

Korean Children's Folk Tales Remediated into Picture Books

Luis Carlos Girão

Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of our paper proposal is to briefly reflect on the process of remediation as translation of Korean children's folk tales into picture books. Originally published in the "조선아동문학집" from 1938, the short tale "엄마마중", written by Lee Tae-jun, was illustrated by Kim Dong-seong and made into a picture book by Borim Press in 2004 — the title was already translated and published in German and Brazilian Portuguese in 2005 and 2012, respectively. This is just one of the many Korean children's tales (동화) made into picture books (그림책) so far, and we can find its starting point in the 1980s Korean children's literature. Nowadays, the process of retelling old tales made for children into book media has broadened up to case such as the Vacance Project (바캉스 프로젝트) — which started its activities in 2019, gathering famous Korean authors such as Suzy Lee, Shin Dong-jun, Lee Myung-ae, No In-kyung and others —, a collaborative project of picture book artists and its experimental books. Within our proposal, we will take a deep look at the recently released "Young Man Who Bought the Tree Shade (그늘을 산 총각)", by Suzy Lee, initially as a Vacance Project's title and now as a picture book within BIR's catalog. To think on remediation as translation, we put in discussion the remediation process as one of the dynamics of cultural memory, as defended by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009) — all referencing the concept of remediation, by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999).

OBJECTIVES

Trying to answer the questions "How does the Korean children's folk tales present themselves within contemporary Korean children's picture books?", and "In which creative ways the Korean picture book artists represent these old tales?", our main purpose is to reflect on how the remediation process, from old folk tales (oral and written form) to experimental picture books (written, pictorial, material form) nowadays, present these memorial elements from Korean children's culture within this recognized Korean art-form, the picture book (그림책), while reading the remediated tale "Young Man Who Bought the Tree Shade (그늘을 산 총각)", by Suzy Lee.

METHODS

The way through which we promoted our reading of this remediated phenomenon within Korea's contemporary children's literature requested that we read both Dafna Zur (2017), on her studies about the traditional poetic forms for children in Korea, and Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009), on their ideas about the keeping of cultural memory nowadays through remediation. That made us better understand, while reading, the way Suzy Lee (2019; 2021) retold a classical folk tale in an experimental book form, which is part of the arts she usually does. However, it was really important to understand the remediation concept, by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), to better follow the idea from the story's content shaping the book's unfolding format.

RESULTS

According to Eun Suk Cho (2006: 151), the Korean picture books' formation process "is divided into five periods: from opening to before 1960, the period of darkness; 1960 to 1978, the period of the introduction; 1979 to the end of 1980, the period of formation; 1990 to the present time, the period of settlement of Korean picture books." Within the 1980s, a portion of the picture books published in South Korea were of traditional folk tales turned into picture books, written by now-famous Korean writers and illustrated by now-prestigious Korean illustrators. It means that folk tales and picture books have been together for, at least, 40 years within Korean children's literature.

The Korean author Suzy Lee is world-wide known for her wordless picture books, like "Mirror" (2003), "Wave" (2008), "Shadow" (2010), and "Lines" (2017). She is also known for her experimental production with the codex form, i.e. the book form, so it is with great pleasure that Korean readers receive her work with both words and pictures within an accordion-fold picture book retelling a classical children's folk tale - or 동화, according to Dafna Zur (2017).

This retelling process, from an oral-narrative art form to the experimental book form can be understood as a remediation process. According to Bolter and Grusin (1999: 273), remediation is "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. Along with immediacy and hypermediacy, remediation is one of the three traits of our genealogy of new media." Lee is one of the many Korean picture book artists that belong to the Vacance Project (바캉스 프로젝트), which started its activities as a creative collective in 2019, retelling old and famous Korean children's folk tales into the picture book various forms, not just the conventional and codexical one.

What those picture books artists are doing is, in a creative and experimental way, keeping traditional oral culture shape-shifted into a contemporary art form, the picture book, that is one of the Korean art forms nowadays. Within cultural memory studies, as Erll and Rigney (2009: 2) stated, "one can note a shift towards understanding cultural memory in more dynamic terms: as an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites." Not so focused on written, historical, and documental texts, but demanding "new insight into the factors which allow certain collective memories to become hegemonic or, conversely, allow hitherto marginalized memories to gain prominence in the public arena." (ERLL, RIGNEY, 2009: 2).

Within the accordion-fold format, Suzy Lee retold and remediated the children's folk tale "Young Man Who Bought the Tree Shade (그늘을 산 총각)", making use of the paper folds to enhance the projection of the tree shadow as well as to mark timing moments of the story's development.

CONCLUSIONS

At first, in a more independent way, and as part of the Vacance Project, Suzy Lee remediated a classical tale into a performative-way-of-reading book, with words, pictures, and the book's objectuality, in a more horizontal way of unfolding the book, making its development not so fast, promoting a way of accessing the content that is different from the "officially" published version, within BIR Publishing, where the accordion-fold format shifted to a more vertical way of unfolding the book, making its pace a little faster and even projecting an idea of the tree format projecting its shade through the book, following the verbal and visual narration.

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BIO & CONTACT

Luis Carlos Girão is a Ph.D. in Literature and Literary Criticism at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP). He's a member at the Brazilian research groups 'The written voice of children and youth: discursive practices' (PUC-SP) and 'Hallyu - Korean Studies' (USP), being also a member at the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSL) and the Korean Literature Association (KLA). Since 2019, he has coordinated a Korean children's literature translation group, part of the Korean Language and Literature BA at the University of São Paulo (USP).

Contact: luis.changmin@gmail.com



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