



Конструкция смысла через структуру в эрзяно-мокшанском эпосе «Масторава» А. М. Шаронова

Ингл Оксана Петровна

Чарлстонский колледж, Южная Каролина, США

The Construction of Meaning Through Structure in the Ersya-Mokshan Epic, *The Mastorava*, by A. M. Sharonov

Ingle Oksana P.

College of Charleston, South Carolina, USA

Аннотация

Статья рассматривает эффективность эпического жанра как средства создания смысла через структуру на примере мордовского эпоса «Масторава» А. М. Шаронова, в котором автор показывает возможные альтернативы правления в эпической истории эрзи и мокши.

Abstract

This paper discusses how the epic genre is effective as a means for using structure to create meaning, as in the Mordovian epic *Mastorava* by A. M. Sharonov, where the author shows possible alternatives of government in the epic history of the Erzya and Moksha people.

Ключевые слова:

Keywords: Mordovian epic, epic «Mastorava», Sharonov, epic poetry.

Using Structure to Create Meaning in Epics

The Finno-Ugrians are still creating their epics. The structure of the epic genre continues to attract both writers and readers, not to mention film makers. One of the underlying features of an epic is that its structure already contains a certain meaning. As John Foley, a student of the renowned Albert Lord, said, "Instead of asking 'what' is meant by a work of art and its constituent parts, we should begin by asking 'how' that work or part conveys whatever meaning can be or is communicated" (Foley, 5).

This is true of modern written epics as well as traditional oral epics. Even though Finno-Ugrian epics are written, they are based on the oral tradition and on oral material, and are comparable to oral epics in how their structure conveys meaning.

One example of this is the Mordovian epic, *The Mastorava*, by A. M. Sharonov, which was first published in 1994.



Using Structure to Create Meaning in *The Mastorava*

The crisis of absolute patriarchal power and alternatives of government in The Mastorava

One of the main functions of an epic is to glorify the deeds of the kings and heroes of a nation, which is what the *The Mastorava* does. It also depicts the crisis of absolute patriarchal power and introduces alternatives of government in the Erzya and Moksha worlds.

The Mastorava tells the history of the Erzya and Moksha people from the creation of the world through the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Although the external events of *The Mastorava* seem disconnected on their surface, their underlying structure ties them together in a way that gives the story an inner meaning.

Patriarchal Rulers

According to the creation of the world in *The Mastorava*, the chief God Inishkipaz, shown as a powerful patriarch, creates Mastorava which is the name for the epic Mordovian land and the goddess of this land. The people, however, resist any absolute power, including the power of their Creator, since he supposedly created them in his image—free to live their own lives. *The Mastorava* tells about a woman who is irritated that the smoke in her fireplace will not go out through her chimney. She wants to know:

Why His heaven is so low,
Why so close to Mastorava.
Erzya women grabbed a bended oven
fork,
Put up a tall ladder,
Scrambled onto the roof of her house,
Started quarrelling with Inishkipaz,

Poking him with her oven fork
(Sharonov, 41).

Annoyed by her behaviour, Inishkipaz lifted the sky farther from the earth. That was the end of the careless life of the Mastoravians. But Inishkipaz did not forget them. He soon sent his son, Velenpaz, to rule. Velenpaz was also an absolute ruler, but his power was limited to the land of Erzya. He had no power over evil forces such as the devil who enticed Erzyans, causing them to start drinking heavily to the point that they ruined their morality. The inner meaning of the story is that if official power is not strong enough, the majority cannot sufficiently govern themselves and will eventually succumb to evil powers.

At this point, Kudadey, the son of an epic hero, establishes a tribe and serves as its fair patriarch until his death in old age. His leadership brings prosperity and harmony back into the society. But, although this was possible at the level of one tribe with a strong and just patriarch, other components—such as an army and a court—are needed to rule an entire land.

Knowing this, a group of Erzyan elders sets off in search of a tsar to govern Mastorava. They soon find Tyushtyan, a plowman, whom they choose as tsar after they receive an omen from the heavens. Tyushtyan is the son of a simple woman and the god, Purginepaz. Tyushtyan's rule is depicted as the golden age of Erzyan history. Their preference for an autocratic patriarch is reflective of both the Erzyan oral tradition and of the author of *The Mastorava*.

After Tyushtyan's death, his son, Tyushtyan, inherits the throne. But the son is unable to protect Mastorava from foreign invaders, and he is forced to move away and leave some of his people behind. The inner meaning is that social disorder and external war symbolize a crisis of patriarchal power.



Alternatives to patriarch rulers

The author's alternative to authoritarian, patriarchal power is the Princess of the Russian fortress-city, Kliasma. The Princess of Kliasma shares her power with the citizens. When the younger Tyushtyan, after being forced out of Mastorava, shows up in her city, she shoots an arrow and wounds him. In return, he kills her. The citizens ask him in Russian (even though he is Erzya) if he is willing to be their ruler. He has no intention to be a ruler of foreigners in their city, and he declines. He later settles with his people on an island where they are homesick for Mastorava which no longer has a tsar.

The author then introduces another matriarch—the courageous Princess Narchatka, of the Mokshan land. But her rule also does not last as she dies in a battle against the army of Nogais Khan. After that, different heroes fight to the death trying to resist the hordes of invaders, all in vain. Chaos increases and destroys all of the former prosperity and happiness of Mastorava.

In these hard times, the elders again set off to look for a new ruler. But instead of choosing someone from their circle, they choose the innocent young hermit, Arsa, who, because of his inexperience is unable to protect his people and loses his army. This causes Mother land Mastorava herself to wake up and cover the invaders with her soil. Arsa then disappears and Mastorava is again left without a ruler.

The power of the Russian tsar

In the final chapter, *the New Age*, the girl Samanka helps Ivan the Terrible conquer an ancient Tatar fortress-city—Kazan. For her heroic deed, Ivan grants Erzyans their independence from the Russian boyars. Soon after, while the elders are praying to Inishkipaz, they see Ivan and send the young fellows to bring

him gifts of bread, salt, and honey. But the young fellows eat the gifts and instead bring Ivan water from the Ra (Volga) river and soil from Mastorava. Ivan interprets their gift as a symbol that the Erzyans have given him their entire land, which he gladly accepts as his.

The legend is that this is how Mastorava (Mordovia) became a part of Russia. As a result of the naïve selfishness of a group of young fellows, the Erzya people ended up being ruled by the Russian tsar. Sharonov uses the people's concept of history to demonstrate that if a nation does not have a powerful patriarch, a larger nation with an organized military will subjugate it. But the Erzyans accept their fate:

It seems that Paz himself wished
the Russian tsar
to become our new monarch
(Sharonov, 238)...

Returning to God

The epic began with Inishkipaz creating Ersyans, who nudged God away from themselves only to end up returning to him in their prayers. The epic ends with the Erzyans praying to Inishkipaz and hearing the sound of the Tsar Tyushtian's ritual horn and his voice counseling them to keep their traditions and language, and to have an Erzyan tsar. As E. Fedoseeva noticed, *The Mastorava* argues that «only ethnically identified people can live a meaningful life» (Федосеева, 186).

How the crisis of power was solved

The Mastorava was first published in 1994 during the crisis of government power in Russia. It seems that Sharonov, by borrowing ideas from the oral tradition and creating some of his own, used his epic to show the possible alternatives of power. The only force that can bring



order to the Mastoravians for an extended period of time is the power of the tsar. And if there is no strong Erzyan tsar, the Russian tsar will do.

The Mastorava further asserts that the individual, family, city, and country can flourish only under a patriarchal world order with the highest values of kindness, beauty, and harmony in which people, knowingly or unknowingly, serve the divine will (Ingle, 23).

Literature

Ингл О. П. Книжные формы эпоса финно-угорских народов: типология и поэтика / Автореферат дис. на соиск. уч. ст. канд. фил. наук. – Саранск: Изд-во Мордов. ун-та. 2015. – 24 с.

Федосеева Е. А. Книжные формы мордовского героического эпоса: Возникновение и эволюция. – Саранск: Изд-во Мордов. ун-та. 2007. – 210 с. (монография)

Шаронов А. М. Масторава. – Саранск: Эрзянь Мастор, 2010. – 264 с.

Foley J. M. Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic. – Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, – 278 p.