

NANAI FAIRYTALES ABOUT THE CRUEL BRIDE

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ABSTRACT

Fairytales plots are studied in the present article in the context of the shamanic practice of the Nanai people; they are mainly dealt with from an emic perspective. The plots about the cruel behaviour of the bride, which are in contradiction to real Nanai traditions, are divided into two categories in the present article – on the one hand, plots connected with the cohabitation of humans and the spirits, and, on the other hand, plots that speak about the marriage of two people in which the cruelty of the bride is very often expressed by the perishing of the bridegroom, who loses a pre-marriage contest with the bride or her relatives. Our analysis shows that the task of the pre-marriage contest is not to find the worthiest pretender to the bride's hand, but to find a bridegroom with more powerful shamanic strength than that of the bride's family in order that, in 'virtual battles', he is able to beat shamans who are hostile to the bride's family. The pre-marriage contest is an episode in the shaman 'war', although the marriage itself can be unreliable, producing only a short truce between the two hostile tribes of shamans. The gender asymmetry of these marriage problems (a cruel bride, but not a cruel bridegroom) can be explained by Nanai ideas that, as a result of cohabitation, the man is involved in hostile relations with those shamans who are hostile to the bride's family.

KEYWORDS: fairytale • marriage competition tale motif • shamanism • kinship • spiritual conflict

The Nanai think that everything the fairytale *ningman diorgilni* (a fairytale about the shaman road *diorgil*) tells us is a true story, a narrative of events that really took place some time ago, many of which are connected with shamanic practice. This gives us an opportunity to look at and explain fairytale plots not only in the context of historical reality – the habits – but also within shamanic practice as a whole: in the context of everything that shamans experience in the invisible spiritual world and therefore in the context of that social relations that are formed as a result of this shamanic practice. Shamanic traditions, as well as the story telling traditions, which have been preserved among the Nanai to the present day give the researcher information that is inaccessible in the European material. Studying the Russian fairytale, Vladimir Propp complained that the habitual practice, which according to his opinion had once served as the basis for generating fairytales, was lost irrevocably in the European material. Propp proposed that the sources of folklore plots should be studied on the basis of this material, in which they interact closely, in particular on the basis of the material of the shamanic tradition of Siberia and the North, places where the complexes of habits and oral poetic tradition are of a productive character and fixed by ethnographers in their live environment.

Propp had particular hopes in studying shamanism. He considered that “when collecting shamans’ stories about their rituals, of how the shamans went to the life beyond the grave searching for souls, who helped them, how he crossed (the border between the words), and when comparing these stories with the wandering and flight of fairytale hero, some conformity is found” (Propp 1966: 360). He stressed that the study of fairytale plot sources can be extremely productive if shamanic materials are used.¹

In spite of the changes in Nanai society that have taken place over the last decades and the transfer from traditional shamanism to neo-shamanism, for all the traditional shamans the fairytale remained, until recently, part of their own practice, or at least remained understandable to them, which was taken as verbal proof of the shamanic practice of their predecessors. At the same time for the majority of other tradition carriers, including some storytellers (because of the confidentiality of information connected with shamanic practice), for whom the fairytale is simply an interesting narrative. In our research we plan to reveal how the Nanai fairytale *nigman diorgilni* is seen not just by any story tellers but by devoted experts who may be either shamans or people with basic knowledge of shamanism.² Therefore, I wish to understand how the fairytale is seen by devoted listeners and narrators, i.e. the shamans themselves. The author of the article has discussed with both groups their own fairytales and published fairytales. The present article shows how shamans themselves and shamanists interpret various fairytale plots with the limited theme of violence in the marriage of shamans, and how these plots are compared by tradition carriers with analogous situations within shamanic practice.

THE CRUEL BRIDE

In the fairy-tale told by Aleksei Kisovich Onenko the bridegroom appears before the bride in the form of a bear and unexpectedly attacks her. Then the bride, taking her spear, thrusts the bridegroom into the earth. Keeping her spear to support her, the bride jumps over the bear, hits him and injures his back. The bear disappears. From some place underground the voice of the bridegroom – bear – is heard: “I do not die of your wound, this way you cannot kill me!” At another time the bride strongly grasps the future husband, whose wound has healed, and pushes him onto sharp stakes in the earth so that he is below and she is on top of him. The wounded bridegroom disappears again and the bride hears his voice from underground: “This way you cannot kill me!” After some time, when the bridegroom is healthy again, he is boating on a river and again meets the bride, who is boating in his direction. The bridegroom offers her the liver of the elk he has killed in the forest. The bride comes to his boat, takes the liver from him, eats it and then, pushing her own boat away, throws her harpoon into the groom. The wounded bridegroom remains alive again. After that they join forces to kill the enemy who had killed their fathers and get married. In some fairy-tales the bride’s cruelty affects not only the bridegroom but also other people around him. In the fairytale written down by Valentin Avrorin, “There Were Two *Pudins*” (beauties), one *pudin*, having seen such a handsome man that seeing him “the tears were coming from her eyes” (1986: 140), noticed that one of the man’s wives was cutting a fish, taking a piece to her mouth to eat it. Then the *pudin* “stuck her nails into the fish and threw pieces in

the direction of the woman, who was going to eat fish. She choked and died." The *pudin* killed the attractive man's other wife in exactly the same way, "then set the man's house on fire. But because of the fire the house became iron and was sealed (no entrance, no exit). The man could not find the place to come out."

However, the man did get out and his future bride took with her all the people in the man's village, making them her slaves. When the man marries once more, again not the heroine of the fairytale, the future bride comes to visit the man's new wife. "Eh, my friend, where do you go, why did you come?" asks the wife. "I move among people not willing to see anybody", says the *pudin* cunningly. The *pudin* eats the refreshments offered by the wife, then takes the tobacco pipe from her and slips it into her bosom. "The pipe was turned into a snake who killed the man's wife." In this fairytale not only the bride is cruel. The bridegroom, as if not planning it and against his will, uses violence in relation to her. Having met her future husband when he is fishing,

the woman slaps the back of her head and becomes a bear. Then she jumps into the water. The man says: "Oh, a bear! It must be killed!" He took an arrow and shot. Killed. Brought it to the shore. Looked. He made a mistake and killed a woman. He began to weep. The woman came back to life. When she was alive, the man married her. They went home together.

The fairytale motif of the cruel behaviour of the bride does not in any way reflect the real habits of the Nanai people. Not a single researcher mentioned the cruelty of women. Above all, cruelty, if it happens in the everyday family life of the Nanai, can be connected with men who sometimes treat their wives roughly, although not women in general. The researchers confirm that the woman in the Nanai family is not without rights and is not oppressed. The cruel behaviour of the husband against his wife was criticised by Nanai community (*Istoriya i kultura nanaicev* 2003: 51). It is also characteristic of the Nanai that the brides who cause suffering to their bridegrooms do so – apparently – against their will and, as is stressed in some fairytales, feel remorse for their behaviour and sympathy for the bridegroom they have made suffer. This way the bride from Aleksei Kisovich's fairytale, who had hit her bridegroom-bear with a spear, can neither work nor sit calmly when she comes home. She thinks about her wounded bridegroom-bear and grieves: "Perhaps he feels bad, the wound is serious!" In the fairytale "There Were Two *Pudins*" (Avrorin 1986: 138) the wife, who is beaten by her husband and so lets him starve to death (as a result of her conspiracy the food store in the granary disappears, and wild animals in the forest that could be hunted disappear) weeps for her dead husband: "Who listened to my voice and made even the taiga animals disappear?" She supposes that she herself was not to blame but her shamanic spirit-helper *pudin* Simfuni, whom she did not always please. In addition, despite the cruel deeds of the future married couple mentioned here, Nanai fairytales are full of the motif of bride and groom helping one another, as well as the married couple's joint fight with their enemies. However, the motif of the cruel bride is not only imaginary; it undoubtedly has sources in the real life of the Nanai. The present article is devoted to revealing the ethnographic realities behind these issues.

THE BRIDE AS BAIT

The plots about cruel relations between spouses can be divided, on the one hand, into those in which a human cohabits with a spirit and, on the other, those relating to marriage between two humans. The assertion that some fairytale characters are not human but spirits comes from those among my informants – the Nanai shamans – who are narrators. In some cases the shamans themselves, discussing separate fairytales with me, indicated who of the fairytale characters was human and who a spirit. In some other cases, when there was no possibility to ask the shamans, I dared to define them myself, taking into consideration the nature of the relations between the personalities.

In their turn, the fairytales about conflict within relationships between a human and a spirit in cohabitation are divided into two groups – the fairytales that speak about violence as a means by which a human successfully tames a received spirit-helper (the spirit is a threat, it is tamed and becomes a helper), and the fairytales in which spirits tempt a human and threaten him or her with mortal danger, in which version the taming of the spirit is unsuccessful or it is not planned.

In both fairytales and shamanic practice, the notion of seeing a beautiful woman (or for a woman, seeing a handsome man) and the wish to leave a close relations with them serves as bait, with the invitation to have contacts with the spirit possibly finishing tragically for the tempted person. In the fairytale “Coffin” by Nikolai Petrovich Belda the hero sees: “Oh, oh, nine *pudins* are bathing, chattering loudly.” When he passed them he hears: “Our friend *mergen*, come to bathe with us, have a rest with us bathing.” So they are shouting, laughing and playing. *Mergen* says: “Oh, cute ladies, delightful *pudins*.” Uttering these words he fainted. After some time he woke up with his eyes full of worms. According to the interpretation by Nikolai Petrovich, the female spirits, met by the hero, could become his helping spirits if the hero is able to tame them. No death would have threatened him. The same happens in shamanism “if [the shaman] cannot take a good *sewen* [helping spirits],” says the same Nikolai Petrovich. In a vision, an analogous case to that in the fairytale was seen by the famous female shaman Dekhe, Nikolai Petrovich’s mother. She imagined that in the form of a bird she, together with other shamans who looked like birds, flew onto a tree branch on the bank of a mountain river. Nikolai Petrovich tells:

The man looks, but a beautiful woman shouts: “Is there anybody, come and save me!” She was caught here [shows under the chin]. She is hanging on a hook. It is a mountain river with a quick current. And across the river a rope is pulled. And she is hanging in the middle of the rope. That’s it! Every shaman knows, if he wins here, takes the woman, he will get the best *sewen*. If he saves [this woman].

Nikolai Petrovich continues:

And my mother says, “I was also caught. Caught!” She said. “It was too bad!” she says. “For a woman an extremely handsome man is hanging. But for a man an extremely beautiful woman is hanging.” It would have been enough to wish to get the *sewen* hanging on the hook. She says: “I only could say it and at the same moment I was hanging on the hook.” Other shamans said: “So sorry, she was a good she-shaman, now she is perishing!” And then she speaks, as if in the fairytale an old woman appears, looks and says: “Ah! Ah! You were caught!” And she tells

the old man: "So-so!" They had a boat, boarded it and began to row to Mother. The old woman was at the oars, the old woman was pulling the rope [on which Mother was hanging]. They come closer and closer. They reach the place, the old man gives the rope to his old wife, takes a hammer and wants to hit the person who is caught on the rope. She [Nikolai Petrovich's mother] sees what is happening, sees that soon she will be dead. At the same moment she called her [spirit] husband *Namo edini*.

At the very moment when the old man wanted to hit her head, she called her spirit-husband. And immediately he comes to the surface of the water, almost making the boat capsize. Instead of Mother the old man hit the old woman, broke the rope on which Mother was hanging. She swam away. Her husband *Namo edini* saved her. This way she had taken the man, the handsome man [hanging on the hook] and won!

As a result, this spirit-man became the shaman helping spirit of Nikolai Petrovich's mother. As Nikolai Petrovich explains, one and the same attractive spirit of the opposite gender is seen in the vision, or in dreams by several shamans while each tries to outdo the other and get a new helping spirit who will make him stronger than his less successful competitors. "On two banks of the mountain river there are trees and on both sides shamans are sitting on the branches of trees," says Nikolai Petrovich. "They are sitting and looking and each one is envious [of competitors who are able to get attractive spirits for themselves]. Each one is envious!" Nikolai Petrovich confirms that an unsuccessful attempt to get such a spirit leads to the real death of the shaman: "who is hit by a hammer, and perishes. That's all! Comes home and immediately dies!" Other informants also told me about similar ways of getting attractive spirits as cohabitation partners. According to the female shaman Toio Petrovna Belda, "the shaman Chongida Mapa was walking in a dream and came [in his dream] to some small river. He sees that a woman with long hair is swimming. It is impossible to look at her, she is so beautiful. This was a *sewen*! Chongida Mapa hugged her and became very strongly attached to her, could not free himself. He called endlessly for his *sewens*, but nothing happened. Then he called [his family spirit] Hodger Ama. And only Hodger Ama freed him." As in shamanic practice, cohabitation with a spirit (and also other forms of contact with spirits) are very often accompanied by the risk of danger to the shaman's life, and the motif of death caused by an attractive woman (or man) is confirmed in the fairytale.

HARD TASKS FOR THE BRIDEGROOM

In the fairytales that tell of the marriage of two people (rather than of a human and a spirit), the cruelty of the bride is very often seen during the pre-marriage contests that take place between bridegrooms to win the right to take a bride. If a bridegroom loses the contest, he may be killed by the bride, as was already mentioned in the fairytale by Aleksei Kisovich, or as in his other fairytale about a woman who pulled two of her bridegrooms – neither of whom could win her outright – by their hair so hard that their heads were pulled away from their bodies ("The Two Sisters"). In the best case, the losing bridegrooms remain alive but become the slaves of the prospective bride. They give her and her father their villages with all the people under their power. In the fairytale

called "There Lived Two Sisters" the bridegrooms who lose the contest tell the bride: "As you beat us, we will be living according to your wishes. Whatever you do, we will not argue." (Avrorin 1986)

The pre-marriage contests "between the wife's brothers and her husband" took place not only in fairytales but also in the practical lives of the Nanai and other Tungus-Manchurian peoples.³ In Soviet ethnographic literature it was a tradition to explain this as the bride's brothers wanted to find the best and the strongest bridegroom among the suitors. Valentin Avrorin supposed that such contests were the survival of the matriarchy tradition "when the brothers had more rights on their sister than her alien husband." Apart from that, from Avrorin's point of view, the contests were limited to hunting and carried out to give the husband the opportunity to prove his "superiority over his brothers in endurance and hunting skills, thus confirming his right to have their sister for his wife" (1986: 219). Arkadi Anisimov has written about similar contests based on Evenki material.⁴ "Between the son-in-law and the male population of the wife's village a real competition begins" – he writes. Sons-in-law "hunted from dawn to dusk to win the name of good hunters" (1936: 36).

Exaggeration of the material content over the spiritual role was characteristic of Soviet ethnography, which was oriented to materialism and sometimes, as in this case, was in contradiction to the peculiarities of the studied culture. In this way, Valentin Avrorin's opinion of the pre-marriage contest as a means of finding a successful son-in-law and hunter is summarised in his comment on the fairytale "Palim Podo" in which the brothers invite their sister's husband to hunt: "Let us see who is stronger and more skilful" (1986: 216). With the purpose of winning, the son-in-law asks help from a shamanic spirit called the sea shell who not only kills a whole sounder of wild boars for him but also makes a handsome man out of this formerly "bald and snotty" man: "Such a white man, so handsome, not bald, without boils, not snotty, nothing... It is nice to speak about him. To write about him – one cannot stop." In fact, the bride's brothers do not so much test the man's hunting skills as his shamanic abilities.

The supposition that the task of the contest is to find the worthiest suitor is in contradiction to the fact that sometimes in a fairytale the plainness of the winner and selected bridegroom is especially stressed. The character of the tasks in such contests, which are not limited to hunting and exceed the realistic human physical abilities, speaks about the fact that contests are held not to test the bridegroom's personal qualities but his shamanic abilities and his contacts with spirits. These tasks are not, for example, meant to lead to the hunting and killing of an elk (as expressed, for example, through the fairytale by Olga Yegorovna Kile called "Yurgi *megren*"). The hero has to run long distances, either by an agreed route (as in Aleksei Kisovich's fairytale "The Two Sisters") or for a long time after an unnaturally flying ball (as in Kisovich's fairytale "The Horse's Son"). A task in the contest may be a test of skill, for example jumping into some fantastic cradle in the middle of the sea (as in "The Horse's Son"). In one of the fairytales it was necessary to beat the spirits in a game of bones (Avrorin 1986: 189), in another to beat them in the contest with a woman who "throws enemies so that the hip or the hand may break" and kills the suitors of her hand (as in "The Horse's Son"). Fulfilling each of these tasks is possible only if you have superhuman strength, and even then it is necessary to use the help of spirits.

In this case it was possible for the bride to select the strongest shaman from among

the contestants. However, we have to give up this supposition if we pay attention to who is competing with whom in such competitions. The bridegrooms do not compete with one another but with the bride, although in some fairytales a bridegroom's brother competes with the father or the unmarried sister of the bride. In this way the bride is not simply looking for the strongest at the shamanic contest but for such a bridegroom who would exceed her in shamanic power or on a broader scale: for a man who would be a more powerful shaman than the shamans of her family.

Therefore, harm is not caused by the bad character of the bride but by the contest between family shamans and the establishment of possible mutual assistance between shamans of the different families who would join together as a result of the marriage. In shamanic society, governed by contact with family spirits – the spirits believed to be in family relations with humans – contact with another family's spirit carrier, that is with alien and potentially dangerous spirits, in itself raises problems. Even the arrival of guests, the representatives of another family, was accompanied by certain 'safety measures' in traditional society. Moreover, such measures are important in such an important case as the introduction of the bride, the representative of another family, to her new family.

SHOOTING AS A DEFENCE AGAINST THE BRIDE'S SPIRITS

Traditional Nanai marriage was carried out at the patriarchal locality. When the bride moved to the bridegroom's family, certain rites were performed with the purpose of protecting the bridegroom and his relatives from the bride's spirits, whom she involuntarily brought with her and who, according to the Nanai, could cause different unpleasant things to happen to both the bridegroom and his relatives. To avoid this danger, the spirits of the bride's patrilineal line⁵ were frightened off during the wedding ceremony. When the bride's cortege left her father's village, the men of this family fired shots into the air in the direction of the bride "driving away her spirits, forcing them to remain in the village". The female shaman Olga Yegorovna explains: "The bride, for example, my daughter, leaves and our *ambans* [spirits] go with her. Men with guns are shooting and driving *ambans* away." Vera Chubovna Geiker says: "Take them away and shoot, so that devils, not a single one, [did not go after her]. Drive away, shoot to allow the bride leave calmly." In addition, taking the bride away from her father's home, they turn to *diulin*, the wooden image of the home spirit, and ask him not to follow the bride. Moreover, the legs of the spirit's image were tied to keep the *diulin* from going after the girl. "This is how the spirit stands in the corner with the tied legs," says Vera Chubovna.

They tied [his legs], left him there. Only then [the girl from this house] was given to the bridegroom. Otherwise the spirit would untie himself, follow the girl and would not allow her to live in peace. Later the spirit's legs were untied and he was told: "Don't go after her, she has already gone away. Now she is already a stranger to us. Protect us here. If it is necessary, you can go and see how she lives." This is how they spoke to the *diulin*. I remember it very well.

When the bride's cortege came closer to the village of the bridegroom, already a group of other men relatives of the bridegroom came to meet the bride, shot into the air driving away her father's spirits. The female shaman Olga Yegorovna tells:

When they reach the other village, people also shoot in the direction of the arriving cortege. It is like a war! When my mother's sister married, there were Chinese soldiers, a military unit. People say that they were shooting together with the village people. They were helping. Oh! Like a war! Shooting!

Olga Yegorovna remembered a bridegroom who considered this measure insufficient. To have more security and reliability, he put the barrel of the gun on the arriving bride's shoulder and shot again. It is true that in some cases people believe the danger of the spirits who are brought with the bride can be extremely great. For example, marriage to a widow is dangerous because the spirits who had killed the former husband could also kill the new bridegroom. Vera Chubovna remembers that, at the wedding of an old woman a real salute was arranged. "Everything burnt in fire!" – says Vera Chubovna. Together with this there were also opposite cases in which wedding shooting was not good. Olga Yegorovna remembers the wedding of a shaman's daughter (who was not a female shaman). This wedding was held without the traditional shooting. As she remembers, the shaman, the bride's father, had banned shooting. He said: "Shooting is not allowed! You may hit gods!" Among the spirits accompanying the bride there could be – so he thought – his helping spirits.⁶ It is possible that similar problems could sometimes appear if the bride could have become a female shaman, and her helping spirits were consequently the spirits of her father's family. To cope with such a bride, it was necessary to have a bridegroom who could outstrip the bride's shaman spirits. The search for a more powerful bridegroom-shaman became more acute when the female shaman-bride, or the shamans of her father's family, had a *baigoan*, i.e. a shaman from another family as her enemy.⁷

THE BRIDEGROOM ABLE TO SURVIVE TAKES A GRATUITOUS BRIDE

The bride had always been considered to a certain extent dangerous for the bridegroom and his relatives; in certain cases the danger presented by the bride was considered so great that the bride's relatives refused to take the bride money (*kalym*) for finding a bridegroom and gave the girl free of charge. The amount of the bride money that they refused to take was rather large. (See, for example, *Istoriya i kultura nanaicev* 2003: 52.) According to Ivan Lopatin's data, at the beginning of the 20th century a bride was always found by financial transaction; the price for a bride was "too high and for many men it was beyond their means". As a result, "some poor people work until old age and cannot collect enough money to pay for a wife. This is why among Golds⁸ there were very many men who were, against their will, unmarried. On the other hand, rich Golds buy several wives for themselves." (Lopatin 1922: 149) Against the background of such an attitude to marriage, if the girl's parents announced a pre-marriage contest with a free bride as the prize, it was evident that they had a benefit in mind that exceeded the sum of the bride-money to a significant degree.

This situation, which seems strange, requires explanation. In the pre-marriage contests described in Nanai fairytales, the loser rather than the winner celebrates victory. In the fairytale recorded by Orest Sunik, the shaman asks the people present to attack him. No one could beat him.

Kochalan and Tugdelen began to attack him. Tugdelen says: "Shaman, attack me!" The shaman invited the strongest spirits and attacked him. Kochalan's hand broke. Tugdelen's breast was crushed. Now they began to look for another man to fight the shaman. The shaman's daughter was in tears: "Instead of these men, will you, please, come up! *If there is not such a man found, my father dies because there is no one who can win the fight with him.*"⁹ (Sunik 1958: 115)

It seems that the shaman and his daughter should have been glad that there was nobody with stronger shamanic power. On the contrary, they grieved. The absence of a shaman-bridegroom who was stronger than the girl's father presented a deadly danger for the girl's father. This is why the shaman offered his daughter to such a man – if there was one – free without a *kalym*. When this fairytale was discussed with shamans and the question of why the girl's father dies if nobody can beat him in the contest arose, I received the following answer. The shaman, the girl's father is in a state of invisible shamanic war with some of his colleagues; that is, he has a *baigoan* (enemy) from another family, a family of greater shamanic strength than his and who can therefore vanquish and kill him. As shamans themselves say, such shaman killings take place later. The loser and the shaman killed by the spirit usually die unexpectedly and without a clear reason. Understanding that the shaman himself may not be able to cope with the enemy, he uses the additional chance he has to save life – he looks to marry his daughter to a shaman who is stronger than he and his enemy and who could become a powerful ally. Then, with the bridegroom's help, the shaman can get rid of his enemy. This effort from his son-in-law is so important to the father that he frees the son-in-law from paying *kalym*. If this man does not become son-in-law and family member of the shaman in danger, the strong shaman may instead become one more dangerous enemy of the girl's father. The means for finding a shaman who could be made an ally was a pre-marriage contest, which attracted men (both married and unmarried, because the Nanai practise polygamy) who were willing to compete for the prize of a free bride. According to the female shaman Olga Yegorovna, the bride in the fairytale "wants to find a good man for herself to save her father and protect him [from *baigoan*]" . The girl wants to have a strong helper for her father, who organised the contest to find such a young man. In the fairytale analysed by Avrorin, the shaman needing a bridegroom's help is the bride's father. In other fairytales such a female shaman is the bride herself. The pre-marriage contest is not always an episode in the shaman 'war' and the bride, or one of her relatives, does not always risk losing this war. In some fairytales the bride suffers significantly because of her own spirits. This is also a problem that she cannot solve unless she finds herself a suitable bridegroom. For example, in one particular fairytale a woman is laying in an iron cage "tied nine times nine" struggling here and there *kingiar* (the iron cage clanking). As if she is mad or *amban* [as if the evil spirit had gained the upper hand over the woman]. The hero of the fairytale tells her:

The woman... Nobody could win in the contest with you to get married to you. Why did you become an *amban*, unwilling to have a husband? You began to kill all the people in the village, ate them and became a mad *amban*.¹⁰ (Avrorin 1986: 148)

The contest is a fight with this woman who "throws [the contestant] so that his hip or hand is broken." (ibid.) Here the aim of the contest is to find a shaman-bridegroom who is able to cope with the spirits torturing the woman.

It is possible that such fairytales reflect the Nanai understanding that if a man without enough shamanic power marries a woman with some serious spiritual problems, he perishes because her spirits gain power over him. This way the fairytale bride does not kill anybody, the bridegroom dies as the result of his efforts to marry her. In one of the fairytales the story is told not about the contest but about some men who spend a night in the house of a single woman. One man stops the others, who are trying to go to the woman "to get married". He warns them that approaching the woman may kill them: "Do not go to the *pudin*, do not marry her because she has not yet got rid of her enemy." The shamans whom I questioned about this fairytale confirm that this woman is a female shaman with a *baigoan* who is stronger than she is. I asked Niura Sergejevna Kile, "Why wasn't it possible to marry the woman from the fairy-tale?" She answered: "Because she was a female shaman and she had *baigoans*." "She was a female shaman and fought with shamans of some other nation," confirms Olga Yegorovna. "At the beginning [with the help of the bridegroom] it is necessary to kill this *baigoan*; only then they marry. It is like that in the fairytale and in real life." The female shaman Niura Sergejevna confirms that she "had also heard about it. If the bride had a *baigoan* it was not recommended to marry her. I do not know why the man is afraid to marry, but if he marries, he is afraid he will be killed." "If a man marries such a woman, the *baigoan* kills him," says Kseniya Ivanovna Digor. If the man who did not allow the other men to go to the woman marries her (he is stronger because he could foresee everything), his helping spirits would help the woman's helping spirits. In the pre-marriage contests, the winner is not only the man who voluntarily helps solve the bride and her family's problems, but also the man who, having received the bride free of charge, survives.

MARRIAGE AS A TRUCE IN SHAMANIC WAR

If a shaman cannot beat another antagonistic shaman, marriage can become a means of getting a strong ally – a son-in-law who is able to help. Another way of getting rid of enmity is a marriage between the fighting shamans themselves or between their close relatives. In the fairytale recorded by Valentin Avrorin, the shaman Saksi together with the *mergen*

began to push each other. The *mergen* pushed the shaman Saksi so that he fell. Later he kicked the shaman so that the shaman flew to the sky... Somewhat later the shaman Saksi fell on the ground and stuck there. Shaman Saksi says: "You won, I give my daughter to you". (Avrorin 1986: 152)

When the hero of the fairytale kills an enemy who had killed his father, in some cases he marries the enemy's daughter bringing a temporary cessation of enmity between the families. In the fairytale "Fox", a *mergen* is fighting with his enemy. When his enemy understands that he has no strength to beat the hero, and that he will soon perish, he says: "Don't reach my spirit. Good, together with my village I surrender to you, with all my property I shall follow you. *Pudin*, I shall give my beloved sister to you free of charge, without a *kalym*." The *mergen* accepts his conditions and stops fighting.

Olga Yegorovna, the female shaman, says:

Earlier families were enemies. Earlier they lived this way: they did not approach each other and say let us fight! They fought with spirits [that is they did not meet each other in reality]. The unfamiliar shaman comes here [i.e. remaining at his home, he sends his spirits here] and kills children in our village. But our shaman also goes to their village and kills people there. When will it stop? Some fight this way. But if a man fights with a woman, and if they make a deal with a spirit, they can stop fighting and marry. If they marry, the enmity will be over... Nobody touches anybody else. It happened. In the fairytale it was really so.

In the same fairytale, called "Fox", the *mergen* disputes the right of seven evil spirits *ngevens* to have the master's daughter as a bride and wins a game of dice (Avrorin 1986: 189). As a result, the *ngevens* do not "take away the old man's daughter without a *kalym*" but rather the *mergen* gets the right to become a bridegroom. However, he does not marry the master's daughter immediately. First the *mergen* goes on a trip, during which he kills the enemy who had killed his father. During this trip he meets his bride, several times refusing closeness with her as it seems to be dangerous for him. Within this time a big snake attacks him for four times during the nights. ("The snake crawled to him, as an arrow piercing his breast.") When he eventually comes to the house where his wife-*pudin* lived, she "only flashed him a look". "After that she did not look at him." (ibid.) Which means that a relationship between the bridegroom and the bride has not yet been established. Then some very beautiful woman appears and, as the storyteller explains, she was the same snake who attacked the hero. When the beauty spoke with the hero's bride, the hero

stood up, took out a knife and fell on the *pudin*, striking with his knife. He stuck the knife in to the depth of one finger, slashed with the knife and did not shout: "Painful!" The man stuck the knife into her heart to a depth of two fingers, he thrust it – and she did not shout: "Painful!" When measuring a quarter of the knife, he wanted to [thrust it and to] kill her, the woman [the bride] stood up and took the man's hand: "My friend *mergen*, if you kill this *pudin*, you will also kill me". (ibid.)

Only after this do they make peace and get married. Such a long delay before the wedding of these fairytale characters can be explained by the following: The *mergen* cannot marry the *pudin* immediately after having won the contest because they are both shamans who are in hostile relations with each other and their helping spirits cannot immediately get along with each other. In this way, the hero is unable to fight the snake (who is his bride's spirit). The Nanai believe that the helping spirit forms an integral whole with the human whose servant he or she is, and that the injuries made, for example, to the pictorial image of this spirit are at the same moment transferred to the human. Hence the woman's words to the bridegroom when she explains that killing the snake-woman threatens the life of the bride herself. However, the hero must be violent with her to tame her and ensure his own safety. This why, despite the fact that the marriage between the characters was predestined at the beginning of the story (after the victory in the game with bones), the marriage could take place only after the victory over the snake-woman, the bride's helping spirit, who was dangerous for him.

As Chapaka Danilovna Posar tells us, "When shamans get married, they are unable to make peace between their *sevens*." In "Two Sisters", told by Aleksei Kisovich, the contradictory emotions of the girl, who fiercely attacks the bridegroom, inflicting

deadly wounds while at the same time feeling sorry for him, can be explained by the fact that her helping spirits continue without the girl's will to wage war on a man with whom the bride has fallen in love and considers her bridegroom. The activities of the girl's spirits are in contradiction to her usual human feelings. The mutual enmity of the shamans who have already lived for some time in marriage may be renewed on the initiative of the spirits, who may not have finally made peace with each other, as happens in the fairytale about the woman whose helping spirit Simfuni *pudin* made her husband starve to death against the woman's will. (Avrorin 1986: 138)

Chapaka Danilovna confirmed that even the marriage of hostile shamans does not guarantee the end of enmity. Chapaka Danilovna says: "In dreams they still quarrel. At the beginning of the marriage of previously hostile shamans, the woman's spirits may kill the husband's family. In their turn, the man's spirits will continue, against his will, to kill the family of the woman with whom he was previously in hostile relations." Chapaka Danilovna explains: "In reality they do not kill anybody, although the person dies anyhow. Although it happens that the body is killed in real life." Other informants confirm that the enmity of the married shamans stops after the wedding:

When spouses live together, their *sewens* also live together. They live together and during shamanic activities help each other. The enmity between them comes to an end. (Niura Sergejevna)

The male shaman fights together with his wife. The *baigoan* attacks and the wife says: "Will you help me! It is necessary to drive him away! Help!" Immediately they start their shamanic activities together and drive him out. (Ivan Torokovich Beldy)

When it is hard, spouses help each other... When they perform their shamanic activities, they call each other to help. Only in the case of marriage can a shaman give his helping spirit to his wife for an extended period; only the husband gives his helping spirit to his wife, not on the other way round. (Niura Sergejevna)

If hostile shamans cannot themselves marry, they can ensure that their children marry in order to stop hostility. The female shaman Olga Yegorovna says:

It is so that I, for example, have a daughter and my *baigoan* a son. Then they give the children to each other for marriage. They will live together peacefully, their life together will be good. Shamans will not fight with each other... even when [the *baigoans*] married and their children married... there was peace. [For the sake of peace] I give you my daughter without a *kalym*! There will be peace, everything will be alright.

UNRELIABILITY OF THE MARRIAGE TRUCE

In some cases the marriage of hostile shamans can stop their enmity for only a limited time. The agreement to have marital relations could be risky for former enemies and result in his or her death. The success of such a marriage depended on the will of the spouse who supposed that his or her shamanic power was greater. Forgiveness of the former offence and peaceful coexistence characterised the weaker spouse, while

the other felt his or her power could at any moment restore enmity unexpectedly and insidiously. Chapaka Danilovna says:

I know about it. The future husband loves the woman but she does not want him! But anyhow in her body she felt pain and she does not want to make peace. If he had killed anybody in her family, in her soul there is still some pain and she does not want to find peace. If the woman agrees, she will tell all her *sewens* to act peacefully and there will be peace. But if she does not want that, there can be no peace.

The female shaman Miraka lived in the village of Upper Nergen; her grandfather, a shaman, was in hostile relations with a shaman Hodger¹¹ from the lower reaches of the Amur River. As this enmity resulted in sacrifices among shaman Hodger's relatives ("the Hodgers family began to die"),¹² the shaman from the lower Amur gave his granddaughter to Miraka to be his son's bride.

The enmity stopped. Later Miraka herself was engaged in shamanic activities, at which time she rejected the truce and restored enmity. They say that after the restoration of enmity Miraka saw the shaman from the lower Amur in a dream. He asked her: "Let us become friends, there will be peace!" Knowing about the restoration of enmity, Miraka's relatives began to persuade her. Olga Yegorovna's husband began to scold her for her hostility and said: "Make peace! When you pray, [the spirits] ask them to make peace with you... There is no life without peace, you will die anyhow!" Miraka said: "What the deuce do I need with peace? I did not want it!" Olga Yegorovna's husband told her: "Make peace... It is necessary to speak [with the lower Amur shaman] to make peace, not to compete with anybody." But Miraka answered, "I do not want to! What the deuce do I need with it?"

According to Olga Yegorovna, Miraka's sister told her:

"Make peace! Let us conclude an agreement with the lower Amur shaman! You will live in peace and all others will have peace!" But she [Miraka] does not want this. Her competitor learnt in his dreams [that she does not want peace]. Only two years after that the same Miraka was alive.

As a result of the continuation of the shaman war, the participants and some of their relatives perished. At the beginning Gosha, Miraka's youngest son, perished in a traffic accident. Then Klava, the daughter of the lower Amur female shaman, died. She was given to marry Miraka's other son. This is what the female shaman Olga Yegorovna remembers about her:

I saw Klava, loved her. She was a shy girl, not swearing. Slim, not tall... She worked at a hospital. Once she woke up in the morning, prepared food, fed her children, and said: "Now I go to work. I do not know whether I come back or not." She went out and fell. Simply fell and died. She fell in the porch. There was a loud noise. People ran out but she was already dead. She was a good girl, I loved her. Miraka herself also did not live long.

For a male shaman the possibility of a marriage truce is more complicated because of the insidious deception of a female shaman who is weaker than he, and who, under cover of the wish to have a marriage truce, may conceal her true aggressive intentions. Nesulta Borisovna says that, "if a woman cannot cope with a man – her *baigoan* – she will

suck up to him. The female shamans are very sly." The female shaman Olga Yegorovna repeats: "She will suck up to him. Surround [the other shaman] with her spirits. She is sitting together with me, [keeps] talking nicely and unexpectedly seizes me. There are many sly people! The whole village – full of shamans!" Olga Yegorovna clarifies that sometimes a man can use such a method, but it is more characteristic for women: "Women have more slyness and deception, men have less." One of the methods of such deception, characteristic of women, is to attract a man for temporary cohabitation; then during sexual intercourse she steals the spirit from him when she considers it most dangerous for herself and at the same time most desired. Obtaining such a spirit, the woman turns the man's own strongest weapon against him. As a result of such a theft, a weak woman becomes stronger than her contestant; however, the male shaman may fall seriously ill and even perish from the loss of his spirit.

Olga Yegorovna explains in more detail:

If two shamans begin cohabitation, the woman may steal the *sewen* from the man. She steals! It happens! I understood it when aunt Olgoni told me that to steal a man's *sewen* it is necessary to have sex with him. When a woman sleeps with the man, he does not expect, or think, that she may steal, he thinks that she loves him. He does not think that she could play dirty tricks on him. But at the same time the woman takes away his *sewen*. Only after that he understands [what had happened]. Nevertheless, she will not give [the *sewen*] back. Or if she has a *sewen* who is not very good, not much of a *sewen*, she may exchange this and give her bad *sewen* to him.

She continues with a story about a case in which such a theft almost took place in the following way:

Here we had a female shaman and a blind male shaman. The woman wanted to take something away from him. They two remained alone together and she began to make proposals. She wanted to take away his *sewen*, but the man began to suspect it. Suspecting, he came to us. He was silently sitting. I asked him: "What are you grieving about? About the road back?" He says: "No! Not about that. Your female shaman wants to take away my *sewen*. She does not leave me for a moment. She follows me all the time. Is it good to allow this? I have the only one *sewen*. If I give him away, how could I live? How could I remain alone? I live with this *sewen* as if with my own face." This man loved children. He loved children. He was a good man. When Soviet power was established, the collective farm was established. He worked in the rural municipal council at Bolan. I have forgotten his name. In spring his eyes became painful. He told his story: "I went to the doctor, she dropped some acid into my eyes, one after the other. I was all in tears when my eyes were painful – this is how my eyes were destroyed. Both eyes. Another doctor, who was older, asked the younger one: 'Why did you do it?' She answered: 'I mixed up two medicines.' – 'There was a label! You should have read which medicine to use!'" She had burnt both his eyes and he became blind. Poor man! He walked slowly, with a long stick. When you look at him, he seems rather young. This female shaman wanted to take away his *sewen*. She lived at Lidoga. The man did not approach her, did not come close. He did not speak with her. He says: "This is my only *sewen*, apart from him I do not have any other *sewens*. With him I can at least cure small ill

children." So he went away from the village. The man says: "If she follows me to my house, I begin to quarrel with her." But this female shaman did not follow him. She understood. It was dangerous to go to the lower Amur. *Baigoans* almost always come from the area of the lower Amur. She did not go after him. Later, when he had gone away, she said: "If I had been a young woman, I would have had sex with him and taken the *seven* from him."

A truce achieved as the result of a marriage of hostile partners is reliable only on condition of mutual agreement between the future marriage partners and their aspiration for peace. We know of many cases when shamanic marriage was successful and did not result in the revitalisation of enmity. However, sometimes such an agreement is not eternal and can be broken for different reasons. Then the enmity of families, united as a result of the marriage, may be renewed with fresh strength.

CONCLUSION

The violence connected with marriage or cohabitation, which Nanai fairytales relate to us, is practically always based upon shamanic practice. If one of the cohabitation partners is (according to the interpretation of the shamans) not human but a spirit, violence is either necessary for the human as a means to tame the spirit, or that human must survive in a dangerous situation, enduring the violence of the unpredictable spirit. When the fairytale marriage partners are human, violence is caused by the fact that either both or one of them practises shamanism. The shamanic characteristics of the woman (or of close relatives like her father or brothers) decrease the possibility of her marriage because, through marriage or even through a short cohabitation, she may involve her partner in the spiritual problems of her family. As a result of cohabitation, a hostile shaman may affect both partners. The hostile shaman may constantly attack the family of someone who practises shamanism. If a person under attack does not have sufficient shamanic strength to cope, he or she perishes.

It is important to note the asymmetry of marriage problems. Fairytales talk about the danger to men of cohabitation with a female shaman, but not the other way around: they talk about cruel brides but not about cruel bridegrooms. Evidently this can be explained by the fact that the transfer of spirits takes place in marriage – as the Nanai confirm – from a man to a woman, but not the other way round. In a happy shamanic marriage the man can give his wife the possibility of temporarily using his shaman spirits, although the wife cannot give her spirits to her husband. It is possible that such movement of spirits from men to women is connected with the paternalistic organisation of the Nanai family. Unfortunately, the information I received from my informants is not satisfactory to confidently speak about these issues, and is even partially contradictory.¹³ My informants told me, for example, that the helping spirit is transferred from the man to the woman, while at the same time speaking about the fact that as a result of cohabitation the woman is able to involve the man in hostile relations with her own enemy – a shaman who will now attack not only her but her cohabitee as well. Nevertheless, it is possible to presume that the fairytale motif of the cruel bride (but not the cruel bridegroom) is connected on the one hand with the cruelty of spirits and the danger in communicating with them, and on the other hand with the definite laws of

primary movement – the transfer of these spirits from the man to the woman and not in the other way around.

NOTES

1 His wish was adopted and today several research papers have appeared dealing with the interrelations of fairytales and shamanism using the latest studies on shamanic practices. Some researchers started to look for conformity in the essential features of fairytales and the heroic epos, and shamanic rituals (Taube 1984: 350). The conformity of fairytales and rituals was very often seen in the fairytales of the ethnic groups who practiced no shamanism, that is to say in non-shamanic fairytales (Horváth 1995). Other researchers turned to strictly shamanic folklore. In this way the objects of attention for Åke Hultkrantz (1995) were not fairytales, myths or legends, but those stories that spoke about shamans and the shamanic spirits. The monograph by Yelena Novik (1984), became one of the most profound studies of the structural conformity of the fairytale and the shamanic right within the single cultural complex.

2 When we speak about the fairytale as a sacramental message to the spirit, as a partner in the communicative act, we are passing over information recorded by us from shamans. When we transfer to the fairytale the attitudes of tradition carriers, such as epic narration, which are kept away from the audience with the frame of the plot, we demonstrate how the fairytale is seen by non-shamans. In this way part of society (the shamans) is involved in the process of generating texts, while the other part (the listeners, the story tellers, those who adopt fairytales from shamans as ready-made tributes) don't always see in them the same content that was added by the creators. This is demonstrated by different interpretations of one and the same text by different tradition carriers. Here we confront the typical multiplicity of complicated conceptual structures that characterise different groups in society. The majority of structures are placed on top of each other or simply mixed up (Geertz 2004). For the devoted listener or narrator, the fairytale is a means to achieve a certain magical aim. Its artistic features are secondary, constituting simply an additional way to more effectively achieve the same magical aim. According to Vladimir Propp (1996: 354), the fairytale it is a 'product' of 'free' artistic creation for the undevoted person. The undevoted person can accept artistic action as a ritual. Some travellers in past centuries saw shamanic rituals in this way.

3 Such contests were rare and constitute an exception to the rule.

4 The Evenki as also the Nanai belong to the Tungus-Manchurian language group, but differently from the Nanai, to the Northern subgroups. (The Nanai belong to the Southern subgroup of the Tungus-Manchurian group.)

5 For the Nanai and other peoples of the Tungus-Manchurian group the patriarchal line is characteristic in the families.

6 As a bride inherited her father's spirits, they are supposed to follow her.

7 Shaman conflicts and wars mainly take place in dreams between people who, in real life, have not met but at the same time have the most serious influence on people's lives. A person who was killed in a dream by a shaman also dies in real life, while a bridegroom-ally found in dreams also appears in real life. "Shamans have quarrels with their helping spirits, a *sewen* against a *sewen*," says Chapaka Danilovna. "The fight is not real. The *sewens'* fight is against each other. In dreams they meet *sewens* and quarrel. Everything takes place in dreams. The winner is decided, the loser is killed. True, if the *sewen* is killed, the master will die. A similar contest to those of fairytales takes place in dreams!"

8 Golds – an old name for the Nanai people.

9 Italics by the author.

10 In this fairytale the contest is not finished with a wedding but only with the recovery of the woman.

11 Miraka is a first name of a woman-shaman. Unfortunately, I did not ask about her second name. Hodger is a clan name of the lower Amur shaman.

12 To be safe when defending themselves from the attacking virtual enemy, shamans usually give their enemy the *panians* (soul-shadows) of their relatives or patients.

13 As a result of changes, which have recently taken place in the Nanai culture and in the culture of other peoples of Siberia and the Far East, it was difficult to find the informants who could be conscious of the links between the shamanic practice and the laws of the traditional family organisation.

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