

Organic Kinship or Incidental Analogy? Similar Meaning Clusters in and *Correspondances* Between Folklore Texts and Pieces of Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Starting with the spookily accurate coincidences of erotic motifs of a famous poet and the Hungarian folk tradition, we try to portray the hidden framework behind the similarities of different motifs. Using Gell's subtle and holistic model interconnecting the forms and "legacy" of art with the abductive reasoning, we get a point, where lot of "second generation" research questions are raising.

1. INTRODUCTION

"No reasonable person could suppose that art-like relations between people and things do not involve at least some form of semiosis." (Alfred Gell)

The erotic folklore motifs are far more popular to be analyzed as *iconographical phenomena* than in their *textual forms and versions*. If someone after all prefers texts, the leading "genre" of the examinations is the universe of *folk tales and myths* [1]. However, the majority of this literature is a *simple collection of "erotic tales"*, or descriptive *motif indexes and classifications*. It is not so common to "zoom" into the level of specific meaning structures, finding contacts and regular patterns between the erotic motifs and other topics (like Limerov could show, how "erotic motifs occur frequently in the late (komi) mythological texts associated with the forest theme" [2]).

This one-sidedness is also very common in the world of lyrics and literature. The erotic approach becomes important as an *artistic object* of the writings [3], while the main theoretical challenge is to be able to "reconstruct" the "macrostructure" (like Geoffroy-Menoux interprets Angela Carter's work, who "transformed the children's tales into potent adult fable's", perversely applying "erotic motifs and allusions" into hypertextual hybrid tales form "on the crossroads of paraliterature, oral literature and mainstream literature" [4]). The analytic unit is the text itself, and there is seldom zoom into the "micro" level: *sentences, expressions, phrases, metaphors*. However, these individual "sub-textual

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puzzles of meaning" are also complete "small worlds": every motif has a holistic explanatory background.

We make an attempt to take these elementary pieces of erotic motifs underneath a magnifying glass.

2. EROTIC MOTIFS EVERYWHERE

2.1 Representing Impotence in the Poetry of Late Attila József

*I am **drying**, shattering,*

*Growing **old** soon*

Sleeplessly laying down

*On the **desert** ground*

*Fresh and vital **moistures***

*Do not **flushing** humour*

*into my big, **venous meat***

and I mopingly yearn...

This heart-ache is too heavy

To manage it by mind

*Make me **young**, forgiveness,*

Flore's slightly love. (1937)

(Raw translation, L. Z.K.)

One of the biggest 20th century poets, the 32 years old Hungarian Attila József, in a deep and hopeless depression, few months before his tragic death, is holding on to a possible intimacy with his latest Muse, Flore. The key motifs - "dryness" versus lack of "moisture" and "flushing", "getting old" versus "being young", "meat" - are foreshadowing, that all these are not simply about the loneliness, the temporal absence of mating, but about a very explicit manifestation of impotence, whether it is a neuro-anatomical fact or simple role-playing game of a sensitive artist.

One of the preparatory manuscript versions has a far more explicit verse of this "basic message":

*It will be hard to enmesh into
a **hot and fine cuddle** with me.
Beautiful Flore strains **dry**
hunger-weed¹ to her heart.*

Now let's compare the motifs of Attila József with some Hungarian folk songs and idioms:

***Dry hunger-weed doesn't wet**
The **old** girl is not good egg²*

or:

*You are **dry bough**,
If you'll be **verdant** again
come back to me.³*

or:

***dry hunger-weed flourishes**
the **old** lady is **on heat**⁴*

We can see just the same vocabulary: a kind of “secondary picture language” where every special motif is used in a figurative sense, having a strictly defined place in the interlocking system of (symbolic) shadow-meanings.

2.2 The Origins of “Secondary Picture Language”

How to get this stage? In the folk tradition this is a long, but easily detectable process. At the beginning of a story, immediate (esoteric) erotic associations were attached to dozens of everyday, innocent (exoteric) words. As Josef Winthuis explains [5] it was obvious for the gunantuna people in Melanesia and the Australian aborigines to think “vagina” when they were talking about eye, mouth, ear or cave, think “penis”, when they were talking about nose, tongue or pike.

The very interesting point is the loss of these archetypic meanings during the civilization process. The contemporary speakers are using lot of folk idioms without knowing anything about their secondary meaning. A studious Hungarian researcher, Béla Bernáth made a giant step ahead to reveal the full system, as a meaning-archeologist in his book [6], deducing the original erotic context and associations in the case of hundreds of well-known folk texts, including nursery rhymes, says, paternosters, love-ditties, figures of speech, songs, old tags, adages, mocking rhymes, etc. He could built a two layer symbol system, with *hundreds* of proven vagina, penis and coitus synonyms as elementary motifs on the lower level, and *plenty of* detectable erotic situations on a higher level, where the speech community

¹ hunger-weed = *high grass with hard stalk*

² “*Száraz kóró nem nedves, a vén leány nem rendes*”

³ “*Száraz ág vagy, ha ismét zöldellsz, gyere hozzám*”(Means: I wait for you when you are able and ready for making love again)

⁴ “*Száraz kóró virágzik, a vén asszony bogázzik*”

were using these motifs in a dynamic way, (*re*)combining them constantly in just the same meaning.

From this aspect we have to modify slightly the basic AMICUS definition of motifs. “*Motifs are complex higher-level patterns that recur in a non-accidental way; they contribute crucially to the function of the story, and have evolved over time, gaining cultural significance along a long path of oral and written transmission and canonization*”. The elementary (erotic) synonyms are also quasi-complex, lower level motifs, with a sophisticated ontology behind them: all these “simple” motifs⁵ are based on the locally and culturally given picture asset of the nature, the human body and the environment, fully overrun with artefacts, objects, types of food and drinks, etc.

The inceptive reason is the (mainly metonymic) similarity of these items with the biological and physical features of sexuality. The homology is constant, (almost) invariant, regular, permanent and persistent, so scanning the full clusters of these motifs provides an excellent possibility to amend and integrate even missing or incomplete pieces of texts.

2.3 The Artificial Version: Picture Creating Power of a Poet

We have to realize, that the logic of motif creation and multiplication is just the same in a full “oeuvre” of a very autonomous world of the poets. To choose an image, to design new verbal constructs and meaning structures is always subjected to strict laws, rules and perceptions, always counting with the decoding and understanding abilities of the readers.

The best example is a well-known Vietnamese poetess, Ho Xuan Huong’s magnificent work⁶. Living in the late 18th and the early 19th century, almost her full subtle and witty oeuvre is based on hidden but very coherent and consistent stream of erotic motifs. She applied unique symbols, plays on words, visual tricks using the Chinese pictograms, but first and foremost, she was playing with the pitch-range, using the secondary or tertiary meanings of the syllables, depends on the altitude of the outspeaking voice.

The history of literature calls this solution “*double entendre*”⁷ (or *adiaoeta* (in rhetoric), and its story has started with Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* in the 12th century⁸. As we could see, Attila József’s erotic motifs are using just the same *double entendre*, than the Hungarian folk texts.

Erotic motifs are classical forms of *double entendre* – however, they were not born through individual, accidental and random coinages, like in the folklore, but as a results of conscious composition efforts.

⁵ “*Simplicity is complex*” See [10].

⁶ About her see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Xuan_Huong

⁷ French double = *double*, entendre = *to mean, to understand*. Nowadays the French currently refers the phrase with the term „*double sens*”, and the original French version became *terminus technicus* in an English speaking world.

⁸ The famous Chaucerian “double entendre” is the word “*queynte*”, meaning “*domestic duty*” on one hand, and “*queynte*”, the early forms of modern English “*cunt*” (vagina) on the other hand.

2.4 The Triple Discovery Hypothesis

Attila József did not know the book of Bernáth Béla. May be he met some direct erotic motifs during his stay in Öcsöd, a small Hungarian village, but it is almost sure, that his cluster of impotence-related motifs is a *sovereign poetic re-discovery of long time evolving folklore motifs*.⁹

The third (re)discovery is taking place in the minds of the readers, the “recipients”. In times past the performance and the reception did not come apart: the motifs were well known common goods. Losing the enormous set of these meaning asset, and facing ahead with brand new poetic texts, the understanding becomes investigative: when it is successful, how could it happen?

It is not enough to have almost similar knowledges about the narrow and wide environment, common codes, memory contents, languages and experiences. We need a perfect encounter of our thinking, imagination and picture creating rules with the logic and structure of reality.

2.5 Abductive Thinking: The Common Multiple

This is the momentum which was named *abduction* by Charles S. Peirce, the father of semiotics¹⁰. The abductive reasoning is the third, non rational, non causal mode of cognition, in contrast the deductive and inductive ways, determining plausibility based on a set of evidence, being able to manage uncertain information very efficiently. “Abductive reasoning use non-sentential representations”, and “some abductive inference is better understood as using pictorial or other iconic representations” [10]. The basis of abductive capacity and performance is the right model of the world.

The folk texts are objectivations of collective cognitions, compressing adequate and proved sets of experiences into different genres¹¹. The poetic neologism and picture creating are also innovative ways of cognition, based on individual experiences and fantasy.

It was Alfred Gell who could apply the notion of abductive reasoning for anthropological research, in his pivotal work [16]. He defined abduction, as “*a case of synthetic inference 'where we find some very curious circumstances, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of some general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition'*”.

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⁹ About this common “social manufacturing” of folklore and literature see Susan Stewart’s classic monography[7].

¹⁰ See more details about the abduction in Thomas Sebeok’s book[8], and a fresh contribution in the context of grounded theory [9].

¹¹ The researchers has already started to simultaneously apply the abductive reasoning considerations and reviewing folklore materials (mythology, fairy tales, and other folklore texts), see Mira Karjalainen’s theses [11].

Approaching Gell’s significance, an excellent summary¹² emphasizes, that “Gell criticizes existing 'anthropological' studies of art, for being too preoccupied with aesthetic value and not preoccupied enough with the central anthropological concern of uncovering 'social relationships' specifically the social contexts in which artworks are produced, circulated, and received. Abduction is used as the basis of one gets from art to agency in the sense of a theory of how works of art can inspire a *sensus communis*, or the commonly-held views that a characteristic of a given society because they are shared by everyone in that society”. Abduction means “that not only can it operate outside of any pre-existing framework, but moreover, it can actually intimate the existence of a framework... the physical existence of the artwork prompts the viewer to perform an abduction that imbues the artwork with intentionality... art can have the kind of agency that plants the seeds that grow into cultural myths. The power of agency is the power to motivate actions and inspire ultimately the shared understanding that characterizes any given society¹³”.

3. “CORRESPONDANCES” BETWEEN OTHER REALITY SEGMENTS

3.1 The Message of David M. Guss

David M. Guss is an excellent anthropologist of the Tufts University. Several years ago he tried to translate the famous yekuana mythic text, the Watunna. He had to quickly realize, that to understand the universe of the myth, he has to learn to be able to become abductive. “I had originally come to learn demanded much more than just verbal skills. It required the use of all my senses or, more precisely, a reorientation to the nature of meaning and the manner of its transmission”[12:4].

The yekuana society through the prism of Guss is a laboratory of meanings. „Each activity, whether ritual or material, was determined by the same underlying configuration of symbols. Thus whatever an action’s external form or particular function, it was involved in the same dialogue as the rest of the culture, communicating the same essential messages and meanings. It was truly a mutually reflective universe in which every moment was filled with the same possibilities of illumination as any other. To tell a story, therefore, was to weave a basket, just as it was to make a canoe, to prepare barbasco, to build a house, to clear a garden, to give birth, etc”.

In a society such as the Yekuana’s, it was possible “to see the entire culture refracted through a single object or deed. Every part was a recapitulation of the whole, a synthesis of the intelligible organization of reality that informed every other”.

For Guss, to learn the basket-making was the crucial, abductive point. As such, the baskets provided a prism through which the Yekuana universe was reflected. “... cast in a metaphor of endless dualities, the symbols in the baskets, like those elsewhere, confronted the most elemental oppositions between chaos and order, visible and invisible, being and non being. The concept of culture which they presented was not simply one of communication, or what Geertz calls „a mode of thoughts”, but also of transformation, of the constant metamorphosis of reality into a comprehensible and coherent order”.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Gell

¹³ See more from the „Information community” approach [20].

As both an observer and a basket maker, he “was able to participate in this process of transformation, to experience culture not as the distillation of a set of abstract ideals but as an ongoing act of creation”.

Of course, apart from basketry [13] there are lot of other ways of activity (or domains of culture), where we can find just the same connections and homologies. In conclusion, let’s look at some very interesting and also motif-based ones.

3.2 Other Correspondance Possibilities

Ferrer [18] provides a long enumeration, recycling the results of Java field-work of Geertz [19]: the motifs in *Batik, Arabic calligraphy, wood-carving, jewelry, silverwork, weaponry, music, and the performance arts of dance, theater, and puppet theater (wayang kulit)* are interpretable using the same framework. Gell [17] adds the *tattoo* to the list, and gives an example, how a *statue of a goddess* “in some senses actually becomes the goddess in the mind of the beholder; and represents not only the form of the deity but also her intentions (which are adduced from the feeling of her very presence)” [16].

However, it is not a question, that the most serendipitous field is the *music*. Recently the Hungarian physicist and musician, Zoltán Juhász processed the melody strings (musical motifs) of folk songs of enormous quantity [14] by computer, distilling amazing, surprising and wondrous generic relationships between different cultures.

It seems to be attack anywhere the hidden framework presented by Gell, we can find the much-discussed homologies.

4. FURTHER RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This deep “framework” behind the surface of motif flow and manifest motif clusters has to be documented through detailed investigations, particularly being concerned with evolutionary and cross-cultural aspects. We need a methodology to be able to capture the “semantic synaesthesia” and turning it an applicable *pattern-recognition* and *pattern-reconstruction* technology. It is also important to come near to the *stratification of elementary and more complex motifs*, and motivating the fractal-like nature of motifs, discovered by Guss.

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