

# System of Images in Magical Fairy Tales

Jamilaxon Baxodirovna Asqarova

Doctor of Philological Sciences, Leading Research Fellow, Institute of Uzbek Language, Literature, and Folklore, Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** The article compares the study, classification, and types of magical fairy tale characters in world folklore. The differences between the terms character, image and hero are analyzed and the place and role of the hero in the system of images in Uzbek folk magic tales is researched.

**Keywords:** Folklore, magical tale, character, image, hero, type.

**Introduction:** Oral folk literature, which constitutes an integral part of the spiritual values of a nation, particularly fairy tales, vividly reflects the cognitive processes, aesthetic perception of the world, social structures, customs, and ethical principles of a people. As noted in national discourse, "The priceless pearls of human culture are primarily embodied in the folklore of each nation... Folklore, one might say, is the cradle song of humanity" [1, №68]. From this standpoint, a pressing scholarly challenge in the study of Uzbek fairy tales is the systematic investigation of the unique traits and functions of characters in magical tales. This includes their classification based on defining characteristics and their division into functional types. The current study applies a structural-typological approach to analyze characters according to their narrative roles, and a structural-semantic method to group them based on poetic attributes and symbolism. In the realm of magical tales, the system of characters has been extensively studied by folklorists around the world. Russian scholar V.Y. Propp, in his 1928 work *Morphology of the Folktale*, conducted structural research on magical fairy tales by analyzing the composition of one hundred Russian folktales. According to him, Russian fairy tales typically include seven types of dramatis personae [3, p. 73]:

1. The Villain
2. The Donor
3. The Helper
4. The Princess and her Father
5. The Dispatcher

6. The Hero

7. The False Hero

R. Drory identifies five main roles in magical tales:

1. Hero A
2. Hero B
3. Guide
4. Giver of a magical gift
5. Defeated character [14, p. 32]

B. Kerbelytė, while analyzing magical tales, divides characters into five groups:

1. Hero
2. Hero's close ones
3. Antagonist
4. Antagonist's close ones
5. Neutral characters [13, p. 50]

E. Novik classifies fairy tale characters according to semantic features:

1. By gender (male/female)
2. By age (old/young/child)
3. By individual traits (ordinary/extraordinary, anthropomorphic/non-anthropomorphic)
4. By family status (parent/child, older/younger, biological/step-relative)
5. By social status (king/peasant, rich/poor, master/servant)
6. By location (home/forest, own or foreign kingdom, near/far).

Before systematizing the character system in Uzbek magical tales, it is essential to clarify the conceptual differences among key terms in the field.

**Character, Image, and Hero: Terminological Distinctions** What distinguishes the terms hero, character, and image in the context of magical fairy tales? Although often used interchangeably in both folklore and literary studies, each term carries distinct semantic and theoretical implications.

In literary criticism, the term character denotes an acting figure—an individual portrayed to a greater or lesser extent within a work of art.

“Any person depicted in a literary work, regardless of the extent, is referred to as a character. The term personage (from French) signifies a person or figure...” [5, p. 103].

A more formal definition states: “A character (Lat. persona) is a person represented by the author in art or literature. Depending on their involvement and significance in the narrative, characters are categorized as major, supporting, or episodic. Those central to the plot and conveying the work’s primary ideological and aesthetic purpose are principal characters or protagonists. Characters who support the main narrative without being central are supporting characters, while those appearing minimally are considered episodic” [11, p. 178].

The term image (Rus. obraz), meaning “reflection,” refers to an artistic representation. In literary theory, an image represents a creative reinterpretation of reality, encompassing people, objects, and events: “An artistic image is an aesthetic and imaginative representation of reality, shaped by the author’s perception and reworking of the world” [4, p. 43].

L.I. Timofeev defined the concept as: “An image is a generalized yet concrete depiction of human life, created through imaginative means and possessing aesthetic value” [9, p. 62].

In pre-Soviet Uzbek literary tradition, synonyms such as symbol, depiction, and copy were used in place of image. The term obraz was introduced into Uzbek critical terminology in the 1920s and 1930s [10, p. 41].

The term hero derives from the Greek heros, meaning a demi-god or divine figure, and traditionally represents an object of admiration and a moral exemplar in literature [2, p. 23]. In Persian and Turkic traditions, the word hero (e.g., bahodir, alp) refers to a brave, noble warrior.

“A hero (Persian: bahodir) is someone renowned for bravery and valor, who distinguishes themselves through courage and noble deeds” [12, p. 273].

Mahmud Kashgari, in his *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*, explains

that alp means hero or warrior [6, p. 77].

Thus, in fairy tales, the term hero refers to brave and victorious characters—typically warriors or adventurers—whereas not all main figures qualify as heroes.

For instance, in the tale *Kenja Botir*, the prince is the hero, while in *Ur, To’qmoq*, the old man is the central figure but not a hero, as he does not display heroic actions.

The term character (personage) implies a human figure who participates actively in the narrative. By this logic, animals, magical objects, and natural phenomena cannot be classified as characters. However, within the broader system of images, not only human characters but also animals, objects, and natural elements contribute meaningfully to the tale.

“All images in the system are interrelated—they complement, clarify, and expand upon one another. Object and setting images are subordinate to character images, and within the character system itself, supporting and secondary characters are hierarchically related to main characters” [4, p. 207].

While folklore criticism adopts many of the same terms and frameworks as literary criticism, their application differs due to the specific nature of oral tradition. Key distinctions include: In literature, images are individually crafted by a known author; in folklore, they are collectively developed and refined by many voices over time.

Literary images are typically original; folkloric images often exist in multiple variants.

In literature, stylistic uniqueness is paramount; in folklore, tradition and collective memory shape the image.

Proposed typology of characters in Uzbek magical fairy tales based on the structural roles and functions of characters in Uzbek magical fairy tales, we propose the following classification:

#### I. Main Hero

Male protagonists: prince, youngest son, brave youth

Female protagonists: fairy, princess, young girl, youngest daughter

#### II. Supporting Characters

Mythological supporters: Khidr, old man, father, fairy, magical old woman

Zoomorphic supporters: animals, birds

#### III. Antagonists

Open enemies (mythological): demons (dev), witches (yalmo’g’iz), dragons (ajdar), evil old women, stepmothers

Hidden rivals (antipodes): older brothers, older sisters  
IV. Helpers

Mythological helpers: fairies, devs

Zoomorphic helpers: dogs, cats [15, p 23].

Each hero engages with the other character groups in unique ways:

Supporters guide the hero or bestow magical items, but are not subordinate.

Antagonists oppose the hero in action or intention.

Helpers act in support of the hero, often under their command.

Importantly, each character type is programmatically defined—not only by function but also by name, appearance, and symbolic attributes.

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