———. ed. 1977–1981. Enzyklopädie des Märchens. 11 vols. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, s.v. Erzähltypen (for tale type references); Freisemärchen (Marianne Rumpf); Freud, Sigmund (Elliot Oring); Herzmütter (Albert Gier); Künstler (Birgitta Hauser-Schaublin); Menschenfleisch wachsen (Christine Shoja-Jawar); Ogre (Thomas Gelder).
Identity Tests

Motifs Η0–Η199

Thompson introduces the section on Recognition Tests in the Motif-Index by saying, “Elaborate means are employed in folk-literature for the recognition of persons even though they have been separated a very short time.” In cases where people are not recognized by sight, identity must be proved through common knowledge (Η10), such as telling a story known to both persons concerned (Η11), telling one’s life history (Η11.1), ancestry (Η11.1.4), singing a song (Η12), or producing a token (Η80). Sometimes recognition occurs when a person’s conversation with objects or animals is overheard (AT 313, 533, 706, 870). There are, in addition, numerous other motifs of establishing identity and recognizing someone who has returned after an absence.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

In The Skillful Hunter (AT 304), a hero who has killed giants who were menacing a castle lies with a princess sleeping there. He takes something from her when he leaves, either a handkerchief or a ring. After her child is born, she is condemned to stay at an inn where all guests must tell their life stories. In time the hero comes, tells his story, and produces his token (Η80, “Identification by tokens”), and they marry (Thompson 1977, 34). This story thus combines two elements of recognition: telling one’s life story and producing a token.

Recognition can come about by seeing a scar (Η51; AT 314) or birthmark (Η51.1; AT 400, 850). An extremely famous example of the scar motif is in Book XIX of the Odyssey, when Odysseus returns home after twenty years.
and his old nurse, Eurycleia, washes his feet and sees the scar on his leg from the wound of a wild boar that he had hunted as a young man. The motif also occurs in the Thousand and One Nights and in Indonesian, Chinese, and North American (Ponca, Blackfoot, Eastern Cree) tales. In Book XXI, Odysseus is further able to prove his identity by bending his bow, which the suitors cannot do (H3.1.2, “Recognition by unique ability to bend bow”; D1651.1, “Only master able to bend bow”).

In some cases a royal pedigree is recognized when a person is unable to sleep on a bed that has a pea under its dozen mattresses (H41.1, “Princess on the pea”).

THE BROKEN TOKEN

A common theme of recognition is identification by matching parts of a divided token (H100), commonly a broken ring whose two parts fit together (H94.5, “Identification through broken ring. The two parts of the ring fit together”). In the ballad “Hind Horn” (Child 17), a man who has been away from the princess to whom he has been betrothed for seven years sees that the ring she gave him has turned pale, a sign that she has found another man. He returns home and arrives on her wedding day (N681, “Husband (lover) arrives home just as wife (mistress) is to marry another”). He disguises himself as a beggar and is unrecognized by the princess when he comes to the castle. She gives him a drink of wine and when he returns the cup to her he drops in the ring she had given him. She recognizes the ring and asks him where he got it. He tells her she herself gave it to him, and, recognizing him, she says she will follow him as a beggar. Child lists many analogues to this ballad, most having the motif of the ring, which is kept intact by the departing lover in some cases and broken in other cases, with each partner keeping one half. Versions occur in medieval stories (one written down in the first quarter of the thirteenth century) and romances from various parts of Europe including Russia and Greece (Child 1965, 187–208).

The broken token motif is also found in the tale of Bearskin (AT 361), an unusual example of a hero enlisting the aid of the devil (in most folktales the devil is an adversary). In exchange for living in a filthy beardskin for seven years, the devil provides the hero with an inexhaustible supply of money from a pocket in the beardskin. The hero helps an impoverished man with three daughters, two of whom treat him badly while the youngest is kind to him despite his appearance. At the end of seven years, the hero cleans himself, dresses in fine clothing, and goes back to the house of the three sisters, making himself known by the broken ring he had divided with the youngest. Thompson says this story “has been told frequently in literature since the

seventeenth century, but a strong oral tradition has also preserved the story. It is extraordinarily popular in the folklore of the Baltic states, of Sweden, Denmark, and Germany; and it is known over all parts of Europe” (1977, 65–66).

In a Chinese story called “Husband and Wife in This Life and in the Life to Come,” a man’s dead wife is reincarnated in a baby (T589.5, “Newborn child reincarnation of recently deceased person”). The baby keeps her right hand tightly clutch until she is seventeen years old, when the husband opens it and finds half a coin which makes a perfect whole with his own half (Eberhard 1965, 31–33).

Related to identification by tokens is S334, “Tokens of royalty (nobility) left with exposed child.” King Aegeus, the father of the Greek hero Theseus, leaves a sword and a pair of sandals under a rock as tokens, telling Aethra, the baby’s mother, that when the boy is strong enough to lift the rock he should retrieve them and bring the tokens to him at Athens. When Theseus arrives years later, Aegeus’s wife, Medea, convinces him to poison the young man, and only after Theseus draws his sword to cut his meat at dinner does Aegeus recognize him as his son.

AT 780, The Princess Confined in the Mound, contains motif H13.1.1, “Recognition by overheard conversation with horse.” In this story, found predominantly in Scandinavia, a princess is confined in a mound by her father because of her obstinacy in wanting to marry a certain prince. She finally escapes after years of imprisonment and obtains a position as a maid in her beloved’s castle. The prince is soon to be married, and his bride-to-be arranges for the heroine to take her place at the wedding, in order to conceal her pregnancy or her unattractiveness. The heroine agrees not to tell the prince, but she contrives to let him know by telling her story to a horse, a bridge (H13.2.1), or a stone (H13.2.2). The Grimms’ tale “The Goose Girl” (KHM 89) is a variant of this story.

THE SLIPPER TEST

One of the most famous recognition tests is that of the slipper (H36.1). It is significant that the oldest recorded complete telling of a European Cinderella story (AT 510A, Cinderella), “The Cat Cinderella” from Basile’s Pentamerone, written in 1634 (1932, 1:6), contains what has become the most memorable motif in the tale: the recognition of the true bride by the fit of her lost slipper (H36.1, “Slipper test. Identification by fitting of slipper”). However, strictly speaking, in Basile’s tale the identifying item is not a slipper, but a cloglike piece of footwear called a patten, worn over the shoe. Although normally constructed with a high platform to protect the wearer from mud, the item lost by Basile’s heroine is described as “the richest and prettiest patten you could
Imagine.” Not only is it marked by fine workmanship and dainty size, but when put to the trial of discovering the runaway beauty, it darts forward to the heroine’s foot, just as iron flies to a magnet, thus magically confirming that the true bride has been found.

The next version to be published was that of Charles Perrault, “Cinderella; or, the Little Glass Slipper,” in his classic collection Stories or Tales from Times Past, with Morals, with the added frontispiece Tales of Mother Goose (1697). This story’s defining motif, the slipper, is not only prominent in the tale’s title, but is also given an otherworldly aspect by being made of glass. It is not true, as suggested by the 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica and subsequent writers, that Perrault’s glass slipper is a mistranslation into English of pantoufle en vair (fur slipper), mistaken for en verre (of glass). Nor are the claims entirely believable that Perrault himself understood verre when his oral informant used the word vair. These arguments, which have been substantially discredited by Paul Delarue (1982, 110–114), are based primarily on some modern critics’ unwillingness to let fairy tales be fairy tales, imposing on them instead a utilitarian logic that storytellers have rarely adhered to. Of course, fur is a more practical material for slippers than is glass, but glass, crystal, diamonds, pearls, gold, feathers, and other symbolically rich substances are featured in magic tales of all epochs and from around the world in ways that violate everyday logic. Fairy tales thrive on unreality.

Two of the unique properties of glass are its transparency (purity) and its fragility, thus making it an appropriate symbol of virginity, as exemplified, for instance, in the bridegroom’s breaking of a glass at a traditional Jewish wedding. This symbolic value notwithstanding, in most European versions of The Cinderella Story, including that of the Grimm brothers (KHM 21), the slipper is made of gold, also an impractical material for footwear, but one with rich symbolic traditions. In magic tales, anything can be made of gold: plants, animals, people, organs and limbs, castles, carriages, clothing. The word gold in essence becomes a synonym for “good,” “desirable,” “pure,” or any other positive quality.

It has often been demonstrated that the shoe, in various folkloric contexts, serves well as a symbol of sexuality, especially female sexuality. This is true whether the shoe is made of fur, glass, gold, or more conventional materials such as leather or cloth. Any such symbolic value would be lost on younger listeners, but not on older members of the storyteller’s audience. The Grimms’ title Children’s and Household Tales reflects the multiple levels of significance contained in most of the stories in their pioneering collection, an observation that would apply equally well to most classic folktales collections.

In Europe, the normal pattern is for the prince first to fall in love with the heroine and then to use the lost slipper to reclaim her. A number of explanations are offered as to how she loses her slipper. Most often, as in Perrault’s story, for example, the heroine, in her haste to leave a festive event, simply drops it. In other renditions, as in that of the Grimsms, the prince purposely sets a trap, catching the slipper in pitch or tar. In at least one version, a Gypsy tale from England titled “The Little Cinder-Girl” (Bridges 1970, 1:383–388), the trap seems to have been set by the heroine, using her shoe as bait. Her magic helper tells her explicitly, “Mark what thou shalt do now. Do as I bid thee. Go to church, and this time thou must leave still earlier; the prince will follow thee. One slipper will drop from thy foot, and he will come after thee and find it.” In a few instances, such as the Irish “Fair, Brown, and Trembling” (Curtin 1890, 37–48) and the Romanian “The Bewitched Calf and the Wicked Step-Mother” (Gaster 1915, no. 89), the prince forcefully pulls the shoe off the fleeing heroine.

Once the prince has the slipper in hand, the bridal test is quite straightforward: If the shoe fits, marry her. No other qualities seem important. In a large number of versions, preeminently that of the Grimsms, one or more of the
heroine’s sisters or stepsisters mutilate their feet in order to make the shoe fit (J2131.3.1). Inexplicably, the prince does not notice the false bride’s wounds until he is on his way home with her. Typically, he discovers the fraud only after a bird tells him that his bride has blood in her shoe. The symbolic interpretation of this episode is obvious.

How the heroine’s slipper is lost differs substantially in various tellings of the story, with each explanation symbolizing different motivations on the part of both the leading male and the leading female. A sparsely told tale from Scotland begins simply, “Lang lang syne, in some far awa’ country ayeont the sea, there was a grand prince, and he had a shoe made o’ glass.” The storyteller continues by stating that the prince decides to marry only the woman whose bonny wee foot would fit the slipper (Chambers 1870, 68–70). For a prince to fall in love with a woman he has never seen before just because of a shoe (T11.4.2) is especially common in Cinderella tales from the Middle East and the Orient, for example from Georgia (Wardrop 1894, 63–67), Iraq (Bushnaq 1986, 181–187), India (Freere 1881, no. 21), Vietnam (Thang and Lawson 1993, 75–89), and China (Folk Tales from China 1958, 6–22).

Of this group, the Vietnamese tale “Tam and Cam” is exemplary. Tam, dressed in elegant clothes magically supplied by a Buddha, is on her way to a festival. While crossing a stream, she loses one of her shoes. Sometime later, the king and his entourage arrive at the same spot. His elephants refuse to cross the water, leading to the discovery of the lost shoe, and the king forthwith proclaims that he will marry the girl whose foot fits the shoe.

In a Chinese tale (Eberhard 1965, no. 66), the heroine herself uses her lost shoe as a means of finding a bridegroom. While she is riding along in her magically obtained clothing, one of her embroidered shoes falls into a ditch. Unable to dismount and recover it, and unwilling to abandon it, she asks successive passersby to pick it up for her. Each one responds, “With great pleasure, if you will marry me.” She rejects proposals from a fishmonger, a rice seller, and an oil merchant, but accepts the offer of a handsome scholar. He picks up the shoe and puts it on her foot, then takes her to his house and makes her his wife.

In a few instances, the shoe-fitting test fails. For example, in the Chican tale “Maria Cinderella,” the lost slipper perfectly fits both the heroine and her unworthy stepmother, but only Maria can produce the slipper’s mate, so she still proves herself the true bride by means of a shoe (Pino-Saavedra 1968, no. 19). In at least one folktale, the expected gender roles are reversed. In “Sheepskin Boy” from Sweden, an anonymous and reticent hero drops one of his gold shoes, which is picked up by the princess, who then uses it to find her future bridegroom (Blecher and Blecher 1993, 118–123; AT 530).

Identifying a heroine by her shoe is not limited to Cinderella folktales, but is found in stories of other types as well. For example, in “A Lost Shoe of Gold” from Saudi Arabia, a sultan’s daughter sees her tutor eating a dead horse and thus discovers that he is a ghoul. Terrified, she runs from his house, leaving one of her shoes behind. The ghoul, with the lost shoe as proof of her identity and of her presence in his house, cruelly harasses her, trying unsuccessfully to get her to admit what she saw. Enduring the persecution, she ultimately gains victory over the ghoul (Bushnaq 1986, 132–137; AT 894). In the Grimms’ tale “The Trained Huntsman [Der gelernte Jäger, KHMIII],” the title hero kills three giants who threaten to attack a sleeping princess. He cuts out the giants’ tongues and takes one of the princess’s slippers. Later, an impostor claims to have killed the giants, but the huntsman shows the tongues and the slipper, thus gaining the hand of the princess in marriage (KHM 111, AT 304).

Shoes provide identification of a different kind in the Grimms’ “The Blue Light” (KHM 116, AT 562, The Spirit in the Blue Light) and “The Shoes That Were Danced to Pieces” (KHM 133, AT 306, The Danced-out Shoes). In the first tale, a dismissed soldier spirits a princess into his room every night. The princess traps and identifies her abductor by hiding one of her shoes under his bed. In the second tale, twelve princesses mysteriously dance their shoes to pieces every night. Another dismissed soldier discovers how they nightly enter an underground realm to dance with enchanted partners. His reward for putting an end to this forbidden activity is the hand in marriage of one of the twelve. As most of the shoe episodes discussed in this article, these tales suggest significant possibilities for symbolic interpretation.

D.L. Ashliman (slipper test) and Jane Garry

REFERENCES


It should come as no surprise that Thompson required twenty-six pages of the Motif-Index to list and classify riddle motifs in traditional narrative. Riddles are classified under Tests of Cleverness. The presence of riddles in folk narratives often functions as a test of the hero or protagonist.

Skill in propounding and solving riddles is highly prized in traditional cultures as a mark of intellectual agility, shrewdness, practical wisdom, and worldly knowledge; it is only logical that traditional narrative should recount the riddling exploits of noteworthy characters and exploit audience interest in verbal and intellectual play, an interest that appears early in the young and in some cultures is institutionally encouraged among adults.

The riddle is a verbal puzzle or cipher, at the heart of which is metaphor. Solving the riddle usually entails recognizing multiple connections between the riddle’s vehicle (the metaphorical substitution) and its tenor (the meaning or solution to the riddle). Such multiple similarities extend and enlarge the metaphor, moving it in the direction of allegory. Spenser’s “dark conceit,” puzzle, or enigma. These qualities may be illustrated from the riddle posed by the Sphinx at Thebes and solved by Oedipus (AT 932, Oedipus; H761, “Riddle of the Sphinx: what is it that goes on four legs in the morning, on two at midday, and on three in the evening?”). The Sphinx has afflicted Thebes with plague, but she will lift the epidemic if anyone can answer her riddle. Oedipus, entering Thebes after having unknowingly killed his father Laius, the king of Thebes, on the road from Delphi, easily solves the riddle: man, who crawls in infancy, walks upright in maturity, and requires the assistance of a cane in old age. The solution depends upon recognizing three tropes: the
metaphor that perceives the human life span in terms of a single day, and the
metonymical associations of human arms with animal forelegs, and of the
walking stick with the leg.

In the Oedipus example, the hero’s ability to solve the riddle leads to his
being made king of Thebes and given the widowed queen—his own mother—
in marriage. While his success inadvertently fulfills the second part of the
baleful prophecy that accompanied his birth and thus leads, years later, to his
undoing, for the time being it characterizes him as a superior human being:
even his father had failed the Sphinx’s test, apparently, and was on his way to
Delphi to seek oracular assistance when his fateful encounter with Oedipus
took place.

There are a number of classes of riddle stories. One is the neck riddle, in
which the answering of a riddle is the only way to avoid death. Another is the
wager or contest riddle, in which a riddle is put to someone for large stakes;
another is the suitor riddle, in which a wife can be won upon guessing a riddle;
another is the clever girl riddle, in which a girl wins a husband by answering
riddles. Sometimes the types overlap, as in the suitor riddle where the hero
not only does not get the bride if he fails to answer the riddle, but loses his life
as well.

THE NECK RIDDLE

The neck riddle occurs when a protagonist must either propound or expound
a riddle or a series of riddles in order to avoid being killed. Some versions of
the Oedipus legend say that the Sphinx kills those who try but cannot solve
her riddle (H541.1.1. “Sphinx propounds riddle on pain of death”). Neck
riddlers are alike in being highly motivated, but the riddles they pose or solve
are quite various.

In Type 927, Out-riddling the Judge, a man is set free when the judge is
unable to answer his riddles (H542, “Death sentence escaped by propounding
riddle king [judge] cannot solve”). One riddle commonly propounded here is
“What has seven tongues in one head?” Answer: a bird’s nest with seven young
in a horse’s skull.

There are many variants of Type 812, The Devil’s Riddle (H543, “Escape
from devil by answering his riddles”). Aarne-Thompson lists examples from
Scandinavia, the British Isles, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Slavic
nations, and Greece. The Grimms collected a version, called “The Devil and
His Grandmother” (“Der Teufel und seine Großmutter,” KHM 125), in which
three soldiers who have deserted from the army are aided by the devil, who
promises them untold riches as long as they can answer his riddles at the end
of seven years. They lead a merry life for that period, but as the deadline
approaches, they despair of their fate. An old woman inquires why they are
so sad (N825.3, “Old woman helper”), and when they confide in her, she
says that one of them must go into the forest and look for a little rock house
that he must enter. It turns out to be the house of the devil’s grandmother,
who conceals the soldier so he can hear the devil give the answers to the
When the devil poses the riddles, they are easily answered, and the devil
flies away with a loud cry.

In versions of Type 461, Quest for Devil’s Hair, a youth is sent on a
quest to hell or must find the cleverest person in the world, and along the
way various riddles are posed to him, such as why a certain tree does not
flourish, why a spring has gone dry, where a lost key is, and so forth (H544,
“Answers found in other world to riddles propounded on way”). The devil’s
wife hides the youth when he arrives in hell and helps him find the answers
to the questions.

RIDDLE CONTESTS

Riddle contests (H548) are very ancient, and a notable one appears in the Old
Testament where Samson propounds a riddle to the Philistines (Judges 14).
Another example of the riddle contest is Type 922, The Emperor and the
Abbot. This tale was the focus of one of the most exhaustive folktales studies
in the historic-geographic method, by Walter Anderson (Kaiser und Abt, 1923).
Child (1965) printed two ballad versions called “King John and the Bishop.”

THE SUITOR RIDDLE

Aarne-Thompson lists numerous tale types which contain motif H551, “Prin-
cess offered to man who can out-riddle her,” including Types 725 (The Dream),
851 (The Princess Who Cannot Solve the Riddle), and 900 (King Thrushbeard—
although the version known from the Grimm collection does not contain the
riddling element).

The medieval Latin legend of Apollonius King of Tyre, presumably based
on a lost Greek romance, was translated into Old English and later into most
other European vernaculars. The legend appears as Book 8 of John Gower’s
Confessio Amantis (ca. 1390); with a change of the hero’s name it was the
source for Shakespeare’s tragicomic romance Pericles, Prince of Tyre (ca.
1607). In that version, Antiochus, king of Antioch, wards off potential suitors
of his beautiful daughter by posing a riddle that they must solve on pain of
death. The answer to the riddle contains the dark secret that the king and his
daughter are lovers.
THE CLEVER GIRL RIDDLE

Motif H561.1, “Clever peasant girl asked riddles by king,” is a component of Type 875, The Clever Peasant Girl, who in some versions answers riddles correctly and wins the king as her husband.

One of the best examples of this class is the ballad “Riddles Wisely Expounded” (Child 1). In this ballad a man beds a maiden and when she asks in the morning if they are to wed, he says they will wed only if she can answer his riddles. In some versions the man is a knight and upon her successfully guessing the riddles he marries her; in others, he is a “bynd” and flies away as soon as she names him (C432.1, “Guessing name of supernatural creature gives power over him”).

In a discussion of Child 2, “The Elfin Knight,” which contains “riddlercraft” in the form of impossible tasks, Wimberly says that “a maid escapes being carried off to the Otherworld by outwitting her dead lover. The impossible tasks set by him are met on her part by a proposal of tasks equally difficult” (1965, 305). The verses that follow are from Child’s version G from 1810. The lover asks:

“Can you make me a cambrick shirt,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Without any seam or needle work?
And you shall be a true lover of mine.”

“Can you wash it in yonder well,
Where never sprung water nor rain ever fell?”

“Can you dry it on yonder thorn,
Which never bore blossom sine Adam was born?”

The girl replies:

“Now you have asked me questions three,
I hope you’ll answer as many for me.”

“Can you find me an acre of land
Between the salt water and the sea sand?”

“Can you plow it with a ram’s horn,
And sow it all over with one pepper corn?” (Child 1965, 1:18)

When the knight cannot do these things, the girl escapes having to follow him in death (E266, “Dead carry off living”).

Klipple gives a précis of a Swahili story from the East African cattle area illustrating Motif H552, “Man marries girl who guesses his riddles.” It involves being able to solve not only verbal riddles but symbolic ones as well.
Thompson classified quests under Chapter H (Tests) as tests of prowess. The significance of the quest, however, goes far beyond its function as a test of the hero. As Leeming writes, “Life renewal is always the ultimate goal of the quest, and life renewal is both a spiritual and a physical process” (1987, 147). He stresses that a quest need not involve a physical journey because it is essentially a religious endeavor, so that the Buddha seeking enlightenment while sitting under a tree is on a quest just as much as is Jason, sailing to Argos in search of the Golden Fleece. Moreover, what heroes do in the old quest stories, flesh and blood human beings act out through the medium of religious ritual and related disciplines. The Muslim who journeys to Mecca is given the special title of hajj for having followed in the steps of the Prophet. The shaman... journeys ritually and psychically to the “other world” to confront the spirits who would deprive an individual or tribe of health or life... Even the ordinary worshipper becomes a real quester: ... [and] undertakes a re-creative journey in microcosm from the chaos of the world to the cosmos of ultimate reality or primal cause. ... A modern secular version of this spiritual journey takes place on the psychiatrist’s couch, where renewal involves a quest of self-discovery by means of a process of recalling—literally, remembering. (Leeming 1987, 147)

Scholars of comparative folklore, literature, and religion have long noted a universal pattern, known as the hero cycle, that holds cross-culturally. Heroes or religious deities are marked, called, and tested, events that correspond to birth, initiation, and death, the significant events in an individual’s life that are ritually observed. The hero’s birth and parentage are unusual and the test (quest) often involves symbolic or actual death and, sometimes, resurrection.

THE QUEST IN FOLKTALES

While the pattern is most transparent and whole in myth and epic, parts of it can be discerned in folktales. As Underberg notes in her essay on the Hero Cycle on page 10 in this volume, the magic tale is an elaboration of the middle part of that cycle, namely, the hero’s quest.

In 1928, the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp analyzed the structure of some hundred Russian fairy tales that correspond to tale types in Aarne and Thompson’s Types of the Folktales (AT 300-749) and noted that “the names of the dramatis personae change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change. From this we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. This makes possible the study of the tale according to the functions of its dramatis personae” (emphasis in the original) (Propp 1971, 20). Propp identified thirty-one functions, and although not all are present in all tales, those that are present always occur in the same order unless the tales have been mangled. For example, function 11 is the departure of the hero or heroine from home, and function 20 is the return. Propp distinguishes between seeker-heroes and victim-heroes, noting that their departures are different: seeker-heroes proactively go off in search of something, while victim-heroes often are compelled to leave (39). Victim-heroes are often banished from home and may be ordered killed, but are saved by a compassionate person and then have adventures in the world; for example, Snow-White is ordered killed by her stepmother but the hunter spares her (AT 709). It is the seeker-heroes who typically go on a quest.

Other functions include testing and/or interrogation of the hero/heroine, which prepares the way for receiving either a magical agent or helper (function 12; Motif H1550–H1569, “Tests of character”; D1581, “Tasks performed by use of magic objects”; N810, “Supernatural helper”), and difficult tasks proposed to the hero/heroine (function 25; Motif H900, “Tasks imposed”). Again, these functions or motifs are typical of the quest in myth and epic, and Dundes remarks that Propp’s functions 23 to 31 correspond very well with the last portion of the Odyssey (Propp 1971, xiv).

Thompson also classified tasks as tests of prowess (H900–H1199). Like quests, tasks function as tests of the hero, who must perform them in order to defeat evil, restore order, and/or achieve union with a woman (or man). Tasks may be impossible (H1010), contrary to the laws of nature (H1020),
paradoxical (H1050), tedious (H1110), or superhuman (H1130), and they can be performed within the context of a quest or independently of it.

Tales such as The Dragon Slayer (AT 300) or The Water of Life (AT 551) are prime examples of folktales embodying the quest motif; in the former, the hero must rescue a princess from being sacrificed to a dragon that is the scourge of a kingdom; in the latter, he must find the healing waters to restore his father to health. Thompson writes that there are “some half a dozen” tales in which the quest is the central event (1977, 105). The two tales mentioned above are in this latter category, as is The Bird, the Horse, and the Princess (AT 550).

While the number of tales in which the quest is the major part of the story is small, Thompson states that there is a “very large number” of tales in which tasks and quests figure as a subordinate part of the story. He lists the following: Jack the Giant Killer (AT 328), The Devil’s Riddle (AT 812), Tom-Tit-Tot (AT 500), The Three Old Women Helpers (AT 501), The Monster’s Bride (AT 507A), Ferdinand the Faithful and Ferdinand the Unfaithful (AT 531), The Devil as Advocate (AT 821B), The Healing Fruits (AT 610), The Gifts of the Dwarfs (AT 611), The Two Travelers (AT 613), The Three Oranges (AT 408), The Wolf (AT 428), The Prince and the Armbands (AT 590), The Spinning Women by the Spring (AT 480), The Journey to God to Receive Reward (AT 460A), The Journey in Search of Fortune (AT 460B), The Prophecy (AT 930), The Dream (AT 725), Three Hairs from the Devil’s Beard (AT 461), The Clever Peasant Girl (AT 875), The Son of the King and of the Smith (AT 920), and The Master Thief (AT 1525) (1977, 105).

As an example, in Tom-Tit-Tot—commonly known from the Grimm’s version, “Rumpelstiltskin” (KHM 55)—a poor girl is given the task of spinning a roomful of straw into gold. The completion of this task, as extraordinary as it is, is but a prelude to the central motif of the story: learning the name of her supernatural helper, which releases her from the bargain she made with him to give up her first child to him in exchange for his help (C432.1, “Guessing name of supernatural creature gives power over him”).

In Three Hairs from the Devil’s Beard, the quest (for the tale involves a journey to the otherworld) is more crucial to the story. The hero is sent by a powerful person, often his prospective father-in-law who is a king, on a quest to hell to obtain three hairs from the devil’s beard. “In all these stories, the otherworld is conceived of as lying beyond a great body of water” (F141, “Water barrier to otherworld”; Thompson 1977, 140). On his way, the hero is asked various questions by people he meets—why a certain tree does not flourish, why a sick princess can be cured, why a certain spring has gone dry. Finally, the man who ferries the hero across the water asks how he (the ferryman) can be relieved of his work (F93.0.1.1, “Ferryman to lower world”). When the hero arrives in hell, the devil’s mother hides him and obtains for him not only the three hairs but the answers to the questions (G530.3, “Help from ogre’s mother”). As he returns home, the hero provides the answers to the questions to those who asked them, gains a rich reward, and wins his wife. He coincidentally is rid of his prospective father-in-law, who greedily follows in the hero’s wake in search of the gold, but does not succeed either in gaining the fortune or in returning home. Thompson may have considered this story’s quest as subordinate because the tale is often combined with another tale, AT 930 The Rich Man and His Son-in-Law, which serves as an introduction to the action just outlined.

A TALE QUEST FROM NORTH AMERICA

“Mudjukiwiis” is a Cree Indian tale that contains a quest for a lost wife (H1385.3, “Quest for vanished wife [mistress]).

Ten brothers, the eldest of them being named Mudjukiwis, keep house together. When they return from the hunt, they find that their house has been mysteriously put in order (N831.1, “Mysterious housekeeper”). They take turns in remaining home to investigate the mystery. One of the brothers succeeds in finding a girl who has been hiding from them. He marries her, and she remains as housekeeper for the brothers. Mudjukiwis, the eldest brother, becomes jealous, and tries to win the girl from his brother. When she rejects him, he shoots her and goes back home. When her husband misses her and follows her, she tells him that she is supernatural and that after four days if he will come for her, he can find her. He becomes impatient and comes for her on the third day. She therefore disappears, leaving bloody tracks behind her. Her husband now undertakes a long quest to recover her. . . . He encounters a mysterious old woman helper. . . . who informs him that his wife is one of ten daughters of the supernatural people in the sky. From this old woman he is sent on in turn to three others. . . . They give him magic objects to help him climb into the upper world. By means of these objects, and by the power of transformation which they give him, he succeeds in overcoming all the perils of the journey and reaching the upper world (H1200, “Quest to the upper world”). He finds that there is to be a contest to see who is to marry his wife. He wins the contest, and takes back not only his own wife, but her nine sisters for his nine brothers. (Thompson 1977, 350; 1929, 135–144)

THE QUEST IN MYTH, EPIC, AND LITERATURE

As stated above, the quest is an extremely important motif in myth and traditional epics of many cultures. While the epic has not been found in all cultures, it is extremely common around the world. It has been assumed that epic literature was unknown in Africa, but since the last third of the twentieth
century intensive fieldwork has proven that assessment wrong. There is a rich mine of epics that runs across the Sahel and down into Central Africa, defined by William Johnson as the “African Epic Belt” (Johnson, Hale, and Belcher 1997, xv).

For example, Biebuyck (1969, 1978) has collected multiple variants of the Mwindo epic among the Nyanga in Zaire, which, he affirms, fit the standard definitions and characterization of epic literature (1978, 3). Some of the motifs in these versions are A511.1.3.3, “Immaculate conception of culture hero”; A511.2.1, “Abandonment of culture hero at birth”; A527.1, “Culture hero precocious”; H1270, “Quest to lower world”; F81.1, “Journey to land of dead to bring back person from the dead”; N831, “Girl as helper”; H901, “Tasks imposed”; D1581, “Tasks performed by use of magic objects”; and A566, “Culture hero returns to upper world”; A581, “Culture hero returns.”

The quest has been a theme used by writers of literary epics, most notably by Dante in *Inferno*, the first book of *The Divine Comedy* (ca. 1320). Earlier, Virgil wrote of the quest of Aeneas to found a new civilization (Rome) in the *Aeneid* (19 BCE), which also involves a descent to the underworld. Medieval writers who elaborated Celtic and Christian themes produced the various works of the Arthurian legends, including the quest for the grail, which is undertaken by the Knights of the Round Table in order to heal the dying Fisher King and his kingdom’s barren land.

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*See also:* Hero Cycle; Individuation; Otherworld Journeys; Quest for the Vanished Husband.

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In folklore, a woman’s quest for her vanished husband or lover is the central motif in numerous tales named for these motifs (H1285.4 and H1385.5), AT 425 A-P, *The Search for the Vanished Husband*. That quest also appears in related tales (AT 430, 432, 441). One of the best documented and researched tale types, AT 425 has been the subject of monographs by Tegghettof (1922), Swahn (1955), and Megas (1971), as well as numerous articles. It may be summarized as follows: a girl is married or betrothed to a supernatural male, who may appear as a beast or monster by day and a man at night (D621.1). She violates a taboo—frequently an injunction to secrecy about his condition (C421)—and he vanishes. To regain him, she must typically perform a penitential search, overcoming apparently insuperable obstacles, such as climbing a glass hill, as in the Scottish “The Black Bull of Norroway” (Chambers 1847); or wearing out seven sets of iron clothes, seven pairs of iron shoes, and seven iron canes, as in the Afghani “Khasakhumar and Bibinagar” (Dorson 1975); or, as in the Italian “Filod’Oro and Filomena” (Calvino 1980), crossing the River of Serpents, the River of Blood, the River of Bile, and scaling a mountain. The search usually entails the heroine’s emotional and physical abjection; in “The Magic Box” from Armenia (Hoogasian-Villa 1966), the bride walks for so many years that her hair becomes pure white, symbolizing her loss of youth and beauty. In “The Snail Choya” from Japan, the bride wades through muddy fields seeking her snail spouse, “until her face was splattered . . . her beautiful kimono was completely covered in mud,” and she is prepared to drown herself (Seiki 1963, 88). In some variants the wife is pregnant, and the labor of the quest mimics the labor of birth (according to
Christian tradition a punishment for Eve's sin): in "The Serpent and The Grape Grower's Daughter" from France, the abandoned wife "cried night and day and walked unceasingly; she was all the more afflicted and her wandering was all the more painful in that she was with child" (Delarue 1956, 180). Sometimes the actual birth precipitates the successful conclusion of the quest: thus, in "The Sun and His Wife" from Greece, the heroine gives birth to a boy, and "when the Sun's sister saw it, she cried, 'That is my brother's child, and this is his wife'" (Megas 1970, 60). Here the sister's recognition of her brother's paternity and the wife's status is sufficient to secure the happy ending: the Sun returns. The wife is frequently aided in her quest by three helpers (H1235, "Succession of helpers on quest")—often crones, sometimes her husband's relatives—who give her three valuable objects; they may also impose tasks, such as filling a bowl with tears. When she at last finds her husband—"east of the sun, and west of the moon," in the words of the well-known Norwegian version (Asbjørnsen 1953)—he is usually living in the home of a rival bride, and the first wife must undertake menial labor in or near their house. In the Kashmiri "Nāgray and Hīmal," a princess follows her snake husband to his home in a spring, where she becomes the servant and victim of his jealous serpent wives (Knowles 1977). In European versions, she frequently exchanges the objects given by the helpers for three nights in the same room as her husband; on the third night he finally recognizes her (D1978.4, "Hero wakened from magic sleep by wife who has purchased place in his bed from false bride"). His recognition usually ends the enchantment under which the husband has lived: rejecting the false bride and embracing the true one, he resumes his true identity. At the end of a Scottish variant, "The Hoodie-Crow," the husband declares, "That is my married wife . . . and no one else will I have," and "at that very moment the spells fell off him, and never more would he be a hoodie" (Lang 1910, 340). "The Camel Husband," from Palestine, lacks the rival bride but emphasizes the redemptive nature of the wife's search: her husband cries, "You have chased me into the land of the Djinn and crossed the boundary between the world above and the world beneath, you have opened the way for my return. From today I can live not as a camel but as a man" (Bushnaq 1986, 192–193).

More than 1,500 versions of this tale type have been recorded from Europe, Asia, parts of Africa, and the European traditions in North America (Noy 1963; Nicolaisen 1989; Anderson 2000). These, however, "are only a fragment of the mass of variants that could be accumulated from the living oral tradition" (Dorson 1975, 230); the tale "has achieved an acceptance through time and space and among peoples of the most diverse cultures as has no other magic tale" (Ward 1989, 119). It first appears in literature as the story of Cupid and Psyche (AT 425A, The Monster [Animal] as Bridegroom), an "old wives' tale" embedded in Apuleius's The Golden Ass (second century CE). However, scholars have traced its antecedents to Greek and Hittite mythology of the second millennium BCE (Anderson 2000). Megas (1971) shows that some of the oldest elements in the tale were not used by Apuleius, but remain current in modern European versions, evidence of an independent oral tradition.

INTERPRETATION

Early interpreters read the Cupid and Psyche story as a Neoplatonic allegory in which Psyche represents the human soul and Cupid represents the Divine Principle in humankind. Desiring the beauty of the Divine, the soul seeks it throughout the world, enduring affliction as a necessary purification (Wright 2000). Psyche's tasks are "images of the mighty toils and anxious cares which the soul must necessarily endure after her lapse, in order to atone for her guilt" and return to the world of essences (Apuleius 1795, xii–xiii). In the twentieth century, psychologists advanced influential interpretations. Thus Neumann (1956) views the story of Cupid and Psyche in Jungian terms as a myth of feminine psychic development. Psyche's disobedience in shedding light on her lover is a heroic act of individuation, a rebellion against the state of unconscious sensuality represented by the power of Aphrodite, the Great Mother:

The embrace of Eros [Cupid] and Psyche in the darkness represents the elementary and unconscious attraction of opposites, which impersonally bestows life but is not yet human. But the coming of light makes Eros' visible; it manifests the phenomenon of psychic love ... as the human and higher form of the archetype of relatedness. It is only the completion of Psyche's development, effected in the course of her search for the invisible Eros, that brings with it the highest manifestation of the archetype of relatedness: a divine Eros joined in a divine Psyche. (Neumann 1956, 109–110)

Psyche's tasks symbolize a feminine initiation that culminates in her redemption of Eros: "Through Psyche's sacrifice and [symbolic] death the divine lover is changed from a wounded boy to a man and savior, because in Psyche he finds ... the feminine mystery of rebirth through love" (Neumann 1956, 125).

Bettelheim, from a Freudian perspective, interprets Psyche's quest as the attempt to unify sex, love, and life by overcoming sexual anxieties. He sees in Psyche a type of the modern woman:

Despite all warnings about the dire consequences if she tries to find out, woman is not satisfied with remaining ignorant about sex and life. Comfortable as an existence in relative naïveté may be, it is an empty life which must not be accepted. Notwithstanding all the hardships woman has to suffer to
be reborn to full consciousness and humanity, the [animal-groom] stories leave no doubt that this is what she must do. Otherwise there would be no story: no fairy story worth telling, no worthwhile story to her life. (Bettelheim 1976, 295)

Propp (1949) suggests that the story of Cupid and Psyche has a basis in an ancient ritual of sexual initiation: Psyche represents the girl who encounters her lover in darkness; after the initiation, he leaves, forgets her, and starts a family. Rebell ing against ritual law, the girl pursues and claims her lover. Calvino, noting the popularity of the AT 425 tale type throughout Italy, cites Propp’s theory as an explanation of the story’s persistent eroticism: “Although the customs of millennia are disregarded, the plot of the story still reflects the spirit of those laws and describes every love thwarted and forbidden by law, convention, or social disparity. That is why it has been possible, from prehistory to the present, to preserving . . . the sensuality so often underlying this love, evident in the ecstasy and frenzy of mysterious nocturnal embraces” (Calvino 1980, xxx). For Calvino, the story is a timeless tale of erotic love overcoming law or social custom; by contrast, Dawkins explains the perennial attraction of the story in its reflection of marital relations: “The loss of the mate through disobedience or by some misunderstanding, or lack of sympathy reflects the quarrels of lovers and their alienation. That the lost mate can indeed be won back, but only after toil and sacrifice, presents equally a human truth” (Dawkins 1953, 55).

Feminist scholars and critics have challenged ahistorical interpretations of the AT 425 tale, highlighting its gender ideology. The self-sacrifice and submission of the heroine, they argue, should be seen not as essential feminine qualities, but rather as aspects of a patriarchal script for women. Bacchilega argues that the story “repeatedly reenacts the patriarchal exchange of women, and affirms women’s collusion with the system” (Bacchilega 1997, 76). She concludes that its “insidiously patriarchal appeal depends most on the active but self-effacing heroine—a protagonist with agency whose subjectivity is construed as absence and whose symbolic reward is giving rebirth to another” (78). Tatar compares the gender roles in AT 425 tales with those in AT 400 (The Man on the Quest for His Lost Wife). She observes that in the former the heroines are rewarded for the expression of emotion, while in the latter the heroes are rewarded for impassive stoicism.

No matter in what cultural context or epoch European tales about animal-brides and animal-grooms are told, they each present a surprisingly durable notion of female and male roles. Women, as a study of The Search for the Lost Husband reveals, are creatures of feeling . . . The desire for greater intimacy and the overvaluation of family attachments always get these women in trouble, even as their surplus of emotion (passion or compassion) gets their grooms out of trouble. And finally, the desire to meet the needs of others . . . and to please their husbands . . . shows the extent to which these fairy-tale figures are invested in becoming connected and establishing relationships. (Tatar 1992, 160)

Recent fieldwork on the AT 425 tale by folklorists, who stress its local and historically specific meanings, provides support for a feminist analysis. Dégh studied the ethnic Hungarian version of the Cupid and Psyche tale, in which a girl is married to a snake prince; when she burns the snakeskin in an attempt to disenchant him, he abandons her angrily. To regain him, she must plant a grain of wheat and a walnut, and water them with her tears until she can bake a bread and a walnut cake. After seven years, she can start her voyage of another seven years with the token food to find him. Throughout her fourteen years of penitential labor and travel, she is pregnant but, bound with an iron hoop, unable to give birth until she finds her husband and wins him from a rival. According to Dégh, this story dramatizes the consummation of an arranged marriage and its consequences:

The woman’s domain is the home where she serves the husband and raises his sons; her procreative capacity is her main worth. The man, on the other hand, is powerful and free of ties. He takes the reluctant girl by force, then, and for disobeying his orders leaves her and orders her to leave after him in pursuit while he also ties her with impregnation. She becomes his property for good but he has no obligation to her; he is free to establish new family ties. (Dégh 1995, 150)

Analyzing the performance of Spanish AT 425 variants, Taggart finds that older women use the stories to prepare younger women for the transition from courtship to marriage. Girls are encouraged to overcome sexual anxieties and schooled to assume the burden of emotional labor in marriage: the wife’s love will humanize her husband and restore riffs in their relationship. Men retell the same stories, affirming this division of labor and their need for a woman’s devotion. “The metaphorical description of the women’s role in maintaining the marital bond appears in the ‘Cupid and Psyche’ stories told by women as well as men, in which heroines endure long and difficult ordeals to restore their relationships with lost husbands. The role of men in maintaining the marital tie is substantially less, judging from the stories circulating in oral tradition” (Taggart 1990, 164). Taggart contrasts Spanish oral tradition, in which lost husband tales are popular and lost wife tales (AT 400) scarce, with that in Nahua and Mayan culture, where lost wife tales are more prominent: “‘Lost Wife’ tales undoubtedly express Mayan and Nahua men’s anxiety
about losing the nurture of women on whom they heavily depend, and they capture the actual experiences of many young husbands whose wives have returned to their parents after a family quarrel (211). He suggests that lost wife tales are comparatively rare in Spanish oral tradition because a social structure in which women marry late promotes faith in the conjugal bond and the power of a woman’s love for a man.

The story of Cupid and Psyche has appeared in numerous literary versions, including plays by Lope de Vega (Psíquica y Cupid, 1608), Don Pedro Calderón de la Barca (Ni amor se libra de Amor, 1669), and Molière (Psyche, 1671); poems by William Morris (“The Earthly Paradise,” 1868) and Coventry Patmore (“To the Unknown Eros,” 1877); and novels by Walter Pater (Marius the Epicurean, 1885), Sylvia Townsend Warner (The True Heart, 1929) and C.S. Lewis (Till We Have Faces, 1956). Since the eighteenth century, when Madame Le Prince de Beaumont published her influential version of AT 425 (subtype C), “Beauty and the Beast” stories have appeared widely in European literature (Hearn 1989; Ralph 1989; Warner 1994; Zipes 1994; Accardo 2002).

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