Historical Subject
Matter in Oral Lyric Poetry

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The relationship between lyrical oral poems and historical events is discussed. As contents of lyric oral poems, historical events are transformed according to poetical pattern. So transformed, they lose connection with the real historical data. The author concludes that it is necessary to distinguish the poetical pattern from the historical fact, and that the lyric poem has to be regarded as a folkloristic fact. Such a fact can only indirectly be considered as a testimony of historical data.

When faced with the task of defining the historical element of traditional lyric poetry, the problem of reality in oral literature poses a question: how far does oral literature as art influence the change of our understanding of reality. The question, of course, is not a new one.

The interest in particular historical elements in a literary work of art, i.e. those that can be isolated, - is not really the subject under discussion of literary history as a specific scientific discipline "which produces texts according to the public quality of literary diachrony of longer or shorter periods, wider or narrower language areas." (Žmegač, 1982, 21).

The basic question posed by literary history is: how does one reasonably present *processuality* in the field of artistic creativity, i.e. the social activity called literature? Literary history is, consequently, not the history of aesthetic promotion (works of art do not become better or worse but simply different) - there is no aesthetic gradation in diachrony. Change, alteration, difference, diachrony, all these are the terms used by literary history. When we wish to discuss oral literature - i.e. folklore facts, then it is inevitable that the notion of process be included. We are aware that these are effects that result from sources outside the spheres of artistic creativity. It is justifiable as well as highly necessary to study the causes of changes of aesthetic images and goals when oral literature, i.e. folklore creativity is concerned.

We shall probably agree with the idea that literature is based on "alterity"[1], (a term used by H. R. Jauß) and continuity, repetition in alteration. In order to understand what repetition, i.e. tradition, and what a break of tradition is, we need a his-

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[1]Literary historian Hans Robert Jauß tries to connect literary history with the current literary phenomena, viewing literature as a triangle of the writer, literary work and the public; the public is not "only passive part", only a chain of mere reactions, but the public itself is the energy which makes history. The historical life of a literary work is hardly conceivable without its recipient. Jauß demands that the literary science be open to the questions of aesthetic reception, having effect on the reader so that the historical order of literary works can be viewed as the connection of literary history. (Jauß, 1977, 169)

torical background, because tradition is eminently a historic concept. The historical background is only partly literary by nature when we deal with written literature, but when oral literature is being analysed, then this part of literary nature is lessened while the part of practical usage is increased, the latter being the application and reception which cause changes in the structure of various literary oral genres. The category of recipients, the audience itself participating in folklore activities, is extremely important in any approach to folklore. The text is received via a medium - it is by no means irrelevant whether the text exists in the oral or written form. This is why the folklore process could be viewed in the light of the historical development of technical media: oral, written, electronic (the media mentioned last require different aesthetic codes, never used before). In this way, besides accepting the oral, written and electronic medium at text level, should the history of media and reception in folklore include also the musical and visual art level. In traditional oral culture there existed a collective reception of folklore, whereas in the written culture the written record saved the folklore element from oblivion. At the same time, it "concealed" it form the people. The electronic medium, on the other hand, again enables collective reception.

The duration of particular phenomena in oral literature is of no consequence when it is being defined. The range of the possible duration is infinite - from a few years' length or less - to several centuries. Though the duration of an individual phenomenon is important, it is still impossible to set a common rule as to the duration of its phenomena in oral literature, nor can this duration be taken as a valid criterion.

It is obvious that the approach to literature as tradition, its continuity, or, on the other hand, as an explanation of literary phenomena being unique manifestations of the historic moments of their occurrence - are by no means characteristics of traditional oral literature only.

The changes that took place in traditional literature in the past and the ways in which they occurred are not well known. This is the reason why our consciousness is influenced by those aspects that are present and are continuously being stressed, rather than being aware of the interaction between the earlier long historic periods and changes in the past of traditional oral literature.

However, the duration of phenomena in traditional oral literature is by no means the criterion of their value. Yet, the old tendency inherited from the romantic times to equate, or at least bring into closer contact, age and value is still present.

When traditional lyric poetry is concerned, it is impossible to talk about a complete rejection of history, though it is quite obvious that one should draw the line at *historicism*. One wonders what and how important the "historical unit" in traditional verse is. Of course, it is well known that the so called reality ("realia") present in poetry is in a rather chaotic form: neither the names nor the facts are present in the same way as in chronicles, for example, but at the same time a chronicle could be an actual historic basis of a particular poetic subject matter.

Universal models: e.g. a *hero in a dungeon*, in captivity, *good prevails over evil*, *freeing oneself from captivity*, etc., all these models make the exchange of the name and the date of an event possible. The role of the captive hero, e.g., is often given to various historic figures whose real destinies are usually quite different. It is only the fact they have, at some time in their lives, been in a dungeon, in captivity, that links them together. The verse builds up their destinies and presents them in the same situation. What conclusions can be derived from this fact?

Should one suppose that the "original" variants of each of these poems reflect the corresponding event in its entire real-history concreteness and entity and only gradually get transformed into the text that is at our disposal nowadays?

Should one, on the contrary, conclude that we deal with a typical "roaming" topic that is only formally linked with various historic names? This, consequently, means that we may concentrate exclusively upon the explanation of the historic development of the particular subject matter (in this case one would have to "take back" the subject matter to the very origins of the first dungeons).

Actually, both conclusions are wrong. In the quoted example the common "unit of historicism" is evident in the usage of historic names, as well as in choosing particular causes and motives that have brought together those historic names and the popular topic. The fact that we know the causes makes it superfluous to supplement the subject matter with the missing elements of actual events known from other sources. The actual event in a given example will exclusively be the author's aspiration to express his opinion about the hero. Yet, the conception of the hero does not allow us to see the connection between the historic name and "type of subject matter" as an accidental one. Furthermore, we cannot state that this "reality" reflected in the poem has a completely different artistic function. One should not "equate" the poem with real events. It is equally unnecessary to analyse the poem's subject matter by establishing its relationship with reality. The real event remains the subject matter of the poem even when it is only represented in it as a symbol.

The relationship between the poem and reality in the so called historic poems, i.e. poems with obvious historic content (specially epic poems) differs from the same relationship in lyric poems and ballads. The very form of the poem in which a historical fact is present, be it epic, ballad or lyric poem, makes it possible to point out the characteristic expression of facts, but not the degree of awareness of the author's standpoint with respect to those facts.[2]

Images of heroes are represented by a great number of topics, so that there is not a single uniform poetic hero image. It was possible to make their names (Ivan Karlović, Vid Maričić, Ivan Vlatković, and others) part of already shaped content models with the motif of a hero's death, without regard to what had really happened in actual life. One could speak in terms of patterns which could be applied to various characters and events. The aesthetic function of the pattern itself should be mentioned here - in itself it offers satisfying artistic experience. For example, one and the same fairy tale told and retold to a child many times gives pleasure to the child again and again. A crime story is also a genre type, yet it is read with great pleasure. Likewise, there are patterns in traditional oral poems which are applied to different characters and events. The essential thing is the maximal adherence to a fixed pattern of the story, characters and ideological background, even to the language. The characters actually exist at the level of functions. In traditional oral poetry a character is created, as was already mentioned, from some real-life facts and from the life of a certain person who is given other persons' experiences and environmental elements. The example of Ivan Karlović, a frequent hero of lyric oral poems, is a good illustration of the above point. Some data of the existence of the actual man can be found.

We quote from the General Encyclopaedia, p:

"Karlović, Ivan, (? - Medvedgrad, 1531), Prince of Krbava, the last descendant of the noble family of Kurjaković. Civil governor of Croatia 1521-24 and 1527-31. He took an active part in organizing the defence of Croatia and in fighting the Turks. In 1527 the Turks conquered the land of his ancestors (the cities of Komić, Mrsinj, Obrovac, Osrtovica and Udbina). As a retribution King Ferdinand gave him some

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[2]It is very often a case of a "combination of poetic and real facts" as mentioned by M. Kleut in her comprehensive study about the hero Ivan Senjanin. There the author showed the relationship between "the real man (Ivan Vlatković) and his poetic representation (Ivan Senjanin)." (Kleut, 1987, 141-175).

castles and cities in Croatia, among them Medvedgrad, while he bought Lukavec in Turopolje. During the civil war he took King Ferdinand's side against Ivan Zapolja. Even today some castle ruins are traditionally called "Karlovića dvori" (Karlović's castles), e.g. Komić, Kozja Draga, Mazin, and the memory of governor Karlović is still retained in some traditional poems."

Round the 1780-ies, Pavao Ritter Vitezović, in his work about the noble family Gušić[3] *"Apographum ex Ioanne Lucio"*, confirms the existence of traditional songs about the Croatian governor Ivan Karlović who also figured in the "bugarštice" (Croatian popular ballads in 15 or 16 syllables). According to Vitezović, Karlović can be counted among those heroes who figure in almost all patriotic poems and songs in the "kolo" (Yugoslav round dance), "in cantilenis patriae et in choreis" - or, to put it more simply, he figures in both epic and lyric poems. Vitezović, quotes four rhymes:

> In as many cities as there are in Lika,
> In all the seventy-seven cities,
> There is no young girl or bride
> Whom Karlović did not make love to.

> (Klaić, 1914, 36)

This is the beginning of the poem about Ivan Karlović as a seducer of girls. There are similar variants to be found in the records of the 16th century Croatian emigrants to southern Italy as well as in other Croatian regions up to the present day.[4]

Many writers from Reljković's "enlightened circle" are very much against such traditional poems like the ones about Ivan Karlović, seducer of girls. They also disagree with the poems about "Hajduks" (robbers) - songs that were sung in the "kolos" in Slavonia at that time. Thus, Vid Došen angrily attacks the poems in which "disreputable lechers are wrongly called illustrious knights" and those "ravished maidens" are supposedly of noble descent. He also attacks the poems in praising "bitter wrath and battle" as well as the ones making heroes of infidels, blood-thirsty persons, mountain robbers, killers, thieves and assassins.[5]

The motives of the collectors, who have made comprehensive collections of traditional oral poems for the first time, are different from the previous literary interest in traditional oral folk poetry, especially lyric. In their approach to the traditional oral poetry as an image of history, latently present in their collections, even without referring to the above mentioned quotation from the Ragusan manuscript, the collectors do not differ very much from Kačić and other historiographic writers like Vitezović and Krčelić.[6]

There is another type of poem in which the name of Ivan Karlović is mentioned. It is a ballad sung as a "koleda" (a carol):

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[3]See more in detail about this in Bošković-Stulli, 1978, 208-210.

[4]An entry by Fran Kurelac, most probably from Hrvatsko Primorje, begins in this way:

> There is no bride or girl in Lika
> Who was not seduced by Ivo Karlović,
> Except for the girl Marica.

> (Kurelac, 1871, p. XXXIV.
> - Other examples are quoted by Delorko, 1976, poems 46 and 137, and Milaković, 1919, 12)

[5]He says:

> This is where dark evil is being praised,
> And pure virtue is being thwarted.

> (Bogišić, 1973, 190-193)

[6]More in detail: Bošković-Stulli, 1978, 233.

> It's pleasure to look, koledo, koledo,
> Through the feather-grass into basil-clusters, merrily, merrily,
> At two fighting armies, koledo, koledo,
> The Turks and the Christians, merrily, merrily.
> The Turks are led by Hasan-pasha, koledo, koledo,
> And the Christians by Karli-ban, merrily, merrily.

This example introduces another group of variants featuring Vid (perhaps Vid Maričić) as the main hero. Here is an example which was also sung as a carol, beginning with the following rhymes:

> Brave Vid was fighting, koledo!
> For three years against the cursed Turks,
> And four years against the gloomy Hungarians.

(Karadžić, V, 1898, No 164)

Some scholars consider this poem to be an "ancient 'koleda' rite" poem. They say it is a *classical 'koleda' poem*. The "anthropomorphic hero and warrior in the poem at the same time conceals and symbolizes the images of the ancient Slav deity of light - Vid, Svantovid, the counterpart of Dyonisius". (Krnjević, 1987, 301).

Other scholars, on the other hand, present different variants of the poems featuring *master Vid* who had been lying sick in the mountain for seven long years (a romantic poem from Hvar)[7]. In a ballad with a similar motif the hero Vid Maričić is also lying sick in the mountain. A fairy comes to tell him what has been going on in his castle during his absence.

In these and in some other poems, similar in subject matter, coming from various parts of Croatia, Vid should most probably be Vid Maričić.[8] According to oral tradition his castle was the one in Modrić near Jesenice at the foot of mount Velebit. He is said to have had nine daughters who got married off to different parts of the country. The castle fell into decay (the ruins can still be seen) because Vid's descendants fled to the islands before the Turkish army. In a folk poem from Lovinac (in Lika), Vid Maričić is mentioned as the owner of two hilltops of mount Velebit, Mila and Vrbica.[9]

Vid Maričić is also known as a "sirdar" from Ravni Kotari. Nevertheless, we cannot be sure whether this Vid, be it Vid Maričić or not, has replaced some other ancient hero in these poems. However, it is perhaps too far-fetched to bring him into connection with the ancient Slav deity Svantovid. The singers, as well as and poem-narrators respectively are indifferent to the names of their heroes and very often exchange them.

Here is another example, a poem which is believed to be based on a historic fact. Its content is supposed to refer to the departure of Prince Ivan Frankopan from the island of Krk in the year 1480. In anthologies this poem is often found under the title of "Prince Ivan's Grief":

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[7]Hvar variant - see: Delorko, 1979, 49-65.

[8]Banija variant - see: Delorko, 1979, 59-61.

[9]Do you know, Vid Maričić,
 That Mila was the king's property,
 And so was Vrbica, small and big.

When Venetian galleys
Sail in great numbers
And reach Omišalj shores,
A host of soldiers
Come ashore to invite
Our Prince Ivan to join the
        merry-making
Given in his honour
On board the galleys.
After drinking a lot of red
        wine,
Off they sail with the prince
        on board the galley,
Across the bay of Cress
And its big seaway!
When the prince discovered

That he was fooled and cheated
        by the Venetians,
He called to Glavina:
Oh, my lovely tower,
Lovely and spatious,
I built thee fair
And now I mustn't
Return to thee.
Who do I leave thee to?
I leave thee to a bird,
The swallow bird,
Who will fly over thee
On a summer's day,
As a sad memory of me
And tell the world about
This fiendish deceit.

(Delorko, 1951, 12)

In its integral form, this poem can be found in a number of collections and anthologies of our traditional oral poetry. However, in many handwritten (and published) records of this poem in recent times, as well as in the individual oral renderings on the island of Krk nowadays, only the poem's second part has "survived" - the part in which prince Ivan grieves over the loss of his tower and his homeland. The second part is indeed structured as an independent entity, it is neutral and not associated with any name. It could have been a dirge poem of other islanders from Krk who were forced to leave their native land to go to foreign parts, to America.

(Prevela Jasna Bilinić-Zubak)

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Povijesni sadržaji u lirskim usmenim pjesmama
SAŽETAK

Ono što se u usmenoj književnosti u prošlosti mijenjalo i kako se mijenjalo ostalo nam je slabo poznato. Zbog toga utječu na našu svijest oni aspekti koji se održavaju trajno i naglašenije negoli bi to bilo kad bismo mogli ravnomjerno poznavati međusobne odnose stabilnosti i promjena u proteklim dugotrajnim razdobljima povijesti usmene književnosti.

Međutim, trajnost pojava u usmenoj književnosti nije mjerilo njihove vrijednosti (premda i danas još postoji sklonost, baštinjena iz romantičkih vremena, da se poistovjete ili bar blisko povežu starost i vrijednost).

Kada je riječ o usmenom pjesništvu, nije moguće govoriti o potpunom "otklonu" od povijesti, ali je jasno da valja govoriti o ograničenosti povijesnosti. Dakle, pitamo se koja je to i kolika "jedinica povijesnosti" u usmenim pjesmama. Naravno, znamo da su tzv. "realije" prisutne u pjesmama u veoma kaotičnom obliku: i imena i činjenice nisu prisutne na onaj način na koji su prisutne u, npr., ljetopisima, ali isto tako ljetopis može biti stvarnom povijesnom osnovom pjesničkih sižea. Smatramo da ne treba pjesmu "povjeriti" činjenici, ali također, ne treba analizirati sadržaj pjesme unutar njezina odnosa prema činjenici. Sama forma u kojoj je prisutna povijesna činjenica (da li je to epska pjesma, balada ili lirska pjesma) dozvoljava nam da upozorimo na osobitosti odražavanja činjenice, ali ne i na stupanj svijesti koju ima sam stvaralac.