

# THE *KNOWLEDGE IS VISION* AND THE *AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION* METAPHORS IN FAIRY TALES<sup>1</sup>

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*RESUMEN.* Este artículo estudia cómo las metáforas conceptuales EL CONOCIMIENTO ES VISIÓN y LA AUTORIDAD ES UN ÁREA DELIMITADA permiten explicar el significado básico y la interpretación de más de veinte cuentos y mitos populares. Los cuentos, representativos de varias culturas, han sido extraídos de un *corpus* informático de 386 historias escritas por ANDREW LANG (1844-1912). Además, se ofrece la posibilidad de clasificar los cuentos según la metáfora básica que contienen o según la combinación de metáforas que los caracterizan. También se explora cómo las metáforas objeto de estudio dan cuenta de parte de lo maravilloso de los cuentos. Para acabar proponemos que estas metáforas, al estar fuertemente ligadas a la experiencia, pueden haber contribuido a que muchos de los cuentos hayan sido transmitidos más fácilmente (ya que hubiera sido más sencillo memorizar sus patrones estructurales básicos) y, en consecuencia, a que los cuentos sean parecidos en diferentes contextos socio-culturales.

*PALABRAS CLAVE.* Metáfora conceptual, experiencia, lo maravilloso de los cuentos, cultura, cuentos populares, mitos.

*ABSTRACT.* This paper studies how the conceptual metaphors *KNOWLEDGE IS VISION* and *AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION* are able to account for the basic meaning and interpretation of more than twenty popular tales and myths. The tales, which are representative of various cultures, have been extracted from a computerized *corpus* of analysis containing 386 fairy tales written by ANDREW LANG (1844-1912). Besides, we offer the possibility of classifying tales according either to the basic metaphor they contain or to the combination of metaphors that may comprise them. Additionally, the paper explores in what ways the two metaphors under scrutiny allow us to explain some of the uncanny elements of tales. Finally, we suggest that the two metaphors, because of their strong experiential grounding, may have contributed to an easier transmission of many fairy tales (as it would be easier to memorise their basic patterns), and also to make tales alike in different socio-cultural settings.

*KEY WORDS.* Conceptual metaphor, experiential, uncanny, culture, fairy tales, myths.

This paper studies how the conceptual metaphors *KNOWLEDGE IS VISION* and *AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION* are able to account for the basic meaning and interpretation of more than twenty popular tales and myths. Besides, we offer the possibility of classifying tales according either to the basic metaphor they contain or to the combination

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of metaphors that may comprise them (for example, whereas *The Young Man Who Would Have his Eyes Opened* is mainly characterised by the metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS VISION, *Rapunzel* makes use of both metaphors). Additionally, the paper explores in what ways the two metaphors under scrutiny allow us to explain some of the uncanny elements of tales. Finally, we suggest that the two metaphors, because of their strong experiential grounding, may have contributed to an easier transmission of many fairy tales (as it would be easier to memorise their basic patterns), and also to make tales alike in different socio-cultural settings.

In order to substantiate these points, we have worked with a computerized corpus of analysis containing 386 fairy tales written by ANDREW LANG (1844-1912). The tales, which are representative of various cultures, have been entirely downloaded from the Project Gutenberg online library. The work of identification of underlying metaphors has been carried out with the help of the (encyclopedic) information provided in the Berkeley Framenet Project. This information has allowed us to make an exhaustive and systematic analysis of the lexical patterns of the metaphors. Then, we have made use of WordSmith and its tool Concord in order to find examples of key words and phrases that we expected to underlie metaphorical usage in the texts. This has allowed us to observe if a given metaphor applies in a given tale or not. Also, we have made use of complementary Google searches in order to further substantiate our analysis of the metaphors in every day usage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Of the various types of mythological literature, fairy tales are the simplest and purest expressions of the collective unconscious and thus offer the clearest understanding of the basic patterns of the human psyche. Every people or nation has its own way of experiencing this psychic reality, and so a study of the world's fairy tales yields a wealth of insights into the archetypal experiences of humankind. (MARIE-LOUISE VON FRANZ 1996).

Fairy tales represent our cultural unconscious, metaphor too and so it may underlie some basic tales in human history.

Fairy tales have been studied from many different theoretical angles (e.g. psychoanalytical, feminist, structuralist, anthropological, etc.). It is generally accepted that they have a huge semiotic potency and an ever-varying polysemous nature. Themes keep jumping around, and mix and remix lending themselves to different meanings in different historical and social contexts. Furthermore, the notion of metamorphosis, so central to any defining characteristic of the fairy tale, can also be seen to be reflected in the shape-shifting quality of the fairy tale structure itself. Also, it is the taken-for-granted nature of these allusions, their commonly accessible meaning, that makes the fairy tale a productive site for cultural analysis since the specifics of each re-telling are historically and culturally bound. Nevertheless, while individual versions of fairy tales may vary, their motifs (the stylistic details used to relate the basic events) are quite consistent in their adherence to the plot outline (the sequence of basic events) of the tale type, which explains why they have been repeated over time and across national boundaries in recognisably similar forms.

But how have fairy tales transmitted all this knowledge and experiences over the centuries? Why are fairy tales similar across different national boundaries and even distant cultures?

Conceptual metaphor is pervasive in both thought and language. It is hard to think of a common subjective experience that is not conventionally conceptualized in terms of metaphor... Everyday metaphors are built out of primary metaphors plus forms of commonplace knowledge: cultural models, folk theories, or simply knowledge or beliefs that are widely accepted in a culture. (LAKOFF & JOHNSON 1999).

In order to address the aforementioned questions, conceptual metaphor may give a huge clue since, as this research work attempts to show, besides being a reasoning tool that has conveyed and conveys our commonplace knowledge throughout human generations, it is not only a pervasive device used in fairy tales at a local level but even a full structuring mechanism of the plot outline that underlies the very essence of the fairy tale. With the help of this powerful tool, not only can we make sense out of the basic events of tales (the journey of the protagonist, his final marriage and enthronement, the princess being isolated in a tower, etc.) but even fully understand the punishments, morality, love affairs, and the magic contained in them.

## 2. NEED AND PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The study of fairy tales has received much attention from different angles of study. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has proved final on the issue. In this respect, we believe that the current theory of cognitive metaphor, applied to an analysis of fairy tales, may cast light onto the questions addressed above.

On the basis of these observations, our purpose in this research work is to show how conceptual metaphor may be considered not only the cornerstone upon which the fairy tale is understood and built, but even a sort of scaffolding which sustains its basic structure and allows its development. Also, the following are other complementary aims of our research:

(a) It has long been a familiar fact that some forms of literature (fairy tales, mythology, etc.) involve metaphorical and symbolic structures. This research work will try to show some of the relationships between those structures and the metaphorical ones found in everyday language.

(b) The fact that some forms of literature, especially fairy tales, have been found to be similar across different cultures and over time may be partly relatable to the existence of the so-called «universal metaphors», that are thought to be a cross-linguistic norm.

(c) As KAREN BOWE (1996) mentions, fantastic literature contains creatures and events impossible or at least highly unlikely in the real world. Nonetheless, fairy tales and myths can be considered constructs in which the bizarre is usual, and the laws which govern our reality do not always apply. But, «Does this mean that there are no laws? Does the world where magic is possible, the world of fantastic literature, function entirely arbitrarily? Or does this world also have a structure, however differently it may be organised?» (BOWE 1996). In Case Study 1 of *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, Lakoff points out, «A topic such as the logic of emotions would seem... a contradiction in terms; similarly, it may seem strange to talk about the principles which structure the logic of the

fairy tale». What we may infer from these lines is that, as the logic of emotions appears to be structured by metaphor and other ICMs (LAKOFF & JOHNSON 1980, 1999; LAKOFF 1987, 1989; LAKOFF & TURNER 1989; KÖVECSES 2000; PEÑA 2000, etc.), the inner logic of the fairy tale is as well structured by these mechanisms.

(d) The fact that conceptual metaphor has been proved to be a reasoning tool that has conveyed our commonplace knowledge throughout human generations may explain why, in a similar way, fairy tales condense a sort of collective unconscious that has been transmitted since the very moment man was man.

(d) The fact that tales have survived over time in similar forms, apart from being fully memorised and transmitted by story-tellers, may also be explained from an experiential perspective (LAKOFF 1987: xv; JOHNSON 1997: xvi). From this point of view, metaphor is considered an internalised mechanism of thought and reasoning. Thus, upon the acquisition of these internalised patterns (which generally stem from the inner structure of the body and the way we conceive it in its interaction with the physical and social world), not only the understanding but also the retelling of these traditional stories –whose basic structure is based on metaphor- would have been facilitated to a large extent.

Likewise, the conception of metaphor as a reasoning tool, that somehow determines the way in which we understand and perceive our surrounding world, and as a device that structures tales may also explain the views (see BETTELHEIM 1976) which argue that fairy tales lead to a sort of embodiment of fundamental psychological dramas.

(f) The problem of classifying tales has always been the object of heated debate due to the vast array of forms in which they appear. Thus, the study of the tale as structured by conceptual metaphor may cast light onto this problematic and unresolved issue.

After reading these lines, the need for an analysis of the crucial role of metaphor in understanding and structuring fairy tales, and even other forms of literature may be a bit more obvious. As far as we know, there are no preceding works within this line of research with the exception of Karen Bowe's Senior Honors Thesis (1996), and some other papers on metaphor and myths (e.g. SWEETSER 2000).

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE METAPHORS

#### 3.1. THE *KNOWLEDGE IS VISION* METAPHOR

The *KNOWING IS SEEING* conceptual metaphor allows us to understand the abstract domain of knowledge by means of the concrete domain of sight. This is a metaphor with a clear experiential basis<sup>2</sup> grounded in the fact that in early childhood human beings normally receive cognitive input by seeing. Nevertheless, whereas in the first years of one's life

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<sup>2</sup> See SWEETSER (1990), especially pp. 37-40.

perception and cognition are conceived as together (or conflated in terms of JOHNSON 1997), due to the fact that there is a deep basic correlation between the intellectual input and vision, afterwards these two domains separate from each other («deconflation» in JOHNSON's words 1997). This is the reason why we are able to use the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING meaning just «awareness» and not being linked to vision at all, which may be seen in everyday language expressions like the following ones:

- (a) I see what you're getting at.
- (b) His claims aren't clear.
- (c) The passage is opaque.

This metaphor is really pervasive in fairy tales and mythical stories, albeit in multiple forms. First, as BOWE (1996) points out, we may find cases in which a crime of unauthorised knowledge is punished by loss of sight, both the crime and punishment taking place in the domain of sight. More specifically, what is punished is the prohibited viewing of a god or goddess, especially if naked or otherwise exposed. In fact, gods are normally covered or hidden so that we cannot see them, which prompts the metaphor UNAVAILABLE TO KNOWLEDGE IS INVISIBLE OR COVERED. What is interesting here is that by means of this metaphor the sight of a god or marvellous thing is understood as knowledge of that god or thing. Hence, the punishment as well as the crime are understood metaphorically. This may be seen in some Greek myths such as the case of Anchises, who received a visit from Aphrodite and, upon the revelation of her identity, he was «horrified to learn that he had uncovered the nakedness of a goddess, and begged her to spare his life» (Graves, 25g –from BOWE 1996–). It is clear that via this metaphor we are able to understand his sight as a crime: Anchises is terrified since total sight (knowledge) of a goddess is too much for a mortal to bear.

As in many other cases, the unauthorised sight will be severely punished. For instance, Tiresias was blinded by Athena after surprising her in her bath, although he is endowed with «inward sight», which again stands for knowledge. In a different story, Tiresias was asked to solve a row between Hera and Zeus about the relative enjoyment of sexual intercourse by women and men (it is his knowledge –because he has *seen* it- that causes him to be called and then punished in answering that women enjoy it more). Actaeon saw Artemis bathing in a brook, which directly resulted in his death. Semele also died when she saw Zeus in all his splendour since he appeared as thunder and lightning and she was thus consumed (just as extreme light is destructive to the eyes, an excess of knowledge is destructive to the self). In all these cases, we may see how complete knowledge of the gods is destructive to mortals, which is metaphorically expressed as sight of the gods.

This may be exemplified by means of fairy tales if we make use of the final section of «Rapunzel». In this tale, the child of a couple is given to a witch who keeps her locked in a tower with no access (UNAVAILABLE TO KNOWLEDGE IS INVISIBLE OR COVERED) but for a window at the top through which, when asked to do so, Rapunzel let her long beautiful hair drop to the ground so that the witch could climb up. However, a prince discovered her and tried to flee with her but, as soon as the witch learnt about their intentions, she punished them. The prince lost his eyes as a punishment for having seen her, that is, having acquired knowledge of Rapunzel, who was exclusively available to the witch.

As regards our corpus of analysis, the metaphor under study appears in several tales. The Norwegian folk tale «East of the Sun, West of the Moon» relates the story of a beautiful

girl who marries a white bear. However, the bear transforms itself into a man at night, when she is not able to see him. As in *Cupid and Psyche*, the girl asks the bear to let her visit her family, at which point he warns her against letting her mother take her to a different room to talk. However, the mother persuades her and, after discovering that her daughter's husband is a bear, she encourages her to see the beast with a candle while he is sleeping. In so doing, the girl lets some hot tallow fall upon him by accident, thus waking him up and causing his disappearance and the girl's journey to rescue him.

So when she had reached home and had gone to bed it was just the same as it had been before, and a man came and lay down beside her, and late at night, when she could hear that he was sleeping, she got up and kindled a light, lit her candle, let her light shine on him, and saw him, and he was the handsomest prince that eyes had ever beheld, and she loved him so much that it seemed to her that she must die if she did not kiss him that very moment. So she did kiss him; but while she was doing it she let three drops of hot tallow fall upon his shirt, and he awoke. «What have you done now?» said he; «you have brought misery on both of us. If you had but held out for the space of one year I should have been free. I have a step-mother who has bewitched me so that I am a white bear by day and a man by night; but now all is at an end between you and me, and I must leave you, and go to her. She lives in a castle which lies east of the sun and west of the moon, and there too is a princess with a nose which is three ells long, and she now is the one whom I must marry».

Also, we have cases in which discovering and thus knowing the truth about something is so powerful that it makes either the hero punish himself and lose his own sight or experience an extreme suffering. This leads us to the famous example of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. In this story, the Delphic oracle prophesied to Laius, the king of Thebes, that he would be killed by a son and that his son would marry his mother. Shocked by this, Laius decides to kill the child, but the shepherd in charge of killing the child took him to Corinth instead where he was adopted by King Polybus and his childless queen. When he grew up, Oedipus discovered that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Thinking that the prophecy referred to his foster parents, he decided not to return to Corinth. Then, at a crossroads and after a row, Oedipus kills King Laius, his real father although he doesn't know it at the time. After solving a famous riddle, the hero gets rid of the Sphinx and is welcomed as a saviour in Thebes, being offered the vacant throne. He then becomes king and marries the queen who, unbeknownst to him, is his biological mother. After Thebes is again stricken by a plague, the Delphic oracle tells Oedipus that the plague would end when the murderer of King Laius was punished. Later, Oedipus learns that he was the murderer: the awful truth is revealed about his own past and about who the stranger was on the path. After discovering all this and after having made love to his real mother, Oedipus blinds himself in an act of self-hatred, thus attempting to forget everything.

Regarding fairy tales, «The Young Man Who Would Have his Eyes Opened» constantly shows the parallelism between knowledge and vision. It tells about a man who was never happy unless he was prying into something that other people knew nothing about. He discovered that a great deal took place under the cover of night which mortal eyes never saw and, from that moment he felt he could not rest till these hidden secrets were laid bare to him, and he spent his whole time wandering from one wizard to another, begging them «to open his eyes». Even though the magician warns him that he will need more than a man's

courage «to bear the sight», he accepts the challenge. These were the consequences (at the end, «blindness» obviously refers to «absence of knowledge»):

He felt that day to be endless, and counted the minutes till night should come, and he might return to the forest. But when at last he got there he found neither pavilions nor nymphs, and though he went back many nights after he never saw them again. Still, he thought about them night and day, and ceased to care about anything else in the world, and was sick to the end of his life with longing for that beautiful vision. And that was the way he learned that the wizard had spoken truly when he said, '**Blindness is man's highest good**'.

Finally, a different approach may be adopted as regards the KNOWLEDGE IS VISION metaphor. The KNOWN/SEEN IS SAFE (and its converse, UNKNOWN/UNSEEN IS UNSAFE) is also a metaphor which underlies many fairy tales<sup>3</sup>: some of the already analysed cases show that the lover who has not been seen is perceived as possibly dangerous (e.g. «East of the Sun, West of the Moon»); in many other instances, unknown places are depicted as being really dangerous. This is the case of tales in which the hero must travel to a distant, unknown place, or just enter an unknown castle (e.g. «The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood»). Nevertheless, the most common instance that draws from this metaphor is the story which involves a forest: in spite of the fact that there are always cases in which the woods may be seen as a sort of cover in which characters may take refuge (e.g. «The One-Handed Girl», «Toads and Diamonds», «The Fox and the Lap», etc.) in order not to be seen<sup>4</sup>, the forest is typically understood to be a dangerous place. These two different aspects of the forest may be explained on the basis of the same experiential account. On the one hand, the density of trees and plants is so great in a forest that, besides the obvious fact that there is not much light, it becomes a sort of cover, concealment, enclosure... which makes objects inaccessible to vision. On the other hand, the negative aspects a forest may acquire seem to derive from that it is normally a dark place and, as has been already seen, darkness tends to be given negative connotations (e.g. death, badness, cold, etc.). In fact, many forests in fairy tales are not just the place where parents abandon their children, but they are typically inhabited by evil creatures such as witches, beasts, etc. as well (e.g. «Hansel and Grettel», «Brother and Sister», «The Golden Lads», «Little Thumb», etc.). Let us view some negative expressions which characterise the woods in our corpus of study:

(a) «After what seemed to him a very long time, he found himself all alone in a vast **forest, so dark and gloomy that he secretly shuddered**». («Prince Vivien and the Princess Placida»).

(b) «Graciosa was so happy to have found Percinet, and to have escaped from the **gloomy forest and all its terrors**, that she was very hungry and very merry, and they were a gay party». («Graciosa and Percinet»).

<sup>3</sup> And it also appears in sayings and proverbs : e.g. Spanish *Más vale malo conocido que bueno por conocer* («*Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know*»).

<sup>4</sup> The Arthurian legends contained the famous example of Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot hiding in the woods to conceal their passionate romance from the eyes of King Arthur and his court.

(c) «In an instant prince, princess, and horse had all disappeared, and instead was a **dense forest, crossed and recrossed by countless paths**». («The Unlooked-for Prince»).

Finally, as an unknown place (in contrast to the castle or palace<sup>5</sup>), the forest tends to be the place where the wondrous takes place, and magic is indeed something characterised by somehow being concealed from human eyes. The sort of uncertainty, sense of being lost, and lack of a clear basis that characterise forests may motivate the fact that magic typically occurs while in the woods. Also, in accounting for the meaning of the forest, Bettelheim (1976: 93-94) points out that in many European tales, a character may find himself in a deep, dark forest where he feels lost (because, from our explanation, the place has not been seen and hence it is unknown to the character), after having given up the organisation of his life which the parental home provided (which he knew in detail). And, what is more, in the dark forest, the fairy-tale hero often encounters the witch and her magic powers.

### 3.2. THE *AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION* METAPHOR

As happens with any kind of authority, many kids would see that PARENTAL AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION, a metaphor whose experiential basis may be found in the fact that many parents usually set barriers on the freedom of their children in such a way that they feel constrained, limited, restricted... This can even be considered a primary metaphor (in terms of GRADY 1997), since by the time we are small kids, parents and educators normally tell us what we can do and what we cannot do, the rules thus being conceptualised as a sort of physical boundary for our actions and movements. Everyday language also shows this metaphor that maps a bounded region onto any sort of authority,

(1) There is everything within my authority. We do not want any more choice. The parents in my area are happy with the choices they have.

(2) Only he would dare to go beyond my authority!

(3) Supreme Board of the Press Council has the power of taking any decision which does not trespass the authority of the members' council.

(4) In Iceland, at least, the Norwegians really did escape from the authority of rulers.

(5) She remains under the authority of her father until she enters the authority of her husband in marriage.

Regarding the sense in which this metaphor applies to fairy tales, we do not just find the metaphor as being related to parents and children but to upper forces in society, namely that of kings and rulers, since they were the ones who exerted authority over the people within their kingdom, lands, palaces, or castles. Besides, what is a really pervasive pattern is the case in which princes and princesses fall within the parental authority of kings, not being allowed to leave the castle or the lands surrounding the parental palace, especially if there is

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<sup>5</sup> The Arthurian legend of «Sir Gawain and the Green Knight», an anonymous writing of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, clearly depicts the court as a civilised place in contrast to the wild, unknown forest that the Green Knight inhabits, which is obviously a metaphor of wild, uncivilised nature.



a curse upon them. Furthermore, we may even find cases of a more restricted nature, in which the offspring are confined to and locked in a small room or tower. In a similar way, humbler people prevent their children from leaving the house or a given way (see *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* below).

«The Golden Branch» is the story of a king who wants his son to be married. As the prince does not accept the proposed girl, the king locks him up in a gallery for rebellious princes. However, as he wanders through the gallery, he will discover his true love. «Rapunzel» tells about a child who is handed over to a witch who becomes her mother. However, the wicked witch locks her up in a tower to hide her from the rest of the world. People could just enter the tower by climbing the girl's long hair. «The Bear» is also a similar story in which a princess is kept in a palace. Let us see its introduction:

Once upon a time there was a king who had an only daughter. He was so proud and so fond of her, that he was in constant terror that something would happen to her if she went outside the palace, and thus, owing to his great love for her, he forced her to lead the life of a prisoner, shut up within her own rooms.

An extension of the AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION metaphor are the metaphors OUT OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY IS DANGER and BEING WITHIN PARENTAL AUTHORITY IS PROTECTION/SAFETY. This second example is constantly used in advertising, with cars for example, and it tends to be represented by means of a father embracing his son in a caring, protecting manner. As applied to fairy tales, these metaphors also come into being in many different instances. To draw a famous example, despite not being included in the corpus, Beatrix Potter's *The tale of Peter Rabbit* tells about a mother who forbids her children from leaving home as she goes to do some shopping. However, daring Peter leaves and he reaches Mr. McGregor's vegetable garden where he is almost caught after causing some mess. When he manages to escape, he returns home exhausted, feverish, and without his trousers, while his brothers are eating the things their mother brought, thus leading to the moral «remain under your safe parents' authority». There are many versions of this tale with different characters (e.g. lambs, little pigs, etc.).

In our corpus, this is reflected in a version of the famous and worldwide known «Little Red Riding-Hood» (here under the title of «The True History of Little Golden Hood»), the story of a young girl who is given the task of visiting her ill grandmother to give her some food and clothes to help her recover. The girl's mother tells her not to pay attention to unknown people, but Little Red Riding-Hood disobeys and follows a path that a wolf suggests, not only putting her own grandmother in peril but also herself. The moral is again «do not leave safe parental authority».

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have clearly shown how the conceptual metaphors KNOWLEDGE IS VISION and AUTHORITY IS A BOUNDED REGION are able to account for the basic meaning and interpretation of the analysed tales and myths. Besides, metaphor can be considered a key factor as regards tale classification: we have offered the possibility of classifying tales according either to the basic metaphor they contain or to the combination of metaphors that may comprise them. And, what is more, conceptual metaphor allows us to explain the uncanny of tales (magical punishments –loss of sight, loss of freedom-, princes

and princesses imprisoned in towers, etc.), which is apparently unexplainable. Finally, as we have seen, since the conceptual metaphors under study have an experiential basis, not only they may have made the transmission of fairy tales easier (as it would be easier to memorise their basic patterns), but they could have made tales alike in different socio-cultural settings as well (we have seen how the metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS VISION is not only applicable to Greek myths but to Scandinavian stories as well).

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