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Ethnopoetic Constants as Semiotic Structures: Functioning in Literary Text

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Abstract. Ethnopoetics is an integrative discipline in the humanities, whose main task is to study the national characteristics of specific literatures by appealing to semiotic elements of varying degrees of complexity — archetypes and archetypal motifs, concepts-sensibilities, cultural codes (from spatial to spiritual), and genre structures. All of the above units act as ethnopoetic constants — recurrent and retransmitted concepts that form national linguistic worldviews, manifested in a work of art as a semiotic field of a complex, palimpsestic nature. The purpose of this study is to analyze the ethnopoetic constants of Kazakhstani Russian-language artistic discourse from the point of view of their semiotic affiliation. Particular attention is paid to the consideration of the sensibility concept “EMSHAN” (“wormwood”) and its correlation with the archetypal complex “HOME.” The material for the study was the eponymous story (“poem in prose”) by M. Simashko, narratively organized as a sequence of events possessing the semiotic characteristics of consecutiveness, unity, irreversibility, transformativeness, and the subject’s crossing of the semiotic boundary. In the course of the study, we came to the conclusion that ethnopoetic constants are not only formants of the linguistic picture of the world of a particular ethnic group, but also serve as the substrate basis of the aesthetic whole. The taxonomic distribution of ethnopoetic constants is the perspective of this study.

Key words: concept, archetype, cultural code, narrative, Russian-language prose of Kazakhstan

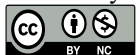
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Этнопоэтические константы как семиотические структуры: функционирование в художественном тексте

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Аннотация. Этнопоэтика — интегративная дисциплина гуманитарного цикла, главная задача которой — исследовать национальное своеобразие конкретных литератур через апелляции к семиотическим элементам разного уровня сложности — архетипам и архетипическим мотивам, концептам-сенсбилиям, кодам культуры (от пространственного до духовного), жанровым структурам. Все перечисленные единицы выступают как этнопоэтические константы — рекуррентные и ретранслируемые концепты, формирующие национальные языковые картины мира, явленные в художественном произведении как семиотическом поле осложненной, палимпсестной природы. Цель настоящего исследования — проанализировать этнопоэтические константы казахстанского русскоязычного художественного дискурса с точки зрения их семиотической принадлежности. Особое внимание уделяется рассмотрению сенсбилического концепта «ЕМШАН» («полюнь») и его корреляции с архетипическим комплексом «ДОМ». Материалом для исследования послужила одноименная повесть («поэма в прозе») М. Симашко, нарративно организованная как последовательность событий, обладающих семиотическими признаками консекутивности, одноактности, необратимости, трансформативности и пересечения субъектом семиотической границы. В ходе исследования мы пришли к выводу, что этнопоэтические константы являются не только формантами языковой картины мира того или иного этноса, но и служат субстратным базисом эстетического целого. Таксономическое распределение этнопоэтических констант — перспектива настоящего исследования.

Ключевые слова: концепт, архетип, культурный код, нарратив, русскоязычная проза Казахстана

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Introduction

The term “ethnopoetics,” which has not yet been codified in Russian-language dictionaries, first began to be actively used in foreign scientific discourse. D. Rotenberg and J. Rotenberg believed that appealing to the ethnic substrate of national cultures contributes to the expansion of the expressive possibilities of language [1. P. 50]. The definition was introduced by Rotenberg in the process of recording and studying the poetry of American Indians; the scholar and his colleagues needed a fundamentally new episteme to analyze the material and

translate it into English. The scholars [2; 3] set themselves the goal of preserving poetic texts that had not been recorded in writing in the English language. The method of “total translation” was used.

H. Jason emphasizes that ethnopoetics is oriented towards linguistics: it is designed to study the qualitative features of oral literature and its mythical subtext [2. P. 273]. This approach is very productive. V.N. Zakharov [4] and O.V. Zyryanov [5] apply it in an ethno-confessional context. In the folklore-mythological aspect, it is used by O.K. Lagunova [6] and A.E. Chernova [7]. The introduction of a new integrative scientific discipline is the merit of V.N. Zakharov, who argues that ethnopoetics should study the national uniqueness of specific literatures [4. P. 6]: “Among the various disciplines that begin with the word ethno-, there is clearly one missing — ethnopoetics, which should study the national characteristics of specific literatures and their place in the global artistic process. It should provide an answer to the question of what makes a given literature national.”

Terminological field of ethnopoetics was significantly expanded by V.M. Gatsak, who proposed the concept of ethnopoetic constants [8]. In the works of his followers, ethnopoetic constants are understood as stylistic and plot-narrative coordinates of the depicted folkloric world. O.V. Zyryanov examines the works of Russian classics — A.S. Pushkin, F.M. Dostoevsky, and others — from the perspective of the ethnopoetic approach [5]. K.K. Sultanov has made a significant contribution to the development of this new discipline, insisting on the importance of relying on the principle of typological commonality. It is this principle that allows us to identify the national and individual in the works of regional writers [9; 10]. The researcher discusses the dominant images and symbols in the text, archetypal attitudes, and basic concepts of culture, which serve as evidence of the ontological nature of ethnicity. It is the ethnic substratum of the narrative that represents the cultural code, as well as the axiological elements of national existence. “The works of these scholars use a wide variety of methods for studying ethnopoetics: contextual and intertextual analysis, mythopoetics, motivic and archetypal analysis, concept analysis, narratological and genre studies. Thus, the ethnopoetic approach is applied in a field of research where the search and explanation of how ethnocultural constants are embedded in the text and change its meanings is carried out. Summarizing the experience of the studies conducted, we note that the terminological variability of concepts is due to their interdisciplinary nature, since the main national constants can be spatial, temporal, subject-specific, spiritual, and religious [11. P. 213].

The areas of application of the ethnopoetic approach are quite diverse. One of the promising directions in contemporary humanities is ethnopoetic folklore studies. Nevertheless, a number of scholars ([12–14]) define its place within the circle of linguistic disciplines.

Thus, ethnopoetics is a branch of philology that aims to record, systematize, and analyze those elements of a literary text that appeal to its archetypal substrate and signal its belonging to a particular ethnic “dimension.” These elements act as markers, the taxonomic distribution of which has yet to be determined by science.

We see ethnopoetics as a promising area of research, as its tools allow us to take into account the uniqueness of national linguistic worldviews, which are heterogeneous in their composition. When dealing with complex phenomena such as Russian-language literature in Kazakhstan, we must take into account that the linguistic representation of literary material may not fully or partially coincide with the cultural affiliation of the text itself. In this case, the ethnopoetic approach gives us significant results. By immersing ourselves in the national identity of the source culture, we can identify the elements that contribute to the retransmission of ethno-specific content.

The methods used in the analysis are relevant to the task we have set ourselves: first and foremost, these are description and systematization, as well as the combinatorial method, which is a combination of modern concepts that have developed in ethnopoetics. These include the study of the specifics of national literatures [15], national worldviews [16–18], and regional literatures.

Most modern researchers consider thesaurus analysis to be productive — the study of an individual's and collective's conceptological lexicon, which is formed by concepts — “quanta of meaning,” mental cells of a person's cognitive space. Concepts, in turn, constitute the cultural code of language, the elements of which allow one to penetrate the national imagination and, when it comes to concepts-sensibilities, the national experience. According to V.I. Zakharov, ethnopoetic constants are concepts that form the national linguistic picture of the world. As a rule, they contain cultural information encoded in specific images and symbols [4].

Results & Discussion

A holistic analysis of a literary text focuses on its palimpsestic nature, permeated with multiple codes. Ethnopoetic constants are semiotically significant elements of literary text. When properly deciphered, they can reveal important information embedded in ontological motifs — retransmitted units of narrative characteristic of the worldview of a particular ethnic group. We reconstruct and describe archetypal concepts of culture, which, according to V.I. Karasik, represent a regulatory parametric/non-parametric phenomenon with the following properties: 1)- generality; 2) emotiveness; 3) recurrence; 4) retransmissibility [19].

In the process of intergenerational transmission, such concepts do not undergo significant semantic modification, as they have a constant core and an adaptive periphery. With a limited repertoire of archetypal concepts, their implementation in the artistic text is characterized by increased variability. Their manifestation occurs at different semiotic levels: motivational; figurative; code.

From a semiotic point of view, motifs are discrete retransmitted units that can be characterized as “plot engines.” In A.N. Veselovsky's “Poetics of Plots,” a motif is an indivisible semantic whole that cannot be divided into simpler units without losing the unity of its meaning [20]. At the same time, it is noteworthy that a motif is morphologically divisible. It is a narrative formula with certain constituent parts. The variability of the components of a motif does not violate the integrity of its

semantics. The scholar thus insists on the fact that the invariant of the motif determines the semantics of its variants by means of a set of differential features. A complex motif forms a plot. I.V. Silant'ev, however, puts forward the hypothesis that the motif is semantically indivisible not from the point of view of logic, but from the point of view of aesthetically significant semantics [21]. V.B. Shklovsky considers the motif as an integral semiotic whole of the plot, themes as units of the plot [22]. A motif as a sign with a plane of expression and a plane of content can be correlated not only with a symbol, but also with an archetype.

An archetype is a pattern of the collective unconscious that accumulates universal human ideas about the world. It is a retranslative concept with a universal core (determined by similar human ideas about the organization of the world order) and a variable, flexible periphery that adapts to specific extralinguistic factors: the habitat of the ethnic community, the climatic conditions of its existence, etc.

Both the motif and the archetype as a regulatory concept semiotically refer to ethnopoetic constants. They represent cultural codes, among which the most significant are: spatial; temporal; object; biomorphic; somatic; spiritual [23]. Ethnopoetic constants can be realized not only in the content of a work, but also at the level of its external representation, in the system of genres as formulas of aesthetically obtained truth. Thus, in S. Sanbaev's story "When They Thirst for Myth"¹, we find a fragment describing a starry night capable of awakening memories of the legendary past of the steppe lands: the hills await the hour when they will come alive again in the old man's stories; the fortress cities and bustling villages will rise again; the legend will breathe life into all living and non-living things, acting as the savior of human memory. This linguistically and poetically significant fragment is accentuated in the last part of the text, which is expressively saturated and semiotically intense: it goes back to the national genre of *tolgau*, a poem-reflection with a polycentric structure. This rhythmic pattern is determined by an ethno-specific worldview, in which the earth itself is perceived as an endlessly rotating sphere. Its movement is commensurate with the cycles of life-death-life of the Great Steppe, which knows no beginning and no end and exists in a series of natural transformations. Hence the polycentric composition characteristic of reflections-contemplations (*tolgau*), "weeping for the end of the world" (*zhoktau*), and *kyuy*, which main purpose is to harmonize the world. It is no coincidence that in the above fragment, the past comes to life in the words of an old man who is culturally associated with the image of a demiurge, a shaman, a *bak*sy. This has connotations with the image of the great *Korkyt*, who, in his search for eternal life, invented an instrument sacred to the Kazakh people — the *kobyz*. The *kobyz* was created as a counterweight to chaos and death. According to legend, it was made from the skin of a magical camel. As a zoomorphic concept of culture, the camel symbolizes the idea of the unity of the universe, as its external appearance combines elements of the appearance of all known animals. It is no coincidence that in S. Sanbaev's story "White Arwana," it is the camel that symbolizes the motif of

¹ Sanbayev, S. *When Myths Are Craving*. Almaty: Zhasushy, 1989.

eternal return and appeals to the archetypal complex of “HOME”: death in a foreign land is perceived by animals as existentially preferable to life in a foreign land.

Despite the fact that the texts presented are written in Russian, their structure contains an archetypal substrate that forms the aesthetic reality of the artistic whole. Let us try to analyze the archetypal concept of “EMSHAN” in the eponymous story by M. Simashko. The story is a conditional definition. The work is also classified as a “poem in prose,” and we find this genre designation more acceptable. The text, which is limited in volume (each paragraph, from 3 to 9 lines, can be considered a “stanza”), is organized according to the principle of polyfragmentarity: each fragment represents an event that arises in the memory of the main character, Beibars. From the point of view of semiotic narratology, an event is an exceptional situation that contributes to the launch of transformational plot twists. Unlike the proposition underlying an everyday situation, an event is single-act, consequential, irreversible, and requires the protagonist to cross a semiotic boundary. The technique of analeptic repetition allows the author to return the protagonist to his past and evaluate it from the height of his acquired experience. The impulse for analeptic “leaps” is provided by the ethnospecific vocative “kuke” — a word that the hero cannot decipher until the very end. The short text is characterized by an “epic expanse” that gravitates toward the genre of the poem, as does the choice of an exceptional historical figure as the acting subject.

The poem touches on a dramatic theme for the steppe people: the destruction of the Kipchak ethnic group during the Mongol conquest and the gradual rise of the slave Beibars in the state of Misr, medieval Egypt. The idea was suggested by O.O. Suleimenov. It is noteworthy that the motif of power does not become transformative for the plot: the hero, faithful to his inner code, remains himself in the ship’s hold, in the slave barracks, and on the throne. Life, according to Beibars, is an endless struggle. He despises weak-minded men and tearful women. The only word that instills indelible bitterness in the sultan’s soul is *kuke* (“father”). *Kuke* is a concept-sensibility with a high degree of perceptiveness and sensory perception. In the narrative structure of the story, it plays the role of an analeptic impulse, returning the hero to his past. The events of this past are dramatic. Remembering himself in the saddle, the hero actualizes the motif of the centaur-man, once a Kipchak and carrying within himself echoes of the steppe life. A little slave who killed three people for a piece of bread. A Genoese rower and overseer who chose a new name for himself. A Mamluk warrior bought at a slave market. A great hero who fought the Crusaders. The emir of the sultan himself. A rebel who raised an uprising and took the sultan’s place. The series of events that tempered Beibars’ soul did not erase the bitter word “*kuke*” from his memory. Only at the end of his life, in the rays of the setting sun, did a flash of memory illuminate the hero: the desert at sunset, a little boy calling out to his dead father, pierced by an arrow, and the fragrance of *emshan* — wormwood.

Kuke-e! The word suddenly tore at his throat. His lips immediately became bitter. And he remembered everything...

This tall, bitter grass smells so good, red from the evening sun. And the red sand turns blacker. And a man lies on the sand, and it is his kuke. And the boy cries and pulls his kuke by his big hand. Only he is afraid to touch the arrow with its black, stiff feathers...

The sand turns black. And everything around turns black. And the smell becomes thicker, and it is so bitter that you cannot lick your dry lips. And green dots are very close in the bitter darkness. There are more and more of them around, and they are getting closer. And he presses himself against the big cold kuke, and he feels warm, and he is not so afraid...

The concept of “EMSHAN” becomes representative of the motif of memory, made explicit in Beibars’ decision to drink the cup of poison and reunite with his family forever.

The semiotic nature of the concept of “EMSHAN” is revealed through the pretext of the poem “A Dry Bundle of Steppe Grass,” given in the epigraph, which becomes an important intertextual impulse. The reader is presented with the voice of a singer narrating about Khan Syrchan and his brother Otrok. Otrok was defeated by the troops of Vladimir Monomakh and fled to the Caucasus Mountains, where he managed to rise to the rank of Tsar. After Monomakh’s death, Syrchan sends a singer to Otrok to “give up everything... To go to his inheritance, to the fragrant steppes.” Sensing that his brother would not respond to the songs of his native land, Syrchan ordered the singer to give Otrok a bunch of dry steppe grass — emshan. Having renounced everything, Otrok returns to the free steppes. “EMSHAN” as a phytonymic code of culture and concept-sensibility correlates with the archetype “HOME” — the ontological center of the universe.

Archetypal motifs are rooted in fundamental cultural concepts, such as images of “home,” “one’s circle,” and the like. It is important to emphasize that a motif is not identical to an archetype, but embodies it in a narrative structure. The archetype of “home,” one of the most ancient in cultural heritage, is historically closely linked to the idea of “one’s own space” or “one’s own circle.” In the early periods of human development, the boundaries of “one’s own” were of exceptional importance. The area that people knew and that ensured their survival was considered sacred. The entire territory beyond its borders was perceived as dangerous and threatening. The concept of “one’s own circle” encompassed not only geographical boundaries, but to a greater extent, family ties. The image of “home” in mythological and literary traditions is often filled with archetypal meaning, which is clearly evident in common plots where heroes explore and settle in various places.

An archetype is a model embedded in the collective unconscious, where people’s ideas about reality are concentrated. This universal knowledge is passed down from generation to generation. As an element of mental structure, the archetype reflects the generalized, original, and therefore universal ideas of the collective about the world. Its stability is due to the stability of its core meaning. The structure is characterized by a variable, changeable periphery, which is formed under the influence of the historical and geographical context.

The archetype is a phenomenon that affects both the individual and collective aspects of human experience. Despite differences in the geographical location of various ethnic groups, the original living conditions of people were very similar. The formation of communities was a key factor in survival, which led to community members being perceived as “their own,” as opposed to “strangers,” who became “enemies.” In the early periods of human history, belonging to “one’s own circle” was considered the highest value. According to C.G. Jung, archetypes are fundamental and common images embedded in the collective unconscious of humanity [24]. Archetypes are organically linked to myths, which embody primitive models of perception of the world. A myth is not just an abstract idea, but a living, emotionally charged reality that is perceived by a person as something urgent and immediate. Mythology is not a system of schemes, but a living, illustrative reflection of existence. Archetypes not only accumulate meanings, but also play an important role in cognition, information transfer, the formation of value orientations, the reflection of relativity, and conceptual thinking.

In the search for archetypal content, turning to mythology and literature proves to be most fruitful. The home is an archetype associated with space. It satisfies the fundamental human needs for security, communication, and a sense of belonging to one’s group. The opposition of order and chaos lies at its core.

The term “archetype” was first introduced into scientific discourse by C.G. Jung, who was involved in analytical psychology. It is important to note that the idea of the existence of universal models of collective experience predated Jung’s work and can be found in the writings of thinkers such as Philo of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite, Plato, and Augustine. Jung considered archetypes to be analogous to Durkheim’s “collective representations,” Kant’s “a priori ideas,” and the “behavior patterns” studied by behaviorists. Jung considered the archetype to be not just a pattern, but a fundamental structure embedded in the collective unconscious and passed down from generation to generation. It is the embodiment of powerful psychic energy that manifests itself in human consciousness. According to Jung, the myths of different cultures are the result of the embodiment of archetypes. He emphasized the metaphorical nature of archetypes, seeing them as multidimensional symbols.

According to archetype theory, all cultural creations of humanity form a single meta-story, where an infinite variety of manifestations reflects a limited number of fundamental life situations structured by archetypal patterns.

In the first half of the twentieth century, there was a tendency to mythologize everyday language and ordinary phenomena, discovering mythological roots in them. Against this backdrop, various concepts were formed that explored the mythological aspect of culture. Among them are: the theory of the incarnation of Apollo in the person of Grigoriev, Odoevsky’s historiosophical concept, Solovyov’s sophrology, Fedorov’s “common cause” project, Florensky’s concept of “primary symbols,” and Veselovsky’s theory of stable motifs. Within the framework of narratology, concepts such as mytheme (Lévi-Strauss), archimotive

(Bremen), and archetypal motif (Meletinsky) have emerged, which help to analyze mythological structures in texts.

Artistic creations are interpreted as systems of codes, continuous semiotic chains, mythocentric constructions reflecting mental models. In scientific discourse, the concepts of “mythopoetics,” “mythopoetic subtext,” and narrative models in literature are increasingly used.

Human spiritual life finds expression in various forms, among which ritual and myth occupy a special place. Myths from different cultures serve as a kind of repository of archetypes. In linguistics and literary studies, the archetype is closely related to the concept of “motif.” An archetypal motif, which is a miniature plot, combines all the key components that drive it. The set of motifs forms a more extensive structure — the plot. Archetypal motifs are often found in literature, such as an encounter with a demonic creature, marriage to a princess, or a journey, notes Meletinsky.

Such renowned researchers as E.M. Meletinsky, V.N. Toporov, B.A. Uspensky, and Y.M. Lotman have studied literary archetypes. However, creating a clear classification system for archetypes proves difficult. Despite this, E.M. Meletinsky attempted to identify several groups of archetypes. Although the researcher did not touch on the topic of spatial archetypes, such as the archetype of home, he emphasized the inextricable link between the description of the world by mythological consciousness and its narration. According to Meletinsky, the key archetypal motif is the conflict between Cosmos and Chaos. The theme of creation is closely intertwined with the concept of time, within which the motif of the hero’s journey through space and interaction with different spheres and worlds is highlighted. The hero most often acts outside his home, in the outside world. In contrast to home, the forest is a symbol of “foreign” territory. Meletinsky introduces the term “archetypal motif,” which refers to a mini-plot with clearly defined elements (subject, action, and object) that carries a deep universal meaning [25].

Yuri Domansky considers spatial archetypes as a separate category. He groups archetypal motifs according to thematic characteristics: connections with elements of nature, human life cycles, and human location in space. Domansky identifies six basic motifs: motifs related to weather and seasons, orphanhood and widowhood, forests and dwellings. At the same time, he emphasizes that each archetypal motif contains a whole set of semantic associations [26].

In the modern understanding, a spatial archetype is a universal image of space, passed down from generation to generation, which permeates the entire history of human culture. This image is usually based on contrasts, such as “home — forest,” “home — road,” “home — anti-home.” The key element here is the “boundary” — the line separating “self” space from “other.”

In the texts we have examined, the potential of the sensibility concept “EMSHAN” proves to be inexhaustible. In terms of narrative structure, the plots are similar: both Beibars and Otrok are ready to choose death in their homeland over life in a foreign land. Beibars returns to the world of his kind, the world of

primordial memory. Otok, having renounced his title and wealth, experiences social death in order to return home to his native steppe.

It is no coincidence that M.S. Mukhamadiev considers wormwood to be one of the basic concepts of Kazakh linguistic culture and one of the ethno-poetic constants of Kazakh literature. The researcher cites a number of works in which the “wormwood branch” becomes a symbolic image: “A Sprig of Wormwood” by A. Khasanov, “A Branch of Darmina” by R. Nasyrov, “The Bitter Smell of Wormwood” by S. Muratbekov, “Wormwood and Flowers” by D. Doszhanov, “Wormwood” by D. Isabekov, “Yemshan” by M. Simashko, “Wormwood of a Foreign Land” by A. Moskalenko. “For the modern Kazakh novel, the wormwood theme is its own internal theme, which it develops very persistently, revealing the integrity of the concept <...> Wormwood, as a steppe grass, is inextricably linked to the image of the steppe. The steppe, like a mirror, reflects, remembers, and preserves human joys and sufferings” [27. P. 146].

Wormwood is a concept that is used as an axiologem in a number of works of Kazakhstani literature. Hence the conceptual metaphors *of wormwood of memory*, *wormwood of foreign lands*, *wormwood of separation*, *wormwood of reflection*.

In the poetics of the poem in prose “Emshan,” the semantics of the title have special significance, being made explicit in the text as a symbolic image that contributes to the development of the author’s idea. This axiologem accumulates the features of wormwood-memory; repeating itself in the text, the image acquires the features of a dominant, becoming a symbol of memory of the homeland. It is also symptomatic that Simashko uses the Turkic phytonym *yemshan* as the title. As we can see, the transfer of the image with all its semantic and axiological meanings becomes one of the mechanisms of intercultural dialogue within the artistic text.

Conclusions

Ethnopoetics is a new integrative discipline whose main task is to identify the ethnic uniqueness of regional literatures. Although it currently lacks clear terminological codification, it has nevertheless been widely developed in the works of a number of followers — from the study of folklore motifs to the study of ethnopoetic constants, which are key units of the declared scientific epistemology. Despite the multiplicity of approaches to understanding the text, the main thing remains unchanged: ethnopoetics appeals to those linguistic units that constitute the national specificity of literary text. Ethnopoetic constants can be represented in a system of motifs, archetypes, sensibility concepts, and linguistic and cultural codes — spatial, temporal, biomorphic, etc. They are also realized in the genre structure of a work, as was shown in the example of R. Seisenbaev’s work “When Myths Are Longed For”.

Ethnopoetic constants are semiotically crystallized in archetypal concepts and motifs. We have examined the ethnopoetic constant “EMSHAN” (“wormwood”) in the text of the poem of the same name by M. Simashko, which realizes the motif of memory, correlating with the intertextual complex of themes set out in the epigraph

of the work. “EMSHAN” is a sensorial (perceptual, sensual) concept that goes back to the archetypal complex “HOME” — a spatial pattern that signifies the idea of “ONE’S OWN CIRCLE.” Archetypes are one of the forms of representation of the ethno-poetic constant, and their study provides us with essential cultural information.

Ethnopoetic constants are semiotic structures of varying degrees of complexity. Their taxonomic distribution has yet to be determined by science. Nevertheless, their study is hermeneutically productive when we are dealing with a text of increased semiotic complexity — for example, a transcultural Russian-language text of a palimpsestic nature.

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