

Phytomymic Names in English Folklore

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the use of phytomymic names in English folklore. Phytonyms are reflected in various stable expressions, proverbs, and riddles, encompassing important information about the culture, history, and traditions of the people. The article examines the role and semantic features of phytonyms in English folklore based on the works of authors such as Donald Watts, Thomas Thistleton Dyer, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Michael Drayton. The mythological and literary context of phytonyms is also analyzed, shedding light on their historical development.

Keywords: Phytonym, folklore, English literature, mythology, proverb, stable expression, phytomymic lexicon.

INTRODUCTION

Plant names (phytonyms) occupy an important place in folk culture and literature. Each nation's folklore has unique phytonyms that reflect its traditions, beliefs, and worldview. English folklore is also rich in various phytonyms, many of which appear in stable expressions, proverbs, riddles, and poems. This article analyzes the use of phytonyms in English folklore and literary monuments, as well as their symbolic meanings.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A study of English phytonymy identified the presence of numerous stable expressions, proverbs, and riddles containing plant names. These cultural artifacts reflect the country's culture,

history, and life realities. Below, we will analyze the use of phytonyms in English folklore and literary monuments.

To collect data, the works of several authors were used as sources, including Donald Watts' *Dictionary of Plant Lore*, Thomas Thistleton Dyer's *The Folklore of Plants*, as well as the works of William Langland, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, Robert Herrick, Thomas Chatterton, Christina Rossetti, J. R. R. Tolkien, and others.

One of the most interesting phytonyms is *ash* (Uzbek: *shumtol*), scientifically known as *Fraxinus*. In European and especially English culture, this tree can be considered one of the most symbolically significant plants. According to Germanic mythology, the vertical projection of the worldview is represented by the world tree *Yggdrasil*, believed to unite nine worlds. Many beliefs are associated with the *ash* tree, one of which considers it capable of scaring away snakes. This superstition led to various methods of snake protection, including planting these trees around homes or using their leaves to treat snakebites. This is expressed in the following folk rhyme:

Ashing-tree, ashing-tree,
Take this bite away from me [1,15]

In folklore and popular imagination, the *ash* tree has such a strong reputation that it was considered a powerful tool against magic. This can be explained by the following lines:

Rowan-ash, and red thread,
Keep the Devils from their speed.

The *ash* tree is also associated with luck, as evidenced by many folk poems. Especially, an *even ash* leaf (one with an even number of leaflets) is believed to bring good fortune:

Even ash, I thee go pluck,
Hoping thus to meet good luck;
If no luck I get from thee
I shall wish I left thee on the tree. [3,11]

The lucky properties of the *ash* leaf are related to the *clover* (*Trifolium*), which enjoys a similar reputation:

A clover, a clover or two,
Put it in your right shoe;
The first young man you meet,
In field, street, or lane,
You'll get him, or one of his name [2].

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is another plant endowed with positive properties; this phytonym is often mentioned in fortune-telling:

Good-night, fair yarrow,
Thrice good-night to thee,
I hope before to-morrow's dawn,
My true love I shall see [4,112-113].

In contrast, the *willow* (*Salix*) is associated with entirely different connotations. In European and British culture, this tree traditionally symbolizes sorrow and unfulfilled love. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona, sensing her impending death, recites the following:

My mother had a maid call'd Barbara;
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,
And did forsake her: she had a song of willow,
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it: that song to-night
Will not go from my mind. [5, 232]

Furthermore, in *Hamlet*, Ophelia, while holding onto a willow branch, falls into the water and drowns:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make... [6, 131]

Michael Drayton's *The Muses' Elizium* also includes the following lines:

In love the sad forsake wight
The Willow garland wareth. [2]

To observe how perceptions of plants change over time, the phytonym *elder* (*Sambucusnigra*) can be analyzed. According to ancient European beliefs, a female spirit was believed to inhabit elder bushes. Over time, this belief transformed, associating the bush with witches and sorcery. This motif appears in the legend of the Rollright Stones – an ancient megalithic complex on the border of Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. The legend tells of a king who sought to conquer all of England but was confronted by a witch, who declared:

Seven long strides shalt thou take and
If long Compton thou canst see,
King of England thou shalt be.

However, on his last stride, a hill suddenly rose, obscuring his view of Long Compton, and the witch proclaimed:

As Long Compton thou canst not see,
King of England thou shalt not be,
Rise up, stick, and still, stone,
For King of England thou shalt be none.

As a result, the king and his knights were turned into stones, while the witch transformed into an elder tree [7,130].

Under Christian influence, ancient beliefs changed or were suppressed. One such Christian legend claims that Judas hanged himself on an elder tree. In Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the following lines appear:

He shall be your Judas, and you shall be his elder-tree to hang on.
[8,131]

CONCLUSION

The role of phytonyms in English folklore and literature is immensely significant, reflecting the historical experience,

beliefs, and culture of the people. In English folklore, phytonyms are not just plant names but symbolic images with deep meanings. For example, the *ash* tree is associated with magic and luck, while the *willow* symbolizes sorrow and lost love. Analyzing how such phytonymic imagery has evolved in literary and mythological contexts helps us understand the intricate relationship between language and culture. Therefore, studying phytonyms in folklore and literary sources is crucial for researching collective thought and cultural heritage.

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