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**MYTHOLOGEM ETERNAL FEMININE IN NOVEL OF GAITO  
GAZDANOV “AN EVENING WITH CLAIRE”**

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*Abstract*

The novel “An evening with Claire” is presented as a symbolic work. It was led by the image of Claire, the main character. Her image’s mystery and inconsistency correspond to the aesthetics of the symbolists, which means the connection of the incomprehensible and simple, heavenly and earthly, high and low. At the same time, this image of Gazdanov’s character is devoid of mysticism. Simplicity and clarity, predetermined in the speaking name-image of “Claire”, do not deprive it of meaning’s multidimensionality and symbolic concentration. The image of Claire appears as a cosmological level mediator. It converts the aggression of violence and death into a vitalistic future represented in the text as Concorde Square. The mythology of the eternal feminine (das Ewig-Weibliche) is associated with foreignness contaminated with a crypto-sentimental image of the “foreign”. The “foreign” is the “most real reality” obtained as a result of the rebirth of the imperfect world. The image of a woman in the context of the transition time of the day is given from the very name of the novel. Both positions are coherent with the mythology of the eternal feminine. Claire’s “unbeatable charm” converts the chaos of war. Her anticipated “foreign image” as the eternal feminine is presented in the same vitalistic perspective with the spiritual inheritance that the hero reproduces in the “gallery of memories” about childhood and youth in Russia. At the same time, the more intimate loci of a hero’s inner world, the more restrained their designation in the letter.

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## 1. Introduction

The mnemonic narration in G. Gazdanov's novel "An evening with Claire" is represented by various temporary layers. "The convergence of historical and biographical time in the narrator's perception and memory is associated with the experience of memories as a reality" (Kosenkova, 2014).

"An evening with Claire" is a novel of personal development. It determines the installation on self-restraint in an external reality. Overcoming the "horrors before history" (Eliade, 1998) is accomplished by re-creating the world in the personal experience of "rebirth". M. Eliade calls historical time "old time", it should be "destroyed and restored" anew (materia prima "primary chaos") (Eliade, 1998, p. 92).

"The destruction of the world and its subsequent re-creation" through a trip to childhood is achieved by the memories from present time to the absolute beginning ... "It is very important to keep in mind even the smallest details of existence (present or previous), since they make possible to burn the past, to seize it and to prevent from affecting the present" (Eliade, 2014). Thus, the "burning" - remembering is to be the alchemical sublimation of the old world to the quintessence of the "primary broth". The protagonist of the hero's path to the Golden Age of Childhood was his union with Claire. His image is expressed from the novel's title to the final.

The idea of the eternal feminine (hereinafter the EF) seeks to the symbol's laconic brevity and encryption. "The symbolic world is not located in one plane. It deepens and multiplies, going back from the "real" to the "realest" (very often through the psychological mechanisms of memory, imagination, intuition, sleep, dreaming). The world in the symbolist novel is based on the eidetic principle, which means a level-by-level analysis (from a phenomenon to essence, to an idea to eidos). The whole semantic vertical is not given in the text, only its "generating model" is presented. A reader peruses a depicted reality, and the artistic form, which is fluid, dynamic and containing a motivating, creative impulse, guides the perception process" (Barkovskaya, 1996). Claire represents the ultimate degree of impulse's crystallization: "Entpuppt sich dann der literarische „Held“ als seine bloße Realisierung bzw. Personifizierung seines Namens, der ihm zum "Schicksal" wird, der sein Geschick in "nuce" vorprogrammiert" (Hansen-Löve, Aage, 1982).

The word of another language sounds like foreign. But it has become "new" through the prism of the "foreign" in the novel. It is the EF when a vamp appears in an angel. This thought and the fact that "life is a pledge of a date" (A. S. Pushkin) is paraphrased in the works of F. Sologub, V. Bryusov, I. Bunin, and it is developed in the work of (Panova, 2018).

## 2. Problem Statement

Gender relations is one of the key issues of intellectual reflection at the turn of the century. Erokhina (2015) gives an overall picture of the EF's cultivation in the symbolism. She notes the "confluence of masculine and feminine", where a woman is "a great secret universe, attractive and painful, beautiful and mysterious, like life and death ...". The male principle is suffering and waiting, guessing and deceiving. Although the character of the novel "expects" and "searches" (Gazdanov, 2009) for a meeting with Claire, he differs from the general paradigm of symbolism. It is not by chance that researchers of Gazdanov's works note the originality of his first novel (Dienes, 1982; Dienes, 1995). This was reflected in the symbolic design of the EF in "An evening with Claire."

The protagonist may seem suffering, not self-sufficient, “fixated” on the discord with the outer empirical world. He does not hesitate to recognize the “superiority” of both younger sisters and mother (Gazdanov, 2009, pp. 65-66, 68), but this self-deprecation disappears when he decides to end carnal relations with Claire, detachedly admiring her “perfect body” (Gazdanov, 2009). Now, when one secret cover has been removed, “foreign” ways of self-improvement and “new opportunities” are opening up (Gazdanov, 2009). The achievement of Claire’s body and the cleansing “sadness” that followed him healed an obsession with an object. The character’s rebirth took place at the spiritual and soul levels.

The image of Claire embodies the material world in its iconic symbol name. The “speaking” name of the main character (translated from French as “simple”, “clear”, “transparent”) not only embodies the empirical world of Maya in its primary element, but also fixes in the “natural man” idea. Paris is the birthplace of revolutions. The thesis “back to nature” of the French humanists is questioned by Sosedov’s irony in connection with a vulgar French song, which Claire teased the future lover. The comparison of a woman with a flower in this couplet (“Simple as a flower of the fields”) (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 44) looks like a multilayer symbolist. It is intertwined with the ephrasis of “disproportionate”, “thick Leda” (Gazdanov, 2009). The ideal of female beauty in the aesthetics of the Silver Age was a fragile female flower, just as in ancient mythology an elegant and faithful swan bird. Loyalty as an ideal is also stated in the epigraph of the novel, in a letter of Pushkin’s Tatyana (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 39).

The noble, faithful and spiritualized hypostasis of femininity is presented in the image of the character’s mother. The bond with Claire is filled with changeable, carnal, deceptive obsession. But both images are edges of femininity’s vital noumenon as its two poles. In their original natural simplicity, they oppose the absurdity and the entropy of war as masculinity derivatives like “the phenomenon of ... some intangible biology”, “the death of corals” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 118). Thus, the irreconcilable collision of Claire’s image is opened. She is one of the faces of femininity pathos, shock, surpassing “the horrors of history” in the form of civil war. The gender vector is declared from the first conversation of lovers and in the future, it becomes a motive. It is based on “the idea that you need to have a special conversation with women somehow” (Gazdanov, 2009). The effect of Claire’s suggestion to make love in the absence of her husband is the “numbness” lasted for 10 years cyclically, “the silent rumble of the greatest upheaval in my life” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 100).

“Rebirth” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 126) is the only reason for voluntarily leaving the war. It is primarily associated with the self-assertion of the character as a man who overcame “terrible cowardice” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 128) and the fear of death. V. G. Shmyrova characterizes the world of foreignness, disorder and entanglement that surrounds the character as a crazy one: “There is no normality. There are varieties of human inadequacy in the world of the novel, a dead end of human thinking ... Dialects, languages, mentalities, countries are the same ways of foreignness, in other words, forms of madness, like all human differences listed above ..., and the difference of the sexes is another derivative of twisted thinking ... This foreignness, according to the writer, is a consequence of inadequacy perception of the world by human consciousness, which, in turn, arises as a result of the strain of thinking about death” (Shmyrova 2013, pp. 179-182.).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the character seeks purgatorial simplicity in the intellectual sphere (his priorities are Avakum, Boehme, Tolstoy). In love he was attracted by the amateur of vulgar jokes

Claire. Uncle Vitaly also teaches: “Never become a convinced person, do not draw conclusions, do not argue and try to be as simple as possible” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 122).

The foreignness expressed in the symbolization’s femininity contrasts with the “ownness”, the realistic world of men. The collective image of masculinity is expressed in the images of the neighbor and son of Sosedovs. They are both fearless, patient in dealing with women, wise, immersed in creativity. The portrait of the character’s father has vivid details, such as the “wide hairy back” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 55). His bodily redundancy is full of life and energy. The contemplation of the hair on the body of Claire is veiled. The description of Claire’s appearance is generally reduced to the perception of her eyes as an erotic locus. The mother is unbending under the blows of fate, she, unlike her husband and son, is disciplined. She is distinguished by wholeness as a person, and Claire has a “foreign” wholeness, that is, bodily form. At the same time, the author expressed diegetic ways of describing in the image of “own” male world. But femininity has an intention to double-world timeless symbolization, to “simultaneousness of all times” as Borges formulated the notion of “eternity” (Borges, 1992). Nikolai compares his mother with the still “wonderful” picture (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 66); and he avoids portraying the beloved because of her continual fluidity (“looking like Lady Hamilton, then like the fairy Rautendelain” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 92). “The face of a woman is her visible image, her face turns into a mask, a pretense that conceals the true essence” (Erokhina, 2015, p. 212).

The image of Claire has the connotation of the eternal femininity. The character who knew the fratricidal war as an “artificial... undivine” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 148) and all sorts of contradictions, tries to remove the darkness cover of things from the surrounding reality, that is, to “erase random features”. To understand the apparent difference in compliance is the task of the symbolist artist. The harmony of the different relates to the eternal femininity theurgically. The author poeticizes and embellishes the imperfection of a woman as an accident, obvious to the uninitiated consciousness. Thereby he recreates her substantial superiority in another transcendental plane. Not all women are appropriate for idealization, but only young ones. Fussy old women on the street and Claire’s maid do not fit the sphere of the eternal femininity. In the novel “An evening with Claire” there are two mythological plots: initial and cosmogonic. When in the text these semiotic highways are present together, “the main thing is not the transition, but the connection” (Zhiganova, 2007, p. 17).

The novel “An evening with Claire” culminates in the goal-setting of Nikolay Sosedov to look for a different image of Claire. The storytelling is limited to several courtship evenings until the evening of intimacy as a moment of truth-insight. After the bodily union with the beloved the character restores all life as a “gallery of memories” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 46). The author shows “the date” instead of the “life” or the evening series instead of the “evening”. It demonstrates a general tendency to create symbolic thickenings of meanings in the poetics of the novel. The reference to the primary elements of symbolic concentration through the war chaos in the past and the path of the emigrant in the future makes the image of Claire a beacon and a driver of a vital impulse.

Göbler (1999) defines the multiple nature of Gazdanov’s character: “The character is no longer portrayed as something integral, but as “a collection of separate incarnations”. Sosedov’s self-reflection emphasizes the “multitude of existences” and “all that number of lives” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 160), which he represents like myriads of spermatozoa heading for the egg cell, if we apply the analogy from “intangible

biology” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 118). The integrity of Claire encourages the character to overcome the randomness and gives the eternal feminine cosmogonic coloring. “It is because of this wholeness that later modifications are developed. The cosmic environment inhabited by man is the “world,” his “origin”; and his “history” precede all other private histories. The mythical idea of “origin” is superimposed on the idea of “creation” (Eliade, 2014, p. 47).

The character meets the fate challenges in order to confront the extremities of the visible world. The exit to another unknown for him is an opportunity to show his hidden manpower. The need for self-affirmation makes him a volunteer on the side of the “conquered” whites. The image of Claire as a centripetal force, which was for Nicholas the persistent thought that filled all his youthful imagination, “burns out” in the childhood memories and a martyrology on the “Dym” armored train. And the world, which was obscured by its tormenting appearance, opened for the character in its entirety in the final episode of the novel, which depicts the moment of the world’s birth with the vision of “Claire’s dream coming true.”

Kibalnik (2011) commenting on the features of Gazdano’s mythologism, notes his “wide, universal nature, and the images of different mythological nature flow and turn into each other” (p.73).

The chaos emerges from the fertilization of water by fire. R. Guenon (Guenon, 1953) writes: “In order for this chaos to take shape and organize, the spiritual forces that the biblical Book of Genesis calls Elohim must inform him of the original vibration. This vibration is Fiat Lux, “Let There Be Light”, which illuminates chaos and becomes a necessary starting point for any subsequent development”. Elohim translates as “many” flames, but the sea in the horizon of Sosedov, who is departing to a foreign land, was littered with the lights of a flotilla. The scattered light is going into the emerging luminous form of Claire’s image.

A little later after the novel publication, G. Gazdanov entered the Masonic Lodge, where he participated in the discussion of the problems that are highlighted in “An evening with Claire”. Babich (2016) reviewed the meetings of this educational organization and cited G. Gazdanov’s “The Wall of China” report on the meaning of the symbols “overcoming borders between people” resulting from their universal nature.

### **3. Research Questions**

The gender issue as a mode of consciousness is presented in the novel in three positions: the patriarchal grandfather’s model, the “golden mean” in the parents’ idyll and the model of the formal observance of Claire’s parents decency. The male brotherhood is considered by the character as communication, limited by the duration of a human life: “I thought: friendship means that we are still alive, and others are dead” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 63). Gender unions in the novel are exaggerated by gender. The relationships of parents or Claire and Nicholas are built on a contrasting basis. The principle of polar foreignness most enriches partners, antipodes. Overcoming foreignness as the knowledge of the female body in the character’s self-reflection looks like an existential event, more important than the fear of being killed in a war. In contrast to the classical scheme (the actant, having passed the test, receives an award), closeness with Claire is an even more difficult test with foreignness, which gives the transition to a new life and a sense of self-confidence after “sadness” only. “Probably, the main result of the Silver Age can be

considered that Russian culture found itself in the mainstream of the European cultural process. She spoke in a common European language and began to be measured by a common European “arshin” (Berezovaya, 2001). At the same time, the idea of the eternal feminine, which goes back to Plato’s “soul of the world,” in Russian literature, thanks to the work of V. Solovyov, became a unique aesthetic topos.

The direction to a woman as the eternal feminine aims to create the world not only in the speculative way, but also in the context of the life of symbolists. In other words, direct sexual contact is required, which is also a celestial cosmogonic act. Commenting on the sophianic-erotic poems of V. Solovyov, L. R. Usmanova writes: “... in V. Solovyov, Sofia is a cosmic creative principle, “an essential image of beauty”, “a bright body of eternity, “completely identified with eternal femininity, which should appear in the world and save his beauty from corruption” (Usmanova, 2013, p. 35). In the novel “An evening with Claire” intimacy is accompanied by the contemplation of the clouds on the wallpaper of the room Claire, which switches the situation of storytelling in the mode of memories.

In the world of Gazdanov, “foreign” means “new”. The path towards the woman becomes an alluring way into adult life, which is carried out by a self-testing. The character contrasts his patriarchal world to the bourgeois world of Paris in value terms, but there is no radical protest in this. The alien world appears to be the substrate of rebirth or the foreignness transformation. Just as the unrecognized world of a woman’s body was still an object of dream and imaginative re-creation, so the world of Paris with its horse smell (manure), ridiculous old women and advertising gurus with “all-knowing eyes under horn-rimmed European glasses” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 39) gives a vitalistic perspective to the discovery of new yet invisible potentials, focused in the new image of Claire. The French word “claire”, thus, symbolizes Paris as a “brothel city”, referring to biblical Babylon (“I walked along the long and narrow Babylone street” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 39), which can reach “the maximum in the image of a brothel country, a brothel nation” (Melnikova, 2011) and, as an image, a confidence in the future. The foreignness as one external to the character is a whole. “The old time” lies in the tide of the “horrors of history” and Claire’s deviant behavior. Claire’s world was brought by character’s imaginative efforts to the standard of the eternal feminine. With the adultery completion it finally becomes a symbol of the eternity feminine.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

During the work, the goal was to describe the peculiarities of the symbolist aesthetics in the novel, to analyze them implicitly from the perspective of the opposition “carnal/spiritual” through the images of Claire and the mother of the character, and explicitly through the dialectical unity of the opposites of the male and female principles.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Historical-literary method, structural-semiotic method, hermeneutic method, historical-semantic method.

#### **6. Findings**

As a result of the analysis of the “strong positions of the text” (title, epigraph, exposition, final), the speaking name of the main character, several motifs and the image system, invariant symbolist the features

of the eternal feminine, as well as its occasional elements, were found. The latter includes the life-affirming installation “An evening with Claire” as a novel of becoming and the cosmogonic “reset” of the world destroyed by the Civil War with the help of the eternal feminine.

## 7. Conclusion

The character is not looking for easy ways in life. On the contrary. At the front, he chooses the side of the doomed whites, on whose side there is even no truth. His beloved is a woman with whom he fails to find a common language. In addition, in the war he feels like a “Russian foreigner” in the eyes of “ordinary” people. He is attracted by the opportunity to overcome the impossible, as the path of the personality evolution. Therefore, the present emigrant reality appears in vitalistic enthusiasm. “The symbolist novel that emerged during the recessionary crisis of Russia’ era reflected the writers’ desire to bring into the reality the universalism of the myth, which allows seeing not only the eschatological, but also the historiosophical perspective of the world’s development” (Barkovskaya, 1996, p. 39).

The current life represented as a zoom realization of a surreal project. “Ah, you are French,” I said, having rejoiced at the unknown why (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 87). “But Claire is French,” I suddenly remembered, and if so, then why was this constant and intense sadness about the snow and green plains, and about that whole number of lives that I spent in the country that was hiding from me behind the fiery the curtain” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 160). The knowledge of Claire’s body in Paris and the same unconscious refusal of it in Russia look like predetermined acts of entering the environment of fluid identities of the Western world, a foreign space of Chaos. M. Eliade writes that when missionaries (in the novel there is a mention of conquistadors in herbal in the case of an adventurous key) or other settlers populate the space alien from their point of view, they perform sacral rites and order Chaos into Cosmos (Eliade, 1998, p. 36). The carrier of patriarchal values Sosedov regains their homeland of revolutions through the sex with a woman who he inspires with a dream, idealizing her feminine essence: “she never ceased to be herself” (Gazdanov, 2009, p. 49).

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