

The Representation Of The Wolf As A Leading And Rival Character In English And Uzbek Folk Tales

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Abstract: This article analyzes the depiction of the wolf in English and Uzbek folk tales. Although the wolf is often portrayed as a symbol of evil, strength, and danger, it also appears as a rival, tester, and didactic character. The study explores the wolf's rivalry with the fox, goat, sheep, and birds, revealing the social, moral, and psychological meanings expressed through their images. In addition, the archetypal and psychological features of the wolf are examined based on folkloric and mythological roots, drawing on the theories of Propp, Jung, Campbell, Bottigheimer, and Tatar. In English fairy tales, the wolf typically functions as a manipulator and antagonistic force that drives the plot forward, ultimately punished as a vehicle for moral instruction. In Uzbek tales, however, the wolf is more often represented as naïve and gullible, set against cunning characters such as the fox. The findings indicate that while the functional role of the wolf is similar in both traditions, there are also contextual and cultural differences.

Keywords: Image of the wolf, English folk tales, Uzbek folk tales, folklore, mythology, antagonistic character, fox, goat, sheep, birds, archetype, psychological analysis, moral lesson, collectivity, manipulation, gender context.

Introduction: The depiction of the wolf in English fairy tales represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has transformed over the centuries. The wolf is frequently portrayed as a symbol of evil, cunning, fear, and, at the same time, as an emblem of strength and freedom. The identification of such an image requires folkloric, mythological, and psychoanalytic approaches, which play a significant role in its interpretation. In English folk narratives, the wolf is depicted not only as an independent protagonist but also as an antagonist or testing character engaged in rivalry with other animals in numerous plots. As Joseph Campbell states in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), folkloric characters embody archetypal qualities through which cultural, psychological, and moral values are conveyed. The archetype of the wolf is particularly analyzed through Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, according to which the wolf symbolizes instincts associated with evil and danger in the depths of the human psyche (Jung, 1959). Thus, the wolf's rivalry with other animals—especially the fox, goat, sheep, and birds—is

metaphorically expressed through notions of human relationships such as loyalty, betrayal, cleverness, and naivety. In English fairy tales, the wolf is typically strong but not always wise; it threatens through its physical power, yet is often defeated by the fox's cunning, the goat's collectivism, or the birds' wisdom. The rivalry between the wolf and the fox is one of the most recurrent motifs in numerous plots. For example, in the tale *The Fox and the Wolf*, the wolf is represented as powerful but naïve and gullible, while the fox, with its intelligence and wit, deceives the wolf. In these narratives, the wolf is generally portrayed as a predator acting on instinct, incapable of critically evaluating its own behavior. The fox, in contrast, is characterized as a prudent figure who can find solutions to problems or trick the wolf, thereby emerging as a symbol of life experience and sagacity.

As folklorist Ruth Bottigheimer emphasizes in her study *Fairy Tales: A New History* (2009), "in fairy tales, cunning is associated with intelligence, whereas strength is linked to danger." According to her, while the wolf seeks to dominate through brute force, the fox

achieves superiority within the boundaries of social norms by means of intellect. This reflects the ancient dichotomy between strength and wisdom in human society, metaphorically represented through the imagery of animals.

One of the frequently encountered tales in both English and Uzbek traditions is known as “The Fox and the Wolf”. However, the key difference lies in the naming order: in English folklore the fox’s name is mentioned first and the wolf’s second, whereas in Uzbek folk tradition the reverse occurs, with the title rendered as “The Wolf and the Fox”. In one version of the Uzbek tale with this title, it is narrated that one day a wolf was carrying a large piece of meat in its mouth when it came across a fox. Upon seeing the meat, the fox attempted to trick the wolf into speaking so that the food would fall. As the wolf tried to say “from Pop” (Popdan), the meat dropped from its mouth. The fox, who had been waiting for this moment, immediately seized the meat and escaped, leaving the wolf hungry. A few days later, the starving wolf encountered the fox again, this time with another large piece of meat in its mouth. Intending to imitate the fox’s trick, the wolf tried to lure the fox into speaking. However, the fox bit tightly onto the meat and, while uttering “from G’ijduvon,” quickly ran away. This tale highlights the wolf’s simplicity, honesty, and straightforwardness in contrast to the fox’s cunning and deceitful nature.

In another version of “The Wolf and the Fox”, the two animals are initially depicted as friends, yet the fox’s craftiness ultimately undermines this companionship. A hungry wolf proposes to the fox that they go somewhere together to find food and enjoy themselves. The fox agrees and leads the wolf along. Eventually, they come across a group of seven or eight women on their way to a wedding feast, each carrying bundles of food. The fox suddenly rolled over and transformed itself into a quail, fluttering in front of the women. Eager to catch it for their children, the women set down their bundles and chased after the quail. In the meantime, the wolf devoured the food from the abandoned bundles until it was satisfied. When the exhausted women returned, they found their bundles empty. The fox later discovered the wolf resting nearby after its indulgence.

The following day, the wolf asked the fox to “play a slight trick on me, but do not harm me seriously.” In response, the fox led the wolf into a vineyard. They squeezed through a narrow opening beneath the wall and found themselves in a storehouse overflowing with grapes, with no one around. Seizing the opportunity, both began to feast greedily. Once the fox had eaten its fill, it mockingly stuffed two clusters of grapes into its nostrils and went to the wolf, claiming that the grapes

were coming out of its nose from overeating. The wolf, however, no matter how much it ate, could not achieve the same effect. Having eaten excessively, its belly became greatly swollen until it could no longer move and collapsed on the ground. This was exactly what the fox had intended. It quickly climbed onto the wall and cried out loudly: “There is a thief in the vineyard!” Hearing the noise, the gardener came rushing with a cudgel. The wolf attempted to escape, but when it tried to squeeze back through the storehouse opening, it became stuck. Nor could it climb over the wall. The gardener beat the wolf mercilessly, until the grapes it had devoured spewed from its mouth and nose, leaving it nearly lifeless. He then dragged the wolf outside and abandoned it. After some time, the wolf regained consciousness and found itself at the entrance of the storehouse. Seeing no one nearby, it staggered away and lay down groaning in pain. Eventually, the fox arrived and inquired after its condition. With difficulty, the wolf lamented: “Ah, friend, you have killed me. When I asked you to upset me a little, did you have to go this far?” To which the fox replied mockingly: “Brother, how could I have known the vineyard’s owner would beat you so severely?”

On the following day, the fox again led the hungry wolf into a sheepfold to eat the fat tail of a sheep. The fox itself kept a distance, refusing to approach. As the wolf reached for the tail, however, its snout was caught in a trap. The fox quickly devoured the fat and fled before the approaching shepherd arrived. When the shepherd reached the spot, he found not the fox but the wolf ensnared. “Ah! I thought it was the fox, but it is you,” he exclaimed, before beating the wolf severely and then releasing it. After escaping from his previous misfortune, the wolf, still hungry, encountered a lamb, then a rooster, later a mule, and finally a horse along his way. Yet, believing their deceptive words, he was left with nothing each time. The horse ultimately kicked the wolf, leaving his mouth and nose covered in blood. The wolf later recounted this incident to the fox. In short, after repeatedly being deceived and punished by the fox, the wolf resigned himself silently to his fate. Soon afterward, two hunters spotted him and gave chase.

In his attempt to flee, the wolf came across a ploughman working his field. The wolf pleaded with the man to hide him. Out of pity, the ploughman concealed the wolf in a large sack. When the hunters had passed, the wolf tried to attack and devour the ploughman. At that very moment, the fox appeared. The ploughman explained the entire incident to the fox. The fox then turned to the wolf and said mockingly: “I cannot believe you could fit into such a sack; even if your body fits, surely your tail cannot.” Wanting to prove it, the wolf

crawled back into the sack. The fox immediately signaled to the ploughman to tie the mouth of the sack tightly. Together, they each took a heavy cudgel and beat the wolf until he was killed.

In some tales, a third character is added to the rivalry between the fox and the wolf. Examples include “The Tortoise, the Fox, and the Wolf” and “The Fox, the Stork, and the Wolf.” In the tale “The Tortoise, the Fox, and the Wolf,” it is narrated that one day the wolf visited the fox. Greeting him, the fox asked what brought him. The wolf replied: “Dear Fox, today I want you to host me as your guest.” The fox agreed: “Very well, it will give us an opportunity to converse. I will make preparations while you wash your hands.” He then sent the tortoise to bring some meat and other provisions. The fox laid out a tablecloth and placed what little he had on it. The wolf entered, and the two sat conversing, waiting eagerly for the meat to arrive. Impatient, the wolf exclaimed: “That one is unbearably slow! How could you send him?” The fox responded: “Let us wait a little longer. When he arrives, I will punish him by breaking his bowl into pieces for being late.” Suddenly, a voice retorted: “If you intend to do that, then I shall not go at all.” They looked up and realized it was the tortoise—who, in fact, had not even reached the door yet.

The tale “The Fox, the Stork, and the Wolf” closely resembles the well-known fable “The Fox and the Crane.” According to the narrative, one day the stork invited the fox to a feast, preparing a thin broth served in a tall jug. The fox, unable to reach the contents with its mouth, could not eat, while the stork comfortably inserted its long beak and ate at leisure. The next day, the fox invited the stork in return. This time, he prepared a flat cake, spreading it thinly across a wooden board. The stork, striking the board with its beak, was unable to eat anything, while the fox consumed the entire cake by itself.

From this point onward, the events unfold around the two animals taking revenge on one another through trickery. The fox forced the stork to spread its wings wide and, by biting the tips, dragged it through dense thickets, stripping its wings until they were torn and bloodied. The stork survived only by feeding on frogs along the riverside, recovering after forty days. Seeking retaliation, the stork later carried the fox high into the sky and dropped it once the earth was no longer visible. Fortunately, the fox landed on a shepherd’s sheepskin, placing it beneath itself for shelter. Soon after, a wolf approached and inquired who had sewn the sheepskin. The fox deceitfully claimed to have stitched it himself, convincing the wolf that thirty-five sheepskins would be required for such a task. The gullible wolf obeyed, slaughtering sheep and providing the hides, while the

fox feasted on their meat and fat. When the wolf returned a month later, the fox tricked him again and fled. The wolf gave chase, but the fox hid in a crevice too narrow for the wolf to enter. The wolf waited motionless for three days, but weakened by hunger, he fetched a jar from a farmer and placed it at the entrance of the crevice. The wind howled through the jar, sounding like the wolf’s howl. Terrified and famished, the fox, mistaking it for the wolf, emerged cautiously. Upon discovering the trick, he tied the jar to his tail and dragged it to the river. As the jar filled with water, the fox began to sink. He narrowly escaped by severing his tail, but remained tailless, mocked by the other foxes. Eventually, he took revenge on the forty foxes who had ridiculed him. It is evident that in this narrative, particular attention is given to the wolf’s howl, which terrifies the fox. This is significant, since in folk belief the howling of wolves or dogs is regarded as an omen of misfortune. Similar motifs can be found in other tales. For instance, in the Uzbek tale “The Five Girls” one finds the line: “The voices of wolves were heard. Out of fear, I climbed up a tall tree and sat there.”

In the tale “The Brave Goat”, a goat, a bullock, and an ox encounter the skins of a tiger, a wolf, and a fox lying on the ground. Draping the hides over the ox, they continue on their way and come upon a gathering of wild beasts—including lions, leopards, and wolves. There, a fox boasts of being a contractor hired to slaughter sixty tigers, sixty wolves, and sixty foxes, while others even regard him as a sorcerer.

In another tale, “The Calf, the Goat, and the Lamb”, a wolf enters the house of a lazy man, planning to feast on his calf, goat, and lamb for three days. Overjoyed, he begins to sing. But the clever calf devises a plan, and together the animals frighten the wolf away. In panic, the wolf flees, only to encounter eight other wolves who, curious about the feast, head to the house. Anticipating their arrival, the animals hide. When nine wolves storm into the courtyard, they search the house and barn in vain, reproaching their companion for misleading them. They then gather to perform divination, but at that very moment the calf leaps upon them, creating chaos. The goat shouts: “Seize the one who is fortune-telling!” and all nine wolves scatter in terror. Grateful to have escaped unharmed, they rejoice. Meanwhile, the lazy man’s animals live on safely, grow fat, and thrive happily.

The steppe wolf (jackal-like wolf) represents a subspecies of the wolf, and its name also appears in certain folktales. One such example is the Uzbek tale “The Deceptive Cat”. In this story, a wise tabby cat living in a large forest deceives a mighty elephant by claiming that it is on its way to fight the steppe wolf.

The elephant ironically replies: “With your small size? Who are you compared to the steppe wolf?” Yet, through cunning, the wise cat escapes calamities, outwits many, and ultimately achieves its goals. The rivalry between the wolf and the goat in English folklore is often framed through the notions of family, motherhood, and community. In “The Wolf and the Seven Kids” and its variants, the wolf is portrayed as solitary, independent, and even violent, whereas the goat symbolizes familial values, maternal protection, and sacrifice. The struggle against the wolf who devours her offspring highlights the mother goat’s courage, endurance, and determination. As the anthropologist Marina Warner observes in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994): “The opposition between animals expresses human concepts.” In this symbolic framework, the wolf represents external danger, while the goat embodies internal values. Their confrontation produces a moral conclusion: the aspiration to resist threat, the strength of the community, and the primacy of protective values prevail. The conflict between wolves and sheep has a universal symbolic dimension. The sheep signify simplicity, obedience, and collective spirit, whereas the wolf embodies cruelty and menace. Tales such as “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing” are not merely about deception but serve as moral lessons—warning against trusting appearances. This motif, originating in Aesop’s fables, is widely adapted in English oral tradition.

Birds are not always direct rivals of the wolf, yet they often stand in contrast as symbols of wisdom and foresight. In “The Wolf and the Crane”, the wolf betrays the crane that has helped him, illustrating the theme of ingratitude and the motif of responding to good with evil. Moreover, the bird’s capacity for free flight and long vision symbolizes superiority over the wolf, who relies solely on brute strength. In many tales, the wolf asserts not only physical power but also psychological dominance, attempting to frighten, deceive, or manipulate others for his own gain. However, these manipulations frequently result in his defeat. As Maria Tatar emphasizes in *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales* (2002): “The wolf’s behavior is often based on short-term strategies. He disrupts balance but cannot restore it. He wields power but cannot control it.” This illustrates the wolf’s dramatic crisis: strong yet unstable; dominant yet isolated. For example, in “Little Red Riding Hood”, the wolf deceives and devours both the girl and her grandmother, but is ultimately punished when the huntsman rescues the victims by killing the wolf. The moral is clear: victories gained through deceit are unsustainable and inevitably punished. Thus, the wolf’s rivals—the fox, the goat, the sheep, and the birds—are each endowed with qualities

that counteract the wolf’s violence. Their common trait is reliance not on brute force, but on values such as communal solidarity, loyalty, intellect, and sociability. Against the wolf’s physical dominance, these figures embody cultural and moral superiority.

- The fox is always portrayed as shrewd, resourceful, and cunning, frequently unmasking or outsmarting the wolf. This represents the triumph of wit over force.
- The goat embodies maternal love and familial devotion, bravely confronting the wolf’s aggression with communal spirit and determination.
- The sheep, though symbolizing simplicity and obedience, are not merely passive victims; in some tales, they embody moral supremacy, reminding that society punishes the wolf’s exploitation of innocence.
- Birds are distinguished by their associations with freedom, knowledge, and foresight. In fairy tales, they frequently appear as advisors to the wolf or as interpreters of unfolding events.

Although the wolf consistently embodies the symbol of strength, his recurrent defeats underscore the superiority of intellect and wisdom. It may be argued that within this system of oppositions, the wolf invariably assumes the role of the “loser.” For this reason, he is repeatedly punished, expelled, destroyed, or ridiculed. The wolf’s naivety, excessive credulity, and overreliance on his own strength render him perpetually vulnerable to opponents who rely on cunning, wisdom, or collective solidarity. This dynamic conveys the central message of these tales: not brute force, but wisdom, patience, cooperation, and moral integrity prevail.

In English folklore, the wolf functions not only as an antagonistic power but also as a literary and aesthetic device. His portrayals generate dramatic dynamism, propel narrative development, and produce unexpected plot turns. The wolf’s sudden attacks, deceptions, and hidden schemes behind disguises captivate children’s attention, engage their emotions, and heighten the impact of the tale. As Peter Hunt notes in *Children’s Literature: An Illustrated History* (1995): “The wolf is the generator of dynamism within the tale. He initiates action, sets conflict in motion, and creates dramatic tension.” This confirms that the wolf serves not only a didactic purpose but also enriches the tales with aesthetic enjoyment. Through these narratives, children come to understand that similar “wolves” exist in real life—danger, deceit, negligence, and injustice. Such warnings are especially evident in tales such as “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “The Three Little Pigs.” In these stories, children not only follow the plot but also absorb

crucial social lessons. The wolf image has also been shaped as a cultural code within collective consciousness. In English national imagination, it has developed as a symbol of danger, independence, evil, and occasionally freedom. In fairy tales, this cultural code is continually reinforced, modified, or reinterpreted through recurring variants. Such recurring motifs belong to the archetypal layer of oral tradition, reflecting how a community perceives itself and how it wishes to be perceived. As cultural theorist Raymond Williams observed: "Folklore is the mirror of a society's memory; it preserves its deepest desires, fears, and dreams through artistic imagery." The wolf's persistent placement in a negative role thus preserves feelings associated with real-life dangers within cultural memory. Consequently, folk tales function as warning devices, alerting audiences to social, political, and moral threats.

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