

WOMEN IN LOVE AGAINST THE UNDERWORLD: “FEMALE SAVIOR” SCENARIO IN ENGLISH, RUSSIAN AND TURKISH FOLKLORE NARRATIVES

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Abstract: The main idea of this work was to study gender representations in the English “Ballad of Tam Lin”, the Russian fairy tale “Finist the Bright Falcon” and the Turkish tale “Patience-Stone” through the analysis of language units with implicit gender semantics. These folklore narratives have important similarities featuring the female protagonist as the main plot driver and possessor of cultural wisdom. They follow the “female savior” scenario, depicting women as decisive and challenging the traditional role of a decorative victim.

Keywords: gender, female representation, folklore narrative, language units, metaphor, culture codes

1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of women in folklore remained latent for many years but from the second half of the twentieth century it started gradually shifting from the periphery to the foreground of academic discussions. The central idea underpinning those discussions is that “the difference between the sexes is one of the important conditions upon which mankind has built the many varieties of human culture that give human beings dignity and stature” (Mead 2016: 7).

Simone de Beauvoir, while dwelling on the genesis of the whole notion of gender, pointed out that sex is biological identity, whereas gender is a social concept (1972: 295): “One is not born but rather becomes a woman... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...”.

Bonnie Kime Scott emphasized the complex character of gender as a mental construct rather than a physically existing phenomenon: “Gender is a category constructed through cultural and social systems. Unlike sex, it is not a biological fact determined at conception... gender is more fluid, flexible and multiple in its options than the ... unchanging biological binary of male and female” (2007: 1).

The women’s liberation campaign together with a splash of interest in gender studies played a crucial role in raising awareness of the subject through scholarly investigation of female roles in relation to their position in the family and society. The approach attaching paramount importance to gender implications reached folklore having established itself in the fields of social sciences.

Gender relations are inevitably intricate. Folklore narratives may impart messages that women should conform to their social roles and sometimes warn about the repercussions of violating cultural norms. Yet women’s messages unequivocally communicate their resistance to male dominance and an alternative vision. According to Bacchilega (1997: 11), folk narratives are “sites of competing, historically and socially framed desires... (they)... continue to play a privileged function in the reproduction of various social constructs including gender and narrative”. Contemporary works emphasize the feminist contribution to folklore studies in general (cf. Kérchy 2011, Milz 2018).

2 METHODOLOGY

The material of this study comprises three texts, the English “Ballad of Tam Lin”, the Russian fairy tale “Finist the Bright Falcon” and the Turkish fairy tale “Patience-Stone” (“Sabır Taşı”). Their likeness stems from their similar scenario of a female savior of her shapeshifted lover. Our work aims at studying the culture-specific ways of representing gender identities through the analysis of language units bearing gender semantics.

The study applies the gender approach to the traditional folklore material in order to look at the wide range of man-woman interactions in intimate and social spheres. Some researchers argue that folklore narratives express an androcentric world conceptualization, and treat women as inferior. An important implication of the study is to challenge the hypothesis of supposed sexist disproportion and provide evidence for female power as a critical element of the folklore picture of the world.

Recently metaphor has been widely employed in order to structure and describe categorization and inference phenomena. A paradigm change happened when the cognitive approach was introduced, and metaphor, long considered a mere figure of speech, was acknowledged as an important cognitive tool. The conceptual metaphor theory put forward by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980) states that metaphors represent the omnipresent principle of thought and provide mental models or frames for cognitive processes in terms of which single lexical items are produced and comprehended.

The motif of transformation or shapeshifting pervades all cultures. According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphors of transformation are involved in the conceptualization of gender. Due to their universal appeal, folklore narratives teach the young generation gender values, and shapeshifts are metaphoric models of gendered concerns, struggles, and dramas. In the framework of this approach metaphors are not just figurative expressions, but underlying cognitive patterns based on the universal ability of the human mind to use familiar images to categorize the unthinkable. This cognitive process can be implicit and find its manifestation only in a few language units used as a key to whole chunks of experience, but can also be followed by the emergence of linguistic metaphors in the text.

Transformation metaphors are connected with the well-known literary motif of metamorphosis: "A transformed body, like a rewritten text, very often contains sufficient traces of its original manifestation for it to be understood as a changed entity, rather than a completely new one" (Griffin 2015: 15). For example, metaphors of shapeshifting can discover a mismatch between true and disguised gender identities, and the true identity remains evident and seen through the disguise due to the incongruity of its depiction. Metamorphosis and metaphor are inseparable. Traditional metaphors of the masculine include spirit, logos, activity, striving, strength, fire, light, form, plentitude, etc. The feminine is expressed through the images of matter, chaos, nature, water, passiveness, weakness, emotionality, darkness, emptiness and amorphism.

In folklore gender can be directly attributed to characters, or just mentioned in the descriptions of surroundings. Our units of analysis include those expressing information about gender directly (personal pronouns, and a number of nouns labeling creatures having sex, i.e. mother, king, lady) and metaphorically. In this case they contain information about objects from the outside world or various phenomena of culture that can shed light on gender in the context of epoch, society, and common vernacular. So gender characteristics can be expressed directly or mediated through nature (flora and fauna, landscapes, etc.), man-made objects or culturally meaningful numbers or events.

It is obvious that the latter group is culture-specific and needs in-depth linguacultural analysis for the most reliable interpretation of all possible associations and diverse meanings. In order to relate linguistic metaphors to culture universals the notion of culture codes was used. It defines the matrix imposed by culture for segmenting, categorizing, structuring and assessing the world around us. Krasnykh (2001: 6) identifies six main codes of culture: somatic, spatial, time, material world, biomorphic, and spiritual. They are related to the prehistoric archetypical thinking of humankind, and embrace the whole world in its entirety; it is difficult to mark clear borders between them.

The methodology of gender semantics analysis includes:

1. Finding all language units pertaining to gender representation;
2. Marking them as expressing gender semantics directly or
3. metaphorically;
4. Inside the second group dividing metaphors into thematic areas;
5. Analyzing gender information implied by metaphors;
6. Summarizing.

We assume that the gender dimension is an inevitable part of all story elements; gender semantics is omnipresent and can be discovered even in words and expressions on the margins of the central topic.

3 “THE BALLAD OF TAM LIN” AND THE EVOLUTION OF FEMININITY AS A LOVE CRUSADE

We used Robert Burns’ version of “The Ballad of Tam Lin” (Child 2014: 335–358), although the plot dates back to as early as 1549. It presents an exceptional example of both English and Scottish cultures. The setting, characters and main motif contain reverberations of the Scottish Borders folklore, though the metaphysical context and mode of conflict resolution are obviously influenced by the English culture.

The plot of the ballad is typical for folklore: Tam, an offspring of a noble family, was captivated by the Queen of fairies, and is kept as a prisoner. Under threat of losing his soul, he begs his earthly lover, Janet, to help him. She has to recognize him in the mounted row of fairy knights, catch and hold him tight despite all his transformations into monstrous beasts or burning iron. Janet rescues Tam out of great love and returns him to the human world.

The story has several dimensions that can comprise a subject of independent study, such as the pagan-Christian dichotomy, as Tam’s shapeshifting can be treated as a form of exorcism, or the Scottish fight for independence against England.

Our approach is a combined linguistic, textual and cultural analysis of the ballad from the gender perspective. Altogether in the text of “Tam Lin” 253 gender-related units were found; 65 of them represent gender directly, and 188 metaphorically. The group of gender metaphors is represented by units verbalizing various culture codes, but their distribution is uneven. The biggest numbers of metaphors belong to spatial code (51), somatic code (47), time code (37), and material world code (31), whereas verbalizations of biomorphic and spiritual semantics are represented only by twelve and ten units respectively.

Somatic metaphors in the text perform a significant function of depicting men as opposed and contrasted to elves. According to Hall (2007: 157), Anglo-Saxon *ælf* (elves) possessed seductive, feminine beauty, and for men a relationship with them might mean abandoning their gender authenticity. For Tam this encounter also results in shapeshifting from a mortal man to an elf, the first transformation in his cycle of shapeshifting.

In the English cultural tradition, the elf functions as ‘an otherworldly double’ (Bergman 2011: 1), an illustration of what is inhuman, vicious and deviating from the cultural norm. In terms of gender, elves’ magic can be associated with sexual temptations surrounding a man at the dawn of his life. So, the words and phrases pertaining to magic and witchcraft emphasize both the enjoyment and the danger of sexual freedom: *elfin gray, The Queen o’ Fairies, the pleasant fairy-land, fairy folk, unco, eerie*; however, the world of elves is gloomy and frightening: *we pay a tiend to hell*.

The abundance of spatial metaphors enhances the contrast between mortal men’s dwelling and the underworld. The underlying meaning of the verb *fell* not only reflects the ancient metaphor model ‘Down is bad’, but stresses the gender shift as well: Tam is devoid of free will, not a hunter as he used to be (*When we were frae the hunting come*), but the game of the Queen of fairies (*The Queen o’ Fairies she caught me*).

Another spatial unit playing a key role in the ballad is the word *well*, commonly defined as a hole in the earth or a natural source of water. However, it is also a gate to the shadowy land of fairies. In the ballad the well represents a border between the two worlds or their meeting point, and the meaning is specified by the ballad ring composition: “*Tam Lin was at the well*” – at the beginning the well symbolizes the entrance into the world of magic. In order to become a man again Tam should plunge into clear spring water and wash away the evil spell: “*Then throw me into well water*” (metaphor of birth and baptizing). Both the onset and the denouement of the ballad are connected with the well as the symbol of innocence, purity and freedom from sins.

Janet dismounts from Tam and pulls him down, an inverted repetition of his capture by the Queen of fairies and symbolic abdication of the supernatural fairies’ power. Then she has to turn him in her arms, as though enclosing him in her body in order to give new birth. After he gets out of the well reborn as a naked knight, she covers him with her green mantle, a ritual attire or talismanic garment used to protect from evil spells. In general, all these symbols convey Tam’s ambivalence, and gender identity evolution from the immature position of the Queen of fairies’ captive to the cultural success as a noble knight.

A powerful way of representing gender identity dynamics is the depiction of Tam’s transformations through biomorphic metaphors. The animal most frequently mentioned in the ballad, the horse (seven times), is not directly connected with the shapeshifting motif. However, it is a metaphoric representation of Tam’s ‘true colors’. He fell off his horse before leaving the world of men, and again had to be dismounted in order to break away from the fairies, so this image contributes to the ballad’s orbital pattern. The horse is a magical animal, especially in Scottish folklore, which has many tales about kelpie, or water horses. The English culture counts its grace, power and authority among the most appreciated values. The beauty, dignity and white color of his steed designate Tam’s nature as not corrupt and vicious, but as pure, generous and devoted.

Tam turns into an elf, four animals (*an esk, an adder, a bear sae grim, a lion bold*), two metal objects (*a red het gaud of airn, a burning lead*), and, at the end, a human (*a naked knight*). All of these images and the order of shapeshifts have symbolic meaning. The first transformation happened when Tam was kidnapped by the Queen of fairies. His way back to being a human starts with the image of a snake: “*They’ll turn me ... into*

an esk and adder". The serpent or snake is revered worldwide and has a dual nature, as is shown in the Bible in the story of Adam and Eve. It has an implication of sexual promiscuity, sinful temptation and treachery. At the same time this creature is associated with wisdom and the ability to shed old skin when it outgrows it. The casting off of old skin metaphorically represents the release of old ways of thinking that hold people back, and the fresh new skin – purification and new beginnings. In general, the snake is an allegory of hidden threat and betrayal. If a woman has wisdom and strength to forgive her lover's infidelity, their union has a chance to receive a new impetus.

The next step is transformation into ferocious animals: *"They'll turn me to a bear sae grim and then a lion bold"*. In the old Celtic culture, the images of a bear and a lion were associated with leadership and sovereignty. Scandinavian conquerors considered the bear to be a symbol of blind fury on the edge of insanity; *berserk* is a reckless and self-abandoned warrior. A lion is a traditional symbol of power and dominance. The gender approach to animal metaphors may suggest that women have to learn to put up with the lower instincts of males.

Finally, through further transformations to iron and lead, Tam regains his human shape: *"I turn a naked knight"*. Nudity symbolizes human nature, readiness to undergo the baptism ritual and restitution to the world of men. After the spell is gone, Tam is compared to a joyful bird: *"As blythe's a bird in Spring"*. In West Europe's mythology, birds are the embodiment of spiritual power and freedom, and spring brings regeneration.

Those allusions fit very well in the context of the archetypical initiation rites for men and women that they have to pass through in order to mature and enter a new stage of life.

On balance, gender representations in "The Ballad of Tam Lin" do not depict a male-orientated outlook. The protagonist and main driving force of the story is Janet, and not merely because she undergoes a severe trial. The entire ballad is a tribute to a female heroine, a doer who makes things happen. She has no fear to challenge any authority, worldly or supernatural, talks freely and fights for the right to be with the father of her child in spite of superstitions and social pressures.

4 "FINIST THE BRIGHT FALCON" AND FEMININE MAGIC

In this work the text of "Finist the Bright Falcon" edited by Vanslova (1987: 1-12) was used. It tells the story of a peasant and his three daughters. Father asked what they wanted him to bring them from the fair. The older two asked for nice clothes, but the youngest, Maryushka, wanted the feather of Finist the Falcon. He went to the fair three times, and bought the feather only the last time. For three nights Maryushka summoned Finist, a handsome youth from a faraway land shapeshifted into a falcon. But the jealous sisters put sharp knives outside her window and sleeping powder in her drink. Finist flew to the window at midnight but the girl did not hear him flapping against her window. He flew away with the words, *"Not before you've worn out three pairs of iron boots, and three iron staffs, and three iron caps, can you see me again"*.

The next morning Maryushka set off on a journey with three pairs of iron boots and three iron staffs, and three iron caps. She encountered three ancient Baba Yaga

sisters, who gave her some magic objects and showed her the way to Finist's castle. Finist was married to another, but Maryushka bribed his wife in order to see him at night. Maryushka spent two nights trying in vain to wake him up. On the third and final night, her bitter tears fell on his body, and broke the spell. Finist married his true love, and they lived happily ever after.

The total number of all lexical items connected with gender imagery equals 415. Especially meaningful in terms of gender is the group of somatic units (47 items). The most frequently used words pertain to the semantic field "eyes, tears, vision". Thus, Maryushka uses bitter tears to wash away Finist's blood from the window frame, or sheds a single involuntary tear on Finist's bare shoulder. Looking at the sleeping lover in tears is associated with the idea of love evolving and changing its essence. Physical attraction and passion symbolized by the trace of blood from Finist's wounds when he could not get in through the window evolve into mature and sacrificial love that stands the test of time and does not seek physical satisfaction above all.

Some somatic units are also spatial metaphors, as they segment space in terms of the human body. For example, the windows of a Russian wooden house are symbolic expressions of eyes. Maryushka's three animal helpers order her not to look back. With reference to space, this ban stems from ancient myths about the underworld, such as Greek Hades or the Biblical story of Lot's wife. The passage through Baba Yaga's hut symbolizes death and reappearance in the other world: the hut metaphorically represents a woman's vagina, and spinning around on its legs symbolizes eternity, the never-ending cycle of deaths and births.

This existential role of Baba Yaga shows the importance of the feminine in traditional Russian culture: a woman is a donor of life, a judge and a cultural paragon. For Maryushka, the route homeland – death – rebirth – Kingdom of Far Far Away designates the female rite of passage after which she acquires a new life and new opportunities. The ban on looking back marks the need to forget the old life and dismiss old values, and in terms of the body – the need for a baby to be born with its head first.

From the gender perspective, the images of iron shoes, staffs and caps that Finist ordered Maryushka to wear out are essential. Shoes are connected with feet, journey and space, and iron complicates the way. Iron has sorcery-protecting power, and also symbolizes humankind's power over nature. Putting on iron shoes, Maryushka agrees to limit her abilities, turns down magic help (help appears when she has worn out each successive pair), and shows humility and adherence to male guidance. A staff is a phallic symbol, an attribute of a pilgrim, and a sign of connection with the sun through the world's axis. Apparently, it designates invisible help and support on the way. In the traditional culture women's hair was associated with witchcraft and sexual promiscuity, so covering hair with an iron cap was a sign of faithful love. Comparing Janet's trial in "The Ballad of Tam Lin" with that of "Finist the Bright Falcon", it is obvious that Maryushka's test took much longer and required perseverance rather than defiance and courage; so, patience is viewed as a critical component of the Russian female identity.

The philosophy of love and marriage represented in "Finist" is based on the elaborate code of behavior propagating the passive, silent and victimized position of a woman. A decent girl is not supposed to challenge this asymmetrical status

quo; ambitious and status-conscious women are depicted as bad-tempered, ugly and scheming. However, for a woman in a sub-valuable position there was an indirect way to realize herself. Maryushka accepts the prescribed role as long as it goes in line with her aspirations. She knows exactly what her goal is and insists on realizing it, three times asking for the feather of Finist the Falcon. She chose Finist as a future husband knowingly and willingly; nobody compelled her to marry either him or another.

Maryushka is an example of a self-made woman, the one with a dream and a far-reaching plan. Her hardships and sufferings indicate that a woman should not wait for immediate success, but use ‘soft skills’ over a considerable period of time. Only the woman who is kind, virtuous, tolerant and compliant with the cultural outlook obtains the desired. She should be able to forgive her lover and turn the bodily and erotic aspects of love into a spiritual experience and more elevated form of affection.

5 “PATIENCE-STONE” AND THE CORNERSTONE OF FEMININITY

The Turkish fairy tale “Sabır Taşı” (“Patience-Stone”) can be found in many editions including the one used in this study (Sarı 2016: 115–125).

According to the tale, once upon a time there lived a poor woman’s daughter. One day a small bird flew in saying, “You are going to get into big trouble”. and it happened three days in a row. Some days later, when the girl went out she was transferred to a beautiful palace with forty different rooms full of gold. In the last room the girl saw a good-looking youth in deep sleep, and read the note, “*She who for forty days will fan me and pray by me shall become my wife*”. The girl stayed by the youth and did what was required, and then asked an Arab girl to stay with the youth for a while as she wanted to prepare herself for the meeting. The youth woke up, thought that it was the Arab who had stayed by him, and married her. The girl was made a cook.

On the eve of the feast the youth asked the cook what she would like to get as a present. The girl asked for a yellow patience-stone and a black patience-knife. He gave her the desired things but was very curious and watched her secretly. The girl told the patience-stone all that had happened to her and it cracked into two halves. Then she took up the knife and would have plunged it into her body had the youth not sprung from his hiding-place and caught her hand. The false wife was put to death, and the young couple lived happily thereafter.

This tale depicts the sequence of initiation trials that a young girl passes in order to become a fully-fledged member of adult society. The total number of units related to gender equals 265; 95 of them express gender semantics directly, and 170 indirectly, through imagery appealing to various codes of culture.

Essentially, the storyline is a female competition judged by other females from the point of view of their life experience and values nurtured inside the culture. The protagonist competes with another girl metaphorically described as *Arap*. This word does not refer to a representative of a particular nation but labels a stranger in general whose behavior deviates from values shared by other people. The image also has the semantics of shapeshift – a character who looks and behaves like humans but is their

antagonist. This strangeness explains her hostile actions, impossibility to reconcile with them, and eventual putting to death.

On the whole, *Arap* is the embodiment of evil features – cruelty, dishonesty, jealousy and greed, a black witch rather than a real woman, opposed to the virtuous protagonist. At the same time she is resourceful, quick-minded, ruthless and ambitious, whereas the protagonist is gentle, shy, dependent, passive and often not able to stand up for her rights. The features of the female villain are very similar to male features, and the culture views such a shift of gender roles as unfeminine, inappropriate and disgraceful. Men and women are meant to be different, and an offender must inevitably be punished for crossing the borders of her gender. Her death was caused by mules – hybrid animals incapable of reproducing themselves, which indicates her nature of half-male and half-female, half-human and half-genie. The task of folklore is to promote culturally legitimate gender identities, and show what can happen to violators of the norms.

According to the Turkish beliefs, social space or the world beyond the limits of the house belongs to men, and there they have plenty of opportunities to assert their authority and obtain a distinguished position. The inside sphere, the space of the house, on the contrary, is considered a woman's comfort zone where she reigns and regulates domestic life. The girl and her mother were frightened because the mysterious bird appeared notwithstanding the locks, and intruded into the female area of the house. That is why the protagonist's loss is first of all the loss of her house, which she seeks to restore.

At the end of the story, when the youth wanted to learn the truth, he also penetrated secretly into her room and hid in the wardrobe, mirroring her actions at the beginning. So, the bottom of the woman's heart is associated with the most secret area of the house. The metaphor of the house as a figurative representation of the female body, found in the Russian culture, is also present in "Patience-Stone".

The girl's becoming a cook is not accidental: a human is a unity of body, mind and soul, and properly prepared food is also responsible for purity of thoughts and feelings, and plays a vital balancing function in the Muslim culture, where the division between halal and haram food is very powerful. In terms of family roles, the ability to cook is critical for a good wife: the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

The patience-stone is a metaphor unpacking a number of cultural meanings. First, it is a female symbol of the Earth. It also bears an allusion to the philosopher's stone, a legendary substance that turns all metals into gold, and figuratively means perfection and sublime nature. The stone is associated with such features of character as reliability, firmness, strength of body and mind, and fidelity, but at the same time the expression 'heart of stone' often describes an emotionally cold and merciless person. Together the black patience-knife and the yellow patience-stone have erotic symbolism and also stand for life and death, good and evil. As gender metaphors they have parallels to the iron shoes and iron caps in the Russian fairy tale – material embodiment of all the misery and pain that women have to go through in a relationship. Breaking of the patience-stone marks the end of suffering but it can also denote the rebellion of a particular woman against the imposed gender role.

6 CONCLUSION

The main idea of this study was to look at three folklore stories – “The Ballad of Tam Lin”, “Finist the Bright Falcon” and “Patience-Stone” – in an attempt to perform a semantic and linguocultural analysis of all elements of narrative related to gender representations. These texts have some important similarities: they are woman-centered and feature the female protagonist as the main plot driver and the possessor of moral truth and cultural wisdom. They also follow the “female savior” scenario, as women are depicted as strong, decisive and challenging the traditional female role of a decorative victim. and finally, they are fascinating love stories asserting the power of a woman’s love over underworld magic.

Generally speaking, the main plot line of folklore narratives is connected with passing initiation rites, self-perfection and transformation of young people on the threshold of adulthood. Initiation rites can be of two different kinds. First, they include images of passing the border between the human world and the underworld. Second, initiation metaphors denote different complications or hardships: holding wild animals or burning metal, wearing irons, or fanning and praying for forty days. Both males and females can experience the first type of trials, but only women are destined for the second one. Thus, gender representations reveal considerable asymmetry in their means of depicting the process of maturing and gender education. Males are not subjected to prolonged and exhausting sufferings, and often need a woman’s help. They have neither control over shapeshifting, nor the ability to break away from the underworld.

On the contrary, women are not shapeshifted but are exposed to painful agonizing tortures, or enormous waste of time, effort and vitality, and are able not only to overcome all pains, but also to rescue their grooms. It also seems that men deserved the punishment much more, whereas the female protagonists did not commit wrong. Why is the gender distribution of suffering so uneven?

Apparently, folklore employs highly figurative language teaching ethical and moral values. From the ancient times, the inner space of relationships has been a woman’s realm. Man’s self-realization is outside the intimate sphere; he struggles and conflicts with the outer world. According to the cultural norms and assumptions, female fulfillment takes place almost entirely inside the close sphere that is emphasized by the association of the house with the female body. So it is a woman’s responsibility to provide the union of the two with life power.

The study of gender representations involved the analysis of lexical units expressing direct or indirect gender semantics. Let us compare the percentage of each kind of unit across the three folklore narratives:

	Explicit gender semantics	Gender semantics is expressed metaphorically through symbols belonging to the following codes of culture:					
		Somatic code	Spatial code	Time code	Material world code	Biomorphic code	Spiritual code
“Tam Lin”	25%	19%	20%	15%	12%	5%	4%
“Finist”	30%	11%	11%	6%	20%	16%	6%
“Patience-Stone”	36%	12%	16%	8%	18%	5%	5%

Table 1: Occurrence of gender-related lexical units in the three folklore narratives

These data show that the frequency of occurrence of same-category items is quite uniform across the three texts, and the maximum dispersion of values does not exceed eleven per cent. Apparently, all the three cultures under consideration tended to use similar imagery as a means of gender representation.

Looking more closely at each group of units can reveal interesting similarities as well as differences. For example, in the first group it was noted that in the English ballad the words “she/her” and “he/his/him” occurred more frequently than similar pronouns in both fairy tales that prefer to call the characters by name or gender status.

Somatic gender code demonstrates a culture-specific character: in the English culture the most frequently mentioned are hair, knee, brow, face and tongue; in the Russian fairy tale the most culturally important body parts are eyes and legs, and in the Turkish tale – head and hands.

A lot more similarities can be discovered in the group of words and expressions related to spatial organization. In all folklore narratives there is the symbolism of the other world as opposed to our human world and the clearly marked border between them; there is also a division between male and female space and the archetypical image of the road as a metaphor for quest or human life in general.

The time-related lexical units are most expressive in the ballad, as all action there is concentrated within a short time period, and they also refer to the symbolism of evil spirits and the door between the worlds, which opens at particular times. However, day – night opposition is equally relevant in all cultures, and the same meaning is attributed to diurnal and nocturnal events and activities: day belongs to man, human affairs and life, night – to woman, otherworldly magic and death.

Material world symbolism is richer in the fairy tales as they pay more attention to details serving as plot ornamentations. Nevertheless, in all the three narratives gold and silver play the same role: they are connected with the underworld and express the male and female principles. The fairy-tale material metaphors of female destiny as a hard burden are interesting: iron wear and stone patience. The image of water is also universal and has tremendous meaning as the source of life and the transportation medium between the realms of mortal men and non-humans.

Biomorphic metaphors are by no means less remarkable, as they personify the idea of a shapeshifted lover, crucial for these three narratives. The image of shapeshifting amplifies the difference in the perception of gender roles and behaviors:

from the female perspective, men can be promiscuous and treacherous (elf, snake), physically aggressive and violent (bear and lion), free-loving and abandoning (falcon), or passive and irresponsible (elves' captive, enchanted sleeper), while at the same time having high-flown ideals and divine sparks (all bird images). The female mission is to humanize the controversial male nature and through their own change impart him honest and unconditional love, the message that is also expressed by means of spiritual symbolism, meaning of numbers and codified religious and humanistic values.

The summaries of gender truths stemming from each folklore narrative are very similar. Men are viewed as light-hearted and first avoiding obligations but gradually taking on more responsibilities, while women's main features are sacrificial love, faithfulness, strength and endurance. The protagonists of the stories under study are shining personalities: Janet is daring, fearless and confident, Maryushka – smart, cooperative and persistent, and the Turkish girl – pious, reliable and helpful. Far from being plain and hackneyed, they embody the ideas of the feminine promoted by their national cultures.

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