

## A COMPARATIVISTIC APPROACH TO “THE MYTH OF PUNISHMENT”

Emine INANIR  
Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters  
Departement of Slavic Languages and Literatures  
Ordu Cad. No. 196, 34459 Laleli / Istanbul, Turkey  
emineinanir@hotmail.com

The aim of the paper is to investigate the myth of punishment in a socio-cultural context, which could be defined as universal rather than as concrete and national. It also examines the topos of its manifestations in the literary life of two neighbouring peoples: the Bulgarians and Turks. Because of this the selected texts are presented mainly through characteristics, proved to be points of intersection for the general background of the mythopoetics and peculiarities of each national model. Separate folklore and literary works are scrutinized from an intertextual perspective. The paper focuses also on some definitions, which in my opinion are of great importance for the genealogy of punishment and its variety – “kasas” (vindictiveness).

**Keywords:** myth of punishment, intertextual perspective, Balkan people, literature of neighbouring countries

Punishment is a well unfolded strategy of mythological thinking in the spiritual mentality of both Bulgarians and Turks. Over centuries it has attained a sacral expression of passion and unconscious fear, unexplainable zeal and hatred – as a “system of antagonistical forces, the union of antipodes” – in the structure of the myth according to P. Brunel.<sup>1</sup>

Mythological texts, as Lotman notes, present a special model of the world. They do not know categories of beginning and end, the text is rather comprehended as a ceaselessly repeated structure. In these texts the diversity of

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<sup>1</sup> BRUNEL, P. *Mythe et littérature, in Mythe et littérature. Etudes réunies et présentées par Ernst Leonardy (Louvain-la-Neuve), [Université de Louvain. Recueil de travaux d'histoire et de philologie 6<sup>e</sup> série Fascicule 47]*, pp. 29 – 40.

the world is presented in invariant images. According to Lotman, mythological texts bring the outrages and abnormalities in the surrounding world to being something standardized and orderly – they do not examine exclusive or single events but rather phenomena that reproduce themselves without end and which in that sense are static. Their regular recurrence does not make them an excess but a law, innate to the world as described by Lotman.<sup>2</sup> Searching for punishment in particular literary works, we do not find representational variants in a literal sense of ritual performance. We rather come across narrative models with symbolic suggestion; their “regular repetitiveness” gives them immanent meaning and turns them into a type of statute.

Mahmut Tezdjan considers “blood revenge”, on whose foundation retribution is based, to be a form of “kasas” (vindictiveness), which was practiced in primitive traditions and which has spread to present-day Turkish society.<sup>3</sup> This conclusion shows that Tezdjan sees punishment as a strategy of mythological thinking in the spiritual mentality of the Turks which has been transformed into a “pragmatic statute of primitive faith and moral wisdom.”<sup>4</sup>

In the “Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics” blood revenge is seen as one of the most widespread themes both in primitive systems of rules and in fictitiously developing law systems. The abovementioned encyclopaedia recommends this notion be defined in its own boundaries, i.e. within ethnological law and as its main principle. According to this principle, a whole family (sometimes a clan) can be subjected to an assault or pursuit by another family (clan or tribe) when one of its members has killed a man (or violated women) from the other family or clan.<sup>5</sup>

When we juxtapose the two definitions we can make the conclusion that they overlap with the old Turkish tradition of “kasas” (talion), a variant of punishment, directly related to religious rituals as well as moral and social factors. Although both sources apply mainly to primitive communities, “blood revenge” as an emotional act was also typical for European aristocracy before the origins of feudalism. Bloch, describing this act in “Feudal Society”, underlines that in this way the aristocrats, who were a minority in feudal society, emphasized the distinction between themselves and the populace: “*If the propensity to bloody deeds was prevalent everywhere – more than one*

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<sup>2</sup> LOTMAN, J. M. *Semiosfera – Vnutri myslyashchih mirov. [Semiosphere – the inside world of concern]*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> TEZCAN, M. *Kan Gütme Olayları Sosyolojisi. [Sociology of Cherishing Vendetta Cases]*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> MALINOVSKIY, B. *Rol mifa v jizni// Magiya, nauka, religiya. [Importance of Myth in Life//Magic, Science, Religion]*, pp. 94 – 108.

<sup>5</sup> HASTINGS, J. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 720.

*abbot indeed met his death as the victim of a cloister feud – it was the conception of the necessity of war that set apart the little group of ‘noble’ folk from the rest of society.”*<sup>6</sup>

The duel as an element of a universal culture in its receptive characterization (that of chivalry), is also a kind of revenge and in general represents a “self-identification to the mythogenic figure of the almighty hero”<sup>7</sup> who gives the retribution. This confirms the concept of M. Black that blood revenges and murders indicate increasing discrepancies between different people and groups.<sup>8</sup> The same author notes that this phenomenon is widespread both in the Near East and in Mediterranean countries. Black speaks about blood revenge only as a social system legitimated in its own borders.

In numerous interpretations of punishment outside national borders, pointed out by Black, blood revenge as a collective act committed in the name of family (clan) honour and personal dignity is comprehended by sociologists as a religious-ritual act. Punishment in traditional patriarchal communities along with “blood revenge” is situated as a collective action and in this form finds reflection in the folklore-patriarchal mentality of Balkan people, as we will see in the following examples.

A number of examples related to the mythological programming and modelling of peoples’ moral system can be found in the context of legends, sagas and chronicles about Celtic tribes as well as about Arabians, Albanians, Greeks, Turks, Bulgarians and Slavs. However, in contrast to the rituals of Turks and Greeks, where for each good or bad deed a balance is drawn up, in Slav rituals we can see how synonyms of the concept of “punishment” and synonyms of the concept “sacrifice” have overlapped and interweaved. Pieces of information on the occasion of writing the historical “Povest o zachale Moskvi” (“The Beginning Short Story of Moscow”) and “Skazanie ob ubienii Daniila Suzdalskovo i o nachale Moskvi” (“The Legend of Establishment of Moscow and Daniil Suzdalsky’s Killing”) are a demonstration for that. The idea of “Moscow – the third Rome” is at the root of these chronicles, but this traditional idea is accompanied by the motif of a sacrifice when a new town or a house is built. The foundation of Moscow began in 6666 (1157 – 1158) –

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<sup>6</sup> BLOCH, M. *Feudal Society, Volume I.*, p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> KORSEMOVA, R. *Proektsii idisektsii na “legendarniya” bretyor v “Iztrel” na Pushkin. in Identichnosti \*Otrazheniya\* Igri. [Projections and Dissections of the “Legendary” Breather in Puskin’s ‘A Shot’. Identifications\*Reflections\*Plays.]*, p. 458.

<sup>8</sup> BLACK, M. J. *Cohesive Force: Feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, pp. 84 – 85.

since “evangelic time the number 666 has been considered as a number of the Beast-Antichrist.”<sup>9</sup> The author, choosing an apocalyptic number, obviously emphasizes the religious-mythical predestination in building the town, which requires shed blood. The blood of the boyar Kuchka is not sufficient as a sacrifice; Andrey Bogolyubsky is also assassinated by his wife’s brothers. Here we see an intertwining of motives – the “building victim” and the borrowing from Byzantine chronicles of the conflict between the lascivious princess and pious husband.<sup>10</sup> The plots in these Russian chronicles lead towards particular patterns from Bulgarian literature and numerous popular folklore plots. In “The Spring of the White-Legend” (“Izvorat na Belonogata”), written by the Bulgarian poet Petko Slaveykov, the motif of punishment is expressed in a notably lyrical way. The legend of the walled-in shadow of Gergana, who remained loyal to “her first sweetheart Nikola”, sounds like a mythological legend interweaved with poetic massage and has gained the form of a folklore song. In a dramatic clash between characters the Turkish vizier, who falls in love with Gergana tries to seduce her, offering her unparalleled wealth and a girl. However, Gergana remained devoted to her love, parents and idyllic rural way of life and the young girl is a winner. The vizier “let the girl go away free”, but his good intentions could not cancel out the punishment (the omen of the “black evil nymph”) as a result of violated moral foundations and happiness, shown in the “dangerous” *midnight time*, when “*dragons, dragons’ ghosts and fairies*” roam. That is why in a newly built fountain, the young girl, doomed to death, is walled in.

We often come across similar motives about building sacrifice, known as the motif of the “walled-in bride” in Bulgarian folklore. L. Parpulova reconstructs the complex semiotic intertextuality of the building sacrifice motif in the process of its adaption to the religious-mythological values of Bulgarians.<sup>11</sup>

The Bulgarian folklorist Ivan Shishmanov, defining the main idea of a saga about a dead brother or fiancé (who wants to punish his fiancée, taking revenge because the silence of the grave has been violated), also emphasizes one widely spread religious belief that dead people do not have tears or weep.<sup>12</sup> He notices that for this type of ballad or song the initial idea was not material, but

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<sup>9</sup> LIKHACHEV, D. S. (ed.). *Istoriya Russkoy literatury. T.1. Drevnerusskaya Literatura. Literatura XVIII veka. [History of Russian Literature. V. 1. Old Russian Literature. The 18th Century.]*, p. 339.

<sup>10</sup> LIKHACHEV, D. S. (ed.). *ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>11</sup> PAPPULOVA, L. Kam rekonstruktsiyata na otnosheniyata mejdu folklor i religiya na Balkanite prez srednite vekove. (Vāz osnova na baladata “Vgradena nevesta”) [Upon the Reconstruction of Foklore – Religion Relations in the Balkans in the Middle Ages. Upon “Victim Bride”]. In *Bālgarska etnografiya*, pp. 208 – 210.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

moralizing (a mother's curse, an unfulfilled promise). The plot of "Belchin Kills His Sister" ("Belchi ubiva sestra si"), belonging to a cycle of heroic songs, is closely related to the motif of punishment. The female character Elenka is reproached by her brother, the voivode Belchin, because she has fallen in love with "young Stoyan – a young", who is, as she admits to her brother "for me a sweetheart, brother, and for you a fierce foe." A bitter reproach transforms itself into a death penalty – Belchin's revenge for the disobedience of his sister, who had not listened to the counsel of her relatives. Here the punishment also has a potential for sacredness as a result of a religious cult devoted to parents and relatives and connected to its mythical notions.

Turkish authors, on their side, seeking the initial prototype of the "blood victim", complement ancient plots with anachronisms, sometimes with untypical characters situated in a new social context. The Turkish researchers Ziya Gyokalp, Fuat Kyoprulyu and Abdulkadir Inan specify the text of the single written record of the medieval Turkish epos – "The Book of My Grandfather Korkut" ("Kitab-i Dedem Korkut") as a main document, which reflects Turkic tribes from the 9th to the 15th centuries, their lifestyles, traditions and social forms of communication "preserved themselves even after adopting Islam as a part of more ancient linear patriarchal social system with all peculiarities of pre-Islamic believes and rites."<sup>13</sup> Detailed descriptions of customs and ancient beliefs, which are comprised in this epos, create a notion of major characteristics of the ancient Oguses. They could be summarized in this way: the bravery and nobility of Djigits; a strong, authoritative woman and a high place assigned for her in the ancient Turks' system of values; philosophical understandings of mortality and transience of man in the world.<sup>14</sup>

These moral principles of the society of Oguses show those women, similarly to Amazons (heroic and strong) or the wife of Spartacus – Varinia (devoted and selfless), play an important role in this society and are highly esteemed by men. Comparing examples from Bulgarian folklore and medieval Turkic epos, we can see similarities in relation to sacred respects to women and elderly people. These juxtapositions also demonstrate the fact that ancient Turkic people followed moral rules which sometimes "justified" the punishment. We can obtain knowledge about the authority of Turkic women, about their profound respect that their husbands and sons have for them, about matrimonial and ethical relations from the short warrior novel "Battal Gazi", which could be related to the period of dissemination of Islam in Anatolia. The Byzantine

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<sup>13</sup> BIBINA, Y. *İstoriya na turskata literatura. T. 1. [History of Turkish Literature. Vol. 1.]*, p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> BINYAZAR, A. *Dedem Korkut (2). [My Grandfather Korkut]*, p. 63.

princess Eleanor, who has run away with a warrior from Malatia – Djaffer Battal Gazi, who was fighting against the Byzantines, decides to confess to a priest from one of the prince’s islands (called Buyukada in Turkish) and speak about her love for this foreign warrior. The priest explains to her the difference between Byzantines and Turks: “*The Byzantine character is not like the Turkish one. Turkish husbands, without getting anything from their darlings, give everything to them. Byzantines get everything from their wives and in response do not even give them any love. The most sacred things for the Turk are his weapon, horse and wife. These three things cannot be yielded (...). But the Turk also is jealous of (...) and blood is shed....*”<sup>15</sup>

From the examined texts in trajectory time-space we can see that punishment is an acknowledgement of a collective action and a “personal” imitation of the ability for revenge. On the other hand, as a result of accumulated meanings on the primary semantic meaning of “punishment” in a cultural-historic diachronic plan, the texts actually function in different contexts and lead to different reflections innate to each separate cultural surroundings.

As a part of collective memory, which connects practical rules of a particular community with its religious-pagan norms, this theme is acknowledged with different receptivity. While in the ancient world vindictiveness lies at the root of tribal pressure on jurisdiction as it is shown in the short warrior novel, it actually only has a religious-pagan meaning. The reasons for its contemporary manifestations in the south-eastern part of Turkey as well in all other communities where it exists could be sought in two directions: economical and spiritual (cultural, sacred).

In the “Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics” the authors, disclosing the effects of blood revenge, note that as a result of severe loss the family or the clan of the punished victim is not able to keep its power in relation to the family or a clan of the murderer.<sup>16</sup> The mentioned type of punishment in present-day Turkey is connected to the process of destroying the rural way of life, the transformation of Turkish villages, the passion for land and its distribution. This question could also be related to demographic problems – for instance, rapid population growth in Turkey is a reason for uninterrupted land division, which leads to hereditary arguments.<sup>17</sup>

An apogee of the motif of “blood revenge” in Turkish literature is the novel “Kan Davası” (“Blood Retribution”), written by Reshat Nuri Gyuntekin, where hostile relations between two villages grow into a sequence of blood quarrels,

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<sup>15</sup> KOZANOGLU, A. Z. *Battal Gazi Destanı (1)*. [Legend of Battal Gazi.], pp. 11 – 12.

<sup>16</sup> HASTINGS, J. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, In ‘Blood-Feud’, p. 730.

<sup>17</sup> SHIMSHEK, S. *Törelerin Aynasında Doğu ile Batı [East and West in the Mirror of Traditions]*, p. 62.

which have extended since Ottoman times until the middle of the 20th century. The main character Omar, who is a narrator in the novel, together with a public servant called Murat Bey, visit these villages just on the eve of blood retribution. The reason for quarrel this time is a robbery committed by the residents of one village on another village. Murat Bey in his own way resumes the series of bloody events, telling the teacher Omar what had happened: *“Quarrels over land, quarrels over women, over property... is it possible for these people to live without quarrels?”*<sup>18</sup>

From Eline Pelin’s short stories and short novels we can learn about the Bulgarian mystic passion for land: *“His face has the colour of wheat grain and his soul looks at the sky, clouds and the sun with hopes and fears of the motherland...”*<sup>19</sup> In the short novel “Land”, the land is metaphorically presented as a fearful element which carries away and kills people. Creating Enyo – a character who tries to kill his brother in order to gain his property and land – the Bulgarian author E. Pelin dichotomically shows a universal villain: the embodiment of a disastrous passion which brings crime into the world.

Although they originated in a deep admiration for land and a patriarchal style of life, neither case of punishment and blood retribution is neither juridical nor morally justified. The greed for revenge is only an emotionally motivated act – a man aims with this to do harm to people who, according to his subjective opinion, have done injustice to him or hurt other people.

From the abovementioned examples we see that in staging the myth of punishment, the person who accomplishes it symbolically reincarnates in the role of the “other” and “gains” the strength attributed beforehand to the pagan gods. This “overestimating” or identification with God (a line which we can observe in texts of vanguard literature from the first half of the 20th century) manifests itself in providing supernatural potential for a man – earlier a prerogative of God or pagan gods.

Despite the great advance of science and technology, modern man, deprived of faith and left alone with his fierceness and progressively growing self-hate is compelled to seek new values. Metaphorically presenting this rough dilemma, which man could face with the character of the Bulgarian author Nikolay Haytov’s short story “The Dervish’s Seed” (“Dervishovo seme”), there is the utterance: “I am trampling on this crossroad and do not know where to set out for.”<sup>20</sup> On spontaneous reflection, the main character Ramadan presents the complicated conflicts of existence which could tie or untie the knot of life. The text submits to deep emotions: trepidations of first love, strong hatred,

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<sup>18</sup> GYUNTEKIN, R. N. *Kan Davasi [Blood Retribution]*, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> PELIN, E. L. *Povesti i razkazi [Short Novels and Short Stories]*, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> HAYTOV, N. *Dünya poturunu çıkariyor [Wild Novels]*, p. 42.

desperation and readiness to murder – feelings that the character goes through in order to reach the wisdom which will turn him into a real, noble man. But not all ethno-cultures traditions are strong enough to make overcoming hatred possible. We have to also mention that the transition to an information society is accompanied with some negative factors: crises, terrorism, a number of different cultural policies, religious sects and doctrines and a lot of tolerances, which shake faith in institutions and their role in society. We can observe a strong tendency of returning to religion – we speak about desecularization, which comes to fill the chasm of unfulfilled modern ideas. However, the radical change of foundations which man relies on leads to a radical change of human behaviour and man’s adaptability to the environment. That is why the works of the contemporary Turkish author Aishe Kulin are quite sensitive to female characters that have been punished according to the rules of still-existing clan traditions in some areas of the country. In the novel “Kardelenler” (“Snowdrops”), as well in her last collection of short stories “Bir Varmış Bir Yokmuş” (“Once Upon a Time”), traditional beliefs or extreme religious views of the “other” (male sex) are explicitly presented in the plot or in the symbolic plan of the text.

We can see from the above that in intertextual and intercultural space the myth of “punishment” gathers “the sacral and the profane”, modelling man’s style of life. Whereas in archaic communities myth has irreplaceable functions – “it expresses, stabilizes and codifies faith; it justifies and realizes in life moral principles; it confirms the efficiency of the rite and offers practical rules, directing man” (faith has got not only sacral, but also a regulating social behaviour function)<sup>21</sup> – in modernism and later on in postmodern situations, chaos in ideas about authority, truth and law occurs. The examined texts suggest that if moral values, comprised in religious-ritual traditions and belief, are applied then each country could reach social prosperity of a fuller value.

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<sup>21</sup> MALINOVSKIY, B. *Rol mifa v jizni//Magiya, nauka, religiya. [Importance of the Myth in Life//Magic, Science, Religion.]*, p. 108.



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