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## WORLDVIEW AND IDEOLOGY IN THREE ENGLISH FAIRY TALES – A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

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***Abstract:** The purpose of the present study is to investigate the predominant value orientation and worldview of three English fairy tales (Jack and the Beanstalk, Jack the Giant Killer and Jack and His Magic Snuffbox) included Joseph Jacob's English Fairy Tales. By exploring the linguistic evidence which the texts have to offer, i.e. the specific linguistic constructions and choices made by the author within the texts, I try to reveal the culturally shared cognition and values that can serve as pointers to a culture's worldview and predominant ideology, typical of a given period. More specifically, the study investigates the text value orientation as revealed by the level of the story (actants and action, time and setting) and the level of narration (characterization).*

***Keywords:** narrative analysis, linguo-cultural studies, value orientation, worldview, fairy tales.*

### INTRODUCTION

Fairy and folk tales can be seen as a ubiquitous linguistic resource that has had an important role in building and sustaining stereotypes, values and ideologies in different communities and cultures. Looking at the history of the fairy tale genre, as it developed and moved from oral folk narratives to the printed literary form, it can be noticed how it changed its focus from a genre aimed at adult amusement to one focusing on the education of children. Thus, tale collectors and authors altered and purified folklore texts so that they can suit better the social value systems of the time. Consequently, fairy tales are often seen not just as mere figs of imagination whose aim is to create fun and entertainment but also as purposeful literary products that 'operate ideologically to indoctrinate children so that they will conform to dominant social standards which are not necessarily established on their behalf' (Zipes, 1983, p. 18). Then, in sociologically and discourse oriented studies, fairy tale texts can be seen as products of their authors and as such, as incorporating a specific worldview and world outlook.

My research, due to its object of study (folk and fairytale texts) and research agenda (linguo-cultural linguistics), is at the crossroads between language and culture and between linguistics and literary studies. From this broad and varied perspective, a text as a complete whole can be seen as the quintessence of the relationship culture – values - language – thought. Accordingly, I first look at the linguistic evidence which a text itself has to offer, i.e. at the specific linguistic constructions and choices made by the author within a text in order to try to reveal the culturally shared cognition and values. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the predominant value orientation of three English fairy tale narratives by employing linguistic tools and to reveal the worldview encoded in them.

### EXPOSITION

#### 1. Theoretical background and methodological perspectives

The linguo-cultural and value-oriented perspective on researching fairy tales calls for a systematic and comprehensive methodology which allows the analysis of texts to be carried out at all linguistic levels since in texts all levels of the language system are intricately intertwined. This means that when a writer/speaker chooses certain grammatical or lexical forms over others, different meanings are realized. An important concept here is what Fowler calls the "ideological point of view of a text". He defines it as the "set of values or belief systems, communicated by the

language of the text.” (Fowler, 1986, p. 130). So, in order to reveal the textual elements that can serve as pointers to a writer’s worldview and therefore to a culture’s worldview and its predominant ideologies, I base my research methodology on the following theoretical assumptions and positions:

1. Adopting M.A.C Halliday’s seminal theory, I view language as social semiotic. In brief, Halliday argues that except for a few concepts whose meaning is natural (e.g. colour words), most meanings in a language encode social, economic, technological and theoretical needs of a given culture. A language not only reflects the ideas and notions typical of the culture that uses it, but it is also an effective means of their creation, formation and reproduction. (Cf. Halliday, 2007) In Fowler’s words “this theory opens the way for an analysis of the formal structure of any text as encoding and constituting a version of reality. ” (Fowler, 1986, pp. 21-22)

2. I also adopt a discourse perspective on narrative, meaning that a narrative text is viewed from the prism of linguistic interaction and so attention is paid to the structural elements of a text which are connected with the participants in the communicative act, the actions they perform through uttering/writing the texts and the contexts, including the broader cultural context within which discourse takes place. After all, stories are always told to make a point and to transmit a message which often is a kind of moral evaluation or implied critical judgment that can account for the communicative purpose of the whole text.

3. The definition of worldview employed in the current study is that of Alan Dundes and can be defined as “the way people perceive the world and its place in it” (Bronner, 2007, p. 194). As such it is made up of building blocks that he refers to as folk ideas (also as cultural axioms, existential postulates) which in Dundes’ words can be defined as traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of humanity, of the world, and of life in the world. Thus worldview as a notion is highly structured and following Hoebel can be said to have a dual structure consisting of (Hoebel’s terms) existential postulates and normative postulates or values. (Bronner, 2007)

4. Related to the notion of worldview is that of ideology, which is of major research interest in many postmodernist narratology studies. Ideology might be a term associated with the holding of fallacious and distorted perspectives on reality by a community. However, following Fowler and Herman and Bart I’ll take a more neutral view on the notion to define it a system of norms, ideas, beliefs and categories by reference to which a person or a society comprehends the world (Fowler, 1986), (Herman & Bart, 2007). In this milder sense the concepts of ideology and worldview overlap and for the purposes of this report I will choose to use the terms interchangeably.

Ideology/worldview is actively present in any text, as languages do not reflect reality neutrally; rather, they encompass a given culture’s ideas about how the world is arranged. In addition, according to Fowler, consistent stylistic choices signify particular distinctive ordering of experience, i.e. different outlooks on the world. Thus, as he claims, “the significance of linguistic structures in literature is a function of the relationship between textual construction and the social, institutional and ideological conditions of its production and reception”. (Fowler, 1986). This view I adopt as fundamental for my research as well.

In brief, the methodology I have come up with to analyse a larger corpus of fairy tales is based on value and ideology-oriented research in narratology and fairy tale studies by considering the broader theoretical frameworks mentioned above. (Levorato, 2003), (Jouve, 2001), (Toolan, 2007) I adopt a two-stratum structuralist and narratological approach and look at the worldview expressed in a text first at the story level and then at the level of discourse/narration. The story level is the most abstract level of analysis as defined by structuralists and the elements to be investigated at it include actions/events, actants, setting in time and space. All these elements are usually studied through binary oppositions. Worldview and the level of narration include the linguistic investigation of elements such as characterization, focalization and transitivity analysis.

## 2. Research design and corpus

The object of research of the current study are three English fairy tales - *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Jack the Giant Killer* and *Jack and His Magic Snuffbox* in the version narrated by Joseph Jacobs in *English Fairy Tales* (Jacobs, 1980). The choice is justified by the fact that Jacobs's collections were the first in Britain to contain texts collected mainly in England and distributed to the English community (with a few exceptions of texts borrowed from Irish and Scottish sources), as well as the first aimed at children. Despite the fact that the collection was first published much later than similar ones in Europe, it can be claimed that Joseph Jacobs acted in the likeness of his predecessors in Europe. To cite Jacobs himself: "In putting these tales together, I have acted on the same principles as in the preceding volume, which has already, I am happy to say, established itself as a kind of English Grimm". (Jacobs, 2002, p. 189). All three tales are tales of magic according to the Aarne-Thomson-Uther classification system and all three of them are hero tales, part of a bigger circle of tales known as Jack's tales. The versions of all three tales in the collection display differences from previous ones which were distributed at earlier periods mainly as chapbooks. The changes in the texts as well as the linguistic choices made then must be significant and it can be assumed that the collector/rewriter both influences the formation of language traditions and draws heavily upon them.

For the purposes of the current study, I look only at the structural and linguistic choices related to the actants and the representation of places and time in the story, i.e. only the first level of analysis is realized. I carry it out in several steps:

1. First, I look at the actants using the actantial model developed by A. J. Greimas. It is usually used to break down an action down into six actants or roles: (1) the subject, (2) an object, (3) a sender, (4) a receiver, (5) a helper and (6) an opponent. It is undoubtedly a model based on the one proposed by Propp, and I see it as more appropriate for my analysis as it seems not to be so much corpus dependent as that of Propp's.

The six actants are divided into 3 binary pairs and there are axes of opposition between them: the axis of desire; the axis of power and the axis of transmission. A graphical representation of the model can be seen in figure 1.

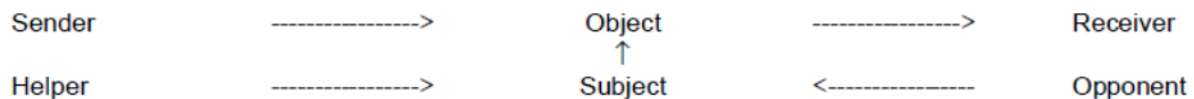


Fig. 1 The Actantial Model

This model is also convenient because an actant does not always have to correspond to the idea of the character in the traditional sense of the term. From an ontological point of view, an actant may correspond to: (1) an anthropomorphic being (for example, a human, an animal, a talking sword, etc.) (2) a concrete, inanimate element, including things (such as a sword), although not limited to the concrete (such as the wind, the distance to be traveled), (3) a concept (courage, hope, freedom, etc.). An actant may be individual or collective (Hebert, 2020).

2. In addition, at the level of the story, I compare the settings in time and space and look at the oppositions that appear in the text.

3. I include the evidence present in the texts in comparison tables and summarise the results.

## 3. Findings and discussion

### 3.1. Actants

All three stories are hero tales and in this respect they involve a quest. All three start from an initial situation of some type of a lack or a problem, as most fairy tales do. In *Jack and the Beanstalk* the problem is imminent poverty in the literal sense of the word as the family cow ceases to give milk. In *Jack the Giant-Killer* we are initially immersed in a world full of terror and suffering as a giant wreaks havoc in the towns in villages in a specific area. In the third of the examined tales, *Jack and his Golden Snuff-box*, the lack may be called social poverty: the hero is

only in the company of his parents, he “never saw any other people in his life” but knows there is more, as he has books to read. So in all three of the tales, the hero is sent off on the quest or decides to go in order to obtain something or to resolve the lack or the problem.

From this vantage point, the actantial model applied to the three tales reveals some interesting findings. Table 1 summarizes the actant roles in the three fairy tales from the point of view of the primary action.

Table 1. Greimas’ actant model for the three tales primary action

Tale	Actant class	Actant name/ontological concept
<b>Jack and the Beanstalk</b>	Subject	Jack
	Object	Wealth, higher status in society
	Sender	Mother/ Jack himself
	Receiver	Mother/ Jack
	Helper	Giant’s wife
	Opponent	Giant
	<b>Jack and His Golden Snuff-box</b>	Subject
Object		Marriage; higher status; inclusion
Sender		1. Jack himself (initial situation) 2. The princess’s father
Receiver		1. Jack (marriage; higher status) 2. Princess’s father
Helper		The Mouse king; The king of the frogs; The King of the fowls; the three little men from the snuff-box ; the mouse; the eagle; the little frog
Opponent		The valet?
<b>Jack the Giant-killer</b>		Subject
	Object	Treasure and wealth; knighthood; a wife of noble descent
	Sender	Jack himself
	Receiver	Jack
	Helper	Magic objects retrieved from one of the giants
	Opponent	Giants

What can be noticed from the data in the table is that while the Subject is the main hero, which can be expected from hero tales of quest, the Object is not a princess as it can be expected from European tales of magic nor is marriage a primary goal guiding the action. Rather, the heroes in all three tales strive for increasing their personal and family wealth. Another desired result is the rise in the social hierarchy and the receipt of a higher status achieved primarily through one’s deeds and exploits. In fact it is only in one of the tales, *Jack and his Golden Snuff-box* that the hero starts the quest in order to meet women and presumably to marry. In the other two tales marriage does take place but it is mentioned as a transitory remark at the end of the stories and is not a primary initial goal.

Another interesting similarity is the fact that the hero himself is in the role of the Sender which means they go on the quest driven by personal motivation. In *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Jack disobeys his mother to start his journey. In *Jack and his Golden Snuff-box*, Jack starts his adventures one day as his father is away cutting wood and he tells his mother: “I see nothing at all here but great trees around me; and if I stay here, maybe I shall go mad before I see anything.” (Jacobs, 1980, p. 52). In the third tale, the hero seizes the opportunity to go on a journey one day as he is in town and the magistrates are discussing the situation with the giant attacking the region. Jack then approaches them saying: “What reward will be given to the man who kills Cormoran?” and after the answer “the giant’s treasure”, he retorts: “Then let me undertake it.” (Jacobs, 1980, p. 64).

In contrast, the opponents in the three tales are fierce or cunning but somewhat passive victims of the heroes’ exploits. In two of the tales where the opponents are giants, they are represented as brutish and cannibalistic which certainly sets them outside the limits of the civilized world and this fact might serve as a sufficient motive for stealing from them or murdering them. In the tale of *Jack and his Golden Snuffbox* there isn’t really an opponent, for the valet who steals Jack’s castle has only a very marginal role for the sake of the action. Accordingly, Jack the hero in all three tales is both an active Receiver and a Beneficiary of his actions which ultimately lead to the obtaining of the desired Object.

### 3.2. Setting in time and space

The setting of time and space is an important element of analysis at the story level. Although in most fairy tales both time and setting are unspecified and are general enough since the tales’ power rests in their generic truth, there seem to be some important clues in the texts that can reveal

the worldview expressed in them. When we compare the data from the three tales, interesting patterns start to emerge. Table 2 summarizes some of the findings.

Table 2 Setting in time and space

Tale	Time	Space	
		Home	New places
Jack and the Beanstalk	Unspecified; once upon a time	A village; market; parish; A cottage; A small room upstairs	The giant's world Situating up Distance (signaled by repetition- Jack climbed x 7; and he walked along x 3) A long broad straight road A great big tall house
		-FOOD One day Milky way gave no milk No supper (on the evening Jack got back with the beans); hungry as a hunter + POVERTY	+FOOD - a junk of bread and cheese and a jug of milk -POVERTY – collocations with gold/golden
Jack and his Golden Snuff-box	Unspecified; ONCE UPON A TIME, and a very good time it was, though it was neither in my time nor in your time nor in anyone else's time	A great forest; great big trees around; blocked vision - people; +books	Wonderful sight A great castle Travel through space/distance
		-FOOD not enough food (choice between a small cake and a blessing or big cake and a curse)	+FOOD (e.g. plenty to eat, good meat and bread and beer) +good meal and bed (many times) +good company + good entertainment +conversation
Jack the Giant Killer	King Arthur's reign	Cornwall/Mount of Cornwall/ Town-hall; magistrates; council	Different locations - Giant's castles and abodes - Enchanted castles in the woods - West of England - The principality of Wales
		Despair (from the giant's exploits)	Treasure/gold/silver/magic objects/A noble castle and a beautiful estate + food and entertainment

In terms of space, as it can be noticed from the table, there is a marked opposition between home space and new places and between proximity and distance. Home is associated with some kind of lack or deprivation which also corresponds with the idea of lack or a problem that drives the action forward. In *Jack and his Golden Snuff-box* home is in the woods and there is the idea of blocked vision and opportunities. Often, home is a place where food is scarce (e.g. in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Jack and his Golden Snuff-box*). In contrast, the new places are associated with abundance be it treasure, plentiful food or good company and entertainment. In addition, new places in all three tales can be associated with the ideas of greatness, long roads that have to be travelled, beautiful scenery/settings and in addition they bear the idea of positive experiences that adventure can lead to.

As for time, fairy tales often take place in an unspecified time period and two of the tales in my corpus are typical examples of the rule. However, *Jack the Giant Killer* is set in a specific historical period, namely the reign of King Arthur, which is an archetypal setting of medieval romances and is often associated with great adventures and feats, knighthood and valor.

### 3.3. Discussion of the results

The analysis of the data at the story level suggests a worldview where the value of being opportunistic is held in high regard. All three tales read as stories of adventure and reward with a special emphasis on how adventure can lead to character development while creating opportunity. The messages that risk-taking and hard work can eventually pay off can be discerned even at this very first level of analysis. One can definitely notice a contextual relationship between the worldview represented in the stories and the discursive environment, i.e. Britain in the Victorian Era and the socio-political ideas of colonialism. The idea of the self-made man, i.e. someone who achieves success with his own hard work in order to come up the social, economic or financial ladder was a very important one in the Victorian era. (Tyrrel, 1970). This correlates with the value of social mobility as part of the worldview of the tales - all three Jacks manage to outgrow their circumstances at birth and achieve a higher status and wealth at the end of the tales. Thus material success is elevated into a cultural value, something important to strive for in order to cross the social boundaries of a class society. At the same time, the opposition barbarism-civilization seen

in the power axis is based on colonial ideology and serves as a justification of the deeds done by the heroes.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, even though the analysis is only at the first and basic level from a narratological point view, a certain ideology or worldview can be identified in the collector's/author's choices of arranging actants along the opposition axes as well as in representing time and space. Further analysis at the level of discourse/narration can reveal even a broader picture of the worldview and values expressed in the text. An important fact to stress is that traditionally, English fairy and folk tales rarely have an explicit moral at the end of the text unlike, for example, local Bulgarian traditions, so a more robust analysis can reveal a richer picture of the value systems present in the texts. At an even further stage of analysis, a diachronic study of tales' variants could answer an important question: To what extent are value systems expressed through the tales universal and to what extent do they correspond to the sociopolitical situations typical of their respective contextual environments?

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