



THE IMAGE OF THE CAT IN RUSSIAN FOLKLORE

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive study of the image of the cat in Russian folklore as a significant element of the traditional worldview. It examines the functions of this image in various genres of folklore, including fairy tales, mythological beliefs, superstitions, and rituals. The study analyzes characters such as cat Bayun and the generalized image of the cat as a cunning helper. It concludes that the image of the cat plays an important role in shaping symbolic thinking and cultural values.

Keywords: Russian folklore, cat image, mythology, symbolism, folk tales, superstitions, rituals.

Introduction

Russian folklore represents a unique system of artistic images reflecting the worldview of the people, their ideas about the world, nature, and human beings. A special place in this system is occupied by zoomorphic images, among which the image of the cat stands out. Unlike many other animals, the cat occupies an intermediate position between the world of nature and the world of humans. It is both a domestic animal and a creature endowed with special, often mystical properties.

The mythological consciousness of the ancient Slavs was formed in close connection with nature and the surrounding environment. Animals were perceived not simply as part of the world, but as beings possessing special power, knowledge, and the ability to interact with supernatural forces. In this context, the cat stands out as a character with clearly expressed supernatural characteristics.

A special place is occupied by the image of Kot Bayun. In folk legends, he is described as a huge cat sitting on an iron pillar or in a dense forest. His voice possesses hypnotic power: he lulls travelers to sleep and sometimes leads them to death. However, under certain conditions, Kot Bayun can become a source of healing and wisdom. This



image reflects ancient ideas about the magical power of the word, which can both destroy and save. In mythological consciousness, the word had sacred meaning and was perceived as a special form of influence on the world [1, p. 87].

The fairy tale as a genre of folklore represents a special form of artistic thinking in which archetypal structures of consciousness are reflected. In fairy tales, the cat appears as a character with a clearly expressed individuality. One of the key functions of the cat is the function of a helper. It helps the hero achieve the goal using not physical strength, but intelligence, cunning, and strategic thinking. Due to these qualities, the cat becomes an important participant in the plot.

Comparison with the image of the cat in Puss in Boots makes it possible to identify the universal features of this character. Despite differences in cultural contexts, in both traditions the cat acts as a figure capable of changing the social status of its owner, helping him achieve success and overcome life difficulties [2, p. 154].

In addition, the cat can perform the function of a tester. It examines the hero, creates situations of moral choice, and contributes to the revelation of the character's personality. In some cases, the cat becomes an antagonist, which emphasizes its ambivalent nature and the duality of its symbolic meaning.

In the system of folk beliefs, the image of the cat occupies a special place due to its close connection with the everyday life of humans and, at the same time, with the sacred sphere. Unlike many other animals, the cat was constantly in direct contact with humans, living inside the house, which made it not simply an observed object, but an active participant in domestic and spiritual life. This led to the formation of a large number of beliefs, signs, and magical representations around it.

One of the most widespread beliefs is the idea of the cat as a creature capable of sensing the presence of supernatural forces. It was believed that the cat could see spirits, evil forces, and various invisible entities inaccessible to human perception. This was explained by the peculiarities of its behavior: sudden movements, staring into emptiness, and reactions to seemingly absent stimuli. In folk consciousness, such actions were interpreted as evidence of contact with the "other world." Thus, the cat acts as a kind of mediator between reality and the supernatural space [3, p. 201].

Of particular importance is the ritual associated with moving into a new home. In traditional culture, there was a stable belief that the cat should be the first to enter a new house. This custom had not only symbolic but also magical significance. It was believed that the cat could "cleanse" the space, identify possible negative forces, and



“tame” the domovoy the guardian spirit of the home. Calm behavior of the cat was perceived as a favorable sign indicating safety and harmony in future life in the house. No less important is the complex of signs connected with the cat’s everyday behavior. For example, a well-known sign says that if a cat washes itself with its paw, guests should be expected. This belief is based on associative thinking: the process of cleansing was associated with preparation for meeting someone. If the cat curls up into a ball and hides its nose, this is interpreted as a sign of cold weather. Such observation also has a rational basis, since animals actually react to changes in temperature and atmospheric pressure.

A special place in folk beliefs is occupied by the image of the black cat. In mass consciousness, it is often associated with misfortune, especially if it crosses the road. However, this idea is not unambiguous. In some regions, on the contrary, the black cat was considered a protector from evil forces and a bringer of good luck. Such contradiction indicates the complex nature of the symbol and the influence of various cultural and historical factors on the formation of its meaning [2, p. 233].

It is interesting to note that in some beliefs the cat appears not only as a passive observer but also as an active participant in magical processes. It was believed that it could “take away” negative energy, protecting the owners from illnesses and misfortunes. In this context, the cat acquires the features of a kind of talisman—a living amulet ensuring the safety of the home.

There were also ideas about the connection between the cat and human destiny. The sudden death or disappearance of a cat could be perceived as a sign of serious changes or even misfortune. This is connected with the fact that the cat was perceived as an integral part of the domestic space, closely connected with family life [4, p. 119].

Thus, folk beliefs and signs associated with the cat represent a complex and multilayered system of ideas in which rational observations, mythological thinking, and symbolic interpretation are intertwined. In this context, the cat acts as a figure connecting the everyday and the sacred, the real and the supernatural. Its image reflects the human desire to comprehend the surrounding world and find ways of interacting with the unknown.



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