Original scientific paper

MULTIMODAL ADAPTATIONS OF *BAŠ-ČELIK*: FROM A FAIRY TALE TO A COMIC AND ILLUSTRATED BOOK

UDC (741.52:004.032.6):821.163.41-342 Baš-Čelik

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Abstract. *Employing the theoretical framework that represents a unique amalgam of the domains of multimodality, intermediality, transmedia storytelling and adaptation, the paper analyses the process of medial transposition of the folk fairy tale* Baš-Čelik*, primarily into Đorđe Lobačev's comic book of the same name (1939/1989), and then into Petar Meseldžija's 2008 illustrated book* The Legend of Baš-Čelik *(orig.* Legenda o Baš-Čeliku*). The paper presents verbal and graphic tools used by these authors in adapting the original text from a monomodal into multimodal media, with a special focus on three research directions. The first is the manner in which the compositional structure of the fairy tale is transferred into the comic and the illustrated book, with the aim of assessing the level of fidelity in these adaptations. The second direction is related to the most important narrative and stylistic differences (e.g., language and tone of narration). The third direction deals with the use of certain comics-specific techniques and resources, such as page layout, use of colour for emphasis, representation of speed and motion, and the presence or absence of particular graphic devices (upfixes and pictorial runes). Finally, the adaptations themselves are compared to each other, highlighting the major similarities and differences between them.*

Key words: *multimodal adaptation, medial transposition, fairy tale, comics, illustrated book*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we delve into exploring the process of adaptation of the well-known folk fairy tale *Baš-Čelik*. Specifically, we investigate its conversion into Đorđe Lobačev's 1939/1989 comic book with the same name and Petar Meseldžija's 2008 illustrated book *The Legend of Baš-Čelik* (orig. *Legenda o Baš-Čeliku*). Our study employs a comprehensive theoretical framework that encompasses multimodality, intermediality, adaptation, and transmedia storytelling, allowing for a detailed analysis of the verbal and graphic tools

used by the authors in their respective adaptations. The study is a continuation of our efforts to analyse folk literature adapted to different forms of popular culture. It started with "Visualising an Oral Epic: Lobačev's Comic Book *Tsar Dušan's Wedding*" (Tasić & Stamenković 2023), and it shares a large part of its methodology with this study. The primary focus of our investigation lies in three crucial aspects of these adaptations. Firstly, we examine how the compositional structure of the original fairy tale is conveyed in both the comic and the illustrated book, assessing the level of fidelity in these adaptations. Secondly, we explore the most significant narrative and stylistic differences between the source material and its adaptations, examining the changes in style with a particular focus on the language and tone of narration. Last but not least, we discuss the use of comics-specific techniques and resources, such as page layout, emphasis through colour, representation of speed and motion, and the presence or absence of specific graphic devices (pictorial runes and upfixes). By comparing these adaptations, our goal is to produce valuable insights into their similarities and differences, as well as their relationship with the original fairy tale. We hope that our findings can contribute to the understanding of medial transposition and transmedia storytelling, offering a unique perspective on the process of adaptation of monomodal media products to multimodal ones. Furthermore, this study opens new paths for future research in the field of literature, comics, illustrated books, and other multimodal phenomena. Given the fact that the task of systematically relating textual, perceptual, and ideological analysis usually generates considerable challenges for adaptation studies (Tseng & Bateman 2018), we intend to focus on those elements which seem to be most relevant to the nature of the genres involved here.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With the aim of providing a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the two multimodal adaptations of the fairy tale *Baš-Čelik*, we have decided to approach the subject matter from several theoretical viewpoints. Due to the very nature of the examined adaptations, we start from the theory of multimodality, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the verbal and the pictorial mode are combined in comics and illustrated books. Next, as adaptation implies a unique relation between products of different media, in our case a folk fairy tale, on the one hand, and a comic and an illustrated book, on the other, the analysis is also grounded in the concept of intermediality, understood both as any relation between two or more media and as something that focuses on "concrete medial configurations and their specific intermedial qualities" (Rajewsky 2005, 51). Then, we consider the very process of adaptation itself, along with its observable properties, mainly based around the addition or deletion of material when adapting the fairy tale. Finally, one could argue that the very existence of a narrative in different media, regardless of the level of novelty found in those works (based on the definition of transmediality given by Verstraete [2010, 10]), constitutes an example of transmedia storytelling, therefore, our theoretical framework covers this area of research as well. Establishing such an approach serves another purpose, too. It reflects the complexity of the field of comics studies and showcase, and how its overall heterogeneity has been built on the fact that many theories and methods have been introduced into it and adapted accordingly (see Bramlett et al. 2017; Packard et al. 2019; Smith & Duncan 2017). Our goal here is the same: to go beyond analysing comics from an exclusively linguistic perspective and employ several other available tools (see Bateman & Wildfeuer 2014 for a critique of narrow linguistics-based methods).

Multimodality is an obvious choice when selecting parts of a theoretical framework to tackle different aspects of comics and illustrated books, as they are media products that combine visual and textual elements to create meaning. Understanding these narratives requires readers to engage with both verbal and non-verbal/visual cues simultaneously. The interplay between different modes of communication makes comics more than an ideal subject for the application of multimodal theories and analysis. As expected, several scholars have addressed various possibilities for using aspects of multimodality in investigating comic books (e.g., Bateman et al. 2017; Bateman & Wildfeuer 2014; Cohn 2013; Cohn & Schilperoord 2023; Dunst et al. 2018; Forceville 2021; Tasić & Stamenković 2022, 2023, etc.). Different authors (or groups of authors) offer different and often divergent views, but there are links between comics and multimodality that seem to exist on a level not aligned with any of the existing theoretical and methodological approaches. When it comes to the most obvious application of multimodality to comics studies, it is embodied in the combination of visual and verbal elements in comics, which is fundamental to their storytelling. Multimodal analysis can examine how these elements interact on the page, with text often used to convey dialogue (mostly through speech bubbles) or narration (primarily in captions and narrative boxes), while images (of various styles) provide visual context and expand on the story. There are instances where one can be more important than the other in specific contexts (e.g., Tasić & Stamenković 2015), but in any case, much of the comics will be understood because of the constant interaction between these two modalities. The verbal and visual components can also challenge each other, leading to unique narrative effects. Moreover, multimodality can address the spatial arrangement of panels on a comic page (panel size, shape, transition, and arrangement), which can significantly impact the reading experience. As comics often employ visual metaphors, other forms of nonliteral language, and symbols to convey complex or abstract concepts, multimodal analysis can help unpack these elements by examining the ways in which visual and verbal elements combine to create transferred meaning (e.g., El Refaie 2015; Tasić & Stamenković 2015, 2022). Tackling multimodal metaphors is often seen as one of the frontiers of metaphor research (see Holyoak & Stamenković 2018). Along with these, comics often portray non-verbal cues and gestures, which can provide insights into emotions, relationships, and tensions among characters. Paradoxically, sound is often contained in comic books in the form of auditory cues expressed through different fonts, onomatopoeia, musical notes, and similar symbols. Multimodality in comics has also been assessed from the perspective of translation (e.g., Borodo 2015; Kaindl 2004). Illustrated books rely on a similar set of semiotic resources, but the way in which they use and combine them is not the same. It can belong to an extensive range of possible relations between text and image (see Bateman 2014).

Our next point of interest lies in the ways in which the media of the original text and its adaptations relate to each other. The fairy tale is a part of Serbian folk literature, and it was transferred from generation to generation by oral storytellers, until it was first recorded and published in its written form in 1870. This written form was then adapted to the two multimodal media products analysed in this paper. To examine the relations between all these media, we now introduce the concept of intermediality in its various senses. Most simply put, intermediality can be understood as "the interconnectedness of modern media of communication" (Jensen 2016, 972). What this means is that intermediality encompasses numerous different relations between media, which, according to Jensen (2016), can be divided into three distinctive categories:

1) discursive intermediality – simultaneous communication through several discourses and modalities,
2) material intermediality – different material vehicles of representation,
3) institutional intermediality – the interplay between media as institutions.

In addition, Schröter (2011) focuses on the discourse in which intermediality can be found, and offers further four types for consideration:

1) synthetic intermediality – different media are fused together,
2) formal or transmedial intermediality – formal structures are present in different media,
3) transformational intermediality – one medium is represented through another
4) ontological intermediality – an intermedial relation between two or more media is of more interest than any one of those media themselves.

If comics and, particularly, illustrated books are seen as combinations of two discrete media (written text and drawn image), one could say that they are intermedial in their essence, and several authors have, indeed, claimed so (e.g., Rajewsky 2005; Rippl & Etter 2013; Stein 2015). Nevertheless, especially in the case of comics, we believe that we deal with a phenomenon that is not intermedial but rather multimodal. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001, 21–22) define modes as semiotic resources used in the realisation of discourses and interactions, while media to them constitute material resources that are employed in the creation of semiotic products and events. Comics and illustrated books thus contain at least two modes of communication, the verbal and the visual.[1] Consequently, comics and illustrated books do not draw on multiple material resources but use their multimodality to create and convey meaning. The concept of intermediality only comes into play when products of these media establish a connection with another medium, as is the case in the adaptations examined in this paper.

Rajewsky's (2005, 51–53) definition of intermediality in the narrow sense, which implies the use of this concept in analysing texts and other media products, sheds more light on the above connection. If one is to observe concrete medial configurations, as Rajewsky proposes, then intermediality in the narrow sense can be broken down into three further subcategories:

1) medial transposition – a product is transformed from one medium into another,
2) media combination – different media are integrated into a single product (e.g., film, theatre, opera)
3) intermedial references – a book referencing a film or a film referencing a painting.

Based on this division, the works discussed in this study fall under the first subcategory of medial transposition, since the process of transforming a media product from one medium to another is what these adaptations actually are.

When they come to adaptation, both Djordje Lobačev and Petar Meseldžija inescapably introduce several changes during the process. This process involves transforming the narrative from the fairy tale's "telling mode" to the comic's and the illustrated book's "showing mode", as described by Hutcheon (2013, 22), albeit with the illustrated book placing less emphasis on showing compared to the comic. These adaptations entail numerous informing and deforming constraints influenced by the inherent structure of their respective media (Gaudreault & Marion 2004, 58). Gaudreault and Marion (2004, 61) argue that any adaptation process must consider the "incarnations" that arise from the interaction between a story and a medium. These incarnations pertain

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[1] Kukkonen (2011, 35) goes on to claim that sequence can be considered as the third mode in comics, which is of great import to us since it will be one of the major differences between the analysed comic and the illustrated book.

to the materiality of the media, and they are closely linked to the concept of intermediality. The authors explore the theoretical categories of mediativity and narrativity, both of which hold significant relevance to the adaptation process. Mediativity, in particular, is of special interest for our approach. According to Gaudreault and Marion (2004, 66), mediativity represents a medium's inherent ability to depict and convey that depiction. This characteristic is shaped by the medium's technical capabilities or its internal semiotic configurations. In our case, these involve a fusion of image and text. These unique attributes consequently lead to the deletion or addition of content during the adaptation process (Lefèvre 2007, 3–4). This aspect will be thoroughly examined in the present study, particularly since it directly affects the level of fidelity in adaptation (Kukkonen 2013, 80–85), which is one of our main research interests.

Finally, this process of adapting a fairy tale into a comic and an illustrated book can also be observed through the lens of transmedia storytelling, if the concept of transmediality is understood as the phenomenon of translating one medium into another (Verstraete 2010, 10), which is akin to Rajewsky's subcategory of intermedial transposition. There are, indeed, several different definitions of the term (Eder 2015, 69), similar to intermediality, within which transmediality is interpreted as "the state of being represented in multiple media" (Wolf 2012, 247) or, more specifically, illustrated by media-unspecified phenomena that exist in more than one medium (Rajewsky 2002, 206). Jenkins (2006, 95–96) further discusses the notion of transmedia storytelling as a process of narrating a story through different media, where each new addition brings something new to the overarching narrative, enriching the original text. If we were to understand transmedia storytelling in this sense alone, then, perhaps, the adaptations being analysed here might not fall under the concept of transmediality, in the same way that a transmedia franchise such as the Marvel or DC universe would. However, drawing on Verstraete's definition of transmediality, the adaptations at hand can, certainly, be taken as an example of transmedia storytelling, and the very fact that we are dealing with different media that employ a number of different narrative techniques and procedures, along with certain substantial structural and narrative changes present in the two works, should be enough to deem the intermedial relation between the original and its adaptations transmedial as well. Regardless of some overlapping of Rajewsky's definition of intermediality and Verstraete's understanding of the concept of transmediality, the introduction of the latter further expands our analysis by addressing all of the examined works as belonging to a single narrative that crosses the borders of media. In the sections that follow, we will explore how these theoretical foundations contribute to our analysis of the process of adapting a fairy tale into a comic and an illustrated book, hoping to further illuminate the complexities involved in these transformations.

3. Methodology

Three works are examined in the present study. The original text is the first published version of the fairy tale *Baš-Čelik*, found in the second edition of Vuk Karadžić's *Serbian folktales* (orig. *Srpske narodne pripovijetke*), edited by his wife Ana and printed posthumously in 1870. The fairy tale is one of the most well-known stories in Serbian folk tradition and its narrative structure represents a combination of the following types according to the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) Index: 552A (*Three animals as brothers-in-law*) + 304 (*Dangerous night-watch*/*The hunter*) + 302 (*The ogre's* [*devil's*] *heart in the egg*)

(Bošković-Stulli 1962). The second work is Đorđe Lobačev's 62-page-long comic book of the same name, initially published in black and white in 1939 in *Politikin zabavnik*, only to be later redrawn in 1976 from the author's memory since the original version was lost during World War II. The author added colour to the drawings in 1989 for a special edition of his back catalogue published by *Dečje novine*, and this is the version analysed in the paper. Aside from the obvious advantage of its widespread availability compared to the black and white version, the coloured edition of the comic book was also chosen because colour represents one of the comics-specific semiotic resources, and as such provides an additional layer of meaning for scrutiny. The last work is the illustrated book *The Legend of Baš-Čelik*, written and drawn by Petar Meseldžija in 2008. The illustrated book is the author's take on the fairy tale, based on a very peculiar rendition of the tale that he heard as a child from the people living in his grandparents' village (Meseldžija 2008). The story itself occupies 32 large-format pages in the book, 12 of them containing text, and 20 reserved for illustrations. These illustrations are not incorporated in the text but located on separate pages, with four of them being double-page spreads.

Our primarily qualitative and descriptive analysis of these works focused on three main lines of inquiry. The first involved comparing the structure of the original text and its adaptations by evaluating whether the adaptations adhered to the plotline of the fairy tale. This was done to determine how faithful the adaptations remained to the fairy tale concerning this specific issue. In determining this, we also sought to gauge the general fidelity level (Kukkonen 2013, 80–85) of both Lobačev's and Meseldžija's work with regard to the source material. The second line of inquiry was closely related and examined all the narrative and stylistic differences present in the three texts. In accordance with one of the adaptation challenges outlined by Lefèvre (2007, 3–4) – the problems that may arise during the deletion or addition of material when transitioning from one medium to another – we paid particular attention to the language and narrative tone of the adaptations compared to the fairy tale, and identified the most significant deviations in storytelling from the original text. Lastly, the third area of interest addressed various comics-related issues such as page layout, colour usage, representation of speed and motion, and the presence or absence of graphic devices for enhancing emotional content. In this context, we relied on the work of Cohn (2013) and Forceville (2011), as well as some of our previous studies (Stamenković & Tasić 2014; Tasić & Stamenković 2017, 2022, 2023) to analyse the use of pictorial runes and upfixes for representing speed, motion, and emotion in the comic book. We integrated all these tools into a comprehensive methodological approach with the goal of thoroughly examining these specific instances of adaptation from multiple perspectives.

Our methodological approach consisted of several steps. We conducted the analysis by first reading the fairy tale, comic book, and illustrated book, and then identifying specific points of interest in the adaptations to compare with the fairy tale. The next few steps were related to the first two major lines of inquiry, while the latter ones focused on the third aspect, specifically comics-related resources. The process involved tracking and matching the key structural elements of the three plotlines, pinpointing the main narrative differences between the texts by closely examining them, and searching for and comparing any existing stylistic differences such as language and tone. Additionally, we studied the page layout of the comic and the illustrated book, examined the use of colour and its ability to emphasise certain elements, identified and analysed any graphic devices used to express speed and motion, and identified and analysed any graphic devices used to express emotion. The subsequent section will address all of the major lines of inquiry mentioned above.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Compositional structure and plot outline

As described above, the first step of the analysis after having read all of the examined works, was to compare the compositional structure and plotline of the original text with its adaptations. The major structural elements of the fairy tale predominantly represent a combination of three folktale types (ATU 552A + 304 + 302), which form the tale's plotline in the following manner. The story begins with a dying king telling his three sons that they should marry off his three daughters, their sisters, to the first person who asks for their hand after he dies. The sons follow his dying wish, albeit quite reluctantly apart from the youngest son, and their sisters are soon taken by unknown forces that visit the castle. Soon after the last sister leaves, the sons set out to find them and encounter several difficulties on their way. At one point, the youngest son goes searching for fire and ends up in a cave where he has to trick nine giants in order to save his life. He succeeds and that leads him to a town where he meets a princess who later becomes his wife. In the meantime, the youngest brother gets separated from his older siblings, who return to their kingdom. In the town castle he discovers a room in which Baš-Čelik is held and sets him free after giving him water three times and receiving three lives in return. However, Baš-Čelik steals his wife while escaping from the town, and the prince now goes on to find him and save his wife. On his way, he reunites with all three sisters and learns that they have married the three lords of dragons, hawks and eagles. All of his brothers-in-law attempt to dissuade him from persecuting Baš-Čelik further, yet seeing his determination they offer help in the form of a feather that should be burned when the young prince is in danger. He finally reaches Baš-Čelik's lair and dies three times while attempting to save the princess. Before dying the fourth time, he manages to burn the feathers and his brothers-in-law arrive to resurrect him using magical water. Eventually, they learn that Baš-Čelik can only be killed if his courage, which is hidden in a bird that lives in a fox's heart, is destroyed. They hunt the fox down and by killing it they destroy Baš-Čelik in the process.

The comic book adaptation is the more faithful one of the two analysed here, and even though there are certain major narrative differences that will be discussed later on, the overall structure is quite similar to the original text. Moreover, the space allocated to each of the key narrative elements is roughly the same as in the fairy tale, with a slight expansion of the second part of the story, after Baš-Čelik is released from captivity. In the fairy tale, this key scene occurs right in the middle of the story, while in the comic it happens slightly earlier, yet does not dramatically affect the compositional structure of the narrative. All of the major elements are transferred from the fairy tale, albeit adapted to suit the contemporary audience. The most important compositional difference, or perhaps better put, the most important difference in one of the key structural elements is the fact that Baš-Čelik does not die in the end but is spared by the young couple. At least, that is what we see on the final page of the comic. Another difference worth mentioning is the prolonged pursuit sequence in the second part of the comic, where Lobačev introduces a number of epic fantasy tropes, not found in the original text in the same form. We believe that this could also be attributed to the target audience and their desire for more action and adventure that the medium of comics can provide. Nevertheless, compositionally speaking, the comic book adaptation retains a relatively high and stable level of fidelity to the source material.

When it comes to the illustrated book, this level decreases significantly in comparison with the comic. This can be seen from the onset of the narrative, where the motivation for the marriage does not come from the dying king, who is completely absent from the story, but from an old woman to whom the princess speaks. The rest of the first part of the book, up to the point of Baš-Čelik's appearance, more or less follows the structure of the fairy tale, however, major new plot elements are introduced in the second part. By far the most significant of them is the backstory of Baš-Čelik and the reasoning for his behaviour, which provides further motivation for the characters' actions. Baš-Čelik's origin is never fully explained in the fairy tale, nor in the comic, and we only learn that he is a very strong person who has fought against the town king's army and somehow been captured. In the comic book, he also leads a great army in the north, which is an addition to the original text. The illustrated book differs in the description of Baš-Čelik as well. While he is depicted as a man with wings in both the tale and the comic, here he is a dragon, which also serves the plot element related to his background. The second part of the book, especially the pursuit for Baš-Čelik's courage, strays further from the source material, introducing new structural elements such as riddle-solving and encountering various obstacles along the way. The book also deviates significantly when compared to both the fairy tale and the comic in that the protagonist does not die but is only gravely hurt and saved by his brother-in-law. The very end introduces yet another new element, which is the theme of redemption, where Baš-Čelik is spared by the hero and offered a chance to atone for his sins. Thus, we can say that the level of fidelity in the compositional structure of the illustrated book is lower than in the comic, and that it offers a wider variety of pivotal narrative elements.

4.2. Major narrative and stylistic differences

Regardless of the extent to which the two adaptations differ in their compositional structure from the original text, both contain very significant narrative changes, which are brought about by deleting or adding material during the adaptation process in the sense of Lefèvre (2007). We will first cover those differences that are present in both works and then focus on the ones specific to each of them. The first shared major narrative difference is the naming of the characters. Apart from Baš-Čelik, no other character in the original tale has a name, not even the main protagonist himself. Contrary to this, both the comic and the illustrated book give names to the main characters and even introduce new ones. Lobačev, for example, uses the same set of characters from his other comics of the time, thus the youngest son from the fairy tale becomes the only son in the comic, prince Miloš, who is accompanied by his loyal sidekick Brka (absent from the original text) and princess Biserka, who takes the place of the princess from the tale, but appears in other Lobačev's comics as well. On the other hand, the hero of *The Legend of Baš-Čelik* is a king called Marko, who rules together with his sister Jelena, and meets princess Milica in his search for his sister. This leads to the second important difference, which might also be considered a compositional one with regard to its effect on the storytelling structure, and that is the absence of the symbolism of the number 3. The entire fairy tale revolves around this number, which is one of the most commonly present numerical elements in Serbian mythology and folk literature (Kulišić et al. 1998). So, we have three sons, three daughters and three brothers-in-law, the brothers encounter three monsters, there are nine giants and nine rooms (three multiplied by three), the hero receives three lives and so on. Conversely, in the comic there are only one brother and two sisters, two monsters, five

giants in the cave. Yet, certain elements are retained, such as three lives and nine rooms. In the illustrated book we have only one brother and sister, one monster, two giants, one life and so on. Again, the only transferred element is the nine rooms, with Baš-Čelik being kept in the last one. The absence of the number 3 in the adaptations is not only symbolic. This number plays a very important role in oral literature, since it helps the storyteller remember the story more easily (everything happens three times) and convey it to the next generation. As far as the comic and the illustrated book are concerned, such narrative repetition becomes redundant, and there is no need to keep it because it no longer serves its initial purpose. Furthermore, the two adaptations are directed toward different, more modern audiences who might find such storytelling techniques tedious. The last major shared difference is the fate of Baš-Čelik, who, as already mentioned, remains alive at the end of both adaptations. In the comic he simply pleads for his life and gets spared by Miloš, however, we can only assume what happens next. In the illustrated book, Marko tells Baš-Čelik that he knows everything about him and offers him a chance to repent for what he has done. Marko keeps the bird in which Baš-Čelik's strength is locked and threatens to throw it into the fire if he ever hears about Baš-Čelik's misdeeds again. In the end, Baš-Čelik retreats and is never seen again.

Before we move on to the individual differences, let us observe the ways in which the main protagonist and antagonist are graphically depicted in the adaptations. Fig. 1 shows Prince Miloš and Baš-Čelik as seen in the comic book.

Fig. 1 Miloš (above) and Baš-Čelik (below) in the comic book
Source: Lobačev (1989, 5, 59), copyright © 1989 by Dečje novine

Here, the comic is again more faithful to the fairy tale than the illustrated book, at least in the fact that Baš-Čelik is presented as a man with wings, which is closer to the original description. Lobačev draws Miloš in a manner similar to the other protagonists in his comic

books of the time, with a remarkable resemblance to the character of Prince Valiant as portrayed in the comics by Hal Foster (Tasić & Stamenković 2023). On the other hand, the illustrated book offers a strikingly different take on the two main characters (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Marko (left) and Baš-Čelik (right) in the illustrated book
Source: Meseldžija (2008), copyright © 2008 by Petar Meseldžija

Meseldžija depicts Marko as more of a red-haired Marko Kraljević type of character, with a much more powerful physique. We could even say that he retains more of his Slavic character (both in his appearance and in his weaponry), which is somewhat lost in Lobačev's version of the tale's hero. Furthermore, Baš-Čelik is a dragon in Meseldžija's take on the story, a choice clearly presented both in the verbal and the pictorial mode of the work, both of which are delivered through the visual channel.

There are numerous other larger and smaller narrative deviations from the source material that are found only in one of the two adaptations. For the sake of brevity, we will now focus on those we deem most important. Starting with the comic, one of the major differences is the way in which Miloš and his companion Brka overcome the obstacle with giants. Here we also learn something more about the giants and the monsters from the lake and see a lot of people from the town being held in the cave by the giants. After defeating the giants, Miloš kills the snake that is attempting to bite princess Biserka and falls in love with her subsequently. Another difference is that they open the ninth room together, unlike in the fairy tale, where the youngest son is alone when that happens and Baš-Čelik is set free. Also, no magical water is used to revive Miloš, it is his sidekick who does it by simply removing Miloš's cause of death, usually a spear or a sword. The last important difference is found in the final act, where a sort of cinematic parallel narration takes place. While Miloš is trying to save Biserka, his brothers-in-law hunt the black hyena, whose heart is occupied by a hornet that holds Baš-Čelik's courage, in an obvious departure from the source material. It is not fully clear why Lobačev opts for a

hyena instead of a fox, but we can assume that the former animal bears a more sinister look, and it is depicted as such in the comic itself.

As for the illustrated book, the most important narrative difference is certainly the way in which Baš-Čelik is represented, with a fully developed backstory that uncovers his motivation. He is, in fact, the brother of Marko's brother-in-law, the White Dragon. Baš-Čelik has grown envious of and hateful toward his brother, believing that their father has divided the kingdom unequally. This has led to him escaping their kingdom and coming down to earth, wreaking havoc on his surroundings. As already mentioned several times, neither Marko nor Baš-Čelik die at any point during their confrontation, which is also a prominent change in the illustrated book. Marko meets his future wife Milica in a different fashion as well by rescuing her from the giants in the cave. Their entire relationship is depicted in much more detail in the book, compared to both the fairy tale and the comic. Generally, more emphasis is put on the way in which relations are established between different characters, which makes them more fleshed out than in the other two works. Lastly, Marko's search for the fox with Baš-Čelik's strength is presented as an adventure on its own, with several obstacles that he needs to overcome in order to find and catch the animal. This also diverges considerably from the original and the comic.

Now, stylistically speaking, we can pinpoint three main differences between the fairy tale and its adaptations. The first is evident in both adaptations, and that is the modernization of language. Even though exactly the same period passed from the first publication of the fairy tale (1870) to the comic (1939) and from the comic to the illustrated book (2008), the language of the two adaptations is much closer in style, particularly bearing in mind that the comic was redrawn in 1976, which must have included the new script as well. Also, being incorporated into the pictorial mode, the language of the comic is naturally more concise and adjusted to its audience. This is not the case with the illustrated book, where the verbal mode is the one dominantly used in telling the story, making it in turn more descriptive and ornamental. It is also fine-tuned to its contemporary audience, which cannot be said about the original text that probably sounded a bit dated due to its origin even when it was first published. The second major stylistic difference can be observed in the genre of the two adaptations. As we have already mentioned, the comic contains certain epic fantasy traits not found in the fairy tale (e.g., battles of large armies, a sorceress, landscapes changing on the hero's journey), and one can assume that Lobačev found inspiration in the popular characters of the 1930s, such as Conan the Barbarian. In addition to this, the illustrated book introduces some romantic elements into the epic narrative, especially noticeable in the relationship between the two protagonists. Their rapport is built more meticulously and does not feel as something that is there only to propel the narrative to the next scene. Furthermore, all relations are established on much more solid grounds. This adds a layer to the narration not present in either the fairy tale or the comic. Finally, the last major stylistic difference is the tone of storytelling when it comes to the way in which violence is depicted in the adaptations. Lobačev retains much of the gory details from the original, primarily related to human-eating giants and the graphic manner in which characters die (e.g., being cloven in half or falling on a multitude of spikes). Unlike in some other of his comics of the time (see Tasić & Stamenković 2023), Lobačev does not shy away from depicting violence in this case and stays faithful to the original source. Meseldžija does not follow suit, and there are no such depictions in his illustrations, nor any similar descriptions in the text. He maintains a much less cruel style and refrains from any gratuitous representations of violence.

4.3. Comics-specific semiotic resources

This part of analysis delves deeper into the multimodal character of the two adaptations. The focus is more on the comic than the illustrated book, since its nature allows for a more detailed investigation of the pictorial mode and how its specific media affordances are employed by the author in telling the story. As outlined in the methodology section, we will first examine how page layout frames and drives the narrative, then we will see how colour is used to further emphasise certain character traits, and end with the study of graphic devices such as pictorial runes (Forceville 2011; Tasić and Stamenković 2017) and upfixes (Cohn 2013), used to represent speed, motion and affect.

4.3.1. Page layout

According to Groensteen (2007, 91), page layout is "that which particularly has the function of guiding the spatio-topical parameters [in assuring] the integration of the components of a comic". Page layout serves a number of purposes: narrative, compositional, discursive, aesthetic, etc. By taking into account the first two, Peeters (2007) distinguishes between four general conceptions of the page:

1) conventional – panels maintain a strictly constant format,
2) decorative – aesthetic organization dominates all other aspects,
3) rhetorical – panel dimensions are subordinated to the narrative,
4) productive – page organization dictates the story.

In the case of Lobačev's comic, we are dealing with the rhetorical utilisation, which is the most widespread system that dominates the traditional comics (Peeters 2007). Lobačev's page organisation is fairly consistent, where pages mostly contain from 5 to 7 panels, with a few exceptions: there is one page with 8 panels, two with 3 panels, and three single-panel pages (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Examples of page layout from the comic book
Source: Lobačev (1989, 29, 52), copyright © 1989 by Dečje novine

As the above figure shows, pages in the comic book also contain entirely textual panels, which are not included in the count here. Their primary function is to drive the narrative and bridge both the spatial and temporal gap between two adjacent panels. Contrary to what Peeters defines as the conventional conception of the page, the panels vary in number per page, on the one hand, and do not follow a strict grid, on the other, even though they are angular. We suggest that Lobačev uses such a layout, among other things, to provide a sense of haste and motion in what is essentially an action comic. His page organisation also lends a certain dynamic to this intrinsically static medium, and the specific rhythm of multi-panel pages is punctuated by the three full-page panels that showcase the author's prowess in depicting monumental scenes, such as the battle seen in the right-hand image in Fig. 3. Another argument in favour of this being an example of the rhetorical use of page layout, which is narrative-dominant according to Peeters, is the fact that different scenes in the comic do not firmly adhere to the employed page layout but that they may begin in the first, middle or the last panel of the page, depending on the progression of the story. This would certainly not be the case in the composition-dominant conventional and decorative conceptions.

Even though this analysis of page layout cannot be applied to the illustrated book in the same vein, let us just briefly consider its organisation and the interplay between the verbal and the pictorial content. As mentioned before, illustrations in the book are not incorporated in the text but occupy entire pages or even double-page spreads. Single-page illustrations are located in such a way as to closely follow the text on the opposite page, albeit there are certain discrepancies between the two, but also between the illustrations themselves. One of the most obvious inconsistencies in the pictorial mode is the way in which Baš-Čelik is depicted, however, this can probably be ascribed to the fact that Petar Meseldžija worked intermittently on the book for some 15 years. Still, the most significant difference between the comic and the illustrated book when it comes to their pictorial modality lies in what, as Kukkonen (2011) proposes, is the third mode of comics – the sequence. Lobačev's *Baš-Čelik*, being a true representative of the sequential art of comics (Eisner 1985/2008), is grounded in this concept and allows itself to be understood in its terms. Conversely, if we were to remove the verbal content from Meseldžija's book, we would be left with a rather unintelligible collection of illustrations. In spite of them being presented in a specific order, the reader would find it fairly difficult to follow the narrative and receive the intended meaning. Naturally, this is not only due to the lack of sequential arrangement of the illustrations in the same manner as evinced in the comic book, but also due to the scarcity of information that the 20 illustrations contain in comparison with the verbal text. Nevertheless, this finding leads us to one of the most important conclusions of the present analysis. Narratively speaking, the pictorial mode plays a far more important role in the comic book, precisely thanks to its sequentiality, which cannot be said of the illustrated book, where it merely accompanies the verbal mode in telling the story.

4.3.2. Use of colour

When examining the use of colour, our main concern is its application for the purpose of emphasis or conveying metaphorical meaning. This means that we will not be discussing its fundamental use, which is to make these media products seem as lifelike as possible by applying a photorealistic palette. With that in mind, we will again start with a few examples from the comic book (Fig. 4).

Unlike in some other of his works from the same period (Tasić & Stamenković 2023), Lobačev does not use colour in *Baš-Čelik* that much for metaphorical effect but only to

emphasise certain character states or traits. We can observe his method in the examples in Fig. 4. The left-hand panel shows the two protagonists, Miloš and Biserka, with rosy cheeks, which are predominantly used in depictions of young, healthy characters. This, of course, strays a bit from the photorealistic use of colour but is rather there to emphasise a certain characteristic most often associated with youth and health. On the contrary, the colour in the middle panel, which shows a guard that has been bitten by a venomous snake, implies death. His greyish-green complexion is a clear sign of his unfortunate end, and Lobačev uses the colour to cue readers in on it. As soon as we see the guard, we know what is being conveyed and the verbal text merely expands on the primary pictorial message. Finally, the colour in the right-hand panel provides a visual hint that would only be resolved in the next panel. Namely, we see Baš-Čelik whose physique does not yet disclose the fact that the hornet in which his strength was hidden has been killed. The text in the balloon introduces this narrative development, but judging by the image itself, it is the colour of his hair and beard that lets readers know what is about to transpire. Again, we see how Lobačev's specific use of colour clearly emphasizes the physical state of the depicted character.

Fig. 4 Use of colour for emphasis in the comic book
Source: Lobačev (1989, 19, 24, 63), copyright © 1989 by Dečje novine

As for conveying metaphorical meaning, let us use an example from the illustrated book in which the use of colour can be understood as being metaphorically charged, so to say. The example in Fig. 5 is one of the double-page spreads from Meseldžija's book and it shows the battle between Baš-Čelik on the left and his brother, the White Dragon, and his army on the right.

Meseldžija's illustrations are, in fact, oil on masonite paintings and his technique can be seen in this large-format image. The colour palette is used to clearly differentiate the two main combatants. Baš-Čelik's scaly skin is depicted either in dark green or grey hues in the book, while the White Dragon's skin is bright, almost golden, as is the case in the image above. The light and dark (or white and black) metaphor obviously lies at the basis of the artist's decision, as light and dark, and associated colours, are easily linked with good and evil, respectively (see Ajdačić 1992; Kövecses 2010; Vlajković & Stamenković 2013).

Fig. 5 Metaphorical use of colour in the illustrated book
Source: Meseldžija (2008), copyright © 2008 by Petar Meseldžija

4.3.3. Speed and motion

To present speed and motion in an inherently static medium, such as comics and illustration, authors must rely on a variety of techniques. Most often, as is the case in the analysed illustrated book, artists would attempt to convey the sense of movement by capturing the image in mid-motion. Fig. 5 provides a good example of this as well. However, comics artists, depending on
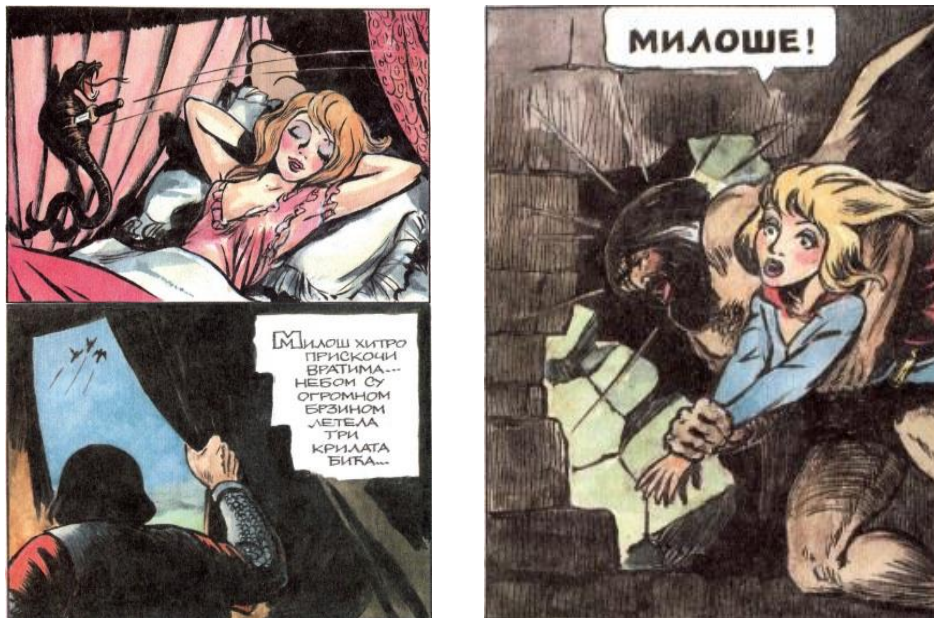
Fig. 6 Speed and motion lines in the comic book
Source: Lobačev (1989, 20, 28, 30), copyright © 1989 by Dečje novine

their style, frequently employ another technique, which includes the use of speed and motion lines. These lines, sometimes classified under the wider category of pictorial runes (Forceville 2011; Tasić & Stamenković 2017), are graphic devices of various shapes, sizes, and positions, whose purpose is to imply motion paths or trajectory lines, along with the speed of movement. They are usually drawn as extensions of a moving person or object (e.g., in front of or behind them depending on the direction of movement), or adjacent to them when marking the position previously occupied by such a person or object. Due to the painting technique used by Meseldžija, there are no such lines found in the illustrated book, but they are abundant in the comic (Fig. 6).

The three above examples illustrate how speed and motion lines, on the left-hand images, and closely related impact lines, in the sense of Cohn (2013, 40), on the right-hand side, are used by Lobačev to depict motion and its speed and force. The two images on the left contain lines that show the path of movement of the knife (above) and the flying creatures (below), but also emphasise the high speed at which these movements occur. The impact lines on the right show the actual point of impact between two objects, or Baš-Čelik's head and the wall in this particular case. They are, nevertheless, closely related to both speed and motion since they "may be highly conventionalized to represent the rushing of air away from the impact" (Cohn 2013, 40).

4.3.4. Emotional content

Our last point of interest in this multimodal analysis is the use of some other types of pictorial runes that represent graphic devices used by comics authors to enhance emotional content. These pictorial runes might be droplets, spikes, spirals, twirls or similar graphic flourishes (for an extensive catalogue of pictorial runes see Forceville 2011 or Tasić & Stamenković 2017), most often located around a character's head. They serve the purpose of further emphasising the character's affective state, such as anxiety, anger, surprise, etc. Some of these devices also fall under Cohn's (2013, 42) class of upfixes, which are "bound morphemes in visual languages appear[ing] above the head of characters [...] most often to depict emotional or cognitive state". As expected, no such devices are found in the illustrated book. However, the comic does not contain any pictorial runes or upfixes as well. One of the reasons behind this might lie in Lobačev's realistic style, which probably informs his decision to fully rely on facial expressions (see McCloud 1993) and expressive anatomy and body grammar (see Eisner 2008) in conveying emotive meaning in his graphic narrative.

4.3.5. Different modes working together

The use of colour, speed and motion, and emotional content in the comic and the illustrated book are intricately linked, contributing to the overall impact and meaning of the narratives based on different modalities working with one another to convey meaning. In the comic book, colour is employed not only for photorealistic purposes but also to emphasize character states and traits. The rosy cheeks of the young, healthy characters convey vitality and youthfulness, while the greyish-green complexion of the guard signifies his unfortunate demise, evoking a sense of death and gloom. Additionally, the colour of Baš-Čelik's hair and beard serves as a visual hint, foreshadowing an impending narrative development. The contrasting colour palettes of Baš-Čelik and the White Dragon in the illustrated book represent their moral alignment, with dark or grey hues symbolizing ruggedness and light, golden tones implying virtue. These colour choices enhance the portrayal of the characters' emotional and

moral states. Moreover, the depiction of speed and motion relies on techniques such as mid-motion imagery and speed lines. The absence of speed lines in the illustrated book is at least partly compensated by the emphasis on colour, where the hues contribute to the perception of movement and anticipation. In the comic book, speed and motion lines, along with impact lines, are utilized to depict the trajectory, speed, and force of actions, intensifying emotional impact and evoking sensations of tension, excitement, surprise, and pain. Given all this, the use of colour, speed and motion, and emotional content in these visual narratives collaboratively enhance the storytelling experience and construct different layers of multimodal complexity, with the hope of immersing the audience in vivid and expressive multimodal worlds.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to analyse the adaptation process of a monomodal media product, the folk fairy tale *Baš-Čelik*, into two separate multimodal works: a comic and an illustrated book, both of which incorporate pictorial and verbal elements in their storytelling. In order to conduct a systematic and comprehensive analysis, we combined various theoretical perspectives, including multimodality, intermediality, adaptation, and transmedia storytelling. After examining different definitions of intermediality, we concluded that the two adaptations can be considered instances of medial transposition, as the source material is transformed from one medium into another, in this case, comics and illustrated books, thus establishing an intermedial connection with the two adaptations. Additionally, when viewed through the lens of transmediality, as primarily understood by Verstraete (2010), the source and its adaptations together exemplify transmedia storytelling, enabling the narrative to span different media. Regardless of the level of novelty in the adaptations, it could be suggested that the presented narrative and stylistic differences ultimately result in a significant variety between the three works.

Based on these differences, we can conclude that the comic displays a higher level of fidelity to the original text, especially in terms of compositional structure and tone of narration. Both adaptations feature numerous examples of material deletion or addition, but these changes are more substantial in the illustrated book, leading its narrative further away from the source text than the changes in the comic. It should be noted that both adaptations share certain deviations from the fairy tale, such as modernizing the language, introducing and naming new characters, and relinquishing the symbolic importance of the number 3. Regarding the pictorial mode, the comic effectively utilizes various semiotic resources, with page layout, colour emphasis (also present in the illustrated book), and speed and motion lines all playing significant roles in graphic narration. We also observed the absence of specific pictorial runes or upfixes commonly used to enhance emotional content, possibly due to Lobačev's fairly realistic drawing style. The most notable difference between the two adaptations in terms of the pictorial mode is the lack of sequentiality in the illustrated book, making it difficult for the illustrations to narrate the story independently, without verbal input.

In addition to finding similar examples in literature and comics, future research directions could also include instances that fall under Jenkins' definition of transmediality, where each addition introduces something new to the overarching narrative. Moreover, applying a more formal discourse analysis approach (based, for example, on Asher & Lascarides 2003; Bateman & Wildfeuer 2014; Kamp & Reyle 1993) may reveal further similarities and

differences between portrayals of the same events. This approach has already proven effective in analysing various multimodal phenomena, including comic books and graphic narratives (e.g., Bateman & Wildfeuer 2014), films (e.g., Wildfeuer 2014) and video games (e.g., Wildfeuer & Stamenković 2022). Yet another way of expanding the current method would be to perform a more systematic empirical discourse analysis focused on cross-media cohesion, along the lines of Tseng and Bateman (2018).

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MULTIMODALNE ADAPTACIJE *BAŠ-ČELIKA*:
OD BAJKE DO STRIPA I ILUSTROVANE KNJIGE

Polazeći od teorijskog okvira koji predstavlja svojevrsni amalgam domena multimodalnosti, intermedijalnosti, transmedijskog pripovedanja i adaptacije, u ovom radu ćemo analizirati proces medijske transpozicije narodne pripovetke (bajke) Baš-Čelik *, prvenstveno u istoimeni strip autora Đorđa Lobačeva (1939/1989), a zatim i u ilustrovanu knjigu* Legenda o Baš-Čeliku *Petra Meseldžije (2008). Prikazaćemo verbalne i grafičke alate pomoću kojih su ovi autori adaptirali izvorni tekst iz jednog monomodalnog u multimodalne medije, sa posebnim osvrtom na sledeća tri glavna smera istraživanja. Prvo, analiziraćemo na koji je način kompoziciona struktura bajke preneta u strip i ilustrovanu knjigu, u cilju procene nivoa verodostojnosti adaptacija. Drugo, obratićemo naročitu pažnju na najvažnije narativne i stilističke razlike (npr. jezik i ton naracije). Treće, razmotrićemo upotrebu određenih tehnika i sredstava specifičnih za medij stripa, poput kompozicije strane, upotrebe boja, predstavljanja brzine i kretanja, te prisustva i odsustva pojedinih grafičkih dekoracija (apfiksa i slikovnih runa). Na kraju, daćemo i poređenje samih adaptacija i ukazati na najznačajnije sličnosti i razlike između njih.*

Ključne reči: *narodna bajka, strip, ilustrovana knjiga, multimodalna adaptacija, medijska transpozicija*