TRANSFORMAREA POVEȘTILOR: DE LA ION CREANGĂ LA CREANGĂ 2.0. RECONFIGURĂRI NARATIVE ȘI MUTAȚII VALORICE ÎN REINTERPRETĂRILE CONTEMPORANE

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF TALES: FROM ION CREANGĂ TO CREANGĂ 2.0. NARRATIVE RECONFIGURATIONS AND MORAL SHIFTS IN CONTEMPORARY REINTERPRETATIONS

Abstract

The article investigates how Ion Creangă's narrative universe is reconfigured in five contemporary sequels brought together in the Creangă 2.0 project (2019), analyzing the processes of rewriting and updating traditional fairy tales. The study looks at how these texts reinterpret the structure of the traditional fairy tale, through an analysis of: the evolution of characters and gender roles; historical and social influences; structural and thematic reconfigurations; symbolic valences and metaphorical registers; the relationship between the audience and the reception environment. The methodological framework combines hypertextual analysis (G. Genette) with fairy tale morphology (V. Propp) and a reading of narrative and ideological mutations in modern rewritings (J. Zipes) in order to capture recurring shifts from punitive moralizing and binary oppositions to more nuanced ethical scenarios centered on empathy, cooperation, and the renegotiation of gender roles. Anchored in narratological tools (V. Propp), (G. Genette) and narrative mutation theory (J. Zipes), the research highlights a shift from binary and authoritarian morality to a reflexive and democratic ethic centered on empathy, gender equality, and cooperation. The results reveal the intertextual dynamics between canonical texts and their contemporary rewritings, as well as the way in which they translate current sensibilities without breaking continuity with literary tradition.

Keywords: contemporary rewriting, intertextuality, comparative narratology, narrative mutation, literary ethics, gender representation, Creangă 2.0.

Rezumat

Articolul investighează modul în care universul narativ al lui Ion Creangă este reconfigurat în cinci continuări contemporane, reunite în proiectul *Creangă 2.0* (2019), analizând procesele de rescriere și actualizare ale basmului tradițional. Studiul urmărește

modul în care aceste texte resemnifică structura basmului tradițional printr-o analiză a: evoluției personajelor și a rolurilor de gen; influențelor istorice și sociale; reconfigurărilor structurale și tematice; valențelor simbolice și a registrelor metaforice; raportului dintre public și mediul de receptare. Cadrul metodologic combină analiza hipertextuală (G. Genette) cu morfologia basmului (V. Propp) și lectura mutațiilor narative și ideologice în rescrierile moderne (J. Zipes), pentru a surprinde deplasări recurente de la moralizări punitive și opoziții binare către scenarii etice mai nuanțate, centrate pe empatie, cooperare și renegocierea rolurilor de gen. Ancorată în instrumentarul naratologic (V. Propp), (G. Genette) și în teoria mutațiilor narative (J. Zipes), cercetarea evidențiază o deplasare de la moralitatea binară și autoritară spre o etică reflexivă și democratică, centrată pe empatie, egalitate de gen și cooperare. Rezultatele subliniază dinamica intertextuală dintre textele canonice și rescrierile lor contemporane, precum și felul în care acestea traduc sensibilitățile actuale fără a rupe continuitatea cu tradiția literară.

Cuvinte-cheie: rescriere contemporană, intertextualitate, naratologie comparativă, mutație narativă, etică literară, reprezentare de gen, Creangă 2.0.

Introduction

More than a century and a half after their initial publication, Ion Creangă's tales have acquired the status of foundational texts that continue to inspire contemporary Romanian writers. This dynamic is exemplified by the editorial project Creangă 2.0, launched during the International Festival of Literature and Translation (FILIT) in 2019, which includes five volumes that continue and reinterpret Creangă's original tales: *The Goat with Three Kids 2.0* by Matei Vișniec, *The Human Stupidity 2.0* by Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu, *White Harap 2.0* by Veronica D. Niculescu, *The Bag with 2 Coins 2.0* by Lavinia Braniște and *Ivan Turbincă 2.0* by Alexandru Vakulovski.[1] In doing so, these continuations renew and transform Creangă's fabulous imaginary, extending its moral and symbolic horizons to address the values and anxieties of modern society (Gherman 2021, p. 55).

Engaged in a renewed creative process, Creangă's tales have evolved into foundational source texts that continue to inspire contemporary reinterpretations. Owing to his remarkable narrative artistry and his profound connection to Romanian folklore, Ion Creangă remains a central figure in the country's literary imagination. In his 1930 study, the French scholar Jean Boutière famously compared Creangă to

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[1] The contemporary continuations analysed in this study are part of the Creangă 2.0 collection, published in 2019 by the Museum of Romanian Literature (Muzeul Literaturii Române). This editorial project invited contemporary Romanian authors to reinterpret Ion Creangă's canonical tales through modern narrative lenses. The collection includes the following titles: *The Goat with Three Kids 2.0* by Matei Vișniec, *The Human Stupidity 2.0* by Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu, *White Harap 2.0* by Veronica D. Niculescu, *The Bag with 2 Coins 2.0* by Lavinia Braniște and *Ivan Turbincă 2.0* by Alexandru Vakulovski. All citations referring to these continuations follow the 2019 edition to ensure accuracy and uniformity throughout this article.

Charles Perrault, recognizing him as a storyteller who transformed folk narratives into vivid portrayals of nineteenth-century national life (*Ibidem*, p. 56). Decades later, Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga (2002) observed that Creangă revitalized ancient folk models by transposing them into the domain of cultivated literary form (Creangă, Bușulenga 2002, p. 7). This dual legacy – deeply rooted in oral tradition yet re-articulated through literary sophistication – renders Creangă's work a fertile ground for examining how traditional narratives evolve across time and culture.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

The present study explores these transformations through a comparative framework that foregrounds narrative structure, thematic symbolism, moral evolution, and cultural context. At its core, the methodology relies on Gérard Genette's theory of hypertextuality, which provides the conceptual basis for analysing the relationship between the original texts as hypotexts and the modern rewritings as hypertexts (1982, pp. 7-19). This intertextual perspective enables a systematic comparison of narrative structures, symbolic configurations, and modes of re-signification.

To address structural changes at the level of narrative form, the analysis draws on Vladimir Propp's morphological model to trace shifts in narrative functions, character roles, and action patterns. These formal observations are further contextualized through Jack Zipes's socio-historical approach to fairy-tale transformation, which emphasizes the ideological and ethical recalibration of traditional narratives in response to changing cultural and social frameworks (Zipes 2012, pp. 7-20). Together, these methodological lenses allow for an integrated examination of formal, thematic, and axiological reconfigurations without presupposing a linear model of cultural evolution. Within this framework, contrastive analysis functions as the primary analytical procedure. The study focuses on points of divergence where contemporary continuations deliberately modify or suspend elements of the source texts in order to renegotiate narrative meaning, ethical orientation, or socio-cultural assumptions. Such transformations are traced through changes in narrative morphology (in Proppian terms), the redistribution of character agency, the reconfiguration of gender roles, and the adjustment of moral frameworks in relation to contemporary sensibilities and reception contexts.

Applied across the corpus, this methodological approach highlights several recurrent patterns of narrative transformation. In *The Little Bag with Two Coins 2.0*, the redistribution of narrative agency from the rooster to the hen alters the traditional hierarchy of character functions and reframes the tale as a form of female initiation rather than a reward-based moral fable. In *Ivan Turbincă 2.0*, the folkloric trickster is reconfigured as a reflective and disillusioned figure, and immortality – initially framed as a divine reward – is recast as an existential burden, signalling a shift in moral perspective. A comparable process of ethical and psychological complexification is observable in *The Goat with Three Kids 2.0*, where the formerly authoritative maternal

figure is reimagined as a character marked by guilt and trauma, thereby destabilizing the original tale's punitive moral closure. Similarly, *Harap-Alb 2.0* replaces the linear initiation plot centred on obedience and heroic endurance with an inward-oriented journey focused on cooperation, emotional maturity, and shared responsibility, while *The Human Stupidity 2.0* extends the original's playful satire into a dystopian critique of systemic manipulation and collective irrationality. These examples outline the analytical directions developed in detail in the following sections.

Rewriting *The Little Bag with Two Coins*: Ion Creangă and Lavinia Braniște

In the case of *The Little Bag with Two Coins*, the relationship between Ion Creangă's original tale (1876) and Lavinia Braniște's contemporary continuation (2019) illustrates a marked reconfiguration of character functions and gender dynamics. Through comparative analysis, this section examines how Braniște reworks Creangă's narrative universe in dialogue with contemporary sensibilities, selectively preserving traditional motifs while redistributing narrative agency and moral emphasis. In the original tale, the old man, driven by envy and avarice, reacts violently when the rooster fails to meet his unrealistic expectations, a behavior consistent with the patriarchal and punitive moral order of the time (Creangă 2002, p. 56). Although the old woman is also portrayed unfavourably, her greed and rivalry prompt her to kill the hen, reinforcing rigid gender hierarchies and domestic violence. The rooster, following a conventional hero's journey from poverty to reward, functions as an active agent shaping the narrative's moral direction, whereas the hen remains a docile and self-sacrificing figure who ultimately succumbs to the woman's jealousy.

The 2019 revision critically inverts these traditional roles: the old woman, despite her negative traits, is re-conceptualized as less physically aggressive and more superficial, indicating a thematic shift from physical dominance to emotional disengagement. Conversely, the old man becomes defined by unmerited pride, his social standing dependent only on the magical rooster. This marginalization of the rooster, which is ultimately attacked and abandoned, symbolically represents the erosion of conventional masculine heroism in the contemporary context (Zipes 2012, p. 30). The most significant transformation concerns the hen, who is elevated to the role of active protagonist. Her journey functions as a modern female initiation narrative, directly challenging conventional gender codes and symbolizing empowerment. The inclusion of auxiliary figures, such as a supportive cow or potential male companions, introduces dynamics of female autonomy and solidarity into the narrative.

In sum, this character restructuring signals a definitive move away from rigid gender norms toward a more fluid and critical examination of morality, identity, and personal agency. The values promoted in the hypotext, such as tenacity, solidarity, and selflessness, were aligned with a society pursuing modernity. However, the 2019 hypertext is shaped by a democratic, globalized, and technologically advanced

society. This modern environment emphasizes cultural heterogeneity, gender fluidity, and the critical influence of mass media and consumerism.

The original text is characterized by a conventional folktale structure involving an initial conflict, the rooster's quest (the departure), magical trials, and culminating in wealth and retribution. The thematic content was dominated by avarice, rivalry, and the enforcement of strict gender norms. The 2019 version subverts this fixed framework by shifting narrative agency to the hen, giving rise to new roles and diffusing narrative control. While the rooster is humbled, the hen undertakes the primary transformative path, facing both psychological and external obstacles. Therefore, this character outlines female heroism and self-discovery, reorienting the narrative emphasis from punishment to transfiguration (Propp 1997, pp. 120-127). The contemporary narrative rejects authoritarian solutions, validating transformations by favoring democratic, emotionally nuanced outcomes and emphasizing flexible gender roles that promote fairness and mutual respect. An argument to what has been concluded is that the contemporary tale is characterized by the absence of a clearly defined villain. The male character roles are reduced, while the hen's prominence mirrors the evolving societal roles of women. The narrative emphasizes that emotional strength and personal growth, rather than dominance, are the true mechanisms of social transformation. Thus, the departure becomes a metaphor for compassion and emotional integrity over material wealth and power, suggesting a shift toward humanistic values.

Reinterpreting the *Tale of Ivan Turbincă*: Ion Creangă and Alexandru Vakulovski

Alexandru Vakulovski's contemporary sequel hypertextualizes the traditional narrative by relocating the mythical setting within a modern spatio-temporal framework and a transcultural virtuality (Gherman 2021, p. 56). Ivan, having attained immortality, initiates an existential quest immediately defined by the confrontation with malicious forces, which are seen as the fundamental cause of contemporary societal decline. The narrative focus is shifted from the protagonist's direct actions to the socio-historical specificity of the setting, where Ivan's water-surrounded village functions as a microcosm of the national condition (*Ibidem*). This environment literally evolves into a "hell on earth" characterized by moral degradation and human decay. Adapting to the modern environment, Ivan aligns with a schoolmaster to purge the community of infernal influences and corrupt leadership. The tale concludes by the protagonist's intertextual integration into global pop culture, exemplified by his collaborative effort with figures like the Winchester brothers, a technique reliant on maintaining a strong "web of interconnections" with the hypotext (*Ibidem*).

The contemporary narrative adheres to Jack Zipes's theory of re-visioned folklore (Zipes 2012, p. 170), a concept asserting that traditional myths are systematically reinterpreted to address and reflect current societal anxieties and issues. This

structural choice transforms the protagonist from a merely clever soldier into an observant, critically engaged figure navigating a morally compromised and often absurd modern environment. This framework establishes a dichotomy with the original tale. While the hypotext promoted religious faith, submission to divine authority, and the efficacy of wit, framing Ivan's victory and subsequent immortality as a form of divine reward, the modern Ivan embodies a shift toward skepticism, individualism, and social critique. He is characterized by a strong sense of disillusionment with traditional authority and spiritual figures. Consequently, the celebrated gift of eternal life is redefined as an existential burden or curse. Traditional religious symbols are stripped of their inherent sanctity through processes of ironic reinterpretation, and the former lighthearted confrontation with Death is recast as a darker philosophical inquiry into the nature of power and ultimate meaning. Essentially, the sequel can be read as a potent, critical commentary on pervasive societal decay and existential fatigue.

A Contemporary Reframing of *Harap-Alb*: Ion Creangă and Veronica D. Niculescu

Ion Creangă's original tale, published in 1877 (Creangă 2002, p. 14), establishes the archetypal struggle of good versus evil and follows the protagonist's heroic journey as a process of moral and ethical maturation. The setting is a deliberately miraculous, exaggerated, and carnivalesque world where fantastic conventions are accepted without question (*Ibidem*). Niculescu's continuation initiates a definitive thematic shift by challenging the original's conventions. Rigid and severe displays of power are replaced with internalization of wisdom rather than its imposing (Niculescu 2019, p. 14). While cultural continuity is maintained through the presence of divine elements, the narrative prioritizes personal agency. Conventional gender roles are subverted: female characters, such as the Emperor's Daughter, undergo the transition from being a mere reward to an active and collaborative partner in solving the shared curse; the concept of manhood shifts away from reliance on physical strength and external heroics toward cooperation, shared responsibility, and internal resilience; the protagonist's quest is redefined as an interior battle focused on self-awareness and emotional strength rather than external conquest.

The continuation reflects a significant evolution in socio-historical context. Creangă's initial tale supported a strict, hierarchical structure where power was validated by both divine will and individual merit. The Story of *Harap Alb 2.0*, conversely, promotes a more democratic and reflective approach to governance, emphasizing teamwork and shared leadership between the protagonist and his spouse. This aligns the narrative with contemporary democratic ideals, reframing leadership as a shared responsibility rather than an individual burden (Zipes 2012, p. 35).

The moral system transitions from Creangă's binary conflict, Harap Alb vs. the Bald-Man, to a more nuanced, internal struggle. Niculescu subverts the traditional

villain role by removing the external foe and depicting the Bald-Man's former empire as having achieved redemption. The protagonist's journey is no longer a linear test of physical endurance but an interior quest focused on self-awareness, compassion, and emotional growth. Furthermore, the transformation of The Bald-Man's land from tyranny to kindness challenges the conventional folktale requirement for definitive retribution, advocating instead for the possibility of restoration and communal change.

Finally, the turtle dove, a rudimentary element in Creangă's work, acquires new symbolic weight in the sequel, representing rebirth and dedication. This small yet vital detail underscores the narrative's central message: transformation is not a single, triumphant event, but an ongoing process of learning and change. By means of these shifts, *The Story of Harap Alb 2.0* reframes the timeless narrative as a mirror of contemporary cultural values, prioritizing shared governance, emotional intelligence, and self-reflection over authoritarian.

Re-envisioning *Human Stupidity*: Ion Creangă and Alexandru-Bogdan Stănescu

Ion Creangă's 1877 tale, *Human Stupidity*, functions as a masterful blend of satirical folk humor and social critique, set against the backdrop of 19th-century Romanian society, exploring the widely shared human predisposition toward overconcern, misbehavior, and exaggeration over trivial matters (Creangă 2002, p. 32). Through irony and hyperbole, the author constructs a narrative framework suggesting that foolishness is not an isolated individual trait but a pervasive collective phenomenon. Triggered by his wife's unfounded fear of an imagined calamity, the protagonist's journey can be read as an exploration of collective irrationality. The community's disproportionate reaction to a nonexistent threat functions as a metaphor for anxiety shaped by imagined futures and for the dominance of fear and cultural superstition over reasoned judgment. In this way, the original tale emerges as a thoughtful, yet satirical and incisive reflection on human folly and on the ease with which rational thinking can be displaced by emotional excess. Contemporary writer Alexandru-Bogdan Stănescu's continuation expands this critique into a modern socio-cultural matrix. The author extends the Creangă family and elevates the theme of foolishness to the dominant, systemic principle of the narrative. Structurally, the original tale's linear, cyclical plot is transformed into a metaphysical excursion as the protagonist is transported into a dystopian, unreal world. This narrative shift is so that the urban contemporary setting becomes a direct comparison to hell, invoking the culturally resonant expression, "from laughter to tears" (Stănescu 2019, p. 10).

The central theme in both texts remains human foolishness, but its conceptualization reveals a transformation in meaning across time, a shift from a straightforward moral tale to a contemporary dystopian allegory. The source text depicts stupidity as a harmless product of simplicity and limited education, often treated with affectionate irony, but in the hypertext it is a dangerous systemic failure, viewed with existential despair. The man is the traditional voice of reason,

temporarily accepting his wife's absurdity out of resignation in the hypotext, whereas he becomes a painfully victimized figure in the hypertext, his disappointment leading him to an inescapable, tragic end. The man's acceptance reflects society's adaptation to perpetual mediocrity (*Ibidem*, p. 6). The extension of the flaw from individual trait to a structural component is another narrative change followed in the hypertext since absurdity is persistent, and its legacy of foolishness is passed down through the next generation.

The symbolism in the sequel becomes significantly darker: the future city is a metaphor for a deplorable existence where people are overwhelmed by aimless labor, blind consumerism, and mechanical routines. Elements like concrete high-rises symbolize spiritual passing and loss of individuality, while money is depicted as the "devil's eye," binding individuals to a cycle of dissatisfaction. This systematicity transforms ignorance from an innocent flaw into an inescapable societal disease. Thus, while the crengia narrative allowed foolishness to coexist with happiness, the contemporary tale portrays it as a trap of modern civilization, redirecting the text to target a contemporary audience familiar with satire, irony, and post-modern techniques by making foolishness a haunting commentary on materialism, alienation, and existential emptiness.

Modern Transformations of *The Goat and Her Three Kids*: Ion Creangă and Matei Vișniec

Ion Creangă's renowned mid-19th-century tale, an enduring fixture in Romanian education, employs animal figures to allegorically explore concepts of maternal protection and the consequences of childish disobedience (Creangă 1989, 2002). Early literary interpretation, notably by George Călinescu, interpreted the tale as a "drama of maternity" (Călinescu 1966, p. 367), where the characters function as symbolic caricatures, the garrulous Goat embodying dedicated motherhood and the Wolf representing unscrupulous malice. This contributed to the tale's traditional foundation in a clear, didactic moral dichotomy and swift, uncompromising justice.

Matei Vișniec's contemporary continuation offers a psychological and ethical reinterpretation, directly questioning the original's moral absolutism. The core narrative of betrayal and vengeance is retained, but the focus shifts to remorse, doubt, and the devastating psychological effects of merciless justice. The Mother Goat, once an archetype of righteous retribution, is now consumed by guilt over her brutal vengeance, emerging as a more introspective and vulnerable character. This shift adds significant emotional depth to a figure previously characterized by force. The rigid moral boundary is blurred through the humanization of the deceased Wolf and the introduction of the She-Wolf, whose presence facilitates themes of female solidarity and allows the reader to engage with the perspective of the antagonist's family.

The contrast between the two texts is structurally substantiated by Vladimir Propp's narrative functions, which highlight the transformation of character

roles, and ideologically framed by Jack Zipes's theory of narrative shifts, emphasizing the evolution of moral themes. While both tales maintain core functions (villainy, initial departure, return), Vișniec deconstructs the original's straightforward moral arc. The contemporary narrative is reshaped by psychological complexity and moral ambiguity. The rescue of the surviving kid is overshadowed by trauma and lingering suspicion, and the focus of the final situation shifts away from retributive justice to the Goat's inner conflict and philosophical reflection on justice itself (Propp 1997, p. 120). The original's didactic and static tone, built on fixed archetypes, is replaced by a reflective and dynamic voice. The foolishness once attributed to the disobedient children is subtly projected onto the adult Goat, whose blind trust in the She-Wolf demonstrates a new layer of vulnerability. The once triumphant ending is replaced by ambiguity, positioning the sequel as a postmodern narrative that foregrounds memory, psychological trauma, and moral relativism over clear-cut moral lessons.

The symbols lose their moral clarity. The act of burning the Wolf is reinterpreted by the Goat as an act of cruelty, manifesting as the externalized inner guilt that haunts her in hallucinations. Her black attire may symbolize long-lasting psychological collapse, rather than empowered mourning. This shift transforms traditional moral markers into metaphors for psychological wounding and existential doubt, challenging the reader with moral uncertainty. The continuation can thus be read as transforming the original tale into a complex appraisal of intrinsic values, prioritizing ethical introspection over moral absolutism.

This study has examined the contemporary continuations included in the *Creangă 2.0* project as a coherent corpus of hypertextual rewritings that engage critically with Ion Creangă's canonical tales. By combining hypertextual analysis (Genette), morphological comparison (Propp), and a socio-historical perspective on fairy-tale transformation (Zipes), the article has demonstrated that these rewritings do not merely modernize narrative surfaces, but systematically reconfigure narrative functions, character agency, and moral frameworks.

Across all five case studies, a set of recurrent patterns emerges. Traditional folktale structures grounded in binary moral oppositions, punitive justice, and externally validated authority are reworked into narratives that privilege ethical ambiguity, psychological interiority, and negotiated forms of responsibility. In *The Little Bag with Two Coins 2.0*, the redistribution of narrative agency from the rooster to the hen reorients the tale away from reward-based morality toward personal autonomy and social awareness. *Ivan Turbincă 2.0* transforms the folkloric trickster into a reflective figure burdened by immortality, reframing divine reward as existential dilemma. *Harap-Alb 2.0* replaces the linear initiation plot centered on obedience and heroic endurance with an inward-oriented journey focused on cooperation, emotional maturity, and shared leadership. *The Human Stupidity 2.0* extends Creangă's satirical treatment of folly into a dystopian allegory of systemic manipulation and collective unreason. Finally, *The Goat with Three Kids 2.0*

dismantles the original tale's moral absolutism by foregrounding trauma, guilt, and ethical introspection in place of retributive justice.

Taken together, these transformations suggest a broader narrative shift from externally imposed moral order toward reflexive ethical inquiry. Rather than offering definitive moral resolutions, the contemporary rewritings invite readers to confront uncertainty, vulnerability, and responsibility as central conditions of modern experience. Importantly, this shift does not sever the connection with literary tradition; instead, it operates through selective continuity, preserving recognizable narrative motifs while reassigning their functions and symbolic valences. By mapping these recurrent structural and ethical reconfigurations, the article contributes to ongoing debates on the afterlives of canonical texts and the cultural work performed by contemporary rewriting. The *Creangă 2.0* project thus emerges not as a simple homage to a national classic, but as a site of critical negotiation between inherited narrative forms and the ethical concerns of the present.

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