

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUTH TEXTS BY OSCAR WILD AND CIRIL KOSMAČ



Literature

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Abstract

Oscar Wilde or Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854–1900) is an Irish poet, writer and playwright who became famous for his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and dramatic texts. It is known that Wilde wrote two books of fairy tales for his two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan, namely *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891). In total, he wrote only nine authorial tales for the double addressee (*The Great Rocket*, *Infantina's Birthday*, *The Young King*, *The Fisherman and His Soul*, *The Selfish Giant*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, *The Happy Prince*, *The Loyal Friend and The Star - Child*). His fairy tales have a special place in world youth literature precisely because of the openness of the addressee—the text is intended for children and the context for adults. Young addressees are also surprised to read his texts because there is no 'happy ending,' as is typical of the folk tale model. Wilde's distinctly authorial tales have a mostly tragic ending. Ciril Kosmač (1910–1980) is a contemporary classic in Slovenian (youth) literature. He is better known as an adult author and less well known as a youth author. He wrote eleven texts for young addressees, namely *Kamen in njiva* (Stone and Field), *Kdo bo zobal češnje* (Who will Eat the Cherries), *Kovač in hudič* (The Blacksmith and the Devil), *Kruh* (The Bread), *Medvejke* (The Bears), *Pravljica o maku* (The Tale of the Poppy), *Pravljica o velikem mlinu* (The Tale of the Great Mill), *Vrnitev Martina Jakončiča* (The Return of Martin Jakončič), *Ringaraja*, *Smrt nedolžnega velikana* (The Death of an Innocent Giant), *Sreča* (The Happiness), and *Vgaju* (In the Grove). His youthful work can be divided into realistic (*Kdobožobalčešnje*, *Kovačinhudič*, *Kruh*, *Medvejke*, *Pravljica o velikem mlinu*, *Ringaraja*, *Smrt nedolžnega velikana*, *Sreča*, *Vgaju*) and fantastic (*Kameninnjiva*, *Pravljicaomaku*) texts. Authentic authorial tales are *Kamen in njiva*, which is associatively distant from the Korean tale *The Stone*, and *Pravljica o maku*.¹

INTRODUCTION

Ciril Kosmač translated the fairy tales of Oscar Wilde in 1959. It is interesting that the accompanying word was written by Josip Vidmar and the book was illustrated by Vladimir Lakovič. It is a telling fact that neither the accompanying text nor the illustrations are intended for a young, but for a double, especially adult addressee. Oscar Wilde has influenced many authors, including Slovenian ones, e.g. Bina Štampe Žmavc, Lela B. Njatin and also Ciril Kosmač, but the influence in the latter case was atypical.

METHODOLOGY

The present article uses the scientific apparatus (quoting and citing references) and the literary theory of fairy tale analysis by Max Luthi (1986), adapted by Marjana Kobe. In the comparative analysis of relevant sources (Oscar Wilde – *The Selfish Giant* – and Ciril Kosmač – *The Death of an Innocent Giant*) and literature analytical-descriptive and analytical-interpretative research methods were used, as well as the method of qualitative textual analysis-keywords in context and analysis of bio-bibliographic context.

¹ Blažič, Milena Mileva (2016d). Skriti pomen pravljic: od svilne do jantarne poti. [The Hidden Meaning of fairy Tales: from the Silk- to the Amber Road] Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Characteristic of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales is that they belong to the authorial fairy tale model, which means that the author uses elements of the folktale model (J. and W. Grimm, *Children's and Household Tales*, 1812–15), but also builds on them. His fairytales are intertextually connected with the authorial fairy tales by H. C. Andersen. In the following, a comparative analysis of Wilde's fairy tale *The Selfish Giant* (1888) and Kosmač's *Smrtne dolžnega velikana* (The Death of an Innocent Giant, 1959) will be performed, as there is more connecting the two than just a variation of the title. The villagers also call Kosmač's giant "the innocent mountain" (Kosmač 1959: 108).

MOTIF OF THE GIANT

The motif of a giant is a common motif in the ATU Fairy Tale Index (Uther 2004), it even contains a special group entitled *Tales of a Stupid Giant*, which are divided into individual motifs, e.g. the motif of the agreement between man and giant; competition between man and giant; man kills (wounds) a giant; the giant is afraid of man, etc. The motif of the giant appears not only independently, but also as an integral part of other fairy tales (e.g., Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Giant and the Tailor*; folktale *Sedem na enmah* [Seven at Once]; *Lojze Zupan, Velikan Nenasit* [The Giant Insatiable]; *Kornej Čukovski, Šuri-Muri velikan* [Šuri-Muri the Giant]), in the authorial tradition (Roald Dahl, *The BFG*–The Big Friendly Giant; Janez Bitenc, *Velikan Gorjan* [The Giant Gorjan]; Leopold Suhodolčan, *Velikan in pajac* [The Giant and the Clown], etc.), and in texts that are directly intertextually connected with Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*, e.g. Bina Štampe *Žmavc, Popravljalnica igrač* (Toy Repair Shop); Lela B. Njatin, *Velikanovo srce* (The Giant's Heart); Neli Kodrič Filipič, *Punčka in velikan* (The Girl and the Giant), etc.

Comparative analysis of Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* and Kosmač's *Smrt nedolžnega velikana* (Death of an Innocent Giant)

Luthi's literary-stylistic analysis of fairy tales in the book *European Polk Tales: The Form and Nature* (1948, 1984) deals with five characteristics of fairy tales (superficiality, abstractness, isolation and universal connection, sublimation, and all-inclusiveness), which Marjana Kobe adapted into seven (beginning and end, time and space, literary characters, ethical basis, building, magic props, one-dimensionality) (Kobe 1987).

1. The beginning and the end – Wilde's fairy tale begins a typically because the author emphasizes the cyclical nature of events. Kosmač's narrative² begins with a general narrative: "Every afternoon, when the children came back from school, they usually went to the giants' garden top lay there. [...] And when the children came to the garden that afternoon, they found the

² All quotes from Kosmač are taken from the book Kosmač, Ciril, 1970: *Izbrano delo 1*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.

giant lying dead under a tree covered with white flowers.” (Wilde1959:29). “We talked about the great deaths in themasterpieces of world literature. [...] They stood motionless and silent for a few moments, then moved and began to speak – and they spoke louder and louder.” (Kosmač 1959: 101).

2. Time and Space – In Wilde’s text, the setting space is a garden (fenced garden), a tree and a garden in the sky, which means that the text is Christianized. The time of the event is cyclical and thus mythical. Wilde emphasizes the importance of the seasons, especially winter, which in youth literature is a symbol of dying or death. Despite the indirect determinability of time, Wilde’s text is timeless because it is a concept of cyclicity, recurring events (every afternoon), customs, and rituals.

In Kosmač’s text, time is indirectly determined, but we infer a more modern time (e.g., airplane, wartime). The event space is set in a rural environment, specifically, in Hotejč’s room. At the same time, Kosmač also uses symbols for space (e.g., garden and cherry), which is also concretized, e.g. Modrijan’s meadow, Lazar’s bend, Lazar’s wheat, Usadar’s bend, etc. Some Slavic or pagan elements are associated with antiquity, e.g. wheat.

3. Literary characters – In both authors, the title character – the giant – is also the main character, the side literary characters are collective protagonists or children with an individual that stands – a child. Both authors deal with the archetype of a wounded child placed in a different environment, Wilde’s in a higher (aristocratic) and Kosmač’s in a lower (peasant) social class. Despite his lower social class, Kosmač’s hero is the bearer of higher values and as such differs from Wilde’s hero. He is noble, sociocentric from the beginning, even though he is socially, emotionally and intellectually marked from conception and later after birth. Both literary characters are of a certain type – the type of the giant who is at the same time the archetype of the wounded child. Both texts belong to different genres; Wilde’s fairy tale belongs to the authorial fairy tale model.

Kosmač’s text is an authorial tale, which is related to the model of folk and authorial fairy tales, but is a narrative due to the definability of time and space and literary characters. Literary characters are placed in a rural social environment. It is interesting that Kosmač added a typical Slovenian characteristic to the giant’s motif – Alex-andrianism as a phenomenon. The author explicitly mentions:

“I will give birth and then return to Egypt as a wet nurse. I will earn more, but I will also send you more so that you can take care of the child. [...] Hotejčev Matic is a child of God and a God’s child, in fact his mother, Lužnikova Pepa, brought him unborn from Egypt, where she served with the lords (Kosmač 1959). They even called hima ‘little Egyptian’.” (118–121).

4. The ethical basis in Wilde’s text is not similar to the model of a folk tale, where the so-called black and white technique prevails and it is clear who is good and who is bad. Wilde’s

selfish literary character from beginning to end of the text makes the path of individuation matures personaly; this is an authorial model that represents inner maturation from selfishness to selflessness, from egocentrism to sociocentrism, which are the characteristics of the authorial model of fairy tales and modern heroes.

The ethical basis of Kosmač is based on the model of a folk tale, where it is completely clear who is good and who is bad, who is the bearer of positive (Hotejčev Matic) and negative (villagers) characteristics. Kosmač placed the entire text in a rural environment, in the peasant class, which is portrayed as good, healthy, with some village fools, but still the bearer of positive values which are also a metaphor for the Slovenian nation.

5. The structure of duality, trinity and escalation – Wilde’s authorial tale is based on the structure of escalation, events in the text despite the cyclical or mythical design (every afternoon), i.e. changing seasons or cycles, are based on escalation from start to finish. It is a typical structure of traditional tragedy, when the herophysically fails but wins morally. Wilde’s hero is an example of a tragic hero who grows personally from the beginning to the end of the text, it is an inner journey. The end is tragic, the hero dies or he goes to the Garden of Eden – the conclusion is Christianized, despite the mythical concept of time and space.

Kosmač’s text is not built on the concept of duality (e.g., *The Good and Evil Daughter*, *Two Brothers*, *Two Blasphemers*, etc.) or trinity (e.g., *Three Fox God parents*, *Three Peas*, *Three Pigs*, etc.), but on the escalation of external and internal events. The structure of the event is threefold – Kosmač divided the text into three parts. In addition to the frame narrative, this is a prediction of a retrospective narrative, which is also a typical for the folktale model and is a feature of the authorial model of the fairy tale and narrative.

6. Magic Props – Wilde’s *The Selfish Giant* does not have the typical props for a folktale model (magic hat, magic words, magic instrument, etc.), but the giant’s garden itself miraculously blooms due to sociocentrism:

“Suddenly, however, he rolled his eyes in astonishment and then stared and stared. What he saw was really wonderful. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree covered with beautiful white flowers. The branches were golden, silver fruits hung on them, and under them stood the boy the giant loved so much.” (Wilde 1959: 31).

Wilde’s text contains Christianized elements and intertextual allusions to the motif of Jesus Christ: “Who was so presumptuous as to hurt you?” He asked, as the boy’s palms had wounds from two nails and the wounds from two nails were also on his tiny legs. ‘Who was so presumptuous as to hurt you?’ cried the giant. ‘Tell me so I can grab my big sword and kill him.’” (Wilde 1959: 35).

Kosmač's innocent giant, although a realistic text uses the symbol of the sunflower as a kind of magic prop, even a snow-white stick, cherry and threshold have the function of a discreet magic prop. The sunflower is also a symbol of marginal survival (Dundes 1996).

7. One-dimensionality – Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* takes place on the level of two-dimensionality, but for the model of a folk tale one-dimensionality is otherwise typical – the level of a miracle. The action starts on a real level (e.g., children walk out of school), then they come to the wall. The dividing line between the real and the fantastic level is also indicated by the text in capital letters in the form of the giant's ban, set on Wednesday and before the central event, which is an intertextual allusion to Dante's (2005) *Hell* and the inscription: *Give up all hope, you who enter.*

WHOEVER CLIMBS THIS WALL, WILL BE PUNISHED (Wilde 1959: 29)

This level is slightly blurred, but magical things happen, e.g., the tree suddenly blooms, golden tree branches, silver fruit, etc. Two-dimensionality is also present or at least indicated: "You once allowed me to play in your garden, but today you go with me to my garden in heaven." (Wilde 1959: 35).

Kosmač's innocent giant is happening on a one-dimensional level, however not fantastic, but realistic. The hypothesis that the line between realism and fiction is blurred can also be confirmed, as Kosmač created in the period of social realism which he surpassed in a distinctly poetic way. Kosmač's fairy tales, especially the poetic *Pravljica o maku* (*The Tale of the Poppy*), are a clear example of poetic social realism. The text speaks of medieval peasant uprisings, but on a poetic level and in the language of innovative symbols.

Intertextuality

Based on the theory of intertextuality by Marko Juvan (*Intertextuality*, 2000), we can say that Ciril Kosmač borrows persons, motifs and events, which is also an intertextual link with Wilde. It is about intertextuality with world literature, e.g. about characters from Greek mythology (Hesiod: children of Uranus and Gee, cyclops – one-eyed giant – Polyphemus and titans) and Slavic mythology (buck wheat). Associatively close and at the same time distant is the motif of the giant, which in the first written version is articulated in Homer's *The Odyssey*, which describes Polyphemus imprisoned in a cave. Odysseus gives wine to Polyphemus, and in Kosmač's work the villagers give a bundle to their giant – Hotejčev Matic, and if in *Odyssey* the blinding of Polyphemus follows, in Kosmač's fairy tale it is followed by death. In fact, the motif of a giant is the type or even archetype of a child or a wounded child. In Wilde, the giant is symbolically wounded by selfishness, and in Kosmač he is wounded literally. Here, with the determination of the heroes with the rural environment, Kosmač presented the archetypal situation and the traditional structure of the tragedy – the hero physically fails and wins morally. For Kosmač, the symbolic parallelism between the (autobiographical) giant, captured in time and space, is

important, where misunderstanding is hypothetically understood as a metaphor for the Slovenian nation. The technique of distinguishing between good and evil and between must and want is more pronounced. Wilde described the representatives of the upper class on a very high symbolic level, while Kosmač described the representatives of the lower class (farmers, Alexandrines) on a high stylistic level, but this poeticization is not an ideological strategy but a feature of Kosmač's sociocentrism, social empathy and poetic style. The main event in Kosmač's *Smrtne dolžnega velikana* (*The Death of the Innocent Giant*) is set inside, in the house, but it is also an ambitious fairy-tale fresco. Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* is depicted on the outside, although it is an internal maturation from egocentrism to sociocentrism.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that Wilde's text *The Selfish Giant* is an authorial fairy tale and Kosmač's *The Death of an Innocent Giant* is an authorial story, there are similarities and differences between them on the motif-thematic and literary-stylistic level.

Although these are two different genres (fantastic and realistic text), the poetic style is characteristic of both authors.

Wilde's and Kosmač's style is poetic – the authors are stylistically similar, but at the same time they follow two different concepts, firstly, formal interaction between the model of folk and authorial fairy tale (*Wilde*) and the model of folk and authorial story (*Kosmač*); secondly, both in terms of content and form, both texts approach the model of a folktale, especially the model of an authorial tale or story. In the context of the time in which he lived, Wilde adds typical elements of decadence, symbolism and new romance.

An important contextual difference is that Wilde's text contains allusions to homosexuality, as it is known from literary history that Wilde was the first declared homosexual author, which is why he was also imprisoned (1897–9), and in prison he wrote his last work *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898). Almost all the main literary figures are male, boys with a prominent individual and a giant. There is also a physical, otherwise symbolic contact between the giant and the boy. "The boy grabbed his arms, threw them around the giant's neck and kissed him. That boy who was planted in a tree in the morning. The giant loved him because he kissed him." (Wilde 1959: 32).

Thirdly, there are no allusions to homosexuality in Kosmač, but that is a motif-thematic constant in Wild; girls also perform in literary events (e.g., Katra, old Lužnica, Lužnikova Pepa, etc.). A common feature of both great authors is high poetics, in Wilde's biblicality, e.g. *A Pomegranate House* – the very symbol of pomegranates is a typical symbol from the Song of Songs. Interestingly, Wilde, originally from an aristocratic family, wrote the essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) and advocated for the socially weak. Kosmač had a return journey from the village to the city, from a folk author to an academic. Both shared a social and emotional

sensibility with which they portrayed their great characters. It is also interesting that, although Kosmač imitated Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*, his short story has the status of an original work because it upgraded the sample of the imitated text and thus enriched Slovenian youth literature and became a modern classic worthy of further imitation.

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