature [9]. The comic elements such as jokes, folk dance, changing everyday clothes for the masks accompany the celebration and are the means of constructing the sacred reality.

The comic elements in mythological thinking (that include in particular such mythological character as the trickster, the ritual humour and the festival jokes, dancing and masks) help to reconcile the numerous opposites of human life.

List of sources:

1. Гулыга А. В. Миф как философская проблема / А.В. Гулыга // Античная культура и современная наука. — М.: изд-во МГУ, 1985. — С. 271-276.
2. Ионин Л. Г. Социология культуры / Л.Г. Ионин. — М.: Издательская корпорация «Логос», 1995. — 280с.
3. Леви-Брюль Л. Сверхъестественное в первобытном мышлении. [Пер. с франц]. — / Л. Леви-Брюль. — М.: Педагогика-Пресс, 1994. — 608с.
4. Леви-Стросс К. Структурная антропология. [Пер. с франц]. — / К. Леви-Стросс. — М.: Наука. Главная редакция восточной литературы, 1985. — 535с
5. Лосев А.Ф. Миф, число, сущность / А.Ф. Лосев. — М.: Мысль, 1994. — 919 с.
6. Мелетинский Е.М. Поэтика мифа / Е.М. Мелетинский. — М.: Искусство, 1976. — 507с.
7. Пропп В. Я. Проблемы комизма и смеха / В.Я. Пропп. — М.: Лабиринт, 2002. — 192с.
8. Пятигорский А. М. Некоторые общие замечания о мифологии с точки зрения психолога / А.М. Пятигорский // Учёные записки Тартуского государственного университета. Вып. 181. Труды по знаковым системам-2. — Тарту: 1965. — С. 38-48.
9. Сорокин П.А. Эмиль Дюркгейм о религии / П.А. Сорокин // Новые идеи в социологии / под. ред. Ковалевского М.М. и Де-Роберти Е.В. — Сб. 4. Генетическая социология I. — СПб.: Образование, 1914. — С. 58-83.
10. Юнг К.Г. Душа и миф: шесть архетипов. — [Пер. с нем]. / К.Г. Юнг. — К.: Государственная библиотека Украины для юношества, 1996. — 384 с.

Аннотация. Панкова Л.А. Роль комических элементов в структуре мифологического мышления. — Статья.

В статье показана роль комических элементов, таких как трикстер, ритуальный смех, народное праздничное веселье в бинарной структуре мифологического мышления на основе наработок таких исследователей как К.Леви-Стросс, К.Г.Юнг, Э.Дюркгейм, П.Сорокин, В.Я.Пропп.

Ключевые слова: мифологическое мышление, бинарные оппозиции, трикстер, ритуальный смех, народный праздник.

Анотація. Панкова Л.А. Роль елементів комізму в структурі міфологічного мислення. — Стаття.

У статті продемонстровано роль елементів комізму, таких як трикстер, ритуальний сміх, народне святкування в бінарній структурі міфологічного мислення на підґрунті доробку таких мислителів як К.Леві-Стросс, К.Г.Юнг, Е.Дюркгейм, П.Сорокін, В.Я.Пропп.

Ключові слова: міфологічне мислення, бінарні опозиції, трикстер, ритуальній сміх, народне святкування.