

A LETTER TO MAJA BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI

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Dear Maja!

A scientific work speaks for itself. The biographies of many scientists can be regarded as encyclopaedic tools, as temporal and spatial marks, and as mere appendixes to a bibliography.¹

But, it's not the case with you, dear Maja. Grateful students and colleagues as we are, we daily witness the humanism of your highly intellectual personality, your frankness, and devotion to your profession, your humbleness and scientific probity. Your life and scholarly work are tightly entwined.

On this occasion we would also like to recall your late husband, dr. Bernard Stulli, an outstanding historian and the director of the Archive of Croatia. He was always a friend, a critical collocutor, a protector of tolerance in science, always claiming for responsibility in the research of national values and culture.

Allow us now to present your scientific work by reviewing your published books - to the benefit of the readers who have not had the opportunity to read them all.

Your career as a folklorist starts with a thorough field-work in the early fifties.

In its early days, the *Institute of Folk Art* (today: the *Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies* in Zagreb) dealt mostly with folk music

¹ For biography and bibliography of Maja Bošković-Stulli see pp. 389-420.

and poetry, and paid special attention to the folk songs of the anti fascist resistance. A lot of research was done in Istria and other regions that had been restituted to Croatia after the World War II. A systematic research in oral literature (specially prose) started with your arrival in the Institute in 1952.

Your book *Istrian Folk Tales*² is a result of the fieldwork in Istria. In the book the main characteristics of your future work can be observed: the intention to record truly the oral text, in order to fancy a spoken word; the scrupulousness in taking notes about the story-tellers and their individual style, and the care for the context of narration.³

Istrian Folk Tales is not the anthology of the old recordings taken over from the earlier sources - this book is a collection of the living, contemporary Istrian oral prose. Its additional value lies in the fact that it was made before the great demographic and social changes in the peasant life.

In this very first book an almost incredible meticulousness can be detected in the detailed notes on particular tales. These notes are not merely pointing at correspondences in various Istrian, Slovenian, Italian and other European sources - some of the notes are the real and concise studies (e. g. notes about *Atila*, *malik*, *vukodlak* and *krsnik*). As a matter of fact, the note about *krsnik* was shortly afterwards elaborated and published as a separate study in *Fabula* (3/3, 1960, pp. 275-298).

From 1959 to 1964 you published four anthologies⁴: a collection of folk songs from W.W.II, the anthology of oral fairy tales (intended for school readings), and two representative collections of folk tales and epic songs (for the edition *Five Centuries of Croatian Literature*).⁵

² *Istarske narodne priče*, Institut za narodnu umjetnost, Zagreb 1959.

³ The young M. Bošković-Stulli even used the experimental method in her research. She asked a teacher to set task to the pupils: every pupil in the class had to write a short tale.

⁴ *Petokraka zašto si crvena : Narodne pjesme iz ustanka*, Lykos, Zagreb 1959;
Drvo nasred svijeta : Hrvatskosrpske narodne bajke, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1961;
Narodne pripovijetke, Matica hrvatska - Zora, Zagreb 1963, (Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti, Vol. 26); *Narodne epske pjesme*, Vol. 2, Matica hrvatska - Zora, Zagreb 1964, (Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti, Vol. 25). In all collections of folk tales and legends edited by M. Bošković Stulli, a reader can always find notes about the narrators, about the tales and their variants collected in the areas of Croatian and Serbian language, the classification according to the international catalogue of folk tales by Aarne and Thompson...

⁵ The collection of folk tales from 1963 partially follows the earlier editorial concept from *Istrian Folk Tales*. The representative anthological texts from old and new Croatian collections are here accompanied by complete scholarly apparatus. Texts are from all the three Croatian dialects (štokavian, kajkavian and čakavian). That anthology marks an important step forward regarding all the previous publications of Croatian oral prose.

The result of your indefatigable field-work and research can be seen in many capital collections of oral literature. One of them, a collection of folk tales, was published in German⁶ (and partially translated into Japanese). In the collection *Kroatische Volksmärchen* German audience could learn about the basic traits of the Croatian oral literature. The epilogue is a complete treatise, written in the spirit of contemporary theory of oral literature, and gives an account of the narration of the Croatian populace from the glagolitic times up to the present days.

But your endeavours are not limited to collecting and safeguarding of the oral heritage. Your main contribution to the national culture and science is in the scientific evaluation of the Croatian oral literature, specially in establishing the new folkloristic theory, which was opposed to the more or less politically coloured approaches of the previous century, and in pleading for the study of folklore in context, which takes into consideration the life of the tellers and their environment. Being fully aware of the problems, particularly of this part of the world, where the decrepit ideas persist to exist in the field of folk literature, you have always been trying to unveil various myths and to draw your conclusions calmly and soberly. That is your exquisite way of treating the "delicate" folklore data.

Your writings have thrown new light on folklore - it can be regarded as a contemporary and dynamic process. This orientation has helped our folklore studies to keep pace with Europe and the rest of the world; it has modernized the approach to the oral literature; it has subjected many inconsistent theories to criticism; it has formed a significant theoretical frame for the contemporary research in oral literature.

*The Folk Legend about the Ruler's Secret*⁷ appeared in 1967. Originally, it is your doctoral dissertation: the book follows the technical procedures of the Finnish school, but it avoids the extremes of conclusion based on schematic statistics. You have found 291 variant of the legend about the ruler having the goat's ears (or the he-goat's horns, etc.) from all

The introduction to the collection will be published once again in the book *Usmena književnost : izbor studija i oglada*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1971, pp. 247-264).

The anthology is later partially translated to Slovak: *Rozmarinovy kriček*, translated by Michal Nadubinsky, illustrated by Karol Ondreička, Vychodoslovenské vydavateľstvo, Košice 1987.

⁶ *Kroatische Volksmärchen*, Eugen Diederichs Verlag, Düsseldorf-Köln 1975, in the edition *Die Märchen der Weltliteratur*. Partially translated to Japanese: Michio Ihtōio, Toshio Ozawa: Sekainominwa, 4, Tokyo 1977, pp. 351-394 and 16, Tokyo 1978, pp. 209-378.

⁷ *Narodna predaja o vladarevoj tajni*, Institut za narodnu umjetnost, Zagreb 1967.

The book includes an extensive summary in German (*König Midas hat Eselsöhren*, pp. 301-341).

over the world. According to your hypothesis, the legend had its origins somewhere in the Central Asia, migrated to the East and then arrived in the West in two redactions.

The special value of the book is in throwing light upon the cult-mythic and historical context of the legend. It reveals your capabilities of a scrupulous and cautious anthropologist, mythologist and culturologist who is successful in linking the beliefs, rituals, cults and myths of the ancient times with the motif of the ruler's secret. The book vigilantly follows the legend in its millenary history, detecting in many variants the traces of the past performances and their appertaining social context.

Being a dissertation as it is, and inevitably a "school-exercise", *The Legend about the Ruler's Secret* is at the same time the announcement of your future scientific path.

In the book *Oral literature: Selected Studies and Essays*⁸ you have tried to change the petrified and obsolete views about oral literature in Croatia (particularly within the educational system) by introducing a selection of texts written by leading folklorists. You have deliberately selected the meritorious works of different authors from various countries and periods, in order to encourage the audience to read critically and to make their own judgements. However, the famous paper by Jakobson and Bogatyrev ("Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity") ranks first in the book, emphasizing the difference in functioning between the written and oral literature. Your introduction places both written and oral literature in the wide field of literature (conceived as verbal art). The book contains your article about the oral literature in the history of Croatian literature. Partly inspired by the statements of Jakobson and Bogatyrev, it analyzes the place of oral literature in the history of the Croatian literature as a whole, and deals with the problem of the national frames in the study of oral literature and sketches the programme of further research. The way of the new approach in studying the "folk literature" has been paved.

*The Oral Literature as Verbal Art*⁹ appears to be the first selection of your scholarly works, which had been previously published in the sixties. The book contains the articles about oral poetry, oral prose (mainly dealing with the problems of prose genres in oral literature), and the articles about the bonds between oral and written literature. Regardless of the thematic heterogeneousness, it is your developed approach and the relation to oral literature that give the integrity to the book. The starting-point is the complexity of the oral literature in its life-context. The oral literature is multi-functional, it cannot be restricted neither to its verbal nor artistic

⁸ *Usmena književnost : izbor studija i ogleda*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1971.

⁹ *Usmena književnost kao umjetnost riječi*, Mladost, Zagreb 1975.

components. Yet, the artistic verbal expression remains to be one of its main aspects. Another main feature of the oral literature is the particular way of its functioning, namely the direct oral communication. The oral literature lasts for centuries in its non-written form: the oral literary phenomena have their own way of existence, including the unique diversity of variants in songs, tales or other folk genres. Yet, they do not lose the stability of their fundamental structures.

Your book entitled *The Oral Literature* appeared as the first part of the first volume in the edition "The History of Croatian Literature"¹⁰. For the first time the oral literature is treated as a separate unit within the historical survey of Croatian literature. The task was not easy. Is it possible to trace the history of oral literature at all? The answer is only partially affirmative - the book is not a history of oral literature, it is a review of the oral literary resonances in written literature. At the same time it is the review of the influences of written texts on oral literature, and a sketch of their intertwining (from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the systematic collecting and research in the first half of the nineteenth century). The book is an important contribution to the history of Croatian literature. It remains a capital work of the Croatian folklore studies.

Being aware of the difficulties, you have elaborated theoretical problems on the first sixty pages, offering us both the historical survey of the studies in oral literature and your own theoretical and methodological views.

To view the oral literature "in its living context" as "a form of direct oral artistic communication in small communities", and to write its history is not an easy task. The work of oral literature is limited in time by its performance. Every performance is a new creation, and the possible written record remains to be an incomplete and unreliable evidence. Yet, you do not support the extreme "preformancionist" opinions. Although you accept the concept of the oral literature as a process, you try to make the scientific approach work by introducing the three levels (texture, text and context) in analyzing the literary folklore. The context and social situation cannot be analyzed without observing the performance. Only through the performance we can get the information about the "dramatization of texture" (i. e. the way of expounding, diction, voice modulation, face expressions, movements, impressions on audience). However, you do believe it is possible to analyze the oral literature in its written form, too. The oral literature can also be defined "as an aesthetic (literary) information originating from the natural verbal communication, and preserved in written

¹⁰ *Usmena književnost*, Liber, Mladost, Zagreb 1978. (In the edition: *Povijest hrvatske književnosti*, Vol. 1)

record which is separated from the dramatization of texture as well as from the context, and yet, it bears witness to the texture and context indirectly". From the viewpoint of the literary history, the written sources are the main problem in studying oral literature. The available collections of folk poetry and prose contain the adapted texts (in the sense of language and style), and usually lack the artistic qualities of the spoken word. The truer the record of the narrator's performance, the better literary character of the oral media is preserved.

While writing about the oral literary genres, you point out their special features - which originate from the performance situations, from the oral way of their existence and from the fact that they are connected with extra-literary functions. You limit yourself to a brief account of the main concepts and different approaches to the problems, avoiding to determine the genres themselves.

All your colleagues do know that Maja Bošković-Stulli is always up-to-date, following closely the trends in world folklore studies, critically revising and improving her own views.

In the book *The Oral Literature Once and Today*,¹¹ together with the texts which clarify different approaches in teaching oral literature, as well as with the articles which treat the changes or the new phenomena within the contemporary urban folklore, you have published four theoretical studies. Two of them are about the relation of the oral artistic communication and the written text of the folk tale¹², the third one ("The Fairy-Tale") is about the definition of the fairy tale and special features of *bajka* (both as a term and as a concept) in Croatian language. The fourth article, "On the Concepts of Oral and Popular Literature and Their Appellations",¹³ deserves the utmost attention. In this study you have renounced the general term *narodna književnost* (folk literature). The terms *narod* (folk, people, nation) and *narodno* (belonging to folk, to people or to a nation) are ambiguous and vague, as well as handicapped by different ideological uses. Therefore they are not suitable in the contemporary research of the literary folklore. You are determined to support the term *usmena književnost* (oral literature), as an appellation for orally communicated literature, i. e. literature in direct communication which is transmitted by tradition. The term oral literature shows precisely and suitably the way of originating, existing and spreading of this type of literature. At the

¹¹ *Usmena književnost nekad i danas*, Prosveta, Beograd 1983.

¹² "From the Oral Narration to the Published Folk Tale" and "On Oral Literature Outside the Original Context".

¹³ The article had been previously published in the journal *Umjetnost riječi*, 17 (1973), No. 3 and 4.

same time it opposes the fixed texts and "technical" communication of written literature. Nevertheless, you do retain the attribute *narodni* (folk) as a part of the appellations for particular oral literary genres - justifying it by literary history. You are using the term *pučka književnost* (popular literature) to describe written literary products intended for wide social layers.

The book *Oral Poetry in the Horizon of Literature*¹⁴ is a kind of your scientific review. It unites the rich field-work experience with the subtle sense for the most complicated theoretical problems within the realm of various oral literary genres. The book is divided into three parts: the first part is treating the relations and connections between the oral and the written in the work of two Croatian writers (Krlježa, Šenoa) and the views on the oral literature of two Croatian scholars (Jagić, Lovrić). The second part of the book contains your studies based on the collections from the 19th century as well as on your own recent field-work. In the third part of the book you treat the problems of the contemporary genres in oral literature and the performative aspects of oral narration. In a way, the book *Oral Poetry in the Horizon of Literature* builds onto your earlier works, namely *The Oral Literature as Verbal Art* and *The Oral Literature Once and Today*. The article about the theoretical aspects of narrating the events from real life, deals with the telling that emerges from a conversation and becomes a shaped story (i. e. from one's own memories, or from the memories of someone close to the narrator, or the near ancestors). For the first time (in Croatia) the article questions the belonging of such narrations to the body of oral literature. Your thorough and critical survey of the current relevant literature leads us to the conclusion that those narrations do have specific qualities, and thus represent an independent category within the contemporary oral literary prose.

Apart from the books of studies and articles, during the eighties and nineties, you have been publishing new collections of folk tales.

About sixty previously unedited fairy tales, legends and jokes intended for adults appeared in 1983 under the title *Šingala-Mingala*.¹⁵ The title is given after the tale with the same title, told by your storyteller Ante Rančić (from Brnaze, near Sinj).¹⁶ As far as subject matter is concerned, the majority of the stories could be called stories about life¹⁷. Some of

¹⁴ *Usmeno pjesništvo u obzorju književnosti*, Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, Zagreb 1984.

¹⁵ *Šingala-mingala*, Znanje, Zagreb 1983.

¹⁶ A documentary film was made in 1968 about that storyteller and that very tale, by the educational programme of Zagreb television.

¹⁷ Using the Propp's term.

them are adventurous, some of them speak about outwitting the stupid devil, some about life, about ancient experiences, while some of them treat human relations in a family or among the neighbours, or among the social strata. Some of them are about the crafty fellows or about the foolish guys. But all the stories are shaped into permanent narrative patterns, usually containing the storytellers' view of life.

Other collections (*The Buried Gold*¹⁸ and *The King of Norin*¹⁹, as well as the newest one: *Grain Amidst the Sea*²⁰) are regionally conceived. In the first one, *The Buried Gold*, you went back to Istria, and used mostly your own recordings to make a representative choice of tales and legends told by Croatian storytellers from Istria.

A collection of tales and poems, *The King of Norin*, takes us to the marshy landscape of the Neretva region, back to the reminiscences of the inhabitants about the former big town Naronia and its ruins and relics from the Roman period.

Grain Amidst the Sea is the anthology intended both for the wide audience as well as for the experts. In the choice of texts from throughout Dalmatia you inserted the tales which had been previously published in the almanac *Narodna umjetnost* (and other publications²¹), together with then unpublished folk tales from your own recordings.

Since you have been following the concept of oral literature as a spoken word, as always different, interesting and unrepeatable texts that are permanently emerging from direct human contacts, you have also prepared several collections of folk tales intended for school children. In the very first of them, *A Tree in the Middle of the World*²², and even more so in the second one, *What Never Happened*²³, you have succeeded in showing to children that poetical realizations of oral literature belong to our generation as well as to the past ones. You have pointed out that this kind

¹⁸ *Zakopano zlato : Hrvatske usmene pripovijetke, predaje i legende iz Istre*, Edited by M. Bošković-Stulli, Čakavski sabor...[et al], Pula-Rijeka 1986, (Istra kroz stoljeća, 7th Series, Vol. 38).

¹⁹ *U kralja od Norina: Priče, pjesme, zagonetke i poslovice s Neretve*, Edited by M. Bošković-Stulli, in collaboration with Z. Rajković, Galerija "Stećak" Klek, Metković-Opuzen 1987, (Liber III).

²⁰ *Žito posred mora : Usmene priče iz Dalmacije*, Književni krug, Split 1993.

²¹ "Narodne pripovijetke i predaje Sinjske krajine", *Narodna umjetnost*, Zagreb, 5-6, pp. 303-432. = in: *Studije i građa o Sinjskoj krajini*, Institut za narodnu umjetnost, Zagreb 1968, pp. 303-432.

"Usmene pripovijetke i predaje s otoka Brača", *Narodna umjetnost*, Zagreb 1974/1975, 11-12, pp. 5-159.

²² *Drvo nasred svijeta : Hrvatskosrpske narodne bajke*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1961.

²³ *Što nikad nije bilo... : Usmene pripovijetke i predaje*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1986.

of literature lasts, although subject to changes, and that even pupils themselves directly and daily take part in it.

Your recent book of studies and articles *Poems, Tales, Fantasy*²⁴ contains ten works that had been previously published in Croatian and foreign publications, from 1985 to 1991. The topics are diverse - in addition to the precious expert analysis of the main trends of folklore in the life and history of Dubrovnik, there are six studies on oral prose. The first of them, "Traditional Narration in Town" describes the characteristics of the published urban tales, and the differences in relation to oral rural tales. It discusses once again the problem of the oral and written, showing the influence of written literature on urban narration.

"Anecdotes About Priest Kujiš" deal with the problem of reality and folklore. The article shows how a historical person (don Antonij Kujiš who was a parish priest on the islands of Hvar and Brač in the 19th century) could become a subject of the oral tradition. The historical traces of the real priest Kujiš merge in usual *topoi* from other anecdotes about priests in oral literature.

"Story About the Best Friend and the Worst Enemy" is a short essay about the antifeminist folk tale (Aarne / Thompson 921 B). The ideological motive for the story derives from the Bible and can be found in medieval literature.

The study "Stories About Collective Murder" treats again the relation of the historical truth and the oral tradition. The topic pattern of the story is the same as in the drama *Fuente Ovejuna* by Lope de Vega: i. e. the peasants murder the odious leader. At the court they admit the collective guilt, and get acquitted. The Croatian variant from Kastav describes partially the real murder of a captain in 1666.

The multidisciplinary approach, the viewing of the oral literary phenomena in the comparative context, elegance of presentation, scientific exactitude and literary sensitivity can also be recognized in the other studies in the book²⁵. Your text "The Origins and Transformations of a Folk Song (In Kordun, full of graves)"²⁶ becomes these days painfully accurate. In the study you are in search for the origins of the well known ballad, discovering its wide historical background, from the anonymous Croatian medieval poems until the present days. At the same time you are

²⁴ *Pjesme, priče, fantastika*, Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, Zavod za istraživanje folkloru, Zagreb 1991.

²⁵ "The Legends About Witches and Persecutions in Croatia", "Fantasy in Oral Prose (The Narrations of Serbs From Croatia)", "The Balladic Forms of *Bugarštice* and the Epic Songs" and "Mažuranić's Recordings of Songs Within the Croatian Oral Poetry".

²⁶ *Na Kordunu grob do groba*.

unveiling the curious and winding ways of "creation, duration, changes and the re-birth of the oral songs".

What to say in the end?

You have always been far from the national romantics and historical idealization. You have been avoiding panegyrics and thus struggling for the impartial approach. Your scientific path is characterized by tolerance and understanding. As a scholar you have never lamented about "the neglected heritage". With such an attitude, you have paid contribution to Croatian literature and culture.

For all that we remain very grateful to you.