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Mythopoetics as a Subject and Method of Literary Research

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ABSTRACT

This study explores mythopoetics as both a subject and a method of literary research, offering a comprehensive analysis of its conceptual foundations, contemporary interpretations, and interdisciplinary applications. By examining the term's evolution and the semiotic approaches used to define it, the article underscores the significance of mythopoetics in understanding the interplay between myth and literature. The absence of a unified definition for mythopoetics highlights not only terminological ambiguities but also the necessity for a cohesive framework that can accommodate its use across diverse fields, including literature, linguistics, cultural studies, folklore, historiography, philosophy, and psychology. As a subject of study, mythopoetics investigates the reception, transformation, and reinterpretation of myths in artistic works, revealing how authors draw on mythological models, images, and motifs to explore cultural, psychological, and symbolic dimensions. As a method of analysis, mythopoetics provides a powerful tool for interpreting literary texts, enabling researchers to uncover the deeper structures and meanings embedded in mythological elements. This approach facilitates

the identification of intertextual and extratextual connections, shedding light on how myths evolve across historical and cultural contexts. The article argues that mythopoetics is not only a valid but also a highly effective framework for literary research, capable of revealing the intricate ways in which myths shape artistic expression. By integrating theoretical insights with practical applications, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of mythopoetics' role in both literary scholarship and interdisciplinary research, offering new perspectives on the enduring relevance of myth in contemporary culture.

Keywords: Literary Studies; Myth; Myth Reception; Myth Creation; Worldview

1. Introduction

Throughout literary eras, many artists have turned to myth, incorporating archaic and authentically authorial mythological elements into their work. The tendency of literature to orient towards the original myth can be traced back to antiquity[1]. The peak of such a phenomenon should be considered the literature of the 20th century when the penetration of mythostructures into the fabric of the work acquires a new effect, and in the 21st century—a qualitatively innovative form, mostly "playful", in which the author-postmodernist "reconstructs" the forms of the myth into completely unusual realities, sometimes extravagant[2].

The Greek words *mythos* (word, tale) and poietike (the art of creation) are two constituent components at the base of one of the literary concepts of the 20th century – mythopoetics, although, undoubtedly, mythopoetics is different from mythology and poetics, representing something else, special, although both myth and poetics are present in this concept[3]. The term "mythopoetics" itself was proposed by Tolkien in 1931 to denote myth creation[4]. Tolkien's ideas received further development among the leading artists of his time; they were actively discussed in the 1930s–60s by an informal literary discussion group organized at the University of Oxford, which also included his close friend Lewis[5].

The interest of literary scholars in mythopoetics and its relevance are associated with the use by writers of the depths of world culture, dissecting the myth as a universal model. Understanding the text becomes possible only through penetration into the layers of mythological perspectives, the realization of a "transphenomenal" intertransition (author ↔ myth)[6]. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the study of mythopoetics has gained particular prominence, which led to the emergence of variable concepts, a polysemantic terminological structure, its multi-vector interpretations, polar approaches to the illumination of the problems of functioning, etymology of myth elements, etc.

2. Literature Review

The term "mythopoetics" occupies a special place in literary theory because the opinions of scholars on this concept are diametrically opposed. Krebel[7], for example, writes that this term essentially has not found application in foreign literary studies, at least if judged by the titles of monographic studies or articles, for example, in English, or by the works of such famous mythologists as Lévi-Strauss[8] or Eliade[9].

However, in Russian literary studies, the mythopoetic discourse has not been ignored by scholars; on the contrary, it has been actively researched in the last decade by both well-known and young scientists. Without aiming for a comprehensive analysis of the problem, let us focus on those interpretations of mythopoetics that are most characteristic of the contemporary understanding of mythopoetic discourse on the one hand, and on the other hand, on its components that serve as the tools of our research.

Thus, Soldatkina[10] asserts that the difficulty in defining the term "mythopoetics" is due to the fact that this concept combines two different creative processes: myth reception and myth creation. Under myth reception, the researcher understands the process of artistic reading and perception of the myth, its subsequent rethinking and assimilation, and under myth creation – the process of producing new myths. Having a similar view on the interpretation of the term "mythopoetics," Gadzhiev[11] suggests dividing it into mythopoetics as the name of the object of study (archetypal and symbolic in works and its components: composition, plot, images) and as the name of the method of literary analysis, aimed at studying these phenomena. Meletinsky[12] believes that mythopoetics is a part of poetics that explores not individual mythologems

assimilated by the artist, but the holistic mythopoetic model of the world reflected by him and, accordingly, his myth consciousness, realized in the system of symbols and other poetic categories.

Studying the genesis and transformation of mythopoetic paradigms in Russian prose of the 20th century, Kornienko[13] notes the ambiguity in the definition of the mythopoetic, caused by the very nature of the concept, which is characterized by the complexity and heterogeneity of semantic and functional structures, and offers several interconnected and complementary definitions of the essence of mythopoetics: mythopoetics as a reflection of myth consciousness, as a poetic device, a methodological principle, and an object of research.

The mythopoetic in the system of literary connections is read by Kozubovskaya[14] as a mechanism, the function of which is to generate new cultural meanings, a new interpretation of the text, which necessarily includes its concretization. The mythological code, in her opinion, by creating variations of a certain invariant, gives artistic works new cultural meanings, formed "at the text level".

Polonsky[15], considering mythopoetics as a branch of "mythological science," identifies two of its directions—semantic and syntactic. The first denotes the "mythopoetic model of the world," which is a totality of all myths of a certain tradition and exists as a connection between nature and man; the second reveals the signification content of the myth. Kozolupenko[16] also defines mythopoetics as the totality of cultural heritage, rightly emphasizing that mythopoetics and myth are not synonymous phenomena, although they are interconnected. Bokoveli[17] defines mythopoetics as a certain totality of cultural traces – a reflection of the dominance of mythopoetic worldview, based on the traditional type of myth. In terms of content, the author represents mythopoetics as a corpus of actually ancient myths and associated rituals, songs, proverbs, drawings, tales, as well as a certain corpus of folk texts from later times.

As a creative principle that concentrates and transforms the aesthetics and poetics of previous epochs, generating the semantic richness and density of an artistic work, Zhuravlev[18] considers mythopoetic. According to the author, each era has its own cultural myth and its own artistic method for incorporating the myth-ritual context into the poetic design, and the development of culture, based on the concentration and transformation of existing experience and creative achievements, comes down to a revision of known archetypes from a new perspective. The aspect of the mythopoetic is the result of myth's integration into another cultural system, the transfer of mythological text into the conditions of non-mythological consciousness, and the reorganization of myth according to the laws and forms of poetics[18]. In the cultural sense, following Lotman, the scholar defines mythopoetics as the natural, organic language of culture, highly symbolic since it is based on metaphorical constructions characteristic of all spheres of culture. The mythopoetic device arises as an imitation of myth and is read as a metaphorical construction, as an alternative to the singular (semiotic) definition of things and phenomena[18]. Therefore, mythopoetics is a special, alternative to the analytical and rationalist form of world perception.

The absence of a unified definition has led to a significant divergence in the understanding of the concept among scholars who freely experiment in the field of terminology. Tokareva[19] considers a diverse palette of definitions related to the presence of the mythological beginning in artistic practice. The term "mythopoetics," in her opinion, was created with the intention of emphasizing the difference between the archaic myth, the artistry of which is unconscious and therefore not considered by literary studies, and the myth that has organically entered the structure of the literary work. According to her, as soon as there is a loss of direct belief in the events narrated by the myth, its images and plots move to another level—they become phenomena of an aesthetic nature. It is at this limit that the archaic myth ceases to exist and a new formation appears – "mythopoesis"[19]. This term, to some extent synonymous with "mythopoetics," was introduced into scientific discourse by representatives of the Anglo-American school of myth criticism (Frye[20], Bodkin[21], Slochower[22]), understanding it as the system of all genres of artistic creativity, thematically or structurally related to the archaic myth[23].

The work of Mironov[24] is devoted to the study of the mythopoetic function and the definition of mythopoetics as a functional subsystem within the system of folklore-literary connections. Having analyzed a wide range of scientific meanings and definitions understood by scholars today under the concept of "mythopoetics," the author also emphasizes the contradictoriness of the proposed definitions.

Pashinina[25] sees the main cultural function of mythopoetics in that it acts as a connecting link in the system of complex relationships between mythology, folklore, and literature. Referring folklore-literary genres to myth, Gabrielyan[26] interprets the folklore text as "conditionally homogeneous" to the mythological environment, whereas the literary text, on the contrary, as "heterogeneous" due to its rhetorical and poetic status.

Pogrebnaya[27] identifies four approaches to defining mythopoetics: "1) reflection of myths in the creative authorial worldview; 2) 'mythological tradition,' that is, the use of previous worldview templates in a later historical time; 3) reflects the individual worldview; 4) 'methodological principle of researching the semantics of literary creativity'"[27]. Despite the complexity of the definition, such a definition of the term seems to us the most comprehensive; therefore, we will use it as an effective tool in our research.

The aim of the research: to carry out an analysis of mythopoetics as a subject and method of literary research.

In connection with the set research goal, we attempted to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the main directions of mythopoetics? 2) What are the main research directions of mythopoetics? 3) What are the stages of mythopoetic analysis of the text?

3. Materials and Methods

The theoretical basis of the article consisted of the systematic method of studying mythopoetics as a subject and method of literary research and the systematization of the results of scientific works on the problem.

In accordance with the purpose of the research, at the first stage of the research, we conducted a selection of scientific sources on the research problem.

At the second stage of the research, based on the analysis of the selected scientific sources, the main directions of mythopoetics, the main research directions of mythopoetics, and the main stages of mythopoetic analysis of the text were identified.

The following methods were used: theoretical generalization; abstract-logical.

4. Results

Contemporary scholars, analyzing the mythopoetics of the works of specific writers, set themselves the task of classifying the main forms of combining the semantic field of myth with the narrative text. Such classifications represent, first and foremost, a generalization of the main approaches of authors to myths, the principles of the functioning of elements of myths in the artistic text. Three main directions of mythopoetics are highlighted **(Table 1)**.

Table 1. Main directions of mythopoetics.

N	Direction of Mythopoetics
1	Use of traditional mythological plots and images, involving both interpretation and transformation (mythological elements directly shape the problematic of the work)
2	Creation of an author's myth, when the organization of the artistic text is subject to the laws of myth poetics (myth is used as a model structure, on the pattern of which a new myth is created)
3	Mythological stylization, in which the author only formally imitates the style of myth (myth plays the role of only a decorative element)

The analysis of studies showed that mythopoetics as a subject and method of research was developed by different scientific schools in the following directions (**Table 2**).

The analysis of approaches to conducting mythopoetic analysis of the text allowed us to propose the following step-by-step implementation (**Table 3**).

5. Discussion

By summarizing numerous studies existing in contemporary humanities, it is possible to identify several key approaches to understanding mythopoetics. Mythopoetics refers to a creative system that draws on traditional mythological schemes, models, plots, and images, reinterpreting them through artistic and poetic frameworks. This system encompasses both the personal creative processes of the artist and the broader cultural and psychological mechanisms that shape mythological thought.

Firstly, the understanding of mythopoetics as a creative system based on the artistically motivated reference to tra-

Table 2. Directions of mythopoetics research.

N	Research Direction	Scientific School
1	Reconstruction of archaic myths and mythological semantics by means of semiotics	Lévi-Strauss[8], Ivanov, Toporov[28]
2	Combination of the structure and semantics of myth with the literary text, explanation of the conceptual schemes present in it	Polonsky[15], Pogrebnaya[27]
3	Study of the function of myth in the cultural system, interpretation of myth as a universal cultural structure in relationships with other forms of culture	Lotman[29], Uspensky[30], Meletinsky[12]

Note: compiled by the author based on the analysis of scientific literature.

Table 3. Stages of mythopoetic analysis of the text.

Stage	Stage Content
I	Identification of myths, images, motifs borrowed by the writer from mythology, use of individual compositional and plot moves of the myth for organizing the artistic world of their own work
II	Analysis of the mythological material creatively reinterpreted by the writer in accordance with the ideological-aesthetic direction of the literary context
III	Determination of the function of myth in the text
IV	Establishing the place and significance of the borrowed mythological material for creating the artistic picture of the world of the artist, his artistic manner

Note: Compiled by the author based on the analysis of scientific literature.

ditional mythological schemes, models, plots, and images, and to the poetics of archaic myth and ritual. This creative system includes both the personal and life-creative system of the artist[16], the worldview system of mythological thought processes[18], the author's technique of creative modeling of the mythological manner[23], and the generalized system of reorganizing the myth according to the laws of poetic creativity[25]. It is this system that represents the object of study of contemporary literary studies, linguistics, psychology, cultural studies, folklore studies, and other sciences. This also encompasses the consideration of mythopoetics as a creative form that organizes reality and assimilates past cultural epochs[15].

For example, in *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass, the protagonist Oskar Matzerath's symbolic relationship with his drum reflects a mythopoetic reimagining of cultural trauma and identity in post-war Germany[31]. Grass draws on traditional mythological motifs, such as the "eternal child" archetype, while reorganizing them through poetic creativity to address modern historical and psychological realities. Similarly, *Harry Potter* reworks archetypal myths of the hero's journey, blending them with modern themes of friendship, power, and morality[32]. J.K. Rowling's use of mythological structures—such as the quest narrative, the battle between good and evil, and the symbolic significance of magical ob-

jects—demonstrates how mythopoetics serves as a bridge between ancient myth and contemporary storytelling. These examples illustrate how mythopoetics functions as both a creative system and a method of literary analysis, enabling authors to reinterpret traditional myths in ways that resonate with modern audiences.

Mythopoetics are always allusive: sensations of the eternal are created through various implicit hints, represented by symbolic images, expanded metaphors, multivalent epithets, stylistic, and rhythmic constructions[11]. For instance, in *The Game of Thrones*, the recurring motif of "winter is coming" serves as a powerful symbolic image, evoking both a literal seasonal change and a metaphor for existential threat and cyclical history[33]. This allusiveness draws on cultural constants like the archetype of the "long winter" from Norse mythology, creating a sense of timelessness and universality. Similarly, in *Harry Potter*, the symbolic use of the "Deathly Hallows"—a triangle, circle, and line—combines multivalent epithets and mythological imagery to represent themes of mortality, power, and the quest for immortality, resonating with ancient myths about the human condition.

Mythopoetics are also characterized by analogies referring to important natural and cultural constants: well-known places, times, legends, and common concepts[13]. American superhero films, such as those in the Marvel Cinematic

Universe, frequently employ this technique. For example, the character of Thor is directly modeled on the Norse god of thunder, drawing on well-known legends and cultural constants to explore themes of power, responsibility, and redemption[34]. The mythical realm of Asgard serves as a symbolic place that bridges the ancient and the modern, grounding the narrative in a shared cultural heritage while allowing for contemporary reinterpretation. These examples demonstrate how mythopoetics uses allusiveness and cultural analogies to create works that feel both timeless and deeply rooted in universal human experiences. The difficulty of unequivocally defining the subject of mythopoetics, in our view, is due to the fact that this concept combines two different creative processes: myth reception and myth creation. By myth reception, we understand the process of artistic reading and perception of myth, its subsequent rethinking and assimilation. Myth creation is the process of producing new myths.

Scientific debates continue around the concept of "myth creation" in literary studies. Some researchers understand it broadly as any contemporary reference to myth[15, 17], such as the way *Harry Potter* reimagines the myth of the hero's journey or how American superhero films like *Black Panther* draw on African mythology to create new cultural narratives. Others differentiate myth creation into conscious and unconscious acts[12, 18], as seen in *The Tin Drum*, where Günter Grass consciously reworks mythological archetypes like the "eternal child," while also unconsciously reflecting the collective trauma of post-war Europe. Some scholars emphasize the individual or collective nature of creating new myths[24], such as the collective myth-making in *The Game of Thrones*, where George R.R. Martin synthesizes medieval legends and folklore into a modern epic. Conversely, other scholars stress that myth creation can only be called the process of producing new myths and define it as a phenomenon characteristic of European literature of the modern era[10], as exemplified by the way *The Lord of the Rings* constructs an entirely new mythological universe[35].

We believe that mythopoetics, arising from myth creation, is contrasted with it in the main; if myth creation is a process, then mythopoetics is its static result. In our opinion, mythopoetics is not limited to myth reception alone, as it represents a creative process, or to myth creation, as the latter is impossible without prior myth reception. Therefore,

mythopoetics is simultaneously a substantive and formal category; it is both a process with unified universal principles of worldview and specific internal laws, and the result of artistic world modeling. Based on the multivariance of possible cultural models, it transforms the mythological worldview into stable cultural schemes, into new poetic forms. For example, *Harry Potter* transforms the myth of the hero's journey into a modern Bildungsroman, while *The Game of Thrones* reinterprets medieval myths of power and destiny to critique contemporary political systems.

As a leading pattern of thought, mythopoetics is primarily characteristic of archaic epochs, but as a "text" it is actualized throughout the historical development of human culture, especially in folklore and literature. Since folklore and literature are genetically linked to myth, mythopoetics, through myth reception, acts as a substantive and formative component of artistic form. Mythopoetics functions by forming new meanings defined by specific socio-historical and cultural conditions and their subjective authorial reception. For instance, in *The Tin Drum*, Grass uses mythopoetics to explore the tension between individual and collective memory in post-war Germany, while in *Black Panther*[36], the mythopoetic reimagining of African mythology serves to address themes of identity, colonialism, and empowerment.

Besides defining the subject of mythopoetics, an important link in literary science is the mythopoetic analysis of the text, using mythopoetics as a method of researching literary phenomena containing mythological elements, with the aim of studying their reception, transformation, and development, their function in creating a holistic picture of the world, as precisely the mythopoetic method of analyzing an artistic work facilitates a deep study of its content, explains the motivation of actions and behavior of characters, and reveals intercultural and intertextual connections[27]. For example, a mythopoetic analysis of *Harry Potter* might explore how the series reinterprets the myth of the "chosen one" to reflect modern anxieties about identity and destiny, or how *The Game of Thrones* uses the myth of the "hero's fall" to critique the corrupting nature of power.

This method allows for exploring both intertextual connections and extratextual ones—connections with culture, religion, the author's biography. As a method of interpreting artistic works, mythopoetics helps explain the motivation of actions and behavior of characters, opens new meanings of

the poetic text. The mythopoetic method is one of the possible analytical ways, allowing the identification of mythological motives, plots, and images in the work, which, due to their own capacity and expressiveness, enable the author to give the work significant and multi-layered content. Interpreting the text through mythological motifs allows revealing its implicit symbolic meaning, evidencing the richness and ambiguity of the narrative. For instance, analyzing *The Tin Drum* through a mythopoetic lens reveals how Grass uses the myth of the "eternal child" to explore themes of innocence, guilt, and historical trauma, while a similar analysis of *Black Panther* might focus on how the film reinterprets the myth of the "returning king" to address contemporary issues of diaspora and cultural reclamation.

Analyzing works, it seems appropriate to us to use its step-by-step implementation presented in **Table 2**. However, researchers also identify other main stages of analysis for a mythopoetic work, such as 1) identifying mythological motifs and plots that the author uses in their work at all textual levels, studying their transformation in relation to the primary myth; 2) analyzing actions, considering the development of character traits of characters in the plane of their mythological origin and thinking; 3) establishing the significance of the new myth for understanding reality as a phenomenon developing from the author's and his characters' point of view, i.e., in a historical perspective and in relation to the meanings of other myths of the specified historical-cultural space[17]. For example, in *Harry Potter*, the mythopoetic analysis might focus on how the "Deathly Hallows" symbol transforms the myth of the quest for immortality, or in *The Game of Thrones*, how the "Long Night" myth evolves into a symbol of existential threat and cyclical history.

When using this method, the researcher proposes to analyze the work through the prism of analyzing mythemes at the hypotextual, textual, and hypertextual levels. At the first level, elements of analysis are the structural elements of the mythological work (title, subtitle, exposition, inciting incident, rising action and climax, falling action, epilogue) and genre-semiotic components of the text (space, time, character system, language codes). The main object of analysis at the textual level is the system of components: thematic, compositional, chronotopic, characterological, plot, within which various types and forms of mythological elements are studied, their semantic content, the dynamics of changes in their meanings. At the hypertextual level, due to semantic transformations (polarization or inversion), the meaning of mythologism develops, giving it the status of a historical mega-symbol, performing an evolutionary function, which reproduces the mental values of society as a whole and whose understanding is adequate within the mega-text. Further development leads to the transition of such a mega-symbol into the category of mythological concepts, which are reproduced in a significant number of texts within the cycle of works of national literature or within the entire culture[17]. For instance, the "One Ring" in *The Lord of the Rings* functions as a mega-symbol, evolving from a simple plot device into a representation of power, corruption, and moral choice, resonating across cultures and historical contexts.

As Gabrielyan[26] noted, the problem of the origins of artistic creation has long been associated with myth, as any artist uses, consciously or not, myths that their works borrow, transform, or convey. Some writers denote the connection of their work with myth through the attraction to its title of the names of mythological heroes, others refer to the mythological context, while others introduce a mythological detail or name into the work with greater or lesser insistence, containing the key to its understanding[7]. For example, in *Harry Potter*, the names of characters like Sirius Black (referencing the dog star in mythology) or Albus Dumbledore (derived from the Latin word for "white" and Old English for "bumblebee") carry mythological connotations that deepen their symbolic roles. Similarly, in Black Panther, the name "Wakanda" evokes mythical African utopias, while the character of Killmonger draws on the archetype of the tragic antihero. The researcher considers the identification of myth in the work both as a form of palimpsest writing, in which myth serves as an intertext, and as an interpretation of the mythological plot-image material, and as a factor in the manifestation of phenomena of mythopoetics and myth creation.

6. Conclusions

In contemporary philology, mythopoetics occupies an important place as an object of study—thanks to the universality and comprehensiveness of the analysis of artistic and literary works, the possibility of getting as close as possible to the deep content of the artistic text and the psychology of

artists' creativity, and to identify specific features of reflection in literature. Throughout the development of European culture, we observe a constant reference by creative personalities in various forms of art to myth. Writers artistically process mythological material, reinterpret it in accordance with their vision of modernity, analyze the current problems of the universe, and then create their own myth, in which they reveal their own worldview and philosophical model of being (hence the concept of "author's myth").

Mythopoetics, as a poetic transformation of myth on both substantive and formal levels, represents the interweaving of myth reception and myth creation. The use of the mythopoetic technique allows the author to briefly capture a significant volume of existing cultural content in the work, expanding the narrative chronotope of the story, and consciously experiment in the field of myth creation.

The use of mythopoetics as a research method as a tool for literary research is not only appropriate and motivated but also productive, as it allows identifying the presence and characteristics of the functioning of mythological models, images, and motifs in artistic works.

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