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RIVOJLANISHINING ASOSIY
YO’NALISHLARI: MUAMMO VA YECHIMLAR”



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**ZAMONAVIY GUMANITAR TA’LIMNING DOLZARB
MUAMMOLARI**

**THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ANIMAL IMAGERY IN ENGLISH
AND UZBEK FOLKTALES**

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Annotation: This article investigates the mythological, cultural, and literary importance of animal imagery—with special attention to the wolf—in both English and Uzbek folktales. Within Turkic mythology and Uzbek oral heritage, the wolf is honored as a sacred totem symbolizing bravery, protection, leadership, and spiritual strength. The research explores the mythic origins, folk rituals, linguistic representations, and narrative functions of the wolf by analyzing tales such as “*The Hungry Wolf*” and “*The Lame Wolf*.¹” It further compares the symbolic roles of the wolf in English and Uzbek traditions, revealing its dual nature as a guardian and a threat. Through comparative and typological analysis, the study illustrates how animal imagery embodies cultural morals, social values, and artistic expression. The results show that figures like the wolf possess not only poetic and folkloric relevance but also deep psychological and cultural resonance across different societies.

Key words: wolf imagery, Uzbek folktales, English folktales, totemism, mythology, symbolism, animal characters, folklore, comparative literature, cultural heritage.

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуется мифологическое, культурное и литературное значение зооморфных образов — с особым акцентом на образ волка — в английских и узбекских народных сказках. В тюркской мифологии и узбекском устном наследии волк почитается как священное тотемное существо, олицетворяющее мужество, защиту, лидерство и духовную силу. В исследовании рассматриваются мифологические истоки, народные обряды, языковые выражения и повествовательные функции образа волка на примере таких сказок, как «Голодный волк» и «Хромой волк». Также проводится сопоставление символических ролей волка в английских и узбекских традициях, что позволяет выявить его двойственную природу — как защитника и противника. Посредством сравнительного и типологического анализа показано, что образы животных воплощают культурные ценности, моральные идеалы и художественные традиции. Результаты исследования демонстрируют, что такие персонажи, как волк, имеют не только поэтическое и фольклорное значение, но и глубокий психологический и культурный смысл в различных обществах.

Ключевые слова: образ волка, узбекские народные сказки, английские народные сказки, тотемизм, мифология, символизм, зооморфные персонажи, фольклор, сравнительное литературоведение, культурное наследие.

Among the Turkic peoples, the Uzbeks have long revered the wolf as a sacred totemic creature. This veneration is reflected in numerous genealogical legends in which various clans trace their ancestry to a mythical she-wolf. Consequently, within Turkic mythology, the wolf is traditionally portrayed as a positive and noble figure. Over centuries, however, its mythological, social, and ethnic symbolism has undergone transformation and diversification.

In Nasimkhan Rakhmonov’s *The Turkic Khaganate*, a well-known legend recounts the origin of the Turks through a wolf myth:

“The ancestors of the Turks who lived on the western coast of the sea were exterminated by neighboring tribes. A surviving boy, about ten years old, was rescued and cared for by a she-wolf. She became his wife and protected him from hunger and enemies by fleeing to the Turfan mountains. There, in a cave, she gave birth to ten sons, whose father was the saved Turk. These wolf-descendants later married women from Turfan, each founding a new clan.”

By the 6th century, the terms *wolf* and *khan* had become nearly synonymous among the ancient Turks. For this reason, early Turkic banners often displayed the image of a wolf’s head. The wolf motif also appeared in personal names and titles of rulers and heroes—such as the character *Bo‘riboy* (“Son of the Wolf”) from the epic *Alpomish*.

In early Turkic inscriptions, the term for “wolf” appears in multiple variants—*bo‘ri*, *bo‘ru*, *ko‘r bo‘ri*, *kurt*, *ko‘k kurt*, *ko‘k yalli kurt*, and *bozkurt*. To their ancestors, the wolf represented far more than an animal: it was a divine protector, progenitor, guide, and savior—an embodiment of courage, loyalty, and spiritual power.

Within the oral traditions of Turkic tribes, the wolf totem was glorified as a leader and defender of the people. In the epic *O‘g‘uznoma*, for instance, the wolf acts as a key figure guiding and protecting the tribe, symbolizing care and unity.

In Uzbek folklore, this deep-rooted tradition produced both positive and negative portrayals of the wolf. Among Uzbeks, certain customs reveal its continued totemic significance. To safeguard infants from evil spirits or premature death, newborns were sometimes wrapped in a wolf’s pelt or passed through its jawbones. Similarly, infertile women wore a wolf’s tooth around their waist, believing in its power to bring fertility and protection.

As D. Uraeva observes, the Turkic peoples saw the wolf as a guardian not only in earthly life but also in the afterlife. During mourning rituals, they would “entrust” the souls of the dead to the spirit of the wolf—howling like wolves and imitating their behavior as part of symbolic rites.

Over time, however, the sacred and heroic image of the wolf gradually diminished. No longer viewed as divine, brave, or loyal, the wolf began to be depicted as a ferocious, greedy, and malevolent creature. This shift is most evident

in later folktales, where figures such as the “Hungry Wolf,” “Greedy Wolf,” “Lame Wolf,” and “Wolf Girl” came to represent its darker, more predatory side.

There are two known versions of the Uzbek folk tale titled **“The Hungry Wolf”** (*Och bo‘ri*). According to the story, once there was a very hungry wolf. One day, the wolf saw a rooster pecking at grain. Seizing the opportunity, the wolf decided to catch the rooster.

Just as the rooster spread its wings and shouted “Kak-kak!”, the wolf leapt forward and bit down on the rooster’s wing. The rooster found itself tightly held in the wolf’s jaws. The rooster then asked the wolf what he intended to do. The wolf replied that he was going to eat him.

The rooster cleverly said, “If you eat me like this, you won’t enjoy it at all. If you’re going to eat me, at least do it with some coriander and onions—have a proper meal!”

Believing this, the wolf let go of the rooster and went off in search of coriander and onions. As soon as the wolf left, the rooster flapped its wings and flew away.

It is evident that in this tale, the wolf is portrayed as extremely naive, gullible, uneducated, and lacking in understanding.

In another version of the “*Hungry Wolf*” tale, it is said that once upon a time, there was an old man and an old woman who had a piebald cow. One day, the old man said to the old woman:

“Hey, old woman, take some flour from the piebald sack and some fat from the piebald cow, and bake a small round bread.”

The old woman followed his instructions, made a round loaf using the flour and the fat, and brought it to the table. Just as the old man and woman were about to eat it, the round bread jumped up and ran away.

The old couple chased after it but could not catch it. Then a horseman and a camel driver also tried to catch the loaf but failed. Eventually, a cunning fox managed to catch it. The fox ate the inside of the loaf and gave the remaining part to a hungry shepherd in exchange for a lamb. The shepherd became angry with the fox.

The fox, it turned out, had a wolf as a friend. The wolf happened to meet the fox and, seeing the lamb, was overjoyed and ate it. The fox, now seeking revenge, devised a plan. At home, it dug a pit in the middle of its house, filled it with coal embers, and covered the pit with a thin wooden stick, laid a mat over it, and finally placed a blanket on top.

That day, the fox cooked the lamb’s head in a pot. Then it went to invite its friend the wolf to a feast. At first, the wolf refused, saying he was feeling unwell. But the fox insisted and eventually brought the wolf to its house. As planned, the wolf stepped onto the covered pit and fell in. All its fur burned off, and only flesh remained on its body. The wolf, though severely burned, managed to crawl out of the pit and realized the fox had fled.

The wolf lay in pain between two hills. The fox, now in a different disguise, approached and asked how the wolf was doing. The wolf replied: *“I had a fox friend. I ate his lamb. He tricked me, threw me into a fire pit, and ran away. Now I am suffering badly.”*

The fox, pretending to be a healer, advised the wolf to run through thorn bushes to heal its wounds. Believing the fox again, the wolf stood up and ran through the thorns. The sharp branches tore into its wounded body, causing it immense pain. The wolf collapsed from exhaustion.

The next day, the fox returned again in another disguise and asked the wolf how it was. The wolf told the whole story. The fox replied:

“Those were mountain foxes. We are steppe foxes. They don’t know how to heal. But I do.”

Then, pretending to check the wolf’s pulse, the fox advised the wolf to roll in ashes. The wolf rolled in the ashes, but the fine particles got into its wounds, causing unbearable pain. The wolf screamed in agony.

The following day, the fox returned once again, this time in yet another disguise, and introduced itself as a house fox. It advised the wolf: *“Break the ice on the river, take a bowl, and pour water over your head. That will cure you.”*

Then the fox ran off. The wolf followed the advice, took a bowl, broke the river ice, and sat on top of the frozen water, pouring cold water over itself. Soon, its entire body froze. As it tried to escape, it couldn’t get up, and its tail became stuck to the ice. Unable to move, the wolf froze to death with a stiff grin on its face.

When the fox came back and found the dead wolf, it said:

“You fool. You never gave up your wickedness. If you had, you wouldn’t be lying here dead”. Then the fox walked away.

Among the Uzbek people, it is a long-standing tradition to name a newborn child—especially a boy—after the wolf, with names such as Bo‘ri, Bo‘riboy, Bo‘rinoso, Bo‘ritosh, Bo‘rixol, and Bo‘rigul. This practice stems from the belief that the wolf would protect the child from death and misfortune. Such names were thought to possess protective powers, safeguarding the individual from evil. This cultural belief is also reflected in the names of characters in Uzbek folktales. For example, in the tale “The Hero of the Land of the Sun”, a character named Bo‘ri kosa (Wolf Elder) appears.

There are many traditional beliefs among Uzbeks associated with the wolf totem. For instance, to protect a newborn from premature death or calamity, it was customary to wrap the child in a wolf’s skin, pass the baby through a wolf’s jaw, or for infertile women to wear a wolf’s tooth tied around their waist. These customs clearly demonstrate the totemic reverence for the wolf.

The word bo‘ri (wolf) also appears in various idiomatic expressions in the Uzbek language. One such phrase is “bo‘ri boqmoq” or “bo‘ri qarash qilmoq”, which refers to someone giving another person a fierce, threatening, or predatory look—“as if ready to devour them.”

Similarly, the phrase “Bo‘ri yeydimi?” (literally: Will a wolf eat it?) is used to mean “What are you afraid of?”, expressing disbelief or dismissiveness toward fear or hesitation. It is evident that in this tale, the wolf is depicted as a mystical and magical being who assists humans. In this context, the wolf acts as a totemic figure, providing direct aid to the protagonists of the fairy tale and playing a key role in ensuring their victory. In fact, throughout history, humans have viewed powerful and potentially dangerous creatures—such as lions, tigers, wolves, foxes, and

snakes—as beings stronger than themselves, and have sought support or protection from them. Such beliefs are reflected in the recurring motifs of the wolf cult in folk tales.

The wolf is one of the recurring allegorical characters in Uzbek animal-based metaphorical tales. With its distinctive character traits, the wolf serves a specific aesthetic and ideological function within the narrative structure of the tale. In this regard, the wolf often appears as a symbol of foolish, ignorant, arrogant, or tyrannical palace officials or authority figures.

In magical and fantastical tales, the wolf is portrayed as a shapeshifting being, capable of transforming into a golden bird, a beautiful maiden, or a magical flying horse. For example, in the tale *“The Lame Wolf”*, the wolf is depicted as a wondrous creature that spreads its wings and travels vast distances—covering four months' journey in just four leaps, or eight months' journey in eight leaps—essentially crossing these distances in the blink of an eye. Moreover, the wolf can speak like a human and provides guidance and advice to the protagonist (usually the youngest son), helping him along his journey.

In Uzbek folk tales, the hero often obtains magical, enchanted items and ultimately achieves his goals with the help of a mystical wolf. The wolf's ability to speak, offer wise counsel, show the right path, and appear or disappear mysteriously positions it as an “epic guardian” or tutelary figure within the folklore tradition.

It is well known that the extraordinary birth or origin of an epic hero is one of the traditional motifs found in the epics and folktales of many world cultures. In ancient myths, this motif is often expressed through the hero's emergence from a wolf. The origin of this motif lies in early mythological beliefs, according to which conception and birth were interpreted as resulting from the intervention of totemic animals or the reincarnation of ancestral spirits manifested in various forms and phenomena. Moreover, in global folklore and literary scholarship, the poetics and genesis of the wolf image, its formation in connection with mythological thinking, its role in both oral traditions and written literature, as well as its artistic evolution, typology, and symbolic meanings, have consistently attracted the attention of scholars—including both English and Uzbek researchers.

It should be noted that in literary works written in different linguistic systems—such as English and Uzbek—the image of the wolf is interpreted in various ways: sometimes humanized, sometimes portrayed as a loyal companion to humans, and other times as a rival or adversarial creature. When studied from a comparative perspective, such differences offer valuable insight into the development of this character, revealing the evolution of humanity's artistic and aesthetic consciousness and the spiritual-moral foundations embedded within.

There exists a wide range of literary works that feature the image of the wolf or the wolf-horse hybrid. A comparative-typological, thematic-aesthetic, ethno-folkloristic, and ethno-cultural analysis of these texts is essential for exploring the development, national peculiarities, and universal symbolism of the wolf figure in both Western and Eastern traditions. Such a study also allows for the identification of its poetic characteristics and symbolic meanings.

The literary portrayal of the wolf is not coincidental—it emerged in direct relation to the long history of human civilization and has undergone a unique process of artistic evolution. A comparative examination of this developmental trajectory within both world and Uzbek literary criticism contributes to identifying the shared cultural roots that have emerged through literary interaction between Western and Eastern creative traditions and civilizations.

In conclusion, animal characters simultaneously fulfill folkloric, didactic, psychological, poetic, and gender-related functions. They have evolved and transformed throughout the continuum of oral to written literature. In particular, in modern times, animal images have become effective artistic tools for exploring social issues, ecological awareness, and cultural diversity. As seen through the example of the wolf, animal figures open up multiple layers of symbolic meaning: they represent fear, temptation, wisdom, trials, and personal growth. Over time, the interpretation of these characters has become more nuanced and complex. However, their core function remains unchanged—to serve as artistic representations of human nature. Therefore, the study of animal imagery in English fairy tales from a scientific perspective is not only relevant within literary studies, but also offers valuable insights for fields such as cultural studies, psychology, anthropology, and gender research. It is a rich and fruitful area of interdisciplinary inquiry.

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