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**Folklore as a means of expressing national identity:
the image of the serpent in British literature
of the XXI century**

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Abstract: The issue of national identity remains one of the key topics in contemporary literary studies, especially in the context of globalization and cultural interaction. Over the past fifteen years, scholars have increasingly focused on analyzing the ways national self-awareness is represented in fiction, with folklore motifs playing a particularly important role. As a vital part of the cultural code, folklore enables authors to draw on collective memory and reinterpret traditional imagery within contemporary contexts.

The article examines the depictions of serpents and dragons in three contemporary British novels: *The Last Dragonslayer* (2010) by Jasper Fforde, *The Buried Giant* (2016) by Kazuo Ishiguro, and *The Essex Serpent* (2017) by Sarah Perry. The study aims to determine the extent to which these images draw upon British national folklore and to explore how their interpretation contributes to the expression of national identity in 21st-century literature. The study primarily employs a cultural-historical approach and V. Propp's typology.

The analysis reveals that the serpents and dragons in the novels by Sarah Perry and Kazuo Ishiguro exhibit the most distinct folkloric traits, which are deeply rooted in the British mythopoetic tradition. In *The Buried Giant*, the dragon serves as a symbol of collective memory and historical trauma, echoing motifs from medieval legends. In *The Essex Serpent*, the reptilian creature is interpreted through the lens of English folk beliefs, enhancing the sense of local color. Meanwhile, in Jasper Fforde's novel, the connection to national folklore is less explicit: the dragon here becomes part of a playful postmodernist style, though this does not negate its cultural allusions. Thus, the study confirms that the use of folkloric imagery remains a significant tool for constructing national identity in contemporary British literature. At the same time, the authors employ traditional motifs in different ways, ranging from direct borrowing to transforming them in new artistic contexts.


Key words: British literature; National identity; Folklore; Serpent image; Sarah Perry; Jasper Fforde; Kazuo Ishiguro


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Обращение к национальному фольклору в литературе как средство выражения национальной идентичности: образ змея в британской литературе XXI-го в.

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Аннотация: Проблема национальной идентичности остается одной из ключевых тем в современном литературоведении, особенно в контексте глобализации и культурного взаимодействия. В последние пятнадцать лет исследователи все чаще обращаются к анализу способов репрезентации национального самосознания в художественной литературе, среди которых особое место занимает использование фольклорных мотивов. Фольклор, будучи важной частью культурного кода, позволяет авторам не только апеллировать к коллективной памяти, но и переосмысливать традиционные образы в новых контекстах.

В данной статье исследуются образы змеев и драконов в трех современных британских романах: «Последняя охотница на драконов» (2010) Джаспера Ффорде, «Похороненный великан» (2016) Кадзуо Исигуро и «Змей в Эссексе» (2017) Сары Перри. Цель работы – определить, в какой степени эти образы восходят к британскому национальному фольклору и как их интерпретация способствует выражению национальной идентичности в литературе XXI века. Проведенный анализ показал, что в романах Сары Перри и Кадзуо Исигуро змеи и драконы обладают наиболее явными фольклорными чертами, связанными с британской мифопоэтической традицией. В «Похороненном

великане» дракон выступает как символ коллективной памяти и исторической травмы, что перекликается с мотивами средневековых легенд. В «Змее в Эссексе» образ рептилии интерпретируется через призму английских народных поверий, что усиливает ощущение локального колорита. В то же время в романе Джаспера Ффорде связь с национальным фольклором менее очевидна: дракон здесь становится частью игровой постмодернистской стилистики, что, однако, не исключает его культурных аллюзий. В работе в основном используется культурно-исторический метод и типология В. Проппа.

Таким образом, исследование подтверждает, что обращение к фольклорным образам остается значимым инструментом конструирования национальной идентичности в современной британской литературе. При этом авторы по-разному используют традиционные мотивы – от прямого заимствования до их трансформации в новых художественных контекстах.

Ключевые слова: Британская литература; Национальная идентичность; Фольклор; Образ змея; Сара Перри; Джаспер Ффорде; Кадзуо Исигуро

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Introduction

The concept of national identity has become a subject of interdisciplinary research in many countries affected by multiculturalism and globalisation to varying degrees. As an explicit and expressive part of culture, literature has likewise been actively studied. Over the past decade, the means by which national identity is expressed in British literature have been examined by numerous researchers, including L. Khabibullina, Z. Zinnatullina, A. Kalicka, M. Hurwitz and many others. Even more so does the novelty of its subject. Notably, the use of folklore imagery to express British national identity in British literature has not been the focus of much study.

The relationship between folklore and literature in Britain has been close since the 19th century. During the Victorian era, British writers began to actively draw on their national folklore. J. M. Harris notes that, since then, 'literary fairy tales and folk tales have mutually enriched each other — individual tales, as well as motifs, have gradually slipped from one category into the other' (Harris, 2008: 46). In the 20th century, fantasy literature saw the "blending" of "folk

traditions with invented traditions" in the works of authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis (Evans, 2016: 64). Recent studies, such as those by L. T. Briggs (2022), have highlighted that this process has accelerated in the 21st century. Contemporary writers such as Susanna Clarke (Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell, 2004) and Neil Gaiman (The Ocean at the End of the Lane, 2013) have further dissolved the boundaries between folklore reinvention and literary innovation.

One reason for incorporating folklore into art, particularly literature, is to lend authenticity to the creator's work and political agenda by linking them to a perceived or imagined folk community and the traditions associated with it, as T. Evans (2016: 64) argues. This practice has gained renewed urgency in the past decade, as K. Varga (2023) notes, observing that post-Brexit British literature increasingly turns to folklore as a means of 'renegotiating cultural belonging in a fragmented national landscape' (Varga, 2023: 112). However, referring to national folklore can also risk commodifying tradition for nationalist narratives, as critiqued in recent scholarship such as M. Henson's *Folklore and the Politics of Nostalgia* (2021).

National folklore is undeniably a marker of national identity (Yuldashbaeva, 2021: 162), though its deployment in literature now reflects more fluid, hybrid identities. For instance, R. S. Patel's 2022 study of British-Asian writers demonstrates how authors like Salman Rushdie (*The Satanic Verses*) and Preti Taneja (*We That Are Young*) subvert traditional folklore motifs to challenge monolithic conceptions of "Britishness." Meanwhile, digital folklore adaptations – such as viral retellings of myths on platforms like TikTok – have expanded the ways folklore circulates and evolves, as explored in J. Carter's *Digital Folkloristics* (2023).

An important study into the expression of national identity in Russian and English folklore (particularly fairy tales) was conducted by O. A. Egorova. The researcher compares traditional formulae of Russian and English fairy tales, concluding, for example, that Russian consciousness is more prone to "something fairy and magic," whereas the English one is more 'terrestrial' and real" (Egorova, 2015: 190).

This study focuses on the use of folklore imagery in literature to express national identity. It engages with ongoing scholarly conversations about tradition, adaptation and identity politics in contemporary literature.

However, studying folklore images in literature implies certain complications. For instance, it may be difficult to ascertain whether a given image truly represents the local national folklore tradition or if it has been devised and is an example of what is known as 'folkloresque'. Also, one may question the extent to which a given folklore image reflects national character. Many folklore images are international, at least within European traditions. Serpents are one example. Thus, one may have to establish whether a serpent in a British novel has been wholly, largely, or partially borrowed from British folklore. If this proves successful, it will be possible to reach a positive conclusion.

Admittedly, studying all national folklore images would make a research work much larger than what the format of the given article may allow. Therefore, this paper will focus on a single category of images, that is, on images of serpents more or less derived from British national folklore.

Main part

The **research aim** is to analyze serpent images in three selected British novels. The **objectives** include the following:

- to establish whether or not the image is actually derived from folklore;
- to establish whether or not the given image represents national tradition in the novel and, thus, expresses national identity therein.

The research material comprises three novels published in the 21st century. The novels are *The Last Dragonslayer* by Jasper Fforde (2010), *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ichiguro (2016), and *The Essex Serpent* by Sarah Perry (2017).

The novels were selected based on three criteria: they contain serpent images that appear to be derived from folklore, they were written by British authors, and they were published in the 21st century. The first novel tells a story about an emancipated widow retiring to a small town in Essex, which is popularly known to be infested by a monstrous serpent. The author creates an artificial Victorian setting and tackles the woman's question and religion in Victorian England. "The Last Dragonslayer" is a young-adult dystopian fantasy novel about a teenage girl that proves to be the last Dragonslayer. Yet, when she finds out that the dragon's death is plotted only for enriching some powerful people, she refuses to perform her function. The novel exposes the destructive nature of mercantilism and raises the problem of discriminating "the other". The third one is an intellectual novel that draws on Welsh legendary past and places the hero within the Arturian setting. Wistan is tasked with killing the she-dragon, whose mere presence terrorises the locals and causes forgetfulness. However, once the dragon is dead, the Welsh

and the Saxons remember the grievances they had against each other and their enmity is rekindled. The novel addresses the problem of enmity between nations in general, and between the Welsh and the English in particular.

The given paper applies cultural-historical **method** with elements of comparative analysis. The study also draws heavily on V. Propp's typology of folklore images. Although Propp (2009) used Russian folklore material when developing his method, it has been widely argued that it is universal. For example, D. Kochieva showed the universality of Propp's functions for at least two European traditions: Ossetian and English (Kochieva, 2016: 99). Similarly, Sapna Dogra states that 'the significance of his work extends far beyond the study of folktales, and its power lies in its potential application to various narratives' (Dogra, 2017: 418). Additionally, the national character of the folklore imagery studied in the novels is verified through G. Trofimov's typology (Trofimov, 2015) and based on authentic examples of British folklore.

Results and discussion

The term 'Western serpent' refers to a type of serpent found in European folklore. It may take different forms, such as a dragon, a wyvern or a sea serpent. However, a common characteristic of the Western serpent is that it is always portrayed negatively. Jianwen Liu compares English and Chinese folklore dragons, stating that "...in Western countries, the dragon is seen as a dangerous, evil monster that harms human beings", whereas in China, it symbolises auspiciousness, authority and nobility, and is generally considered a positive character (Liu, 2013: 1847). The Western serpent is associated with evil and bears explicit negative epithets (Egorova, 2016: 179). Vladimir Propp names the serpent as a 'typical villain' (though Propp's original term 'вредитель' should more accurately be translated as 'harmer', meaning someone who causes harm), thus confirming the first important feature of the Western serpent (Propp, 2009: 113). This is important

for analysis, as not all European writers use Western serpent imagery in their literary works. For example, the German writer Michael Ende 'borrowed the idea of dragons being beautiful and benevolent from Chinese tradition' (Petzold, 2006: 214). However, British writers mostly pay tribute to the European tradition.

Vladimir Propp identifies four types of serpent: the kidnapper, the invader, the border guard and the swallower. The function of the kidnapper is to abduct virgins or women (Propp, 2000: 184). This abduction typically occurs in a natural setting, such as a garden, field, or near the sea (Lyzlova, 2008: 53). It is also noteworthy that such serpents tend to inhabit watery locations. The invader typically demands ransom for the safety of those they have abducted. Interestingly, this type of serpent is also a water creature (Propp, 2000: 185). The border guard stands by the river and guards the crossing. Often, the river is on fire (Ibid., 186). The border is the river itself, and the serpent is its guardian. N. Novikov remarks that the swallower is not an independent type. Any other type may perform its function (Novikov, 1974: 189). Propp's typology should be supplemented with the additional type proposed by Novikov. This is the 'serpent-tempter', who can change form and is a turnskin (Ibid.). Another important function of the Western dragon is to guard treasure (Kravchenko & Shvets, 2019: 127). Thus, slaying a dragon in Western tradition 'represents the questing and conquering hero's act of destroying an evil creature that guards a hoard or threatens people with its powers' (Madden, 2010: 249).

In addition to Propp's typology, there is a typology provided by A. Alshevskaya. The researcher lists eight types of serpent: cosmogonic, functional, allegorical, symbolic, metaphorical, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and anthropozoomorphic. For this study, the functional, anthropozoomorphic and zoomorphic types are important. The first is a cumulative category of all of Propp's serpent types. According to Alshevskaya's table, functional serpents are present in myths,

folklore, and literature. This highlights the connection between folklore and literature, facilitating the verification of folkloric imagery (Alshevskaya, 2018: 187). The second type is a serpent with human features and a serpent's body. This type is found in many European traditions. Finally, the zoomorphic serpent is a beast with no human features. Interestingly, Alshevskaya claims that the zoomorphic serpent is not present in folklore; however, as will become evident later, it is.

The most common type of serpent in Western tradition is anthropo-zoomorphic one. Its distinguishing feature is its human-like appearance. This type is often a dragon that can understand and speak human speech. An example is Fafnir from the *Völsunga Saga*, who was described as a 'human turned dragon' (Honegger, 2009: 30). Another example of an intelligent serpent is the Russian Zmei Gorynych. Dijana Vučković identifies a similar character in a Serbian folktale, in which the 'abducted tsarina questions the dragon' (Vučković & Bratić, 2020: 348). A literary example of this type of character is Smaug in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Tolkien had two models for his dragon: 'Smaug's creation is based on the dragon from *Beowulf* and has features taken from Fafnir as well, such as the ability to speak and additional armour' (Hyla, 2018: 215). Like Fafnir, Smaug can communicate: "The riddling talk between Smaug and the hobbit has its parallel in the dialogue between Fafnir and Sigurd" (Unerman, 2002: 96). Like the two archetypal dragons, Smaug guards cursed gold. However, neither of these archetypes has British roots. The former emerged before England was formed as a solid state. The latter is Scandinavian. According to Alshevskaya's typology, the anthropomorphic serpent is an archetype present in most European folklore, except British folklore.

Although the British serpent basically belongs to the Western tradition, it has features that help to distinguish it from the Western anthropo-zoomorphic dragon. **One way to clearly see the features typical of the**

English serpent is to compare it with another European image, such as the Russian serpent. Having compared British and Russian folklore serpents, G. Trofimov highlights complete zoomorphism as the defining feature of the British serpent. This means that the British serpent has no human qualities. Most importantly, it is unable to communicate with or understand humans. It also exhibits no other signs of a human mind. The British serpent is merely a beast (Trofimov, 2015: 96). An example of this is the Lambton worm from the eponymous folktale. After being dropped into a well, the creature grows into a giant serpent that terrorises the locals. There is no communication between the worm and the humans. Similarly incommunicable and non-human-like is the serpent in the famous folktale "St. George of Merrie England". In contrast, the serpent in "The Laidly Worm" seems to be able to speak. However, the voice emanating from its belly belongs to the enchanted princess concealed beneath the beast's skin. Similarly zoomorphic serpents appear in the Scottish folktale "Assipattle and the Mester Stoor Worm" and the Welsh legend "Llud and Llevelys".

The researcher also states that both British and Russian serpents dwell in the wild. Yet, while Russian serpents commonly inhabit rocky terrains – Gorynych means 'mountain dweller' – British serpents are prone to stay close to lakes, rivers or the sea. All the three aforementioned serpents indeed live away from civilization. In Scotland, for example, serpents Nessie and Morag are traditionally believed to inhabit lakes (Parsons, 2004: 74).

The British serpents' activities are geographically limited to one or a few towns (Trofimov, 2015: 96). It is no coincidence that many British serpents bear town names: The Lambton Worm and the Mordiford Dragon, for example. The British serpent also commonly possesses the ability to poison the hero (Trofimov, 2015: 95). This ability is exemplified by the Stoor worm, the legendary

Mordiford dragon and the dragon from “St. George of Merrie England”.

The British serpents’ major function is invading the neighboring lands and devouring both people and cattle. Depriving locals of their cattle seems to be a characteristic typical of the British serpents. Out of all previously mentioned serpents only that of “St. George of Merrie England” proves to be more selective and preferring virgins.

According to Trofimov, the death of the British serpent is also unlike that of the Russian (or European anthropomorphic) type. Often, the dragon slayer cunningly devises a way to kill the serpent, sometimes without even a fight (Trofimov, 2015: 96). For instance, the Lambton worm, which could regenerate, could only be killed after the hero had cut it in two and allowed one of the pieces to be carried away by a river. The Mordiford dragon is killed by a hero who hides in a barrel (Roud & Simpson, 2000: 245). St George of Merry England uses an orange tree to shelter from the serpent's poison.

It is also important to note that the British serpent is typically a chthonic creature. It typically emerges from beneath the earth or from the depths of the sea, bearing “chthonic and aquatic symbolism” (Alexander, 2008: 8). Since ancient times, serpents have been considered “messengers of the underworld” (Khalifa-Gueta, 2018: 271). In Christian consciousness, the underworld is associated with evil. Thus, in some folktales, the mere presence of a serpent is enough to cause a local plague. The serpent may not reveal itself openly, but evil may spread around it and affect people's lives. It can therefore be concluded that the British serpent symbolises an impersonal, chthonic evil that afflicts humans like a plague. This could be perceived as the wrath of God incurred by people's sins.

Thus, the British serpent is a zoomorphic invader. It kidnaps and devours both people and cattle. One more detail that helps to attribute the British serpent to Propp’s type ‘invader’ is the ransom that people have to pay to the serpent for their

safety. Ransom takes different forms: the milk, the cattle or the virgins. The British serpent may also act as a local plague negatively affecting people’s lives only by its presence.

The presented characteristics of both the Western serpents in general and the British serpents in particular will facilitate the analysis of serpent images in the three novels. They will help establish whether the author drew on the British national tradition, the general European tradition, or neither. If the former is true, it will be possible to conclude that the image represents British national identity within the novel.

The serpent in Sarah Perry’s novel (henceforth referred to as the Essex Serpent), being a product of the superstitious imagination of the inhabitants of Aldwinter, proves to be an expressive national image. Its national folkloric origins are highlighted by the fact that it is derived from a 17th-century legend (Böle, 2022: 74). The functions of the Essex Serpent confirm its solid basis in folklore.

First of all, the Essex Serpent is a kidnapper. When Banks’ daughter disappeared, the blame was immediately put on the Serpent.

He’d sat at a distance, alone, thinking of his poor lost daughter and her coral-coloured hair. ‘All alone out there with the flotsam and jetsam,’ he’d said, ‘and the mark of the Serpent on her.’ (Perry, 2016: 354)

The Essex Serpent is an invader. He is thought to attack local people. Since the discovery on New Year’s morning of a drowned man down on the Blackwater marshes – naked, his head turned almost 180 degrees, a look of dread in his wide-open eyes – the Essex Serpent had ceased to be merely a device to keep children in check, and had begun to stalk the streets (Perry, 2016: 62). Likewise, the Essex Serpent is believed to attack cattle. Cracknell strongly believes that the Serpent stole one of his goats (Perry, 2016: 121).

The Serpent turns into a local harmer and plague: “the unseen thing [the Serpent] had been blamed for every mislaid child and every broken limb” (Perry, 2016: 71). A particularly remarkable harm is that the local water source is believed to have been poisoned by the Serpent’s urine. Thus, the functions of the Essex Serpent may be stated to correspond those of the folklore serpent, according to Propp’s typology.

Other characteristics of the Essex Serpent place it very close to the traditional image of the British serpent. First, the Essex Serpent is absolutely zoomorphic. There is no communication happening between people and the Serpent. The monster has no name, and often it is referred to as ‘the beast’.

The Essex Serpent dwells in the wild areas close to the river. Its activity is limited by Aldwinter. It has no power outside the village. Once Joanna Ransom comes to London, she quickly forgets her dread of the Serpent: “Aldwinter dwindled, became mud-bound and dull, the Essex Serpent a bumpkin beast too dim-witted to make its presence felt” (Perry, 2016: 379). This is why it is called the Essex Serpent: it does not give the creature a human-like identity, but merely ties it to a particular location.

Finally, the Essex Serpent is thought to possess poisonous breath. When one of the villagers complains that her daughter is “sick as a dog”, the other one blames the Serpent’s breath for it: “It’s the *breath* of the thing, the very *breath* of it I tell you” (Perry, 2016: 314).

Thus, it is possible to state the national British folklore origin of Perry’s Essex Serpent. The monster has no human-like individuality or abilities. The author tells a traditional British story about a beast-like monster that is a local disaster. In this way, Sarah Perry adheres to the British national tradition, wherewith she expresses the British national identity in her novel.

Maltcassion, the last dragon left in the Ununited Kingdom, differs from the Essex Serpent in many respects. First, Maltcassion and other dragons in the novel are anthropomorphic at least in the ability to

communicate with humans: “They were fierce fire-breathing creatures of great intelligence, dignity and sensitivity who could and did converse on matters of great importance” (Fforde, 2010: 73). Moreover, they prove to be highly intelligent creatures in general: “it was Dimwiddy, a small Dragon from the island of what is now ConStuffia, who first discovered the mathematical law of differential calculus” (Fforde, 2010: 149). Also, Fforde’s dragons have names, which is common for anthro-zoomorphic serpents. Like most of Western dragons, Maltcassion is a treasure guard. Specifically, it guards the lands that are valued very highly by the interested people, and that may be equalized with the treasure. Nevertheless, all this does not mean that Fforde did not refer to the British tradition in his novel.

First, it must be said that in “The Last Dragonslayer” Fforde anthropomorphized, and thus equalized, all animals. In a court of law “The same burden of proof is required for a Dragon as it is for any other living creature” (Fforde, 2010: 227). At such background human-like serpents do not look like anything exceptional. Fforde made the dragon human-like, as he did with the rabbits in his novel “Constant Rabbit”, to dehumanise ‘the other’ in the British society and, thus, to illustrate social discrimination. This likewise proves to be the clue to Fforde’s dragons’ being ultimately positive characters: “We [dragons] want only peace with humans and have much to teach you” (Fforde, 2010: 273). The author shows ‘the other’ as someone different from the rest of the society, and not negative.

Besides that, there are still hints that point to the British national serpent image traits in the novel. First, there is an idea that dragons are zoomorphic: “According to naturalists the Dragon belonged to the animal kingdom for certain, almost definitely to the vertebrates, and was as likely as not a reptile” (Fforde, 2010: 116). There is an idea that dragons are invaders: “They liked to eat people” (Fforde, 2010: 74). For people’s safety dragons receive ransom: “The Dragons were to have lands given over to them and

they would be kept stocked with sheep and cows for the Dragons to eat” (Fforde, 2010: 88). The dragons’ activities, and those of Maltcassion in particular, are limited by the Dragonlands, which place is away from civilization. Dragons’ death must be contrived: “out of a recorded 8,128 attempts by knights, only twelve managed to succeed, mostly due to a lucky charge with a brave horse and a providential jab in the unarmoured section just beneath the throat” (Fforde, 2010: 74).

Thus, even though Fforde’s dragons bear distinctive characteristics of the Fafnir-like anthro-zoomorphic dragons, consciously or unconsciously Fforde still partially refers to the British folklore tradition, expressing in this way the British national identity.

Surprisingly, K. Ishiguro, an English author of Japanese descent, created a more British image of a dragon than the Welsh-born J. Fforde. Although Ishiguro’s she-dragon is named Querig, this is the only anthropomorphic feature of the image, and without other human qualities, it bears no resemblance to humans. However, there are plenty of features that demonstrate Querig’s connection to British national folklore.

First, Querig is totally zoomorphic. That is, there is no instance of communication with the dragon. The dragon is discussed as nothing but a dangerous beast. Second, the she-dragon is an invader: “she may on a whim attack a passing traveller” (Ishiguro, 2015: 75). Also, to ensure their safety, people are forced to hand over their cattle to the dragon as ransom: “If you’d only take the goat up to the giant’s cairn, where it’s well known food’s regularly left for the she-dragon” (Ishiguro, 2015: 271). Similarly to the Essex Serpent, Querig is considered to be a domestic plague and the cause of many local evils: “Querig may rarely show herself, but many a dark force stems from her and it’s a disgrace she remains unslain all these years” (Ishiguro, 2015: 75). In addition, Querig possesses poisonous breath. However, her breath poisons minds and not bodies. It creates a

mist that bereaves humans of their memories: “It’s Querig’s breath which fills this land and robs us of memories” (Ishiguro, 2015: 167). Finally, a contrivance is attempted in order to kill the dragon. Namely, a poisoned goat is used to kill the she-dragon: “make the goat poisonous for the she-dragon” (Ishiguro, 2015: 269).

Thus, K. Ishiguro presents in his novel a genuinely British beast-like dragon image, paying tribute to the British national folklore legacy, and adding to the Britishness of his novel.

Discussion

The results show two expressively British serpents – the Essex Serpent and Querig – and one that may not be thought equally British – Maltcassion.

Sarah Perry seems to have introduced the serpent into her novel for two major purposes. First, to reveal the materialistic worldview of the main character, Cora Seaborne. The other is to demonstrate the religious syncretism and superstition of the people of Aldwinter. The serpent’s appearance in the village is widely accepted as divine retribution for the people’s sins. However, the villagers react to this phenomenon in different ways. Some merely complain, some look hopefully to their pastor for guidance, and others perform pagan rituals. However, everyone is aware that action is required. This is a particularly British trait of tales about monstrous serpents, apart from the ones previously listed. The serpent’s appearance disturbs people’s tranquillity, prompting them to change their lives and take action. Therefore, it is not surprising that the author based her novel on a 17th-century English legend. To reveal the English national inclination towards local togetherness and readiness to take united action in the event of danger, an equally English image of danger is needed.

Kazuo Ishiguro’s she-dragon is an even more ambiguous image than the Essex Serpent. The serpent’s forgetfulness is particularly ambivalent. On the one hand, Querig is presented as an invader and a local

plague, spreading evil among those living close to its lair. This forgetfulness is also portrayed as an evil that the hero Wistan is determined to overcome. However, the she-dragon is also associated with the image of the Great Mother. Once the forgetfulness is gone, the conflict between the Britons and the Saxons resumes (Selitrina, 2017: 217).

Yet, regardless of the author's intentions, the image of the she-dragon is firmly rooted in the British national tradition. A. Mikheikina (2020: 34) identifies several intertextual links between Ishiguro's novel and Welsh legends. Of particular importance is the novel's intertextuality with the legend of Llud and Llevelys. In this legend, the serpent does not reveal itself openly; its mere presence is a plague.

The second plague was a shriek which came on every May-eve, over every hearth in the Island of Britain. And this went through people's hearts, and so scared them, that the men lost their hue and their strength, and the women their children, and the young men and the maidens lost their senses, and all the animals and trees and the earth and the waters, were left barren (Llud and Llevelys, 1910: 90)

The researcher notices that in the novel, like in the legend, the very presence of the she-dragon does harm to the people (Mikheikina, 2020: 35). Similarly to the Essex Serpent, in "The Buried Giant" the presence of the she-dragon disturbs lives of the locals and prompts them to take action. It is the locals that advice the hero to use the poisoned goat and provide the goat itself in order to kill the monster.

Thus, K. Ishiguro, a revisionist though he is, bases his intellectual novel on a solid British traditional background. Therefore, his serpent image is expressively British, and through it the British national identity is revealed.

Jasper Fforde's dragons serve different purposes. Similarly to human-like rabbits in Fforde's other animalistic novel "Constant Rabbit", the dragons and the plot around them illustrate 'otherness' and discrimination (Fforde, 2020). Particularly, Maltcassion

accuses humans of "making this planet into an exclusive mammals-only club", which he also refers to as mammal supremacism (Fforde, 2010: 148). Given Fforde's purpose, his deviation from the traditional British dragon image becomes understandable. Indeed, in order to reveal the problem of 'otherness' through animal images, it is necessary to anthropomorphise them.

The question of why the dragon images in Fforde's novel are neutral, if not positive, remains. However, here one can only speculate about the answer. One possibility is Fforde's Welsh patriotism. Welsh people have a particular fondness for dragons. In a Welsh legend written by Nennius, the red dragon's ultimate victory over the white dragon symbolises the Welsh people's victory over the English. This legend is the main reason why the Welsh flag features a red dragon. Yet Welsh love for dragons seems merely to be the reason for their choice as a symbol of 'otherness'. Characters used to impersonalise 'the other' and criticise discrimination are bound to be positive or, at least, neutral.

However, as a patriotic Briton, Fforde could not write about dragons without acknowledging the British tradition. As the analysis shows, he inevitably refers to the British folkloric image of the dragon, thus revealing his national identity.

Conclusion

The serpent is a deeply rooted archetypal image in the folklore of many nations. If an author chooses to introduce such an image into their novel, they are naturally expected to select a type of serpent that is familiar to their national consciousness and that of their readers. This was Sarah Perry's approach. An author who revises their country's legendary past is also bound to use genuine national characters to create a strong intertextual connection with true legends. This is evident in Kazuo Ishiguro's reference to the British legendary past. Sometimes, the writer may need to adapt the image for their own purposes. Nevertheless, there should be at least some traces of the British national character. Traces of this can be found in Jasper Fforde's

novels. Despite the strong influence of multiculturalism and globalisation, national identity is expressed in British literature in this century of spreading obscurity, and national folklore imagery serves as an important instrument of that expression.

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