

EASTERN AND WESTERN VERSIONS OF FOLKTALES ABOUT *THE GIRL SEEKING HER BROTHERS*: THEMES OF EMOTION, SONG, AND JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

The international oral narrative about a girl who seeks her brothers belongs to one of the most widespread tales in European and Middle Eastern folklore, indexed as ATU451 in *The Types of International Folktales*. These tales are well-known in European folklore and literature through the literary treatments by the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. In the worldwide folkloric versions, the motif of a sister who seeks her brothers coexists with the transformation of the main characters into animals. The paper concentrates on topics as follows: the relationship between siblings, animals, and music, and the search journey. The paper focuses on Georgian, Middle Eastern, North African and European folktales. Different ways of narration show how these folktales have formed their specific variety, which arose in adaptation to local circumstances.

Keywords: Fairy Tale, Folklore, Singing Animals, Journey.

INTRODUCTION

Oral narrative traditions encompass tales of journeys, experiences, ideas, and discoveries. Within the broader context of folklore, it is precisely in the domain of magic tales that the entire world comes into being. Folktales have the capacity to encourage individuals to reflect on human responsibility for the world from a vantage point that differs from the conventional scholarly perspective.

Adventures narrated in fairy tales can be read as traces of ancient customs and activities that refer to ritual rehearsals. Fairy tales reflect social relationships, human feelings and desires. Fairy tales build a bridge between ancient times and the present. They link people and countries. We do not read them as imaginative stories, but rather as having preserved some of the ancient knowledge in their motifs and images. They tell them in a way that can touch everyone's heart, even today.

The paper focuses on Georgian, Middle Eastern, North African and European folktales about the girl who seeks her enchanted brothers. Different ways of narration show how these folktales have formed their specific variety, which arose in adaptation to local circumstances.¹

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The international oral narrative about a girl who seeks her brothers belongs to one of the most widespread tales in European and Middle Eastern folklore, indexed as ATU451 in *The Types of International Folktales* (Uther 2004). These tales are well-known in European folklore and literature through the literary treatments by the Grimm Brothers *The Seven Ravens* (KHM 25), *The Twelve Brothers* (KHM 9), *The Six Swans* (KHM 49), and *The Wild Swans* by Hans Christian Andersen. In the worldwide folkloric versions, the motif of a sister who seeks her brothers coexists with the transformation of the main characters into animals. The paper concentrates on topics as follows: the relationship between siblings, animals, and music, and the search journey.

The methodological approach of the paper relies on a combination of certain folkloric and cultural premises for the following reasons: “Folktale symbolism is usually related to a multiplicity of factors; anthropological perspectives stress the relation of folktales to culture; and folktales can shed light on the internal processes of the human mind when studied in conjunction with social acts, beliefs, and rituals. Thus, the meaning of a folktale depends on its references to a common cultural background and on the diachronic underlying ideas and values of a given folk group” (Kaplanoglou 2016: 1).

It is worth accentuating that despite the increasing popularity since the late 19th century of the famous printed fairy tales from Western Europe, many countries have kept their authentic styles of narrative tradition. From the perspective of comparative research, the type ATU 451 with its motif-complex and creative composition presents an interesting cause for study. In the context of the European and Eastern narrative traditions, the study of the national repertoire with its local specifics opens up possibilities for the comparative study of folktales in the transnational context.

STRUCTURE OF THE FOLKTALE TYPE ATU451

The Georgian folktale “The Nine Brothers” and its variants have the following content:

After knowing that she has brothers, the girl seeks and finds her brothers in a remote place and keeps a house for them. They live happily. The brothers tell her to take care of the fire and be careful of the demonic neighbour giant. Once she forgets to watch the fire. After the girl asks the neighbour for help, the giant comes regularly to suck her blood. When the brothers discover this, they kill him. The girl takes herbs from the grave of the giant. Her brothers eat them and they are changed into deer. The animal brothers leave home and their sister follows them. They live in a forest. A king finds the young woman in the forest and marries her. All the brothers are with her.

One day, a servant woman throws her into the water and substitutes herself for the Prince’s wife. She commands the servants to kill the deer. The deer go to the river and cry. Meanwhile, their sister has been turned into a fish-woman. One of the deer sings a song: *Sister, sister like an apple,/ we will be killed,/ the water in the bowl is boiled,/ and the knife is sharp.*

The sister answers with a song: *Please go and tell the king, / why he forgot his word given to me.*

The king let the fish be captured and brought to the palace. The false bride orders the fish to be cooked and that no fishbone is to fall on the ground. The cook follows the orders, but one of the fishbones is thrown on the ground and a Populus tree sprouts. The tree uses its leaves to caress the prince when he passes by, and the false bride also wants it chopped down. A splinter of the plane tree survives and is taken by an old woman to her house. The girl comes out of the splinter to do chores at the old woman's house but is discovered and adopted by the old woman. The husband discovers his true wife. After the couple's reunion, the animal brothers are transformed into men (Ketelauri 1977, 538-548; my summary and translation).

All the Georgian variants of this plot are recorded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and published by several editors: *The Nine Brothers and a Frog* (Umikashvili 1964: 67-69), *The Nine Brothers* (Chikovani 1969, 119-124), *The nine brothers and a sister* (Ketelauri 1977, 538-548) etc.

The starting episode of the folktale "The Nine Brothers" is well-known in South Caucasian and North African folktales, which follow the pattern of the tale type ATU451: The brothers ask their mother to give a sign when their new sibling is born. The symbol for a girl is a spindle and a plugh or stick for a boy. The brothers like to have a sister, not a brother again. They receive the wrong information. An evil woman hoisted a sign which meant that a boy was born. The brothers leave home. The little sister grows up and knows she has brothers. She goes to find them.

Georgian folktale is very close to an Armenian folktale *Seven Brothers and One Sister* (Aleksidze 1976, 150-152). Here must be mentioned the Arabic versions of the tale type ATU451: Moroccan folktale *The Little Sister with Seven Brothers*, Western Saharan *Shreser Dahbú*, Egyptian *The Sister of the Seven* and North African *The Daughter and the Black Woman* (Aris 1991, 39-46; Frobenius 1921, 133-137; Stumme 1898).

The Moroccan folktale *The Little Sister with Seven Brothers*, edited by Jilali El Koudia and Roger Allen, tells about a girl who finds out that she has brothers and asks her parents to let her go to seek them. She is accompanied by a she-camel, a pair of black slaves. They reach a stop with two fountains, a white one that makes people white, and a black one that makes people black. The pair washes themselves in the white fountain and forces the princess to bathe in the black one.² Then they reach a kingdom, where the elder brother became a sultan the other brothers are governors in different provinces.

The woman on the camel introduced herself as his sister and the man with her as her husband. The slave simply watched from the side. The sultan embraced his sister and her husband and took them into his palace. He gave them a nice place to

² It must be noted that physical ugliness and deformity (although a politically incorrect term by today's standards) have long been considered a sign of internal ugliness in folktales. Just as beauty represents inner goodness, physical ugliness is used to stereotype inner ugliness, especially in the literature of previous centuries.

live, and their slave was given a small room set apart. Then the sultan sent messages to his brothers, and they all arrived to welcome the sister. Thus, the couple stayed in the palace, enjoying a luxurious life.

Sometime later, the camel herd flees and the slave (the true sister) is made to herd them. She laments her fate and the camels, out of pity, join in her sorrow and become thin and emaciated.

O camels of my brother! / How can you eat and drink / When the free has become slave / And the slave free?

The camels listened to her intently and started to cry.

One of the brothers, the sultan, discovers the strange incident and questions the slave herd. She confesses the whole story and the camels begin to eat healthier again. The sultan orders some guards to take the false sister and her companion to the black fountain to restore their true form and to punish them.

The sisters-in-law are jealous of the girl. They let her eat a snake egg. Finally, the truth is discovered, the seven wives were punished. The sister and her brothers lived happily ever after (Koudia 2003, 33-38).

The tale type ATU451 is widely recorded in Europe and in the Middle East, as well as in India and the Americas. In Europe only, there exist over two hundred versions collected and published. Ulrich Marzolph, in his catalogue of Persian folktales, listed four Iranian tales he grouped under type ATU451 *The Girl Seeks her Brothers*. These tales closely follow the second part of the Georgian folktale *Nine Brothers*: the brothers depart from home, and the girl looks for them and is welcomed by them as their sister. One day, when the brothers are out on a hunt and the heroine is cleaning up the place, a cat comes and puts out the fire. Thus, the heroine has to look for fire with a cannibalistic creature (Marzolph 1884, 93). Scholars and folktale catalogues report variants of the tale type across Europe, and the Middle East, although the number of brothers and their animal form may vary between tales. French scholar Nicole Belmont identified two forms of the tale type in Europe: one essentially present in the Germanic area and Scandinavia, and another she dubbed the Western version. She noted that in this Western version, the youngest sister after she settles with the brothers, asks for fire from a neighbouring ogre, and a tree sprouts in their yard and bears fruit that causes the transformation. In the tale of the Brothers Grimm, there are six brothers and they are transformed into swans. In other European variants, the number of brothers alternates between three, seven, or twelve. The other variation is in the result of the brothers' transformation: in some versions, they are ducks, in others ravens, and even eagles, geese, peacocks, blackbirds, storks, cranes, jackdaws or rooks (Belmont 2006, 185-194).

WEST-EUROPEAN VERSIONS OF THE ATU451

One of the well-known versions of the ATU451 is *The Twelve Brothers* by Grimm Brothers (KHM 9):

A king wants to kill his twelve sons, but only if his thirteenth child is a girl. This way, she alone can inherit his kingdom. The Queen tells this to their youngest son Benjamin, and that she will give them a warning with a flag. A white flag

indicates that a baby boy was born, and a blood-red flag indicates a girl was born and that the boys should run far away. After twelve days of waiting in the forest, the sons see a red flag, indicating that they shall be sentenced to death. The brothers get so angry at their father's cruel betrayal that they swear bloody revenge on every girl and move to an enchanted cottage deep in the forest, where they must feed on animals. In the meantime, the Queen gives birth to a beautiful girl with a star on her forehead.

Ten years later, after hearing of their existence from her mother, the sister leaves to find them where the queen hid them for precaution. She first finds a now older Benjamin, who happily greets her and then introduces them to their other brothers, convincing them to stop their revenge on girls. Together, the siblings live in harmony. Some time later as the sister rips out twelve white lilies out of ignorance, her brothers turn to ravens and fly away. An old woman said there could be one way to rescue her brothers, she decided not to speak and not to laugh for seven years, to save her brothers.

A hunting king finds her and marries her. His mother, however, slanders the girl's silence and tries to get the king to burn her as a witch. The young king is torn as he does love his wife but ultimately gives in with tears in his eyes. As the pyre is lit, the seven years pass and the twelve ravens arrive: they recover their human forms as soon as they touch the ground, then they put out the flames and free their sister. The girl is now free to talk and she explains to her husband what's going on. With the cruel mother-in-law executed, they with the brothers all live happily together (Grimm 2023).

A close version of the Grimm's *The Twelve Brothers* is *The Wild Swans* by Hans Christian Andersen:

In a faraway kingdom, there lives a widowed king with his twelve children: eleven princes and one princess. One day, he decides to remarry. An evil queen turns the princes into swans with a magic spell. Princess Elisa flees from her evil stepmother and her brothers take her to a distant land where she is safe from the queen. She learns from a good fairy how she can transform the swans back: she should collect nettles from cemeteries and weave them into shirts for her brothers. However, she has to promise not to say a word until the task is completed; otherwise, her brothers will die. One day she is surprised at work by a hunting party. This is led by the king of the country, who falls in love with the supposedly mute Elisa and wants to make her his wife despite the archbishop's objections. He takes her to his castle, where she secretly continues her work. When Elisa's supply of nettles runs out one day, she goes to the cemetery of a nearby church at night to pick up new ones. There she comes across a group of witches, whom she fearlessly approaches. However, she is observed by the king's archbishop, who also thinks she is a witch and reports this to the king. The king believes the archbishop and with a heavy heart orders a witch trial. Since Elisa cannot speak or defend herself because of her promise, she is found guilty and sentenced to death at the stake.

On the way to her execution, she continues to weave the shirts for her brothers, which angers the onlookers so much that they try to take the shirts away

from her and tear them up. Then Elisa's brothers appear and save the princess. People take this as a sign of innocence, but the executioner wants to continue with the execution. Elisa manages to throw the shirts over her brothers and the princes assume their human form again, only the youngest brother keeps one wing because his shirt is not completely finished. After the people hear the story of Elisa and her brothers, the king asks for her hand in marriage again. Elisa agrees and becomes the new queen (Andersen 1872).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIBLINGS

Friendship among siblings and rivalry between siblings exist everywhere in the world. The differences in social contexts, beliefs, and opinions within each family probably influence sibling relationships. Patronage is a common social value in traditional societies. The sibling relationships both in Near Eastern and European fairy tales are divided into three types: positive, negative, and neutral. Each type of sibling relationship is in turn classified as sister-sister, brother-brother, and brother-sister. A positive relationship between siblings exists when they sympathize with each other in the face of danger or an unpleasant situation. According to the research of Hasan El-Shamy, (1) The brother-brother relationship is predominantly negative and fraught with conflict. Negative sentiments cohere around feelings of jealousy over parental favors, financial advantages, or the beauty of a brother's wife or female companion. (2) The sister-sister relationship is exclusively negative and fraught with conflict. Negative sentiments cohere around feelings mirroring those that dominate the brother-brother relationship. Naturally, the attractiveness of a sister's husband or male companion provides a strong cause of jealousy. (3) The brother-sister and brother-sister-like relationships are exclusively positive and may lead to sexual attraction. This dyadic set of sibling relationships and the attitudes it generates govern the "structure of sentiments" of a significant portion of Arab (and non-Arab) kinship systems and consequent forms of expressive cultures (El-Shamy 2004, 186).

ANIMALS AND MUSIC

In the tale type ATU451 animals and humans help each other. The enchanted brothers as birds put out the flames and free their sister from being buried in the fire in fairy tales by Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. In Georgian folktales, the animals give a signal by singing to inform the king. In Moroccan folktales, the animals listen and cry when the heroine sings a sad song.

Animals naturally appear as acting subjects in fairy tales. Just as if they were human, they speak language and are capable of suffering. They show gratitude for the help they receive while punishing carelessness or rudeness. Very often the animals that appear in fairy tales are enchanted people who eventually regain their true form. Given that fairy tales are a very old form of storytelling, this self-evident fact deserves attention. In fairy tales, animals and plants are creatures equal to humans, not inferior and degraded to objects – a view that seems absurd to us today. In fairy tales, animals are brothers and sisters. This becomes particularly

clear in those fairy tales in which siblings are transformed into animals and then transformed back into humans.

There are numerous fairy tales in which animals appear as helpers to the fairy tale hero. These animals often have magical powers or special knowledge that they entrust to the hero so that he can solve various tasks that await him. The magical powers usually work because the animal appears at the right time to magically help the hero out of trouble. In these fairy tales, too, the animal embodies an (often hidden) part of the hero's soul. This can be a wish that the hero does not (yet) admit to himself, repressed or buried knowledge of what to do in a certain situation, or a characteristic of the hero that is suppressed due to external circumstances.

In the Moroccan folktale, the crying camels are the sign that reminds the sultan of his sister. The camels are listening to the sister. This is the symbol of something that has died in the soul of the girl but can be brought back to life, which is represented by the song that the girl sings.

Musical components occur in various fairy tales. The most important groups of these are the motifs with musical instruments and the motifs with singing. While musical instruments only serve to support larger motifs, singing is usually associated with entire independent motifs, to such an extent that the episodes with singing can ultimately dominate the episodes and become the focus of the fairy tale (Schmidt 1950, 144). This central role of singing in fairy tales can be briefly described as a "magical function". In fairy tales, singing is not done for artistic reasons or entertainment, but rather to magically achieve an action. This is where the belief in the magic of music seems most pronounced. The music is in a functional place in each fairy tale. In all cases, there must be music sung in some way by the innocent hero. Singing arises from the relevant cultural-historical situation of the narrator and his community. Since the fairy tale is extremely antiquated and is generally seen as a reflection of prehistoric conditions, many versions have of course retained music and the oldest types of instruments.

From these conclusions, it can be deduced that the fairy tale of the singing heroines and crying animals is important not only for the problem of music in fairy tales but also for the cultural-historical understanding of the function of music itself. Finally, one could formulate the following conclusion: The fairy tale motif of truth discovered through magical music is one of the oldest mythological motifs. The cultural-historical determination of the age and origin of the fairy tale about a sister looking for her brothers provides a new approach to understanding this individual story and perhaps the entire type. Very old layers of folk music live on here with a strength that has not yet been realized, and careful observation and strict use of modern research methods will yield important insights for both areas that meet so attractively here, for fairy tales and music.

It is no coincidence that the deer appears as a favourite animal in Georgian fairy tales and the camel in Moroccan fairy tales. The North Arabian societal and spiritual traditions surrounding the camel motif throughout the pre-Islamic era show some aspects of their traditional belief systems, specifically relating to the

camel imagery. Various pre-Islamic verses highlight the cultural and spiritual relationships pre-Islamic Arabs developed with the camel, particularly the she-camel (Kanaan 2022, 4).

Deer figures appear in large numbers in archaeological finds in Georgia. Researchers are particularly interested in the bronze sculptures (from the 12th-11th centuries BC) and the bronze belts (from the 11th-7th centuries BC). The deer figure has certain symbolic meanings in the Christian religion, which can also be found in Georgian folk poetry.

In the Christian context, the deer appears as a symbol of man's spiritual hunger. This symbolism is inspired by the famous quote from Psalm 42: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God" (Ps. 42: 1). The she-camel of God in Islam is a miraculous female camel sent by God to the people of Thamud in Al-Hijr, after they demanded a miracle from the prophet Salih.

Mircea Eliade finds the source of the mythical character traits of the fairy-tale animals in archaic magical-religious worldviews: It is certainly a prehistoric view, which is not surprising when you know that for hundreds of thousands of years, man was not only interested in hunting lived but also had to accept a mystical blood relationship with the animals. This primal past has never been completely erased. The symbols, contents, and images that arose and were articulated in those legendary times when the animal represented both the mystery of the world and the code that made it understandable have long since lost their function in consciousness; because they have become useless at the level of everyday pragmatic experience. But they still live in the imaginary spheres: in dreams, fantasies, artistic and literary creations, etc. (Eliade 1990, 170).

SEARCH JOURNEY

In many fairy tales, as part of the plot, the hero or heroine goes on a long journey through inhospitable, dangerous areas in search of something or someone. During this quest, he has to pass tests, find magical supporters, or acquire items that give him supernatural powers. After a multitude of difficulties have already been mastered and the hero has proven his physical and moral strength, there is often a retarding moment: the hero has found what he was looking for, but it initially remains out of reach for him; Only after passing a final, special test do the seeker and the person being sought finally come together.

In the Grimm's fairy tale *The Seven Ravens*, after finding and climbing the glass mountain, the girl has to chop off a finger to be able to open the door behind which her brothers, who have been transformed into ravens, are. The search journey as a structural element also occurs in heroic epics, chivalric novels, and fantasy stories.

The trigger for a search is always a lack that either the hero himself or a very important person feels. Accordingly, the happy ending has the character of redemption. What is typical is that not only is the person being sought found, but the power of an evil sorcerer is generally broken.

A second common form of search is a girl's search for her brothers who have been lost. She blames herself for this, which means that in this case, the hike is a real act of penance. The girl usually has to make personal sacrifices:

- cutting off a finger *Grimm's Seven Ravens*
- taking a vow of silence *Andersen's The Wild Swans*
- lose her identity and become a slave *Moroccan folktale*
- enchanted as a fish and tree in *Georgian folktale*

The Christian theme of guilt, atonement, and redemption is particularly evident in Grimm's and Andersen's fairy tales, especially since the bird is the symbol of the soul. From the religious point of view, the religious theme can occur in Georgian and Moroccan folktales. Both Deer and Camel are connected with Bible and Quran metaphors of spiritual grade. On the other hand, both Camel and deer are pre-Christian and pre-Islamic symbols too.

The symbols and metaphors in folktales can only be understood "correctly" if their meaning has first been agreed upon. There are many different approaches to interpreting folk tales. The following two are the most well-known:

(1) Interpretation of origin and history: The folktale is interpreted based on its origin, and the social and religious forms of the past. Its supposed original meaning is established.

(2) Psychological interpretation: Interpretations of folktales that concern the human psyche are common. In more recent interpretations a certain ambiguity is admitted, but in the concrete analysis of individual fairy tales, it is withdrawn again. Psychologists, therapists, educators, and other circles interpret individual fairy tales from their perspective such as psychological interpretation stress that they represent the animal and spiritual sides of our personality, which become separated but must be integrated for human happiness. According to Bruno Bettelheim, the sister as a symbol of motherly care once one has become alienated from home, is the rescuer, and the brother represents the endangered aspect of an essentially inseparable unity (Bettelheim 1975, 79). It remains undisputed that fairy tales have an effect on the psyche and that their use, like a medication chosen and dosed depending on experience, can help individual people.

The folktales about the girl who seeks her enchanted brothers are not like fairy tales in which the marriage comes before the end of the story. Marriage is not the ultimate goal of this tale as it is in many romantic fairy tales. The tale is one of family unity. The brother and sister struggle to find happiness together as a family unit as adults. These folktales are important for their messages about family fidelity through adversity and separation.

CONCLUSION

Folklorists can focus on both the cultural specificity of symbols and their alignment to a cultural set of underlying ideas. However, it is not enough to study folktales as tales only. As folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow said, "It is also necessary to make oneself familiar with the use of folk-tales, their life in tradition, their transmission and spread" (Sydow 1999, 140).

Folktales work through images and scenes. Usually, they do not require any explanation or interpretation, but only a receptive attitude of listening: they transform us by touching our unconscious and in this way convey trust, orientation, and motivation for life. The fairy tales are not only rooted in the wisdom of childhood but also nourish themselves from cosmic realms. Viewed in this way, the fairy tale images can become valuable meditation content, especially for adults. They offer release from constraints and strive toward a positive end. As a result, they seem exhilarating and invigorating. Because they mobilize life-affirming feelings, they exude a certain lightness.

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