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## THE FAIRY TALE «KOLOBOK» AS A PHENOMENON OF UKRAINIAN FOLKLORE AND A WORK FOR CHILDREN

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**Abstract.** *The article examines the phenomenon of the 'Kolobok' fairy tale in the context of Ukrainian folklore and its significance for children's development. The main provisions of the article cover the genesis of animal tales, their archaic roots in totemic beliefs and their original sacred character, which evolved to a didactic function. The article analyses the structural and narrative features of Kolobok, in particular its cumulative nature and tragic ending, which is atypical for Ukrainian fairy tales. Particular attention is paid to the sacred meaning of the image of Kolobok as ritual bread and the mystery of the process of its baking. The symbolism of the characters and the protective significance of the Kolobok's song are explored. The author emphasises the educational potential of the fairy tale in shaping children's ideas about safety, critical thinking, prudence and understanding of the consequences of their own actions. The article substantiates that Kolobok is not only an entertaining story, but also a powerful means of transmitting cultural values and folk wisdom to future generations.*

**Key words:** *animal tales, children's literature, folklore, sacredness, cumulativity, didacticism.*

**Introduction.** Ukrainian folk tales are an important component of folklore, a representative of mentality, spiritual culture, customs and rituals, and the history of the ancestral Ukrainians. Ukrainian scholar Halyna Sabat emphasises this feature of folk tales: «...a fairy tale is a mental and cultural phenomenon of many peoples of the world and has its own national attributes» [6, p. 29].

Animal fairy tales play an exceptional role, as they contain information about the life of the ancestors of Ukraine. Researcher Tetiana Kachak notes that these tales arose «on the basis of the beliefs of primitive people: animism (spiritualisation of natural phenomena), anthropomorphism (humanisation of natural phenomena, animals, attribution of human qualities to them), totemism (belief that a person descends from a totem - one of the animals)» [5, c. 45].

The «Kolobok» fairy tale holds a special place in Ukrainian folklore and literature for children. This seemingly simple story about a round bread that escaped from its creators and a number of forest dwellers is not only a fascinating tale for children, but also a profound cultural phenomenon that reflects archaic beliefs, social models, and

peculiarities of the national worldview. Its universality and, at the same time, national identity make it relevant to study this fairy tale in the context of folklore traditions and its importance for the development of children's imagination and moral values.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the structural and narrative features of the fairy tale «Kolobok» as a phenomenal phenomenon of Ukrainian folklore and its role in shaping children's reading culture.

Animal tales have their roots in ancient totemic beliefs, reflecting primitive ideas about the kinship between humans and the animal kingdom and the endowment of animals with anthropomorphic features. Traditionally, animal tales are associated only with literature for children, which is not true: «In folklore studies and literary criticism, animal tales were perceived as children's tales because they were aimed at a children's audience. However, by genesis and tradition, animal tales are a genre that was created by the people for an adult audience, and later travelled to the children's environment for 'permanent residence» [6, p. 30].

The genesis of animal tales is associated with mythological ideas about animals as mediators between worlds, patron spirits, and with ritual practices where animals played an important role: «The first tales about animals that (fairy tales) arose in the early stages of society's development were mythological, magical and sacred in nature, they were devoid of allegory» [6, 31].

As we can see, originally animal tales played a sacred role in society, telling about the events that took place. Ivan Franko points to this function of fairy tales: «A «fairy tale» is a story in which reality is mixed with a miraculous element, so that the whole is a free creation of fantasy without any side, church-moralising purpose» [2, p. 330]. Modern literary criticism provides a more detailed definition of animal tales: «Animal tales are fantastic stories that differ from other types of fairy tales not only in their content but also in their system of images, language palette, established narrative clichés, fairy tale logic that metaphorises, symbolises the idea of the work and is aimed at revealing the truth of life according to its very specific laws» [6, p. 30].

As we can see, both Ivan Franko and Halyna Sabat emphasise the realism of the events described in animal tales and the absence of allegory.

Throughout their historical development, animal tales have undergone transformations and adaptations, reflecting changes in the worldview, social relations, and cultural values of society, while retaining their genre specificity. Animal tales are characterised by certain structural and narrative models, such as cumulative, dialogic, repetitive actions, the use of stable formulas, and a clear opposition between characters (strong-weak, cunning-simple).

The plot of the Kolobok fairy tale is quite simple: it is a story about the journey of Kolobok, baked from leftover flour, who escaped from his creators, his grandparents. The hero meets a hare, a wolf and a bear, from whom he also runs away after singing a ritual song. The meeting with the fox becomes decisive in Kolobok's fate, as he could not escape. Among Ukrainian folk tales about animals, the Kolobok tale stands out because its ending is tragic, and the hero dies: «The Ukrainian folk tale «Kolobok» is based on the traditional scheme of the fairy-tale hero meeting various animals; it uses repetition and interweaving of the prose text with a song. The work does not have a happy ending, because Kolobok is eaten by a fox, but it is instructive and attracts with its dynamic plot, images of a bunny, wolf, bear, fox, and poetic language» [5, p. 46]. This discrepancy with the traditional fairy tale ending immediately attracts the attention of scholars. The combination of the sacred motif in the fairy tale 'Kolobok' and the instructive nature of the work is obvious.

Let's look at the elements of sacredness in the Kolobok fairy tale. It is no coincidence that the text of the fairy tale at the beginning refers to a loaf of bread baked from the last of the flour. Since our ancestors attached great importance to the actions associated with growing wheat, it is no coincidence that it was from the leftover flour that the grandparents baked the ritual bread: «Our ancestors, in particular, the Western Scythians - Celts/Colts, considered themselves children of the sun god Cola and the water goddess Dana. Given the role of the sun and water in growing bread, it is likely that the Ukrainian bun bears the sacred (magical) name of Kolo-god, having turned into an «edible geometric figure» in Ukrainian fairy tales (B. Grinchenko, 1907)» [1]. In Ukrainian traditional culture, bread is perceived not just as food, but as a sacred gift from God, a symbol of life, well-being and prosperity. The process of baking bread

was accompanied by strict rituals of purity and had a distinct protective function. The woman who baked the bread had to be physically and spiritually pure, and the baking itself protected the house from evil forces and misfortunes: «The fairy tale describes in detail the process of cooking and the ritual action. The process of baking (flour + eggs = dough + sour cream + fire = bun) is a sacred act (transformation) in which the old man, the bearer of knowledge and experience of the era, acts as the creator. As is well known, ancestors, demiurge, cultural heroes are primarily the central characters of creation myths, in which they generate (ancestors), produce (demiurge) or obtain (cultural heroes) natural and cultural objects, establish social and religious institutions» [4, p. 7].

Thus, the Kolobok fairy tale describes in a coded form the ritual of baking bread, which in Ukrainian culture had a deep symbolic meaning and was regarded as a mystery. Kneading the dough was often accompanied by prayers, and its rise was associated with growth and development.

As folk tales underwent transformations over time, with plots being supplemented with new details, the Kolobok tale also features characters whose actions are caused by new realities. The images of animals in fairy tales can have character traits determined by a particular situation: «None of the cumulative fairy tales has signs of allegory. Moreover, observation of a wide range of folklore material convinces us that none of the zoomorphic characters in fairy tales has even permanent character traits, so depending on the content, they can be either positive or negative» [3, p. 31].

In the Kolobok fairy tale, the bunny, wolf and bear did not eat Kolobok, so they do not have a pronounced emotional connotation, unlike the fox. Literary scholar Viktor Davydiuk has hypothesised that this is due to the development of hunting. Before the fox was hunted, the level of guilt for which it was to be punished was determined, namely, eating Kolobok: «Yes, in the Kolobok fairy tale, the bunny, bear, and wolf are potential villains who fail to realise their intentions, but in the end they are also neutral, because their actions lead to neither positive nor negative consequences. The only negative character here is the fox who ate the bun. If we consider that a bun baked with the last of the flour and placed on the window can be

perceived as a ritual attribute, then this is enough to consider the fox a great villain. Each hunting tale has only one such character» [3, p. 32].

It is noteworthy that the fairy tale contains information about why the fox was able to bypass Kolobok's defences. It turns out that the ritual song sung by Kolobok was of a cautious nature. It lost its magical power when listened to for the second time or repeated often: «With the help of a simple song «I'm thrown around in a box, I'm baked on eggs», which probably indicates the sacredness of the bun's origin, he manages to escape from the bunny, the wolf, the bear, and even the fox at first. But he sings this song for the second time at her request, and, having given away the secret of the word, he becomes an easy prey» [3, p. 41].

The space-time continuum of a cumulative fairy tale functions as a highly organised narrative structure, where each unit of information, implicitly or explicitly encoded in verbal elements, purposefully conveys fundamental knowledge about the universal laws of interaction and social interaction, ensuring their transgenerational relay potential.

The repetition and build-up of elements in a cumulative fairy tale not only facilitates memorisation, but also creates an effective didactic framework. This cyclicity allows for the gradual introduction of new concepts and the consolidation of the learned ones, forming cause-and-effect relationships. The Kolobok fairy tale is one of the first and most accessible sources for developing children's ideas about personal safety, teaching them not to trust strangers and not to give in to persuasion. The plot of the fairy tale, which develops from a simple escape to a dangerous encounter, encourages the child to analyse the character's actions and foresee the possible consequences of Kolobok's rash actions.

The Kolobok fairy tale clearly defines the boundaries of permissible behaviour and the consequences of violating them. Kolobok's escape from his grandparents symbolises disobedience, which ultimately leads to negative consequences.

Despite the tragic ending, the tale allows children to discuss different emotions - fear, trust, cunning - and develop empathy for the characters, understanding their motives. Through the images of the animals and their interactions, the tale conveys

elements of folk wisdom about nature, behaviour and relationships in society, promoting cultural integration.

### **Conclusions.**

The fairy tale 'Kolobok' is a unique phenomenon of Ukrainian folklore and a valuable asset of children's literature. Its archaic roots, simple but profound structure, character symbolism and educational potential make it not only an interesting entertainment for children, but also an important means of transmitting cultural values and shaping their worldview. Further study of this fairy tale in various aspects will contribute to a deeper understanding of its place and significance in Ukrainian national culture.

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