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## ZOOMORPHISM IN FANTASY WORLDS CONSTRUCTION

Elena Valerievna Medvedeva (a)\*, Svetlana Viacheslavovna Kolomiets (b)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Kemerovo State Medical University, 22A, Voroshilova st., Kemerovo, 650056, Russia, lmv72@mail.ru,

(b) Kemerovo State University, 6, Krasnaya st., Kemerovo, 650000, Russia, kolomsvetlana@yandex.ru

### *Abstract*

The research touches upon the issue of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism in culture and particularly in literature. The article presents the examination of historical roots of zoomorphic images in European culture and the tradition of the zoomorphic representation, explored through the prism of culture, art and literature. In literature zoomorphism has proved to be a powerful literary tool explored by authors to develop a plot and evolve a different narrative perspective. The article focuses on the creation of fantasy worlds via zoomorphism usage. Zoomorphic images are regarded as a specific zoomorphic code that makes possible to create an immersive picture of the *Strangeness*. A zoomorphic code in fantasy literature is exposed to a detailed analysis mainly performed with the help of the method of linguistic interpretation. The works written by A. Norton, a famous American fantasy writer, were chosen as material for the current research as her works are known to have well-developed system of different humanoid and non-humanoid personages. The analysis carried out on the given material showed that zoomorphic code is used in different ways while creating the images of the fantasy worlds characters. It has also proved the significant role of zoomorphism in revealing the key characteristics of real humanity, helping to solve the problem of human identification in culture.

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**Keywords:** Zoomorphism, anthropomorphism, fantasy world, zoomorphic code, intertextuality.



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## 1. Introduction

Animals play an important part in the human culture, being used in many spheres of life. They also served as the basis and a source of inspiration for many artefacts, rituals, religious practices and archetypes. As the first understanding of the world around was syncretic one, it united natural and supernatural, natural and human. This has found its reflection in such religious traditions as animism and totemism, showing supernatural link between man and certain animals. In different ancient cultures we can find examples of animal creator of the world or ancestor of the human groups. According to Toporov, animals stand out in myths in three main aspects: 1) animal ancestor; 2) a magic animal guardian associated to a man; 3) a sacred embodiment of man, animal numen creator or a zoomorphic god (as cited in Barrios, 2012).

Animals are also a part of numerous folk rituals. Testa (2017) mentions that the main characteristics of such rituals are formalization and repetition. Their structure was necessary to include the following elements: coming from and leaving to the outside of the settlement; wearing beasts' masks and acting like beasts; performing dances or miming and acting out a hunt. Thus the idea of non-human was stressed and intensified. Kindt (2019) points out that animals though only one aspect among many in the interrelation of natural and supernatural stand apart for they share human physical existence and thus become to be used as complex symbols of the way to negotiate to the supernatural.

These first anthropomorphic representations of the supernatural (attributing human characteristics to animals) which we observe in animism traditions with the time gave way to zoomorphic representations of it. Even in such cultures as that of the Ancient Greece where anthropomorphism as a way of representing the divinity was prevailing, the principles of zoomorphism (attributing animal features to man) were also in use. Zoomorphism was used for instance to provide semi- or aniconic representation of the divine body as it helps to show its immanence on the one hand and transcendence on the other. Zoomorphic representation is located between the absence of any bodily form of the deity and absolute anthropomorphism. It should be mentioned that if the effect of anthropomorphism is to "familiarize" the deity making it look like human, the result of zoomorphism is to "de-familiarize" and even to depersonalize it. The use of zoomorphic representations stresses the non-human aspects of deity, aspects that go beyond the human realm. These representations can be temporary (transformations to camouflage or show the power to transform) or constant. The last give us the examples of mixanthropes bringing together humans and animals, they reveal the characteristics of the third – the supernatural. (Kindt, 2019).

Thus, zoomorphic images in culture show the correlation between the natural and human reflecting the system of interrelation between the human society and the environment. They serve as points of cultural meaning concentration reflecting the complicated and controversial character of these interrelations. The zoomorphic hybrid is the representation of humans and by means of its hybridization of nature and culture is reaffirmed (Lai, 2014). The analysis of the manifestation of zoomorphism in culture leads to understanding bestial component in the human nature and in socio-cultural processes thus helping to solve such key problems of the modern knowledge as identification of human place in the society and formation of the world understanding in the modern culture (Khranova, 2015).

## **2. Problem Statement**

All the literary works create their specific, possible worlds, drawing peculiar space and time more or less similar to the real one, the one we live in. However, this task is doubled for the creators of fantasy worlds, as it should be “twice possible” world. To solve this problem, the authors use various sources while making the worlds that have something in common with the real world on the one hand but quite different on the other hand. The cultural heritage of the mankind serves as the main source for the writers actively introduce various myths, legends, historical events and characters while creating their new, fantasy worlds.

The category of intertextuality in the form of intertextual coding provides the necessary mechanism to apply all of them to the construction of fantasy worlds reality. One of the main and the most used means is allusions to various mythological and historical events and cultural archetypes. Kochneva (2018) points out that allusions have functional and semantic importance as by means of them the reader learns, analyzes and generalizes information, gets deeper understanding of what has been read. Due to the close link of allusions to associations, the process of information decoding depends greatly on the reader and his background knowledge.

The principle of zoomorphism which helps to embody non-human in the culture is also used for this purpose. From the semiotic point of view zoomorphic images result in the creation of a specific zoomorphic code, providing both the link with the archetype and stressing the Strangeness. This code is considered a part of mythological code because the animals’ images are widely used in modelling the world. It is also a part of the language picture of the world, being used in the art and literature. In the structure of zoomorphic images we can clearly distinguish archetypical core meaning and layers of later cultural meanings which speaks for polysemy of the images and makes zoomorphism a universal metaphorization complex of culture (Khramova, 2015).

Fantasy literature as one of the most popular genres of nowadays arises many questions for analysis and discussion. One of them is the way of creation fantastic reality. Some of the means used by the fantasy literature writers have been paid much attention, for instance, using proper names, myths, legends, etc. Yet, the usage of zoomorphism for this purpose was not fully analyzed.

## **3. Research Questions**

To do this research we have to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of zoomorphic images in the modern culture?
2. In what way is zoomorphism used in fantasy literature?
3. What are the main functions of using zoomorphism in fantasy literature?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify and analyze zoomorphism usage in fantasy world construction. The material for the research is the works written by A. Norton, a famous American fantasy writer.

## 5. Research Methods

The study is performed by using such method as the method of linguistic interpretation. Methods of semantic analysis of a text and contextual analysis are used as additional ones.

## 6. Findings

An integral part of fiction is interpretation of national myth, which contributes to the aesthetic enrichment of literary work. It also facilitates identification of the national world view embodied through an individual author's vision (Antonov & Levina, 2019). Thus, zoomorphic code, being a part of a wider mythological code is to reflect national specificity in combination with some generalized understanding.

Khramova (2015) mentions that with the time passed zoomorphic images became merely means of artistic expression, having lost their sacral symbolic meaning. The attention of modern authors is concentrated on the archetypal features of these images that allow affecting the subconscious of the readers and viewers. As for mass culture, it closely connects zoomorphic images with the children's and teenagers' culture where they are involved into the process of identification through the association with the animal character. However, in fantasy literature the functioning of zoomorphic images is not limited by this only as they are used to create the fantastic reality forming the system of fantastic personages as well.

The worlds of Norton's (1957, 1960, 1973) fiction have a well-developed system of personages. Her worlds are inhabited by different humanoid and non-humanoid races, there are also unusual animals living with the people mostly. The specific characteristics of her creativity is the use of zoomorphism principle for making bright and vivid images. The analysis of the novels "Storm Over Warlock", "Star Born", "Forerunner Foray" and "Elvenblood (Halfblood Chronicles – 2)" showed that these characters can be divided into several groups.

In the first group we include usual at first sight, terrestrial animals having specific abilities. The example of them are the wolverines Togi and Taggi from "Storm Over Warlock". They were specially bred for the investigating and settling the new territory and are full of their original bestial essence. The last fact is underlined by the author's metaphor "*Wolverines, the ancient "devils" of the northlands on Terra*", "*teeth gleamed – those cruel teeth of a carnivore to whom they were weapons of aggression*". But their attitude to the main character which is based on their mutual ability "to speak" in mind resembles that of a pet-dog: "*to Taggi and Togi he was a person, an important person*", "*those teeth, which could tear flesh into ragged strips, nipped gently at his fingers, closed without pressure on arm...in what was the ultimate caress of their kind*" (Norton, 1960).

The second group includes the images based on the combination of characteristics of different representatives of the animal world. One of such characters is Harath from the novel "Forerunner Foray". He has some resemblance to a bird as he has a "*beaked mouth*", "*round eyes*", "*his small body was covered with a down which could be either feathers or the lightest and fluffiest fur*". At the same time, he is deprived of one of the main bird's characteristic – the wings as "*he was wingless, having coiled within deep pockets of his body-covering four short tentacles*". His small size, speech characterization with the help of the verb "chitter" presupposes helplessness but it is not so: "*The toes ended in wicked-looking*

*talons which matched the oddly vicious warning of his large curved beak*". To increase the expression of the image the author uses the following comparisons: "tentacles he could use as one could use rather clumsy arms and hands"; "his legs and feet were down-covered though the down was shorter in length and fluffed out as if he were wearing leggings and three-toed slippers on his feet" (Norton, 1973).

The third group which is the most numerous consists of the characters whose images are based on the balanced combination of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic features. For instance, the representatives of *Salarica* combine the features of a man and a cat ("*feline-evolved race*"), those of *Zacathans* – the features of a man and a reptile ("*reptilian-evolved*"), the representatives of Wyverns – the features of a man and a dragon ("*the features were non-human, closer to saurian in contour*"), the representatives of *Throgs* – the characteristics of a man and an insect ("*... grotesque insectile bodies*").

It should be noted that while choosing the animal as a model for a new image, the author attributes it with the characteristics corresponding to her individual, mythological or common cultural ideas about the species (Medvedeva, 2012). For example, insects as the most distant in their body organization and functioning serve like the prototype of human rivals: "*between Throg and man there appeared to be no meeting ground at all – total differences of mental processes producing insurmountable misunderstanding*". The key concept of their image is "alien" and the only emotion of theirs is anger.

Another image is of *Salarica* race. The representatives of this race have a more detailed description. The specific features of cats can be easily traced both in the appearance and in personality. For instance, the personage of "Forerunner Foray" Yasa can purr, roll like ball, has an acute susceptibility to smells and is fond of sparkling jewelry. She is practical, egoistic, independent and intelligent, she can get on well with the others for some reasonable purpose: "*Yasa was an alien, a Salarika... Like all her feline-evolved race, Yasa was highly practical, utterly self-centered, but able to company with other species to a workable degree without ever losing her individuality. Her intelligence was of a very high order, even if she approached matters from a slightly different angle than would one of Ziantha's species*"; "*Humanoid Yasa might be in general form, but there was no human type of emotion which Ziantha could detect in that long stare*"; "*the most graceful creature in movement .... Black hair, more like plushy fur, was thick and satiny on her head and shoulders and down the upper sides of her arms. Her face, not quite as broad and flat as those of most of her species, narrowed to an almost sharply pointed chin. ...very large eyes .... Slanted a little in her skull, their pupils contracting and expanding in degrees of light, like those of her far-off feline ancestors, these were a deep red-gold*". So we can not fail to observe all the main characteristics and habits of cats as they are reflected in the culture. From the point of view of phonetics her speech is also marked: "*Yessss – ... "How old – and what isss thisss thing which isss sssso old?"*"; "*Sssomewhere now in Tikil there isss a Patrol ssssensitive at alert. How long you think before Jucundusss beginss to wonder?"*"; "*From down in her throat came a tiny murmur of sound the girl knew of old. Yasa purred, Yasa was well pleased*"; "*Yasa's purr was louder*" (Norton, 1973).

*Zacathans* are shown as historians and archeologists of the space: "*very long-lived Hist-techneers and archaeologists of the galaxy*". They are marked as a very patient race, not apt to showing emotions. Their images embody the idea of a serpent as a symbol of wisdom. It is interesting that their images do not include any Bible motifs concerning Eve or anything associated with the danger they can cause to the others.

The main principle underlying the image of the next race – *Wyverns* is the same: combination of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic characteristics. But this time one of the bases of this combination is connected with the mythological creature – dragon. As such they possess not only the features of an animal but some mental superpowers as well. They have “*reptilian appearance*” with “*large yellow eyes*” and “*vertical slits of green for pupils*”, “*a nose united with the jaw to make a snout*”, “*the doomed forehead*”, “*a sharp V-point of raised spiky growth extended back and down... behind the shoulder blades it widened and expanded to resemble a pair of wings*”. The key characteristic of the image is “*glitter*” resembling “*brilliance of jewels*” (Norton, 1957). We can also note that mental superpowers are developed only among the females of the race who control the opposite sex.

Close to the previous race, there is a group, which uses a mythological creature as a basis for the origin. In the novel referring to proper fantasy genre A. Norton uses dragons to create some of the main characters. Though they possess all the external characteristics of these animals (size, wings, ability to fly, etc.), they are shown as the wise supporters and protectors of the humans. They are able to love and feel jealousy as well. Thus, in their mind they are closer to human than to animal. They also are the masters of shape-shifting, illusion and mental powers. When in human appearance, only shadow can reveal their real self (Norton & Lacke, 1996).

The last group of characters having zoomorphic traits is an example of true zoomorphism as now we have an example of using some animal characteristics (for example, fur and scales) to make a new image. That is the case of Ssuri, a merman from the novel “*Star Born*” who was “*covered with a fluffy pelt of rainbow-tipped gray fur*” and has “*scales which covered his hands and feet*” (Norton, 1957). We can not detect one specific animal being the “*donor*” of this image but it helps to create the atmosphere of *Strangeness*.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of the material presented in the study showed that creating fantasy worlds zoomorphic code reflecting the principle of zoomorphism is widely used for several reasons. First of all, it serves for the creation of the atmosphere of *Strangeness*. These half or absolutely alien images make the reader feel that the events take place in some different, another world provoking at the same time some remembrance because the images are based on some familiar archetypes. Another reason is identification of a human for real humanity is not dependent on the appearance, body shape or race. By shifting the stress from these characteristics, the writers reveal the problem of understanding what a human is. Animals, being companions of man for so long, help to do this task.

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