

Joanna Bocheńska

Jagiellonian University
Cracow

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF GOOD AND BEAUTY? ETHIC AND AESTHETIC ASPECTS OF KURDISH FAIRY TALES FROM JALILS' FAMILY COLLECTION.

The idea of this article is to consider selected Kurdish fairy tales from the perspective of philosophical and psychological theories which draw attention to the role of telling stories ingaining emotional maturity and in the process of moral education. The first was stressed by Bruno Bettelheim in his well known *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976), the second is very much exemplified in Alasdair MacIntyre's search of the heritage of ancient virtue (*After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, 1984). It is also useful to refer to Tadeusz Czeżowski's understanding of human life as integrated by achieving near and far goals¹.

The fairy tales presented here were recorded by Jalil's family from traditional Kurdish storytellers – *çirokbêj*² in Soviet Armenia and Syria, published in Kurdish (1978)³ and Russian (1989) in the Soviet Union. It needs to be underlined at the very beginning that the author's article has no intention

¹ Tadeusz Czeżowski, *Jak rozumieć sens życia?*, in: *O wartościach, normach i problemach moralnych*, ed. Magdalena Środa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, 344-350, p. 345-347

² Storyteller was usually called *çirokbêj* (*çirok* – fairy tale) while singer – *stranbêj* (*stran* – song) or *dengbêj*. The etymology of *çirokbêj* and *dengbêj* comes also from Kurmanji word *gotin* – which means *to speak*, and sounds *dibêjin* in present tense. Stories and songs of *dengbêj* and *çirokbêj* were told during long evenings or national holydays and always had a big amount of listeners. Based on improvisation and fantasy they included legends, fairytales, proverbs and songs deeply rooted in the Kurdish folklore tradition. The word *dengbêj* is sometimes used as common for traditional storytellers and singers, since both roles were very often inseparable. It can be noticed in the Kurdish writer Mehmed Uzun's novels and essays. See the book Mehmed Uzun, *Dengbêjlerim*, Gendaş Kültür, İstanbul 2001.

³ *Zargotina K'urda*, ed. Ordikhane Jalil and Jalile Jalil, part II, Nauka, Moskva 1978

of rejecting or confirming the “kurdishness” of the abovementioned fairy tales, perceiving them rather as the natural combination of universal and regional values which according to the Polish ethnologist Jerzy Bartmiński compose the sense of folklore⁴. This approach will allow us to follow the deep meaning of the fairy tales rather than discussing it’s regional or national specific which very often is irrelevant and misleading. It goes without saying that many elements of Kurdish fairy tales have been borrowed from neighbouring cultures (Armenian, Arab, Turkish, Persian) as well as many elements from Kurdish fairy tales were used by their neighbours especially if we take into consideration the multilingual character of the Middle East community before it was exposed to the national ideas at the threshhold of 19th and 20th centuries. However it does not exclude the Kurdish character of aforementioned fairy tales because of the simple fact that they were told in Kurdish (Kurmanji dialect) and addressed to the Kurdish audience. The analysis of Kurdish fairy tales from the perspective of ethic issues can help us to understand some aspects of Kurdish community system of values. This seems to have a crucial meaning for developing and deepening Kurdish studies especially in the literature domain. The multiple subjects of ethics exemplified in Kurdish fairy tales considers human interaction in a traditional community and can bring new light when studying Kurdish culture and so called “Kurdish issue”.

Kurdish fairy tales from Jalil’s collection consists of traditional specifics such as: close attachment to the transcendent world and God, or stressing the value of honour and purity. Applying MacIntyre’s conception of virtue considering so called “heroic societies” we can perceive storytelling as the way to order human life. According to the Scottish philosopher, ones character *can only be exhibited in a succession of incidents and the succession itself must exemplify certain patterns. So to understand courage as a virtue is not just to understand how it may be exhibited in character, but also what place it can have in a certain kind of enacted story. For courage in heroic society is a capacity not just to face particular harms and dangers but to face a particular kind of pattern of harms and dangers, a pattern in which individual lives find their place and which such lives in turn exemplify*⁵.

So heroic stories – the chain of events and deeds – were perceived as the meaningful background for multiple disputes which took place in many classical societies even if their contents can not be treated as the direct reflection

⁴ Jerzy Bartmiński, *Folklor – język – poetyka*, Polska Akademia Nauk, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław, 1990, s. 8

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A study in moral theory*, Duckworth, London 1985, p.125

of historical events⁶. Although MacIntyre emphasized the role of heroic epic poetry rather than fairy tales, his remarks can be applicable in case of Kurdish fairy tales where the role of heroes and heroic deeds are significant. Moreover, they were usually told by *çirokbêj* (story tellers) along with other epic stories – heroic epos (for example *Dimdim*) and legends.

Goal, integration and healing. In search of the fairy tale meaning of life

According to the Polish philosopher Tadeusz Czeżowski (1889-1981), human life becomes reasonable if it gains meaning as a whole, being integrated by man's struggle to achieve near and far goals, as well as maintaining moral standards.⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre stresses the teleological dimension of ethics too, perceiving it, after Aristotle, as the way to achieve “good life” which is inseparable from the idea of virtues being one of the main instruments to shape ones own life properly⁸. According to Czeżowski in order to shape your own life reasonably man needs to diversify between the true and false appearance of good, and moreover, should be persistent in pursuing one's own aims. Czeżowski defines the first ability as, ‘life wisdom’, the second as, ‘strong will’, while both factors together compose ‘the ethical character of a man’⁹. In relationship to such definitions, ‘life’ by itself becomes the problem to resolve, and ‘meaning of life’, seems to be the solution to achieve¹⁰. Both philosophical concepts are rooted in classical tradition, which to MacIntyre can be uncovered also in stories told by many “heroic societies”. Czeżowski and MacIntyre’s depictions correspond also to Bruno Bettelheim’s theory of which fairy tales help children to resolve problems that are concealed deep in their subconscious. Overcoming such problems are, according to Bettelheim, crucial in understanding ‘the meaning of one’s own life’, and what follows – in gaining mature happiness. In his book he argues that the fantastical content of fairy tales, although sometimes cruel and seemingly senseless, has a very important impact on children’s imagination and emotions and helps them in the difficult art of living. The fantasy content should not be interpreted literally but it needs to be recognized as the answer for the child’s subconscious necessity when experiencing psychological troubles. Listening to and interpreting the fantasy images of a fairy tale, gives the child the possibility to understand the difference between good and evil and to face the difficulties or even tragic moments of his own life. It is because the child’s imagination

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności*, PWN, Warszawa, 1996, p.227

⁷ Tadeusz Czeżowski, p. 345-347

⁸ A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty*, p. 273

⁹ T. Czeżowski, p. 346

¹⁰ As above, p. 350

lacks the possibility to grasp the whole rational meaning of adult explanations of the surrounding reality. That is the reason why even the smallest obstacles such as the temporary absence of a mother seems to be difficult to understand and overcome. On the other hand, by the way of adapting or creating fantasy images in order to overcome difficulties without the necessity to understand it's rational reasons the child's imagination is very resourceful in resolving even the most serious psychological problems. The black and white dimensions of a fairy tale plot, that is, the triumph of the good character over the bad one – is also of crucial importance. Although from an adult point of view it does not reflect reality, and it's rather complicated nature of good and evil, but from the child's point of view it allows the possibility to overcome many difficulties (being equivalent to the evil of fairy tales) if only one presents enough determination and will to do it. That is why in fairy tales evil can not be partially overcome or be forgiven. The bad character should be annihilated so as the child could believe that the bad experiences he would have to face will have its final end. Bettelheim argues that it is the reason why it is so important to let the child know traditional fairy tales without "improving" or "softening" it's plot and meaning¹¹. Killing off the bad character can not be treated as an equivalent to the story on the actual killing of someone, which of course, is not a constructive and appropriate example for a child.

The immortal power of creating images with which people are able to orientate themselves in one's center of the world between the sphere of *sacrum* and *profanum* was often stressed by Mircea Eliade who very much appreciated the achievements of depth psychology, considered it very useful in understanding the collective religious experience¹². Fairy tales can be treated as one of the best manifestations of human imagination, an ability which made people live easier and act in a most "proper way". That is why they can be considered a source of ethic – the way, which according to Eliade's depiction, was to strengthen human links with transcendent reality¹³.

The healing meaning of fairy tales and of the process of telling stories was also often noted by the Kurdish writer Mehmed Uzun who's contemporary works were very much inspired by Kurdish folklore. However, speaking about the healing meaning of fairy tales Uzun concentrates on the personages of *dengbêj* – the Kurdish storytellers¹⁴. He states that their activity represented the immortal

¹¹ Bruno Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, part 1, PIW, Warszawa 1985, p. 39-64

¹² Mirce Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, PIW, Warszawa, 1993, p. 25-34

¹³ As above

¹⁴ Uzun uses the word *dengbêj* as the general term for storytellers and singers

human desire of sharing sorrow and joy with somebody. In spite of poverty and hopelessness of social and political conditions *dengbêj* like Apê Qado, Alihan or Ehmedê Fermanê Kiki always wanted to share experiences and thoughts with other people. Maybe, for them this desire was even stronger than the feeling of cold and hunger¹⁵. The second issue discussed by Uzun is the therapeutic ability of words and of the process of storytelling. An essay about Alihan whom M. Uzun met in Diarbakir's prison¹⁶ tells the sad life history and tragedy of a poor peasant storyteller. Not considering the triviality of the robbery crime he was convicted of, and sentenced to 35 years of hard Turkish imprisonment. He lost his wife and children and the only thing he had been able to do was tell stories. Sitting in the cell and drinking never ending tea he was incessantly recounting the old Kurdish story of *Siyabend* and *Xecê*. This well known story, the words and the process of telling it over and over again, regardless of his listeners, seemed to be a kind of cure for him. In this context telling stories resembles a kind of struggle to stay alive, using Czejkowski's definition it gives men both "the life wisdom" and "the strong will" to survive. In Uzun's *Rojek ji Rojên Evdalê Zeynikê* (*One day of Evdale Zeynike*) devoted to the legendary Kurdish *dengbêj* the author composes even the ethics of a *dengbêj*. It is important to stress that this ethic exceeds pure moral meaning and refers to the aesthetic aspect of telling stories. In other words, to be a good, talented and convincing *dengbêj*, and to tell beautiful stories, seems to be the equivalent of a man with high moral characteristics. First and foremost he should be honest with himself and the other listeners:

Şagiritino, rûgeşino, bi xwe bawer, bi zimane xwe şérîn, bi dengê xwe xweş, bi gotina xwe fesîh û sivik bin. Hunermendî; daxwaz, coş, sebir, înad, xebat, nermî û ziravbihîstiyarî ye. Bila çar tişt ji we kêm nebin; jîrî û ciwanmerdî comerdî û xérwxazî. Bila çar tişt ji we bi dûr bin; qelsî û namerdî, çikosî û xirabîxwazî. Ev her çar tişt, jîrî, ciwanmerdî, comerdî û xérwxazî dê alîkarî li hunermendiya we bike. Gava hûn bi xwe û bi gotina xwe ne bawer in, mebêjin. Li serê bixebeitin, lê hûr bin da ku hûn pê bawer dibin. Gava gotin û stran we nahejîne, kela dilê we hilnade û bi germî ruhê we venagire, hingê hûn wê gotin û stranê mebêjin.

Pupils of bright faces, believe in yourself, use kind language, a sweet voice and the open and light way of telling. The creation consists of will, enthusiasm, patience, obstinacy, hard work, gentleness and sensitivity. Four things should not be lacking: cleverness and nobleness, generosity and goodness. But beware of four things: the lack of will and courage, avarice and malice. These four features, I mean: cleverness and nobleness, generosity and goodness will help

¹⁵ Mehmed Uzun, *Dengbêjlerim*, Gendaş Kültür, İstanbul 2001, p. 53-74

¹⁶ As above

your art. If you do not believe in yourself and your words do not tell the stories. Work on them, try to understand their deep meaning to be able to believe them. If the song or story does not move you, or touch your heart, or warm your soul, then do not tell it¹⁷

Kurdish fairy tales and the ancient virtue – *arete*

The idea mentioned above seems to be quite close to many classical depictions of the ancient Greeks for whom moral categories were very much interlinked with aesthetics, being based on the concept of virtue and the desire for perfection rather than on the opposition between the good and the evil¹⁸. According to MacIntyre the Greek word *arete*, which was than translated as “virtue”, in Homer times meant “perfection” and was inseparable from physical strength and courage. Both values were absolutely essential in preserving one’s family, home and community¹⁹. It is also worth noting that bad characters of nearly all fairy tales are usually very ugly and disgusting. Maybe, it is not a coincidence that the Kurdish word *pîs*²⁰ meaning *dirty, impure, foul* and *dishonourable* at the same time²¹. Although it is not the direct opposite to the words meaning beauty (*bedew, rind, ciwan, xwesik, spehî*) but rather to the words meaning clean (*paqij, temiz*), its relation to the aesthetic aspect of reality and human life as it is given in Kurdish fairy tales is obvious and of great importance.

Comparison between the ancient *arete* and the ethics of Kurdish fairy tales are not so inappropriate as it seems at first. Although Kurdish fairy tales collected by Jalils’ family refer to religious tradition²², it is not Islamic ethics that shape the figure of a good character. It is not the *sharia* that is followed but rather the traits of the good characters, with whom – according to Bettelheim’s theory – the child needs to identify. The good characters of Kurdish fairy tales such as Mirza Mahmud, Baksmat, Small Evdile, Chilkezi or Gulbarin do bad things (killing not only their direct adversaries but even their own parents), it is not their activity but the combination of traits which distinguishes them and makes listeners like them. That is why, it can be compared to the ancient virtue (*arete*) which was

¹⁷ Mehmed Uzun, *Rojek ji rojén Evdalê Zeynikê*, Avesta, Istanbul 2002. p. 59 All translation from Kurmanji to English made by JB.

¹⁸ Magdalena Środa, Paweł Śpiewak, *O cnocie*, [in:] O wartościach..., p. 326

¹⁹ MacIntyre, p. 228-229

²⁰ used also in Turkish

²¹ Look at Michael L. Chyet, *Kurdish-English Dictionary*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003, p. 465, The dictionary of Kurdyov translate it to Russian as: 1) *griazniy, nechistiy, nechistoplotniy*, 2) *protivniy, niepriyatniy, gadkiy, skvierniy, gnusniy, otvratitelniy* or 3) *niepristoyniy, nieprilichniy*, K. K Kurdyov, *Kurdsко-russkiy slovar*, Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo inostrannyyh i natsionalnyh slovariey, Moskwa 1960, p. 604

²² Islam or Yezidism

defined by the good traits and position of a person²³ whose understanding of “good deeds” must be seen from historical and regional perspectives. Searching for the source of ancient virtues MacIntyre draws attention to the stories of heroic societies showing what were its moral meanings and importance. First of all he emphasizes the role of social status and position in a community which had shaped a man’s duty, responsibility and understanding of ethics. Moral duties were always inseparable from community life as well as from very particular regional and traditional specifics. The “good life” was not perceived as individual but rather as a common goal to be achieved by people²⁴. It is not a discovery that in spite of the influence of Western subjectivism and individualism, the idea of “a happy community” is still present in contemporary Kurdish and Middle Eastern reality. It was strengthened by the concept of Islamic *ummah* and – to some extent by the 20th century nationalistic ideas. Today, it is also present in many disputes considering “Kurdish issue” and possible ways to resolve it. One of the Kurdish arguments for recognizing their rights in Turkey, the idea that such recognition should be based not only on the rights of an “individual” but on the rights of all the (Kurdish) “community”²⁵.

As mentioned above, the ancient Greeks’ *arete* was based more on an archetype, models of behaviour or trait combinations than on rigid rules that should be followed²⁶. This can also be applied to the characters of Kurdish fairy tales who do not follow any moral standards but seem to adapt ethics according to the person’s own traits and external necessity which creates MacIntyre’s aforementioned patterns. The only exceptions are two Kurdish traditional rules; hospitality and honor, which are followed regardless of the story or character. It can be easily understood when we take into consideration that both values were absolutely essential in achieving and keeping good in the community²⁷.

Moreover, protagonists of Kurdish fairy tales must have sensitive abilities which take them closer to the spiritual dimension of the world. One did not have to be a member of aristocracy, even ordinary people can possess such sensitivity. They are able to hear voices of animals or ghosts which guide them during their difficult journeys. Other times, they just strongly believe in the sense of traditions and customs that have shaped their reality through the ages. Mixed tribal and

²³ Środa, Śpiewak op. cit, p. 324 We need to remember that the heroic community understanding of good was very much different than ours.

²⁴ A. MacIntyre, p. 226-242

²⁵ an interview taken by author with Aziz Alis from The Kurdish Initiative in Europe, May 2008

²⁶ Środa, Śpiewak op. cit, p. 322

²⁷ A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo Cnoty*, p. 231-235

religious traditions make them feel closer to the social and cultural reality of Kurdistan and the Middle East.

It is also worth pointing out that the idea of virtue does not allow any imitations or exact following²⁸. We can find it in the story of Khatun Maymun (Princess Monkey). In spite of being a monkey and a human being at the same time Khatun Maymun, the wife of Mirza Mahmud, seems much more noble than other young women, the wives of the other brothers and the sons of the king. Everyone in the palace admires her very much. During a banquet given by the king, she and her forty maids conceal leftovers of the meal behind them or hide it in the folds of their dresses. So, the other daughters-in-law begin to copy her in order to be admired too. When she and her forty maids finally stand up, their leftovers become flowers whereas the leftovers of the daughters-in-law remain the same, discarded food when they stand. This disgusts the king and all his guests. Khatun Maymun's opposite is her mother-in-law, who's rash decision to burn the monkey skin of her daughter-in-law causes many subsequent problems. Although she wants to help her son and sets out with him to search for Khatun Maymun, she is unable to change her weak nature. On the way she becomes a lover of a monster called Babir and betrays her own son because of Babir's incitement. Mirza Mahmud kills her in the final part of the tale. These examples show the unique and exceptional character of Khatun Maymun's nature, which cannot be changed just by rigidly following or imitation, as well as the weakness of her mother-in-law who's nature becomes even worse and more disgusting than it was at the beginning of the tale. These two examples show very clearly that we can consider the nature of fairy tale characters to be unchangeable or unable to adapt and follow, which also resembles the idea of ancient virtue.

Building ethical character. Fantastical obstacles to overcome

Tadeusz Czeżowski's concept of a meaningful life as a problem to resolve which needs to be integrated by achieving near and distant goals²⁹ – it seems very appropriate to analyze the plot of Kurdish stories and tales. We make no discovery if we point at the incredible obstacles to overcome as the main element of a fairy tale structure, no matter what fairy tale we decide to consider. However, Kurdish fairy tale plots seem to be very complex and – as it was mentioned above – the main character's adventures construct a specific pattern which can be analysed referring to contemporary psychological and philosophical conceptions, as well as to Kurdish customs and traditions.

²⁸ Środa, Śpiewak op. cit, p. 327

²⁹ Tadeusz Czeżowski, op. cit, p. 345

In the tale entitled Sharur Bilbil (The Singing Nightingale) the main character Mirza Mahmud, sets out with his two brothers to find the magic singing nightingale, and has to overcome about 34 obstacles of different kinds. They can be divided into three stages:

1. The first one is a **test of courage and how not to yield to temptation**. It consists of six repeating tasks – fighting three monsters (Black, Red and White) and refusing to pass the night with their three beautiful daughters. Each monster becomes more dangerous and terrifying and each monster's daughter more and more beautiful. Mirza Mahmud overcomes his fear and desire. He is ruthless with the monsters but courteous toward the women, promising to take them with him when he comes back. In this way, Mirza Mahmud proves his emotional maturity by showing that he is ready to face more serious problems.

2. The second stage consists of 14 obstacles which are of a more **intellectual character**. Overcoming them demands the ability to listen thoroughly to the advice given by an old man and to follow it meticulously and with humility, as some of the obstacles seem irrational and the action required even stupid (such as saying “hello” to a dog's bowl). Mirza Mahmud's deeds are a kind of interference to the surrounding reality, its aim is to recover the lost harmony of the world (such as: giving the right meal to a ram and to a wolf, closing the 40 open doors and opening the 40 closed doors) which needs wisdom and good will. The results of actions that seem stupid or senseless demonstrates and proves the old man's wisdom and advice to be good and true.

3. The last stage has 14 obstacles and its main sense is **facing a misfortune**. In spite of his brave nature, goodness, rationality and good luck Mirza Mahmud has to overcome misfortune and to start again from the beginning. His failure takes place due to his unwillingness to suspect his own brothers of envy and bad intentions. He does not listen to the young women's advice and ends up in a well. It is worth mentioning that Mirza Mahmud's reluctance to believe the women's words comes from his deep respect in Kurdish traditional customs which teach unquestionable loyalty between immediate family members. Therefore, suspecting his elder brothers of bad intentions is the equivalent to spoiling family confidence and harmony. That is why Mirza Mahmud's failure cannot be considered only in the light of losing vigilance and naivety, but should be understood as the readiness to fail in the name of honour and subscribed values. His readiness to begin again is based on Mirza Mahmud's trust in fate and his humility. He redeems himself by fighting his brothers who had stolen the nightingale and is recognised by Princess Gula Gulzada which enables him to become her husband. This end brings him satisfaction, love and happiness.

It is important to stress that the overriding aim of Mirza Mahmud's activity is to fulfill his father's desire to have the magic nightingale, a bird whose song is able to give new life to the king's infertile garden. This goal is of a spiritual nature and fulfilling it – as we can see – has nothing to do with securing a safe and comfortable life. Mirza Mahmud's deeds and adventures reflect the nearer goals in Czeżowski's depictions which are subordinate to the more important idea of enriching life by spiritual and moral values, symbolized here by the blooming garden.

The plot of Kurdish fairy tales seem to be even more complicated especially when it concerns more than one main character. The story of Princess Chilkezi (The Woman with Forty Braids) starts when the young prince sets out to find the unknown beauty whom he has seen in a portrait fished out of the sea. He has to face many obstacles before he reaches Chilkezi's hometown and during an ensuing competition wins the hand of the princess. But his adventures are not the main focus of the story. Chilkezi loses her newly wed husband as he is kidnapped by a bad and jealous clerk. The continuing story now concentrates on Chilkezi's way to recover her beloved. Her adventures prove that not only men but a female too can be a brave and clever heroine. She has to overcome her own difficulties by not only fighting against evil but also protecting her own reputation, keeping her inviolated chastity in situations demanding contact with men (who are not close family members), and finally proving her own honesty and purity in the presence of her husband. A combination of two main characters male and female who have to overcome different obstacles to obtain final happiness adds quite a new quality to the story, namely, respect for one another pertaining to the male and female factors.

In the context of Kurdish history and experiences, the considerable amount of fantastical obstacles to be conquered by the fairy tales' main characters are by no means of accidental meaning. Kurdistan fairy tales are told including it's recent past and are addressed not only to children but to the adult audience. Taking into consideration Bettelheim and Uzun's concepts of the healing ability through telling and listening to stories, maybe, it will not be an exaggeration to characterize Kurdish fairy tales as a kind of "collective psychotherapy" for Kurdish people, who – due to many historical circumstances – have suffered a great deal. In this way, challenging these fantastical obstacles and overcoming them have prepared the listeners to face real problems, fears and tragedies in which a rational meaning was sometimes very difficult or impossible to grasp. Fairy tales told both to the young and to the old were the main lesson of honour, courage, hospitality and patience which were shown as crucial in overcoming different obstacles. This way the fantastical stories and the process of telling them again and again to the audience granted the most important result in the

process of moral education. Human features and deeds based on it had become reasoned and understandable so applying certain virtues in everyday life were gaining crucial importance as the precondition for a “good and happy life”.

Spiritual nature of reality as the source of ethics and beauty

The connection between fairy tales and the ability to perceive the spiritual dimension of life is clear and has been brought up by many scholars. On one hand, fantastical motives concern people's beliefs and religious doctrines³⁰, on the other hand, listening to fairy tales make people more sensitive to the spiritual sphere of life³¹ and to a transcendent dimension of reality. Comparing sacred time and space along with secular ones Mircea Eliade points out the heterogenous nature of the first and the homogenous nature of the second. According to Eliade a religious man of a traditional community, was always open to the possibility of associating with Deity which divided his time into sacred and non sacred periods³². The sacred space was to identify with it's “own reality”, ordered and usually considered to be “central to the world”. It's opposition was the “all surrounding”, the being of unknown and chaotic character³³. Eliade argues that for many traditional societies to settle meant bringing order into reality, which in this way became “own”, “known”, “identify” and “sacred”. Moreover, there were some moments and places (holes in time and space) where a man could meet or experience Deity.³⁴

Most characters of Kurdish fairy tales live in a very ordered and well known world, but due to various circumstances they have to face unexpected events which often bring chaos to their well known reality. In the fairy tale Small Evdile, it is a dragon eating fruit from the king's vineyard, which spoils the cosmic harmony of the king's family. Three brothers attempt to destroy the dragon but only the youngest one, Evdile, is successful. However, the struggle with the dragon is only the beginning of many ordeals Evdile must confront, in particular, he has to face the elder brothers' wickedness. In Sharur Bilbil, it is the king's longing for the magic bird that makes the three brothers leave their homeland, and in the Seva Seling story it is a simple failure in ruling the country that make the three brothers set out on a journey in order to find the solution – as we can guess – the new meaningful order of reality.

³⁰ Ordikhane Jalil, *Predisloviye*, in: *Kurdskiye legendy, skazki i predanya*, p. 18

³¹ B. Bettelheim, op. cit. p. 67

³² M. Eliade, op. cit, p. 89-92

³³ As above, p. 53-87

³⁴ As above, p. 53-87

The above mentioned character's extraordinary features which makes him a good hero to identify with, are closely connected with their ability to open to the spiritual dimension of the world. In Kurdish fairy tales there are many fantastic creatures who help good characters to act in an appropriate way, as well as the silent but quite visible presence of God, who's name is called upon many times, especially in moments of danger. It corresponds with Eliade's concept depicting God as very natural and obvious but at the same time quite a distant object of traditional reality³⁵. However, it seems that good characters always know when to call God's name and God knows best whom and why to help. Calling upon God's name consists of a simple phrase that is told as narrative in part by the *çirokbêj*:

Gazî Xwedê kir (he called God/ God's name)

But the relation to God is also revealed in many other direct sayings of characters such as:

çika Xudê k'îderê nanekî dike qismeta me (The place where God gives us a piece of bread will point out our fate /our place to live)

Yaziya mi te xudê tev kiriye (God has bound us by common fate)

Emrê Xudê (God's will/by God's will)

Xudê mala te xirav neke (God, do not let your home be ruined, expressing good wishes)

Xudê mala te xirav ke (May God ruin your home!)

Mêvan – mêvanê xudenê (The guests are God's guests)

Xwedê te ev kerem ji mira kir? (O God, You did this miracle for me/you gave this miracle to me – expressing gratefulness)³⁶

And many others....

It best represents the main characters as well as the storytellers close attachment to God, so typical for a traditional community. It is worth noting that this attachment is not the same as the bond to Islam as many of those stories were

³⁵ As above, p. 125-132

³⁶ Most of them were lost in Russian translation published in Soviet times in Moscow.

collected among the Yezidi community. Even in stories where the presence of Islam is obvious (for example with mullas as supporting figures) the attachment to God and the sacred world seems much broader and deeper than to a specific religion. It shows the multidimensional nature of Kurdish devotion to religion which was sometimes considered and criticised by more devoted Muslims. Nevertheless, the good features of fantastical characters such as courage, wisdom, goodness and humbleness seem to have its direct source in their attachment to God and to transcendent reality. In other words, fairy tale ethics need confirmation in a metaphysical justification even if such a confirmation amounts to the specific sensitivity of the characters. Maybe, to some extent we can compare this sensitivity with Aristotle's contemplation of deity which is to achieve, as the crowning achievement of a man³⁷. Also being in agreement with deity is to Aristotle one of the preconditions for good and happiness³⁸. Sensitivity seems to correspond with the beauty of characters, although there are also ugly characters though pure of heart such as the dragon in the story of Baksamat. He transformed himself into a dragon due to the pain and sorrow he had experienced. It is worth adding that the sensitivity to spiritual reality was also the element which distinguished Mam and Zin of the *Mam û Zin* poem of the classical Kurdish poet Ehmede Khani (1651-1708), making their beauty unique and famous³⁹. Beauty and ugliness can change gradually so that we could see more and more dazzling and more and more disgusting characters. Just like the monsters of the first stage of Mirza Mahmud's adventures in the tale of Sharur Bilbil, become more and more ugly and terrifying, and their daughters become more and more beautiful.

The very important element of a characters' attachment to transcendent reality seems to be their trust in God and fate. According to MacIntyre fate was the significant element of heroic societies reality, and being a prophet or a clarivoyant had played an important role in that society⁴⁰. The trust in God or in fate gave characters the self-confidence and calm which is one of the foundations of the ancient concept of ethic⁴¹. On the other hand, it is the refusal to accept one's own fate that sometimes caused trouble and misfortune. In the story of Khatun Maymun the youngest prince of Mirza Mahmud shoots an arrow to make him choose his fiance. Unfortunately his arrow lands in front of a rock where there is a monkey who declares that she will become his wife. Mirza Mahmud does not want to accept it and feels ashamed in front of his family by trying to hide the monkey. When he finally finds out that Khatun Maymun is also a beautiful

³⁷ See MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo Cnoty*, p. 289

³⁸ 272

³⁹ Look at Joanna Bocheńska, *Między ciemnością i światłem. O kurdyjskiej tożsamości i literaturze*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2011, p. 135

⁴⁰ A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo Cnoty*, p. 232

⁴¹ M. Środa, P. Śpiewak, op. cit., p. 321

women he accepts her but still feels ashamed and does not want to reveal his secret to close relatives. Thanks to her changing nature Khatun Maymun can be introduced to his family as a noble and talented princess but due to some rumours Mirza Mahmud's mother wants to reveal Khatun Maymun's real identity. When she finds out Khatun Maymun to be a monkey she burns her monkey skin in the hope that it will resolve the shameful problem. But as a result Khatun Maymun changes into a pigeon and flees their home. Mirza Mahmud has to set out on a long and dangerous journey to find her. The absence of Khatun Maymun makes him realize how much he loves her. This beautiful story can be interpreted as a warning that not only rejecting your own fate even when it seems so unfriendly, but rejecting somebody's personality as well can be the reason for serious trouble and misfortune.

In the story of Miride Zozani it is the archangel Gabriel who descends from heaven as God's envoy to fulfill three mens' desires and test them at once. After granting and fulfilling all of their wishes he dresses up as a poor person and asks them to share with him the most valuable thing they possess. While two of the now rich men refused to give him what he had asked, the third man and the poorest one who desired only to have a family and a child agrees to kill his small boy in order to heal the beggar. Similar to the prophet Abraham he does it "in the name of God" but then, unlike Abraham, he has to endure what he had done until the morning when Gabriel raises the boy from the dead. The story resembles a parable rather than a fairy tale and exemplifies the importance of, and attachment to trust in God.

It is also useful to recall the old dispute concerning the meaning of the fate of man and free will, which thrilled minds in both the ancient and muslim worlds. In Kurdish fairy tales there is no such opposition as long as the character is open to the transcendent reality. The characters' will and activity correspond with the world's harmony and order. Even hunger is satisfied by "things sent from God". In the story of Gulbarin, a poor man one day rejects his own bad fortune and refuses to go to work to feed his wife and children. But unexpectedly his situation is changed due to the influence of two magic pigeons, who decide to help his pregnant wife. Her new born daughter possesses a strange magic—when she brushes her hair silver and gold coins fall from it. As we can see from the story, being open to the spiritual dimension of the world suggests that fate will be favourable although it can allow some misfortunes too.

Finally, it would be useful to give some examples of Eliade's "holes in space and time" which help the fairy tale characters to contact the transcendent world. We can point at magic pigeons or other birds or ghosts whose conversations can determine the characters' fate. They appear to help the characters or to

turn misfortune by giving some advice. Birds used to appear over fountains in gardens or forests which of course recalls the images of heaven in many different traditions. Talking birds sometimes reveal a specific nature which is not only of magic but also of a religious character:

Xûşkê go: Em qencê xudêne. Em hatine bik'evine avê, wekî ewî camêr viraye emê çawa bik'evinê avê? Emê gazî xudê kin, dia' bikin û emê bifrin. Sê perê ji perê me bik'evin, bira ç'e'vê xu derxe têxe kanîyê, avêda bişû û têke dewsa ç'e'vê xu. Her sê perkê me avêdane, bide serçevê xu, çevê wîyê sax bin.

Sister, she said: We are God's goodness. We came here to take a bath, but when he (Mirza Mahmud-JB) is here how can we do it? We will call God's name, we will pray and fly away. Three of our feathers will fall down. Let him take out his eyes, wash them in the spring and put them in place. Then let him soak our feathers and touch his eyes with them, he will recover his sight⁴².

Gulbarin whose envious aunt blinded her then abandoned her, was taken in by a shepherd. She finally returns to the same place were she was left in hope that she will find the solution to her own disability. There she hears the voices of the magic pigeons who help her. As if the forest where her wicked aunt had left her was perfect place to seek further evidence. It's as if this place and time were planned in advanced by the invisible hand...

In Kurdish fairy tales good as well as bad characters usually had a secret power, which can be concealed in a certain object or in the history of origin. In the story of Small Evdile the dragon's power is hidden in his sword which is kept in a pot filled with tar. But it is not only his sword but how to use it against the dragon which is the secret of its power and victory. Small Evdile is instructed by the dragon's daughter to strike with the sword only once. A second blow would keep the dragon alive. In the story of Seva Seling it is the origin of the magic horse (called Seva Seling/ Three-legged horse) which is kept secret by the bad character who has kidnapped Mirza Mahmud's wife. Revealing the secret helps Mirza Mahmud to get another horse from the Sea mare which makes Seva Seling obedient to him. In the story about Khatun Maymun one needs to tie up Mirza Mahmud to defeat him. This is the secret of his power which afterwards is revealed to Mirza Mahmud's unfaithful mother. Revealing a secret often belongs to prying women who argue that they do not like to be bored while the man of the house is absent. Interestingly, one can play with the power during the absence of it's owner. It points out that the power seems to be something independent to the character itself. Moreover, while the power of a good character is usually

⁴² Zargotina K'urda, op. cit, p. 301

concealed in his/her own body or spirit, the secret of the bad one is hidden in an object he possesses. It can also be considered as a good character's advantage, stressing his links with transcendent reality.

There is another kind of a “time and space hole” which is the magic flying carpet. First of all, it is important to stress that flying carpets, known widely as magic objects, were of a religious character not just a fairy tale specific. The word for ‘magic flying carpet’ in a Kurdish fairy tales is *sicade* from Arabic *sajjāda* – meaning the mat used by Muslims to perform five daily prayers. It keeps worshippers clean and isolated from the dirtiness of the surrounding world during their prayer. Although fairy tale characters do not use it for praying, they have to use a special phrase to make it fly (not just to sit down on it as thought in reading or watching widespread western adaptations of eastern fairy tales). We can read as follow:

Sicade, mi ji te, te ji xwedê, şeherê Xatûn Meymûn k'derêye tu mi wederê daynî

Carpet, I am turning to you, you turn to God, take me to the town of Khatun Meymun wherever it is.

This phrase can be read as a kind of prayer too, although performed by the owner of the carpet. To possess such a carpet means to be privileged in front of God's eyes. It is not accidental too that in one story the fairy tale character takes it insidiously from three men who quarrel about whom should possess it. It is a good character who's features and the moment of a plot which enable him to obtain such a carpet and to make use of it in an appropriate way.

The role of honour and reputation

In a tribal community such as the Kurdish one, the role of family honour is always of the utmost importance. Recounting honour in heroic communities MacIntyre defines it as a value awarded a man by his companions, the lack of which means “being a man without any value”⁴³. This virtue is inseparable from friendship, loyalty and confidence which granted “good” not only to a single man but to the community. In the contemporary reality of the Middle East which is undergoing changes, family honour seems to be one of the most vulnerable values and is still difficult to abandon or neglect, especially when the traditional community has to face new, mostly western challenges such as a new style of life and women's emancipation. While cases of the so called “honour killing” are well known, it seems that the reasons for those crimes and the ethics

⁴³ A. MacIntyre, p. 234

which allow it, still has not been analysed adequately. Also, the news that had come from Libya informing us about the Ghaddafi soldier mass rape of women, sometimes in the presence of the family show evidence that the values of honour, reputation and sexual purity are closely interlinked and of a great importance for the whole contemporary Middle East and North Africa. That is why it seems very important to analyse this value in terms of cultural and not only social studies. The indepth study of Kurdish fairy tale images can help to grasp the wide and complex meaning of honour.

According to M. Chyet, there are some Kurdish (Kurmanji) words such as: *şeref, namûs, e'rz, hurmet, merîfet, qedir, rêz, rûmet, 'ezet, giram, serfirazî, xatir, hetik, p'erda rû*⁴⁴ which are close to English meaning of honour. The meaning of them is however very wide and the ethymology not only Kurdish but also Arabic or Persian. To translate them precisely we should look at the context of expression and prepare a wider lexicon of English words such as: honour, respect, reverence, reputation, chastity, decency, pride, esteem, good name etc. The word connected with female sexual purity is *namûs* used both by the Kurds and the Turks. Calling someone *bênamûs* in Kurdish or alternatively *namussuz* in Turkish belongs to the most serious of insults. But undoubtedly this is not the only word which can ruin the good name and respectability of a woman and the whole family. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, words are not just words but more importantly form images which construct the most powerful and impressive dimension of the fairy tale. While there is no word for *namûs* used in the text of fairy tales we can find many examples of its presence in numerous stories.

According to fairy tale narration the preservation of family honour seems to belong both to men and women. In the story of Seva Seling it is the youngest of three brothers, Mirza Mahmud who is the main keeper of family honour. First he convinces all his brothers to fulfill their father's last wish to marry off their sisters with anyone who comes and sits on the chair of the marriage broker⁴⁵. But when the brothers see wild animals coming they do not agree to give them their sisters, but Mirza Mahmud insists:

Na, bira, t'emîya bavê meye, şîreta bavê me heye. Bavê me gotye çi terewul tê, çi bende tê, çi r'u'h'berbe, qîza mezin gerekê hûn bidnê.

⁴⁴ M. Chyet, op. cit. p. 764

⁴⁵ A chair of marriage broker – *kursiyê xazgînî* in Kurdish – according to the old customs it was a place for traditional marriage broker when she/he comes one's home to arrange a marriage.

No brothers, we should remember our father's request and hint. Our father has said no matter what creature will come and wait, no matter what living soul it will be we should give him our eldest sister⁴⁶

Afterwards when the brothers lose their kingdom, he argues that they have to leave in order not to spoil the good name of their father:

Bira, em çawa bikin? Axir, vira mer'a sekinandin dest nade. Em nikarin vira bisekinin. Dewleta bavê me dest me çû. Qewata me em bixevertin tişte jî t'une. Şivantîyê bikin – nave, gavantîyê bikin – nave. Mer'a dest nade. Navê bavê mer'a jî şerme.

Brothers what should we do? If we stay here it will not help us. We can not stay here. We have lost our kingdom. We can not do any work. If we work as shepherds it will not be a suitable occupation. It will bring shame on our father's name.⁴⁷

When brothers cannot fulfill their father's last request or follow Mirza Mahmud's insistence to honour it, Mirza obliges everyone to leave and move to another country to preserve the family reputation. This attachment to traditional values distinguishes Mirza from his elder brothers, it's an exemplary manner to identify with.

Moreover, Mirza Mahmud from the tale of Sharur Bilbil can be considered honourable due to his behaviour during the fight with the monster. Although fighting for a good cause and his own life, he considers himself an intruder in the kingdom of the monster. That is why, on the question of who should start first he declares:

*Dora teye, go, sînorê teye.
It is your turn, it is your kingdom (literally: your border)⁴⁸*

There are also honourable and respectful kings who prefer to keep a king's word than to save their own daughters:

Ha qancixa h'eram, cir'a xîna te ji xîna qîza k'ê çêtirbû? Tu ji k'ê şîrintir bûy tu lêxistîi hatî? Te ev e'cêva anî serê min? Eva çend sale usa xelq qîza xwe dide, iro sirê hatye ser min, tu lêxistîi hatî.

⁴⁶ Çirokên Kurdî, op. Cit., p. 1

⁴⁷ As above

⁴⁸ Çirokên Kurdî, op. cit.p.

Oh damn fraud, why is your blood better than other girl's blood? From whom you were sweeter just to leave and come here. Why you have brought shame on my head. For how many years people have given their daughters [to the dragon – JB], today it was my turn and you have left and escaped⁴⁹.

In the example above, being honourable means keeping one's word, but also to be responsible for the whole country not only for your own private happiness. Moreover, the king does not want to consider himself (and members of his family) superior to ordinary people. This attitude gains him even more respect in the eyes of his subjects. He is the kind of ruler the Kurds always yearned for⁵⁰.

The more physical aspect of honour which can be connected with the words; *man of respect* rather than “preserving family honour” is presented many times when the main character refuses to pass the night with a woman (a princess, a queen or a monster's daughter) by explaining the necessity to continue on his journey. First, he may declare that the woman is to him “like his own mother or sister” which means that any sexual bonds are out of the question. This declaration can also be used in other similar circumstances such as the character's refusal to marry a woman even if she is the king's daughter:

P'adşaî xaş be, qîza te xûşka mine, dîya mine, şîrê sipî mi ji bedena wê mîtye

My king, your daughter is to me a sister, a mother, I have sucked white milk from her breast. ⁵¹

The words quoted above also show the naturalism of expression which was widespread in Kurdish folklore aesthetic⁵² sometimes seeming to be quite provocative and undermining all the sexual taboos.

Refusing to spend the night with a woman whom the character has liberated can be taken as an insult to her, suggesting that it was something lacking in her beauty, nature or honour (*namûs*) which caused the man not to marry her. So Mirza Mahmud in the tale of Sharur Bilbil seems rather confused when he had to refuse the monsters' daughters, explaining that it is due to his difficult task to fullfil. He also promises to come back and take them with him:

⁴⁹ As above, .p. 47

⁵⁰ To mention only the Ehmede Khani *Mem û Zin* poem and the image of ideal ruler presented there. Khani stressed that the absence of such a ruler is one of the Kurdish biggest problems of historical and moral character.

⁵¹ *Cirokên Kurdi*, op. cit.p.48

⁵² Look at J. Bocheńska, op. cit., p. 66

Qîza qenc, e'vda Xudê, – go, – met'remeke min heye, min sond xwarye, h'eta met'rana min neê serî, gerekê t'u cara lingê min lingê k'ulfet nek'eve. Were, go, tiştê dinê, xişûşê dilê xu derxe, go, giliyê dinê t'une, qisûra te t'une, go. Qisûr ç'e 'vê wî mîrîda heye, lê, go, teda t'une. Lê eva gilya gerekê neve. Ez çûm, met'rema min hate sérî, (de ada bere ad bû), go, ad be, ez bêm te xur'a bivim.

*Young girl, the servant of God – he said – I have a goal to fulfil, I have sworn that until I will do it, my leg will not lay down beside a woman's leg. There is no other reason, do not take it to heart, there is no complaint, no lack in you. It can be something lacking in one's eyes (if he will say such a thing against you – JB) but there is no need to complain. I am leaving now but when I will finish my job I swear I will be back and take you with me.*⁵³

There is also an old Kurdish custom of preserving sexual purity and one's reputation in situations regarding close contact between males and females that is mentioned in this and other fairy tales. A man should put a naked sword on the bed between him and the woman during the night they have to spend together in the same bed. It was believed that the naked sword would protect the woman and prove her sexual purity. This custom has been mentioned and has taken on new meaning in some works of contemporary writers too⁵⁴.

So refusing to spend the night and marry the woman shows the maturity and responsibility of the main character who feels obliged to fulfil his difficult task first. But at the same time such a refusal contradicts the traditional Kurdish rules so it has to be thoroughly explained. On the other hand, the character shows evidence of their deep knowledge of the community customs which helps him to find the appropriate solution within the same tradition. According to MacIntyre for a man from a "heroic society" looking at reality from a distance, from outside of it was impossible due to the fact that he was the inseparable part of this reality⁵⁵. There was no other reality to compare with. However such fairy tales which have been told, listened or read in 20th and 21th century reality of Kurdistan, Armenia or Europe has gained a completely new meaning. In this context the main character's ability to discuss the tradition as well as to find a solution which will not be so contradictory to traditionally binding rules seems to be of the utmost importance. It can be the best evidence that traditional or so called "backward" culture has the possibility to open up to the new solutions demanded by contemporary reality of the Middle East which very often causes

⁵³ *Cirokên Kurdi*, op. cit.p.19

⁵⁴ For example Yaşar Kemal's *Ağrı dağı efsanesi*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, p. 88-89

⁵⁵ A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo Cnoty*, p. 235

misunderstandings with Western culture and the East, “the old fashioned” and “the modern”. The only hope seems to be, not rejecting or neglecting it as “backward” or “barbaric”.

A good example of how to discuss traditional customs and what kind of strategy to follow in order not to lose one’s happiness and reputation is the fairy tale of Chilkezi (The Woman of Forty Braids), mentioned earlier. The Princess Chilkezi seems to be a character of outstanding features from the very beginning of the fairy tale, when her portrait is fished out of the sea by a fisherman. He remains on the seashore admiring her beauty for seven days and seven nights. (The number seven is symbolic and very widespread in Kurdish and eastern fairy tales, interpreted as a sign of the heavens or God). Later on, it is the king’s son who falls in love with Chilkezi and decides to find and marry her. When he finally reaches her hometown, he has to take part in a competition to win her hand. But Chilkezi does not want to marry any of the competitors. The only person she has fallen in love with is the unknown prince whom she frequented on his arrival. The storyteller describes her love to him as of “seven hearts”. When they finally marry, both have to face separation as the prince is kidnapped by the evil cleric (probably Christian). But it is Chilkezi who struggles to find her beloved husband. She sets out on a journey but being a lone woman seems much more difficult than being a lone male character in the fairy tale. First, she has to deal with men who desire to marry her or – calling it in a more literal way – to sleep with her. To save and protect her purity for her beloved husband she has to resort to cheating or playing cruel tricks. She asks the shepherd to bring along family members in order to marry her in an appropriate way, and promises him to guard his flock while he is away. But when he is gone she eats his food, leaves his flock to the wolves and runs away. Then, she cheats the Prince of Hasankale, the old man who adopts her as a daughter and the king who wants to marry her along with thirty nine other women. She becomes the leader of the women who run away with her from the king. However, they are captured by highwaymen who desire to marry them too. On her incitement the women kill the highwaymen while they sleep, leaving only their chief alive. Finally, the bird which according to the old custom that could foretell the future ruler of a kingdom, points twice at Chilkezi and she becomes a king but in men’s clothing. This gives her the possibility to look for her beloved husband in a better way. She orders her portrait to put on display near the town fountain and anyone who sighs while looking at it should be brought to her. Soon, she gathers all her admirers including her husband (who meanwhile has become a beggar). All of them tell the ‘king’ their story and the way this beautiful woman has cheated them. They also had to confess any sexual relationship with her. Only then, after confirming that not one of them had any intimate contact with her, does she reveal who she really is. And so, in the presence of her husband Chilkezi proves her deep love and devotion in

finding him as well as maintaining her sexual purity. Maybe, it can be taken as a very bitter moral that in such a traditional community, the strong commitment and deep devotion in finding her missing husband may not be enough to guarantee final happiness. That is, one's reputation is above everything, and only this factor will make future happiness possible or not. MacIntyre stresses that in heroic society fidelity is one of the main element of one's home unity and good and a woman is the one who can guarantee these values to be realised⁵⁶. However, reading this tale nowadays, from the point of view of emancipated women, one can also see a rather chauvinistic nature in a traditional patriarchal community dominated by male will and desires. It shows that being a brave and active woman in such a community is possible, but demands an extremely strong character and harder struggle than men. Nevertheless, it deserves to be noted that Chilkezi manages to act according to traditional customs, even if some of her deeds seem unjustified to other characters. Moreover, she acts "in the name of love" to find her husband, representing wisdom and strong will which corresponds with Czeżowski's depiction of the "ethical character of man". Thanks to her knowledge of, and deep attachment to tradition, she finally found a solution to her problem and becomes happy and respectable. It is also important to stress that the beauty of Chilkezi, which was mentioned many times, seems to be determined by her flawless and strong nature. Once again the connection between ethic and aesthetic appears inseparable in the structure of the fairy tale.

The Duty of Hospitality

Kurdish hospitality is no exception, as this value resides deep in eastern culture, especially in its traditional dimension. It can be easily understood in relation to the Middle East reality which for a long time has consisted of caravan travels and pilgrimages of the kind. Even today, for many Kurdish people travelling, seems to be quite a serious venture to undertake. That is why one's hospitality is considered, one of the most important prerequisites to conduct a journey in the most auspicious and safest way. It is usually connected with other virtues such as generosity, goodness, and frankness. Moreover, in the Muslim world, hospitality is considered a duty, not only to strangers but first of all to God⁵⁷, and according to John Koenig – who wrote about The New Testament and Middle Eastern hospitality – it *was seen as one of the pillars of morality upon which the universe stands*⁵⁸. Unsurprisingly we can trace hospitality back to ancient times and conditions. MacIntyre stresses that the Greek word of *xenos* (ξένος) meant guest and foreigner at the same time in society where the stranger

⁵⁶ MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo Cnoty*, p. 230

⁵⁷ Miriam Schulman and Amal Barkouki-Winter, *The ancient virtue of hospitality imposes duties on host and guest*, <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v11n1/hospitality.html>

⁵⁸ As above,

was a person of a certain status⁵⁹. Mela Mahmud Bayazidi in his description of Kurdish customs from 1858 stated that “even if there is no place in a Kurdish house shelter for a guest must not be refused because such a thing would be treated as dishonour and shame”⁶⁰.

Analysing the plots of Kurdish stories and tales, one can often see the frequent references to hospitality, which besides honour seems to be one of the most important values. The plot of the story Miride Zozani, cited earlier, can also be interpreted in terms of “the hospitality requirements”. When the archangel Gabriel came to the three men, and asked them to give him their most precious possession, it is their duty, to give him everything he requested. Alternatively, another case involves the questions and assurances concerning the way one’s wife has met a guest. In the story of Baksamat, there is the old king who travels dressed as a Dervish. He is invited by her as a guest into the shepherd’s home while the shepherd is out with his flock. When he comes back he asks his wife: “Woman, did you receive the Dervish Baba with due respect?”

- *Jinik te qe h’urmetek dewrêş babara kirîy?*
- *Evdê xwedê, xwedê çi qismet dabû min jêra h’urmet kir.*

- *Woman did you receive the Dervish Baba (literally Father Dervish) with due respect?*

- *Servant of God, anything I have received from God I offered to the Dervish Baba*⁶¹

As it is seen in the example above, according to the fairy tales’ ethics, hospitality addressed to a beggar, a poor person, or even a mad stranger seems to carry much importance. It is determined by the belief that such people are “God’s people” and they maybe “God’s envoy” and should be treated in a courteous way, and what is more, they bring luck or misfortune on one’s head depending. However, receiving an important guest favourably like a prince or a princess, even if their origin is not so clear at the beginning is also expected. In the story of Zilfinaz and Jhilififaraz the princess travels disguised as a man. When she arrives to another kingdom, the son of the king is told to receive her (him) especially favourably due to her (his) very noble appearance.

⁵⁹ MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo Cnoty*, s. 231

⁶⁰ Mela Mahmud Bayazidi, *Nrawy i obychai Kurdov*, Izdatelstvo Wostochnoy Literatury, Moskva, 1963, p. 31

⁶¹ *Zargotina K’urda, op. cit.p.324*

However, receiving a guest favourably can sometimes be rather unpleasant to the guest himself. There is an amusing anecdote in the story about Small Evdile, who arrives in a town where the only water well has been sieged by a dragon. The inhabitants lack water, so, in order to receive the guest in the expected fashion, the old woman just urinates into a pitcher and gives it to Small Evdile as water to drink.

The reception of the guest can be also a kind of sign for him. In the story about two brothers Mir and Meshtari, there is a ghost village where both brothers decide to spend the night. Due to Meshtari's very noble nature and both brothers lofty intentions to find the beautiful Princesses of Sugerdene and Nazilbedew, the invisible hostess of one of the ghost houses receives them with respect, giving the best food to eat and the best bedding to sleep. But when Mir turns Meshtari to stone, the hospitality in the ghosts' house worsens in order to punish him and make him realize what he has done.

Being a guest also imposes a kind of responsibility. It is very rude to reject or insult one's hospitality, even if such behaviour is evoked by very just reasons – for example, the need to continue one's journey. In the fairy tale about the hunter Ahmed, the main character is put in a difficult position. While overhearing and understanding a dog's conversation, he surmises, that he should insult the host's hospitality by giving his meal to the dog in order to avoid serious danger to the host's herd. He decided to save the host's livestock, thinking it more important than upholding tradition, thus accordingly, he forfeited his own honour and reputation for giving away his host's food.

The examples mentioned above show hospitality from many different perspectives, proving it's wide meaning and deep connections with other ethic values such as honour, respect, generosity, goodness, wisdom, responsibility and even courage. Decidedly, to be hospitable, to appreciate and respect one's hospitality, is an ever recurring and important feature of 'ethic character' or 'virtue' of fairy tales' figures.

The Vague Nature of Good and Evil

A notable example of the links between ethic and aesthetic aspects of Kurdish fairy tales, is the very interesting and vivid motif of black and white animals braided together, it's impossible to distinguish them from one another. In the fairy tale about the hunter, Ahmed, there are two snakes – a black and a white one, who fight with each other. The white one is the daughter of the king of snakes. She asked the hunter's help to rescue her. But while aiming at the black snake Ahmed mixes them up, and his arrow cuts off the tail of the

white snake. As a hunter, his aim is normally outstanding, but his mistaken shot makes him weary and fearful of the snakes' possible revenge. This event brings changes to his life. In the tale of Small Evdile, the two rams, one black and one white fight with each other. When they sweat, the black one becomes white while the white one becomes black. According to the monster's daughter's advice, Small Evdile should jump on the white ram's back, after it has become black. But due to the animals fast and rapid movements, he mixes them up and jumps on the back of the black one. This worsens his troubles by plunging him even deeper into the well that imprisons him – finishing in the land where there is no light.

The above mentioned examples resemble the dualistic tradition of the Middle East which can be found in Yezidism as well as in Islam. Interestingly, the images of black and white, good and evil, they oppose each other but what is even more crucial, for a moment their natures become extremely difficult to recognize and separate. This is misleading for someone who has to choose the right option. These two motifs seem extremely meaningful, giving the fairy tale a more complex view concerning the nature of good and evil, as well as human weakness and bad choice. However, the bad decisions made here are done in good faith, they do not end one's struggle, but are the reasons to explore new spaces and to face new experiences. The characters' strong and willing attitude makes further travelling possible and necessary. This attitude seems to be based not only, on the necessity to fulfill the higher goal but also on ordinary courage and will to survive. In spite of this, the opposing natures of good and evil and the possibility to be wrong, evil does not seem so dangerous or impossible to overcome, which becomes the source of hope.

Conclusions

The Kurdish fairy tales from Jalils' collection consists of a wide range of motifs and images. As we could see above, close reading or study reveals many ethic and aesthetic aspects, usually very much interlinked. They were useful to a man of a traditional community by helping him to grasp the meaning of his surrounding reality, to act and to make choices. Yet the content of fairy tales seemed to affect human imagination as well as personality by the way of images concerning ethics in a very complex and multidimensional way. It presented ones deeds and life as determined and integrated by goals to fulfill, guided by virtue which was based first and foremost on the ability to sense and cooperate with the spiritual reality. The character could have followed the old customs as well as discuss or even spoil them in the name of higher values such as fulfilling larger goals, being faithful to a given promise, love or the truth. He or she was a symbol of a hero, strong, brave and noble enough to

face difficulties and danger. Despite the constant battle between good and evil which is present in the plot of fairy tales, the character's deeds were in fact, not only of a black and white dimension. Moreover, the existing black and white dimension – according to Bettelheim's theory – should be interpreted rather in terms of psychological adequacy for a child's imagination and feelings, which is not based on the literal meaning of a fairy tale. As referred to in this essay the good and evil met by the characters was sometimes vague or unclear, but the main task was to remain faithful to the goal he had set himself. More importantly, the goal usually involved transcendental reality as being equivalent to God's will or fate, or the character's will to make other people happy. It was never motivated by selfishness. Fairy tales characters' understanding of good and happiness was always connected with other people and community. To repeat MacIntyre's conviction it was the "heroic society" and its common experiences that provide moral education to a man. The common good was the main reason to develop the understanding of ethics by the way of telling stories. In addition, being faithful to one's own goal did not mean that the character of a fairy tale disregarded other small tasks or other figures' needs. On the contrary, the complex structure of the Kurdish fairy tale containing many short stories, and consequently numerous problems to resolve evidently shows that it was not the idea of success which justified the means, but rather, the belief of the spiritual sense of living and of human activity, that guided the character. Like in Czeżowski's theory Kurdish fairy tales presented life as an important problem to resolve and the spiritual meaning of it and followed happiness was the main task to achieve. The close contact with transcendent world was the foundation for ethic and for ones happiness. But, as many times underlined in MacIntyre's theory it was the process of telling stories which construct the core of moral education even if the reality of Kurdish community had never lacked the direct hints and preaching of older and experienced people⁶². However presenting the meaningful sequences of events, deeds and images based on different moral choices brought subtle but convincing understanding and justification for certain human features and virtues. Moreover it was also the process of telling stories by talented storytellers which could grant some emotional and aesthetic experiences being crucial for developing psychological maturity as many times stressed by Bettelheim and Uzun. That is why, during the long winter nights the Kurdish storytellers told their stories⁶³ to the young and old, it had become an important lesson of ethic, beauty, and the sometimes incredulous art of living, where obstacles to overcome and tasks to fulfill construct the narrow and uncertain path to follow.

⁶² see Mela Mahmud Bayzidi, p. 23 According to Bayazidi the preaches of old people were usually presented in the narrative form too.

⁶³ Such nights were called *şeybûhêrk* in Kurdish tradition

Basic bibliography

In Kurdish:

Çirokên Kurdî, file from the archives of Jalil's family by courtesy of Jalile Jalil
Zargotina K'urda, ed. Ordikhane Jalil and Jalile Jalil, part II, Nauka, Moskva 1978
Mehmed Uzun, *Rojek ji rojén Evdalê Zeynikê*, Avesta, İstanbul 2002

In Polish:

O wartościach, normach i problemach moralnych, ed. Magdalena Środa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994
Jerzy Bartmiński, *Folklor – język – poetyka*, Polska Akademia Nauk, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław, 1990
Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności*, PWN, Warszawa, 1996
Bruno Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pozyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, part 1, PIW, Warszawa 1985
Joanna Bocheńska, *Między ciemnością i światłem. O kurdyjskiej tożsamości i literaturze*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2011
Mirce Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, PIW, Warszawa, 1993

In Turkish:

Mehmed Uzun, *Dengbêjlerim*, Gendaş Kültür, İstanbul 2001.
Yaşar Kemal's *Ağrı dağı efsanesi*, Yapı Kredi Yayıncıları, İstanbul 2004

In Russian:

Ordikhane Jalil, *Predisloviye*, in: *Kurdskiye legendy, skazki i predanya*, Nauka, Moskva 1989, pp. 5-24.
Mela Mahmud Bayazidi, *Nrawy i obychai Kurdov*, Izdatelstvo Wostochnoy Literatury, Moskva, 1963

In English:

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A study in moral theory*, Duckworth, London 1985
Miriam Schulman and Amal Barkouki-Winter, *The ancient virtue of hospitality imposes duties on host and guest*, <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v11n1/hospitality.html>

Dictionaries:

Michael L. Chyet, *Kurdish-English Dictionary*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003
K. K Kurdo耶ev, *Kurdsko-russkiy slovar*, Gosudarstvennoye izdatelstvo inostrannyh i natsionalnyh slovarley, Moskwa 1960
Zana Farqînî, Ferhenga Kurdî-Tirkî, Enstîtuya Kurdî, Stenbol 1992

Joanna Bocheńska

This article is a result of the translation project done in the scope of the *Knowledge and Practice Programme* (2011) run by The Małopolska Regional Development Agency and the research project *How to Make a Voice Audible? Continuity and change of Kurdish Culture and of Social Reality in Postcolonial Perspectives* being financed by National Science Center of Poland based on the decision DEC-2012/05/E/HS2/03779.