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TELLING FAIRY TALES TODAY IN SLOVENIA

Abstract: In Slovenia people encounter fairy tales primarily in books, during art performances, when they are recounted at folklore events, Assumption celebrations, etc. As a special type of folk narrative fairy tales have been preserved only in certain remote places, especially along the border, in which the elderly, when asked if they still remember a fairy tale, sometimes start to tell stories with an occasional fairy tale among them.

Key words: Slovenia, fairy tales, telling fairy tales

As I started to write this short paper on story-telling in present-day Slovenia I naturally immediately assumed that genuine folk fairy tales can be hardly encountered anymore. There are, however, other ways of conveying fairy tales, which are increasingly employed: reading books, or re-telling stories from books, recounting fairy tales at folklore events or on holidays such as, for instance, the Assumption on August 15 in Resia. Some re-creators of folk poetry (Anja Shtefan or Ljoba Jenche, for instance) recount fairy tales in much a similar way as folk songs. They tell them to children gathered in libraries, book stores, kindergartens, primary schools, or to adults during certain artistic events. This time, however, I shall speak only about present-day fairy tales as one of the type of folk narratives. It can be said that in the fifties and sixties, when neither television nor computers were part of our daily lives, children and adults living in the countryside were eager to hear stories recounted by their grandparents in the evenings, after all the chores had been finished, or also while performing these chores - the habit that is slowly dying in the present day and age. Yet there are still some remote places, especially along the state border, where the elderly, when asked if they still remember a beautiful fairy tale, sometimes start to narrate stories that they used to tell their children or grandchildren; there may be an occasional fairy tale among them. Old tales still narrated today are not only rare, but also shorter. People are no longer used to telling long fairy tales as in the olden times when there was still enough time for this. Narration of fairy tales, such as the one recorded by Milko Maticetov in Resia, could not have been reproduced today, for even in this "fairy tale part" of the Slovene ethnic territory one can encounter only short tales and stories about ghosts, creatures of the night, mythological beings, or tales about dreams or signs foretelling future events. But despite the invasion of mass media and numerous technical accomplishments, despite the fact that the modern world of today rendered them to the level of a subject employed to keep children occupied, fairy tales shall not be forgotten.

Narratives represent part of a nation's culture, and Slovene culture is especially diverse. Slovenes had to adapt to living in fishing villages and coastal towns alongside the Adriatic, making a living in the rough, stony world of the Karst, as well as on Alpine farmsteads high in the mountains, or in the Pannonian plain or on the poetically dreamy hills of Dolenjsko which are dotted with vineyards. Moreover, the territory of Slovenia lies at the crossroads of different cultures where diverse cultural streams have been meeting and influencing one another. If one looked back to examine Slovene ethnogenesis of the past one could recognize numerous ethnic shifts and mixings which have been transforming and enriching Slovene folk culture, and also folk narratives within this culture.

What has actually been preserved to the present days? Which of the beautiful Slovene fairytales are still being told today? Maybe the one about the stepdaughter rewarded for her kindness and good heart by supernatural beings while her stepsister, striving to obtain the same reward, receives punishment; or the one about Kresnik who kills a terrible snake; or the story about the robber Tolovaj Mataj, a penitent sinner who mourns his sins until dry sticks sprout

green leaves again; about the Blacksmith who shuts death into his bellows; about Kurent who climbs to the moon; about Peter Klepec, a weak boy who miraculously receives incredible powers, whereupon near Vienna he defeats the Turks; about the Water Sprite who kidnaps a boy, but cannot manage to keep him in his domain in spite of all the toys made from precious stones, richness and sparkle - just as he cannot prevent an abducted woman from running away and leaving her own children behind, in his underwater castle; and what about the story of St. Anthony who brings fire from hell; maybe numerous fairy tales featuring creatures with dogs' heads (Pasjeglavci), or giants (Ajdi), or king Matthew (Kralj Matjazh); or the ones taking place in robbers' castles; or maybe fairy tales for children such as the one about Mojca Pokrajculja who sweeps a floor and finds a coin. With the coin she buys a pot and makes it her home. When it rains animals one by one come to the pot, asking for shelter, and she takes them in until the pot finally bursts. Then there are also numerous fairy tales about animals in which Godmother Fox and clumsy, hard-headed Wolf take precedence over other animals.

It would be possible to list a number of other tales, of course. But what has been left from these riches at the turn of the millennium? Judging from the collection titled *Glasovi* (Voices, edited by Marija Stanonik) it would be possible to say that not much. Collectors themselves agree on this, as is evident from the words of one of them: *I have collected several real-life stories in the valley; we could call them stories from the past. Old stories, taking place in the fairy tale world, are very rare. They got lost in the last century and a half. More numerous are the ones, for which people claim, that had really happened, but which are nevertheless like jewels, recounting of our existence.* (Andrej Karnichar, *Jezerske shtorije*, Ljubljana 1997, p. 10).

Late Karel Krajczer, a teacher from Porabje, wrote in the preface of his book: *People who were recounting stories to me are all dead. They were telling me these stories when they were bedridden and very old - thus when they had time after having worked hard all their lives. They had heard these fairy tales, ballads and tales from their parents, grandmothers and grandfathers. These fairy tales thus take us back to olden times when life was slower, when our elders still had time to sit in the shade of apple, linden and walnut trees, or in front of their little cottages in the evenings. Such stories were recounted during corn husking in the fall, or when villagers were husking pumpkin seeds or stripping feathers in winter. Most of the stories which have been written down were narrated by Brgancin Gjanshek (Janshek). As a veritable traveling fairy tale narrator he was journeying across America to which he had immigrated from his native Porabje. In America he would travel from place to place, recounting stories from Porabje to his fellowmen from this region.* (Karel Krajczer, *Kraljich pa Lejpa Vida*, Ljubljana 1996, p. 9).

Here is Anton Grichnik's brief description of the situation in Haloze: *People in Haloze really had no time for true fairy tales; but they nevertheless experienced many things.* (Anton Grichnik, *Farice. Haloske folklorne pripovedi*, Ljubljana 1998, p.10).

Now we have reached real-life experiences, narratives which supposedly truly happened to their narrators or to one of their acquaintances - modern tales, in fact. Traditional heritage thus blends with the so-called contemporary stories. As we have seen, folk fairy tales are slowly getting lost in books or in artistic events, while fairy-tale motifs inspire parodies, jokes and advertisements.