

A COMPARATIVE DEPICTION OF FIGURATIVE IMAGES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY WORKS

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Annotation

This article presents a comparative analysis of figurative (symbolic) images in English and Uzbek folk tales. The research focuses on the English folk tale “Jack and the Beanstalk” and the Uzbek folk tale “Rustamxon”. Both stories are examined through the lens of their main characters, magical helpers, evil forces, and the trials faced by the heroes, each interpreted as figurative images. These elements are explored to understand the moral, ethical, and educational values conveyed through them.

The findings show that figurative imagery in folk oral traditions serves as a universal artistic device. While these images may reflect the unique cultural characteristics of each nation, they collectively aim to express shared human values and ideals. The article uses a comparative literary approach to shed light on the cultural and spiritual perspectives embedded in these folk narratives.

Keywords: folk tales, figurative image, comparative analysis, Rustamxon, Jack and the Beanstalk, oral folklore, symbolic meaning, literary image, cultural worldview, pragmatic approach, educational message.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a powerful cultural phenomenon that reflects the national mindset, values, and aspirations of a people. In both English and Uzbek literature, figurative images—characters, objects, or events carrying symbolic meaning—play a central role in imparting ethical and aesthetic depth to literary works.¹

This article conducts a comparative study of symbolic figures in selected folk tales from both cultures. Specifically, it analyzes “Rustamxon”, a classic Uzbek folk tale, and “Jack and the Beanstalk”, a well-known English fairy tale, to explore the similarities and differences in their figurative imagery and the broader cultural implications.

Comparative Analysis of Figurative Images in “Rustamxon” and “Jack and the Beanstalk”

1. Main Character – Symbol of Social Struggle and Inner Strength

In both tales, the protagonist is a young boy from a poor, disadvantaged background. In “Rustamxon”, the hero lives with his mother in hardship after the loss of his father. Similarly, Jack is depicted as a boy growing up in poverty with his mother.

These characters symbolically represent:

- The dream of a fair and just society;

¹ the concept of figurative imagery in literature refers to characters, objects, and scenarios that symbolize broader meanings beyond their literal existence.

- The dignity of hard work;
- The triumph of intellect and courage over brute strength.

Despite their difficult circumstances, both characters achieve success through bravery and cleverness, symbolizing the belief that one's character, not social class, determines their fate.²

2. Magical Helpers and Fantastical Elements

In "Rustamxon", the hero gains strength through a magical carrot and a talking horse. These helpers guide him and assist in overcoming challenges.

In "Jack and the Beanstalk", Jack acquires magical beans that grow into a giant beanstalk, leading him to a mystical realm inhabited by a giant. The beanstalk represents a bridge between the earthly and the extraordinary.

These elements symbolically represent:

- The magical carrot and beans: new opportunities, inner strength, turning points in life;
- The talking horse: wisdom, spiritual guidance;
- The growing beanstalk: growth, hope, aspiration, and the journey toward dreams.

3. Antagonist – Representation of Fear and Obstacles

In both tales, evil forces present major challenges for the hero. In "Rustamxon", a demon or dragon serves as the primary antagonist, embodying physical and emotional trials. In "Jack and the Beanstalk", the giant plays a similar role.

These figures symbolically represent:

- Fear;
- Danger;
- The struggle against oppressive or evil powers.

Defeating these villains reflects the hero's transformation and the broader theme of overcoming adversity to achieve personal growth.

4. Moral and Educational Lessons

Both stories emphasize core moral values such as honesty, bravery, and perseverance. Through symbolic imagery, the tales convey:

- Patience, hard work, and wisdom lead to success;
- Good always triumphs over evil;
- One must seize opportunities (e.g., magic beans or carrot as metaphors for life-changing chances);³
- Inner strength and moral courage matter more than physical power.

5. National Characteristics and Universal Values

The Uzbek tale reflects Eastern traditions and values such as:

- Deep spiritual insight;
- Communication with animals;
- Emphasis on patience and moral strength.

In contrast, the English tale leans more toward:

- Pragmatism;
- Financial gain;

² Folklore serves as a vehicle for cultural transmission, often embedding national identity, morals, and history within its narratives.

³ Talking animals or magical creatures in Uzbek tales often function as spiritual guides, reflecting Sufi and animistic influences in the region's folklore.

- Resourcefulness and quick thinking.

Despite these cultural differences, both tales ultimately highlight similar universal values: the importance of resilience, the triumph of good over evil, and the celebration of personal growth through trials.

he dream of upward mobility;

The triumph of moral character over inherited status.

The character of Rustamxon especially embodies Eastern philosophical ideals such as patience and moral growth, while Jack reflects a Western pragmatism and bold initiative. Yet both characters reinforce a common belief: that the individual can rise above their circumstances through inner strength and brave action.⁴

2. Magical Helpers – Spiritual Aid and Transformative Forces

A defining feature of both tales is the presence of magical elements that assist the hero. These do not merely advance the plot—they symbolize inner potential and transformative life opportunities.

In Rustamxon, the talking horse and the magical carrot serve as guides and enhancers of strength. The horse, in particular, represents spiritual wisdom and companionship, common themes in Eastern tales that emphasize communication with animals and the harmony of man with nature.

Meanwhile, in Jack and the Beanstalk, the magic beans serve as a metaphor for life-changing decisions or risks. The beans sprout into a towering beanstalk—a bridge between the mundane and the mystical. This ascent mirrors Jack's inner development and his boldness to explore the unknown.

Symbolically, these elements represent:

Magical carrot and beans: pivotal moments, new beginnings, untapped potential;

Talking horse: spiritual guidance, ancestral wisdom;

Beanstalk: personal growth, hope, ascent toward one's dreams.

Thus, magical helpers in both tales symbolize the hidden strengths and timely interventions that enable the hero to achieve greatness.

3. Antagonists – Personification of Evil and Inner Demons

Every hero's journey is marked by trials. The antagonists—whether a dragon or a giant—are not only physical threats but also representations of internal and societal challenges.

In Rustamxon, the dragon reflects complex fears—physical danger, moral temptation, and social injustice. Its defeat symbolizes the hero's moral and psychological victory over fear and evil.

In Jack and the Beanstalk, the giant is a metaphor for oppression and greed. Jack's theft of gold and eventual killing of the giant suggest a confrontation with power structures and moral ambiguity—was Jack's act heroic or opportunistic?

Despite this moral tension, the giant ultimately serves as a test of courage and cleverness.

These antagonists symbolically represent:

Dragons and giants: fear, moral challenge, oppressive forces;

⁴ Jack and the Beanstalk has been traced back to oral versions dating from the 18th century in England, with the first printed version appearing in 1807

Victory over evil: personal growth, societal justice, the power of good.

By overcoming these figures, both heroes demonstrate the value of resilience and righteousness, echoing ancient mythological and religious narratives.

4. Moral Messages – Ethical Instruction Through Symbolism

A central function of folklore is moral instruction. Both Rustamxon and Jack and the Beanstalk promote ethical values, often embedded in symbolic motifs and narrative choices.

The tales stress virtues such as:

Bravery in adversity;

Intelligence over strength;

Honesty, diligence, and perseverance;

Faith in oneself and unseen forces.

For example, the magic carrot is not just nourishment—it is the reward for faith and patience. The beans, thrown away in frustration, grow only when planted—a metaphor for faith in small beginnings.

Thus, the symbolic elements in both tales transform everyday objects into carriers of wisdom. They teach young readers the importance of:

Trusting intuition;

Staying persistent;

Seizing unexpected opportunities.

5. Cultural Identity and Universal Themes⁵

Despite cultural specificities, both tales express core human values. However, their figurative frameworks reflect distinct worldviews.

CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of “Rustamxon” and “Jack and the Beanstalk” demonstrates that despite originating from different cultures, both tales share deep cultural and educational commonalities. The heroes, though raised in poverty without a father, succeed through intelligence, bravery, and spiritual strength.

The magical elements, villains, and fantastical journeys symbolize each nation’s historical experiences and ethical outlook. Uzbek literature emphasizes patience, inner maturity, and moral development, while English literature highlights quick decisions and practical solutions.

In conclusion, figurative images in these tales reflect the spiritual and cultural consciousness of their respective societies. They serve as powerful educational tools, encouraging young readers to embrace courage, hard work, wisdom, and goodness in their lives.

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⁵ The character of Rustamxon is a recurring folk archetype in Uzbek oral storytelling, symbolizing the ideal of the brave and honest youth.

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