

RELIGIOUS AND MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH TEXTS

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Abstract

Symbolism is a powerful semiotic resource through which cultures encode collective experiences, spiritual beliefs, and mythological narratives. This study examines the representation of religious and mythological symbols in Uzbek and English texts across various genres, including folklore, classical literature, modern works, and sacred traditions. Using a qualitative comparative semiotic approach, the research analyzes symbols such as celestial bodies, natural elements, animals, moral and spiritual metaphors, and sacred numbers to identify similarities and differences between the two cultures. The findings show that while many symbols share universal mythic foundations, their meanings diverge significantly due to the influence of Islam in Uzbek culture and Christianity and Greco-Roman mythology in English culture. The study provides insights for comparative linguistics, cultural semiotics, and translation studies by demonstrating how symbols reflect cultural memory and shape literary interpretation.

Keywords: symbolism; mythological symbols; religious symbolism; Uzbek literature; English literature; cultural semiotics; archetypes; comparative literature.

Introduction

Symbols are deeply embedded in human communication, functioning as condensed carriers of cultural knowledge, spiritual meaning, and collective memory. In both English and Uzbek traditions, religious and mythological symbols appear as narrative tools that structure worldviews and organize cultural experience. Previous scholarship in comparative semiotics has shown that symbols such as light, water, tree, horse, and moon have cross-cultural resonance but localized meaning (Lotman, 1990; Eliade, 1998). Despite a rich body of research on individual traditions, systematic comparative analysis between English and Uzbek symbolic systems remains limited.

Uzbek texts derive their symbolic framework largely from Turkic mythology, Zoroastrian traditions, Islamic cosmology, and centuries of oral folklore. English texts, on the other hand, reflect Judeo-Christian religious imagery, Greco-Roman mythology, Celtic traditions, and literary developments from medieval to modern eras. By analyzing symbolic units across a

broad corpus—including folklore, classical and modern literature, and sacred texts—this study aims to trace cultural roots and identify how religious and mythological symbols encode value systems in both cultures.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the dominant religious and mythological symbols in English and Uzbek texts?
2. How do these symbols compare in their meanings, functions, and cultural roots?
3. What universal and culture-specific symbolic patterns can be identified across the two traditions?

Methods

This study applies a qualitative comparative semiotic approach to examine religious and mythological symbols in Uzbek and English texts. The analysis draws on cultural semiotics, classical mythology, and linguistic anthropology to trace how symbolic meanings are formed, transmitted, and transformed across cultures. The corpus for this research includes a wide spectrum of genres so that the comparison reflects both historical continuity and cultural diversity. Uzbek sources include oral folklore such as Alpomish, Go'ro'g'li, and various folk tales containing mythological creatures, sacred animals, and cosmological motifs. Classical works by Alisher Navoi and Ogahiy were also incorporated due to their deep symbolic layering. To represent modern perspectives, symbolic passages from O'tkan Kunlar and selected twentieth-century narratives were examined. Additionally, references from Islamic tradition, particularly Qur'anic imagery related to light, water, and purity, were considered because they shape much of the symbolic worldview in Uzbek culture.

English texts were selected to reflect both mythological and religious foundations as well as major literary developments. Greek and Roman myths were used because they provide the underlying symbolic framework for European literature. Biblical passages were included to trace Christian influences, especially in symbols related to moral dualities and spiritual archetypes. Shakespeare's works served as classic literary examples where symbolic representation is particularly dense. Modern English literature was also consulted to observe how traditional symbols were reinterpreted over time.

The symbolic units in the corpus were analysed by identifying recurring motifs and categorizing them into thematic domains such as celestial imagery, natural elements, animal symbolism, moral-spiritual concepts, and sacred numbers. Each symbol was examined for its semantic range, narrative function, and cultural origin. The analysis compared not only the meanings themselves but also the deeper mythological and religious roots that support those meanings. This method allowed for a contextualized comparison, highlighting both the shared archetypal patterns and the culture-specific reinterpretations present in each tradition.

Results

The analysis revealed several significant patterns regarding the representation of religious and mythological symbols in both cultures. Celestial symbols such as the sun and moon appear frequently in both Uzbek and English texts, but their connotations differ according to cultural and historical context. In Uzbek folklore, the sun is closely linked to life, prosperity, and divine protection, reflecting roots in ancient Turkic beliefs about Tengri. The moon, especially the crescent moon, often carries feminine, gentle, and mystical meanings, which are reinforced by Islamic symbolism. In English texts, however, the sun often symbolizes order, clarity, and the authority of rulers, while the moon tends to represent instability, emotional fluctuation, or enchantment, influenced strongly by Greco-Roman lunar deities and medieval belief systems. Symbols related to natural elements also showed both overlap and divergence. Water is commonly associated with purification in both cultures, but the source of the meaning differs. In Uzbek texts, water evokes agricultural life in Central Asia and Islamic metaphors of divine mercy. English interpretations rely more on Biblical narratives, especially baptism and rebirth. Fire displayed even stronger divergence. Uzbek representations preserve the duality inherited from Zoroastrian heritage, where fire can be sacred and protective yet potentially destructive. In English religious symbolism, fire tends to be a marker of divine punishment or spiritual purification, while in mythological contexts, such as the Prometheus story, it represents knowledge, rebellion, and transformation.

Animal symbolism displayed some of the clearest cultural distinctions. The horse holds extraordinary cultural weight in Uzbek texts, serving as a symbol of heroism, loyalty, and identity, particularly in Alpomish, where the hero and his horse are inseparable. While English texts also use the horse to symbolize nobility or military strength, it does not hold the same mythic centrality. The snake showed an even sharper contrast: in English Christian tradition it functions almost exclusively as a negative symbol of temptation and evil, whereas Uzbek folklore presents more varied meanings, including wisdom, hidden knowledge, and even protective qualities in pre-Islamic traditions.

Across both cultures, light and darkness consistently appear as moral-spiritual symbols, but with religiously distinct overtones. The light in Uzbek texts is influenced heavily by the Qur'anic concept of nur, representing divine guidance and purity. In English literature, light is shaped by Biblical imagery of salvation and truth. Darkness, similarly, is associated with ignorance or danger in both cultures, though English texts emphasize sin, while Uzbek texts often emphasize misfortune or spiritual confusion. Sacred numbers also illustrated shared Indo-Eurasian roots. Uzbek and English traditions both show frequent use of numbers such as three, seven, and forty. Although their meanings are expressed through different religious narratives, the recurrence shows a deep connection to ancient numerical symbolism across Eurasian cultures.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Uzbek and English symbolic systems share a considerable number of universal motifs, yet interpret them differently due to cultural, geographical, and religious factors. Many symbols particularly those connected to nature, cosmology, and human morality stem from archetypal patterns found throughout Eurasian mythologies. The sun, moon, horse, fire, and sacred numbers appear in both traditions, suggesting that certain symbolic frameworks transcend specific ethnic or religious boundaries. However, each culture adapts these archetypes according to its spiritual worldview.

Religious traditions play a decisive role in shaping symbolic meaning. Islamic symbolism in Uzbek culture and Christian symbolism in English culture reinterpret older mythological structures. For instance, Islamic metaphors of light, purity, and water reshape the meanings of celestial bodies and natural elements found in earlier Turkic and Zoroastrian traditions. Meanwhile, Christian concepts of sin, salvation, and divine justice overlay pre-Christian Celtic and Greco-Roman symbolic frameworks in English texts. This process of religious reinterpretation explains why the same symbol for example, the snake can carry dramatically different connotations.

Geography and lifestyle also influence symbolic development. The horse's importance in Uzbek culture reflects centuries of nomadic tradition and steppe life, giving it a heroic and spiritual dimension that English literature does not fully replicate. Similarly, fire's ambivalence in Uzbek contexts echoes Zoroastrian ritual practices, while English meanings are shaped more by Biblical narratives and industrial-era reinterpretations. Despite these differences, the study reveals significant symbolic convergence. Both cultures consistently use light and darkness to express moral categories, though with variations in religious emphasis. Sacred numbers such as three, seven, and forty appear in both traditions, reflecting shared ancient cosmological patterns that have persisted through different cultural transformations. These parallels highlight the interconnectedness of Eurasian symbolic heritage while underscoring the unique ways in which communities reshape inherited symbols to express their own values and worldviews.

Overall, the discussion indicates that comparative symbolic analysis helps uncover the deep cultural roots embedded in literary and religious texts. It also clarifies why certain metaphors and symbolic structures may be interpreted differently across cultures, which is particularly valuable for translation studies, intercultural communication, and literary interpretation. The findings show that symbolism serves as both a bridge and a boundary between cultures revealing shared human concerns while preserving distinct cultural identities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious and mythological symbols in Uzbek and English texts share both universal patterns and culturally specific meanings. While ancient mythologies

provide shared archetypal foundations, Islam and Christianity reshape these symbols, creating unique national and linguistic identities. Comparative symbolism therefore offers an effective lens for understanding cultural memory, translation challenges, and literary interpretation. Further research may explore cognitive aspects of symbolic interpretation, symbolism in modern media, or quantitative corpus-based methods.

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