

## CHILDREN'S JOKES - POSSIBILITIES FOR CLASSIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION

### SUMMARY

Over the last ten years, systematic research of oral literary in its many and varied forms has inevitably drawn attention to the subject of children's folklore. One of the questions confronting the researcher is whether the folklore content in the exchange of stories and songs between children is of a lower order or value, only of passing interest and actuality when it is encountered as a part of other research being conducted. Should it be regarded as a specific utterance in the time flow of oral literature; or is children's folklore merely one of the ways of everyday communication between children? A further problem lies in the way in which this varied, diverse, and rich material should be dealt with and organised; what aspects of study does it offer?

Mainly on the basis of her own material, the author analyses children's jokes, drawing attention to the matter of their classification. She proposes a number of hypothetical possibilities (formal structure, participants, and themes), but also points out their inherent weaknesses and defects. Through interpretation of specific examples, she indicates the complexity and stratified nature of the problem. Local specificities are shown on the example of riddles and ethnic jokes, and their place, at the same time, in the rich international repertoire of children's narrative. Known joke models are enriched with fully up-to-date political and social connotations.

On a formal level, attention is drawn to the parallel with the fairy tale and its threefold structure, showing the characters as types symbolising certain actions and themes, with typical story openings and particular rhythmicised sections. The themes of certain jokes are often identical with traditional folklore motifs, and their variants can be found in the international catalogue of tales. In some jokes meant as a deterrent - and these have a place only in children's narrative repertoire - there is present an atmosphere of underlying fear and horror in expectation of some terrifying occurrence. This atmosphere is created by the manner in which the tale is told, but the point when it is reached is extremely banal, quite ironic, and instantly disperses the fear. In point and in ironic note, these jokes differ from tales of horror such as that of the corpse returning for some article which has been stolen, or that about the witch, their final objective being to invoke the most fear possible.

Through examples, it is shown that children's jokes form part of the oldest narrative traditions, and continue to enjoy full vitality today, having equal rights with other types of oral literature.

*(Translated by Nina H. Antoljak)*