

NARRATIVES ON DREAM'S EFFECT ON PEOPLE IN LITHUANIAN AND LATVIAN ORAL FOLKLORE

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Abstract

In this article we studied certain cases of dreaming in narrative folklore of the Baltic nations. We try to ascertain the effect of a dream on the hero-protagonist in narratives about miraculous recovery where certain information is obtained through a dream. Data of oral folklore recorded in the 20th century have been used.

Through analysis two aspects were singled out: 1. The *inner* effect on the protagonist of a narrative. Encouraged by a dream, he / she acts and achieves positive results. 2. The *outer* effect on listeners of a story and on the narrator himself, when the protagonist's action set an example. A case of a hero has an effect on the audience and the narrator. Such stories urge people to have faith in dreams and in the actions they induce one to perform.

Resumo

Examinámos neste artigo alguns casos de sonhos no folclore narrativo dos países bálticos. Pretendemos estudar o efeito de um sonho no herói-protagonista em narrativas sobre curas miraculosas, quando determinada informação é obtida através de um sonho. Utilizámos informação recolhida no séc. XX.

Dois aspectos emergiram desta análise: 1. O efeito *interno* no protagonista da narrativa. Encorajado por um sonho, o protagonista actua e alcança resultados positivos. 2. O efeito *externo* nos ouvintes da narrativa e no próprio narrador, quando a acção do protagonista é tomada como exemplo. O caso de um herói tem efeitos na audiência e no narrador. Histórias como estas aconselham as pessoas a terem fé nos sonhos e nas acções que eles induzem a praticar.

The goal of this paper is to investigate dreaming as it is represented in Baltic narrative folklore. The main focus is on the effects dreams have on the hero-protagonist as described in narratives about miraculous recoveries where vital information is obtained through a dream. The paper uses data from the oral folklore recorded in the 20th century.

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The motif of a dream is frequent in Lithuanian and Latvian oral folklore, especially in myths and historical legends. A sleeping person is suddenly urged to go and dig out a treasure (Кербелите 2001: 450); to rebuild a cross (Trasauskienė 1999: 68); to celebrate Mass in a specified place; to return an object (Kerbelytė 1999: 105, 109). In some cases, s/he is ordered to stop some work s/he has begun: felling a tree (Кербелите 2001: 94); digging a hill; anchoring a lake (Kerbelytė 1999: 157, 159). Sometimes, the protagonist does not believe the dream and thus does not fulfill the orders. However, when a dream deals with health issues, people tend to obey without hesitation.

First of all, I will discuss several narratives in which a sick protagonist sleeps in an ordinary place and sees a meaningful dream. Many Latvian legends tell that in such dreams those sick with fever may learn what will help them to recover. For instance, a feverish man had a dream in which he was informed that if he took off his clothes and waded through the river naked, his fever would leave him. In the dream, the man did as he was told. While he was wading into the river, a certain gentleman came up to his clothes and said: "It's sowing time, but the horse is absent, only its skin remains" (Šmits 1936: 337).

In Lithuanian legends fever is frequently disposed of in a similar way. The illness can be left behind with a certain object, often unintentionally. After that the patient recovers (LTR 1497/77). By contrast, if someone finds and takes a thing which belongs to a sick person, that man takes the illness – the fever, the plague – too (LTR 2749 /47/, 1505 /38/). Folk medicine knows of similar cases of disposing of an ailment together with a thing. Latvians believe that in order to recover from fever one has to ride a poker or a broom up to a certain crossroad, throw it away and run home without looking back (Šmits 1940: 372-375). In other legends a sick person is advised or encouraged to do the same by some authority: a magician, a woman, or some other people (Šmits 1936: 338-341). Thus legends show that a dream can induce a person to undertake a beneficial action – to abandon an illness together with some possession of his/her.

Sometimes, a way of recovering is suggested by some person the protagonist sees in a dream. A Latvian legend describes a case when an old man appears to a sick girl in a dream. He tells her to go to the bathhouse, then to the cemetery and lie down among the graves. "At midnight the dead will start singing and walking from one church to the other. Then the devil will descend in a fever cart from the Kempu hill. He will be carrying 7 more fevers for you, and you will die of them. So you run away." The girl did as she was told, and thus reached her house, and shut the door just in time (Šmits 1936: 339).

Such ways of treating diseases have their equivalents in folk medicine. For instance, people suffering from high temperature would be suggested to go wash themselves in a hot bathhouse; those struck with fever would go to

the cemetery, lie down and stay there until the illness disappeared (Šmits 1940: 373, 399).

Lithuanian folklore abounds with narratives in which a sick person gets advice about curing his/her illness from certain other-worldly powers. For example, a woman suffering from a severe headache has a very nice lady, probably Our Lady, visiting her in a dream. The lady tenderly strokes the woman's aching head and says: "You are ill, but take two candles to a chapel in Akmenė and light them. After the candles have burnt up, you will be well." The woman obeys the order and recovers (Buračas 1996: 116). In this story, the protagonist is not able to identify the woman she has seen in her dream. She only guesses her to have been the Virgin Mary.

In a different story, a blind woman has a dream in which she is told to go to the Jurgaičiai mound. She goes there, helped by her daughter, and recovers her sight (Kerbelytė 1999: 109). A sick man has a dream that he should make a cross and take it to the same hill. He also recovers after doing that (Kerbelytė 1999: 111). Occasionally, the way of recovery can be communicated to a relative or a close friend of the sick person. In a dream, the father of a sick daughter sees a woman clad in bright garments. The woman says that if he wants his daughter to recover, he has to make a wooden cross, take it to the Jurgaičiai mound, and put it up in a certain place. The father wakes up and cannot understand whether he has had a dream or has thought of it himself. In any case, he does everything as he was told, and his daughter recovers (Buračas 1996: 129). The protagonist is therefore informed about the measures necessary for recovery and is urged to make use of the information.

Those three narratives describe the origins of the Cross Hill, situated near the city of Šiauliai, on which people erect crosses appealing to God to help fulfill their wishes. In the first story, the protagonist does not need to put up a cross in order to recover; it is enough to go to the place, which obviously is not ordinary, but sacred. In other stories, elements of the Christian cult are introduced. There are actual records of real cases when "the sick and the lame would recover who had taken a vow on that hill and erected crosses on it" (Motuzas 2004: 222). Up to this day pilgrims make their way to this place and build crosses here.

Two legends in which Jesus Christ appears and his statue is erected in Šnipiškės, near Vilnius, describe similar cases. In 1709 a plague was devastating Vilnius, and people were massively leaving the town, among them a sculptor named Jonas. However, one night before his departure, when he was dreaming or maybe not (he could not say for certain), Christ appeared to him, clad in red clothes. He was carrying a big cross on his shoulders. He said: "Jonas, hasten to make a statue out of this piece of wood, and make it such as I appear to you now. No disease will then touch you or your family. Remember that!" Jonas started working. It took him a year to carve a statue of the Savior carrying a cross on his shoulders. All this

time the plague had been reigning in town, but no one had fallen ill in Jonas' house, even though people had been dying all around. Some time later the statue was erected in Šnipiškės (*Vilniaus padavimai* 1990: 172).

Thus a dangerous epidemic is devastating the protagonist's community, but he is taught how to survive. If he fulfills Jesus' order, he is promised not a cure, as in the majority of cases, but a prevention of the illness.

Another legend tells of the magic recovery of the blind Matas Pakutavičius. In 1847, on the eve of Candlemas, he went to bed and had scarcely dozed off as he heard a voice calling: "Come clean me, and I will cure you, and you will recover your sight!" The same voice called him the following night as well. The man then plucked his courage and inquired where he was supposed to go. He was directed to a certain place where he had to clean a statue of Christ. He did that and recovered his sight (*Vilniaus padavimai* 1990: 172).

A statue asks to be cleaned and is thus personified. Its initial shape and appearance have to be restored. Lithuanian oral folklore abounds with similar narratives about crosses and chapels, which ask sleeping people to rebuild or repair them. Usually, these demands are communicated to healthy people, and the motif of magic recovery is absent in such dreams.

In the narratives about a girl's recovery and about sculptor Jonas, characters are uncertain whether the message was delivered to them in a dream, or whether it was their own idea: "When [the girl's father] woke up, he could not understand whether he had seen a dream or had thought of [taking a cross to the Jurgaičiai mound]"; "when [Jonas] was dreaming or maybe he was not (he could not say for certain)." Similarly, in the legend about Pakutavičius' recovery of sight, the protagonist "went to bed and had scarcely dozed off as he heard a voice calling." The following night the man plucked his courage and responded to the voice in order to inquire about certain details. The phrase "plucked his courage" shows that it is possible the conversation took place in reality, as it describes a state of non-sleep. The voice addresses the man when he had just begun drowsing, that is, when he is in an intermediate state between sleep and non-sleep, and is thus still able to hear real-life sounds, but is almost asleep.

Thus, an old man, a woman, Jesus Christ, Jesus' statue or the Virgin Mary are seen, or some voice is heard giving advice to the dreaming protagonist. Many narratives dealing with ways of recovery learnt in or through a dream feature details of Christian ritual. To be cured, people have to fulfill tasks that are often related to objects of cult or involve ritual actions, such as erecting a cross, making or cleaning a statue, lighting a candle.

Interestingly, traditional culture encourages people to perform similar actions to achieve analogous purposes in real life. Thus in order to recover, to give birth or to cure infertility people would make vows, erect crosses and

statues of saints, or build chapels and Lourdes¹ (Lileikienė 2003: 301-303; Vaitkevičius 1998: 404). Those unaware of such means would usually be informed about them by a certain person, for example, a beggar².

Very few narratives seem to have escaped the influence of the Christian tradition. The protagonist is advised to climb a hill, which might be considered sacred; s/he is reminded of a certain recipe, used in traditional medicine. In such cases the dream encourages dreamer to confide in traditional aids for maladies. Sometimes, the protagonist doubts the advice heard in the dream; nevertheless, s/he performs the prescribed actions and recovers. Usually, the protagonist does not seek help from supernatural forces, but is noticed by them because of his/her physical condition and helped.

Thus legends inform us that under the influence of dreams a person performs certain actions and achieves positive results. When there is no clear incentive in a story, the protagonist achieves beneficial results by chance or by relying on well-known traditional methods. For instance, there is a story about a blind man, who is ordered in a dream to find a sacred stone in the field of Zigmantiškės. Surprisingly, the man recovers his sight while he is still searching for the stone. Some time later, a blind old woman sits near the same stone and falls asleep. In her sleep she hears a voice say: "If you weed out this stone, you will recover your sight and you will see as before." The woman does what she is told and becomes healthy again (Kerbelytė 1999: 103). As was suggested in the legend about cleaning a statue, in this case too the protagonist has to restore an object to its initial form.

Most often narratives do not specify the place where the protagonist sleeps when he is given a message. Hence, it is possible that s/he sleeps in an ordinary place, probably at home, and thus the place is not specified because of its unimportance. However, the latter narrative about the blind old woman is different in this respect as the protagonist sleeps near a stone in a certain field. Since the woman is old and blind, it is unlikely that she would have walked a long way to the field alone without any purpose, she has simply been overcome with fatigue so that she has lied down to rest.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider the place where the blind woman spends the night according to this narrative. Notably, the stone near which she lies is said to be "sacred". According to another story, Our Lady once stood on the same stone and left her footprint on it (Kerbelytė 1999: 103). Arūnas Vaicekauskas explains that

many stones worshipped in Lithuania [still] in the 16th and 17th centuries should be related to old religious ceremonies. This is confirmed by the

¹ In Lithuania, the so-called *Lurdai* are built after the example of the French Lourdes, where it is believed that Our Lady appeared to Bernadette Soubirous. Usually they consist of a grotto with a statue of Our Lady inside.

² See e.g. the documentary *Šiluva* (2003), broadcasted on the Lithuanian national channel in September 2003.

results of archeological investigations, however scarce. Historical sources give evidence that stones related to the cult of Saint Mary and thus considered sacred were known in Lithuania at least from the beginning of the 18th century (Vaičekas 2004: 246).

According to folklorist Bronislava Kerbelytė, in Lithuanian folklore Our Lady superseded certain female figures of the pagan Lithuanian mythology (Kerbelytė 2004: 265). Thus characterizing the stone as sacred can be said to have been an old pagan influence, not of Christian imagery. The British scholar Dowden similarly notes that the stone was one of the elements of the sacral landscape in the Europe of the pagan period. Stones were considered sacred because they attracted people's attention by standing out and contrasting with the usual environment, which could be defined as profane (Dowden 2000: 25-29). Furthermore, stones were commonly linked with the healing of certain diseases all over Europe. For instance, in Celtic Britain the sick were known to bathe in a spring and then sleep on a stone or "[proceed] to a stone circle" (Dowden 2000: 65, 38). According to Vytautas Vaitkevičius, Lithuanian folklore also has evidence of the tradition of sleeping on stones. In the Northwestern part of Lithuania there are five stones named a Lady's or a Witch's bed. Legends tell of female deities, such as a Sorceress or a Witch, or of mythological creatures – a Lady, a Queen – who once lied on the stones and left hollows on them. The names of the stones suggest that they were used for ceremonial purposes (Vaitkevičius 1998: 43).

As was mentioned earlier, the stone in the field of Zigmantiškės is related to a miraculous recovery of sight. People would also visit and pray at the stone, crawl around it on their knees, break off pieces of it to take home and rub their sores with (Kerbelytė 1999: 101). It is thus possible to conclude that the protagonist in the dream narrative sleeps in a sacred place. The old chronicles mention another case of sleeping in a sacred place: Gediminas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, once spends one night at the burial ground of the old Dukes³ (Beresnevičius 1995: 169-177).

The practice of incubation was widely known in the ancient cultures of Greece and the Near East. People believed that sleeping in sacred places could summon a deity to appear in a dream and answer their questions. The sick were undoubtedly most interested in the possibility of recovery. In

³ The legend was recorded in the 16th century. The Grand Duke set out for a hunting expedition. He killed an aurochs on a hill. Then the Duke spent the night in the valley of Sventaragis, where the old Dukes had been burned. He slept there and had a dream. In the dream, a huge iron wolf appeared on the hill, and it howled so loud it seemed a hundred wolves were howling. The Duke woke up and told a pagan priest about his dream. The priest responded: "My Lord, the iron wolf means the capital city has to be built in this place; and the howling of the wolf means that the city's fame will spread all over the world". Gediminas built a castle on the hill on which he saw the wolf howling, and moved the capital of the country to that place. (*Baltų religijos ir mitologijos šaltiniai* 2001: 382)

ancient Greece the sick used to visit temples of the hero Asclepias; there, they would lie down on the fur of a sacrificed sheep and would wait for the deity to appear in a dream (Фрэдзеп 1983: 249-251). The Celtic tradition also mentions two sacred places in Burgundy where the sick hoped to see a divine vision in a dream and recover (Green 1992: 32, 102). The burial-ground of the forefathers was considered sacred, too. For example, the wounded Irish hero Cu Chulain recovered while lying at a grave (Barber 1999: 279).

In the Lithuanian narrative about the blind old woman sleeping near a stone, the stone is apparently considered able to cure, and various ceremonies are practiced near it. Possibly, the blind woman intentionally went to the sacred stone alone (or with a companion, whom the story does not mention). The woman desired to regain her sight and achieved this after she had carried out the instructions received in a dream. Similarly, the legend about the Duke Gediminas' dream also omits or deliberately "erases" the goal of the protagonist, and the story is told as a chance accident.⁴ Bronislava Kerbelytė contends that folklore frequently omits facts that are common knowledge and cannot be doubted. Explanations and argumentation enter narratives only in relation to something novel, or in case a tradition for some reason is doubted (Kerbelytė 2004: 288).

Thus in the narrative of the blind woman, all elements characteristic to incubation are present: the aim of the protagonist, a sacred place, sleeping and certain information obtained in a dream. The recovery of the sick person is the result of all these elements. Thus the narrative can be said to depict a practice of incubation, or quite simply, a model of customary behavior – sleeping in a sacred place with the purpose of obtaining certain information, or waiting for a positive effect.

To sum up, two aspects of the influence dreams have on people can be noted:

1. the *inner effect* on the protagonist. Encouraged by a dream, the protagonist performs a specific action and achieves positive results;
2. the *outward effect* on the audience of the narrative and on the narrator. The protagonist's actions set an example: such stories urge people to have faith in dreams and the messages they communicate;

In order to determine why a dream has an effect on the protagonist, it is also necessary to take into consideration the circumstances of the incentive: who urges the protagonist, and where the urging takes place.

⁴ For a night's lodging, the Grand Duke Gediminas settles in the place of burning and burial of Lithuanian Grand Dukes. Gintaras Beresnevičius contends that in order to transfer the capital to Vilnius, the Duke needed the approval of pagan priests and gods. "And the approval of priests was received only after the will of the gods had been expressed in his dream: it was an expression of the will of the gods what he was seeking to experience by spending a night in the valley of Šventaragis" (Beresnevičius 1995: 169-177).

Abbreviation

LTR: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Manuscript department.

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