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BETWEEN LEGEND AND WONDER TALE: THE SUPERNATURAL WATER BRIDE IN BRITISH AND UZBEK TRADITIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF GENRE

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: water maiden, mermaid, pari, supernatural bride, migratory legend, wonder tale, ATU 400, ML 4080, comparative folkloristics, Uzbek folklore.

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Abstract: Comparisons of the British mermaid and the Uzbek *suv parisi* often conclude that the first is a dangerous seductress whose stories end in loss and the second an ideal bride whose stories end in marriage, and they explain the contrast by differences in religion, landscape and family values. This article argues that much of that contrast is produced by genre. Focusing on one plot, the marriage of a mortal man to a woman from the water or the fairy world, it sorts British, Irish and Uzbek–Persianate material into belief legend, ballad, wonder tale, epic and literary reworking, drawing on Bascom's and Lüthi's accounts of genre, Christiansen's migratory legend ML 4080, the tale type ATU 400 and Hatto's study of the bird-maiden tale. In the British and Irish record the plot survives mainly as legend: the seal wife, the merrow of Gollerus, the lake maiden of Llyn y Fan Fach and the Cornish mermaids all leave, because the legend exists to explain a lineage, a place or an object that outlived the union. In the Uzbek and wider Persianate record the plot survives mainly as wonder tale and epic, where the lost bride is sought and recovered, while the belief register treats paris as afflicting spirits that call for a healer. Once genre is held constant, the two traditions look much closer. The differences that remain concern the obstacle to the marriage, which British sources and Victorian poets frame through the Christian soul and the Persianate tradition frames through distance and kinship. The article proposes genre as a required variable in comparative studies of supernatural women.

AFSONA VA SEHRLI ERTAK ORASIDA: BRITANIYA VA O‘ZBEK AN’ANALARIDA G‘AYRITABIIY SUV KELINI OBRAZI VA JANR MUAMMOSI

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so‘zlar: suv qizi, suv parisi, pari, g‘ayritabiiy kelin, ko‘chma rivoyat, sehrli ertak, ATU 400, ML 4080, qiyosiy folklorshunoslik, o‘zbek folklori.

Annotatsiya: Britaniya folkloridagi suv parisi (mermaid) va o‘zbek folkloridagi suv parisi obrazlarini qiyoslashga bag‘ishlangan tadqiqotlarda ko‘pincha birinchisi xavfli, o‘ziga rom etuvchi ayol sifatida tasvirlanib, u haqidagi hikoyalar ayriliq va yo‘qotish bilan yakunlanishi, ikkinchisi esa ideal kelin timsolida namoyon bo‘lib, u haqidagi hikoyalar nikoh bilan tugashi ta’kidlanadi. Mazkur tafovut odatda din, tabiiy-geografik muhit va oilaviy qadriyatlarning turlichaligi bilan izohlanadi. Ushbu maqolada esa mazkur qarama-qarshilikning katta qismi folklor janrining o‘ziga xos xususiyatlari natijasida yuzaga kelishi asoslanadi. Tadqiqotda oddiy insonning suv yoki parilar olamidan kelgan ayol bilan turmush qurishi haqidagi yagona syujet markazga qo‘yilib, Britaniya, Irlandiya hamda o‘zbek-forsiy madaniy an’analariga mansub materiallar e’tiqodiy rivoyat, ballada, sehrli ertak, epos va adabiy qayta ishlanma janrlari bo‘yicha tasniflanadi. Bunda Uilyam Baskom va Maks Lyutining janr haqidagi nazariy qarashlari, Reydar Toralf Kristiansenning ML 4080 raqamli ko‘chma rivoyat tasnifi, ATU 400 ertak syujeti turi hamda Artur Hattoning qush-qiz haqidagi ertak yuzasidan tadqiqotiga tayaniladi.

Britaniya va Irlandiya folklorida mazkur syujet asosan rivoyat janrida saqlanib qolgan. Tyulen-ayol, Gollerus merrousi, Llin-i-Fan-Fax ko‘li parisi hamda Kornuoll suv parilari haqidagi hikoyalarda g‘ayritabiiy kelin oxir-oqibat turmush o‘rtog‘ini tark etadi. Buning sababi rivoyat janrining nikoh ittifoqidan keyin saqlanib qolgan nasl-nasab, muayyan joy yoki buyumning kelib chiqishini izohlashga yo‘naltirilganligidir. O‘zbek va kengroq forsiy madaniy an’analarda esa mazkur syujet ko‘proq sehrli ertak va epos shaklida uchraydi. Ularda yo‘qolgan kelin izlab topiladi va qaytarib olinadi. Shu bilan birga, xalq e’tiqodlari bilan bog‘liq tasavvurlarda parilar

insonga ozor yetkazuvchi ruhiy mavjudotlar sifatida talqin qilinib, ulardan xalos bo‘lish uchun tabib yoki parixon yordamiga murojaat qilish zarur deb qaraladi.

Bir janr doirasidagi matnlar o‘zaro qiyoslanganda, ikki folklor an’anasi o‘rtasidagi o‘xshashliklar ancha yaqqol namoyon bo‘ladi. Shundan keyin ham saqlanib qoladigan asosiy tafovutlar nikoh yo‘lidagi to‘siqlarning mohiyati bilan bog‘liq bo‘lib, Britaniya manbalari va Viktoriya davri shoirlari ularni xristianlikdagi ruh tushunchasi orqali, forsiy madaniy an’ana esa masofa va qarindoshlik munosabatlari orqali talqin qiladi. Maqolada g‘ayritabiiy ayol obrazlarini qiyosiy o‘rganishda janrni hisobga olish zarur bo‘lgan asosiy tahliliy omillardan biri sifatida qarash taklif etiladi.

МЕЖДУ ЛЕГЕНДОЙ И ВОЛШЕБНОЙ СКАЗКОЙ: ОБРАЗ СВЕРХЪЕСТЕСТВЕННОЙ ВОДЯНОЙ НЕВЕСТЫ В БРИТАНСКОЙ И УЗБЕКСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИЯХ И ПРОБЛЕМА ЖАНРА

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: водяная дева, русалка, пари, сверхъестественная невеста, мигрирующая легенда, волшебная сказка, ATU 400, ML 4080, сравнительная фольклористика, узбекский фольклор.

Аннотация: В сравнительных исследованиях образов британской русалки (mermaid) и узбекской сув париси нередко утверждается, что первая представляет собой опасную соблазнительницу, истории о которой заканчиваются утратой и разлукой, тогда как вторая воплощает образ идеальной невесты, а повествования о ней завершаются браком. Подобное различие обычно объясняется особенностями религии, природно-географической среды и семейных ценностей. В настоящей статье выдвигается тезис о том, что значительная часть данного противопоставления обусловлена жанровой принадлежностью фольклорных произведений. В центре исследования находится один сюжет — брак смертного мужчины с женщиной из водного или волшебного мира. Британские, ирландские и узбекско-персианские материалы классифицируются по жанрам легенды, связанной с народными

верованиями, баллады, волшебной сказки, эпоса и литературной переработки. Теоретическую основу исследования составляют концепции жанра Уильяма Баскома и Макса Люти, классификация мигрирующих легенд ML 4080 Рейдара Торальфа Кристиансена, сказочный тип ATU 400, а также исследование Артура Хатто, посвящённое сюжету о девушке-птице.

В британской и ирландской фольклорной традиции рассматриваемый сюжет сохранился преимущественно в форме легенды. В историях о женщине-тюлене, мерроу из Голлеруса, озёрной деве из Ллин-и-Фан-Фах и корнуолльских русалках сверхъестественная супруга в конечном итоге покидает своего мужа. Это обусловлено функцией легенды, направленной на объяснение происхождения определённого рода, места или предмета, сохранившегося после прекращения брачного союза. В узбекской и более широкой персианской традиции данный сюжет представлен главным образом в волшебных сказках и эпических произведениях, где исчезнувшую невесту разыскивают и возвращают. Вместе с тем в сфере народных верований пари рассматриваются как духи, способные причинять человеку страдания, вследствие чего возникает необходимость обращения к целителю.

При сопоставлении произведений с учётом их жанровой принадлежности сходство между двумя фольклорными традициями становится значительно более очевидным. Сохраняющиеся различия касаются прежде всего характера препятствий для заключения или сохранения брака. В британских источниках и произведениях поэтов викторианской эпохи эти препятствия осмысляются через христианское представление о душе, тогда как в персианской традиции — через категории пространственной удалённости и родственных отношений. В статье предлагается рассматривать жанр как обязательную аналитическую переменную в сравнительных исследованиях образов сверхъестественных женщин.

Introduction. Few figures travel as well as the woman from the water. The British Isles know her as mermaid, merrow, selkie and lake maiden; Uzbek speakers call her *suv parisi*, a compound of Turkic *suv* “water” and Persian *parī* “fairy”. Comparative studies of the two traditions, including the author's own dissertation research, have tended to reach a symmetrical conclusion. The British figure appears as a seductress whose stories end in drowning or separation, while the Uzbek figure appears as a beautiful and faithful bride whose stories end in marriage. The contrast is then explained by large-scale differences: Christianity and Islam, sea and oasis, the individual and the family.

This article questions that symmetry. The difficulty is not that the observations are wrong but that they are often drawn from different kinds of narrative. British material on water women reaches the comparatist largely as belief legend: short accounts attached to named places and families and told as things that happened. Uzbek material on the pari reaches the comparatist largely as wonder tale and epic, where the hero's union with a supernatural bride is the goal of the plot. Folklorists have long known that these genres carry their own expectations about belief, place and ending (Bascom, 1965; Lüthi, 1982). If one compares a legend from Cornwall with a tale told in Bukhara, the different endings may say more about legend and tale than about Cornwall and Bukhara.

To test this, the article narrows the comparison to one plot: the marriage of a mortal man to a woman from the water or from the fairy world. Three questions guide the analysis. How is this plot distributed across genres in the British and Irish record and in the Uzbek and wider Persianate record? Do the differences in ending and in moral evaluation persist when genre is held constant? Which differences remain, and how can they be explained?

A note on terms is needed. Much of the material usually labelled “English” in Uzbek scholarship is Scottish, Irish, Welsh or Cornish, and some of it, such as Andersen's tale of the little mermaid, is Danish. I therefore speak of British and Irish folk material and reserve “English” for literature written in English. On the other side, the Uzbek pari belongs to a Persianate world of stories shared with Tajik, Persian and other Turkic traditions, and the analysis treats it in that wider frame where the evidence requires.

Theoretical framework. *2.1. Genre and the shape of an ending.* Bascom (1965) separated myth, legend and folktale by four criteria: whether a narrative is believed, when it is set, where it is set and how it is regarded. Legends are told as true or possibly true, are set in the recent or historical past and are tied to the world the audience knows. Folktales are told as fiction and are set nowhere in particular. Later scholarship stressed that legend is a genre of debate about belief.

It does not assert one answer; it invites listeners to weigh whether the uncanny can happen here (Dégh, 2001; Tangherlini, 1990).

These features shape endings. A legend that explains why a family has healing gifts, why a hillside bears a furrow or why a church holds a carving must end with the supernatural partner gone and the trace left behind. A warning legend must end with someone harmed. Lüthi (1982), by contrast, described the European wonder tale as a form that isolates its hero, moves him through tests with abstract clarity and leads him toward a final state of restoration. In the wonder tale a lost bride is a problem to be solved, not a fact to be explained.

2.2. Types and motifs. Two classification tools describe the plot. Christiansen (1958) listed the seal-woman story as migratory legend ML 4080: a man hides the skin of a seal woman, marries her and loses her when she finds it. The international tale-type catalogue lists the corresponding wonder tale as ATU 400, The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife, in which the loss opens a search that ends in reunion (Uther, 2004). Thompson's (1955–1958) motif D361.1, the swan maiden, names the shared core: a bird-woman who bathes, loses her feather garment to a man and must stay with him until she recovers it. Hatto (1961) traced this core across Eurasia and recorded versions in Persian and in the Turkic traditions of southern Siberia.

Set side by side, ML 4080 and ATU 400 share their opening and differ in their continuation. That difference is the hinge of the argument that follows.

2.3. The comparative frame. The study follows the typological branch of comparative literature associated with Zhirmunsky (1979), which compares analogous forms in traditions that need not be in contact. Typological comparison requires a stable point of reference. Here that point is the combination of plot and genre: a marriage plot compared within one genre across traditions, and across genres within one tradition.

Material and methods. The material is grouped by genre in Table 1. On the British and Irish side, the belief legends are the seal-woman legends of Orkney and Shetland (Christiansen, 1958), Croker's merrow legend “The Lady of Gollerus” from County Kerry (Croker, 1825–1828), the Welsh legend of the lake maiden of Llyn y Fan Fach (Rhys, 1901), the Cornish legends of Lutey of Cury (Hunt, 1865) and of the Mermaid of Zennor (Westwood & Simpson, 2005), and the cautionary figure of Jenny Greenteeth (Briggs, 1976). The ballad is “The Mermaid” (Child, 1882–1898, No. 289). Two literary reworkings are included: Matthew Arnold's “The Forsaken Merman” (1849) and Oscar Wilde's “The Fisherman and his Soul” (1891).

On the Uzbek and Persianate side, the belief register is represented by the complex of ideas around the pari as a spirit that can afflict people and by the healer who mediates with such spirits (Adhami, 2000; Basilov, 1992), together with the relics of water cults recorded in Khorezm (Snesarev, 1969). The wonder tale is represented by the bathing bird-maiden tale in Persian and

Turkic variants (Hatto, 1961) and by the story of Hasan of Basra, which circulated widely in the Persianate world through the *Thousand and One Nights* (Marzolph & van Leeuwen, 2004). The epic register is represented by the pari women of the Go‘ro‘g‘li cycle (Reichl, 1992).

Table 1. Material by genre and tradition

Genre	British and Irish material	Uzbek and Persianate material
Belief legend and belief complex	Seal-woman legends of Orkney and Shetland (ML 4080); “The Lady of Gollerus” (Kerry); the lake maiden of Llyn y Fan Fach (Carmarthenshire); Lutey of Cury and the Mermaid of Zennor (Cornwall); Jenny Greenteeth (Lancashire, Cheshire)	The pari as an afflicting spirit and the healer (parixon) who mediates with it; relics of water cults in Khorezm
Ballad	“The Mermaid” (Child 289)	—
Wonder tale	Rarely carried to reunion in the published record	The bathing bird-maiden tale (ATU 400) in Persian and Turkic variants; Hasan of Basra
Epic	—	Pari wives and allies of the hero in the Go‘ro‘g‘li cycle
Literary reworking	Arnold, “The Forsaken Merman” (1849); Wilde, “The Fisherman and his Soul” (1891)	Not examined in this study

Note. A dash marks a genre in which the plot is not attested in the material examined.

Each narrative was described with the same set of features: markers of genre (named places and persons, a claim to truth, a link to a present-day trace); the stages of the relationship (encounter, acquisition, marriage, condition or taboo, separation, aftermath); the token or condition that binds the bride; the type of ending; and the evaluation of the supernatural woman. Comparison proceeded first within each genre across the two traditions and then across genres within each tradition.

One asymmetry must be stated at the outset. British and Irish legends about water women were collected and printed in large numbers from the nineteenth century onward. Comparable Uzbek belief narratives about water beings are less accessible in published form and often reach scholarship as ethnographic summary rather than as recorded texts. The comparison of the belief register is therefore thinner on the Uzbek side, and this gap is itself one of the findings discussed in Section 5.

Analysis. *4.1. Legend: the bride who leaves and the trace she leaves behind.* The seal-woman legends of the Northern Isles follow ML 4080 closely. A man sees seal women who have taken off their skins on the shore and hides one skin, and the woman left without it must follow him. She becomes his wife and bears children. Years later, often through a child who has seen where the skin is kept, she finds it and returns to the sea (Christiansen, 1958). Croker's “The Lady

of Gollerus" tells the same story with a merrow and her magic cap, the *cohuleen druith*. Dick Fitzgerald takes the cap, marries its owner, has children with her and loses her when she finds the cap he had hidden.

The Welsh legend of Llyn y Fan Fach shows that the British record is not confined to the sea. A young herdsman courts a woman who rises from a mountain lake, wins her through a test of bread and marries her on her father's condition that he must never strike her three causeless blows. She brings cattle out of the lake as her dowry. Over the years he touches her three times, lightly and without malice, and she returns to the lake with all her animals. Her sons, whom she later teaches, become the Physicians of Myddfai (Rhys, 1901). The binding condition here is a rule of conduct, not a stolen object, and the water is fresh.

In Cornwall, Lutey of Cury helps a mermaid stranded in a rock pool and receives gifts of healing and of undoing witchcraft that pass to his descendants; nine years later the sea claims him (Hunt, 1865). At Zennor a young chorister follows a mysterious woman to the sea and is not seen again, and the legend accounts for a mermaid carved on a bench end in the parish church (Westwood & Simpson, 2005). Jenny Greenteeth, a water hag of northern English ponds, is no bride at all. She exists to keep children away from the water's edge (Briggs, 1976).

What unites these narratives is not a view of women but a task. Each legend explains something its audience could still see or know: a family of physicians, a lineage of healers, a carving, a dangerous pond. For that task the union has to end. The supernatural wife is remembered because she left, and what she left behind is the reason the story is told. The ending is not a verdict on female desire. It is the legend's way of connecting the uncanny to the present. Even the Welsh blows, which might be read as a lesson for husbands, serve first to make the departure lawful and the physicians' gift explicable.

The Uzbek belief register: the pari who afflicts. The Uzbek word *pari* carries a long history of ambivalence. Its source, Avestan *pairikā*, named a demonic female being that Zoroastrian texts placed among the enemies of fire, water and plants. In New Persian the pari lost almost all of these negative features and became a figure of beauty, a process Adhami (2000) calls de-demonization. Persian and Chagatai poetry used pari and its derivatives as standard images of the beloved, and Uzbek keeps this sense in everyday speech and in personal names such as Parizod.

In lived belief, however, the pari remained dangerous. Across Central Asia paris were counted among the spirits that could strike or possess a person, and illness attributed to them called for a specialist who invoked and bargained with the spirits; among Uzbeks this healer was known as *parixon* (Basilov, 1992; see also Adhami, 2000). Water sites were among the places where older cults survived, and Snesarev (1969) documented in Khorezm a dense layer of pre-Islamic practice around water and water sources.

The belief register therefore does not present an ideal bride. It presents a being whose attention is hazardous and whose relationship with people has to be managed through ritual. The danger differs in form from the British legend, since affliction replaces drowning and mediation replaces avoidance, but its evaluative direction is the same. A comparison that sets this register beside British legends finds two cautious traditions, not one cautious and one trusting.

Wonder tale: the bride who is lost and found. The plot that British and Irish sources record as legend appears in the Persianate and Turkic world above all as wonder tale. Hatto (1961) cites a Persian version in which the bird-maidens come as doves and a south Siberian Turkic tale in which they bathe in a lake inside a walled garden. The best-known example in the region is the story of Hasan of Basra from the *Thousand and One Nights*. Hasan watches bird-maidens bathe in a pool, takes the feather garment of one of them, the daughter of a king of the jinn, and marries her. She bears him two sons. When she recovers the garment she flies away with the children to the distant islands of Wak-Wak, and Hasan follows her through a long series of trials until he wins her back and brings his family home (Marzolph & van Leeuwen, 2004).

The opening matches ML 4080: a woman from another order of being, a garment taken while she bathes, a marriage held in place by the hidden object, children, and the recovery of the object. The difference lies entirely in what follows. The legend stops at the loss because the loss is what it explains. The wonder tale treats the loss as the middle of the story, the lack that launches a quest, as ATU 400 prescribes (Uther, 2004). The happy ending that comparative studies attribute to Uzbek values is, in the first instance, the ending the wonder tale gives this plot wherever it is told.

Epic: the pari as the hero's wife. Uzbek epic carries the same logic further. In the Go‘ro‘g‘li cycle, pari women become wives and allies of the hero, and the otherworldly origin of a wife adds to his standing instead of threatening his household (Reichl, 1992). Epic, like wonder tale, is a genre of achievement. Union with a supernatural bride is one of the forms the achievement takes, and the genre has no need to account for a trace in the present.

Literary reworkings in English. When English poets took up the water-bride plot, they inherited the legend's ending but changed its moral weight. Arnold's “The Forsaken Merman” (1849) reverses the genders of the seal-woman legend. Margaret, a mortal woman married to a merman, hears the church bells at Easter, goes ashore to pray and never returns. The poem is spoken by the abandoned husband to their children, so the reader sees the human church through the eyes of the sea family. Loss is still the outcome, but the agent of separation is now a human institution, and sympathy lies with the water.

Wilde's “The Fisherman and his Soul” (1891) goes further. To marry the mermaid, the young fisherman must cut away his soul, since she cannot love a man who has one, and the priest

curses the sea folk and refuses to help. The lovers die and are buried without rites in the corner of a field; the strange flowers that grow there move the priest to preach of love and to bless the sea and its creatures. Wilde keeps the legend's trace, the flowers, but turns it against the church that had condemned the union (Silver, 1999). In neither poem is the water woman a femme fatale. If anything is fatal, it is the human order that cannot make room for her.

These literary cases matter for the comparison because they show that the moral evaluation of the water woman is unstable even within writing in English. It depends on which genre an author borrows from and what he does with its ending.

4.6. Summary of findings. Table 2 sets out the results by genre.

Table 2. The water-bride plot by genre: outcome and function

Genre	British and Irish	Uzbek and Persianate	Typical ending	What the ending does
Belief legend and belief complex	Seal wife; merrow; lake maiden; Cornish mermaids; Jenny Greenteeth	Pari as afflicting spirit; the parixon healer; water-cult relics	Separation, death or illness	Explains a present trace or delivers a warning
Ballad	“The Mermaid” (Child 289)	—	Shipwreck	Serves as an omen
Wonder tale	Rare in the record	Bathing bird-maiden (ATU 400); Hasan of Basra	Loss, quest, reunion	Restores the hero's household
Epic	—	Pari wives of Go‘ro‘g‘li	Union	Adds to the hero's standing
Literary reworking	Arnold (1849); Wilde (1891)	Not examined	Loss, with sympathy for the water	Criticises the human order

Read down the columns, the table reproduces the familiar national contrast. Read across the rows, it shows that legends end in loss and tales in reunion on both sides.

Discussion. The first question concerned distribution. In the British and Irish record the marriage plot lives mainly in belief legend. In the Uzbek and Persianate record it lives mainly in wonder tale and epic, while the belief register is concerned with affliction rather than marriage. The second question asked whether the contrast survives when genre is held constant. For the most part it does not. Legends on both sides treat contact with the supernatural woman as hazardous and end in separation, death or illness. Wonder tales, where they exist, carry the plot through loss to

reunion. The familiar pairing of “British danger” with “Uzbek harmony” is to a large extent a pairing of legend with tale.

Some differences remain once genre is controlled, and they are more specific than a contrast of national values. The clearest concerns the nature of the obstacle. In British legend and in Victorian literature the marriage is threatened by the question of the soul. Water beings are imagined as soulless or outside salvation, so the union endangers the human partner's afterlife or requires him to give it up; the church is present at Zennor, in Arnold and in Wilde. In the Persianate tradition the obstacle is spatial and social: the bride's father, the distant islands, the guardians of the other world. A pari or a jinn princess can marry a human without theological scandal, and Iranian tradition records heroes and royal lineages said to descend from such unions (Adhami, 2000). Part of the difference in literary endings can be traced to this difference in the obstacle.

Other contrasts that are often cited hold less firmly. The British record leans toward the sea, but the Welsh lake legends show that fresh water is not foreign to it. The token that binds the bride varies within each tradition, from sealskin and cap to feather garment, and the Welsh legend replaces the token with a rule of conduct. These features do not divide the two traditions along national lines.

The finding has consequences for gender readings. Warner (1994) has shown how much of a fairy-tale heroine's character is supplied by the purposes of those who tell her story. The present material suggests that genre supplies a good part of it as well. The opposition between a British femme fatale and an Uzbek ideal woman assigns to national ideology what is partly a matter of narrative role. In legend the supernatural woman is the uncanny partner whose departure must be explained. In wonder tale and epic she is the prize whose recovery completes the hero. The same woman changes character when she changes genre.

Methodologically, the study suggests that genre should be a required variable in comparative work on supernatural women. A comparison should state which genres it draws on and, where the record allows, compare within a genre before comparing across traditions. Where the record does not allow it, as with Uzbek belief narratives about water beings, the gap should be reported as a limit on the conclusions instead of being filled with material from another genre.

The study has limits. The Uzbek belief register is represented through ethnographic summary rather than recorded texts. The wonder-tale material is drawn partly from the wider Persianate repertoire rather than from specifically Uzbek recordings, and the epic material from secondary description. Literary reworkings are examined only on the English side. Each limit points to further work: fieldwork recording present-day Uzbek accounts of encounters with water beings, a survey of ATU 400 in published Uzbek tale collections, and a study of how modern Uzbek prose and Uzbek translations of Andersen and Wilde handle the water woman.

Conclusion. This article has examined the marriage of a mortal man to a woman from the water in British, Irish and Uzbek–Persianate tradition, with genre as the main variable. Three conclusions follow.

First, the plot is unevenly distributed. The British and Irish record keeps it mostly as legend, the Uzbek and Persianate record mostly as wonder tale and epic.

Second, endings follow genre more closely than nation. Legends end in separation because they explain a trace or deliver a warning; wonder tales end in reunion because the loss is the lack that drives the quest.

Third, the differences that survive this control are specific. The most significant is the obstacle to the marriage: the Christian question of the soul on one side, distance and kinship on the other. Comparative studies of the water maiden will be more accurate if they compare like with like before drawing conclusions about national character.

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