

BALLADS OF SUPERNATURAL IN ENGLISH-SCOTTISH, SCANDINAVIAN AND BELARUSIAN TRADITIONS

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Ballad genre is incredibly diverse. It includes a lot of different theme groups and ballads of supernatural is one of the most extensive. Ballads about magic, transformations and supernatural beings are known all over Europe, especially in Scotland and Scandinavian countries. Belarusian folk song and ballad tradition is not an exception.

Ballads of supernatural belong to the most ancient layer of the ballad genre; at the same time most surviving texts are much younger than the texts of many historical ballads. Ballads of supernatural preserved longer in oral tradition; probably ballad collectors and publishers were more attracted by history while folk singers – by the world of magic and mystery [1, p. 111].

The determination of the time when ballads of supernatural appeared is the greatest difficulty, because the gap between the first records and the supposed time of their creation can be very large. It is possible that over the centuries of oral existence they changed their original form significantly, the traces of feudal or tribal customs and pagan beliefs often disappeared or conformed to the changing realities of later periods and circumstances [2, p. 11–12].

A. Slesarev is considering two hypotheses about the time when ballads of supernatural appeared. According to the first hypothesis this group of ballads occurred as early as in the pre-feudal period. As the evidence of this he mentions the presence in ballads of supernatural such archaic plot features as metamorphosis, marriages with mythical creatures, incest and talking animals. The family is presented as pre-patriarchal on the stage of forming, with traces of matriarchy and kind. At the same time the emergence of the genre can be connected with the feudal period, and all the archaic features are explained as being borrowings and remnants. These elements can easily occur later and exist in the form of beliefs, element of fairy stories or poetic schemes [3, p. 2].

Ballads of this type, as a rule, contain a romantic element and a tragic denouement. Ballads of supernatural were particularly popular in the era of romanticism, and many poets composed quite similar literary works. Since then the idea has spread that in a ballad there must necessarily be a meeting with a supernatural being, but in reality these stories are typical only for a small number of ballads [4, p. 235–237].

It should be noted that among more than three hundred English-Scottish folk ballads currently known supernatural events occur less than in fifty of them. Except the ballad “Robin Hood and the Prince of Aragon” an extensive series of ballads about Robin Hood is completely devoid of supernatural motives. Household ballads are also deprived of supernatural motifs, as well as those that tell about blood vengeance, clan and family feuds [5, p. 22–24].

Among English-Scottish ballads there are no mythological ballads. The time interval between the fall of paganism and the flourishing of the ballad poetry was too great. However the themes associated with supernatural beings are quite common but, of course, not as much as in the Nordic countries [6, p. 236–237]. Most of these ballads (about 86%) were recorded in Scotland, not in England.

In Scandinavia non-historical ballads are divided by researchers into ballads of supernatural (Swedish “naturmytiska visor” (“natural-mythological ballads”) Danish “trylleviser” and Norwegian “trollvisor” (“fabulous ballads”)), and chivalry ballads (“riddervisor”). The first group contains a supernatural element, neither does the second. This division proves the recognition of the extraordinary importance of the role played by the supernatural in the Scandinavian imagination. Of course, the pagan gods had disappeared before the flourishing of ballad literature but the old fears did not weaken at all. The power of nature plunged humans into awe. The sea swallowed up ships during storms and gales, ladies were killed in the turbulent flow of the rivers. Each bridge carried a risk because it was hiding a bloodthirsty nix under the water. Mermaids and nixes, gnomes and elves, trolls and dragons surrounded the Scandinavians, who were not so religious to defend against the enemy with the help of the Christian cross. Runes had a much greater force in comparison with the Christian symbols, and the omnipotent harper could make the evil set their unfortunate victims free. Thus, “natural-mythological” or “fabulous” ballads is a distinctive feature of the Scandinavian ballad literature, which is also typical for Scotland. Many European nations have songs about evil supernatural beings, but they do not cause reverent terror. In Latvia and Lithuania people remember and honour their pagan pantheon, but Perkunas and Lima have become friendly home spirits. In Scandinavia the situation is different. It seemed that Asgard had left people without any

protection in the face of the terrible Nature, accompanied by fog, storms, ice and mountains [6, p. 219]. It should be noted that in Scandinavia ballads of supernatural is a large group they makes up about a fifth of the total number in Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

From the point of view of the variety of ballad plots about supernatural Sweden (as well as Denmark, a coincidence with which is 89% [4, p. 228]) takes the first place among the other Nordic countries. At the same time similar plots can often be found in Norwegian, Icelandic and Faroese traditions.

Among English-Scottish and Scandinavian folk ballads of supernatural the work "Thord af Havsgaard" ("Thord from Havsgaard") should be singled out. It is well-known in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The uniqueness of this ballad is that it is actually the only example in Europe when a mythological plot had been taken as the basis for a ballad. And the plot had not changed at all until the 16th century when the ballad was first recorded. The story repeats Icelandic "Þrymskviða" ("The Song about Þrymr" from "Elder Edda"), according to which the Thurs' prince Þrymr stole Thor's hammer Mjöltnir and hid it in Jötunheimr. With Loki's help he told Thor that he would return the hammer only when they marry him (Þrymr) with Freya. But Freya refused and Thor himself had to disguise himself into the bride and go to Jötunheimr, where, thanks to the trick he regained Mjöltnir and killed Þrymr.

Despite the fact that the names in the ballad are slightly corrupted, there is no doubt that Havsgaard is Asgard, Tord is Thor, Lokke is Loki and Norgefjeld is Jötunheimr. However, in the ballad Tord is depicted not as a god but as a common man [7, c. 3]:

Det var Tord af Havsgård,
Han red over grønne eng,
Så tabte han sin hammer af guld
Og den var væk så længe.
("It was Tord from Havsgård,
He rode through a green meadow,
He lost his hammer of gold,
And it was taken far away.")

Also the hammer in the ballad is devoid of its magic power. But still before us there is the actually identical work to "The Song about Þrymr" which, according to William Entwistle, gives the right to call this ballad the only mythological ballad [6, p. 93–94].

According to L. Salavej the term "балады з міфалагічнымі матывамі" ("ballads with mythological motifs") is used to refer to Belarusian ballads of supernatural. The author asserts that the number of plots and the preservation of archaic motifs in this group are much richer than the corresponding ballad group of the neighbouring nations [8, p. 11].

The close examination reveals many similarities with English-Scottish and Scandinavian ballads. There are the same themes in the group of ballads about witchcraft and magic. It should be noted that in the Belarusian tradition ballads about transformation is the largest group. At the core of these works there is the etiological myth of the origin of a particular flower, a tree, a living being or an inanimate object. Our ancestors believed that such a transformation does not mean death; it is only a transition of human life in a new form, a new quality [9, p. 11–12]. Belarusian ballads mention dragons, or "цмокі" (as lindworms in English-Scottish and Scandinavian ballads). A significant number of works is devoted to wolves with human characteristics (it can be assumed that they are werewolves, as in the Scandinavian ballad "Varulfven"). There are also Belarusian ballads about mermaids. The storyline of the ballad "Дзеўка і шатан" resembles similar works about the meeting with the dead and especially Scandinavian ballads about how supernatural beings steal young ladies and take them in their estates ("Agneta och havsmannen" or "Den bergtagna"). The ending of the ballad "Заклятае вяселле" is almost the exact completion of Scottish ballads about tragic love, the only difference is that after death the lovers turn into an oak and a birch. All this proves that Belarusian ballads as well as the Belarusian culture in general are an integral part of the Europe-wide culture.

So, ballads of supernatural are widely represented in English-Scottish, Scandinavian and Belarusian traditions. It should be noted that in the above-mentioned traditions the terminology regarding this ballad groups is significantly different. And the question remains still open about the time of appearance of ballads of supernatural, but they are still considered the most ancient layer of the ballad genre.

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