

Fairy-Tale as a Genre

Ketevan SIKHARULIDZE*

Abstract

The article reviews a significant and popular genre of folklore – a fairy-tale. It discusses the main characteristics, composition and solid structure of a fairy-tale as a genre, which is found in the folklore of different nations. This phenomenon is scientifically well studied both in Europe and the US. Confrontation of kindness and evil becomes extremely acute and its didactic function is often related to this issue. The problematic issue related to translation of fairy-tales is also mentioned in the article.

Key words: folklore, fairy-tale, genre, structure.

A fairy-tale occupies one of the prominent places in the folk arts, as it fully expresses peculiarities of people's artistic thinking, its ideals and aspirations. A fairy-tale is an oral story and it is based on an artistic fiction. It is ancient, but it is impossible to say exactly when the first fairy-tale was created. However, we can say one thing for sure: the composition which we call a magic fairy-tale today had already existed in the fund of literature of people of the 2nd millennium B.C. and its content has not been largely changed over so many centuries. This is an old Egyptian fairy-tale about two brothers.

Origin of the fairy-tale, its history is lost in the depth of the past like the history of other genres of oral literature. Folklore (meaning "people's wisdom") had been orally created during centuries and orally transferred from generation to generation. Therefore, we do not have a trustworthy document of when, how, and under what conditions this or that genre originated, what way of formation it went through until it reached us in the given form.

Mythology was an oral history for people. It became the basis of religious rituals and defined the lifestyle of society (it was believed that the story had already happened), while a fairy-tale is a fiction, invented story. It belongs to a prose (narrative) genre and is based on artistic fiction. However simple it may seem, interest towards a fairy-tale has never faded.

At a glance, a fairy-tale is an entertaining story, but it was also attached a didactic function and was used to learn something. It was related to wisdom to a certain extent. For example, in some fairy-tales the hero of the fairy-tale is tested by narrating such a fairy-tale which has never been heard before. In case of success, the hero acquires the royal power. Initially, a fairy-tale did not have any ritualistic purpose, but over the time, an opinion was formed that it could be narrated only in the evening, otherwise the narrator's family would suffer from lack of wealth.

A fairy-tale is the most diverse among the genres of

oral literature, so it became necessary to demarcate the compositions of this kind and distinguish its sub-genres. These are: magic fairy-tale, animal fairy-tales and everyday-realistic fairy-tales. Scientific research has revealed that fairy-tale eposes of the world people are based on homogenous units – motives and despite the external diversity of these stories, their basic material is homogenous. This led to formation of catalogues of fairy-tale motives, which are successfully used by folklorists (Aarne-Thompson, 1961). It is noteworthy that a magic fairy-tale has the most sustainable structure in this entire mosaic. It has strictly defined the laws which are repeated in all stories. The Russian scientist V. Propp studied a magic fairy-tale and showed that it has a strictly defined structure (Propp, 1984:33). The American edition of his book gave a strong impetus to structural-typological study of a fairy-tale in America, where the ground had already been prepared by the activities of structural linguists. The most significant work about structural analysis of a fairy-tale is the monograph of Alan Dundes (Dundes, 1964).

When was a fairy-tale created? Who was the first to narrate it? It is impossible to answer this question, as this process was not recorded and it has not been saved in the memory of people. It is thought that a fairy-tale was originated as a result of desacralization of the myth, but the mythic motives acquired a totally different appearance in the new genre (Meletinsky, 1970: 132-148).

The source of creation of a fairy-tale is everyday life, experience of people and their fantasy, aspiration towards miracles. Magic occupies a certain place in the magic fairy-tale, but if we look closer, we will see the reality alongside with the fantasy.

Who is a hero of the magic fairy-tale? Heroes of myths are gods who act by divine force and resolve all issues on their own, while the hero of a magic fairy-tale is an ordinary human. Though he is distinguished from others by special features (he has golden curly hair, has a special physical

* An Associated Professor at International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia;

E-mail: ksikharulidze@ibsu.edu.ge

strength, grows up day-by-day, while others grow year-by-year etc.), but he is still an ordinary human, no matter whether he is a son of a peasant or a king. As it is common for a heroic story, he fights with dragons, monsters and other evils, but his heroism is still conditional, as he would not be able to overcome obstacles if he were left alone. The magic fairy-tale hero is dependent on external forces. He mainly follows the advice and instructions of others. He is helped by a helper or he finds magic things and achieves success by means of these things. But it should be mentioned that the hero of a magic fairy-tale always embodies kindness. That's why the fate smiles upon him and he is never left alone. Anybody who would provide real help to the hero would be always found.

If we look attentively, we will notice that all magic fairy-tales follow the same pattern and resemble each other. The fairy-tale narrator uses a scheme formed a long time ago and makes only slight changes to the plot (prop). The narrator is restricted here, can not reveal his individual character, as this will interfere with the structure of the fairy-tale. Therefore, fairy-tale narration seems to be simple, as an already prepared scheme is repeated and it is complicated as well because the narrator has to be very careful not to violate the accepted tradition and make the listener (not the reader!!!) interested at the same time. This must have required great experience of the narrator.

Despite the diversity of the content, a magic fairy-tale has a simple and almost homogenous composition. Their content can be brought to one form: the hero appears in a dangerous situation for various reasons and then is requested to perform difficult tasks. He overcomes all difficulties with the help of magic objects or a helper, acquires the beauty and the royal crown. The fairy-tale ends up with the hero's marriage and the fairy-tale is not interested in his further life any more. Nothing special is expected there, because there is no aim any more (Kiknadze, 2006:34-43). This is the main scheme of a magic fairy-tale. The story will continue only if the marriage is not final and the hero loses his love and goes to find her. Such a move may be repeated even three times in one fairy-tale, but all of them are the same and not different from others by anything. It is necessary for the hero to leave his home (own land) for the development of the plot of the fairy-tale.

In all magic fairy-tales the hero goes "outside", where he is met by his enemies, but he also finds friends, helpers, obtains magic objects and, most importantly, defeats evil. At the end of the fairy-tale the hero gets married with the daughter of the king, the beauty, which is the necessary condition for him to become a king (Kurdovanidze, 2002: 64). Leaving home and marriage are the two margins between which the storyline of the magic fairy-tale develops. These stories entertained the listeners very much and at the same time facilitated the development of cognition and fantasy. There are many strained episodes in the fairy-tale,

but nonetheless the narration flows in a calm and natural manner.

Today a fairy-tale is included in the category of children's literature, though we cannot say for sure whether it had been this way initially. It is thought that in the past it was intended for adults as well. Folklore performed the function of literature for illiterate people. A fairy-tale enriches imagination of children and helps them in their perception of the universe. By means of a fairy-tale, a child learns what kindness and helping others are and that kindness always defeats the evil.

As we can see, the magic fairy-tale hero embodies kindness. He seems to be looking for his own fate, but the kindness obtained by him is universal, as the representative of evil is the enemy not only for himself, but for people in general and he brings relief to society by defeating the evil. By this and many other elements (among them, by the world vision), the ideology of European magic fairy-tales is related to Christianity. If we had not known for sure that a fairy-tale was created in ancient times, we would have thought that it is a creation of the Christian culture. However, the Christian ideology also contributed to the formation of the fairy-tale in Europe in this form over the time (Gogiashvili, 2011). Therefore, a fairy-tale does not contradict Christianity. On the contrary, it seems to prepare an adolescent for the cognition of Christian literature. Many children in the elementary school still live in the world of fairy-tales. As they grow, they become acquainted with a more serious literature, however, the love of fairy-tales remains with many of them for a long time.

As we have mentioned, all magic fairy-tales resemble each other. In all of them confrontation of kindness and evil and victory of kindness are presented. Therefore, selecting a magic fairy-tale eligible for children does not require great efforts. As for the animal and everyday fairy-tales, adults have to be thoughtful. There are many violent episodes in animal fairy-tales (skinning alive, falling into the abyss, etc.). I think we should avoid reading/telling such stories to little children to prevent the development of aggression or phobias in them (aggravated aggression is, unfortunately, noticed in modern youth). Everyday-realistic fairy-tales should also be selected for children with care. Attention should be paid to the moral-aesthetic side of the fairy-tale. The fairy-tales where clergymen are caricatured (this motive is the trace of atheism in such fairy-tales) can form a wrong idea about the clergymen and religious issues to the child.

When translating fairy-tales, translators sometimes make some changes to them, so that the elements of a different culture do not make the text unclear for children of various nationalities. Soviet translators particularly accentuated these issues and moral-ethical aspects of fairy-tales. They made certain changes to the content to mitigate cruelty and not to cause negative emotions in children. As an

example we can provide an English fairy-tale “The Three Piglets”, which was adapted by a Russian poet, Sergey Mikhalkov. According to the original text, a wolf ate two piglets, while the third took advantage of the wolf, threw it into boiling water and ate it for supper. The situation is mitigated in Mikhalkov’s translation. All three piglets stay alive and the scalded (but alive) wolf runs away. Ideologically, this translation criticizes laziness and negligence, therefore, it has a didactic nature. Despite the fact that the exact translation of this fairy-tale performed by M. Klyagina-Kondratyeva existed (English Folk Tales, 1957), Mikhalkov’s version gained a great popularity.

A fairy-tale is one of the traditional genres of folklore, formed during centuries, which contributed greatly to the development of literature, but it exhausted its creative supplies after a certain period of time. Epochal changes brought other mentality and other demands. The process of creation of fairy-tales was terminated under the influence of this and other factors. Modernity could not have made any change to the fairy-tale, as a completed system, without violating the rules of the genre. So it was left unchanged, as the relics of the past. As for innovations, making the characters and situations modern, these are signs of a literary fairy-tale, which has a concrete author and is the genre of literature, not of folklore. The written by an author fairy-tale acquired its features and was formed as a rather interesting genre, in most cases of allegoric nature. A special place among literary genres is occupied by the English literary fairy-tales, which have their specific features. That is why it arouses a great interest not only among readers, but also among scientists. One of the peculiarities of the English literary fairy-tale as a genre is that it is intended not only for children, but also for adults. Such fairy-tales are, for example, “The King of the Golden River, or Black Brothers” by John Ruskin, “The Ring and the Rose” by William Thackeray, “Star Boy” by Oscar Wilde, “Cold Iron” by *Rudyard* Kipling, and “Winnie-the-Pooh” by A. Milne.

The world of a magic fairy-tale is an unreal world. “Once upon a time” – all English magic fairy-tales begin this way. “There was once ...” – this is the typical beginning of Georgian fairy-tales, which clearly points to the fact that the narrated story is taken beyond the time and space. Time does not move in a magic fairy-tale. The characters’ age does not change. The genre peculiarity of a magic fairy-tale is that it seems that nothing serious happens in it, everything is done lightly as if it were a game. Even death is not taken seriously here, as the listener knows that the hero will resuscitate by all means. A fairy-tale does not know real suffering, faces distorted by grief, nothing which could have been perceived as mundane and broken the illusion of irreality. The universe of a fairy-tale is above the time. Everybody is equal here – the son of the king and the goose breeder. It is the universe which cannot exist on

the earth. Maybe that is why a person who finds himself in an uncommon and pleasant environment compares it to a fairy-tale (“feeling like being in a fairy-tale”).

Indefiniteness of time and space are genre signs of a fairy-tale, the story is disconnected from everyday life. The fairy-tale does not tell us anything about the fight and victory of any layer of society or its social condition. The changes occurred in us cannot be reflected by a fairy-tale due to its genre peculiarity. The action takes place in the unreal world. Nothing connects it with the specific environment, with the historic reality of this or that nation and possibly did not connect tens of centuries ago.

References:

- Aarne A. , Thompson S. (1961). The types of the folktales. A classification and Bibliography. Second Revision, Helsinki: Academia ScientiarumFennica
- Dundes A. (1964). Morphology of North American Indian Folktales. Folklore Fellows Communications 195. Helsinki,Academia ScientiarumFennica
- English Folk Tales (1957). Moscow
- Gogiasvili E. (2011). The Dynamic of mythical and Religious Symbolism in the Structure of Magic Tale, Tbilisi
- Kiknadze Z. (2006). Georgian Folklore, Tbilisi
- Kurdovanidze T. (2002). Georgian Folktales, Tbilisi
- Kurdovanidze T. (2000). The index of Georgian folktales plot types: systematic directory, according to the system of Aarne-Thompson, Tbilisi
- Meletinski E. (1970). Myth and fairy-tale. Folklore and Ethnography, Moscow
- Propp V. (1984). Morphology of Magic Tale, Tbilisi