

Mythological Stories about House-Spirit: Themes, Structure, Psychological Particularities

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Abstract: The article is devoted to "real-like" stories (bylikhas/byvalshchinas) about house-spirit dwelling in Elabuga District of Republic of Tatarstan. They are classified in accordance with their genre specific character, the subject (plot), their stylistic particularities. Special attention is paid to the analysis of human behaviour in the situation of encounter with a house-spirit. The archetypes which are the source of mythology, folklore of the inhabitants of Elabuga District are described. Belief in vague, elusive living beings is explained by enlivening of the mechanisms of psychological defense of a person.

Key words: Bylikha/byvalshchina • Situation of encounter • Demonic creature • House-spirit • Composition • Structure • Archetypes • The unconscious.

INTRODUCTION

In modern studies of folklore scientists pay more and more attention to studying of genres of conversational folk non-fairy-tale prose. Actual issues are: specific features of the genres, poetics, process of modern existence and development of pieces of work which are different from fairy-tales.

We are focused on small real-like stories - actively developing genres of modern folk creative work. We have taken material for our study from texts of mythological stories, written down at the territory of Elabuga-city and Elabuga District of Republic of Tatarstan since 2005 to 2013 in conversations with people of age 18-85.

Term "bylichka" which means wonderful encounters with all kinds of super-natural creatures was put into use by brothers B. and Yu. Sokolov [1] in the beginning of 20th century. By that time mythological stories were named "byvalshchina"(thing which really happened). So terms "bylichka", "byvalshchina" and some others formed from the same word base can be regarded as equal [2]. Distinct terminological differentiation of notions "bylichka" and "byvalshchina" was proposed by E. Pomerantseva. In her opinion "bylichka" is a story with features of witness' confession about human contacts with "other" world, she defines this genre as superstitious "memorat", having distinct features of shapelessness, singularity, non-generalization which is different from

"fabulat" - byvalshchinas which have a distinct plot and completed form, afterwards they turns into traditional stories [3].

Therefore "bylichka" and byvalshchina are genres of prosaic non-fairy-tale-like folklore, stories about encounters with fantastic creatures originating from native demonology. Modern evidence prove that bylichka has kept its main background assumption to be real-like - that is why story-teller presents his narration as a real event from his own life or from life of people close to him or familiar to him. "Byvalshchina" apart from bylichka has lost particular features of being recalled by the witness of the event. It suggests more generalization, more fantastic details. Often byvalshchina is told from the 3rd person (he or she), though there are stories told from 1st person, featuring deep psychology, detailed description of emotional experience.

Looking at modern texts of bylikhas and byvalshchinas we can say that these genres are developing ones and currently, so to say, are passing through new period of their rise. Native demonology existence is registered in all age groups. Notably, mythological stories are presented both in traditional and changed forms. The changes take place by different reasons. One of them is absence of stable poetic form of both bylichka and byvalshchina. That is why we observe absence of boundaries between genres. Other example - changing of functional mindset: besides informative

function (transferring of experience, practical knowledge, warnings) modern *bylichkas* and *byvalshchinas* perform entertainment function. Because of all that principle of fear has lost its meaning in regard to these genres; mythological beliefs of a modern man lead to transformation of mythology of genre in texts; modality of stories is often different as well [4-6].

In regard to *bylichka/byvalshchina* the situation of encounter with demonological creature is a fragment (empirical experience [7]) in which it is narrated about experiencing by the hero an impossible encounter with mythological character in ordinary for people domestic surroundings. "Situation" means circumstances, surroundings, position [8].

Obligatory characteristics for this situation are instantaneousness, stress character and apparent randomness of an event. Situation of encounter is connected with such forms of cognition of the universe as empirical cognition based on perception of external world phenomena with five organs of senses and mind, intuitive cognition of reality which is available for people with rich imagination, who are able to hear voices from "other" world and embody them into words, sounds and colour combinations.

Fact of encounter is a key plot-forming element of *bylichka/byvalshchina*, semantic center of both archaic and modern texts of this folklore genre. This is to some extent an "archetype" filled with different contents but structurally the same all the time.

Situation of encounter has a triune structure (3 elements): unexpected display of demonological forces; a man influenced by this force; the outcome of the encounter.

In compositional structure of genre of *bylichka* (*byvalshchina*) the situation of encounter is supplemented with sketches from narrator's domestic life, at the background and on this "stage" contact of a man with other-world representative or its manifestation takes place: "Once I was sitting until midnight, addicted to knitting. My old man has fallen asleep long time ago. But I'm sitting and stirring my needles very quickly. Suddenly I here: Boom! What's that? Maybe my cat has fallen from somewhere? Again the same sound! But this time from another place. I was very frightened. I feel that something's wrong and became paralyzed. And suddenly there is a laugh very close to me. That was all. It disappeared. I guessed: house-spirit (*brownie*) plays pranks. Well, it is not my time to stay awake! I stopped my knitting and went to sleep (*Murzikcha* village).

House-spirit or mythological ancient ancestor is a godfather of household. In conversational stories house-spirit is often described as an ideal host, an order-keeper in a house and it is angry with those who break established rules. In given above folklore text *brownie* reminds to an inaccurate hostess about prohibition for doing things about home after midnight: it is high time for other living beings, but not a man. A hostess who was still busy with knitting after midnight understands unconsciously her fault and is hurrying to improve the situation: as a wife she must be with her husband, be asleep and preparing for new wonderful day. Ignored law "day-night" made a person who crossed the line between light and darkness subject to punishment, that is why the hero of this story heard that house-spirit is doing foolish things - it was warning her.

Plotline of *bylichka/byvalshchina* is finished with evaluation of the events by the narrator or with reference to the consequences of this encounter.

Particularities of domestic life of a person are not by chance in the myth-like story: the more real background and more "impossible" the encounter is, the more emotional impact on the listener it does.

A man must believe in very-difficult-to-explain phenomena because it sets balance between the conscious and unconscious. In K. Yung's opinion human psychology is a integral (in the state of balance) dynamic unity of conscious and unconscious processes. Experience of visions and rituals with ecstatic component was always regarded as highly precious in traditional cultures. They enable to get in touch with the unconscious and balance the conscious and unconscious [9].

In *bylichkas* a man encounters house-spirit much more often than other creatures (wood-goblin, water-sprite, a witch- werewolf and others) and it demonstrates that character of house-spirit is well-kept in people's memory, belief in ancient myth creature is alive. Belief in house-spirit was common in Ancient Russia and stories about it did not raise any doubts for long time - because of common knowledge that it is an obligatory, close participator of a peasant's life, a "patron" of his household, defender of his house. That is why it is of no surprise that among all characters of lower mythology the character of house-spirit is the most stable and everlasting [10].

House-spirit is personification of the past in the present. It inherited many attributes of its archaic predecessor - one's family god-father, to be exact – totem-

like ancestor. In the process of its existence this character has embodied in himself the souls of the dead ancestors, which had deprived themselves of flesh but did not disrupt connections with their off-springs, participating in all their affairs and worries. That is why situation of the encounter with brownie has psychological significance. It is belief that there is something which supports us all throughout of our life and this belief is programmed by us during our life - that is why character of house-spirit is not lost in the unconscious of a man [11].

The character feature of demonological stories about house-spirit is moral factor: house-spirit as a mythological character, participates in human relations "a man – his family", "a man – the surrounding people", "house-spirit - a man" [12]. It can act as a companion in life, in domestic affairs, as a predictor. In modern interpretation the obligations of house-spirit do not differ from traditional human ones: protection of a house, warning to a man about approaching trouble, punishment or favour, predicting future events and others.

Situation and the conditions of encounter with house-spirit enable us to classify the texts of bylichkas/byvalshchinas in the following way:

- Narration, plot of which is daylight actions of a house-spirit;
- Narration about encounter of a man with a house-spirit when he is asleep or staying non-asleep at night.

The texts of the 1st group are plots depicting ordinary life of a hero (narrator) or hero (participator of the events). Encounters with house-spirit are taking place in daylight conditions: a) a story about house-spirit's manifestation of gratitude towards the hosts and good attitude to people ("Suddenly someone touches my leg tenderly"; "In the morning I see that my pan is as though it was not burnt - it's quite clean!"; b) narration about its warnings, predictions of happiness (for example, burned wooden pieces found in a room were perceived as warning about fire); c) stories about jokes and playing pranks by house-spirit (the loss of some thing and then unexpected discovery of it in a quite unusual place, knocking, stirring etc).

The second group consists of bylichkas, in which events take place in nighttime or late in the evening. It is not obligatory that a hero is asleep. These are the stories about friendly signs from house-spirit, though the most frequent are stories about unfriendly attitude towards

people, about warning of a man about trouble, illness. One special theme is "house-spirit is suffocating me", "house-spirit is frightening me".

"Then I was young yet. It was a pleasure to work in teams of other workers. They moved us to a new place, it seemed like a workers' village, The name of it is difficult to remember, well - Grigory Kuznetsov must remember it. We worked together and his memory is stronger. In the beginning they provided us with lodgings. There was a big izba (a house). All rooms were empty, so I took one of them. In the evening everybody went to the Club but I was tired after mess and went to sleep. Suddenly, when I was not asleep yet, I see: hairy creature, looks like a man, is getting out from the oven. He was very short and his body was strange. He came to me and started to suffocate me. But I was paralyzed – could not even move a hand - and I feared that such an old “grandpa” would suffocate me! I pulled all my forces together and with full effort pushed him from me - threw him away. And there was an open hole in the floor (it was a cellar) - and he hurried into it. It is not clear if he fell down or sprang down deliberately. Ah, I did not understand. He got quiet down in the cellar. No sound was heard in the house. In the morning I told everything to the people who were with me. And one of them remarked: the brownie has not loved you". I was lucky that they found another lodgings for us, close to work.." (Shurnyak village).

Unexpected Display of Demonic Force: We have already mentioned that all encounters with house-spirit and other creatures take place in conditions ordinary for a man. "The story usually begins with realistic description: a man in the most usual conditions where everything is understandable and known. These are routine affairs of a peasant, ordinary rest" [2]. House-spirit always appear unexpectedly and it is demonstrated by the word “suddenly” in bylichkas - or by some other word close to it in semantics. For example, in Elabuga bylichkas they use the words "Look", I see, I hear in combinations with "suddenly": suddenly I see etc. All of them “show the boundary between the ordinary and supernatural” [2].

"This story was told to me by my grand-grand-mother. She really wanted to see a brownie and they taught her. Take, they said, a clean comb, pour clean water into a bucket and throw the comb into it. In three days there will be a brownie's hair in it. Take it and rub in hands one time - the light will go out, twice - a brownie will appear. She did what they told. In 3 days a hair had appeared. She rubbed the hair - there was nothing.

Then on the second day she rubbed again at night and suddenly saw: somebody is sitting behind her. It was hairy, with a long grey hair and beard. She felt bad - it was awful. She saw him and the words could not go out from her throat. But "he" did not do anything to her - and in one moment disappeared.... She told that this encounter brought happiness for her" (Tanaika village).

In this bylichka the most interesting is the following: in spite of the wish of the hero to see the house-spirit and her special preparation in the form of magical procedure the encounter is still unexpected. It can be explained in such a way: the world of demonological creatures is unknown and unexplored by the man and even special preparation procedure for intrusion into it does not change anything: it is not clear what this encounter will bring.

A Man Influenced by Demonic Force: We see that encounter with house-spirit is rarely take place directly (in the flesh) - more often it happens in the form of its tangible or audible signs. Any encounter conveys information to the man which must be understood, interpreted in a right way ("for the food or evil?"). It means that being influenced by house-spirit force a man is in a situation of recognition, comprehension" (who was it?) and "understanding, realization" (what was the purpose of house-spirit coming?).

In a situation of meeting with house-spirit a man experience great psychological shock. "Unexpected guest" provokes in him trouble, surprise, it puts him at a loss, paralyzes him. "A witness is more often finds himself in conditions which he can not change, that is why there are no active reaction from his side" [2]

In bylichkas psychological experience of encounter of a man with house-spirit is depicted without details, very shortly: "possessed with fear", "paralyzed", "couldn't move a hand", "cold went down my spine" etc

Therefore the personality of a witness, his state is expressed dramatically and the stories themselves are told "in highly emotional form" [2].

Often in bylichkas psychological unconscious defense of a person is emphasized. Discomfortable, nasty situations always threaten mental health of people and lead to emotional unhappiness. However we are put in these circumstances because of circumstances and we are obliged to dwell in life conditions which do not provide for comfort and quietness. Reaction of our psychology is that it unconsciously resist to emotional discomfort using mechanism of psychological defense, "compensation"

which is aimed to restore normal emotional balance and therefore becomes self-control of mental system. Threatening situation of conflict is combated by belief in elusive living beings which help us not to disrupt connection with mother-nature, about which we forget until it "spanks" us a bit or until we are in real trouble [9].

Outcome of Encounter: Encounter with house-spirit always brings some results for a man: his usual way of life can be changed. Seeing or hearing a house-spirit can be a sign of trouble, approaching death or an urge to recollect and think over one's life in a new way, to change one's behaviour, attitude towards relatives, people around him or even to house-spirit itself.

Outcome of encounter with enemy-like house-spirit can mean threat of death to people. Among Elabuga bylichkas there are few texts in which people protect themselves from rudely acting house-spirit by a prayer, but there a lot of texts which contain a common belief that while encountering with house-spirit one should use sign of the cross for protection and at night it should be a curse spoken in rude, dirty words. Only in this case the outcome of the encounter with spiteful "host" of the house will be harmless for a man. Encounter with a house-spirit is a non-standard situation and an incentive for deep, badly experienced, neurotic reaction. It results in extremely emotional rude cursing words giving some kind of a medicine to the man. It distracts the brain from reflexion in regard to incurred psychological stress and for some time it allows a man to think about how to narrate one's own indignation in expressive rude words. Curses are a kind of protection, talisman, cry for help, the most available emotional response for extremely uncomfortable conditions. This can explain why practice of using crude words contradicting all moral norms still exists by now.

Nowadays encounter with house-spirit is the most demanded structure of expression of personal belief in existence of representative of other world. The encounter has 3 main elements: attitude towards the world, life norms and mystic feeling which are embodied in cult. The 1st element is directed to man's intellect, the 2nd - to his ambitions, the 3rd - to his emotional sphere.

It must be mentioned that house-spirit is understood by modern narrators of bylichkas of Elabuga District as a kind creature because it is connected with a house, home and is allotted with features of a talisman. His angeriness is explained by its tutorial function rather than its belonging to the pantheon of demonic creatures.

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