
STARBEARERS: THE PORTRAYAL OF FOREIGNERS IN FOLK THEATRE AND THE METAMORPHOSES OF THE THREE KINGS THEME

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Abstract: The author examines the issue of Magi theatrical idiom originating in the Christian feast of Epiphany and in the more archaic celebration of winter solstice. She conceives this idiom as open to racial, religious and cultural presentation of otherness, and as a situational model for the projection of specific historical events – as illustrated by the example of Tuscan narrative painting from the 15th century.

The central part of the study draws on two examples. The first analyzes a fragment from Ballek's performance *Tiso*, the second an itinerant theatrical activity of *Dobrá novina's* carolling. This is seen as a new theatrical phenomenon in terms of cultural and social functions and is characterized by its strong territorial expansion.

Key words: the Bethlehem idiom, the Three Kings theme, *Dobrá novina*, carollers, Epiphany

“I don't think theatre can be made without a certain kind of intellectual pride; by this I mean the author's presumptuous belief that his work must primarily express a concern about our world.”¹

I would like to add to Ballek's statement that theatre cannot be made without a certain kind of silencing of the intellect or intellectual humility;² I mean by this a work that expresses a concern about the author's own soul. A good example would be Ballek's production of a work by Kristína Royová³ from 1999 elaborating on the theme of the Good Shepherd and the Bethlehem idiom –the theme of Christmas.⁴

Intellectual humility involves knowing the laws and constraints of your medium. The main requirement for communication is tuning the audience and the actors in the play to each other. But how does one achieve this desired state? Musicians have the answer, and this is why the tuning of instruments often takes place in the concert hall instead of backstage. In the same way that the instruments entered the concert hall differently tuned, so did the individual members of the audience. It is through tuning that musicians become one body so that they can spread this unity into the

¹ Ballek, Rastislav: *Ako sa darí slovenskému divadlu?* (the bulletin of the 2011 Divadelná Nitra theatre festival). p. 13.

² This cognitive humility makes the books of outstanding directors an excellent theatrical source because they reveal a certain dislike for focusing on abstract theory. The humbly formulated statements in these works are convincingly rooted in staged empiricism. We could say that the tone of Brook or Mnouchkine is wise rather than academic.

³ *Bez Boha na svete*, Senica 1893

⁴ “The essence of the liturgical topic of Christmas is the trope *Quem queritis in praesepe pastores?* (Shepherds, who are you looking for in the crib?) Later additions include *oficium stellae*, the Ceremony of the Star, the Three Kings, Herod, the Flight into Egypt and other actions and characters connected with the biblical birth.” In: Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p. 13.

auditorium. In the beginnings of drama this task was fulfilled by the chorus. Today the most common model of theatre communication is the direct spreading of the actor's performance from the centre based on the assumption that the intensity of his actions will gradually affect the viewer through the mechanism of identification in the same form that is dominant in cinematography. This method primarily creates a contact between the individual viewer and the actor.

There is another possible approach: Japanese Noh theatre does not place a stress on captivating the viewer from the start. No matter how negative or indifferent the audience initially feels, the most important thing is that it shares one soul. This means that before the audience opens up to the theatrical form, it has to tune itself – this tuning can take place even during the beginning of the performance. Similarly to Zeami Motokijo, the theatre director Peter Brook stated that the audience needed to be tuned first in order to achieve the desired vibrations. This is obvious, as in this way the stage performance is not closed to the great energy potential represented by the audience. But how can one touch a Slovak audience (an audience that is receptive but which – except for a really small circle of people – has minimal theatrical experience)?

In the 1990s a small group of young theatre workers experimented with a very Bartókian idea – to play a track characteristic for the Gemer region at the beginning of a performance. The initial instrumental part would make everybody cheerfully tap their feet. Then a vocal part sung in Hungarian would follow and they could see how the audience reacts, whether according to the initial resonance or from some *a priori* ideological position.

Rastislav Ballek has done something similar by elaborating the idiom of the Bethlehem play in his production of *Tiso*. He does so bravely and meaningfully based on the fact that cultural diversity in Slovak villages was represented by the characters of the Jew and the Gypsy.⁵ This topic is widely spoken about in theatrical society. *Tiso* is an important stage production because it shows the terrible consequences of lacking a sense of understanding human rights: notably the fact that the commandment “Thou shalt not kill”⁶ cannot be obeyed without obeying the other commandments (e.g. respect for the freedom and property of others). *Tiso* mainly touches the viewer with the seemingly innocent phenomenon of a folk spectacle, which changes into a reflection of human sheep-like behaviour.

Many European intellectuals have searched for the roots of racism in the works of philosophers and linguists or in the Germanic mythological patterns of Wagner's operas. Ballek has a similar motive, but he looks for the roots of racism in folk culture,⁷ which means going even further back in the past than other intellectuals. Ballek is not trying to understand the phenomenon in his original environment but has com-

⁵ Sometimes the concept of “foreigner” is a reflection of isolation. For example in Japanese script the term “foreigner” corresponds with the term “Chinese”.

⁶ Ballek deals with the same commandment “Thou shalt not kill” in the staging of *Atómy Boha (Atoms of God)* (1998) by Gejza Vámoš, where he accentuates the ethical through an expressive reduction of a vicious cycle in which a doctor aborts his own child.

⁷ In this context it is necessary to point out the archaic nature of the Slovak folk spectacle in comparison with the Czech one: “In Slovakia, the continuity of the medieval base and the different cultural, social, and historical context determined a qualitatively different development and repertoire of the folk spectacle. The Slovak folk spectacle is characterised by more archaic forms of genesis.” In: Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p. 15. Slivka's statement encompasses the Middle Ages as well as the pre-Christian strata of culture.



A collection box for missions with the movable head of a black boy, Spiš region – beginning of the 20th century

pressed it into an expressive reduction he uses for his own purposes as a director. If we were about to look at his stage work in an equally metaphorical manner, we could say he sews the star above the carollers' heads onto the rabbi's caftan.

Although we accept Ballek's scene as inspired by folk theatre, it is possible in this context to raise the question of to what extent a folk phenomenon bound to highland areas reflects the national situation. For example, the city of Topoľčany, infamous for the September pogrom in 1945,⁸ did not even know about the folk masquerades. By contrast, it was the common people of highland villages, who include masked spectacles in their culture, who helped the persecuted⁹ on several occasions. That is why we should leave the world of black and white definitions. There are enough of them on commercial TV stations that shamelessly take advantage of this tragic topic!¹⁰

In the same way that the Second World War saw both just and brave men, the Bethlehem idiom can also be looked at from another point of view. The rounds of Bethlehem carollers are connected with the Three Kings festival, the Epiphany – which is the Revelation of Good News to all nations. This theatrical re-enactment of

⁸ This issue is tackled in the documentary *Miluj bližneho svojho* (*Love Thy Neighbour*) directed by Dušan Hudec (2004).

⁹ On a number of occasions they were encouraged to do so by the example of the clergy. On this occasion let us recall Bishop Pavol Peter Gojdič, who was titled Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem in 2007.

¹⁰ There are opinions which point out this exploitation in other categories as well: "the black and white way of presenting is a sinful tendency, which always prefers conflict to unity." In: Skorka, Abraham – Bergoglio, Jorge Mario: *O nebi a zemi*. Kumran.sk, 2013, p.185.

both a historic event and the Epiphany of Light is based on the fact that the days get longer after the solstice. Through the arrival of the Three Kings, the New Testament stops being a mainly Hebrew matter and opens up to a universal horizon. In addition to the three stages of human life, the trio represent the three races: white, yellow and black.

Needless to say, the variety of races is reflected only according to the painters' knowledge and experience. The history of painting shows that until trips overseas became common, most people had never seen a black man or a camel; they had only heard about them.¹¹ Thus, the creolisation of the idiom happened gradually. Paintings created in the period before overseas expeditions usually present the different race as a man with a bronze complexion – a Byzantine. A special alternative of this subject is the Magi Chapel in Palazzo Medici Riccardi painted by Gozzoli, where he depicted one of the kings as Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos travelling to the Council of Florence on horseback.¹²

But let us get back to the Slovak Three Kings issue. While director Ballek as a moralist transfers his opinion into the past¹³ from the position of a well-informed modern man, there is also a different level of theatrical communication where the folk theatre idiom breaks free of rural connotations of foreigners being "Jews" and "Gypsies"¹⁴ and re-establishes the biblical understanding of foreigners as guests. These guests, whether we call them "magi", "wise men" or "kings", are without doubt positive characters in the New Testament narration (Matthew 2, 1–12).¹⁵ Returning to the bibli-

¹¹ The work of Štefan Siváň, a naïve art carver from Orava, is one such story-based interpretation of a camel. Similarly, when in the 15th century the sculptor Filaret labelled every important historical figure on the Bronze doors of Old St Peter's Basilica, he found it very important to label the camel with the inscription *dromedarius*. Even though he saw the animal with his own eyes during a visit from the Ethiopians, it was still an extraordinary occurrence.

¹² Also see Hlaváčová, Anna A.: *Adventus Graecorum: Byzancia vo Florencii a v Gozzoliho Klaiňani troch kráľov*. In: D. Buran (Ed.). Bratislava: Ročenka SNG (Yearbook of the Slovak National Gallery), 2009, pp. 5-16.

¹³ It fulfils its function in Ballek's staging, yet we should not apply the prism of such a view onto the pre-Holocaust phenomenon of folk theatre, which is mostly unknown to the contemporary audience. The Star of David, as a mandatory discriminating patch, is semantically opposed to the carollers and starbearers, who represent the kings following the natural epiphany in the form of a star that guides them out from the desert.

¹⁴ We need to understand that these characters were a part of the array of divergence – the costume gave space to the phenomena of social exclusion (Prespanka, the character of a single mother confirming the norms of behaviour established in the villages, was "taken pity on" thanks to the Christian aspect of Christmas) but also to the valued and awaited (journeying craftsmen – a gelder and chimney sweep as well as characters personifying fertility and good harvest called Slameník and Turoň). However, a foreigner can also be dangerous, at least in the sense that he interrupts planned social interactions. In this context it should be mentioned that apart from their preventive and punitive role, masquerades also have the power of reminding (a commemorative function). For example, some settlements in the Nigerian Delta have a spectacle called *Odun*, played in shallow waters. A queue of people and a large snake head represent a python. A ship's crew then throws offerings and gifts into the python's head to secure safe entrance into unknown waters. In Bonny the tankers of oil companies regularly lie at anchor, and so they became a part of the everyday life of the locals. Therefore, the reason for ludic commemoration would now be redundant. A local informant from Bonny said the following about this spectacle performed in a distant Niger Delta settlement: "They need masquerade showing ship of white men because a steamer once strayed into their village." In: Hlaváčová, Anna A.: *Homo ludens Africanus alebo pohľady na predstavenia masiek Západnej Afriky*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2007, pp.74-75.

¹⁵ II. The Magi Visit the Messiah I After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem. 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teach-

cal concept of differentness thus essentially removes the heretic and pagan veil on the Christian interpretation.

In connection with this logic, I believe that the renewed tradition of carolling is culturally and sociologically essential, especially in the context of the activities of the *Dobrá novina* event. Unlike midsummer songs, which Hana Urbancová¹⁶ analysed knowing they are a historically closed chapter in the development of traditional song culture, Martin Slivka¹⁷ has captured the still-functioning phenomenon of carolling. This phenomenon, as a marginalised segment of folklore, did not undergo any internal development in the 1980s. The prevailing attitude of the time towards this cultural display can be seen in the conditions Martin Slivka¹⁸ had for filming his documentaries during the Soviet occupation – no longer on national television, but only in the modest production of the Theatre Institute. The stagnation of this folklore phenomenon was caused not only by the natural regression of folk culture, but also by its connection with Christian holidays, which were dislodged into family and church space under the socialist regime. The ambulant and exterior character of carolling was unwanted. These facts paradoxically also contributed to a certain defiant insistence on tradition and its conservation – especially in secluded rural areas where the wider family ties of the original population had been preserved. Contemporary culture ideologists were not sure how to deal with the rough pre-Christian source of folk mask theatre. They preferred having it reduced to the dance and visual attractiveness.

In the late 1980s the character of Kubo in the village of Detvianska Huta traditionally stood in front of the church during Midnight Mass. Dressed in furs, with a hedgehog hide on his head and in a cloud of steam emitting from his body, he represented the pagan shut out of the church, but was also in a way subject to the Christian ceremony. Apart from the Mass he would scare girls and children and stop cars. He was truly as good as any performer from a masquerade in the Nigerian delta!¹⁹ We should note that this Kubo represents a greatly reduced form of the phenomenon compared to the diversity that has been captured by Slivka.

Not even Slivka could foresee the extent to which the carolling phenomenon would be revived thanks to *Dobrá novina* during his work on the Three Kings theme. It would be interesting to find out to what extent Slivka's work was an impulse for renewing the carolling tradition as an extremely complex cultural step (theatrical, ethnological and cinematographic). Even if it was not a stimulus in the beginning,

ers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route (The Gospel according to Matthew).

¹⁶ Urbancová, Hana: *Jánske piesne na Slovensku*. Bratislava: AEPRESS, 2010, p. 6

¹⁷ Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990.

¹⁸ *Hra o Svätej Dorote* (1969), *Obradové divadlo* (1974)

¹⁹ "If we go beyond the external shape and we look for connections between related phenomena, we start to see the typological patterns." In: Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p.19.



Tiso, a performance directed by Rastislav Ballek, a nativity scene in juxtaposition with the president making a speech, 2005

we can hardly dismiss its role in the later expansion of the carolling project. Carolling spread to places where there was no tradition that could be used for further development.

The absence of any direct inspiration from local traditions can be seen in the need of publishing carolling manuals like *Koledník* – a guidebook for little carollers and the monothematic issue of *Rebrík* magazine about *Dobrá novina*. Slivka's books and films²⁰ could have been a welcome inspiration in the context: a hypothesis which is almost impossible to disprove even though folk spectacle carolling and the carolling of *Dobrá novina* greatly differ in their social function, and this difference has to be visible in the aesthetics of carolling.

There is an apparent development analogy with the St Nicholas phenomenon as described by Slivka, who differentiates between the urban and rural character of representation. When applied to *Dobrá novina*, this means that the modern Bethlehem starbearers are a part of urban folklore and because of the dissolving differences between the city and the country this is also the case even if they go carolling in the country.²¹

²⁰ *Masky ľudového divadla*, documentary, STV, 1984; *Fašiangy*, documentary, STV, 1969.

²¹ "Saint Nicholas has two versions in our tradition. In one of them he is a kindly old bishop that punishes naughty children and brings presents to the nice ones. Today he is a part of urban folklore and his

There is a visible continuity in costumery: even though some of the children involved in the *Dobrá novina* project go carolling dressed very simply in regular winter clothes, there is also a dramatising tendency presented by the wearing of costumes. The crowns of today's little carollers can be described as variations on the folklore starbearer's costumes:

Tall paper crowns are usually decorated with colourful tinfoil, geometric and plant ornaments, stars, religious symbols, sometimes even inscriptions, and in the play *The Three Kings* with the initials G, B and M (Gaspar²², Melchior and Balthazar).²³ An ornamental overlay of decorative paper lining the crowns edges is also popular. Except for the printed and colour adornments, chains of pearls or glittery sequin are also used for decoration.[...] Regarding shape and decoration, the tall paper crown is the dominant optic-theatrical element.[...] It seems that the tendencies of moderation, unison and harmony typical for folk art reject the wearing of a face mask together with such expressive headwear.²⁴

With the *Dobrá novina* carollers there is only this one visual transformation.

The fact that there are negative characters in traditional folk spectacle confirms the existence of a certain dualism, typical for nature religions. These characters include Death, the Devil, and as a part of the opposition of old and new they are joined by Grandfather, the Old Man and Herod from the play *King Herod*.

The Jew appearing in the play *King Herod*²⁵ bears costume characteristics contemporary to the actors of folk spectacles. He represents the old in the same way that Adam and Eve are brought to the topic of Christ's birth²⁶ as a contrast (disobedience, no more being the chosen ones). As *pars pro toto* he represents the non-dualistic²⁷ contrasts between a synagogue and the ecclesia, that similarly to the contrasting pair of Adam and Christ (the new Adam), is not merely a kind of folk

scenic exterior was until recently that of a bishop. In rural tradition the bishop theme is only secondary. Here, Saint Nicholas is a temperament old man who authoritatively scares children, young girls and youth. He is accompanied by a devil or a whole group of devils that romp around and are up to all kinds of mischief. The traditional theatrical costume and mask of the rural Saint Nicholas bares nothing even remotely suggestive of a priests' garment. He wears a long fur coat turned inside out and tied around the waist with a straw rope; a bell hangs from his belt and he carries a crude staff sometimes with a hedgehog hide tied to the top. The mask is made of leather and thoroughly covers the face, so that the person underneath, talking in a deep voice, stays unknown. His theatrical outfit and acting style place him into the category of old men and forfathers." In: Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p.35.

²² Gaspar, who is usually the youngest of the Magi was possibly the model for the puppet character of Gašparko (a jester) as a transformation with baroque features.

²³ During the Epiphany we can see the initials of G+M+B, which are on the tall crowns of the carollers, also being written in chalk on door jambs or directly on the doors of homes. People who attended Mass can bring chalk from the church. Sometimes it is up to the carollers to write the initials if they were given chalk during the Epiphany Mass. Similarly on Christmas Eve and the following days the carollers sometimes pass on the Peace Light – a flame from Bethlehem. Both these actions performed by *Dobrá novina* – passing on the Peace Light and writing initials on doors – can be considered more as ritual than theatrical moments.

²⁴ Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990.

²⁵ Picture 101. In: Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990.

²⁶ "Christmas plays are a folklore continuation of medieval dramatic traditions. They represent the qualitatively richest part of the Slovak folk theatre repertoire. The plays were mainly acted by the shepherd-Wallachian inhabitants. Christmas plays are also inspired by the Old Testament theme of the Expulsion from Paradise, but their main topic remains the birth of Christ." In: Slivka, Martin: *Ludové masky*. Bratislava: Tatran, 1990, p. 17.

²⁷ In the sense that the pair cannot be assigned the characteristics of good and bad.

The Dobrá novina
carollers, Pružina, 2009



invention. The existence of these characters reflects a theological interpretation. The same cannot be said about their dialogues, which sometimes have a similar content to such limericks as “Snail, snail, come out of your hole, Or else I’ll beat you as black as coal.”

While cultural workers complain about a shortage of funds because it is a tradition and currently also a reality,²⁸ the non-profit organisation that started the carolling event in 1995 generated in its 18th year (2012) a profit of more than 867,000 euros. The proceeds were not collected for the organisation itself, but for charity work in developing countries (projects for drinking-water wells, schools, supporting the disabled, etc.)

Dobrá novina as an area-wide carolling event organised at Christmas time (between Christmas Day and the Epiphany) takes various forms, especially in places where there was no original folk staging tradition to back it up. In these areas it takes a predominantly musical direction. In other places it takes up elements of traditional folk-mask spectacles, or extracts the dramatic background for theatrical performance from the biblical Three Kings theme. The question for further investigation remains of whether the new carolling in the form of theatre is thriving more in the countries with a history of Wallachian colonisation.

²⁸ Appreciated community activities should by no means be an argument for art to be profitable or the self-financing of culture.

If the information about *Dobrá novina* states that “the children build a relationship to the carolling tradition through a nice experience,”²⁹ they definitely do not mean just the national traditions. In fact, the main project partner of *Dobrá novina* is the Austrian Epiphany event (Dreikönigsaktion/Sternsingeraktion),³⁰ which has been taking place for 60 years now (since 1953). Apart from this, the tradition has been long maintained in other German-speaking areas as well: in Germany (Die Sternsinger – Kindermissionswerk), Switzerland (Kindermissionswerk – MISSIO)³¹ and in northern Italy (Katholische Jungschar Südtirol). In the German context, stressing the carolling tradition can be regarded as a confirmation of Christian universalism and a resolute separation from the national socialist narration. Recently, similarly to Slovakia, the carolling tradition was popularised in Hungary (EMF Alapítvány).

It was not an ethnologist who founded the biggest annual volunteer event in Slovakia, but an engineer, Marián Čaučík, whose activities come from Christian dissent. Sources embraced by *Dobrá novina*, which they posted on their website are illustrated through three saints with the name Francis:

St Francis of Assisi (introduced the tradition of the Nativity play– a Christmas carolling tradition)

St Francis Xavier (the patron of missions – *Dobrá novina* also helps the missions)

St Francis of Sales (introduced the Salesian Preventive System in the Education of Youth – in *Dobrá novina*, we try to support people in Africa through projects and in this way help to prevent extreme poverty and the negative behaviour it creates).³²

The above mentioned facts make the social function of carolling clearly visible. However, it is not oriented only in an outward direction. The preventive function concerns also negative behaviour brought by wealth. No matter what the possible social differences are between them, the Slovak carollers are among the wealthier part of mankind just because of their nationality.

The cultivating function is also important. In the past, when people wanted to listen to music or see a theatre performance, they had to make their own. This way there a cultivated audience arose with a developed musical thinking and a certain level of musical skills. This fact makes carolling important for the carollers themselves. Currently, theatrical education is not a broad cultural and social topic. Through *Dobrá novina* thousands of children can get acquainted with the ludic principle, try out this tool of live communication and withdraw themselves from the world of computer games into reality. However, this is not a withdrawal into a secluded LARP group. The little carollers act for an audience and this opening up takes place on two levels: a direct level for adults or the families they visit and an indirect level for foreign children in Africa. Apart from this, carolling often becomes a spontaneous need and tradition for families which no longer take part in its organised form but who used to take part in *Dobrá novina* in the past.

²⁹ <http://www.dobranovina.sk/o/dobra-novina-v-kocke/>.

³⁰ <http://www.dka.at/>.

³¹ <http://www.missio.ch/missio-kinder-und-jugend/sternsingen.html>.

³² <http://www.dobranovina.sk/o/dobra-novina-v-kocke/>.

The Three Kings idiom has undergone a few fascinating metamorphoses in the last thousand years. St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) is considered to be the founder of the Nativity play (a live Bethlehem) and later on a festive and potentially dramatic storyline was added to this contemplative theme. It is no longer just the angels waking up the shepherds. In the Three Kings story the good and the bad king stand opposite each other, even though their conflict never develops into direct confrontation. A number of Magi fraternities were created in medieval towns. Their task was to celebrate the holiday, but also unite groups of youths into one polis, thus preventing street scuffles such as were depicted in the story of the Verona lovers, Romeo and Juliet. This happens in a connection with the portrayal of the Epiphany – a portrayal consisting of characters of various ages and origin.

In the 15th century the Three Kings idiom encompassed also the ceremonial arrival of the patriarch of Constantinople³³ and the Byzantine emperor to the Council of Florence – *Adventus Graecorum* with a sacralising function (the sanctification of the city by the hand of a noble foreigner) captured in the collaborative work of Gozzoli and Fra Angelico.³⁴ The later period saw an increase in the representative and self-



The logo of the *Dobrá novina* charitable carolling event

³³ Such a staging of historical events to fit into biblical models and subsequently into biblical canon imagery gives cyclic movement and ritualistic elements to the perception of history. The ritualisation of events makes us perceive the movement of history as transparent and lawful. In connection with the event known as *Adventus Graecorum*, the arrival of the Byzantines (the protagonists come one by one, each surrounded by their own escort) was staged as the ceremonial entrance of Christ into Jerusalem. The Epiphany took place during the council, thus affecting the retrospective narration of the Byzantines' arrival. Subsequently the painting "staged" an event in the Three Kings canon.

³⁴ "The idea of including *Adventus Graecorum* into the Adoration of the Magi is new and can be assigned to Fra Angelico. As a monk and a painter he was one of the first beholders of the council. Gozzoli, who worked on Fra Angelico's "Adoration" in San Marco, also painted the "Adoration" in the nearby Medici-Riccardi palace. While Fra Angelico caught the scene of meeting and welcoming the Greeks, Gozzoli expanded this vision and using his own attention to detail he emphasised the role of the Medici family in this event. He based his vision on the spectacular Epiphany celebrations that took place before the Union of Florence celebration. The equestrian character of Gozzoli's Epiphany scene is connected with the long way the Byzantines had to travel. Even though the Epiphany is celebrated after Christmas according to the liturgy, during the Council of Florence it was celebrated on the Festival of St John, the patron of Florence. The Epiphany performance took place on 23 June 1439. Participants of the council signed the union decree on 28 June and the union was solemnly declared in the Dome of Santa Maria del Fiore on 6 July. In this quick sequence of events it seemed that the long and flamboyant Epiphany celebration resulted in the completion of the council and the Greeks' departure. The realization of Gozzoli's "Adoration of the Magi" in the Medici palace began six years after the fall of Constantinople and was created with the aim of informing about the *Adventus Graecorum* and *Exodus Graecorum*. Staging the commissioner's or author's ideas into the existing image canon was characteristic for the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Therefore, except for the votive part, we can also find a historical component in the crypto portrait. While in the case of a dominant votive component it can be called a patronal crypto portrait, when the historic component is dominant, it is a situation crypto portrait. Its study shows us the pressing need of art theory to consider the results of newer research in the field of general and ecclesiastical history. The topic of the "Adoration of the Magi" is great for similar interpretative development. It is the main reason why it became an ecumenical tool during the Council of Florence and together with other phenomena *teatro sacro* overcame language barriers. In this way the performance of the Magi fraternity contributed to the

glorifying function of the Medici family within the same idiom without any significant diversion from the original Christian holiday celebration.

While in the Florentine quattrocento and other parts of medieval Europe the Epiphany processions consisted of adult members of guilds and fraternities, in the countryside this tradition moved to the children's repertoire. This way it ranked among the phenomena described by Bogatyrev.³⁵ A part of this process could relate to folklore carolling, but the *Dobrá novina* carolling cannot be regarded entirely as a part of children's culture. If its protagonists are children, this is not because the adult part of the population lost interest in this cultural segment and gave it away to the children.³⁶

The ambulant character³⁷ of *Dobrá novina* brings positive social occurrences. In wintertime it tears the visited families out of isolation; it strengthens personal relationships and overcomes the fragmentation of social life in the neighbourhoods. In addition, the festival that portrays all the human races in the Magi turns the Three Kings idiom into a bridge between cultures. This idiom has potential for further development and one day it may become a tool of real intercultural dialogue. The development can be quite free, similar to European theatre history. There was a reason why Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the twelfth night after Christmas Eve,³⁸ has been adequately translated into Slovak as "*Večer Trojkráľový*" – (Three Kings' Eve). Written specially for this holiday, it was premiered on 6 January 1606 on the occasion of a visit from the Continent. Even though the story of Shakespeare's work diverts from the topic, its light-hearted tone shows that it was created to celebrate the second most important Christian Holiday after Easter: the Epiphany, which should be celebrated with theatrical performance.

Addendum

As there are cinemas in the slums of Nairobi (because not everybody there owns a TV) it would be interesting to have them screen a recording of the event or a documentary about the *Dobrá novina* carolling. Given that Africa represents the biggest Christian continent³⁹ nowadays and Christmas concerts with dramatic passages are

implementation of the union signed in Florence. Later performances of the Adoration of the Magi as well as Gozzoli's fresco served Florence as a reminder of the council and a tool for handing down the story in unwritten form. Even though it is likely that the self-presentational dimension of the Medici family in the Epiphany procession was on the rise, it would be better to date these tendencies to after the death of the Medicis, who took part in the Council of Florence." In: Hlaváčová, Anna: *Adventus Graecorum. Odraz florentského koncilu vo výtvarnom umení*. In: <http://www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2012-2/em-Adventus-Graecorum-em-odraz-Florentskeho-koncilu-vo-vytvarnom-umeni.html>.

³⁵ Bogatyrev, Jurij: *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia*. Paris, 1971, p.77

³⁶ Hlaváčová, Anna: *Three Points of View of Masquerades among the Ijo of the Niger Delta River*, Chapter 7, In: *Playful Performers: African Children's Masquerades*. Ottenberg, Simon and Binkley, David A. (Eds.), London; New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006, pp. 151-158. ISBN: 0-7658-0286-4.

³⁷ Maybe we should even call it a touring phenomenon instead of an ambulant one, judging by the photos of the children carolling on the train. <http://www.dobranovina.sk/fotogaleria/>.

³⁸ The twelve days also represent the gap between celebrating Christmas according to the Gregorian and Julian calendars in our country.

³⁹ "In 2012 the number of Christian followers in Africa reached 500 million. Of all the Christians in the world, 20 % live in Africa. It is estimated that within 10 years the centre of Christianity will move to Africa, which will be the country with the highest number of Christian inhabitants, exceeding Europe or North America. At present, there are already more practising Christians in Africa than in Europe, which will

quite common, it would also be delightful to record an Epiphany play with all the differences as visualised by today's Africans.

We can only hope that the white man would not be presented as a hunter in a white suit with a tropical helmet and a gun in his hand (as he is usually visualised by the Ibo people in Nigeria)⁴⁰ or as a wooden model of a ship on the head of a dancer giving out candy as he is represented by the Ijo people from the coast of the Nigerian delta.⁴¹ In both cases this is a portrayal of power. Even though one of them shows a certain kindness, the machete held by the dancer wearing a boat as a hat reminds us of the deep ambivalence of this theatre image without any doubt. As can be seen from the African tribal masked spectacles, the theatre image of the foreigner was not positive. But is that a reason to talk about xenophobia? After all, the described masked spectacles are an accurate metaphor of the African experience both in the inland and coastal areas.

We cannot change the idiom in reflective drama before a qualitative change in reality occurs. A critical image, be it Ballek's play or an African masked spectacle, indirectly encourages us to demand a change. Complementary to Ballek's challenge, the idealistic Magi representation brought by the *Dobrá novina* carolling event anticipates the future in its theatre image and thus, step by step, makes the world a better place.

Translated by Stanislava Nichtová

have a significant impact on Africa and Christianity as well." In: Pawliková-Vilhanová, Viera: K dejinám kresťanstva na africkom kontinente. Historická revue, Vol. XXIII, No. 12, 2012, p. 53.

⁴⁰ I am aware of the approximate character of the used image, given by the limitation of my experience. As an explanation I add that I returned from a study trip to Nigeria in 1995, at the end of which *Dobrá novina* started their first year. However, Nigeria is not a country which would be assigned to Slovakia in terms of development cooperation and I am not familiar with the traditional culture of Kenya.

⁴¹ Hlaváčová, Anna A.: Homo ludens Africanus alebo pohľady na predstavenia masiek Západnej Afriky. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2007, p. 48.