

*Haere mai ano hoa, ka waiho ano te utuafare.*

(You came as friends and leave as family.)

According to Nahoto Uehashi (Hans Christian Andersen Award winner, 2014), by “simply borrowing the device of the story” we can share the authenticity of indigenous experience, transcend the bounds of other cultures and access a world full of diversity. So, here is to more *mana* (Maori for “prestige and power”) to the IBBY motto of alleviating ignorance through stories, which I find inspiring and enlightening in equal measure. *Kia Ora!*

*Soumi Dey*

## International Conference

### *A Century of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's Tales of Long Ago*

Zagreb, Croatia, 12 – 15 October 2016

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The most famous Croatian collection of fairy tales written by the prominent author Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, *Tales of Long Ago* (*Priče iz davnine*, 1916), celebrated the centenary of its first publication. As the most published and translated Croatian prose collection, *Tales of Long Ago* is certainly a jewel in the crown of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's literary work. What makes the *Tales* so exquisite is an original storyline with motifs taken from Slavic mythology. Confirmation of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's impeccable writing came with four nominations for the world's most respected literary award – the Nobel Prize in Literature. Besides being one of Croatia's most famous nominees for the Nobel Prize in literature, she also played a significant role in Croatian cultural history as the first woman member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. To honour another famous work by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, *The Strange Adventures of Hlapić the Apprentice* (*Čudnovate zgrade šegrta Hlapića*, 1913), the Croatian Association of Researchers in Children's Literature (CARCL) in cooperation with Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Matrix Croatica Unit in Slavonski Brod and several other institutions organised an international conference held in Slavonski Brod (18–20 April 2013): “From the Strange to the Wondrous: 100 Years of *The Strange Adventures of Hlapić the Apprentice*”. The conference held in Slavonski Brod was the first in Croatia entirely dedicated to a single work of children's literature. In this tradition, CARCL, the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Matrix Croatica organised an international conference to celebrate *Tales of Long Ago*: “A Century of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's *Tales of Long Ago*”, which attracted even more presenters than its predecessor.

The Conference was held under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Mrs. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, in Zagreb, from 12 to 15 October, and took place in the library of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the halls of Matica hrvatska [Matrix Croatica]. The opening ceremony was held at the National Revival Hall of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. More than 160 participants from many different countries contributed to the Conference with their presentations, which were held in 24 thematic sections. Besides enjoying the Conference, visitors and presenters had the

opportunity to travel to Ogulin to explore the birthplace of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and its natural beauty and mountainous surroundings which inspired her imagination in writing the *Tales*. The official languages of the Conference were Croatian and English. The Conference covered a variety of topics related to *Tales of Long Ago*, from its influence on literature to its presentation in media and culture.

Two keynote lectures were held after the welcome address of the organisers and the artistic programme. Jennifer Miscec from Longwood University (Virginia, USA) talked about her curricular project in which students explore Croatian children's culture. They read and discussed the English translation of the book, titled *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* and the adaptations of individual tales on a CD ROM and related their own experience of Disney-conveyed traditional fairy tales to these complex tales. The project involves a field trip to Croatia, including a visit to the museum "Ivana's House of Fairy Tales" in Ogulin. The second keynote lecture was held by Dubravka Zima from the Centre for Croatian Studies (University of Zagreb). In her talk, she explored the discourse, poetic descriptions, interpretations and other features of *Tales of Long Ago* in the context of Croatian modernism.

The following two days of the Conference were divided into several sections. Since Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's tales also have a notable history of reception in other cultures, it was exciting to hear presentations about translations of *Tales of Long Ago* into other languages and the mark that the book and its author left on other cultures, for instance Slovak (Radoslav Rusňák, Martin Machata), Italian (Sabrina Fava) and Ukrainian (Ljudmila Vasiljeva). Besides language, other domains such as history, folklore and religion were addressed as areas where the *Tales* have been an important and influential addition to Croatian culture and to other international cultural contexts. As an example, M. Brkić Vučina talked about the juxtaposition of pre-Christian and Christian layers in *Tales of Long Ago*. There were several presentations concerning old Slavic religion and mythological motifs in Brlić-Mažuranić's work, such as elements from Slavic and Mediterranean mythology (Mirjana Barović, Martina Novosel).

Presentations by Tea Dvorščak and Sanja Lovrić Kralj referred to Vladimir Kirin and his illustrations of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's works. They discussed the relationship between Kirin and Brlić-Mažuranić and her influence on his illustrations, as he illustrated the edition of *Tales of Long Ago* translated into English (1924) and continued to illustrate other editions even after her death. The presentation also received visual support in the form of an exhibition of Kirin's illustrations held in the library of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Some presentations led us into the world of interactive *Tales of Long Ago*, such as talks on dramatic adaptations for actors and puppets (Maja Verdonik and Natalija Stojaković), or on musical arrangements inspired by the literary works of Brlić-Mažuranić (Mirna Marić and Mihaela Matešić). Željka Flegar and Ivana Moritz discussed the little people (brownies) from the *Tales* in the context of a similar fictional population of international classics. There were several sections dedicated to the fairy tale genre in general. Topics such as the transformation of domestic settings in fairy tales and contemporary adaptations of age-old tales, for instance retellings of Charles Perrault's "Cinderella", were just a small part of the variety of themes presented in these sections.

The uniqueness of Brlić-Mažuranić's tales extend beyond the enjoyment of reading such art. Her characters have personalities that challenge readers, which provides a good

basis for research in neighbouring areas of literature studies. One of the sections dealt with *Tales of Long Ago* in a pedagogical and educational context. It was rather diverse, as some of the presenters focused on the educational values in *Tales of Long Ago* (Vesnica Mlinarević, Antonija Vranješ), while others focused more on the methodological aspects of comprehension of less familiar words (Lejla Ovčina, Sanja Soče). The section dedicated to linguistic and stylistic aspects of *Tales of Long Ago* highlighted elements of language, such as archaic words (Irena Krumes), style, and phrases (Željka Matulina). Brlić-Mažuranić's literary work belongs to the peak of Croatian literature. The main source of her creative and original work is the author's bold character and determined personality. These aspects, including her inspiration and biography, were the main themes of several presentations, for example that by Jasna Ažman. Presentations addressing the topic of Brlić-Mažuranić's character and personal life left the audience inspired and motivated.

Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić made a huge contribution not only to Croatian, but also world literature. Her works are wide fields open for exploration. Even though her tales remain the same in form, words and expressions, they still change through time, as their readers change. Books that are as relevant today as they were at the time of publication are rare, but this Conference showed that *Tales of Long Ago* belong to these few: it has the same significance today as it had a hundred years ago.

*Katarina Kokanović*