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Politique culturelle actuelle et représentation du folklore à l'écran

Present-day Cultural Policy and On-screen Folklore Representation

АКТУАЛЬНАЯ КУЛЬТУРНАЯ ПОЛИТИКА И РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ФОЛЬКЛОРА В
МЕДИАКУЛЬТУРЕ

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work is supported by Strategic Development Program of the Russian State University for the Humanities and Russian Science Foundation (project “Texts and practices of folklore as a model of cultural tradition: A comparative-typological study”).

- 1 This paper deals with the problem of how cultural policy influences the representation of folklore. This issue is being examined by analyzing animated cartoons of the 2000s, released in the USA, Europe, and in post-Soviet countries with a specific focus on Post-Soviet films. Therefore, more attention is paid to full-length cartoons and animated series, because these are major projects requiring serious financial investments. For this reason, they are very much dependent on the cultural, political and ideological situation in link with the financial risks involved. These films are also products of mass culture. Consequently, they should be in tune with the wishes of and be intelligible to wider audiences. Here are a few examples of such animated films which are based on folklore or its literary versions: “Alpomish” (Uzbekistan, 2000-2002), “The Song of a Wonderful Deer” / “Ének A Csodaszarváról” (Hungary, 2002), “El Cid: The Legend” / “El Cid: La leyenda” (Spain, 2003), “Alyosha Popovich and Tugarin” / “АЛЁША ПОПОВИЧ И ТУГАРИН ЗМЕЙ” (Russia, 2004), “Happily Never After” (USA, 2007), “Unstable Fables: Goldilocks & 3 Bears Show” (USA, 2008), “The Gem Mountain” / “ГОРА САМОЦВЕТОВ” (Russia, 2004-2010).

- 2 On the face of it, the renewed interest in folklore may be caused by a reaction to globalization and the decline of political, economic and cultural diversity. In certain cases, the search for a national identity becomes essential, which gives more significance to national history and national folklore. Yet, a full-range assessment of folklore adaptations proves more complicated.
- 3 Let us consider the dominant folklore genres in the contemporary animated films (Illustration No. 1 “Diagram of the dominant folklore genres in the animated films of the 2000s”). In America fairy tales dominate, Europe and the Post-Soviet countries display a high interest in the heroic epos. Other genres (such as myths or proverbs) are also represented.
- 4 What are the specific features of folklore genres, and what can a preference for one genre or another indicate? According to Russian folklorist Eleazar Meletinsky, a fairy tale is characterized by unspecified fabulous (a-historical) time, an unspecified fairy kingdom, personal or family goals—e.g. a hero gets a bride for himself or healing water for his own sick father—(Meletinsky, 1998: 284–96). In addition, it should be emphasized that fairy tale characters are typical and international (evil stepmother, brave prince, beautiful princess). As Eleazar Meletinsky notes, episodes of heroic epics take place in ancient heroic age or quasi-historical time. Moreover, these are set in a specific country and deals with matters of national or state importance—e.g. a hero protects his country from foreign conquerors—(Meletinsky, 1980: 665–6). In other words, a tale is more international, whereas an epic has clear ethnic connotations (this fact, however, does not negate the existence of international epic patterns and plots).
- 5 In U.S. animated cartoons, tales are international and those devoid of ethnic specificity dominate. Folklore studies provide no single answer to the question of what constitutes American folklore: is it exclusively Indian folklore? Are stories about the first settlers, or traditions of all cultures involved? American animated films use tales from different countries (stories about Cinderella, Snow White, Goldilocks, Rapunzel and others) as a source of easily recognizable plots and characters.
- 6 In European cartoons, both its own and folklore texts are present as well as other borrowed from other traditions. For example, the German cartoon series “SimsalaGrimm” (running since 1999) is based on fairy tales by the Grimm brothers while a Latvian cartoon “Female fox” (2002) is an interpretation of a Chilean tale.
- 7 National epic and fairy tales dominate in Post-Soviet cartoons, a fact easily explained by the current cultural-political situation. Post-Soviet countries now use the slogan: “new independent states with old cultural traditions” to illustrate the notion that folklore is considered the quintessence of ancient folk culture. It is a symbol of cultural independence and cultural identity, therefore governments support studies, adaptations and publications of folklore texts.
- 8 The idea of the value of folklore for contemporary Post-Soviet cultural policy was heralded in the speech by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev at the 6th Summit of Turkic States (Baku, 8 April 2000):
 “The 6th Baku summit, which has brought us together today, once again proves that multilateral cooperation between our countries and peoples has, above all, brought excellent results in the restoration of our common culture, customs and traditions, history, national and spiritual values, opened up broad prospects for the future. [...] Our summits have established... a noble tradition. It is a celebration of significant

anniversaries of our brilliant personalities, key figures of our national culture, our national epics, a gem of human culture, and important historical events in the life of our people. [...] The main purpose of such commemorative events is to return a rich spiritual heritage—created by our people for centuries—to the modern generation, and restore the knowledge that we have common roots, common history” (Speech of the Azerbaijani President, 2000).

- 9 The phrases “our common culture”, “national and spiritual values”, “common roots, common history” are very expressive. Turkic epic traditions are called “a gem of human culture”, and they act as “a rich spiritual heritage”, which should be “returned to the modern generation”. Thus, folklore is represented as ancient cultural values which in the present are capable of providing a basis for national unity.
- 10 A similar attitude to the folklore heritage could be observed in various Post-Soviet countries.
- 11 In the main square of the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, two very symbolic replacements of monuments took place over the course of the 2000s: in 2003 the statue of liberty was erected on the site of the statue of Lenin, and in 2011 its place was taken by the statue of the epic hero Manas. These three monuments symbolize the three stages of the Kyrgyz history: Soviet period, anti-Soviet period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the period of the creation of a national state with an ancient cultural history.
- 12 The Kyrgyz consider the adaptation of their folk heritage important. Work on the first full-length animated film (based on the epic about Manas) has not yet been completed for financial reasons, but director Kanybek Omurbekov is confident: “We must commit to film all our folk tales and legends” (Muchkina, 2011).
- 13 Azerbaijan also has a monument to an epic hero. In February 2012, the unveiling of the memorial to the national epic hero Kerogly was attended by the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (son of Heydar Aliyev) and his spouse. In 2003, the animated film “Basat and Tepegez” based on the heroic epic “Kitabi Dede Korkut” presented a modern adaptation of the story about the feats of the national hero.
In the Turkmen calendar (2002-2008), July used to be called “Gorkut aý” in honor of the epic hero.
In Uzbekistan, the 1000th anniversary of the national epic “Alpomish” was celebrated in 1998, and a six-part cartoon series based on the epic patterns was created in the early 2000s.
- 14 Similar situations are typical of other Post-Soviet countries. Below is a non-exhaustive list of the Post-Soviet animated adaptations of folklore:
- “Nesterka”/“НЕСТЕРКА” (Belarus, 2004-2011)—cartoon series inspired by folk stories;
 - “The Belarussian Proverbs”/“БЕЛОРУССКИЕ ПОГОВОРКИ” (Belarus, 2008)—cartoon series;
 - “Nikita Kozhemyaka”/“НИКИТА КОЖЕМЯКА” (Ukraine, 2011)—the first Ukrainian 3D-cartoon; it is based on the epic motifs and elements of East Slavic fairy tales;
 - “Kazakhia”/“КАЗАКИЯ” (Kazakhstan, 2012)—the first Kazakh animated series about national traditions and proverbs.
- 15 The Post-Soviet situation sends us back to the romantic attitude to folklore as an expression of the national spirit. Contemporary culture is, nonetheless, different. If the romantic tradition is characterized by the interest in publishing folklore literature, now screen-media products—animated films in particular—are more popular.

- 16 Russian folklore is also represented in cartoons, as exemplified in the cartoon series about three bogatyrs based on the epic songs (2004-2012), and the full-length cartoon “Vol’ga and the Sultan’s Wife”/“ВОЛЬГА И СУЛТАНОВА ЖЕНА” (2010) or “Prince Ivan and the Grey Wolf”/“ИВАН ЦАРЕВИЧ И СЕРЫЙ ВОЛК” (2011).
- 17 There are two approaches to fairy tale adaptations. In the first approach, the characters are shown in new situations not related to folklore. For example, this principle is used in making such movies as “Babka Yozhka and Others”/“БАБКА ЁЖКА И ДРУГИЕ”, “Masha and the Bear”/“МАША И МЕДВЕДЬ”.
- 18 The first one shows characters of different folklore genres (tale, mythological story—БЫЛИЧКА—, epic), which traditionally would not have appeared in the same text. The stories in which they were originally found are summarized at the beginning of the movie, while further action has no equivalent in folklore: Baba Yaga (БАБА ЯГА), Wood spirit (ЛЕШИЙ), Water spirit (ВОДЯНОЙ), Kikimora (КИКИМОРА) and Koschei the Immortal (КОЩЕЙ БЕССМЕРТНЫЙ) team up to bring up a foundling girl, who will have to fight against the Dragon (ЗМЕЙ).
- 19 “Masha and the Bear” is a 3D-animated series, in which only the situation of “a little girl meets a bear in the woods” is taken from the original folk tale. In the folk story a bear kidnaps a child, but the girl is returned home by deception. In the series they are friends and share funny adventures.
- 20 The second approach to fairy-tale screen adaptations emphasizes the ethnic specificity of the tales (images of national costumes, dialects), not a word-for-word reproduction of folklore texts. The most notable example of this is to be found in “The Gem Mountain”, a project dedicated to the tales of Russian ethnic groups. Each one of the 54 episodes is preceded by a brief introduction about the geographical location, folk crafts, traditional agriculture, etc. At the same time, the folk stories undergo significant changes; numerous plots are merged into one or endings are changed.
- 21 Whereas the first approach to adaptation is related to the modern Western (primarily American) animation, the second approach is consistent with the Soviet tradition of representing the idea of the Fraternity of Soviet Peoples.
- 22 European and post-Soviet cartoon directors often oppose their animated films based on national folklore, to American “international” animated films, which are very popular. José Pozo, director of the animated film “El Cid, la leyenda”, considers the national epic hero more interesting than characters of the North American film industry: “El personaje histórico del Cid despierta más interés que el que pueda crear la industria cinematográfica norteamericana” (Recuero, 2004). Karen Vardanyan, the sponsor of the first full-length Armenian cartoon regrets that “unfortunately, the majority of Armenian children do not read books”, and expresses the hope that the “Sasuntsi David” cartoon will help fill this gap by introducing them to folk art of a higher category and will become no less loved than the Disney cartoons (Zatikyan, 2009).
- 23 Yet, American techniques are often used in European and Post-Soviet film adaptations of folklore: Disney’s style or computer graphics; contemporary background; animals as secondary characters; specific film as a melting pot of characters from different folklore stories, different folklore genres, or from folklore and literary fairy tales.
- 24 Whereas the cartoons of the 2000s are based on an established animation tradition of previous years especially in USA, Europe and Russia, there is a need to avoid repetition

and to update adaptations. Therefore it is possible to distinguish three stages in the development of folklore screen representations: first, the animated film as a revival of folklore texts; second, the animated film as an addition to folklore texts (sequel principle); and finally the animated film as the rewriting of folklore texts (remake principle), currently the most popular approach. The idea of deconstructing stereotypes and misconceptions is reflected in the titles, which promise to offer the public the “true” stories: “The true story of the three little pigs”/“ПРАВДИВАЯ ИСТОРИЯ О ТРЕХ ПОРОСЯТАХ” (Russia, 2008), “The true story of Puss in Boots”/“La véritable histoire du Chat Botté” (France, 2009).

- 25 Modern animated screen versions of folklore (especially European and Post-Soviet group) are based on the complex interconnection of global and local aspirations. On the one hand, cartoon films present traditional national culture. On the other hand, formal methods are unified as much as possible (full-length cartoons are often intended for international distribution, so they must be clear and attractive to viewers from different countries). The analysis of animated films shows that these cultural texts demonstrate several intentions: supporting national folklore and commercial aims, patriotic education (echoing the old Romantic period) and international aesthetic demands.
- 26 By referring to the material selection principles and the attitude towards the folklore heritage it is possible to unite Post-soviet and European animated screen versions of folklore into one group, and to oppose them to the North American cartoon tradition. In Europe and in Post-Soviet countries, folklore is used in support of national patriotic projects and in most cases cartoon films draw on the material of epic songs, characterized by strongly pronounced national specificities and national ideas. By contrast, in the US, commercial principles prevail and international fantastic plots (especially magic tales) with personal and family values are in great demand.
- 27 The post-Soviet adaptations of folklore are especially interesting because they demonstrate the stability of the mechanism of romantic interpretation of folklore in contemporary cultural conditions.

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ABSTRACTS

In this article, the influence of current cultural policy on the representation of folklore in media culture is considered through the example of animated films of the 2000s. European and Post-Soviet cartoon films present traditional national cultures: folklore (especially epic songs) is used to support national patriotic projects. These animated cartoons often borrow technical elements from the American animated films. At the same time, the intentions of the folklore adaptations created in the U.S.A. are different from European and Post-Soviet countries: the commercial purposes are in the foreground, for which internationally known fairy tales are best suited.

Cet article étudie l'influence de la politique culturelle actuelle sur la représentation du folklore dans la culture médiatique à travers l'exemple de films d'animation des années 2000. Les dessins animés européens et post-soviétiques présentent leur culture nationale traditionnelle: le folklore (en particulier les chants épiques) est utilisé pour soutenir des projets nationaux patriotiques. Ces dessins animés empruntent souvent des éléments techniques aux films d'animation américains. Dans le même temps, les intentions qui président à la création d'adaptations d'éléments du folklore aux États-Unis diffèrent de celles des pays européens et post-soviétiques, dans la mesure où elles mettent au premier plan les buts commerciaux, auxquels les sujets de contes universellement connus correspondent à merveille.

В ДАННОЙ СТАТЬЕ НА ПРИМЕРЕ АНИМАЦИОННЫХ ФИЛЬМОВ 2000-Х ГОДОВ РАССМАТРИВАЕТСЯ ВЛИЯНИЕ АКТУАЛЬНОЙ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ НА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЮ ФОЛЬКЛОРА В МЕДИАКУЛЬТУРЕ. ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЕ И ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЕ МУЛЬТФИЛЬМЫ ПРЕЗЕНТИРУЮТ ТРАДИЦИОННУЮ НАЦИОНАЛЬНУЮ КУЛЬТУРУ: ФОЛЬКЛОР (ОСОБЕННО ЭПИЧЕСКИЕ ПЕСНИ) ИСПОЛЬЗУЕТСЯ ДЛЯ ПОДДЕРЖКИ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ ПАТРИОТИЧЕСКИХ ПРОЕКТОВ. ЭТИ МУЛЬТФИЛЬМЫ ЧАСТО ЗАИМСТВУЮТ ТЕХНИЧЕСКИЕ ЭЛЕМЕНТЫ АМЕРИКАНСКИХ АНИМАЦИОННЫХ ФИЛЬМОВ. В ТО ЖЕ ВРЕМЯ ИНТЕНЦИИ СОЗДАНИЯ ФОЛЬКЛОРНЫХ АДАПТАЦИЙ В США ОТЛИЧАЮТСЯ ОТ ЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ И ПОСТСОВЕТСКИХ СТРАН: НА ПЕРЕДНИЙ ПЛАН ВЫХОДЯТ КОММЕРЧЕСКИЕ ЦЕЛИ, КОТОРЫМ НАИБОЛЕЕ СООТВЕТСТВУЮТ МЕЖДУНАРОДНО ИЗВЕСТНЫЕ СКАЗОЧНЫЕ СЮЖЕТЫ.

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Mots-clés: folklore, médiatisation du folklore, adaptation du folklore, politique culturelle

Keywords: folklore, folklore mediatization, film adaptation of folklore, cultural policy

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