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SLAVIC FOLKTALES IN GEORGIA: TRANSLATION AND ADAPTATION

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Abstract: This article examines the translation and adaptation of Slavic folktales in Georgia from the Soviet period to the present, analysing their role as instruments of cultural transmission, ideological mediation, and literary transformation. Drawing on a multidisciplinary framework that combines translation studies, folklore studies, polysystem theory, and comparative literary analysis, the study investigates Georgian translations of Czech, Bulgarian, Polish, Slovak, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Yugoslav folktales published between the 1950s and the present day. Particular attention is paid to the ideological framing of Soviet-era editions, the function of Russian as an intermediary language, and the translation strategies employed in rendering culture-specific elements, mythological figures, magical objects, and narrative structures. The analysis demonstrates that translated folktales functioned simultaneously as vehicles of socialist cultural policy and as dynamic agents of intercultural dialogue, fostering enduring literary connections between Georgia and the Slavic world. At the same time, translators actively negotiated between foreignization and domestication, integrating Slavic narratives into Georgian folkloric and literary traditions while preserving their cultural distinctiveness. The study further examines contemporary theatrical adaptations, demonstrating that these narratives continue to circulate beyond their original ideological context as living cultural texts that undergo continual reinterpretation. By tracing the historical evolution of translated and adapted Slavic folktales in Georgia, the article argues that translation should be understood not as secondary reproduction but as an active process of cultural creation that reshapes literary systems, collective memory, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Slavic folktales; Georgian translation; mediated translation; polysystem theory; Soviet cultural policy; folklore translation; cultural transfer; theatre adaptation

1. Introduction

Fairy tale collections are more than mere stories; they are mirrors of culture, reflecting the fears and values of the societies that tell them. In Georgia, the translation of Slavic folktales flourished during the Soviet period, revealing a complex interplay between artistic creativity, cultural exchange, and ideological oversight. These translations were produced under the shadow of Russian imperialism, within a framework that imposed

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political and social constraints. However, they also opened channels for dialogue, mutual understanding, and enduring cultural connections. Far from being passive reproductions of foreign texts, these tales became active agents in shaping Georgia's literary and folkloric landscape. Slavic folktales keep a strong presence in contemporary Georgia, engaging audiences without ideological constraints or censorship. The ongoing circulation, translation and adaptation of folktales for theatre and audio media reveal the ability of such tales to function as dynamic cultural texts, effectively negotiating linguistic, temporal and performative boundaries.

2. Historical and Cultural Context of Georgian–Slavic Literary Relations

Georgia and the Slavic regions (including Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the broader Balkans) share a rich tapestry of cultural and historical connections. These connections extend to various aspects, including politics, religion and literature. The relationship between Poland and Georgia can be traced back to the early seventeenth century, a period during which both countries confronted the expansion of the Ottoman Empire as a shared challenge (Woźniak 1998; Wojtasiewicz 2012). In the eighteenth century, both nations were threatened by the emergence of the Russian Empire. The shared struggles for independence and efforts to preserve national cultures under the pressures of the Russian Empire fostered early literary and intellectual exchanges, particularly during the Romantic period, when themes of national identity and cultural memory were emphasised. Georgian-Bulgarian relations have deeper historical roots, grounded in shared Byzantine influence. The Ukrainian-Georgian literary context, as part of the cultural and scholarly history of both nations, includes a substantial body of artistic, translated, and scholarly-critical literature. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a tradition devoted to the study of Georgian literature first began to take shape in Ukrainian academic writing (Mtchedeladze 2024: 533).

The project, which was highly productive and carried out in the 1960s, has been described as a kind of oxymoron – a "Soviet Erasmus." The programme facilitated exchanges among universities in the Soviet republics intending to foster mutual study of languages and cultures, as well as training new specialists. The origins of this exchange can be traced back to the establishment of a partnership between the universities of Kyiv and Tbilisi in 1964. The project was innovative in two respects: firstly, in its form; and secondly, in the new content it introduced into inter-university relations. The development of models of national culture occurred under the Soviet framework, through processes of reproduction and transformation, resulting in the infusion of national content into totalitarian structures.

The Ukrainian-Georgian dialogue has successfully overcome initial differences to establish a relationship characterised by mutual respect and collaboration. This was most effectively achieved when the relatively neutral field of translation studies assumed a dominant role in the research of literary relations. The Soviet period can therefore be viewed as a time of significant development of literary and cultural contacts between Ukraine and Georgia. However, it is also important to note that this

period coincided with the most extensive phase of literary dialogue conducted under the specific conditions of imperial oversight. The translations of classical works are a distinctive marker of the literary relations between Georgia and Ukraine during this period.[1] The Soviet period was a time of significant cultural exchange between Ukraine and Georgia, particularly in the literary sphere. However, it should be noted that this period also coincided with the most extensive stage of literary dialogue conducted under the specific conditions of imperialism (Chkhatarashvili 2015). This institutionalized university network and imperial oversight did not merely facilitate intellectual contact; it directly established the ideological parameters through which foreign folklore was filtered. This political conditioning becomes immediately visible when examining the subsequent wave of publication**,** paratextual framing, and thematic orientation of Slavic collections during the Soviet era.

3. Translation of Slavic Folktales into Georgian: Historical Development and Publishing Trends

The Soviet period introduced new structures and constraints that reshaped the literary and folkloric polysystem. Official cultural policy emphasized the doctrine of the "Friendship of Peoples," positioning translation not only as a moral duty but also as an instrument of ideological guidance (Mtchedeladze 2024: 534). Within this system, translated literature – including folktales – occupied a dual role: it was peripheral in aesthetic terms, yet central in its ideological function. Translation between Soviet republics was actively encouraged to promote unity, mutual understanding, and socialist internationalism, always under careful supervision. Folklore, in particular, was seen as a politically safe medium; its popular and flexible nature allowed it to be adapted to convey narratives of shared historical struggles and collective values.

Soviet Georgia thus became both a recipient and a producer of translated folklore, illustrating how subsystems of the cultural polysystem interacted dynamically. Publishing houses such as *Nakaduli*, *Sakhelgami*, *Ganatleba*, *Merani*, *Sabchota Sakartvelo* and others commissioned translations of Slavic folktales, often including introductions and commentary that framed the narratives in terms of socialist moral lessons or cross-cultural solidarity. At the same time, Georgian folklorists and translators were engaged in comparative studies, using Slavic materials to illuminate parallels with Caucasian narrative traditions. From a polysystem perspective, these activities demonstrate how translations and local folklore influenced each other, negotiating their position within the broader Soviet literary system while balancing aesthetic, cultural, and ideological priorities.

Since 1953, Georgia has published a series of Slavic and Eastern European folktales, reflecting sustained interest in regional folklore. The first of these was Karel

[1] Researchers of Ukrainian literature are achieving notable success in Georgia. The studies by Sophio Chkhatarashvili (2015) and Ivane Mchedeladze (2026) cover various stages in the history of Georgian-Ukrainian literary relations, as well as research on translation studies and socio-cultural issues. Tbilisi State University is home to the Institute of Slavic Studies, the Centre of Ukrainian Studies and the Centre of Polish Studies.

Erben's *Czech Folktales*, translated from the Czech by Elene Eristavi in 1953. Then, in 1954, followed *The Wishing Stone: Bulgarian Folktales*, translated by Ketevan Nadiradze. *Ukrainian Folktales*, translated by Valentina Khazalia published in 1957. Another edition of *Czech Folktales*, translated by Lia Eristavi, appeared in 1969, alongside *Russian Folktales*, compiled, with introduction and notes by Elene Virsaladze in 1968. The 1970s saw a proliferation of editions: *Polish Folktales*, compiled and translated by Givi Chichinadze with editorial oversight by Elene Virsaladze and colleagues, in 1970; *Slovak Folktales*, translated by Lia Eristavi, in 1971; *Belarusian Folktales*, with introduction and notes by Ksenia Sikharulidze, in 1972; *Yugoslavian Folktales*, in 1974, including the folktales from Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia; *Ukrainian Folktales*, compiled with introduction and notes by Ksenia Sikharulidze, also in 1974; and *Bulgarian Folktales*, translated by Natela Arjevanidze, Ketevan Nadiradze, and Manana Zubadalashvili in 1975. In the contemporary period, *Czech Folktales*, translated by Lia Eristavi, was published in 2013, and *Russian Folktales: Anthology*, translated by Tamar Babuadze with editorial and illustrative contributions, appeared in 2014.

4. Ideological Framing and Socialist Realism in Soviet-Era Folktale Translations

In the translated editions of Slavic folktales published in Soviet Georgia, the influence of socialist realism and the broader ideological directives of the Soviet cultural system is clearly visible, particularly in the prefaces and paratextual materials that accompanied the texts. These introductions consistently foreground social conflict, class struggle, and the moral supremacy of the working class, framing traditional folkloric narratives through the lens of socialist values.

The editor of the *Bulgarian Folktales* asserts that fairy tales reveal "the existence of good and evil," emphasise social inequality, and cultivate faith in the boundless potential of the working person, who inevitably triumphs over evil and dark forces (Bulgaruli zgaprebi 1975: 8). Kings, sultans, and rich landowners are depicted as exploiters who have become wealthy "through the sweat" of the working masses. Conversely, the hero, emerging from "the bosom of the common people," is seen as embodying strength, determination, and moral righteousness. Even individual episodes, such as the scene in *The Little Ploughman* where a magical calf returns the setting sun to noon to prolong the workday, are interpreted allegorically: labour is depicted as a transformative force capable of overcoming natural limits and producing human happiness (Bulgaruli zgaprebi 1975: 59-64).

A similar ideological framing is evident in the preface to the Georgian edition of *Czech Folktales*. In this context, the defining feature of the Czech tradition is characterized as "extremely simple democracy," expressed through narratives in which common people – peasants, artisans, soldiers, and labourers – are depicted as more intelligent, just, and courageous than members of the ruling classes (Chekhuri zgaprebi 1969: 8). The preface draws attention to the fact that ordinary protagonists often outmanoeuvre princes, counts, and even kings, and in some cases even ascend to royal

status themselves. It is important to note that such an ascent is not driven by the pursuit of power, but rather by the fulfilment of civic duty, the defence of the oppressed, and the opposition to injustice. The message is clear: human dignity and social value are not derived from factors such as birth, wealth, or status, but rather from factors such as labour, moral integrity, intelligence, courage, and modesty. Accordingly, the concept of happiness is presented as a consequence of personal virtue, rather than an arbitrary gift of fate.

These ideological readings demonstrate how Soviet-era translations functioned not only as vehicles of cultural transmission but also as instruments of political pedagogy. By reframing traditional folk narratives within the discourse of socialist morality, the prefaces sought to harmonise international folklore with Soviet ideals of class consciousness, productive labour, and the ethical primacy of the common people.

The translated collections typically encompassed the full range of folktale sub-genres, including magic tales, realistic tales, anecdotes and jokes, formula tales, and animal tales. Narratives displaying parallels with Georgian oral tradition, particularly those rooted in agrarian themes, were particularly welcomed. For illustrative purposes, we can consider the Bulgarian folktale entitled *The Little Ploughman*. In this narrative, the son of a poor widow is assisted by two miraculous calves, which are rewarded for their kindness. This motif bears a strong resemblance to the Georgian folktale *Faithful Bulls*, in which two giant bulls assist their master by ploughing the field and lengthening the day by striking the sun (Ketelauri 1977: 89-97). Such correspondences demonstrate both shared archaic agrarian imagery and mutual narrative structures across Bulgarian and Georgian traditions. At the same time, Bulgarian folktales are characterised by their distinct national features, which ensure that – even when there are thematic affinities – they retain a recognisable cultural specificity.

The Magician and His Pupil provides a compelling case for the comparative study of Slavic and Georgian folktales and corresponds to ATU 325, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. This tale type, which is widely attested across Eurasian traditions, depicts a pupil who acquires magical knowledge and ultimately confronts a malevolent or unscrupulous teacher (Öztürk 2025: 94; Troshkova 2019: 1022; Uther 2004). This narrative exemplifies the motif of magical transformation and clever resourcefulness, characteristic of the "Helpful Animals" or "Magic Object" types in folklore, and illustrates the interplay of cunning, loyalty, and magical agency in Slavic fairy tales. The Georgian folktale *Master and Pupil* chronicles the experiences of a peasant's son who, unbeknownst to him, is placed under the tutelage of a sinister master (Wardrop 1894: 2-5).

A comparison of the Czech and Georgian versions of the tale about a young man learning magic from a powerful mentor highlights both universal motifs and culturally specific variations. In the Czech tale, the hero feigns illiteracy in order to master transformations into animals and birds, leveraging his magic for practical gain through market trickery, ultimately resulting in a magical ring that secures his marriage. The narrative places significant emphasis on social interaction, everyday cunning, and the role of incidental helpers. In contrast, the Georgian tale focuses on epic confrontation with evil: the hero trains under the devil-teacher Vakhraca, employs complex sequences of transformations to defeat his opponent, and returns home to a peaceful

life. Trade and social manoeuvring are secondary considerations. Both versions share motifs of apprenticeship, magical mastery, and the use of transformations for personal benefit and protection. However, cultural context shapes their emphases. Czech storytelling is characterised by its emphasis on practical ingenuity and social astuteness. In contrast, Georgian storytelling places greater emphasis on epic conflict and moral triumph.

These two examples illustrate how the cross-cultural transmission of Slavic folktales in Georgia not only preserves core narrative structures but also allows local adaptations to reflect Georgian cultural values, social norms, and narrative preferences. This clearly illustrates the interplay between the universality and specificity of folk narratives in terms of circulation.

The examination of Slavic folktales translated into Georgian demonstrates a multifaceted process of cultural transmission, in which narrative content, ideological framing and local resonances intersect. Translations not only made these stories accessible to Georgian audiences but also mediated them through the lens of Soviet socialist realism, emphasising social justice, labour, and the moral virtues of common people. Prefaces and editorial commentary reinforced these themes, highlighting class consciousness, civic duty, and the ethical rewards of hard work and integrity. At the same time, the tales themselves maintained universal folkloric motifs, such as magical helpers, heroic quests and triumph over adversity. This allowed them to resonate across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

5. Mediated Translation and the Cross-Cultural Transmission of Folktales

The circulation of translated fairy tales in Georgia provides a particularly illuminating example of mediated or secondary-language transmission. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Eastern European folktales enjoyed remarkable popularity in Georgia**.** Yet it was precisely Russian, functioning as a mediating linguistic channel, that facilitated the wide reception of Slavic and Eastern European narratives. Russian served as the primary conduit through which children's literature, theatrical repertoires, and illustrated editions reached Georgian readers.

A significant body of recent scholarship reconsiders the notion of 'mediated' or 'indirect' translation, emphasizing that translations filtered through another language, culture, or adaptation should not be viewed as diminished or secondary versions of an 'original.' One influential contribution is the discussion of mediated translations as independent re-creations, which contribute to the ongoing variability of fairy tales. In this approach, translation is not a transparent mechanism of linguistic transfer but a generative, interpretive, and culturally embedded act. Such perspectives are particularly productive for fairy-tale studies, where many narratives lack a stable "authoritative" version, exist in multiple variants, and circulate fluidly across oral and literary channels.

In the study by Alvard Jivanyan, mediated translations (whether interlingual, intralingual, or intersemiotic) are regarded not as inferior approximations of an "original," but as independent re-creations that contribute to the continued afterlife and

variability of fairy-tale texts. This approach challenges the conventional notion of translation as a straightforward process of linguistic transfer, instead emphasising its role as a complex, interpretive, and culturally influenced act. In that sense, mediated translation becomes a natural part of fairy-tale dynamics — not an exception, but often the norm (Jivanyan 2024: 45).

A recurring theme in the literature on fairy tale translation is the challenge of preserving or negotiating cultural and literary equivalence, especially in translations intended for children's readership. Piro Tanku emphasises that fairy tale translation involves more than just transferring language; it is also about transferring cultural worldviews. Translators must navigate cultural differences in norms, social assumptions, and imagery, adapting narrative and linguistic features so that the tales remain accessible, meaningful, and appropriate for the target audience (Tanku 2013: 469).

The complexity of the text increases with the inclusion of culture-specific elements, including folkloric motifs, mythical real characters, idioms, archaic or regional language, and symbolic references. Many of these elements may not have direct equivalents in the target language. As demonstrated in a recent study on German fairy tales, translation of such "realities with linguo-cultural specificity" often compels translators to choose among strategies such as generic matching, functional analogy, calibration, or transcription (Karpiuk et al. 2023: 84). Consequently, the process of mediated translation often involves a degree of cultural negotiation, whereby certain features are adapted to the target culture, others are retained in their original form, and some are hybridised. This dynamic interplay can have a significant impact on the interpretation of the narrative, its register, and its cultural impact.

Another important dimension is the intersection between translated literary tales and oral narrative traditions**.** While written translation is one medium, these translations often feed into oral re-tellings, local adaptations, and folklore repertoires — thereby blurring the lines between 'literary' and 'folk.'

As pointed out in a chapter of *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, translation, retelling, and adaptation of fairy and folk tales for children often overlap; what we call "translation" can be a form of adaptation and retelling, not simply conversion. This applies especially when tales travel across languages and cultural contexts: what emerges may become part of a new oral tradition, mediated through successive retellings (Inggs 2018).

A broader conception of mediated translation extends beyond direct interlingual transfer to include various forms of cultural mediation undertaken by folklorists, bilingual storytellers, and ethnographers. Oral narratives may be recorded, transcribed, translated, and occasionally adapted before entering another linguistic and cultural environment. Especially in bilingual and diasporic contexts, these processes represent legitimate forms of textual transmission and should be understood as part of the broader continuum of mediated translation.

This perspective is particularly relevant when studying the cross-cultural movement of tales, their integration into local folklore repertoires, and the dynamic evolution of story types. Mediation and retelling do not simply exist as translations, but as part of living oral-literate circulation, blending literary origin, translator intervention, and oral adaptation.

The examples of cultural domestication are clearly observable in the rendering of magical objects and supernatural motifs. In Bulgarian folktales, the motif of the wishing object is often represented by the *вълшебният пръстен* – magic ring. In the Georgian translation, the term is rendered as 'natvristvali' – wishing stone. This is a well-known magical object in Georgian folklore. It is associated with the fulfilment of wishes and supernatural assistance. Instead of preserving the original form of the magical ring, the translator substitutes it with a culturally familiar equivalent, thereby relocating the narrative into a symbolic framework readily recognisable to Georgian readers. A comparable adaptation occurs in the translation of the Bulgarian concept of *жива вода* – water of life, which is rendered as 'ukvdavebis tskali' – water of immortality. Despite the fact that both expressions refer to a miraculous substance capable of restoring life and overcoming death, the Georgian term emphasises immortality rather than revival, reflecting local mythological conceptions of supernatural power.

6. Translation Strategies in the Georgian Reception of Slavic Folktales

When analysing and evaluating a translation, it is crucial to consider the genre, as this can significantly impact the interpretation and reception of the text. It is important to note that strategies that may be fully appropriate for translating a work of literary prose are not necessarily suitable for a fairy tale, and vice versa. Within the broader category of fairy tales, distinctions must be made between folk tales and literary tales, each of which demands a different stylistic and interpretive approach.

In the field of Georgian scholarship, Germanist Dali Panjikidze (1937-2018) and Slavist Giorgi Tsibakhashvili (1921-2013) have both made significant contributions to the study of Georgian translation theories, practices and stylistics. Their in-depth analyses, especially those of translations from Slavic traditions, identify the key stylistic challenges in the genre and propose evaluation criteria for translating fairy tales. According to Panjikidze, the rhythm and intonation of the fairy tale constitute fundamental stylistic markers that differentiate it from other forms of prose. Additional features characteristic of the genre include: simplicity and clarity of narrative structure; straightforward, unembellished figurative language; patterned repetition; the predominance of indirect speech; formulaic openings and closings; a clearly expressed national colouring; traditional character names and functional naming practices; and the integration of couplets or rhyming lines into the narrative. Translators must consider the aesthetic texture of the fairy tale and ensure that this is recognised and preserved. Maintaining the cultural and linguistic specificity of a folktale is as important in fairy-tale translation as in other forms of literary translation. However, this dimension is particularly vulnerable to loss, especially when translation occurs through an intermediary language. In the Georgian context, translations mediated through Russian frequently acquire a distinctly Russian stylistic colouring, even when the source tale originates from a different cultural environment. Ultimately, as with any literary genre, the challenges of fairy-tale translation must be resolved at the level of

style. Sensitivity to genre-specific stylistic features is therefore essential to producing translations that are both aesthetically coherent and culturally respectful.

Giorgi Tsibakhashvili emphasised several key issues that arise in the translation of fairy tales, the foremost being the relationship between the source text and its translation. In theory, an ideal translation is often defined as a complete transfer of the original work into another language while preserving all its essential features. These include its content, plot structure, characterisation, stylistic nuances, cultural colouring, linguistic particularities and narrative tone.

While such an ideal is undoubtedly aspirational, it is also, realistically, unattainable. In practice, every translation inevitably entails some degree of loss or transformation. Please note that certain elements may be omitted, altered or reinterpreted. It should be noticed that some loss is unavoidable and is due to the structural and expressive differences between source and target languages. However, other shortcomings may be subjective and depend on the translator's competence, interpretive choices, skill and sensitivity.

These divergences become even more pronounced when a text is translated not from the original language but from an intermediary translation – for example, Georgian translations of Slavic fairy tales rendered via Russian versions. In such cases, the Russian translator has already undertaken a complex interpretive task, attempting to understand and convey the essence of the original. The Georgian translation, in turn, reflects the broad, surface-level features of the tale – its storyline, plot sequence, proper names and selected lexical items. It should be noted that these components may not fully correspond to the primary source due to possible alterations, including but not limited to abbreviations, episode reordering, and both intentional and unintentional modifications of names that may have occurred during the initial translation stage.

Literary form is inseparable from the expressive resources of the language in which it is created; thus, when the linguistic fabric changes, so too does the aesthetic form. For this reason, Tsibakhashvili argues that analyses comparing a second-hand translation directly with the original are largely unproductive, as a genuine relationship between the two texts effectively no longer exists.

Instead, the reader is left with the impression of encountering a fairy tale, an impression created primarily by the narrative content, proper names, cultural markers and references to everyday life or historical context. It is important to note that translations made through an intermediary language are not without value. There is a possibility that they will continue to fulfil significant literary, educational or cultural roles. However, the value of these translations is inevitably more limited than that of translations made directly from the original, and the intermediary translation functions as an indispensable yet invisible mediator in the transmission process.

In the Georgian translations of South-Eastern European folktales, the rendering of fantastic creatures offers a particularly telling example of culturally motivated translation strategies. Rather than preserving the internationalized Latin or Slavic forms (e.g., *drago*, *zmei*, *zmija*), translators consistently employ the Georgian folkloric term *gveleshapi*. This choice reflects a conscious domesticating strategy: the foreign creature is not simply transferred as an exotic entity but is assimilated into the Georgian mythological system, where serpentine and aquatic dragon *gveleshapi*

("snake-whale," *gveli* – serpent, *veshapi* – whale) occupy a central position. Such decisions illustrate how translators navigate the tension between maintaining the cultural specificity of the source text and ensuring recognizability, resonance, and narrative coherence for Georgian readers.

In Slavic folktales, fairy-tale antagonists typically appear as dragons and snakes. Both scholars and ordinary readers acquainted with South Caucasian traditions readily perceive the typological parallels among these figures. The Slavic *zmei* family – Polish *żmij*, Belarusian *змей*, Russian *змей*, Bulgarian *змии*, Macedonian змев, Serbian змај, Croatian *zmaj*, Slovene *zmaj*, Ukrainian *змії* — belongs to a broader category of serpentine adversaries widely attested in the region. In the South Caucasus, dragons play a similar role. They are associated with water, danger, liminality, and the protection or violation of natural boundaries. The Georgian compound *gvel-veshapi* further underscores the hybrid nature of this creature, aligning with the Armenian *vishap* (Marr and Smirnov 1931: 98-101). It is evident that snake, worm and whale collectively constitute a unified semantic category, encompassing monstrous beings.

From a translation-theoretical perspective (Even-Zohar 1979), the substitution of 'drago' with 'gveleshapi' in Georgian folklore demonstrates that translators do not approach folktales as static texts, but rather as dynamic components of the target literary-folkloric polysystem. By selecting culturally embedded mythological terminology, translators can ensure the successful integration of Slavic narratives into the Georgian narrative universe. This process enables the translation of folktales to be made comprehensible and ensures that they are accepted as a natural and integral part of local storytelling conventions. This strategy demonstrates how translation – especially of folklore – operates not only at the lexical level but also at the deeper level of symbolic systems, genre norms and culturally shared mythological taxonomies.

The translation of magical birds demonstrates a similar process of cultural accommodation. Across Slavic folklore, the Firebird occupies a prominent position as a luminous, prophetic creature associated with both fortune and danger. Known under various names — including Ukrainian *жар-птúця*, Russian, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian *жар-птица*, Croatian *žar-ptica*, Polish *żar-ptak*, Czech *pták ohnivák*, and Slovak *vták ohnivák* – the bird functions as an object of quest and wonder, frequently initiating the hero's journey. In the context of Georgian folklore, the 'paskunji' is a supernatural creature that bears a striking resemblance to the aforementioned bird. This powerful winged entity is said to possess the remarkable ability to transport heroes between different realms, thereby providing them with invaluable aid in overcoming formidable challenges that appear to be insurmountable. The firebird and the paskunji occupy a comparable position within their respective narrative traditions, as extraordinary birds connected with the otherworld, magical assistance, and the hero's quest. Consequently, Georgian readers encounter the Slavic firebird not as an entirely foreign mythological creature, but as a figure that can be interpreted through existing local narrative patterns and symbolic associations.

In contrast to the domestication of mythological terminology, Georgian translations generally preserve the Slavic personal and place names with a high degree of precision. This strategic use of foreignisation reflects a deliberate translational balance: while culturally specific supernatural beings are adapted to the Georgian mythological

system, proper names remain unchanged to maintain the narrative's geographic and ethnic anchoring. By retaining the original anthroponyms and toponyms, translators ensure that the cultural provenance of the tale remains visible, allowing Georgian readers to situate the story within its Slavic context even as certain narrative elements are assimilated into local folkloric conventions. This dual strategy underlines how translation deals with the conflicting demands of maintaining fidelity to the source culture and achieving functional integration into the target culture's literary polysystem.

7. Contemporary Stage Adaptations and the Afterlife of Slavic Folktales in Georgia

The continued presence of Slavic folktales on the Georgian stage demonstrates that their reception has extended beyond literary translation into the broader sphere of cultural performance. Theatrical adaptation represents a new phase in the intercultural transmission of folklore, where translated narratives are reinterpreted through dramatic performance, visual expression, and contemporary artistic language. Rather than replacing literary translation, stage adaptations complement it, illustrating how folklore continues to evolve while remaining accessible to new generations of audiences.

Current stage adaptations of Slavic folktales in Georgian theatres fulfil both educational and artistic functions, preserving traditional narratives while presenting them in forms that resonate with contemporary spectators. In addition to the scenic adaptations of Grimm's, Perrault's and Andersen's fairy tales, Georgian theatres also stage selected Slavic folktales. In 2012, performances based on Czech fairy-tale motifs were staged at the Theatre for Young Audiences, including *The Golden-Haired Princess,* directed by Anatoli Lobov. In 2019, the Tbilisi Theatre for Young Audiences hosted a performance based on Belarusian folktales, produced as a co-production with the Minsk Theatre for Young Audiences. The artistic director, Vladimir Savitsky, and the set designer, Nino Chitaishvili, staged the play, which was created using motifs of Belarusian folktales. The play was performed in two languages under the title *Shlyakhtich Zavalnia, or Belarus in Fantastic Narratives*. The play, based on the novel by Jan Barszczewski, combines a classical collection of gothic and folk horror stories drawn from the eerie tales and legends of northern Belarus, narrated by Zawalnia to his guests. The stage adaptation skillfully weaves together multiple narratives, focusing on individuals who, whether voluntarily or not, succumb to temptation, abandoning their principles in the pursuit of gold and power, and gradually descending into moral corruption.

A reinterpretation of the Slovenian folktale *The Twelve Months* was staged at the Marjanishvili Drama Theatre in Tbilisi in January 2025 as part of its Christmas programme. This well-known fairy tale, classified as ATU 480 *The Kind and the Unkind Girls*, is deeply rooted in the folk traditions of Southeastern Europe and exemplifies the extensive journey of a folktale across languages, media, and cultural contexts. It is evident from these contemporary productions that Georgian interest in Slavic folktales extends beyond shared moral values. In fact, it is also sustained by

emotional resonance, cultural familiarity, and the enduring appeal of its narrative charm. An analysis of these two aspects — translation and theatrical adaptation — indicates that fundamental themes, such as the hero's attainment of magical knowledge, the support of helpful animals, and the quest for the golden-haired princess, demonstrate remarkable resilience even as narrative elements, structures, and character portrayals are adapted. These transformations highlight the dynamic nature of folklore, where each retelling must balance the need to preserve tradition with the requirement to accommodate contemporary tastes, social norms and aesthetic expectations.

8. Conclusion

Translations and adaptations of folktales function as complementary channels that facilitate the transmission, transformation, and renewed appreciation of narrative traditions across cultural boundaries. The present analysis underscores not only the persistent appeal of particular tale types but also the complex mediating practices through which translators, editors, and dramatists negotiate relevance, coherence, and aesthetic impact. The dual nature of this lens, which is both textual and performative, serves to reinforce the prevailing perspective that folk narratives are mutable cultural artefacts. These narratives continually traverse temporal, linguistic and aesthetic spheres, while concomitantly maintaining their core ethical and imaginative functions.

Contemporary Georgian stage adaptations also demonstrate the enduring vitality of Slavic folktales, illustrating their ability to engage audiences both artistically and affectively, transcending the ideological frameworks that previously influenced their reception. In a cultural environment such as Georgia, where narratives circulate across multiple linguistic and semiotic thresholds, translated fairy tales should be understood not as secondary or derivative but as dynamic cultural productions that contribute actively to the shaping and ongoing evolution of literary, folkloric, and theatrical systems. This re-evaluation underscores the pivotal function of translation and adaptation in preserving folklore as a living, perpetually self-renewing cultural phenomenon.

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Conflict of Interests
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Ethics Statement
The author(s) confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.