

## Stith Thompson - The folktale - pp 70-72

### B. MAGIC OBJECTS

A general pattern is found in nearly all stories of magic objects. There is the extraordinary manner in which the objects are acquired, the use of the objects by the hero, the loss (usually by theft), and the final recovery. Of these tales, we shall first examine The Magic Ring (Type 560). This story was one of the first to receive exhaustive treatment by the so-called Finnish method. After a close examination and analysis of several hundred versions, Aarne<sup>(3)</sup> constructs an "archetype," somewhat as follows:

A poor ( or impoverished) young man spends the little money he has in order to rescue a dog and later a cat who are about to be killed. With the help of these animals he also rescues a serpent who is in danger of being burned. The thankful serpent takes him to his home, where his father gives him a stone (sometimes with a hole in it). By means of this magic object the young man constructs a beautiful castle and wins a princess for a wife. The stone, however, is stolen from him by a stranger, and through the magic power of the stone the castle and the wife are likewise removed far away. The helpful animals now set forth to recover the magic object. The dog swims, carrying the cat on his back, and succeeds in crossing the river to the opposite bank where the thief dwells. In front of the castle the cat catches a mouse and threatens it with death if it will not get for her the stone which the thief is holding in his mouth. In the night, the mouse tickles the lips of the sleeping thief with its tail. The thief must spit the stone up onto the floor. The cat receives it and carries it away in its mouth. On the way home as they are crossing the river the dog demands the stone so that he can carry it. But he lets it fall out of his mouth, and a fish swallows it. Later they are able to catch the fish, to recover the stone, and to bring it to their master. He immediately has his castle returned and joins his wife, with whom he lives happily ever after.

In most of the European versions, of course, we deal with a magic ring rather than a stone. But Aarne is convinced that the stone represents the older form of the story. Although he did not have available nearly so large a collection of versions as it would be possible to assemble today, his discussion shows that there can be little doubt that the tale was made up in Asia, probably in India, and that it has moved from there into Europe. It was certainly well established there before the seventeenth century, when it was apparently heard in Italy by Basile, who tells the story in his *Pentamerone*. While the tale is undoubtedly more popular in eastern Europe than in western, it is told, at least sometimes, in almost every country or

province on the Continent. It has been reported from the Highland Scottish, and the Irish, but seems not to be known in Iceland. It is popular through North Africa and the Near East and has penetrated as far south as Madagascar and the Hottentot country. Eastward of India the tale has been recorded several times in farther India, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines. A clear enough version is also current in Japan. The French have brought the story to the Indians of the Maritime Provinces and to Missouri. There are Portuguese versions (from the Cape Verde Islands) in Massachusetts, and Spanish in Argentina. If, as Aarne contends, the story started in India, it has gone a long way and has made itself thoroughly at home in the western world.

The same general pattern is, of course, familiar in the tale of Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp (Type 561). The finding of the lamp in the underground chamber and the magic effects of rubbing it, the acquisition of castle and wife, the theft of the lamp and loss of all his fortune, and the final restoration of the stolen lamp by means of another magic object is known to all readers of the Arabian Nights, even of the most juvenile collections. Though this tale has entered somewhat into the folklore of most European countries, it has never become a truly oral tale. Its life has been dependent upon the popularity of the Arabian Nights, especially since their translation by Galland little over two hundred years ago. There was, indeed, doubt for a good while as to whether the Aladdin story really belonged to the canon of the Arabian Nights, and it was suggested that it was a concoction of Galland himself. But the authenticity of the story as a part of the Thousand and One Nights has now been sufficiently proved. It is doubtful, however, whether the story has ever been a part of the actual folklore of any country.

Much the same relationship between written and oral versions is to be seen in the closely related tale, The Spirit in the Blue Light (Type 562). The form in which it is now told over a considerable part of Europe has undoubtedly been influenced, and in most cases is the direct result of its artistic telling by Hans Christian Andersen in his *Fyrtojet* (The Tinder Box). As in the Aladdin story, a fire steel, or tinder box, is found in an underground room. With this the hero makes a light, in response to which a spirit comes to serve him. Among other adventures, he has his servant bring the princess to him three nights in succession. He is discovered and in his confusion loses his tinder box. As he is about to be executed he asks permission to light his pipe. A comrade has brought back his tinder box to him and given it to him in prison. As he lights his pipe, his spirit helper appears and rescues him.

In spite of the fact that this tale was carefully studied by Aarne,(4) he has not very clearly distinguished this tradition from that of Aladdin and, indeed, the two are almost inextricably mixed up. The essential difference is that in this tale the magic object is lost through accident rather than through the plot of an enemy. Though the tale is not unknown in southeastern Europe, its greatest popularity is in the Baltic states and Scandinavia. Not all these versions have been analyzed, but it would seem probable that Hans Christian Andersen has had a predominant influence in the dissemination of this story.

(3). *Vergleichende Märchenforschungen*, pp. 3-82

(4). As a part of his study of *The Magic Ring* (*Vergleichende Märchenforschungen*, pp. 3-82).