

Folk and Fairy Tales as Philosophy through Fantasy: an interpretation of memory, imagination, and culture

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Abstract: Folk tales are a repository of cultural memory of a society that holds philosophy, morality, and wisdom through symbols and fantasy. In this way, folk tales play with language through imagination and fantasy to pursue popular wisdom, initiatory customs, mysteries, and traditions. In order to discover and enjoy folk wisdom, we need to go through the morphology and cross the history of *magic folk tales*. With this motivation, this essay tries to highlight the philosophical traces in folk literature as the repository of the memory of societies through the imagination (*fantasia*) of folk tales and myths. The power of imagination is considered across the theories of Vico and Kant, with the respective differences that characterize them.

We point out that myths and folk culture are the most ancient forms of philosophical wisdom that appeared in ancient times and established legend and narration from which contemporary societies are built and which legitimized a social and political establishment. Myths and folk tales hold the popular truth of one society. They are philosophy through fantasy, and in this way, this article builds on Propp's intention to develop his studies into philosophical research based on magic folk tales as a sequential step of a kind of archeo-philosophical study.

Keywords: philosophy of culture, memory, imagination, folk culture, archeo-philosophy

Philosophy, as part of human culture, is dedicated, among other things, to the arts and ideas of the human being as Donald Phillip Verene underlines in *Speculative Philosophy*¹. In particular, philosophy is a form of high culture because it implies the use of senses, memory, imagination and reason to achieve self-knowledge, which is the human characteristic

¹ Donald Phillip Verene, *Speculative Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009).

of self-knowing insight. It is high culture because the intention of the philosophers are “motivated by a sense of the absolute,”² such as the research of ultimate reality of the True, Good, and Beautiful. What make the distinction between the different forms of cultural productions is the motivation that led to the production of culture. Culture is not divided into folk products and niche culture products but by the sense of the absolute traceable in literary expression through spoken or written words.

What we want to stress here is the intrinsic relationship between philosophy and poetry which was highlighted by Vico and Verene, in which both philosophy and poetry use words to push them to the limits of the possible expressiveness of the language. But unlike poetry, philosophy leads language “to join imagination to reason,” to achieve the perfectness of thesis with the ultimate reality.³

In the same way, it is plausible to compare the pairing of philosophy and poetry with philosophy and folk literature, where folk literature is a production of wise human beings in whom senses, imagination, memory, and reason are engaged in attempting self-knowledge.

With this motivation, this essay tries to highlight the philosophical traces in folk literature as a repository of the memory of societies through the imagination (*fantasia*) of folk tales and myths. The main questions are what does it mean that folk culture is the repository of the memory of society? And how can fairy tales, or *magic folk tales* and myths, be philosophy through fantasy? To answer these questions, we must attempt to give a philosophical definition of culture, memory, and cultural memory.

Culture as a complex entity inseparable from its parts

Thomas Stearns Eliot in *Notes towards the definition of Culture* (1949) says that culture “is a term which needs to be, not only defined but illustrated almost every time we use it.”⁴ This is because culture is a complex phenomenon that needs to be identified and contextualized each time in order to understand the meaning of the word in the context of use.

To start, we must go back to the first scientific definition of culture

² Verene, *Speculative Philosophy*, xi.

³ Verene, *Speculative Philosophy*, xii-xiii.

⁴ Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), ePub, 128.

made by Eduard B. Tylor in 1871, the anthropologist who gave an ethnographic definition of culture. Tylor begins *Primitive Culture* (1871) with this statement: “Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”⁵ He uses culture and civilization as two sides of the same coin. In Tylor’s definition, culture and civilization are expressed in a “wide ethnographic sense” which includes all aspects of human “capabilities and habits” as a member of society. In his definition, culture is not divisible from civilization and, consequently, from society. This symbiosis between culture and civilization is an essential point to understand the relevance of culture within a society. However, this definition does not express the temporal function, which is important when we consider culture as part of the development of one society over time. On this point, Terence Turner can help us with his definition of culture. Turner defines culture in *Anthropology and Multiculturalism* (1993) as “the way specific social groups, acting under specific historical and material conditions, have ‘made themselves,’” and “cultures as historically contingent products of such collective activity.”⁶ Turner emphasized social groups as agents of cultural production in specific historical times and material conditions to develop cultural products. He highlights the self-made nature of the group: the way in which specific social groups have “made themselves” in a particular historical time.

Furthermore, Plamen Makariev, in *The Public Legitimacy of Minority Claims* (2016), underlined Turner’s definition in relation to minority entities in society. He stresses Turner’s meaning of culture combining the direct act of a social group in “made themselves” through historical development.⁷ He considers the evolution in time of one culture and the self-identification in it as part of the “made themselves,” in which each person is developed as part of a collective social life. The

⁵ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. I (Mineola, New York: Dover Publication Inc., 2016), ePub, 14.

⁶ Terence Turner. “Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What Is Anthropology That Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It?” *Cultural Anthropology* 8: 4 (1993): 411–29.

⁷ Plamen Makariev, “Minority Identities” in *The Public Legitimacy of Minority Claims: A Central/Eastern European perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2016), Kindle, 20.

culture and the self-identification itself are built individually in time through the social life with others.

This identification in a group and as part of society is also traceable in Tylor's definition when he says "habits acquired by man as a member of society." But Tylor does not express the development in time. Both these definitions take into consideration the direct activities of a person to act as part of a group, and at the same time make a distinction between them from other social groups as Makariev explains in Turner's definition.⁸ Makariev improves Turner's definition of culture with an explanation of culture as the "self-creation of a community."⁹ The "self-creation of a community" is part of the development of the group of culture, forming all aspects of social life such as law, morality, art, belief, knowledge, custom, etc. He says that "the self-creation of a community also incorporates the formation of mechanisms for explaining and morally justifying a particular way of life."¹⁰ Here are condensed all the aspects of the formation and development of a community with self-justification of morality and the way of life of a group by "the formation of mechanisms" to legitimize a type of life.

The "formation of mechanisms" to legitimize a type of life implies a mental and social justification for our actions and this means also justifying a lifestyle in a consumer society. To play a social identification and one cultural identification needs to be legitimized by the other, directly or indirectly. For one culture, the formation of mechanisms, inside and outside of a group, involves different recognition from other social groups of one society. The recognition of one's group and the other social groups is also produced inside the consumer society, which Jean Baudrillard has extensively highlighted, by interacting with consumption objects to identify oneself with a particular social group.¹¹ Nonetheless, to come back to the start, Eliot in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* emphasized the existence of different elements that constitute, define, and establish a culture. He says that:

"By 'culture,' then, I mean first of all what anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place.

⁸ Makariev, *Minority Identities*, Kindle, 20.

⁹ Makariev, *Minority Identities*, Kindle, 2.

¹⁰ Makariev, *Minority Identities*, Kindle, 21.

¹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *La société de Consommation* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1970).

That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs, in their religion. But these things added together do not constitute the culture, though we often speak for convenience as if they did. These things are simply the parts into which a culture can be anatomized, as a human body can. But just as a man is something more than an assemblage of various parts of his body, so a culture is more than the assemblage of its arts, customs, and religious beliefs. These things all act upon each other, and fully to understand one you have to understand all.”¹²

In this definition, we point out two primary elements. Culture is a composed phenomenon. It is an assemblage of different elements. And second, we need to “understand all” parts of a culture in order to “understand” one part of it. In other words, if we want to understand a work of art, we need to know and understand the other parts that have produced the work of art as ambient and the society in which it is produced because the culture “is something more than an assemblage of various parts” of a society.

In conclusion, culture is a process that involves different elements not divisible from each other that belongs to a complex whole of group-self-identification “as a result of the continuity of all [...] individual actions”¹³ in time that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of social groups with “the formation of mechanisms”¹⁴ to legitimize a type of life and lifestyle. This definition combines Tylor’s definition of culture with Makariev and Eliot’s definitions to fit it better in this context and identify the people not only in society but within some group of that society as part of it.

Memory between imagination and fantasy

Philosophy, as we said, is dedicated to the arts and ideas of human beings. Between the XVII and XVIII centuries, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) dedicated his studies to the research of a new approach to science by developing his concept of an ideal history of the eternal law (*storia ideale eterna*) with “fantasia” and memory. Vico in *Scienza nuova*

¹² Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, ePub, 129.

¹³ Makariev, *Minority Identities*, Kindle, 20.

¹⁴ Makariev, *Minority Identities*, Kindle, 21.

(1725/1730/1744)¹⁵ does not use the term *cultura* in any part of his definitive work, but he focalizes his attention to the memory and imagination in cultural narration defined as *Scienza poetica*, poetic science.

In *Opere minori*,¹⁶ published in 1913, Leone Luzzatto collected some short studies of Vico on memory and imagination called “De memoria e della fantasia” which perfectly summarizes the heart of *Scienza nuova* with an explanation of “*fantasia*” and “*memoria*”. In this paper, Vico says that (author’s accents and italics):

La facoltà rammentativa era dai Latini nominata, *memoria*, quando ella ripone come in un'arca le raccolte percezioni dei sensi, e *reminiscenza* allorchè le ripiglia e le esterna. Ma allargavano i Latini la significanza della memoria, applicandola anche alla facoltà di figurarci le immagini, detta dai Greci φαντασία e nel nostro volgare *imaginativa*; imperocchè il nostro *immaginare* era pei Latini *memorare*. Sarebbe ciò forse perchè non possiamo immaginare, se non cose da noi rammemorate, nè rammemorarci se non oggetti percepiti dai sensi? Al certo niun pittore ha giammai preso a dipingere un genere di pianta o di animale, che non gli fosse offerto dalla natura; poichè codesti ippogrifi e centauri sono verità di natura miste al falso. Nè i poeti hanno giammai pensato una forma di virtù, che non si rinvenisse realmente nei fatti umani; ma trascelta di mezzo a questi, la innalzano sopra i limiti comuni, facendone un tipo, al quale conformano i loro eroi. E perciò nelle loro favole vollero i Greci nominare figlie di Memoria le Muse, forme ideali delle potenze della fantasia.¹⁷

¹⁵ Giambattista Vico, *Scienza nuova* (Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2013), ePub.

¹⁶ Giambattista Vico, *Opere minori, Passi scelti e curati dal Prof. Leone Luzzatto* (Lanciano: Editore R. Carabba, 1913).

¹⁷ Giambattista Vico, “§II Della memoria e della fantasia,” in *Opere minori*, ed. Leone Luzzatto (Lanciano: Editore R. Carabba, 1913), 53-54. My translation: “The faculty of remembrance was named by the Latins, *memory* when it places the collected perceptions of the senses as in an ark, and *reminiscence* when it takes them back and externalizes them. But the Latins extended the significance of memory by applying it also to the faculty of imagining (figurarci le immagini), called by Greeks φαντασία and into our vulgar *imaginative*; wherefore our *imagining* was for the Latin *memorare*. Would this be because we cannot be imagining, except the things we remembered, nor remember

As Vico explained, memory is related in many aspects to imagination and fantasy and from many different points of view since ancient times. He underlines the difference between Greek and Latin use of the terms *fantasia* and *memorare*. He used the metaphor of an ark to illustrate the idea of memory in which are collected the perceptions of the senses, and reminiscence is described as the faculty of bringing out from the ark the perceptions of the senses collected in it. But he specifies that Latin has increased the meaning of memory by extending it to the imagining faculty called by Greeks φαντασία (*fantasia*), which was for Latins *memorare* (remember). This observation becomes in Vico the basis for asserting that artists who create something not existent in nature are also supported by their own *fantasia* or *memorare*. For example, an image of a hippogriff or centaur is based on truths of nature mixed with falsehood. But for Vico also the qualities of heroes are not directly findable in human facts; instead, they are a mix of different qualities of the human being to conform their heroes to uncommon unlimited capacities.

Furthermore, today many philosophers have discussed memory and its function based on Vico's philosophy. One of them is Donald Phillip Verene. He presents a position on memory based on Vico's *Scienza nuova*, which combines Vico's common mental language (*lingua mentale comune*) and the mental dictionary (*dizionario mentale*) with the "art of memory or recollection."¹⁸ He examines language as a memory system associated with common sense (*il senso comune*), where the language and the memory of society are combined into the common mental language and the mental dictionary. In this regard, Raymond C. Barfield in *The Poetic Apriori* highlights that Vico's *senso comune* differs from Aristotle, Descartes, and Locke's common sense (*sensus*

except things perceived by the senses? Certainly, no painter has ever taken to painting a kind of plant or animal that was not offered to him by nature; since these hippogriffs and centaurs are truths of nature mixed with falsehood. No poets have ever thought of a form of virtue, which is not really found in human facts; but chosen from among them, they raise it above the common limits, making it a type, to which they conform their heroes. And therefore, in their fables, the Greeks wanted to name the Muses daughters of Memory, ideal forms of the powers of imagination (*fantasia*)."

¹⁸ Verene, "Vico's *New Science* as Theater of Memory" in *Speculative Philosophy*, 75-77.

communis). He says that Vico considers “the idea of *commune* as a mental property that stands over and above understanding,” namely, a mental property that came from imagination.¹⁹ Vico identified the connection between memory, language, and common sense with his theory of poetic wisdom presented in the second book of *Scienza nuova*.

The basis of Vico’s *Scienza nuova* is the study of memory and imagination that takes the metaphysical art of producing narrative joining ideas. Vico’s philosophical imagination is the root of the poetic wisdom of the arts, such as literature and history. Imagination appears to Vico as a hook to elaborate narrative poems in philosophy. Poetic wisdom emerges not as a traditional text of a poem but as something beyond that, something that enlightens the human mind. Through imagination, the philosopher can produce poetic wisdom in prose and reach and climb over the mountain. But for Vico, only God can understand reality, because he is its creator, and by this, he shows his withdrawal and distance from the modern scientific theories that were developing among his contemporaries, as Paolo Rossi underlines in the introduction to the *Scienza nuova* printed in 2012 by Rizzoli in Milan.²⁰

But for Vico, through imagination, humans can perceive, realize, and discover the reality of the quality of the moral world produced in history, and this perception has a similar nature to the knowledge of the creator god.²¹ The language used in poetry is developed in the history of the world and its costumes. Vico considers evolution in the history of language as the meaning of philology. He, in the introduction *Idea dell’Opera* (Idea of the work) to the *Scienza nuova*,²² explains how philosophy aims to examine philology. And he says that philology is philosophy because such as philosophy stays in history; similarly philology holds the history of language, costumes, and facts.²³ Following this closeness between philology and philosophy, we found the association with the development of the human being through the poetic images written in myths, songs, and tales of gods. The world and its society are

¹⁹ Raymond C. Barfield, “Imagination and Mythic Discovery” in *The Poetic Apriori: Philosophical Imagination in a Meaningful Universe* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2020), ePub, 63-78.

²⁰ Vico, “2. Arcaicità del pensiero di Vico” in *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 14-22.

²¹ Vico, “Della Sapienza generalmente” in *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 209-212.

²² Vico, “Idea dell’opera” in *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 69-101.

²³ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 73.

built into a metaphorical revelation to us. Heroic fables tell us the true history of the world with its heroic costumes and the evolution of knowledge. Vico finds the revelation of the secret understanding of creation through allegorical images and myths.²⁴

Great poets, such as Dante Alighieri, can brighten through imagination and allegory the historical visionary path of the world with “*Sapienza poetica*” (poetic wisdom).²⁵ Vico identifies Dante, with *Divina Commedia*, as the one who told the true story of the people and facts of the world beyond the visionary Christian system of the soul; beyond earthly life where punishment, valor, and enjoyment or bliss are described with allegoric images and poetic wisdom to present imaginary theological poetry called “*Commedia*.”²⁶ The poetic embellishment is not considered as a merely extrinsic aesthetic enrichment of narration but the art of poetry itself as a philosophical embodiment of wisdom through metaphor, allegory, and irony. Verene underlines the *fantasia* or *universale fantastico*, in Vico’s *Scienza nuova*, which is considered the essence of narration. The sap of what philosophical discourse can trace. He introduces the “imaginative universal” (*universale fantastico*), considered by Vico to be the “master key” of *Scienza nuova* outlined in his work.^{27, 28}

This *imaginative universalis* can give meaning to the poetic narration and can produce the history of language with the creation of the human philosophy of thought. Raymond C. Barfield calls *imaginative universalis* “poetic apriori.”²⁹ In *The Poetic Apriori*, he describes Vico’s *Scienza nuova* as a “story-telling science” of philosophy that takes us to human society and to Vichian “*sensus comunis*.”³⁰ He emphasizes the importance of myths and the interpretation of fables to understand the philosophical language of imagination used in them. *Common sense* is the producer of the “mental dictionary” of new languages and the new “men-

²⁴ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 74.

²⁵ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 208-453.

²⁶ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 471 of 857.

²⁷ Verene, *Speculative philosophy*, 75.

²⁸ Vico, “Idea dell’Opera,” in *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 94.

²⁹ Raymond C. Barfield, “V. Imagination and Mythic Discovery” in *The Poetic Apriori: Philosophical Imagination in a Meaningful Universe* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2020), ePub, 68.

³⁰ Barfield, “V. Imagination and Mythic Discovery” in *The Poetic Apriori*, ePub, 69.

tal language.”³¹ On his part, Barfield described storytelling as the way to transform the philosophical imagination in memory. Through storytelling, we build memory traditions and pass them on to a new generation of philosophers and human beings. The relations between memory and imagination are multiple. The imagination can activate memory through painting, writing, song, and storytelling.³² Equally, imagination is the seal for discovering and investigating the reality of nature and the magical path of human secrets.

In brief, in Vico’s theory, imagination (*fantasia*) as memory is a quality of poetic wisdom where the poet intertwines history, narration, and allegory with *imagination* to create a kind of philosophical narration. Vico, in the third book of *Scienza nuova* “Della scoperta del vero Omero,” introduces memory as fantasy but he has distinguished it in three differences: memory remembers things, fantasy alters and disguises, and ingenuity wraps and harmonizes them. By these principles, the “theologian poets” call memory “madre delle muse,” mother of the muses able to recall the story and the narration through the imagination (*fantasia, memorare*).³³

In the first place, Vico traced the relationship between philosophy and narration in ancient Greek and Egyptian civilization, where he compared the two civilizations with the development of “favole greche” (Greek fables) and the historical and philosophical tales of Egyptian natural theology.³⁴ In particular, he says that:

Quindi si truova nelle favole essere stati nascosti i misteri di si fatta sapienza volgare; e si medita cosi nelle cagioni onde poi i filosofi ebbero tanto disiderio di conseguire la sapienza degli antichi, come nelle occasioni ch’essi filosofi n’ebbero di destarsi a meditare altissime cose in filosofia e nelle comodità, d’intrudere nelle favole la loro sapienza riposta.³⁵

³¹ Barfield, “V. Imagination and Mythic Discovery” in *The Poetic Apriori*, ePub, 69.

³² Barfield, “V. Imagination and Mythic Discovery” in *The Poetic Apriori*, ePub, 70.

³³ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 472.

³⁴ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 106.

³⁵ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 95. My translation “Thus it is found in fables that the mysteries of so-called vulgar wisdom have been hidden; and thus is meditated in the cause, whereupon the philosophers were so eager to reach the wisdom of the ancients, as on the occasions when they philosophers had the opportunity to awaken to meditate on very high things in philosophy and comfort, to bring into fables their wisdom placed.”

In the edition published by Rizzoli in 2012, Rossi points out, in a note to this paragraph, that Vico differed in his view from Plato, Platonic Renaissance, and Bacon's views of ancient fables. Vico considers the fables not only as an expression of philosophical wisdom, but as a historical phenomenon that appeared in the fantastic age of the first period,³⁶ in the Vichian system of universal history of the three ages, the first age is the age of gods, characterized by the poetic history of the gods, the second is the age of heroes, and the third is the age of men.³⁷

In this way, myths and fables become the most ancient form of philosophical wisdom that appeared in the age of gods in which it is possible to find ethical allegories for the development of religion and costumes, as Vico has presented extensively in the second book of *Scienza nuova, Della Sapienza poetica (The Poetic Wisdom)*.³⁸

Furthermore, Verene analyses the relationship between philosophy and literature in the *Borges and Vico* article in which the philosophy of literature is presented in four ways: philosophy *independent from* literature with its own philosophical literary speculation; philosophy *in* literature where we find the research of philosophical allegory in literary works; philosophy *and* literature as independent matter but connected with each other through dialectical thought such as philosophy and poetry or fable; philosophy *as* literature where philosophy and literary writing meet each other just as in Plato's *Republic* or Dante's *Divina Commedia* which are characterized by dialogues, poems, and wisdom. He considers this investigation of philosophy and literature as "two sides of a coin," inseparable from each other and complementary to each other, philosophy to literature.³⁹ Philosophy and literature extend and take "language beyond itself" to advance in wisdom. He concludes by saying "the philosopher becomes a literary thinker and the litterateur becomes a lover of wisdom."⁴⁰

In short, the Vichian *fantastico universale* and the memory are approached in literary narration from a philosophical wisdom point of view to rebuild a poetic text of literature in the same way a myth or fable in the ancient age.

³⁶ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, Paolo Rossi note 4 and note 36, 656.

³⁷ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 73.

³⁸ Vico, *Scienza Nuova*, ePub, 208-453.

³⁹ Verene, "Borges and Vico," 7-8.

⁴⁰ Verene, "Borges and Vico," 8.

Kant's Anthropology: imagination, fantasy, and memory

On the other hand, about fifty years after Vico's death, we have a different perspective from Immanuel Kant. Kant presents in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798)⁴¹ some studies of imagination, fantasy, and memory that lead to a completely different result from Vico's studies. Kant presents the difference between *imagination* and *fantasy*; one as rational, productive, and reproductive, and the other as irrational and coming from the power of mental images, involuntarily. Imagination is a rational faculty, and it is possible to be controlled by rationality in its production and reproduction. Fantasy is not controlled by rationality and produces its "mental images" unintentionally. In other words, he says that the production of involuntary imagination is called *fantasy*.⁴²

However, Kant extends the variety of imagination. He presents different types of imagination as *facultas imaginandi*, "as a faculty of intuition without the presence of the object," and could be *productive* or *reproductive*. In all cases, the power of imagination (*facultas imaginandi*) is a faculty of intuition and not a direct perception of an object. *Productive facultas imaginandi* is characterized by previous contact with the object, which means imagining something we have experienced before. *Reproductive facultas imaginandi* is described as the faculty by which to "bring back to the mind an empirical intuition that it had previously." Reproductive is a faculty that is produced by a "derivative presentation of the object (*exhibition derivativa*)" and not based on a previous perception of an object. In addition, he emphasizes the "intuitions of space and time" as related to the *productive faculty*, rather than an empirical intuition that is connected with the "concept of the object" that produces an empirical cognition called *experience*.⁴³

In other words, Kant considers space and time as the "phenomena" perceived previously, and that forms the basis of the intuition of space and time rather than the concept of space and time that produces an empirical cognition. Space and time are phenomena that are experimented with rather than there being one cognition of them. In the following, he identifies productive as *inventive* and reproductive as *recollective*, and

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, translated by Robert B. Loudon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴² Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 60.

⁴³ Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 60.

he says that the *inventive* faculty cannot be “exactly *creative*,” because it is incapable of producing something that is not based on some previous experience but should “always furnish evidence of the material of its ideas.”⁴⁴ Kant exemplifies that in this way, a person born blind cannot understand what red is because s/he has not experienced what color it is at all. It seems uncertain what Kant means by *inventive* and *creative*, even to himself. It seems that he had some concerns about these two terms. He does not define what creative is, but it is possible to deduce it from a *Handschrift*⁴⁵ note in the manuscript for the first publication in 1798, which is presented in the 2006 Cambridge University Press edition. In the note, we read “The power of imagination is either creative (*productive*) or reproductive (*reproductive*),” but after he replaces *creative* with *inventive* for the first publication of the book and specifies the *inventive* cannot be “exactly *creative*.” It seems that this *creative* could be a faculty of intuition that has already a kind of knowledge of its object of intuition but not only. It is deductible that for Kant the *creative* could be also a *reproductive* idea by the reproduction of a previous experience. Perhaps, his rethinking suggests a change of mind from the concept of *creative* to *inventive*.

As we mentioned earlier, Kant connects productivity with sensibility and the intuitions of space and time. Specifically, he divides *productivity* into three types:

“the *forming* of intuitions in space (*imaginatio plastica*), the *associating* of intuitions in time (*imaginatio associans*), and that of *affinity*, based on the common origin of ideas from each other (*affinitas*).”⁴⁶

The first *imaginatio plastica* is associated with the “intuition in space” that Kant explains with an analogy to the artistic product. Before showing a physical work of art, the artist should produce it in “his power of imagination.”⁴⁷ The production of *forming* is divisible into two types,

⁴⁴ Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 61.

⁴⁵ Kant, “Marginal note in *Handschrift*” in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, note 68, 64. The power of imagination is either creative (*productive*) or reproductive (*reproductive*).

⁴⁶ Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 67.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

one is involuntary and “does not belong to the artist,”⁴⁸ called *fantasy*, and the other is voluntary and comes from choices. He called the last one *composition* or *fabrication*. *Fantasy* is sometimes described as inconvenient, especially when it is over-present in the waking state. In addition, he specifies that fantasy in a sleeping state is called *dreaming* but when we are awake, the excess of fantasy becomes a form of “diseased condition”⁴⁹ because we are involved in “involuntary invented events”⁵⁰ that lead to wrong perceptions.

There is one other interesting element in Kant's theory, and that element is the *fantastic*. Kant describes *fantastic* as an artistic production based on “forms according to images that cannot be found in existence.”⁵¹ In other words, when an artist produces something “according to images” that are not perceptible by the human senses, that creation is called *fantastic*. That *fantastic* perception is unnatural and distorted in forms such as “dream images of one [who] is awake.”⁵²

The second *imaginatio associans* is mainly the “habit in the mind”⁵³ of some empirical idea that we usually do. Kant says that “when one idea is produced, the other also comes into being.”⁵⁴ In other words, the association of the mind works as two factors, one being the subsequence of ideas, one connected to another, and the second is the habit of doing this following association. In footnote j,⁵⁵ Kant presents the example of a conversation that moves from one idea to another through the association of concepts.

The third *affinitas* is identified by Kant as the union of diversity from a common ground of origin in which the power of imagination is developed with the “rules of sensibility” related to the intelligence able to recognize the affinities of association “achieved without consciousness of the rule” but “*in conformity with* the understanding.”⁵⁶ In other words, affinity (*affinitas*) is characterized by a union of multiplicity

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 69.

⁵¹ Ibid., 68.

⁵² Ibid., 68.

⁵³ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁵ Ibid., note j, 69.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 70.

close to the same ground or, as Kant specifies, “one had its origin in the other”⁵⁷ which produced a new different thing, but this union is unconsciously and in conformity with the understanding. Kant illustrates this with a comparison between “intellectual combination” and a chemical combination of “two heterogeneous elements” that produce a new entity achievable only from two different substances.⁵⁸

In conclusion, the power of imagination in Kant’s theory is productive or reproductive but could be also a production subject as *fantasy*.⁵⁹ Similarly, memory is described as a *voluntary* reproduction of the power of imagination, and Kant alerts us by underlining that if *fantasy*, the involuntary creative power of imagination, is mixed with memory, “then memory would be *unfaithful*.”⁶⁰ In addition, in *Critique of Judgment*, Kant highlights the direct causality between the experience had in life and the actual evolution of natural things such as the presence of mosquitoes in a land and the human action of draining the land as a direct answer to the problem of mosquito bites.⁶¹ This Kantian evolutionary explanation moves Nuria Sanchez Madrid in *Origine, sviluppo e autolimitazione della Kultur in Kant*⁶² to summarize his description of culture as a fundamental category that moves to civilization process by the comparison of qualities and proprieties of objects to obtain own goals inside to a society.⁶³ The Kantian process of “*intentional* propose of nature”⁶⁴ shows us a different aspect of the evolution of society with the essential previous experience of the *productive facultas imaginandi*.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 67-68.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 75-76.

⁶¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Indianapolis/Cambridge; Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 259-260.

⁶² Nuria Sánchez Madrid, “Origine, sviluppo e autolimitazione della *Kultur* in Kant” in *Kant and Culture*, ed. Tommaso Morawski (Rome: Sapienza Università Editrice, 2022), 11-30.

⁶³ Nuria Sánchez Madrid, “Origine, sviluppo e autolimitazione della *Kultur* in Kant,” 14.

⁶⁴ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 259.

Folk culture as the repository of cultural memory of the society

We have seen how two major philosophers of the XVIII century have described imagination and fantasy as part of memory and how they are indivisible from memory itself, particularly in the case of Kantian unfaithful memory. Each author has a different position, but both consider imagination as the main factor of memory, so the main factor of the cultural memory of society is like a type of evolutionary process.

Culture, as we have shown, is a complex thing with manifold parts connected to each other developed in time and each of its parts is indispensable for knowing the other parts. This is traceable also in Tylor's *Primitive Culture* in which the traces of mythology are recounted in "remote ages among the whole human race," and he says that "Myth forms a consistent part of the development of Culture."⁶⁵ Myths come in the form of documentaries of the development of life experiences, a form of repository of cultural memory developed over time. Tylor points out that myth appears to be a transposition of the original beliefs of animists as the personification of natural elements steeped in religious and philosophical ideas. Animism influenced philosophy and religion and has brought into the myth some aspects of its beliefs on "personal animated creatures"⁶⁶ of rivers, sun, moon, mountains, winds, and prodigious powers, as Vico explains in *Della memoria e della fantasia* for painters' activities to combine in an image of a centaur or hippogriff the truth of nature mixed with falsehood.⁶⁷

For example, the fascinating story of the Stone of Destiny, also called the Coronation Stone of Scone, is used in Scotland and now in England for the United Kingdom coronation. Marc Bloch, in *An Unknown Testimony on the History of Coronation in Scotland*, considers the stone as "the last remnant of a pagan enthronization"⁶⁸ and presents the relative myth evolution in a Christian religious invention to justify the symbolic-ritualistic use of the stone in the coronation of the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth realms. The stone has developed towards itself a great deal of literature, from myths and legends to his-

⁶⁵ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 280.

⁶⁶ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 280-281.

⁶⁷ Vico, "§II Della memoria e della fantasia," 53.

⁶⁸ Marc Bloch, "An Unknown Testimony on the History of Coronation in Scotland" in *The Scottish Historical Review* 23: 90 (1926): 105-6..

torical tales in which is used it during the coronation of kings. Hilton James in *The coronation Stone at Westminster Abbey* tracks down a certain legend that starts “In the time of Moses ...”⁶⁹ with a detailed description of the excursus of the stone and its use in Spain, Ireland, and Scotland. This example takes us to the importance of myths and folk culture in the memory of a society in which the power of imagination and fantasy of narration builds up the costumes and traditions of a country. Today the Coronation Stone of Scone is still in use in the United Kingdom for the King and Queen coronations.⁷⁰ But the historian Patrick Weston Joyce points out, in *The Lia Fail and the Westminster Coronation Stone*, that there may exist two coronation stones, one is the original Irish Lia Fail in Tara and the second is the Coronation Stone of Scone.⁷¹ Joyce presents the tale of Dedannans with the travel of the main character to Greece to learn magic and become great in arts and sciences. After, Dedannans brought the Stone of Destiny to Scotland and later for seven years in Ireland. The story is mythic and traditionally establishes the legend and narration of the Lia Fail and the coronation of the Irish kings in Tara. He highlights the chronicle of the relocation of Stone of Destiny to Scotland from Ireland, presented in the thirteenth century, is universally rejected as a pure fable, and remains traced only in the old Scottish documents but not a note of that story is traceable in the Irish chronicles or poems.⁷²

We point out that the power of imagination and fantasy around myths and folk tales that justify and actualize the authority of a King is great. Recalling memory through myths and legends becomes the act of establishing and governing a society. Folk culture becomes the repository of memory for the society to establish the authority of traditions and rituals.

⁶⁹ Hilton James, “The Coronation Stone at Westminster Abbey,” in *Archaeological Journal* 54: 1 (1897): 201-224.

⁷⁰ James, “The Coronation Stone at Westminster Abbey,” 201-224.

⁷¹ P. W. Joyce, “The Lia Fail and the Westminster Coronation Stone,” in *The Irish Monthly* 12: 133 (1884): 325–331..

⁷² Joyce, “The Lia Fail and the Westminster Coronation Stone,” 327-328.

Historical evolution from primitive ritual to fairy tales

Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp in *The Historical Roots of the Magic Folk Tales (Istoričeskie korni volšebnoj skazki)*⁷³ presents the evolution of folk tales from primitive ritual to magic fairy tales, but he was not the first to do so. Alberto M. Cirese says in the introduction to *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*,⁷⁴ the Italian translation of Propp's work, that it was already introduced by other authors. Cirese underlines the relationship between folk tales and primitive initiations that had already been presented by the French folklorist Pierre Saintyves in his studies.⁷⁵ But he points out the merit of Propp in "making his premises clearly and rationally explicit and fine-tuning his inquiry criteria."⁷⁶ Furthermore, Propp starts to present the intrinsic connection between each folk tale, or better *magic folk tales*, and the indivisibility of the studies of one tale with the study of all other stories. He identifies two main points "first, no *subject* of a *magic folk tale* can be studied without another, and second, no *motif* of a *magic folk tale* can be studied without its relationship to the whole."^{77, 78, 79}

To be clear, before starting, we must dwell on some terms used by Propp. First, in his studies, Propp has selected a type of fairy tale characterized by magic power, supernatural aspects, or magic objects that iden-

⁷³ *The Historical Roots of the Magic Folk Tales* (1946) is partially translated in English in *Theory and History of Folklore* as *Historical Roots of the Wondertale*, edited by Antoly Liberman (1997), and integrally translated in Italian and France as *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, translated by Clara Coïsson (1949/1972) and as *Les Racines historiques du conte merveilleux*, translated by Lise Gruel-Apert (1983).

⁷⁴ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, trans. by Clara Coïsson (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2017), ePub.

⁷⁵ Alberto M. Cirese, "Introduzione di Alberto M. Cirese" in *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, 22.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 22. My translation: "a rendere ordinatamente e razionalmente esplicite le sue premesse e a mettere a punto i suoi criteri d'indagine."

⁷⁷ Propp, *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, 37.

⁷⁸ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, "Historical roots of Wondertale: Premises" in *Theory and History of Folklore*, 4th. edit. by Antoly Liberman, trans. by Ariadna Y. Martin, & Richard P. Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 102.

⁷⁹ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, *Морфология волшебной сказки. Исторические корни волшебной сказки*, (Moscow: КоЛибри [Kolibri], 2020), 208.

tify as 300 to 749 in Aarne's classification.⁸⁰ He defines these fairy tales as *volshebnykh skazok* (волшебных сказок), italics of Propp in the Russian version,⁸¹ and that is translated differently in each translation. We have chosen to use the form of *magic folk tales* adopted by Serge Shishkoff in the translation of Propp's "Study of the Folktale: Structure and History" published in 1976 as an article on *Dispositio*.⁸² This choice is motivated mainly by coherence with the subject of the tales and by emphasizing the relationship with the traditional mystical rituals. But for the definition of *motif*, there are some unclear aspects.

Propp in *Morphology of Folktales* presents Aleksandr Nikolaevič Veselovskij's position on the *motif* as "an indivisible narrative unit" and says that "Veselovskij means by 'theme' a complex of motifs."⁸³

After, he presents a series of Veselovskij's statements published in *Poëtika* vol. II fasc. I⁸⁴ to show and clarify the position on the *motif* and rendered in English as:

A theme is a series of motifs. A motif develops into a theme." "Themes vary: certain motifs make their way into themes, or else themes combine with one another." "By theme I mean a subject in which various situations, that is, motifs, move in and out."⁸⁵

Now, the main question is related to how it is translated *syuzhet* (сюжет) and consequently *temu* (тему) because, as Anatoly Liberman says in the introduction of *Theory and History of Folklore*⁸⁶, "the English translation ... most unhappily renders *sjuzhet* as *theme*." Liberman suggests *plot* as a plausible translation. Instead, *temu* (тему) is translated as *subject* in the last sentence. Therefore, we see clearly, without knowl-

⁸⁰ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, *Morphology of the Folktales*, edit. by Louis A. Wagner, trans. by Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 19.

⁸¹ Propp, *Морфология волшебной сказки*, 27.

⁸² Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, "Study of the Folktale: Structure and History" in *Dispositio*, 1: 3 (1976): 277-292.

⁸³ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, *Morphology of the Folktales*, edit. (Carroll 2015) by Louis A. Wagner, trans. by Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 12.

⁸⁴ Note 14 in Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. A. N. Veselovskij, *Poetika* [Poetics] Vol. II, Fasc. I: *Poetika sjuzetov* [The Poetics of Themes], Introduction, chapters I and II.

⁸⁵ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktales*, 12.

⁸⁶ Anatoly Liberman, "Introduction" in *Theory and History of Folklore*, xxvii.

edge of the Russian language, that there are some troubles with translation. After all, Propp inserts a note in some lines below, which explains his disagreement with Volkov's definition of *syuzhet*. Perhaps, this note is useful to clarify Propp's idea of what *syuzhet* is and consequently what *motif* and *theme* are. Propp says that:

Volkov makes a fatal mistake when he says: 'The tale's theme [*syuzhet*] is that constant unit from which alone it is possible to proceed to the study of the tale.' (The Tale, p. 5). We answer: 'A theme [*syuzhet*] is not a unit, but a complex, it is not constant, but variable, and one should not proceed from it to the study of the tale.'^{87 88}

Propp's note highlights his position and how to proceed to study folk tales. One point is that Propp does not proceed from *syuzhet* to study folk tales because it is not a unit and it is a complex, inconstant, and variable. This assertion brings the meaning of *syuzhet* to the concept of *plot* rather than to the *theme* or to the *subject*. *Syuzhet* "is not a unit, but a complex, it is not constant, but variable"⁸⁹ understandable as a complex and variable of *motif* which is formed the *theme* of a folk tale or a fairy tale as Liberman suggested. In addition, Liberman says that Propp used the term *motif* more compressively and not like Stith Thompson and Veselovskij that considers motif as a minimal narrative unit.⁹⁰

Propp says "we must affirm that a motif is not monomial or indivisible"⁹¹, and he presents an example to show his position. E.g., if we take the motif of "a dragon kidnaps the tsar's daughter" we see that it is divisible into four and each part of it is changeable with one other element as the dragon with a devil or a falcon. And he points out that "the final divisible unit, as such, does not represent a logical whole"⁹² and consequently should be considered a more comprehensive unit. To return to the speech of folk tales as the repository of memory, we see Propp considering the magic folk tales as directly connected with the ritual or customs of a society, and he shows a direct relationship be-

⁸⁷ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 17, note 15.

⁸⁸ Propp, *Морфология волшебной сказки*, note 8, 19 of 740.

⁸⁹ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 17, note 15.

⁹⁰ Liberman, "Introduction" in *Theory and History of Folklore*, xxvii.

⁹¹ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 13.

⁹² Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 13.

tween the *motif* of magic folk tales and the ritual.^{93, 94}

The *motif* becomes a transposition or a reading of the customs of society such as the traditional isolation or reclusion of the royal family to protect them, e.g. the princess imprisoned in the tower by the King.⁹⁵ This kind of reclusion/isolation is possible to interpret today by the distance of the royal families from the common and ordinary life of society. One other important distinction made by Propp in *Study of The Folktale: Structure and History* is between *myth* and *magic folk tales*. The *magic folk tales* are “based on poetic invention and are a fabrication of reality,”⁹⁶ and he emphasizes the meaning of the word “tale” that is in most languages “a synonym for ‘lie,’ or ‘falsehood’.”⁹⁷ This should be understood as an invention or as the use of Vichian *imagination* and *fantasy* to build up the *plot* of the *theme*. *Magic folk tales* are one construction of different motifs produced by imagination, but this does not mean that it is not based on reality and social costumes. Propp compares magic folk tales with myths because, as he said, myths are “a sacral narrative whose veracity is believed and which, moreover, expresses the sacred faith of the people.”⁹⁸ What he wants to underline is that the two forms of narrative could coexist at the same time but not on the same subject. In other words, the myth and the folk tale of Argonauts do not exist at the same time among the same people because the myth of Argonauts is based on belief; instead, the *magic folk tales* are considered one production of the poetic imagination. Therefore, he specifies that the myth always precedes the folk tale, but only when the two are based on the same subject with the “same system” and “history of the plot.”⁹⁹ Perhaps it is possible to assume that myths can be transformed into folk tales but not the other way around. It is difficult for a fairy tale to become a belief and be followed by many people as a real truth.

⁹³ Propp, *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, 43-44 of 549.

⁹⁴ Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 106.

⁹⁵ Propp, *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, 66-74 of 549.

⁹⁶ Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp, “Study of The Folktale: Structure and History,” trans. by Serge Shishkoff in *Dispositio* (Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Michigan) 1: 3 (1976): 289.

⁹⁷ Propp, “Study of The Folktale: Structure and History,” 289.

⁹⁸ Propp, “Study of The Folktale: Structure and History,” 290.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 290.

However, Propp starts to search for the origin of *magic folk tales* in the first “stages of history” or better in the “first stages of the development of human society,”¹⁰⁰ But his final objective was not simply to establish the unity of the composition of *magic folk tales* and their origin. His works, *Morphology* and *The Historical Roots*, are “two parts or two volumes of a single broad work”¹⁰¹ and he subjects to seeing his works as a continuum of the same project. In addition, we should see these studies as a preparatory step “to analyze objectively and scientifically, in its historical development, that world of popular philosophy and popular morality that is one of the most interesting and significant components of the folk tale.”¹⁰²

In conclusion, we should see his studies as a propaedeutic work to accede to a deeper study of folk philosophy and morality through the evolution of *magic folk tales* and folk tales in general.¹⁰³ In some ways, as Vico sees poems and fables as philosophy, Propp sees people’s imagination and fantasy as a hook to elaborate folk narrative in philosophy and rediscover some folk initiation of lost wisdom in time through the historical evolution of the fairy tale.

Fairy tales and *magic folk tales* are philosophy through fantasy, and in order to discover and enjoy folk wisdom, we need to go through the morphology and cross the history of folk tales. Verene, in the preface to *Speculative Philosophy*, has written that philosophy is essentially a literary activity, that “depends upon the words, spoken or written,” to pursue wisdom.¹⁰⁴ In the same way, folk tales are expressed in spoken or written words, and like philosophy and poetry, folk tales play with language through imagination and fantasy to pursue popular wisdom, initiatory customs, mysteries, and traditions.

Folk tales are a repository of cultural memory of a society that holds philosophy, morality, and wisdom through symbols and fantasy. The plots of the tales are made up of several motifs that represent the social costumes and traditions of a society. The motifs show and report to us the traditional acts and behaviors of people of the ancient original

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 281.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 281.

¹⁰² Ibid., 289.

¹⁰³ Propp, “Inversione del rito” in *Le radici storiche dei racconti di fate*, 47-50 of 550.

¹⁰⁴ Verene, *Speculative Philosophy*, xii-xiii

society performed and carried out in several situations and life occasions structured on the moral and philosophical system of that time. Reading and interpreting them gives us opportunities to discover new elements and details about the original folk pearls of wisdom and knowledge.