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**FUNCTIONS OF FOLKLORE IN LEGENDS
(TALES WITH CHRISTIAN CONTENT)**

Abstract: The article represents functions of folklore that are evident in Slovene tales with Christian content. The analysis refers to collection of 155 written Slovene legends of St. Peter, collected on the Slovene ethnical territory. In collected material all four basic functions of folklore, referring to W. Bascom, can be found. Educational/pedagogical function is emphasised, although it intertwines with other functions, especially with the function of maintaining subordination to accepted patterns of behaviour. Some cases of function of legalization, function of confirming the culture and function of justifying culture's rituals and institutions are also shown, as are the behaviour models that are accepted or desired in Slovene culture.

Key words: Slovene legends, folk literature, functions of folklore, educational/pedagogical function, culture.

Introduction:

With arrival of new media the value of folklore faded: it could be because of the rivalry in the show business industry, the loss of other functions such as educational or because of the lack of ability to integrate to cultural changes which are too fast or too radical... (Bascom 1965: 296–297).

In the following article the presence of folklore functions before the arrival of new media is shown. Interdisciplinary connection between folk literature and anthropology/ethnology is established and linguistic approach is also considered. "Language is a powerful dimension of identification and community". Because language in written form is a "long-lasting" source, it is very appropriate for researching cultural, ideological, political, valuable, mythological ... segments of specific society and period (Smith 1991). The field of this research are written Slovene legends, legends as a genre of folk literature, as a reflection of conditions within the Slovene society or culture and as a subject of interpretation of socio-linguistic paradigm. Linguistics has a great potential meaning for researching the culture (Goodenough 2002:429).

Literature and material

The research is based on analyses and interpretation of 155 Slovene legends¹ in which apostle Peter is one of the characters². The material has already been written or printed and was obtained in longhand collection on the Institute of Slovene ethnography, in various newspapers, magazines and collections or monographs. Considerable amount of gathered material represents literature from the collection Glasovi (*Voices*) that includes tales from wider Slovene territory. The legends were recorded or written down between the middle of 19th century and the beginning of 21st century on the whole ethnical Slovene territory (also in the neighbouring countries), but with the different density of appearance in certain area.

Folklore functions according to W. Bascom

The basic function of folk literature is in its maintenance of cultural stability and the folklore inside a society should function in the way to preserve subordination to accepted cultural norms.

William R. Bascom defined four folklore functions; the folklore reveals human frustrations and acts as an escape to fantasy from different forms of repression of the society; it legalises and confirms the culture, justifies its rituals and institutions; it plays an important role in education; it maintains subordination to accepted patterns of behaviour. Similar or even completely equal functions can be found in different types of folklore genres. It is equally possible to find different functions intertwined in only one folklore type (Bascom 1965: 279).

Looking at legends it is important to stress the educational/pedagogical function which is clearly expressed (also from the point of view of some writers that wrote down the legends; A. Kosi, F.K. Mesko, some anonymous writers) and intertwines with other functions; the connection between educational/pedagogical function and the function of maintaining subordination to accepted patterns of behaviour is the strongest one.

¹ A legend is a story of life of holy people, prophets, martyrs and saints, taken from the religious tradition. Legends are usually related to Jewish or Christian traditions, but can be related also to Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist religion traditions. The core of the legend is mostly a story of a magical event that proofs the holiness of a person (in Christian world Jesus Christ, his mother or other saints), and at the same time it is a remuneration for good deeds and the punishment for sinners. The origins of legends are holy books of different religions, biography of saints or apocryphal literature that is not canonically recognised (Encyclopaedia of Slovenia 1987: 117, Stanonik 1999: 279).

² Different sources (Smitek, Kuret) make me believe that legends, stories with Christian content, are only transformations of already established motives. The worshiping of St. Peter is directly connected to the deity, worshiping of which was closely connected to and intertwined with the worshiping of the Sun (Kuret 1998: 496).

The escape to fantasy function and the function of confirming the culture are, in my opinion, implied implicitly. The latter will be represented with intertwined educational tendency.

Educational/pedagogical function

Educational or didactical hints in texts come in different forms, in verses or in the form of plain texts (Kmecl 1996: 292). William R. Bascom also emphasises that educational meaning of different folklore forms can be found all around the world: they can be used to discipline little children, to calm them or to sing them lullabies; proverbs are used to express threats that the speaking person does not wish to express openly, but with insult and irony wants to encourage different action of a person. In folk literature moral lessons and defending of principles such as diligence and respect for parents can be found. And they mock behaviour such as laziness, rebelliousness and snobbery (1965: 293-294).

Legend is one of the genres in which most of the times the moral lesson is expressed directly and is then justified. The quick educational end of the legend should be its main point, so the depiction story is short with no unnecessary action; the legend is therefore short. Titles and subtitles of legends many times show the educational note, especially the titles from the times when Mohorian tale was emerging.³

It is only my assumption that the collectors from that time (such as A. Kosi) did not want to fall behind others whose tendency was to raise the young by book. Legends gathered from the collections from the end of 19th century are considered as suitable for young people, with attractive content and educational note and are considered even as school reading material. Therefore the values that are most emphasised are those of most importance for young people in that time. Adultery or similar bad acts are not talked about. One of the reasons is probably that among the common people topics like that were considered a taboo. The care for clean environment is also one of the topics that came forward in modern times.

Often a title of the legend itself shows the educational and teaching purpose: *Be merciful and sincere* (Kržišnik 1888: 16); *Help yourself and God will help you* (Primožič 2003); *Who to help?* (Jelinčič 2003); *Jesus rewards the good girl* (Dolšek 2000: 121)...

We can also find similar subtitles: *!...! to Slovene young people to inform and for pleasure* (Kosi 1897). The most legends from that time can be found in the newspaper *V(e)rtec (Kindergarten)*, which has the purpose to

³ It is also named Christofschmidian tale, after the author Christoph Schmidt (1768 – 1854) who popularized the mentioned genre in catholic Europe and on our territory (by Hladnik: <http://www.ijs.si/lit/mladini.html-l2>).

bring *“the young innocent and useful fun; healthy and strong food for the soul”* (Tomšič 1871: 1).

Many legends are religiously and practically educational. Components of practical education and religious education are fully interweaved because next to believing in (infallible) God the legends also talk about other (civilian) qualities that are required for pleasant coexistence with other people.⁴ In my opinion there is even more emphasis on the latter. Two characters (St. Peter and Jesus Christ) with whom the legend leads us to that knowledge are taken from the religious/Christian world although both characters existed before, in Indo-European myths. Following mythological explanation Christ is a giant (Iranian Gayomart, Indian Purusha, Germanic Ymir). St. Peter “emerges”, following a dualistic myth, from Christ’s opponent, a felon. This dualistic theory explains that former animal God’s helper gradually changes into God’s servant, “a friend”, and this friend gradually changes into a rival. That kind of a transformation happened under Iranian influence (Šmitek 2004: 14–16).

In the late Middle Ages these old dualistic myths changed and their message was partially used in legends that talked about Christ and St. Peter walking together.

The religion (through customs that evolved)⁵ itself used to be a very good guide in the life of “common” people (in collected legends they are defined as typical people), it was a sort of “civil education” (education for community), with no police, no social service or other institutions that lead the life of community today. So the values represented to us as acceptable in that cultural environment could easily originate from the *Bible* and are unavoidable for the life in community.

Striving for educational religion and faith can be found in legends that implicate the importance of trusting in God⁶, although we do not understand God’s deeds. A good example is St. Peter who, on the basis of his own experience, at the end always expresses a strong faith in God:

“Everything you do is good, everything you do is wise!” whispered St. Peter, walking silently next to Jesus and in his heart praising his wisdom and fairness (in Dom in svet 1889: 189).

⁴ Honesty, loyalty (not only to the God’s moral), kindness, truthfulness, sincerity, patience...

⁵ “In the medieval times the laws were named customs. Customs that people lived by and silently approved, led the life of a group of people and set boundaries to rebellious individuals. There were always some individuals that wanted to cross the lines that society approved (under the Christian influence). Even if there was no public authority to punish those people, the society rejected them on the basis of the customs and social values” (according to Pernoud 2003: 76-77).

⁶ Implied in all legends.

At that time Peter shamefully bowed his head. "Forgive me, my Lord, that I could think of you as bad. But I know and I believe that everything you do, you do it right" (Meško 1930: 1-4).

In the following words we can find religious education (also a human value) – honesty – and economical advice: how to make money: *"He who wants to have a penny must earn it fairly"* (Iskrač 1859: 291). Similar: *If we want others to help us, we must start working ourselves. At that point Peter realised that everyone must work for their own existence.*

Instruction for proper behaviour that the legend gives to the people (the success will be achieved if a person can see themselves in one of the characters, which is not hard since the names are derived from general names) is clear: many things can be achieved with patience, diligence and persistence; one needs to sacrifice for their happiness; loyalty to rightness of God's intentions; with our own and with God's help a lot can be accomplished in life; obedience;... In the background of this information there is a belief that with God's help the world is finally balanced and in order⁷. To keep the balance, every change in the positive side of the world has its negative contrast. Legends that make us believe that are the ones where a good deed is awarded and bad deed is punished. Polarisation of good and evil can be found not only in different legends but also within one legend. Christian tradition here follows the Slavic tradition (which allegedly comes from old Iran), but it needs to be pointed out that the difference between good and bad forces and deities appears in Christian times (Šmitek 2004: 219).

The folklore shows a change in interpreting culture as a strain of controlling mechanisms, such as plans, recipes, rules and instructions, that was caused by Geertz's claim. He sees culture as a net of different meanings that man created and that got caught in them. That is why he thinks that the meaning of life is not in finding laws but in finding the meaning in interpretative way; culture should be understood as a context within which we could explain and describe social processes (Geertz 1974: 5-20). With interpretation of legends we can satisfy Geertz's opinion that it is not important only to know the theme of the texts (as culture), but we must also understand how those themes enlighten other aspects of the society (Monaghan and Just 2000: 45).

Function of maintaining subordination to accepted patterns of behaviour

Function of maintaining subordination to accepted patterns of behaviour is so intertwined with educational/pedagogical function that the two

⁷ From that point of view individual judgements and deeds are always explained with the force of cultural and social structure; Reemtsma thinks similarly when he understands a certain moral as a certain culture (Carrithers 2005: 439) and the moral effect works together with convincing the cultural and social idea (ibid).

can not be separated; something is acceptable and something else is not; that is the way people should be brought up. Even with no written laws a society/community sets its own rules and promulgates them through social and cultural actions. If the legend says that something is right and that Christ (a very respected, positive and honourable person) is doing that same thing in the same good way then other people should have him as a role model and do things the same way. It is obvious that messages of the legends are moralistically and didactically adjusted to thinking of Baroque people.

In cases of St. Peter, when he was punished for his disobedience and was rewarded for his obedience, then the same things await other characters in the legend and even the readers – if inhospitable housewife was punished then in real life one should be hospitable.

Legends of rewarding the kindness awake our hopes and patience; they are also consolation or a proof that some people made it. *When Jesus and St. Peter were wandering around the world they came one night to a village and asked an old lady if they could sleep over. She had nothing so she put some straw on the floor and covered it with plain sheets. In the morning they asked the lady what she wanted for payment. "Eee," she replied, "only that my work is blessed!" They went on. The old lady started to fold the sheets. And she folds them and folds them, the whole day, the whole house was full of those sheets* (Gričnik 1995: 438).

Function of legalising, confirming the culture

The term culture⁸ and its (descriptive) synonyms can not be overlooked in legends. In the year 1954 africanist William Bascom still saw the problem and that was that even though the general concept that folklore is an important part of culture⁹, anthropologists never really tried to research relations between the folklore and the culture, nor did they take the advantages that were offered as an insight to culture through the folklore (Mencej 2005: 167). Therefore in texts there is also a reflection of culture and it can be seen through collected texts¹⁰ and legends. Culture as a concept again sees Carrithers (2005: 442)¹¹, although it was first seen like that by Tylor, metaphorically as a house to which we move into when we are born and leave

⁸ Culture is one of the key and most commonly used concepts for justifying cultural anthropology (Muršič 2005: lecture notes).

⁹ "Folktales" are more than just literary expression of the people; they are their ethnography which (if systematized) allows an insight into their way of living (Bascom 1965: 282).

¹⁰ Because of writing and handwriting technologically speaking we can describe and analyse the content of the language and that ability comes before any other ability of our cultural tradition (Goodenough 2002: 429).

¹¹ Carrithers adds that this house exceeds the morale and can bear anything (2005: 442).

when we die. In Geertz's opinion culture should be found in public symbols through which members of the society inform others about their own perception of the world (Keesing 1981: 17). Symbolism expressed in legends can also be found in collected legends because the concept of folk literature, objectively and subjectively, is defined as experience, reality and religion, all intertwined together. Every tale is somehow connected to reality (Röhrich 1991: 3) and with sociolinguistic analysis of the tale reality of certain period of time or reality of certain place can be recognised.

Legends tell us about hidden laws of intangible and unseen spiritual world, which sometimes can come true as good or evil, proved by the centuries of life experience. We can see our reflection in them just like we would look in the mirror. We could say that collected¹² legends are still in their main core a reliable truth about life, despite our critical and shallow consideration (according to Röhrich 1991: 3).

With that a function of legalisation, confirming the culture, justifying culture's rituals and institutions comes true, at the same time it shows us which behaviour patterns are acceptable or even desired by a specific culture (in this case Slovene culture). Folklore should therefore confirm, legalise the culture – certain social behaviour in one culture is accepted, different behaviour is not. With that culture and immanent identity is made; what is acceptable is positive, "ours", it is culture where diligence (and not so much ingenuity), obedience, subordination, honesty, moderation, restraint, hospitality, kindness, humility, motherhood, 'Christian' family are appreciated ... Therefore they have an impact on public life and the other way around: people themselves make culture and strengthen it.

An example of welcoming guests, educationally emphasised hospitality: *Come to us, come to stay for the night /.../ Come, I will serve you* (Dolšek 2000: 121).

But poor people would also like to serve the travellers and they start to raise small change (Kosi 1897: 75).

Help with farm chores or how honest money for the work done:

Christ and Peter stay at a farmer over the night and should therefore help with harvest the next day (Ferčnik 1873: 78).

An example of an "instruction" of how to behave during some rituals, festivals:

There was a fast; they were fasting because of the Easter. One got lunch only at eleven (Gričnik 1995: 439).

The moral note of legends is usually presented right at the end of the legend, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. In the legends where infallibility of God is emphasised, the moral note can not always be found.

¹² Not only the collection of Kosi *Sto narodnih legend slovenski mladini poduk in v zabavo* (Hundred folk legends for Slovene young people to inform and for pleasure) that Orožen analyses (2006: 618).

They are not connected to the territory, they appear in all areas; mostly used are the moral notes that represent hardworking and diligence, obedience and modesty. Some other guidelines can be found such as piety and faith in God. Anger and lie are punished, contentment is rewarded.

An example of punished greed: *From the beginning they were taking it slowly, but then they started to glutton. They stuffed their pockets, baskets and mouth. Women filled their aprons, men filled their coats. And when they could not swallow anymore, their throats closed. That is what the apostles saw and they decided to punish such greed* (Gričnik 1995: 440).

When talking about importance of work it is usually about the reward, rewarded zeal, punishment for laziness or at the end of the legend coalition of work and laziness. Enthusiasm for work is closely connected to effort and perseverance.

One time Christ and St. Peter walk past two men. One is working hard and is digging a hole, the other one is sitting in a shade near the pond. Peter asks them what they are doing. The first one replies: "I'm digging up some soil, because I'd like to grow something here." The other one replies: "I'm drying up the pond, because I'd like to grow here something." St. Peter says: "Here in the whole everything will grow, because the man deserves it, because he is trying hard; but in the pond nothing will grow." And it is like that even today: in the soil everything grows that you sow, in the pond nothing grows (Archive ISN SAZU 2005).

They meet the second driver. He also tipped over, but he did not just lie there, he was trying really hard and was placing it back. The God said: "We must help this one, he is so hard working himself!" (Gričnik 1995: 439).

Often punishment for disobedient can be found. The purpose of this punishment was probably to raise obedient people as well as to try and achieve more subordination to accepted patterns of behaviour.

Christ warns the housewife not to do what she has just seen him do. And he leaves with St. Peter. The woman says: what he can do, I can do. So she throws sheaves on the floor and sets it on fire, but no! not only sheaves with grains and chaff caught fire, but the floor, the whole house and all other buildings, too (in Slovan 1913: 291).

"Do not go, because they will beat you!" the God says to him again. Peter did not obey him and so they went inside. God made an accordion to appear on Peter's back. The drunks saw it and said to Peter to play it. But Peter did not know he had an accordion on his back. He refused to play, so they beat him hard (Krajcar 1996: 270).

It is interesting that in the legends where greed or avarice is emphasised, educational effect is made by example of punishment and not the other way around: with reward for modesty – there is only a few of the latter. That triggers a question why is modesty always rewarded with plenty of everything, if it is a virtue by itself.

At night Christ hears the barkeeper, who had a word with his daughter: "Did you see how much money they have! In the morning I will get up early. I will wait around the corner..." /.../ They come around the corner. There was the barkeeper with a big stake. He wanted to hit Christ, but Christ was faster and hit the barkeeper on his back with the hazel rod. He instantly changed into a donkey (Kocjan 1993: 122).

There are more legends that emphasise justly holy payment, on the Earth or in Heaven. The payment for good deeds is positive, for bad or evil deeds the payment is negative.

Christ and St. Peter were walking around the world and they came to some people who were threshing grain in the barn. They said they wanted to help them. And they start to thresh. St. Peter hit himself on the head with the flail and fell down. He said: "Why are you Christ next to me, if you did not protect me from hitting myself?" Christ said: "I can not help you if you did not turn the flail the right way and it hit you in the head. You needed it!" (Gričnik 1998).

St. Peter goes and says to God: "A barkeeper wants to come in (to Heaven). And that can not be." He says: "He was the one that was selling the wine, right. And husbands got drunk and beat their wives and children. Whole families were suffering" (Dolšek 2000: 121).

Function of confirming culture has an obvious intention: it expresses, strengthens and codifies the belief; **it preserves and enforces the morale**; guaranties the effect of rituals and includes practical rules and guidelines for people's life (Röhrich 1991).

The collected legends also reflect local material culture. Local (Slovene) country conditions often create circumstances in which the story happens¹³. Fields, meadows, forests and other areas can be found that are typical for Slovene countryside. Even everyday events such as eating habits, work, clothing, etc. are all under regional influence. Often regional political and historical reality reflects in the stories. Economy conditions can be found, too; the (hard) life of Slovene farmer is presented; trades and other services are present, trading, means of transport and everyday life – eating habits, clothing, dwellings and other buildings.

From individual legends, a Slovenian zeal of building churches can be seen; some of these legends were known from the pre-roman period. At least some of them must have been known or even written in pre-Christian (Slavic or indigenous) cult towns. The towns were allegedly built by people called "ajdi" (Šmitek 2004: 56–57).

In one of the legends St. Peter shows him self to a peasant and tells him where and how to build church and to name it after St. Peter. "I am telling you: Here on this hill, which is from now on called "Kronska gora", you will build me **a chapel** and later on **a church!**" /.../ There he found directions,

¹³ Evident from quotations already used in this article.

how the church should look like and that **it should have two belfries** (Gričnik 1995).

According to some experts, this was an influence of indigenous Mediterranean tradition, others say that this was only a proof that worshipping of deity of the Sun was still deeply in the people's hearts. And this stayed as a habit of building churches in Christian times (Šmitek 2004: 57).

Our ancestors and many other historic people understood pregnancy as a process, where the soul of a dead person came into a body of a young woman (Šmitek 2004: 103). Later on, this thinking was changed with holy persons for the purpose of Catholic Church.¹⁴

But God took that heart with him. He came to a house where three daughters of a farmer lived. And he said: "I will put this heart into a wardrobe and no-one can touch it. If someone touches it, that is the way it is going to happen..." And one of the daughters could not help herself and she tried the heart. And she became pregnant! (Gričnik 1995).

Function of escape to fantasy

Implicitly expressed folklore functions that would mean an escape to fantasy were not interpreted, although it would be possible that the tale would be fiction and not fact; W. Bascom rejected different psychological theories that could be evident in folklore tales. However he did not reject the mechanisms which – regardless of consistent reflection of folklore details of some culture and content of everyday life situation – express unusual or even unbelievable. Directly fiction is visible in all legends, because the characters are "holy" people, in my case Christ and St. Peter. Both are most of the times playing roles that could easily be ordinary people. Extraordinary are the miracles that happen and the circumstances in legends that under the AT classification fall under type 800-809 "Heaven" and 810-826 "the Devil".

Folklore that is understood as fictional also has an educational function – it has many moral stories and lessons; at the same time it confirms the presence of Christian culture on the Slovene territory.

The myth about the existence of Heaven and life after death is not of an explanatory nature, but serves as a guarantee and often as practical guide for ceremonies, rituals and social structure.

Door to Heaven or passing through that door means a change from this world to the other world; it is some sort of a milestone – entrance is allowed only to the ones who deserve it, and we are talked into that through the legends classified under the mentioned AT. The role of the doorkeeper is trusted to St. Peter and he accepts the souls of the dead to Heaven¹⁵.

¹⁴ According to Serbian tradition (in this case it is not Catholicism) it happens when a girl tries a bit of a powder made from the skull of a diseased (Šmitek 2004: 103).

¹⁵ Peter's key as an Orion.

Our farm boy stands outside and waits peacefully. Before the door to Heaven he stands and he hears how the people in Heaven rejoice in coming of the wealthy man (144).

And then he came to Mary and in her hand she held a flower. She put it on a scale. On one side of the scale were his sins, on the other there was a flower. And the scale inclined in sinner's favour (124).

The description of “the other side” is more a reflection of folk believes than an individual imagination. The relation earth-sky first appeared in an establishment of isomorphism between structures of heavenly upper world; old Indians believed that the spring of the river Ganges is on the sky and there was also the path to the kingdom of the dead, ruled by god Yama. The appearance of dead people in “the other side” was already known to Egyptians (the heavenly Nile), Greeks and Romans and is in folk traditions still known today (Šmitek 2004: 99).

Conclusion

If I go back to the summarised statement by W. Bascom at the beginning of this article, I could only partially agree. Collected legends have been written down by ethnographers since 1850. There is always an educational note at the end of them. Unfortunately these lectures are not close to modern children. Social changes that also change the way children grow up can not be escaped from. And as Carrithers in *Why Humans have Cultures* says there is still room for believing in anthropology (Muršič 1994: 418), I say that there is still room for believing in folk literature. With all the modern technology we have the approach with which we present the folk literature to children can be changed. To finish with a bit of scepticism, confirmation of W. Bascom's thesis can be supported by the article on the web side of the First on-line literary magazine /.../ that the institution of copywriting in the hands of big corporations and their lawyers emerged as a monster that will definitely destroy human creativity (Muršič 2008). Although the article talks about a different field of human creativity, it concerns me that this will also happen with folk literature. After all tales, as Röhrich says, are more than just literary expression of people; they are their ethnography, that allows an insight to their way of life.

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