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## **Symbolism and Functions of Marriage Motifs in Turkic Epics and Selected European Works (Fairy Tales, Legends) and Their Transformation in Modern Narrative Fiction**

### **Symbolika i funkcje motywów małżeństwa w eposach tureckich i wybranych utworach europejskich (baśniach, legendach) oraz ich transformacja we współczesnej narracji fikcjonalnej**

**Keywords:** cultural symbols, folklore plots, social rituals, social structures, cultural heritage, archetypes

**Słowa kluczowe:** symbole kulturowe, wątki folklorystyczne, rytuały społeczne, struktury społeczne, dziedzictwo kulturowe, archetypy

### Abstract

This article examines the symbolism and societal roles of marriage motifs in the epic traditions of Turkic and European cultures, with a primary focus on fairy tales and legends. It offers a comparative analysis of recurring marriage motifs, including heroic trials, magical unions, and socially strategic marriages, demonstrating how these themes reflect cultural values, collective identity, and social cohesion. Special attention is given to the socio-political and ethical dimensions of marriage in Turkic epics, where partnerships frequently represent tribal unity and legitimacy, in contrast to the personal, moral, and transformational elements seen in European narratives. The article also explores the reworking of these motifs in Kyrgyz novels, particularly in the writings of Chingiz Aitmatov. In this context, marriage motifs from oral epic traditions are reinterpreted to address current issues such as modernisation, cultural identity, and gender roles. By analysing the preservation and adaptation of classic story structures, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the continuity and evolution of marriage symbols across diverse genres and cultural settings.

## Introduction

The need to study marriage motifs in traditional narrative forms – such as fairy tales, legends, and epic poetry – arises due to their important role in the formation of key narratives that influence narrative fiction. In the epic traditions of Turkic-speaking peoples, these motifs not only reflect the personal aspirations of heroes but also encapsulate broader societal principles, such as justice, hierarchy, and cultural unity. Conversely, European cultures frequently see marriage as the apex of personal growth and a symbolic prize for virtue and resilience. A comparative analysis of these narratives reveals that the institution of marriage functions as a significant cultural symbol across many areas.

A multitude of researchers have analysed marriage motifs in several cultural epics. In the European tradition, marriage often represents the restoration of social order by heroic actions, as highlighted by Garciano et al. (2023: 39–45) and Day (2020: 162–169), while Dvorova (2024: 167) emphasises the gender dynamics inherent in these depictions. Luiten (2019: 45) and McCarthy (2022) propose that marriage is the ultimate reward for exhibiting values like bravery and loyalty. These assessments contrast with the Turkic tradition, where marriage represents intertribal unity and legitimacy, as noted by Sapayeva (2024: 436–438), Talieva (2024: 103–104), and Ussipbayeva et al. (2020: 577). These marital alliances are essential for fostering peace and stability, frequently requiring heroic challenges that represent moral and political preparedness.

This article examines the influence of epic elements on narrative fiction, specifically in the work of Chingiz Aitmatov (2018). Chingiz Aitmatov's fiction, especially "The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years" (1980), "Farewell, Gulsary!"

(1966), and “The White Ship” (1970), reworks epic motifs, including marriage, to address questions of identity, continuity, and modernity. In “The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years”, the myth of Raimaly and Ukubala exemplifies how traditional marriage symbols are transformed into metaphors for cultural rupture and ethical crisis. Aitmatov thus preserves and reinterprets folkloric archetypes, aligning them with contemporary social concerns.

According to Sabirova (2023: 36) and Kerimkulova and Ibraev (2021: 135), marriage motifs from folklore are reinterpreted in literary fiction to express modern concerns including modernisation, cultural identity, and gender relations. Aitmatov’s works often reinterpret national folklore components, imbuing them with philosophical significance and examining the changing role of marriage within societal structures.

While previous research has highlighted the socio-political symbolism of marriage in Turkic epics, this article goes further by examining how this motif is transformed in literary fiction, particularly in the works of Chingiz Aitmatov. By tracing the continuity and transformation of epic marriage motifs across folklore, classical epics, and modern prose, the study demonstrates how these symbols evolve in response to shifts in cultural and political structures. Furthermore, the comparative analysis with European narratives offers new insights into the culturally specific roles marriage plays in forging individual identity versus collective unity.

Notwithstanding a substantial corpus of research, comparative studies investigating marriage symbols in both European and Turkic traditions are still inadequately developed. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing thematic and symbolic similarities and differences. The study’s aims encompass:

- identification of key motifs of marriage in folk epics of Turkic and European peoples;
- assessing the role of marriage unions in the socio-political context of traditional narratives;
- comparing the symbolism of marriage in both traditions to identify differences and similarities.

The data gathering entailed the identification and compilation of primary epic and fairy tale texts from Turkic and European traditions, sourced from published anthologies, scholarly translations, and digital folklore and literary sources. The aforementioned texts were picked for their canonical stature, academic acknowledgement, and thematic pertinence to marriage motifs. Thematic coding was employed to systematise narrative themes across texts, focussing on courtship, pre-marital trials, ceremonial activities, and the socio-symbolic significance of marital unions. A matrix was created to categorise and analyse tale elements,

encompassing the types of trials, the roles of male and female characters, and the societal purposes of marriage within various cultural contexts. This matrix functioned as a mechanism for maintaining consistency in comparative analysis and tracking motif recurrence and transition across genres and eras.

The first stage of the research involved a detailed analysis of culturally significant European narrative texts, including “Cinderella” (Perrault and Koopmans 2002) and “The Romance of Tristan and Iseult” (Bédier 2005). While these works do not belong to the epic genre in the strict literary sense – “Cinderella” being a fairy tale and Tristan and Isolde a chivalric romance – they were selected due to their enduring influence on European cultural imagination and their rich use of marriage motifs. These narratives offer valuable insight into how marriage symbolizes personal transformation, social mobility, and moral ideals within the context of European traditions. In the Turkic tradition, attention has focused on epics such as “Alpamysh” (Juldash-ogly 1982) and “Ural-batyr” (Khusainov 2017). Here, marriage has a much more political and social character. In works of Turkic epic, as previously noted, marriage unions serve to strengthen unity between clans or tribes, and also symbolize the hero’s attainment of a certain social and military status that is recognized by society. Thus, in Turkic culture, the motifs of marriage in epics emphasize the significance of this procedure as a way of maintaining peace and stability in the community, linking the hero’s personal happiness with the public good.

“Alpamysh” is a significant epic from Uzbek folklore, thought to have originated in the oral tradition of Central Asia. The epic centres on the hero Alpamysh, who exemplifies power, wisdom, and ethical integrity. The narrative encompasses his pursuit of marriage, interwoven with political and social obstacles, mirroring the tribal dynamics of the day. The epic is believed to have attained its present form between the 14th and 17th centuries, although its origins are probably considerably older.

“Ural-batyr” is a Bashkir epic that recounts the exploits of the hero Ural-batyr, who is charged with vanquishing legendary beings and surmounting challenges to secure marriage and restore harmony to his society. The epic is abundant in mythical components and underscores the hero’s function in preserving societal order. It is thought to have been created and conveyed orally for centuries, with recorded versions emerging in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The second stage of the study was devoted to a comparative analysis of marriage motifs in the texts of both traditions. The focus was on the trials that precede marriage and their role in establishing the social and political status of the heroes. The third stage of the study involved summarizing the results of the comparative

analysis and identifying cultural differences and similarities in the symbolism of marriage. At this stage, special attention was paid not only to the immediate elements of marriage motifs, such as rituals and trials preceding the union, but also to their interpretation in different cultural contexts. Data from the epics allowed for a deeper comparative analysis between the literary traditions of different peoples, which helped to identify similarities and differences in the perception of marriage as a social and symbolic phenomenon.

In addition, the analysis revealed key patterns in the development of marriage motifs that allow us to trace their evolution in epic and prose forms. For example, in Turkic culture, marriage unions are often associated with the idea of uniting clans and maintaining peace, which persists in literary fiction works as well. In the European tradition, the motif of marriage continues to be viewed through the prism of personal happiness and social recognition, which also remains relevant in modern literature.

### **Analysis of marriage motifs: symbolism, functions, and cultural implications**

Marriage is an integral part of heroic epics. These motifs can act both as key elements of plot development and as expressions of cultural values, social norms and ideals of the society in which they originated. Marriage in folklore traditions often symbolizes not just the union of two people, but also the unification of clans, peace and stability, and the achievement of harmony between the natural and supernatural worlds (Guliyeva and Kopanitsa 2024; Nesen 2024). In European fairy tales, particularly those of the Brothers Grimm, marriage motifs are manifested through various trials, heroes' exploits and magical transformations, which emphasize the importance of valour, bravery, and honesty (Althobaiti 2023: 45). They not only serve the development of the plot, but also reflect an idealized vision of the marriage union, in which personal merit or trials act as a condition for achieving harmony. In the tales of Turkic peoples, marriage motifs also play a central role, but they are usually linked to ideas of tribal unity, social structure and traditional rituals. Heroes go through a series of trials and adventures to prove their dignity, emphasizing the importance of the social and moral values embedded in these stories. Marriage appears here not only as an individual union, but as a symbol of maintaining and strengthening social bonds.

Despite the different purpose of marriage in the works, they share common motifs. The trope of the "princess and hero" is one of the most common motifs in

the world fairy tale tradition, where marriage to a princess or prince acts not only as the climax of the plot, but also as a symbolic reward for the hero's courage, valour and moral purity. In European fairy tales, this motif reflects the socio-cultural expectations of the time, when heroic feats or overcoming difficulties become a kind of test that the main character must pass in order to obtain the right to marry. For example, in the fairy tale "The Frog Prince" (Brothers Grimm 2024b), the hero, who overcomes his difficulties and trials, eventually receives the hand of the princess, which not only confirms his physical and moral maturity, but also gives him social status and power, emphasizing the role of marriage as a symbol of social recognition and strengthening of the hero's position. Similar motifs are observed in the fairy tales of "Cinderella" (Perrault and Koopmans 2002), where the protagonist, going through hardships, humiliations and trials, finally achieves the favour of the prince. The trials and sufferings "Cinderella" goes through are a kind of initiation path leading to a marriage union that elevates her social status and confirms the justice and moral values on which society is based. Marriage in such tales becomes a means of achieving harmony and balance, where the reward for moral fortitude or physical effort symbolizes the opportunity to rise higher in the social hierarchy.

In Turkic epics, this trope is also a key element of the plot. In such works, the heroes usually have to overcome numerous trials, fight enemies, or perform difficult tasks in order to gain the right to marry a princess. In tales of Uzbek or Kazakh folklore, for example, the heroes must demonstrate their strength, bravery, wisdom, and even cunning. These feats emphasize the heroic nature of the characters and present them as models of the ideal man, ready not only to protect the family, but also to preserve and expand social and political ties between tribes or clans. Marriage in this context not only confirms the status of the hero, but also becomes a means of strengthening social, political and tribal ties, which is important for maintaining the stability and unity of the community.

The next trope, the trials to obtain the bride's hand in marriage, is represented in both European and Turkic tales. The trials that the hero must overcome act as a form of testing his physical and moral qualities, as well as symbolizing his ability to provide security, stability, and well-being for his future wife. In European fairy tales such as "Rapunzel" (Brothers Grimm 2024a), the hero has to overcome a series of physical obstacles and dangers in order to free his beloved, highlighting the motif of sacrifice and selflessness. This is not only a test of physical strength, but also a test of endurance, perseverance, and willingness to overcome difficulties in order to achieve the goal. Such plots demonstrate that marriage is a reward for the hero who fully deserves it due to his deeds and feats. In Turkic folk tales, such as

“Alpamysh” (Juldash-ogly 1982), the hero faces challenges that are more complex in nature, encompassing not only physical strength but also strategy, courage, and moral qualities. In such stories, marriage acts not only as an ultimate goal but as a kind of initiation ritual through which the hero passes to a new social status. He is no longer just a warrior or traveller, but becomes a leader, a man, and a protector of his clan. The trial, as an aspect of the marriage bond, demonstrates the high demands on the hero, highlighting his dual role as protector, responsible for defending his society, and as prey, subject to the challenges and dangers posed by these trials. It also demonstrates that in folkloric traditions, marriage is not only a personal union, but also a socially significant act that defines the individual’s place in the community and points out his importance in providing security and stability.

A third trope is the magical marriage, which acts as a symbol of uniting the human world with supernatural forces or achieving harmony through magical means. Such a motif is a key motif in many traditional narratives where marriage takes place through magic or between a human and a supernatural being. In European fairy tales, such as “Beauty and the Beast: The Original Story” (de Vileneuve 2020), marriage becomes possible only after the Beast undergoes a magical transformation, symbolizing both physical and spiritual renewal. This transformation also reflects Belle’s moral influence, positioning marriage as the culmination of inner change and restored harmony. In this story, marriage appears not simply as an act of uniting two individuals, but as a ritual that opens the way to inner and outer healing, reconciliation and harmony. Such a motif is deeply rooted in the European cultural tradition, where marital unions are interpreted as instruments of transformation, fusion, and restoration.

In the fairy tales of Turkic peoples, magical marriage is also widespread, particularly in stories about heroes who marry peri girls or other mythical creatures such as snakes or birds with human features. In such works, marriage to a supernatural creature not only emphasizes the exclusivity of the hero, who is able to transcend the boundaries between the human and spirit worlds, but also serves as a tool for achieving harmony between nature and society. In particular, in the tales of Uzbek and Kazakh folklore, such marriages symbolize the unification of tribes or groups through the achievement of supernatural harmony, which, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of social and cultural ties. In addition, magical marriage often embodies the pursuit of an ideal or the search for spiritual wholeness. For example, in Turkic tales about heroes who go through severe trials to win the hand of a peri girl, the magical marriage becomes the climax of the plot, where the hero receives not only the chosen one, but also recognition, wisdom, and a new social status. In some cases, such marital unions act as a spiritual quest or



achieving harmony with the environment, reflecting the cosmogonic ideas of peoples about the interaction between the worlds of humans and spirits. Such a motif illustrates the desire for wholeness and ideal state, when a person, overcoming trials and threats, achieves unity with natural or supernatural forces, which is a manifestation of the search for harmony and balance in the world.

Analysing the tropes and their motifs, we can conclude that in folklore and folk epics marriage is often a symbol of achieving power, unity of different social groups or victory over adversity (Table 1). In the context of European fairy tales, marriage is not only a means to ensure personal happiness, but also the hero’s social advancement, which emphasizes his or her ability to achieve more through the display of bravery, loyalty, or other moral qualities. Marriage to a member of the royal family symbolizes the establishment of new social and political alliances, which in medieval European culture were considered important for the stability and expansion of the influence of the ruling house (Stadnik 2024). This motif is often used to express the idea that a hero must earn respect and prove his dignity before being rewarded with marriage to a princess or other dignitary. In Turkic folk epics, marriage often has a deeper socio-political significance than the mere union of two individuals (Serikzhanova et al. 2024). It symbolizes the strengthening of ties between clans or tribes, bringing peace and stability in a wider context. These epics reflect the realities of nomadic and tribal societies, where marriage unions served to guarantee lasting peace and support alliances. Marriage in folklore is often associated with overcoming adversity, emphasizing the importance of courage, bravery, and endurance. Highlighting individual merit and the demonstration of courage, the ability to overcome adversity, which becomes a key element in achieving a marriage union.

Table 1. Trials before marriage in folk and romantic narrative traditions

Work	Type of the trial	Social role of the trial
Alpamish	Passing physical tests	Affirms the hero’s status and his right to marry the chosen one, reinforcing authority in the community
Tristan and Isolde	Dangerous journey and battle with enemies	Reaffirms commitment to duty and community despite personal feelings
Ural Batyr	Battle with demons and monsters	Shows that the hero is worthy of spiritual union with the forces of nature and his people
Cinderella	Trials of patience and humility	Social and moral lesson encouraging patience and virtue

Source: composed by authors.



Marriage motifs play a key role in the formation of ideas about family values and gender roles, reflecting the socio-cultural standards of society (Guo et al. 2023; Bocheliuk et al. 2019). In European fairy tales, marriage is often the final stage of plot development, where the heroine finds her place in society, moving from the role of a dependent daughter to that of a wife and future mother. Such tales as “Cinderella” or “Sleeping Beauty” demonstrate the traditional ideal of femininity, where the heroines are given a passive role, and their main task is to find a worthy man who will provide them with social and material protection. In the fairy tales of Turkic peoples, traditional gender roles are also manifested through marriage motifs. Often, the protagonist in such tales has not only an attractive appearance, but also outstanding moral qualities, which makes her a worthy candidate for marriage. However, in such works, the man’s role is usually more active: he has to prove his strength, courage, or wisdom in order to get the beloved, as it often happens in heroic epics like *Manas*. In such a context, marriage acts as a ritual that confirms the social structure and gender expectations embedded in the folkloric tradition.

Epic narratives and legends have profoundly shaped the development of the novel, especially through the incorporation of marital motifs, which often function as crucial narrative elements. These motifs not only direct the plot’s progression but also express the cultural, social, and moral ideals inherent to particular historical epochs. In literary fiction influenced by folkloric traditions, marital motifs are frequently reconfigured into more complex narrative frameworks. These facilitate the development of complex characters and narratives that embody personal experiences and societal issues. In nineteenth-century European novels, especially those influenced by Romanticism and subsequently Realism, authors often incorporated folkloric themes, such as heroic journeys or trials to secure a partner’s hand, which had previously emerged in epic or fairy tale traditions (Cohen 2017). These narrative patterns, encompassing the protagonist’s quest for a cherished individual or a symbolic union, illustrate the overarching societal function of marriage as both a human ambition and a social construct. These alterations provide a psychological and moral enhancement of classic motifs, revealing not only exterior achievements but also internal conflicts such as the quest for love, self-actualization, or ethical purity.

Moreover, in novels, marriage motifs are often employed to critique social structures and conditions. For instance, in the works of Austen (2009) and Brontë (2022), marriage is presented not merely as a goal for the protagonists, but as a tool for examining issues of social inequality, the infringement of women’s rights, and their dependence on men within a patriarchal society. Thus, marriage in these novels becomes a means of analysing social dynamics and a way of

portraying the conflict between individual aspirations and societal constraints. In Turkic peoples, marriage motifs are also reflected in narrative fiction, but they retain elements of traditional epic tales, such as the hero's struggle to unite families or tribes, which has social or political significance. Marriage in such works often acts as a means of expressing the concepts of unity, strength and heredity, which aims not only to unite two persons, but also to strengthen ties between clans. At the same time, new interpretations of these motifs appear in contemporary Turkic prose that take into account changes in social conditions, such as the impact of modernization and globalization on traditional structures. Marriage motifs in novels allow authors to explore not only traditional, but also contemporary realities and ways of preserving or reinterpreting cultural values in a changing world.

Novels often adapt and reinterpret traditional marriage motifs, creating complex narratives where marriage becomes not just the climax of the plot, but an important tool for revealing the inner world of the characters and societal issues (Bazaluk and Nezhyya 2016). In nineteenth and twentieth-century European novels, the idea of marriage often serves to explore issues of freedom, equality, and justice. For example, in the work by Austen (2009), marriage is a critical tool to explore social inequality and the limitation of women's rights. In such works, marriage ceases to be merely a reward for valour or a test, as it was in folklore, but becomes a field for criticizing social structures and norms.

In Turkic novels, marriage remains a central element reflecting deep cultural and social values, in particular symbolizing the unification of tribes or families, as traditionally represented in heroic epics. This motif often serves as a way of emphasizing the importance of social ties and unity, where marriage does not only unite individuals but acts as an act of strengthening the social structure of the whole society. The heroes of such works go through a series of tests aimed at proving their dignity, loyalty to their family and ability to become a protector or leader of their people. However, in modern literary fiction interpretations of Turkic authors, marriage motifs undergo significant transformations. Under the influence of modernization, urbanization and globalization, marriage concepts are reinterpreted, acquiring new meanings and functions.

Modern Turkic authors often refer to traditional marriage motifs, but use them to criticize social and political realities, emphasizing the conflict between the desire to preserve traditions and the need to adapt to the changing conditions of the modern world. In this context, marriage becomes a kind of arena in which the struggle between the past and the modern, tradition and new challenges unfolds. In modern prose, one can see how authors create complex, multi-layered images of characters who try to find a balance between their desire to follow

traditional values and the demands of modernity. In the plot construction of the novels of Kyrgyz literature of the twentieth century, there was a wide use of myths and legends, not only in the context of marriage. Modern man with his developed intellect, extensive knowledge and aesthetic sense seeks to understand more deeply and express in art the complex social and spiritual nature of life (Spytska 2024). For this purpose, he turns to myths and archetypes, discovering in them philosophical ideas, poetic images, allegories, which help to make a structure capable of creating a global philosophical and artistic concept of the world.

### **Comparative analysis of motifs for marriage in different cultures**

The European tradition of epic tales is extremely rich and diverse in its plots and symbols. One of the most common and important motifs is marriage, which is central to the development of the plot and the formation of the meaningful structure of the work. This tradition uses marriage not only as the climax or denouement of the tale, but as an instrument to convey the social, moral, and cultural ideals inherent in the era and cultural milieu in which the tales originated and circulated. In European fairy tales, marriage functions as a universal means of resolving conflicts, achieving justice and establishing harmony, which emphasizes its symbolic significance.

The Grimm Brothers' tales are a prime example of how the European tradition of epic tales develops and transforms marriage motifs, using them as a means of representing cultural values. These tales, collected and processed by the Brothers Grimm in the nineteenth century, are not just examples of folklore, but also reflect the social and ethical norms of the time (Yusuf 2021: 89–90). In the stories of fairy tales, marriage becomes the ultimate goal for the characters, but it is not given to them without effort. Overcoming various trials, and displaying valour, courage, and honesty is a prerequisite for achieving this union, which emphasizes the idea that personal development and moral qualities are necessary to gain happiness and social acceptance. Marriage motifs in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales reflect not only the ideals of society, but also its structural elements, such as gender roles and social statuses. In these fairy tales, the heroine is often presented as the embodiment of honesty, submission and virtue, while the hero who frees her or wins her favour is a manly, noble and strong character. Thus, the gender roles embedded in the marriage motifs form a stable image of the social ideal, where men are responsible for protection and women for fidelity and moral purity.

The fairy tale “Cinderella” (Perrault and Koopmans 2002) is one of the most prominent examples of the use of the marriage motif as a tool for social mobility and moral victory in the European tradition. In this story, marriage not only serves as the climax of the plot, but also fulfils an important role in the development of the heroine, who goes through numerous trials before finding her happiness. Marriage to the prince becomes a reward for her virtue, goodness, and moral purity, which is in keeping with the ideal that merit is rewarded with high status. The heroine of the tale is forced to endure the unjust treatment of the stepmother and her daughters, which symbolizes the social difficulties and injustice faced by the individual in society. An important element of the plot is the transformation of the heroine with the help of a magical fairy, which allows her to take part in the ball where she meets the prince. This transformation points to the idea of inner potential hidden behind external circumstances and the need for magical or external intervention to bring about change in life.

Marriage in the fairy tale symbolizes not only personal happiness and love, but also the attainment of a social status that conforms to the ideals of European culture. She goes through a series of trials – humiliation, poverty, ridicule, and only through her inner fortitude and virtue is she rewarded in the end. This is in line with archetypal motifs in fairy tales where heroes who display moral purity and patience achieve reward in the form of marriage union, indicating social upliftment (Rathnasena 2022: 68). Apart from this, the motifs of transformation at the ball have deep symbolic significance. Cinderella’s magical transformation is a condition for her to achieve a new social status, highlighting the importance of inner beauty and dignity to be recognized by society. Marriage to the prince symbolizes the harmonious combination of different worlds – the world of poverty personified by Cinderella and the world of wealth and power represented by the prince. Marriage in the European tradition not only acts as a means of personal happiness, but also functions as a mechanism of social mobility that rewards moral virtues and confirms social ideals. At the same time, these motifs clearly demonstrate the idea that inner qualities such as patience, kindness, and willingness to change are important conditions for success in a social context, echoing many other tales in European epic.

In Grimm’s fairy tales, marital unions are often used as a means of demonstrating gender roles and social ideals. For example, the image of the princess in need of the hero’s help and protection reflects traditional ideas about femininity and its role in society. At the same time, the hero, who must show courage, endurance, and nobility to win the hand of the princess, demonstrates an idealized image of men as protectors and earners. These gender roles emphasize cultural

values related to the social structure and responsibilities that are shared between men and women. The social ideals embedded in the marriage motifs of European fairy tales also reflect the desire for stability and harmony. Marriage uniting representatives of different social classes or even warring families becomes a symbol of reconciliation and restoration of social order (Romaniuk and Yavorska 2022). Thus, in Grimm's fairy tales, marriage does not simply conclude the plot, but acts as a means of establishing a new social balance that corresponds to the cultural ideals of the time.

The theme of marriage motifs in Turkic epics and literary fiction is an important aspect of cultural heritage, reflecting the historical, social and spiritual values of Turkic peoples. In traditional narratives, marriage fulfils the role of personal union and symbolizes the political and social mechanisms of uniting tribes, establishing hierarchy and maintaining stability (Spytska 2023). Marriage plots in these epics are inextricably linked with the trials and heroic feats of the main characters, which confirms their importance in the structure of Turkic narratives. Turkic epics such as "Alpamysh" (Juldash-ogly 1982), "Er Toshtuk" (Karalaev 1996) and "Ural-batyr" (Khusainov 2017) present multi-layered marriage motifs that act as key plot elements to establish social hierarchy, consolidate power and unite tribes. Marriage in these epics has not only a personal character, but also symbolizes socio-political aspects, reflecting important processes of integration and harmonization of society. It is an important instrument not only at the individual level, but also at the collective level, indicating the role of personal unions in forming stable political alliances and ensuring peace between individual clans or tribes.

The Bashkir epic "Ural-batyr" and the Uzbek version "Alpamysh" present a rich symbolism of marriage motifs that are closely intertwined with mythological and heroic elements, forming an epic framework that emphasizes the social and cultural values of Turkic peoples. In both epic traditions, marriage is not just the result of a personal choice, but a symbol of triumph, a socially and politically significant action aimed at maintaining peace and well-being of the whole community.

In the "Ural-batyr" epic, the motifs of marriage begin to unfold through the hero's interaction with mythological characters and sages, who predict the future of the hero and point out the importance of fulfilling his social duties (Khusainov 2017):

To make your country happy,  
Your father gave you life.  
Your mother gave you her milk;  
So that your soul may be firm to your enemies,  
And kind and bright to your friends.

That's how you were raised,  
 They put you on a faithful lion.  
*(translated by the authors)*

This motif emphasizes that the wedding for Ural is not only the culmination of his personal journey, but also an important social act. When Ural encounters and fights the mythical serpent, he not only frees the captives, but also establishes himself as a defender of the people. As an act of encouragement for his exploits – he meets a girl with whom he falls in love (Khusainov 2017):

As if among the white stones  
 A pearl she is,  
 As among the stars that adorn the sky,  
 She is the moon's radiance.  
 The only flower in the meadow,  
 Adorning the grasses, she is.  
*(translated by the authors)*

As can be seen, the mythological event here provided an opportunity to develop the motif of marriage within the framework of the general canonical plot. The wedding becomes an affirmation of his strength and heroism, symbolizing the establishment of justice and the restoration of order. This plot emphasizes the importance of courage and loyalty to society, and marriage is both a personal achievement and social recognition.

In the “Alpamysh” epic, the motifs of marriage take on mythological and spiritual overtones. One of the key moments of this motif is connected with the magical intervention of the chiltens, who unite the souls of the heroes – Alpamysh and Barchyn – in a dream, symbolizing physical and spiritual separation. This episode emphasizes an important mythological theme in Turkic epics – the connection between soul and body, especially in the context of marriage. The wedding here is not just an act of joining bodies, but a deep spiritual union that the chiltens (mythological beings) seek to restore. Barchyn, by offering Alpamysh to share the divine drink with her, symbolically represents the desire for unity, but not only on a physical but also on a spiritual level. This motif is reinforced by her words (Juldash-ogly 1982):

Take it, allaør-allaør.  
 Come, allaør-allaør,  
 Hurry up, allaør-allaør.  
 Holding the cup, my hand is tired.  
 Biya's daughter is waiting,

Or you have a grudge against someone,  
I can't hold my passion,  
My Khan, my Töre,  
what's the matter with you?  
Take it, allaør-allaør.  
*(translated by the authors)*

Alpamysh's refusal to accept the offered cup, despite his passion and love, indicates that the hero needs to overcome additional obstacles to be worthy of this union (Juldash-ogly 1982):

I won't take it, allaør-allaør.  
You've made me a woe-begone man.  
*(translated by the authors)*

This refusal represents an important symbol of heroism and fortitude characteristic of epic heroes. Alpamysh is not ready to accept the union of souls until he has completed all the necessary tests and restored the balance between the bodily and spiritual. Thus, the Alpamysh epic uses the motifs of marriage as a means to illustrate not only personal but also social and mythological goals. The hero must overcome suffering and go through trials to earn the right to marry, which unites not only their destinies but also strengthens the social and political ties between the tribes. Events in the epic from the beginning to the end are filled with legends, myths, fairy-tale episodes, while it also retains the same archaic elements, but individual events resemble the earthly exploits of earthly bogatyrs. If looking from this angle, the epoch of creation of the epic "Ural-batyr", in comparison with "Alpamysh", falls at a much earlier time.

Turkic epics offer an image of marriage that is deeply rooted in collective ideals and archetypes. It becomes an important means for resolving social and political conflicts, where personal relationships have a deeper meaning and serve the purpose of peace and harmony in society. Marriage unions in epics are often combined with trials symbolizing purification, ritual initiation and confirmation of the hero's dignity. Thus, marriage in Turkic epics is not just the final goal of a heroic journey, but a complex mechanism of social organization that forms the integrity of society, strengthens its internal ties and ensures stability through the integration of individual tribes or social groups. This model of marriage also demonstrates the close connection between individual achievement and collective interests, emphasizing the importance of personal trials in achieving social status and political power (Smetaniak 2024). In Turkic epics, marriage symbolizes not only personal happiness but also collective well-being, which points out its key importance in the cultural and social context.



When comparing marriage motifs in Turkic epics and European fairy tales, significant cultural differences and similarities can be found, reflecting the specific world-views, social structures and value systems of each community (Table 2). Marriage in European fairy tales is often the culmination of the hero or heroine’s personal journey, where the union becomes a reward for moral fortitude, virtue, or fidelity. The marriage union here has a predominantly individual character, symbolizing the attainment of personal happiness, inner harmony and the completion of the quest, giving it the role of a happy ending to the fairy tale narrative. This function of marriage is partly similar to the Turkic epics, where it is also an important element of the narrative structure, but its meaning is much deeper and more complex. In Turkic epics, marriage fulfils not only an individual function, but also acquires a collective and social dimension, representing an instrument for uniting clans, tribes, or even society as a whole. Here the marriage union is a symbol of stability, order and social harmony. In the Turkic context, the marriage of heroes can serve as an allegory for peace, social reconciliation or political unity, emphasizing the importance of collective responsibility and mutual support within society. Furthermore, marriage in Turkic epics is often associated with the fulfilment of certain social duties or roles, which includes ensuring the well-being of the community or family. This contrasts with the European emphasis on the individual experiences and achievements of heroes, where marriage is a personal achievement and rather completes the inner journey of becoming a hero or heroine.

Table 2. Social values in the marriage motifs of the analysed works

Work	Social value	Role of marriage
Alpamysh	Unity of clan and consolidation of power	Marriage as a way of uniting clans, consolidation of power and social position
Tristan and Isolde	Loyalty and fidelity	Forbidden marriage as a symbol of devotion to personal feelings in defiance of social laws
Ural Batyr	Community unity and spiritual guidance	Marriage serves to strengthen the connection between the human world and the spiritual world
Cinderella	Social ascent and reward for virtue	Marriage as an opportunity to move to a higher social status and a reward for patience

Source: composed by authors.

The similarities between European fairy tales and Turkic epics are manifested in the structure and stages of plot development, where trials and symbolic rites preceding the wedding events occupy a special place. In both traditions, an

important element is the passage of the main characters through a series of tests, which serve as a kind of means of testing their courage, endurance, devotion to their ideals and moral principles. These trials are not only physical but also spiritual challenges that mould the characters, contribute to their inner development and become key stages of their formation. The symbolic rituals and actions that accompany the process of the journey to marriage also occupy an important place in both cultures. The wedding is not just a final stage, but a kind of metaphor for the hero reaching maturity, establishing harmony between the individual and society, and overcoming internal and external obstacles (Efremov 2024). In Turkic and European traditions, this element acts as a kind of ritual transition to a new phase of life, when marriage symbolizes the completion of personal formation and integration into the social community.

Regardless of the cultural context, the ordeal before marriage has a universal significance as key stages in the formation of heroes, indicating similar approaches to the portrayal of human maturity and responsibility. After successfully overcoming the trials and completing personal transformations, marriage symbolizes the achievement of a balance between individual aspirations and social responsibilities, serving as the final stage in the development of the individual. When comparing the marriage motifs of European tales and Turkic epics, one can see both differences and common features. The European tradition emphasizes the individual romantic component, while the Turkic tradition highlights the social and political function of marriage. In both cases, marriage remains the central symbol that completes the characters' life journey and serves as an important element of their internal and social transformation.

### **Contextualising marriage motifs within cultural frameworks**

The results of the study of marriage motifs in traditional narratives provide an in-depth understanding of how marriage unions reflect the social, cultural and political ideals of different traditions. Depending on the cultural context, marriage fulfils different functions: it can serve as a symbol of social order or personal happiness, as well as express ideals of heroism and spiritual unity. The present study analysed how European and Turkic epics depict marriage unions, showing their diversity depending on cultural specificities.

In European epics, marriage is often portrayed as the culmination of moral trials and the reward for virtue. This approach is reflected in the research of O'Connell (2019: 200) and Loschykhin et al. (2023: 30), who emphasized that

marriage in European fairy tales is linked to social mobility and the moral qualities of the characters. Marriage in “Cinderella” becomes a symbol of the restoration of social justice. However, some researchers such as Mohammed and Jacob (2022) point out that such fairy tales may perpetuate stereotypical gender roles by idealizing passive images of women. This is also in line with the findings of this study, indicating that in European epics, marriage is primarily a symbol of personal success and social harmony. On the other hand, in Turkic epics, marriage plays a much more important socio-political role. Here, marriage serves not so much as a symbol of the hero’s personal achievement, but rather as an affirmation of tribal unity and political stability. This is confirmed by the studies of Sayfulina et al. (2020: 24) and Zipes (2019: 251), who emphasize that Turkic epics reflect the historical realities of nomadic peoples, where marriage represented an important element of social structure. This is also confirmed by the works of Taimova and Begmanova (2022: 187), who noted that mythological and magical elements in Turkic epics symbolize not only love and unity of souls, but also social order, the strengthening of political alliances between clans.

Shaheen et al. (2019: 34) and Murati Kurti (2021) criticized the traditional gender roles enshrined through marriage motifs in European tales. The studies emphasized that female characters are often portrayed in passive roles, expecting salvation or recognition through marriage, which can be seen as a reflection of the patriarchal values of the society. This corroborates with the findings of this study, showing that in European epics, marriage represents the reward for virtue and social advancement of the hero, while women often play secondary roles. In contrast, as Dvorova (2024: 168) notes, in Turkic epics women, such as Barchin in *Alpamysh*, are often actively involved in the development of the plot, displaying not only wisdom but also physical strength. This study confirms this conclusion by demonstrating that in the Turkic tradition female characters fulfil key roles in maintaining social order, and marriage symbolizes not only personal but also collective unity, reflecting the difference in cultural ideals and social structures of the two traditions.

Marriage in Turkic epics is primarily a multi-layered symbol. The epic reflects not only real historical events, but also deeper, mythological concepts of order and harmony, which makes marriage motifs not just a part of the plot, but a basis for understanding the cultural and social structures of the people (Kongyratbay 2023). This was confirmed by the works of Berdikabilova and Sultanbaeva (2024: 49–52), whose analysis showed that the marriage union in such works as “*Alpamysh*” and “*Ural-batyr*” symbolizes not only the unity of souls, but also the strengthening of social and political structures through magical and mythological tests.

In the works of Garey (2023: 1–5), the author treats epic as a reflection not only of historical and social realities, but also of mythological and cultural memory of the people. The author emphasizes that marriage in epics fulfils the function of cosmic order and balance of the universe. This is especially evident in the works of Turkic-speaking peoples, where the heroes overcome both earthly and spirit tests on the way to marriage. Epic has had a significant influence on the development of literary fiction, especially in terms of the use of archetypes, symbolic motifs and narrative structures. This thesis is confirmed by Crossley (2022), noting that epic motifs such as marital unions, heroic trials and mythological elements are reflected in narrative fiction genres, where they are transformed and adapted to modern conditions. In contemporary Turkic prose, epic motifs such as marriage trials and the struggle for social unity are often reinterpreted in the context of personal and national crises. Studies by Krieger (2023: 172–203) and Zholaman et al. (2024: 1095–1103) show that epic motifs can often be found in such works, which are used to convey deeper philosophical and political ideas that reflect the realities of contemporary society. This indicates that epic not only continues to live on in novels, but also develops, becoming part of modern literary narratives.

Marriage motifs in Turkic epics are gradually transformed under the influence of modern social realities (Romaniuk 2021). An important addition to this study is the work of Trask (2021) and Pawłowska (2021: 155–170), who study the influence of modern socio-political changes on the reinterpretation of traditional motifs, including marriage, in a modern context. B. Trask notes that globalization and urbanization are changing the perception of marriage unions in modern Turkic literature, where traditional epic motifs are often subjected to critical reflection. As with European epics, the revision of gender roles and marriage symbols reflects cultural shifts. This echoes also the research of Pawłowska, which emphasizes the revision of the role of marriage in European fairy tales and myths, also under the influence of social change and feminist critique. Marriage motifs in European and Turkic epics reflect not only internal cultural changes, but also the influence of global processes such as political transformations and modernization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially in the context of socio-political change. This also echoes the findings of the study by Khojamuratovich (2023: 26), which states the importance of comparative analyses of marriage motifs in different epochs in terms of global cultural processes. The papers discuss how the interaction of cultures through colonization, migration, and globalization has led to the adaptation and transformation of traditional motifs in modern epic and literary works.

The results of the study show that the differences in the portrayal of marriage in these traditions are linked to different social structures and values. European epics emphasize personal merit and social mobility, whereas Turkic works focus on collective interests, social unity and the political power of marriage unions. This comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of how motifs for marriage reflect cultural and social ideals in different societies.

In perspective, it is worth considering how contemporary social change and globalization affect the reinterpretation of marriage motifs in epics and fairy tales. Modern adaptations of epics show a tendency to revise traditional ideas about marriage, which is relevant to cultural changes in regions. This study highlights the importance of cross-cultural analyses of marriage motifs in epics and folktales, revealing both unique cultural traits and common trends. This opens up prospects for further study of these motifs in the context of globalization and social transformation.

## Conclusions

The study examined marriage motifs in European and Turkic epic traditions, focusing on their symbolism and socio-cultural significance. It was shown how marriage reflects key cultural and social aspects in both traditions, and how these motifs help to maintain social and political harmony. European epics, where marriage is often a symbol of social justice and harmony, and Turkic epics, where marriage has a deep political and social context, were analysed.

The study concludes that European and Turkic epic traditions have both common features and significant differences in their approach to depicting marital unions. Marriage motifs present in both traditions play an important role in maintaining the social structure and demonstrate the values that society attaches to the institution of marriage. However, the symbolic load that marriage carries, and its social functions, differ depending on the cultural context. In European epics, marriage is most often associated with the personal qualities of heroes, such as virtue, humility, and patience. These qualities become key to overcoming social barriers, enabling characters to achieve personal happiness through marriage. Marriage in European epic traditions symbolize not only the union of two people, but also social justice, rewarding the heroes for their moral fortitude and nobility. This process is accompanied by the theme of social mobility, when the protagonist or heroine, originally in the lower social strata, can rise to a higher social level due to their inner qualities.

In Turkic epic traditions, marriage acquires greater significance in the context of not only personal relationships, but also political and social processes. In these works, marriage acts as a means of strengthening intertribal ties and also symbolizes the establishment of peace and stability between different groups. Here it is not just an expression of the personal happiness of the heroes, but also an important mechanism for achieving social harmony. Often the heroes of Turkic epics face dangerous trials, and their ability to overcome these difficulties confirms not only the right to marry, but also their leadership qualities, which contribute to the strengthening of authority in the community.

The findings provide a better understanding of how epics reflect the cultural values and social ideals of each of the traditions examined. The comparison helps to identify key differences between European and Turkic perceptions of marriage as an institution that preserves order and harmony in society. It also opens up a wide range of possibilities for further research, allowing us to consider how marriage motifs have evolved in different cultural contexts and reflect the specific social and political processes that took place in the societies of these peoples.

In the future, a promising avenue of research could be a more in-depth analysis of other cultural aspects, in particular gender roles and mythological symbols, that influence the depiction of marriage motifs in epics. One of the key limitations of this study was the limited sources. The analyses were based on specific heroic epics from European and Turkic traditions, which created a certain scope for a general overview of marriage motifs. This may have led to an incomplete representation of wedding motifs and reduced the possibilities for broader comparison.

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