

STORYTELLING: PERFORMANCE, PRESENTATIONS AND SACRAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Various schools of tale research manifested the relationship of tales to the sacred based on their ideological preconceptions: the relationship between tales and the sacred is refused or accepted. In this article tales are investigated not from the perspective of the possible sacral referent(s) but rather it looks at them as a kind of communicational subsystem that is part of human culture. The focus is on revealing the specific features of sacral communication in the communication system of tales. Sacral communication is a special form of communication in which the elements of the communication model are transformed. The goal of sacral communication is exactly this kind of identity creation. This may be oriented towards creating a personal or a communal self-identity. Among its characteristics we may find the special type of language forms in which the predominance of linguistic elements pushes the sense conveying possibilities more into the background than usual, and those linguistic forms that restructure consciousness become emphasised. In this communication the tale telling is transformed by a language use characteristic of sacral communication (rhythm, repetition and rhetorical forms). Various examples explain that traditional tale telling creates a complex effect related to the visual, auditory, and kinetic senses: a modification and transformation of the self-understanding and self-identity that connect the world of tale telling to sacral communication.

KEYWORDS: traditional tale telling • sacral communication • tale as a language event • hermeneutics • phenomenology

APPROACHING THE CONCEPT OF THE SACRED

Various schools of tale research manifested the relationship of tales to the sacred based on their ideological preconceptions. There are two versions to be noted: one set of interpretations refused the relationship between tales and the sacred in general, the other however accepted it. Those researchers and schools that represent the main stream of scientific investigation either negate the possible relationship between tales and the sacred or they only accept an eliminated relationship since their position is already determined by the belief that the phenomena of the sacred come/came to existence as a product of diverse psychological and social motifs:

Most of these thinkers have taken up the implicitly theological position of trying to explain, or explain away, religious phenomena as the product of psychological or sociological causes of the most diverse and even conflicting types, denying to them any preterhuman origin (Turner 1987 [1969]: 4).

The sacral form of consciousness is not attributed to a general feature of the human mind but is regarded as a historical phenomenon, not as something that characterizes the reality of human consciousness but as a 'less developed' state of it. This later state of consciousness historically speaking progressively gives way to a new form of consciousness characterised by rationality, sound thinking, and insight. From this perspective the relationship between tales and the sacred may be interpreted as part of the historically developing human consciousness. Tales preserve traces of sacral phenomena and mythological-religious fragments. Tales are partly the result of the decay of sacral forms of consciousness and where the sacral form of consciousness is no longer capable of creating or sustaining the unified and constant mythological-religious worldview, the role of imagination becomes more and more important, fictionalisation begins and tales begin to form themselves.¹

The other possible approach to the relationship between tales and the sacred is based on the thesis that the sacred is a feature of human consciousness and that therefore tales are connected to these forms of human consciousness naturally. Tales do not compile and include mythological-religious elements inorganically or fragmentarily due to the demolishing forces inherent in historical processes but can be understood as a more general phenomenon of the sacral form of consciousness. These approaches – usually outside of mainstream research – interpret the world of tales in connection to the various domains of the sacred. Archetypical symbols,² astral mysticism, astrophysical mythemes,³ texts of initiation rites⁴ or complete religious systems (Láma Csöpel, Kovács 2002) are inbuilt in the texts of tales.

Anthropological research, however, would not investigate tales from the perspective of the possible sacral referent(s) but rather it looks at them as a kind of communicational subsystem that is part of human culture, understood as a network of communication systems. From this perspective the emphasis is not on pointing out to what particular religions or sacral phenomena the tales are related, but on revealing the specific features of sacral communication in the communication system of tales.

The system of thoughts and actions of sacral phenomena is a well regulated common practice in life in which "a community shapes itself for itself" and expresses itself for itself (Lovász 2002: 15). The appearance of the sacred in human relations is therefore a specific form of communication, a possible means for social and personal self-understanding, and for *autonoesis*.

TALES AND COMMUNICATION

Researchers who work on tales – as well as on questions of the sacred – would like to grasp the referents in tales, so they inevitably draw diverse conclusions and receive different results. Perhaps the most important question is whether it is possible to tackle tales before interpreting them on the level of the referent, and if so then what would

this mean in connection with the act of interpretation. If this is possible then tales could be interpreted not as a kind of object but as a certain type of process. Tales might have a philosophical, ethnological, psychological, cosmic, or anthropological field of signification (even if they contradict each other), although this is not what determines the ontological status of tales. If we think of tales as a peculiar form of communication then as part of communication in general they may carry instances of these fields of signification since in this case the aim of tales is not generating these meanings but setting up the communication process.

In Hungarian ethnology it was Irén Lovász (2002) who introduced the term of sacral communication into scholarly discourse.⁵ The fact that she has not interpreted the sacral as an external entity but as a possibility inherent in the process of communication in several fields – as well as in the domain of tales – made the reconsideration of the relationship to the sacral possible. Regarding the sacral, interpretations of tales investigated the objectified traces of some kind of sacral – manifested in motif analysis only or in the mystic interpretation of tales. Approaching the question from the aspect of sacral communications it seems that the concept of the sacred in tales has to be reframed. Accordingly not only did those tales that preserved ancient religious or mythic elements – either as a remainder of ancient tradition or by borrowing other elements representing a different world view – count as sacred, but also those in which we may find characteristically sacral communicational practice. Sacral communication is a special form of communication in which the elements of the communication model are transformed. In sacral communication the symmetric and variable relationship between the speaker and the listener is replaced by a rather asymmetric unity in which the speaker is seemingly the active party, the listener is passive or is not present in the scene of communication, not having an identical position with the speaker (for instance in the case of a prayer where the person praying talks to God, whose response arrives in an unexpected way and at an unexpected time).

Setting up the channel of communication differs in that the usual formulaic speech units become significant at other times and acquire meaning in themselves (see, for instance, the introductory or closing parts of a prayer). Whereas from the perspective of the code in everyday communication the goal is to convey information as precisely as possible, in sacral communication the impact or effect is derived from the act of changing the code system and from the act of reinterpreting the old codes. This is made possible by a special use of the codes. Examples are the anagram, disguising the name or the so-called *lingua sacra*, a special language use. Naturally the message also appears differently in sacral communication since apart from the direct message functions (praising God, prayer or request) a peculiar element is always present whose main goal is to call for the creation of self-identity. The goal of sacral communication is exactly this kind of identity creation. This may be oriented towards creating a personal or towards creating a communal self-identity. Due to successful sacral communication the speaker/sender will acquire a new self-identity of higher quality, which entails the organisation and transformation of his/her previous existential situation. Among its characteristics we may find the special type of language forms where the predominance of linguistic elements pushes the sense conveying possibilities more to the background than is usual, with those linguistic forms that restructure consciousness becoming emphasised: repetition, elimination, the narrowing of vocabulary, focused rhythm, full musical effects.

Contextual, non-verbal communicational elements closely belong to sacral communication. Those sensual experiences that relate to vision, taste, smell, touch, which together may contribute to the event and become more focused, emphasised and separated from everyday routines for the participants and become a real possibility for transforming and recreating a person's identity and reality.

Do tales, especially folk tales, have features that may be paralleled to this phenomenon? Some scholarly books by ethnographers strictly exclude any similar preconception since for them tales cannot be given roles other than their entertainment function, or at the most, moral teaching function, the rest is relegated to the domain of fantasy. These approaches mainly justify this exclusion by interpreting the sacred in the narrow sense of referring to some kind of religious, mythic form of consciousness. The same is true – albeit inversely – for those interpretations that approach tales from an almost religious devotion when reading a kind of ancient faith from the content of tales and creating a syncretic surrogate religion by using new elements, often borrowed from other religions. I think that interpreting the concept of the sacred from this point of view oversimplifies the question, neglecting and eliminating a few important aspects that relate to the order of spreading the tradition, to historical features of tales.

We have to address the problem of discourses on tales. Perhaps all of them divert attention; or more precisely and more carefully put, would they not delay the realisation of the essential if not the most essential feature of tales? Specifically, tales are basically and unquestionably linguistic phenomena, inseparably connected to language. It is important to clarify that tales do not need to be investigated as a linguistic phenomenon, we are not speaking of the vocabulary, grammar or style of tales when we interpret them as a *language event* using a key concept of New Hermeneutics:⁶ language and reality are intertwined inseparably, language creates reality. The existential mode of tales, their self revealing act therefore happens in language, by language; one existential mode, self revealing possibility of language is the tale, paraphrasing the famous sentence by Gadamer (1989: 470): *Being – in tales – that can be understood is language*.

Before continuing this train of thought, we need to face the problem that we usually read tale texts, unless we are fortunate tale researchers who meet good tale-tellers in person. Moreover tales, due to various preconceptions, are read in a rewritten stylised form. The situation is especially challenging since those rewriting the more original oral texts usually enforce a system of aesthetic expectations that is alien to them. Styling was born from the concept of written culture in which individually formed 'whole works' were produced, whereas tales include the characteristic feature of the time prior to these written works fitting into the canon (they also exceed them) according to which all works are fragmentary and become whole in something else by being completed by something else.

The textual existence of tales may be conceived as a system of relationships of an intertextual kind since tale texts travel through a route of transmitting tradition, so we should rather speak of tale labyrinths instead of individual tales. Tale texts therefore may never be regarded as finished works either on the temporal or on the spatial plane. Starting from folk tales, travelling from tale teller to tale teller, they become texts, textures in which the elements can be infinitely and freely varied in a peculiar way (and they remain so) and identical motives⁷ diversely intertwined will create new text vari-

ations. Written tales that have an author transform and recode those elements that are offered by folk tales, connecting them to the writer's stock of style and linguistic signs (see Boldizsár 2003: 16–18).⁸

As a communication process tales are not merely the means of conveying some kind of message. Communication is basically a type of exchange process (just as in other cultural subsystems we speak of exchange processes: in trade it is the goods, in media it is information, in science it is knowledge, etc.), however tales transgress the act of pure exchange without excluding its possibility. This may be obvious in relation to the 'modernisation' of tales. Technical achievements, historical events of recent times are present as message elements (Biczó 2003: 146), although the overloading of actualities leads exactly to the disappearance of the features of tales: in the best cases instead of tales only life stories remain (Keszeg 2011: 165). Tales therefore accomplish a certain type of communication, where the existence of communication itself – not language understood as a means – and existence revealing itself in language becomes graspable.

TALES AND SACRAL COMMUNICATION

If we approach the problem of the language of tales from the point of view of myths, the problem of the language of mythic texts is tackled – albeit in my opinion not with the necessary emphasis – in many instances of myth research. The case of Sir George Gray reported by Carl Kerényi (1988: 357–358) – who as the Governor-in-Chief of the British colony in New Zealand first learned the Maori language and then Maori mythology in order to be able to have a better contact with locals – highlights the fact that mythic stories do not function as language referents but as a peculiar language functioning within a language, themselves generating a network of referents. Doubled language not only had an ornamental-metaphoric role but was part of real communication.

Another passage needs to be quoted. A chapter in János Láng's *Myth and Tale* reports several stories in which referential relations do not form in the usual way (Láng 1979: 513).⁹ Texts are generated by a polysemantic word, most often a 'declination' of the hero's name. This may be paralleled to the already mentioned anagram research conducted by Ferdinand de Saussure (Starobinski 1980; Tokarev 1988: 199–200) in which he points out the fact that numerous antique literary (partly mythic) texts consist of the anagrammatic disguising and transcribing of the name of a god.

The performer-centred research school of Gyula Ortutay and Linda Dégh (for example, Ortutay 1981; Dégh 1993) provides essential information on the process of authentic tale telling. Moreover, the findings of Dávid Kara Somfai (2003: 189) give inspiration to rethink the process since during his Inner Asian fieldwork he met forms of epic tradition that make the world of tale telling more comprehensible.

A characteristic example is reported by Bruno Bettelheim: In India a peculiar healing technique was observed in which the patient visiting the doctor receives a tale 'on receipt', that is, the telling of the tale leads to healing:

[...] in traditional Hindu medicine a fairy tale giving form to his particular problem was offered to a physically disoriented person, for his meditation. It was expected that through contemplating the story the disturbed person would be led to visualize

both the nature of the impasse in living from which he suffered, and the possibility of its resolution. From what a particular tale implied about man's despair, hopes, and methods of overcoming tribulations, the patient could discover not only a way out of his distress, but also a way to find himself, as the hero of the story did. (Bettelheim 2010: 25)

According to ethnographic literature, the Indian tale collection *Panchatantra* was compiled for a similar therapeutic reason (Deppermann 2003: 34). In connection to the Indian tradition it is important to point out the concept of tales as a factor that forms the psyche, a force that is capable of mobilising physical or psychological possibilities that are not present elsewhere, or at least not in this form. Bettelheim analyses tales following this tradition as a projective escort to psychological development that present existential problems in powerful images so they become sizeable at various – conscious, preconscious or unconscious – levels therefore facilitating the understanding, self-understanding of the psyche and the creation of its self-identity. Modern psychological tale instrumentalisation follows the steps of this tradition when therapeutic functions are complemented by cognitive-diagnostic or prognostic elements (Deppermann 2003: 34–35).

The Estonian tale telling tradition also preserved the attitude of contributing sacral-magic significance to the act of tale telling itself. Richard Viidalepp reports on the Setu tradition that tale telling only took place in the darkest period of the year, before Christmas time and in the evenings. Tale telling was connected to taboos: if there was a recently born animal at the house tale telling might have exercised a damaging influence on the new-born animals. (Viidalepp, 2004; see also Metsvahi 2013)

There are objective, preserved elements found in the process of bequeathing tale telling when investigating the effect of tales. In “The Golden-haired Twins” (ATU 707), or in another version of the same tale “Two Pieces of Nuts” (Bódis 2003: 137),¹⁰ the story of the children sent to death by their fathers provides the main plot; on the other hand, as Péter Bálint (2012: 104–105) elaborated on in one of his studies, due to its mirroring technique – a tale in a tale – the tale retells the same story. In the Baranya (in south-west Hungary) version of this tale (Kovács 1988: 123–126) the tale telling is transformed within the tale and a language use characteristic to sacral communication (rhythm, repetition, rhetorical forms) appears as well as a kind of accompanying ritual. The twins, revealing their lives, place “two pieces of hazelnut each” in front of their royal father, who had renounced and attempted to destroy them before using a hoax. The hazelnuts clacking on the table make the king slowly realise his fatal mistake and he restores the original status quo: his children regain their royal dignity. In the tale, this strange ritual becomes significant because they read the hazelnuts, that is, they count them, as if stringing their true story onto the line of hazelnuts. This action resembles the use of the rosary in the Catholic tradition – a line of beads following each other in a certain order corresponding to the order of prayers –, determining the language forms as well, through which this action has its effect: it calms down and opens up the consciousness of the one praying towards a transcendental, higher truth (Rauhe, Schnack 2002).¹¹ At this point the tale definitely connects features of sacral communication to tale telling.

The performer-centred research school, even though not as a main aspect, describes or refers to the circumstances of tale telling. Data gathered from this research may be grouped according to the criterion of whether it affects the tale teller or the listeners.

Among the motifs related to the person of the tale teller the role of visibility is prominent. Many authors point out the visual accompanying elements of tale telling. Francis Lee Utley (1974: 23) recognises “the community generating cooperation between the tale teller and his/her audience” in visual signs, while Ágnes Kovács emphasised the scenery of tale telling: the tale teller makes visible, acts out almost all elements of the tale (Kovács 1987: 240–244), identifies those elements the audience knows well, and triggers the creation of a kind of inner film (Kovács 1974: 25). Another researcher from the same school, Magda Szapu, later discovered the significance of the accompanying visual elements in the process of bequeathing tales. Apart from certain cases, becoming a tale teller gains a feature of initiation, since for years the youth only listened to older tale tellers, learning their movements. After a while, the tale teller tests the ‘students’, he omits parts, or transforms them, so the learners have to pay attention closely and point out the mistakes intentionally committed by the tale teller. At the end of this process the new tale teller has the opportunity to replace the older tale teller at major occasions. (Szapu 1985: 17–18)

The Gypsy tale telling tradition is noteworthy for tale telling is an essential part of vigils even today – according to ethnographic data this was a characteristic function of Hungarian tale tellers, especially in Transylvania. What role might tale telling have had at vigils? For example, according to the Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopaedia László Márton’s¹² *Book of the Dead* consisted of two parts:

[...] he wrote 64 songs for the vigil for the dead of various ages, sexes and deceased in various states of health, in the second part he collected diverse prose texts. This reveals the fact that apart from tales different types of entertaining stories based on their own experiences, moral teachings as well as anecdotes were performed. (Ortutay 1977–1982)

Although ethnographic scholarship attributes entertainment functions to tales told during a vigil (either as an inorganic addendum or to prevent the people at the vigil from sleeping), based on other data, it is possible to presume that the tales in the above mentioned collection were significant in ways other than entertainment. If they were to entertain only and to pass time then it may seem as if these tales were told just for the sake of those present at the vigil. However if we look at tales of the vigil from the point of view of sacral communication we notice the following data: in the case of a dead adult person, only men were allowed to tell tales, while in case of a dead child women told fairy tales (ibid.). These two pieces of data, which might seem insignificant at first, refer to the fact that tales were not only addressed to those present but to the dead person as well. Consequently, tales were not only told to fulfil an entertainment function. As obvious parallels we may mention various Books of the Dead, especially the so-called Bardos from Tibet, since these texts were similarly recited next to the corpse for three days. Therefore in this case the act of tale telling directly reaches out to the domain of sacral communication.

Another essential aspect is reported by Ágnes Kovács (1974: 25). Creating the space for tale telling was a very important part of the event. At the arrival of dusk and darkness the light from candles or a fire made the venue a special place for those present. By this, the sacred space of tales and the profane space of the outside world became separated. This lightness/darkness dichotomy underlined the role of communication

elements that are not so emphasised and important in ordinary communication. Gestures become exaggerated, the volume is more dynamic, the tone is more differentiated. Tale telling turns into a kind of declamation, this type of tale telling is again a feature of sacral communication. (Lalèyè 2003: 313)¹³

Apart from the visual and auditory elements, attention needs to be paid to the fact that in forming subconscious structures and the later transformation of these structures, activities related to movement and touch have a special role. Almost all tale collectors report that the event of tale telling took place in the *fonó* (spinning barn) while threshing the corn, when the hands had a specific function. At first sight these circumstances have little significance, although they become important if we are aware of the fact that a major territory of human perception is touch. All activities carried out by hand help to achieve the state of concentration, absorption, and a meditative state of mind. As Costandi's illustration of the sensory and motor functions shows (see Costandi 2008), if we form the body according to the number of sensory and motor nerve endings, then among all parts of the human body the hands have the most nerves. Small objects in the hand (a piece of corn, a feather, a thread) generate intense stimulation that helps the audience's state of mind to receive those elements better, as well as reaching that point beyond everyday communicational processes.

A N E X A M P L E

In conclusion it is possible to say that during traditional tale telling the tale teller and the audience, due to a complex effect related to visual, auditory, and kinetic senses experienced a modification and transformation of their own self-understanding and self-identity, which both undoubtedly connect the world of tale telling to sacral communication. In this sense we may definitely separate the concept of the sacred from the previous concept of the sacred as a cognitive phenomenon. The sacred is a special form of communication that concerns the whole personality, influences it and brings about a kind of state of consciousness, which is the goal of all sacred ritual activity. This change in the state of consciousness may completely reshape the identity of the tale teller, the listener and even the entire community. Max Lüthi, an excellent researcher of German folk tales, considered the interpretation of epic texts as having a merely entertaining function as unsatisfactory.

'Exclusive entertainment' – for a long time this was the final thesis of folk tale research – draw conclusions of the proper recognition according to which folk tales, as opposed to myths, are a mere, aimless form of poetry. However, real poetry always strives for more than being pure entertainment. (Lüthi 1960: 76)¹⁴

Lüthi, most likely in the spirit of Walter Benjamin, treats the entertaining function as secondary and develops his folk tale interpretation according to aspects of reception and human needs. This is how he formulates one of the most important theses of his research: "All elements of our reality, even the least significant, most episodic ones, are striving to become language" (Lüthi 1960: 77).¹⁵

Therefore folk tales are linguistic phenomena which make it possible for the participants of the tale telling act – i.e. the tale teller and listener, sometimes the reader – to

face the key moment of identity formation through the text of the tale: on the one hand they become part of a linguistic tradition, on the other hand their self-interpretation (being the totality of their understanding of themselves and the world) becomes open to being reshaped. This possibility may be paralleled to those data that are the outcomes of research on shamanistic activities: shamanistic trance achieved by the proper technique – ritual body posture, special activity and/or reciting a text –, affects the participants of the shamanistic ritual, although on the other hand these techniques when ‘cited’, repeated outside their original context, exercise a similar influence as well.¹⁶ This means that the given linguistic pattern together with the elements of traditional tale telling is capable of exercising various effects due to the altered state of consciousness; these effects may be spiritual-psychological processes – creating individual and community identity – or even by physical healing (Somfai 2003: 192–194).¹⁷

Traditional tale telling may not only be researched using methods of existing traditions, although tales themselves contain references to the possibilities of sacred communication in tale telling. Those tales that use a special self-mirroring structure may engender new aspects since these tales make tale telling itself the subject of tales. How tales allow themselves to be interpreted is clear; as too are the roles and functions that are attributed to the subject or theme of tale telling within the act of tale telling. An excellent example for this phenomenon is provided by Péter Bálint, the head of the phenomenological tale research school, when he writes:

[...] within the fictional space of the tale the *tale telling* itself functions as a life story that reminds and contributes to the sanity and sobriety of those who listen, [...] despite its incompleteness, obeying the conventions of true speech, reveals precisely these elements. [...] Tale telling sensibly presents itself and creates the illusion that the tale was a speech about truth. The ‘tale’ woven into the texture of the fictional space of narration seems to be a kind of knowledge either possessed by a person who knows the fate of the hero and confronts his blindness with the help of a mirror-tale, or possessed by the hero himself who, during his adventures, had personally experienced and at the same time intended to reject the state of being cursed or being part of a ritualistic murder. The knowledge gained or received from the various narrative forms helps to create and formulate narrative identity by retelling and interpreting the narration. (Bálint 2010: 104)

The creation of narrative identity is presented in the tale of “The Cursed Prince Who Was a Hedgehog” (Csenki 1974: 16–24), a tale close to tale type ATU 441.

– Brother-in-law, aren’t you bored? Because I really know how to tell stories!
 – Well tell me a story then! – says Rudolf.
 – Once upon a time – she says – there was a little hedgehog. The little hedgehog got married. He left his wife when she was pregnant. He came here and here he got married again. His first wife was called Ludinca. And well, listen carefully brother-in-law! Here is your wife, she has already spent two nights in a bed with you, and then she suddenly says: “Rudolf, my husband, put your arms around me, so that I can give birth, because I know I can’t even move!” But when you get home, eat, but don’t drink coffee, because my sister, that bitch has drugged it. (Csenki 1974: 22–23)

Basing our conclusion on the text we may state the following: the tale is a real story, it is even the only story based on reality, the life story of a cursed prince while all other texts in the tale prove to be false. Until the prince realises the truth of this story, he thinks of it as a forgettable text, however when the revealed truth becomes verified it gains a performative force and turns the course of events towards a happy, fulfilled ending. This is how it becomes the locus of experiencing presence, a presentation: i.e. in the tale the possibility of sacred communication opens up.

We may find an even more conspicuous example in the Hungarian folk tale using the self-mirroring technique of telling a tale within the tale. This tale is a variant of tale type ATU 707 and its title is "Two Pieces of Nuts".

Once in the king's garden three girls were hoeing. They were hoeing in the garden as a service to the king. And the king was walking by the garden, the girls were chatting and the king started to listen.

One girl said:

– If the prince married me I would bake such a huge piece of bread that it would be enough to feed an entire group of soldiers.

The other one said:

– If the prince married me I would weave such an enormous sheet that it would be enough for the entire group of soldiers.

Then the third one said:

– If the prince married me I would give birth to a child who would have the moon on his chest and a star on his forehead.

So the king married her.

And the king had nothing else but a cook and she had a daughter she wanted the king to marry.

So when the king married one of the three girls, the cook and her daughter were sent away. The king, his wife and her mother moved into the house.

So when they were married the prince – who had already become king – was recruited. He had to leave to go to war. And his wife became pregnant at home.

The king was away when the child was born; and it really happened so, just as the wife said. When she gave birth to the little girl, a letter was sent to the young king that happened just as the wife predicted.

And then the woman, who was the cook before, became angry with him for not marrying her daughter. When the postman walked by they – the cook becoming an innkeeper living at the edge of the village – always called him in and made him drink a lot of spirit so that he would read the letters written to the king.

Then they read the young queen's letter and they added as if the queen had written it:

– What shall we do with your wife; she gave birth to two puppies?

And the king replied that the puppies must be locked up in a barrel and allowed to flow down the river; he ordered his wife to be locked up.

And then soon enough the king returned home and he took the old cook and her daughter back into his household. And then he married the daughter of his cook.

Well, big wedding festivities followed again.

Then a man displayed two big bowls of nuts when all that people came together, who would be able to count them, say a different word for each and every piece.

The two small children landed at the forester. Well, they did not have children. And when they took the barrel out of the river, opened it, and saw two little children inside. They were very happy to have two little children.

These two little children also went to the wedding; they were seven years old by that time.

As the man asked who could count the nuts nobody dared to be courageous. These two children were there and they came forward to count the nuts.

Well, then the lords, even the king himself said:

– No, you are not able to count them.

But they continued:

– Well, now you are allowed to count¹⁸ the nuts, if you can.

And then they began to count them; always two pieces had to be picked out.

And then they began:

Two pieces of nuts
Once three girls hoed in the king's garden
Two pieces of nuts,
And these three girls told a tale,
And the king listened,
Two pieces of nuts,
And he listened,
Two pieces of nuts.
One said,
Two pieces of nuts,
If the king married me,
Two pieces of nuts,
I would bake such a loaf of bread,
Two pieces of nuts,
That would feed all the soldiers,
Two pieces of nuts.
The other one said:
Two pieces of nuts,
If the king married me,
Two pieces of nuts,
I would weave a big sheet,
Two pieces of nuts,
That would be good for all the soldiers.
Two pieces of nuts,
The third one said:
Two pieces of nuts,
If the king married me,
Two pieces of nuts,
I would bear children,
Two pieces of nuts,
Moon on the chest,

Two pieces of nuts,
Star on the forehead
Two pieces of nuts.

And then the lords were staring and the king as well did not know how these two children would know about this. Then the children said:

If you do not believe it,
Two pieces of nuts,
Well, here is the sign,
Two pieces of nuts,
Look at them.

And they opened up their shirts, pushed their hats back and the moon and the star were there.

Then the king became very happy, his wife was immediately released from prison. He was very happy about the children, too. Again great wedding festivities followed, great joy followed. He had the cook and her daughter executed and the king and his family lived happily ever after until they departed with death.

This is the end and the turning point. Whoever can, will tell it again. (Banó 1988: 123–126)¹⁹

In this text the two sibling princes are chased away from their homes only to return some time later. Apart from having golden hair they have special sign decorating their bodies, the star on their foreheads and the moon on their chests. When their father is celebrating his wedding with the daughter of his cook – who was plotting to have the two princes ‘lost’ – they reappear in the crowd as unknown guests. In the wedding crowd a bag of nuts turns up and a call for a test is announced: who is able to count them? This is where we readers or listeners enter the story. The two children take the pieces of nuts out of the bag in twos; therefore through a peculiar movement and the monotone sounds of the nuts knocking on the table a ritual choreography is presented. At the same time the tale textually asserts its subject matter since its prose text becomes a rhythmic and almost poetically shaped text in which the repeated lines of the refrain “Two pieces of nuts” are hardly significant for their informational content but more for the role they play in establishing the rhythm. This repetitive technique is the characteristic feature of the language use in sacred communication since the linguistic elements that are separated from their meanings by rhythm and repetition are transformed and bring about a change in the state of consciousness, which is a precondition of shamanistic journeys and trances.²⁰ I would conclude that this phenomenon in the tale text appears not as a trace of ancient religious rites but it is a special communicational possibility in the act of tale telling.

After the two princes told their stories as a rhyming, rhythmic and poetically formed text they reach the present moment unexpectedly. However, they do not tell the story in further details (their father recognises them, therefore their mother is saved and the wicked woman is punished); tale telling leaves its character of tale telling and passing on information in order to show a peculiar way of using language. According to Peter Szondi, as opposed to lexical-discursive language use, meta-discursive language use occurs when “language does not speak about something but ‘speaks’ itself. It speaks about things and about language through its very manner of speaking.” (Szondi 1978: 321–344) When the princes telling the tale reaches the point of the present, they exclaim:

“Here is the sign!” In this communicational situation language is no longer discursive, instead of representing it appears to have a presenting force since they have become signs due to their own beings, their story and their story telling. The turn in language use makes it possible for their royal father to recognise them, therefore allowing family unity to be restored. As a symbol of the integration of consciousness, the past can be rewritten, i.e. a kind of mental healing helps the king to leave behind his previous unconscious, ignorant state of mind. According to the text he “was very happy” to see his wife and children arriving to a kind of recognition that changed his heart and restored his lost identity.

The end of the tale however inserts another turn: it does not end with the usual formula of “and they lived happily ever after” or “whoever has doubts, make sure of it himself”. In this tale two lines close the story, similar to the rhythmic, rhyming formulas used by the two princes when telling their tales. “This is the end and the turning point. Whoever can, will tell it again.”²¹ So at the end the tale teller refers to a turning point according to which at the end of the tale it will be clear and decided whether the tale teller succeeded in appropriating this voice, whether he is able to invoke the linguistic force that brought about this change in the state of consciousness within the tale. This is the true turning point in the tale, where tale telling inside and outside of the tale is connected. This may offer the possibility for the listener to be able to tell the tale himself as well. During active-alert hypnotic states and shamanistic rituals a narrowing of consciousness takes place, euphoria and pain releasing effects due to a dissociative state of consciousness appear but at the same time through the phenomenon of social biofeedback participants in the ritual also “often experience alternated states of consciousness”²² leading to the event of healing. Just as the two princes opened their father’s eyes by their tale generating joy and happiness, giving him a new sense of identity, similarly the tale teller opens the eyes of the listener and changes his/her identity both in psychological and in spiritual terms, thus fulfilling the basic intention of sacred communication: taking one closer to oneself.

Translated by Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

NOTES

1 Cf. the myth and tale interpretation of Carl Kerényi and Yelazar Meletinsky. Kerényi compares the Vogul mythic text with a folk tale:

With the Vogul mythologem we approach very closely to a familiar type of fairy-tale, that of “Strong Hans”. But a comparison with this particular tale shows how much less impressive and significant the fairy-tale is. What meaning it has comes solely from the grotesquely exaggerated feats of an exceptionally strong farmer’s boy and the absurd situations that result. The difference lies not in the environment or in the social atmosphere (though the atmosphere of the Vogul myths is most regal), but in what we may call the dramatic structure of the mythologem. Such a structure is entirely lacking in this type of fairy-tale. (Jung, Kerényi 1969: 45–46)

2 Cf. Jung’s theory on the ancient images in tales and myths (Jung 1954: 3–48).

3 In the Hungarian tradition of tale interpretation, this school may be linked to Marcell Jankovics and Gábor Pap. This line of research labels itself *astrosophical* instead of astrological because

adherents interpret archaic astronomy as a complete worldview and not just as a precursor of a New Age approach.

4 Cf. the analysis of Mircea Eliade, Lajos Szántai, and Norman J. Girardot, whose writings emphasise the initiation character of tales.

5 International forerunners were Stanley Tambiah (1968) and Gideon Goosen (1976).

6 New Hermeneutics has evolved on the basis of Rudolf Bultman's hermeneutics, which has existential foundations. Its main representatives are Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, who formulated the linguistic nature of human existence: Any text is a kind of language event (*Sprachereignis*), carrying some meaning other than the original but has a constantly renewing significance in the act of reading. (McKnight 1998: 60–61)

7 Here I apply the concept of motif in the Proppian sense as an invariable element of the tale.

8 According to the taxonomy offered by Boldizsár, modern written tales transform folk tale elements (creating a peculiar combination of the motif resource, in addition to which they like to transform and rationalise miraculous elements), or recode them (the fixed sign relation of tales are re-written into occasional sign relations).

9 See his book on the story formation process of the name *vomba* in a tale of Australian aborigines. In this tale we find a special way to create a story: the word *vomba* has several meanings. These meanings function as basic motifs of the story and the action is based on these motifs.

10 In a former study of mine I have pointed out the legitimacy of linking sacral communication to these tale texts (Bódis 2003).

11 The so-called repetitive meditation technique following the practice of the rosary prayer became a good method in therapeutic practice.

12 Born in Andrásfalva (Mănești, Romania) and died in Hungary, in 1949.

13 In connection to the research on *Homo religiosus* Issiaka-Prosper Lalèyè explains that the ritualisation of words – that is, their elevation to sacral communication – means their 'rhythmisation', a rhythmisation different from the ordinary, and their vocalisation.

14 Translated from German original: "*Ausschließlich Unterhaltung*" war lange Zeit die Antwort der Märchenforschung. Sie entsprang der richtigen Erkenntnis, dass das Märchen, im Gegensatz zur Sage, reine, tendenzlose Dichtung ist. Aber echte Dichtung will mehr als Unterhaltung.

15 German original runs as follows: *Alle Wirklichkeit, auch die unscheinbare, nebensächliche, drängt danach, Sprache zu werden.*

16 Under controlled circumstances and repeated many times Felicitas Goodman devised a peculiar body posture ritual based on archaic depictions and sculptures with the help of which participants could experience trance like states corresponding entirely to shamanistic experiences (see Goodman 2006).

17 Dávid Kara Somfai mentions in his article the fact that in those shamanistic traditions that he researched, healing shamans as well as tale telling shamans can be found. They are considered by the community as initiated shamans with healing power in the same way as those traditional shamans who specifically perform healing practices.

18 In Hungarian the word *olvas, megolvas* has the meaning 'to read' and 'to count'.

19 Tale teller: Mária Takács, wife of István Rajna, 32 years old, from Jágónak (Hungary), 1938.

20 In altered states of consciousness related to shamanistic rituals, stronger activity, rhythmic sounds (drums, rattling) create the possibility to step over a threshold of consciousness; in addition to which the latest outcomes in hypnosis research – the active-alert hypnotic induction – show the connection between movements and sounds leading to altered states of consciousness (see Bányai 2006).

21 In Hungarian: *Itt a vége, düleje. Aki tudja, mesélje.*

22 Bányai (2006: 108–109) compares dynamic hypnosis, active-alert hypnotic induction and shamanistic rituals.

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