
NEOPAGANISM IN ART AND SOCIAL PROCESSES OF MODERN SOCIETY

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Abstract

In modern culture and art one can find many signs of ancient beliefs and mythological concepts. The authors reveal these phenomena and study their role in modern spirituality and their mental and psychological influence. The article is aimed at uncovering the causes and consequences of the archaic world awareness and ancient pagan beliefs renewal in modern art. The authors analyse the phenomena of neopaganism in art and reveal two aspects. The first aspect is the ancient ideological concept associated with people's deep spiritual sources and forms of beliefs. This phenomenon is associated with the collective memory and ethno-psychological characteristics of every nation. The second aspect is the use of belief in ancient myths and practices in order to manipulate people for social and commercial purposes. The research results show that the experience of reclaiming the natural and social environment of the ancient man has been accumulated for thousands of years in myths and legends. Modern people, due to the internal and external reasons, address this experience when trying to solve their problems with the help of neopagan practices or the formation of quasi-religious movements.

Keywords: antiquity, totemism, animism, spiritualism, simulacrum

1. Introduction

The analysis of past periods of culture shows that pagan concepts and values constantly return and are being recreated. In the modern national culture of Kazakhstan, ancient mythological, Tengrian and shamanistic motifs are widespread. In the country, the festival 'Tāñir dawısı' ('The Voice of Tengri') and the art gallery 'Umay' are held annually. These ethnographic exhibitions present information about ancient beliefs and traditions.

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Recreation of pagan beliefs and mythological concepts is closely connected with ideological concepts among researchers. The book 'ASiA' by O. Suleimenov [1], published in the 80s of the last century, gave rise to enthusiasm for studying Kazakh history and culture. The works of A. Margulan [2], K. Akishev [3] and A. Akishev [4], A. Konyratbaev [5], which belong to the same period, discovered new borders for deepening into the secrets of history. The works of archaeologists and philologists, writers and artists recreate ancient beliefs, as well as raise new myths and legends that feed the phenomenon of paganism. Ancient paganism, originating from the ancient folk culture, is transformed today into a new socio-cultural and religious-philosophical phenomenon – neopaganism. Modern art, recreating pagan themes and plots, changes the meaning and content of paganism and, at the same time, introduces viewers and readers to the context of neopaganism born by the needs and demands of the new time. One of the sources for art is mythology. Myths are indisputably an inexhaustible source of art. According to the French writer R. Caillois, the eternal life of myths is in the contradictions of human nature [6]. Folklore and fantastic, as well as mythological motifs, can be associated with dramatic situations. The main meaning is that it is necessary to concretize various phenomena of psychological possibilities in one particular world. That is, that the modern man, like the ancient man, always faces a choice; this choice forms a dramatic situation. The dramatic situation gives rise to a deep individual psychological experience of the character, covering the character's essence. According to R. Caillois, the character (or a hero) is an individual who can solve this problem, in a good or bad way, but still can find a way out of this situation. The French writer argues: "The spirit of abstraction and coarse simplifications (rather accurately denoted by the terms 'rationalism' and 'positivism') needlessly cast into the utter darkness all those elements of life experience that did not fit within its narrow framework. Such a position of misunderstanding carried in itself the germ of its own death and inevitably had disastrous consequences in many respects. In fact, the human spirit is eternally confronted with extremely alarming problems, finding satisfaction only in solution." [6, p. 133-134]

The myth is a set of beliefs, which give people a certain sense of life. The myth makes it possible for people and society to adequately adapt to the environment [6, p. 135-136]. Further, R. Caillois suggests that the recreation of a myth is not a goal in itself. A person seeks to expand their spiritual horizons through a myth. R. Caillois concludes "Mythology and its reconstruction cannot be an end in itself. The main thing is the ability to transmit information for the current generation and society through such a reconstruction. This meaninglessness being transformed into a national disease, even if it is not possible to show a direct path to self-knowledge, can be defeated by reaching a source of information that gives a certain creative idea." [6, p. 138] This reasoning of the author shows that myth is not only a reconstruction of events from ancient times or a projection on modernity in a certain aspect, it is one of the deepest manifestations of the syncretic unity of man and nature, of all that

exists. In other words, the attitude of the simple-hearted person, not aimed at 'deceiving one's nature' is a form of world-consciousness, when the mind and feelings, sanity and emotions are united.

2. The role of mythological knowledge in the literature

In the archaic religious beliefs of many nations, there is an internal feature of pantheism, with the inherent syncretic integrity of the micro- and macrocosm. Although many centuries have passed, the motifs for perceiving the world from such a pantheistic position are preserved as an important element of national world consciousness, mentality, and spiritual culture. The deep and systematic comprehension of the ideological aspects of Kazakh epics, legends, and traditions, makes it possible to find the arguments for what was mentioned above. One of the fundamental concepts of the Kazakh world-consciousness – 'The concept of the bright world' (Zharyk dunie) depicts the integrity and unity of these two worlds.

Modern neopaganism idealizes this thinking of an early-communal person, who perceives themselves not separately, but together with nature, and seeks to over-embellish it. According to neopaganism, human consciousness, from the moment of separation from nature, undergoes an incurable disease. It breaks away from its roots and turns into a fading creature.

Features of mythological thinking are revealed in totemism, in the evolution of the image of a human-animal. In totemism, an animal implies not only magical power, which dominates and controls an individual but also denotes sacred power, which protects, patronizes and protects a human.

The development of the image of a totem animal was closely related to arguments about various aspects of human nature. Therefore, the image of the human-animal in the myths, while retaining its original meaning, is complemented by new content. Now, not mythological, folklore-fantastic factors, but human problems come to the front row. The image of human inherits properties from an animal. For example, a fox turns into a symbol of a human's cunning; a bear becomes a symbol of naivety; a lion – a symbol of danger. In such myths, the main attention is paid to a human, and the animal becomes to a certain extent a metaphorical image of the human essence. The social content, the image of a person, society, social environment through a metaphoric form or character are the main elements. The metaphor here, on the one hand, is a consequence of an organic connection with the myth, on the other hand, a method of a veiled image of truth. Therefore, behind each mythological character lies a social content. We also often encounter mythological influence on modern art. In modern realistic prose, nature is often used as a tool for describing a person's state. At the same time, mystical scenes and motifs also become an inseparable part of modern art. This means that although the mythological consciousness has undergone a fundamental change, it has nevertheless found its place in contemporary art. Myth, as a form of the

syncretic inseparability of consciousness, retains this property in the course of its historical development.

Another feature of the artistic myth is the ability to express life in a truly sensual inseparability. As in the original forms of oral literature, myth is also the result of collective creativity. In myths, the hero is not separated from the team and does not perceive themselves separately from the team. An individual, even if different from other members with various qualities and abilities, still sees themselves as part of the team. At the existing threat to a tradition of the life of the collective, this archetypical consciousness is recreated in each member of the collective with particular force. Reviving legends and ancient religious beliefs, people look for their foundations for ethnic-identity.

Mythology – even in a deformed state – seeks to depict specific phenomena of life. Therefore, it differs from religious consciousness. Religious consciousness equates the images of beliefs with the truth. God in religious consciousness is perceived as a living entity that dominates people. Derivatives of religious consciousness are perceived not as the mystical fruits of human consciousness, but as transcendence of human consciousness and spirit, and the second reality opposed to it.

When considering any sphere of modern art, one can often meet works based on the motifs of ancient myths or based on the transformation of myths according to modern realities. Works of art by such classics as J.P. Sartre [7], A. Camus [8], F. Kafka [9], M. Bulgakov [10] are full of plot constructions and images borrowed from ancient, biblical, national myths. By using appropriately ancient myths and religious beliefs, spiritual positions, and values, revealing the actual problems of their era and passing them on to their readers, the works of these writers managed to raise great interest and great demand.

Why are myths interesting to modern writers? What attracts readers to the works built on mythological motifs?

The mythological form and plot, going beyond the naturalistic and one-sided realism, make it possible to fill the work with the magical truth, bubbling in the depths of the human spirit.

A realistic work of art is aimed at the active creativity of the perceiving subject. The reader is required to have a deep associative practice for perception. For example, in the work of M. Bulgakov 'The Master and Margarita' mystical and mythological motifs are delicately twisted to reveal the problems of modern society – morality and immorality, faith and betrayal. Aitmatov in his works revives the ancient concepts and beliefs and reveals the essence of modern society, human weakness and spiritual poverty of an individual [11]. Aitmatov comprehends the problem of spiritual poverty through a work of art and therefore warns people and society about the danger posed by the consequences of forgetting the past and ancient spiritual attitudes.

The writer not only revives ancient myths and beliefs, he again explains the truth through a work of art. By drawing attention to the unknown bounds of life, the author reveals the current problems of the era and society. In other words, a writer is not limited to the reconstruction of myths, he deconstructs the

myths and thereby give them a new modern sound. Thus, myths and ancient beliefs are included in the modernity, closely intertwined with its processes. For example, J. Updike [12], inspired by the myth of the ancient centaur Chiron, wrote his novel 'The Centaurus'. The writer is concerned with the eternal problem of human nature – the encounter of animal and social principles in human nature, as well as opposites and struggles that torment the human soul and spirit. J. Updike builds the plot of 'The Centaurus' on the tradition of separating the spiritual and physical principles of human nature in world culture [13]. Like C. Aitmatov, J. Updike also contrasts the cruelty that has overwhelmed modern society with the mercy and kindness of his hero. No matter how cruel the world is it will not be able to deprive a person of their aspirations for good and mercy. It is easy to notice that these themes are intertwined with the ideas of 'Bright World' (Zharyk dunie) and 'Be a man' (Adam bol) of the Kazakh worldview. For a person, the idea 'if the era has become a fox, then turn into a hound dog' is not the main, but never losing mercy and kindness to subordinate the animal base to the human origin is. The modern mass-propheying culture, by reviving the peculiarities of primitive communal consciousness, archetypal beliefs, opened the way for a deformed image of them in the public consciousness.

Researcher I. Rezepova names two reasons for the genesis of neopaganism in modern culture. The first is the process of global secularization. The second is the traditional values that have undergone a change in postmodern culture [14]. Pagan motifs manifested through the secularization of culture, have become the cause of the increasing influence of the components of neopaganism in the world. Such components of neopagan world consciousness are being introduced into all spheres of intellectual, religious, socio-political, every day and communicative-informational life. The elements of neopagan worldview can be found in modern philosophy and literature, music and art, in the teachings of religious sects, in politics and social relationships, in styles of clothing and manners of communication, as well as the media.

3. Neopaganism as crowd manipulation - mechanisms for the formation of archaic worldview

There are various mechanisms for the formation of a mass-propheying culture in modern society, and the elements of the religious-mythological consciousness have their own place in this process. The English scientist R. Silverstone states the following: "Television is a language and a myth, it retains a cultural practice that was considered to be characteristic of a primitive society". In his opinion, myths enrich the phenomena that are born in modern art, suppress confrontations between different types of knowledge and practices, this brings it closer to the type of television narration. This is due to the fact that ritual properties are inherent in television and myths [15].

The Internet has made it possible for the public to get acquainted with a much greater amount of information about neopaganism and its various organizations, communities, as well as their programs. Today, features of neopaganism manifest themselves differently, for example, some neopagan groups call for a return to the traditions of their ancestors, others suggest ways to overcome crises and threats of modernity, and others raise their nation and continue talking about its unique identity. On television, in newspapers and magazines, there are various advertisements that offer to solve any problems through magic or fortune telling. Many Internet sites offer horoscopes and services to cleanse the aura and change destinies, open the path to happiness. It can be said that paganism has become an inseparable part of the modern world and one cannot deny the enormous influence of television, the Internet and modern media on the process of its revival. While for the reader and the viewer with a developed consciousness and a well-established worldview, this is something of an exotic nature that evokes a passing interest, then for children and adolescents it is a very dangerous phenomenon. The reason is that most modern computer games and cartoons are based on similar neo-mythological and neopagan motifs. For example, one can mention the digital game 'The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt' [16, 17]. Young people no longer distinguish the difference between the real truth and virtual truth, the difference between good and evil. Thus, the mystification of consciousness takes place, the projection of the mystification onto the truth.

Some TV-shows, e.g. on Russian television, show spiritualism and magic, esotericism and modern scientific achievements without distinguishing between a fantasy world and the real life, fiction and truth, myth and scientific opinion. Of course, these programs are not aimed at revealing the truth, the achievement of truth, the main thing for such programs is the rating – how to attract more viewers. The desire to learn something unknown is an indispensable instrument of enrichment. Therefore, such programs and Internet sites exploit these aspirations, seeking to make a profit.

In recent years, similar trends have begun to appear on Kazakh television. The heroes of TV-shows visit a sacred place, touch a sacred monument or an object, such as a holy tree, receive miraculous powers and healing, and their destinies turn for the better. According to the authors of such programs, this practice is capable of invoking the power of ancient beliefs to help people.

Another modern manifestation of neopaganism is neo-shamanism. Starting with kumalakshi (a fortune-teller who uses sheep droppings) and emshi-tauips (healers) sitting along the streets, and up to high-class psychics with several diplomas and a great number of certificates promising to clean one's home and family from evil eye and damage. Modern neo-shamans – whose ancestors too allegedly had miraculous powers – strive to make extensive use of the language of modern science, various concepts and methods. However, the meaning of these concepts, used by modern shamans, is inherently a set of a number of terms, while their methods resemble occult-magical acts. They operate a range of instruments from traditional shamanic paraphernalia (various

musical instruments, kamcha, a miraculous staff, and others) to devices that imitate the instruments of scientific experiments. Using these tools, they assure that they can identify weak spots in the body's bio-energy, while others use domestic animals for this purpose. They consider palmistry and astrology as the directions of human knowledge and consider themselves to have mastered forgotten and secret knowledge.

Thus, the analysis of the manifestations of the archaic world-consciousness taking place in contemporary culture and art gives us the opportunity to examine them, dividing them conditionally into two stages. The first period, covering the 60-80s of the last century, mainly developed in the intellectual and spiritual aspect. The revival in this period in art and literature, in scientific and popular science editions, of the archaic worldview and mythology, ancient beliefs and concepts revealed deep historical layers of national consciousness and essence and became a period of combining ancient values with modern social needs. Writers, scholars and artists in their works, engaged in the reconstruction of the patterns of world perception, characteristic of the archaic periods of national history and culture, have contributed to the preservation of their own 'I', their uniqueness and originality. Researchers provided spiritual and cultural continuity, which came down to modern society from past centuries. This tradition recently manifested itself in the works of such scholars as S. Kondybaev [18], A. Kodar [A. Kodar, *Dolgiy put tyurkskogo boga. Tengrivedenie (The Long Path of the Turkic God. Tengriduction)*, <https://yadi.sk/i/UGa2kqyZduyLv>], M. Orynbekov [19]. The analysis of archaic world-consciousness, mythology and ancient beliefs carried out in their works was not intended to revive paganism. They proved the syncretic nature of the world's perception of the people, and the fact that in its depths many layers merge with each other.

Reconstruction of pagan beliefs in the second period, originating from the end of the 80s, led to a mass manifestation of it as one of the phenomena of popular culture. Neopaganism of this period was associated with social groups and movements that pursued political and ideological goals, and with individuals and entire communities seeking to turn it into a source of business income. The revival of paganism in Eurasia in the 1980s, right before the collapse of the Soviet Union influenced the strengthening of ethno national consciousness and mood. Therefore, political movements take the elements of neopaganism as the basis of their ideology. However, neopaganism, in the case of a religious movement, is a marginal phenomenon. This marginal feature and intrinsic diversity raise doubts about its ability to turn into a force capable of uniting the masses for specific purposes. Modern neopaganism gave rise to fluctuations in the public consciousness. However, it is not able to radically change the religious consciousness. It can manifest itself as an idea that conveys the mood of any social group seeking a future in the past or consoling themselves with the achievements of the past. Also, neopaganism can be preserved in the opinions of modern people as an ethnic phenomenon, limited to influencing the growth of

interest in ancient times, which received an exotic overtone, and in folk archaic traditions.

4. Manifestations and development strategies of neopaganism in the mass consciousness and culture

Manifestations of modern neopaganism in the mass consciousness and culture can be assessed as simulacra. The term was introduced in the second half of the 20th century by French post-modern philosophers. It accurately describes the elements of neopaganism in modern culture. Modern paganism and its views on values and concepts, magic and ritual actions are a simulacrum of 'neo-shamanism'. Their reconstruction of paganism is based on subjectivity and assumptions. The simulacrum is a perfect example – it shows the connection between the original and its copy or a similar type of it. This copy of the original (a simulacrum) can be close to true or false. It is difficult to call a copy of modern neopaganism close to true. It separates the ancient archaic beliefs from the depths of the household, religious-ideological, cultural and value spheres, which gave rise to it and a new cultural context at the same time. This leads to a change in the content and form of paganism. Information that has been preserved in archaeological, ethnographic, historical information does not make it possible to restore completely pagan concepts and rites. Modern neopagan groups, in order to determine the correctness and accuracy of their views and principles, rely on the recent information, the truth of which is doubtful. One of the most striking manifestations of this is the 'The Book of Veles' that was widely distributed among Russian neopagans [20]. Although among the scientific community this work is recognized as a fake, Russian neopagans do not doubt its truth. 'The Book of Veles', 'translated' by A. Asov [21], was especially widespread; some people even recognize it as a canon.

Some neopagans combine the pagan concepts and customs preserved in other nations (in many cases from neighbouring peoples living in the territory of one state) with the ancient beliefs of the people they are representatives of, strive to recreate the broken pagan customs and concepts.

Researchers give several strategies for adopting pagan customs from other ethnic cultures:

- 1) The strategy of genetic identity. Neopagans with local Asian or African roots explain their religious choices by returning to basics. From a psychological point of view, it is much easier for an individual to explain their pagan belief by returning to their origins than to be accused of accepting someone else's.
- 2) Apprenticeship strategy. Neopagans who have learned from the fortunetellers and healers – the bearers of pagan rites – hide behind their teachers and seek to prove their involvement in paganism, using the knowledge and teaching habits. A neopagan, pointing out that they received knowledge from teachers who adhere to various religious customs, can declare that all these customs are not alien to them.

- 3) Learning or research strategy. If from a genetic point of view, a neopagan was not involved in the religious traditions they chose, they can declare that they gained knowledge about these religious traditions through the study of sacred books, collections of myths and legends, archaeological, ethnographic, religious sources and sources of oral literature. In their opinion, higher knowledge is much more important than involvement in religious traditions.
- 4) The strategy of pragmatism. Neopagans believe it is better to stick to this strategy than to justify themselves by accepting other people's religious traditions. They believe that religious wisdom is not the property of one nation, that it belongs to humanity and that each person can take from it what they want and what will lead them to success.
- 5) The strategy of the election. Here the believer does not choose a convenient or appropriate religious tradition, on the contrary, a religious tradition chooses a believer. Some unknown force or God (or idols) urges them to accept this religious tradition, gives an omen.
- 6) Reincarnation strategy. Like the genetic one, this strategy also represents a neopagan as the one that has mastered the religious tradition. However, their genetic relationship with the people adhering to paganism is not due to their present life, but to their past life [15].

Although these strategies can be implemented, the religious traditions and rites formed under the influence of other cultures and having other values and mental features will remain alien to a neopagan. In the religious traditions of every nation, the totals of practice accumulated over thousands of years are manifested. The ability for the period of one generation to fully perceive and revive this practice is very doubtful. This practice, as we said above, as the relationship between the original and its copy, the copy will always remain a copy, to a certain extent it may be indistinguishable from the original, but it will never become one. At the same time, the modern generation is unlikely to be able to accurately revive the religious practices and traditions of previous generations. In each epoch, the views and the worldviews, values and mental-psychological structures of a person and society will undergo changes. This forms the unique spiritual practice of each generation, and when perceiving the past spiritual heritage and reviving it, the handwriting of this practice will be imprinted [22].

5. Conclusions

Analysis of the ratio of archaic worldviews and modern art shows their ability to search for eternal sacred action in human nature. The spirituality of a modern person, in spite of their race and nationality, gender and psycho-mental differences, feed on uniform archetypal symbols and images. Compared to world religions, it is this mythological consciousness that implies the unity of the spiritual world of all mankind, merging in the same direction of its search and values. This unity and inseparability of mankind, in comparison with religion

and Philosophy, more clearly and fully show the art. Summing up the problems raised in the article, we make the following conclusions.

Mythological worldview and ancient beliefs are inseparable parts of culture and art. They are sources of inspiration for aesthetic consciousness as the archetypes of the consciousness of human spirituality. In realistic art and culture, mythological world-awareness and ancient beliefs play a positive role, they enrich the spirituality of a person.

The desacralization of human nature, which began in modern times, pragmatism and excessive utilitarianism, as well as legal derivatives, transforming modern mass-prophesying culture and ancient archetypes into an instrument of enrichment and realization of commercial interests, deprives them of their values and content, turns them in manifestations of simulacrum.

We believe that through conducting a philosophical and aesthetic analysis of media content, created after the ancient beliefs, the content of the themes of modern advertising products, and their influence on the thinking and tastes of viewers and readers, new topics for future research can be opened.

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