

NEOMYTH AND DECONSTRUCTION: THE COURTLY NARRATIVE AND ITS TRANSFORMATION IN JOHN UPDIKE'S «BRAZIL»

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This article examines John Updike's «Brazil» (1994) as a postmodern transformation of the Tristan and Isolde myth within the framework of magical realism and postcolonial discourse. The study hypothesizes that Updike does not reproduce the canonical narrative, but deconstructs it, presenting courtly love as resistance to societal norms, racial hierarchy, and gender constraints. The aim is to analyze how the novel reconfigures key mythopoetic elements—archetypes, sacred objects, ritual, and liminal space—through narrative inversion and symbolic reinterpretation. Particular attention is given to onomastic symbolism, the theme of embodiment and initiation, and the replacement of medieval ethics with contemporary identity politics. The methodological approach combines hermeneutics, structuralism, and postcolonial theory, alongside tools from comparative mythology and literary semiotics. The article argues that «Brazil» functions as a neomyth – a syncretic philosophical parable where the miraculous emerges not from divine intervention but from the human capacity to transgress. In reimagining the legend through a poetic of hybridity and transformation, Updike's novel challenges traditional conceptions of love, fate, and the heroic, revealing how myth adapts to modern cultural and historical contexts.

Key words: *Updike, magical realism, Tristan and Isolde, postmodernism, ritual, myth*

Introduction

The legend of Tristan and Isolde, one of the central archetypes of European cultural memory, has undergone numerous transformations across centuries – from Celtic oral tradition to medieval courtly romance, from Romantic reinterpretations to postmodern deconstructions. Its adaptability is rooted in a mythopoetic structure that encodes core oppositions: love and law, passion and prohibition, nature and civilization. The legend's semantic flexibility enables its continual revival in varying ideological and aesthetic contexts.

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John Updike's «Brazil» offers a radical reimagining of this myth, shifting it from the medieval world of chivalry and sacral order to the polyphonic and fragmented space of contemporary Brazil. Here, love is no longer framed by divine codes or feudal ethics, but by the fractures of postcolonial identity, social injustice, and racial hierarchies. The novel operates at the intersection of magical realism and postmodernist narrative strategy, constructing what may be termed a neomyth – a restructured symbolic system in which traditional archetypes are retained but reloaded with new cultural, racial, and gendered meanings.

This study proposes that «Brazil» does not merely allude to the courtly narrative but enacts a comprehensive deconstruction of its foundational logic. While retaining key motifs – initiation, exile, transgression, and tragic love – Updike recontextualizes them within a world governed not by metaphysical destiny but by social determinism and historical violence. The sword becomes a razor; the forest, a marginal zone of poverty; the love token, a stolen ring; and the metamorphosis of the lovers, a literal bodily transformation crossing racial boundaries.

The central aim of this article is to examine the mechanisms through which Updike rewrites the Tristan and Isolde myth as a reflection on the limits of identity and love in a post-traditional world. The hypothesis guiding this inquiry is that «Brazil» functions as a postmodern philosophical parable, where myth is no longer a sacred given but a site of struggle – between memory and erasure, archetype and stereotype, desire and ideology.

Methodologically, the article combines hermeneutic, structuralist, and postcolonial approaches, drawing from literary comparativism, myth criticism, and semiotics. The analysis focuses on symbolic materiality (sword, ring, body), narrative inversion, and the gendered agency of transformation. In doing so, it situates «Brazil» not only within the tradition of Arthurian reception but also within broader debates on the function of myth in late modernity.

Ultimately, this introduction frames «Brazil» as a case study in the contemporary survival of myth – no longer transcendent, but embedded in the contradictions of history and the flesh.

The Arthurian Myth as a Mythopoetic Structure: Symbolic and Narrative Evolution from Chronicle to Courtly Archetype

The myth of King Arthur emerges at the junction of oral tradition, monastic historiography, and symbolic power. In early sources like «*De Excidio Britanniae*», «*Historia Brittonum*» by Nennius, and the «*Annales Cambriae*», Arthur appears not as a king, but as a sacralized war leader. The latter text emphasizes the religious dimension: «appear in the statement relative to Arthur at the battle of Badon, that he carried the cross of Christ “in humeros suos”»¹. Geoffrey of Monmouth's «*Historia Regum Britanniae*» (XII century) shifts the figure into a national monarch, structuring the myth around magical birth, alliance with Merlin, battles with Saxons, betrayal by

¹ *Annales Cambriae*. (2008). Edited by John Williams. Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, p. 24. -231 p. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/annalescambriae00willgoog> (Accessed: 15.07.2025).

Mordred, and departure to Avalon. The Glastonbury tomb discovery of 1191 reinforced the legend's sacral-political role in Plantagenet legitimization.

In the later Middle Ages, the Arthurian myth evolves into a synthesis of heroic, sacred, and courtly codes. Wace, Layamon, and Chrétien de Troyes expand the narrative with the Round Table, Excalibur, and knights like Launcelot and Galahad. Arthur transforms from conqueror into a moral mediator. This culminates in Malory's «*Le Morte d'Arthur*» (1470), a mythopoetic compilation shaped in prison, fusing epic, allegory, and Christian eschatology.

Malory's structure centers on four archetypes: sacred origin, power's legitimization (sword in the stone), betrayal (Launcelot and Guinevere), and sacred death (Avalon). Excalibur unites mystery and sacrifice, returning to its source. The Round Table symbolizes circular perfection; its twelve knights evoke apostolic and cosmological harmony. The Grail, its epicenter, remains inaccessible to the unworthy: «Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite... every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world... the holy vessel departed suddenly <...> And then the king yielded thanking to God, oh his good grace that he had sent them»². The Grail nourishes the soul and acts as a spiritual catalyst.

Malory's Book V introduces Tristram of Lyonesse – not as a victim of fate, but as a figure torn between honor and love. His antagonist is King Mark, portrayed as politically weak yet dangerous. Tristram's quest for Isolde the Fair is framed by duels and betrayal, yet he survives. Malory eliminates the love potion, central in Bédier's version; here, love arises from compassion and loyalty. Even Tristram's marriage to Isolde of the White Hands becomes an attempt at ethical resolution. Nevertheless, chivalric ideals condemn him: even Launcelot calls him enemy. Tristram's arc – jealousy, madness, transformation – ends in moral solitude.

His duel with Launcelot becomes a moment of ethical recognition: «because Sir Launcelot abode and was the last in the field the prize was given him... Sir Tristram hath won the field, for he began first, and last he hath endured, and so he hath done the first day, the second, and the third day»³. In Joyous Gard, a utopian chivalric space, he finds harmony outside courtly intrigue. Malory redefines the woman not as temptation, but as ideal – a mirror of knightly identity. Malory thus constructs an ethical epic: his characters embody virtues – valor, loyalty, temperance – not as qualities, but as existential choices. The Arthurian world becomes a field of moral initiation.

The Tristan and Isolde myth, originating in Celtic oral tradition (skel, lais), was redefined through Anglo-Norman reception. Bédier links its transformation to Breton jongleurs, who helped shape the genre of chivalric romance. Béroul's fragmentary «*Tristan*» shifts responsibility onto the potion; Isolde's imperfect beauty breaks with the courtly ideal. Thomas of Britain deepens psychology and dialogue. These lay the groundwork for Gottfried's «*Tristan*» and the *madman* motif later reprised by Bédier.

² Malory Tomas. (1998). *Le Morte d'Arthur. King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table in Two Vols. Volume 2* [Electronic resource]. Available at:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1252/pg1252-images.html> (Accessed: 15.07.2025).

³ Ibid. Volume 1 [Electronic resource]. Available at:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1251/pg1251-images.html> (Accessed: 15.07.2025).

Adaptations reflect narrative flexibility: in the «*Saga of Tristram and Isolde*», his musical gifts are emphasized; Marie de France's «*Chevrefeuille*» equates honeysuckle and hazel as inseparable lovers: «The hazel and the honeysuckle... if someone tries to separate them, each plant dies»⁴. English ballads polarize the two Isoldes, while Spanish versions add giants and interpret the potion as Christian absolution.

By the XVI century, Pierre Sala shifts focus to heroic deeds. Vinaver notes that the legend eventually merges into unrelated episodes: «Collection des aventures de Tristan et de Lancelot n'ayant aucun rapport avec les versions connues du roman»⁵. Romanticism revives the myth: Swinburne's «*Tristram of Lyonesse*» sees love as a cosmic force, while Wagner's «*Tristan und Isolde*» internalizes tragedy. Isolde becomes an active agent; death follows even after forgiveness.

In prose, Mann's «*Tristan*» parodies the myth in a sanatorium setting; Kaiser centers Mark, suggesting transparency kills passion. In «*Finnegans Wake*», identity disintegrates as Tristan and Mark merge. Sapkowski's «*Lamaladie*» ends with a postmodern gesture: Isolde remains only as a name, her voice recoded through Isolde of the White Hands.

Russian reception evolves from distant allusions to modernist and postmodernist transformations. From the «*Tale of Peter and Fevronia*» to post-Soviet reworkings (Nepodoba, Maksimenkova, Kochetkov), the myth becomes a reflective model of love, loss, and the metaphysical structure of desire.

The Semiotics of Number, Object, and Name in the Sacred Structure of Joseph Bédier's «Romance of Tristan and Isolde»

Bédier's adaptation («Le Roman de Tristan et Iseult», late XIX century) is unique in that it offers not merely a literary reconstruction of the legend, but a conceptually complete sacred structure, in which numerical, object-related, and onomastic symbolism function as deep codes of mythopoetic thought. From the very exposition, Tristan is framed as a «child of death»: «In sadness came I hither, in sadness did I bring forth, and in sadness has your first feast day gone. And as by sadness you came into the world, your name shall be called Tristan»⁶, – and this grief becomes the ontological vector of his existence. In Joseph Bédier's Romance of Tristan and Isolde, a system of numerical motifs serves a symbolic and compositional function. The number three recurs at key structural points, often marking turning events. Tristan lives with King Mark for three years before his lineage is revealed: «and for three years a mutual love grew up in their hearts» (1: 33). The tribute from Cornwall to Ireland follows a ternary pattern: «three hundred pounds of copper», «three hundred pounds of

⁴ **France Marie de.** (2013). The Lays of Marie de France / Translated by David R. Slavitt. – Edmonton: AU Press, Athabasca University. – 160 p. [Electronic resource]. Available at: https://www.aupress.ca/app/uploads/120228_99Z_Slavitt_2013-The_Lays_of_Marie_de_France.pdf (Accessed: 15.07.2025).

⁵ **Vinaver E.** (1925). Etudes sur le Tristan en prose. – Paris: Champion, p. 55 – 120 p.

⁶ **Bédier Joseph.** (191-?). Le roman de Tristan et Iseut. Paris: H. Piazza, p. 23 [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/leromandetristan00bduoft/page/22/mode/2up> (Accessed: 15.07.2025). Further references to this source are given in the text in parentheses as (1: page number).

silver», «three hundred pounds of gold», and finally, «three hundred youths and three hundred maidens drawn by lot from among the Cornish folk» (1: 37-38). The duel site is set «three days from Tintagel» (1: 40); Mark cries out «Tristan! Tristan! Tristan, my son!» (1: 161); reconciliation with the queen is announced for «three days» later (1: 169); and in Morois, «three days later, Tristan spent a long time tracking a wounded stag» (1: 153). This ternary repetition reflects not only narrative rhythm but also deeper symbolic meaning. In traditional and Christian symbolism, the triad represents wholeness and transformation, yet in the romance it also encodes tension: the love triangle—Tristan, Isolde, Mark—brings conflict rather than balance.

The number seven appears at decisive thresholds: Tristan is entrusted to Governal at age seven (1: 24); the sea voyage lasts «seven days and seven nights» (1: 47); and in his final battle, «he slew seven brothers, but was himself wounded by a spear» (1: 267). These uses signal stages of inner transformation and fateful transitions. Eight, often associated with eternity and cycles, frames Tristan's and Isolde's sea journeys: «eight days and eight nights» to King Mark and again to fetch Isolde (1: 272). This recurrence stresses the closed rhythm of desire, the idea of unchanging (predestined) Fate and the lovers' ultimate reunion in death as a form of paradise regained.

The number four marks both the beginning and end of Tristan's life. He is born on the fourth day after his father's death, and dies after calling Isolde's name three times: «and on the fourth, he breathes his last» (1: 281). Four warriors represent Morholt's strength (1: 39), and four barons — «Andret, Genelon, Gondoin, and Denoalen»—plot intrigue (1: 51), establishing four as a marker of earthly structure tied to conflict and mortality.

Finally, forty, rooted in Christian tradition, appears in pivotal healing and transitional episodes: Isolde heals Tristan over forty days (1: 48-49); King Mark postpones remarriage for forty days (1: 53); and Tristan sets «not later than forty days from now» as Kahedin's deadline (1: 271). These echo spiritual trial and renewal, linking the romance to broader religious and mythic frameworks. Thus, the system of numbers in Joseph Bédier's romance is far from arbitrary: it shapes the internal structure of the narrative, determines the rhythm and typology of events, and enriches the text with an additional layer of meaning, drawing upon religious, philosophical, and folkloric traditions. The recurring numerical formulas not only organize the narrative but also represent the protagonists' journey as a sacred process — one filled with trials, temptation, healing, and the passage toward eternity.

Symbolic materiality reinforces the structural code of the romance. The sword separating the lovers in sleep marks the threshold between sacred and profane: «Would they have placed this sword between themselves? ... the naked blade ... serves as a pledge and guardian of chastity» (1: 149–150). Similarly, the farewell scene (1: 168) becomes a ritual of sacralized love: the ring with green jasper, symbolizing eternity, and the dog Hudson, a token of loyalty, enact the transfer of essence: «Their value lay not in their utility or market worth, but in the fact that they, as it were, embodied and gave visible form to the relationships between the people who exchanged them»⁷.

At the narrative's close, myth returns to liturgy: Isolde «kissed him on the lips and on the forehead and gently lay beside him — body to body, mouth to mouth. Thus she

⁷ Гуревич А.Я. (1984). Категории Средневековой культуры. — М.: Искусство, с. 191. – 285 с.

gave up her soul, dying of grief for her beloved» (1: 282). The hawthorn, growing from Tristan and «arched over the chapel into Isolde's grave» (1: 283), unites them in death. This vegetal symbol recurs as a mythic threshold, both obstacle – the blazing hawthorn pyre (1: 131) – and union (1: 283), framing the lovers' journey beyond mortality.

The sail emerges as a false sign and a hermeneutic trap: «Twice in the romance the sail deceives expectation – the red on Marholt's ship and the black – the lie of Isolde of the White Hands»⁸. Here, tragedy stems not from fate, but from misreading, echoing the classical motif of Theseus.

Onomastics provides a final semantic closure: Tristan (from *triste*) – a name of mourning; Isolde – the one gazed upon, the sanctified object of eros; Mark (from *mar*, death) – a vector of decay. Thus, number, object, and name together form a mythopoetic system, in which love is inseparable from transgression, and tragedy unfolds as sacred fulfillment.

This material-symbolic and numerical matrix echoes through 20th-century adaptations, including John Updike's *Brazil*, where the lovers confront anew the archetypes of prohibition, initiation, and death, reinterpreted within postcolonial and magical realist paradigms.

Postmodern Strategy of Retransmission: The Destruction of Social Order and Mythopoetic Resonance in Updike's «Brazil»

John Updike's literary practice is marked by a consistent interest in archetypal models, reinterpreted through the lens of contemporary cultural concerns. As early as «The Centaur», mythological discourse is integrated into a realist narrative, and the characters acquire a dual ontology – as both real figures and mythological projections. The aesthetics of metamorphosis, the syncretism of classical and Christian codes, and the variability of perspective create a palimpsestic textual structure, in which the teacher Caldwell appears simultaneously as a martyr and as the centaur Chiron.

In «The Witches of Eastwick», Updike develops a strategy of mythological reprise through a gender-critical lens: witches – marginal figures in classical mythology – become bearers of power and transcendence. The town of Eastwick is transformed into a sacred *topos* of female strength, and magical realism serves as a vehicle for sociocultural revisionism. As Margaret Atwood observes, Updike constructs a model of mythopoetic matriarchy – a line that finds radical continuation in «Brazil». Updike's reconstruction of myth extends beyond individual plots, encompassing a broad corpus – from the Rabbit tetralogy to «The Poorhouse Fair» and «Of the Farm» – where themes of identity loss, the disintegration of authority, and the collapse of familial order are recurrent. These motifs form the foundation of «Brazil» as a neomyth that reinterprets the legend of Tristan and Isolde through postcolonial and postmodern lenses.

John Updike's «Brazil» (1994), one of his later works, presents a syncretic narrative in which the canonical legend of Tristan and Isolde undergoes a radical postmodern transformation. The text functions as a mytho-epic reprise, embedding the classical love story within the sociocultural polyphony of twentieth-century Brazilian reality. Through the lens of postcolonial and racial discourse, Updike reconstructs universal

⁸ Малиновская Н. (2014). Тема с вариациями. –М.: Центр книги Рудомино, с. 51. – 528 с.

archetypes, reactivating them within the coordinates of contemporary oppositions: «white–black», «wealth–poverty», «civilization–primitivism», «life–death». The very exposition of the novel, which opens with the word «black», establishes the semantic dominant of the text: binarity becomes the structural foundation of the narrative and a metaphor for cultural confrontation.

Updike explicitly cites Joseph Bédier's «Romance of Tristan and Isolde» as a source of compositional inspiration; however, his interpretation functions as a hermeneutic displacement rather than a direct adaptation. The heroine's name – Isabel – traces back to Isolde but acquires solar symbolism: her fair skin, blond hair, and association with the sun transform her into a mediator of mythopoetic light and erotic awakening. The sea, alongside the sun, serves as a sacred element: it frames the novel's ring structure, linking the scene of the lovers' first encounter with Tristan's death, thereby reproducing the archetype of fate. Yet Updike's ending travesties the canonical version, deflating the romantic perception of the story: «She lay down beside him and kissed his eyes, his lips... But the rising sun continued to redden her shut lids, and the chemicals within her continued their fathomless commerce, and the crowd grew bored. There would be no miracle today... Having absorbed this desolating truth, the dark-eyed widow staggered to her feet, tightened her robe about her nakedness, and let her uncle lead her home»⁹.

Key courtly attributes are reinterpreted: the sword is replaced by a razor – a mundane object imbued with the symbolism of masculinity and power. In the scene of intimacy, it takes the place of the sword from the forest of Morois, alluding to the classical motif but in a different register. Updike performs a deconstruction of the chivalric myth, preserving its iconography while radically altering its semantic charge.

In Updike's postmodern representation, the figures of Tristan and Isolde retain the key motifs of the canonical chronicle – the ritual of initiation, flight, exile, concealment in a symbolic forest, return, and the tragic impossibility of existence within the confines of society. However, their semantic charge undergoes a radical shift. Thus, the giving of a ring – a symbolic token of love and betrothal, familiar from the versions by Bédier and Gottfried von Strassburg – is preserved in «Brazil», yet stripped of its courtly purity: on the beach, Tristan offers Isabel a copper ring engraved with the word *DAR*, and the act is tinged with transgression, a gesture outside the law, as the ring is stolen, «a ring yanked from the finger of an elderly tourist gringa» (2: 3).

The rite of initiation, which in the medieval tradition is enacted through Tristan's death and miraculous healing, is reinterpreted in «Brazil» through an erotic experience initiated by the woman. It is Isabel who becomes the agent of action, disrupting the gender hierarchy of the original: unlike Isolde, she does not merely save the hero but guides, activates, and possesses him. This shift is emphasized both through linguistic markers and through her interaction with the sacred: the shaman calls Isabel a «warrior» (2: 210) and equates her with a prophet. In this way, the traditional animus–anima structure is destabilized: the feminine assumes the functions of the masculine, enacting the Jungian principle of synthesis in a postmodern key.

⁹ Updike John. (1994). «Brazil». Ballantine Books, p. 290-291 [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/Brazil> noveljohnu0000unse/page/290/mode/2up (Accessed: 15.07.2025). Further references to this source are given in the text in parentheses as (2: page number).

The protagonists' narrative journey in «Brazil» serves as a reprise of the knight-and-lady quest known from the Tristan and Isolde chronicle, but it is imbued with the colors of racial and social antagonism. In «Brazil», the obstacle is not only the familial code but also skin color, class affiliation, and institutional power. The figure of Isabel's father, Salomão, symbolizes not merely paternal prohibition but also the politico-administrative hierarchy – a structural analogue to royal authority. His speech is imbued with the rhetoric of exclusion: he explicitly tells his daughter, «You will not throw away your life on a black slum boy» (2: 80), thereby transforming the courtly trial into an ethnic conflict.

The spatial model in «Brazil» reproduces the mythologeme of the «forest refuge»: Ursula's hut – an analogue to the forest of Morois – functions as a zone of otherness and a temporary space of freedom from society: «his tense grip tugged her down, into a narrow space where the bare clay was overlaid with scratchy lumps, rough bags stuffed, from their faint fragrance, with what might have been dried flowers, or the skeletons of very small and delicate dead creatures. Stretching out her own delicate bones, thinking herself as safe from pursuit now as a body in its tomb, she whimpered in an approach to pleasure» (2: 33). This space of corporeal and natural union preserves its archetypal structure but is reinterpreted through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, and power. Thus, «Brazil» emerges as a reversal of the courtly narrative, transformed into artistic hermeneutics of contemporaneity.

The plot paradigm of «Brazil» continues the reconstruction of the Tristan and Isolde myth, incorporating the essential motif of separation followed by sacred reunion. As in the canonical legend, Updike's protagonists are parted for two years: Isabel spends this time at university and in casual relationships, while Tristão undergoes physical decline, condemned to an inner death. Updike metaphorically interprets Tristão's physical deterioration as the loss of his soul: «She was his eternal life» (2: 96), thereby activating the traditional dualism of man as body and woman as soul. This coupling of the corporeal and the spiritual, the sexual and the eschatological, finds its roots in the chronicles of the thirteenth century, where the death of one protagonist inevitably entails the death of the other – as an ontological response to the rupture of an indivisible unity.

The financial motivation in «Brazil» introduces a modernist element, aligning the novel with the tradition of the XVIII century. As in Abbé Prévost's «Manon Lescaut», love is intertwined with material dependence: like Des Grieux, Tristão makes compromises for the sake of his beloved, who is driven by a desire for comfort. The similarity of the overarching narrative discourse gives the novel a hybrid character, in which the courtly myth is interwoven with a critique of economic determinism, revealing the postmodern hero's duality – suspended between archetype and social reality.

The escalating destruction of the environment in «Brazil» takes on a spatial metaphor: the deeper Tristão and Isabel move inland, the more acutely they feel distanced not only from civilization but from the chronological present – «Moving inland, they seemed to move backwards in time» (2, 125). Updike constructs a chronotope of a vanishing world, where the return to archaism is not an aesthetic gesture but a mode of reality. The four-year isolation at the gold mine becomes a form of initiation outside society: Tristão experiences physical depletion, while Isabel

assumes the role of provider, including bodily sacrifice. This inverted archetypal scenario deconstructs traditional gender roles and calls into question heroism as an exclusively masculine discourse.

The death of Cesar at Tristão's hands and the lovers' flight into the wilderness (another point of contact with Prévost's novel) continue the motif of escape from «the system» which Isabel explicitly names as the true adversary: « “It is not my father that hunts us”, she said defensively. “It is the system”» (2: 169). This statement shifts the focus from a personal conflict to institutional violence, drawing a parallel between the chivalric hierarchy that obstructed love in the courtly myth and the modern social barriers – racial and class-based. Thus, «Brazil» is not merely an allusion to Tristan and Isolde, but a pointed social diagnosis of the postcolonial capitalist era.

The episode of the shamanic ritual marks a pivotal moment in the mythopoetics of «Brazil»: the lovers exchange bodies, and as a result, Tristão becomes white, while Isabel becomes Black. This bodily metamorphosis encompasses racial, gender, and social identities, dissolving traditional oppositions. The rite of initiation is enacted not through weaponry or a male figure, but within the sacred space of a ritual initiated by a woman. Isabel assumes the role of the hero, acting as the agent of salvation and transformation. The courtly structure is not abolished but reconfigured: love becomes an act of will and a form of resistance against fixed social and cultural roles. The ending of «Brazil» rejects the myth of return: although the protagonists formally reintegrate into the system, true assimilation never occurs. Despite the change in skin color and social status, Tristão remains symbolically other and experiences existential estrangement. Isabel, though having lost her physical identity, retains an inner connection to her racial and cultural belonging: «Eyes are the window of the spirit. When your soul becomes black, then will your eyes also» (2: 213), where the «black soul» functions as a marker of the «white» society. Their union is possible only outside the normative world – beyond law, time, and lineage. It is a myth of love without progeny, love as a transgression of order, destined from the outset to vanish. The final scene on the shore is a mirror image of the lovers' first meeting, as in Bédier's version or the anonymous texts of the «Roman de Tristan». The hero dies where love once began: the mythological circle is completed. His death is an act of class violence, marking the collapse of the utopia of reconciliation. Peace remains unattainable, even after completing all stages of the journey – a quality that links «Brazil» to Georg Kaiser's tragedy «The Cuckold King», where the legitimization of desire leads not to union, but to the loss of longing. In his novel, Updike realizes the deep structure of the courtly myth, interpreting it through the prism of postmodernism and social critique.

The novel reconfigures key motifs of the medieval narrative, reinterpreting the names of the protagonists as markers of archetype; the sun and the sea – as cosmogonic principles; the sword and the ring – as sacred objects; the ritual of initiation – as bodily transformation; and the prohibition of love and the motif of wandering – as necessary phases within the mythological cycle. Particular significance is also attached to the absence of offspring as a structural element within the mythological paradigm of forbidden love. This system of motifs, rooted in Celtic origins, proves productive in the context of twentieth-century modern «Brazil», where myth and history converge, and love emerges simultaneously as a form of resistance and a form of impossibility.

«Brazil» operates within the paradigm of magical realism, where the mythological, the sensual, and the historical coexist in an ontologically unstable reality. The protagonists' journey from Rio into the interior is not merely a change of landscape but a passage into a liminal space in which the civilizational yields to the archaic and the ritualistic. From the very exposition, the forest is portrayed as a symbol of the dissolution of the familiar order: «The old forest, it is coming back, it will eat all the poor» (2: 45). This remark establishes a magical realist perspective, in which space is endowed with metaphysical properties. The descent into an unencoded territory is accompanied by the loss of temporal and spatial coordinates: «They seemed under their loads to be moving backward in time, away from the furies that excessive population had brought to their century, into a chaste space where pairs of willing human hands would still be valuable» (2: 166-167), marking a transition into a post-civilizational realm governed by different – shamanic – laws.

It is within this space that magic manifests through objects and actions: the ring functions as a sacred marker of connection; the razor, named «Brilliant», serves as a functional analogue to the sword and simultaneously as a totem, an amulet that protects its bearer. Forgotten at the climactic moment, it ceases to fulfill its protective role, and the hero, having lost the magical object, perishes. The razor thus acts as a fetish in the Lévi-Straussian sense: it is both an artifact and a conduit of the sacred. This transfer of function from the sword to a mundane object is a characteristic device of magical realism, one that blurs the boundary between the elevated and the vernacular, the sacred and the profane. In the figure of Tristão – a Black protagonist who evokes African archetypes – Updike introduces the presence of the Other, a mediator between worlds, whose departure from the social structure cannot occur without sacrifice.

The figure of Isabel in «Brazil» combines features of the courtly romance heroine and a character from magical realism. Her appearance – golden hair, radiant skin likened to the sun or ivory – synthesizes the images of Isolde the Fair and Isolde of the White Hands, forming the archetype of the woman of light. From their very first encounter, Tristão registers the ambivalence of her image: «An angel or a whore?» (2: 8). The shaman sees her as Mayra – a messianic figure, the embodiment of solar energy: «Your skin is no longer magic» (2: 214). Within the poetics of magical realism, Isabel appears as a mediator between worlds; her corporeal ephemerality and detachment correspond to the concept of the «ghostly hero» (the definition by N. V. Kuznetsova, the author of a study devoted to mythologism in Updike's novels). She becomes not only a reinterpreted Isolde, but also a symbol of sacred otherness, expressed through body, color, and perception. The culmination of the mythopoetic transformation in «Brazil» is the scene of the shamanic ritual, in which a skin exchange occurs between Tristão and Isabel. This bodily metamorphosis embodies the shamanic idea of the changeability of the outer shell and the conditionality of boundaries between worlds. The ritual space – the summit of the Mesa – symbolizes the passage into the transcendent. The ring inscribed with «DAR» becomes the price for the transformation, a token of love offered as a ritual sacrifice. The ritual is accompanied by a psychoactive experience that facilitates the establishment of rapport between Isabel and the Tupinambá shaman: «When the shaman at last did speak, she miraculously understood; certain of his mumbled words stood out like highlights, glimmering with meaning, and the sense of the sentence slitheringly moved through

under the dark spaces between. Something in the smoke had eaten away at the boundary between their minds» (2: 207).

The process lasts seven days – a number traditionally associated with feminine and cosmogonic cycles. Isabel's transformation reflects not only a physical change but also a shift from sacred status to human vulnerability. Updike inscribes «Brazil» into the tradition of literary metamorphoses (Ovid, Apuleius, Stevenson, Kafka, Bulgakov), bringing the novel closer to Andersen's «The Little Mermaid»: the heroine voluntarily leaves her world for the sake of love, losing her magical gifts (her voice – in Andersen, the radiance of her skin – in Isabel) and passing through the figure of a mediator (a witch / a shaman). Both characters are marked by angelic otherness – white skin, transparency, gray-blue eyes. Their journey involves the loss of former identity and existence at the boundary between worlds.

Updike interprets the archetype of transformation through a feminist and postcolonial lens: the woman is not the object of the rite but its initiator. Isabel's return to her father's house completes the cycle: he instantly recognizes her – «To a father, a daughter is always perfection» (2: 255). This episode illustrates a core principle of magical realism – the integration of the supernatural into the fabric of the everyday.

In «Brazil», the miraculous does not oppose reality but reveals its deeper structure. Ritual, the sacralization of objects (the ring, the razor, the body), and the shift in chronology shape an ontology in which magic is not an anomaly but a mode of being. Updike's novel emerges as a philosophical parable about love, identity, and the boundaries of belonging, narrated in the language of myth and magical thinking.

Conclusion

The present study has examined John Updike's novel «Brazil» in its intertextual relationship with the courtly narrative of Tristan and Isolde. By tracing the mythopoetic structure of the Arthurian cycle – from the chronicles of Gildas and Nennius to the synthetic canon of Thomas Malory – we have explored how the medieval model of love, honor, initiation, and sacred space undergoes transformation in contemporary literature.

Updike preserves the fundamental structural elements of the courtly myth – flight, concealment, the rite of initiation, the extralegal love union, and the tragic outcome – but redistributes their semantic weight. The Arthurian narrative, in which the sword, the ring, the sacred forest, and the name carried sacral meaning and defined an ethical trajectory, is reinserted by Updike into a new framework – postcolonial, postmodern, and gender-critical. Within this system, the archetype no longer functions as a universal ideal but rather as a fraught cultural code subject to revision.

The comparison between the courtly original and its modern counterpart in «Brazil» reveals significant transformations: the knightly sword is replaced by a razor – a symbol of masculinity and a domestic weapon; the ring loses its ritual purity and becomes a gesture of alienated love; the rite of initiation is enacted through the body, suffering, and a symbolic shift in race. These displacements demonstrate that the myth of Tristan and Isolde in Updike's novel is not negated but reinterpreted – as a cultural mechanism of resistance to system, authority, and normative order.

The mythological model in «Brazil» unfolds within the poetics of magical realism, where the boundaries between reality and the miraculous are blurred. The protagonists

do not merely reenact the fate of their medieval predecessors but travesty it under conditions of profound social and ontological instability. Their love is not a gift but a choice – not fate, but defiance. This new mythopoetics reveals the nature of love as transgression and gives rise to a distinctive narrative form: the neomyth, which fuses archetype with trauma, structure with social critique.

Thus, the objectives of the study – identifying the mechanisms of deconstructing the courtly narrative, analyzing the transformations of archetypes, symbols, and gender roles, and reflecting on the functions of myth within the context of magical realism – have been fulfilled through comparative analysis. Updike's «Brazil» emerges not merely as a literary echo of the legend, but as a profound artistic reflection on the limits of identity and the possibilities of love in a post-traditional world. In this reading, the Arthurian myth reveals its resilience: though it loses its sacred integrity, it retains the capacity to generate meaning – within a different cultural body and with new ideological functions.

ՆԱՏԱԼԻՅԱ ԳՈՆՉԱՐ-ԽԱՆԴՋՅԱՆ – Նեոմիֆ և ապամոնտաժում. կուրտուազ նարատիվը և դրա վերափոխումը Զոն Ափդայքի «Բրազիլիա» վեպում – Զոն Ափդայքի «Բրազիլիա» (1994) վեպը դիտարկվում է որպես պոստմոդեռնիստական կերպափոխում Տրիստանի և Իզոլդայի մասին առասպելի՝ մոզական ռեալիզմի և հետզաղութային դիսկուրսի տեսանկյունից: Հիպոթեզն այն է, որ Ափդայքը ոչ թե վերարտադրում է ապանդական նարատիվը, այլ ապամոնտաժում է այն՝ փոխակերպելով կուրտուազ սիրո մոտիվը հասարակական նորմերին, ռասայական և գենդերային հիերարխիային ընդդիմանալու ձևաչափի: Հոդվածի նպատակը վերլուծելն է՝ ինչպես է վեպում վերաշերտավորվում առասպելի միֆոպետիկ կառուցվածքը արքայիպերի, սրբազն առարկաների, ծիսակարգի և սահմանազգային տարածքի վերախմաստավորման միջոցով: Հասուկ ուշադրություն է դրաձվում անունների խորիրանշաբանությանը, մարմնավորման և նախաձեռնումի մոտիվներին, ինչպես նաև միջնադարյան բարոյագիտության փոխարինմանը ինքնության ժամանակակից խնդիրներով: Մեթոդաբանությունը ներառում է հերմենևիլիկ, կառուցվածքաբան և հետզաղութային մոտեցումներ՝ միֆարանական և գրական սեմիոտիկայի գործիքակազմի համարդումով: Աշխատանքը հանգում է այն եզրակացության, որ «Բրազիլիան» հանդես է գալիս որպես նեոմիֆ՝ փիլիսոփայական առակ այն սահմանների մասին, որտեղ մարդկայինը միաձուլվում է իրաշքին: Ափդայքն իր հիբրիդային և փոխակերպվող պոետիկայով վերախմաստավորում է սերը, ճակատագիրը և հերոսությունը ցույց տալով, թե ինչպես է առասպելը վերափոխվում ժամանակակից մշակութային և պատմական համատեքստում:

Բանալի բառեր – Ափդայք, մոզական ռեալիզմ, Տրիստան և Իզոլդա, պոստմոդեռնիզմ, ծես, առասպել

НАТАЛИЯ ГОНЧАР-ХАНДЖЯН – Неомиф и деконструкция: куртуазный нарратив и его трансформация в «Бразилии» Джона Апдайка. – В статье рассматривается роман Джона Апдайка «Бразилия» (1994) как постмодернистская трансформация мифа о Тристане и Изольде в контексте магического реализма и постколониального дискурса. Выдвигается гипотеза о том, что Апдайк не воспроизводит канонический сюжет, а де-конструирует его, превращая куртуазную любовь в форму сопротивления социальным

нормам, расовой и гендерной иерархии. Цель исследования – проанализировать, как в романе переосмысляются мифopoэтические элементы: архетипы, сакральные объекты, ритуал и пограничное пространство. Особое внимание уделяется ономастической символике, мотивам воплощения и инициации, а также замещению средневековой этики проблематикой идентичности. Методологическая основа включает герменевтический, структуралистский и постколониальный подходы в сочетании с элементами сравнительной мифокритики и литературной семиотики. Статья показывает, что «Бразилия» выступает как неомиф – философская притча о границах человеческого и чудесного, где мифологическое рождается не из сверхъестественного, а из способности героя к трансгрессии. Через поэтику гибридности и превращения Апдайк заново формулирует ключевые категории любви, судьбы и героизма, демонстрируя, как миф адаптируется к реалиям современной культуры.

Ключевые слова: *Апдайк, магический реализм, Тристан и Изольда, постмодернизм, ритуал, миф.*

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