Change Is the Only Constant

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2024

FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET
SVEUČILIŠTE JOSIPA JURJA STROSSMAYERA U OSIJEKU

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Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer i pedagogije

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Samo je promjena stalna: Tropi i arhetipi iz narodnih priča u suvremenoj animaciji

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Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

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Change Is the Only Constant: Folktale Tropes and Archetypes in Contemporary Animation

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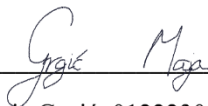# Change Is the Only Constant: Folktale Tropes and Archetypes in Contemporary Animation

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

There is a wide range of theoretical and semantic definitions of the term *folklore*, but generally it can be defined as a set of traditional beliefs that are transmitted orally in a given culture. As such, folklore plays a crucial role in preserving cultural and social identity. As part of a wider meaning-making system, it has gained importance among people who engage in practices that ensure its continuous existence. Historically, folkloristics has utilized communal practice as an essential part of cultural preservation, inevitably producing an image of folklore as an ever-evolving phenomenon. Contemporary folkloric studies have continued this tradition through the development of classification systems that examine the possibilities of folkloric existence. Following this tradition, the paper will portray the importance of folklore in contemporary animated works by analyzing three animated films and one series: *The Legend of Hei* (2019), *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), *Princes and Princesses* (2000), and *The Magician's Hat* (1990), in order to show that the motif of change is a fundamental aspect of folklore in various cultures.

Keywords: *The Legend of Hei*, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Princes and Princesses*, *The Magician's Hat*, folklore, animation, identity, change.

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Introduction

In traditional folktales, the motif of change occurs within internal and external processes which shape the characters' lived experiences and depict pervasive cultural practices through the use of figurative language. Well-known folktales like "The Frog King or Iron Heinrich" (Grimm, 1812) and "Beauty and the Beast" (de Villeneuve, 1740) portray characters whose internal transformations result in external change, consequently leading to a greater appreciation of the world they inhabit. Other similar tales, such as "The Little Mermaid" (Andersen, 1837) and the Japanese "The Tale of Princess Kaguya,"[1] depict transformation as an illusory state in order to emphasize the dangers of external transformation at the expense of personal identity. Alternatively, tales like "The Legend of Anansi the Spider," a folktale originating in Ghana, show inner transformation as a necessary sacrifice which reclaims the possibility of cultural and historical change. Thus, folktales – regardless of their national or cultural origin – depict inner and external transformation through figurative processes which lie at the boundary between the real and non-real. Stylistic devices, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony, represent the foundational mechanisms of abstract, associative and experiential understanding of the world, while the characters who experience change are archetypes. Consequently, tropes and archetypes reflected in animated media share a similar purpose as rhetorical devices which help people understand the world, which the paper will prove through analyzing the relevant tropes and archetypes.

The paper will provide an overview of the patterns of figurative language found in contemporary animated films, and define the aspects that differentiate the stories, focusing on the interaction between motivic development and narrative structure. The analysis comprises three contemporary animated films and one animated series, in the following order: *The Legend of Hei* (2019), *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), *Princes and Princesses* (2000), *and The Magician's Hat* (1990). These works have been chosen because they intricately reflect the interplay between the possibilities of internal and external transformation, depicting archetypal characters and tropes that easily lend themselves to figurative analysis. The works are comprised of tales from various traditions and heterogeneous practices which provide a wider range of perspectives and experiences, contributing to a more realistic overview of folktale tropes and archetypes depicted in contemporary animated media. Drawing from different cultures (Chinese, Japanese, French and Croatian respectively), they also illustrate that all

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[1] Or "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter." The story is believed to have originated in the ninth century, the oldest surviving manuscript dated 1592 (Katagiri et al. 95).

folktales share the focus on the notion of change. Since its inception, the study of folklore has expressed the necessity for change through meaning-making, communal action, the effects of which are felt today due to its evocative language. To this day, tropes remain a constant part of contemporary folkloristics, which makes them the prototypical mode of exchange that reliably reflects the needs and experiences of various cultural groups, which can be contextually dependent and independent. The paper will connect the context-dependent motifs and figures from the animated films and series with their folktale examples.

This paper is organized into five main chapters, the first of which will provide a theoretical and historical background to the study of folklore and its constituents. The next four chapters will analyze the motif of change in three contemporary animated films and one animated series through an examination of prevalent tropes and motifs as features of figurative language. So, the second chapter will focus on *The Legend of* Hei, exemplifying how the film depicts the motif of change through tropes and archetypes that depict the necessity of establishing authentic connection with the environment and the self, represented through the motif of nature.

The following chapter will portray the motif of change in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, examining transformation through subversive action under oppressive control, exemplified through meaningful connection. The fourth chapter will depict motifs found in *Princes and Princesses*, focusing on change as it relates to reaffirmation of folkloric identity through the connection with past, present, and future. The fifth chapter will exemplify the motif of change in *The Magician's Hat,* depicting the role of change as the foundational element of the cyclical nature of existence. The paper ends with concluding remarks and Works Cited.

1.   What Is Folklore?

In one of its issues, *Journal of Folklore Research* dedicates an article only to listing definitions of folklore by more than twenty scholars. Despite their variety, the meaning of the term can be narrowed down to John L. Mish's formulation suggesting that folklore is: "The entire body of ancient popular beliefs, customs, and traditions, which have survived among the less educated elements of civilized societies until today. It thus includes fairy tales, myths, and legends, superstitions, festival rites, traditional games, folk songs, popular sayings, arts, crafts, folk dances, and the like" (qtd. in "Definitions of Folklore" 261). In other words, folklore "embraces

the whole panorama of traditional culture" (Dorson 1) through categories of knowledge that retain a strong connection to oral culture and human experience.

As such, folklore is primarily contextual, "but can be manipulated, exploited, and otherwise used by those normally outside the context in which that folklore is performed" (de Caro 1). This implies both artists, who create new artefacts based on folklore, and folklorists, who are academically engaged with the study of folklore (folkloristics). Additionally, folkloric action presupposes change which, through cyclic processes of action and stagnation, leads to alternate forms of experiencing and celebrating life: "Commonly, however, folklore is not experienced in its usual performative contexts but through some sort of recycling" (de Caro 2). Folklorists strive to establish a semi-permanent connection to the past through the continuous preservation of cultural identity. Additionally, they aim to create a shared sense of belonging and emphasize the importance of various worldviews within their communities: "Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time it is also the vigorous voice of the present" (Dorson 17). Throughout the centuries, folkloristics has carried the inexorable responsibility of connecting thoughts and ideas of people from all walks of life, emphasizing that folklore can encompass anything and everything with "qualities of tradition, vernacular culture, performativity, community, and belief" (Hill 3). Consequently, contemporary folkloristics focuses on people's needs for connection, successfully adapting to various modes of communication, whether oral, written or visual, moving "beyond categorical distinctions to appeal to a notion of beautiful experience as grounded in the participant's everyday existence and identity" (Hill 25). The notion of "beautiful experience" that arises from folklore is taken up by artists, such as writers and filmmakers, whose adaptations of elements of folklore make it accessible to a wide audience, outside of the academic study of folkloristics, and who – by adapting and changing them – keep folklore alive.

Folktales depend on transformative human action, involving people who experience and retell stories that occurred long before their time. Folktales, as a fundamental part of folklore, are living examples of human experience. Thus, human beings have a responsibility to interact with stories in a continuous process that involves substantial internal and external change. Consequently, folkloric tropes embody the outcomes of this transformative process, carrying meaning that transcends the confines of the present moment to convey the depth of human experience. They emphasize the variety of human experience, making folktales, and other works inspired by folktales, relevant to anyone attempting to understand themselves or the

world around them. Indeed, as Charles Francis Potter has suggested: "Folklore is a lively fossil which refuses to die" (qtd. in "Definitions of Folklore" 261).

By focusing on contemporary works of animation that adapt elements from folktales, this paper will explore the motif of change as a fundamental aspect of both folklore and folkloristics, emphasizing its role as the primary factor that has kept folklore alive and folklore studies relevant since their inception. In particular, the paper will focus on tropes and archetypes in selected animated films and series, such as the hero, the prince or princess, the change of seasons, life and death, and similar, as they illustrate the pervasive need for understanding the world through a readjustment of the language used to bridge the boundary between the abstract world of ideas and the tangible environment.

2. *The Legend of Hei (罗小黑战记大电影)*

Folkloric studies, particularly in contexts with a focus on animistic cultural practices and spiritual stories, frequently explore relationships between humans and animals explicated through depictions of talking animals or humans undergoing animal-like transformations. The motifs in these stories serve to emphasize the differences between people and non-human beings in order to exemplify the human desire to learn more about the unknown world. Folktales contained in various historical records, such as *wugu* [2] (Chinese: 巫蛊, trans. dark magic) tales and stories involving cat ghosts (猫鬼), form the narrative foundation of *The Legend of Hei* (2019). The animated film, directed by a Chinese cartoonist, director and animator MTJJ, also known as MTJJ Mu Mu, depicts non-human transformation as a consequence of human interference with the natural world, and shapeshifting creatures as both natural predecessors of man-made culture and representations of the unknown, transformed through human influence. Consequently, the motif of change is most evident in the lives of the animal-like creatures, who are "othered" and aim to either restore their world through balance or disruption of the natural order. Thus, the film depicts the motif of change, whether internal or external, as a foundational element of fable narrative structure.

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[2] *Wugu* tales, contained in *The Book of Sui* (581–618) and *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (1368–1644), portray spiritual animals as cats that differ in size and have "human-like facial expressions," often taking on the form of children. The tales often thematically oppose cat spirits and humans, depicting spiritual animals as metaphorical representations of natural forces, benevolent if given proper respect (Gruntov and Mazo 103).

In *Physics*, Aristotle introduces the idea of change through two variations of form and matter: the accidental, "which involve concrete particulars, or "substances" (*ousiai*) in Aristotle's terminology, gaining or losing a property," and the substantial, "whereby a substance comes into, or passes out of, existence" (qtd. in Ainsworth 1). The motif of change, both accidental and substantial, is a foundational element of folklore, often depicted through the use of tropes and archetypes, which share its dualistic quality as both describe the various connections between two seemingly opposite concepts (life-death, light-shadow). Similarly, in *The Legend of Hei*, various characters undergo transformations that are both accidental and substantial, since they lie at the boundary of the human and non-human, man and animal.

Xiaohei, the titular character, is a cat sprite or elf (Chinese: 小妖精, trans. little sprite) who partially transforms into a human in order to exact revenge and, as time passes, begins to understand humans who destroyed the forest, his birthplace (00:01:43-00:03:53). At first, Xiaohei's transformation carries accidental properties which hold metonymic (and synecdochic) connections to the forest through his lingering animal features, emphasizing Xiaohei's inability to conform to the needs of the human world. As the narrative progresses, Xiaohei's transformations become increasingly substantial, metaphorically depicting the archetypal struggle between life and death, questioning whether differences between humans and non-human beings ultimately matter. In the film, his metamorphosis metaphorically represents exile as he is, both literally and figuratively, forced out of his body and transformed into the Other. Similarly, his changes contain metonymic and synecdochic functions, exemplified through his fragmentary identities, which are partial representations of his connection to the outside world. Partial transformation, as a recurring folktale motif, reestablishes the connection between the known and unknown, leading to a renewed focus on specific human desires and aspirations that are not as apparent in non-animal stories. These desires, exemplified by folkloric motifs such as shapeshifting and metamorphosis, introduce change as a fundamental aspect of folkloric experience and a process that all human beings must undergo.

According to Aristotle, change occurs after three conditions are met, in the following order: "(1) something which underlies and persists through the change; (2) a "lack", which is one of a pair of opposites, the other of which is (3) a form acquired during the course of the change" (qtd. in Ainsworth 1). The following subchapters will focus on the implications of accidental and substantial transformations of characters and their environment, and how they influence the consequent degradation or reconnection to nature in its various forms. Likewise,

as nature is a recurring folkloric motif mirroring both physical and psychological change, the paper will analyze the symbolic role of nature within contemporary folklore studies through the interplay of relevant tropes and archetypes.

2.1. *Nature's Heaven*

According to Kant, nature is a force that connects various spheres of human existence: "nature is regarded by us as if its particular empirical laws were not isolated and disparate, but connected and in relation" (23). In *The Legend of Hei*, human nature acts in accordance with the environment, as both share the same purpose: to reach an ultimate end through constant reinvention, death and rebirth. At first, humans in the film struggle to realign their goal with the environment and, instead, find purpose in its desecration: "if [nature] be regarded as a teleological system he is, by his destination, the ultimate purpose of nature" (354). Consequently, physical deterioration closely follows characters who have rejected nature. Numerous folktales, such as "The Wild Swans" (Andersen, 1838) and "Beauty and the Beast," depict characters who are once transformed and then stagnate physically or psychologically in that form. Here, change is represented as an obstructive force, often a curse resulting in the loss of humanity. Contrary to this, *The Legend of Hei* depicts change as a fundamental part of nature; characters freely change forms whenever they desire, but need to do so in alignment with their Nature (their spiritual realm). The characters in the film metaphorically reaffirm their existence through an embodied attachment to the physical and non-physical world. Their perpetual transformations, "predominantly viewed in terms of 'motion' rather than stasis" (Sterckx 3), emphasize the necessity to return balance to the environment through continuous change.

In traditional Chinese folklore, the motif of nature symbolically represents the indivisible connection between people and their environment, with real and imagined beings as natural occurrences, often depicted in religious and philosophical texts. Similarly, *The Legend of Hei* depicts characters as both metonymic extensions of the forest and metaphorical ties to ancient China's agricultural roots. The forest represents an illusory boundary between the animal and human world, which serves as the metaphorical birthplace of the characters' transformative abilities, its purpose lying in "clarifying their place within an overarching moral cosmos which encompassed both humans and animals" (Sterckx 2).

The Legend of Hei depicts nature as the primary mode of experience through which humanity establishes a connection with themselves and the environment. Notions of time, space, and living are metaphorical and experientially tied to nature: "If nature is the stage for

behavior, it is not a force of necessities but possibilities" (Mangrum 66). The characters have no desire to possess or control nature because it predates all existence – the forest is the source of their spiritual and cultural transformations: "Creating, yet not possessing. / Working yet not taking credit / Work is done, then forgotten. / Therefore it lasts forever" (Liu 6). Similarly, Chinese creation myths, such as the story of Pangu, portray formless chaos, divided by Pangu, whose death results in the beginning of life, representing connection to nature through cyclical death and rebirth: "his breath became the wind, the mist and the clouds: his blood became the rivers, land and lakes; his eyes turned into the sun and the moon" ("1, 2, 3 - The Legend of Pangu"). In Chinese folklore, primordial beings are inherently tied to the environment, often embodying natural forces, emphasizing the interconnection of all parts of nature. Consequently, *The Legend of Hei* parallels these motifs through erasing the metaphorical boundary between the self and the environment, and suggesting that rejecting nature is equivalent to physical and metaphorical death.

Xiaohei's powers partially hold a metonymic connection to the man-made inventions that have made human existence and evolution possible: "your spiritual type – it's part metal, like mine" (00:30:35-00:30:37), metaphorically depicting his existence at the boundary of human and non-human existence. His abilities include the expansion of his spiritual realm, resulting in a space surrounding and, in some cases, infringing upon the natural environment. Comparably, traditional cautionary tales, such as the Australian "Tiddalik the Frog" and the Chinese "Journey to the West," portray characters whose interference with the natural order causes disturbance, emphasizing the need for restoring balance through repentance or restoration. In *The Legend of Hei*, characters using powers closely connected to nature do so in a destructive and metonymically coercive manner. The antagonists emphasize the need to protect the forest, but resolve their issues through non-emphatic actions that diverge from their inherent nature. Namely, the antagonist, Feng Xi, uses abilities taken from other characters in order to enact his revenge. In doing so, he destroys the natural world, leaving only burnt branches and dead creatures (00:37:31-00:37:33). Their attempts to gain control over the continuously industrialized world culminate in a metonymic and synecdochic representation of nature's inevitable supremacy and destructive tendencies; branches and leaves intertwine to reveal behemoth trees, enveloping the antagonist who becomes a non-figurative part of the sea-like forest: "What a shame. They will just cut him down regardless" (1:32:57).

The characters' abilities resemble various aspects of folkloric practices, where spiritual and magical rituals involving barriers and weapons symbolically evoke drawings and depictions used as protective charms or shields against supernatural dangers. In the film, these rituals and

symbols are depicted through characters' interactions with the environment, reinforcing the notion that nature both invigorates and reduces transformative action: "It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last" (Whitman 48). Thus, the motif of nature is metaphorically tied to change, as it is only through transformation that the characters can fully grow into themselves, and live in accordance with their inner nature.

2.2. *The City of Ruins*

In *The Legend of Hei*, the motif of change is inherently tied to the notion of self-preservation occurring within the boundaries of a rapidly developing contemporary culture. The study of folklore reflects this desire for self-expression through the works of marginalized groups and individuals who face similar issues. Thus, this subchapter explores the role of tropes and archetypes which help explicate the connection of characters with their nature (whether internal or external), and how the contemporary environment might hinder or foster similar ties. Through the use of relevant tropes and archetypes, this part will show how *The Legend of Hei* portrays the motif of change within intertwining processes of self-preservation and conformity, ultimately depicting folkloristics as the driving force behind cultural adaptation and personal reclamation.

In the film, the creatures living in the city seemingly peacefully coexist with human beings, but their need for assimilation becomes a prerequisite for a sustainable life: "Cities that exclude marginalized communities cannot claim to realize the right to the city . . . or consider themselves producers of true human-centered spaces" (Kempin Reuter 5). Although the sprites may appear to live fulfilling lives, they are experientially excluded from authentic living as their survival needs undermine personal expression: "They attain Nothing, but their needs are provided for" (Liu 43). There exist numerous tales, such as H. C. Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" (1843), which metaphorically explore the, often unattainable, desire for belonging, and, in doing so, reflect the inevitability of returning to one's own nature, as long as there is a divide between cultural demand and personal identity. Likewise, cultural identity persists through the development of folklore, which makes the creation of distinct, but recognizable stories a significant consequence of the changing landscape of folkloric research. In pre-modern China, social and personal identity were closely tied to one's location, while the notion of a birthplace (Chinese: 籍貫, trans. ancestral home) was of extreme political and communicative importance: "geographic origin was generally the first matter of inquiry among strangers, the first characteristic recorded about a person (after name and pseudonyms)" (Goodman 4).

In *The Legend of Hei,* Xiaohei's arrival elucidates the metaphorical change of nature; the contemporary environment has mercilessly expanded upon the forest and become a bustling concrete jungle filled with humans and creatures alike – beings that share a sense of belonging and attachment to the city: "Many monsters prefer to live in the city. They can choose their own identity and lifestyle. However, they all must abide by one rule: they can't expose their true identity" (00:57:18-00:57:28). In contrast, the antagonists represent the oppressive consequences of assimilation through the metonymic titles they use for the Executors' headquarters; instead of its full name, the characters often use euphemistic expressions or names of related places. Similarly, the actions of the antagonists exemplify the severity of social disconnection and alienation provided by the rapid growth of the city, which they attempt to mitigate through a rejection of their connection with human beings: "This is somewhere abandoned by humans" (00:10:11).

Despite the fear of losing their cultural identities, the antagonists' resistance to oppressive systems does not depend only on violent action. Instead, it is symbolized through communal interconnective practice, where sharing metaphorically represents adaptation and resilience. Characters connect with each other in ways that appear distinctly human, "My name is Feng Xi. What's yours?" (00:07:50-00:07:51), and remain in their human forms, but use abilities and gestures that are closely related to their animal origins, resisting "otherness" through personal transformation of typically human cultural practices. Similarly, the film's food-sharing scenes depict their adaptation to oppressive systems, which helps reframe the antagonists as metaphorical extensions of the natural environment, connected even if their experiences differ: "Don't be scared. We're of the same kind" (00:07:28-00:07:32).

Folkloric studies that focus on inter- and intracultural communication often analyze the influence of normative behavior within and outside defined groups in order to portray the role of social approval and disapproval in establishing personal identity. Folkloric traditions depend on the balance between conformity and defiance, through which relevant behaviors and creative acts are preserved. *The Legend of Hei* juxtaposes folkloric connection between two diverging settings – the forest and the city – but ultimately portrays that group action metaphorically overlaps the beliefs and values of both environments. Xiaohei's attachment to the group comes from shared, lived experiences, which metaphorically emphasize the persistence of connection to nature as a concurrent motif and change as the mechanism of cultural and personal preservation.

2.3. *The Spirit Realm*

Philosophical and religious schools of thought that predated the second century A.D. were not part of a rigid classification system, but were more akin to fluid worldviews, referring to "a changing situation and to attitudes to life that were evolving" (Loewe 653). The period was marked by the desire to explain unknown natural forces which formed the foundational mechanism of the universe. *The Legend of Hei* mirrors this desire through the concept of *wu xing* ("the rule of the five phases," the five agents), which delineates principles underlying the foundational processes of nature, often transpiring in a predictable manner: "One is the order of mutual promotion or mutual arising. . . . Another pattern is the order of mutual control or mutual destruction" (Weil 11). In the film, the characters' abilities depend on the *wu xing* principles, which ascribe certain qualities to agents (wood, fire, earth, metal, water) that correlate to different phenomena, such as season, environment, and emotions, concepts that are central to the film. Consequently, *The Legend of Hei* portrays characters whose inner realms becomes sources of various abilities which correlate to the five agents, representing the metaphorical connection between themselves and their environment. Contemporary Chinese religious beliefs and practices rely on different aspects tied to ancient traditions, which often refer to "everyday beliefs and practices shared by people at different levels of society" (Wilkinson 379). Similarly, the film interweaves religious customs with fantastical elements, portraying living spirits, sprites, and monsters entering worlds that are often imperceptible. It evokes both contemporary and ancient beliefs through the connection of numerous worlds, echoing animistic practices, common and indigenous religious systems; environments marked by signs from ancient civilizations bring to mind mythological deities, while characters with strong abilities (Executors) pursue "monsters" (00:57:52).

The film depicts the characters' inner world as the main source of their spiritual energy and existence: "Every living being has their own Spirit Realm. It's where our spirit resides. Its existence is the foundation of all life and our abilities" (00:29:34-00:29:44). Xiaohei's journey ends with the reclamation of his inner Realm, symbolizing a path that leads to metaphorical reiteration and renewal, unlike Feng Xi's Spirit Realm, which encompasses the city and causes its destruction, ironically exacting the same violence from the beginning of the film (01:17:52-01:18:40). Consequently, Xiaohei's spiritual journey culminates in the decision to find a balanced or harmonious path ("the middle way" in Buddhism or "the Dao" in Daoism) which lessens harm or suffering: "That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature. Stirring only after being stimulated, our nature is harmed" (Liu 42).

In numerous folktales, change is both a human and non-human experience, often resulting in the loss of identity and physical form, blurring the boundary between the internal and the external realities. Xiaohei's journey ends with the dissolution of his fixed identity, culminating with the coexistence of the human and non-human, the consequent reaffirming of both identities. His continuous efforts to reconnect with the environment end with his symbolic transformation, reflecting the nature of existence that closely aligns with classical depictions of the natural world: "the zoomorphic iconography of the lunar mansions that appear after the eleventh century—reflect changes in the way a community understands natural objects" (Kim 3). Consequently, the film ends with a metaphorical rebirth, as the spiritually renounced forest symbolically consumes the city, a scene that points to the inevitability of life and death, and the cyclical nature of existence: "many Daoist texts call for humans to 'return' to the Dao, advocating that which is simple or pure over what is complex or ornamental" (Miller 154). The ending emphasizes contrast through complementary action; there is light in every shadow, and the balance of all forces (or agents) depends on self-transformation that occurs in accordance with the world: "do not lie in the Other / but instead lie in the self; / do not lie in other people / but instead lie in your own person" (Liu 1).

2.4. *The World of the Other*

According to Abrams and Harpham, a fable is "a short narrative, in prose or verse, that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behavior" (7). While fables can feature various living beings, such as plants or gods, most of them primarily focus on animals, in part due to their importance in everyday life, either as sources of food or companionship. In some areas, animals became central to numerous stories due to textual representations of spiritual and bodily transformations: "Buddhist allegories influenced people's acceptance of human-animal transformation, setting the stage for spiritual animal stories" (Z. Chen 538).

Consequently, Xiaohei's animal form echoes numerous depictions of spiritual animals, such as the Huan (讙), depicted in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海经), a collection of Chinese myths and folklore, as a wild (mountain) cat, with three tails, its cry likened to hundred kinds of calls that could, in some instances, ward off evil spirits (26). Fables often portray animal characters whose existence serves to explicate human flaws or virtues, a process which imposes animal-like characteristics that are purposeless when disconnected from their human counterparts: "A traditional narrative about animal language is that it doesn't exist - that the

sounds that animals make . . . are fundamentally different than human speech" (Heald). In the film, the creatures' experiences are placed to the forefront; their primary function, however, is not to directly oppose human experience, but to uplift dispossessed voices and experiences, successfully adapting familiar tropes and motifs found in fables and animal folktales: "Although fables were marked as language of the lower class, anyone in a vulnerable social position in antiquity could potentially benefit from employing fable" (McCafferty 11).

The role of folklore has remained unchanged since pre-written history; ancient tales, whether spoken or written, have all endured because they hold the power to transform, to bring back what has been lost or alter what was once known. Folklore, in its many forms, renews life and memory, inviting readers to realize that their lives are larger than existence. Folklore persists to convince the reader of their greater purpose, of their connection to the seen and unseen. *The Legend of Hei* portrays the pervasive, adaptive power of folklore through a metamorphosis of the self and the environment, portraying the devastating effect change can bring and, alternatively, how it also embodies the potential for freedom. The film evokes a feeling of an all-encompassing need for change, a desire that has emboldened folkloric action, preservation, and sharing throughout the centuries.

3.   *Revolutionary Girl Utena (少女革命ウテナ)*

Revolutionary Girl Utena, a Japanese animated TV series directed by Kunihiko Ikuhara (1997), is an adaptation of various myths, of which the most apparent is the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, including subversions of Arthurian legends,[3] portrayed in a contemporary manner and echoing the works of the Takarazuka Revue.[4] It portrays the motif of change through a combination of stylistic and figurative narrative choices, among which the most pervasive are its use of tropes and motifs central to the series' overarching themes. The series follows Utena Tenjou, a young girl who aspires to become a prince due to a promise, a dream that brings her to Ohtori Academy, where she unwittingly participates in a series of duels with the purpose of obtaining the Rose Bride and "something eternal" ("The Castle Said to Hold Eternity"

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[3] Thematically, the myth of Orpheus depicts the motif of grief, which, in the series, functions as the motivational force exacerbating change, while Arthurian legends represent the mechanism of chivalric action, portrayed as an oppositional force which hinders change (leading to subversion).
[4] The Takarazuka Revue, founded by Kobayashi Ichizō in 1913, is a Japanese all-female theater company which performs Japanese songs and dances with Western arrangements in a visually appealing, spectacular manner (Brau 80).

00:09:45). The series depicts the characters embodying ideals and roles they undertake to reaffirm noble or romantic archetypal behavior, emphasizing that their beliefs help perpetuate the workings of the oppressive system that seemingly controls their fates. Similarly, metaphorically dense tales, such as the Czech "Dlouhý, Široký a Bystrozraký" (Erben, 1966) and myths and legends of the Holy Grail, depict heroes who undergo various quests predetermined by fate or natural forces, often resulting in a symbolic union with the object of one's quest. However, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* subverts the tropes of the traditional hero narrative in order to question whether change is possible under an oppressive system, emphasizing that real change requires rejection of societal roles and expectations.

The main parts of the narrative occur across multiple locations, each persistently portraying the eternal, template-like drudgery of an unchangeable daily life. Ohtori Academy is central to the series as part of the illusory environment, providing momentary release from the mirage imposed by the mechanical underpinnings of the world created by the Ends of the World. The Academy is both a hostile environment and a place where the characters come to understand the purpose of the oppressive system and, consequently, change to transcend the limitations of their world. Both the academy and the Forest symbolize places of conformity and revolutionary transformation. Thus, the theme of revolution, "Give me the power to revolutionize the world" ("The Rose Bride" 00:18:41), serves as a metaphor for renewal, emphasizing that true revolution lies in breaking free from the illusory constraints imposed by the patriarchal oppressive system, ultimately portraying personal connection as the foundational element of inner transformation. The following subchapters will examine the ways in which the series subverts archetypal role expectations, ultimately portraying the manner in which the motif of change depicts themes and tropes connected to the highly influential hero-story.

3.1. *The Hero (Or, the Prince)*

According to Richard Kraut, altruistic acts "include not only those undertaken in order to do good to others, but also those undertaken in order to avoid or prevent harm to them" ("Altruism"). *Revolutionary Girl Utena* represents this divide between true altruistic action and illusory heroism through the fragmentation of archetypal roles, most evident in the subversion of Utena's dual role as both the mythic hero and heroine, and in the motif of the witch, which represents a degraded state of the archetypal goddess. Folkloristics portrays altruistic action as a significant aspect of hero-stories, with feats of archetypal heroes such as the Greek Heracles and the Phoenician Melquart providing the foundation for artistic and cultural expression,

which are imbued with life through continuous reinterpretation. Consequently, although the possibility of true altruism remains a topic of debate, folkloric materials continuously uncover aspects of interconnective practices that make altruistic action possible through consistent recounting and retelling of archetypal stories. As the story's hero and prince-in-making, Utena's motives and actions are both altruistic and self-serving, metaphorically representing the transmitted idea of an ideal prince who perpetually haunts the narrative, now an after-image or mirage: "Like someone who lost something important... Still, somehow he gives me the feeling that I've known him before" ("Our Eternal Apocalypse" 00:07:44-00:07:51). Similarly, in the series, those who fully embody their archetypes experience profound alienation. Thus, the motif of change becomes increasingly relevant as the characters leave the spiritual scarcity of conformity and transform both their world and themselves through altruistic, revolutionary acts.

In the beginning, Utena's actions, although life-threatening, bring superficial change resulting in a disruption of the ideal - if she fails, she is not a prince; if she succeeds, she is one step closer to the ideal. Consequently, narrative pressure ends in the dissolution of her identity: she is not a prince, there never was one. Her change begins with the "questioning of [her] own myths" (Foley 19) – traditions established to uphold the status quo, serving to make conformity a bearable burden: "I can't forgive a system that deprives someone of their personal freedom!" ("The Sunlit Garden Finale" 00:08:06). Likewise, folkloric studies depict myths as reflections of belief systems, representations of living history, and, in most cases, as metaphorical or allegorical tales of rituals, unknown occurrences, philosophical and moral truths. Thus, heroic myths depict cult-like figures venerated beyond death, with the retelling of their tales resulting in reconnection to cultural history and renewed belief in the possibility of meaningful change.

In *Revolutionary Girl,* Utena, the hero, explicated through the motif of the sun, defies the natural order of the Academy and must endure subjugation if she wishes to act within the boundaries of the system as power to change must be seized through the means of oppression: "And unless the Sun sinks, [the star] can never shine" ("Our Eternal Apocalypse" 00:06:45). In the series, the willingness to step out of the comfort of illusion leads to revolutionary action "requiring the intervention of a god on the machine to reassert tradition" (Foley 19). Ritualistic traditions of the Academy resemble ancient rites, with characters who participate in duels "metaphorized as sacrifice" (Foley 19). Restoration begins with loss; characters who lose the duels, including Utena, become purposeless, but reconstruct their identity through new traditions.

Utena's becoming a prince is the ironic mechanism through which she gains a voice in a world that silences those who need its help; after her parents' deaths, her only hope is the ephemeral vision of eternity, a promise as elusive as the faceless prince she chases. Although the hero in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* usurps the balance of the world of Ohtori Academy, it is only within the boundaries of her obligation; ultimately, she realizes her journey necessitates a rejection of the system, including her assigned role. The ideal Prince (or his many forms), hidden within the confines of Utena's academy, metaphorically represents both the students' dreams and fears, but remains powerless as long as he fears change. In Utena's world, even the ideal fears itself: "Looking at you reminds me of my former self. But, that's exactly why you can't save her" ("The Ends of the World" 00:09:56-00:10:02).

3.2. *The Witch (Or, the Rose Bride)*

Witches, "as symbols of disorder" (Gaskill 303) depict the effects of narrative subversion, representing the boundaries of patriarchal power and assertion of control. The oppressive system divides Anthy ("the Rose Bride") into two states of being as she "assumes the role of both victim and heroine; she is idolized as a symbol of triumph, self-actualization, and power while also serving as a figure of victimhood and oppression" (Gerely). Throughout the series, Anthy's actions seem inconsolable with the overarching plot, but her motives become clearer as the plot progresses, as does her role as the primary force that causes the viewer to question the ever-changing narrative reality: "the Prince's Grave. When she became known as a witch, Dios perished" ("The Ends of the World" 00:15:14-00:15:23). Folkloric studies often portray witchcraft (and witches) as invariably tied to the natural environment, utilizing symbols and concepts which metaphorically represent changing seasons, natural beings or plants. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, the witch is inherently tied to her environment, as it is her presence that systematizes eternity, which is essentially opposed to the motif of change. Alternatively, the witch in folklore represents the desire for change hindered by imposed stagnation, which occurs due to the fear of the unknown (witch hunt) or the perceived subversion of the ideal (the saintess as the mistress). In the series, the archetypal witch functions as an instrument through which other characters attempt to fulfill their desires, her involvement often leading to their metaphorical deaths. These characters are often unable to discern their true needs and, as a result, mistakenly believe that the witch is the most direct means to obtain what they seek. When they see that Anthy is, just like them, a victim of the system and a casualty of their unresolved conflicts, they realize that they are incapable of truly aiding her: "I thought that she was a

goddess who sacrificed her body for the one she loved, for me . . . And she really might have been, once. But now she's a witch" ("The Ends of the World" 00:15:47-00:15:53).

Anthy attempts to rationalize the harm caused by the system, but she realizes that the suffering never disappeared, she simply made it an unrecognizable part of external influence: "I thought that no matter what befell my body, my heart wouldn't feel the pain" ("The Ends of the World" 00:07:20-00:07:25). Like the witches of folklore, she cannot free herself of the influence of the oppressive system, instead choosing to assert herself through choices made within the system itself but still "experiences [herself] as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (de Beauvoir 7). Folkloric research portrays witchcraft as a set of cultural practices which often involve various rituals and traditions that can have positive or negative consequences, such as healing or causing intentional harm. Curses are a prevalent motif in traditional folktales, often invoked by malevolent witches who seek revenge or punishment. As such, manifestations of supernatural forces serve to influence change in another person's life. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, characters who participate in the subjugation of the witch, whether knowingly or otherwise, believe that she is both the cure and source of their cursed existence. The characters emphasize that "The Rose Bride has no will of her own" ("Our Eternal Apocalypse" 00:17:19), but fail to realize that Anthy's dependency on the system does not stem from the system's oppressive power (although it plays a part in her subjection), but her desire to gain power within the system because it is all she has ever known; if there is no world where she feels secure, the only alternative is death: "Are you running away?" ("The Ends of the World" 00:06:31). The characters believe that she "can't be happy any other way" ("The Ends of the World" 00:16:09) because happiness is irretrievable without the power of Eternity.

In the end, the ideal of "something eternal" comes as a warning, exemplifying that physical eternity only brings suffering, as it implies a resistance to change, which ends in deterioration. Mirroring fictional and historical witchcraft narratives, Anthy resists change because it brings condemnation – the people who supported Dios (the Prince) proclaim her a witch when she offers her protection: "At those wounded moments when we most need love, a hardened heart can seem like the best defense" (Salzberg 2). However, establishing truthful connection enables her to consider change, which leads to a metaphorical rebirth and reclamation of hope, with "no one who could either bestow that capacity on me or take it away" (Salzberg 3). Thus, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* shows that hope does not lie in destruction through role-imposed objectification (the instrumentalized body), but in meaningful connection emboldened by love: Utena and Anthy help each other, the hero does not save the witch.

3.3. *The Sword*

The world of Ohtori Academy depends on the existence of the duels; as long as they exist, the Rose Bride has a purpose, as long as she exists, there is a need for the god-prince who will save her (Dios) or relinquish her to a death-like fate. The duels, ordained by The Ends of the World (Dios, metaphorically taking on the role of Fate), have a singular function: eternal role reaffirmation and consolidation through voluntary action (fueled by fear and desire). In folkloric studies, duels serve to mythologize characters and capture narrative tension, as depicted in numerous tales which portray grand-scale battles (as in "The Tale of the Heike") or smaller, more personal conflicts (Joan of Arc's duel in Shakespeare's "Henry VI"). Heroic romances and epics, such as *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and *Beowulf,* envision dueling landscapes as metaphorically connected to the characters' supernatural origins, emphasizing the unfamiliarity of the environment (underwater halls) and mythical items, such as magical armor and sword, as inherent aspects of the hero-story.

Similarly, the dueling arena in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* consists of structures that intertwine and overlap one another, the most prominent being an absurdly high staircase. Relevant structures frame the world of the Academy at a cosmic level; ancient sculptures guard the entrance to the dueling arena, which floods when a duelist enters, signifying the ocean of creation, baptismal water or the destructive myth of the flood, while a planetarium lies at the center of the principal's office, projecting the illusory castle of eternity: "this device paints the illusion of fairy tales for those with naive wishes in their hearts" ("The Ends of the World" 00:11:15-00:11:25). Reflecting the hero's mythological origins, the sword of Dios serves as a metonymic representation of the hero, which disappears when his will is enforced. Thus, the sword that wins the bride is a mere prop, while the arena is a stage (during the duels, the weapon never pierces the opponent, only their rose). The sword of Dios can only be used to further perpetuate the cycle of violence, thus Utena's final victory exemplifies that the only solution to a system that oppresses both the oppressed and the oppressor is connection through empathy, a hand that reaches out: "The Sword of Dios didn't appear. But even so, she won the duel" ("Our Eternal Apocalypse" 00:20:56-00:21:01).

3.3.1. *The Chorus*

The study of folklore often emphasizes the inherent connection between musical forms and social activity. Rogers suggests that folk songs reflect "reflect the collective experiences of a particular group of people" ("What is Folk Music?"), portraying music-making as a natural

outcome of cultural interconnective practice. "Folk music is characterized by its simplicity in terms of instrumentation and musical structure" (Rogers), whereas contemporary musical practice depends on experimentation and reinvention through familiarization with various cultures, contexts, and diverse histories. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, folkloric choral chanting connected with contemporary electronic instrumentals and riffs forms the background of the duels, its content filled with emphatic discussions on the state of the characters' world, revealing that its essence cannot be articulated through literal means. Thus, the mechanism of the illusory world depends on the use of subversive language as a revolutionary act: "Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe" (Wittgenstein 62). Mirroring folkloric transmissive practice, metaphoric language exploits the form of the oppressive system (illusory, vague, and uncertain) to express the representative reality in an effort to reveal its underlying structure; the hideous truth that renders the characters unable to move past fear and desire. The film's lyric background holds numerous references to religious and philosophical texts, most of which surmise the efforts to overcome one's shortcomings in order to grow in accordance with the world, to appreciate it fully: "Not love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st / Live well" (Milton 25-26).

Replete with metaphorical and mythological imagery, the song "Absolute Destiny Apocalypse" plays during the grand staircase sequence and repeats most frequently throughout the series (excluding the opening song). Its lyrics emphasize the archetypal relationship between life and death, suggesting that the natural conclusion to all human experiences is apocalypse; an absolute birth ends with absolute death: "Birth records, / baptismal records, / records of death. . . . My own birth, / absolute birth. / Apocalypse" ("The Absolute Destiny Apocalypse" 3-5, 8-10). The following lyrics describe "[a] shining place in a desert of darkness. / A gold-plated Shangri-La" (11-12), in which the desert metaphorically represents the sense of alienation, with the lack of life-sustaining water often symbolizing death, while the shining light resembles the glimmer of hope, the birth of the hero.

The mysterious Shangri-La and the elusive Elysian fields reflect the nature of Utena's world, the truth of the illusory castle and the reasoning behind the creation of a world stuck in eternity: "I determined to gather together all things of beauty and culture that I could and preserve them here against the doom toward which the world is rushing" (*Lost Horizon* 01:12:40). Fear of the future, of disappointment in oneself and others fuels the roaring engine of Ohtori Academy. The song resolves with the ironic reversals of images of light and shadow, elucidating the darkness of "Sodom, light, distance" (15-17), possibly referring to the "prince

of darkness" and his illusions. Following folkloric principles, the song depicts the motif of change through the act of uncovering deep-seated purpose, exposing its shadows and metaphorically describing the phantasms hiding within the light, resulting in the possibility of uncovering true meaning through rejection of the expected.

3.4. *The End(s) of the World*

Different cultures depict the motif of evil in various ways, with most portraying the influence of evil as greater within those groups or individuals who disobey cultural norms. Religious narratives emphasize the role of the Devil as the main source of spiritual and physical retribution, indirectly elucidating the purpose of cultural groups as inheritors and regulators of normative behavior. In a similar way, the series' antagonist, The Ends of the World, enforces the will of Ohtori Academy; at first, the mysterious sender of the rose-sealed letters that outline the specifics of each duel, is later revealed as the principal of the Academy and the former Prince, Dios. Similarly to the mythologized prince of darkness, his title evokes a sense of omnipotence, implying that even destiny is within his grasp, as long as there is someone who believes his illusions: "But sincerity by itself changes nothing. Without power, one finds themself merely depending on others to live" ("Someday, Shine with Me" 00:12:37-00:12:42). However, Dios is more akin to Milton's light-bringer than his Biblical counterpart – at first a sympathetic figure who, due to perceived injustice, rebels against a seemingly oppressive system, consequently turns into a shadow of his former self, destined to spend eternity in torturous remembrance of his, once glorious, past. The characters who receive the letters believe in the promised "eternity" and relinquish themselves to the "absolute destiny" they receive by bearing the rose signet. The characters remain convinced that they "shall eventually reach the castle and receive the power to revolutionize the world" ("For Whom the Rose Smiles" 00:05:45-00:05:50), and decide to fight in the duels, despite the disagreeable conditions: "But isn't all we're doing just ruining something vital to humanity anyway?" ("The Sunlit Garden – Finale" 00:09:24-00:09:30). Subsequently, each duelist appropriates oppressive strategies inherent to the system, exemplifying "fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him within, being consubstantial with him" (Burke 435).

Alternatively, the shadow play girls' performances exist outside of Dios's reach and effectively portray the banality and futility of the characters' search for lost happiness and meaningless attachment to eternity. Evocative of *Hamlet*'s "Mousetrap," the shadow girls put

on a dramatic performance for the students of the Academy, depicting the tragic story of the beloved Prince and the witch-like Rose Bride: "And so the witch imprisoned the Prince, and the world was completely enclosed in darkness. The witch roams this world of darkness even now" ("Seal of the Rose" 00:09:26-00:09:37). The shadow girls are silhouettes who, through their seemingly incorporeal forms, unravel reality; at times, they might represent the characters' guilt or conscience, or their deepest thoughts and regrets. During the series, Utena willingly responds to them, implying that she is aware of some of the inner workings of the Academy. However, the Ends of the World refuses to listen to them, dismissing their depictions of events as juvenile: "A very sophomoric play" ("Seal of the Rose" 00:12:21).

The series relies on dramatic irony as the foundational element of narrative structure and tension; its existence hinges on the conflict between what is and could be, but never will be (as long as the world remains unyielding, unchallenged). In the end, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* depicts the need for a different kind of eternity – one that rejects the stagnation of archetypal desire through self-sacrifice, leading to cathartic disillusionment; There is no prince. There is no witch: "In the end, all that stuff about the Prince and the castle holding eternity is merely make-believe" ("The Ends of the World" 00:10:02-00:10:07).

3.5. *The Sunlit Garden*

The sunlit garden in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is a recurring metaphorical and symbolic setting, often alluding to characters' backstories, which then become part of "a sensed and intimately known reality" (Valk and Sävborg 8). Initially introduced as both a confinement area (a gilded cage) and Anthy's place of respite, the garden would later form the backdrop for the fourth, titular episode ("The Sunlit Garden") which contains one of the main motifs which echoes the obsessive misconception of the entire series.

Inadvertently tied to the sunlit garden, roses of different colors appear as a consistent motif, whether as decorative elements (frames, ornaments), living plants, insignia or metonymic representations of duelists and the rose bride. Ancient cultures considered roses the principal flowers of funerary practice, some rituals expressing "the hope of a blessed afterlife" (Brenk 219). In some cases, blood-colored roses signify death or death-like wounds. In the series, roses have a metaphorical connection with the underworld, adorning physical spaces such as the elevator of the Black Rose Arc, which descends as the characters delve deeper into their pasts, or explicating metaphysical experiences (Anthy falls as the rose-filled arena crumbles, symbolizing her connection with the underworld). The role of roses shifts from ornamental to

oppressive, as black roses become the primary destructive instrument of the second arc, foreshadowing the physical violence of the final act. Red roses depict the ending of a transitory state; while Utena's rose in the duels is white, she recalls memories of meeting Anthy that imbue their color with a pink hue, signifying that experience, whether good or bad, leads to change. While the witch's red represents death and suffering, and Dios' white innocence and ignorance, Utena firmly stands between life and death, fearing change as it comes at the cost of her identity: "And Anthy was the Rose Bride, then and now. And she's a witch. That goes for you too. Both then and now, you're a girl. There's no need for you to fight with a sword in your hand" ("The Ends of the World" 00:14:06-00:14:22). The change in color foreshadows the transformation of the hero into the princess, signifying eventual transformation into the familiar witch-red, as all princesses inadvertently become witches when they cannot comply with the demands of the system, and remain as the exploited body: "You can become a noble, beautiful princess. Now, won't you give me that sword?" ("The Ends of the World" 00:14:23-00:14:26).

Historically, the language of flowers had a similar function to figurative language, expressing thoughts that could not be spoken aloud, often in abstract and subversive ways. Flowers held symbolic meanings tied to various mythological, religious, and scientific sources, creating an ever-evolving landscape of cultural expression and transformation. Similarly, Japanese tales like "The Legend of Konohanasakuya-hime" and "The Old Man Who Made the Dead Trees Blossom" portray the archetypal themes of life and death through the symbolic use of flowers. In these tales, flowers metonymically represent the passing of a lifetime through the loss of their essence, depicting their spiritual connection to people's fleeting lives, consequently mirroring the folkloric motif of change.

3.6. *The Grave*

Ohtori Academy positions itself atop a hill, gazing upon the world from a magnificent height; its outlines resemble a burial ground (*kofun*) with funerary bells marking the beginning of each duel. Historically, graves have been used for both burials and as part of sacrificial rituals. Folktales often depict graves as gates to the underworld or metaphorical representations of otherworldly journeys, as is the case with Nordic burial ships. Additionally, some rituals serve as reinterpretations of cosmic myths, which are an important theme in the series, since the Academy is metonymically structured as a microcosmos. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, graves serve as synecdochic representations of characters' fragmented identities, which are continually reshaped and suppressed by external expectations. Consequently, these interpretations

metaphorically represent the divide between archetypal desire and normative constraints, portraying the motif of change through personal transformation, which lies beyond inner and external limitations. This theme is portrayed in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* through the motif of coffins, which represent figurative death and rebirth.

Following the death of her parents, Utena hides in a third coffin that was seemingly made for her, refusing to believe that there is purpose to living a life destined to end in death: "There can't be anything eternal, can there?" ("The Love That Blossomed in Winter" 00:17:58-00:18:00). Coffins are a recurrent motif in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, with roses as symbolic engravings or funeral flowers, echoing the familiar frame-like borders that metaphorically represent the boundaries set by the Academy and the self-imposed rules characters create to protect themselves from harm. Stepping out of her coffin, Utena sees "something eternal," leading her to become the prince-like figure shown at the beginning of the series. However, even though she found a goal that keeps her from seeking death, her quest for the prince places her in a significantly larger coffin, deepened by her inability to confront the grief of her past: "But she's still in the coffin. No, not just her. We're in our coffins too" ("The Love That Blossomed in Winter" 00:19:52-00:20:00). Although Utena does not remember her past, she is consistently looking for her ideal (the representation of safety), while the viewer gradually discovers that her desire to become a prince emanates from witnessing someone's suffering: "Hey, save her! It's too cruel!" ("Seal of the Rose" 00:19:06-00:19:14).

The workings of Ohtori Academy reflect the illusory comfort of eternal death; it offers "something shining" at the expense of growth, false hope at the expense of meaningful existence. The only escape from a meaningless cycle with no beginning or end lies in envisioning a future: "After you graduate and leave here. Do you have anything you want to do?" ("The One Who Will Revolutionize the World" 00:17:34-00:17:38). The characters' journeys end with genuine hope for the future as Utena reaches out: "I came here to meet you. So don't be afraid of this world where we'll meet" ("Someday, Shine with Me" 00:14:35-00:14:40). Similarly, folktales undergo various processes to fit new context and audiences, often starting at the foundational level of social groups and communities. Adaptation of previous material occurs through a melding process of various aspects of the human experience, resulting in alternative forms that encompass rituals and traditions of the community, codifying them within new spheres of imagination. Authentic adaptation exemplifies the need for preservation through transmission: "the act of remembrance becomes oppositional and revolutionary when cultural survival is at stake" (Angel 1).

Revolutionary Girl Utena portrays the possibility of a future without being held back by the past and, with it, the capability for storytelling to exist in various forms and contexts, unburdened by past rules and expectations. The series emphasizes the need to discover personal identity and belonging through a process of rediscovery, letting go of the past and honoring it when necessary. Similarly, folklore depends on change through adaptation to variations over a certain period, while its transformative qualities reflect the cultural and social changes within a community. Consequently, the capacity for change ensures that folklore has a place in the world; while some of its characteristics may be lost to time, others can become more apparent, depicting the same cyclical exchange that follows most cultural processes.

4. *Princes and Princesses (Princes et Princesses)*

Princes and Princesses (2000) is an animated omnibus film directed by the French director Michel Ocelot, and it functionally represents folktales as stories within stories, or frame narratives. An old art teacher and two children, a boy and a girl, meet in an old cinema where they create different stories, each featuring a princess or a prince. The structure of the film metaphorically reflects the beginnings of folkloric transmissive practices through the characters' participation in shared cultural practices. The characters, represented by silhouettes, gather inspiration for their stories, perform them, and later prepare for the next tale, depicting a ritualistic routine that reflects the transmission of cultural values and beliefs. Mirroring ancient and traditional narratives, such as the Arabic *One Thousand and One Nights* and *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1476), the story cycle portrays everyday characters placed into wondrous, often dangerous situations, through which the narrative emphasizes the ever-changing connection between the past, present and future.

In the film, the storytellers become actors who perform imagined stories which portray different eras and cultures, consequently depicting the contemporary view of the manner in which these cultures have changed. Similarly, as the storytellers are both actors and audience during the creative process, they are themselves transformed and represent the continuously evolving boundary between the real and non-real. Likewise, the tales of *The Princes and Princesses* deal with the need to create something due to unfulfilled desires that are satiated in wondrous, often subversive ways. Each character, led by personal beliefs or values (that may be challenged) takes on a journey that ends with the recognition of their personhood through meaningful connection. The stories intertwine past with present and future in order to depict

the most relevant folkloric characteristics that have continuously shaped and redefined societal thoughts and values. The tales vary chronologically and geographically, but the actors remain the same; consequently, they become allegorical representations of themselves. Thus, the following subchapters will focus on the motif of change as exemplified through the archetypal notions of time and space, portraying its effects through the use of creative elements found in the series, such as shadow play and architecture.

4.1. *The Eternal Moment*

In *Princes and Princesses*, what was informs the present, and what will be is also informed by the present: "A presentist thinks that everything is present; more generally, that, necessarily, it is always true that everything is (then) present" (Ingram and Tallant). The creators of the silhouette stories exist outside of the story-space, a place untouched by temporal requirements of past, present or future. Similarly, the study of folklore lies at the boundary of perceived time, with animated media metaphorically representing the past through the lens of contemporary life. Characters who play out different historical roles inadvertently depict the characters as if they were presently alive, metaphorically tying all the tales to the present moment.

Reminiscent of the introductory scenes in Atamanov's *The Snow Queen* (1957), the characters in *Princes and Princesses* step out of their houses, meeting at a familiar cinema in a ritualistic manner, emphasizing that both time and place are relevant metaphorical structures that aid in folkloric preservation by being sufficiently unspecified so that they can be seen as universal or general. Indeed, the characters realize they exist outside of temporal restraints, and that their stories are not absolute, but are conditionally restricted: "If you were this / If you were that / If you drew / If you decided / If we invented / If we acted" (00:00:21 – 00:00:34). The characters, first inhabiting a present or atemporal space (the projection booth), turn into actors, now at the mercy of an all-knowing past and the unforeseeable future. Consequently, the stories of both actors and writers occupy two different spaces, reflecting the nature of folklore itself; a continuously ever-present and ever-changing existence.

Presentism focuses on the change of the present state through the passage of time (where, paradoxically, the present remains constant) and the change of present itself through a change in the state of present things: "to be replaced by other things, each of which will go out of existence in their turn" (Ingram and Tallant). In *Princes and Princesses*, this change becomes most apparent in two areas: the preparation phase during which the actors take on relevant roles and the scene setup (specifically, the mechanics of the *mise en scène*). The actors embody their

characters through a transformative sequence that is technically identical, but varies based on the provided setting. Once they enter the imagined world of the cinema, they act out imagined events that substantially differ from one another, but arrive and depart from the stage in a self-replicating process. Thus, the atemporal essence of the stories of the princes and princesses remains – everything else is subordinated to the present moment and remains ever-changing and inconsistent. Similarly, the present in *Princes and Princesses* is exclusive in an episodic sense: what was ceases to exist, and what will be is irrelevant or unknown to the actors of the present. What matters is the moment, and its existence extolled within the world of the cinema. The essence of the present moment lies in the experiential transformation of the stage and its characters; what the actors experience as real in the present moment, becomes (or is) real. Conceptually, the past becomes irretrievable because its realized experience is part of a present moment that has ceased to exist.

The notion of present time is most apparent in the third ("The Cruel Queen and the Fabulo Trainer") and final tale ("The Old Lady's Coat") of the series. "The Cruel Queen and the Fabulo Trainer" portrays a ruthless queen from the year 3000 who uses the powers of her mega-radar to incinerate all suitors, while "The Old Lady's Coat," set in the nineteenth-century Japan, shows an elderly woman who attempts to return home, but a bandit follows her, intending to steal her priceless coat. Both stories depict events occurring over the course of a single day; the Fabulo's trainer evades the radar to win the princess's hand and the old lady forces the bandit to carry her to different places until nighttime. Through an archetypal depiction of a lifetime using the symbolic imagery of the rising and setting sun (birth and death), the stories portray the necessity of looking at the present with renewed focus in order to honor the efforts of contemporary creators of folklore. The tales portray the motif of change through contrasting time periods in order to depict the atemporal nature of folktales, exemplifying that certain archetypal narratives can transcend the boundaries of time. Consequently, the stories revitalize traditional folktale themes, reflecting the nature of folklore, which continuously evolves in order to adapt to contemporary needs.

4.2. *The Shadow of the Past*

Shadow theatre (or shadow play) often depicts the interdependence of light and shadow through silhouettes that form a persisting, but metonymic image of reality, a shadow: "the figures she cuts out and constructs were originally inspired by the puppets used in traditional Eastern shadow theatres, of which the silhouette film is the logical conclusion" (*The Art of Lotte Reiniger* 00:03:25-00:03:34). *Princes and Princesses* employs a stylistic technique that is most

closely related to the origin of storytelling practice, the source of which lies in creative shadow play of earliest civilizations, with a general agreement that "shadow theater originated in Asia, either in India, Indonesia, Central Asia, or China" (P. Chen 26). Traditional shadow puppets were made of materials that closely resembled aspects of living beings, whether human beings or animals: "in India, for example, puppets are built with the skin from animals that have died from a natural death. In Asian tradition . . . according to the personality of each figure" (P. Chen 3).

The actors in the film, however, breach the boundaries of reality by becoming the silhouettes, unlike ancient puppeteers who are separate from the characters they perform: "even if Nang Yai performers are standing, they lift the figures above their heads, being in the same sort of position as the performer in Wayang kulit [theatre] and Indian tradition: below the shadows" (Honorato 4). In *Princes and Princesses*, the actors are themselves shadows, whether on stage or beyond. In line with ancient iconography, engravings and scripts, silhouettes in the film have items or accessories that emphasize their position or role in the play, resembling "metaphorical and metonymic constructs that were used as identity markers to identify individual people" (van der Moezel 93). For instance, the story set in ancient Egypt ("The Fig Boy") features characters with linen tunics, *nemes* headdresses, pectorals, *shenti*, while future tales portray unconventional accessories and clothing that denotes status through employment of various shapes (sharp edges representing the queen). The characters in the stories interact through meaning-making action and concepts "represented partially in an iconic way through the forms and movements of manual (and other) gestures" (van der Moezel 126).

Depictions of the past are most prevalent in "The Fig Boy" and "The Sorceress," which adapt the imagery of past eras to contemporary folklore, making them both familiar and unfamiliar. In both tales, historical depictions portray the motif of change through contemporary transformations of archetypal characters and settings. In "The Fig Boy," the sun mechanically sets, lowered on the evening solar barque (Mesektet) with the ancient god Ra, while "The Sorceress" depicts a seemingly futuristic fortress which visually contrasts medieval castles and metallic garments. Following the principles of contemporary adaptation, the characters' appearances are not exact historical replicas, but contain essential characteristics that exemplify the spirit of the portrayed time periods: "How can the spirit of an author be preserved in an adaptation? Not by literal illustration and replication of the original narrative content but by echoing the inventiveness of the author in a similarly original approach for the adaptation" (Rall 304). Similarly, their interactions are contemporary transformations of historical gestures,

which reveal changes in cultural norms and values: "they tell [the stories] three times, with slight variations. And then, the younger generation contributes to them too . . . we embrace this idea of fantasizing, of 'spinning a yarn.' We are metaphorically 'sitting around the campfire'" (Rall 436).

In *Princess and Princesses*, the gestures are further emphasized by the use of light, which has an illuminating function, representing the boundary between the actors, the stage, and the silhouettes, thus revealing the most relevant constituents of a story: "they hoped they would reveal for all to see, inestimable, hidden qualities" (van der Moezel 93). Light symbolizes the wondrous, the intuitive, the ornamental; the characters wear shining jewelry, bright celestial sets fill the backgrounds, beams of light move across the stage. The effect of light persists throughout the scenes, but metaphorically emphasizes the form of the silhouettes, revealing the hidden depths of the unseen through the interplay of light and darkness: "the affection made by the light, is still in our eyes; and when that is gone by degrees, we see clearly in dark places" (della Porta 363). Illuminated space serves in the film as the foundational element of the setting design, depicting places and structures relevant to the characters (castles, pyramids) which exemplify their relationship to the environment through experience, often mirroring the characters' inner worlds (the color of the background changes during important, shocking moments). The shadow-like characters, at times, become their environment, melt into parts of large crowds, extend beyond the confines of their silhouette to become part of a larger whole. Consequently, their existence metaphorically reflects the light and darkness of human existence. Animated media explore similar topics, but alter historical narratives in order to provide new perspectives, unburdened by social expectations that plague artistically representative media. As such, animation is a medium that invites the viewer to question their preconceived notions of archetypal narratives, which in turn can lead to the reconstruction of personal identity.

4.3. *The Sublime Space*

Namely, the stories in the omnibus film *Princes and Princesses* reveal a dream-filled space in which actors can play out every conceivable life, limited only by their imagination; magic swords and rings from fantastical stories turn into a mechanical device capable of transforming anyone into whatever or whoever they speak into existence: "the word becomes flesh and phantoms of the mind have substance" (Tatar and Gates Jr. 24). The stage turns into an entrance to another world, in which scenes become substantial reflections of reality, directing the viewer's gaze to external reality that is connected to the world of the stage: "spaces must be

sensitive to events outside themselves. They must bring certain external events into themselves" (Adcock and Turrell 19).

Architectural elements in *Princes and Princesses* echo the sentiment that storytelling is an illusory but permanent part of culture; castles, magical fortresses, and real-life buildings are transparent, truth-revealing: "new architecture of glass to illuminate the painting from unseen sources with the actual light of nature itself" (Mannoni 25). Thus, the setting reflects the outcome of various experiments that lead the viewer to the beginning of cinema, from the first *camera obscura* to-nineteenth century stage diorama: "changing effects of light and shadow, compressing time, for instance, by moving through the cycles of the day and night" (Mannoni 25). Numerous objects in the film draw upon imaginary and impractical machinery designs, utilizing both past and present knowledge of the world to create natural and mechanical architecture; the sorceress' fortress births unseen inventions, the statue princess' dragon has robotic limbs, the Fabulo's world is entirely mechanical. This interplay between organic and artificial architecture not only depicts the folkloric beginnings of cinema, but portrays the sublime through architectural representations of awe-inspiring settings and landscapes.

The set design in *Princes and Princesses* portrays the sublime through the harmonious balance between divine nature and man-made wonders, depicting structures that both inspire and evoke fear, consolidating humanity's greatest desires with their deepest concerns. Scenes from "The Old Lady's Coat" show the peaceful scenery of Hokusai's Japan, presenting images of Ukon no Baba, Kirifuri Falls and Mt. Fuji, symbolizing the realization of the impermanence of existence that the sublime easily evokes: "Pursued, the firefly / hides in the moon / Autumn breeze in the branches / Brown snow before white snow" (00:41:52-00:42:11). The film portrays the sublime in its many forms, not shying away from unpredictable and grotesque depictions found in "The Fig Boy," in which the intendant, due to scheming against the queen's orders, suffers death by decapitation: "The Queen's treasure, all mine!" (00:19:13).

The influence of the sublime in "The Cruel Queen and the Fabulo trainer" depicts the fearsome disintegrating ray which reveals the potential suitors' locations, emphasizing that one of the roles of the sublime is familiarization with the unknown through the subversion of the unfamiliar: "the presence of Being, [or] the presence of the invisible within the world of the everyday" (Nesbitt 178). The sublime, in the sense of "overwhelming greatness" (Nesbitt 179), is most evident in "The Sorceress," as her fortress emphasizes the principal aspects of the sublime, which are, according to Nesbitt, infinity, vastness, magnificence, and obscurity (179),

through endless pathways leading to fantastical lakes, giant halls filled with inventions, mechanical dragons, and anachronistic repeating ornaments that make the fortress both familiar and distant: "The avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation" (Lyotard 18).

4.4. *The Need for Preservation*

The first tale in the film, "The Princess of Diamonds," depicts a statue-like princess trapped in a hidden, enchanted gazebo, surrounded by a field of grass with scattered diamonds. The princess sits on a throne that rises every time a prince takes one of the diamonds, after which she formulaically recites the necessary steps that lead to her freedom: "Before the sand in this hourglass runs out, you must find all the diamonds" (00:04:16-00:04:18). Any person who wishes to marry the princess would have to find all the diamonds that form her broken necklace by following the provided symbolic instructions, which metonymically depict partial representations of each step of the process. Similarly, monuments and sculptures often reflect the need for preservation of time through (re)memory, representing the motif of change by reshaping cultural identity. Consequently, the statue-like princess metaphorically represents change as a fundamental aspect of folklore, as her freedom results in the temporal breaching of her mythical boundary. Princes, transformed due to failure, help the story's hero, portraying that communal action is one of the main mechanisms of folkloric change, apparent in all the analyzed films and series.

Furthermore, the preparation phase for the first tale in *Princes and Princesses* begins with the actors describing the foundational elements of their story as they reflect on the historical garments their "grand-grand-grandparents" wore, which they use as inspiration. The characters "enter the realm of the audience, the realm of readers, the realm of change" (Tatar and Gates Jr. 19) as the actors begin their stories through relation to historical imagery, which they combine with contemporary storytelling, leading to an experience that feels both familiar and unknown. The film connects past, present, and future, conserving memory as "something seemingly stable, even if it is always also malleable and subject to misreading and reinterpretation" (Tatar and Gates Jr. 7). In the film, the past informs the present through the process of storytelling, beginning with the spoken word (oral tradition), resembling "a vast network of oral storytelling" (Tatar and Gates Jr. 8), ending with the visual medium which embeds information, and makes it substantial through restriction.

The silhouettes in *Princes and Princesses* bear no resemblance to specific living figures, allowing for a portrayal of stories evocative of the entire human experience, thus providing answers to timeless questions of tradition, remembrance, and community: "Who will tell your story? My story? Or, for that matter, our story? And whose story is 'our' story?" (Tatar and Gates Jr. 3). Their stories depict the essence of humanity's great love toward all that serves as a reminder of our impermanence, but gives hope for the possibility of the eternal moment: "For all of these things melt away and drift apart within the obscure traffic of time. Live well and live broadly. You are alive and living now. Now is the envy of all of the dead" (*World of Tomorrow* 00:14:50-00:14:57).

5. *The Magician's Hat (Čarobnjakov šešir)*

The Magician's Hat is a Croatian animated film, directed by animator and director Milan Blažeković (1990). The film depicts Thistle, a dwarf magician, who, with the help of his forest friends, defeats the Ice Emperor Frostkill, "bringing life back to every corner of the magical forest" ("Čarobnjakov šešir, 1989"). The film portrays the duality of existence through an archetypal battle between good and evil, in which The Ice Emperor and his witches symbolize death through annihilation, and disruption of the natural order, while Thistle represents the necessity of bringing balance to the world through preservation, embodying the transformative forces of life.

The film offers a vision of an anachronistic fantastical story that connects characteristics of various classical myths and legends with a wide variety of mythological beings and folktale tropes that emphasize distinct regional customs and beliefs. In particular, variations of tales involving heroic boys and fairies who assist them, such as "Vile i deček" and "Vile dečka čuvale" (Koprivšek and Mencin, 2002), served as foundation for the mythological narrative of the film. The presence of mythical beings such as fairies, dwarves and talking animals evokes early animistic beliefs depicting the life force found in all beings, asking "whether the faces of all others— including all animal others— are intimations of divinity in the world" (Wallace 5). The film affirms the role of imagination as one of the most significant aspects of folklore, emphasizing that "there is a sign that even those flimsiest of things, whispers and dreams, are more than fugitive and futile acts of imagination" (Tatar and Gates Jr. 23). Consequently, the film explores the interconnected concepts of life and death through the conflict with Emperor Frostkill, the archetypal ruler of the ice empire.

5.1. *Summer*

Folkloric studies depict summer as the season of joy and communal living, as some of the most important festivals and celebrations occur during the season, such as the summer solstice festival and various fertility rituals[5]. These celebrations often involve group activities, such as drinking and eating, and are rooted in traditions involving divine forces or supernatural beings. Consequently, *The Magician's Hat* portrays mythological and fantastical creatures as natural constituents of ritual and religious settings, and as intrinsically tied to folkloric transmissive practices. As such, the film gives folkloric relevance to the creatures, providing its own interpretations of their role within the realm of contemporary animation. Supernatural creatures, such as dragons, fairies, and dwarves, depicted in a variety of shapes and colors, represent the motif of change through their "othered" variations, which resemble their mythological sources, but also establish a new relationship to myth and fantasy through the use of contemporary creative forms.

Folkloric depictions of fairies often represent humanity's desire to understand inexplicable natural occurrences, such as sudden deaths or natural phenomena, explained by tales in which people would try not to "offend the wicked old fairies, or they would do us dreadful injury" (Briggs 154). Similarly, Frazer portrays customs that served to alleviate these worries through blessings of tree-spirits or fairies which were gained by taking a piece of the forest (a tree or a branch) into the home. Thus, fairies hold an intrinsic connection to nature and are often portrayed as containing powers that metaphorically represent summer: "We carry Death out of the village, / We bring Summer into the village" (qtd. in Frazer 82). In the film, fairies live in the evergreen meadows "where the enchanted tree provides power and protection to anyone who seeks shelter" (00:00:35-00:00:45), mirroring the familiar notion of fairyland as the realm of "eternal summer" (Döring 16).

Historically, dragons were depicted in various ways, mostly as symbols of chaos and destruction, but also as metaphorical boundaries between life and death: "A hero vanquishing a dragon was the rising sun conquering the night" (Flieger 10). However, the archetypal dragon in *The Magician's Hat* holds hero-like qualities, with his flame metaphorically evoking the breath of life, mirroring the fires of Midsummer and rites of the cult of the sun. Typically described as "a beast born from the earth or living underground" (Evans 100), in the film the

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[5] Famous festivities and rituals involved traditional processions and songs performed in honor of the Slavic gods Lado and Lada, whose ceremonies were practiced during both spring and summer (Dragić 45).

dragon is depicted as a metaphorical bridge between the people who participate in summer festivities, and the unknown realm of summer deities and supernatural beings. As such, the dragon in *The Magician's Hat* signifies the sacred fire of summer, representing life opposing winter's death, motifs which culminate in scenes depicting the dragon's fiery breath melting the ice witches (01:03:41). Similarly, the fire metonymically echoes the hearth which was part of everyday storytelling rituals, portrayed as the only source of life, with the dragon taking on a more classical role as a mythological creature which hoards treasure, depicted as the life-giving fire (00:57:17).

Dwarves, traditionally described as "master artisans who serve as donor figures" (Hafstein 111), hold various functions in the film, most of which emphasize connection to the natural world through various feats of magic. Like fairies and dragons, dwarves are depicted as beings inherently tied to earthen rocks and mountains, and, as such, hold a metaphorical connection to the summer rites and rituals which were often held in temples and cemeteries. In the film, Thistle can produce fairy-like magic, but also receives a magic rock from Oberon, the dwarven king, which leads to a golden sword that vanquishes death, representing his connection to dwarven mythology (00:38:20). Consequently, the dual nature of his background symbolizes his role as the connection between different creatures (as the hero) and, inadvertently, as the personification of summer, which contains the renewing force of spring, and the abundance of autumn.

Therefore, the presence of fantastical beings helps reinforce the folkloric desire for meaningful connection with the environment, which aids in understanding of personal history and identity. At first, Thistle begins his journey with the goal of saving the fairy queen. Consequently, his quest turns into a struggle that transcends his desires, ending with the realization of personal and communal responsibility toward cultural and social preservation. Similarly, his transformation mirrors the primary conflict of the film, which represents a wider folkloric issue – the inevitability of deterioration – as one of the main vehicles of folkloric archival and preservation efforts.

5.2. *Autumn*

The study of folklore portrays autumn as a season most influenced by changing conditions, as the season is often considered a transitory period between summer and winter. Contemporary depictions of autumn emphasize its visually appealing characteristics, focusing on the study of color as a seasonal aspect that easily lends itself to change. As such, contemporary folkloric

studies, such as Löffler's, which focuses on analyzing figurative properties of color and semantic color associations based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Color (8), frequently analyze the metaphorical uses of color in media (and their universal significance) in order to uncover various cultural meanings that can provide insight into the artistic development of communities. According to Löffler, color-related language is often reflective of transmissive practices, as color meanings are often "both biologically based and learned" (32) from an early age in the process of enculturation. Consequently, color shares the same importance for the analysis of animated media, since it allows for metaphorical expression through creation of abstract imagery, with colors that purposefully reflect inner states and experiences, often in a more extensive and personal manner than other media.

The Magician's Hat opens with a yellow-orange scene, colors that symbolically represent late summer and autumn, as they contrast with the pulsating blue winter hues that invigorate the residents of the icy empire. Birds of various colors fly through the forest, revealing the blue shadows of the trees, symbolizing the transition of autumn to the realm of winter, and with it the notion of death as an ever-present part of life (00:00:28-00:00:36). In contrast, Thistle creates golden pears, which are symbolically tied to the sunlit scenery, emphasizing the connection of late summer and early autumnal harvests to the folkloric motifs of life and preservation: "marking the end of the agricultural year, the time of animal slaughtering and storing food for winter, represented by abundance and satiety" (Valentsova 66). In *The Magician's Hat*, yellow hues symbolically represent warmth and plenitude through images of sunlight and food, but they also emerge during times of great hardship, unexpectedly appearing in near-death situations to point to the idea of hope. The divine light of the oak tree, stifled by winter's breath, metaphorically represents the transition between seasons and, through them, the waning of life (00:07:48). Conversely, in many countries, yellow-green hues often signify danger or health issues, "partly due to the fact that yellow is in real/physical connection with death" (Bálizs 101). Alternatively, according to McCaffery, yellow has been portrayed as a royal color (China) or a color representing items, animals or qualities related to numerous deities (the golden egg depicting the sun, yellow garments that represent the truth): "all that was pure, all that had been refined, and hence glory and wisdom" (17).

In line with this, autumn represents the motif of change through both invigorating and life-threatening motifs. Folkloric studies connect these contrasting motifs through the depiction of autumn which, lying between summer and winter, inherits characteristics of both seasons: "summer with growth and development, autumn with maturity or decline, and winter with

death" (Fischer and Macauley 12). At the same time, autumn is a season of joyful abundance, but it is also a period of contemplation, signifying matured existence. Additionally, autumn depicts seasonal preparation as representative of the motif of loss, showing that "the very existence of the season is emphasized by the preparation of death and in that sense, even the prosperity of Nature in autumn appears to be quite ephemeral" (Majumdar 534). Numerous folktale adaptations, such as Ivanov-Vano's *The Twelve Months* (1956) and Pekar's *Vasilisa the Beautiful* (1977), portray this contrasting relationship, the first movie representing death through different blues of the winter landscape contrasted with autumnal fire, while Vasilisa's story depicts her loss and departure through blue winter skies opposing golden autumnal feasts.

Consequently, autumn is depicted as the near-final stage of one's life, in which people find comfort in solitude, but still seek out the numerous joys of the outer world. Similarly, in the film, the mountain dragon lives a peaceful solitary life, but resists winter-wrought sleep in order to help Thistle reclaim the forest (00:59:38). Likewise, forest creatures contemplate the arrival of winter in warm huts, but resist change as they realize it might come at the expense of their lives (00:18:20-00:18:44). Therefore, autumn represents a season that depicts both the waning of life through loss of color, and the hope for renewal through the motif of change, which is the primary mechanism of seasonal transition.

5.3. *Winter*

The study of folklore portrays the motif of change through seasonal transformation and living practices relevant to early societies, which depended on different, often predictable, aspects of changing seasons, such as weather and day length. People's lives were deeply influenced by seasonal cycles, the effects of which were often attributed to supernatural forces or deities. The seasons which most closely represent the interconnected nature of death and rebirth are, in most Slavic cultures, winter and spring. *The Magician's Hat* portrays winter through imagery connected to the archetypal antagonist, emperor Frostkill, who metaphorically represents death and stagnation. Unlike depictions found in traditional folktales, such as "Little Red Riding Hood" (Perault, 1697; Grimm 1812) and "The Willful Child" (Grimm, 1815), which show death as punishment or a sudden occurrence avoided through trickery, *The Magician's Hat* portrays death as a natural stage of life. The film echoes pre-modern cultural practices which imagine death as the gateway leading to transformed existence; as Assmann explains: [t]he deceased now has behind him the rites that have transformed him into a deified ancestral spirit. So equipped, he begins the journey into the beyond" (158). As death lies at the boundary between existence and non-existence, it is one of the most relevant motifs in *The Magician's Hat*, since

it represents the transformative divide between the real and non-real, a theme central to the study of contemporary folklore.

In the film, winter is formulaically depicted through the setting of the Ice Empire, "the realm of eternal ice and winter, deadening everything that looks forward to life" (00:01:12), thematically tying the season to motivic elements which emphasize feelings of grief and hopelessness. Winter is essentially connected to emperor Frostkill, the deified representation of death, through motivic qualities related to water and ice, which are both sudden and transitory. Mirroring this dual nature of the season, the ice emperor's ship represents the boundary between life and death, symbolizing the pathway to another existence. Echoing ancient mythological sources, Frostkill's funerary ship rides across a great river that connects life-sustaining areas, "the hydrographic network—crucial for the selection of a position to build a settlement" (Buzov 361), emphasizing his role as the mythical ferryman who guides living beings to their deaths.

Various tales, such as Andersen's "The Snow Queen," depict winter as a natural force which incurs death through a life-eroding process, which begins with the motif of coldness. Similarly, the characters in *The Magician's Hat*, frozen by the ice witches, enter a state that disallows growth, empathically contrasting the cyclical, ever-evolving nature of the world. As such, the film introduces winter-induced death as a state of deep sleep, setting into motion the various posthumous rituals and Slavic mourning traditions: "[one] reads a farewell letter, shares a memory of the deceased, allowing those present to say their final goodbyes to the departed" (Tepšić 33). Likewise, folkloric studies examine regional winter traditions, most of which involve the burning of a ritual fire or cultural practices that involve the motif of the sun, symbolizing its role as a restorative force: "He begins the day as a youth and dies each night as an old man" (Gimbutas 747). The film's portrayal of winter as personified death exemplifies that the notion of life presupposes deterioration, and the viewer cannot comprehend the thought of a deathless eternity: "in whichever sense somebody's intellect continues to exist as a substance after the person's death, it would seem that it ceases to be human" (Ebbesen).

5.4. *Spring*

Echoing ancient mythological sources, the forest in *The Magician's Hat* is a place that can only be accessed through a meaning-making, transcendental act: "It can only be reached with the help of imagination" (00:00:15). Its central tree resembles an oak tree, famous for its longevity, consequently depicting a mythological connection to the world tree, Yggdrasil. Similarly, the motifs of rebirth and eternal youth, representative of the spring season, are inadvertently tied to

depictions of such inaccessible, distant places. Therefore, *The Magician's Hat* depicts an archetypal tale of death and rebirth, symbolically representing "a central unifying myth [which] connects seasonal cycles with romantic quests; the hero is equated with spring, his enemies with winter" (Baer 80).

The revival narrative reflects ancient ritualistic practices, which frequently involved various spring motifs, such as leaves and flowers, as representative of the nature of renewed life. Various folkloric studies examine numerous interpretations of traditions representing the motif of spring, the most relevant of which are the rituals involving Slavic Green George, often depicted as a tree-spirit connected to motifs of various trees and flowers ("Jack in the Green"), and Slavonian kings and queens (*ljelje*) who, during springtime, wear garments decorated with flowers and perform ritualistic songs and sword dances (Dragić 43). In Slavic folklore, according to Dragić, ritual songs were performed based on cycles corresponding to seasons, often including superstitious or magical enchantments of accompanying songs which, performed during Queen's Day, were associated with nature and greenery, while rain was sacred to people who performed *dodolske* songs (44). In *The Magician's Hat*, similar rituals provide a momentary escape from the idea of death, portraying characters who embody the lighthearted nature of spring through daily celebrations of life: "I watch her dance every night" (00:08:37), portraying folk dance as the mechanism which "reveals consensual and conflictual cultural processes" (Hanna 40). The spring rituals of the film mirror ancient tales, such as the myth of Persephone, which explains the cyclical nature of the seasons. Similarly, the film depicts Thistle as the hero who must visit and leave the underworld, perpetually renewing the cycle of life and death.

In *The Magician's Hat*, the hero vanquishes personified death, and is rescued by love, his story ending with the echo of the ever-present hope for the future and power of love, in spite of whatever tragedy befalls him. The characters are part of a greater narrative and feel the fear-inspiring claws of its being, but share their stories nonetheless, in hopes that they would be remembered "by practically anyone in the community" (de Rhett 646). Their stories, then, would help anyone who views them, to remember: "That you are here—that life exists and identity, / That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse" (12-13).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show that the motif of change is a foundational element in folklore which contemporary research has shown through the preservation and analysis of a wide range of rituals, tradition, stories, and practices that are interdependent, mutually influential, and continuously evolving. The paper analyzes three animated films and an anime series, all of which represent adaptations of folktales or folk myths.

The Legend of Hei depicts the motif of change through the transformative connection between the self and the environment, portraying that change is a foundational aspect of folkloric practice, which evolves through the continuous focus on self-growth, development of communal practices, and preservation of nature. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* examines transformation through the connection of love, self-sacrifice and reaffirmation of identity, emphasizing that change emboldens folkloric action through consistent reassertion of personal identity, elucidated by a willingness to take action, in spite of one's fears and worries. *Princes and Princesses* exemplifies the motif of change through a dynamic connection to notions of time and place, clarifying the position of folklore studies as the foundational link between past, present, and future. *The Magician's Hat* expands on the analyses of the motif of change, consequently portraying transformation as the primary force of folkloric development, elaborated through the cyclical nature of the seasons which symbolize the archetypal connection between life and death.

Transformative folkloric practice makes it relevant for contemporary artists as it involves the preservation of culture and language through use of tropes and archetypes that aim to revitalize and conserve tangible and intangible cultural resources. Ultimately, folklore's persistence in contemporary works can be attributed to its universality as it is concerned with human life and its major aspects that everyone shares (life, death, birth, love, and so on), the variety of its content, and its inherent capacity for change.

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