

THE FORBIDDEN LOVE IN NATURE

ANALYSIS OF THE “ANIMAL WIFE” FOLKTALE IN TERMS OF CONTENT LEVEL, STRUCTURAL LEVEL AND SEMANTIC LEVEL

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Abstract: This study attempts to analyze exemplified tales according to three levels: the content level, the structural level, and the semantic level. The content analysis of the thread of exemplified tales helps us realize the interconnection with their plots and tensions. The structural analysis of this interconnection shows the typological pattern, which describes the constituent structural elements of the example tales. The semantic analysis of that typological pattern explains to us the apex of that tale, which represents what narrators aim to dramatize and, moreover, what audiences look for to in the example tales.

The following analyses show dissimilarities of the apex among the exemplified tales. The apex pattern *Unknown – Known* of a Japanese “Frog Wife” tale can show the shift of awareness of the wife’s animal origin. In contrast, the apex pattern *Constraint – Unconstraint* of other exemplified tales can reveal the shift of circumstances related to the couple. Even though an animal wife is recounted, the apex pattern varies depending on different culture areas. Therefore, the semantic analysis of that apex pattern can help us better understand the constituent theme of exemplified tales. To deeply interpret the constituent theme of the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale in terms of the culture-context is the next task for this study.

Key words: animal wife, apex pattern, Japanese tale, semantic analysis

1. RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Compared to the “Animal Wife” folktale in other culture areas, the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale obviously shows some differences in its story development.¹ One good example must be Japanese “Frog Wife” tale (JP 111).² Unlike a Turkish “Frog Maiden” tale (EBT 86)³ and also a Korean “Pond Snail Wife” tale (KT 206),⁴ a man in the Japanese “Frog Wife” tale gets married to a woman without knowing about her animal origin, and the marriage immediately breaks with his becoming aware about her origin; the tale itself ends without any

quests for his Lost Wife (cf. ATU 400).⁵ Unlike the Russian “The Frog Princess” tale (NRS 269),⁶ in the Japanese “Frog Wife” tale, the frog skin is never recounted as the key to the frog’s shape shift (cf. ATU 402). Unlike the woman-shaped toad of the Grimm Brothers’ “The Three Feather”/“Die drei Federn” (KHM 63),⁷ enchantment never serves to transform a frog into a woman in the Japanese “Frog Wife” tale. The story development, plots, and the climax of the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale are not always similar to the “Animal Wife” folktale in other culture areas.

In this paper I would like to analyze the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale at the content level (the content analysis), the structural level (the structural analysis), and the semantic level (the semantic analysis) in order to know what sort of plots Japanese narrators aim to dramatize and what sort of a climax are the Japanese audiences looking forward to in their “Animal Wife” folktale. Those three levels of analysis can lead us to a better understanding of the Japanese version of the folktale and reveal us the constituent theme of that tale.

2. THE JAPANESE “ANIMAL WIFE” FOLKTALE

We can get some idea about the Japanese version of the folktale under the “Supernatural Wife” genre tales in Japanese tale type catalogues such as Keigo Seki’s *Corpus of the Japanese Folktale* (1980) (JT 110–119)⁸ and also Kōji Inada’s *General Survey and Analysis of Japanese Folktales* (1988). However, both “descriptions” in AT 402 and “Literature/Variants” in ATU 402 give us a different view of the “Animal Wife” folktale compared to the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale. Variants in AT 402 and ATU 402 generally describe (1) how a man discovers an animal that is an enchanted woman, disenchants her into a beautiful woman, and then gets married to her, or (2) how a man captures an animal that transforms into a woman, hides its skin or shell to make its female appearance persist, and then gets married to her. For example, a man gets married to an animal even though his bride assumes the shape of a frog, such as in the Russian “The Frog Princess” (NRS 269) or when this animal assumes the shape of a woman, such as in the Korean “Pond Snail Wife” tale (KT 206) and the Turkish “Frog Maiden” tale (EBT 86). In contrast, the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale recounts neither enchantment nor disenchantment and the folktale reveals us a man’s great concern about the wife’s animal origin. A man cannot continue the married life with a woman-shaped animal in the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale, but in the “Animal Wife” folktale of other culture areas, a man can continue his marriage because the wife’s animal

origin or the animal figure seldom affects the beginning of connubiality.⁹ This represents a huge difference between the two sorts of folktale, and reveals the different characteristics of their contents.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF THE JAPANESE “ANIMAL WIFE” FOLKTALE

The above characteristics of the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale lead us to the content analysis: in short, we have to examine how plots and tensions interconnect with each other to shape the content of a given tale. This interconnection is represented as plot description and tension description.

The Japanese “Frog Wife” tale (JT 111), for example, divides into several plots (the plot description), but major plots are as follows;

1. A woman visits a man.
2. They become a couple.
3. The husband learns that his wife is a frog.
4. The wife leaves.

We can notice tensions in the above plots, and the tensions (the tension description) are as follows;

1. A woman’s sudden advent to a man.
2. Connubiality between them.
3. Revelation of the woman’s origin of being a frog to the man.
4. The woman-shaped frog’s leaving the husband.

Now we can analyze the above tensions at the structural level, creating the sequence of tensions by using abstract but rather concrete formulation.¹⁰ This sequence, which can be regarded as the typological pattern of the Japanese “Frog Wife” tale, is as follows: *Advent – Revelation – Resolution*.¹¹

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE “ANIMAL WIFE” FOLKTALE IN OTHER CULTURE AREAS

The above analytical method also gives us the plot description, the tension description, and the typological pattern of the Korean “Pond Snail Wife” tale (KT 206), the Turkish “Frog Maiden” tale (EBT 86), the Russian “The Frog Princess” tale (NRS 269), and the woman-shaped toad in the Grimm Brothers’ “The Three Feathers”/“Die drei Federn” (KHM 63).¹² The plot description, the

tension description, and the typological pattern for the above example tales are as follows:

The Korean “Pond Snail Wife” tale (KT 206):

A. The plot description:

1. A man finds a pond snail.
2. He captures the woman into which the pond snail transforms.
3. They live together.
4. A bad landlord intervenes in their life.
5. The couple defeats this landlord, living happily.
(Or the couple ends up dead by committing suicide.)

B. The tension description:

1. A man’s finding of a pond snail.
2. His capturing/acquiring a woman into which the pond snail transforms.
3. Connubiality between the woman-shaped pond snail and him.
4. Intervention by an outsider.
5. The couple’s resolving the intervention, living happily.
(Or the couple’s resolving this intervention by their death.)

C. The typological pattern:

*Discovery – Intervention – Resolution*¹³

The Turkish “Frog Maiden” tale (EBT 86):

A. The plot description:

1. The youngest prince finds a frog in shape of a woman.
2. He gets married to this woman-shaped frog.
3. The king intervenes in their connubial life.
4. The couple resolves this king’s intervention, living happily.

B. The tension description:

1. A man’s finding of a frog in shape of a woman.
2. Connubiality between him and this woman-shaped frog.
3. Intervention by an outsider.
4. The couple’s resolving this intervention, living happily.

C. The typological pattern:

*Discovery – Intervention – Resolution*¹⁴

A Russian “The Frog Princess” tale (NRS 269):

A. The plot description:

1. Ivan, the youngest prince, finds a frog who assumes the shape of Vasilisa the Wise.
2. He gets married to the frog at his father’s (the king’s) behest.¹⁵
3. He burns the frog skin so that she cannot turn back into a frog.
4. He sets out on a quest to find her and lives with her happily.

B. The tension description:

1. A man's finding of a frog.
2. Connubiality between him and the frog.
3. His burning her frog skin.
4. His finding the lost wife after his quest for her.

C. The typological pattern:

*Discovery – Intervention – Resolution*¹⁶

The Woman-Shaped Toad in the Grimm Brothers' "Die drei Federn" (KHM 63):

A. The plot description:

1. The youngest prince finds a speaking toad.
2. This toad helps him resolve the king's hard requests.
3. This toad transforms one frog into a beautiful woman to get married to him.
4. He becomes the successor to the throne because he brings the most beautiful bride.

B. The tension description:

1. A man's being subject to an intervention from outside.
2. An animal helper's advent to him.
3. This helper's enchantment, by which the frog is transformed into a woman for his bride.
4. His resolution to intervention.

C. The typological pattern:

*Discovery – Intervention – Resolution*¹⁷

5. THE TYPOLOGICAL PATTERN OF EXAMPLE TALES

The above analysis gives us the typological pattern of the example tales as follows:

The Japanese "Frog Wife" tale (JT 111):

Advent – Revelation – Resolution

The Korean "Pond Snail Wife" tale (KT 206):

Discovery – Intervention – Resolution

The Turkish "Frog Maiden" tale (EBT 86):

Discovery – Intervention – Resolution

The Russian "The Frog Princess" tale (NRS 269):

Discovery – Intervention – Resolution

The Woman-Shaped Toad in the Grimm Brothers' "Die drei Federn" (KHM 63):

Discovery – Intervention – Resolution¹⁸

6. OBSERVATIONS AND A TENTATIVE CONCLUSION AT THE SEMANTIC LEVEL

How do we interpret the above typological pattern at the semantic level? Even though each actual event is different, the typological pattern ends with the tension *Resolution*. The semantic analysis of what triggers off this ending tension can show the apex,¹⁹ which articulates the semantically key twist in the plot of each tale. We can presume that audiences look forward to the expected apex in order to enjoy the expected ending tension such as the *Resolution*. Research on this specific folktale in various culture areas may indicate that the apex is almost patterned in their folktale²⁰; this apex shows the long-lived (or the time-tested) consistency of the people's preference for their own folktale.²¹ Therefore, one specific apex is always found in the Japanese "Animal Wife" folktale, and can be termed the "generic" apex of that folktale. The analysis of the generic apex can give us some idea of the constituent theme of the Japanese "Animal Wife" folktale because this apex may result from consensus between narrators and audiences about the story development.²²

A careful examination of the typological pattern in the Japanese "Frog Wife" tale shows that this tale focuses on the shift from the tension *Revelation* to the tension *Resolution*. Presumably, this shift explains us that the interest of both narrators and audiences centers on both the revelation of the wife's animal origin and the resolution of the unusual situation (i.e., the unusual connubiality between a man and an animal); the shift of awareness from the apex *Unknown* to the apex *Known* in the "wife's origin" is central to both the narrators' creativity and the audiences' expectation, which is a crucial apex in the Japanese "Frog Wife" tale. The constituent theme of this tale could be that a human cannot continue a connubial life with an animal; even though encountering each other in their daily life, humans and animals cannot trespass their own habitats in nature (this prohibition must result from the Japanese awareness of nature).²³

The typological pattern of other example tales shows that they focus on the shift from the tension *Intervention* to the tension *Resolution*. This shift explains us that the wife's origin seldom affects connubiality, but the connubial life depends upon the circumstances related to the couple. The husband knows his wife's animal origin from the beginning or, in earlier parts of the example

tales, he does not care about her origin. For example, in the Russian “The Frog Princess” tale (NRS 269), the youngest prince gets married to a frog by the king’s command even though neither he nor the king knows that Vasilisa the Wise has assumed the shape of a frog. The focus of what narrators aim to dramatize and what audiences look forward to is not on the origin of wife (both narrators and audiences do not care about the animal origin of a wife), but on the shift from the *Intervention* to the *Resolution*. In short, the shift of circumstances related to the “couple” from the apex *Constraint* to the apex *Unconstraint* is a great concern of both narrators and audiences.²⁴

The above analyses of the example tale variants of the “Animal Wife” folktale show their own intrinsic particularity in the content level, the structural level, and the semantic level. Those analyses explain to us that the apex pattern *Unknown – Known* of the Japanese “Frog Wife” tale is different from another pattern *Constraint – Unconstraint*. The apex pattern *Unknown – Known* of the Japanese “Frog Wife” tale may result from the shift of awareness of the wife’s animal origin. In contrast, the apex pattern *Constraint – Unconstraint* of other exemplified tales may come from the shift of circumstances related to the couple. These two patterns result from a culture-specific consensus about what narrators aim to dramatize and audiences look forward to in their own folktale; this consensus may depend on their worldview (the world awareness), the social view (the social awareness), the specific code of their community, and so on. The semantic analysis of the apex pattern can lead us into an important investigation to grasp the constituent theme that can uncover the mechanism of people’s creating folk narratives with their cultural particularity and, moreover, people’s preference for their narratives.²⁵ To deeply interpret the constituent theme of the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale in terms of the culture-context is the next task for this study.

TERMS USED IN THE ARTICLE:

Animal Wife – an animal that assumes the shape of a woman, having connubiality with a man, i.e., a “woman-shaped animal wife.”

the Animal Wife folktale – the folktale, plots of which are based on connubiality between a man and a woman-shaped animal.

apex – a semantic unit; a climax which shows at the semantic level what narrators aim to recount and what audiences look forward to in a tale.

the generic apex – a specific apex which is generally found in a certain folktale genre or a certain regional folktale, and also a key concept to clarify the constituent theme of that folktale.

plot – a “minimal narrative component” depending on one tension.

plot description – a sequenced description of plots, which shows at the content level what types of plot shape a tale.

tension – an abstract signification focusing on “what happens to the couple (which consist of a woman-shaped animal and a man).”

tension description – a sequenced description of tensions, which shows at the content level what types of tension shape a tale.

typological pattern – a sequence of tensions, which shows how each tension interconnects with each other to shape a tale at the structural level.

COMMENTS

¹ In this paper I have employed the term “Animal Wife” instead of “The Animal Bride” (see ATU 402) because Japanese, Korean, and also Chinese tales generally incline to place weight on plots after the connubial consummation between a woman-figured animal and a man; “to transform into a woman-figured bride and then never return to an animal figure” is not always a central plot in tales of those regions. Incidentally, this paper focuses on actual animals excluding imaginary animals such as a dragon, a mermaid, a were-animal and the like. The main reasons of such limitation are that the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale seldom recounts those imaginary animal wife tales. However, I plan to carry out research into the folktale of other culture areas that recounts about an imaginary animal wife.

² JP – Japanese tale type in Seki Keigo’s *Corpus of the Japanese Folktale* (1980).

³ EBT – Turkish tale type in Wolfram Eberhard’s *Typen Türkischer Volksmärchen* (1953).

⁴ KT – Korean tale type in In-hak Choi’s *A Type Index of Korean Folktales* (1979).

⁵ ATU – tale type in Uther’s *The Types of International Folktales* (2004).

⁶ NRS – tale type in Afanas’ev’s *Narodnye Russkie Skazki* (1863).

⁷ KHM – Grimm Brothers’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1857).

⁸ This categorization covers all kinds of “wives of supernatural origin”, also those whose physical figure is not shaped like an animal, are also included in the categorization. As regards some problems about the categorization method in Japanese tale type catalogues, especially in Seki’s tale type catalogue, see Kazuhiko Komatsu’s article “The Structure of the Japanese Folktale” (1983 [in Japanese]).

⁹ We may say that a man can live together with a woman-shaped animal as a wife unless he comes to know her animal origin, so that this couple is basically capable to continue their married life happily forever. Indeed, it could be, but the texts of the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale seldom recount their “possible happily long connubiality.” In these texts, the break of the connubiality is not a “variable” plot depending on whether the man comes to know his wife’s origin or not; conversely, the

break of the connubiality is a “must” plot between a man and a woman-shaped animal.

- ¹⁰ Abstract words here used for describing tensions are less abstract than those used by V. Propp, A. Dundes, and H. Jason because, as T. Ozawa points out, highly abstract terms are apt to miss semantic connotation that depicts culture-specific preference embedded inside tales. See Ozawa’s “Folktales about One-Night Experience” (1983) [in Japanese], and also “Die Naturanschauung im japanischen Märchen” (1992).
- ¹¹ The precise meaning of the *Advent* is *Advent as a woman-shaped animal to a man*, and that of *Revelation* is *Revelation of a frog-origin to a man*. The given Japanese “Frog Wife” tale tells neither the shape shift from/into a frog into/from a woman nor enchantment/disenchantment from/to a woman to/from a frog. Incidentally, the *Advent* signifies neither “to discovery” nor “to capture” a woman-shaped animal; conversely, a woman-shaped animal voluntarily visits a man. This signification is different from other example tales.
- ¹² As regards the content level characteristics (the stylistic level characteristics) of a woman-shaped toad in the Grimm Brothers’ tales, see Walter Scherf’s *Das Märchenlexikon* (vol.1, 1995: 189–193). He says that those characteristics of a woman-figured toad (which he calls a “frog fiancée/ der “Frosch als Braut”; “the Frog as Bride”) are the reflection of those of “Frog King” tales (“eine Spiegelung des Froschkönigsmärchens ist”) (190). I assent to his opinion as the content level (or stylistic level) remarks about a frog such as the surprising character or the *deus ex machina* character in the story development because a frog unexpectedly appears in order to change the troublesome situation that a co-character (e.g., a princess) suffers from.
- ¹³ The precise meaning of the *Discovery* is “a man discovers a woman-shaped pond snail, capturing a woman-shaped pond snail to start connubial life.” Incidentally, as already noted, the *Advent* in a Japanese “Frog Wife” tale does not signify the *Capture*; a woman-shaped animal comes to the man. This is also different from the given example tales. As regards *Resolution*, “to commit suicide” as well as “to live happily again” is treated as *Resolution* in terms of the tension, because, even though actual events are different, the outside intervention is resolved.
- ¹⁴ The first tension *Discovery* signifies that “a man discovers a woman-figured frog, capturing a woman-shaped frog to start a connubial life.”
- ¹⁵ Interestingly enough, the king commands his son to get married to a frog even though he does not know that Vasilisa the Wise is disguised as the frog. This plot can be different from the general conception of the Grimm Brothers’ tales, in which “the marriage is between two humans” (Röhrich 1991: 73–92, especially 83–84); in contrast to the Grimms’ tales, the marriage between a man and a frog, even though Vasilisa the Wise is disguised as the frog, is done in a Russian “The Frog Princess” tale. This difference is noticeable to consider the culture-specific preference for folk tales.
- ¹⁶ The first tension *Discovery* includes connubiality because he discovers a frog to marry even though reluctantly doing so. The third tension *Intervention* includes the king’s intervention (such as hard tasks) and also Ivan’s quest for Vasilisa the Wise.

- ¹⁷ The *Discovery* here means that the youngest prince encounters a speaking toad as a helper; in that tension he does not yet meet his future woman-shaped toad bride. Therefore, the content of that tension is different from that of the *Discovery* in the rest of the above example tales.
- ¹⁸ As already noted, the meaning of the tension *Discovery* is not identical with that of other example tales in the above.
- ¹⁹ As already noted, the apex stands for a semantic unit that shows at the semantic level what narrators aim to recount and, moreover, what audiences look forward to in a tale.
- ²⁰ The apex is patterned in the folktale, but this formulation of the apex varies depending on the genre of the folktale. For example, the apex of the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale-genre is different from that of the Japanese “Animal Tale” genre (JT 1–83).
- ²¹ Graham Anderson also points out consistency in folk tales, saying that “If a story is a genuine folktale or fairy tale it will maintain most of its structure, intrinsic logic and basic identity for centuries or millennia on end. In the world of traditional storytelling, I [Anderson] have yet to encounter a wolf trying on the glass slipper” (*Fairytales in the Ancient World* 2000: 19).
- ²² I have no intention of insisting that the generic apex here is the only one to reveal the consensus between narrators and audiences about the Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale. There would be other possible “generic apex,” but I find the generic apex that I here describe widely spread in that folktale.
- ²³ The apex can be seen in Japanese “Animal Husband” folktale even though the typological pattern is not always identical with that of Japanese “Animal Wife” folktale.
- ²⁴ In the “Animal Husband” folktale of what we call “European” folktale corpora, the apex of that folktale can generally be seen as the shift from the *Enchantment* to the *Disenchantment*. However, the “Animal Wife” folktale of theirs does not wholly show that shift. Probably the apex pattern *Constraint – Unconstraint* can account for what Lutz Röhrich remarks on “folktale disenchantment” clearer than his statement that “it [folktale disenchantment] frees characters so they can enjoy their worldly existence” (Röhrich 1991: 92). In short, the main concern of narrators and audiences is also the shift of circumstances related to the couple.
- ²⁵ Presumably the people’s preference for their narratives has a lot to do with the “prophylactic censorship.” As regards this “prophylactic censorship,” see P. Bogatyrev and R. Jakobson’s article “Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity” (1982).

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