The anticlerical images in traditional Bulgarian fairytales

Fairytales as a literature genre are an integral part of folk tradition which is inherited to the next generations. Through them people had been expressing their views and perceptions for the surrounding world, for facts and experiences of everyday life, for the superstitions and prejudices that they had. So, the study of fairytales becomes significant for the study of the ensemble of each country’s oral and written tradition.

In the European continent, there were two major historical stations for the collection and recording of modern fairytales. The first one was at the end of the 17th century with the work of Charles Perrault2. Of course, he wasn’t the first collector and publisher of fairytales. Before him oral folk stories were partly collected and published by Giovanni Francesco "Gianfrancesco" Straparola (1485?-1558)3, Giambattista Basile (1566 –1632)4 and Marie-

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4 G. Basile, Lo cunto de li cunti overo lo trattenimento de peccerille, Naples 1634 1st vol., 2nd vol. 1636.
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Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d’Aulnoy (1650/1651–1705)\(^5\). But what made Charles Perrault surpass the previous publishers was first of all the massive popularity and acceptance that his work gained and second is the fact that despite his work reflects awareness of the earlier fairy tales written in the salons, he ornamented his folktale subject matter with details, asides and subtext drawn from the world of fashion. Therefore, he is often credited as the founder of the modern fairy tale genre\(^6\).

The second station was at the beginning of the 19th century with the work of the now famous Grimm brothers. Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) published the first volume of their work *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812\(^7\). They were strongly influenced by Romanticism, which was introduced to them by their law professor Friedrich von Savigny\(^8\). They collected and published tales as a reflection of German cultural identity, through the conviction that a national identity could be found in popular culture and with the common folk (Volk)\(^9\). Thus their works and methodology became the basis for folklore studies\(^10\).

Additionally, for the Slavic world, a great collector and publisher of fairytales was the Russian folklorist Alexander Nikolayevich Afanasyev (1826-1871)\(^11\). He is considered now as the equal of the Grimm brothers for Eastern Europe, since his

collections overcome 600 stories\textsuperscript{12}. He also recorded the stories sources (narrators and places) and the different versions which each story had\textsuperscript{13}. According to his methodology were later published the Bulgarian fairytale collections, one of the most important being the 

\textit{Sbornik za narodni umotvorenija, nauka I knižnina} (SbNU) along with the \textit{Sbornik ot bălgarski narodni umotvorenija}. The SbNU’s first volume was published in 1889 and kept going on till 2013. The collection has an encyclopedic presentation and besides fairytales there can be found on its contents sources about traditional bulgarian songs, superstitions and mythology, customs and also scientific studies of geology, zoology etc. about the bulgarian land. In short terms the collection is an ethnographic source for Bulgaria, with various authors and folklorists to contribute and cooperate for its publishing. In the SbNU there had been recorded over 3000 traditional bulgarian fairytales. Of course, a big part of those fairytales are simple different versions of the same stories, yet it is a significant source material for bulgarian folklore. The \textit{Sbornik ot bălgarski narodni umotvorenija} was published from 1891 till 1894 and it was the main work of Kuzman Sapkarev\textsuperscript{14}.

Through the fairytales’ analysis\textsuperscript{15} of all these collections, we can observe that they have different themes. There are fairytales of magic, fairytales with animals in the model of Aesop’s fables,

\textsuperscript{12} H. Roderick, El. Davidson, A. Chaudhr, A Companion to the Fairy Tale, DS Brewer 2006, 221.
\textsuperscript{13} I. Šišmanov, «Značenieto i zadačata na našata etnografija» Sbornik za narodni umotvorenija, nauka I knižnina (SbNU), vol. I, Sofia 1899, 18-30.
\textsuperscript{15} According to the international fairytale classification catalog ATU (from the surnames of the researches Aarne-Thompson-Uther). The different kinds of fairytales are separated into groups with numbers, for example 300-749: Tales of Magic.
fairytales about the rural everyday life without supernatural elements and religious fairytales. The latter are considered a very interesting study, because through them we can see the simplistic folk beliefs of the Christian faith apart from the dogmatic teachings. Therefore, we can observe again the folk presentations about God, Christ and the Virgin Mary, saints, monks and the clergy. Especially for the clergy, the stories are giving us a quite negative image, for the bigger part of them. The cause for this could perhaps be found on the historical frame of the era in which the fairytales were published.

For Western Europe, the end of the 17th century, besides being the first important station for the collection and publication of fairytales as we saw, was the early ground for the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment. As known, the Enlightenment advocated rationalization and scientific progress thus it was strongly opposing the Catholic Church. Therefore, people of the clergy as conservative ambassadors of the Church were mocked and ridiculed in the stories, no matter where they were standing on the ranks.\(^{16}\)

Except that, the stories themselves lead us to a conjecture that another major historical fact that occurred then probably influenced them. In almost half of the western European clerical stories\(^ {17}\), the clergymen which are being mocked are called «pastors» and we know that «pastor» stands for the clergymen of the Protestant Church. Besides this, the stories are referred to their families and their spouses and children, and again we know that this will be impossible for a clergyman of the Catholic Church since

\(^{16}\) The above view is supported by many researches as Raymonde Robert, Nadine Jasmin, Jean Mainil, Constance Cagnat-Deboeuf.

\(^{17}\) On the international catalog- ATU 1725-1849: Jokes about Clergymen and Religious Figures.
they maintain celibacy when entering priesthood. The other half stories are referred to «priests» and they are not mentioning any spouses or children so hypothetically they stand for Catholic priests. If we consider now, that at the first half of the 17th century had just ended the Thirty Years war\(^\text{18}\) and the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church continued for little more\(^\text{19}\), the clerical stories possibly are expressing the tense situation that existed between Protestants and Catholics. Therefore, either a «pastor» either a «priest», for the common people that were telling these stories it was always the clergyman of the opposite dogma that it’s been ridiculed. The latter subject has not been proposed as a cause for the fairytale’s anticlerical images so far, but we think that it could be a clue for a further thorough research.

Eastern Europe is also familiar with these anticlerical images. Although the accomplishments of the Enlightenment delayed reaching the East, the negative images of the clergy existed at the same time with West. For the cause of this phenomenon and for a brief presentation of these fairy tales, we will focus on the images of the Bulgarian anticlerical fairytales, since a study of all the Slavic fairytales of that kind is not feasible at present.

First of all, for the causes of the anticlerical images, researches\(^\text{20}\) have proposed so far three points: A) In social terms,


\(^{20}\) «Българско Народно Творчество (BNT) в дvanadeset toma», Redakcionna kalogija prof. M. Arnaudov, I. Byrin, X. Vakarelski, prof. P. Dinekov, D.Osinin,
people were seeing the clergymen from the higher ranks as another form of “bad authority”, since their social status allowed them to have various privileges in contrast with the common folk. Especially during the time of the Ottoman reign, when the most stories were probably told, in Bulgaria the clergymen from the higher ranks were of Greek origin most of the times, so the matter besides its uneven social perspective was receiving and a patriotic-ethnic one. B) In cultural terms, low ranking clergymen weren’t receiving any special education and in rural communities mainly they were coming from the lowest social classes, thus they remained simple humans with all their flaws and failures and this was an obstacle for the right guidance of their parishes. C) In moral terms, it was usually observed the great contradiction between what the clergymen supposedly had to do and how to act according to the principles of the Christian faith and how they were acting in reality. This point is a natural consequence of the previous one.

But as for the western anticlerical stories, so for the bulgarian we think that there was another deeper cause for their spreading. The anticlerical images show a treat that is close enough with the bogomilic beliefs. As known, Bogomilism was a heresy which tormented the Byzantine Empire and Bulgaria for many centuries. Apart from its theological beliefs which have been proved that

affected the bulgarian legends\textsuperscript{22}, from a social point of view Bogomilism rejected any kind of authority after setting up its system with the imperatives of the early Church that was leaner and more spiritual, thus disagreed strongly with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. And since the bogomilic beliefs affected the legends why they couldn’t affect the fairytales as well as part of the same oral tradition? Unfortunately, the lack of previous sources (i.e. before the 19\textsuperscript{th} century)or records of these fairytales doesn’t allow us to analyze and compare them, so we could prove this point, yet again it could be a clue for a further thorough research.

Now, the most usual negative images of the clergy in the stories are the following: they were presented as people totally naive, dirty, obscene and lustful, greedy, uppish, and double-faced. The above attributes appear both individually and in combination with each other within the stories. Of course, they relate to stories in which clergymen have a leading role and are about 50-60 in number, and not stories that are referred to them as complementary characters. We will now present very briefly about 10 of the well-known fairy tales that depict these negative images the most, in order to better understand the narrative structure of these stories. We should note also that the stories titles are different in some versions, so we are recoding the most popular title or the one who shows the central point of the story.

\textit{The priest’s servant} (Čiraka na popa)\textsuperscript{23}: One young lad goes to work as a priest’s servant. The priest takes a wager with the lad, no matter what happens they should not get mad to each other, or the winner will skin the loser alive. After this, the priest assigns some very weird and peculiar tasks to the lad, so he can win the wager.

\textsuperscript{22} J. Ivanov, Bogomilski knigi I legendi, 1924, fototipno izdanie BAN 1970.  
\textsuperscript{23} SbNU vol. 7, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 58, 62, K. Šapkarev, \textit{Sbornik ot bălgarski narodni umotvorenija}, vol VIII. 142-147.
But the lad is too cunning and overbeats the priest’s tasks every time and so at the end the priest loses the wager and the lad skins him alive.

*Obscene priests* (each version of the story has been recorded with a different title so we give the one that shows the story’s central point): Three priests are making indecent proposals to a miller’s (or a farmer’s or a painter’s) wife, so he decides to teach them a lesson. He says to his wife to invite them all in their home and with witty tricks ends up the two priests to die due to accidents and the last one was ashamed in front of the whole village.

*Father wants to marry his daughter* (Bašta iska da se ženi za dăšterija si): A widowed priest raises by himself his only daughter. As the young girl comes to age, she is almost identical with her deceased mother and so her father decides to marry her. The maiden then flees from her home and after she encountered various misfortunes she marries a royal.

*They didn’t admit God’s help* (again a title who shows the story’s central point): God in the form of an old man sits in the forest. Three priests are passing by one after another and he asks them the same question “is it going to rain?”. All the priests answer him “of course, don’t you see the dark clouds that are gathering?”. He turns them all to donkeys. Then a poor villager passes and when the old man asks him the same, he says “the weather will be according to God’s will”. So, the old man gives him the donkeys.

*Without title* (the following story unfortunately has been recorded without title): A poor man found by luck a pouch full of

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26 SbNU vol. 3, 10, 15, 49, 57.  
27 SbNU vol. 7.
gold coins. The local metropolitan then wants to take the pouch from the poor man. He disguises himself as the devil, wearing a goat skin with horns so he can scare the poor man. But later when the deed is done, he cannot take off the goat skin. He returns the pouch to the poor man and thus his punishment ends.

*The hermit and the metropolitan* (Posnikot I vladikata): A metropolitan deceives a hermit to eat meat during the Lent, and he slanders him to the villagers. The hermit comes to the village to apologize, but with divine intervention it is revealed that the metropolitan has had an illegitimate child with a married woman. Thus, the villagers complain to the patriarch for the indecent metropolitan and the hermit returns to his residence.

*A priest harasses the non-deceased* (Pop mori nedoumrelite): A priest didn’t know what to say in the funeral sequence, so he sung it secretly in the church alone. After some time, the villagers wondered what exactly was going on the church and why the priest didn’t let them to be present at the funerals, so they arranged one of them to pretend the deceased and tell them later what he had heard. When the supposed funeral was done, the priest was left alone in the church with the man in the casket and start talking nuances. The man was astonished and he rose up from the casket and the priest in terror hit him with a candelabrum in the head and killed him. He came out from the church after that and started to complain to the villagers to assure first that someone died before bringing him for the funeral.

*The priest’s wife that made her husband to engage her with her lover* (Popadijata kojato nakarala mąża si da ja venčae så ljubovnika

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28 SbNU vol. 15.
29 SbNU vol.1, 57, 58, K. Šapkarev, Sbornik ot bălgarski narodni umotvoreniya, vol.VIII, 453.
s] The wife of a naïve priest is unfaithful. One day when the priest comes back from his field earlier, finds his wife and her lover together, but she convinces him that her lover is just a distant relative of hers. They sit all together for supper and drink. Later, when the priest is drunk, his wife makes him to engage her with the lover.

*The metropolitan and the swineherd* (Vladikata I svinaryt): A metropolitan mocks the son of a swineherd and says to the father that he wasted his money for the education of his son, because he was asking the young man the meaning of some very strange words that supposedly were in Greek and he couldn’t answer him. Time passed and the patriarch paid a visit to the metropolitan. The young man then asked the meaning of the same words from the patriarch. Either he could answer and said to the man who was so fool to say such strange words and the man told him about the incident with the metropolitan. The patriarch rebuked the metropolitan and then hired the young man as his secretor.

*Can the donkey become a priest?* (Magare pop biva li?): The residents of a small village are betting that their metropolitan is so greedy that he could do anything for money. They decide to prove it. With the financial help of a landlord they gather a great sum and went to the metropolitan with a donkey. They say that they wish the donkey to be anointed as the parish’s priest cause for so long there wasn’t someone. The metropolitan takes the money and anoints the donkey as priest. After a long time, a synod is gathered and all the priests and bishops of the nearby parishes are invited. The villagers are presenting to the synod their donkey-priest and so they reveal the metropolitan’s greediness.

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30 SbNU vol.11, 38.
31 SbNU vol. 4.
32 SbNU vol. 6, 31.
All the other stories have also similar structure, and some have been shortened to the types of jokes with the pass of time. Of course, the clergymen aren’t represented only negatively in the stories. In many stories they are shown to be kind, generous and philanthropists. They offer shelter and guidance to the heroes or heroines of the stories, they help them to expose the crooks that misdeed them, they give financial support to widows and orphans. But again, these are the fairytales were the clergymen are referred as complementary characters, as we mentioned above.

In contrast with the clergymen, we can observe that monks and hermits in the fairytales are represented with respect and honor, besides some exceptions which we will mention further. We already gave an example with the story of the hermit and the metropolitan. Few more examples are in fairytales such as *Sinner man* and *The girl without hands*. In the first story, a man who had murdered 99 people went to a monk so he can help him to redeem himself, as he does, and the second story is a different version of Snowhite, where the evil steppmother wants her foster daughter’s death and the huntsman who was given the deed is letting the girl to live by cutting only her hands as proof for the steppmother that he done it. The girl after that finds shelter to a hermit’s cave, which takes care of her and quite some time later he miraculously restored her hands. There are still enough stories that are showing these positive images of monks and hermits, with the narratives to be referred mostly to bandits and thieves who have been seeking redemption to them. Even the few stories that are presenting a negative image for a monk or a hermit seems that their purpose isn’t

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33 See for example stories from SbNU vol. 57, 58, 62.
34 SbNU vol. 3, 47, 57, 58, 62.
36 See for example SbNU vol. 7, 40, 45, 57.
their mocking and ridicule as with the clergymen but rather they operate as warnings and advices that show the hard path of monastic or hermetic life. A great example of this theory is the story He make all the sins when he got drunk (Izvăršil všički pregrešenija kato se napil)\textsuperscript{37}. In it, the abbot of a monastery wanted to test three monks during Lent. To the first one, he gave a piece of meat, to the second one a young woman to spend the night and to the third one a bottle of wine. The first monk thought that for so long he endured without meat, why break his oath especially during Lent, so he didn’t eat the meat. The second monk thought the same, so he didn’t come near the woman. The third monk thought that the wine wasn’t forbidden during Lent plus it was blessed by our Lord for the Holy Communion, so he finished all the bottle and got drunk, thus his barriers lowered and later he eat the meat that was left from the first monk and slept with the young woman which was rejected by the second monk. The other stories which are presenting the monks and hermits negatively also have similar structures, so we conclude that their function is like parables with deeper meanings, than as signs of condemnation.

All these stories have been recorded from almost every part of Bulgaria during the 19\textsuperscript{th}-20\textsuperscript{th} century. Very often, the same stories have different versions in each area, sometimes with the addition or removal of insignificant details and sometimes with completely different versions of the beginning or the ending of the narratives. But this is considered natural since we’re dealing with stories that were spread mostly by oral tradition. Each common narrator was forming the story according to his or her memory and was filling the gaps either due to improvisation either with details or parts of other similar stories that could be better remembered. Thankfully their recording and publishing preserve them into the cultural

\textsuperscript{37} SbNU vol. 57.
heritage, so we could see the wide variety of the common folk beliefs of the Christian faith.

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