Janka Maŭr

The Journey to Hell: A Fairy Tale [Падарожжа ў пекла: байка (Padarozhzha ŭ pekla: baĭka)]

Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (1929)

TAGS: Achilles Cerberus Hades Hercules Styx





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General information	
Title of the work	The Journey to Hell: A Fairy Tale [Падарожжа ў пекла: байка (Padarozhzha ŭ pekla: baĭka)]
Country of the First Edition	Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
Country/countries of popularity	Belarus, the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc
Original Language	Belarusian
First Edition Date	1929
First Edition Details	Янка Маўр, *Падарожжа ў пекла: байка* (Padarozhzha ŭ pekla: baĭka). Мінск: Белдзяржвыдавецтва, 1929. [Janka Maŭr, *The Journey to Hell: A Fairy Tale.* Minsk: Beldziarzhvydavetstva, 1929].
Available Onllne	knihi.com, p. 258–314 (accessed: January 15, 2018).
Genre	Fables, Humor, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Children (see addenda)
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Janka Maŭr , 1883 - 1971
(Author)

Janka Maŭr, a famous Soviet Belarusian writer, is one of the most popular authors for children in the former Soviet Union. He was born in Liepāja (Latvia) and spent his childhood in the village of Lebianiški (then in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic; now the village is in Lithuania, and the name in Lithuanian is Lebeniškiai). In 1899 Maŭr enrolled in a pedagogical school in Panevėžys, but was expelled in his final year of study for his liberal views and "religious doubts." In 1903, he passed all the exams as an extern and started working as a village teacher. In 1906, Maŭr took part in an underground meeting of Belarusian teachers in the village of Mikałajeŭščyna; as a result he was arrested and dismissed from school. He resumed teaching only in 1911.

He blends in his works a wide range of genres: adventure fiction, historical fiction, fairy tales and satire. He is also known as the founder of science fiction tradition in Belarusian literature. His most popular book is *Palesse Robinsons* (1929). It describes the adventures of two boys on a small island during the high-water period in the Palesse region. Among the other of his famous books are titles such as: *In the Country of the Paradise Bird* (1926), *The Son of Water* (1927), *Amok* (1928), *The Story of the Future Days* (1932), *Around the World* (1947), *TVT* (1934, reworked in 1949). Books by Janka Maŭr were translated into Russian, Ukrainian, Armenian, Tajik, Lithuanian, Polish, Czech, German, and Romanian.

Bio prepared by Maria Pushkina, National Academic Janka Kupała Theatre, maryiapushkina@gmail.com

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Additional information

Translation

Russian: *Путешествие в преисподнюю* [Putešestvie v preispobnûû], trans. Boris Yakovlev, Moskva, 1958.

Summary

The Journey to Hell is a satirical anti-religious fable in 7 parts. It describes adventures of two Soviet pioneers in a mythological Hell which combines ancient, Christian, and traditional Slavic features and topoi. The fable starts with a short introduction providing basic information about Hell as present in the collective consciousness and some quantitative data cited after quasi-scientific Soviet sources and books on religious themes, including *The Divine Comedy* by Dante. The introduction is written in a simplistic and sarcastic way. In the main text the two diligent Soviet pioneers, Janka Huž and Jurka Pyž, educated in the anti-religious ideology of their time, decide to go and find out what Hell looked like.

They started asking people for directions and analyzing various proverbs connected to Hell. The journey began in the hollow of a huge oak; from there, the boys reached an underground cave and crossed the River Styx with the help of the ferryman Charon. The River Styx marked the border of the Underworld. During the crossing the pioneers learned about wonderful properties of the waters of the Styx and the story of Achilles, whose mother had dipped him into the river to make him immortal. An old Professor in Charon's boat also explained to the children the definition of the expression "Achilles' heel." The pioneers bathed in the Styx and became invulnerable. The text contains a footnote explaining ancient Greek origins of Styx, Charon, and Achilles. Janka Huž and Jurka Pyž explained to Charon, who had been working nonstop since the creation of the world, his rights as an employee, so Charon went on strike. After the crossing the invulnerable pioneers met Cerberus – "a yellow dog with three heads and a living snake instead of the tail." The devil which was on duty nearby explained that, after meeting Hercules, the dog didn't like people who were alive.

The pioneers explored the internal structure and rules of the Underworld where believers of all faiths were gathered: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, different kinds of Shamanists and Sectarians. Despite the reference to Dante at the beginning, Maŭr's

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underworld has an entirely different structure.Yet, the gate of Hell bears an inscription with the famous phrase "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Janka and Jurka inspected Purgatory, got acquainted with the work and hierarchy of devils, and the ways sinners were supposed to suffer. Sinners were divided into zones where they were punished according to their sins. The selected punishment instruments represent the most common cultural topoi: boilers with tar, frying pans, hooks. Hell was trying to keep up with the times, however the lower class (devils) had been working hard without vacations and weekend leave, and the ruling class (Luciferand his “Chancery”) made all decisions and set the general agenda. Surprised by widespread injustice (in regard to sinners and low-rank devils), the pioneers carried out in a Hell a socialist revolution. After the revolution, Lucifer and his henchmen are thrown out into space (where neither science nor culture exist). The rest of the devils reorganize the structure of Hell. They liberate 90% of sinners, but make the most cruel sinners stay. The devils don’t condemn them to eternal tortures, but prepare punishment according to their sins – “from 1000 to 1 000 000 years.” Janka and Jurka return home.

Analysis

The Journey to Hell uses the most vivid aspects of common topoi and characters to visualize the concept of Hell for the target group – Soviet pioneers aspiring to eradicate religious beliefs in their social environment. The reception presented in the book is in keeping with the general concept of Hell and the idea of emancipation of young Soviet citizens from the scourge of religion following an anti-religious propaganda campaign. The setting includes references which provide the main concepts of Soviet ideology: the plight of the working class, socialistic revolution, and cultivation of a materialist world view. Although the text contains classical topoi, it first of all promotes Soviet socialist values. The main characters know nothing about Classical Antiquity (or Christianity) but share values of the Soviet ideology and are ready to promote it. Greek mythological figures are perceived by the pioneers as part of old religious beliefs constructing the whole concept of Hell. Classical mythology is used as a means to reduce religion to the level of fairy tale (the original title: “Hell: A Fairy Tale” indicates this aspect clearly) that is not taken seriously by civilized and educated Soviet people.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Cerberus Hades Hercules Styx
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Heroism Knowledge Learning Propaganda Religious beliefs

Further Reading

Bartsok, Maryna [Бартсок, Марына], Віднейшы беларускі дзіцячы пісьменнік Янка Маўр [The outstanding Belarusian writer – Janka Maŭr (Vidneĭshy belaruski pis'mennik Janka Maŭr)], Minsk: Таварыства па распаўсюджванню палітычных і навуковых ведаў Беларускай ССР [Tavarystva pa raspaŭsiudzhvanni palitychnykh i navukovykh vedaŭ Belaruskaĭ SSR], 1958.

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Iafimava, Marharyta [Яфімава, Маргарыта], Янка Маўр: (жыцце і творчасць) [Janka Maŭr: life and work (Janka Maŭr: zhytstsio i tvorchasc')], Minsk: Дзяржаўнае выдавецтва БССР [Dziarzhaŭnae vydavetstva BSSR], 1960.

Runec, Piatro [Рунец, Пятро], Чалавек з крылатай фантазіяй [A man with a winged fantasy (Chalavek z krylataĭ fantaziiaĭ)], Minsk: Народная асвета [Narodnaia asveta], 1979.

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Addenda

Title: The title was changed after the 1st edition, the following editions have the title as noted above.

The book's title written with the use of the Belarusian Latin script, łacinka (latsinka): "Padarožža ŭ piekła: bajka".

Target group: children (Soviet school students–pioneers; typically children joined the pioneer movement in elementary school and continued until adolescence).

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