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## **KLJUKA OR ABOUT IMPOTENCE, LEGENDS AND ANTITHESIS**

Legends with *kljuka* as their theme (*kljuka* being the impossibility of having sexual relations, largely in marriage) noted down in the first decade of this century in Istria, are analysed in this article. Along with brief indications of the historical and geographical dissemination of this theme in written and oral sources, the distributive data on legends (protagonists, material and verbal magical components of carrying out those procedures) are analysed, followed by the structure of the legend texts in which a powerful antithetical mechanism is revealed as an important formative principle.

Key words: *kljuka*, legend, impotence, love and hate, antithesis, Istria

In extensive research that dealt with demonological legends in Istria (2000–2003) and, among other, also examined the narrative fertility *plodnost*<sup>1</sup> of the demonological personages in legend and phenomena (that is, supernatural beings, beings with supernatural capabilities and supernatural phenomena) I also recorded and/or wrote down ten legends about *kljuka*.<sup>2</sup> *Kljuka*<sup>3</sup> is a term in Istrian oral legends that covers the meanings of the impossibility of having sexual relations in marriage that is caused by magical methods.

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<sup>1</sup> The capability of the personages (and phenomena) in demonological legends to form new variants of legends or to secure the narrative circulation of old ones (cf. Rudan Kapec 2010:2, 174).

<sup>2</sup> In the Appendix at the end of the article, I present six selected ones, that I included in my dissertation as examples of narrative fertility (Rudan Kapec 2010:573-576).

<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, *kljuka* is a bent metal tool that is usually on a long pole; however, according to Bonifačić, it is also a door handle (Bonifačić IEF MS 140:4).

Sexual incapacity caused by supernatural, magical techniques are mentioned by writers from Antiquity,<sup>4</sup> debates in canon law,<sup>5</sup> Mediaeval astrological manuals,<sup>6</sup> Inquisitional instructions,<sup>7</sup> and reports on witch trials,<sup>8</sup> provide examples for researching micro-history,<sup>9</sup> certain remedies from traditional medicine

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<sup>4</sup> In the chapter “‘My lady knows impious things’. Impotence magic in the Ancient World” of her book *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages*, Catherine Rider fundamentally describes the manner in which magical, supernatural procedures of love and hatred and of their consequences in the form of impotence entered into the works of Tibullus, Ovid, Pliny the Elder, Petronius and others (Rider 2006:14-28), or directly, for example, in Pliny (*C. Plinius Secundus Naturalis Historia*, 30, 141.4-142.6) and in the Tibullus *Elegies* (Albius Tibullus *Elegiae*, 1.5.39-1.5.42) or Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, IX, 296-300) (Ovidije Nason 1907:234), while on the motifs of the magical in that type in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* also cf. e.g. Segal (Segal 2002:1-34). In the book mentioned, C. Rider also finds elements of traditional beliefs on magical practice in the title period in three fields of well-documented written sources: canon law, theological discourses and writings on medicine.

<sup>5</sup> Gratiani’s Decree (Decretum Gratiani, compiled around 1140) speaks directly about those who have been prevented by spells from having sexual intercourse (Bayer 1953:55), while emphasising types of sexual inadequacy: one is common and natural, *frigiditas*, while the other is *impotentia ex malefici*. The first implies sexual impotence with every woman, and not only with the one with whom he is under the influence of a magical spell, which also has consequences for the possibility of potential marriage, when the first marriage is declared null and void. In the second case, only the woman can enter into the new marriage (actually the only one as the first one was null and void), and not the man, who now has a known obstacle to concluding a valid marriage, while both can enter into a second one (ibid.:55).

<sup>6</sup> “Whoever [was born] in [the lunar mansion of] Scadbola is moderate; judicious in eating; (...) He will love women, but he is impeded by a magic art and is not able to have intercourse” (*Liber Alchandreii*, 10. c., cit according to Rider 2006:42).

<sup>7</sup> Moira Smith in her article “The Flying Phallus and the Laughing Inquisitor: Penis Theft in the Malles Maleficarum” shows that the best-known Inquisitor Manual was also influenced, among other, in the formation of attitudes and well-known stories, by folklore motifs on magical, supernatural causes of sexual impotence (Smith 2002:85-117), particularly (ibid.:92-97).

<sup>8</sup> In the trial of Marion and Margo in Chatelet 1390., the former mistress Marion was charged for using the services of Margot in the renewed winning of a man and that they had bewitched him so that he could no longer engage in sexual intercourse with his wife. The casting of spells included the use of material objects (two sprays of grass) and verbal entreaties (together with invoking the devil) (Bayer 1953:481).

<sup>9</sup> Le Roy Ladurie (1981:84-96) wrote about the French phenomenon of *nouer l’aiguillette* (whose name indicates the magical activity procedure itself of tying knots in ribbons or threads, as a form of sympathetic magic, which could point to castration), while the wide dissemination of that belief in France, according to Delumeau, included the example of fear, since reports spoke of the fear of secret weddings, which took place outside the couple’s local parish, as well as conclusions and instructions of the provincial ecclesiastic synods against such behaviour (Delumeau/Delimo 1987:77). The high number of reports and confirmations about the very dissemination of that phenomenon (more precisely: fear of it) in a concrete period of some forty years (c. 1500–1590) is linked by Delumeau with the concrete socio-economic situation and its influence on human health and, in that way, on reproductive capability, on the one hand, and on the other (particularly male sexual inadequacy) with “mental hindrances” partly conditioned by self-fulfilling foresights (prompted by acquaintance with those very stories [of the experiences of others] with that problem), while he also sees it partly in fear of women as a projective image of “sinful sensuality” (Delumeau/Delimo 1987:82).

are recommended for them,<sup>10</sup> and for protection from such dangers (and also for wide protection of love in marriage and prevention of marital hatred) and also relate to certain beliefs and spells in ethnographies<sup>11</sup> or examples of entreaties in collections of fables.<sup>12</sup> The amorous knots mentioned in the first Croatian novel, Zoranić's *Planine* [Mountains] (1569, are a debt to the allegorical procedure, but even then they refer to emotional and extramarital and not sexual bonds, just as their thematicising is probably more a debt to reading (of Ovid, for example) than the author's wish to include his potential knowledge of such techniques from his own environment. Nonetheless, the material elements he mentions on his departure to the Dinara Fairy to untie the knots and heal the pain also include (Zoranić 1988:216-220) those elements that appear precisely in loosening the bonds of sexual dependence (dead bones, the fat of various animals, fire, water) as shall be seen further on in the text, so that it is not completely unfeasible that

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<sup>10</sup> "When a man cannot sleep with a woman he should take the tooth of a dead man and put it under his head so she does not see, and then he will be able to sleep with her" (Strohal 1910:125). Although there is no detailed description in that folk medicine book of the source, the way of curing it points to a possible supernatural, magical cause, since the procedures connected with particular parts of dead persons (e.g. bones) were not foreign precisely to that type of cause. Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims (845-882) mentions objects by which such a magical effect could be achieved: coloured thread, parts of snakes, pubic hair... and among other things, the bones of dead persons (Rider 2006:33).

<sup>11</sup> "Let her buy a *krajcar*'s [one hundredth of a forint] worth of fasteners, but they must be hooks and eyes, and let her carry them on her breast to the wedding, and in the evening, when she lies down, she must be careful that the young man does not notice, but she should hug him, and with her arms around him she should fasten two pairs of fasteners, and then leave them somewhere and never touch them again. Just as those two pairs came together, so she, too, comes together with him, never to be separated again" (Lovretić 1902:192).

Or, for example "When a woman's husband does not love her, she takes the wax that drops to the ground from the Easter candle. She divides that wax into two parts and places them on the door-jamb, where her husband will be passing. When her husband walks through, the woman glues together the wax [pieces] and put them in their bed, that the two of them be each other's only" (Lovretić 1902:193). These procedures (although, not the material) are similar to that mentioned by Arnaldus de Villanova (c. 1240–1311), according to Bayer. The magical effect was attained by dividing a walnut or other fruit into halves and placing one half on each side of the path along which the couple have to pass, and when a problem arises, then the young couple will take both halves, remove the husk and join the whole walnut and let it stand, joined together like that, for six days and then eat it (Bayer 1953:78). Still, the procedures in Lovretić's example were carried out by the brides themselves primarily, while the grooms had particular techniques to protect against that spell, or others of the brides. "The young man takes flint, lard and nine hazelnuts, and urinates on the wheel-hub of his best man's cart, so that the girl can do nothing to him that day. He carries a plant graft that has not taken in his pocket to the wedding, so that the girl's spells cannot affect him" (Lovretić 1902:192).

<sup>12</sup> In that way, Lj. Radenković divides "girlish spell-casting" into several sub-groups, while one of them serves to "'bind' someone to them", but he mentions that such *sorcery* can also be carried out by men (Radenković 1982:433-434); the examples of fables he provides are largely from Bosnia and Serbia.

such procedures and stories about them were known to him from the customs of his environment and time, and not only from classical reading matter.

Both geographically<sup>13</sup> and in diverse historical periods, belief in the magical causes of sexual impotence were fairly widely disseminated.<sup>14</sup> However, the belief fits in in the broad sense with the general susceptibility of young marriages to evil forces, as testified to by the custom of delaying sexual consummation on the first night of marriage, or for several nights in a row, which Đorđević called *Tovijine noći* in keeping with the way in which the Old Testament Tobias<sup>15</sup> ensured his life and later marriage, as instructed by the angel (Tob 6:17-18) [Vulgate]. Đorđević showed on the examples of diverse customs from the Southern Slavic region, and on the examples of diverse nations and from diverse historical periods, how and why the custom of initial non-consummation of marriages survived. Referring to the reasons given by former researchers: resistance on the bride's part; the shyness of the bride, the groom or both of them; and, finally, fear of evil creatures. I have said quite some time ago that young married couples, in the opinion of the primitive common man, are constantly exposed to danger from evil creatures. He decided that "(...) the last [reason] was the main one, that is, fear of evil creatures. (...) However, it seems that young married couples are particularly endangered by evil creatures during and after coupling in the sleeping-chamber".

Maja Bošković-Stulli did not mention the term *kljuka* or take the legends associated with it as a theme in *Istarske narodne priče* [Traditional Istrian Stories] (1959). However, there are writings that thematicise *kljuka* using precisely that term in the manuscript collections of researchers at what was then the Institute of Folk Art. Those papers range from very extensive legends written down by

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<sup>13</sup> Researchers have found similar phenomena in Sudan, Ethiopia and in the Middle East (Rider 2006:1).

<sup>14</sup> Including, among other, examples from the 20th century noted during the 1960s in France and the 1970s in Greece (Rider 2008:2).

<sup>15</sup> S. Botica wrote about the connections between the Bible story about Tobias and Croatian oral literature, also finding the motif of the girl who kills her suitors in the verse forms of Croatian oral literature, and showing the link between certain narrative forms (fairy-tales) and that story (Botica 1995:3).

M. Bošković-Stulli<sup>16</sup> through shorter legends<sup>17</sup> to chronicat<sup>18</sup> in the manuscript collections of N. Bonifačić Rožin.

In my preliminary research experience in authentic narrator situation, I did not hear any legends that had that phenomenon as their theme. I first learnt of it reading D. Orlić and his *Štorice od štrig i štrigun* [Stories about *Štrig* and *Štrigun*] from 1986. That does not prove that such stories did not exist in oral narration, but rather shows they were acceptable largely to a more adult public. In any case, the fact that the selection from the material offers six texts uttered by five different narrators,<sup>19</sup> demonstrates that the phenomenon had narrative potential, while the somewhat taboo nature surrounding legends of that type (which can be seen below in the text as being greater, for example, than in legends about *krsniks*) shows that there were, or still are, many more stories of this type than they would want or could share with researchers.

Apart from the interesting nature of the stories themselves, the narrative fertility of legends with that theme could also be ensured by various circumstances in

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<sup>16</sup> “Aunt Fuma is from Jasenovica near Sv Lovreč. She married young, you know, 14 years old she was, while he was an older man. The wedding guests came and it was all merry, but she could never create a home with him, because she ran from her husband. Her mother-in-law noticed that and she thought that she had heard tell that she was *kljuka* in some way, so she went to look for some big *kršnjak* [healer] far, far away. She told him all about it and he came here to Rovinjsko Selo to [see] her, so she left Rovinjsko Selo, that bride, and went with him to her family. The *kršnjak* asked her mother for a large ball of wool and asked where the nearest vineyard was. He used the ball of wool to measure one row of vines and he said some sort of prayer. Later they came to Rovinjsko Selo at night and that *kršnjak* took one of her brothers-in-law with him and they went in front of the church door, and that *kršnjak* held one end of the wool yarn, and the brother-in-law took the ball and, as the *kršnjak* instructed, he walked around the church going backwards and he went right around it, unwinding that ball of wool and when he met up with the *kršnjak* again, he took both ends of the wool yarn and tied them together and prayed something. And then everything was alright. She suspected that it was done by a young man from the place from which she came, who was in love with her” (Bošković-Stulli IEF MS 78:48).

<sup>17</sup> “And he can do it to himself. The one who does it can also break it [the spell]. It is done on the handle of the church door. If he takes hold of the handle to open the door [of the church] he is then – *kljuka*. He can do it to himself. When going to the wedding, he takes a sapling and bends it, and that is how *kljuka* is done. This is how it is lifted [the *kljuka* spell]: he goes then and finds the young branch that he bent and that is how it is broken. He goes to running water and places three stones in the water and they must flow away. And that is how it is undone. Those people who have *kljuka* cannot sleep together, he runs away from her and she runs away from him. Then someone told him that he would break the *kljuka*. They went into the woods and came to a bush full of young saplings and that man cut off those high-growing saplings and blood started to flow from them and from then on the young people [could] make love” (Bonifačić Rožin IEF MS 140:4).

<sup>18</sup> *Kljuka* – so they could not be together. One gets into the bed, the other one runs away from the bed (Bonifačić Rožin IEF MS 140:5).

<sup>19</sup> However, the term and the meaning connected with it was known by many more narrators, although not all of them wanted to talk about that theme, and I recorded four more legends on the theme that are variants of Nos. 1 and 4, and two of No. 5.

life: from the parental choice of the bride or groom, the fact that the young couple barely knew each other, great difference in age, sexual disfunction, through to the shyness Đorđević mentioned, but also to family violence that was interpreted in some statements as being due precisely to *kljuka*. Current recasting of *kljuka* in Istrian legends has been confined to visits to various *sorcerers* to ensure lasting relationships or the dissolution of bad ones (that they narrated to me in a situation in Štokovci in 2003, but also outside of this research in various parts of Istria).

*Kljuka* legends differ from the majority of other legends in one distributive fact:<sup>20</sup> and that is the intention of the spell is definitely in question. In all other legends with human protagonists who manufacture evil connected with the supernatural, the possibility is largely left for the eventuation of unintentional effects, for example, people with a weak eye can harm others with it, consciously or unconsciously, and even if they do it consciously, they cannot help themselves (sometimes even warning the possible injured party) (Rudan Kapec 2010:351-356). In the *kljuka* legends, those who invoke the spells do so with full awareness of the consequences, they do so completely intentionally and the legends do not allow for the possibility that this is a matter of unhappy destiny as, for example, in the case of the *mora* (ibid.:771-272) and the *štriga* (ibid.:351-356) who, according to certain legends, are incapable of completely avoiding their activities; they can only reduce the damage they do, or choose whom they will harm. However, the situation is the opposite with the caster of the *kljuka* spell; his/her preparedness to impose *kljuka* is a matter of choice. In other words, according to the legends about *kljuka* that point to the guilty party, the spell is cast by a young man or woman, who cannot accept the fact that they have been abandoned in a matter of love. Among the legends about this choice, two legends (Nos. 1 and 2) indicate who is to blame. The absence of denouncement in the remaining legends is perhaps also a debt to what is passed over in silence in the context (that is, the assumptions that I might know who the guilty party could be). Moreover, that fact is not mentioned directly in Legend No. 1, but is mentioned in the metanarrative part that functions as the internal finer points in the legend (the narrator speaks about joking with the *milkmen* – whom she singles out as constant carriers of news about fresh happenings and stories, and that very jest – *You cheated someone and she is getting revenge on you by making you afraid of it [the sexual act]* – serves as the trigger of the story in the second example of *kljuka* given in the same text. On the other hand, Legend No. 5 mentions the guilty party and his motivation: (...) *and that young man who wanted her, he was the one who did that to her [cast the spell]. A young man from her village did that to her so that she couldn't sleep with her*

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<sup>20</sup> “(...) a relatively flexible group of data about supernatural creatures, supernatural capabilities and supernatural phenomena, verbalised in text or implied by context, which are known to potential participants in narrative situations (narrators and recipients) in one or more intimate communities” (Rudan Kapec 2010:40).

husband until he allowed her to. In the footnote with Legend No. 2, the guilty party, that is, the responsibility is not allocated to the person but to the emotion: *It's jealousy, that comes from jealousy*. In the repeated question in which the co-narrator explained what I had asked, the narrator continued to answer by defining the guilty party by the emotion he felt, and not by the supernatural powers that he could possibly possess. However, in a legend noted by Nikola Bonifačić Rožin it is clearly stated that the *kljuka* spell could have been cast by one of the future spouses, the reasons for which is not particularly stressed – perhaps lack of freedom in choosing a partner – but, according to the description, the procedure obviously must have been intentional. Furthermore, among those that Orlić speaks of as being guilty for *kljuka* spells, apart from victims of unrequited love, (in legends entitled *Kljuka, Kljuka II, Kljuka III, Nisu mogli, Berita ka ne gori i Želizni klin od timuna*) (Orlić 1986:179-181, 183-186) there is also one brother – of the bride. Although the lyrical forms in Istria also report on incest between a brother and sister (cf. I. Rudan 1979:164-165), this legend does not give any indication that that was the reason for the brother's *contriving kljuka*. In other words, the brother had been known previously as a short-tempered and malicious man with special capabilities ("he made the oxen on a man's cart turn backwards and pull in the opposite direction" Orlić 1986:182), while the reason was lack of control and authority (at least according to the text of the legend: "(...) but she did not ask Marko [for permission] and he did not want her to marry him" (ibid.).

Legend also provides information on the conditions for *kljuka*: it is only possible to cast the spell if the bride is innocent (as nothing is said about the future groom's virginity, it can be assumed that that was not a condition). In the narrative situation in which I heard that information for the second time (Rajki, 2000), it was obviously a part of the implied distributive facts on *kljuka*, because it was also confirmed with a smile by the second narrator and not only the one who had first communicated it to me. However, the legend presented by Orlić under the title *Kljuka III* shows that it is possible to cast the *kljuka* spell notwithstanding pre-nuptial sexual intercourse: "Their daughter was conceived before they were married. Her mother, the poor thing, told me on a number of occasions, that they had sex before they married, so she fell pregnant before the wedding. But after the wedding, they could not sleep together, not even once" (Orlić 1986:181). It is possible that changes in this respect occurred in various areas and times (unlikely in the latter case, because the texts were noted down after Orlić's), but it does not seem probable to me that such a large change would have come about after Orlić's stylisation. However, in the Orlić example, the groom's *kljuka* was the work of the girl, so the absence of the condition could have been in their diverse status in the patriarchal system, in which virginity was, in any case, only examined on the female side.

Consequently, apart from the implication or the direct naming of the guilty party, the caster of the *kljuka* spell, important parts of the *kljuka* legends are:

- determination of the existence of *kljuka*
- and the intimation or description of the (non)annulment of the spell (which includes the intimation or description of the technique for annulment or the instruction of the healer / assistant, and sometimes also of the counsellor to the assistant in question).<sup>21</sup>

Determining the presence of *kljuka* can also include mentioning the objects, methods (the technique of spell-casting) and/or the space in which the spell was cast: to the *door-handle* (on the church doors) and the weaving of the wreaths before departure to the wedding (Bonifačić Rožin IEF MS 140:4), thread and knots in it<sup>22</sup> and verbal inversion of the performative act of marriage (the spell-caster must be present at the marriage ritual) (Orlić 1986:179), cutting coins in half and entreaties during the marriage ritual (actually at the time of exchange of wedding rings) (ibid.:180), throwing a cap onto the fire (the effect of the magic lies in the fact that the cap does not burn (ibid.:185), into the oven (no detailed explanation is given)<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Because of the flexibility of the genre, the absence of firm compositional laws, the free addition and omission of episodes (Marks 1996:28) and closer connection with everyday narrations (ibid.:30), depending on the context in which the narrator forms the story so that, for example, it is reduced to only one sentence in Bonifačić's chronicle (admittedly, also one that is very important in forming the legend of *kljuka* as will be seen in further text).

<sup>22</sup> That procedure is also credited with the French name given to the phenomenon, *l'aiguillette* (Le Roy Ladurie 1981), while coloured threads and their resultant effect are also mentioned in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages (Rider 2006:18, 33); apart from that, without particular naming of the procedure or the phenomena that it can cause, the procedure itself was also described in detail in the town of Otok in Slavonia by Lovretić at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. "One takes the root of hyssop grass, cuts it along the length, one part is smeared with lard, and the other with honey, and they are buried in the ground with some distance between them, but, those who love one another must pass through that gap. They do not bury that root any more but each of them keeps one half in one hand and embraces the one whom they love with the other, and while they embrace, they join the root to be as it was before it was divided. Or they bury the root, or they embrace it as they put it together, each of them, when they separate they wrap it in three woollen threads: red, green and black and they say 'When you saw me, you turned red; when you met me then you turned green, and when you did not meet with me, you turned black'". Although Lovretić did not comment on the procedure and did not connect it to any extent with a sexual problem, but with the broader stimulus of love (towards him or her) for whoever carried out the procedure, and of dislike for all others.

<sup>23</sup> The powerful effect of fire in the first of Orlić's examples does not in fact create *kljuka* in the narrower sense (due to the fact that the young man threw his cap into the fire a week before the marriage of the girl to whom he was attracted, after which the bride called off the wedding – which, according to stories from life, is a fairly rare occurrence) and "as if enchanted she said: – I don't want anyone except him!" Such powerful influence of fire is confirmed, in a somewhat different manner, in one of the Mediaeval theological discourses in which it is proven that if the objects that caused impotence are thrown somewhere on the ground, the marriage does not have to be dissolved because the object could be found, the magical effect annulled, and the marriage maintained. However, if the objects are thrown into fire or water (which implies that the effect is more difficult or impossible to annul), then the marriage can be annulled (pronounced null and void) (Rider 2006:121).



(No. 4), while the problem can be in the marriage bed itself<sup>24</sup> which needs to be changed (No. 6).

Distributive data that deal with the intimation or description of the annulling of the *kljuka* spell include the one annulling it (whatever the outcome): it can be the person who cast the spell (including the groom himself from the Bonifačić example), some other guilty party (the bride's brother who did so after 15 days and that after the young couple had asked for forgiveness for marrying without his permission (Orlić 1986:182), a traditional certified assistant such as a *kršnjak/ krsnik*<sup>25</sup> and his assistant (Bošković-Stulli IEF MS 78:48), but also one who has a specific reputation for his capabilities (this person usually being from outside the community) a *štrigun*<sup>26</sup> (here in the role of assistant, although an unsuccessful one) (Orlić 1986:182), and unnamed assistant from a far-away place (No. 1), an unnamed assistant from within the community (No. 5), and a named assistant from the community (Orlić 1986:183).

Distributive data on the procedure of annulment itself are not expansive in either Orlić's texts or those from my research; usually, they only mention where they went and who helped them – but not how – the exception being found only in Legend No. 5 in which it is mentioned that the helper from the community went to the grave and threw away the cross in order to cancel the magical effect, in which process the precise timing was also important, “until the clock strikes midnight”. However, the earlier, above mentioned notes of M. Bošković-Stulli and N. Bonifačić Rožin offer, particularly the first one, a description of the entire complex procedure: the arrival of the *kršnjak*, asking for the ball of wool, the departure with that ball of wool to the nearest vineyard owned by the family to which the young married couple belong, the unidentified prayer in the vineyard with the threads of wool, then the departure at night in the company of a family member who becomes the *kršnjak's* assistant at the nearby church around which the assistant unwinds the ball of wool, walking backwards, and when he has completed that, then the *kršnjak* ties a knot connecting the yarn. The second notation of the procedure includes unravelling the interwoven branches, throwing three

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<sup>24</sup> About the bed (and/or the space beneath it) as a place in which objects could be placed for magical provocation of the impossibility of sexual intercourse, (cf. Rider 2006:8, 23, 48, 66), while the same place can serve for breaking the spell by placing fish bile on hot coal, which Rider connects with the biblical Tobias (ibid.:47).

<sup>25</sup> The *krsnik* or *kršnjak* is a man with supernatural capabilities (he is born in a caul or with a caul cap on his head), is able to predict events, understands the language of animals and, what is most important for this text, has the capability of healing various ailments caused by natural causes or supernatural intervention (for more detail, see Bošković-Stulli 2005:125-159, and Rudan Kapec 2010:175-228).

<sup>26</sup> The male opposite of *štriga* (witch), in texts written more recently they are also called assistants or helpers (healers who treat ailments provoked supernaturally (by magic) using their capabilities and techniques).

small stones into running water (the stones have to be carried away by the water) and going to the woods and the cutting off young branches from which blood must flow. The complex nature of these procedures and the seeking of a strong *kršnjak* indicates just how strong the *kljuka* mechanism was believed to be in tradition. The *kljuka* was so very powerful that there were cases mentioned in the 20th century oral stories from the Istrian region in which it could not be lifted (Orlić 1986:181, 184) as well as being so in the selection of appendices for this paper, Legends Nos. 3 and 6, as in the Mediaeval legal documents on marriage referred to at the beginning of this text.

The strength of that mechanism was also shown in the ways in which the narrators formed those parts of the *kljuka* legends that expressed the problem of sexual incapacity and of love and hatred. Those expressions tended towards set formulae (identifiable in the repetitions or similar syntactical structures) and were also subjected to taboos. The formula trend is also partly reflected in the formative formulae of the entreaties themselves (which accompany the procedure): “When that knot is unravelled, then let them find each other in love” (Orlić 1986:179), “When those two pieces are joined again, let them come together in their bed!”<sup>27</sup> (ibid.:180). This is how the narrators explained just what *kljuka* implies:

She could not create a home with him, she ran away from her husband. [*Ona se ni mogla domiti š njin, je bižala spred mužom.*] (Bošković-Stulli IEF MS 78:48)

One gets into bed, while the other flees from the bed. [*Jedan gre na postelju, a oni drugi beži s postelji.*] (Bonifačić Rožin MS 140:4)

They came but if he drew near to her, she would depart. [*Su došli i ku je von doša blizu nje, vona je hodila ća, bižala.*] (No. 3 in the Appendix)

If he would take to their bed, she would fall to the floor, when she would raise herself up onto the bed, he would fall to the floor. [*Ko bi on sta na postelju, ona bi pala na pod, kada bi se ona digla na postelju, on bi pa na pod.*] (Orlić 1986:184)

Ah yes, that's how it was, a year together and they could not even reach out to each other. He was miserable, she was miserable. He was ashamed, she was ashamed. And they could not even reach out to each other. [*I ja to su bili već leto dan skupa i se nisu mogli nikako taknut. Mučni jedan i drugi. Sram jenega i drugega. I se nisu mogli nikako taknut.*] (No. 1 in the Appendix)

Apart from parallelism, in the two second examples, in which the second is framed literally in repetition of the utterance (actually with the sinecdoch for sexual intercourse) – *And they could not even reach out to each other* – thus emphasising even

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<sup>27</sup> D. Ajdačić detaches this type of utterance as a conditional twofold magic formula: “The conditional magical utterances are based on the cause-and-effect connection of phenomena in the mythic-magical conception of the world. In one and the same type of magical twofold formulative utterance the objects in the first and/or the second part of the utterance can exchange themselves paradigmatically” ([www.kapija.narod.ru/Authors/Ajdacic/ajd01\\_dvoslozni.htm](http://www.kapija.narod.ru/Authors/Ajdacic/ajd01_dvoslozni.htm) (accessed January 2, 2011)).

more the adjective (miserable) and the word *ashamed* from the dyadic sentences, all the utterances are formed as more or less successful antitheses.<sup>28</sup> In the first example the verbs *to create [a home]* and *to run [away]* are in antithesis, in the second *to get into bed* and *to flee from the bed*; in the third syntagma: *draw near to her – she would depart*, in the fourth example the verbs are in an antithetical parallel pair (although the possibility exists that this was a debt to Orlić's stylisation and, if so, it is evident in the examples that they skilfully following the formations in oral narrations). With greater or lesser success, the antithesis formed in those brief utterances manages to be a sound means of emphasising the majority of the factors that Bagić cites in definition of antithesis (see fn. 28), and are a clear reflection of the emotional conflict (stemming from sexual inadequacy and hatred in love caused by magic) that is presented in the legends, and then given dramatic charge by the key parts of the legend text, the part that explains the problem itself and, finally, also often causes laughter or at least a smile in the oral actualisation (which cannot be seen in the written text), since the unsuccessful sexual act is expressed in euphemistic utterances.

However, the antithetical mechanism is an important principle of *kljuka* also outside the formation of the formula-type utterance on the impossibility of consummating marriage. In one of Orlić's legends they speak of the technique of casting the *kljuka* spell by the performative utterance of specific words: *You're lying* or *A priest's lie*, at the very moment when the priest confirms the act of marriage by himself emphasising that part of the ritual that is formed by antithesis: "... whom God has joined together, let no man cast asunder" (Orlić 1986:179), and then that is all also confirmed by sympathetic magic: the physical formation of the knot on black thread with the formula: when that knot unravells, then let them join in love. (ibid) The antithetic nature of the expressions that describe *kljuka*, the formulae through which it is actuated and the spell-like procedures (tying – untying (of knots), bending – unbending (of branches), use of a tooth or the bones of a dead person in order to ensure life (fertility) successfully correlate to the impossibility of establishing the sexual marital synthesis.

Oral legends that thematicise legend through the use of antithesis in the key places of their stories thus also achieve a convincing aesthetic effect, since all the elements that they mention or imply (the main protagonists who cannot join as one, the "guilty party" and his/her wish in relation to the wishes of the young married couple, procedures within the casting of the *kljuka* spell and those within its annulment, and also each element in relation to the others) are in an antithetical

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<sup>28</sup> "Antithesis (from the Greek *antithesis*, oppositeness, juxtapositioning) is a particular type of comparison that is based on contrariety and/or contrast (Solar 1997:84); "Antithesis as a figure can connect two words, syntagmas or sentences of opposite meaning. It is an appropriate means for emphasising the conflict between ideas or emotions, dramatising a situation, polemical persuasion, and sometimes for evoking laughter" (Bagić 2009).

relation, while all those relations are merged and reflected by the very antithesis of the key place in the story text.

That theme is connected with strong tabooisation so that the two narrators had the need, by additional metanarrative alibies, to justify their knowledge of such stories. In Legend No. 1, the narrator introduced the *milkmen* and the story that they told her about *kljuka*. However, from the manner of her formation of the legend (and the intonation) one gained the impression that the *milkmen* were here not only in the witness-type role of the authenticity formula<sup>29</sup> but also in order to justify the narrator's knowledge of legends with that theme. In Legend No. 4 given in the appendix, four of the ten sentences that relate to explanation of the story-telling situation, along with the type they recount and stories on that theme, are included by the narrator in a metanarrative explanation with citational connection to Gervais' well-known poem *Three Grandmothers (Old ladies, you know when there were those three grannies, when midday rang out, those two gossiped about the third one...)* in order to establish an alibi and reduce the probable feeling of discomfort connected with the choice of the story-telling repertoire.

That aspect enables the conclusion that the actual narrative fertility of those legends would be much greater than the research was able to show and than can be seen in the material collected.

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<sup>29</sup> On formulae of authenticity, cf. Rudan 2006:89-111.

## **Appendix** **(notations made of *kljuka* legends in 2000 – 2003 research):**

### **1. *Kljuka***<sup>30</sup>

Ah yes, when they married. A young couple wed here and... Ah yes, the milkmen told me. I had a lot of milk [for sale]. I made them coffee and offered it to them. And if they brought me something, then I always made a snack for them.

Ah yes, they had already been together for a year but they couldn't touch each other. Both of them were miserable. This one ashamed, that one ashamed. And they just couldn't touch each other.

And her mother told me somehow, quietly and in secret.

Did I know anything about it.

You are always going somewhere. Someone is always coming to your place and you have people you know everywhere.

And about those milkmen, they were always talking about something, one about how he had found an egg out there in the middle of the yard, where that haystack is, where it was not at all likely that there could be an egg.<sup>31</sup> So I said:

– You cheated someone so she is getting revenge on you by making you afraid of it.<sup>32</sup>

So they started talking about this happening:

That a young couple visited them and that they couldn't have children, not this way, not that way and then he said:

– Of course they don't have any when they can't even touch each other. And that they had been in... you know, in Kladuša, in Old Kladuša, somewhere there in Bosnia.

And I told all that to that woman and then they went there and after that they have two children... and I don't know if he knows even today where it came from and who it was... She knows, but I don't know if he knows even today. I have never told anyone who they are. And I won't ever (...).<sup>33</sup> I don't know. And that man gave him four hundred dollars. They went there twice and he asked what the price was the second time. He said:

– I didn't ask the first time either – he said – and it offends me that you gave me so much, don't leave anything for me today because I don't do it for money but to help people. (Žavori, 2001, Kuhar)

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<sup>30</sup> After my question: *Did they tell you that they once used to know how to make kljuka?*

<sup>31</sup> Finding eggs in unexpected places is a distributive fact that indicates *štrigarije* [sorcery]. The narrator included that fact since it shows that the people to whom she turned for help were informed about that type of knowledge, while its indirect inclusion means that she would not tell anyone about it and/or that there were also people in her circle who were not knowledgeable about it, or that it would be offensive for her to identify herself before them with such questions.

<sup>32</sup> The pronoun relates to sexual intercourse.

<sup>33</sup> The continuance of the story followed after my question:

E: *And how does that come about at all, how can anyone create kljuka?*

## 2. Who can be made *kljuka*<sup>34</sup>

But they can only do that if the bride was a virgin. If she had been touched before, then they can't do it. If he found her innocent when they met, then they can do it, if not, then no. (Kringa, 2000, Š. Erman)

## 3. If he came near her, then she left

There was none of that here. They talked about it. I heard it said that it happened during my childhood. But there was one, they weren't married, she just moved in with him. It seems to me that they had *kljuka*, too. They came [here] but if he came near her, she immediately went out, running away. In the end, she had to go back home. Later, he married someone else. She was only here for about eight days but she couldn't stand it, if he even approached her she would leave. (Rovinjsko Selo, 2000, Pokrajac)

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<sup>34</sup> After the following conversation:

E: *But have you heard about that, that they wrote it down in the surroundings of Poreč, and my grandfather told me about it. When young people get married, and if any other young man wanted her, then they make him kljuka so that they can't...*

Š: *That, too, yes.*

Z: *That's how it was.*

Š: *It happened here in our local community.*

E: *And what did they do then?*

Š: *Well they fought each other and ran away. That's what we experienced.*

Z: *Your wife even saw it.*

Š: *She even saw it.*

Z: *When they fought so violently.*

E: *So someone did that to them?*

Š: *Yes.*

E: *Was the spell lifted later?*

Z: *It was.*

Š: *Yes, the spell can be lifted.*

E: *By the one who cast it?*

Š: *Someone else can do it.*

E: *But how do they create kljuka?*

Š: *Ah, I wouldn't know about that.*

E: *How do you remove it.*

Š: *I wouldn't be able to tell you that either. Only, we did know a man personally whom they were very frightened of, who could give it to you. It's jealousy, it's jealousy that causes it.*

Z: *You beg him and he breaks it [the spell].*

Š: *Yes about breaking it, but she's asking who can give it to you.*

Z: *Someone who is very jealous.*

#### **4. Done in the oven<sup>35</sup>**

About *kljuku*? Yes, they did talk about it, old women you know, when there were those three grannies, when the bell rang out at noon, those two [would gossip] about the third one. We used to have more time once to sit in the shade and more time for stories. We don't have time any more even to look each other honestly in the eye. When that young man and girl wed, nothing happened for three nights. It was said that it was done in the oven. Now in which oven, in his or the bread-baking oven – that I don't know. It was supposed to have been done in the oven, so they went somewhere – it was thought that they went somewhere because of that. Now I know the both of them but I won't name them, but that is what was said. That's my generation and that's the way it was. (Hrboki, 2002, N. Benčić)

#### **5. “A young man who wanted her, he did that to her”**

When a girl from Cera in the Barban area got married, her village was against it and that young man who wanted her, he was the one who did that to her [cast the spell].

A young man from her village did that to her so that she couldn't sleep with her husband until he allowed her to. And that's why it was necessary to find some man who would go at midnight to the graveyard in Baban, and when the [church] clock started to chime midnight to go into the graveyard at that time and to pull up a cross from one of the graves and to throw it away so that it was lost. (Rudani, 2002, Rudan)

#### **6. Leaving the same furniture**

And that when... that hasn't happened since long ago. That was long ago what you<sup>36</sup> were saying, but when N.N.<sup>37</sup> got married, they couldn't do it. They were divorced later. I told her, don't use the same furniture. Even though it was lovely furniture, really beautiful. But now I can't say whether it was true or not. It is the truth that they can't be together, but what the reason is, that I don't know. (Rudani, 2002, Rudan)

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<sup>35</sup> After my question: E: *But have you ever heard it said that you call kljuka or foši differently here?*

<sup>36</sup> Speaking to the co-narrator.

<sup>37</sup> The narrator says a name but asks me, at the same time, not to mention it.

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#### KLJUKA ILI O IMPOTENCIJI, PREDAJI I ANTITEZI

#### SAŽETAK

U radu se analiziraju predaje koje tematiziraju kljuku (nemogućnost spolnog odnosa uglavnom u braku), zapisane desetih godina ovoga stoljeća u Istri. Uz kraće upućivanje na povijesnu i zemljopisnu raširenost te teme u pisanim i usmenim izvorima, analiziraju se distributivni podaci predaje (protagonisti, materijalne i verbalne magijske sastavnice činjenja te postupci), zatim struktura tekstova predaja u kojoj se otkriva snažni antitetički mehanizam kao važno oblikovno načelo.

Ključne riječi: kljuka, predaja, impotencija, ljubav i omraza, antiteza, Istra