**Эдит Хэйбер. "Ведьма" Тэффи: мифология русской души**

Teffi herself considered the collection Ведьма (Berlin, 1936) among her best things. Recalling proudly in a late autobiographical note how it was praised highly by Bunin, Kuprin and Merezhkovskii, she adds: «В этой книге наши древние славянские боги, как они живут еще в народной душе, в преданиях, суевериях, обычаях, все, что встречалось мне в моем детстве в русской провинции»1. The key words here, I believe, are «живут еще в народной душе»; in other words, the «славянские боги» in Ведьма join to form not so much an externalized mythological system, as what one may call a mythology of the Russian psyche. That Teffi is recalling specifically Russian phenomena is evident from the beginning of the title story: «Иностранцу, само собою разумеется, рассказать об этом совершенно невозможно — ничего не поймет и ничему не поверит. Ну, а настоящий русский человек, не окончательно былое забывший, тот, конечно, все сочтет вполне достоверным и будет прав»2.

Fantastic stories generally fall into two categories: one in which supernatural forces indeed operate, the other where a rational explanation is given at the end — the protagonist has been dreaming, someone was playing a trick, etc. What is unusual and striking about Teffi's uncanny tales is that they fall into neither of these categories. Some strange events occur, which simple folk interpret as the intercession of unclean spirits, but the events are never unambiguously supernatural, and Teffi doesn't force us to admit the existence of various нежить. At the same time, however, no more plausible explanation is given and the reader therefore is left in a state of disturbing uncertainty: is the supernatural really involved or is this merely some weird coincidence? A clue to Teffi's method is provided by the remarks of the narrator of «Собака»:

«Я вообще считаю, что чудесных историй на свете гораздо больше, чем мы думаем. Надо только уметь видеть, уметь проследить настоящую нить событий, не отметая сознательно то, что нам кажется невероятным, не подтасовывая фактов и не навязывая им своих объяснений.

Часто люди склонны видеть чудесное в пустяках или вообще там, где все обычно и просто, любят припутать какие-нибудь свои предчувствия или сны, которые они толкуют соответственно случаю, так или иначе. Другие же, трезвые натуры, наоборот, очень скептически относятся ко всему необъяснимому, разбирая и объясняя истории, лежащие вне их понимания.

Я не принадлежу ни к тем, ни к другим, объяснять ничего не собираюсь, а просто честно расскажу, как все было, все, начиная с того начала, которое я сама началом считаю» (295-96).

The sober tone of the passage quoted above is very characteristic of this book of uncanny tales. Teffi on the whole eschews the usual techniques of gothic fiction; her stories are understated and restrained, and the narrators usually convince the reader of their level heads and calm natures. The stories generally create an atmosphere of prosaic, even boring, everyday life, into which some strange occurrences intrude, disturbing the placid surface.Such a treatment of the uncanny fits well into Teffi's vision of the world as it emerges from an examination of the totality of her writings, especialle her late works. In generally, Teffi looks upon our seemingly rational and rather boring everyday life as a sort of artificial screen, which only serves to conceal the chaos beneath. As she writes elsewhere:

«Дело в том, что мы живем в двух планах! Один план — это наша бесхитростная реальная жизнь. Другой — весь из предчувствий, из впечатлений, из необъяснимых и непреодолимых симпатий и антипатий. Из снов. У этой второй жизни свои законы, своя логика, в которых мы неответственны. Вынесенные на свет разума, они удивляют и пугают, но преодолеть их мы не можем»3.

In Ведьма she gives us instances of the appearance of these underlying irrational forces, which can be given supernatural interpretation.

A good example of this is the title story, «Ведьма». The narrator, described as an «очень уважаемая дама» (198), tells of an odd occurrence in her past, when she was nineteen years old and living with her husband and year-and-a-half old daughter in a small town in the steppes4. The town is an extremely boring, dreary place: «И скучное же было место этот самый городишка! Летом пыль, зимой снегу наметает выше уличных фонарей, весной и осенью такая грязь, что на соборной площади тройка чуть не утонула, веревками лошадей вытягивали» (198).

The servants are as awful as everything else, but the narrator seems to be lucky with her maid, Ustiusha. She is quiet, doesn't smoke or get drink, and has as unusual ability to find lost objects. Nevertheless when she disappears for four days after being sent to buy salmon for масленица, the narrator and her husband decide to fire her. The cook, however, warns her mistress that Ustiusha «каждую ночь на вас шепчет и бумагу жгет в трубу дует. Вы ее прогнать не можете» (202). The narrator's husband regards these words contemptuously: «— Мало ли у темных людей всяких суеверных пережитков средневековья» (202). The distinction he makes between the enlightened master and mistress and the benighted servants is soon blurred, however, for although the husband and wife vied earlier for the privilege of firing Ustiusha, now neither is capable of doing it.

It is at this point that the main «horror» occurs. One evening the nanny ominously leads her mistress to the dining room, where she finds that the twelve dining room chairs are placed with their back to the table and that a thirteenth unknown chair is there as well. Whwn asked why this has occurred, the nanny answers: «А затем, что нам отсюда всем поворот показан», and adds enigmatically (the incantatory sound repetitions increasing the sense of threat): «— Да, от ворот поворот, вот Бог, а вот порог. Поворачивайте и вон отсюда!» (206). In a state of hysteria after these mysterious words, the narrator runs to get her husband at the club. A police officer questions the servants, including Ustusha, but finds out nothing. No further horrors occur that night, but in the morning the husband decides that, although all this is nonsense, it might be best if they leave this house, which they proceed to do.

As a supernatural events, the turning of the chairs is extremely trivial. What is important in the story is not the event itself, but the power of the irrational over the minds of the characters. For, whether or not one believes that Ustiusha is a witch, still her «поворот» worked, as the narrator herself acknowledges in the conclusion of the story: «Однако, если бы я была суеверной, то, пожалуй, подумала бы: все-таки глупо это, а тем не менее ведь “поворотило” же нас из этого дома, поворотило и выгнало. Как там не посмеивайся, а ведь вышло-то не по-нашему, по-разумному и интеллигентному, а по темному нянькиному толкованию...» (211). In «Ведьма», indeed, both the outer and inner worlds operate on two levels. For while the town is depicted at the beginning as a model of dreary monotony, unexpected and disturbing events occur there. And these dark, inexplicable events echo in the minds even of the seemingly rational people.In certain other stories in the collection this psychological dimension of the uncanny is particularly emphasized. One such story is «Русалка», which takes place on a country estate during the childhood of the narrator. The protagonist here is another maid, Kornelia, whose gentry origins and affectations earn her the title «панночка». She has a white, puffy face, protruding fish-like eyes, and stern eyebrows, but her most striking feature is her remarkably long hair, which she wears in an unattractive crown around her head. Kornelia's nature is quiet, slow, secretly proud. The children are particularly struck by the way she prays on Sundays, dressed in her finest clothes and sitting by the ice house, paying no attention to the prosaic farmyard activities going to around her:

«Рядом хлопотливо кудахтали куры, клевал петух сердитым носом у самых ног “панночки”, обутой в праздничный прюнелевый ботинок, проходила в ледник ключница, гремя ключами, громыхая кувшинами — она, гордая, белая, пухлая, густо распомаженная, не замечала ничего. рихо потрескивали четки, беззвучно шевелились губы, подкаченные глаза, казалось, зрели неземное» (272).

One summer when the family arrives from Moscow, they find that Kornelia has married and is now living in the wing by the pond. She seems little changed, except that she now prays while sitting, русалка-like, on a low branch of a willow growing by the pond. One occurrence, however, causes a sharp change in Kornelia's behavior. One day the many young ladies spending the summer at the estate (the narrator's older sisters, cousins, and their friends) send for Kornelia to bring sugar to the stable so that they can feed the horses. When she arrives, her hair comes tumbling down her back and one expansive young lady exclaims: «Корнеля! ... Да вы настоящая русалка!» (275). She then asks the strikingly handsome young groom, Fed'ko, if he doesn't agree that Kornelia has remarkable hair, and he, to please the young ladies, responds: «Эх, и бывает же красота на свете!» (275) . At this Kornelia stares at Fed'ko with her fish eyes, drops the piece of sugar, and walks out.

The narrator comments that there are instants when the line of fate is broken. Sometimes these moments don't seem unusual at the time and it is only later that one can appreciate their special significance. Such, it seems, is this moment for Kornelia. Now on Sundays, when she sits on her willow tree, she no longer prays, but combs her hair, singing «Злоты влосы, злоты влосы...» (276). Kornelia's русалка-like natura takes a more striking form one time when the narrator, her little sister Lena, and the nanny see Kornelia and the laundress bathing in the pond. They suddenly hear a voice from the other shore shouting: «Го-го-го! ... Го! Руса-алка!» (276). It is Fed'ko, bathing the horses. Upon hearing these words Kornelia turns in his direction and, laughing hysterically, suddenly begins to leap high out of the water up to her waist, while making a beckoning motion with her fingers. Lena screames out: « — Корнеля лошадок манит!» (276). Another time, in the evening, the narrator hears a quiet groan from the pond, which sounds like crying or singing: «O — o... и o-o!» (278). The following day Kornelia looks as if she has been crying and the nanny mutters: «— Плачет! ракие всегда плачут. Попробуй-ка пожалей, она тебе покажет!» (278). Teffi has already described the русалка's habit of luring people by weeping and arousing their pity in an earlier story: «Русскую душу надо брать жалостью. Поэтому что делает русалка? — она плачет. Сидит на дереве женщина маленькая — она собственно не женщина даже, потому что у нее с половины тела рыбий хвост... И вот сидит такая — нежная, маленькая, и горько, горько плачет... Жалостью и потянет»5.

The final episode recounts Fed'ko's wedding, which the two little girls, who have felt sick since morning, observe from the sofa. Fed'ko, very red, sweaty, and a little drink, is wearing Kornelia's green tie around his neck. His bride is young but so unattractive that the little girls are amazed. After watching the peasant couples dance in a business-like, joiless way, lena say's, «— Смотри, вон там еще свадьба» (279). When her sister objects that she is pointing to a mirror, she answer that it is really a door leading to another wedding. She adds, «— Смотри, там Корнеля пляшет!» Her sister sees the green, dim people in the mirror, but can't find Kornelia. The Lena says, «— Корнеля плачет...» The narrator questions, «— Пляшет? Плачет? Что ты говоришь?» She now looks in the mirror again and sees more than the first time:

«Голова у меня кружится. И кружатся зеленые злые люди, упорно колотя ногами, словно втаптывая кого-то в землю. Не та ли это Корнеля, совсем черная, мутная... смотрит огромными рыбьими глазами... И вдруг подпрыгнула, как тогда в пруду, по пояс голая, руки вытянула и манит, манит, а ниже груди рыбья чешуя... Рот у нее раскрыт, не то поет, не то плачет: «о-о-и-о-о!» (279-280)

Echoing Kornelia, the little girl scream hysterically, «O-o и o-o!..» It turns out that they both have scarlatina. It is only later that thay find out that at about tha time of the wedding Kornelia drowned herself in the mill stream.

The narrator asks the meaning of the story: did Kornelia love Fed'ko or did she simply go mad? In conclusion the narrator offers a third possiblity: there are times when she is ill or half-awake when the truth seems to be what she in the mirror. What then is this true? The simplest answer is that Kornelia actually does turn into a русалка, at least psychologically speaking. This transformation is espcially striking because at the story's beginning she seemed so proper, stem, and religious. Kornelia can, in fact, serve as a personification of life as portrayed in Ведьма: on the surface dull and respectable, but then surprising and frightening traits emerge. It is significant that it is a word about beauty — Fed'ko's «;— Эх, и бувает же красота на свете» — and perhaps Fed'ko's own beauty, that causes the break in her life. Longing for beauty, however distorted, is a powerful force in Teffi's works in general.

It is possible to interpret the vision in the mirror still further. A trait of the русалка, already mentioned, is her ability to arouse people's pity through weeping. In «Русалка», however, Kornelia weeps, but nobody pities her. The hard-hearted comment of the nanny («Попробуй-ка пожалей, она тебе покажет») is the more typical reaction. The image in the mirror, where the evil, green people trample on Kornelia, is emblematic of the triumph of these heartless, joyless people over the forces of pity and beauty. (The ugliness of Fed'ko's bride might be another indication of this.) And so there is a surprising reversal here of the usual situation in uncanny tales. In «Русалка» it is the forces of everyday life — the grotesquely portrayed «green people» in the mirror — that are more destructive and frightening than the supposedly supernatural creature. Kornelia's transformation, motivated by love and beauty, actually represents a more positive force, although distorted by the conditions of life, and it is the ordinary people here who destroy the русалка, not the other way around.

In one of the best stories of the collection, «Собака», a similar reversal takes place. The story begins when the narrator, Lialechka, then a high-spirited and pretty fifteen-year-old, is spending the summer at the estate of her friends, the Katkovs. Among the many young people staying there is the son of the steward, Tolia, a nice but terribly shy boy who is deeply but hopelessly in love with Lialechka. All the young people are in the habit of strolling in the evening to a hillock, which overlooks the river and an abandoned mill. One evening thay take turns telling stories and Tolia tells a true tale about the mill. At one time long ago, the mill was rented to a silent, reclusive old German who had an enormous dog. The dog sat opposite the miller for whole days, not taking its eyes off him. Then one day the dog, for no apparent reason, jumped on the old man and bit through his throat. It then ran away and disappeared. Since that time, the mill has been empty.

The others like Tolia's story, but someone complains that is wasn't scary enough; Tolia should have added that since that time tha place is bewitched, and that anyone who spends the night there turns into a dog. The very next night Tolia decides, at Lialechka's prompting, to stay overnight at the mill to see if this is in fact true. In the morning Lialechka, who was terribly nervous at night and hardly slept, is awoken by a scratching at the shutters. Terrified, she throws them open and is overjoyed to see Tolia standing before her. She hugs him and screams: «— Как ты смел, негодяй, как ты смел не обратиться в собаку!» (302). Tolia objects: «Лялечка, ... да разве ты не видишь? Да ты просто смотреть не умеешь! Я ... Лялечка, собака, твой пес навеки верный, никогда не отойду от тебя» (302).

Tolia and Lialechka soon leave the estate, she for St.Petersburg, he for Smolensk. They meet briefly two years later, after which Tolia sends her an enormous bouquet of roses to which he has attached a little heart-faced dog. At the sight of the dog, Lialia is overwhelmed with pity: «Мне почему-то ужасно стало его жалко. И собачка была такая жалкая, с блестящими глазками, точно плакала» (303).

After this begins the «сумбурная полоса жизни» for Lialia (304), coinciding approximately with the First World War and the Revolution. While Tolia and the Katkovs join the war effort, Lialia remains in St.Petersburg to study voice at te conservatory. She soon drifits from her studies, however, and becomes immersed in the Petersburg artistic bohemia, so active at the time. She frequents the famous literatury cafe, Бродячая собака, and it is there that she meets Garri Edvers, a sickly but dandyish young man of the Oscar Wilde type who writes little songs, all to the same tune. At first repelled by him, she is soon drawn into his decadent circle and, with hair cropped and dyed and wearing a man's suit, she begins singing his nonsensical songs. Garri approves of her perfomance, but adds: «— Вы должны воткнуть в петличку ненормальную розу. Зеленую. Огромную. Уродливую» (306). This abnormal rose becomes emblematic of Garri's whole milieu: «У Гарри была своя свита, свой двор. роже “ненормальный, зеленый и уродливый”. Зеленая девица — кокаиноманка, какой-то Юрочка, “которого все знают”, чахоточный лицеист, и горбун, чудесно игравший на рояле» (306-7). Lilia's relations with Garri are also strange. She is repelled by his presence, «точно я целуюсь с трупом» (307), but cannot live without him. Here as in «Русалка» the grotesque is transposed from the realm of fantasy, with which it is usually associated in supernatural tales, to the «real» woeld of Petersburg bohema. Garri's «green and deformed» suite resembles a collection of petty demons, while Lialia's relations to Garri himself smacks of necrophilia.

Things go from bad to worse for Lialia, especially since her old friends, the Katkovs, disapprove of her way of life and shun her. As for Garri, he disappears for long periods, during one of which he succeeds in getting Lilia's money from her aunt in the country by pretending to be Lilia's husband. The culmination point is reached when Lilia discovers that Garri and his cocaine-sniffing circle, although formerly sympathetic to the White cause, are now associated with the Cheka. This news finally bestirs her to try to escape from her situation and get to her aunt's estate. While running around for the propper papers, Lialia meets one of the Katkov brothers, now a White officer, who promises to get a message to Tolia: «Ляля зовет собаку на помощь» (316).

Lilia manages with great difficult to get the necessary papers, but she still needs to get back some of her money from Garri in order to make the trip. The day she decides to broach the subject she waits for him in her room and suddenly feels someone's eyes on her. She turns around and sees a dog: «Большая, рыжая, худая, шерсть сбитая, а порода в роде chien-loup! Стоит в дверях и смотрит прямо на меня. Что за чудо?». She cannot understand how it got into the locked room and lets it out. Then Garri appears, looking terrible and in state of extreme agitation. He suddenly screams: «— Это откуда?» (318), and Lilia, turning around, sees the dog huddled in the corner, staring intently at Garri. Garri, almost excessively frightened, chases it from the room. Lialia begins her conversation, but then sees a horrified look on Garri's face. She turns around and sees the dog with both its paws on the window sill. It jumps down, but she manages to see its terrible eyes fixed on Garri. When Lilia raises the question os money with Garri, his reaction is direct and brutal: he tears up her paper and grabs her by the throat. Lilia loses consciousness, but first manages to call for help. At this point something weird occurs: «Раздался звон разбитого стекла и что-то огромное, тяжелое, мохнатое впрыгнуло и упало сбоку на Гарри, повалив его и покрыв собою» (319). When Lilia comes to, she finds that Garri's throat is torn through and the dog has

disappeared.This occurs on the twenty-seventh. A long time later, Lilia discovers that Tolia, who had received her message and was rushing to her aid, was shot by the Bolsheviks on the very same day. The story concludes:

«Вот и вся целиком история, которую я хотела рассказать. Ничего в ней я не сочинила и не прибавила, и ничего не могу и не хочу объяснить. Но сама я, когда оборачиваюсь к прошлому, я вижу ясно все кольца событий и стержень, на который некая сила их нанизывала.

Нанизала и сомкнула концы» (320).

«Собака» is typical of Ведьма, in that nothing unambiguously supernatural occurs, and yet one would be hard put to give a rational explanation of the events. What is not typical is the character of Tolia te dog. For while in the other stories, the uncanny force is generally some dark passion or superstition, here it is wholly positive: Tolia's devoted, self-sacrificing love. It is significant in this regard that Tolia is not associated with the frightening нечисть who figure in the other stories, but with a dog. For to Teffi the kind of selfless love that he exemplifies is present in its purest form precisely in animals. She devoted a considerable number of stories to this marvelous animal love, particularly in the volume published immediately after Ведьма, О нежности.

And so in «Собака», even more clearly than in «Русалка», a striking reversal takes place. It is to Lialia's everyday milieu — Garri's «green, abnormal» circle — that grotesque and rfightening traits are attributed. Tolia, on the other hand, although pathetic in his hopeless love, is portrayed as wholesome and boyish, with his round face and childlike eyes.

In general in Ведьма, there is a dichotomy between everyday life — at best monotonous and at worst terribly cruel — and the uncanny. While the latter rarely takes as positive a form as in «Собака», it is frequently an emanation of some genuine and strong passion, although at times perverted by circumstances, as in «Русалка». Even in those cases when some dark superstition is being portrayed, with no particular redeeming features, as in «Ведьма», it still adds a certain excitement and interest to life, which would otherwise be almost unbearably dreary.

**Список литературы**

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