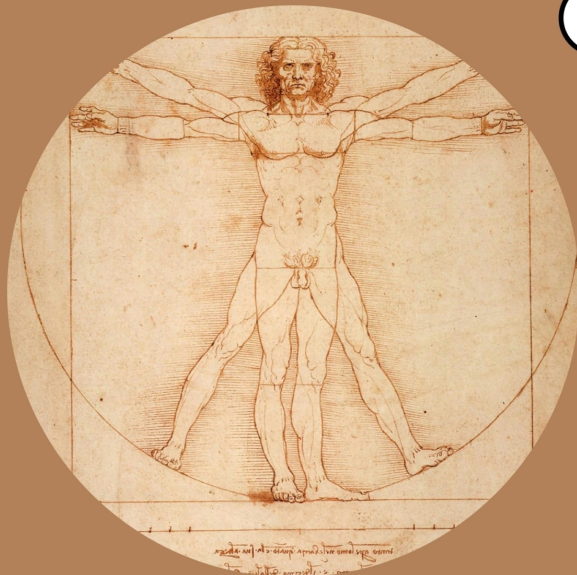


Nadyn Sokolova

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Myths in our Life

# Надежда Игоревна Соколова

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### **Аннотация**

People have always longed to perceive nature, have endeavoured to explain for themselves world that surrounded them and to recognize their place in it. The primitive viewed everything as novelty. Trying to understand eternal principles, mankind began to create myths. This process has been continuing even till this day.

# Содержание

Introduction	4
Chapter 1. The concept of "myth" in scientific and cultural context	9
1.1. Definition of the concept of "a myth" in scientific literature	10
1.2. The concept of "a mythologeme" as the way of socio-cultural processes	19
1.3. Myths in Russian and American cultures	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	27

# Надежда Соколова

## Myths in our Life

### Introduction

As many scientist consider (Levis-Stross, Lihachev, Losev and others), the mankind from the very beginning has lived in the world of myths and legends. Resolute certitude in verity of the mythological stories accompanied the man during all his life, since birth till death. In pagan times everyone believed that his life belonged to the almighty gods, who could do with him everything they wanted. Instead of pagan gods in the christened countries appeared Christian God, and His existence again gave birth to the diversity of myths. In the modern world people in their majority ceased to trust something blindly. To believe in something they should find incontestable facts of existence of the object. An individual nowadays is characterized by strong criticism and deep-rooted habit to doubt in everything that can't be conceived by empirical way. But even today the life of a modern man keeps myths, which primordially appeared in a faraway antiquity and took deep roots in the person's unconscious, affecting his behavior, his evolution, and life in whole.

Actuality of the research. At present time cultural studies

begin to understand the important role of the mythology in the life of society. It perceives that myths are not only the cradle of culture but that they live, develop and even are created in modern society. In the given research mythological reasons are traced in non-fictional interpretation of the biographies of the famous people. Detection of the elements of such myth-making helps to understand some tendencies in the development of the modern society.

The object of the research deals with the biographies of the famous people of the modern show business (J. Depp, Madonna, A. Pugachova) in their non-fictional impression.

Scientific originality of the research is concerned with the fact that it is made according to new facts matter, presented in cultural life, and viewed with the attitude of the crossed interests of two sciences: philology and culture.

The aim of the research is to show the existence of the three culturally-significant figurative stereotypes in the life of a modern Russian and American society with the help of the biographies of the show business stars.

This aim is realized in the solution of the following problems:

- 1) to define the mythologeme as the fact of language and culture, to show the interrelation of a myth and a mythologeme;
- 2) to detect the background and development of the chosen mythologemes;
- 3) to scrutinize the biographies of the famous people in the interpretation of which appeared these mythologemes.

The material of the research consists of the precedential non-fictional texts, which interpret biographies of the stars in accordance with the recited above mythologems.

The problem of the research is the origin and development of the mythologems (culturally-significant stereotypes) in culture.

An individual, as a social being, has definite psychological prescriptions, such as: intention to success, leadership, wealth, etc. He, who has available fund of ambition, is possessed with these prescriptions and tries to realize them. Given prescriptions have most descriptive incarnation in the images of the heroes of the folk and literary fairy-tales. It is proved true by the opinions of many scientists (for instance, Z. Freud, K.G. Jung). These schemes of the human behavior ("mythologemes") can be conditionally called with the names of the heroes of the fairy-tales (Ugly Duckling, Cinderella, John-the-Fool). The images of the given heroes may be found both in the researches devoted to them by different scientists (V. Propp, A. Veselovsky and others), and in the biographies of the famous individuals (see par. 3.2, 3.3 of the given research). For instance, if Madonna is called Cinderella in the series of publications, it doesn't mean that in her childhood she outlived something alike. It happened so because when she reached success her biography started to be actively and consciously mythologised. Putting her as an illustration the society wants to educate a great amount of another socially active individuals since these three schemes demonstrate the social activity (Cinderella longs to

get to the dance, John-the-Fool has no distinctive aim but he commits serious deeds, Ugly Duckling meets with specific concern of society to him). The scheme of the mythologization is the only one but it is scrutinized in the three mythologemes, coming to us in the fairy-tale images. Our research shows the conscious cultivation of these mythologemes. Mythologemes exist, beginning to be cultivated by another way, and in particular, with the help of mass media.

Methodological background of the research consists of the scientific researches of the following authors: V. Anikin, C. Levi-Strauss, V. Propp, A. Veselovsky.

Theoretical significance of the research consists of the necessity of culturological development of conceptualization and mythology.

Practical significance of the research is defined by the possibility of using its material during reading the classes of culture and philology.

The methods of the research are the following: method of the philological description of the mythologemes, method of contrast and regimentation (typology), method of analysis and the following synthesis.

Key concepts of the research are: culture, myth, mythology.

The course of the research is the comparative culturology. The research regards the peculiarities of the modern culture of two countries: Russia and the USA.

The structure of the research. The bachelor research consists

of introduction, in which aim and tasks of the research are shown, three chapters, revealing the particularity of the intercommunication of myth with different aspects of social culture and psychology of an individual existing in this society, conclusion where the results of the research are generalized, bibliography and appendix, in which the schemes sustaining the theoretical basis of the research are given.

# **Chapter 1. The concept of "myth" in scientific and cultural context**

People have always longed to perceive nature, have endeavoured to explain for themselves world that surrounded them and to recognize their place in it. The primitive viewed everything as novelty. Trying to understand eternal principles, mankind began to create myths. This process has been continuing even till this day.

## **1.1. Definition of the concept of "a myth" in scientific literature**

The word "myth" inevitably evokes associations with antique sagas about gods and heroes. Herewith it is believed that a myth belongs to the past and is not available to exist in the present. To seize the essence of this conception we shall examine the statements about a myth given in the scientific literature. In the most general aspect myth is considered as "the way of the human being and attitude, entirely based on the notional linkage of a person and the world; the person perceives here psychological meanings by the way of the elementary features of the material, and regards and considers natural phenomena as animated creatures" [Cultural Study 2001: 100]. In this definition myth is viewed as psychologically-culturological category, determining relationship of the human conscience to the world that surrounds it, at that this relationship is characterized in myth with convergence vector up to complete identification. It is specified further that such a perception of the unity of oneself with the world, such a personification of reality is not confined by temporary framework by early cultural epochs, since myth is eternal: "for mythological mensuration assists in each culture and mythological images and experiences are rooted in unconscious elements of the human soul (compare Jung's conception of archetypes – N. Sh.)" [Ibid.]. Therefore there is no surprise that

myth is present even in modern reality, affecting the unconscious of individuals and aiding the mythologization of their conscience.

A.A. Potebnya considered that "the creation of myth can't be characterized by any time. Myth consists of transference of individual characteristics of an image that should explain the fact itself" [Potebnya 1976: 263].

It should be mentioned that this scientist regarded myth from the psycholinguistic point of view. He presumed that "mythical world view is determined purely by psychical processes (fable-thought), mythology is created by linguistic factors" [Ibid., 267]. He specified: "The creation of a new myth consists of the creation of a new world, not in the oblivion of the preceding meaning" [Ibid., 266]. Potebnya's opinion is important for us because his thought that the process of the world mythologization is connected with language, with word which reflects the fact of the humanization of nature, in particular, in the anthropological metaphors. Dalj in his "The Explanatory Dictionary" gave the following interpretation for the word "myth": "a fabulous, all-time, fabled event or person; an allegory acted out, that came into legends" [Dalj 1994, V. 3: 862]. Here is marked one more – folklore – form of myth's fixing. Creative nature of myth, development of the verbal image in it and the main reason of myths' appearance, their role in development of game culture – everything this is examined in the research of J. Huizinga "Homo Ludens, or The Playing Man". This author considers myth to be "an imaginative materialization

of entity..., elaborated more particularly than a single word. With the help of myth people try to explain earthly, placing the basis of human deeds in the sphere of divine... In myth great motive powers of cultural life begin: law and order, communication and enterprise, craft and art, poetry, scholarship, science" [Huizinga 1997: 24, 121]. Developing such interpretation of myth "Mythological Dictionary" concretizes and enumerates images, personified in myth: "Myths are the sagas of gods, spirits, heroes deified or connected with gods by their birth, ancestors, who functioned at the beginning of time and participated, directly or indirectly, in creation of the world, its element, both natural and cultural" [Mythological Dictionary 1990: 634].

In a brief definition of a dictionary of aesthetics myth, as special form of social conscience, is ascribed to the early phases of the human development. Myth is defined here as "specific for primitive conscience syncretic reflection of the reality in the form of perceptibly concrete personifications and animated beings, which think quite materially..., the product of verbal folk arts, collective folk imagination" [Aesthetics 1989: 206].

Analyzing extant approaches to the myth handling A.V. Vaschenko underlines its profound root-taking in human culture, from its appearance till the present: "Culture is expressed by myth more often than we think. Therefore it is almost impossible to designate territory of culture (and even of everyday life) existing out of myth's influence. The comprehension of

myth's nature – in all sides of its notion – helps to understand modern conflict of culture and civilization to comprehend the communion of cultures, the place of language word's artistry in the human society, to seize the role of a woman in culture and civilization, nature of many customs, etc." [Vaschenko 2000: 148]. Plurality of myth's definitions in scientific literature ensues out of multiplicity, many sides and polyfunctionality of this phenomenon unique because of its complexity: "Myth appears as narration, ceremony, magic, chronotop (the basic national conception about time and space), rhythm, "archetyp", etc." [Ibid.].

If in a previous opinion about myth the accent was put on its generally cultural functions, in the proceedings of the remarkable Russian philosopher A.F. Losev actuality and personal substance of myth are underlined. Losev supposed that myth was "the reality that is utmost by its concrete nature, intense to the maximum and intensive in the supreme degree. This is utterly essential category of thought and life, distant of any contingency and outrage... It is not a fiction but it maintains the stringent and the most fixed structure and is logically, i.e. first of all dialectically, essential category of consciousness and being in general" [Losev 2001: 36 – 37]. This point of view is the most similar with the comprehension of myth that is considered in the given research where myth is regarded as the reality of special kind, i.e. close to the Losev's definition: "Myth is life as itself. This is life for mythical subject, with all its

expectancies and dreads, anticipations and hopes, with all its real workdays and fair personal interest. Myth is not an ideal being but it is vitally felt and created material reality, and physical till animation, validity" [Ibid., 40 – 41]. For a person with mythological thinking myth is "objectively, materially and sensually created reality being at the same time laid-back from the common process of facts and thus maintaining different levels of hierarchy, different levels of detachment" [Ibid., 61]. Losev considered that "myth is a personal being, or to be more exact, it is an image of personal being, individual form, face of personality" [Ibid., 97].

To understand mythological nature and its essence it is also important to regard the thought of the famous French ethnographer and thinker Claude Levi-Strauss, who wrote: "To understand the character of mythological thinking we should concede that myth is simultaneously endolinguistic and extralinguistic fact... Myth always belongs to the events of the past: "before creation of the world" or "in the old days" – at any rate, "ages and ages ago". But myth's function consists in the fact that all these events, having existed in the certain period of time, are in existence out of time. Myth explains equally the past, the present and the future" [Levi-Strauss 2001: 216 – 217].

The study of myth as "conformation of culture and mensuration of human soul" plays an important role in culture. Such scientists and philosophers as G.F. Hegel, Z. Freud, C.G. Jung, J.G. Frazer, L. Levy-Bruhl, C. Levi-Strauss, A.F.

Losev, E.M. Meletinsky, O.M. Freidenberg and others made an important contribution to myth's understanding.

The concept of "myth" traces to the ancient Greek mythos that means story, narration, tale, legend. Its Latin analogue is fabula (narration, fable), and "elementary, or primitive mythology is the figurative poetical language that has been used by ancient tribes for clarification of natural phenomena" [Myths 1993: 5].

Many scientists and philosophers devoting themselves to mythology science elaborated their own classifications of myth's explanation and development. Among modern scientists we can distinguish V.E. Halizev. His opinion about myth, like Losev's conception, is similar to the author of the given research.

Mythology itself is treated by V.E. Halizev as "overepochal, transhistorical form of social consciousness existing in nation's life during its history, which is connected with the peculiar way of thought" [Halizev 2002: 128; italics are of the author – N. Sh.].

Complicated by its nature, varied in manifestations mythology is also valuably polysemantic. This feature causes debates about its role in society. There exist two opposite opinions on value of mythology and possibility of its presence in human culture. Such scientists as R. Barthes, Y.M. Lotman notice in myth similar phenomena. In the book "Mythologies" (1957) Barthes characterized myth as "pseudoevidances" hiding "ideological fraud" under the power of which people get involuntarily, as soon as they begin to discuss and summarize. The author considered that myths' aim was the world's immobilization,

its mortification: myth imposes the society an imagination about reality as primarily harmonious, thereby overturning and draining it [Barthes 1989: 46, 118, 126, 11 – 112].

In the same way mythologized consciousness is interpreted in semiotically cultural researches of Y.M. Lotman, orientated, according to him, at the scientific tradition of Aristotle and Deckard. Here myth is deduced out of culture's framework: cultural area (rationally logical field) and mythological (irrational) area are opposed to each other [Lotman 1992: 15, 32].

G.G. Gadamer and D.S. Lihachev judge about mythology in totally different way. These scientists regard mythology as unique cultural value. In Gadamer's article "Myth and Intellect" (1954) is said that scientific and mythological world views are not antagonists, that "myth and intellect have common, movable by the same rules history" and that they are at the bottom of fact friendly and complementary. "Myth should not be derided as preachers' fraud or old wives' tales but the voice of the wise past". The philosopher mentions that "mythical charms" are unrational but myths are by no means voluntary imagination but bearers of proper, unscientific truth which "form great mental and moral strength of life" [Gadamer 1991: 97, 94, 98 – 99]. In the same way is produced Lihachev's opinion about myth as "being packing", which serves as blessing and value "since it simplifies the world and our behaviour in it". It is even said that without "the mythologization of the being" the last "cannot be

perceived" [Lihachev 1995: 341 – 344].

In the twentieth century the scientists began to learn such phenomenon as mythical (mythological) thinking. Some of them considered that "mythical thinking on the certain phase of development is the only possible, necessary, rational; it is peculiar not to any special time but people of all the times who are on the certain degree of thought evolution; it is formal, i.e. it does not exclude any content: either religious, philosophical or scientific" [Potebnya 1976: 260]. If to uphold this point of view it is possible to allege that in the modern twenty-first century myth-making did not lose its significance and actively develops nowadays. After all, as Potebnya asserted, thinking is called mythological only then when "an image is called objective and therefore is entirely transferred as reason for the subsequent conclusions about characteristics of the signified" [Potebnya 1976: 243].

It means that "the difference between mythical and non-mythical thinking consists in the statement that the more non-mythical thinking the more clearly is perception that the previous content of our thought is only the subjective method of perception; the more mythical thinking the more it is represented as source of perception" [Ibid.: 240; the italics belongs to the author. – N. Sh.].

The mythological thinking is described also by E. Levkievskaya in her book "Myths of the Russian nation". She considers that "for the person having mythological thinking myth

is particularly practical knowledge with which he follows in real life like we in daily life follow the knowledge of highway regulations or personal hygiene" [Levkievskaya 2003: 4]. The author illustrates her thought with the following example: while losing his way in the forest a man, if he lives under the laws of myth, knows that it is wood-goblin who did him much harm. The wood-goblin could manage doing it because the man entered the forest without blessing. To unload the power of the creature of the other world and find the way home the one should lay the clothes off, to turn it inside out and put it on again – everything is upturned he other world [Ibid.]

It is really difficult to escape the influence of myth. It is eternal and omnipresent. The French scientist Roland Barthes affirmed that "myths overtake a person always and everywhere, they dispatch him to that immovable prototype which does not let him to live by his own live. Myths do not allow to breath easily (like a bloodsucker lodged inside the organism) and outline the narrow radius for the human activity where a person is allowed to fret not trying even somehow to change... the world. Myths represent the constant and tiresome exaction, insidious and uncompromising demand, for all people to recognize themselves in that eternal and nevertheless dated image that was once created, alledgedly once and for all" [Barthes 1989: 126].

But if the final deliverance from myth is really difficult the control of its influence is possible for everyone.

## **1.2. The concept of "a mythologeme" as the way of socio-cultural processes**

The term "culture" in "The Dictionary of Russian Language" (edited by A.P. Evgenjeva in one of its meanings is explained as "the complex of the achievements of the human society in the industrial, social, and spiritual life" [The Dictionary 1986: 148]. The author of the given research accounts in the same way, and in the research "culture" would be understood according to the definition given in "The Dictionary of Russian Language" edited by A.P. Evgenjeva.

The concept "a mythologeme" was imported in the modern study of literature relatively late. In the encyclopedic reference book "The Modern Foreign Study of Literature" the mythologeme is defined as "the term of the mythological criticism, designating the borrowing from myth of the motive, theme, or its part and the reproduction in the later folklore works" [The Modern 1996: 236]. In the Internet dictionaries it is defined as "the conscientious borrowing of the mythological motives and their transferring in the world of the modern artistic culture" [www.yandex.ru].

The mythologemes enumerated above can be affixed to the life of everyone, influencing the destiny of the person. Mythologemes can be intruded in the handling of the information about a person with the help of mass media (it

would be shown in the paragraph 3.3). It occurs because the mythologemes live in the culturally informational field of the society, influencing the separate person with the help of the actualization in mass media.

Usually the influence of the mythologemes on the human life happens spontaneously. But in the description of the biographies mythologemes are introduced artificially (see the same paragraph).

As it was earlier mentioned in the introduction the subject of the research in the given work is the study of the tree mythologemes called so on probation (mythologemes about Cinderella, Ugly Duckling and John-the-Fool) in the non-fictional popularization of the biographies of Johnny Depp, Madonna and A. Pugacheva. The given mythologemes are dominated by the personal names (or the nominal names in this role) of the main heroes of the literary (1, 2) and folk (3) fairy-tales.

## **1.3. Myths in Russian and American cultures**

The USA culture comprising with the Russian one is more structured and more homogenous. The Americans live by their own, special myth – myth about "an American dream" by which are understood "the ideals of freedom and open responsibilities for everyone, built on the belief in the boundless responsibilities of the USA and its unique place in the world by which went, according to the official political mythology, "founding fathers"... of the United States of America. In the wide understanding the American values are from the highest ones to the most simple dream of an American about his own home" [Americana 1996:29].

"An American dream" is sort of deformation of the myth about John-the-Fool (see the paragraph 3. 2). Though, if to understand this term in the wide sense it can be allowed that all three myths are united in it (about Cinderella, Ugly Duckling and John-the-Fool). These myths are re-fused in the hearth of the American social relationships and are created in the unified fusion which got the name "the American dream".

To confirm this thought I would like to cite an opinion of the American historian Leon Duncan who considered that "an American dream" has its attractive strength while it is not attained... People who grown up without it are told: if you work

long and hard then there, ahead, on that side of the rainbow you will find a little pot of gold. But when you already have this little pot the dream loses its attractive strength. Then appears the necessity in some alternative which can import significance in your life..." [The Dream 1986: 280].

The mythologemes "an American dream" has no concrete embodiment. Each American understands it in different way, depending on his own educational level and cultural background. For someone it is the ability of the endless usage of the researches of their country, for another it is the cause to feel patriotic feelings and so on.

Here are some examples:

a). miss Beilis, the president of the National Society named "The Daughters of the American Revolution" in Washington defined the essence of the given mythologemes in the following words: "I can not so directly say what "an American Dream" is. Everything I can say is to love your country. When an American flag blows on the parade my heart is overfilled with proud and I feel happy" [Ibid.: 282];

b). Bob Braun, colonel of reserve, noticed: "For me "an American dream" is an increase of the USA prestige all over the world" [Ibid.: 282].

A lot of Americans trying to reach "an American dream" seek only fame and wealth. They chase the material values absolutely forgetting about spiritual values. This leads, at the end, to the solitude, different phobias and dissatisfaction of life.

Here is just one example: Mrs. Beilis, the president of the National Association of Daughters of the American Revolution in Washington, defines the essence of this mythology in this way: "I cannot say directly what the " American dream "is. All I can say is: love your country. When the American flag is fluttering in the parade, the heart overflows with pride and you feel happy "[Ibid: 282];

Many Americans, trying to achieve the "American dream", strive only for fame and well-being. They chase after material values, completely forgetting about spiritual ones, which ultimately leads to loneliness, various "phobias" and to dissatisfaction with life.

The Cinderella myth in the US culture is often mixed with the myth of the Ugly Duckling and the myth of Jonny– the-Fool, which leads to confusion in minds and moods. Nowadays a modern American "Cinderella" is an ordinary average person from a poor family. Thanks to his/her perseverance and loyalty to the American system of values, this person finds the place in this life, achieving what was dreamed about in the youth (eg, his/her own house, expensive car, prestigious work with possible career growth and high salary, etc.) It is this situation that can be called "grinding the" myths ", because it mixes up the characteristics of the heroes of all the mythologists considered in the work, which makes it difficult to crystallize the" myth "that was originally laid down in the human subconscious.

The myth of Jonny– the-Fool also acquired features of other

myths. A young man from a small provincial town aims to get all the benefits from life. He goes to the metropolis, where, using all means at his disposal, he tries to achieve the “American dream”. As a result, he gets what he wants, but he may feel dissatisfied, because the spiritual side of his life is likely to remain unaffected.

In American "mythology" there is such a thing as a self-made man. This is the fusion of all three myths into the one and the creation of a completely new image, the image of a “man who “made ”himself”, an individual who by his work won himself the right to live according to the “American dream”.

It is necessary to clarify that when we talk about people who achieves the ideals of the “American dream”, we often mean ordinary people who wants something extremely small, small things that would not occur to well-known personalities because the whole “American dream” is the dream of a man in the street, striving for a quiet, prosperous, peaceful life, willing to live without any worries and anxieties.

You shouldn't think that the “business above all” position which is prevalent among the majority of American youth, is a phenomenon of the 20th century. The beginning of everything was laid in the XIX century, when mass literature began to flourish in the United States. The authors of the textbook "History of Literature of the USA", published by the Institute of World Literature. A.M. Gorky, consider that the mass literature includes “works of a low aesthetic level, designed for a wide audience and reflecting the mentality of the middle strata of

society” [Literature in the USA 2003: 836]. Necessary and inalienable features of mass literature as such – formula, cliché, mythology – were noticeable in the first literary production of the colonial era (travel notes, religious sermons, political pamphlets, etc.). Puritan thinking has already created a number of national myths, even in the XVII century. The facts of American history – the creation of colonies in the New World, the development of a frontier, and the war with the Indians – were conceptualized in the formulas of heaven and hell, the building of the city of God, the struggle of angels and demons. In this literature were formed persistent concepts, ideas, images and techniques, which determined the face of all national literature, and in their simplified, elementary forms – the face of the modern mass American culture. The artistic heritage of the frontier spawned the national genre of westerns; Puritan literature became the source of a religious, and in many ways a romantic novel; “The American dream and personal success was embodied in the narratives about “ the man who created himself ”; the cult of the family and the hearth was reflected in the "family romance".

The center subject of mass literature became the myth of a simple American, a man of the people who, with the help of labor and virtue, could achieve the material wealth in his life. The ideal of “a man who created himself” became the formula of American success in a historical context. For example, during some time a special magazine “Success” (“Success”) was published, it promoted the book “Acre of Diamonds” in 1888,

in which the author assured readers that the diamonds could be found everywhere, even in their own backyard. Next year, Andrew Carnegie's book, *The Gospel of Wealth*, was published. It in an instructive tone described his way to a millionth state.

The books of Horatio Alger, which served as a model of educational literature for boys, were also very popular. About 130 of his novels describe poor adolescents who, after a lot of vicissitudes in life, managed to succeed in business. The formula of Cinderella (or Zolika, as Levi-Strauss has once called it) fairy-tale was transformed into American style and absorbed the national myths of "self-confidence," "self-creation," "American dream," Franklin's commandments, and puritan virtues. On their basis, the ethics of a new middle class that appeared was formed and approved. The titles of the Elger books are specific: "Work and win," "Strive and succeed," "Do and dare," "Swim or drown." Part of his writings Alger released in series ("Luck and Courage", "The Ragged Tom", etc.). There still exists the society of Horeyshio Alger, which annually presents prizes to people who succeeded on their own (one of them was Dwight Eisenhower, the future president of the United States of America).

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