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THE CONCEPT OF “TREASURE” IN ENGLISH FOLKLORE

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Parmonova Nasiba Amriddin Qizi

Jizzakh Branch Of The National University Of Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article informs about the concept of “treasure” in English folklore and some common themes and examples associated with the concept of treasure in English folklore. It also gives examples of expression of the concept of treasure in Robin Hood stories and “Jack and the Beanstalk” fairy tale in English literature. The concept of treasure in English folklore is multifaceted, reflecting the cultural, historical, and imaginative aspects of the communities that created and passed down these stories. Whether the focus is on material wealth, magical artifacts, or symbolic treasures, these tales continue to captivate audiences and contribute to the rich cultural heritage of England.

KEYWORDS

Treasure, English folklore, “Jack and the Beanstalk”, buried treasure, hidden treasure, legendary outlaw, Robin Hood, “English Fairy Tales”.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “treasure” in English folklore often revolves around myths, legends, and stories of hidden riches, precious artifacts, or valuable items guarded by mystical beings or protected by elaborate traps. These tales have been passed down through generations, contributing to the rich tapestry of English folklore.

Here are some common themes and examples associated with the concept of treasure in English folklore:

Many English folk tales involve the idea of buried treasure, often hidden by pirates, robbers, or

legendary figures. The notion of hidden wealth waiting to be discovered adds an element of mystery and adventure to these stories [3].

Treasure in English folklore is frequently guarded by supernatural beings, mythical creatures, or magical entities. These guardians might include dragons, ghosts, or other creatures that pose challenges to those seeking the treasure [3].

Certain locations in England are associated with tales of hidden treasure. For example, the idea of treasure hidden in the mysterious Oak Island or the legend of the Knights Templar hiding treasures in various locations have captured the imagination of storytellers.

Folk heroes and legendary outlaws, such as Robin Hood, are often connected to the concept of treasure. These figures are portrayed as protectors of the poor who amass wealth and hide it in secret locations.

English folklore is replete with stories of magical objects that are considered treasures. These could include items like enchanted swords, mystical jewels, or other artifacts with supernatural properties.

Many treasure stories involve curses or dire consequences for those who seek the hidden riches without meeting specific conditions or overcoming challenges. This adds an element of caution and drama to the tales.

The pursuit of treasure often serves as a central theme in quests and adventures. Characters embark on perilous journeys, facing obstacles and solving puzzles to reach the coveted treasure.

The legend of the Holy Grail is an integral part of English folklore, with stories connecting this sacred object to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. The quest for the Holy Grail is a classic tale of seeking a transcendent and invaluable treasure.

In “The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood”, expressions related to the concept of “treasure” are less about literal treasure and more about the moral value placed on wealth and its redistribution. Here are some instances:

The outlaws vow to despoil their oppressors, taking what was wrung from the poor by unjust means and returning it to them. This reflects a treasure of justice they seek to restore.

Robin Hood justifies taking from the Bishop of Hereford to aid Sir Richard of Lea, viewing the church’s excess gains as a treasure that could be better used to support those wronged by the church.

Robin Hood, after defeating beggars who feigned ailments, decides their ill-gotten gains would serve better as treasure for charity and the benefit of his band rather than enriching deceitful individuals [2].

These examples illustrate the nuanced portrayal of “treasure” in the narrative, which is not about hoarding wealth but about correcting injustices and supporting communal welfare.

In the lore surrounding Robin Hood, the notion of “treasure” often transcends physical wealth, symbolizing justice, restitution, and the righting of wrongs. Here are additional examples related to the concept of “treasure” in Robin Hood stories:

There’s a tale involving Robin Hood and the Fifteen Foresters, where the “treasure” is not gold but the fair play in a wager over archery skills, ending in a grim manner with the foresters buried in a row in Nottingham.

An article from 1796 recounts the discovery of skeletons believed to be the foresters killed by Robin Hood, hinting at a “treasure” of historical truth buried beneath the ground, symbolizing the tangible remains of the legend.

St Anne's Well in Nottingham, also known as “Robynhode's Well”, was considered a site of buried “treasure”, associated with artifacts such as Robin Hood’s bow and arrows, suggesting a treasure of healing and charity linked to the legend.

A story claims that a hideout containing relics of Robin Hood’s and Friar Tuck’s existence was found, then lost

to a cave-in, representing a treasure trove of the legend's history waiting to be rediscovered.

The tale of Little John's longbow, a physical “treasure” associated with strength and loyalty, represents the enduring legacy of the characters surrounding Robin Hood. The bow's disappearance adds to the mystique of the legend's artifacts.

These accounts convey that in the world of Robin Hood, “treasure” is not solely about material riches but encompasses moral victories, historical artifacts, and the legendary hero’s enduring fight for justice.

“English Fairy Tales” by Joseph Jacobs is a collection of traditional folk tales that includes various themes, including those related to treasure. While specific tales may vary in their details, “Jack and the Beanstalk” from the collection is an example among the stories involve the concept of treasure.

“Jack and the Beanstalk” is a classic English fairy tale about a poor boy named Jack who trades his family’s cow for a handful of magic beans. These beans grow into a gigantic beanstalk overnight, reaching the sky. Jack climbs the beanstalk and discovers a land inhabited by a giant. In the giant’s castle, he finds various treasures, including a magical harp and a hen that lays golden eggs. Jack manages to acquire these treasures and escape the giant [1].

The treasures in this tale include the magical harp and the hen that lays golden eggs, both of which Jack acquires from the giant's castle in the sky. These treasures become a source of wealth and prosperity for Jack and his family.

This is just one example from Jacobs' collection, and "English Fairy Tales" features numerous stories with various expressions of the treasure concept, including hidden riches, magical objects, and valuable rewards obtained through quests and challenges. The collection reflects the richness and diversity of English folklore, showcasing the cultural significance of treasure in traditional tales.

Overall, these folklore elements contribute to the enduring allure of treasure in English culture, inspiring countless stories, poems, and adaptations in various forms of literature and entertainment. The concept of treasure in English folklore encapsulates the timeless themes of adventure, mystery, and the eternal quest for the extraordinary.

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