

Inmar, the Udmurt God, in Modern Udmurt Literature

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Abstract: One of the productive directions of research into Udmurt literature (and more broadly other Finno-Ugric ‘small’ literary traditions) is the identification and interpretation of multidimensional mythological clusters, textual representativeness and semantic ambivalence. In this work I have focused on only one aspect, the functional and semantic field of a particular character in Udmurt mythology and national poetry at the turn of the 21st century. The chosen mythological character is *Inmar*/God. The study has predominantly focused on ethnic and futuristic poems by Petr Zakharov, Viktor Shibanov, and Anastasiya Shumilova, characterised by a high concentration of mythological symbols. The presented research demonstrates how complex the image of *Inmar* is for direct artistic understanding.

Keywords: Udmurt mythology, *Inmar*/God, use of *Inmar* in literature

One of the productive directions of research into Udmurt literature (and more broadly other Finno-Ugric ‘small’ literary traditions) is the identification and interpretation of multidimensional mythological clusters, textual representativeness and semantic

ambivalence. These are primarily caused by the stadial-typological nature of the national literature and its internal and external markers of genetic conjugation with the figurative-symbolic universe of traditional culture. The scientific problem of the search for and analysis of mythological roots, i.e. the layers of literature found in the complex consideration of the development of a minority literary system, is already highly relevant, and moreover it should be mandatory, a programmed analytical strategy, the inevitable choice of the scientist. Mythological representations and folklore imagery are a kind of ethno-cultural fundamental principle on the basis of which the author's artistic identity is formed. It is noteworthy that modern Udmurt literary critics, working with written pieces from different historical periods, trends and genres, usually avoid updating scientific issues related to the folklore and mythological beginning of the artistic whole. To date, study of mythological plots, and mythological and folklore paradigms of Udmurt literature have been limited to individual articles, usually the work of one author (Arzamazov 2010; Vanyushev 2004; Vasil'yev, Shibanov 1997; Zaytseva 2006; Il'yina 2006; Shklyayev 2004). The undeveloped nature of this topic is explained, among other things, by its theoretical complexity. Some blurring of the conceptual and categorical apparatus has developed (or is developing) that hinders interpretation and description of the myth in the systems of Udmurt worldview and culture. The appeal of the mythological strata is of great importance in the context of justifying a systematic development of Udmurt literature, as well as in determining the quality and originality of Udmurt writers' interpretation of their ethnic mythology.

In a global sense, we can talk about identifying the features of an author's 'experience' of mythological matrices in typologically related and unrelated literatures, and about building scientifically reasoned comparative collations.

The mythological expressiveness of Udmurt literature and poetry (depending on the rhetoric of the era), which determines the artistic priorities and semantic centres, had a different qual-

ity of presentation in the written work. Great attention was given to traditional culture by the poet and educator Kuzebay Gerd, for example in his poems. Here we see many mythological contexts and subtexts, and when the characters of Udmurt mythology appear they receive the sufficiently broad dissemination of folk images. Within socialist realism, which for many decades set the themes and determined the artistic and plot pragmatics of national literature, the open mythological hypertexts that go back to the traditional worldview of the Udmurt, were unacceptable. They would have been perceived as an alternative to the Soviet model of the world, as a mentally dangerous symbolic reality. In the conditions of significant ideological and communicative limitations that the Soviet era presented there was a replacement of one system of values and ideas with another. The original Udmurt figurative and symbolic codes were subject to displacement by the socialist emblematic. We can also talk about the emergence of the author's ideologised 'double bottom' texts that have references to ethnos or language and which, despite the strict and artificial external regulations, somehow manifest themselves and translate their semantics.

In the years of perestroika there was a rapid renewal of artistic interests with an inevitable revision of the themes, objectives and concepts of national culture. The undeveloped mythological heritage of the people, the symbolic potency of folklore became a more and more creative attraction. In the early 1990s, the cultural life of Udmurtia saw the rise of ethno-futurism, a complex modernisation phenomenon that played a key role in the history of Udmurt literature and art. In ethno-futuristically oriented works, a significant place is given to mythology, which is perceived not so much as a heterogeneous worldview but more as a source of new imagery, symbolic depiction. The semiotic reality of many written pieces from the post-Soviet period suggests that the national writers' understanding of the subtle matters of the religious and mythological picture of the Udmurt world is incomplete and fragmentary. Decades of ideological press cut off the ethno-forum from

the cultural resources of its people. However, the artistic need for this own yet foreign, not yet acquired language of writing, is notorious. The natural tendency of Udmurt artists to work with mythology and folklore material, including mechanisms of cultural memory, seems to be natural. In the framework of ethnic futurism a specific multi-level mythological discourse developed within art that saw worlds opposed to each other form a sort of single whole, a world of nature and the urban daily routine, paganism, atheism and Orthodox Christianity. It was psychologically interactive, with a sense of ethnic liberation and socio-political awareness of bitterness and a deep sense of being creatively unrealised. Multifaceted mental-social transformations, experienced by the Udmurt people, could not be better reflected in these mythological re-glued mirrors of ethnic futurism, where each shard of glass shows its own picture, its own event.

Realising the scale of the analytical problem of considering the mythological plan of Udmurt literature, in this work we have focused on only one aspect, the functional and semantic field of a particular character from Udmurt mythology in the Udmurt poetry at the turn of the 21st century. Our choice, among other things, was dictated by the relative simplicity of the object of study, the outline of the artistic search area. In the structure of poetic texts the chosen mythological character – *Inmar*/God – is almost always in sight. It was assumed that his in-text position is usually complicated by the author's point of view. Our study has predominantly focused on ethnic and futuristic poems by Petr Zakharov, Viktor Shibanov and Anastasiya Shumilova, characterised by a high concentration of mythological symbols.

Considering the mythological personages of Udmurt poetic works, it is necessary to produce a list of characters that authors would use, and at the same time could be found in the spiritual and ideological foundations of the Udmurt ethnic group. These criteria produce a number of images, subjects, 'beings' that show varying degrees of meaningful and functional complexity and relatedness

to the realities of world religions (*Inmar*, *Kyldys'in*, *Shaytan*, *Keremet*, *N'ulesmurt*, *Vukuz'o/Vumurt*, *Vunyl*, *Palesmurt*, *Ishan*, *Albasty*, *Vozho*). Accordingly, the list of 'heroes' in the study can be continued, and the very formulation of the problem and scale of its scientific solution, suggest comprehensive multilateral analytical work, the results of which go far beyond a single scientific article.

The first in the hierarchical system and one of the most ambiguous from the point of view of artistic conceptualisation of symbols is *Inmar*/God (see Vladykina, Glukhova 2011: 69).

The mythological character *Inmar* as an image in the poetry of Pyotr Zakharov has high indices of use, i.e. it is in high demand. However, the symbol under consideration does not always fit well into a lyrical story, and does not necessarily have an independent artistic function. The analysis of a large corpus of texts showed that the semantic load of *Inmar* in the structure of Zakharov's poems is rarely motivated by mythological representations of the Udmurt ethnic group. In his debut, and most voluminous collection of poems, *Vozh vyzh* ('The Green Bridge', 2001) the symbol of *Inmar* appears more than 30 times, which shows the great potential 'operationality' of this concept in this specific style. Nevertheless, the prevailing scenario emphasises the real poetic role of *Inmar* in the author's text, the facets of its existence and the minimum, peripheral connectedness with the semantic centre of the work. Mention of *Inmar* in a number of Zakharov's texts is often part of a statement about a lyrical subject, a component of speech that expresses a certain set of socially conditioned feelings, a lexical echo of a complex psychological state, a pensive and dreamy immersion in oneself:

"Inmar ponna ud s'oty-a mynym? ('For God's sake, will you give me?");

"Okh, Inmare, – kure Isay, – / tynyd mon van'ze s'otysal, / Puzhyosse soles' ke tshupasal..." ('Oh, my God, says Isai, /

I would give you everything, / If I'd have kissed her
freckles...');

“*Okh, Inmare, kyshe mözmyt...*” (‘Oh, my God, how sad...’);

“*Peymyt mynym, ton us'ty val öste, / Kot'yugdy val ton, oste
Inmare...*” (‘I'm in the dark, open the door / At least, give the
light, my God’).

The fixed frequency of use of the name *Inmar*, in all probability, is due to subconscious compensatory factors relating to God, with especially obvious pagan mythological outlines which during the Soviet period were impossible to mention let alone give a creatively conscious response. After perestroika, in the 1990s, this important word in Udmurt intellectual culture became not just regular in literary, journalistic national discourses but also one of the dominants of everyday communication and colloquial speech, often unburdened by any significant spiritual or mental pragmatics.

The word *Inmar* in Zakharov's work can be semantically integrated into a meaningful artistic context in which the author prescribes its truths and defends his existential position, opposing the position of another. In a poem entitled “*Kabakyn todmatskon*” (‘Meeting in a Pub’), a lyrical ‘me’ declares that poetry for him is *Inmar*, God, thus pointing out his distinguished status to his collocator. The belittling of the lyric ‘you’ follows:

Mon ponna poeziya Inmar, For me, poetry is *Inmar* (God),
Ton ponna ug todis'ky For you, I don't know what
mon mar I am
(Zakharov 2001: 124)

This poem reflects Zakharov's favourite aphorism: that poetry is the quintessence of culture, art, literature, etc., and that the poet

has a special relationship with God. The poet him- or herself is allowed to be a demiurge, creating his or her own universe in the literary word. The lyrical subject compares himself with *Inmar* in the poem “*Töd’y kagaz*” (‘White Paper’). Here he talks again about the divine beginning of creation, creativity.

<i>Mynam az'am töd'y-töd'</i>	Before me there is white
<i>kagaz,</i>	white paper,
<i>Ogpol no kutymte no</i>	Never held, never touched.
<i>isamte no na so.</i>	
<i>Inmar kad' pukis'ko solen</i>	Like <i>Inmar</i> , I'm sitting in
<i>az'az,</i>	front of it.
<i>Nosh no utshke. Vit'e.</i>	And it is watching...
	Waiting...
<i>Dun'n'e tuso...</i>	It features the guise of the
	world...

(Zakharov 2001: 48)

The name *Inmar* in Zakharov's book *Vozh vyzh* can be contextually associated with artistically playing with social issues. The main body of poems included in this collection was written in the 1990s and was permeated with the drama of experiencing the new time and the new rules of the social games. In *Nunal pörat* (‘Every Day’) (Zakharov 2001: 75) the post-Soviet era is associated with the inevitability of atonement for socialist deceptions and illusions. In the nineties people sacrifice themselves to *Inmar* and human blood flowed (the motif of blood shed by the people is also found in the poetry of Mikhail Fedotov, whose lyrical hero perceives the new era in a passive way).

One of the most common subjects in Zakharov's poems is a dispute with himself about the existence of God. Doubts are often marked with a ‘hob-and-nob’ intonation of appealing to the Almighty:

<i>Van'-a ton, övöl-a ton, Inmar? Van' ke, bas'ty, tan'ï so luly...</i>	Do you exist, do you not, <i>Inmar?</i> If you exist, here is this soul, take it...
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(Zakharov 2001: 45)

<i>Van'-a ton, Inmare? – mon shuo. Van'-a ton? – mon shuo, Inmare. Van' ton, van' ton! – achim ik shuo. Van' ton, van' ton! – shuo Inmare.</i>	Do you exist, my <i>Inmar?</i> - shall I say. Do you exist? – I shall say, my <i>Inmar.</i> You exist, you exist! – I shall say myself. You exist, you exist! – I shall say, my <i>Inmar.</i>
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(Zakharov 2001: 94)

Such rhetorical combinations and cognitive reactions are, apparently, the projection of the 'open' consciousness of the post-Soviet Udmurt ethno-forum, existing in the mode of a multi-directional perception of the world, standing at the crossroads of atheism, Orthodox Christianity and traditional belief. Udmurt culture's understanding of its unreadiness for the new realities of the turn of the century is superimposed on this complex internal state of self-determination.

In the poem *Uysyos* ('Owls') *Inmar* is called to witness the lovingly erotic mutual learning of a village boy and girl, whose unity is shown in the lyrical 'me' as an important life event, and as another, new, face of sin: *Ekh, kytshe busas'ko ta uyyos! / Med addzh'oz n'ï, addzh'oz ke Inmar... / Med luoz n'ï, luoz ke koshmar... / Mi gine shat sytshe s'ölykoyes'...* ("Oh, how foggy were those nights!/Let him see already, if *Inmar* sees,/Let it be already, if there is a nightmare./Are only we such sinners?") (Zakharov 2001: 24). On the compositional level, the poem *Adzh'yli val, s'in'yosyd tynad* ('I Saw Your Eyes...'), is a lyrical monologue by a man who persuades a girl in love with

him to forget him. He asks her to erase him from her memory and her heart, and not to ask *Inmar* about him:

<i>Ogshory mon ul'chays'</i>	I'm an ordinary street
<i>shpana –</i>	rabble
<i>Vamyshly byde vuzas'kis'ko</i>	For sale at every step
<i>Inmarez en kure mon</i>	Do not ask <i>Inmar</i> for me
<i>ponna,</i>	
<i>Ton soku achid s'ölykas'kod</i>	Then you yourself will
	become a sinner

(Zakharov 2001: 79).

Again, *Inmar* is narratively manifested in the possibility of sin.

In the lovingly playful poem *Dzh'ol'gyri so dzh'ol'gyri* ('The Sparrow is a Sparrow') the mood of the beloved is expressed using floral, ornithomorphic characters. Within the framework of this association the pine is a cold *Inmar*. Apparently, this parallel emphasises inaccessibility, the cold detachment of the favoured one.

Notably, among the many poems in the collection the Udmurt *Inmar* (*inmaryos*, *inmars*, gods) is mentioned only once. This mythological character is generally characterised by a weak correlation with the semantic core of the poem. His appearance is in parallel to the development of the love story and brings a semantic shade, the divine symbolism or fatal predetermination of the feeling of love:

<i>As'meos kyldytemyn parly:</i>	We're made to be a couple:
<i>Kyknamy uk yug-yug</i>	We're both fair-haired, white-
<i>chukdores'.</i>	maned.
<i>Vashkala udmurt</i>	The ancient Udmurt gods
<i>inmar"yosly</i>	
<i>Par val"yos luo val</i>	Needed a couple of decent
<i>yarys'es' ...</i>	horses...

(Zakharov 2001: 132)

In *Vozh vyzh*, the phrase *Inmar yurtte!* (*Inmar* helps') is used once. At the same time, God's help is presented as a phenomenon from the lives of others: *Yaram in'i, Inmar, shuo, yurtte*" (Well, at least *Inmar*, they say, helps').

Inmar is one of the hypostases of the corporeality of the lyrical 'me':

<i>Nosh mugory, ben, mugory, Napchem omyr so ogshory...</i>	And my body, yes, my body, The thickened air is just it...
<i>Achiz inmar, achiz ishan Achiz kötdzhoz, achiz veshan – Pöyas'konen suro zemlyk</i>	It is <i>Inmar</i> , it is <i>Ishan</i> , It is the very grief, it is – affection, The truth mixed with deception
<i>Kudiz ug s'oty buyganlyk...</i> (Zakharov 2001: 176)	That does not give rest...

In the second poetic collection, *Karas* (Honeycombs), by Petr Zakharov, the word image *Inmar*, despite the general mythological orientation of most poems, is presented fragmentarily, weakly associated with the traditional culture of the Udmurt people. It should be noted that *Karas* is a curious linguistic and artistic experiment in which Udmurt poems are accompanied by Russian-language substrings, often not very accurately made. Individual texts in the collection in terms of their meaning look dark, difficult to easily apprehend or interpret. This category of poem includes *Kytyn övöl kuara* ('Where There Is No Voice') (Zakharov 2010: 18–19). The attraction to the image of *Inmar* here is poorly motivated, reflecting the general artistic ambiguity of the author's idea. *Inmar* is probably actualised in connection with the metatheme of the imperfections of human life, receiving development in *Karas*,

through which the main message of losses and disappointments is delivered.

The poem *Kuke siz'o dzhökkyshtles' s'ures* ('When They Wish You Good Riddance!') is interesting for its artistic reconstruction of the semantics of the image of *Inmar* (Zakharov 2010: 24–25). The text is also notable for the errors in Russian translation: "*Kogda nas shlyut po skaterchnoy dorozhke, pripomnyu, chto nash zad krasivshe pereda*". It seems that there was a language failure when preparing the Russian version: the poet seems to forget about the basic rules of word usage, violates the laws of Russian grammar, and significantly distorts the lexemes.

Such sudden powerlessness before the Russian language is apparently connected with the author's actualisation in the first lines of the poem in its Udmurt phraseological construction. Initially, the original meaning of the phraseology used (the requirement to leave, to get away) is semantically complicated by deep ideological confrontations. The artistic and meaningful 'struggle' between the Udmurt and the Russian languages correlates in the plot with the juxtaposition of the Christian Orthodox God and Pagan Udmurt *Inmar*. The 'darkened' poem, abundant in changes in the author's thoughts, continues the topic of the interaction/mutual repulsion of Udmurt and Russian cultures, which is important and productive for Zakharov because it accentuates the complexity of events in the mind of *a priori* ethno-forum mythological units and the Christian worldview. In 'When They Wish You Good Riddance!' the multiplicative reality of the worldview of the Udmurt individual can be felt as the phraseology of traditional beliefs merges with the desire of the author's 'me' to use Christian philosophical generalisations and conclusions such as the designation of human sinfulness and the inevitability of punishment.

Another option for the mixing of poetry and mythology is present in the sixth poem of Zakharov's *Udmurt tunolen kyrdzhan'yosyz* ('Songs of the Udmurt Shaman') cycle (Zakharov 2010: 42–43).

The Udmurt gods *Inmar* and *Kuaz'*, who give the lyrical hero secret knowledge, are narratively and contextually associated with the Sumerian/Akkadian Marduk. In his literary work, Zakharov often reduces heterogeneous mythological characters to subjects of culture, thereby intuitively emphasising antiquity and Nostratic nature as well as the civilisational 'competitiveness' of the traditional Udmurt worldview and folklore, and the artistic openness of its literature.

Inmar appears in the Utopian urban poem "*Uzy-bory kis'ma val gorodyn...*" ('Strawberries Ripe in the City...'). The space of the city is occupied by insects and worms, busy with affairs that are absurd and useless from the human point of view. Apparently by using such a comparison the poet parodies the life of the modern citizens of Izhevsk. In the poem, *Inmar* becomes a passenger on the tram, the route of which is the sky, the night, light, symbolically named Uruguay:

<i>Kuar</i> "yos <i>uly's taka-baka</i>	From under the leaves, from
<i>s'örys'</i>	behind the shell
<i>Potiz zor-papaly ukshas'</i>	Out came a ladybird-like
<i>tramvay</i>	tram,
<i>Inbam ulti gyldzh'iz so</i>	And it slipped with a song
<i>kyrdzh'asa</i>	through the sky,
<i>So yardure, kytyn val</i>	Onto the shores where
<i>Urugvay.</i>	Uruguay was.
<i>Nosh tramvayyn pishtis'</i>	And in the tram in the shape
<i>kylbur</i> "yosyn	of bright poems
<i>Myniz Inmar, udmurt</i>	<i>Inmar</i> went on a visit like an
<i>kad', kunoye.</i>	Udmurt.
<i>Kiz'il'ios mynda ik</i>	In innumerable lights, as
<i>tyl</i> "yosyn	stars
<i>Salam nuiz so kyd'okys'</i>	He was carrying presents
<i>uye...</i>	into those distant nights...

(Zakharov 2010: 124–125)

It is no coincidence that *Inmar* is associated with poetry in this poem. For Zakharov, poetry is equivalent to God, life, love; its nature is magical, conjuring, sacred.

In Zakharov's third collection of poems, *Kyrmush* ('Wild bee') (Zakharov 2015), *Inmar* neither appears often, nor is he artistically significant. The content of this book suggests that Zakharov's poetry has changed direction towards a deeper discussion of social issues and coverage of recent Udmurt history. The mythological symbolism at this poetic turn remains unclaimed.

Inmar – a symbol of borderline semantics that combines pagan and Christian ideas about God – is very rare in the poems of Viktor Shibanov, one of the main ideologists of the ethno-futurist trend. Shibanov regularly refers to mythological characters of a "second row" that does not usually correspond to Christian or Orthodox contexts. In his debut book *Vyl' uzh"osy öt'o* ('From Case to Case') (Shibanov 1982), the mythological characters do not exist due to the internal and external constraints of social realism. In his *Bertis'ko uyshore* ('I am going back to Midnight') (Shibanov 1991) a whole gallery of mythological subjects is presented, among which there is no place for *Inmar*. *Inmar* does, however, appear in several texts in Shibanov's *Ös* ('Door') (Shibanov 2003), although his artistic functioning is minimised as a whole. In the sixth and seventh poems of the *Yöl kis'tis'kem* ('The Milk Spilled') cycle *Inmar* acts in a unified semantic context with *Keremet*, which embodies the evil principle of the universe. At the same time, the author's attention is more focused on the negative character with whom the lyrical 'me' enters into dialogue. The author perceives the opposition of *Inmar* and *Keremet* as an irrefutable existential reality, an axiological inevitability. The reciprocity of *Inmar* and *Keremet* is iconic – a person rejected by *Inmar* may not be protected by *Keremet*:

<i>Soin ik kot'ku Inmaren arte Med keremet syloz. Mynam soin Kuddyr s'ulmys' veras'keme pote. So vaz'ysal: "Vordskid bere uin, Uyyn ik ul no buygat esh"yoste". "Soos van'zy in'i uzyr". Nosh kin Dan"ya tshukez addzh'ylytek, So ush"yamon ke no, urod poet. So vatsasal: "Kushtiz bere inmar Mynam no yurtteme tynyd ug lu. Gerdzh'as'kemyn mi – mur vyzhy no kuar Nish ogaz'yn kyldytis'kom: pispu. Modos nachar bere, soku nachar S'öd dun'n'ey's' vyzhyosyd.</i>	<p>So always next to <i>Inmar</i> Let <i>Keremet</i> stand. I sincerely Sometimes want to talk to him. He'd say: "Just as you were born in the night, Live at night and calm your friends." "They're all rich already." "And who Glorifies the morning, morning not seeing, Although it is commendable, is a bad poet." He would add: "If <i>Inmar</i> left you, And I can't help you. Connected, we're a deep root and a leaf, And together we form a tree. Once the trunk is weak, so weak Your roots are in this black world."</p>
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(Shibanov 2003: 34–35)

Inmar in the poems of Anastasiya Shumilova, who represents the younger generation of Udmurt poets, occupies a very modest place. The new generation of national writers is far from both the

religious and mythological foundations of the Udmurt world, and from any religion in general. Something of which the artistic existence of Udmurt mythological characters in Shumilova's creative discourse is indicative. Thus, *Inmar* ceases to be the centre of the universe and loses his sacred significance; as he comes to obey the desires and actions of the lyrical 'me', he is mortal and debased.

The presented study shows how complex the image of *Inmar* is to those who wish through art to understand its usage. Despite using *Inmar* frequently, Udmurt poets failed to create meaningful semantic contexts for the poetic use of *Inmar*; for example, mythological resources were not used and the system of Christian Orthodox representations was not fully activated.

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