

УДК 82.091:111.8

Gnostic Code in the Novel by L. Ulitskaya «Medea and Her Children»

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Received 11.06.2012, received in revised form 20.07.2012, accepted 27.07.2012

The present article is the analysis of poetics in the novel “Medea and Her Children” by L. Ulitskaya, that conceptualizes the earlier works of the author. It proves that the leading factor of understanding the text is its gnostic code that reflects the contemporary spirit, which actualizes the problem of the world evil. At the same time, the book is an intellectual game built up of the plots of world literature and art that highlight the characters’ fortune; a game made to initiate the reader, strengthen their ability to read between the lines. Post-modernistic poetics are replaced by hermeneutics, the trace of the truth can only be followed “behind the text” and “behind the time”; the author sustains the rights of private being of a personality, and only this way – from inside the home and from inside the soul, the mysteries of the creation begin to open up.

Keywords: Ulitskaya, «Medea and Her Children», myth, antiquity, Gnosticism, Sophia the Wisdom

In the literary criticism of the end of the XX – beginning of the XXI centuries works by Ulitskaya are tightly bound with the problems of family, blood, the feminine (Bologova, 2010). The purpose of the present work is to find out, how the mentioned values correspond to the main idea of the author’s prose, which is the idea of self-identification of an individual in the world, cyphered as a text. The interest of the writer towards basic myths of culture, from antique, gnostic myths to the myths of literature, reflecting the mysteries of creation, is remarkable. The emphasis on the gnostic symbolism that goes through the novel is connected with the general feeling of disappointment and nihilism that is specific for the era of Post-Modernism. The question about the nature of Evil, imperfection of

the world, and ways of escape is presented in the doctrines of Gnostics in a maximally convincing manner. However, Russian philosophers of the beginning of the XX century working on the theory of sophiology, denied the “anticosmism of the Gnostics” (postulate of the world as of the result of tragic mistake of Sophia aeon, prison for the particles of light/spirit); their characteristic is “bright Cosmism” (optimistic view on the nature of creation that strives for achieving the Absolute and “deification”)” (Jonas, 1998, 8). Ulitskaya follows this tradition, trying to reach peace between the world and the personality.

The novel “Medea and Her Children” (1996) is the conclusion of the early works of the author, that conceptualizes the observations and results, characteristic of it. There are сквозные герои

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(Leva Gottlieb, Aliks), images and plots. The text is movement across labyrinths of signs and illusions in the search for primary scenario, primary meaning, and, at the same time, an intellectual game, pierced with irony. The unavoidability of the collision between “mistakenness – enlightenment, step to the new level of knowledge” that builds up the characters’ fate is provided by the genre archetype of prose by Ulitskaya: educational novel; it also explains the attention towards Mason-enlightenment symbolics, in the base of which there is the same gnostic code. Exposition of the book is the history of the Sinople family, the roots of which go deeply into ancient cultures (Corynthian, Greek); its ending is the call to enter the “circle of the chosen”, the family of Medea. Hermeneutic gift, ability for self-reflection, independence despite of the basic ideologemes of the epoch are just a condition for initiation. Selfhood is admitted to be the main virtue of a Gnostic (Jonas, 1998, 275-280).

The novel is a way of self-control of the writer’s experience, which results in the big amount of self-quotation. The traces of the truth are felt by Ulitskaya exclusively within the limits of private existence, “behind the time”; and only this way, from inside of home/soul, the draft of the world creation begins to open up. Movement within the artistic space is duplicated by the description of “ordeals”, the text is colourful with the mythological stories of afterlife journeys, reminiscence to the Bible, Dante, descriptions of dreams and visions. The main character sees the Trinity on the tomb of her parents: her mother “surrounded by the нимб of her red hair” with a “naked pink-headed girl in her hands, but not a new-born, but aged around three”, and her father, “white haired, with an absolutely white beard and looking much older than Medea ever remembered him” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 29). The place of Christ is taken by Sophia the Wisdom, the face and the hands of who are traditionally depicted in purple

colours, that symbolize “spirit-bearing fire” (Trubetskoy, 1993, 229-230).

The structure forming role in the book is played by the ancient Greek plot of Medea, a magician, a daughter of King Aeëtis of Colchis, the wife of Jason who led the Argonauts campaign. This myth is one of the most wanted in the world literature; the great variety of its interpretations (from Euripide to Jean Anouilh and L. Petrushevskaya) is the proof of the integrity of text and culture, the belonging of the author to the circle of masters. The heroine of Ulitskaya inherits not only the name and origin of her famous predecessor, but also the gift of medicine, art of foreseeing, knowledge of herbs and special connection to horses. Her house situated in “the very centre of the Earth”, “on its “navel”, combines the traits of Colchis, the Ark and Calvary; however, in its relation to the modern civilization the location of this “humble stage of the story” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 6) is emphasized in a peripheral way. In the description of the mansion that is built as steps, there are the traits of a pyramid and the Limbo by Dante. At the root of the conic mountain, there is a well with “precious water”, and on its top, there is an outhouse with a significant inscription: “As you leave, look back to see whether your conscience is clean...”, and in the rectangular hole the “best view of the world” is seen (Ulitskaya, 2006, 16). The ascension is the analogue of initiation, and in the mansion everyone can behold love, friendship, betrayal, their own heaven and hell (from the symbols of plenitude to the gnashing of teeth coming from the baby). On the top of the mountain Dante meets his Beatrice, the poet meets his muse; this plot is reconstructed in the stories of the characters. And only the androgynous image of Medea is beyond the framework of the human games, opposed to the image of the narrator.

The character is the embodiment of the world tree, around which the being develops: “this life,

that immediately and vigorously changed by itself <...>, granted Medea with the strength of wood, that has braided its roots into the rocky soil, under the eternal sun, following its daily and annual path (Ulitskaya, 2005, 60). Since her young years, the character was recognized as a “fadeless star of the girls’ gymnasium; her perfect notebooks were demonstrated to the subsequent generations of the gymnasium girls” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 23). She was “a part of the landscape” (reminiscence to the story by A. Bitov “A Man in the Landscape”), the bearer of wisdom hidden in the land as it was hidden in a book, unique, “approximately knowing Greek”, that still keeps the “amazing literality and the initial meaning of words” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 5). In the utopic texts of the Enlightenment, Ancient Greek and Latin acted as the languages of the chosen ones; they were used to describe land of the Covenant (Kovtun, 2008, 539-556). The mystery hidden behind the series of letters and signs is the Golden Fleece, to the search of which the modern reader is also invited.

Black, tall Medea, who calls herself a “goddamn rake”, is the embodiment of a stylus, while the well is the inkpot. The Landlady leaves the key of the house/temple under a “triangle stone” that sends us back to the basic Mason symbol, the third eye of a Cyclops, the omphalos of the human spirit (Hall, 1994, 276). The housekeeping talent of the character is highlighted by the uselessness of the official authorities that have occupied the promised land, unable to cultivate or read it; as a nurse, Medea finds “all symptoms of brain injury” in the representatives of the state (Ulitskaya, 2005, 12). The story of the Leviathan fight is one of the key plots that determine the fate of the characters. The involvement into the mysteries of creation leads Medea out from the transitory ideas of the good, the evil and the just. She looks at everything from the position of the Creator, “from above”; she

watches and remembers, but never condescends to admonitions. Her image combines the traits of a Christian righteous woman and some distinctive infernal features that altogether witness the integrity of creation. As a Christian ascetic, who “believes not in fortuitousness but in disposition of God” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 152), the heroine has got a talent of mercy, inner concentration; her existence is ascetic (she’s a widow), her appearance strikes with its iconic beauty. Around Medea’s house there are some lilacs growing, a sign of the Blessed Virgin and the talent of “artistic living”, according to Ulitskaya. The mansion is a model of existence, omphalos of ages, spaces, peoples who are alive and dead, righteous and sinful. In “The Funeral Party” novel (1992 – 1997) Alik’s workroom on the skyscraper roof performs the same function of the world axis. Similarly to Sophia the demiurge, Medea is striving for “bringing everything to an order, a system, from the tea cups on her table to the clouds in the sky” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 8). A table is like the God’s hand, like an altar, as the ritual of evening conversations and tea is one of the most stable ones in the family. The same function of bringing chaos to space is performed by all the innermost characters of Ulitskaya: Robert Victorovich, his daughter Tania (reminiscence to the character by Pushkin) play the history of humankind in their own scenery (story “Sonechka”, 1992), Ninka that solves puzzles (“The Funeral Party”), in the milestone novel “Kukotsky Case” (2002) draftsperson Elena discovers the perfect draft of the creation: “Sometimes Elena wanted to open up her ideas of the “draftness” of the world to her husband, tell him about the dreams that she saw from time to time, the dreams with the draft of everything in the world: words, illnesses, or even music...” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 78). Medea’s room is assimilated to a sanctuary, where ignoramuses are forbidden to enter: “Her room was sacred for all the guests, and no one could enter it

without a special invitation...” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 35). Around the house, there are some sheep at grass that symbolize the holiness of the place. All actions within the mansion are ritualized, starting from going to the well to get water till the evening tea: out of respect for Medea, “her unexplainable rules were strictly followed by the guests. However, the more unexplainable, the more convincing it was” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 32). The threshold of Medea’s house has never been crossed by any representatives of the authorities; her house preserved its absolute purity.

The ideological centre of the novel and of all the prose by Ulitskaya, is usually composed by *prophetic dreams and letters*. Medea writes letters to her childhood friend, a born aristocrat, Elena, whose image reminds us of a character of the central gnostic myth, Helen of Troy, who acts in the role of Sophia (Woman in Myths and Legends, 1992, 109). The messages of Medea are a variant of the ancient soliloquium, the artist’s conversation with himself and with his own soul. The novel performs the same function, as the author replays some famous fairy tales of culture, makes up some new plots; this is the existential experience that helps us to survive in the merciless history. Gnostic mythology interprets a letter as the “embodiment of the call sent to the world and reaching the soul sleeping here, below” (Jonas, 1998, 130). In the watershed moments of her life, Medea writes in French, however, the texts are rich in everyday details, random descriptions and must be read between the lines, like messages of the experts (chosen, pneumatics). Only those who have the spiritual gift are able to change themselves as a reply to the “call”. While the soul, according to Gnostics, keeps the flash of divine knowledge and the memory of the lost harmony of the Universe, which is the potential of the Chosen ones. All characters of Ulitskaya are traditionally divided into marionettes, “Pinocchios” with empty chests, and demiurges, or directors;

artists, decorators, doctors, musicians, those who compose stories for the puppets; however, not everyone can have a chance in the game.

The same letter function in the novel is performed by the gymnasium notebooks of Medea, the ancient books (messages from the predecessors to the descendants), the painting canvas, patterns on the fabric, household stuff, even inscriptions on fences and gratings which require some skill to be read. Short before the death/departure the husband of the main character – Samuil Mendos – is given three old Hebrew books by an unknown “brown young man” with a “fat, roughly cut upper lip” who symbolizes the Apocalypses rider. Medea “interpreted this obvious sign without any doubt as “be ready!” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 152). The dying man who used to serve revolutionary ideas, through the ancient texts starts going back to the wisdom of his nation, transforms inside and outside: he becomes quiet, especially kind, his face enlightens (“Medea found him inspired and beautiful”), he reaches the “virtue of tears”, the body of the deceased “was patiently expecting for the relatives’ arrival, without revealing any features of rotting” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 161). Before his death, Samuil discovers the main principle of working with the Word, that “thoughts are transferred by words not totally, but with a great share of approximation; there is a space, some distance between the thought and the word and it is filled up by intensive work of the conscience, and that is how the limited opportunities of the language are compensated. To get back to the thought, which was now imagined by Samuil as a kind of a crystal, it was necessary to avoid text” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 155). The crystal is reminiscence of some images of the pyramid, the conic mountain and the third eye of the Cyclops, that attribute Medea’s mansion. The hermeneutic principle described by the character is also preached by the author.

The oldest symbols that are found in all messages of all nations and times are gender symbols. The symbols of masculine and feminine (a circle, a cup, a lily, a rose, a cross, a dirk) are interpreted in the novel as symbols of fate that appear at strictly selected moments. So, only after her husband's death Medea finds his sister's ring and letter, the evidence of their relationship, the incest. The story of Sandra and Samuil is highlighted by the story of Glaukus and Jason, the plots of the novel "Ada" by V. Nabokov and the short story "Sonya" by Leo Tolstoy, which are built on the canvas of the Nabokov text (Kovtun, 2009, 90-100). The trip of Medea to her motherland, to "wise Lenchka" and her brother Feodor that takes place after the finding, is constructed according to the same initial scheme, and, unlike the myth logics, finishes not with revenge, but with reconciliation with the fate.

The union of Elena and Feodor makes us remember the story of St. George the Victorious. Elena/Sophia and Theodore Stratilates, according to the legend, are recognized as the parents of a famous saint, baptizer of Russ (Markova, 1997, 234). Iegory, cultivating the world with his Word, is usually depicted in the icon with the Gospel Book in his left hand. Reading the sacred book performs the role of an amulet that protects from evil spirits, supported by saying a prayer or a sermon. The functions of the dragon fighter in the novel are inherited by Elena's son, George, and Medea herself, who saved her own husband from Leviathan. The appearance of Medea in Feodosiya is marked with "big water" filling the wells, which symbolizes expurgatory power: "children and old people opened were opening the aryk latches that leaded to their yards. The hour of morning watering began..." (Ulitskaya, 2005, 175). The time in Elena's house is fixed by the Orthodox Christian calendar dates, as Medea spends the Lent and Lazarus Saturday there, and after Good Wednesday she comes back to the

world. Her trip is accompanied with many happy coincidences and miracles; her guide to the space of the chosen is an unknown boy, who reminds of a "road angel". Travelling Medea looks like an ironic remark of the Odysseus: she "felt as Odyssey at any rate", who "was an adventurer and a man of water; he never refrained from delaying his coming back, more pretending that his aim is his rough dwelling in Ithaca" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 165). If a woman is connected to the earth and the space, a man is connected with time elements; he is a stranger and a scout of new territories (as of women). In the novel, the love intrigue is combined with cognition act.

Infernal paradigm in Medea's image includes the family of thirteen children (which is the devil's dozen); the family has a generic mark, which is the "copper colour" of hair, "but only Medea and the youngest brother, Dmitry, were radically red" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 8). The surname of the character's husband is Mendos, which sends us back to the image of the hermaphrodite Mendos' Goat, which symbolizes the universal life power and the astral light in ceremonial magic. Mendos' Goat is equal to Templars' God Baphometh (Hall, 1994, 366-367); interest for Tampers' culture is obvious in Ulitskaya's works, as their characters act out knight scenes, perform songs of troubadours who are involved to Gnostic "heresy" (Rougemont, 1998, 52-72). In real life Samuil is remarkable for his loyalty to "goat cheese", rapid mood changes "as a crow-bill pick" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 55). This character is a parody reflection of Bulgakov's Azazello, "the fallen angel" (Azazel) who taught men the art of war, and women – the mysteries of decoration and seduction, which is closely connected with the plots of lust between angels, "the sons of God" and "the human women" (Book of Enoch). In Talmudic literature Azazel is identified as the Satan or Samael (Mythological Dictionary, 1990, 29). The character of Ulitskaya finds a compliment for every woman, helps

Medea to discover her own beauty just like the demon did with Margarita. One of Azazello's incarnations in the novel by Bulgakov is a nurse (Medea's profession). In the version by Ulitskaya, the mysterious marriage anticipates the illnesses of both of them, which symbolizes the initiation stage and act of finding the world harmony.

Mendos' toms is decorated with a silver star, that at the same time signifies the pentagram in the Mendos' Goat forehead, Magen David and the Christmas star: "Medea re-interpreted the star in a way by painting the edge on which it was fixed with some silver paint; so, the star acquired the sixth, reverse point, and now reminded of the Christmas star, and also led to some other associations" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 18). In the text structure it is important that the most ancient image of hexagram points at Astarte, night Venus, and symbolizes the union of the masculine and the feminine (Woman in Legends and Myths, 1992, 41). Natural analogue of the hexagram is the lily, the flower with six petals. Some features of Astarte are granted to the images of Medea's sisters, Sandra and her beautiful daughter Nika. The figure of Medea, vested in black, with her head wrapped with a black shawl and a distinctive fringe, a remark to A. Akhmatova in the way she was seen by the artists of the beginning of the XX century (Blok charmed by sophiology of V. Soloviev, K. Petrov-Vodkin, N. Tyrsa). It is especially interesting that the novel also considers literary priorities of Anna Andreevna Akhmatova, who called the Bible and the texts by Dante and Shakespeare the most important ones for understanding the world.

The image and the position of Medea wearing nurse whites and "sitting behind the painted frame of the village hospital's registration window" reminds of "some unfinished portrait by Goya" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 6); the master's painting basis contains the principle of combining contrasts, play of light and shade, sensationism and tragic,

which play an important role in Ulitskaya's artistic world. The black shawl and typically Medea's findings (such as "the witch ring" with nineteen mushrooms of exactly same size, the "golden signet ring with darkened aquamarine" and the "big settingless pearl cameo") are clearly infernalized. Cameo sign points at T. Tolstaya's demonic character Ada from "Sonya" story; the old woman's dress is decorated with a big cameo, "on the cameo there are some people killing each other, some shields and spears, an elegantly falling enemy" (Tolstaya, 2006, 13). According to the demiurgical function of Sophia, Medea plays the world's history and keeps scenarios of people's fates inside the ancient chest: "All the neighbourhoods, both close and far away, were known to her just like the content of her own buffet" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 6).

The women stories in the novel and in the previous works of the author are citatory; they reflect the main fin de siècle epoch stereotypes. At the border of XIX and XX centuries the philosophy of the feminine is revealed in the following categories: woman as a *sexual object* (gypsy, meretrix), *fatal vampire woman* (amazon, Salome), *romantic valentine*, *muse* (Madonna, Eternal femininity) (Gryakalova, 2008, 97). In the novel, the colour symbolism of images corresponds to this typology: black, vermilion and white characters.

The female characters hierarchy is headed by "Nora the white mouse", whose story is marked by the drama by H. Ibsen "A Doll's House". Ulitskaya "completes" the story by the famous Norwegian, her character Nora leaves her doll-like life in the "malicious" Petersburg and finds her real love. The character is always depicted on some kind of height; her childishness and special innocence of her soul are emphasized in her image as she sits on a "little foldable chair", paints "on a small kids easel", and is practically no different from her daughter: "both of them were fair-haired,

wearing kerchiefs, long colourful skirts and same blouses with pockets” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 19). The woman is surrounded by “rose and lilac tamarisk” and reminds of the baby girl in the hands of the Holy Virgin from Medea’s dream. The common between Nora and the latter is the gift of artistic perception of life, at the evening tea she always sits by the Landlady’s side, reminding of “medieval German Madonnas” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 107). It was Nora who was granted the mystic vision, a snake shedding its skin. In Gnostic mythology, a snake, able to cure and kill, shedding its skin like years, is “the symbol and the attribute of active powers (both positive and negative) which rule the world” (Cirlot, 1994, 213). At the same place, on the top of the mountain, Nora meets Georgy, and this is the repetition of the stories of Dante and Beatrice, Iegory and Sophia. The house of the characters, built “even higher than Medea’s”, repeats the previous home in the both functional and attributive ways. “The summer kitchen is very similar to Medea’s, with the same copper jars and tableware. Nora learned how to gather local herbs, so there are some bundles of drying herbs all over the walls” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 252).

The purple colours picture the fates of Sandrochka and “deeply pink” Nika. Sandrochka’s story is a mixture of Tatyana Larina’s and Helen’s stories written by L. Tolstoy (as in original, closeness to a snake emphasized through the “sound” code; the character speaks “pointing the “ch” sound), “Mumu” by Turgenev and Yasya/Lilit the temptress from “Sonechka” story by Ulitskaya. Sandra is a person of external effects, a celebrities dresser and decorator, she adores “brilliance” and “brilliant relations”. At the same time, as Medea does, Sandra has the Landlady’s talent and royalty: “from Pontic sailors she probably got a drop of royal blood, the honoured relations with those tsarinas who always turn their profile to the viewer, who spin wool, weave chitons and make cheese for their husbands, the

tsars of Ithaka and Mycenae” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 118). Just according to the myth of Sophia, she is a mother of three daughters bearing meaningful names Nika, Lida and Vera (the last one takes after Nora, “riffing paper in her mousy manner all the time”) and a son, Sergey as a failed Serge the Victorious.

In Sandra’s fate the story of Tatiana, who married a general, is ironically replayed. The “brilliant relations” of Ulitskaya’s character with the Soviet military leaders, though, do not look pernicious; on the opposite, the loveful temper of the girl and her reputation release her soul from all the attempts from the state: “with time this innocent shortcoming developed so much that the attempts of various ideological missionaries from Russian Lenin Youth Communist League, All-Union Lenin Youth Communist League and others just came to an end by themselves” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 74). Ascension symbol is present in this fate too, it is in the “walnut cabinet” a buffet, restoration of which ends up with the marriage between the Landlady and the master. Sandrochka’s husband, ebonist Ivan Isaevich, literally deifies his chosen one, believes in the Virgin Birth than in some obvious facts of her loveful life. In her turn, the heroine inspires her “a little wooden” sweetheart and adjusts him for family life. Their union is crowned with building a countryside house.

All advantages and disadvantages of the mother in the image of her daughter Nika find their ultimate expression. She is attributed as a “winged” deity, the carnival image of Medea the revenger, flying away on horses or dragons. The tones of pink so typical for Sinople women acquire really theatrical intensiveness: Nika wears a “roughly crimson dress” or an “iodine coloured dress”. As Sandra decorates actresses before coming out on stage, her daughter wears masquerade costumes in her everyday life, which brings masters to the association with “Fayum

portraits” sending them back to Ancient Egypt funerary masks. The artist “studied her with tears filling his eyes, repeating: “What a face... God, what a face... a Fayum portrait” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 139). The distinctive feature of this kind of art is abundance of gold, brightness of the images, their special plasticity going back to the ancient traditions. In Mason mythology the Land of Egypt was the land of “bottom”, passions, where the Twelve Tribes of Israel were kept in captivity, and later were released by Moses (the enlightened mind), by raising the copper snake (Hall, 1994, 278). Nika turns she “brilliant relations” her mother was so proud of, into “dangerous relations”, acting as a worth daughter of Samuil, behind whom you can feel the shadow of Azazel. Seduction becomes the art of Nika, her mission and magic, she “did her favourite art of seduction, as thin as lacework, invisible but tangible, like the smell of freshly-baked pie from the hot oven, which immediately fills up any room. It was the requirement of her soul, food close to spiritual food, and there was not a minute higher for Nika than the one when she seduced a man” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 109). The marriage of the beauty to a rich Italian negotiant loops us the story of Sinople family, turns it back to its origins, to the myth of Jason and the biography of her grandfather, Charalampus the merchant, the owner of four vessels.

The ultimate expression of Eros energy in the novel is the image of Rozka the amazon, a circus rider. The name of the heroine itself stands for a vagina symbol. She is gifted with “thick black hair”, “short red nails”, she wears a red shirt, appears from the “velvet darkness” of the horse barn, rides a “tall black stallion” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 102). The way to her is marked only “by red and crimson asters, that are all consumed in colour and have no odour at all” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 101). In her appearance, the new amazon reminds of a “little curly boy”, “a brave gypsy”, and as

she laughs, “in a ghasty manner her little upper fangs protrude”, and recommends herself as “An ordinary slut I am” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 105). White dirty jeans of the rider and water drops in her hair are the signs of a “sunk pearl”, devastated beauty, that the Artist has to save. The relationships between Rozka and Butonov profane the story of Perseus and Andromeda. The woman leaves some chains in the bed of her lover: “out of the messed bed her dragged some torn golden chains that had slipped off her neck” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 105), but, against the myth logic, she still dies. Butonov, on the opposite, opens up a “whole continent”, the promised land of love.

The absolute contrary of the fiery Rozka is “moonlight” Masha, Sandra’s granddaughter: “That fragile, grey-eyed girl is of an absolutely different breed” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 134), her grandmother admits. Masha’s image feels undeveloped, like a “decal”, a mould of her mother Tatiana’s pictures, a reflection of a reflection. The childishness and androgyny of the heroine are especially emphasized (“hair cut in a boyish way”, “thin and sharp like a boy”), and her inclination to mystics: “the early touch of the dark abyss of madness gave her good ear to the mystic, sensitivity to the world and artistic imagination: everything that creates poetic inclinations (Ulitskaya, 2005, 137). While the fates of the Sinople women are highlighted by the mythology of the chosen spaces of Colchis, Ithaca, and Eden, the line of Masha is initially connected to a “bad place” general’s home, where fear and madness rule the place. It is not possible to live there; it is the place for cripples and death. The deathly limits are to be overcome or gotten over, as well as her own death has to be replayed: at nights the mad wife of the general, like the Queen of Spades, comes to Masha’s dreams. The miraculous guides of the girl in “hell” are Nika, Sandra, her husband Alik and the night angel. Since her childhood, the heroine is used to being

assisted by “metaphrasts”, she even sleeps only holding someone’s hand. Her relationship with the husband is a travesty version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and her chosen one is a math sciences specialist.

Absence of completeness is the distinctive trait of Masha’s poetry: she wrote “some poems or weird indefinite texts that felt as though they were torn out from various authors. She had no voice of her own, and she was distracted in several directions, sometimes closer to Rozanov, sometimes closer to Kharms (Ulitskaya, 2005, 210). “The poems went out of her as animals leave the forest: they were totally ready, but always with a shortcoming, with a defect, with some limpness in the hind leg or in the last line” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 238). The girl’s tragedy is in her exclusive trust for the letter and the text, the very first encounter with a mystery and passion leads her to illness and death. The intellectual Masha is usually taken by her relatives as a “peck”, an ignoramus, an object in someone else’s game: “as a ball in a children’s game, she got in some little gates, then rolled down a ditch, that has no way out but an empty hole, weaved around by ropes and threads” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 144).

Masha’s love for Butonov is built according to the “soap opera” rules, and as in goes, it acquires “the cinematographic scale and at the same time cinematographic flatness” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 142). The relationships of the characters are citatory, they include interpretation of the Narcissus myth and some motives of Shakespeare tragedies (Masha’s image reflects some features of Ophelia and Othello), “Eugene Onegin” by Pushkin (the heroine tries to get to know her beloved one by the interior of his countryside house decorated by Nika, writes him some love letters and poems). In Butonov’s fate one can easily see the archaic trace of Narcissus: the victims of the handsome man are Echo nymph (the reason of dependence of Masha’s voice), and a lad called Aminius who

kills himself with a knife because of his love (the heroine is compared to a boy and to a dirk). In some ancient cultures Narcissus is a flower of the dead; the power of Butonov, gifted with a “secret monstrous arrogance” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 87), was fatal. The character, possessing an exclusive body, turned out to be absolutely empty in his spirit. One touch of him caused acute allergic reaction in Masha, just like the effect metal made on the “iron man” of social realism; it remind of a snake’s bite that killed Eurydice. Ulitskaya’s heroine is a victim of wrong discourse interpretation, she called for her romantic lover, while in front eyes there is just a poster image of “a real man” the superman of mass literature.

Female characters of the novel are united by the symbols of *a snake*, *a cat* and *an amazon*, that signify both the lowest astral power (the cat) and the universal wisdom (the snake). If human fate in this story is described through the struggle against the Dragon/the State, the way of soul is a “struggle with an Angel”, “fight for oneself” that sends us back to the story of Prophet Jacob. Only the winners possess their own voice, and their own home as their own temple. The Angel comes both to Medea and Elena, and the conversation of the latter with God is “a mixture of the prayers she had said before and her own voice, alive and grateful...” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 169). The pathos of the winners is hidden in the etymology of the names Sandra (Alexandra) and Nika; Masha is the only one who, in her night flights with the angel, acts not with her own “smart strength”, but with a “lent power, her mentor’s”: “she obeyed his will with pleasure and effort” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 240). As a result, the heroine finds herself in a conflict with the world and with herself: “As though there were two of her: the daylight, calm, loving and friendly Masha, and the night Masha, scared and coursed” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 135). The end of the fate of the girl, who stepped out of the

night window, is the paraphrase of the idea of Nabokov's Luzhin, who stepped from the present into the eternity. After his wife's death Alik publishes a book of her poems, and the book is the analogue of home, as the dwelling of spirit.

The land, which is described in the roman in analogy with feminine sexuality, also must be discovered and cultivated by a man. The success of character's journey depends on his ability to see and save the Beauty. The functions of male characters are associated with the mythological images of Orpheus, Perseus, Pygmalion, Prometheus, Odyssey who do their exploits in the name of Beauty. The figure of Iegory the Brave acts within the same paradigm. Elena's son, Georgy, is the "follower of his family mythology" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 108), the keeper of his family history, and the heir of Medea: "They had a lot in common: both were vigorous, easy to move, values pleasant trifles and hated interference into their inner lives" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 21). In the features of the character one can notice some traits of Prometheus, the creator of "pitiful breed of human", their mentor and defender (Mythological dictionary, 1990, 443): "Without setting any pedagogical tasks, year after year Georgy gave the best life lessons to his relatives' children, the lessons that could not be compared to anything else in the world. Boys and girls learned paganly accurate and careful ways of treating water, fire and wood" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 62). The place of the character's residence, just like the mythological character's, is the mountains of Caucasus. However, Prometheus could not breathe life into his own creations, like the wise virgin, Athena, for the first time in the world culture equalized with Sophia, did. Athena's favourite was Odyssey, whose traits can be found in the line of Medea and Georgy; she was also the one who patronized Jason (Woman in Legends and Myths, 1992, 45-47). In the novel, Georgy was given a significant

profession: a geologist as researcher/reader of the earth itself, the metaphrast of the wisdom hidden in its depths (under the visible limit of letters). His friend from Novosibirsk, Tarasov, the head of a kolkhoz (allusion to the character of the same-name story by B. Ekimov), is obsessed with horseshoe nails, which associates him with Hephaestus.

The image of Georgy is ostensibly brutal, marked with "obvious masculinity", he is attributed with the signs of a "universal soldier": an entrenching shovel, a knife, "a hat from a Middle Asian soldier kit" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 17). Sometimes Nora sees her beloved one as a "Roman legionary", or as cunning Odyssey, with his lively traveler spirit, sometimes she sees him as a gambler, sending us back to the image of her great grandfather Charalampus: "he loved the act of purchase, he enjoyed the game of chose, trade and trophy" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 38). The colour solution of the image is built on the contrast of white and red, that reminds of the symbolics of the Victorious; however, if the saint fought against the infidels to release Russ from captivity (Tartar invasion), the character of Ulitskaya gives Medea's house to its initial owner, a Tartar called Ravil, and together with his brothers erects a new mansion. His union with Nora was blessed with the birth of the daughters; there are three daughters in the family.

Georgy's "twin" is the husband of the "moonlight" Masha, intellectual Alik, whose story repeats Bulgakov's stories of demonic professors experimenting with the living matters ("Heart of a Dog", "The Fatal Eggs") in an ironic projection. Alik who immigrated to America, from where the anaconda's eggs were brought in Bulgakov's novel, "became an American academician and was about to make people happy with his medicine against aging" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 252). It is interesting that all the silly things work out in the official Soviet space. In the sanatorium-

incubator of “new” people “Charcot’s shower” is renamed into “Pavlov’s shower” for Sharikovs’ convenience.

Tiny Alik, who could only buy clothes in a kids’ store even when he was an adult, at the age of seven “continuously read the huge and heavy volumes of the “World History”, at the age of ten got interested in astronomy, and then in mathematics”, and seemed to be absorbing science “from thin air” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 202). His entering to the institute was “like a struggle against a five-headed dragon”, the “hired workers of mechmath” were put down to shame, and at the stage of writing an essay the helpful hand of friendship was given to the young boy by Alexander Sergeevich himself, “the topic “Early lyrical poems of Pushkin” was like a gift from the heaven for Alik” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 203). It is interesting that in the novel itself the characters are structured according to the works of the poet, whose hand of friendship was gratefully accepted by Ulitskaya. Alik’s father was “a well-educated philologist, but the life pushed him back into such a corner where he was forced to gratefully edit the memories of semiliterate marshals of the previous campaign” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 205), which means that he had to give words to the speeches of the wooden dolls marching across the stage of history. Escaping from the space of this “corner” was Alik’s purpose. His immigration abroad “required determination, masculinity and despair”, the people around him compare this action with the Exodus of Jews: “The Black Sea opened its waters again to let the Chosen People if not to the Promised Land, but at least away from this new Egypt” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 213).

Alik’s ascent on the Olympus of science coincides, however, with the death of his mother and with a break up with his mother, who stays in Russia. While the good-looking Butonov is the example of a perfect body, Alik is the icon of rational mind and the power of senses; he is

indifferent to the “fire of life”, and nature did not gift him with great manhood, which resulted in “impossibility to use the school bathroom” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 205). While Georgy leaves his dissertation, “the rotten bunch of papers”, as he called it, in Akademgorodok as a false value and moves to his ancestral home, to Medea’s place, Alik chooses not Beauty or Love, but the Novel Prize as his reward. The only view that is seen from the triangle of “Medea’s cludge”, this initial point of everything, is lost to him. The student age interests of the character, “careless encounters in the laundry room, staff lounge, or examination room were just as easy as evening tea, bore the feeling of medical simplicity” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 205). In fact, such behaviour was close to the narcissism of Butonov, who perceived women as gymnastic apparatus or “pets”. It is interesting, that to one of the dates with Masha Butonov comes wearing a doctor’s hat, resembling Alik.

The image of Butonov the athlete is built on the crossroads of several discourses: it is an ironic combination of the elements from archaic myths of Narcissus and Perseus, the Soviet mythology of a “real person”: “he was coming closer and closer to the generalized character of a builder of communism known from the red-and-white posters, drawn with straight, unpretentious lines” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 89), also the traits of Orthodox Christian legends of demonic (chthonic) powers. The character is called “the beast”, the love for him is compared to madness, his fate is initially marked with giftlessness. The ancestral home stands on the edge of Moscow, in Rastorguevo, the place is in bad repute, the construction is “squat” and for long time “it’s been promising to fall apart” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 84). The child “does not remember his father”, his main fun is playing knives, and the target was the wall of his home izba: “The old mother’s house, shabby even without that, was scarred all over by the boy’s exercises” (Ulitskaya, 2005,

84). Success in this childish game is a feature of maturity, the need to leave the “corner” as one leaves children’s clothes, and to go conquering new territories. The character throwing the knife is compared to a world conqueror: “all the kingdoms and cities played in the fretted ground behind the bus station, he could conquer with joy and ease, like Alexander the Great” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 84).

Despite of his unlimited opportunities in horizontal movement, Butonov, “who has forgotten all once read books tracklessly and forever” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 96), does not see the vertical and cannot read the signs of fate. The limits of the character’s habitation is the sports arena and the circus as the upside-down spaces where success an easily turn into fail, and flight into fall. In this logic of buffoonery the state exists: “in many ways the circus was just the same as other Soviet institutions: a warehouse, a bathhouse or an academy” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 88). Correspondingly, Butonov’s guides in this low farce world are “bogey” of various kinds: a coach of disputable reputation, “a hard-boiled sports wolf”; a fool, “an old circus actor from an unknown circus dynasty, with a hawker appearance, but an Italian name Antonio Muzetoni” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 89), and a specialist in spy games, “a little dowdy man from the Chinese-Eastern Railway workers, with conventionally called Ivanov, with dark and mysterious past” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 96).

In Crimea Butonov stayed in the house of Ada (hell space), and enters the iconic premises of Medea’s mansion under the cover of darkness, as demons do. The character demonstrates the “stone power” of a dolt, even in love “he did not feel the slightest inspiration, but the habit of a scrupulous professional set on him its obligations” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 145). His relationships with the sisters Nika and Masha are the replay of the intrigue of the short story “Sonya” by T. Tolstaya (duet of Ada and

Sonya), when one girl is offered answering the letters of another: “If you need it, you write it, – murmured Butonov. Nika burst into laughter, as the offer seemed fun to her” (Ulitskaya, 2005, 217). In the logic of the initial plot, the character acts as a lady’s dream, play of letters, a phantom, and only high love of Sonya (the embodiment of the Soul) makes this buffoon story as high as an antique drama. It is interesting that unlike her predecessor, Ulitskaya literally gives life to the puppet: the traits of the imaginary Nikolas are granted to Butonov’s circus colleague, a fallen paralyzed acrobat. Completing the story by T. Tolstaya, the author of the novel makes her character a talented massage therapist who literally saves Muzetoni, condemned to bed, his own shadow. Butonov, a specialist in spine, this divine tree in a human being, gets functionally closer to Medea and Georgy, which is pointed at by the domination of white and pink in the colour range of his image. The character’s story is crowned by building a house in Rastorguevo and birth of a son with whom he is “endlessly in love”, just like Narcissus, with his own reflection.

If the archetype of the female images in the novel is Sophia the Wisdom, for male characters the key image is that of Master the Builder, who constructs the temple/the Universe in the name of Beauty. In Mason doctrines Master’s death from the enemies’ hands impersonated in the state, official church and rascality (Hall, 1994, 274-275), every time finishes with the death of the people who lost their shelter. The idea confirmation is found by the author in the history of Jews, Russian Revolution, the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. On the level of personal fate the Master’s killers are illiterateness, prejudice and fear.

The heroine called “wise Lenchka” in her mystical dream sees the Father, who is architect Shinararyan, “a builder of Armenian temples”

(Ulitskaya, 2005, 31), who predicts the death of the family in the revolution chaos and the girl's fate. Through male parental lineage of the Sinople family, from the grandfather Charalampus "passion for building" is passed on. Samuil Mendos and Georgy were granted the opportunity to erect their own house as a shelter for their close and distant relatives. Medea's Lithuanian nephew, Gvidas the Goon (reminiscence to the plot Tsar Gvidon) "built a house and started great construction works" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 42), and only in Butonov's house, decorated according to Nika's recommendations, it "was cool, the house did not keep the warmth" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 230). Within the mascaraed limits of the state, home as a union of close people is principally impossible; every construction turns into a hole, a ditch, or "the Ward No. 6". Masha's grandfather general Gladyshev in his long life built so many military and semi-military objects, got so many medals for his wide and short chest, that he was almost not afraid of the authorities", "the only thing he was afraid of as his wife Vera Ivanovna" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 123), who "launched scandals" in such professional way, that general tried not to stay in his own apartment for too long.

So, in the novel the world is built vertically and horizontally: the intercrossing of the Crimean mountains with the water surface forms an optical cross, the centre of which is the mansion of Medea, and around it there is "the run of the worlds, stars, clouds and sheep herds" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 36). On the microworld level the conic mountain is the symbol of the integrity of the human nature, the lower, middle and upper parts of body, and the spirit opens up in the heart of

the pyramid (Hall, 1994, 256). The way to the mystery requires some hermeneutic talents both from the characters and the readers, as the secret meaning is cognized "behind the time", "behind the text", releasing itself from the captivity of letters as though Dragon teeth (Jason story). As the fate of the ancient world was given into the hands of Sophia the Wisdom, modern history is written by male intellectuals. Medea's favourite cup is "heavy and awkward", "dark blue and red, with some stains of clotted enamel, shaggy, too decorated for everyday use" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 35), is the prototype of the globe, the upper part of which is found at the future Nobel laureate Alik: "that year on his birthday from his wife Alik received a big white cup, with an inscription made in thick blue letters: "And so it will be, you will buy a dress coat, and me, an evening dress, the King will listen to your speech and then the party will start" (Ulitskaya, 2005, 211). The author of both cups was Nika.

Put together, the cups form the Orphic egg of the Universe; in esoteric doctrine the ultimate personal achievement is to break the Orphic egg, which is equivalent to the spirits turning to Nirvana, pleromatic integrity (Hall, 1994, 199-200). So, Ulitskaya, cycling up plots and fates in her texts, remains loyal to the principle that it is easy to break the world as a toy globe, while to keep its fragile integrity is getting more and more difficult. If, according to the gnostic myth, the world is a result of a mistake, the author leaves the right for mistake to her characters, her "infernal women" always look brighter and more entertaining than righteous ladies, who, in their own turn, have a chance to show their mercy.

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Гностический код в романе Л. Улицкой

«Медea и ее дети»

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В статье представлен анализ поэтики романа Л. Улицкой «Медea и ее дети», концептуализирующего раннее творчество автора. Доказывается, что одним из ведущих для понимания текста становится гностический код, отражающий сам дух современности, актуализирующий проблему мирового зла. Одновременно произведение – интеллектуальная игра, составленная из сюжетов мировой литературы, живописи, подсвечивающих судьбы персонажей, рассчитанная на инициацию читателя, его умение читать между строк. На смену постмодернистской поэтике приходит герменевтика, след истины открывается «за текстом» и «за временем», автор восстанавливает в правах частное бытие личности, и только так, изнутри дома/души, открываются тайны мироздания.

Ключевые слова: Улицкая, «Медea и ее дети», миф, античность, гностицизм, София Премудрость.
