

## "Cultural Attitudes toward Biblical Prototexts in Macedonian Folktales"

Adaptations of culturally generated texts, such as biblical texts, have taken place in the verbal and non-verbal arts for many centuries. Adaptations are unique in that their interpretation by an audience is determined largely by the cultural attitudes toward them. This is one of the reasons why the function of biblical texts in folktales is limited by their culturally restricted function outside of the text (re-word). In the history of biblical adaptations it has been the case that even their very creation can be in question when the culture feels a particularly strong bond toward the original text. When this bond is at a minimum, or even non-existent, the adaptation may even assume the parodic (destructive) attitude toward the biblical text. Analysis of this type of works, then, would have to take into consideration the relationship between the two texts. The "information" polyphony" and "density of signs" (Barthes 1972, 262) in adaptations of biblical texts into folktales is increased twofold over those in original folktales. In the perception of such texts the audience is expected to be equipped with specific information about the biblical text that is adapted, and to have the necessary experience for piecing together that information with everything else that has been added by the individual narrator of the folktale.

This meta-communicative sphere involves the manipulation of the primary biblical text by the folktale narrator, where the narrator assumes the role of an author who produces a secondary folkloric text.

How the folktale creates a "representation" from what seems to be a mass of culturally and functionally incongruous texts. How the discourse and ideology of the prototext may influence the perceiver's interpretation of the adapted text are questions that are the focus of this presentation.

The biblical text, or prototext, serves as an object of inter-textual continuity. The metatext, or folktale, in turn, is the result-object of the mediation of the biblical prototext. The unique feature of an adaptation of a biblical text in a folktale rests in the special relationship between the biblical prototext and folktale metatext. The folktale contains invariant features that it shares with the biblical prototext, as well as features that originate in the folkloric system to which it belongs. The basic relationship between the two systems may be expressed as a point on a scale bound by maximum similarity at one end, and minimum similarity on the other end. That is, at one end the folktale may preserve most of the features

of the biblical text, and at the other end it may select only certain features, disregarding the rest of the biblical prototext as irrelevant.

For a successful manipulation of the codes of the adaptation, the audience is required to be familiar with the codes of the biblical prototext, and also to a certain degree with the history of the prototext, that is, its various manifestations.

Although biblical texts are usually associated with a specifically non-aesthetic activity, they are quite adaptable into folktales because they share an abundance of thematic and structural principles.

When a biblical text is used as a prototext in a folktale, two significant changes take place: first, the text changes its function (from religious to folkloric), and as a result another set of laws for production and interpretation come into action; second, there is a parallel change in the perceiver's attitude toward the text. The perceiver in this case is cognizant of the fact that what is being narrated is not part of the religious cultural sphere and is not required to respond to the text as required by the religious cultural practices. In other words, the perceiver can easily distinguish between the narration of a biblical text from a folktale and can respond appropriately to each type of text.

Macedonian biblical folktales are products of a specific culture: the culture of the narrator. As such they represent an abstract model of the given culture's reality, such as attitudes, customs, values, traditions, rituals, habits, presumptions, etc.). The folktales, then, can represent the "world view" of the text generating culture. In opposition to the culture of the folktale stands the culture of the biblical prototexts, which reflect reality as perceived in the religious sphere. The codes for the organization and interpretation of the folktale are provided for in the larger codes of the given culture, while the codes for the perception of the biblical texts are provided by the religious culture.

One of the more noticeable changes observed in the folktale metatext takes place on the linguistic level. The specificity of the linguistic sign in the biblical text is very significant in determining its meaning and function in the folktale. The locutionary word of a biblical text never enters the folktale in a semantically neutral state - it is already provided with lexical coloration by the prototext. The biblical word enters the folktale already colored by a standardized enunciation inherited from the religious ritual. Any other type of delivery is always contrasted against this original, ritualistic

enunciation. The difference between the two becomes pronounced when the word's locutionary quality in the biblical text is characterized by extreme rigidity, and the enunciation in the folktale aims to destroy that rigidity.

Linguistic modernization of biblical texts in folktales involves the inclusion in the folkloric metatext stylistic features of language that are recognizably of a much different cultural environment than that of the biblical prototext. The intertextual relationship between the biblical text and the folktale is characterized by high degree of reduction and substitution of thematic and linguistic units. In some instances the biblical prototext is hardly recognizable in the folktale. Most often the narrator will substitute phraseology and entire sets of linguistic structures with ones that cannot possibly be found in the repertory of biblical texts. One of the most well-known examples of substitution of local phraseology in biblical folktales comes from the American writer Roark Bradford, who wrote a collection of short stories titled “Ol’ Man Adam and His Chillun: Being the Tales They Tell about the Time When the Lord Walked the Earth like a Natural Man”, that are supposedly based on the perspectives of rural black Americans in the Depression-era South, of God, Heaven, Old Testament stories, including Creation and Noah’s Ark. Although not strictly folktales in the true definition of a folktale, these stories imitate the folkloric genre of that culture both on the linguistic and on the structural levels. In these stories biblical characters speak in the dialect of the black Americans of the period. Let me see how well I can imitate southern black speech:

“Eve and That Snake”

WELL, a long time ago things was diff runt. Hit  
 wa'n't nothin' on de yearth 'cause hit wa'n't no  
 yearth. And hit wa'n't nothin' nowheres and  
 ev'y day was Sunday. Wid de Lawd r'ared back  
 preachin' all day long ev'y day. 'Ceptin' on  
 Sadday, and den ev'ybody went to de fish fry.  
 So one day ev'ybody was out to de fish fry,  
 eatin' fish and b'iled custard and carryin' on,

to all at once de Lawd swallowed some b'iled  
custard which didn't suit his tas'e.

"Dis custard," say de Lawd, "ain't seasoned  
right. Hit's too thick."

"Hit's got a heap of sugar and aigs and milk  
and things in hit, Lawd," say Gabriel.

"I know," say de Lawd, "but hit tas'es like  
hit needs jest a little bit more firmament in hit."

"Us ain't got no more firmament, Lawd," say  
Gabriel. "Us ain't got a drap in de jug."

In Macedonia biblical folktales have been collected by numerous folklorists. Vera Antic's The collection "Makedonski Bibliski Narodni Prokazni" Vera Stojcevska Antic's is the largest collection of such tales. Here is a typical example of the language in these tales.

“Откоа и истера Господ дедо Адама и баба Ева од рајо, по многу години пратил ангело при баба Ева да је кажи оти му било мило на Бога да је оди у баба Ева на гости, при се што беше срдит. Коа отиде ангело при баба Ева и је кажал оти ќе е дојдел Госпо на гости, голема радос беше сторила и зготвила ручек, леб и сол, што беше је дал Господ.” And so on.

As a result of the "de-mythologizing" of the biblical text on the level of language, by means of "domestic" linguistic structures, the narrator proposes to present the story as though it were real and contemporary.

The tendency toward realistic representation of the biblical material is also accompanied by an increased use of "fictional" matter interpolated in the biblical sources. These are the first signs of the secularization of the biblical text. This new trend, together with the extensive reliance on the vernacular languages in folktales, establishes a new direction in the development of the biblical folktale. In these folktales the emphasis tends to focus on the representational model, rather than the symbolic-religious.

Plot and characters in these folktales are local. For example, the narrator takes the biblical line "The young son gathered all his things together and travelled abroad into a distant country, and there

squandered his property by living debauched life" (Luke 15:13), and adds to it an abundance of fictional material that centers around the manner in which the property is squandered. The fact that the narrator incorporates local characters makes the folktale even more realistic. The folktale seems to use the biblical background only as a starting point in establishing its own unique characteristic. The narrator borrows from that part of the biblical story which has the least religious significance. Basically, the folktale fills in the void left by the absence of details concerning the son's debauchery. The religious and moral characteristics of the story are pushed almost into the background, while the foreground is characterized by a profusion of contemporary realities.

We also find "fictional" matter interpolated in tales about Adam and Eve after they leave paradise. In most of the folktales in Vera Antic's collection, for example, the narrator relies on the biblical character alone to weave a plot that does not resemble anything in biblical literature. One similarity between Roark Bradford's stories and Macedonian biblical folktale is that in both instances God is brought down to earth in the present as a human being encountering present day realities and meeting contemporary individuals. Both are set at a time "When God walked on earth among the people". Examples of such tales include "Дедо Господ и луѓето по земјата", and "Господ кога шетал по земјава".

There are also numerous such tales based on New Testament personalities, such as Christ, St. John the Baptist and numerous New Testament and later local saints. One of the more interesting such tales is "Jesus Christ and St. John in their mothers' wombs". In this tale both mothers meet, happy that they are pregnant, they hug each other. As they kiss each other, Jesus and St. John also greet each other from the wombs, they have a nice conversation, Jesus tells St. John that he'll have him as his 'kum' when he gets baptized. St. John is so happy that he begins to dance in his mother's womb.

So, secularization of the biblical text takes place on three levels. On the textual level we notice the infusion of non-biblical (non-religious) elements, many of which come from the contemporary reality of the narrator, and some of which are fictional. The juxtaposition of the religious with the secular elements allows for secular interpretation of religious themes and characters. The biblical prototext provides only a framework in which more worldly matters are presented.

As noted earlier, these changes go hand in hand with the second level - the use of the vernacular in the narration. This change offers the possibility to incorporate local speech characteristics. The vocabulary available to the folk narrator increases manyfold, which certainly has a significant effect on the artistic expression of the folktale.

The third level of secularization involves a change in the culture's attitude toward the biblical text. This shift is an instance of intracultural adaptation. The biblical text moves away from the sphere of religious culture into the sphere of folklore. The implication of this shift is that the change of the text's function is culturally recognized as being unique both in function and in structure. For example, there are numerous Macedonian folktales that explain the creation of the world and the rest of the Genesis story that reflect the practices of the local culture. This is how the creation of man is explained in one story:

“Станал Господ една утрина рано, засукал поли и ракаи, зел мотика в раце, ископал земља, напраил кал, та почнал да прай луѓе како грнчаро што прай грниња.” From the perspective of the narrator, if God made man from earth, then the only possible way to do it is as the potter makes clay pots. This story further explains why some people have physical and personality defects and differences. Eventually God gets tired of making each person individually, one day he decides to make himself a mold. God did not have enough time to fix those who came out of the mold with defects, since he promised to make man in only one day.

An extreme example of relaxation of religiously based constraints in plot and subject matter is a folktale in Penishliski's collection of erotic folktales. In the tale “God Grant That What You Plant Sprouts For You”, an old man is working in his garden, which is located at some crossroad. Everyone who passes by asks him what he is working on, what he is planting. The Lord walks by and asks him the same questions, and the old man has had enough being disturbed and replies that he is planting penises. The Lord replies with the appropriate Macedonian response when one sees someone planting something: “Да ти се фати”, “God grant that what you plant sprouts for you!”. Sure enough, some time later penises begin to sprout. The old man has realized that he has sinned by replying in such a rude way. The Lord appears to him again and tells him not to worry. “Don't worry a bit. You won't lose a

thing, but you will make a lot of money. These sprouts are unusual. They're miraculous. When you say "Come on now!" they'll do it. You understand? But water them a little while longer so they'll grow. Then cut them and take them to the market. You'll see how much money you'll make."

According to the Russian folklorist Meletinsky (1977, 111) the perception of the biblical text as a "tale", or verbal folklore, begins with the "weakening of strict belief in the truth of the mythological 'happenings'", which can explain the profusion of biblical folktales that not only contradict the validity of the biblical text but go as far as to negate it and even parody it. I disagree with this assumption. One can hardly find stronger believers in the truthfulness of the stories in the Bible than the black southern Baptists depicted in Roark Bradford's stories. In a footnote to the Macedonian folktale "Satan opposed God, but God punished him horribly", the narrator states, "Оваа приказна е варијанта, од тие луѓе што веруваат од се срце и душа во Христа." (This story is a variant from those who believe in Christ from their heart and soul.)

In biblical adaptations there is often no concern for biblical chronology, there is mixing of Old and New Testament stories with stories of local saints. In the folktale "How the sun and the stars were made", the narrator tells us that Jesus Christ was born before the creation of the world: "Уште коа не бил веков напраен, Христос бил роден. Бидејќим бил малечок, се покрај Бога си одел и за пола му се држел. Кај ќе одел Господ, сполај му, по него одел и Христос."

The elements which distinguish the biblical folktale from the оригинал biblical text are its fictitious nature and the shift from cosmological representation to folkloric representation. As a result of this secularization, the folktale experiences greater freedom in variation and invention of plots and characters. This also leads to the development of the "hero", who becomes the bearer of the resolution of the folktale.

The qualitative variance between a biblical prototext and folkloric meta-text results in a unique intertextual relationship.

Based on the "quantity" of the biblical text's elements that enter the folktale, three basic types of intertextual relationships can be distinguished: First, there is maximum congruity between the biblical text and the folktale. The adaptation process here keeps the reduction and substitution of elements to a

minimum. Jakobson labels this type of literary activity "intra-lingual translation, or rewording" (1959, 233). Such texts are characterized by a high degree of synonymy, and in extreme cases, it is impossible to distinguish the adapted text from the prototext; In the second type, there is somewhat less concord between the two texts. The discrepancy here is the result of the differing formal and lexical structures of each language – the language of the biblical text and the language of the folktale. The narrator cannot always replace verbal sign of one language with semantically equivalent signs of another language; The third type of intertextual relationship occurs when there is minimum agreement between the biblical text and the folktale. It is characterized by high degree of reduction and substitution of thematic and linguistic units. In extreme cases, the biblical text is hardly recognizable in the new text. Examples: hero, God, etc.

The biblical folktale represents an abstract model of the given culture's reality (attitudes, customs, postulates, values, traditions, propositions, rituals, habits, presumptions etc.). It represents the "world view" of the folktale-generating culture. When a biblical text is used as a prototext in a folktale the text changes its function from religious to folkloric, in which case folkloric laws for production and interpretation come into action. There is a change in the perceiver's attitude toward the text from the religious to the folkloric. A folkloric mechanism of interpretation is applied directly on the biblical text. In no sense then does this mean that the narrator and perceiver of the folktale negate the validity of the religious text within the religious sphere. EXPLAIN.

The tendency toward realistic representation of the biblical material is also accompanied by an increased use of "fictional" matter interpolated in the biblical sources.

The search for characters and plots outside of biblical sources is the first step toward the text's "folklorization". The secularization of subject matter leads to the use of non-biblical material as the source for the folktale. Many of these folktales contain an abundance of comic elements, which function much more effectively in the vernacular than they would have in the medium of the 'sacred' language of the religious rituals. Fictionalization contributes greatly toward the introduction of new genres such as 'religious' parodies and comedies.



One conclusion that can be drawn is that the phenomenon of adaptation of biblical texts in folktales begins with the aesthetization of such texts, a gradual change of the text's function and perception, both of which are determined by cultural attitudes.

The popularity of religious prototexts (myths, biblical tales, etc.) in folktales can be attributed to the fact that they provide a 'known' element on the level of plot, character, as well as attitude. Biblical literature has found admiration from folktale narrators who want to re-examine the relationship of man to higher authorities.

The aspect of adaptation of biblical texts which has received the least attention is the transformation of the prototexts on the textual level, and the classification of such adaptations based on their relationship with the prototext.

To understand the phenomenon more completely one would have to address each one of the possible transformations in greater detail.

"Don't taste like much," she say. "I wonder do Adam want to eat hit?" So she tuck de apple out to whar Adam was plowin' de cawn, and give hit to him.

"I don't like apples, gal," say Adam. "Whyn't you give me somethin' I like?"

"Cou'se you don't like apples," say Eve. "You don't never like nothin' I gives you. You got to think of hit yo'self before you likes hit," and Eve blubbers up and commences to cry.

"Aw, don't cry, sugar," say Adam. "I was jest funnin' wid you. I likes apples. Give me a bite."

"Nawp," say Eve. "You's jest mean, dat's what you is. You treats me mean 'cause I ain't nothin' but a poor little weak woman and you's a big, stout man. I ain't gonter give you nothin'."

"Aw, honey, don't tawk like dat," say Adam.

"Dat ain't de way hit is, a-tall. I was jest playin' wid you. Give me a bite of apple and I buys you a new dress."

Well, when a man go to tawkin' new dresses to a woman he gonter git some action. So Eve dry up her cryin' and Adam et de apple and got her de dress. But dat wa'n't all.

De Lawd seed Eve's new dress and he found

out all about bit. And he got mad, cause he  
didn't aim to have nobody on his place which  
stole his apples. So he bailed old Adam's trover  
and leveled on his crop and mule, and put Adam  
and Eve offn de place. And de next news any-  
body yared of old Adam, he was down on de  
levee tryin' to git a job at six bits a day.