

Image of St. George in Art of Silver Age

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Abstract—The work is devoted to the artistic interpretation of the image of St. George in the art of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The article presents the trends of interpretation of traditional motifs of Russian iconography, depicting St. George Feast as a defender, warrior, victorious. The authors also consider the poets of the first quarter of the twentieth century, who actively turned to the image of St. George in the tragic times of the revolution, when only the spiritual power of true art allows a person to confront the circumstances of the revolution and civil war. In the article the methods of lexical and syntactic analysis were used. The authors have analyzed the mythopoetics of St. George image as a national component, defined its role in the semantic and aesthetic expression of the epic content in the works of avant-garde artists and poets of the 1910s-1930s.

Keywords—*Saint George; myth; motifs; poetics; interpretation of the image*

I. INTRODUCTION

St. George is revered throughout the world. It is known that in the IV century he was worshipped by Byzantium [1, pp. 5-6, 9-15]. At the end of the V century a monastery of St. George was founded in Gaul. His image guarded the gates leading to Rome.

Universal veneration of St. George began in the V century and spread to Western Europe, Asia, the Balkan countries, Syria, Palestine, the Caucasus. He was worshipped as a Martyr and a warrior.

In the IX century the icon of St. George killing the snake dragon appeared. It was named "St. George and the dragon". This type of iconography was developed in the period when the millennial struggle against nomads in Eastern Europe came to an end, and became a widespread phenomenon in the history of the world art.

In Russia St. George-the Defender was revered since the days of Slavic paganism [2, pp. 98-107]. In Kievan Rus the family of Yaroslav the Wise considered him to be their patron, and in the Novgorod land St. George was believed to patronize the town residents [3, pp. 73-75].

During the era of cultural and historical change, people always needed the image of a hero defender. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Great Martyr St. George was the most artistically significant character, towards whom the eyes of the artists turned [4, p. 275].

Referring to St. George's image, which was the canonical symbol of not only the triumph of lights over the darks, but also of the Russian statehood, testified to a certain tendency peculiar to the art of the first quarter of the XX century, interpreting the traditional motifs of Orthodox iconography, depicting St. George as a defender, warrior, great Martyr.

This trend is due to a number of cultural and historical factors. The first one is the national component of St. George's image (in folklore traditions called Egory the brave, Yuri-Egory).

Traditionally St. George has been highly honored since the time of ancient Russia, because he miraculously united all social classes, while simultaneously patronizing the princely power, soldiers and peasants.

This might have formed the idea of St. George as a symbol of the Russian statehood and consequently his image appeared on the coat of arms of the Moscow Principality [4, p. 275].

The second factor that explains the active appeal to this image was the philosophical, religious, artistic search of the creative clerisy of the Silver age. This creative clerisy sought to express the ideas of the Russian culture cosmism in times of the socio-political crisis and instability before the revolution of 1905 and the First World War.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

From the philosophical point of view, the ontological basis of the Russian cosmism is the idea of unity and hierarchical structure of being, the gnoseological one is the "integral knowledge" of V. Solovyov, who sees the world development through a man and his attitude to God taking Him as a goal.

The search for a new religious consciousness, has identified the special nature of the Russian culture cosmism of

the Silver age, based on V. Solovyov's idea about God-manhood, unity, synthesis of art, science and philosophy.

The interpreting of cosmos as a living universe and teoantropocosmic religious vision of the world made it possible to identify the religious and philosophical, poetic and artistic, musical and mystical, existential and eschatological directions in cosmism [5, pp. 239-240].

The development of religious cosmism (expecting enlightenment and the world transformation) and some of its aspects enumerated above, the idea of synthesis are characteristic for work of outstanding poets, painters and musicians A. Block, V. Ivanov, V. Khlebnikov, A. Skryabin, M. Vrubel, P. Filonov, V. Kandinsky.

One of the features of Russian cosmism is the existential-eschatological nature of the reality perception. It is caused by the border situation initiated by the catastrophic consequences of the First world war and the Russian revolution.

The war and the revolution resulted in a tense civil confrontation, which caused the "red terror", i.e. the repressive policy of the Bolsheviks, involving a set of punitive measures against the population to strengthen the Soviet power.

Socio-historically, there was a situation when the integrity of the society and a single person existence were destroyed, when the empirical reality of the world with all its institutions disappeared, when not only the social structure of society was destroyed to the ground, but also the system of ideas and values of traditional Russian culture, especially religious, formed over the centuries.

As a result, it seems to us, both in art and in culture as a whole, existential problems were actualized, as the society and human being integrity had been violated.

In our opinion, the existential component is a characteristic feature of the culture of the Silver age due to the border situation in which Russia found itself after the two wars and the revolution, which could not but affect the content of the art of the Silver age.

An important factor that determined the existential-eschatological tendency in the philosophy of the first quarter of XX century was the catastrophic nature of this time. Historical events and social cataclysms destroyed the Russian Empire, the tragic consequence of these events being the civil war.

Besides the above factors, the ultimate reason for the appeal to St. George's image is forming the Russian personalism philosophy in the early twentieth century, the bright representatives of which were L. Shestov, N. Berdyaev. Their eschatology of metaphysics is inextricably linked with the existential experience of the tragic in the man's being, with the morality of the tragedy opposing the morality of everyday life (Shestov) with the idea of the individual and its creative self-expression and freedom identical to God (Berdyaev).

The idea of a creative person as the only guarantee of the preservation and development of the national culture, an individual who can oppose his system of moral values to the havoc of destruction of the first quarter of XX century, the

Russian cosmism ideas and the philosophy of personalism, which actualized the problems of existential being of a man developed the artistic awareness of the Russian art of the Silver age [6, pp. 7, 275-283].

The two plans i.e. metaphysical and existential, eschatology and such poetics features as synthesis, symbolism, associativity, citation, appeal to folk mythology – all these make interpreting of St. George's image by representatives of the Silver age art fundamentally different from the artistic thinking of previous eras.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Artists, poets, musicians of the Silver age referring to the image of St. George, raised a number of problems of existential and personal being such as choice, purpose, responsibility, as well as the dialectical connection between the medieval Renaissance and avant-garde experiments.

In this regard, the mythopoeics of paintings by V. Kandinsky is noteworthy. In his work there are several images of St. George. Some of them are "George-2" (1911, oil on canvas. Russian museum. St. Petersburg), "St. George" (1911, painting on glass. City gallery. Munich), "George – 3" (1911, oil on canvas. Kandinsky St. Georg N 3. City gallery. Munich) and "St. George" (1915, oil on cardboard. Moscow. The Tretyakov gallery Fig.3), in which the artist expressed a fierce spiritual struggle (George) against the material (dragon) vital principles (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. V. Kandinsky, St. George, 1911. City Gallery in the Lenbachhaus (Munich). [<http://www.wassilykandinsky.ru/work-474.php>]

In the paintings of V. Kandinsky dedicated to St. George there is one detail that combines all the above-mentioned works which is a spear. It is sharply drawn and occupies the central place in the composition of paintings (Fig. 2).

The spear in V. Kandinsky's picture is ambivalent: on the one hand, in accordance with the famous Christian relic it symbolizes the fate ordained to St. George, on the other hand it is the vengeful weapon, which had defeated the dragon being the material embodiment of world evil.

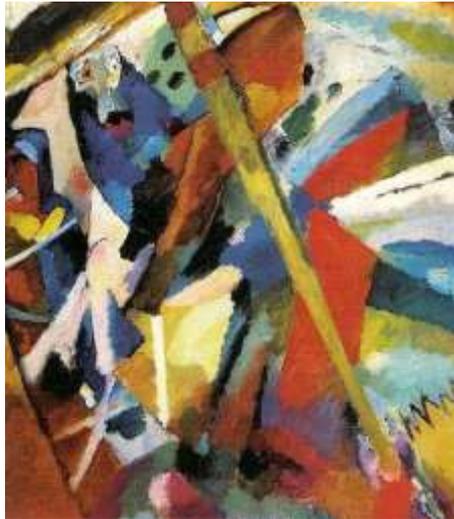


Fig. 2. V. Kandinsky, St. George (II), 1911. Russian Museum (St. Petersburg). [http://www.wassilykandinsky.ru/work-472.php]

In his paintings of 1911, V. Kandinsky portrays St. George as if in two dimensions – the metaphysical one, referring to the myth and the existential one through the dynamic expression of colors, lines which showed unrestrained energy of the hero, aiming to defeat Evil, as the spear head powerfully lancing the dragon's body shows.

In the composition of the painting in 1911, the spear occupies most part of the canvas and dissects it into two parts, thus emphasizing the maximum antagonism of the forces. The outcome of this antagonism will further determine the providential nature of the hero's fate meta-history.

A semantically capacious image of the fate spear is the symbol of St. George mission which he perceives as an existential goal of his life thereby combining the metaphysical (the Kingdom of the spirit) and the personal being of the hero in the artistic logic of the picture. The main thesis of Kandinsky's program "on the spiritual in art" is considered to be the confrontation of the spiritual and material.

As a result of this antagonism the soul refined by the struggle and suffering is reborn. According to Kandinsky's aesthetics, only the abstract painting and synthesis of arts can adequately express the dynamics of personal human development aspiring to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The painting "St. George" (1915), created by the artist during the First World War there is no intense dynamics of the works created in 1911. In it the ordinary world seems frozen in the popular prints, the dragon is not defeated, and leaning out of the cave surrounded with dried branches of dead trees at the entrance, the dragon views happenings quietly.

In the background you can see the Kremlin wall and towers against the blazing red sky. In the perspective drawing, the domes of churches without crosses can be seen. The Princess looks blankly away from George. The rider on the back of a rearing horse holding a spear has frozen in suspense.

The figure of the horse, located in the center between the dragon and the girl is shrouded in a gloomy black mist (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. V. Kandinsky, the Horseman. St. George the Victorious, 1915-1916, State Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow). [http://www.wassilykandinsky.ru/work-100.php]

The picture was painted during the military confrontation between Russia and Germany whose spiritual culture was equally important for V. Kandinsky. Hence, apparently, there appear indifferent images of the Princess and the dragon, ignoring the heavy and somber state of hero's mind, who had been put in a border situation of choice, difficult and unnatural for him.

During the First World War not only the problem of choice and perception of war as a disaster but also the national-patriotic component of the image of St. George was actualized.

The poetic processing of the folk tale about Yegor the brave-wolf shepherd made by S. Yesenin was widely known. A Toporkove noted that this myth about Yegor has traditionally been perceived on the background of the national and religious cult of St. George as the heavenly patron of Russia [7, pp. 529-557].

It is noteworthy in this context that the poem "Yegor" (1914) by S. Esenin in which the national and patriotic idea of defending the homeland and undying faith in victory were expressed resonates with the pathos of Marina Tsvetaeva lines, 1918: «Moscow coat of arms: the hero pierces the serpent. // Blood dragon.// Hero in the ray.// So be it» [8, p. 399] as well as with "Vision" (1915) by N. Gumilev's. This works from the cycle "Quiver" united Gumilev's poems of 1911-1915.

In military verses of the "Quiver" cycle, inspired by the First world war during which N. Gumilev served as a volunteer and even deserved the St. George crosses, he reflects on life, death, duty, responsibility, feat of arms.

The poem "Vision" in which George the warrior calls to the soul of the lyrical hero "to stand up for glory" is important for interpreting the main concept of "Quiver" i.e. the spiritual quest of the lyrical hero.

This is indicated by the ambivalent name of the work "Vision". The meaning of it is versatile. Thus the story of the vision which is interpreted as occurrence of St. Panteleimon

and George the warrior before the hero "fordone on the bed of the disease" who heal the hero's soul and flesh turns into the idea of finding the meaning and purpose of life:

– «От битв отрекаясь, ты жаждал спасенья,
Но сильного слезы пред Богом неправы,
И Бог не слышал твоего отреченья,
Ты встанешь завтра и встанешь для славы» [9, p. 271].
– //Renouncing your battles, you longed for salvation, //
//But the tears of a strong man before God are wrong, //
//And God did not hear your renunciation, //
//You get up tomorrow and rise to fame»// [9, p. 271].

This work was created during the First World War and N. Gumilyov held a Patriotic position to the events of the First World War, his image of St. George emphatically named a warrior call to the soul of the hero. Therefore it is possible to infer the poem tells about the military glory of the Fatherland defender.

The art of the Silver age has many often paradoxical, not characteristic for previous centuries artistic variations of the life story. Thus in the painting by P. Filonov "St. George the victorious" (1915) the hero looks with the kind of compassion and regret at the dragon he had defeated (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. P. Filonov. Untitled (St. George the Victorious), 1915, Russian Museum (St. Petersburg). [<http://cultobzor.ru/2014/08/vzglyani-v-glaza-voyny/19-208/>]

Perhaps the First World War influenced this interpretation of the myth. The war raised the question of the immoral nature of the war and the existential responsibility of a man for his personal choice. Also such interpretation of the myth could be influenced by K. Balmont's cult poem of 1900 "St. George" widely known to the creative clerisy. This poem also has the motif of St. George lamenting over the defeated dragon.

In 1921 M. Kuzmin published his cantata "St. George" about which M. Tsvetaeva at the time of the civil war wrote the following: «...копьем в сердце: Георгий! Белый

Георгий! Мой Георгий, которого пишу два месяца: житие. Ревность и радость. Читаю: радость усиливается...» (//"...a spear through the heart of George!// White George! //My George, whom I write for two months: life. //Jealousy and joy.// Can Read: joy is intensifying...») [10, pp. 290-291].

It was a period when all ideas not only about faith but also about basic humanity were destroyed. At this time only the spiritual power of the true art allows a person to confront the tragic circumstances of the revolution and the civil war causing widespread extreme hunger, destruction, death of relatives and friends.

In her essay "Weird evening" M. Tsvetaeva emphasizes that M. Kuzmin's "St. Georgi" struck her first of all by the poet's absolute freedom of the spirit, as he dared to write a cantata about Christianity in the era of militant atheism of the Bolsheviks. He claims that faith preaches first of all the personal development of a person, the vector of spiritual values of which is the divine beginning of life.

M. Tsvetaeva called her essay "Weird evening" appealing to the atmosphere of people's creative unity, pushing the spatial framework of time through the poets' dialogue and where historical events are seen and interpreted through the providential time events.

«Подземной бездны зеркала: / Два смертных глаза» («Underground mirrors of the void: / the Two mortal eyes») is a metaphor found by Tsvetaeva as a characteristic of M. Kuzmin's poetic essence. This metaphor allowed Tsvetaeva to express spiritually enriching creative dialogue of poets, in the process of which a new work is born, continuing the theme designated by another poet [11, p. 33].

In her cycle "George" M. Tsvetaeva is engaged in dialogue with M. Kuzmin, as indicated by the vocabulary, rhythmic and syntactic allusions of the cycle. It is especially evident in the poem "Oh, by all winds", where "Sweetest", "Victorious" St. George by M. Kuzmin is opposed to "the meekest", "the quietest", "unable to bare the victory" St. George by M. Tsvetaeva.

In the cycle "George" Tsvetaeva is engaged in a dialogue not only with M. Kuzmin, but also with K. Balmont. From the ideological and artistic point of view the image of George created by M. Tsvetaeva has more in common with "St. George" by K. Balmont, in the sense of diversion from the event version of life and integrity of St. George's character.

M. Tsvetaeva and K. Balmont created the image of a reflective, "unable to bear his victory" St. George. They focused on the problem of the personal existential responsibility for their choice, topical for the Russian culture of the Silver age. So the hero, who had defeated the dragon, does not feel a sense of achievement:

И конь святого своим копытом
Ударил гневно о край пути.
Сюда он прибыл путем избитым.

Куда отсюда? Куда идти? [12, с. 586].

//And the horse of the Saint with his hoof//

//Slapped angrily on the edge of the road.//

//Here he had arrived by the beaten path.//

//Where to start from here? Where to go?// [12, p. 586].

The image of St. George, a warrior-defender of Christian ideals allowed M. Tsvetaeva to fully express the existential drama of a man who was involved in the maelstrom of the fratricidal civil war.

The cycle, as you know, was dedicated to S. Efron, M. I. Tsvetaeva's husband. It correlated with his fate, with his existential choice during the civil war and revolution.

In this cycle the life story intertwined with the real events of an individual's life and formed the meta-narrative where a person exists in two realities – in the mythological and particular historical ones.

In the title of the cycle M. Tsvetaeva does not refer to St. George to be affiliated for sainthood which was traditionally mandatory. It was indicated in the subtext of "George" only by some storyline reinterpreted events, which sometimes contradicted to the logic of the life canonical text, where the hero laments the defeated dragon.

It is important for M. Tsvetaeva to express the existential component of human relationships with specific historical time, where time as a metaphysical form of being is reversed changing the form, but not the content of the hero's life ordeal.

In previous works it has already been noted that Tsvetaeva's story filled with the specific content of a man's spiritual development is the history of a man's formation and development choosing his own way in accordance with conscious ideas about the world, about his place in it.

Tsvetaeva's hero remaining true to his essence makes decisions wishing to understand his destiny, the reason for his own being.

Tsvetaeva leaves the main life story lines (the victory over the dragon, the king's proposal to marry his daughter) unchanged, but fills the myth events with a different content.

She passes the myth through the modern man's self-reflection, drawn into the civil war: the hero having fulfilled his duty in accordance with the current cultural and historical archetypes doubts the path he had chosen was right.

St. George of Tsvetaeva's cycle is the "heavenly forces" executor. Having finished "the divine statement" he is crushed by the burden of his personal responsibility for an act committed "by order" but not by the internal laws of identity" [6, p. 198].

M. Tsvetaeva released her George from long - standing traditional ideas and opposed the personal choice of a man to archetypal element. This choice makes a man morally

responsible for everything he is involved in during the civil war and revolution.

The core idea of the cycle is a person's moral choice during the era of historical fault which had destroyed the integrity of the pre-existing world. The era when it becomes impossible to inertly follow long-standing traditions, imposing the burden of responsibility on the hero:

– О страшная тяжесть

Свершенных дел!

И плащ его красен,

И конь его бел [11, с. 36].

– // Oh, the terrible weight of//

//Done things!//

//And his Cloak being red,//

//And his horse being white // [11, p. 36].

The moral choice of a man being his free will, is based on his personal internal value system. This system is formed due to the man's life existential experience and the knowledge of the spiritual universals of the world reflected in the myth.

In the life St. George's act of moral courage is a feat on the way to the Christian faith. In M. Tsvetaeva's cycle the hero does not follow a beaten path but he chooses his own individual way of development, perhaps erroneous, but allowing by trial and error to adjust his system of value.

In accordance with the canonical plot this path requires a person's act of moral courage: meekness, patience and courage. In the finale of the cycle the feat of faith and act of moral courage are correlated not as speculative, but as real and existing categories:

Не тот – высочайший,

С усмешкою гордой:

Кротчайший Георгий,

Тишайший Георгий [11, с. 42].

//Not that one- the highest,//

//With a grin proud://

//Meekest George,//

//Quietest George// [11, p. 42].

At the time of testing, when "St. George's time has come", Tsvetaeva's hero chooses his own "bitter" way, which he must go, looking up to St. George's act of faith and taking it as the spiritual support of his value system.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tsvetaeva's appeal to St. George's image was initiated by the peculiarities of the tipping time, which actualized the

problem of protecting the Fatherland, the choice and personal responsibility of man for everything that happens in reality.

Tsvetaeva turned to the folk myth in order to express her thoughts about the Dionysian beginning of life which underlies the nature of creativity.

It is noteworthy that in addition to S. Yesenin who had limited himself to accentuating the national component in "Yegoria" there were other outstanding exponents of the Silver age arts referring to the image of St. George directly or indirectly sought to solve the problem of a man's existential being.

Thus there are several factors of the Russian culture development as the Russian cosmism, the idea of synthesis of arts, the existential and metaphysical vector of the Russian philosophy development and peculiarities of its eschatology largely initiated by the tragic events of that time. They determined the peculiarities of artistic expression of St. George's image.

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